

# The African Philosophy Reader

S E C O N D   E D I T I O N

Edited by P.H. Coetzee  
and A.P.J. Roux



**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

# The African Philosophy Reader



# The African Philosophy Reader

Second edition  
A text with readings

EDITED BY

P.H.COETZEE AND A.P.J.ROUX



First published in Great Britain in 1998 by  
Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane  
London EC4P 4EE  
[www.routledge.co.uk](http://www.routledge.co.uk)

Second edition published in 2003 by  
Routledge  
29 West 35th Street  
New York, NY 1001  
[www.routledge-ny.com](http://www.routledge-ny.com)

Second edition published in Great Britain in 2003 by  
Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane  
London EC4P 4EE  
[www.routledge.co.uk](http://www.routledge.co.uk)

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.  
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to [www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk)”.

By arrangement with Oxford University Press of Southern Africa.

Published in Southern Africa in 2003 by  
Oxford University Press of Southern Africa  
PO Box 12119, N1 City, 7463, Cape Town, South Africa

© 2002 Oxford University Press of Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval system—without the written permission of the Publisher.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the Publisher and Authors assume no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of information contained herein. In no event shall the Publisher and the Authors be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

All reasonable efforts have been made to trace the copyright holders. Should any outstanding copyright holders exist, the Publisher would be grateful to be notified. It undertakes to amend the omission in the event of a reprint.

Cover design by Brigitte L’Estrange

Reproduction by Castle Graphics

Cover reproduction by The Image Bureau

Cataloging-in-Publication data is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 0-203-49322-2 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-57926-7 (Adobe e-Reader Format)

ISBN 0-415-96809-7 (Print Edition)

# CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Preface to the first edition	xii
Acknowledgements	xv
Copyright acknowledgements	xvi
<b>Chapter 1 Discourses on Africa</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Trends in African philosophy</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Chapter 3 Metaphysical thinking in Africa</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Epistemology and the tradition in Africa</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Chapter 5 Morality in African thought</b>	<b>321</b>
<b>Chapter 6 Race and gender</b>	<b>402</b>
<b>Chapter 7 Justice and restitution in African political thought</b>	<b>541</b>
<b>Chapter 8 Africa in the global context</b>	<b>641</b>
Index	763

## PREFACE

The second edition of this book is a celebration of the success that the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa has had with its efforts to advance the cause of African Philosophy in South Africa after the Apartheid Era. The University of South Africa has generously funded the manuscript preparation of the first and the second editions. This is a demonstration of several things. In the first instance, it is a sign of the University's determination to reform its academic curricula. It is also, secondly, a demonstration of the role the University plays in informing the philosophical community in South Africa and elsewhere of philosophical endeavour in Africa. And, thirdly, in a wide sense, it is a demonstration of the University's commitment to our South African society. In this regard this edition, like the first, celebrates African culture, thus contributing towards the fulfilment of the University's social obligations.

The second edition is a venture by the editors, Pieter Coetzee and Abraham Roux, from the University of South Africa, and colleagues from elsewhere, including the historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa and universities in Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, the Benin Republic, Malawi, Kenya, and the Gold Coast. Echoing among the viewpoints of the contributors that come from the length and breadth of the continent and the diaspora are a number of Africa's most powerful voices, Léopold Senghor, Steve Biko, Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, Abiola Irele, Henry Odera Oruka, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Lucius Outlaw, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ali Mazrui and, Wole Soyinka.

Of the 37 contributors 33 are black Africans speaking for themselves on the topical issues of:

- decolonization
- Afrocentrism in conflict with Eurocentrism
- the struggle for cultural freedoms in Africa
- the historic role of black consciousness in the struggle for liberation
- restitution and reconciliation in the context of Africa's post-colonial situation
- justice for Africa in the context of globalization
- the pressures on the tradition of philosophy in Africa engendered by the challenges of modernity
- the reconstitution of the African self in its relation to changing community
- the African epistemological paradigm in conflict with the Western
- the continuity of religion and metaphysics in African thought.

The second edition contains additional themes on gender and race—in particular feminist critiques of cultural essentialism, the invention of the 'African' woman, and the political morality of race—and on Africa's place in the global context.

The book is structured in the form of eight introductory essays and an accompanying cluster of 'readings'. A kind of antiphony, a call and response technique containing



dominant and discordant voices, allows white and black South African viewpoints to engage with viewpoints from francophone and anglophone Africa. This is a very complex interaction. It raises complex problems concerning the relationship between black academics and Western knowledge systems seen in the context of Africa's challenge to the hegemony of Western philosophical notions, and the mistaken perception that the whole enterprise of philosophy in Africa is neo- rather than post-colonial. One fundamental problem is that of identity: shifting, fluctuating—the identities of writers in and of Africa may be said to be in a state of betweenness, simultaneously inhabiting two worlds. Collectively, the readings demonstrate the phenomenon of hybridity, enacting a post-colonial métissage, blending and blurring old distinctions, dismantling the cordon sanitaire of the colonial world that led to the need for reconstruction initiatives in Africa.

The editors wish to restate the intention they expressed in the first edition. The second edition is intended to present the philosophical debate in Africa to a multicultural audience in such a way that it is understandable in terms of various world-views and life experiences, and so that it brings philosophical themes into play with existential problems. In this regard Biakolo's essay 'Cross-cultural cognition and the African condition' is enlightening. Biakolo identifies the ethnocentrism that lies at the centre of the European Invention' of Africa, revealing, at the same time, the binarist mode of thought that produces stereotypical oppositions such as those between savage and civilized, prelogical and logical, oral and written, magical and scientific. Biakolo unveils the devastating implications of the Lévy-Bruhlian notion of Africans' 'prelogical mentality' that underlies racist dismissals of Africa and the setting up of development models whose effectiveness is strongly disputed in the market place. Ramose's introductory reading, 'The struggle for reason in Africa' picks up the point of letting Africans speak for themselves. This too is a timely reminder to any good (white) man (or woman) in Africa to be particularly circumspect when entering the domain of African thinking.

Chapter 1 deals with a question raised particularly and poignantly by non-Africans. This is the question of whether or not Africans are really human beings. Non-Africans replied that Africans cannot be and are not real human beings despite their human-like appearance. The basis for this answer was Aristotle's definition of 'man' as 'a rational animal'. According to this definition to be rational was to be human. On this basis the African was excluded for centuries from the category of the rational. The African was thus not a human being. Despite the success of many ethical and scientific theories arguing against the restrictive interpretation of Aristotle, the conviction of the non-Africans that the African is not a human being proper continues to live with us even in our time. But the African knows otherwise and has decided no longer to take the conviction of the non-Africans seriously. The readings contained in Chapter 1 testify, each in their own way, that Africans do not wish to entertain any doubt about their being human. The humanity of the African is second to none.

Chapter 2 deals with trends in African Philosophy from two perspectives: On the one hand, readers are introduced to various trends as distinguished by different authors, and on the other, they are given an idea of debates on issues raised by such classifications.

A central issue in African Philosophy is its definition and this forms the basis of the differentiation of trends and of the evaluation of such distinctions. Henry Odera Oruka

was the first to attempt a classification. His fourfold classification (see the Oruka reading), ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, ideological-nationalistic philosophy, and professional philosophy, is severely criticized as being either flawed or too limited. Outlaw (see the reading by him) mentions other suggested classifications. Hountondji accuses Oruka of working with an unacceptable definition of African Philosophy and in this regard he argues against ethnophilosophy as philosophy and thus as part of African Philosophy. With this criticism Hountondji started an ongoing debate about the status of African Philosophy, the status and value of ethnophilosophy, and the position of Placide Tempels in African Philosophy. In the introduction to the chapter, Moya Deacon accepts Oruka's classification as a starting-point, paints a sympathetic picture of Tempels and evaluates his contribution to African Philosophy positively. In the reading by Hountondji the opposite view is expressed, whereas Outlaw, though critical, does not reject ethnophilosophy completely. In the reading by Irele views on African Philosophy in francophone Africa get attention. In this, the important contribution by Senghor, the development of Négritude is highlighted. The readers are thus drawn into a wide-ranging discussion of what African Philosophy is and how it relates to colonialism and Western Philosophy.

Chapter 3 takes up issues in African metaphysics. Metaphysics concerns itself with questions and arguments about 'ultimate reality', that is, that which 'exists/acts' behind our experiences and provides the ground for such experiences. Questions such as 'How are we to explain the fact that bad things happen to good people?', 'that despite changes a person remains the same person?', 'that there is a world?', etc. figure here. Africans have their own 'theories' about all these phenomena and critical discussion of such views forms a large part of metaphysical thinking in African Philosophy. In the introduction witchcraft gets some detailed attention and this is followed up only indirectly in the readings. For instance, Sogolo distinguishes between secondary causation which comprises ordinary material causation—lightning causing a veldfire—and primary (teleological) causation where an objective (aim) comes into play. This distinction then forms a basis for an understanding of traditional health practices and beliefs about witchcraft. Oladipo shows how the categories of African metaphysics are permeated by religious ideas. Teffo and Roux warn that 'miscommunication' results when African concepts such as personality are dealt with in a Western way. In the reading by Gbadegesin the focus is on the concept of person in the Yoruba conceptual scheme, but the family of concepts which figure in talk about a person gets attention: God, body, mind, soul, personality, destiny. He also contrasts the Yoruba concepts in this area with those of the Akan. Okolo argues that in contrast to the Western notion of person, which centres on the individual, the African notion is community based.

Chapter 4 takes up questions dealing with African epistemology. In asking whether there is a uniquely African form of knowing, Malherbe and Kaphagawani position themselves somewhat pragmatically between a relativist and universalist position. Eschewing the idea of a homogeneous African culture, the authors advance, instead, the notion of 'Contemporary confluence of cultures on the Continent', thereby subscribing to prevailing post-colonial notions of hybridity and syncretism. Cross-cultural discourse is characterized, if nothing else, by borrowing, for, as Bakhtin asserts, 'the word in language is half someone else's'. This observation is freshly clarified in Wiredu's

analysis of the concept of truth in the Akan language: he shows how a little knowledge can be a dangerously distorting thing in cross-linguistic exchange. In dealing with the problems of cross-cultural knowing and truth, Sogolo demonstrates that a sine qua non of understanding is the application of Davidson's normative Principle of Charity: 'whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them in most matters'.

Chapter 5 deals broadly with themes in the moral context. The chapter elaborates on the theme of particularity with particular reference to Wiredu's work, developing the theme in the context of the kinship structures of the Akans of Ghana, and shows, broadly, how the opinions and needs of kin groups ultimately come to be expressed, via consensus, in the political structures of civil society. The chapter introduces the problem of the relationship between individual and community, which Wiredu and Gyekye develop, providing interesting insight into the Akan notion of kinship and the rights and obligations which arise from this, citing the example of sympathy towards foreigners who are perceived as being deprived of kinship support. This is a manifestation of what Ramose refers to as *ubuntu*. The role of rights and duties within the framework of a communitarian ethos is explicated by Wiredu, whose readings offer a salutary alternative to the alienated self of Western culture.

Chapter 6 examines issues relating to women and race. At the time of the demise of apartheid, South African women, assuming that they must have a common bond, made several unsuccessful attempts to find consensus for the fight against gender discrimination. However, instead of uniting the delegates, these meetings resulted in bitter recriminations and unfortunate racial divisions. Retrospective analysis of the context in which these took place reveals that the misunderstandings were based largely on an inadequate understanding of how the complex intertwining of race and gender resulted in totally different forms of oppression. This is an attempt to clarify the historical and conceptual reasons for the variation and as a result to show why gender cannot be isolated from race. In addition, once it can be seen that feminism has moved away from its early roots in middle-class mainly white academia, it is possible to appreciate that its aims, instead of marginalizing African women, have become remarkably similar to those articulated in the vision of the twenty-first century becoming the African century. Hence, feminists in South Africa should take the lead not only in ensuring reconciliation between races but also in consolidating the communal values that are embedded in the spirit of the African Renaissance.

Chapter 7 deals with the question of justice for Africa. It pursues this question from the points of view of moral, legal, and political philosophy. Taking the unjustified violence of colonization as its point of departure, it questions the morality of colonization. Part of the argument in this connection is that the violence of colonization cannot be justified on the basis of the just war doctrine. In consequence, it rejects the doctrine of the 'right of conquest'. This rejection is situated particularly within the context of historic titles in law. It is under this rubric that the moral exigencies of restoration, restitution, and compensation are underlined as questions of fundamental justice that must be answered positively and practically in favour of the indigenous conquered peoples. Without this the political mechanism of reconciliation, after the granting of defective sovereignty to the indigenous conquered peoples, shall remain hollow and problematic, as Mandaza's reading shows. Precisely because the 'right of conquest' and its consequences continue to

be contested by the indigenous conquered peoples, Hountondji's reading against the view that the conqueror holds the sole, superior, and exclusive right to define the meaning of experience, knowledge, and truth is particularly pertinent. In the sphere of politics this monopolization of knowledge and truth manifests itself in many ways, as the readings of both Mazrui and Osaghae show. Cumulatively, the readings show that for as long as justice is denied to Africa, justice in Africa will remain systematically elusive. This will render world peace academic and problematical.

Chapter 8 is the continuation of the theme of justice for Africa. It is a panoramic view of this theme in the light of the African experience on the global scale. Its strength lies in the fact that it problematizes the question of justice for Africa in the light of contemporary experiences. Thus the question of African identity is dealt with in the context of the meaning of cosmopolitanism. This is raised also by reference to the meaning of Négritude in so far as it has promoted or can promote the cause of justice for Africa. Alienation also comes on board in the explication of the question of justice for Africa especially in the light of the slave trade. 'Does globalization promote or hinder justice for Africa?' is a question that receives treatment in the set of readings comprising chapter eight. Finally, the much-publicized 'African Renaissance' championed by President Mbeki of South Africa also comes under the prism of critical analysis.

P.H.COETZEE

A.P.J.ROUX

2002

## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

This book is intended to fill a gap in the literature that is currently available to undergraduate students of African philosophy. Most texts in African philosophy are written for a professional audience—philosophers communicating with other philosophers on the nature, problems, and methods of African philosophy. Our task has been twofold: to present the professional debate to a multicultural audience in such a way that it is understandable in terms of various world-views and life-experiences, and so that it brings philosophical themes into play with existential problems.

We have set about our task with certain considerations in mind. Since there are areas in Africa where regional philosophies have grown up, notably in Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda, most of the material presented here has been drawn from these regions. The debate on the nature, problems, and methods of African philosophy is, in part, inspired by the regional contexts in which African philosophy has developed, a factor which has had considerable influence on what we have chosen to present, especially in view of the fact that each region presents its own specific existential problems. It should be pointed out here that there is no developed regional philosophy in South Africa. In South Africa philosophy has its roots largely in European traditions. Professional philosophers practise a form of neo-liberalism which draws on Western ‘continental’ (French and German) and ‘analytic’ (Anglo-American) prototypes. We have chosen one figure from South Africa, Steve Biko, to present something of the political philosophy in this country.

Because the philosophical geography in Africa is very fragmented, we decided to order this fragmented picture under seven categories:

1. Culture (the philosophy of)
2. Trends (ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy)
3. Metaphysics (idealism)
4. Epistemology (sociology of knowledge)
5. Ethics (communitarianism)
6. Politics (liberation ideologies and struggles)
7. Aesthetics (the status of African art as ‘Art’)

The book begins with an introductory sketch on the problems created by European (anthropological) constructions of the African person and his/her life-world. Biakolo argues that the basis of the construction of Africa, in terms of distinctions between savage/civilized, prelogical/ logical, oral/written, magical/scientific, is nothing more than European ethnocentric convention. This sets the scene for an examination of the uses of culture and cultural constructs in African contexts. An attempt is made to develop a context in which the idea of a ‘culture-specific’ philosophy can be discussed and placed in perspective. Van Staden argues for an ‘articulation’ concept of culture which is contrasted with a ‘communicational’ concept. The articulation concept has great power

to displace the communicological concept since it reaches beyond the cultural and ethnic frameworks to which the communicological idea is confined, thereby creating a context for the development of a critical discourse on culture and its uses in the African context.

The discussion of this contemporary notion of culture is essential to the main themes of the book. African philosophers argue that philosophy is a cultural enterprise and that African philosophies are culture specific. This means that they are perspective driven. Some are ethnic perspectival models (Wiredu, Gyekye), others are non-ethnic (pan-African) models (Appiah). The specificity thesis is complemented by a diversity thesis which states that there is no single philosophical (conceptual) order for all mankind. This does not mean that cultural groups differ with respect to their capacity for cognition and rationality, it merely means that systems of reasoning are bound by the traditions within which they develop. There are cognitive as well as normative universals, but these are shaded in different colours in different cultures.

The trends in African philosophy are discussed with reference to the thesis of culture-specificity. Van Niekerk stresses the conceptual link between culture and trends. She develops this link with reference to her distinction between 'Hermesian' and 'Promethean' rationalities, and by applying it in a critical appraisal of ethnophilosophy and related trends.

The chapter on *Understanding Trends in 'African Thinking'* connects conceptually with everything else that follows. The chapter *Metaphysical Thinking in Africa* follows the culture-specific approach which Wiredu has so aptly described as 'strategic particularism'. But Teffo and Roux sketch a view of metaphysics which transcends the parameters of particularity insofar as they show that the themes in African metaphysics have universal significance. This is in line with Wiredu's method of pursuing the universal through the particular, and echoes Van Staden's theme of the need to create a wider context within which particular discourses may meaningfully be examined.

In *African Epistemology* Kaphagawani and Malherbe address the question whether it makes sense to talk of an African articulation and formulation of knowledge, and find an affirmative answer in an argument pitched neatly between the relativism which attends discrete particularism and the absolutism which accompanies an uncompromising universalism. The need for a cross-cultural context and discourse is manifested in the arguments advanced for epistemic modernity, a move which again echoes Van Staden's theme.

Normative universals find a place in communitarian systems of ethics and politics. In *Particularity in Morality and its Relation to Community* Coetzee examines how Wiredu develops a notion of particularity in morals from the specifics of the kinship structures of the Akans of Ghana. Notions of the good, which specific kin groups endorse in civic contexts, generate various solidarities which find a place in civil life. The particularities of civic structures, then, find expression in the political structures of civil society.

The problem of accommodating a variety of civic perspectives in a single political unit in a multicultural state like Ghana is, in fact, a problem for all African states. South Africa is no exception. How might multicultural states accommodate different cultural and social identities within single political orders? In *The Problem of Political Self-Definition in South Africa* Coetzee argues for the need to create a political culture which accords at least an equality of regard to all cultural communities. A substantive equality

may not be achieved, yet it can be approached through social programmes designed in an open forum of public debate—one which acknowledges the constraints of public reason.

In *Using and Abusing African Art* Wilkinson addresses the problem of understanding the objects of African art as African art, and not as re-culturized objects in the European world. She argues that the way the problem has been posed in the past has suffered from misguided attempts to be politically correct. Rather than ask how ‘art’ should (logically) be used, we should ask how ‘art’ has (empirically) been used in Africa and particularly in South Africa.

The book closes with Shutte’s post-anthropological attempt to find a model for cross-cultural philosophical understanding. The history of Africa, Shutte claims, makes the linking between African and European philosophy unavoidable. Shutte elaborates this linking in terms of Senghor’s idea of a ‘Civilization of the Universal’—and in so doing develops Biakolo’s theme and adds a new dimension to Van Staden’s theme.

The readings which appear in Chapters 2–8 present the reader with an exposure to some genuine philosophizing in Africa. They have been chosen as exemplars of the various trends, and also for the story they tell about the concerns of Africa’s philosophers. Among these, a concern with cultural issues, especially the tension between tradition and modernity, which imparts a particular colour to the African experience, figures prominently. This concern with the cultural reconstruction of Africa has many facets. It raises deep critical questions about metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, and, of course, the nature of African philosophy itself. And in doing so, we learn something about other tensions—between the need to conserve what is good and useful in tradition, and what is needed to modernize Africa’s cultures; between preferences for traditional agrarian communities and their value structures, and the force of urbanization which follows in the wake of technological advancement. These tensions create a need for African philosophers to engage in interdisciplinary research, for renewal requires reflection on education, government, social organization, religious practices, and many other areas. We hope the way in which the readings are ordered in each chapter will help the reader to explore these possibilities.

The editors thank all the authors for their contributions. A very special word of thanks goes to Marinda Delpont who took charge of the typing and the preparation of the manuscript, Willena Reinach who assisted her, and to Lynda Gillfillan for the language editing of the manuscript.

P.H.COETZEE

A.P.J.ROUX

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Oxford University Press for their readiness to publish the second edition of *Philosophy from Africa*. A special word of thanks also goes to Professor Anthony Melck, former Principal of the University of South Africa, for making available the necessary funds for editorial work. We wish to convey our heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors for their permission to have their essays published in this second edition. Equally we thank all the copyright holders for their permission to have the essays published in the present volume.

At a time when her research and teaching programme was exceptionally congested our colleague, Professor Naomi Morgan, graciously accepted the additional task of translating two essays from French to English. Her excellence and professionalism speak for themselves. We wish to thank you very much for your efficient and competent response at a time of need.

Anxious to meet the publisher's deadline for the submission of the typescript (manuscript), we were fortunate to have found Mrs Lavina Hobbs. She was responsible for formatting, typing, and arranging the typescript according to the specifications of the publisher. In addition, she had to pay special attention to almost endless changes and details submitted to her by the editors. We thank you very much indeed for your patience, competence, and excellence in the performance of your task. Because of you we were able to submit the typescript before the expiry of the publisher's deadline. Our thanks go also to Ethné Clarke for her careful reading and editing of the manuscript and page proofs. Special thanks are also due to our colleague, Professor Mogobe Ramose, for his encouragement, support, and active participation in the entire editorial process.

P.H.COETZEE

A.P.J.ROUX

2002



## COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publisher and editors gratefully acknowledge and thank the authors and copyright holders for permission to reproduce the following material.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders, but where this has proved impossible, the publisher would be grateful for information that would enable it to amend any omissions in future editions.

Appiah, Kwame A. 'Race, culture, identity: Misunderstood connections', in *Color conscious: The political morality of race*, by Kwame A.Appiah and Amy Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996. pp. 74–105. ©1996 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Biakolo, Emevwo M. 'Categories of cross-cultural cognition and the African condition', in *Philosophy from Africa* (first edition), P.Coetzee and A.Roux (eds). Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 2000. pp. 1–12.

Biko, Steve B. 'Black consciousness and the quest for a true humanity', in *Black theology: The South African voice*, Basil Moore (ed). C. Hurst and Company. 1973. Reproduced by permission of C.Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., London.

Coetzee, Pieter H. 'Particularity in morality and its relation to community', in *Philosophy from Africa* (first edition), P.Coetzee and A. Roux (eds). Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 2000. pp. 275–291.

Coetzee, Pieter H. 'Later Marxist morality: Its relevance for Africa's post-colonial situation', in *KOERS*, 66(4). 2001. pp. 621–637. Reproduced by permission of the Bureau for Scholarly Journals.

Deacon, Moya. The status of Father Tempels and ethnophilosophy in the discourse of African philosophy, an edited extract from her unpublished 1996 M.A. thesis from RAU titled *African philosophy: From drums and masks to rationality*.

Eze, Emmanuel C. The color of reason: The idea of "race" in Kant's anthropology, in *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*, E.Eze (ed). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 1997. pp. 103–140.

Gbadegesin, Segun. 'Ènìyàn: The Yoruba concept of a person', in *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*, by Segun Gbadegesin. New York: Peter Lang. 1991. pp. 27–59.

Gyekye, Kwame. 'Person and community in African thought', in *Person and community: Ghanaian philosophical studies I*, CRVP (Council for Research in Values Philosophy). 1992. pp. 193–206.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 'An alienated literature', in *African philosophy: Myth and reality* (translated by Henri Evans with an introduction by Abiola Irele) (second edition). Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1983. pp. 33–46.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 'Producing knowledge in Africa today', in *African Studies Review*, 38. New Brunswick: African Studies Association. December 1995. pp. 1–10.

Irele, F.Abiola. 'Francophone African philosophy, in *Francophone African philosophy*

by F. A. Irele. London: Routledge.

Irele, F.Abiola. 'Négritude: Literature and ide-ology', in *The journal of African studies*, 3(4). 1965. pp. 499–526.

Kaphagawani, Didier N. and Malherbe, Jeanette G. 'African epistemology, in *Philosophy from Africa* (first edition), P.Coetzee and A. Roux (eds). Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 2000. pp. 205–216.

Laleye, Issiaka P. 'Is there an African philosophy in existence today?', in *Philosophie Africaine*, Vol. 3, Selected texts no. 2. pp. 467–476.

Mandaza, Ibbo. 'Reconciliation and social justice in southern Africa: The Zimbabwe experience', in *African Renaissance*, M.W. Makgoba (ed). Cape Town: Mafuba/Tafelberg. 1999. pp. 77–90.

Masolo, D.A. 'Rethinking communities in a global context', in *African philosophy*, 12 (1). 1999. pp. 51–68.

Mazrui, Ali A. 'Neo-dependency and Africa's fragmentation', in *Towards a pax Africana: A study of ideology and ambition*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 1967. pp. 74–96.

McGary, Howard. 'Alienation and the African-American experience', in *African-American perspectives and philosophical traditions*, J.P. Pittman (ed). London: Routledge. 1997. pp. 282–296.

Murobe, M.F. 'Globalization and African Renaissance: An ethical reflection', in *Problematising the African Renaissance*, E. Maloka and E.Le Roux (eds). Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa. 2000. pp. 43–67.

Mzimba, Thami. 'Victor', 1995, used on cover. Unisa Art Gallery, Permanent Art Collection.

Narayan, Uma. 'Essence of cultures and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism', in *Hypatia*, 13(2). Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Spring 1998. pp. 86–106.

Nasseem, Subairi 'B. 'African heritage and contemporary life', in *The foundations of social life* (Ugandan Philosophical Studies 1), A.T. Dalfovo et al. (eds). The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy with the assistance of CIPSH/UNESCO. 1992. pp.16–36.

Okolo, Chukwudum B. 'Self as a problem in African philosophy, in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXII(4). December 1992. pp. 477–485.

Oladipo, Olusegun. 'Metaphysics, religion and Yoruba traditional thought', in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*. January–April 1990. pp. 71–83.

Oruka, H.Odera. 'Four trends in current African philosophy', in *Symposium on Philosophy in the present situation of Africa, Wednesday, August 30, 1978*, Alwin Diemer and Franz Steiner (eds). Verlag GMBH: Wiesbaden. pp. 1–7.

Oruka, H.Odera. 'Ideology and culture: The African experience', in *Philosophy and cultures: Proceedings of the second Afro-Asian Philosophy Conference*, Nairobi, October/November, 1981, H.Odera Oruka and D.A.Masolo (eds). Bookwise Ltd. pp. 57–62.

Osaghae, Eghosa E. 'Rescuing the post-colonial state of Africa: A reconceptualization of the role of civil society, in *Quest*, 13/18(7). 1998. pp. 269–282.

Outlaw, Lucius. 'African "philosophy": Deconstructive and reconstructive challenges',

- in *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy*, H. Odera Oruka (wd). 1990. Leiden: E.J.Brill. pp. 223–248.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. ‘Visualizing the body, in *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1997. pp. 1–30. (University of Minnesota Press. Reproduced by permission of The University of Minnesota Press.)
- Presbey, Gail M. ‘Should woman love “wisdom”?’ in *Research in African Literatures*, 30(2). Summer 1999. pp. 165–181.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. ‘“African Renaissance”: A northbound gaze’, in *Politeia*, 19(3). 2000. pp. 47–61. Reproduced by permission of Unisa Press.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. ‘Globalization and *ubuntu*’, in *African philosophy through Ubuntu*, by Magobe B.Ramose. Harare: Mond Books. 1999. pp. 160–205.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. ‘Historic titles in law’, a previously unpublished paper.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. ‘I conquer, therefore I am the sovereign: Reflections upon sovereignty, constitutionalism, and democracy in Zimbabwe and South Africa’, a previously unpublished paper.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. ‘The ethics of *ubuntu*’, a previously unpublished paper.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a philosophy’, in *African philosophy through Ubuntu*, by Magobe B. Ramose. Harare: Mond Books. 1999.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. The struggle for reason in Africa’, in *African philosophy through Ubuntu*, by Magobe B.Ramose. Harare: Mond Books. 1999.
- Roux, Abraham P.J. and Teffo, Lebisio J. ‘Metaphysical thinking in Africa’, in *Philosophy from Africa* (first edition), P. Coetzee and A.Roux (eds). Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 2000. pp. 134–148. Reprinted with permission of the authors.
- Serequeberhan. Tsenay. The critique of Eurocentrism and the practice of African philosophy, in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A critical reader*, E.Eze (ed). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 1997. pp. 141–161.
- Sogolo, Godwin S. ‘Logic and rationality’, in *Foundations of African philosophy*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press. 1993. pp. 68–88.
- Sogolo, Godwin S. ‘The concept of cause in African thought’, a paper delivered at Unisa’s first colloquium on African Philosophy, 1994.
- Soyinka, Wole. ‘Négritude and the gods of equity’, in *The burden of memory, the muse of forgiveness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. pp. 145–194.
- Wa Thiong’o, Ngugi. ‘Moving the centre: Towards a pluralism of cultures’, in *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms*. London: James Currey. 1993. pp. 2–11.
- Wilkinson, Jennifer R. ‘South African women and the ties that bind’, a previously unpublished paper.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. ‘An Akan perspective on human rights’, in *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1996. pp. 157–171.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. ‘On decolonising African religions’, a paper delivered at Unisa’s second colloquium on African philosophy, 1995.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. The concept of truth in the Akan language’, a public lecture given for the first time in 1980 at the Department of Philosophy, California State University, Los Angeles.

Wiredu, Kwasi. 'The moral foundations of an African culture', in *Person and community: Ghanaian philosophical studies I*, CRVP (Council for Research in Values Philosophy). 1992. pp. 193–206.

Ya-Mona, Musambi Malongi. 'Primacy of the ethical order over the economic order: Reflections for an ethical economy', in *Philosophie Africaine Et Ordre Social*, Vol. 11. Proceedings of the ninth Philosophical Seminar at Kinshasa under the patronage of the Bishops Conference of Zaire and with the financial support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, from 1 December to 7 December, 1985.



# 1

## DISCOURSES ON AFRICA

### INTRODUCTION

The struggle for reason in Africa

MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

For centuries, discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. Many reasons account for this state of affairs and, not least, the unjustified violence of colonization. Since colonization, Africans have had almost an infinity of spokespersons. These claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them. Thus Africans were reduced to silence even about themselves. On the face of it, decolonization removed this problem. However, on closer analysis it is clear that decolonization was an important catalyst in the breaking of the silence about the Africans. It is still necessary to assert and uphold the right of Africans to define the meaning of experience and truth in their own right. In order to achieve this, one of the requirements is that Africans should take the opportunity to speak for and about themselves and in that way construct an authentic and truly African discourse about Africa. In this introduction, focus is placed first upon some of the main reasons why Africa was reduced to silence. This is followed by the speech, the discourse, of Africans about the meaning of experience and truth for them. The essays contained in this section constitute this discourse. We now turn to consider some of the principal reasons why colonization considered itself justified in silencing and enslaving Africa.

#### **‘MAN IS A RATIONAL ANIMAL’**

One of the bases of colonization was that the belief ‘man is a rational animal’ was not spoken of the African, the Amerindian, and the Australasian. Aristotle, the father of this definition of ‘man’, did not incur the wrath of women then as they were probably astounded by the fact that for him the existence of his mother appeared to be insignificant. It was only much later in history, namely at the rise of feminist thought and action, that the benign forgiveness of Aristotle by the women of his time came to be called into question.<sup>1</sup> Little did Aristotle realize that his definition of ‘man’ laid down the foundation for the struggle for reason—not only between men and women but also between the colonialists and the Africans,<sup>2</sup> the Amerindians,<sup>3</sup> and the Australasians.

Aristotle’s definition of man was deeply inscribed in the social ethos of those communities and societies that undertook the so-called voyages of discovery—apparently driven by innocent curiosity. But it is well known that these voyages changed into violent colonial incursions. These incursions, unjustifiable under all the principles of the theory of the just war, have had consequences that are still with us today. It seems then that the entire process of decolonization has, among others, upheld and not jettisoned the

questionable belief that ‘man is a rational animal’ excludes the African, the Amerindian, and the Australasian. In our time, the struggle for reason is rearing its head again around the globe, especially in the West, under the familiar face of resilient racism.

For example, the term ‘African philosophy’ renders the idea that history repeats itself easy to believe. More often than not the term tends to revive innate scepticism on the one hand, and to stimulate ingrained condescension on the other. The sceptic, unswervingly committed to the will to remain ignorant, is simply dismissive of any possibility, let alone the probability, of African philosophy. Impelled by the will to dominate, the condescendor—who is invariably the posterity of the colonizer—is often ready to entertain the probability of African philosophy provided the judgement pertaining to the experience, knowledge, and truth about African philosophy is recognized as the sole and exclusive right of the condescendor. Of course, this imaginary right, supported by material power designed to defend and sustain the superstition that Africa is incapable of producing knowledge, has far-reaching practical consequences for the construction of knowledge in Africa. The self-appointed heirs to the right to reason have thus established themselves as the producers of all knowledge and the only holders of the truth. In these circumstances, the right to knowledge in relation to the African is measured and determined by passive as well as uncritical assimilation,<sup>4</sup> coupled with faithful implementation of knowledge defined and produced from outside Africa. The condescendor currently manifests the will to dominate through the imposition of ‘democratization’, ‘globalization’, and ‘human rights’. Such imposition is far from credible if one considers, for example, the fact that democracy became inadvertently the route towards the inhumanity as well as the irrationality of the holocaust.

Historically, the unjust wars of colonization resulted in the forcible expropriation of land from its rightful owners: the Africans. At the same time, the land expropriation meant loss of sovereignty by the Africans.<sup>5</sup> The close connection between land and life<sup>6</sup> meant also that by losing land to the conqueror, the African thereby lost a vital resource to life. This loss was aggravated by the fact that, by virtue of the so-called right of conquest, the African was compelled to enter into the money economy. Thus the so-called right of conquest introduced an abrupt and radical change in the life of the African. From the condition of relative peace and reasonable certainty to satisfy the basic necessities of life, the African was suddenly plunged into poverty. There was no longer the reasonable certainty to meet the basic necessities of life unless money was available. Having been thus rendered poor by the stroke of the pen backed by the use of armed force, the African was compelled to find money to assure not only individual survival but also to pay tax for owning a hut, for example. In this way, the African’s right to life—the inalienable right to subsistence—was violated. Since all other rights revolve around the recognition, protection, and respect of the right to life, talk about human rights based upon the continual violation of this right can hardly be meaningful to the African. To be meaningful, human rights discourse must restore material and practical recognition, protection, and respect for the African’s inalienable right to subsistence.

The 1994 Kampala conference on reparations to Africa is a pertinent example of Africa’s demand for the material and practical restoration of her inalienable right to subsistence. Reparations, though not technically due to the conquered, is in this case morally and legally appropriate. It proceeds from the premise that there is a historical and

conceptual link between colonization, racism, and slavery. It was therefore demanded that these items be included in the agenda of the United Nations conference on racism to be held in the city of Durban, South Africa in August 2001. The necessity to include this demand prompted the United States of America to threaten to boycott the conference. It must be emphasized in favour of the United States and, with particular reference to hostile sentiment towards Israel or the world Jewry, that it is ethically imperative to oppose vigorously anyone who contemplates a repeat of the irrationality and the inhumanity of Hitler's holocaust. However, it is the United States which undermined her own ethically laudable position by insisting on the exclusion from the United Nations agenda deliberations on restitution arising from the injustice of colonization and slavery. Surely, these experiences of humanity were also by every test both irrational and inhuman? There is no hierarchy in measuring the value of one human life over another. Thus the question persists: why is it that the African's right to life continues to be denied, derecognized, and remains practically unprotected by the beneficiaries of the violence, irrationality, and the inhumanity of colonization? The United States and Israel sent an official delegation to the Durban conference. Israel and the United States later on withdrew their delegations from the conference. The majority of the Western countries present at the conference insisted that the prevailing inhumanity of the global structural violence and poverty should be maintained. This they did by ensuring that the conference would adopt resolutions that would absolve them from both the moral and the legal guilt of the violence of colonization and the inhumanity of racism. That Africa relented in the name of compromise clearly underlines the urgent need for authentic African philosophy aimed towards the liberation of Africa. Thus the struggle for reason is not only from outside but also from within Africa.

### **'ALL MEN ARE RATIONAL ANIMALS'**

The struggle for reason—who is and who is not a rational animal—is the foundation of racism. Despite democracy and the culture of human rights in our time, the foundation of the struggle for reason remains unshaken. Biological accidents like blue eyes, skin colour, short hair, or an oval cranium are all little pieces of poor evidence to prove the untenable claim that only a particular segment of humanity is rational. This conventionally valid but no less scientifically untenable proof was used to justify both colonization and the christianization of the colonized. This imaginary justification proved unsustainable because of a basic contradiction in the internal logic, as well as the intent of both colonization and christianization. If the colonized are by definition without reason, then it may be justified to turn them into slaves. But they must be seen as slaves of a particular kind, namely sub-human beings who, because of lack of reason, can have no will of their own and therefore no freedom either. To teach them anything that human beings can understand and do by virtue of their rationality would be a contradiction in terms. It would be tantamount to redeeming them from the status of sub-human beings and to elevate them to parity with human beings. This is precisely why the ensuing stalemate in the christianization of the colonized was overcome when the Papal bull, *Sublimis Deus*, gave in to the law of logic and removed the contradiction by unreservedly declaring that 'all men are rational animals'.<sup>7</sup> The Papal declaration, together with the



defeat of scientific racism, do however have great and fundamental significance. Both may be seen as the triumph of reason in the affirmation that all human beings are rational animals. On this basis, it is clear that there is indeed only one race, the human race.

The Papal declaration, just like the defeat of scientific racism by science itself, failed to eradicate and erase the struggle for reason from the social consciousness of successive generations of the former colonizers: be they in the colonizing mother countries or in the former colonies. The will and determination to wish away *Sublimis Deus* and the victory over scientific racism is no more than a sustained endeavour to enliven and sustain the myth that only a particular segment of humanity has a prior, exclusive, and superior right to rationality. According to this reasoning, the myth that within the species *homo sapiens* there are humans proper and sub-humans means that there cannot be one human race. In our complex global village of today, biology through the reproductive route shall eventually vindicate the reality that the human race is one. Children shall continue to be born from mothers and fathers with accidental biological differences and different cultural backgrounds. Provided humanity does not sink into the ultimate irrationality of self-annihilation through an unwinnable nuclear war, human reproductive power shall in the distant future of evolution march inexorably towards the defeat of the myth that the human race is not and cannot be one.

Why did the teaching of Western philosophy in African universities fail for so long to address the concrete experience of racism in the continent in the light of philosophical racism? For too long the teaching of Western philosophy in Africa was decontextualized precisely because both its inspiration and the questions it attempted to answer were not necessarily based upon the living experience of being-an-African in Africa. Yet, the Western philosophers that the teaching of philosophy in Africa emulated always drew their questions from the lived experience of their time and place. Such questioning included the upkeep and refinement of an established philosophical tradition. In this sense, Western philosophy has always been contextual. But this cannot be said without reservation about the teaching of Western philosophy in Africa since it was—and still is—decontextualized to the extent that it systematically and persistently ignored and excluded the experience of being-an-African in Africa. The mimetic and the decontextualized character of the teaching of Western philosophy in Africa calls for a radical overhaul of the whole epistemological paradigm underlying the current educational system. To evade this duty is to condone racism—which is a form of injustice. The injustice is apparent in the recognition that there is neither a moral basis nor pedagogical justification for the Western epistemological paradigm to retain primacy and dominance in decolonized Africa. The independent review and construction of knowledge in the light of the unfolding African experience is not only a vital goal—it is also an act of liberation.<sup>8</sup>

### **IS THERE AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY?**

The question whether or not African philosophy is possible or exists continues to be debated. It is curious that the debate seems endless even though strong arguments have been advanced to demonstrate the actual existence of African philosophy. Non-Africans are the principal initiators of this question. They remain the ones who continue to keep

the question alive. Thus it is pertinent to ask, (i) why they persist in raising this question and, (ii) what is the meaning of this question. In answer to the second question we reply that it is evident that there are many African philosophers around if by that we mean people schooled in the discipline of philosophy. For this reason, it is unlikely that the non-Africans are posing this as an empirical question. The question pertains more to the capability of the African to philosophize. In other words, it is doubtful that Africans can philosophize. If Africans were exposed to philosophy they could not cope with its requirements. This is because by their nature, their very being what they are, it is impossible for Africans to do philosophy. In this way, the question assumes an ontological character: it calls into question the humanity of the African. The question is thus another way of saying that it is doubtful if Africans are wholly and truly human beings. The majority of the non-Africans continue to choose the answer that Africans are not wholly and truly human beings. Proceeding from this premise it was a matter of course for them to write the history of Western philosophy without due consideration for the African component in it.

For example, Pope John Paul II, in his ‘fides et Ratio, Vatican 1998’ implies that Africa provides nothing remarkable or worth recalling in the history of philosophy since antiquity to the contemporary period. The Italian, D. Composta, and Copleston also give neither credit nor scientific status to African philosophy in antiquity. Copleston ‘totally rejects a historical and scientific African philosophy of ancient black Egypt and its subsequent influence on and relation with early Greek philosophy.... F.C. Copleston (1907–1985), an American Catholic clergyman, is a typical twentieth-century European representative of the view which denies and severs all historical philosophical links of ancient Egypt with Greece and Rome. ... Furthermore, Copleston would not accept even the personally documented testimonies of the ancient Greek philosophers. In his *Metaphysics* (1.1981b, 14–24), Aristotle clearly recognizes the Egyptian origin of the philosophical sciences of mathematics and astronomy.... If Copleston ignores the personal and firsthand literary testimonies of ancient Greek philosophers, he would certainly be less ready to accept the secondary reports of later past authors like Herodotus...’<sup>9</sup> Thus in the name of science many spurious excuses were found as to why there could not be and never was an African philosophy. The history of Western philosophy was seen from this perspective and continues to be done within the framework determined by the premise that Africans are not wholly and truly human. African historical reconstruction is a response and a challenge to this tradition. It is a questioning of the standards used in the reconstruction of the history of Western philosophy. It is an interrogation of the manner and extent to which the standards have been used to produce a less than truthful picture of the history of Western philosophy, especially the Ancient and Medieval periods.

### **THE AFRICAN HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION**

Like the defenders of black philosophy in the United States of America, the proponents of African historical reconstruction were asked to justify their claim that there is an African philosophy. This demand for justification clearly presupposed ‘a specific understanding of the nature of the philosophical enterprise and the appropriate standards

and methods for philosophizing.’<sup>10</sup> There was thus an implicit distinction between Philosophy and philosophy, the latter being the suitable label for the African’s claim. But is there any scientific ground for this kind of distinction? Who determines the ‘scientificity’ of the distinction? The demand for the protection of standards arising from this situation is weakened by its very lack of objectivity. It is also devoid of legitimacy since it arises from the questionable premise that Africans are not wholly and truly human. Arguing for the legitimacy of the African historical reconstruction, I. Osuagwu posits that ‘African history of philosophy is an existential, call it an ontological, memorial of the ways our scholarly ancestors thought and lived life through, the way they attempted to understand and master themselves and their world.’<sup>11</sup> The deeper meaning of the word ‘memorial’ in this context is that there is an inextricable connection between memory and the construction of individual or collective identity. Thus self-knowledge can never be complete without reference to one’s roots, to the past which is one’s history. It is because of their adherence to the image of their identity that human beings sometimes prefer to lose their lives rather than suffer the loss of their identity. For this reason the study of one’s history is necessary. On this reasoning, the blurred and dotted picture of the history of Western philosophy is a deformation of the African identity. African historical reconstruction is a corrective to this. It is intended to present the true picture of the African identity. ‘In conducting their historical essay, African philosophers want to rectify the historical prejudices of negation, indifference, severance, and oblivion that have plagued African philosophy in the hands of European devil’s advocates and their African accomplices. African historical investigations in philosophy go beyond defence, confrontations, and corrections. They are also authentic projects and exercises in genuine scientific construction of African philosophy concerning diverse matters of its identity and difference, problem and project, its objectives, discoveries, development, achievements and defects or failures.’<sup>12</sup> Historical investigations such as Cheik Anta Diop’s *The African origin of civilization*, M. Bernal’s *Black Athena*, T. Obenga’s *Philosophie Africaine de la Periode Pharaonique 2780–330 avant notre ere*, and, I. C. Onyewuenyi’s *The African origin of Greek philosophy*, must be studied in this light.

### TOWARDS THE LIBERATION OF PHILOSOPHY

To deny the existence of African philosophy for the sake of maintaining the existing standards in education is to undermine the very nature of education and science. It is at the same time to make the questionable claim that the curriculum is free from ideological tension. The opponents of the protection of the existing standards of education recognize that the educational curriculum is by definition the terrain of ideological struggle. For the sake of the liberation of those who bore the burden of learning under the imposed Western epistemological paradigm, they urge for the transformation of the curriculum. Resistance to this is tantamount to the rejection of liberation. It is precisely standing firm in the position of the de-liberation of philosophy. But the de-liberation of philosophy must be challenged through transformation. Parallel with the black experience in the United States of America, ‘a philosophy that reflects and/or endorses the white experience dominates the discipline. Accordingly, to call for a black philosophy... is to launch an implicit attack on racism in philosophy, especially in its conceptual, research,

curricular, and institutional expressions....to advance a black philosophy is to affirm that the black perspective has been devalued and omitted from the recipe of Western philosophy and that that which has been ignored is a necessary ingredient for authentic philosophizing.<sup>13</sup> Authentic philosophizing is possible only through the inclusion of that which was deliberately ignored and omitted and, in our example, this is African philosophy. The inclusion is necessary for the liberation of philosophy from the overwhelming one-sidedness of the history of Western philosophy.

To deny the existence of African philosophy is also to reject the very idea of philosophy. It is to foreclose in advance the doors of communication with what we do not know. Yet, if the philosopher is the lover of wisdom, surely it is common sense that one cannot acquire wisdom by improving one's skills to avoid listening to others. Hearing others is one thing but listening to them is quite another matter. The latter involves the possibility for communication. Accordingly, to deny oneself the opportunity for dialogue is to reject the possibility condition of becoming a philosopher. Dialogue being the basis of deliberation, it is clear that the liberation of philosophy is possible only through dialogue. For this reason it is imperative to take seriously Gracia's warning to Continental and Anglo-Saxon philosophers, namely, that '...the sorts of questions raised by Continental philosophers are frequently dismissed by analysts as illegitimate, and the questions they regard as legitimate are dismissed by Continental philosophers as trivial ... This technique of dismissal is a serious matter, for it clearly points to a kind of antiphilosophical dogmatic attitude that runs contrary to the very nature of the discipline as traditionally conceived... To reject at the outset any attempt and possibility of communication with those who oppose us is something that has always been criticized by philosophers and that, nonetheless, is generally accepted in the profession today. The curiosity to understand those who don't think as we do is gone from philosophical circles to the detriment of the discipline. The situation, therefore, is intolerable not only from a practical standpoint but more important, because it threatens to transform the discipline into one more of the many ideologies that permeate our times, where differences of opinion are settled not through argument but through political action or force.'<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In reading what follows, both the curious and the adherents to the view that only one segment of humanity has a prior and exclusive claim to reason might feel urged to raise a number of questions and even objections. One of the questions might be that what is presented as African philosophy is so familiar to Western thought that one still wonders what exactly is African after all. First of all, this question is a strange way of preferring to ignore the fact that African philosophy is by any stretch of the imagination linguistically and philosophically distinct from whatever might be termed Western philosophy. Second, one of the unstated presuppositions of this question is that African philosophy is not only an expression of the already familiar in Western philosophy but that it also relies upon it for its existence. To discover familiarity between Western and African philosophies is not the same thing as to affirm identity between them. The two philosophies are not and cannot be identical, since to be identical they must dissolve into one philosophy only. Such dissolution might be possible only if (a) two separate conditions may be found to be

exactly the same in all respects at one and the same time; (b) if human freedom and, therefore the inherent unpredictability of human action, were to be completely removed from the human experience. For as long as requirements (a) and (b) cannot be fulfilled at the same time in specific circumstances relating to a particular human experience, the point that familiarity is not identity remains intact. Furthermore, the fact that human experience is time and space bound allows for the possibility of similar insights arising out of dissimilar experiences. This means that, although insights might be similar, they are always ineluctably clothed and coloured by different experiences. Tintured insights are the possibility condition for dialogue and communication. But they are not the reason for the assimilation, integration, or even dissolution of one experience into another. Yet, over the centuries, since conquest in the unjust wars of colonization, this has been the course preferred by the non-Africans in their relations with the Africans. The former, ignoring the tintured character of insights and refusing to recognize the basic distinction between insight and argument, persistently argue that since the insights are the same, the African must in the name of ‘development’, ‘democracy’, and ‘human rights’, for example, simply dissolve and become Western. This kind of demand—sometimes under the guise of ‘methodological’ objections—is based on the fallacy that one experience is both prior to in terms of temporal or historical sequence and superior to the other in terms of an artificial hierarchical order. This kind of demand is morally questionable. That it is an objection epistemologically untenable requires no special pleading. However, it is understandable that it should come from a people who in the name of science have not only confused but insist on the identification of reason with absolute obedience to the convention to rely on the authority of references. The insistence is implausible because reason manifests itself first through the spoken language. Writing is an invention which depends on the prior existence of the spoken language. Accordingly, the speaking human being (*homo loquens*) precedes the writing human being (*homo scriptans*). Therefore, where there are no footnotes, there is no reason in the fallacy underlying the demand of the non-Africans to assimilate and integrate the African into the West. At bottom this fallacy is expressive of the wish to appropriate experience and history for the sake of sustaining the undying myth that only one segment of humanity has a prior, superior, and exclusive right to reason. Without this wish there is no need to posit the question whether or not there can be an African philosophy.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 McMillan, Carol. 1982. *Women, reason and nature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1982:1–15 and 80–151.
- 2 Hume, D. ‘Of national characters’, in F.N. Norton & R.H. Popkin (eds.), *David Hume: Philosophical historian*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965:47.
- 3 Williams, R.A. 1990. *The American Indian in Western legal thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 4 This is precisely the same structural circumstance in which the Amerindian and the Australasians find themselves. By claiming the sole and exclusive right to reason, the erstwhile conqueror continues to hold epistemological primacy and dominance.

- In this way holding the key to knowledge practically means holding the key to power. See Bondy, A.S. The meaning and problem of Hispanic thought (Can there be a Latin American philosophy?)', in J.J.E.Gracia (ed.), *Latin American philosophy in the twentieth century*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1986:243.
- 5 In his discussion of 'the evolution of the international personality of the new African states', in the pre-colonial period, Okoye argues against the denial of 'any status in classical international law' to the ancient and medieval states outside 'Europe'. He notes pertinently that, 'Again European powers concerned in the acquisition of African territories in the nineteenth century took the opinion that native populations had rights of sovereignty over the territory'. Okoye, F.C. *International law and the new African states*. London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1972:5.
- 6 Brueggemann, W. 1977. *The land*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977:48. Fanon, F. 1961. *The wretched of the earth*. (tr.) C.Farrington. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961:34.
- 7 Hanke, L. 1937. 'Pope Paul III and the American Indians.' *Harvard Theological Review*, xxx:71–72.
- 8 Altbach, P.G. 1984. The distribution of knowledge in the third world: A case study in neocolonialism', in P.G.Altbach and Gail P.Kelly (eds.), *Education and the colonial experience*. New Brunswick (USA) and London: Transaction Books, 1984:230–231.
- 9 Osuagwu, I.M. 1999. *African historical reconstruction*. Imo State, Nigeria: Amamihe Publications, 1999:87, 94, 95, 96.
- 10 Jones, W.R. 1977–1978. The legitimacy and necessity of black philosophy: Some preliminary considerations.' *The Philosophical Forum*, ix(2–3), 1977–1978:151.
- 11 Osuagwu, I.M. 1999. *African historical reconstruction*. Imo State, Nigeria: Amamihe Publications, 1999:22.
- 12 Osuagwu, I.M. 1999. *African historical reconstruction*. Imo State, Nigeria: Amamihe Publications, 1999:25.
- 13 Jones, W.R. 1977–1978. The legitimacy and necessity of black philosophy: Some preliminary considerations.' *The Philosophical Forum*, ix(2–3), 1977–1978:153.
- 14 Gracia, J.J.E. 1992. *Philosophy and its history*. New York: State University of New York Press. 1992:25.

### Categories of cross-cultural cognition and the African condition

#### EMEVWO BIAKOLO

Relations between the knowing subject and its object, in any account of the epistemological process, has occupied Western philosophy from the time of Plato, but most especially since the seventeenth century, with the advent of both Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism. Although in the field of philosophy the central concerns have been with the individual subject as such, it was not long before the influences of these interpretations of the relation began to make themselves felt in the much younger discipline of anthropology. In consonance with the pattern of growth and development of the new science of culture, the determinant factor here was race (Harris

1969:80–107). The critical question was how to think the non-Caucasian races, ‘the Other’, with whom the Western world had come into increasing contact since the great exploratory journeys of the fifteenth century.

In *The invention of Africa* (1988) and *The idea of Africa* (1994), V.Y.Mudimbe has mapped out the historical course of the apprehension and description of the ‘Other’ in Western thought from classical times until the consolidation of the African image in the power-knowledge system of colonialism and the post-colonial period. While the constancy of the ideology behind the building of the paradigm is not in doubt, it is also useful to note the variegation in its employment, the nuanced way in which it is deployed from discipline to discipline within the configuration of anthropocentric studies. It reveals an ingenuity which goes further to confirm the political project behind the Western construction of cultural paradigms of the Other.

### SAVAGE VERSUS CIVILIZED

Before the publication of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, 1910 (translated as *How natives think*), when a slight shift occurred in the idiom of anthropological discourses of the Other, the standard paradigm had been as enunciated in Lewis Henry Morgan’s 1870 classic *Systems of consanguinity and affinity of the human family*. Morgan’s schemata of the developmental stages through which cultures progress was entirely unique, even among evolutionists, in its confident clarity. Neither E.B.Tylor’s *Researches* into the early history of mankind and the development of civilization published earlier in 1865, nor his later, better-known work, *Primitive culture* (1871), could match the structural rigour and conceptual comprehensiveness of Morgan. His seven stages of development—Lower Savagery, Middle Savagery, Upper Savagery, Lower Barbarism, Middle Barbarism, Upper Barbarism and Civilization—were not only determined by forms of family and kinship relationships, the subsistence system and technology, they corresponded with identifiable, that is nameable societies. Of course in this elaborate frame, only Euro-American society attained the status of civilization, typified by the possession of writing and especially of the phonetic alphabet.

The image of the African as ‘brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, and superstitious’, (quoted in Harris 1969:89), which was quite current in Europe and the colonies in the eighteenth century, had a most respectable antecedent in the ethnocentrism of philosophers like David Hume, Voltaire, and the French philosophers such as Montesquieu. This, for instance, is what Hume says:

There never was civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturer among them, no arts, no sciences... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men (quoted in Harris 1969:88).

Articulated within this discourse of the ‘savage’ or ‘barbaric’ African, was the express cultural frame of reference. The point had a double trajectory: the absence of any single individual genius (as against a European milieu full of individual culture-heroes), and a general social context of benighted savagery. If today one of Europe’s most celebrated

philosophers sounds so ludicrous in his assertions, we have to note that this situation had as much to do with ignorance as with 'a will to truth' or 'power-knowledge'. While travellers, traders, and explorers had long since the fifteenth century provided Europeans with some knowledge of non-Western people, and as Mudimbe (1988) says, European artists had contemplated the Other in their paintings, no very systematic study of the subject had been undertaken until well into the eighteenth century.

The protracted arguments, prior to this time, between the monogenists and the polygenists, in the prehistory of anthropology, which have been amply described by Marvin Harris (1969), had less relevance as an attempt to understand the Other than as a disputation in biblical theology. Thus, even with more extensive anthropological studies in the nineteenth century, the persisting paradigm until the turn of the century was the 'savagery/barbarism' of the African pitted against the 'civilization of the West'. The substantive shift that occurred at this period is exemplified in the work of Lévy-Bruhl mentioned above.

### PRE-LOGICAL VERSUS LOGICAL

The anthropology of Lévy-Bruhl marked a watershed in the understanding of the Other. Although like Frazer and Taylor before him, Lévy-Bruhl was an armchair anthropologist, his work departed from the evolutionary quests of his predecessors or even the social scientific aspirations of his contemporaries, and instead focused on the psycho(logical) foundations of primitive culture. For want of a better term, but latching on to what proved very seminal in many respects, he characterized the representations of 'undeveloped peoples' as evidence of a 'prelogical mentality'. This mentality was based on the 'law of participation'.

The collective representations of primitives, therefore, differ very profoundly from our ideas or concepts, nor are they their equivalent either. On the one hand, as we shall presently discover, they have not their logical character... On the other hand, they see many things there of which we are unconscious (Lévy-Bruhl 1985:37–38).

The participation mystique and pre-logical mentality makes primitive reasoning 'essentially synthetic', 'little given to analysis', and 'concrete'. Thus, memory plays a much more important role in primitive mental life than in that of the civilized, European mind. Objective validity is unknown to primitive cultures and

...the slightest mental effort involving abstract reasoning, however elementary it may be, is distasteful to them (Lévy-Bruhl 1985:86–128).

The most notable features of this description are firstly the mutation of the general cultural opposition, savage versus civilized, hitherto dominant in anthropological discourse. In its place was erected an alternative frame 'pre-logical versus logical', which subsumed a host of subsidiary and associated concepts: 'synthetic' versus 'analytic', 'concrete' versus 'abstract', 'particular' versus 'generalizing'. 'Pre-logical' does not mean antedating logic, or anti-logical or even alogical, as Lévy-Bruhl is at pains to point



out (Lévy-Bruhl 1985:78). Nevertheless, it set at nought the rules of logic as commonly known in the Western tradition, such as the law of non-contradiction and *modus ponens*. That is, primitives are 'wholly indifferent' to Western logical procedure. This, for Lévy-Bruhl, was the key to understanding the difference between savage and civilized cultures, rather than the earlier futile pursuit of the evolutionary paths through which the one society has trodden from one stage to another.

But it ought to be immediately added that this conceptual departure did not in any way imply a repudiation or rejection of the earlier paradigm. It rather concretized and specified the sometimes nebulous meanings associated with the notions of savage and civilized. Second, while earlier descriptions, for example, Morgan's, had been concerned with the mode of production, or family and kinship relations of the societies in question, Lévy-Bruhl thought that these were only material expressions of the mentality of the group. Even the remarkable difference in the structure of language of primitive and civilized peoples was determined by their varying mentalities. Thus social scientists such as Emile Durkheim might elaborate the institutions which go into the formation of the social structure, but the very foundation of these structures and processes of culture is the form of mind behind the operations.

The third aspect of this frame is that it posed in alternative terms what we have already seen in Hume's celebration of the superiority of European culture. Lévy-Bruhl speaks of 'collective representations' of primitives, not just representations, which could imply individual creations. In the light of recent debates on ethnophilosophy among African philosophers (cf. Hountondji 1976; Wiredu 1980; Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992; Sogolo 1993), this idea of collective representations assumes a particular poignancy. Lévy-Bruhl spoke of them as collective, following the contemporary terminology, not because he is interested in rendering a general (collectivist) account of a culture, but because the participation mystique is at one with this collectivity. Primitive culture is participated in collectively, it is a shared reality, the idea of individual, and by implication, dissident, grasp or assessment of reality, individual creativity and so on, runs counter to the ethos of primitive culture. Articulated then with a logic and epistemology were ethics.

While a vast majority of the functionalist school of anthropology (and here we include such disparate figures as Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, A.R.Radcliffe-Brown, and Paul Radin) were antagonistic to the prelogical/logical frame enunciated by Lévy-Bruhl, his continued influence in cultural cognitive studies is undeniable (Scott-Littleton 1985). The thrust of this influence can be seen in two different but related directions. First of all, the *emic-etic* dispute from the sixties became articulated with critical methodological and theoretical issues concerned with the concept of cultural relativity in the new ethnography. On this basis, the functionalists' criticism of Lévy-Bruhl becomes, in effect, a validation of putative universal categories under whose suasion non-Western cultures were and could be studied.

There is a curious permutation of these ideas in the consolidation of the colonial state all over Africa. On the one hand, the French model, thoroughly convinced of the superiority of European (French) culture, in the understanding of the cognitive paradigm so clearly set out by Lévy-Bruhl, in effect created two sorts of citizens within the state... black men who had achieved honorary status as French citizens as a consequence of having acquired civilization, and the mass of the African savage population with which

the state was forced by economic and political considerations to have dealings and to protect from competitors. The British model, on the other hand, granting, as British functionalist anthropology did, some, admittedly doubtful, humanity to the African primitives, elaborated a system which permitted the natives to govern themselves after their own fashion, but within the legal and political limits set by the Master. The cultural conquest could more systematically proceed through the religious and educational system, which, while it did not officially force anyone, became prerequisites for political and social advancement of any deserving native.

### PERCEPTUAL VERSUS CONCEPTUAL

From another direction is the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, especially his most seminal book in this respect, *The savage mind* (1966). This work was intended as a response to the arguments of Lévy-Bruhl, proposing to show the logicity of the primitive mind and the structural orderliness of his conceptual schemes. Identifying primitive knowledge schema with magic and the civilized one with science, Lévi-Strauss argued, however, that primitive man had a genuine scientific spirit and logical-categorial abilities as can be seen in his nominal and classificatory systems and his myths. He admits that these modes of knowledge acquisition are not necessarily the preserve of any one culture. Yet, fundamental differences exist between the two.

The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal (Lévi-Strauss 1966:17).

This mode of inquiry Lévi-Strauss characterizes as 'bricolage'. In a pattern of thought, the 'bricoleur' is perceptual where the scientist is conceptual. The latter opens up new possibilities of knowledge by extension and renewal, while the former conserves knowledge by means of reorganization of what is already known. Also, the scientist creates events by means of structures and in this way changes the world; the 'bricoleur', on the other hand, creates structures by means of events.

Lévi-Strauss' declaration that these two mental modes are not unique to any given culture seems to be at one with the intention of the functionalists, contra both Lévy-Bruhl and the evolutionists, namely to demonstrate the similarity of all cultures in terms of their synchronic social operations, in spite of other differences. But what unites all these can be discerned by analysing some of the most important postulates of Lévi-Strauss in comparison with Lévy-Bruhl. Scientific thought, Lévi-Strauss argues, is conceptual, while mythical thought is perceptual. While his compatriot does not adopt this terminology, the conceptual is cognate with Lévy-Bruhl's 'analytical', just as the perceptual shares a relation with the 'synthetic'. Percepts are commonly held to be integrative, while concepts on the other hand can be grasped fully only in their analytical frame, and thus belong to a higher epistemological order.

In a similar manner, scientific thought is innovative, ever inventive of new technological forms, while mythical thought is conservative, recreating existing structures in a manipulative way but without creating anything new. In the light of what we shall see below when we consider what Walter Ong (1977, 1981, 1982) has to say

concerning his so-called oral cultures, even Lévi-Strauss' reluctance to identify any particular cultures with a mythical or scientific spirit poses a problem, and not merely a moral one. What we need to ask is why the problem has to be presented the way it has been. If, following the structuralist thesis, all life and culture present themselves in a binary form, why would this binarism be limited only to individuals or within cultures and not among cultures? Is not this binarism also a necessity of the conditions and possibilities of knowledge? That is to say, meta-theory in structuralism cannot be abstracted from this general binary condition, otherwise structuralism is being pressed arbitrarily into heuristic service. If this is so, all forms of knowledge and their organization and articulation within any episteme become binary and it is only right and fair to identify Lévi-Strauss with a binary view of racial and cultural forms of knowledge. This is in part what Jacques Derrida means when he accuses Lévi-Strauss' cultural theory of ethnocentrism masking as anti-ethnocentrism (Derrida 1976:120–122).

The other point is that if myth and science are really such dichotomous orders of knowing and knowledge, their mode of existence and mutual relationship within the individual or cultural subject is far from clear in Lévi-Strauss' explanation. Do they exist in a sub- or super-ordinate relationship with each other or are they co-terminal, co-ordinate, homologous? At any rate, myth or magic has more recently come to be seen as incommensurable with science. What is the basis of the selection of epistemes for comparative analysis? Why is myth or magic opposed to science? Why is the opposition not between myth and modern religion? Simply put: the selection of the terms of a paradigm are coloured ideologically. Lévi-Strauss is working within the grid of a power-knowledge, and the supposed attempt to decontextualize this, to objectify its terms, just serves to reinforce it in a sophisticated way.

### ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN

The change in the interpretation of the savage/civilized paradigm by the structuralists also coincided with the change of the political fortunes of imperialism. By the fifties, the African subject was no longer content to acquire the civilization of the Master. He too wanted a share of the political estate. In theoretical terms, he could no longer be dismissed as the prelogical primitive, but only now, following the Lévi-Straussian doctrine, as just the exemplary mythical thinker. Under the new argot, everyone was adjudged to be in some way mythical, although some were indeed more mythical in thought than others. Looked at in this way, it becomes particularly significant that similar efforts to change the tune of the song without changing its sense, were being undertaken from another direction, at about the same time. I refer to investigations in philology and communication studies involving such a diverse collection of scholars as Milman Parry, Eric Havelock, Harold Innis, Albert Lord, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong. The basic argument here is that civilization, certainly Western civilization, owes its origin to writing. With the Greek invention of the alphabet, the organization of knowledge was radically transformed. In oral cultures, the poets, sages, and thinkers depend on poetic rhythm and narrative structure to ensure the remembrance of past utterances. With the introduction of writing, this mnemonic function is most effectively served by the medium itself, making the storage and retrieval of knowledge so much easier (Havelock 1963,

1976a, 1976b).

The consequences of this development in the means of communication were not merely practical or mnemonic in the individual sense. What it achieved was alteration in the way the consciousness of Western men and women is organized. There was a paradigmatic shift from a time-oriented focus of communicative consciousness to a space-oriented one. Even more importantly perhaps, there was a change in the style of knowledge presentation resulting in a dominance of discourses that were more and more definitional, descriptive, and analytical (Havelock 1963, 1991; Ong 1977, 1982; Goody and Watt 1968; Goody 1977). Here was the origin of Western science and philosophy. Havelock puts quite starkly:

Without modern literacy, which means Greek literacy, we would not have science, philosophy, written law or literature, nor the automobile or the airplane (Havelock 1991:24).

But it is Walter Ong who has provided by far the most sustained elaboration of the cultural consequences of the change in the medium of communication. For him, the transformation of the mode of codification and structuration of knowledge led to a cultural regimen which placed greater premium on innovativeness, inventiveness, and objectivity. Discourses that emerge from such a milieu tend to be abstract, analytic, syllogistic, and definitional, and their immediate context of production is generally privatist. In contrast, oral cultures tend to be traditionalist and conservative; its members acquire knowledge and skill by personal participation and practice; and its conceptual categories are invariably concrete and are interiorized as communal knowledge. Even the forms of social and political organization in oral and literate cultures differ as a result of this single technological development.

This is where the real challenge in this interpretation of cultures lies and the source of the unease it generates in many scholars (cf. Street 1984): What valid historiographic procedure permits a causal account of culture that relies exclusively on only one technological item? But I think the problem is much more than this. Indeed even before addressing the epistemological issues raised, there is the elementary question of the historical validity of some of the claims made in this account. It has become a historical commonplace that we owe the phonetic alphabet to the Greeks. But this has been contested seriously by I.J. Gelb in his *The study of writing* (1963). Following several authorities, he contends that the Greeks borrowed their alphabetic signs from the Phoenicians. But when presented with incontrovertible evidence of this truth, some scholars have hastened to add that, even if the Greeks did not create the alphabet, it was their introduction of the vowel into the Semitic Aleph-Beth which has made the alphabet what it is today. But Gelb would not provide even this much comfort to these determined ethnocentrists. Says he:

The Greeks did not invent a new vowel system but simply used for vowels those signs which in the various Semitic systems of writing likewise can function as vowels in form of the so-called *matres lectionis*... The greatness of the Greek innovation lies, therefore, not in the invention of a new method of indicating vowels but in a methodical application of a device which the early Semites used

only in an irregular and sporadic fashion. As we have seen, even the Semitic and other Near Eastern writings in the course of time developed this method of indicating vowels to such an extent that they, too, were on the way toward creating a full system of vowel signs and consequently an alphabet (Gelb 1963:181–182).

But the Havelock-Ong argument has other problems as well. If literacy is responsible for Greek artistic and scientific glory, what can account for the relative low-technology of India which took over the Semitic alphabet at about the same time as the Greeks? Against this position it has sometimes been urged that in India or among the Semites, literacy was restricted to the scribal class. But then, how did literacy manage to serve the commercial purpose as it did with the Phoenicians? And at any rate how widespread indeed was literacy among the Greeks? The Greek City States were not a uniform socio-political and cultural experience and so the reliance on the Athenian model for these generalizations is rather problematic. To take only one brief example: the Spartiate enjoyed none but a military sort of education. Thus to argue that Greek achievements in science and philosophy are due to the pervasiveness of literacy is distinctly to overstate the case.

But even on its own grounds the argument is difficult to sustain. Brian Street (1988) has pointed out that the formulation of the argument leaves one uncertain whether these supposed effects pertain to individuals or to sub-groups or to the entire culture. Havelock (1963), began with the description of the consequences of literacy for Plato's discourse and ended up with a large-scale generalization for Western culture. It certainly is a questionable proceeding methodologically to generalize the findings of a subset to other subsets of a higher hierarchy. For instance, can we say that the sort of discursive virtues—rationality, objectivity, analysis, definition—associated with the Academy (both Plato's and ours), are achieved at every instance of literate discourse? Moreover, ideologically speaking, are the virtues of the academy necessarily the virtues of all classes in the social or cultural order? (cf. Street 1984). And if the point is pressed home, it is indeed a strange sort of person who, at all occasions of verbalization, is without exception theoretical, objectivist, and rationalistic. But ultimately the strongest argument against this position is that no literate mentality would have any way of knowing anything about the so-called oral mentality because, following the position of these scholars, it is already trapped in its own literate mind-cast. It has no means at all of gaining access to the oral consciousness.

One interesting aspect of the differentiation between orality and literacy is that it appears to have mastered the art of the ventriloquist, able to speak from both sides of the mouth at once. On the one hand, it is presented as a mere communicative distinction, that is, as a distinction between spoken and written forms of discourse. In such a case, it is possible to study it as a rhetorical phenomenon. On the other hand, this difference is presented as a cultural difference. There seems occasionally an intellectual sleight of hand whereby obvious communicative features are isolated, whose differences are then elaborated until an essentialist cultural paradigm is achieved. This has misled certain linguistic scholars in reposing excessive faith in the spoken/written distinction.

In the various aspects of language study—phonology, semantics, morphology, and syntax—differences between spoken and written language have been drawn, leading to such categorial differences as greater abstraction, elaboration, decontextualization,

explicitness, and richer vocabulary in written language (Goody 1987:264). Starting from this position, other scholars have been more concerned with specifying the discourse features of speaking and writing, that is the language production process itself (cf. Chafe 1982, 1985; Chafe and Danielewicz 1987). For instance Chafe (1982) proposed that speaking is done in spurts of what he called 'idea units' at a rate of about one in two seconds, corresponding roughly to our normal thinking rate. This can be compared to writing which is over ten times slower, thus forcing our thoughts to get ahead of our expression. The result is that in writing

...we have time to integrate a succession of ideas into a single linguistic whole in a way that is not available in speaking (Chafe 1982:36).

Chafe (1985), and especially Chafe and Danielewicz (1987), followed up this consequence, and using as data four discourse types—dinnertable conversations, lectures, letters, and academic papers, which correspond respectively to informal spoken language, formal spoken language, informal written language, and formal written language—concluded in much the same manner as Goody, using indeed identical terms. Spoken language, for him, had greater audience involvement than written language, greater involvement of self in the speech and greater involvement with the reality spoken about. This contrasts with the writer's detachment and his

...interest in ideas that are not tied to specific people, events, times or places, but which are abstract and timeless (Goody 1987:108).

Linguistic studies such as these have about them an air of 'scientific' objectivity, of dealing only with 'facts' and data untrammelled by the assumptions of cognitive and theoretical anthropology. In fact in many of them (for instance Chafe 1982, 1985), there is no evidence of any awareness of the work of Havelock, Ong, or McLuhan. In this way, they mask a whole ideological apparatus. For instance, it is a commonplace of institutional pedagogy that expository and discursive writing should eschew personal references, and aim at detached forms of expression. This is an idea imparted from the earliest years of the school system. To speak of an academic norm as if it were a reality independent of its social context and discoverable by means of the empirical method is curious, to say the least (cf. Street 1984). Is it not rather the norm, however it may have come about, strengthened and safeguarded by a range of ideological operations, that gives rise to social practices which in turn enforce the normative order? To speak of these practices as objective, observable 'facts' of society or culture, without adverting to their genesis and context, can only be due to wilful blindness. Fortunately, not all scholars operate in this fashion. Some, for example, Deborah Tannen (1982), frankly admit that their work is based on investigating and testing the validity of the claims of cognitive anthropology. While some of their findings show divergence on certain specific features, most, however, validate these claims (cf. Olson 1977, 1988; Torrance and Olson 1985; Olson and Torrance 1991). The cumulative impression you are left with is that these scholars are working to the answers.

The point can be well illustrated by the work of Tannen (1982), where she examined the processing of narrative discourse by two sets of subjects, American and Greek. Both

groups are literate, but she found that Greek subjects adopted strategies 'associated with orality', such as formulaicness of language, personal/emotive involvement and internal evaluation. American subjects, on the other hand, adopted writing strategies: external evaluation, decontextualization, and novelty of expression. Tannen is clearly at pains to stress the interconnectedness of orality and literacy, as well as the limitation of her interest to these varying strategies and their fluidity in different discourse situations. But when she declares finally that there is no point to labelling people as either oral or literate (Tannen 1982), one is at a loss what purpose this caveat is intended to serve. It surely cannot be very relevant to her, in the context of her discussion, whether some people are labelled one way or another. But she has a professional obligation to examine whether the constitutive terms on which she relies for the description of her research findings are reliable ones, whether there is a sufficient, rational basis for adopting them or if they run the risk of purveying more than she intended them to do. In other words, for her to avoid the charge of blindly following those she accuses of labelling, she has a responsibility to show the propriety, not to speak of the necessity, of associating those strategies with orality and literacy. What she cannot do is to take over wholly or partially those same associations and then turn round to proclaim that she intended nothing else by them than as value-free descriptions of her research conclusions. This is especially insidious in view of her stated awareness of the ideological and cognitive dimensions of the oral-literate debate.

### **RELIGIOUS VERSUS SCIENTIFIC**

But it is in philosophical discourses that, as the phrase goes, the chickens come home to roost. In the last three decades an ardent debate has progressed as to the degree of rationality attributable to primitive thought. Inspired mostly by the anthropological work of E. Evans-Pritchard (1937) and his later theory of religion (1980), this discourse has relied on a magic-science paradigm (Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982). Three main positions can be isolated: (a) primitive thought is irrational, illogical, and unscientific; (b) primitive thought is rational and logical but not scientific, or alternatively, it is rational but illogical and unscientific; (c) primitive thought is as rational and logical as scientific thought within its own cultural context. When presented in this manner, the rational is separated conceptually from the logical and/or scientific, but in actual practice the disputants often use these terms interchangeably.

One approach that takes account of all three positions is Robin Horton's where he provides an exposé of the methods and objectives of traditional and scientific thought. Primitive thought is, in this view, rational and logical in ways often analogous to science. Scientific thought quests for the unity, simplicity, order, and regularity that underlie apparent diversity, complexity, disorder, and anomaly in the phenomenal universe. African traditional thought also seeks this through the structure of the pantheon and the categorial relations of its spiritual forces. And just like science, it does this through causal explanations, for example in the causal connection between disease states and social conduct. Furthermore, the two forms of thought employ different levels of theory, low and high theory, to cover respectively narrow or wide areas of experience. They both do this by a process of abstraction, analysis, and integration. They both draw analogies

between familiar and puzzling phenomena in their modelling processes.

But this does not turn African traditional thought into a species of scientific thought. For one thing, the African model is a closed system because unlike the open scientific culture, it neither understands nor tolerates alternative thought. It has a mystical attitude to language, takes recourse to a personal idiom and a contextual basis for its discourse. In the event, African traditional thought turns out to be lacking in logic and philosophy *sensus strictu* (Horton 1970:159–160). In this way, Horton exposes finally his ambivalence about African traditional thought. But the real source of this ambivalence is not, as might well be imagined, a commonplace Western prejudice. I propose that it is to be located in the paradigmatic equation that makes all African traditional thought religious (or magical or mythical). On the other side of the paradigm of course is Western science. But if African traditional thought is prototypically religious, would it not then be more theoretically appropriate to compare it with Western religion, in this case, Christianity (accepting here, for the sake of the argument, that Christianity is the ‘traditional’ religion of the Western world), given, as I have stated before, the incommensurability of magic and science.

At any rate, this should lead us to consider at some length the criteria of science. In the classical model of rationality, no scientific theory is considered valid if it is not necessary, universal, and rule-governed (Brown 1988). It is, in this sense, irrelevant whether these truths have been arrived at inductively or deductively. What counts is that the results or conclusion must follow necessarily from the data or premises, that this relation be recognized as such, that the principle be applicable at every instance and domain, and that the entire proceeding should conform to the appropriate rules. However, the question remains: on what basis are data or premises selected or what makes them suitable and acceptable? Secondly, who makes these ‘appropriate rules’ and how can we tell if they are really appropriate? Following these arguments, philosophers generally agree that the only propositions that can fully satisfy the fundamental conditions of rationality are self-evident and self-justifying ones, since every other conceivable proposition seems to require precedent justification, thus leading to infinite regression. But apparently getting propositions that satisfied these two features simultaneously is impossible. When self-justifying ones were found, they were not self-evident. Their truths could only be grasped intuitively.

This untoward state of things has led to all sorts of speculative and critical efforts to resolve the dilemma. As a way out of the despondency of his colleagues, Karl Popper has proposed that while the truth of science cannot be proven, its falsehood can be refuted. Therefore, rationality consists not in corroboration of claims but in our readiness for their refutation, which is what empirical testing is all about. But even here, when pressed hard as to the procedural grounds for beginning this refutation at all (for example, on what rational basis we should accept Popper’s ‘basic statements’), it turns out to be no more secure than convention. Now, if propositional foundations are lacking, we are no luckier with foundational rules. It does not seem sufficient merely to have a logical or scientific rule for testing or evaluating the rationality of any claim. We need appropriate rules, and therefore we need some way of judging that any given set of rules is the right one. As we have seen, no meta-rule seems available that does not involve us in regress. In fact, not even the most traditionally incontestable laws of logic (for instance the principle of



excluded middle) are indubitable, as shown by intuitionist and other recent systems of logic (Brown 1988:70–78).

If the very foundations of scientific and logical rationality turn out to be no more than intuition or convention, on what grounds can cognitivists claim some truths of culture to be irrational and others not? The position rests on pretty thin ice, as philosophers of social science now generally agree. The concern that this position might involve us in cultural and moral relativism is a genuine one, but is not answered by evading the argument. And it appears that the only reply seems to be the position summed up by Charles Taylor. For him, even if we can find no theoretical grounds for adducing superior rationality to Western scientific and technological culture, the obvious fact of its material achievements is an irrefutable proof of its being a higher order of life than that of primitive societies:

If one protests and asks why the theoretical order is more perspicuous transculturally, granted the admitted difference between the aims of the activities compared, and granted that the two cultures identify and distinguish the activities differently, the answer is that at least in some respects theoretical cultures score successes which command the attention of atheoretical ones, and in fact invariably have done so when they met. A case in point is the immense technological successes of one particular theoretical culture, our modern scientific one. Of course, this particular superiority commands attention in a quite non-theoretical way as well. We are reminded of the ditty about nineteenth-century British colonial forces in Africa: 'Whatever happens, we have got the Gatling gun, and they have not (Taylor 1982:104).

Indeed, confronted with a Gatling gun argument such as Taylor's, what hope of refutation have we?

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to show in the preceding analysis, the intertextual connection over a wide range of disciplines and periods of the cross-cultural categories: savage/civilized, prelogical/logical, oral/written, magical/scientific. I argued that the basis of the distinctions is hardly more than ethnocentric convention or intuition. Can this intuitive or conventional wisdom serve any function in the understanding of African culture and condition? One piece of received wisdom has it that the low state of scientific and technological knowledge in Africa is due to the intrinsic mentality of Africans, which, being mystical, illogical and so on, is incapable of scientific pursuit. It is pointed out that the state of technology in all Africa is evident proof of this. And as an additional support, it is often stated that several Asian nationalities themselves passed through the colonial experience and underdevelopment, but have managed so far to industrialize. In sum, racial factors must have a role in scientific and technological ability. But this argument is so clearly circular there is no way to engage it.

The other more common argument is historically based: for Africa to develop, the paths it must tread involve abandoning an oral, magical, pre-logical past, and gradually assimilating a written, logical, scientific culture of the West. This thesis has given rise to developmental studies in anthropology, sociology, economics and even philosophy where

pre-colonial African thought systems, ethnophilosophy so-called, is regarded as not philosophy because (a) it is not individual, (b) not systematic and (c) cannot show historical continuity of any kind. The implication is that only by following the epistemic path already plotted by the West, can African philosophy—and other disciplines for that matter—make any progress. This argument has its own difficulties, but they need not detain us.

For the historical thesis to be meaningful, however, it should include also the understanding that if there is no African essence, culturally speaking, it is because each ethnic or national formation is unique, with a unique historical and cultural experience, even within the sharedness of racial and historical experience, and therefore no general path of development can be prescribed for all African groups. As for the general underdevelopment of Africa, this is a phrase impossible to understand. It assumes either that history is already foreclosed or that in Africa, development is static in a world of dynamic scientific and technological progress. But the model of history, the history of the West for instance, as one continuous upward swing in progress, is little more than a pious fiction. Every national history is an uneven topography, with plains, hills, and valleys: periods of rapid material development, longer or shorter moments of stagnation, and times of more or less serious decline. The fashionable pessimism about material and societal development in Africa seems to me to be more a part of a sustained doctrine of congenital incapacity than a serious reflection on history.

What can we make of the cross-cultural paradigms in view of the African condition? It seems to me that they serve merely to obscure efforts to come to grips with the African condition. They provide no access to understanding either the past or the present of Africa. They have served great uses in the colonization and exploitation of Africa, as Mudimbe suggests. But they are no key to the knowledge of Africa. On the contrary, their perpetuation merely serves to repeat the outdated myth of Africa as the 'whiteman's burden'.

### On decolonizing African religions

#### KWASI WIREDU

As you might expect from my advocacy of strategic particularism, my focus will principally be on Akan religion as an example of African religions. I invite others to compare and contrast (where appropriate) with their own perceptions of their indigenous religions. Religion is, indeed, an area in which there is a superabundance of characterizations of African thought in terms of inappropriate or, at best, only half-appropriate concepts. I shall examine concepts like creation out of nothing, omnipotence and eternity, and categorial contrasts, such as the natural versus the supernatural, and the physical versus the spiritual.

Africans are nowadays frequently said to be a profoundly religious people, not only by themselves but also by foreign students of their culture. This was not always so. Some of the early anthropologists felt that the concept of God, for example, was too sublime for the African understanding, granting that they had any understanding at all. The present situation in which indigenes as well as foreigners vie with one another to testify to the

piety of the African mind is a remarkable reversal of earlier attitudes and prepossessions. There is virtual unanimity, in particular, on the report that Africans have a strong belief in the existence of God.

On all, or virtually all, hands it seems to be assumed that it speaks well of the mental capabilities of a people if they can be shown to have a belief in God, especially a God of a Christian likeness. Accordingly, the literature on African religions is replete with generalizations about African beliefs in the Almighty. In this discussion I want to start with a fairly extended look at the concept of God in the thought of the Akans of Ghana. Since this is the group to which I belong and in which I was raised, I hope I may be excused some show of confidence, though, of course, not dogmatism in making some conceptual suggestions about their thought. I will also try, more briefly, to make some contrasts between Akan thought and the thought of some other African peoples on the question of the belief in God, this time more tentatively. It will emerge that not all African peoples entertain a belief in God and that this is, however, without prejudice to their mental powers.

To start with the Akans, then. Any cursory study of the thought and talk of the Akans will, indeed, reveal an unmistakable belief in a supreme being. This being is known under various names. I mention just a few here. *Nyame* is the word most often used for this being. It means something like 'Absolute satisfier'. Another of his names is *Onyankopon*, which means, literally, 'He who is alone great', a notion that reminds one of St Anselm's 'That than which a greater cannot be conceived', though this is not to assume conceptual congruence in other respects. There is also the name *Twediampon* ('He upon whom you lean and do not fall'). Cosmologically, perhaps, the most important name is *Oboade*, which, for the time being, I will translate as Creator. Frequently, the word *Nana* is added to either of the first two names. The word means grandparent or ruler or, in a more general sense, honored personage. In this context all these meanings are available, but often it is the grandfatherly connotation that is uppermost in the consciousness of people invoking the name.

Indeed, in the literature this grandfatherly appellation of God has often been emphasized by indigenous writers because some early European writers had suggested that the Akan (and, more generally, the African) God was an aloof God, indifferent to the fate of his creatures. These foreign observers even had the impression that this attitude of the supreme being was reciprocated by the Akans when they (the visitors) found among them no evidence of the worship of God, institutional or otherwise. In fact, however, the Akan have a strong sense of the goodwill of God; only this sentiment is not supposed, cosmologically speaking, to be manifested through *ad hoc* interventions in the order of nature.

The word 'nature' is, perhaps, misleading in this context, in so far as it may suggest the complementary contrast of supernature. Here we come, in fact, face to face with an important aspect of the cosmology of the Akans. God is the creator of the world, but he is not apart from the universe: He together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal 'totality' of existence. In the deepest sense, therefore, the ontological chasm indicated by the natural/supernatural distinction does not exist within Akan cosmology. When, then, God is spoken of as creator we must remind ourselves that words can mislead. Creation is often thought of, at least in run-of-the-mill Christianity, as the bringing into existence of

things out on nothing. Now, the Akan God is, certainly, not thought of as such a creator. The notion of creation out of nothing does not even make sense in the Akan language. The idea of nothing can only be expressed by some such phrase as *se whee nni ho*, which means something like 'the circumstance of there not being something there'. The word *ho* (there, at some place) is very important in the phrase; it indicates a spatial context. That of which there is a lack in the given location is always relative to a universe of discourse implicitly defined by the particular thought or communication. Thus, beholding a large expanse of desolate desert, an Akan might say that *whee nni ho*. The meaning would be that there is a lack there of the broad class of things that one expects to find on a land surface of that magnitude. The absolute nothingness entailed in the notion of creation out of nothing, however, scorns any such context. This abolition of context effectively abolishes intelligibility, as far as the Akan language is concerned.

But, it might be asked, does it not occur to the Akan that if God created the world, as s/he supposes, then prior to the act of creation there must have been nothing in quite a strict sense? The answer is that it depends at least on what one means by 'create'. In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words, ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions the world order out of an indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable. And this is, in fact, how the Akan metaphysicians seem to have conceived the matter (Wiredu 1992:3:41ff). Moreover, *Oboade*, the Akan word that I provisionally translated as 'creator', means the maker of things. *Bo* means to make and *ade* means thing. But in Akan to *bo ade* is unambiguously instrumental, you only make something with something.

The almost automatic reaction to such an idea from many people is: If the 'divine architect' fashioned the world out of some pre-existing raw material, then, however indeterminate it may have been, surely, somebody must have created it. But this takes it for granted that the concept of creation out of absolute nothingness makes sense. Since this is the question at issue, the reaction just begs the question. If the concept of nothing in Akan is relative in the way explained, then obviously the notion of absolute nothingness will not make sense. The fundamental reason for this semantical situation in Akan is that, as pointed out in the previous paper, in that language existence is necessarily spatial. To exist is to *wo ho*, be at some location (cf. Gyekye 1987:179). So if God exists, he is *somewhere*. If nothingness excludes space, it has no accommodation in the Akan conceptual framework. On the other hand, if nothingness accommodates space, it is no longer absolute.

Of course, if a concept is incoherent within a given language, it does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with it, for it may be that the language in question is expressively inadequate. In the case of the concept of creation out of nothing, however, its coherence, even within English, is severely questionable. In English, the concept of 'there is'—note the 'there'—which is equivalent to 'exists', is quite clearly spatial. It is because the word 'exists' does not bear its spatiality on its face, that it has been possible in English to speak as if existence were not necessarily spatial without prohibitive implausibility. Besides, the maxim that *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (Out of nothing nothing comes), which, ironically, is championed by Christian philosophers such as Descartes (1951:39), conflicts sharply with the notion of creation out of nothing. That nothing can come out of

nothing is not an empirical insight; it is a conceptual necessity, just like the fact that two and two cannot add up to fifty. Thus to say that some being could make something come out of nothing is of the same order of incoherence as saying that some being could make two and two add up to fifty. Besides, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Wiredu 1992/3:44), the causal connotation of creation is incompatible with the circumstance or rather, non-circumstance, of absolute nothingness. Causation makes sense only when it is, in principle, possible to distinguish between *post hoc* and *propter hoc* (i.e., between mere sequence and causal sequence). If there were one being and absolutely nothing besides him, then logically, that distinction would be impossible. If so, the notion of causation collapses and with it that of creation.

So the notion of creation out of nothing would seem to be incoherent not only in Akan, but also absolutely. At least, the last reason given in evidence of its incoherence was an independent consideration in the sense that it was independent of the peculiarities of Akan or English. It appealed only to a general logical principle. In fact, the conceptual difficulties in creation out of nothing have not been lost on religious thinkers, which accounts for the fact that it is not very unusual to find a sophisticated Christian metaphysician substituting some such rarefied notion as 'the transcendental ground of existence' for the literal idea of creation even while co-operating with the generality of pious Christians in speaking of God as the creator. Another escape from the paradoxes of *ex nihilo* creation by some religious sophisticates, going far back into history, has been by way of emanationism. It might be worth remembering also in this connection that Plato's *demiurge* was an idea innocent of *ex nihilo* pretensions.

Be that as it may, it seems clear that the Akan supreme being is thought of as a cosmic architect rather than a creator out of nothing. The world resulting from the process of divine fashioning is conceived to contain all the potential for its development and bears all the marks of God's goodwill once and for all. In this scheme there are postulated various orders of beings. At the top of this hierarchy is God. Immediately below him are a host of extra-human beings and forces. Then come human beings, the lower animals, vegetation, and the inanimate world, in that order. All these orders of being are believed to be subject to the universal reign of (cosmic) law. And the absence of any notion of creation out of nothing reflects the Akan sense of the ontological homogeneity of that hierarchy of existence.

Since I have mentioned inanimate things, I ought, perhaps, to dispose quickly of the allegation, often heard, that Africans believe that everything has life. The Akans, at least, are a counterexample. Some objects, such as particular rocks or rivers, may be thought to house an extra-human force, but it is not supposed that every rock or stone has life. Among the Akans a piece of dead wood, for example, is regarded as notoriously dead and is the humorous paradigm of absolute lifelessness. A graver paradigm of the same thing is a dead body. Thus the automatic attributions of animism to Africans manifest little empirical or conceptual wisdom.

To return to the subject of order. The strength of the Akan sense of order may be gauged from the following cosmological drum text:

Odomankoma  
 He created the thing  
 ‘Hewer out’ Creator  
 He created the thing  
 What did he create?  
 He created Order  
 He created Knowledge  
 He created Death  
 As its quintessence. (Danquah 1968:70).

I quote this from J.B.Danquah’s *The Akan doctrine of God*, p. 70. The translation is Danquah’s, and it incorporates a bit of interpretation. But it is, I think, accurate. What we need particularly to note is that to the Akan metaphysician, order comes first, cosmologically speaking. The stanza is a statement, above all else, to quote Danquah (1968:72) again, of ‘the primordial orderliness of creation’.

This sense of order in phenomena is manifested at another level in the strong belief in the law of universal causation. There is an Akan saying to the effect that if nothing had touched the palm nut branches they would not have rattled (*Se biribi ankoka papa a anka erenye kredede*). This is often quoted by writers on Akan thought as the Akan statement of universal causation (cf. Oguah 1984:217, and Minkus 1984:115). It is right as far as it goes, but there are more explicit formulations of the principle, such as one quoted by Gyekye (1987:77) in his *Essay: Asem biara wo ne farebae*, which, literally, means everything has what brought it about. There is another formulation which, in addition to being more literal and explicit, is also more comprehensive. It says simply that everything has its explanation (*Biribiara wo nenkyerease*). The advantage of this is that it discourages any impression that the sense of order under study is only conversant with mechanical causation. In Akan thought this kind of causation corresponds to only one kind of explanation, and there are other kinds of explanation that are taken to evince the orderliness of creation (understanding creation, of course, in a quasidemiurgic sense). These include psychological, rational, and quasi-physical explanations with various combinations of them. As one might expect, they correspond to the orders of being postulated in the Akan world-view.

To illustrate with a case which combines all these: Suppose that an illness is interpreted as punishment from the ancestors for wrong conduct. There is here a cosmological dimension. The ancestors are conceived to be the departed ‘spirits’ of erstwhile elders of our societies who live in a world analogous and contiguous to ours and work for the good of the living while watching over their morals. On this showing, they are both like and unlike the living. Like the living, they have an interest in morality of which they are, indeed, recognized as, in some ways, guardians. Moreover, in so far as any imagery is annexed to the conception of the ancestors, it is person-like. But unlike persons, they are not normally perceivable to the naked eye, and they can affect human life in super-human ways for good or, in exceptional cases, as by the present hypothesis, for ill. The explanation involved here, then, is at once psychological, rational,

mechanical, and quasi-physical. It is psychological because it is supposed that the hypothetical misconduct incurs the displeasure of the ancestors, which is a matter of mental dynamics. It is rational in conception, for the imagined punishment is viewed as a reformatory and deterrent measure, which, in principle, is a reasonable objective in the enforcement of morals. It has a 'mechanical' aspect in that the illness being explained involves a physiological condition that will in many ways exhibit scenarios of physical causality. And, finally, it is quasiphysical because, as pointed out, although the ancestors are psycho-physical in imagery, the manner of their operation is not fully constrained by the dynamical and associated laws familiar in day-to-day experience.

That the activities of beings, such as the ancestors, are not supposed to be completely amenable to 'physical' laws is not to be taken to imply that they are regarded as contradicting them. What, in Western thought, are called physical laws, are, in the Akan world-view, understood to govern the phenomena of one sphere of existence. But that understanding, as explained, also postulates another sphere of existence, which is believed to be governed, both internally and in interaction with the human sphere of existence, by laws different in some respects from physical or psychological laws and supplementary to them. Though the generality of Akans do not pretend to understand many aspects of the *modus operandi* of the beings and forces belonging to the super-human sphere, still they view them as regular denizens of the cosmos. Moreover, there is no lack of 'specialists' in Akan (and other African) societies who are supposed to have uncommon insights into the operations of such beings and enjoy expertise in communicating with them. So that the idea of the ancestors punishing misbehaviour evokes no sense of cosmological irregularity. On the contrary, it is perceived as exactly the kind of thing that might happen if people misbehave in certain ways.

Certain conceptual consequences flow immediately from these last considerations. To begin with, since all the orders of being are conceived to interact in a law-like manner, the natural/supernatural dichotomy will have no place in the Akan world-view, which reinforces our earlier remark on this issue made in a slightly different connection. Furthermore, the notion of a miracle does not make sense in this context, if a miracle is something supposed to happen contrary to the laws of 'nature'. Strange things may happen, of course, but in this system of thought, if they cannot be accounted for on the basis of the laws of the familiar world, they will be assumed to be accountable on some quasi-physical laws. This cosmological orientation seems to be not at all uncommon in Africa.

Yet, in the literature on African religions there are profuse references to the supposed African belief in the supernatural, which is frequently inspired by such things as ancestral veneration, almost standardly misdescribed as 'ancestor-worship'. Obviously, these misconceptualizations are the result of that superimposition of Western categories upon Akan thoughtformations that is the quintessence of conceptual colonization. Through education in colonial or neo-colonial circumstances many Africans have come to assimilate these modes of thought and, in some cases, have internalized them so completely that they apparently can take great pride in propagating stories of the ubiquity of the supernatural in African thought. Perhaps, none of us Africans can claim total freedom from this kind of assimilation, but at least we can consciously initiate the struggle of conceptual self-exorcism.

Other aspects of the conceptual superimposition need to be noted. The beings I have, by implication, described as super-human (but, note, not supernatural) are often called spirits. If the notion of spirits is understood in a quasi-physical sense, as they sometimes are, in narratives of ghostly apparitions even in Western thought, there is no problem of conceptual incongruity. But if the word 'spirit' is construed, as so often happens, in a Cartesian sense to designate an immaterial substance, no such category can be fitted into the conceptual framework of Akan thought. The fundamental reason for this is to be found in the spatial connotation of the Akan concept of existence. Given the necessary spatiality of all existents, little reflection is required to see that the absolute ontological cleavage between the material and the immaterial will not exist in Akan metaphysics. Again, that Africans are constantly said to believe in spiritual entities in the immaterial sense can be put down to the conceptual impositions in the colonizing accounts of African thought in colonial times and their post-colonial aftermath.

It is, of course, an independent question whether the notion of an immaterial entity is intellectually viable. I will not pursue that question here (cf. Wiredu 1990:98 ff). What is urgent here and now is to note certain further dimensions of the conceptual misdescriptions of African religions. One of the best entrenched orthodoxies in the literature is the idea that Africans believe in a whole host of 'lesser gods' or 'lesser deities'. That many Akans have bought this story of a pantheon of 'lesser gods' in their traditional religion must be due to a consistent forgetfulness of their own language when thinking about such matters. There is no natural way of translating that phrase into Akan. None of the names, as distinct from descriptions, for God in Akan has a plural. In any case, it is very misleading to call the super-human beings and forces gods. Since the notion of a god, however diminutive, is intimately connected with religion, the use of that word in this context encourages the description of African attitudes to those entities as religious. Then, since Africans do often regard themselves as being in relationship with them, the stage is set for the inference that their life is completely pervaded by religion. African scholars have not left it to foreigners alone to proclaim this image of African thought. Some of them have assumed eminent responsibilities in that direction. Thus John Mbiti, for example, in his *African religions and philosophy*, has said things like 'Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony...' (p. 2) or 'African peoples do not know how to exist without religion' (loc. cit.), or 'religion is their whole system of being' (p. 3.). At work here, for sure, is an assimilation of African thought to Western categories.

As far at least as the Akans are concerned, it can be said that their attitude to those extra-human beings generally called minor gods in the literature is not really religious. On the contrary, it is utilitarian, for the most part. The powers in question are, as previously noted, a regular part of the resources of the world. If human beings understand how they function and are able to establish satisfactory relations with them, they can exploit their powers to their advantage. One has, of course, to be circumspect because falling foul of them could be dangerous. The way of establishing satisfactory relations with them is through those procedures that are often called rituals. But these are not regarded as anything other than a method of making use of the super-human resources of the world. Because the powers that are called lesser gods are conceived to be, in some



ways, person-like, the 'rituals' often have a communicative component heavily laden with flattery. But the tactical character of the procedure is manifest in the fact that a so-called god who is judged inefficient, by reason, for example, of persistent inability to render help at the right time at the right place, is consigned to obsolescence by the permanent averting of attention. An attitude of genuine religious devotion cannot be thus conditional. Accordingly, it would seem inappropriate to call the 'rituals' in question religious. Nor, for the same reason, can the procedures be called acts of *worship* unless the word is used in so broad a sense as to make the concept of worship no longer inseparably bound up with a religious attitude. That the attitude under discussion is not religious or that the procedures do not amount to worship does not imply a judgement that the people concerned fall short of some creditable practice; it simply means that the concepts of religion and worship have been misapplied to aspects of the given culture on the basis of unrigorous analogies of foreign inspiration. It would, in any case, be hasty to assume that there is anything necessarily meritorious about religious activities.

The Akans, in common with most other African peoples, nevertheless, do have a religious aspect to their culture. The question is as to its proper characterization. I would say that Akan religion consists solely in the unconditional veneration for God and trust in his power and goodness—in a word, in his perfection. This religion is, most assuredly, not an institutional religion, and there is nothing that can be called the worship of God in it. The insistence that any genuine belief in God must be accompanied with a practice of God-worship is simply an arbitrary universalization of the habits of religionists of a different culture. It is difficult, actually, to see how a perfect being could welcome or approve of such things as the singing of his praises. Another significant contrast with other religions, particularly certain influential forms of Christianity, is that although God is held to be all-good, morality is not defined in Akan thought in terms of the will of God but rather in terms of human interests. Neither are procedures for the promotion of morality attached to Akan religion; they belong primarily to the home.

The inclusion of the attitudes and practices associated with the Akan belief in various superhuman beings and forces in the scope of Akan religion, is an adulteration of the traditional religion that has exposed it quite severely to unconsidered judgement. It has helped to eclipse the religion in certain layers of the consciousness of the average educated Akan. The movement of thought has been as follows. When that overly inclusive view is taken of Akan religion, the supposed worship of the supposed gods looms so large in it that the whole religion becomes more or less identified with it. Thus it is that in Christian translation Akan religion is called *Abosomsom*, that is, the worship of stones. The same system of pious translation, by the way, called Christianity *Anyamesom*, that is, the worship of God. When, therefore ordinary educated Akans, brought up in Christianity, come to think that they have shed off belief in the 'lesser gods', they automatically see themselves as too enlightened for the traditional religion. Actually, the shedding off of the traditional mind-cast is often superficial only. But let that pass. We were only concerned to illustrate one of the things that the uncritical assimilation of African categories to Western ones has done to an African self-image.

But let us return to the Akan God himself. An important question is how the Akans suppose that knowledge of him is obtained. In this connection there is an extremely interesting Akan saying to the effect that no one teaches God to a child. (*Obi nkyere*

*akwadaa Nyame*.) This is sometimes interpreted to mean that knowledge of God is inborn and not the fruit of argumentation. But this is inconsistent with the implications of some of the names or descriptions for God in Akan. One designation calls God *Ananse Kokroko*, meaning, the Stupendous Spider. Now, the spider is associated with ingenuity in designing, and the designation is clearly a metaphorical articulation of the notion of God as the Great Designer. Oguah also, citing an Akan designation which calls God The Great Planner, comments that we have here a hint of the argument which in Western philosophy is called the teleological argument. Oguah is, I think right, and this shows that the Akans do think that reasoning is involved in the acquisition of the knowledge of the existence of God. If so, the maxim cited at the beginning of this paragraph is unlikely to be one that seeks to rule out the relevance of argument. Its most plausible interpretation is that the reasons for the belief in God are so obvious that even a child can appreciate them unaided.

In my own experience the interpretation last suggested has tallied best with the reactions of the Akans not steeped in foreign philosophies that I have accosted from time to time on the justification of the belief in God. They have never refused the invitation to reason, though they have tended to be surprised that so obvious a point should be the object of earnest inquiry. The following type of argument has often been proffered:

Surely, somebody must be responsible for the world. Were you not brought forth into this world by your parents? And were they not, in turn, by their parents, and so on? Must there not, therefore, be somebody who was responsible for everything?

Another type of argumentation that I have been supplied with is this:

Every household has a father, and every town or country a king. Surely, there must be someone who rules the whole universe.

In this last connection a very common Akan saying comes to mind, namely, 'God is King' (*Onyame ne hene*).

Regarding these arguments, no one can, or should, pretend that they are cogent pieces of reasoning, especially the last one. It is relevant to note that these arguments were deliberately solicited from ordinary Akans, not from their metaphysicians. But two points can be made, the second of especial significance for our discussion. First, if these arguments were sound, they would prove the conclusions advertised or something close. They would, that is, prove that there is a cosmic architect or ruler of the universe or something like that. This is very much more than can be said for almost all the principal arguments for the existence of God in Western philosophy. These arguments also are such that, if they were sound, they would only prove some such being as a cosmic architect or governor. Yet, as a rule, there is, at the concluding point, an inconceivable leap to the affirmation of an *ex nihilo* Creator-God! On this point Hume's words should have been the last. He pointed out, in particular reference to the teleological argument, otherwise known as the argument from design, that even if granted valid, it would only prove a designer, not a creator (*ex nihilo*). But 'faith', even when it pretends to argue, is apparently stronger than logic, and the concluding unphilosophical leap remains a

favourite exercise for some philosophers.

Second, and more importantly, the fact that even ordinary Akans are so willing to reason about the basic proposition of their religion demonstrates a rational attitude to religion that contrasts with the attitude which fundamentalist Christianity brought to many parts of Africa through the missionaries. Their key idea in this regard seems to have been 'faith' as belief is inaccessible to rational discussion. Many Africans have taken the idea to heart and have, in some cases, even been born again. If you ask them for the reason behind their preference for the new religion over the traditional one, the standard reply is that it is a matter of faith, not reason. The foregoing enables us to show also that this irrationality is uncharacteristic of the traditional outlook on religion. In fact, the notion of faith as belief without, and inaccessible to, reason is untranslatable into Akan except by an unflattering paraphrase. *Gyidi hunu*, literally, useless belief, is probably all that is available, unless one preferred a more prolix circumlocution, which would be something like *Gyidi a enni nkyerease*, that is, again literally, belief without explanation. The pejorative connotation of the latter periphrasis, however, does not come through in the English version. Thus within Akan semantics one is going to be hard put to it to sell the idea of faith inhospitable to reason. In this circumstance one must admire the simplicity of the Christian solution to the problem of translating faith (in the non-rational sense) into Akan. They say simply *Gyidi*, which in genuine Akan means simply belief. Since this is patently inadequate, one must assume that the translators may have put their faith in *ad hoc* evangelical glosses. But it is also simple to see that decolonized thinking in religion must make short work of the evangelical talk of faith.

Let us return once more to the concept of God. Oguah (1984:216) advances the interesting claim that the Akan concept of God as the one who is alone great (*Onyankopon*) is the same as the concept of the greatest conceivable being or that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which formed the basis of Saint Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. In a formal sense this is correct, for an Akan believer cannot consistently concede the possibility of any being greater or even equal to God. However, this formal identity pales into insignificance when it is recalled that the Akan God is a cosmic architect while Anselm's is an *ex nihilo* creator. These two concepts are so different that the chances are that the ingenious saint would have considered the Akan concept quite atheistic. Accordingly, when we use the word God to translate *Nyame*, we must bear the disparity in connotation between this and the orthodox Christian concept of God firmly in mind.

This is particularly worth stressing in view of the tendency of many African writers on African religions, proud of their African identity, to suggest that their peoples recognize the same God as the Christians, since God is one. The origin of this tendency seems to me to be the following. Almost all these writers have been themselves Christians, in most cases divines. Being scandalized by the opinion of some of the early European visitors to Africa that the African was too primitive to attain to belief in God unaided, they have sought to demonstrate that Africans discovered God by their own lights before ever a European or any foreigner, for that matter, set foot in Africa. But since they themselves have been brought up to think that the Christian God is the one true God, it has been natural for them to believe that the God of their ancestors is, in fact, the same as the God of Christianity. In this way also they have been able to satisfy themselves that, in taking

to Christianity, they have not fundamentally forsaken the religion of their ancestors. (Incidentally, in this respect, many African specialists in religious studies have differed from average African Christians, who, if they are Akans, would probably, at least verbally, declare traditional religion to be just *abosomsom*, the worship of stones.) Listen to what one very famous African authority on African religions says:

There is no being like ‘the African God’ except in the imagination of those who use the term, be they Africans or Europeans... there is only one God, and while there may be various concepts of God, according to each people’s spiritual perception, it is wrong to limit God with an adjective formed from the name of any race.

The writer was Professor Bolaji Idowu and the passage occurs in his *African traditional religion: A definition* (1973:146). Idowu was for many years Professor of Religions at the University of Ibadan and was in his retirement the Patriarch of the Methodist Church of Nigeria for some years. He is the author of, perhaps, the most famous book on the religion of the Yorubas, a book entitled *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. The Yorubas have a concept of God that is substantially identical with that of the Akans. This is confirmed by a careful study of the direct descriptions of the Yoruba concept of God given in the last-mentioned book. In both cases what we have is a cosmic architect. But if so, it is extremely implausible to suggest that either the Yoruba or the Akan conception of God is just a different way of conceiving one and the same being as the God of Christianity. To see the fallacy clearly, consider that it is conceivable that God as a cosmic architect exists while an *ex nihilo* creator-God does not or cannot exist. Or, since Idowu’s thesis is quite general, imagine that Spinoza, on the verge of ex-communication from his synagogue on account of his view that God and nature are one, had sought to placate the authorities by proleptically taking a leaf out of Idowu’s book and assuring them that God is one and that therefore they were all, after all, talking of the same being. The inevitable aggravation of tempers would, surely, have been blameable on no one but Spinoza himself. As it happened, the gentle metaphysician knew better than to attempt any such misadventure. But in pure logic, when Idowu tries to serve both Olodumare and the God of Christianity, he is embarking on a similar misadventure. More frankly, he is trying to eat his cake and have it. But it is not given to even an ex-Patriarch to prosper logically in such an enterprise. The obvious lesson is that African thinkers will have to make a critical review of those conceptions and choose one or none but not both. Otherwise, colonized thinking must be admitted to retain its hold.

Since, by the present account, God is the beginning and the end of Akan religion, it may be useful to probe still further the Akan doctrine of God. And in doing so, it will be important to bear the point made at the end of the last paragraph securely in mind. What then are the attributes of the Akan God? There are Akan expressions used of God that will warrant saying that he is conceived to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, all-wise, and eternal. But these attributes, especially omnipotence and eternity, must be understood only in a sense applicable to the type of being that a cosmic architect is. For example, the eternity of this being means simply that he has always existed and will always exist. The pressure that some Christian thinkers have felt to say that God is eternal

in the sense of being timeless, that is, of not existing in time, is absent from the Akan mind. This pressure acts on some Christian minds because if God created everything out of nothing, then it might conceivably be wondered whether he did not create time also (however time may be conceived). And if he did, he can hardly be said himself to have been existing in time. It is well known that Saint Augustine held that God created time along with everything else. (This great divine, by the way, was an African, but his mind was soaked in classical Roman culture. It is, indeed, speculated that his thought was not totally untouched by his African origins. But, if so, this particular doctrine was not one of the ways in which that fact may have manifested itself.)

Again, if we take the concept of omnipotence, we notice the same absence of the pressure to push it to transcendental proportions. The Akan God is omnipotent in the sense that he is thought capable of accomplishing any conceptually *well-defined* project. Thus, for example, he will not be supposed capable of creating a person who is at once six foot tall and not six foot tall, going by identical conventions of measurements. And this will not be taken to disclose a limitation on God's powers because the task description discloses no well-defined project. Perhaps, to many people this sounds unremarkable. But what about the following? It is apparent from one of the most famous Akan metaphysical drum texts that God is not supposed to be capable of reversing the laws of the cosmos (cf. Wiredu 1992/3:41ff). The question is whether the project is a coherent one. The answer is: 'Of course not!', from the point of view of the metaphysics in question. Here, then, is another illustration of formal identity amidst substantive disparities. Formally, both the Akan and the Christian may subscribe to the same definition of omnipotence as follows. 'A being is omnipotent if and only if s/he or it can accomplish any well-defined project'. Substantive differences, however, emerge when information is volunteered on both sides regarding the sorts of things that are or are not taken to be well-defined projects. It is interesting to note, in the particular case of omnipotence, that even this formal identity evaporates in the face of certain Christian interpretations of the concept. Omnipotence, for some Christian thinkers, means that God can do absolutely anything, including (as in the example mentioned above) creating a person who is both six foot tall and not six foot tall at the same time. On this showing, omnipotence implies the power to do even self-contradictory things. So powerful a Western Christian mind as Descartes' was apparently attracted to this idea.

To be sure, the Akans are innocent of such a solecism. But they are not free from the intellectual difficulties that have plagued the Christian doctrine of omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and unlimited wisdom. If God has all these qualities, couldn't he have prevented the abundance of evil in the world? And ought he not to have done so? This is 'the problem of evil'. In discussing it one thing that will become clear is that the communal philosophy of a traditional society need not always display unanimity, contrary to the impression fostered by certain colonial-type studies of African life and thought.

It is sometimes suggested that the problem does not really arise in Akan thought. Helaine Minkus, an American researcher who went and lived among the Akwapim Akans, learnt their language, and studied their philosophy, advances a view of this sort in her 'Causal theory in Akwapim Akan philosophy':

God's attribute of transcendence and the concomitant belief that he has delegated power to the other agents that more directly interact with human beings pragmatically diminish His omnipotence. The other agents are treated in practice as if endowed with an independent ability to act... The postulation of a great number of beings empowered to affect events, joined with the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation obviates the problem of evil so burdensome to those monotheistic theologians who define the Supreme Being as both omnipotent and totally benevolent and attempt a reconciliation of these qualities with the existence of evil (Minkus 1984:116).

Minkus talks here of the pragmatic diminution of God's omnipotence. But this represents a dilemma rather than a dissolution. If the diminution of omnipotence is only 'pragmatic', God, as the ultimate source of the powers delegated to the 'other agents', remains ultimately in charge, and the original problem, equally ultimately, remains. If, on the other hand, the diminution is real, this contradicts the well-attested postulate of omnipotence in Akan cosmology. Is the contradiction a feature of Minkus' exposition or of the Akan system expounded? I shall return to this question below.

Interestingly, in an earlier exposition of Akan thought, Busia had shifted the responsibility for evil from God to the 'other agents' not pragmatically but positively. He remarks:

...the problem of evil so often discussed in Western philosophy and Christian theology does not arise in the African concept of deity. It is when a God who is not only all-powerful and omniscient but also perfect and loving is postulated that the problem of the existence of evil becomes a philosophical hurdle. The Supreme being of the African is the Creator, the source of life, but between him and man lie many powers and principalities good and bad, gods, spirits, magical forces, witches to account for the strange happenings in the world (Busia 1965).

Gyekye quotes this passage in his *Essay* and points out that if God is omnipotent, the question still arises why he does not control the 'lesser spirits'. This, he rightly concludes, shows that the problem of evil is not obviated. Gyekye's own account of the Akan solution of the problem of evil, which, for him, is a real problem in Akan philosophy, is that

[t]he Akan thinkers, although recognizing the existence of moral evil in the world, generally do not believe that this fact is inconsistent with the assertion that God is omnipotent and wholly good. Evil, according to them, is the result of the exercise by humans of their freedom of the will with which they were endowed by the Creator, *Oboade* (Gyekye 1987:128).

On Gyekye's account, the Akan thinkers in question advocated a solution to the problem of evil which is also canvassed by some Western thinkers and is known as the 'free-will defence'. Gyekye is certainly right in seeing this solution in Akan thought. But Akan sources also reveal other solutions. Before noticing some of them, let us rapidly note two things in regard to the free-will defence, as it relates to moral evil. First, it does not

provide a satisfactory answer to the question why God does not intervene to stop or forestall evil acts when they are planned. This is, of course, different from the idea that God could have guaranteed *ab initio* that human beings made only right choices. The usual reply to the suggested intervention is that it would destroy the free will of humans. But that reply does not appear to be plausible. Even human beings are sometimes able to intervene by force or by persuasion to stop the evil designs of others, without affecting their free will. In the abstract, countless smooth ways are conceivable by which God might forestall, counteract, or neutralize the evil acts that humans might use their free will to contemplate. Possibly, there might be something wrong with this hypothesis; but clearly, it would not be because of any threat to free will. Second, this solution does not begin to deal with physical evil.

However, the problem of physical evil might, theoretically, be tackled by Akan advocates of the free-will defence with only a little elaboration on the remark of Busia quoted above. They might simply argue that the ‘principalities, good and bad, spirits, gods’, etc., rather than God, are responsible for physical evil, in Busia’s phrase, for ‘the strange happenings in the world’. On this supposition, these happenings would be the result of the exercise, by those beings, of the free will ‘with which they were endowed by the Creator’. In Western philosophy, by the way, the same idea occurred to Saint Augustine, who debited Satan and his cohorts with a lot of the physical evil in the world, a manoeuvre which has recently been exploited by some highly sophisticated apologists (cf. Davis 1983:105ff). In the face of a claim of this sort one can but await probative evidence.

Meanwhile, we may usefully note another Akan angle on the question of evil which is evident in the quotation from Minkus, but which she does not separate from her theory (on behalf of the Akans) of the pragmatic diminution of God’s omnipotence. She attributes to the Akans ‘the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation’. What is proposed here is not just the semantic point that you cannot talk of good if the possibility of the contrast with evil did not exist, but rather the substantive cosmological claim that the components of existence which we describe as good could not possibly exist without those components we call evil. That the Akans do actually entertain this thought is attested to by a common saying among them. It is, indeed, one of the commonest sayings of the Akans. ‘If something does not go wrong’, they say, ‘something does not go right’ (*Se biribi ansee a, biribi nye yie*).

However, even if it is granted that good cannot exist without evil, that still does not amount to a theodicy, for it does not follow that the quantity of evil in the world does not go beyond the call of necessity. But there is another Akan saying that seems to suggest exactly this. The Akans delight in crediting their maxims to animals, and in this instance the epigrammatic surrogate is the hawk. It is said: ‘The hawk says that all that God created is good’ (*Osansa se nea Onyame yee biara ye*). The sense here is not that all is good to a degree that could conceivably be exceeded but rather that all is maximally good. Again, the hawk is not trying to fly in the face of the palpable facts of evil in the world; what it is saying is that the evil, though it is evil, is unavoidably involved in the good and is ultimately for the best—a sentiment that would have warmed the heart of Leibniz, author, in Western philosophy, of the maxim that this is the best of all possible worlds.

But how do we know that? Possibly, because of the difficulty of this question the Akans, or at any rate, some of them, do not seem to have sustained this cosmic optimism indefinitely, and there is evidence of another approach to the problem of evil which seeks to dissolve it by foregoing the claim of the total omnipotence of God. This brings us back to the pragmatic diminution of omnipotence spoken of by Minkus. But this time the diminution is real, not pragmatic. So too is the possibility of inconsistency in the traditional thought of the Akans on this subject. Though in the context of cosmological reflection, they maintain a doctrine of unqualified omnipotence, in connection with issues having a direct bearing on the fate of humankind on this earth, such as the problem of evil, they seem to operate with a notion of the power of God implying rather less than absolute omnipotence. That power is still unique in its extent, but it is conceptually not altogether unlike that of a human potentate. Indeed, correspondingly, God himself comes to be thought of on the model of a father who has laid well-intentioned plans for his children which are, however, sometimes impeded not only by their refractory wills but also by the grossness of the raw materials he has to work with. In conformity with this way of seeing God, a popular Akan lyric cries: 'God descend, descend and come and take care of your children' (*Onyame sane, sane behwe wo mma*). The apparent inconsistency in this dual conception of God and his powers in the Akan communal philosophy may possibly be due to its diversity of authorship; but, on the other hand, it may well be a real inconsistency harboured in identical Akan minds. Actually, a similar inconsistency is evident in some Christian thinking on the same problem.

Be that as it may, the position in question is approvingly expounded by J.B.Danquah as *the* Akan solution to the problem of evil. I quote from Danquah *in extenso*.

What, then, is the Akan solution to the fact of physical pain in man's animate experience? On the Akan view, we could only regard this as a difficulty if we lost sight of the fundamental basis of their thought, namely, that Deity does not stand over against his own creation, but is involved in it. He is, if we may be frank, 'of it'. If we postulate, as the Christians do, that the principle that makes for good 'in this world', Nyame or God, stands over against the community... and if we postulate again that the aforementioned principle is omnipotent, and is also responsible as creator of this world, the existence of physical evil or pain ...becomes an insoluble mystery... It is quite otherwise if we deny that the principle is omnipotent but is itself a 'a spirit striving in the world of experience with the inherent conditions of its own growth and mastering them' at the cost of the physical pain and evil as well as the moral pain or disharmony that stain the pages of human effort... That is to say, in Akan language, where the Nana, the principle that makes for good, is himself or itself a participant in the life of the whole... physical pain and evil are revealed as natural forces which the Nana, in common with others of the group, have to master, dominate, sublimate or eliminate (Danquah 1968:88-89).

This must remind one of John Stuart Mill, who was constrained by the problem of evil to resort to the concept of a limited God.

Danquah is not quite right in seeming to think that the view just noted is the one and



only solution to the problem of evil in Akan thought. Whether by way of inconsistency or doctrinal fecundity among Akan thinkers, there is, as shown above, a diversity of thought on the problem. This discussion, then, demonstrates a vitality of philosophical thought in an African traditional society that the generality of colonial studies of African thought, intending to give the impression of monolithic unanimity, has tended to obscure. It also shows another thing. It shows, in view of the repeated examples of philosophical convergences, that although it is the hallmark of decolonized thinking to be critically cognizant of the differences between African thought and its Western counterpart in its various forms, this is without prejudice to the possibilities of parallels in intellectual concerns and even doctrinal persuasion. This, it need hardly be added, can be a basis for fruitful interchange between African and Western (and, presumably, also Oriental) philosophy.

The reference to philosophical diversity early in the last paragraph is worth exploring at least briefly. The multiplicity of philosophic options is in evidence not only within the Akan tradition but also across the African continent. Thus, it is not to be taken for granted that the Akan doctrine of a basically demiurgic God is universal in Africa. On the evidence of studies such as Harry Sawyer's *God: Ancestor or creator?* and Kofi Asare Opoku's *West African traditional religion*, it might be conjectured that it is widespread in West Africa. On the other hand, if Mbiti is right, this does not apply to certain other parts of Africa. The latter observes that the

concept of creation *ex nihilo* is...reported among the Nuer, Banyarwanda and Shona, and undoubtedly a careful search for it elsewhere is likely to show that there are other peoples who incorporate it into their cosmologies (Mbiti 1990:39).

As regards the Banyarwanda, Maquet has written as follows:

The world in which men are placed and which they know through their senses was created *ex nihilo* by *Imana*. The Ruanda word *kurema*, means to produce, to make. It is here rendered 'to create' because our informants say that there was nothing before *Imana* made the world. This belief concerning the origin of the material world is universal and clear. To any question on this point, the answer is ready (Maquet 1954:166).

This account, if it is right, together with our previous findings, shows that not all traditional Africans think alike about God. It would seem that the Banyarwanda think more like orthodox Christians than like the traditional Akans. Actually, though, Maquet's account is not unproblematic. He says, for example, that *Imana*, the God of the Banyarwanda, 'is non-material. His action influences the whole world; but Ruanda is his home where he comes to spend the night.' How does a non-material being spend the night, and in physical environs, such as Ruanda? Presumably, the idea is that a non-material being can sometimes materialize itself, i.e., manifest itself in a material guise. But this involves a category mistake not unlike that of supposing that the square root of minus one might be able to dance calypso from time to time. Moreover it is as full-blooded a logical inconsistency as ever there was. Is the present incarnation of that

inconsistency Maquet's or the Banyarwanda's? While the question remains open, confidence in Maquet's report of the belief in *ex nihilo* creation among the Banyarwanda cannot be limitless, though it cannot be discounted out of hand.

In vast contrast to the religious thought of both the Akans and the Banyarwanda is that of the Luo of Uganda, if we may go by Okot p'Bitek. According to him, the Central Luo do not entertain any belief in a Supreme, or, as he phrases it, High God. They do not even have truck with the concept of such a being, nor does the notion of creating or even moulding the world make sense within their conceptual framework. In two books, namely, *African religions in Western scholarship* and *Religion of the central Luo*, he argues with intriguing illustrations that 'the idea of a high God among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries' (p'Bitek 1970:50). If truth be told, Okot p'Bitek was the true pioneer of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy. His African religions in Western scholarship might well have been sub-titled 'The decolonization of African religions'. He is an interesting exception to the practice among African writers of endeavouring to prove to the world that Africans had, by their own efforts, reached a concept of God essentially identical with the God of Christianity before the arrival of the missionaries. The general assumption among these writers, as I pointed out earlier, has been that it is a glorious achievement for a culture to be able to arrive, without outside help, at the belief in a God who created the world out of nothing. p'Bitek had no such assumption. He was a sceptic, and found nothing necessarily creditable in such a belief. He thus had no special joy at the prospect of it being demonstrated that the Central Luo were original true believers. It is, of course, open to his critics to argue that, in writing as he did, he was foisting his own unbelief upon his people. There is, certainly, no substitute for an objective and conceptually critical examination of his account of Luo religion. That would, in itself, be an admirable exercise in conceptual decolonization. For my part, given the ease and frequency with which Western categories of thought have been superimposed on African thought, I am inclined to suspect him innocent until proven guilty.

According to p'Bitek, then, the Central Luo believe in a whole host of forces or powers called, in their language, *jogi* (plural of *jok*), each independent of the rest. These *jogi* are regarded as responsible for particular types or patterns of happenings. Some of them are chieftdom *jogi* who are supposed to see to the welfare of particular groups of people. Others are hostile. For example, *jok kulu* causes miscarriage, *jok rubanga* causes tuberculosis of the spine, etc. Even the supposed power of a witch to cause harm is called a *jok*. Some *joks* may be used against other *joks*, but no one *jok* dominates all. This is far cry, indeed, from the Christian religious ontology which postulates an omnipotent creator *ex nihilo* or from even the Akan system with its divine architect who is 'alone great'.

In substantiation of his assertion that the idea of a high God among the Luo was the invention of the Christian missionaries, p'Bitek recounts the following incident. I have quoted it elsewhere (cf. Wiredu 1992b:301–302) in a similar connection but I cannot forebear to quote it again in the present context, as it furnishes a perfect paradigm of conceptual imposition in perfect drama:

In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question 'Who created you?'; and because the Luo language does not have an independent concept of *create* or *creation*, the question was rendered to mean 'Who moulded you?' But this was

still meaningless, because human beings are born of their mothers. The elders told the visitors that they did not know. But we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets 'moulded'. So he said

'Rubanga is the one who moulds people.' This is the name of the hostile spirit which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump back. And instead of exorcising the hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi (p'Bitek 1971:62).

Disentangling African frameworks of thought from colonial impositions, such as this, is an urgent task facing African thinkers, especially philosophers, at this historical juncture. Clarifying African religious concepts should be high on the agenda of this kind of decolonization.

### Négritude: Literature and ideology

#### F.ABIOLA IRELE

Pan-Africanism has been described as 'essentially a movement of emotions and ideas',<sup>1</sup> and this description is equally applicable to *négritude*, which is its cultural parallel. Indeed, no better phrase could be found to sum up its double nature, first as a psychological phrase to the social and cultural conditions of the 'colonial situation',<sup>2</sup> and secondly as a fervent quest for a new and original orientation.

In the former respect, the imaginative writings of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals offer a precious testimony to the human problems and inner conflicts of the colonial situation; in the latter respect, their propaganda writing and other activities represent an effort to transcend the immediate conditions of this situation by a process of reflection. *Négritude* is thus at the same time a literary and an ideological movement.

#### THE LITERATURE

The literature of *négritude* is dominated by the collective consciousness of the black writer as a member of a minority group which is subordinated to another and more powerful group within the total political and social order. The literary preoccupations of the movement revolve around this central problem, the Negro predicament of having been forced by historical circumstances into a state of dependence upon the West, considered the master society and the dominating culture. The literary themes of *négritude* can be seen as a counter-movement away from this state: they constitute a symbolic progression from subordination to independence, from alienation, through revolt, to self-affirmation.

## ALIENATION

The theme of exile is the point of departure of the whole literary expression of *négritude*, and in it is involved the most pathetic aspect of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals' specific situation, which derives from the political and cultural uprooting of black people in general by colonial conquest. The overwhelming sentiment that dominates in this connection is the black man's sense of separation from his own world and of being thrown into a social system with whose cultural values he can strike no personal relation. The black man recognizes himself as belonging to an 'out-group', an alien in relation to the West, which controls the total universe in which he moves. For the French-speaking Negro writer, this situation is signified by his physical exile in Europe.

Bless you, Mother,  
I hear your voice when I am given up to the  
  
insidious silence of this European night  
Prisoner under the white cold sheets tightly  
drawn,  
prisoner of all the inextricable anxieties that  
  
encumber me.<sup>3</sup>

This sentiment of belonging no longer to oneself but to another goes together with an awareness of inferiority, which becomes translated in social terms into a caste and class consciousness. The association between race and servitude is a constant theme in Negro literature, and occupies a prominent place in *négritude*:

I am a docker in Brooklyn  
Bunker-hand on all the oceans  
Labourer in Cuba  
Soldier in Algeria.<sup>4</sup>

The economic exploitation of the race which defines it as a community and gives its members a group consciousness is a consequence of its original humiliation by conquest and slavery. The memory of slavery thus has a particular significance for Negro writers, especially for those of the Caribbean.

And they sold us like beasts and counted our teeth...and they examined our genitals, felt the gloss and the roughness of our skin, pawed us, weighed us, and put around our neck like animals the strap of servitude and of nickname.<sup>5</sup>

The black man's principal role in Western history has thus been as an economic tool.<sup>6</sup>

This is what Césaire, echoing Marx, has called ‘the reduction of the Negro into an object’ (*la chosification du nègre*).<sup>7</sup> But although the Negro experience forms, in this light, part of the general Marxist conception of the ‘class struggle’, the prevailing preoccupation of these writers was with the black people as a race, and not as a class.<sup>8</sup> They were concerned with the collective image of the black man in the West and with his human status in the world.

The colonial system was based on a social division determined by ‘the colour line’,<sup>9</sup> and it was maintained by a racial ideology that defined the black man as inferior. The social relationship between colonizer and colonized was thus converted, as far as the black man was concerned, into an opposition between white and black, which acquired the moral values summarized by the South African, Bloke Modisane, in these words:

White is right, and to be black is to be despised, dehumanised...classed among the beasts, hounded and persecuted, discriminated against, segregated and oppressed by government and by man’s greed. *White is the positive standard, black the negative.*<sup>10</sup> [Italics mine]

The cultural and political ascendancy of the white man over the black man, combined with the active denigration of the black man, has thus had the effect of vitiating the latter’s self-esteem, with profound psychological consequences, which involve shame and self-hatred.<sup>11</sup> The demoralizing effect of the caste system on the black man has been expressed by Léon Damas:

My todays have each one for my yesterdays  
Wide eyes that roll with rancour and with shame.<sup>12</sup>

The black man in the world suffered his negation as a human being. This was the external reality with which the literature of *négritude* was concerned. But there is a more personal and intimate side to this theme of alienation, which has to do with the cultural situation of the assimilated Negro intellectual.

The colonial enterprise was presented as a ‘civilizing mission’, aimed at transforming the black man by his progressive approximation to the ideals of Western civilization through education. This implied in most cases his dissociation from the basic personality pattern imprinted in him by his original culture. Western education was thus an instrument of imposed acculturation, aimed at replacing the black man’s original modes of thought and feeling, which were attuned to his native norms, by another personality structure corresponding to western norms.<sup>13</sup> The French policy of assimilation probably went furthest in this cultural policy, which was to some extent common to all the colonizing powers, of attempting to fashion the black man—or at least a black *élite*—in a foreign image.

This problem is at the heart of the cultural and spiritual dilemma of the French-speaking Negro intellectual. For in order to be acceptable socially in the Western world, it was necessary for him to deny a part of himself. Conformity to white ideals was only possible at the cost of a repression of his original self.<sup>14</sup>

I must hide in the depths of my veins  
The Ancestor storm-dark skinned, shot with  
lightning and thunder  
And my guardian animal, I must hide him  
Lest I smash through the boom of scandal.  
He is my faithful blood and demands fidelity

Protecting my naked pride against  
Myself and all the insolence of lucky races.<sup>15</sup>

The result was a division in his personality. The Haitian poet Léon Laleau has expressed this sentiment of the divided self in remarkable poetic terms:

This beleaguered heart  
Alien to my language and dress  
On which I bite like a brace  
The borrowed sentiments and customs of  
Europe.  
Mine is the agony  
The unutterable despair  
In breaking with the cold words of France

The pulsing heart of Senegal.<sup>16</sup>

We touch here upon what Roger Bastide has called the 'pathology of the uprooted man', and which R.E.Park has observed in the 'cultural hybrid' as part of the psychological results of culture contact and the acculturative process: 'spiritual instability, intensified self-consciousness, restlessness and malaise'.<sup>17</sup> Damas has put this sentiment of malaise into verse:

I feel ridiculous  
in their shoes  
in their evening suits,  
in their starched shirts,  
  
in their hard collars  
in their monocles  
in their bowler hats.<sup>18</sup>

This is a problem that was even more accentuated in the case of the Caribbean writers,

whose non-Western cultural background was marginal, and whose racial stock, because of the total orientation of their society towards Western values, symbolized by whiteness, was more a source of shame and frustration than for the Africans. The pressure upon them to deny their racial connections and to identify with Europe was even greater, though they were subject to the same discrimination as the Africans.<sup>19</sup> The West Indians' sentiment of exile is thus intensified by a feeling of rootlessness, which Césaire expresses with the symbol of the island itself.

Island of the blood of Sargassoes  
island, nibbled remains of remora,  
island, backfiring laughter of whales,

island, specious word of mounted  
proclamations,  
island, large heart spread out

island ill-jointed, island disjointed,  
all islands beckon  
all islands are widows.<sup>20</sup>

The black man, and especially the intellectual, found himself a man no longer in his own right, but with reference to another, thus estranged from himself; in exile, not only in a political and social sense, but also spiritually. The whole colonial existence appears as one long paling of the black self, an 'Ambiguous Adventure' as C.H. Kane has put it. A man divided between two worlds, his over-riding aspiration thus became, in the words of Kane's tragic hero, Diallobé, 'nothing but harmony'.<sup>21</sup>

## REVOLT

A situation of oppression offers to the victim a range of reactions limited by two opposite poles—total submission, or total refusal—but the exact nature and degree of this reaction will depend upon the experience and the disposition of the individual. The colonial situation as a whole was a collective political and cultural oppression of black people yet it cannot be said that it was felt uniformly as such. The black intellectuals were in fact privileged in comparison with the masses, as far as the more external conditions of life were concerned, and it is quite conceivable that their consciousness of the fundamental injustice of the system in which they lived was limited, if it existed at all.

But the mental conflict into which the French-speaking Negro intellectuals were plunged as individuals probably made them aware that their dilemma was inherent in the whole colonial situation. Thus they were forced, despite assimilation, into an identification with the colonized rather than with the colonizer:

But if I must choose at the hour of testing  
I have chosen the verset of streams and of  
forests,  
The assonance of plains and rivers, chosen

the  
rhythm of blood in my naked body,  
Chosen the trembling of balafongs, the  
harmony  
of strings and brass that seem to clash,  
chosen the  
Swing swing yes chosen the swing  
I have chosen my toiling black people, my

peasant people, the peasant race through  
all the world.  
'And thy brothers are wroth against thee,  
they,  
have set thee to till the earth.'  
To be your trumpet!<sup>22</sup>

The literature of *négritude* became, as a result, a testimony to the injustices of colonial rule and an expression of the black man's resentment:

An immense fire which my continuous  
  
suffering  
and your sneers  
and your inhumanity,  
and your scorn  
and your disdain  
have lighted in the depths of my heart  
will swallow you all.<sup>23</sup>

The tone changes often from this kind of menace to one of accusation. The poetry of David Diop illustrates best this indictment of colonial rule:

In those days  
When civilisation kicked us in the face  
When holy water slapped our tamed



foreheads,  
The vultures built in the shadow of their  
talons  
The blood-stained monument of tutelage  
In those days  
There was painful laughter on the  
metallic hell of the roads  
And the monotonous rhythm of the  
pater noster  
Drowned the howling on the plantations.<sup>24</sup>

Accusation in turn becomes a criticism of Western society as a whole, and in this respect the contradiction of 'war and civilization' became a powerful weapon. Senghor's *Hosties Noires*, for example, are a collection of war poems in the tradition of Wilfrid Owen, but he reveals a particular view of European war when he speaks with sarcasm of having been 'delivered up to the savagery of civilized men'.<sup>25</sup>

The shortcomings of Western society, both within and without, furnished that element of disenchantment which made it possible for négritude to develop an attitude of refusal towards the colonial system:

I shout no  
no to class  
no to the taint of soot  
no to the humid floor  
no to the glass furnace  
no to damped lights  
no to love paid for in bank notes.<sup>26</sup>

Protest, accusation, and refusal lead inevitably to a call to arms:

But when, O my people,  
winters in flames dispersing a host  
of birds and ash,  
shall I see the revolt of your hands?<sup>27</sup>

Protest and threats of revolt are in themselves an indirect form of defence, a verbal means of pro-jecting violent reaction which cannot be realized physically. Although the militancy of negritude was an explicit response to a real situation (and the agitated character of a good deal of this writing indicates that the situation was often felt as real personal experience), it has no more than a symbolic value. Its real significance, however, lies elsewhere, for it does reveal in fact the hidden mechanism of response to

oppression. The resentment of the black man against domination tends towards retaliation and, as Fanon has shown, his consciousness as a colonized man is suffused with violence.<sup>28</sup> In the work of Césaire, this element is translated in poetic terms into an apocalyptic vision:

And the sea lice-ridden with islands  
breaking under rose fingers  
flame shafts and my body  
thrown up whole from the thunderbolt.<sup>29</sup>

The surrealist technique is here employed in a manner appropriate to the alienated condition of the black man. It offers the black poet a means of projecting his dream of violence, and becomes in fact a symbolism of aggression. A corresponding side to this aggressiveness is the way in which the black poet responds by wilfully identifying himself with Western symbols of evil:

I seek the thousand folds of the oceans  
  
witnesses of savageness  
and rivers where beasts go to drink  
to make for myself a face  
that would scatter vultures.<sup>30</sup>

Négritude here borders on nihilism. Yet nihilism is not characteristic of the movement as a whole; more often than not, it represents a defiant truculence, as in this passage where Damas operates a literary reversal of situations in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche:

The White will never be negro  
  
for beauty is negro  
and negro is wisdom  
for endurance is negro  
and negro is courage  
for patience is negro  
and negro is irony  
for charm is negro  
and negro is magic  
for joy is negro  
for peace is negro  
for life is negro.<sup>31</sup>

In this respect, one of the most striking technical innovations of *négritude* has to do with the reversal of colour associations in the Western language which was the only tongue accessible to most of them, namely French, as in this example from Césaire's *Cahier*.

a solitary man imprisoned in white  
a solitary man who defies the white cries of  
white death  
TOUSSAINT TOUSSAINT  
LOUVERTURE  
He is a man who bewitches the white hawk of

white death  
He is a man alone in the sterile sea of white  
sand.<sup>32</sup>

A reversal of Western symbols implies as well a reversal of the concepts associated with them. The revolt of *négritude* appears also as a refusal of Western values, regarded as oppressive constraints. The Christian religion<sup>33</sup> in particular comes in for continual attack, and this theme has had an original and refreshing treatment, though mainly in strident notes, in the comic novels of Mongo Beti, in particular *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (Poems, Ibadan 1962:46). Western morality is also set in contrast to the African's unbridled sensuality.<sup>34</sup>

It can be remarked that, in general, the theme of revolt in the literature of *négritude* represents a reinforcement of the antagonism created by the colonial situation, between the white master and the black subordinate. It is a way of underlining an opposition that was implicit in the colonial human context. It is not, however, an end in itself, as Sartre has observed, but rather part of a movement towards a more constructive vision.<sup>35</sup>

### REDISCOVERY

The refusal of Western political and cultural domination in the literature of *négritude* represents also a severing of the bonds that tie the black man to Western civilization. The corollary to this claim for freedom from the West is a search for new values. Revolt becomes not only a self-affirmation but also an instrument of self-differentiation:

For myself I have nothing to fear I am before

Adam I belong neither to the same lion  
nor to the same tree I am of another  
warmth and of another cold.<sup>36</sup>

The quest for new values thus leads the black writer to self-definition in terms that are non-Western, and the association between the black race and Africa acquired a new

meaning: instead of being a source of shame, it becomes a source of pride. This is the ultimate end of *négritude*, and much of the literature is dedicated to a rehabilitation of Africa, a way of refurbishing the image of the black man. The psychological function of this, as well as being a counter to the Negro's inferiority complex, is to permit an open and unashamed identification with the continent, a poetic sublimation of those associations in the Negro's mind which constitute for him a source of mental conflict in his relationship with Western culture: a process of self-avowal and self-recognition. This view of the movement is best justified by the writings of the West Indians, whose collective repression of Africa, as had been pointed out, has been the more painful:

Africa, I have preserved your memory,

Africa  
 you are in me  
 like the splinter in a wound  
 like a totem in the heart of a village.<sup>37</sup>

A myth of Africa developed in consequence out of the literature of *négritude*, which involved a glorification of the African past and a nostalgia for the imaginary beauty and harmony of traditional African society, as in Camara Laye's evocation of his African childhood.<sup>38</sup>

This strain in *négritude* is probably charged with the greatest emotional force. Senghor, for instance, infuses into his well-known love poem, 'Black woman', a feeling that is more filial than erotic, due to his identification of the continent with the idea of woman, in a way that lends to the image of Africa the force of a mother figure:

Naked woman, black woman,  
 Clothed with the colour which is life, with  
 your form which is beauty,  
 In your shadow I have grown up; the  
 gentleness of  
 your hands was laid over my eyes  
 And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at  
 the heart  
 of summer, at the heart of noon, I come  
 upon you,  
 my Promised Land,  
 And your beauty strikes me to the heart like  
 the flash of an eagle.

Naked woman, black woman,  
 I sing your beauty that passes, the form that I

fix in the Eternal,  
Before jealous Fate turns you to ashes to feed  
the roots of life.<sup>39</sup>

In a poem by another writer, Bernard Dadié, despite the use of conventional Western imagery, Africa is celebrated in cosmic terms:

I shall weave you a crown  
of the softest gleam  
bright as the Venus of the Tropics

And in the feverish scintillation  
of the milky sphere  
I shall write  
in letters of fire  
your name  
O, Africa.<sup>40</sup>

The romanticism of the African theme in *négritude* illustrates certain of the functions and characteristics of 'nativistic movements' as analysed by Ralph Linton,<sup>41</sup> but in literary rather than ritualistic form, that is, at a sophisticated level. Yet a purely sociological and 'realistic' view would miss the profound significance of this aspect of *négritude*. In any case, realism is a purely relative term applied to literature, and has little relevance to poetry,<sup>42</sup> but apart from this, the African theme went far beyond a purely compensatory mechanism in that it was also a genuine rediscovery of Africa, a rebirth of the African idea of the black self. This opening up of the African mind to certain dimensions of its own world which Western influence had obscured appears to be in fact the most essential and the most significant element in the literature of *négritude* as the principal channel of the African Renaissance. For the way in which the best of these poets came to root their vision in African modes of thought has given a new meaning to the traditional African world-view.<sup>43</sup>

Césaire's poetic formulation of *négritude* is in fact taken from a Bambara symbol of man in a telluric union with the universe:

My *négritude* is not a stone, its deafness  
hurled  
against the clamour of the day,  
my *négritude* is not a speck of dead water on

the  
dead eye of the earth,  
my négritude is neither a tower nor a  
cathedral  
it thrusts into the red flesh of the earth  
it thrusts into the livid flesh of the sky.<sup>44</sup>

The West Indian is of course at one remove from the living centre of traditional African humanism, which is essential to the poetry of the African writers of négritude, as in Senghor's works;<sup>45</sup> and it has perhaps been expressed in its purest and most authentic form by Birago Diop in his famous poem, 'Souffles':

Listen more often  
To things than to beings;  
The fire's voice is heard,  
Hear the voice of water.  
Hear in the wind  
The bush sob  
It is the ancestors' breath.

Those who died have never left,  
They are in the woman's breast,  
They are in the wailing child  
And in the kindling firebrand  
The dead are not under earth.

They are in the forest, they are in the home

The dead are not dead.<sup>46</sup>

The literature of négritude tends towards a point where it can coincide with the traditional mythical system of thought in Africa. This does not imply that the coincidence is perfect nor that it is always genuine; what is significant about it is the 'backward movement' towards an end from which Western culture had originally pulled the African. Négritude, as literature, retraces a collective drama as well as a spiritual adventure, involving a quest for the self, with the conquest of a lost identity as the prize.

From a social angle, its importance is mainly symbolic and functional. In the historical context in which it developed, the black writer incarnating his despised and oppressed race is the mediator of a new self-awareness. The racial exaltation of the movement is mainly a defence;<sup>47</sup> the use of an African myth represents black ethnocentrism, an attempt to recreate an emotional as well as an original bond beneath the contingencies of a particularly difficult historical experience.

The alliance of the imaginative and the political in négritude relates the movement to

African nationalism. Nationalism hardly ever corresponds to an objective reality, but is, none the less, a powerful emotional attitude, and literature has always been an outstanding vehicle for dominated people to give voice to their group feelings.<sup>48</sup> But imaginative writing, even with an explicit political content, implies a group mind rather than group action; it is essentially inactive. At the literary level, *négritude* remains largely subjective, and it was the ideology that attempted to establish objective standards of thought and action for the black man in general, and for the African in particular.

### THE IDEOLOGY

The non-imaginative writings of French-speaking Negro intellectuals to a great extent run parallel to the literature. They are determined by the same sentiments, and are consequently, in the main, a formulation in direct language of the attitudes expressed in symbolic terms in the imaginative writings. The distinction lies in the fact that, whereas the literary works simply express these attitudes, the non-literary writings formulate and define them.

The majority of the books, essays, articles, and speeches that constitute what may be called the ideological writings of *négritude* are straightforward polemics: protest writing, testimonies, and direct attacks on colonialism. A typical example is Albert Tevoedjre's essay, 'L'Afrique révoltée', which is a violent denunciation of colonial rule, with particular reference to Dahomey, the author's place of origin. Even here, the main source of grievance appears to be cultural rather than economic or social:

I shall always regret the fact of having been obliged to learn French first; to think in French while being ignorant in my own mother tongue. I shall always deplore the fact that anyone should have wanted to make me a foreigner in my own country.<sup>49</sup>

An even more forceful attack on colonialism is Césaire's famous pamphlet, 'Discours sur le Colonialisme', which takes up the question in original terms by demonstrating the evil effects on both colonizer and colonized of a system which limits the idea of man, as promoter of values, to the West:

Never was the west, even at the time when it shouted the word loudest, further removed from being able to assume the responsibilities of real humanism-humanism of a world-wide scope.<sup>50</sup>

It was not enough, however, to denounce colonialism; it was also considered necessary to contest its foundations, and especially the racial and cultural ideas by which it was rationalized.

### SOCIETY, HISTORY, AND CULTURE

The subordinate role of the Negro in Western society had been justified mainly by the allegation that Africa had made no contribution to world history, had no achievements to offer. The logical conclusion drawn from this idea was put by Alioune Diop in this way:

Nothing in their past is of any value. Neither customs nor culture. Like living matter, these natives are asked to take on the customs, the logic, the language of the coloniser, from whom they even have to borrow their ancestors.

The Western thesis that the African had no history implied for the black man that he had no future of his own to look forward to. A good deal of the propaganda effort of French-speaking intellectuals was as a consequence devoted to a refutation of this unacceptable proposition. Cheikh Anta Diop's writings stand out in this respect. His book, *Nations nègres et culture*, for example, is an impassioned, heavily documented attempt to show that ancient Egyptian civilization was in fact a Negro-African achievement, and thus to prove that the West owed its enlightenment to Africa. The conclusion to the principal section of his thesis is worth quoting in full, as it illustrates the tenor of the whole book:

The Egyptian origin of civilisation, and the Greeks' heavy borrowing from it are historical evidence. One wonders therefore why, in the face of these facts, the emphasis is laid on the role played by Greece, while that of Egypt is more and more passed over in silence. The foundation for this attitude can only be understood by recalling the heart of the question.

Egypt being a Negro country, and the civilisation which developed there being the product of black people, any thesis to the contrary would have been of no avail; the protagonists of these ideas are certainly by no means unaware of this fact. Consequently, it is wiser and surer purely and simply to strip Egypt of all her achievements for the benefit of a people of genuine white origin.

This false attribution of values of an Egypt conveniently labelled white to a Greece equally white reveals a profound contradiction, which is not negligible as a proof of the Negro origin of Egyptian civilisation.

As can be seen, the black man, far from being incapable of developing a technical civilisation, is in fact the one who developed it first, in the person of the Negro, at a time when all the white races, wallowing in barbarism, were only just fit for civilisation.

In saying that it was the ancestors of Negroes, who today inhabit principally Black Africa, who first invented mathematics, astronomy, the calendar, science in general, the arts, religion, social organisation, medicine, writing, engineering, architecture...in saying all this, one is simply stating the modest and strict truth, which nobody at the present moment can refute with arguments worthy of the name.<sup>51</sup>

The whole thesis is based on an implied correlation between history and culture which determines the nature of society, and of the individual: and its intention was to prove that the African was essentially a technical man-homo faber. However, by summarily ascribing all civilization to the black man in this way, Diop proceeds in the field of scholarship in the same fashion as Léon Damas in the poem already cited—by reversing the hierarchy established by the colonizer, without contesting the basis on which it was founded. It is, in a way, a total acceptance of the Western measure of evaluation, namely technical achievement.



Négritude may be distinguished from other efforts to rehabilitate Africa by what can be termed its 'ethnological' aspect, which attempted to redefine its terms, and to re-evaluate Africa within a non-Western framework. Here the concept of cultural relativity was to help in sustaining a campaign whose purpose was to establish the validity of African cultural forms in their own right.

This explains the preoccupation of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals with anthropology, a preoccupation which reveals itself in the series of special numbers published by *Présence Africaine*, especially the two remarkable volumes *Le Monde noir* (1951) and *L'Art nègre* (1952). The former, edited by Theodore Monod, brought together a number of articles by eminent scholars, both European and African, on various aspects of African cultural expression, as well as their ramifications in the New World, in such a way as to suggest not only their originality but their world-wide permanence.

The accent was almost invariably placed on the non-material aspects, on those intangible elements which could distinguish the African's approach to the world from the Western, and which might seem to underlie his conscious existence as well as his material productions. Thus African traditional beliefs and, in particular, the native forms of religion received strong emphasis. African 'animism' tended in general to be placed on an equal footing with Christianity, though curiously enough by an effort of reconciliation in most cases. The most noteworthy example of this kind of procedure is perhaps a paper by Paul Hazoumé in which the Dahomean conception of God is likened to that of John the Evangelist.<sup>52</sup>

The anthropological interests of négritude came to the fore at the first Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, whose express purpose was to make a total inventory of the Negro's cultural heritage, in an effort to define a Pan-Negro cultural universe. This was at best a very delicate, if not an impossible, undertaking, as the discomfort and reserve of the American participants at the conference was to make clear. It would be tedious to go into the details, but two main lines of thought emerged from the deliberations of this conference. Foremost in the minds of the organizers was the will to demonstrate the specific character of traditional African institutions and beliefs, as well as of African survivals in America, in a way that refuted the Western thesis of inferiority. The purpose of this was made clear by the Haitian, Emmanuel Paul:

It was from this [African] past that colonial authors undertook to make the black man inferior... But what we look for from these studies is precisely the awakening of a historical consciousness embracing the millennial past of the race. These black people scattered all over the world who, even under the pressure of the West, still hesitate to deny themselves, have need of this source of pride, this reason for clinging to life.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, and as a consequence, the concern with the past implied a process of self-appraisal and self-definition, as a solid basis. The Malagasy writer, Jacques Rabemananjara, declared:

The deliberations [of this Congress] have no other purpose than to assemble and to select material for the dialogue. First among ourselves, with the aim of knowing ourselves more, of grasping, through our diverse mentalities, customs,

and countries of origin, the essential human note, of the ineffable human warmth that unites us.<sup>54</sup>

These efforts cannot be said to have produced a common cultural denominator, but their significance lay rather in the attitude that inspired them. In direct response to the intolerance that characterized the cultural policy of the colonizer, negritude developed into a vindication and an exaltation of cultural institutions which were different from those of the West; it was thus a conscious attitude of pluralism. The corollary was a rejection of assimilation and a claim to cultural autonomy and initiative. Alioune Diop expressed this aspect of the movement in the following terms:

Unable to assimilate to the English, the Belgian, the French, the Portuguese—to allow the elimination of certain original dimensions of our genius for the benefit of a bloated mission of the west—we shall endeavour to forge for this genius those means of expression best suited to its vocation in the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup>

### POLITICS AND RACE

These efforts to rehabilitate African history and to re-evaluate African culture were a conscious reaction to the ideology that sustained colonial rule. But the central pole of the colonial situation was political domination rather than cultural supremacy. The next step after a demand for cultural autonomy was logically a corresponding demand for political independence. The arguments for an explicit political stand came mainly from the Marxist elements in the movement, especially at the second congress in Rome. Frantz Fanon's address to this meeting contained an unequivocal summary of their point of view:

In the colonial situation, culture, denied the twin support of nation and state, withers away in a slow death. The condition for the existence of culture is therefore national liberation, the rebirth of the state.<sup>56</sup>

However, if a certain political awareness was an implicit part of the cultural offensive of the French-speaking black intellectual, which placed *négritude* in close relationship with African nationalism and Pan-Africanism, it is none the less quite clear that *négritude* remained essentially a cultural and intellectual movement, albeit with political implications. The French-speaking Negro élite tended more towards an elaboration of ideas concerning the black man's place in the world than towards the actual mobilization of the masses for an immediate and definite political goal.<sup>57</sup> *Négritude* was thus at the most an ideological movement with remote political purposes.

Its link with nationalism is all the same certain in that a special rationale was developed along with it; it furnished the most important mystique of African nationalism.

In so far then as it is an answer to a certain combination of circumstances, the product of a historical situation, *négritude* is another cultural and political myth: the expression of a justified self-assertion swelling into an exaggerated self-consciousness.<sup>58</sup> *Négritude* has also meant to a considerable extent an assiduous cultivation of the black race.

That Negro nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic should have been based on a vehement racial consciousness can be imputed to the racialism that grew out of and which

often came to underline white domination: black nationalism can in the final analysis be reduced to a challenge to white supremacy. Négritude, by confronting white domination with its own racial protest and zealous partisanship of the Negro race, did more than draw together the sentiments and attitudes that went with black reaction and embody them in a heightened form: it moved in fact very distinctly towards a racial ideology.

Even here, most of the ideas expressed by French Negro intellectuals are limited to a refutation of the racial ideology of colonialism. For if, in the literary works, the exaltation of the black race rises to dizzy heights, it has not been reproduced in the non-literary writings with anything like the same abandon. In the single case of Senghor, this aspect of *négritude* acquires a certain intellectual dimension. So preeminently do his ideas emerge on this question that his conception of *négritude* demands separate consideration.<sup>59</sup>

### SENGHOR AND THE THEORY OF NÉGRITUDE

Senghor's *négritude* starts out as, and essentially remains, a defence of African cultural expression.<sup>60</sup> It presents itself first as an elaborate apology before it becomes an exposition and a personal view of Africa: it is a passion that is later rationalized. None the less, his ideas over the last quarter-century present a coherent and even a consistent pattern.

On several occasions, Senghor has defined *négritude* as 'the sum total of African cultural values', something perhaps more than the simple relation of the African's personality to his social and cultural background. For although Senghor never speaks of an 'essence', he speaks of a 'negro soul', of a special spiritual endowment of the African which is, in some respects, shared by the Negro in the New World, and is therefore a racial mark.<sup>61</sup>

Senghor describes and defines the African's distinctive qualities mainly by opposition to the Western, often by setting a positive value on what the West derided in the African, sometimes proceeding by grounding his own thinking in modern currents of Western thought, which he then turns against the West for the benefit of his arguments. He has written, for example:

Discursive reason merely stops at the surface of things, it does not penetrate their hidden resorts, which escape the lucid consciousness. Intuitive reason is alone capable of an understanding that goes beyond appearances, of taking in total reality.<sup>62</sup>

It is this line of thought that forms the basis for his justification of the African's non-rational approach to the world. He has boldly annexed Lévy-Bruhl's studies on 'primitive mentality' to argue the validity of the African's ways of thinking. He seizes in particular upon the French anthropologists' 'law of participation';<sup>63</sup> and he uses this in his own formulation of the African's mode of experience, which he presents as essentially one of feeling—of a mystical sympathy with the universe: The African cannot imagine an object as different from him in its essence. He endows it with a sensibility, a will, a human soul.<sup>64</sup>

For Senghor, this African mode of apprehending reality through the senses rather than

through the intellect is at the root of his direct experience of the world, of his spontaneity. The African's psychology helps to determine a different form of mental operation from the Western, a different kind of logic:

The life-surge of the African, his self-abandonment to the other, is thus actuated by reason. But here, reason is not the eye-reason of the European, it is the reason-by-embrace which shares more the nature of the logos than ratio.

He goes on to say, 'Classical European reason is analytical and makes use of the object. African reason is intuitive and participates in the object'.<sup>65</sup> Senghor has made this distinction a constant theme in his writings.

The 'law of participation' governs the African's sensibility, which to Senghor is basically emotive. He has pushed this conception of the African mind to a point where emotion has become its cardinal principle. 'Emotion is African, as Reason is Hellenic', he has exclaimed, and though this statement has been given careful nuances by him (for the benefit of his critics) he still leaves no doubt about this aspect of his theory of *négritude*: 'It is this gift of emotion which explains *négritude*... For it is their emotive attitude towards the world which explains the cultural values of Africans.'<sup>66</sup>

Senghor points to creative works to demonstrate the presence of a unique African sensibility which animates them, and insists above all on the privileged position of rhythm in African artistic expression—rhythm is for him the expression of the essential vitality of the African:

[Rhythm] is the architecture of being, the internal dynamism which shapes it, the system of waves which it sends out towards others, the pure expression of vital force... For the Negro-African, it is in the same measure that rhythm is embodied in the senses that it illuminates the Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

In his exposition of the African mind, Senghor lays emphasis on its intensely religious disposition, on the African's 'sense of the divine', on 'his faculty of perceiving the supernatural in the natural'.<sup>68</sup> The African's mystical conception of the world is for Senghor his principal gift, and derives from his close links with the natural world. Because the African 'identifies being with life, or rather with the life-force', the world represents for him the manifestation in diverse forms of the same vital principle: 'For the universe is a closed system of forces, individual and distinct; it is true, yet also interdependent.'<sup>69</sup> Lévy-Bruhl's law of participation is here allied to Fr. Tempels' 'Bantu Philosophy' to produce a conception of the African world-view as a system of participating forces, a kind of great chain of vital responses in which Man, the personification of the 'life-force', occupies a central position: 'From God through man, down to the grain of sand, it is a seamless whole. Man, in his role as person, is the centre of this universe'.<sup>70</sup>

For Senghor, this is not an abstract system but an existential philosophy, a practical view of life; *négritude* is for him not only a way of being, but also a way of living. He therefore extends his theory of the African personality to explain African social organization. Senghor believes that the African society is an extension of the clan, which is a kind of mystical family, 'the sum of all persons, living and dead, who acknowledge a

common ancestor'.<sup>71</sup> Thus African society has a religious character—it is not so much a community of persons as 'a communion of souls'. Where, therefore, Western culture insists on the individual, African culture lays emphasis on the group, though without the loss of a sense of the person.<sup>72</sup>

Senghor's theory of *négritude* is not really a factual and scientific demonstration of African personality and social organization, but rather a personal interpretation. An element of speculation enters into his ideas, which lays them wide open to criticism. His more subtle formulations often have a specious character; besides, the most sympathetic reader of his theories cannot fail to be disturbed by his frequent confusion of race and culture, especially in his early writings.

On the other hand, these weaknesses are due to the circumstances in which his ideas developed. In assessing the objective differences that cut off the African from Western man, his concern is to make positive re-evaluation of realities which the West considered negative.

Furthermore, Senghor's political career has given his theory of *négritude* a practical significance—from polemics, it has evolved into an ideology. His social and political thought are set within the general framework of his cultural philosophy. It is in the name of the innate spiritual sense of the African that he rejects the atheistic materialism of Marxism as unfitted for and irrelevant to the African situation.<sup>73</sup>

In a certain sense, therefore, Senghor may be justified in designating his theory of *négritude* as a cultural and not as a racial philosophy. At any rate, it is not an exclusive racism. Senghor's views on the African, and even on the whole Negro race, open out towards the larger perspectives of a broader humanism. Here he has been influenced by Teilhard de Chardin's philosophy of the convergence of all forms of life and experience towards the evolution of a superior human consciousness, which has given Senghor a pole around which he has developed his idea of 'a civilisation of the Universal'.<sup>74</sup> His defence of cultural and racial mingling is founded on this key concept, which is summed up in the following passage:

The only 'pan-ism' which can meet the demands of the 20th century is—let us proclaim it boldly—pan-humanism, I mean a humanism which embraces all men at the double level of their contributions and their comprehension.<sup>75</sup>

### **THE AFRICAN PRESENCE AND THE BLACK MILLENNIUM**

An ideology, when it becomes explicit, is a kind of thinking aloud on the part of a society or of a group within it. It is a direct response to the actual conditions of life, and has a social function, either as a defensive system of beliefs and ideas which support and justify an established social structure, or as a rational project for the creation of a new order. The latter type of ideology, even when it includes a certain degree of idealism, also implies a reasoned programme of collective action; it becomes the intellectual channel of social life.

The literature and ideology of *négritude* were by their nature revolutionary, or at the very least radical. Because they spring from a need to reverse an intolerable situation, they are moved in the first instance by a negative principle. They are a challenge to the

common lot which Western expansion had imposed on non-Western man, especially the Negro, whose experience—dispersal, subjugation, humiliation—illustrates the worst aspects of contact with the white man. For black people had in common an experience which, in the words of James Baldwin, placed in the same context their widely dissimilar experience. He continues:

What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful reaction to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world, and of themselves, held by other people. What in sum black men held in common was their ache to come into the world as men.<sup>76</sup>

In the circumstances, it is not surprising that this ‘ache’ should have developed sometimes into an intense collective neurosis, which has reached a paroxysm in movements like those of the Black Muslims in the US, and the Rastafarians in Jamaica. The dilemma in which history placed the black man, and from which the intellectual movements could not escape, was that Negro nationalism of any kind was bound to be even more irrational than any other, for it was to a considerable degree a gesture of despair.

This negative aspect of black reaction to white rule has left a mark on *négritude*, even in its development of positive perspectives. A contradiction, purely emotional in origin, bedevils the movement, which, in its crusade for the total emancipation of black people, has sought to comprise within a single cultural vision the different historical experiences of Negro societies and nations.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the movement as a futile and sectarian obsession with self—a kind of black narcissism. In the larger context of Negro experience, it represents the ultimate and most stable point of self-awareness. For, although its expression has sometimes been exaggerated, it has always had an intellectual content. In the African political context, its role as the ideological spear-point of African nationalism has been sufficiently emphasized. Its profound significance in the cultural and social evolution of Africa has been perhaps less appreciated.

*Négritude* represents both an African *crise de conscience*, and its most significant modern expression; it is the watershed that marks the emergence of modern African consciousness. African ‘messianism’ and *négritude* represent the ritualistic and the intellectual facet of the reaction to the same historical, social, and cultural stimulus. Their forms have varied. In African messianism, tradition remains the basis of social behaviour, despite borrowings from Western religion, which are absorbed only so far as they will fit in. The reverse is true of *négritude*: despite its championship of a non-rational tradition, it remains rigorously rational. Senghor’s *négritude*, for example, is an anti-intellectualism mediated by the intellect, and the whole movement is expressed through a Western mould which absorbs African realities. In short, *négritude* is a break with tradition: although African in content, it is Western in its formal expression.

The movement thus marks a transition in the nature of collective expression in Africa—from the myth of the millennium and from the religious undercurrent upon

which traditional Africa had relied for human accomplishment, to the lay, intellectually-centred approach to the world which is a legacy of the European Renaissance. It marks a 'desacralization' of African collective life, an attitude which is spontaneous and no longer imposed, and out of which have begun to flow new currents of ideas for tackling present-day African problems.

This is what Balandier has observed as 'the progression from myth to ideology' in Africa.<sup>77</sup> Although this progression has been continuous and although, as L.-V. Thomas has remarked, 'the originality of modern solutions is inspired by the specific character of former times',<sup>78</sup> none the less the transition is real. African messianism was an archaic reaction to a new situation; négritude was a far more appropriate response, adapted to the modern age.

It thus forms an essential and significant part of an African revolution which is marked not only by the emotions it has liberated and the ideas it has thrown up, but also by the forms it has assimilated. The profound character of the transition can best be appreciated by comparing the respective visions of the Absolute in African messianism and in négritude. The former was supernatural and apocalyptic—essentially an eschatology. The idealism of négritude from the beginning tended towards an earthly utopia:

We Africans need to know the meaning of an ideal, to be able to choose it and believe in it freely, but out of a sense of personal necessity, to relate it to the life of the world. We should occupy ourselves with present questions of world importance, and, in common with others, ponder upon them, in order that we might one day find ourselves among the creators of a new order.<sup>79</sup>

In their search for identity, the adherents of négritude have had to accept and explore to the full their particular situation. But, although preoccupied with a sectional and limited interest, they were inspired by a universal human need for fulfilment. In this, they have never strayed from the central, enduring problem of the human condition.

## ENDNOTES

1 Colin, Legum. 1962. *Pan-Africanism*. (London, 1962:14).

2 The term 'colonial situation' will be used here to denote the global situation of black people as it affected the writings of French-speaking Negro intellectuals. The first part of this study has already spelt out how the position of the Negro in the United States was readily assimilated to the domination of other Negro peoples by the West.

3 Senghor, Léopold Sédar. 1964. 'On the appeal from the race of Sheba', translated by John Reed and Clive Wake in *Selected Poems*, London, 1964:29.

4 Roussan Camille, 1956. *Assaut à la nuit*, Paris, 1956:53.

5 Aimé Césaire, *Et les chiens se taisaient*, Paris, 1956:93–3.

6 Cf. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery*, London, 2nd edn. 1964.

7 Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris, 1955:22.

8 Gunnar Myrdal has observed that racial solidarity is more marked among US Negroes than class consciousness. He speaks therefore of a 'caste struggle', thus

- making the economic status of the American Negro secondary to the ethnic classification, in his analysis of the Negroes' place in US society. *An American dilemma* (New York, 9th edn. 1944, chap. 31:667 ff).
- 9 Cf. Raymond Kennedy: 'The colour line, indeed, is the foundation of the entire colonial system, for on it is built the whole social, economic, and political structure'. The Colonial Crisis and the Future', in Ralph Linton (ed.), *The science of man in the world crisis*, New York, 1945:308.
- 10 Bloke Modisane, 'Why I ran away', in J.Langston Hughes (ed.), *An African treasury*, New York, 1960:26.
- 11 The psychological implications of racial discrimination for the black man in white society have produced numerous studies. This question seems to have been best summarized by John Dollard: 'The upshot of the matter seems to be that recognizing one's own Negro traits is bound to be a process wounding to the basic sense of integrity of the individual who comes into life with no such negative views of his own characteristics.' *Caste and class in a southern town*, New York, 2nd edn. 1949:184. The genesis of Negro 'self-hatred' is discussed at length by Roger Bastide in his chapter on 'Le Heurt des races, des civilisations et la psychanalyse' in *Sociologie et psychanalyse*, Paris, 1950, chap. xi:235ff.
- 12 Léon Damas, 'La Complainte du nègre', in *Pigments*, Paris, 1963:45.
- 13 For the theoretical basis of these remarks, see A. Kardiner, *Psychological frontiers of society* (New York, 2nd edn., 1946), and M. Dufrenne, *La Personnalité de base* (Paris, 1953).
- 14 Cf. O.Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation*, Paris, 1950:10–30.
- 15 Senghor, 'Totem', in *Selected poems*, 1964:10.
- 16 Léon Laleau, 'Trahison', translated by Samuel Allen, in Jacob Drachler (ed.), *African heritage*, New York, 1963:195; French original in Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, Paris, 1948.
- 17 Roger Bastide, 'Problèmes de l'entrecroisement des civilisations et de leurs oeuvres', in G. Gurvitch (ed.), *Traité de sociologie*, Paris, 1963, II:319; and R.E.Park, *Race and culture*, New York, 1950:356.
- 18 Damas, 'Solde', in *Pigments*, 1963:39.
- 19 Cf. F.Henriques, 'Colour values in Jamaica' in *British Journal of Sociology*, London, II, 1951:2; and Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris, *Minorities in the new world*, New York, 1958. Edgar Mittelholzer, *A morning at the office*, London, 1950; and George Lamming, *The emigrants*, London, 1955, offer sensitive inside views of this Caribbean problem.
- 20 Césaire, A. 1961. 'Dit d'errance', in *Cadastre*, Paris, 1961:90.
- 21 C.H.Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Paris, 1961:88. Cf. John Reed, 'Between Two Worlds', in *Makerere Journal* (Kampala), 7, 1963, for an analysis of the theme of cultural conflict in the African novel.
- 22 Senghor, 'For Koras and Balafongs', in *Selected poems*, 1964:13–14.
- 23 Regnor C.Bernard, 'Nègre', quoted and translated by G.R.Courthauld, *Race and colour in Caribbean literature*, London, 1962:81.
- 24 David Diop, 'Les Vautours', in *Coups de pilon*, Paris, 1960:8; translated by Ulli Beier in J. Langston Hughes (ed.), *Poems from black Africa*, Bloomington,



1963:145.

25 Senghor, *Hosties Noires*, Paris, 1948:115.

26 René Despestre, 'Quand je crienon', in *Gerbes de sang*; quoted by Naomi Garret, *The Renaissance of Haitian Poetry*, Paris, 1963:191.

27 Jacques Roumain, 'Prelude' to *Bois d'ébène*, Port-au-Prince, 1945. The titles of the collections of poems by French Negro writers speak manifestly of this mood: *Les Armes miraculeuses* (Césaire), *Coups de pilon* (D.Diop), *Feu de brousse* (Tchikaya U.Tam'si), *Balles noires* (Guy Tirolien), and so on.

28 Fanon, F. *Les Damnés de la terre*, Paris, 1961, chap. I. Georges Balandier and Roger Bastide have both drawn attention to this phenomenon, highlighted by the influence of the Apocalypse on 'messianic' movements. See G.Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*; and Bastide, *Sociologie et psychanalyse*, 262.

29 Césaire, A. 'Soleil Serpent', in *Les Armes miraculeuses*, Paris, 1946:25.

30 René Béance, 'Moi nègre', in *Survivances*; quoted by Naomi Garret, op. cit.:178.

31 Translated by Gerald Moore in *Seven African writers*, London, 1962, introduction, p. xx, from Damas, Black Label, Paris, 1956:52. The same reversal of situations occurs in Camara Laye's *The radiance of the king*, London, 1959, where Clarence the white man goes through a succession of adventures in supplication of the attention of a black king.

32 Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Paris, 1958 edn.:46. Sartre observed, in connection with the problem posed to the black poet by his use of European language: 'Let him open his mouth and he condemns himself, except in so far as he sets himself to destroy the hierarchy' (that is, of the 'coupled terms black-white'); *Black Orpheus*, 1958:27.

33 This theme is also a favourite one with English-speaking African writers. C.Okigbo calls the Angelus 'the bells of exile'; *Heavensgate*, Ibadan, 1962:35. J.P.Clark writes in 'Ivbie', almost a poem of négritude:

Is it ruse or true  
That peace which passeth all understanding?

34 Cf. Wole Soyinka's *The lion and the jewel*, Ibadan, 1963, for a parallel treatment of this theme by an African writing in English.

35 Jean-Paul Sartre speaks of négritude as 'the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Négritude as antithetical value is the moment of Negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who use it well know this; they know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realisation of the human society without racism'. *Black Orpheus*, Paris, 1963:60.

36 Césaire, 'Visitation', in *Les Armes miraculeuses*, 32.

37 Roumain, Jacques. *Bois d'ébène*, 5.

38 Camara Laye, *The African child*, London, 1954.

39 Senghor, *Selected poems*, 1964:6.

40 Bernard Dadié, 'Couronne à l'Afrique', in *La Ronde des jours*, Paris, 1956.

- 41 R.Linton, 'Nativistic Movements', in *American Journal of Sociology*, Chicago. See also his chapter on 'The distinctive aspects of acculturation', in *Acculturation in seven American Indian types*, New York, 1940:ch. 10.
- 42 It is not suggested by these remarks that the romanticism of négritude was without its abuses. But this is a question for literary criticism, which must content itself with judging the aesthetic value of the finished product rather than legislating for the writer about his raw material. Besides, négritude, like any other literary school, has produced its uninspired writers, and like any other movement its lunatic fringe.
- 43 Cf. Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu*, London, 1961, especially chapters 5 and 7, and John V.Taylor, *The primal vision*, London, 1963, for an extensive discussion of this question.
- 44 Césaire, *Cahier*, 1958:71.
- 45 Cf. Ulli Beier, 'The theme of the ancestors in Senghor's poetry', in *Black Orpheus*, Ibadan, 5 May 1959, May Beier concludes his study with the following observation: 'Senghor is not merely a Frenchified African who tries to give exotic interest to his French poems; he is an African who uses the French language to express his African soul'.
- 46 Translated by Anne Atik in Drachler (ed.), *African heritage*, 95.
- 47 Cf. A Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, Paris, 1957:174.
- 48 Cf. Hans Kohn, *The idea of nationalism*, New York, 1946. The analogy between négritude and other nationalist literatures has been drawn, principally by two writers: Bernard Fonlon, who compares négritude to similar movements in Irish nationalism in *La Poésie et le réveil de l'homme noir* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland, Cork); and Thomas Melone, *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine*, Paris, 1962, in which négritude is compared to the literature of the German revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- 49 Tevoedjre, A. *L'Afrique révoltée*, Paris, 1958:114–15.
- 50 Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris, 1955:65.
- 51 Diop, Cheikh-Anta. *Nations nègres et culture*, Paris, 1954:253.
- 52 Hazoumé, P. 'L'âme du Dahoméen, animiste révélée par sa religion', in *Contributions au 1er congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, 233–51. See also the collected volume, *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris, 1957, for a similar approach to African religious beliefs.
- 53 Paul E., 'L'Ethnologie et les cultures noires', in *Contributions au 1er congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, 152.
- 54 Rabemananjara, J. 'L'Europe et nous', *ibid.*:28.
- 55 Alioune Diop, *Deuxième congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, 41.
- 56 Fanon, F. 'Fondements réciproques de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération', *ibid.*:87.
- 57 G.Balandier observes that, in the development of African political myth, 'the accent was placed more on...cultural liberation...than on political liberation'. 'Les mythes politiques de colonisation et de décolonisation en Afrique', in *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, Paris, xxxiii, 1962:93.
- 58 The following observation by Louis Wirth about minorities' reaction to their

- situation should be kept in mind when considering négritude: 'One cannot long discriminate against a people without generating in them a sense of isolation and of persecution, and without giving them a conception of themselves as more different from others than in fact they are'. R.Linton (ed.), *The science of man in the world crisis*, 348.
- 59 No other member of the movement has elaborated négritude so fully as Senghor. As a matter of fact, Césaire himself prefers to regard négritude as a historical stand, as an attitude, rather than as a comprehensive system (private interview with the author).
- 60 The title of one of his early articles is significant: 'Défense de l'Afrique noire', in *Esprit*, Paris, 1945.
- 61 Cf. 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté*, I: *négritude et humanisme*, Paris, 1964:22–39.
- 62 Senghor, 'Preface to Birago Diop, Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba', in *Liberté*, I:246.
- 63 Cf. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Morceaux Choisis*, Paris, 1936:23–7. Although Lévy-Bruhl's ideas have been demolished, and he himself renounced them later in his life, this does not seem to have affected Senghor's own ideas.
- 64 Senghor, 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté*, I:24.
- 65 Senghor, 'Psychologie du Négro-Africaine', in *Diogenes*, 37, 1962; translated by John Reed and Clive Wake, in *Senghor: Prose and poetry*, London, 1965:33.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 'L'Esthétique Négro-Africaine', in *Liberté*, I:212–13.
- 68 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté*, I:27.
- 69 Translations by John Reed and Clive Wake, op. cit.: 37.
- 70 *Ibid.*: 43
- 71 *Ibid.*
- 72 Cf. *Nation et voie Africaine du socialisme*, Paris, 1961:71 and 123–4.
- 73 Cf. Senghor, *Nation et voie Africaine du socialisme*, 41–66, and *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique Africaine*, Paris, 1962:17–31. Senghor does not reject so much the philosophy of Marx as his social ideology.
- 74 *Ibid.*: 33ff.
- 75 *Nation et voie Africaine du socialisme*, 108.
- 76 James Baldwin, *Nobody knows my name*, New York, 1961:29.
- 77 Balandier, op. cit.: 93.
- 78 L.-V.Thomas, *Les Idéologies Négro-Africaines d'aujourd'hui*, Dakar, 1965:19. Cf. also B.Ogot, 'From chief to president', in *Transition*, Kampala, 10, 1963 for a study of the same progression in African political organization and attitudes.
- 79 Diop, A. 'Niam n'goura ou les raisons d'être de Présence Africaine', in *Présence Africaine*, I:1947 (translated by R.Wright).

## Moving the centre: Towards a pluralism of cultures

NGUGI WA THIONG'O

Sometime in 1965 I handed a piece of prose to Professor Arthur Ravenscroft in what was a class exercise in language use. It was a description of carpenter-artist at work on wood. Later this became part of a larger evocation of life in a village in colonial Kenya between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Mau Mau armed struggle against British rule in 1952. When in 1966 I attended the first conference of Scandinavian and African writers in Stockholm, I presented it under the title *Memories of childhood*. By then it had become part of an even larger enterprise, a novel, *A grain of wheat*, which I wrote during my time in Leeds. The novel came out in 1967. In the copy that I signed for Arthur Ravenscroft I was happy to draw his attention to the chapter containing the exercise.

I mention the novel because in so many ways *A grain of wheat* symbolizes, for me, the Leeds I associate with Arthur Ravenscroft's time, which was also a significant moment in the development of African literature. This was the sixties when the centre of the universe was moving from Europe or, to put it another way, when many countries—particularly in Asia and Africa—were demanding and asserting their right to define themselves and their relationship to the universe from their own centres in Africa and Asia. Frantz Fanon became the prophet of the struggle to move the centre, and his book *The wretched of the earth*, became a kind of Bible among the African students from West and East Africa then at Leeds. In politics this moving of the centre was clear. Between 1960 and 1964, the year I came to Leeds, many countries in Africa like Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Nigeria, to mention only a few, had hoisted their national flags and were singing new national anthems instead of those of their conquerors from Europe as was the practice in the colonial era. Kenya had not even properly got used to its new anthem, sung for the first time at the midnight of 12 December 1963. *A grain of wheat* celebrated the more than sixty years of the Kenyan people's struggle to claim their own space. The political struggles to move the centre, the vast decolonization process changing the political map of the post-war world, also had a radicalizing effect in the West, particularly among the young, and this was best symbolized by the support the Vietnamese struggle was enjoying among the youth of the sixties. In turn, this radical tradition had an impact on the African students at Leeds, making them look even more critically at the content rather than the form of the decolonization process, taking their cue from Fanon's critique in the rightly celebrated chapter in the *The wretched of the earth*, entitled 'The pitfalls of national consciousness'. *A grain of wheat* was both a celebration of independence and a warning about those pitfalls.

In the area of culture, the struggle to move the centre was reflected in the tri-continental literature of Asia, Africa, and South America. The struggle was more dramatic in the case of Africa and the Caribbean countries, where the post-war world saw a new literature in English and French consolidating itself into a tradition. This literature was celebrating the right to name the world, and *A grain of wheat* was part of that tradition of the struggle for the right to name the world for ourselves. The new tradition was challenging the more dominant one in which Asia, Africa, and South America were

always being defined from the capitals of Europe by Europeans who often saw the world in colour-tinted glasses. The good and the bad African of the racist European tradition, the clowning Messrs Johnsons of the liberal European tradition, or even the absence of consciousness of the colonized world in the mainstream of the European literary imagination were all being challenged by the energy of the Okonkwos of the new literature—who would rather die resisting than live on bent knees in a world which they could no longer define for themselves on their terms. These were characters who, with their every gesture in their interaction with nature and with their social environment, were a vivid image of the fact that Africa was not a land of perpetual childhood passed over by history as it passed from East to West to find its highest expression in Western empires of the twentieth century. Hegelian Africa was a European myth. The literature was challenging the Eurocentric basis of the vision of other worlds even when this was of writers who were not necessarily in agreement with what Europe was doing to the rest of the world. It was not a question of substituting one centre for the other. The problem arose only when people tried to use the vision from any one centre and generalize it as the universal reality.

The modern world is a product of both European imperialism and of the resistance waged against it by the African, Asian, and South American peoples. Were we to see the world through the European responses to imperialism of the likes of Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, or Joyce Cary, whose work in terms of themes or location or attitude assumed the reality and experience of imperialism? Of course they responded to imperialism from a variety of ideological assumptions and attitudes. But they could never have shifted the centre of vision because they were themselves bound by the European centre of their upbringing and experience. Even where they were aware of the devastating effects of imperialism on the subject peoples, as in Conrad's description of the dying victims of colonial adventurism in *Heart of darkness*, they could not free themselves from the Eurocentric basis of their vision.

It was actually at Makerere University College, but outside the formal structure, that I first encountered the new literatures from Africa and the Caribbean. I can still recall the excitement of reading the world from a centre other than Europe. The great tradition of European literature had invented and even defined the world-view of the Calibans, the Fridays, and the reclaimed Africans of their imaginations. Now the Calibans and the Fridays of the new literature were telling their story—which was also my story. Even the titles, like Peter Abrahams' *Tell freedom*, seemed to speak of a world that I knew and a hope that I shared. When Trumper, one of the characters in George Lamming's novel, *In the castle of my skin*, talks of his suddenly discovering his people, and therefore his world, after hearing Paul Robeson sing, 'Let my people go', he was speaking of me and my encounter with the voices coming out of centres outside Europe. The new literatures had two important effects on me.

I wanted to write, to tell freedom, and by the time I came to Arthur Ravenscroft's class in Leeds in 1965, I had already written two novels: *The river between*, and *Weep not child*; a three-act play, *The black hermit*; two one-act plays; and nine short stories. My third novel, *A grain of wheat*, was to be written in Leeds but even the first two novels carry memories associated with Leeds. *The river between*, the first novel to be written but the second to be published, came out in 1965 and the launch was held in Leeds with

Austicks bookshop across the road flattering the author's ego with a fine display of the new book. *Weep not child*, the second novel but the first to be published by Heinemann in 1964, won a UNESCO first Prize in the first Black and African Writers and Artists Festival in Dakar. I heard the news while in Leeds. I received congratulations from all over the world. A UNESCO prize for literature? My financial worries in Leeds were over and I voiced my hopes to my fellow students who were not a little impressed by the fortune befalling one in their midst. You can imagine my disappointment when later I learnt that the prize was honorary after all. An honorary first prize. I have never talked about this prize or cited it as one of my accomplishments. Fortunately, I heard the honorary news after I was already in the middle of my third novel, *A grain of wheat*, and I hoped that it would not win any honorary first prize. Not while I was a British Council Scholar in Leeds anyway.

Quite as important as my call to write was also my desire to study the new literature further. For a time, I was torn between Joseph Conrad, whom I had formally studied as a special paper in my undergraduate studies at Makerere, and George Lamming who was not known in the official curriculum at Makerere. Joseph Conrad had a certain amount of attraction. He was Polish, born in a country and a family that had known only the pleasure of domination and exile. He had learnt English late in life and yet he had chosen to write in it, a borrowed language, despite his fluency in his native tongue and in French. And what is more, he had made it to the great tradition of English literature. Was he not already an image of what we, the new African writers, like the Irish writers before us, Yeats and others, could become? There was an added reason for his attraction. Conrad's most important novels were mostly located in the colonial empire: in Asia, Africa, and South America. The experience of the empire was central to the sensibility in his major novels, *Lord Jim*, *Heart of darkness*, *Victory*, and *Nostromo*, not to mention all the other long and short stories set in the various outposts of the empire. Notice, for instance, the dominance of the images of ivory in *Heart of darkness*; of coal in *Victory*; of silver in *Nostromo*. *Nostromo*, in particular, was among the earliest novels to depict the coalescence of industrial and bank capital to create finance capital: what Lenin in his book *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* once described as one of the crucial characteristics of modern imperialism. Alienation underlines most of the themes in Conrad's novels, as in *Nostromo*. But Conrad had chosen to be part of the empire and the moral ambivalence in his attitude towards British imperialism stems from that chosen allegiance. George Lamming was also born in exile in the sense that his foreparents did not go to the Caribbean on a voluntary basis. The experience of the empire was also central to his novels, from *In the castle of my skin* to *Season of adventure*. Colonial alienation underlay all the themes in his work and he was to underwrite the centrality of the theme in his work in a book of essays under the title *The pleasures of exile*. But Lamming, unlike Conrad, wrote very clearly from the other side of the empire, from the side of those who were crying out 'Let my people go'. Conrad always made me uneasy with his inability to see any possibility of redemption arising from the energy of the oppressed. He wrote from the centre of the empire. Lamming wrote from the centre of those struggling against the empire. It seemed to me that George Lamming had more to offer and I wanted to do more work on him and on Caribbean literature as a whole.

For if the struggle to shift the base from which to view the world from its narrow base

in Europe to a multiplicity of centres was reflected in the new literatures from Asia, Africa, and South America, it was not similarly reflected in the critical and academic institutions in the newly independent countries, or in Europe for that matter. The study of the humanities meant literally the humanity contained in the canonized tradition of European critical and imaginative literature and, further, confined within the linguistic boundaries of each of the colonizing nations. The English department at Makerere, where I went for my undergraduate studies, was probably typical of all English departments in Europe or Africa at the time. It studied English writing of the British isles from the times of Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare up to the twentieth century of T.S.Eliot, James Joyce, and Wilfred Owen. This narrowness in the study of literature based on a purely national tradition was alleviated in countries where there were other literature departments—of French, for instance. In such institutions there were competing or comparative centres in the study of humanities: the very fact that one was studying at a university where there were other literature departments meant that one was aware of other cultures. But most of these departments were largely confined to the languages of Europe and within Europe to the literature produced by the natives of that language. American literature departments were, for instance, completely oblivious of the poetry and fiction of the African-American peoples. In the discussion of the American novel for instance, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison were hardly mentioned as part of the central tradition of the American literary imagination. It was possible all round to graduate with a literature degree in any of the European languages without ever having heard of Achebe, Lamming, Tagore, Richard Wright, Aimé Césaire, Pablo Neruda, writers from that area of the globe that has come to be known as the Third World. In short, most universities tended to ignore the vast literatures produced, although in European languages, outside the formal boundaries of Europe and Euro-America.

At Makerere, there was no room for this new literature (Makerere did not then have a graduate section anyway) or, from what I could gather, anywhere else at the time. Leeds came to my rescue. A Commonwealth literature conference had already been held at Leeds in 1964. Wole Soyinka, one of the new voices, had been a student at Leeds. Other students from Makerere—Peter Nazareth, Grant Kamenjú, Pio Zirimu—were already there. There had to be something at the University of Leeds and I felt that I had to go there to get my share.

As it turned out, there were no formal studies of the new literatures at Leeds. Neither the Third World literature in general nor the Commonwealth literature, or even more narrowly African and Caribbean literature, were then an integral part of the mainstream of the literary curricula. But there were already visiting Fellows from different parts of the world who introduced visions from centres other than Europe. There was also an openness to the voices coming out of other centres which enabled me to do research on Caribbean literature, focusing on the theme of exile and identity in Caribbean literature with particular reference to the work of George Lamming. My memory of the Leeds of Arthur Ravenscroft was of an institution which was among the first to recognize and admit that there was something worthwhile out there beyond the traditional location of the European imagination, even though it had used a political determinant to demarcate an area for formal admission, an area it called Commonwealth literature. The creation of a chair in Commonwealth studies, with Professor Walsh as the first occupant, and the

launch of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, had the effect of legitimizing the literature from the new centres as worthy of serious academic attention and discussion. The term 'Commonwealth literature' was woefully inadequate, and African and Caribbean literature has always sat uneasily in it. African and Caribbean literature, whether in English or French or Portuguese, shared a more fundamental identity and its natural literary ally was the entire literature of struggle emanating from the former colonized world of Asia, Africa, and South America, irrespective of linguistic barriers. But it did point out the possibility of moving the centre from its location in Europe towards a pluralism of centres, themselves being equally legitimate locations of the human imagination.

What was only tentative in the Leeds of our time, the possibility of opening out the mainstream to take in other streams, was later to become central to the debate about the relevance of literature in an African environment that raged in all the three East African universities at Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Makerere, after most of the students who had been at Leeds at the time later returned and questioned the practices of the existing English departments. There was Grant Kamenjú in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Pio and Van Zirimu in Makerere, Kampala, Uganda; and myself in Nairobi, Kenya. I was horrified, when I returned to Kenya in 1967, to find that the Department of English was still organized on the basis that Europe was the centre of the universe. Europe, the centre of our imagination? Ezekiel Mphahlele from South Africa, who was there before me, had fought hard to have some African texts introduced into the syllabus. Otherwise the department was still largely oblivious to the rise of the new literatures in European languages in Africa, let alone the fact of the long-existing tradition of African-American literature and that of Caribbean peoples. The basic question was: from what base did African peoples look at the world? Eurocentrism or Afrocentrism? The question was not that of mutual exclusion between Africa and Europe but the basis and the starting point of their interaction. I remember the excitement with which I and my two African colleagues at the University of Nairobi in the year 1968 called for the abolition of the English department as then constituted. The department was to be replaced by one which put Third World literatures, available either directly in English or through translations into English, at the centre of the syllabus without of course excluding the European tradition. Such a syllabus would emphasize the literature-ness of literature rather the Englishness of that literature. The department would thus be recognizing the obvious fact: that knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question was therefore of how one centre related to other centres. A pluralism of cultures and literatures was being assumed by the advocates of the renamed departments of literature. If the debate was initiated by the ex-students of Leeds, the actual implementation of the new structures fell to some of the professors who were there in the Leeds of the sixties. Professor Arnold Kettle in Dar es Salaam and Professor Andrew Gurr at Nairobi were instrumental in giving the new departments of literature in East Africa firm and workable structures.

It is to be noted that the mediating languages in both the new literatures from Africa and the literature departments that were accommodating them were European languages.



This was a question that was to haunt me for a long time until 1977 when I started writing in Gikùyù, an African language. Once again my decision finally to opt for doing all my writings mainly in Gikùyù had roots in the Leeds of Arthur Ravenscroft's time. My novel, *A grain of wheat*, came out in 1967. Many who have commented on my work have pointed out the obvious change in form and mood. The change in the political mood was a reflection of the intense ideological debate taking place among both students inside Professor Arnold Kettle's seminar on the novel and outside the formal classroom. I came to realize only too painfully that the novel in which I had so carefully painted the struggle of the Kenya peasantry against colonial oppression would never be read by them. In an interview shortly afterwards in the *Union News*, the student newspaper, in 1967, I said that I did not think that I would continue writing in English: that I knew *about* whom I was writing, but *for* whom was I writing? A full discussion of the politics of language in African literature—in a sense answering that very question posed at the Leeds of the sixties—was to take place in 1987 when I published a book, *Decolonising the mind*. But the most important thing in the immediate context is that the issue of the appropriate language for African literature had been posed at Leeds in the sixties. It was once again the question of moving the centre: from European languages to all the other languages all over Africa and the world; a move if you like towards a pluralism of languages as legitimate vehicles of the human imagination.

I believe that the question of moving towards a pluralism of cultures, literatures, and languages is still important today as the world becomes increasingly one. The question posed by these new literatures, whether in European or African languages, is this: how were we to understand the twentieth century—or for that matter the three hundred years leading up to the twentieth century (assuming, that is, that the study of literature is not simply a masochistic act of dwelling with the dead à la scholar Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*)? Slavery, colonialism, and the whole web of neo-colonial relationships so well analysed by Frantz Fanon, were as much part of the emergence of the modern West as they were of modern Africa. The cultures of Africa, Asia, and South America, as much as those of Europe, are an integral part of the modern world. There is no race, wrote Aimé Césaire in his famous poem, 'Return to my native land', which held for all time the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and knowledge; and that there was a place for all at the rendezvous of victory, human victory.

I have noted from a spell of teaching in the USA that Third World literatures tend to be treated as something outside the mainstream. Many epithets and labels ranging from 'ethnic studies' to 'minority discourses' are often used to legitimate their claims to academic attention. I am not sure of course how far Leeds has gone since the days of Arthur Ravenscroft in the sixties. But the languages and the literatures of the peoples of Africa, Asia, and South America are not peripheral to the twentieth century. They are central to the mainstream of what has made the world what it is today. It is therefore not really a question of studying that which is removed from ourselves wherever we are located in the twentieth century but rather one of understanding all the voices coming from what is essentially a plurality of centres all over the world. Institutions of higher learning in Africa, Europe, Asia, and America should reflect this multiplicity of cultures, literatures, and languages in the ways they allocate resources for various studies. And each department of literature, while maintaining its identity in the language and country

of its foundation, should reflect other streams, using translations as legitimate texts of study. An English or French or Spanish or Swahili student should at the same time be exposed to all the streams of human imagination flowing from all the centres in the world while retaining his or her identity as a student of English, French, Spanish, or Kiswahili literature. Only in this way can we build a proper foundation for a true common-wealth of cultures and literatures.

### Ideology and culture: The African experience

#### H.ODERA ORUKA

In 'Ideology and truth', I have tried to explain a rational search for truth. And one of the results I have come to is that ideology, properly conceived, does and must not defy questions of truth and rational judgement. Ideological propositions are truth-claims and can be defended or rejected on a rational assessment. The problem usually is to establish the objective context on which to make the assessment.

Beliefs and propositions are not just true, but true in a given context. In socio-political life, a context usually is a given cultural system or consciousness—a cultural domain. It is on the basis of a cultural domain that ideological and other socio-political beliefs acquire meaning and truth-value.

It may, therefore, be important to bring the connection between culture, ideology, and philosophy into focus. This is intended to be done by way of making a philosophical reflection on the possible types of cultural domain in modern Africa. But before doing this, a brief statement on the general meaning of culture and cultural consciousness needs to be made. Strictly speaking, culture is not an ideology and ideology does not in itself constitute a culture. The two are, however, sometimes easily confused, and in certain cases, wrongly separated. For example, communism as an ideology is often confused with communism as a cultural system. The former is a social political theory existing as a philosophy of certain governments and political parties in the world. The latter is an ideal form of life not yet realized anywhere on the globe. In Africa, we often vehemently reject foreign ideologies but remain mum about many values of foreign cultures. We, for example, reject a multi-party democracy as a sign of foreign ideology. But we retain all the trappings of the judiciary of foreign cultures. In academic circles, we sometimes brand and reject ideas of foreign social thinkers as foreign ideological indoctrinations. But on the other hand, we continue to keep intact the academic protocols imposed by the colonial systems. The way out of such problems is to have a clear understanding of the connection between culture and ideology.

Culture is often a property, a way of life of a society as a whole. Ideology is usually confined to a class or a sect. It is possible that an ideology can spread and be practised as a form of life by all the classes (i.e. a whole society). But this is possible only when all its rivals have become obsolete both on their institutional existence and moral appeal.

Culture is man's contribution to the nature of environment. It is a general way of life of a people which, among other things, demonstrates their celebrated achievements in thought, morals, and material production. These three summarize the content of culture which in totality is a people's body of knowledge, beliefs and values, behaviour, goals,

social institutions plus tools, techniques, and material constructions.

One of the most formidable aspects of culture consists of the great thoughtful minds that it has produced and the areas of life that such minds have helped to illuminate. One misconception is, however, likely to emerge from the foregoing proposition. I must, therefore, state and dispel it immediately. It is possible to think (though wrong to do so) that great thoughtful minds emerge only from book learning and the world of formal scholarship. Some of the most thoughtful minds have been identified, for example, among the 'illiterate' traditional Kenyans,<sup>1</sup> people who never had any significant access to the book learning. These sages and their thoughts are treated by their people as the embodiment of the wisdoms of the people.

In any given culture, celebrated achievements in thought consist of ideas of its sages, scientists, artists, poets, prophets, philosophers, statesmen, moralists, etc. Such ideas form the intellectual aspects of a culture. 'Intellectual' actually because no serious intellectual attack or defence of a culture is possible if it fails to take account of these ideas.

Let us classify the great thoughtful minds of a culture as its intellectual lights. It is often difficult to think well of a culture without at the same time thinking of its intellectual lights. And no culture is possible if it fails to take account of these ideas.

Can we think of the glory of the Greek culture, for example, without conceiving of figures like Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus? Who would have anything meaningful to say about the British civilization and culture if they were not aware of figures like William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Winston Churchill? Without the ideas of such people, British culture would be a culture of swines, not minds.

In our own continent, Africa, certain minds have recently appeared and are likely to remain symbols of intellectual lights of modern African culture. Figures like Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor have given special shapes and expressions to modern African culture, albeit, political culture. In the field of literature and scholarship in general, we have had individuals like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Willy Abraham (from the West); and Okot p'Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Ali Mazrui (from the East). These figures are symbols of the intellectual lights of modern African cultures. Of course, there are and will be many others.

So culture, without a contribution from her men and women of thought, would be absurd and stagnant. Therefore, intellectual and academic freedom, a platform for people of ideas, must be a necessity for a genuine and complete cultural development anywhere.

Besides the achievements in thought, there are in culture the achievements in the creation of moral institutions and systems. The term 'moral' here is used in a wider sense in which it refers not only to the purely ethical values but also to what are generally referred to as the social, political, and religious conventions. The values of a culture ceremoniously bind the people together through the institutionalized moral form of life. Western culture, for example, has Christianity and parliamentary political democracy as the few of its great achievements in morals. But it also has a number of immoral achievements, namely colonialism and the global suppression of the cultures of other nations. If Socialism, as a form of life, is granted as a cultural moral achievement (as I believe it should) the credit, I conceptualize, must go both to the post-capitalist Western culture and the pre-colonial traditional Africa which is known to have been basically communitarian. Communalism is after all the 'social ancestor' of Socialism.

One great achievement in morals which many traditional African cultures have, as a distinction above the Western cultures, lies in the sphere of the reverence for and communication with the dead. In this sphere morality is not just a set of rules for the living. It is a set of rules for both the living and the dead. The wishes and expectations of the dead are to be advanced by the living. And, through dreams and rituals, a dialogue between the two groups periodically takes place to assess the progress. This sort of morality, morality binding both the dead and the living, is a multi-world morality.

Among the Luo of Kenya, for example, when a husband dies, the wife is taken over by a brother or a close relative of the deceased (in the absence of both, a man is hired) who will, if he does, bear children with the woman in the name of the deceased. When the children are grown-up, the man must go back to where he belongs, and cease to interfere in the home of the deceased. This system is very useful for ensuring social cohesion plus moral purity and continuity. In Europe as a contrast, a wife of a deceased Swede, for instance, can easily abandon her clan and nation for a new husband, say, in Italy or Mexico. The psychological and moral embarrassment between the two sets of children must be there and is best known to those involved.

Achievements in abstract thought and in morals form the spiritual culture. The rest is material culture. We have no sufficient scope to discuss the latter.

In every community there may be several competing ideologies but usually there is one common and dominating culture for the people. Every ideology spells out a possible cultural system which it posits as alternative to the cultures advocated by its rivals. The dominating culture is a result of the victorious ideology, it becomes both a theory and a practical form of life. It sublimates both as a living spiritual culture and the philosophy underlying the dominating culture in society. The dominating culture utilizes its underlying ideology as the official socio-political philosophy in the society.

It is, therefore, difficult, especially in the world of conflicting ideologies, to safeguard or advance a culture while remaining naïve or oblivious to matters of philosophy. In a world of this sort only those cultures with well-articulated and consistently appealing philosophies survive. Those otherwise remain in the abandoned museums of human civilizations. Hence, the need for the revival and promotion of African culture is and must also be the need for the founding of a dynamic and consistent socio-political philosophy for modern Africa.

Let us, for simplicity, refer to the cultural systems (real or imagined) advocated by rival ideologies as 'ideological cultures'. Cultural consciousness then is a symbol of the ideological culture to which one is committed. It is the belief in and commitment to the ethics and logic of a given ideological culture, a general philosophical outlook noted in such a culture.

In modern Africa various types of cultural consciousness can be sketched. Their importance in explaining the diversities and contradictions in the current search for black African cultural authenticity and revival cannot be overemphasized.

### **THE MASTER-SLAVE CULTURE**

The most bestial type of cultural consciousness is that of the master-slave culture. It is a reflection of the ideological position that for man there are two kinds of birth: the birth of

a master and secondly, that of a slave. And, whether by right or might, the latter is seen as destined to remain inferior to the former. It is, thus, the inevitable ontological role of the master to utilize the slave for the master's own comforts and that of the slave to seek happiness in the service and admiration of the master.

Intellectual and moral qualities are, thus, seen as being in-born not acquired. On the basis of these qualities, both the master and the slave develop their own respective, but Manichaen cultures. Within the cultural problems of the modern black world, the master-slave consciousness expresses itself through the concept of the negro-myth: Black is treated as evil, ugly, brutal, irrational, and un-intelligent. White on the other hand, is seen to have all the opposite characteristics of these base qualities. The consequence is a conception of two types of culture treated as permanent and irreducible to each other—the master culture and the slave culture. White civilization is seen as an example of the former, while black culture is equated with the latter. The pre-Négritude European anthropologists had no difficulty in assuming or discovering this distinction. As a consequence, a large number of black people accepted this distinction as a universal truth of mankind, thanks to the history of colonial administration and education. The master-slave consciousness is not necessarily an attribute of slaves. It is simply a level of ideological awareness that results from uncritical commitment to the ethics of the master-slave relationship. It can thus be a consciousness of any person (slave, master, or neither) committed to the truth-claims and mythos of this ethics.

Both Plato and Aristotle, for example, despite their immense philosophical and scientific enlightenment, had the consciousness of the master-slave culture.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in modern Africa, we have even professors and statesmen whose cultural consciousness is Republican in the Platonic sense. In their conviction, the master is still white and the black the slave. Where independence and power are in the hands of the blacks, the leaders are seen as surrogates of the former masters with whose consent and periodic checks they receive their legitimacy as leaders.

### THE COLONIAL CULTURE

Within the master-slave consciousness the conviction is that the difference between the master and slave (between the whites and the blacks) is natural and un-bridgeable. Colonial culture of the recent kind breeds colonial consciousness as a phase beyond the master-slave consciousness. The master is still white and whites by nature are still the breeders of positive qualities (i.e. virtue, beauty, rationality, intelligence, objectivity). But now some blacks (only a few of them) by hard training, can be made to abandon their natural qualities (i.e. evil, ugliness, irrationality, subjectivity), and by God's blessing acquire the first group of qualities. And the first step in this process is for such a person to make a complete rejection of his black culture and tradition. He must then have an almost fanatical attachment to the white culture. He must do everything the white style, whatever that may be. That style must be seen in his talk, walk, laugh, wear, and thought. In historical experience, the colonial consciousness is that of the *evolue* (in French colonies) and *assimilado* (in the Portuguese colonial rule). The British coined no special term for them. But some black Englishmen arose from the British colonial rule.

## NÉGRITUDE IDEOLOGICAL CULTURE

Négritude consciousness is a step above the first two kinds of consciousness. It arises from the experience that the *evolue* or *assimilado* is after all not really recognized as an equal in the white world. The *evolue* has lost his roots to save his head, but in the end discovers that he never had any head. He is allowed to eat at the white man's table, dance with white girls, and marry any of them. He is listened to when he expounds his mastery of scholarship, history, and culture. But (a big But) he will often be reminded of one devastating 'fact': history is the white man's history, culture is a creation of the Occidents and some Orients; and in scholarship there is no black contribution.

Such reminders are terrible for the soul which thought it had found liberation in adopting the 'master culture'. It is a temptation that he must be completely white or return to the 'bush'. In the former alternative, he must not just be black skin white masks. He must be the impossible, 'white skin and soul'. By this requirement, the *assimilado* is to denounce his race, lose his black soul, and completely think and act white.

Faced with this sort of dilemma, a black man is likely to find a dignified escape in Négritude. Culture, he will argue, cannot just be a monopoly of the non-black races. The black man, he believes, must, in his own way, have made some contribution to human civilization and history, and this contribution must be exposed for the world to see. Europe, he maintains, is a master of logic, reason, and science (i.e. rationality) just as the black world is the master of emotion and rhythms. And both rationality and emotion are treated as equal positive qualities in man. The black man's contribution to culture and civilization, therefore, will be stressed as lying predominantly in sensibilities and rhythms—in songs and dances.

The mind of the soul with Négritude consciousness grants as genuine the white man's claim to logic, science, and rationality in general. This mind is not different from that of the colonial culture. But while the latter sees no alternative except in complete surrender to the white world, the former attempts to demonstrate the existence of black culture and its great moral achievements.

One shortcoming of the Négritude consciousness is its blindness to class differences within the black world. There is, in it, an assumption that people of the black world form one economic and political class, and are of similar emotions and tastes. In this consciousness, the black world is a cultural unit and all its inhabitants need periodically to come together to demonstrate this unity and its internal diversity. This public demonstration is particularly for those who hitherto have degraded and ignored the black culture—the white world. FESTAC (World Black Festival of Arts & Cultures) is a concrete manifestation of the Négritude consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Its success and permanency would be a victory of the ideological culture of Négritude.

As a culture, Négritude has as yet no deep roots among the African masses. It is, as Okot p'Bitek writes, an appeal to the 'alienated intelligentsia', it speaks to 'alienation and not to exploitation, to the individual and not to the masses, to the intellectual and not to the illiterate, to the modern and not to the traditional. Senghor was addressing the French public rather than the African masses.'<sup>4</sup>

## **BLACK EXISTENTIAL CULTURE**

Beyond Négritude, we come to another phase of consciousness, that of the uncompromising purely anti-white black nationalism. In this consciousness, all the positive qualities such as beauty, intelligence, goodness, etc., are denied to the white culture. These become the original properties of the black culture which, it is claimed, were stolen and misused by the West. There is therefore to be no compromise with the white culture in any way and the black world must close ranks and, by its own boot straps fight to regain its cultural and political independence and past glory. However, just as the Négritude consciousness makes the mistake of assuming one unified cultural domain for all blacks, existential consciousness makes the mistake of assuming a harmonious ideological position for all blacks.

## **A TRANS-RACIAL IDEOLOGICAL CULTURE**

A further development from Négritude and existential forms of culture results into a synthesis of these two groups. From Négritude, we receive emphasis in the importance and value of one's own racial roots (nothing can be achieved by denouncing one's race). Existential consciousness contributes the significance of closing ranks and fighting it out. But it is dialectically conceived that no success is possible unless there is an ideological harmony within the ranks and solidarity with those races and cultures with similar ideological inclinations. The result then becomes a new form of consciousness, that of a trans-racial ideological culture. Thus, unity, even with one's kith and kin, is fake unless it is unity of the ideologically consistent forces.

In this consciousness, racial conflicts are seen as underdeveloped or misguided ideological conflicts. Cultural and racial liberations are expected as corollaries of the ideological and economic liberation. Economic exploitation and its attendant political oppression or the recent Western imperialism are not seen as the crimes of the nature of European culture, but only as mistakes of a given class and philosophy in the Western civilization. It is imperative that this class and philosophy be up-rooted for the benefits of mankind as a whole. Africa and the black world cannot claim to have no elements of their own bent on introducing and perpetuating imperialistic tendencies and culture.

Therefore, trans-racial ideological consciousness is, so far, the last stage of modern development of black cultural consciousness. This stage understands and transcends all the previous phases of consciousness. It is, however, as yet suppressed from taking firm roots due to the current world's economic and technological imbalance, plus numerous racial and ideological conflicts in the globe.

## **ENDNOTES**

- 1 From 'Thoughts of traditional Kenyan sages', (unpublished research findings) by H.Odera Oruka and J.Donders, Department of Philosophy, University of Nairobi.
- 2 For Plato, demonstration of this position ended up in the *Republic*: the superior are born and trained to rule, the inferior to serve and take orders.

3 During the latest FESTAC (Lagos, Jan. 1977) Nigerian Press and other African circles raised constant complaints that the Western press was not giving the Festival a sufficient coverage. This was quite in line with one of the tenets of Négritude, namely to demonstrate signs of black civilization for the white world to record and appreciate!

4 Okot p'Bitek: 'African culture in the era of foreign rule', *Thought & Practice*, 2(1), 1975:62.

### The critique of Eurocentrism and the practice of African philosophy

TSENAY SEREQUEBERHAN

Philosophy has this universal mission, a mission based on the assumption that mind guides the world. Consequently, they [i.e., the philosophers] think they are doing a great deal for the terrestrial species to which they belong—they are the mind of this species. The time has come to put them [i.e., philosophers] on the spot, to ask them what they think about war, colonialism, the speed-up in industry, love, the varieties of death, unemployment, politics, suicide, police forces, abortions—in a word, all the things that really occupy the minds of this planet's inhabitants. The time has definitely come to ask them where they stand. They must no longer be allowed to fool people, to play a double game (Paul Nizan).<sup>1</sup>

What is the critique of Eurocentrism and how does it relate to the practice of contemporary African philosophy? In answering this double question I hope to lay out, at least in outline, the negative and critical aspect of what I see as a grounding task of thought in the contemporary practice (i.e., writing and thinking) of African philosophy. In doing so, I will suggest to the reader a way or path and supply an instance of what this critique would look like when applied to some of the classical texts of Western philosophy. The texts I have chosen to focus on are the historicopolitical writings of Immanuel Kant, sometimes referred to as his fourth critique.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1

Broadly speaking, Eurocentrism is a pervasive bias located in modernity's self-consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or Idea (*Idee*) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life.<sup>3</sup> The critique of Eurocentrism is aimed at exposing and deconstructing<sup>4</sup> this basic speculative core in the texts of philosophy. This then is the critical-negative aspect of the discourse of contemporary African philosophy.

Specifically, in this reading, I hope to present an instance of this deconstructing critique by systematically exploring Kant's texts indicated above. In reading Kant—and by



extension the Occidental tradition—in this manner, my purpose is to understand it and grasp it in all that it has to offer. This, furthermore, I undertake in full cognizance of the fact that earlier readings have understood these texts differently, and, still more, others will understand them in their own way, in the time to come.

In this respect, our responsibility to the future is to hermeneutically elucidate that which has remained hidden: that is, ‘a relevant reading ...that hasn’t been addressed thus far’<sup>5</sup> by the dominant Euro-American scholarship on the philosophic tradition. For if the future is indeed to be a joint future, as Cheikh Hamidou Kane has aptly observed, then it is necessary to clear the air of false perceptions grounded in a spurious metaphysics.<sup>6</sup>

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the ‘time has definitely come to ask’ philosophers ‘where they stand’. This critically interrogative time is our postcolonial present, in which the colonial asymmetries of the past are—at least in principle—not defensible any more.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the ‘mind of [the] species’, philosophers must not be allowed to ‘play a double game’ any more. To query this ‘double game’ in regards to the complicity of philosophy in empire and colonialism is thus the critique of Eurocentrism: that is, the critical-negative aspect of the contemporary discourses of African philosophy.

In what follows, I will situate the general thematic context in which I will engage Kant’s texts. I will then explore Kant’s texts by letting them speak for themselves, as much as possible, and suggest the manner of reading which I refer to as the critique of Eurocentrism. In conclusion, I will comment on the importance of this critical-negative project for the contemporary discourse of African philosophy.

## 2

In his, by now famous book, *The postmodern condition*, the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard puts the thesis that the ‘postmodern’ is ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’, the discarding of the lived and world-historical ‘grand narratives’ ‘through which modernity constituted itself.’<sup>8</sup> And as Wlad Godzich has noted, for Lyotard the global self-constitution of modernity is coterminous with ‘the unleashing of capitalism’.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, modernity is, properly speaking, the globalization of Europe triumphantly celebrated by Marx in the first few pages of *The communist manifesto*—which constitutes itself globally by claiming that its historicity has ‘at last compelled [Man] to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind’.<sup>10</sup> Before Marx, Hegel,<sup>11</sup> in *The philosophy of right* and in *The philosophy of history*, and before him Kant in his historicopolitical writings, had essentially maintained the same view: that is, European modernity grasps the real in contradistinction to the ephemeral non-reality of non-European existence.

In this respect, Marx, a conscious and conscientious inheritor of the intellectual legacies of Kant and Hegel, articulates in his own idiom, his ‘materialist conception of history’, that which Hegel had already pronounced as the manifestation of *Geist* (mind and/or spirit) and, earlier still, Kant had envisaged and conceptualized as the providential working out of humankind’s ‘unsocial sociability’. In other words, for all three, no matter how differently they view the historical globalization of Europe, what matters is that European modernity is the real in contrast to the unreality of human existence in the non-

European world. In this regard, Hegel and Marx specify systematically, in their own respective ways, the Idea of European superiority which Kant, long before them, enunciated as the centerpiece of his historicopolitical writings.

As Lyotard has observed, '[m]odernity', and in its concrete manifestation this term always means empire and colonialism, 'whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the *lack of reality* in reality—a discovery linked to the invention of other realities'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in its global invasion and subjugation of the world, European modernity found the *unreality* of myriad non-capitalist social formations, which it promptly shattered and replaced with its own replication of itself. Paradoxically, the profusion of differing and different modes of life was experienced, by invading Europe, as the 'lack of reality in reality': that is, as the unreality or vacuousness of and in the *real*.

On the other side of this divide, among the subjugated aboriginal peoples, this European perception of vacuity was experienced as death and destruction—the effective *creation* of vacuity. As Kane puts it:

For the newcomers did not know only how to fight. They were strange people. If they knew how to kill with effectiveness, they also knew how to cure, with the same art. Where they had brought disorder, they established a new order. They destroyed and they *constructed*.<sup>13</sup>

The subjugated experienced Europe as the putting into question of their very existence. In their turn, in the words of Chief Kabongo of the Kikuyu, the subjugated put forth their own interrogative to the vacuity 'constructed' by Europe; 'We Elders looked at each other. Was this the end of everything that we had known and worked for?'<sup>14</sup> Indeed it was!

But how did Europe invent, as Lyotard tells us, 'other realities'? By violently inseminating itself globally, after having properly tilled, turned over, and reduced to compost<sup>15</sup> the once lived actualities of the historicity of the non-European world. Or in the words of Kane:

Those who had shown fight and those who had surrendered, those who had come to terms and those who had been obstinate—they all found themselves, when the day came, checked by census, divided up, classified labeled, conscripted, administrated.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, as Edward W. Said has pointedly observed:

Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of changing the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society. Everything in those territories that suggested waste, disorder, uncultured resources, was to be converted into productivity, order, taxable, potentially developed wealth. You get rid of most of the offending human and animal blight—whether because it simply sprawls untidily all over the place or because it roams around unproductively and uncultured—and you confine the rest to reservations, compounds, native homelands, where you can

count, tax, use them profitably, and you build a new society on the vacated space. Thus was Europe reconstituted abroad, its 'multiplication in space' successfully projected and managed. The result was a widely varied group of little Europes scattered throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas, each reflecting the circumstances, the specific instrumentalities of the parent culture, its pioneers, its vanguard settlers. All of them were similar in one major respect—despite the differences, which were considerable—and that was that their life carried on with an air of *normality*.<sup>17</sup>

In both of the above quotations what needs to be noted is that Europe invents, throughout the globe, 'administrated' replicas of itself and does so in 'an air of normality'. This *normality*, as Said points out, is grounded on an 'idea, which dignifies [and indeed hastens] pure force with arguments drawn from science, morality, ethics, and a *general philosophy*'.<sup>18</sup>

This Idea, this 'general philosophy', is, on the one hand, the trite and bland *prejudice* that European existence is, properly speaking, true human existence *per se*.<sup>19</sup> And, as noted earlier, this same Idea or 'general philosophy' is that which Hegel and Marx, among others, inherit from Kant, and specify in their own idiom. This Idea or 'general philosophy' is the metaphysical ground for the 'normality' and legitimacy of European global expansion and conquest: that is, the consolidation of the real. Thus, trite prejudice and the highest wisdom, speculative thought, circuitously substantiate each other!

This banal bias and its metaphysical 'pretext'<sup>20</sup> or pretension, furthermore, lays a 'heavy burden' (The White Man's Burden?) on Europe in its self-assumed global 'civilizing' charade and/or project. For, as Father Placide Tempels, a colonizing missionary with an intellectual bent, sternly and gravely reminds his co-colonialists:

It has been said that our civilizing mission alone can justify our occupation of the lands of uncivilized peoples. All our writings, lectures and broadcasts repeat *ad nauseam* our wish to civilize the African peoples. No doubt there are people who delight to regard as the progress of civilization the amelioration of material conditions, increase of professional skill, improvements in housing, in hygiene and in scholastic instruction. These are, no doubt, useful and even necessary 'values'. But do they constitute 'civilization'? Is not civilization, above all else, progress in *human personality*?<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, as Rudyard Kipling had poetically noted, Europe's colonizing mission was aimed at properly humanizing the '[h]alf devil and half child'<sup>22</sup> nature of the aboriginal peoples it colonized. This is indeed what Tempels has in mind with his rhetorical question regarding civilization as 'progress in human personality',<sup>23</sup> for it is this self-righteous attitude on which is grounded the 'normality of Europe's process of inventing globally 'administrated' replicas of itself.

The 'lack of reality in reality' which Europe finds, and displaces by its self-replication, is the 'immaturity' of the '[h]alf devil and half child' humanity of aboriginal peoples. Now, in this gauging of the 'lack of reality in reality', European civilization is both the standard and the model by which this deficiency is first recognized and then remedied. Or to be more accurate, it is the Idea or 'general philosophy' of this civilization—or the way

that it understands itself—that is the measure of the whole undertaking.

Now, as Rousseau noted in the first chapter of *The social contract*, force does not give moral or normative sanction to its effects. Thus for philosophy, which conceives of ‘mind’ as the guide of the world, violence and conquest are masks for the rationality of the real. This then is how European philosophy in general participates in and contributes to the invention of ‘other realities’—that is, of the replication of Europe as its cultural, material/physical, and historical substratum. And, as we shall soon see, this is precisely what Kant’s historicopolitical texts intend to and do accomplish.

This inventiveness is grounded, as Lyotard tells us, in ‘the Idea of emancipation’,<sup>24</sup> which is articulated in the ‘Christian narrative of the redemption of original sin through love; the *Aufklärung* narrative [i.e. Kant’s narrative] of emancipation from ignorance and servitude through knowledge and egalitarianism; the speculative narrative [i.e., Hegel’s narrative] of the realization of the universal Idea through the dialectic of the concrete; the Marxist narrative of emancipation from exploitation and alienation through the socialization of work; and the capitalist narrative of emancipation from poverty through technoindustrial development’.<sup>25</sup>

Between ‘these narratives there is ground for litigation’. But in spite of this family or familial conflict, ‘all of them’ are positioned on a singular historical track aimed at ‘universal freedom’, and ‘the fulfillment of all humanity’,<sup>26</sup> In Tempels’ words, they are all aimed at ‘progress in human personality’.

It is not my concern to explore the conflicts between these narratives, but rather to underline their foundational similitude: that is, they all metaphysically coagulate around Tempels’ phrase, ‘progress in human personality’. To this extent these narratives collectively underwrite the colonialist project of global subjugation and expansion. For ‘universal freedom’ and ‘the fulfillment of all humanity’ presuppose, on the level of foundational principles (i.e., metaphysics) a singular humanity or the *singularization* of human diversity by being forced on a singular track of historical ‘progress’ grounded on an emulation and/or mimicry of European historicity.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, it requires us to look at humanity as a whole, in all of its multiple diversity and amplitude, not as it shows itself (i.e., multiple, differing, diverse, dissonant, dissimilar, etc.), but through the ‘mediation or protection of a “pre-text”’<sup>28</sup> that flattens all difference. This is tangibly and masterfully accomplished by elevating European historicity, the ‘pre-text’ (i.e., the text that comes *before* the text of humanity, as it shows in its multiple heterogeneity) to the status of true human historicity *par excellence*.

The de-structuring critique of this ‘pre-text’—the Occidental surrogate for the heterogeneous variance of human historical existence—is then the basic critical-negative task of the contemporary discourse of African philosophy. It is the task of undermining the European-centred conception of humanity on which the Western tradition of philosophy—and much more—is grounded. The way one proceeds in the reading is to allow the texts to present themselves, as much as possible, and to try to grasp them without ‘anticipating the meaning’<sup>29</sup> or superimposing on them the accepted reading

which they themselves help to make possible.

In reading Kant's speculative historicopolitical texts in this manner, my purpose is to track the way this 'pre-text' functions in his reading of our shared humanity. This 'pre-text' (i.e., Idea or 'general philosophy') is the shrine at which the great minds of Europe (past and present) prayed and still pray. It is that which serves as the buttress and justification and thus enshrines the 'normality' of the European subjugation of the world. It is the figleaf of European barbarity which makes it possible and acceptable, and without which Europe could not stand to face itself: that is, its history. As Joseph Conrad puts it:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow before, and offer a sacrifice to.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, as Nietzsche has remarked against Hegel, in *The advantage and disadvantage of history for life*, the 'idea' is that in front of which one prostrates oneself. But let us now turn to Kant and confirm what has been affirmed thus far by exploring the Idea or 'pre-text' in the texts through which he conceptualizes our shared humanity. For Kant is one of the most distinguished fabricators—or should I say constructors—of the Idea, by far the most lucid and important, in the modern European tradition.

### 3

In his piece, 'What is enlightenment?' Michel Foucault poses the question of what the term 'mankind' means in Kant's essay of the same title. Foucault notes that Kant's 'use of the word "mankind", (*Menschheit*)' is rather problematic, and asks:

Are we to understand that the entire human race is caught up in the process of Enlightenment? In that case, we must imagine the Enlightenment as a historical change that affects the political and social existence of all people on the face of the earth. Or are we to understand that it involves a change affecting what constitutes the humanity of human beings?<sup>31</sup>

Having raised the question of the 'use of the word' *Menschheit*, and then postulating an either-or, Foucault bypasses the crucial question of whose humanity is at stake in the project of enlightenment articulated by Kant. To be sure, and to his credit, Foucault indicates (even if only in passing and in parentheses) that this emancipatory project does have a domineering and tyrannical effect in 'respect to others'<sup>32</sup>—that is, non-European peoples. But why is that the case? Foucault neither pursues nor responds to the question. As we shall see, beyond Foucault's either-or, it is the speculative effort to sketch out 'the process of Enlightenment' as it affects 'the humanity of human beings' which 'the entire human race' or 'all people on the face of the earth' are 'caught up in' which makes for this domineering inclination in 'respect to others'. In other words, the

‘transcendentalization’ of the historical fact of the *Aufklärung*—is necessary, if the semblance of an answer is to be given in ‘universal’ terms to the original question,<sup>33</sup> the question, as Kant puts it, of ‘man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage’.<sup>34</sup> The veneer of universality is required and essential, precisely because Kant is concerned with ‘the totality of men united socially on earth into peoples’.<sup>35</sup>

To be sure, the answer to the question of whose humanity is at stake in Kant’s conception of the Enlightenment is rather simple. Two decades prior to ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (1784), Kant had given his categorical response to this question in his precritical work, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime*. In this work, Kant unequivocally affirms that:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.<sup>36</sup>

Much could be written on these ‘enlightened’ and ‘enlightening’ remarks. Kant, who never left the security and cultural ambiance of his country and native city of Königsberg, makes light of being ‘transported elsewhere’. Kant, who, as Hannah Arendt has noted, valued highly ‘one’s community sense, one’s *sensus communis*’<sup>37</sup> and saw it as the source of one’s humanity and critical capacity to judge and communicate, makes light of being uprooted (i.e., the experience of enslavement) when this catastrophe befalls the ‘Negroes of Africa’.

But to return to our main point: Kant recognizes a ‘fundamental’ ‘difference’ and correlates ‘mental capacities’ to the ‘color’ of ‘these two races’. For him the distance between the ‘mental capacities’ of ‘these two races’ is as radically and qualitatively different (in the spectrum of colours) as between white (the absence of colour) and black (the complete absorption of the same). It should be noted, furthermore, that it is not only the ‘Negroes of Africa’ that are castigated in this manner. The passage is too long to quote; it includes all of the non-European peoples that Kant could have known about—the Arabs, the Persians, the Japanese, the Indians, the Chinese, and the ‘savages’ of North America.<sup>38</sup>

The differing peoples listed are described in an extremely pejorative manner, and a few are ‘complimented’ by being compared with Europeans. The Arabs and the Persians are the Spaniards and the French of the Orient respectively, and the Japanese are the Englishmen of this exotic place! The ‘Negroes of Africa’, on the other hand, stand at the highest point of this negative pinnacle, precisely because they are assuredly ‘quite black from head to foot’.<sup>39</sup>

From all of this, then, it follows that, insofar as the project of the Enlightenment is

concerned with ‘the totality of men united socially on earth into peoples’, and is aimed at establishing the ‘humanity of human beings’ in terms of and by reference to use of free and autonomous self-reflexive reason, the ‘Negroes of Africa’ and the differing shades of the rest of humanity are and must be beyond the pale of such a project. In as much as enlightenment is seen as ‘man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage’ and is thus a self-reflexive and self-reflective project of critical and rational emancipation, it cannot—on its own terms—be inclusive of non-European peoples and most distinctly of Negro Africans. This is so precisely because, according to Kant, reason and rationality are not indigenous to these, and in particular black African, peoples.

Indeed, Kant says as much in his ‘Idea for universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view’, published in the same year (1784) as ‘What is Enlightenment?’

[I]f one starts with Greek history...if one follows the influence of Greek history on the ...Roman state...then the Roman influence on the barbarians...if one adds episodes from the national histories of other peoples insofar as they are known from the history of the enlightened [European] nations, one will discover a regular progress in the constitution of states on our continent (which will probably give law, eventually, to all the others.<sup>40</sup>

The ‘others’ (non-Europeans) will receive the Law of Reason from Europe or, in Kant’s words, ‘our continent...will probably give law, eventually, to all the others’. Those who cannot reason—and, as Foucault points out, the word for ‘reason’ that Kant uses is *raisonieren* (i.e., ‘to reason for reasoning’s sake’<sup>41</sup>)—cannot be expected to effect ‘man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage’, since they lack the faculty for this human possibility.

Thus, Europe has to give the ‘Zlaw’ to ‘all the others’. Indeed, *de facto*, we of the present—Europeans and non-Europeans alike—exist in a world in which Europe has bestowed the ‘law’ by means of conquest and violent hegemony. This is the case even if this act of ‘bestowing’ abrogates—in the very act of giving—the Enlightenment’s own notion of the self-liberating capacity of human reason.<sup>42</sup> What we need to examine next is how Kant legitimates this *de facto* (i.e., historical and thus contingent) globalization of Europe and makes of it the *de jure* actualization of the Idea.

To be sure, Kant was not a person devoid of sympathy or compassion for non-European peoples. In ‘Perpetual peace’ (1795), he is quite disturbed by the inhumanity of civilized commercial European states in their dealings and contacts with non-European peoples. In the section in which he discusses ‘universal hospitality’ as the law of ‘world citizenship’, and after noting how the ‘ship and the camel (the desert ship)’ bring people together and can foster ‘peaceable relations’, he makes the following remarkable and praiseworthy statement:

But to this perfection compare the inhospitable actions of the civilized and especially of the commercial states of our part of the world. The injustice which they show to the lands and peoples they visit [which is equivalent to conquering them] is carried by them to terrifying lengths. America, the lands inhabited by the Negro, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc., were at the time of their discovery considered by these civilized intruders as lands without owners, for they

counted the inhabitants as nothing.<sup>43</sup>

The same Kant, however, does express the view that ‘if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more civilized nations, were destined to live in their quiet indolence for thousands of centuries’, one could not give a satisfactory answer to the question ‘why they bothered to exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as well that this island should have been occupied by happy sheep and cattle as by happy men engaged in mere pleasure?’<sup>44</sup>

The force of Kant’s rhetorical question is directed at stressing what he calls ‘the value of existence itself’<sup>45</sup> which is not, in his view, manifested in the placid, sedate, or idle pursuit of ‘mere pleasure’. As we shall see, for Kant, ‘the value of existence itself’, which is ontologically and/or metaphysically proper to human life, is manifested in the rational control of nature, both in the human being and in nature as such.<sup>46</sup> It is interesting and I think significant to note further that Kant sees a similarity between the Tahitians (and the rest of non-European humanity by extension) and sheep because—if one is to judge by the illustrations he uses—sheep, for him, typify the paradigmatic example of a passive resource to be exploited.

In his ‘Conjectural beginning of human history’ (1786), Kant, freely utilizing the story of Genesis, lists the four likely steps by which reason extracts man from instinct and his original abode in the garden of paradise. The fourth ‘and final step which reason took’, he writes, to raise man ‘altogether above community with animals’, occurred when man realized that he himself was the ‘true end of nature’.<sup>47</sup> As Kant depicts it:

The first time he ever said to the sheep, ‘nature has given you the skin you wear for my use, not yours’; the first time he ever took that skin and put it upon himself...that time he became aware of the way in which his nature privileged and raised him above all animals. And from then on he looked upon them, no longer as a fellow creatures, but as mere means and tools to whatever ends he pleased.<sup>48</sup>

In the following page in his remarks on the above—leaving allegory and sheepish examples aside—Kant states bluntly that reason separates man from instinct/nature by establishing dominion over the natural realm.

[M]an’s departure from that paradise which his reason represents as the first abode of his species was nothing but the transition from an uncultivated, merely animal condition to the state of humanity, from bondage to instinct to rational control—in a word, from the tutelage of nature to the state of freedom.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, those whose humanness—by its lack of differentiation from and dominion over nature—resembles the placid and carefree existence of sheep, cattle, and animals in general, are still within the realm of instinct and have not yet ascended to ‘the state of freedom’ which reason makes possible. Thus, if—‘what is good for the goose is good for the gander’, then those who have made the ‘transition’ from ‘merely [an] animal condition’ can treat those who have not—the animalistic ‘gander’ of non-European humanity—‘no longer as fellow creatures [i.e., human beings worthy of respect], but as



mere means and tools to whatever ends'<sup>50</sup> they—Europeans—see fit.

Indeed, as we saw earlier, this is precisely how Said describes the project and practice of European imperialism and colonialism, which is undertaken in 'an air of normality'.<sup>51</sup> This too is what Kant finds reprehensible in the European contact with and conduct towards non-European peoples.<sup>52</sup> And yet, as we have seen thus far, he himself is one of the most important constructors of the Idea or 'general philosophy' behind this brutish practice: that is, the 'pre-text' that insures the confident and self-possessed 'normality' of European conquest.

It is important at this point to emphasize that by 'reason' Kant means exclusively the instrumental and calculative control (i.e., 'rational control') of the natural environment and of the human person as a being of nature with the possibility for rational freedom, or the 'state of humanity' beyond the 'lawless freedom' of non-European 'savages'.<sup>53</sup> Now, within the context of European history, this 'rational control' is established by the proper utilization/control of reason in its public and private domains. For as Kant confidently puts it, in 'What is Enlightenment?': 'Men work themselves gradually out of barbarity if only intentional artifices are not made to hold them in it'.<sup>54</sup> This is the play of 'the unsocial sociability'<sup>55</sup> of human nature within the confines of European history, which Kant wants to assist in its unhampered unfolding,<sup>56</sup> even if it means establishing 'a sort of contract—what might be called the contract of rational despotism with free reason'.<sup>57</sup> This, to be sure, is the core concern of 'What is Enlightenment?' which clearly has Europe and Kant's own 'contemporary reality alone'<sup>58</sup> as its direct object of reflection. This is what Kant refers to and designates as the '*age of enlightenment*'.<sup>59</sup>

What then of non-European humanity? How is it to achieve 'progress' and 'enlightenment'? It is here that the idea of 'unsocial sociability' comes into its own and, beyond the formal niceties and distinctions that Kant makes, presents itself in all of its awesome ferocity. As already noted, for Kant, the non-European world is incapable of engaging in the self-reflexive and self-reflective project of enlightenment on its own terms, since it is beyond the *pale* of reason; just as the Tahitians, had they not been 'benefited' by European contact/conquest, would be little different than sheep or cattle in their existence.

Thus, the non-European has to be civilized or enlightened from the outside. And for this purpose, nature utilizes man's 'unsocial sociability', just as Heraclitus tells us that '[e]very beast is driven to pasture by a blow'.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Kant cannot be candid in his critique of the imperialistic practices of European states (i.e., 'the inhospitable actions of civilized...states', see endnote 39 for the full citation), since he himself thinks that the Tahitians are 'nothing' but mere sheep. He is hard pressed 'to give a satisfactory answer to the question why they bothered to exist at all' except for the fact that they were 'visited by more civilized [European] nations'. As noted earlier, Kant's historicopolitical texts metaphysically substantiate the very attitude he finds reprehensible in Europe's contact with the rest of us.

Indeed, in his ample articulations of the notion of 'unsocial sociability', Kant gives us further and more concrete evidence of the above. According to Kant, humanity achieves greatness not as a result of its own inclinations, but by the secret design of nature.

Man wishes concord; but Nature knows better what is good for the race; she

wills discord. He wishes to live comfortably and pleasantly; Nature will that he should be plunged from sloth and passive contentment into labor and trouble, in order that he may find means of extricating himself from them.<sup>61</sup>

For this purpose, 'a wise Creator'<sup>62</sup> has devised the nature of man such that it is inherently antagonistic—social and yet inclined to isolation.

This opposition it is which awakens all his power, brings him to conquer his inclination to laziness and, propelled by vainglory, lust for power, and avarice, to achieve a rank among his fellows whom he cannot tolerate but from whom he cannot withdraw.<sup>63</sup>

It is in this manner that the first steps are taken from 'barbarism' to 'culture', and gradually by 'continued enlightenment the beginnings are laid' through which 'a society of men driven together by their natural feelings' constitutes 'a moral whole'.<sup>64</sup> Otherwise, says Kant: 'Men, good-natured as the sheep they herd, would hardly reach a higher worth than their beasts; they would not fill the empty place in creation by achieving their end, which is rational nature'.<sup>65</sup> As noted previously, by 'rational nature' Kant means the *ratio* at work in the instrumental control of nature and of human life as a manifestation of nature. This refers to the Value of existence itself, which is lacking in the pursuit of 'mere pleasure' and is actualized through the inherent strife in human nature placed there by 'a wise Creator'.

Thus Kant extols nature for imprinting this basic aggressiveness in man:

Thanks be to nature, then, for the incompatibility, for heartless competitive vanity, for insatiable desire to possess and rule! Without them, all the excellent natural capacities of humanity would forever sleep, undeveloped. Man wishes concord; but nature knows better what is good for the race; she wills discord.<sup>66</sup>

But then it should be noted that the imperialistic attitude of European states in their dealings with non-Europeans is driven precisely by this 'insatiable desire to possess and rule', this 'discord' which nature 'wills'.

Kant cannot have it both ways. He cannot, on the one hand, impute to nature these 'divinely' bestowed violent expansionist drives and glorify her for making them possible, and, on the other hand, condemn the concrete effects of these very drivers: that is, the villainous attitude of Europeans in their travels. In effect, to do so is, in the words of Nizan, 'to fool people, to play a double game'.<sup>67</sup> In Kant's own terms then, conquest and brutish imperialist expansion are part of the foresight and divine design of nature!

The 'free federation'<sup>68</sup> of states, furthermore, which Kant sees as the ultimate purpose of humanity and the only way to avert conflict and perpetual war, is itself a result of the recognition by states that mutual destruction has to be avoided. Such a union of states presupposes that each is already constituted unto itself as a 'civilized' nation under laws, and has thus given up its 'savage...lawless freedom'.<sup>69</sup> But this is possible, for the non-European world, only if, like the inhabitants of Tahiti, it is visited—or, more accurately, conquered—by 'more civilized [European] nations'.

It is important to emphasize that Kant's explicit endorsement of European expansion

and Conquest (as the beneficial effect of the providential and secret design of nature) is not due to his lack of sympathy for non-European peoples; nor is it an accidental or extrinsic aspect of his historical thinking—an easily excusable ‘blemish’. It is rather, as I have argued in the paper, the effect of his universalistic and universalizing discourse grounded on the *Idee* that European history is the “‘transcendentally obligatory” meeting point of all particular histories’.<sup>70</sup>

Kant is not willing to say, with Cornelius Castoriadis, that as a matter of historical fact—*de facto*—‘the earth has been unified by means of Western violence’.<sup>71</sup> He wants to add that this violence—best exemplified in Europe’s contact with the rest of the world—is the work of Providence and the *de jure* actualization of reason on a global scale. It is the secret design for the self-rationalization and actualization of true humanity, whose ‘guiding thread’<sup>72</sup> he—Kant—has discovered.

At this point it should be noted that Kant was well aware of the faulty character of the empirical travel literature and information about non-European peoples that was available to him. In his review of the second part of Johann Gottfried Herder’s ‘Ideas for a philosophy of the history of mankind’ (1785) he makes the following very revealing remark:

[W]orking with a mass of description dealing with different lands, it is possible to prove, if one cares to do so...that [native] Americans and Negroes are relatively inferior races in their intellectual capacities, but on the other hand, according to reports just as plausible, that their natural potentialities are on the same level as those of any inhabitants of the planet.<sup>73</sup>

Now then, in view of the above, why is Kant so categorical in his negative evaluation of non-European peoples? As he himself candidly admits, the ‘ethnic descriptions or tales of travel’<sup>74</sup>—which constitute the information at his disposal—are clearly equivocal and uncertain at best. Why then did he not ‘care’ to consider the contrary and ‘just as plausible’ view regarding native Americans, Negroes, and other non-European peoples?

As Kant himself tells us, what is at stake—*contra* Herder, for example—is the making of ‘natural distinctions’ and ‘classifications based on hereditary coloration...[and]...the notion of race’.<sup>75</sup> In all of this:

The philosopher [i.e., Kant] would say that the destination of the human race in general is perpetual progress, and its perfection is a simple, but in all respects very useful, Idea of the goal to which, conforming to the purpose of Providence, we have to direct our efforts.<sup>76</sup>

We have now come full circle to the Idea—the imperious notion of Occidental superiority—with which Kant begins, constructs, and concludes his historicopolitical reflections. This is the same Idea or ‘general philosophy’ which ensures the ‘normality’ of European empire and colonial conquest, by serving as the ‘pre-text’ through which the humanity of human beings *as such* is conceptualized in Eurocentric terms. It is the Idea of ‘rational control’ best incarnated in European humanity and lacking in the non-European world. It is calculative ‘rational control’ that, unlike the Tahitians’ pursuit of ‘mere pleasure’, is the *true* and proper embodiment of ‘the value of existence itself’. For

why else would Kant turn a blind eye to the equally 'plausible' reports regarding the humanity of the non-European world?

## 4

From all of the above, then, Kant's historicopolitical texts—and, as I have argued elsewhere, the historical thinking of Hegel and Marx<sup>77</sup> and, by extension, the European philosophic tradition as a whole—is *grosso modo* grounded, minus its 'dark horses', on a Eurocentric 'pre-text' of the humanity/historicity of human existence as a whole. But why is it necessary to de-structively engage this 'pre-text' or *Idee*? Why is this critical-negative project an indispensable aspect of the contemporary discourse of African philosophy?

To begin with, as Kwame Anthony Appiah has correctly noted, we contemporary African philosophers,<sup>78</sup> and Westernized Africans in general, share, by our training and educational formation, in the intellectual heritage of Europe. Consequently, we 'see' ourselves and our contemporary situation, at least partially, through the lenses conferred to us by the transmissions of this heritage. Thus, to explore this shared heritage in regard to how it *sees* and *conceptualizes* our lived humanity is a necessary precondition to critically appropriating it.

For as Frantz Fanon reminds us—lest we forget!—our sharing in this heritage is rather problematic, since it is transmitted to us through a dour stepmother who 'restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from...giving free rein to its instincts'—a harsh 'colonial mother' who 'protects her child from itself',<sup>79</sup> Today, that part of our heritage which is African—or its residual—is no longer (at least in principle) considered 'evil'. In order to begin appropriating to ourselves that from which we were thus far protected, it is first necessary to clear the metaphysical grounding of all the evil that was said of us and done to us. It is not enough to say with Kwasi Wiredu that:

Indeed an African needs a certain levelheadedness to deal with some of these thinkers at all. Neither Hume, nor Marx, displayed much respect for the black man, so whatever partiality the African philosopher may develop for these thinkers must rest mostly on considerations of the truth of their philosophical thought.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, to give proper consideration and appreciation to the 'philosophical thought' expressed by these and other thinkers in the European tradition presupposes the critical de-structive labour of seeing how 'the truth' is skewed and skewered by the partiality it justifies and in which it is enmeshed.

The necessity for this undertaking, furthermore, is grounded in the fact that today Eurocentrism is the general consciousness of our age. It is not something that merely affects Europeans. As Marx noted in *The German ideology*, the dominant ideas of the ruling strata in a society are always, at any particular point in time, the dominating ideas of an age or historical period. Today—in our global society—the dominant ideas are the ideas through which Europe dominates the world. As Jose Rabasa has appropriately noted:

I must emphasize again that by Eurocentrism I do not simply mean a tradition that places Europe as a universal cultural ideal embodied in what is called the West, but rather a pervasive [metaphysical] condition of thought. It is universal because it affects both Europeans and nonEuropeans, despite the specific questions and situations each may address.<sup>81</sup>

To critically engage in a de-structive reading of the texts of the Occidental tradition as regards their views on non-European cultures is thus to critically appropriate that part of our own heritage which was violently ‘bestowed’ on us by Europe. Not to do so would be to continue to inhabit a defunct intellectual horizon, whose material embodiments—that is, overt imperialism and colonialism—have already been destroyed by the formerly colonized peoples of the world. Today, in our post-colonial present, we face a more covert hegemony which functions and implements global Euro-American domination through the Westernized segments of formerly colonized peoples.

For better or for worse, *we* who belong to the Westernized segments of formerly colonized societies occupy positions of relative power which can be utilized either to replicate Europe or to try and unleash the concrete and suppressed possibilities of our respective histories.<sup>82</sup> For example, as Lyotard has correctly observed: ‘The spread of struggles for independence since the Second World War and the recognition of new national names seem to imply a consolidation of local legitimacies’. But this ‘spread of struggles for independence’ only ‘seem[s] to imply’ the ‘consolidation of local legitimacies’, it is only a *semblance*, an appearance that hides the actuality that ‘[n]ew “independent” governments either fall in line with the market of world capitalism or adopt a Stalinist-style political apparatus’.<sup>83</sup>

In a similar vein, Castoriadis tells us that the West asserts ‘not that it...[has]... discovered the trick of producing more cheaply and more quickly more commodities, but that it...[has]... discovered the way of life appropriate to all human society’. In making such a grandiose metaphysical assertion, the ‘unease’ that ‘Western ideologues’ might have felt is ‘allayed by the haste with which the “developing nations” or, more accurately, the Westernized elites of these nations greedily adopt the Western ‘model’ of society’.<sup>84</sup>

What both Lyotard and Castoriadis are pointing to is the fact that the hegemonic replication of Europe, in our shared post-colonial present, is carried on by and incarnated in the human residue—that is, the Westernized elites—left behind by the retreating colonial empires of Europe. In other words, the ‘fact that, in some particular domain, and to some particular end [i.e., the scientific/technological control of nature]’,<sup>85</sup> the West has achieved considerable success is taken, by the Westernized elites and their metropolitan mentors, as a sign of Europe’s absolute metaphysical superiority to the rest of humanity. It is, *grosso modo*, this domineering theme that constitutes the Eurocentric consciousness of our post-colonial globe and, as we have seen in our reading of Kant, finds its speculative foundation in the Western tradition of philosophy.

More than through physical force, Euro-America today rules through its hegemony of ideas, ‘through its “models” of growth and development, through the statist and other structures which...are today adopted everywhere’.<sup>86</sup> This is why Fanon concludes *Les damnés de la terre* with a simultaneous call to leave ‘old’ Europe behind and engage in the concrete inventing and creating of our own lived historicity. But to heed, or even hear,

Fanon's call requires that we first recognize and de-structure the speculative metaphysical underpinnings of the Eurocentric constraints that have held us—and still hold us—in bondage. This, in my view, is one of the most important and basic tasks of the contemporary discourse of African philosophy; its critical-negative project—the critique of Eurocentrism.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Nizan, Paul. 'The watchdogs, *Monthly Review Press*, New York, 1971:38.
- 2 Lewis White Beck's introduction to *Kant on history*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, IN, 1963:xviii:n.14.
- 3 The term 'Idea' (i.e., the German *Idee*) designates a theoretical or practical construct of the imagination that serves to give guidance to the theoretical and practical efforts of human reason. On this point, see *Critique of pure reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, Inc., 1965:308–14; see also Lewis White Beck's *Introduction to Kant on history*, 1963:xix–xx.
- 4 I borrow the notion of 'destruction' from Martin Heidegger's *Being and time*, part I, section 6, New York: Harper & Row, 1962. In brief, a destructive reading is one that undermines the text from within and in terms of the cardinal notions on which it is grounded, and in so doing exposes the hidden source out of which the text is articulated. The hyphen in the variations of this term—which I utilize—is meant to stress that what is intended is not the 'destruction' (i.e., the elimination, annihilation, or demolition) of what is in question, but rather its critical un-packing or opening up to a radical inquiry and interrogation. On Heidegger's notion of a destructive reading of the texts of philosophy, see J.L.Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The way and the vision*, Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1976. Mehta describes this aspect of Heidegger's work as 'a metaphysical archaeology', 1976:96–7. For an interesting discussion of this aspect of African philosophy, which takes its point of departure from Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction', see Lucius Outlaw, 'African 'philosophy': Deconstructive and reconstructive challenges', in Guttorm Floistad (ed.) 'Contemporary philosophy', 5, *African Philosophy*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1987.
- 5 Said, Edward. 1994. *The pen and the sword*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994:78.
- 6 Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, 1989. *Ambiguous adventure*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman Educational, 1989:79–81.
- 7 It is to be remembered that, of his own 'time', Kant wrote: 'Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit. Religion through its sanctity, and law-giving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But they then awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain the test of a free and open examination' (*Critique of pure reason*, 9). By the term 'post-colonial', I mean the contradictory situation left by colonialism, and the concrete political struggles and contradictions through which the formerly colonized—i.e. the peoples of the Third World—have constituted themselves as 'independent' nation-

- states. For an interesting critique of the variegated use this term has been put to, see Aijaz Ahmad, 'The politics of literary postcoloniality', *Race and Class*, 36:3, January-March 1995.
- 8 Lyotard, Jean-François. 1992. *The postmodern condition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992:17. I would like to emphasize, since I cannot explore this issue here, that this 'incredulity' is and will always remain suspect so long as it does not explicitly address itself to the colonial globalization of Europe, which is the concrete actualization of modernity. This is because capitalism, as Marx noted long ago, is from its inception and always a global phenomenon.
- 9 Godzich, Wlad. 'Afterword: Reading against literacy', in Lyotard, *Postmodern explained*, 127.
- 10 Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. 1983. *The communist manifesto*. New York: International Publishers, 1983:12; my emphasis.
- 11 For my critique of Hegel and Marx, see 'The idea of colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy of Right', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 29:3, issue no. 115, September 1989; 'Karl Marx and African emancipatory thought: A critique of Marx's Eurocentric metaphysics', *Praxis International*, 10:1/2, April and July 1990.
- 12 Lyotard, *Postmodern explained*, 9. Lyotard makes the same point, with slight verbal variation, in *Postmodern condition*, 77. This almost verbatim recurrence of this formulation indicates that Lyotard sees it as being of cardinal importance to his perspective, and yet, as indicated in endnote 8, this formulation too is suspect so long as it does not concretely explore what 'reality' modernity finds 'lacking' in its self-constituting global escapades.
- 13 Kane, *Ambiguous adventure*, 1989:49; my emphasis.
- 14 Chief Kabongo, 'The coming of the pink checks', in *Through African Eyes, IV, The colonial experience: An inside view*, ed. Leone E. Clark, New York: Praeger, 1973:32.
- 15 The term 'compost' is used because it suggests decomposing matter out of which elements are set free that can then be utilized in another cultural context. On this point, see, Marcien Towa, 'Propositions sur l'identité culturelle', *Présence Africaine*, 109:1st Quarter, 1979:85.
- 16 Kane, *Ambiguous adventure*, 1989:49.
- 17 Said, Edward W. 1980. *The question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage, 1980:78.
- 18 *Ibid.*: 77; my emphasis.
- 19 On this point, V.Y. Mudimbe writes: 'Until the 1950s—and I am not certain at all that things have changed today for the general public in the West—Africa is widely perceived and presented as the continent without memory, without past, without history. More precisely, her history is supposed to commence with her contacts with Europe, specifically with the progressive European invasion of the continent that begins at the end of the fifteenth century.' *The surreptitious speech*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992:xx.
- 20 Lyotard, Jean-François. 1988. *Peregrinations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988:27.
- 21 Tempels, Placide. 'Bantu philosophy.' *Présence Africaine*. Paris, 1969:171–2; my emphasis.

- 22 *A choice of Kipling's verse*, ed. T.S.Eliot. New York: Anchor, 1962:143. This is the last line of the first stanza of Rudyard Kipling's poem, 'The white man's burden', composed in 1899, fourteen years after the Berlin Conference that sanctioned the European colonial scramble for the partition of Africa:
- 23 Starting from the first page of his book, and throughout, Tempels complains about the fact that Christianized *évolués* periodically and violently revert to their 'savage' ways. This is what Tempels sees as the failure of colonialism: i.e., the failure to retain the political and cultural loyalty of the *évolué*.
- 24 Lyotard, *Postmodern explained*, 24.
- 25 Ibid.: 25
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Castoriades, Cornelius. 1991. 'Reflections on "rationality" and "development"', in *Philosophy, politics, autonomy*, New York: Oxford University Press. See also Amanuel Sahle, 'Views on restructuring', *Eritrea Profile*, 2:18, July 15, 1995:2.
- 28 Lyotard, *Peregrinations*, 1988:18.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Conrad, Joseph. 1972. *Heart of darkness*. New York: Pocket Books, 1972:7.
- 31 Foucault, Michel, 1984. 'What is enlightenment?', in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984:35.
- 32 Ibid.: 47.
- 33 Castoriadis, 'The Greek polis and the creation of democracy', in *Philosophy, politics, autonomy*, 1991:100.
- 34 'What is enlightenment?', in *Kant on history*, 1963:3.
- 35 Ibid.: 137.
- 36 Immanuel Kant. 1960. *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, tr. John T.Goldthwait. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1960:110–11.
- 37 Arendt, Hannah. 1982. *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy*, ed. by R.Beiner. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1982:75.
- 38 Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, 1960:109–16.
- 39 Ibid.: 112. In these comparisons, just as the non-Europeans are 'elevated' by being compared to Europeans (i.e., the Arabs and Persians by being likened to the Spanish and the French) to the same degree the Europeans are degraded, relative to other Europeans. The Arabs are like the Spanish just as the Persians are like the French. And the last two stand in the same relationship of superiority to the Spanish and the Arabs within their respective continents. Notice that Spain occupies the southernmost extremity of Europe and that it is the one section of the European mainland that was under Moorish/African control for any extended period of time. Notice also that the English are like the Japanese, but the Germans are not utilized as a unit of comparison. Are they above such comparisons? Thus, you have the Spanish, the French, or the English—depending on how one arranges the hierarchy between their Asiatic correlates—and then the Germans, above all the Europeans: indeed, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!* There is a certain diabolical consistency in all of this. As is well known, Hegel held the view that there are four historical realms. In the order of their hierarchy, starting from the lowest, these are: the Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the Germanic. In a similar vein (vain?) Karl Marx repeats



this same self-flattering evaluation when he writes, of India, the following remarks:

‘At all events, we may safely expect to see, at a more or less remote period, the regeneration of that great and interesting country [India], whose gentle natives are, to use the expression of Prince Saltykov, even in the most inferior classes, ‘plus fins et plus adroits que les italiens’, whose submission even is counterbalanced by a certain calm nobility, who, notwithstanding their natural languor, have astonished the British officers by their bravery, whose country has been the source of our languages, our religions, and who represent that type of the ancient German in the Jat and the type of the ancient Greek in the Brahmin’ (from ‘The future results of the British rule in India’, published in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 3840, August 8, 1853, collected in *On colonialism*, New York, International Publishers, 1972:86). Notice again that the Italian peninsula is located at the southern extremity of Europe and the Italians (especially those of the South) have been inordinately influenced by Moorish and Arab culture. So the Jat—a fiercely independent and thus ‘noble’ Northern Indian peasant group—is like the ancient Germans, and the ancient Greeks are like the Brahmin. All of this in spite of the ‘natural languor’ of the ‘gentle natives’. Such revealing remarks need no explicative commentary!

40 ‘Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view’, *Kant on history*, 1963:24.

41 Foucault, ‘What is enlightenment?’, 1984:36.

42 In other words, the project nullifies itself the moment that it sanctions ‘enlightenment by conquest’, but this is, in effect, what Kant advocates.

43 ‘Perpetual peace’, *Kant on history*, 1963:103.

44 ‘Reviews of Herder’s ideas for a philosophy of the history of mankind’, *Kant on history*, 1963:50–51.

45 *Ibid.*: 50

46 Kant is ontologizing the ontic manifestations of instrumental rationality (manifest in the unfolding capitalist—as opposed to the feudal—relations of production) as a partisan of this rationality within a social formation in the historical process of embodying or being engulfed by the same. It should also be noted that Kant is expressing himself against Herder’s conceptions of human life and history, which do not subscribe to the universalistic nature of Kant’s position.

47 ‘Conjectural beginning of human history’, *Kant on history*, 1963:58.

48 *Ibid.*: 58.

49 *Ibid.*: 59–60.

50 See endnote 48 for the full citation.

51 See endnote 17 for the full citation.

52 See endnote 43.

53 ‘Perpetual peace’, *Kant on history*, 1963:98.

54 ‘What is enlightenment?’, *Kant on history*, 1963:9.

55 ‘Idea for the universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view’, *Kant on history*, 1963:15.

56 ‘What is enlightenment?’, *Kant on history*, 1963:9–10.

57 Michel Foucault, ‘What is enlightenment?’, 1984:37.

58 *Ibid.*: 34.

- 59 'What is enlightenment?', *Kant on history*, 1963:8.
- 60 Whellwright, Philip. 1975. *The Presocratics*, Indianapolis, IN.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975:72.
- 61 'Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view', *Kant on history*, 1963:16.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.: 15.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.: 15–16.
- 66 Ibid.: 16.
- 67 See endnote 1 for full citation.
- 68 'Perpetual peace', *Kant on history*, 1963:101.
- 69 Ibid.: 98.
- 70 Castoriadis, 'The Greek polis and the creation of democracy', 100.
- 71 Castoriadis, 'Reflections on "rationality" and "development"', p. 200.
- 72 'Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view', *Kant on history*, 1963:12.
- 73 'Reviews of Herder's ideas for a philosophy of the history of mankind', *Kant on history*, 1963:47.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid. For an insightful discussion of race in Kant's thinking, see Emmanuel Eze, 'The colour of reason: The idea of "race" in Kant's anthropology', in this volume.
- 76 'Reviews of Herder's ideas for a philosophy of the history of mankind', *Kant on history*, 1963:51.
- 77 See endnote 11.
- 78 Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1992. *In my father's house*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992:85.
- 79 Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove, 1968:211.
- 80 Wiredu, Kwasi. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980:49.
- 81 Rabasa, Jose. *Inventing America*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993:18.
- 82 For a detailed exploration of this point, see my book, *The hermeneutics of African philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1994: chapter 4.
- 83 Lyotard, *Postmodern explained*, 35.
- 84 Castoriadis, 'Reflections on "rationality" and "development"' pp. 181–2.
- 85 Ibid.: 193.
- 86 Ibid.: 201.

### Black Consciousness and the quest for a true humanity

STEVE B.BIKO

It is perhaps fitting to start by examining why it is necessary for us to think collectively about a problem we never created. In doing so, I do not wish to concern myself

unnecessarily with the white people of South Africa, but to get to the right answers, we must ask the right questions; we have to find out what went wrong—where and when; and we have to find out whether our position is a deliberate creation of God or an artificial fabrication of the truth by power-hungry people whose motive is authority, security, wealth, and comfort. In other words, the ‘Black Consciousness’ approach would be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society. It is relevant here because we believe that an anomalous situation is a deliberate creation of man.

There is no doubt that the colour question in South African politics was originally introduced for economic reasons. The leaders of the white community had to create some kind of barrier between blacks and whites so that the whites could enjoy privileges at the expense of blacks and still feel free to give a moral justification for the obvious exploitation that pricked even the hardest of white consciences. However, tradition has it that whenever a group of people has tasted the lovely fruits of wealth, security, and prestige it begins to find it more comfortable to believe in the obvious lie and to accept it as normal that it alone is entitled to privilege. In order to believe this seriously, it needs to convince itself of all the arguments that support the lie. It is not surprising, therefore, that in South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe in the inferiority of the black man, so much so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the economic greed exhibited by white people, it has now become a serious problem on its own. White people now despise black people, not because they need to reinforce their attitude and so justify their position of privilege but simply because they actually believe that black is inferior and bad. This is the basis upon which whites are working in South Africa, and it is what makes South African society racist.

The racism we meet does not only exist on an individual basis: it is also institutionalized to make it look like the South African way of life. Although of late there has been a feeble attempt to gloss over the overt racist elements in the system, it is still true that the system derives its nourishment from the existence of anti-black attitudes in society. To make the lie live even longer, blacks have to be denied any chance of accidentally proving their equality with white men. For this reason there is job reservation, lack of training in skilled work, and a tight orbit around professional possibilities for blacks. Stupidly enough, the system turns back to say that blacks are inferior because they have no economists, no engineers, etc...although it is made impossible for blacks to acquire these skills.

To give authenticity to their lie and to show the righteousness of their claim, whites have further worked out detailed schemes to ‘solve’ the racial situation in this country. Thus, a pseudo-parliament has been created for ‘Coloureds’, and several ‘Bantu states’ are in the process of being set up. So independent and fortunate are they that they do not have to spend a cent on their defence because they have nothing to fear from white South Africa which will always come to their assistance in times of need. One does not, of course, fail to see the arrogance of whites and their contempt for blacks, even in their well-considered modern schemes for subjugation.

The overall success of the white power structure has been in managing to bind the whites together in defence of the status quo. By skillfully playing on that imaginary bogey—*swart gevaar* (danger from the blacks)—they have managed to convince even

diehard liberals that there is something to fear in the idea of the black man assuming his rightful place at the helm of the South African ship. Thus after years of silence we are able to hear the familiar voice of Alan Paton saying, as far away as London: 'perhaps apartheid is worth a try'. 'At whose expense, Dr Paton?', asks an intelligent black journalist. Hence whites in general reinforce each other even though they allow some moderate disagreements on the details of subjugation schemes. There is no doubt that they do not question the validity of white values. They see nothing anomalous in the fact that they alone are arguing about the future of 17 million blacks—in a land which is the natural backyard of the black people. Any proposals for change emanating from the black world are viewed with great indignation. Even the so-called opposition, the United Party, has the nerve to tell the Coloured people that they are asking for too much. A journalist from a liberal newspaper like *The Sunday Times* of Johannesburg describes a black student—who is only telling the truth—as a militant, impatient young man.

It is not enough for whites to be on the offensive. So immersed are they in prejudice that they do not believe that blacks can formulate their thoughts without white guidance and trusteeship. Thus, even those whites who see much wrong with the system make it their business to control the response of the blacks to the provocation. No one is suggesting that it is not the business of liberal whites to oppose what is wrong. However, it appears to us as too much of a coincidence that liberals—few as they are—should not only be determining the modus operandi of those blacks who oppose the system, but also leading it, in spite of their involvement in the system. To us it seems that their role spells out the totality of the white power structure—the fact that though whites are our problem, it is still other whites who want to tell us how to deal with that problem. They do so by dragging all sorts of red herrings across our paths. They tell us that the situation is a class struggle rather than a racial one. Let them go to Van Tonder in the Free State and tell him this. We believe we know what the problem is, and we will stick by our findings.

I want to go a little deeper in this discussion because it is time we killed this false political coalition between blacks and whites as long as it is set up on a wrong analysis of our situation. I want to kill it for another reason—namely that it forms at present the greatest stumbling block to our unity. It dangles before freedom-hungry blacks promises of a great future for which no one in these groups seems to be working particularly hard.

The basic problem in South Africa has been analysed by liberal whites as being apartheid. They argue that in order to oppose it we have to form non-racial groups. Between these two extremes, they claim, lies the land of milk and honey for which we are working. The thesis, the anti-thesis, and the synthesis have been mentioned by some great philosophers as the cardinal points around which any social revolution revolves. For the liberals, the thesis is apartheid, the anti-thesis is non-racialism, but the synthesis is very feebly defined. They want to tell the blacks that they see integration as the ideal solution. Black Consciousness defines the situation differently. The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the antithesis to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity among the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance—a true humanity where power politics will have no place. This analysis spells out the difference between the old and new approaches. The failure of the liberals is in the fact that their antithesis is already a watered-down version of the truth whose close proximity to the thesis will nullify the

purported balance. This accounts for the failure of the Sprocas (Study Project on Race and Christianity in Apartheid South Africa) commissions to make any real headway, for they are already looking for an 'alternative' acceptable to the white man. Everybody in the commissions knows what is right but all are looking for the most seemly way of dodging the responsibility of saying what is right.

It is much more important for blacks to see this difference than it is for whites. We must learn to accept that no group, however benevolent, can ever hand power to the vanquished on a plate. We must accept that the limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. As long as we go to Whitey begging cap in hand for our own emancipation, we are giving him further sanction to continue with his racist and oppressive system. We must realize that our situation is not a mistake on the part of whites but a deliberate act, and that no amount of moral lecturing will persuade the white man to 'correct' the situation. The system concedes nothing without demand, for it formulates its very method of operation on the basis that the ignorant will learn to know, the child will grow into an adult and therefore demands will begin to be made. It gears itself to resist demands in whatever way it sees fit. When you refuse to make these demands and choose to come to a round table to beg for your deliverance, you are asking for the contempt of those who have power over you. This is why we must reject the beggar tactics that are being forced on us by those who wish to appease our cruel masters. This is where the SASO (South African Students Organization) message and cry 'Black man, you are on your own!' becomes relevant.

The concept of integration, whose virtues are often extolled in white liberal circles, is full of unquestioned assumptions that embrace white values. It is a concept long defined by whites and never examined by blacks. It is based on the assumption that all is well with the system apart from some degree of mismanagement by irrational conservatives at the top. Even the people who argue for integration often forget to veil it in its supposedly beautiful covering. They tell each other that, were it not for job reservation, there would be a beautiful market to exploit. They forget they are talking about people. They see blacks as additional levers to some complicated industrial machines. This is white man's integration—an integration based on exploitative values. It is an integration in which black will compete with black, using each other as rungs up a step ladder leading them to white values. It is an integration in which the black man will have to prove himself in terms of these values before merging acceptance and ultimate assimilation, and in which the poor will grow poorer and the rich richer in a country where the poor have always been black. We do not want to be reminded that it is we, the indigenous people, who are poor and exploited in the land of our birth. These are concepts which the Black Consciousness approach wishes to eradicate from the black man's mind before our society is driven to chaos by irresponsible people from Coca-Cola and hamburger cultural backgrounds.

Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and emulate

the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. The philosophy of Black Consciousness therefore expresses group pride and the determination of the black to rise and attain the envisaged self. Freedom is the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities held back not by the power of other people over one but only by one's relationship to God and to natural surroundings. On his own, therefore, the black man wishes to explore his surroundings, and test his possibilities—in other words to make his freedom real by whatever means he deems fit. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters. Hence thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being complete in himself. It makes him less dependent and more free to express his manhood. At the end of it all he cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood.

In order that Black Consciousness can be used to advantage as a philosophy to apply to people in a position like ours, a number of points have to be observed. As people existing in a continuous struggle for truth, we have to examine and question old concepts, values, and systems. Having found the right answers we shall then work for consciousness among all people to make it possible for us to proceed towards putting these answers into effect. In this process, we have to evolve our own schemes, forms and strategies to suit the need and situation, always keeping in mind our fundamental beliefs and values.

In all aspects of the black-white relationship, now and in the past, we see a constant tendency by whites to depict blacks as of an inferior status. Our culture, our history, and indeed all aspects of the black man's life have been battered nearly out of shape in the great collision between the indigenous values and the Anglo-Boer culture.

The first people to come and relate to blacks in a human way in South Africa were the missionaries. They were in the vanguard of the colonization movement to 'civilize and educate' the savages, and introduce the Christian message to them. The religion they brought was quite foreign to the black indigenous people. African religion in its essence was not radically different from Christianity. We also believed in one God, we had our community of saints through whom we related to our God, and we did not find it compatible with our way of life to worship God in isolation from the various aspects of our lives. Hence worship was not a specialized function that found expression once a week in a secluded building, but rather it featured in our wars, our beer-drinking, our dances, and our customs in general. Whenever Africans drank they would first relate to God by giving a portion of their beer away as a token of thanks. When anything went wrong at home they would offer sacrifice to God to appease him and atone for their sins. There was no hell in our religion. We believed in the inherent goodness of man—hence we took it for granted that all people at death joined the community of saints and therefore merited our respect.

It was the missionaries who confused the people with their new religion. They scared our people with stories of hell. They painted their God as a demanding God who wanted worship 'or else'. People had to discard their clothes and their customs in order to be accepted in this new religion. Knowing how religious the African people were, the

missionaries stepped up their terror campaign on the emotions of the people with their detailed accounts of eternal burning, tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth. By some strange and twisted logic, they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours a superstition—all this in spite of the biological discrepancy which is at the base of their religion. This cold and cruel religion was strange to the indigenous people and caused frequent strife between the converted and the ‘pagans’, for the former, having imbibed the false values from white society, were taught to ridicule and despise those who defended the truth of their indigenous religion. With the ultimate acceptance of the Western religion down went our cultural values!

While I do not wish to question the basic truth at the heart of the Christian message, there is a strong case for a re-examination of Christianity. It has proved a very adaptable religion which does not seek to supplement existing orders but—like any universal truth—to find application within a particular situation. More than anyone else, the missionaries knew that not all they did was essential to the spread of the message. But the basic intention went much further than merely spreading the word. Their arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty, and moral judgement taught them to despise native customs and traditions and to seek to infuse their own new values into these societies.

Here then we have the case for a Black Theology. While not wishing to discuss Black Theology at length, let it suffice to say that it seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the black man and his daily problems. It wants to describe Christ as a fighting God, not a passive God who allows a lie to rest unchallenged. It grapples with existential problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes. It seeks to bring back God to the black man and to the truth and reality of his situation. This is an important aspect of Black Consciousness, for quite a large proportion of black people in South Africa are Christians still swimming in a mire of confusion—the aftermath of the missionary approach. It is the duty therefore of all black priests and ministers of religion to save Christianity by adopting Black Theology’s approach and thereby once more uniting the black man with his God.

A long look should also be taken at the educational system for blacks. The same tense situation was found as long ago as the arrival of the missionaries. Children were taught, under the pretext of hygiene, good manners, and other such vague concepts, to despise their mode of upbringing at home and to question the values and customs of their society. The result was the expected one—children and parents saw life differently and the former lost respect for the latter. Now in African society it is a cardinal sin for a child to lose respect for his parent. Yet how can one prevent the loss of respect between child and parent when the child is taught by his know-all white tutors to disregard his family teachings? Who can resist losing respect for his tradition when in school his whole cultural background is summed up in one word—barbarism?

Thus we can immediately see the logic of placing the missionaries in the forefront of the colonization process. A man who succeeds in making a group of people accept a foreign concept in which he is expert makes them perpetual students whose progress in the particular field can only be evaluated by him; the student must constantly turn to him for guidance and promotion. In being forced to accept the Anglo-Boer culture, the blacks have allowed themselves to be at the mercy of the white man and to have him as their eternal supervisor. Only he can tell us how good our performance is and instinctively

each of us is at pains to please this powerful, all-knowing master. This is what Black Consciousness seeks to eradicate.

As one black writer says, colonialism is never satisfied with having the native in its grip but, by some strange logic, it must turn to his past and disfigure and distort it. Hence the history of the black man in this country is most disappointing to read. It is presented merely as a long succession of defeats. The Xhosas were thieves who went to war for stolen property, the Boers never provoked the Xhosas but merely went on 'punitive expeditions' to teach the thieves a lesson. Heroes like Makana<sup>1</sup> (who were essentially revolutionaries) are painted as superstitious trouble-makers who lied to the people about bullets turning into water. Great nation-builders like Shaka are cruel tyrants who frequently attacked smaller tribes for no reason but for some sadistic purpose. Not only is there no objectivity in the history taught us but there is frequently an appalling misrepresentation of facts that sicken even the uninformed student.

Thus a lot of attention has to be paid to our history if we as blacks want to aid each other in our coming into consciousness. We have to rewrite our history and produce in it the heroes that formed the core of our resistance to the white invaders. More has to be revealed, and stress has to be laid on the successful nation-building attempts of men such as Shaka, Moshoeshe, and Hinsta. These areas call for intense research to provide some sorely needed missing links. We would be too naive to expect our conquerors to write unbiased histories about us but we have to destroy the myth that our history starts in 1652, the year Van Riebeeck landed at the Cape.

Our culture must be defined in concrete terms. We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate a historical evolution of the modern black man. There is a tendency to think of our culture as a static culture that was arrested in 1652 and has never developed since the 'return to the bush' concept suggests that we have nothing to boast of except lions, sex, and drink. We accept that when colonization sets in it devours the indigenous culture and leaves behind a bastard culture that may thrive at the pace allowed it by the dominant culture. But we also have to realize that the basic tenets of our culture have largely succeeded in withstanding the process of bastardization and that even at this moment we can still demonstrate that we appreciate a man for himself. Ours is a true man-centred society whose sacred tradition is that of sharing. We must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of the Anglo-Boer culture. We must seek to restore to the black man the great importance we used to give to human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general; to reduce the triumph of technology over man and the materialistic element that is slowly creeping into our society.

These are essential features of our black culture to which we must cling. Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values. This innovation is part of the natural development of any culture. A culture is essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems every day and whatever we do adds to the richness of our cultural heritage as long as it has man as its centre. The adoption of black theatre and drama is one such important innovation which we need to encourage and to develop. We know that our love of music and rhythm has relevance even in this day.

Being part of an exploitative society in which we are often the direct objects of



exploitation, we need to evolve a strategy towards our economic situation. We are aware that the Blacks are still colonized even within the borders of South Africa. Their cheap labour has helped to make South Africa what it is today. Our money from the townships takes a one-way journey to white shops and white banks, and all we do in our lives is pay the white man either with labour or in coin. Capitalistic exploitative tendencies, coupled with the overt arrogance of white racism, have conspired against us. Thus in South Africa now it is very expensive to be poor. It is the poor people who stay furthest from town and therefore have to spend more money on transport to come and work for white people; it is the poor people who use uneconomic and inconvenient fuel like paraffin and coal because of the refusal of the white man to install electricity in black areas; it is the poor people who are governed by many ill-defined restrictive laws and therefore have to spend money on fines for 'technical' offences; it is the poor people who have no hospitals and are therefore exposed to exorbitant charges by private doctors; it is the poor people who use untarred roads, have to walk long distances, and therefore experience the greatest wear and tear on commodities like shoes: it is the poor people who have to pay for their children's books while whites get them free. It does not need to be said that it is the black people who are poor. We therefore need to take another look at how best to use our economic power, little as it may seem to be. We must seriously examine the possibilities of establishing business co-operatives whose interest will be ploughed back into community development programmes. We should think along such lines as the 'buy black' campaign once suggested in Johannesburg and establish our own banks for the benefit of the community. Organizational development among blacks has only been low because we have allowed it to be. Now that we know we are on our own, it is an absolute duty for us to fulfil these needs.

The last step in Black Consciousness is to broaden the base of our operation. One of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness is totality of involvement. This means that all Blacks must sit as one big unit, and no fragmentation and distraction from the mainstream of events be allowed. Hence we must resist the attempts by protagonists of the bantustan theory to fragment our approach. We are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas, or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil.

Our preparedness to take upon ourselves the cudgels of the struggle will see us through. We must remove from our vocabulary completely the concept of fear. Truth must ultimately triumph over evil, and the white man has always nourished his greed on this basic fear that shows itself in the black community. Special Branch agents will not turn the lie into truth, and one must ignore them. In a true bid for change we have to take off our coats, be prepared to lose our comfort and security, our jobs and positions of prestige, and our families, for just as it is true that 'leadership and security are basically incompatible', a struggle without casualties is no struggle. We must realize that prophetic cry of black students: 'Black man, you are on your own!'

Some will charge that we are racist but these people are using exactly the values we reject. We do not have the power to subjugate anyone. We are merely responding to a provocation in the most realistic possible way. Racism does not only imply exclusion of one race by another—it always presupposes that the exclusion is for the purposes of

subjugation. Blacks have had enough experience as objects of racism not to wish to turn the tables. While it may be relevant now to talk about black in relation to white, we must not make this our preoccupation, for it can be a negative exercise. As we proceed further towards the achievement of our goals, let us talk more about ourselves and our struggle and less about whites.

We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood. In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible—a more human face.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Makana was an early nineteenth-century Xhosa prophet, sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island and drowned while escaping in a boat. Refusal by blacks to accept the truth of his death led to the mythical hope of his eventual return.

Is there an African philosophy in existence today?

### ISSIAKA P.LALEYE

Father Tempels is correct in saying that those who refuse to admit the existence of black thought, in so doing exclude blacks from the class of human beings. From what we know of the deeprootedness of philosophical activity within the whole of humankind's mental existence, there can be no doubt of the sincerity of such an attitude.

But we also know that, if it is true that a philosopher is first and foremost a thinker, it does not follow at all that a thinker is already necessarily a philosopher. We even know that the different *Weltanschauungen* (which are the generic products of the human being's mental existence), not satisfied to debate the origin of philosophy, are aspiring at various levels to acquire the latter's recognized status by their constant tendency for increasing universality and rigorous justification.

Is there an African philosophy in existence today? To resolve this abruptly formulated question would thus not only be presumptuous, but also erroneous. What it postulates in the first place, is an investigation. That is to say, neither more nor less than an examination of currently accessible African thought in order to discover whether it would deserve the epithet philosophical or not. An investigation of this nature naturally supposes that its authors are not only equipped with a valid definition of what philosophy is, but also that they know how to ask questions susceptible of revealing philosophical activity to those to whom the questions are going to be put.

What Louis Vincent Thomas wrote, was certainly intended for investigators of this kind: an investigation into African philosophy needs to reconcile the discursive and intuitive points of view, exteriority and interiority, objective explanation and sympathetic comprehension, the search for formal models and the phenomenological grasp of subjective attitudes. It is a difficult task, fraught with pitfalls, the source of many failures, but it is also an exalting task.<sup>1</sup>

More concerned about the circumspection to be observed when tackling the question of African philosophy, the same Thomas writes:

*It may be* [our emphasis] that there is no Diola philosophy in the rigorous sense understood by Western thought, because the Senegalese peasant hardly reflects exhaustively on being, on the value or the conditions of action and has great difficulty in dealing with abstraction or logical dialectics.

But if, by philosophy, one means the original synthesis of knowledge, an attitude vis-à-vis the world and life's problems, even if the elaboration is only implicit, rather confusedly felt than a clearly expressed cosmology, there unquestionably exists a Diola philosophy inscribed not only in dogma, myth, rites and symbols, proverbs and enigmas, songs and dances, but also in the banal, daily gesture of the rice grower or the millet grinder, in the organization of the habitat or the curious division [découpage] of the paddy fields.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that, in the above quotation, the fate of African (or at least Diola) thoughts claiming a philosophical status depends entirely on the recognized meaning of the word philosophy. Neither is the author's circumspection that of one refusing to take sides. On the contrary, it shows a profound knowledge of the thought under discussion and a clear vision of the posed problem, thus having the advantage of inviting people to choose between the two meanings and to draw the obvious conclusions.

We don't think we would be betraying the author's ideas by saying that the sense of the word philosophy involved in the second part of the quote is closer to what W.Dilthey calls 'Weltanschauung' than to philosophy as such.

The phrase rather confusedly felt than [...] clearly expressed is, in fact, quite distinct from the nothing in a state of unconscious behaviour, even if the former may necessarily serve as the latter's springboard.

The banal, daily gesture of the millet grinder or the curious division of the paddy fields is the true manifestation of a thought which is seized as such, but it is the exhaustive reflection on the being it implies which is or could be considered philosophical, and not the gesture itself or the curious division.

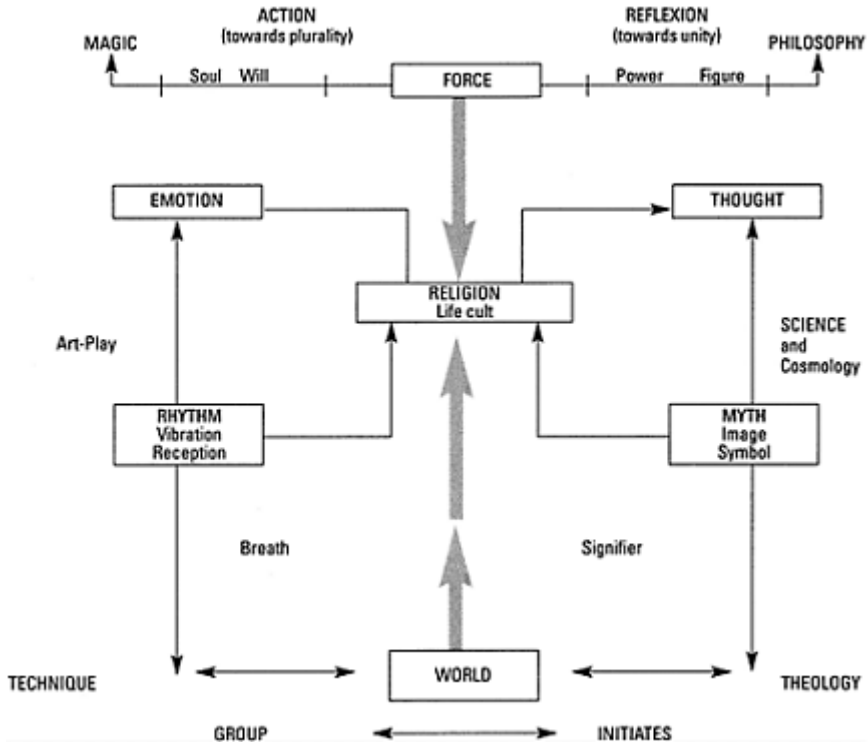
It is obvious that the author is no fool; his formulation of the problem of the existence of an African philosophy seems more propitious for sparking research than many other hasty assertions.

As far as the latter is concerned, we may repeat that which, in our previous research, was almost a watchword, borrowed moreover from the father of phenomenology, i.e.: ZU DEN SACHEN SELBST!

Naturally, all problems will not be solved for all that. All the warnings contained in our remarks on the archaeology of African thought probably deserve to be taken into consideration, once they have been criticized and, if needs be, even modified.

But the researcher may, like ourselves, feel the need for a promontory; a somewhat elevated spot from whence to embrace African thought at a glance. Hopefully he/she will not hold it against us for suggesting an overall diagram<sup>3</sup> of this thought regarding which the author himself hastens to add that a whole life would be necessary to develop the themes which it contains. See the diagram on the previous page.

In fact, noting the internal necessity for philosophical activity, whether human beings have practised it in one form or another, means that the impossibility of qualifying present African thought as philosophical can only motivate the African making this observation to concretely envisage the necessary conditions for this philosophy to see the light of day.



This is exactly what, according to us, lends if not superiority, then at least an attitude advantage to approaching the question of the existence of an African philosophy by firstly wondering about the pertinence of this very question. Henceforth, one thing has been ensured: as the African who henceforth consents to fight for the re-appropriation of previously valid truths, or for present African thought dealing with present problems to discover truths which may be appropriated not only by Africans, but also by present-day humankind, all things which to us seem to more than comply with the essential aspiration of philosophy, there will thus be no reason for the newly elaborated African philosophy to irremediably oppose existing philosophies; rather, experiencing neither a connection of essential dependence nor one of continuity or of any filiation towards the latter, their relations will forcibly be envisaged without false rivalry or false competition. The opposition serving as internal impulse of a healthy competitiveness which will revive them all will have the reference to truth as sole foundation.

Thus it will no longer be to do as others do and especially not to do as the Western European does that the African 'for-itself'—in the Sartrean sense—will be devoted to

philosophy. First and foremost, it will be in order to fully assume his/her human nature, seeing that philosophy originates and springs from the heart of this nature.

Therefore it is clear that searching for originality at any price will definitely be a distraction, and that complacency when faced with the peculiar may be considered a morbid symptom. It is obvious that African thinkers will have to start searching for this new philosophy as a team and not in isolation—a team made up of Africans, but also teaming up with other thinkers without distinction of race or nation.

But seeing as the richness of the common enterprise, thus understood, will only be safe-guarded by every thinker committed to it by firstly preserving the authentic richness of his/her own culture and mentality, the precondition of this common quest for truth will still be for everyone to start by knowing him/herself, quite openly and without puerile complacency.

It is neither presumptuous nor precipitate to say that the shape of thought fundamentally characterizing the traditional African may be termed religious. That is in any case what is authorized by the diagram conceived by L.V. Thomas and reproduced above.

When the Yoruba, E.Bolaji Idowu, asserts that ‘The key note of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. To them, religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity’,<sup>4</sup> the assertion may, until proof to the contrary, be extended to all Africans, it is probably through study and knowledge of this religious form of thought that the African ‘for-itself’ will have to undertake the repossessing of its authentic self.

And yet, also until proof to the contrary, it transpires that this African religion is, in reality, a true life cult. By reflecting on African religion, it is in fact life itself that will be the starting point of the African ‘for-itself’.

Having asked himself how to give a systematic account of Bantu philosophy while still justifying the objectivity of the hypothesis, Father Tempels writes ‘In fact, we need to develop a coherent theory and to prove that it corresponds to Bantu thought, expression and customs’.

We may start by establishing links between Bantu languages, behaviour types, institutions and customs; we could analyse them and extract fundamental ideas from them; finally, based on these elements, we could construct a system of Bantu thought.

In fact, this is the path I have followed. It is the arduous path of trial, error, and research, where a received idea must be rejected immediately, where what seems to be a glimmer of light may cause you to lose your way in the shadows. It is a labour of patience which, in the long run, allows the definition of precise notions which fit into a logical system. I wanted to spare the reader these detours.<sup>5</sup>

Even if one were to denounce the clearly admitted aims of the Tempelsian project as overbearing, that will not change the fact that in many respects the Father was a forerunner, and even a precursor, with all it implies as far as courage is concerned.

It may also be that Tempels’ book *Bantu philosophy* was read somewhat too rapidly, by the pro- as well as the anti-Tempelsians.

The author himself invites his readers to clearly distinguish between:

- the analysis of Bantu philosophy, and

- the Western expression used as a vehicle to render it accessible to European readers.

Then he writes:

Thus, even if the expression were to be defective, it should not be inferred that the very object of this study, the analysis of Bantu thought, would find itself sullied by it. I am asking the reader to pay close attention to the essential problem of the study of Bantu thought, rather than detract from it by way of the incidental terminology question.<sup>6</sup>

In Madeleine Rousseau's account, given when *Bantu philosophy* appeared, or rather was published by *Présence Africaine*, she writes:

It is possible that without his knowing, Father Tempels interpreted Bantu philosophy—in the same way our artists rediscover in black artworks the signs needed to express themselves—and that he underlined those points in it which correspond to our own anguish. That is something which only African blacks will be able to tell us when, in turn, they will outline for us the basic principles of a truly African conception of the universe, or when they will present us with a critical study of Father Tempels' book.<sup>7</sup>

If it is only from the African blacks that Madeleine Rousseau justly awaits either the outline of the basic principles of a conception of a truly African universe or the critical study of Tempels' book, which will permit us to establish if, yes or no, in his analysis, the author of *Bantu philosophy* only underlined the points corresponding to his own anguish, or if the study in question may claim some objectivity, it must be admitted that apart from a few reactions which were, with good reason, violent and almost unanimously negative, these African blacks have, as far as we know, not yet agreed to present an exhaustive and critical study of Father Tempels' book which would interpellate him, not only in the name of the coherence in his use of language, but mainly in the name of the facts from which Bantu theory claims to have been abstracted.

'Without philosophical penetration, ethnology is mere folklore', writes Father Tempels.<sup>8</sup> We admit that he is absolutely right.

This ethnology has yet to cease being bad sociology and bad philosophy.

In fact, there can be few doubts that it is the same science which, turned towards the inside, likes to think of itself as SOCIOLOGY and which, turned towards the other, is called ETHNOLOGY. When will Africans stop looking at themselves with eyes that have been forged by their rulers? That may be the question.

The absence of writing does not justify the assertion of the inexistence of philosophy in present, traditional African thought. The mere word Philosophy (one could ramble on for a long time about its etymology) is not enough to express everything there is to say and it is only by analogy that the meaning which Western Europe attributes to this term may be qualified as philosophical.

If, then, research—enhanced by team-work—should be undertaken, and if a struggle should be led, it cannot be to claim a word. Africa can only prove that it knows how to philosophize by philosophizing. And as there is more philosophy to be done than has

already been done, the African will authenticate his claim to philosophical activity firstly by collaborating in an original way to delivering philosophy from the dilemma where the consciousness of becoming and the becoming of exact sciences have placed it.

But we know that if, for us, the two questions we have just raised are not without ground, they do nevertheless presuppose a third, the only one which confers meaning to them, namely, should Africa have a philosophy?

### SHOULD AFRICA HAVE A PHILOSOPHY?

The pertinence of this question no longer needs to be established. It has become obvious. One will, however, take care that if the fact that philosophical activity has its source and foundation in the very heart of the structure of the human being's mental life and that, consequently, the only illustrious history which should be mentioned resides in the fact of being a member of humankind, it should not be used to avoid discovering whether or not, as a human activity, philosophy as such possesses a value rendering it desirable in itself.

The fact that an activity has found its foundation in the very structure of human nature is not an *ipso facto* guarantee of its quality. Mainly, endowed with freedom and will, humankind remains unquestionably free to grant or to refuse support for an activity, even when the latter is deeply anchored in its structure; in the same way, one could possibly point out that of all the animals, the human being is the only one capable of eating when he/she is no longer hungry, or drinking when he/she is no longer thirsty. Which leads to the observation that most of the essential functions of humankind's nature are likely to undergo such development that they even risk endangering human life. To convince oneself, one has only to compare human sex-life to that of other animals. Only human beings consider cooking to be an art; sight and touch are also pretexts for a great number of our arts.

There as well, we have a sort of 'threshold' between animality and humanity. A threshold on the edge of which we also find a great number of other animals—dogs, cats and monkeys, for example—because of their aptitude for playful activity.

Thus, once the pertinence of the question ensuring that philosophy exists within African thought has been established, it remains urgent to appreciate philosophy, not in the way Westerners reserve its monopoly for themselves to the exclusion of others, but simply and succinctly as a human activity. The former does not excuse us from the necessity of undertaking the latter; on the contrary, it allows us henceforth to envisage it without any complexes or complacency.

It will be observed then that the liberty we so often allowed ourselves in this book to maintain that which Western Europeans today term as such, may only analogically be called philosophy, is not as groundless as it would seem. At most, one could consider it as some sort of anticipation and as such, called upon to benefit from subsequent justifications. Something we will not seek to avoid.

More than to any of the other thinkers whose numerous quotations have allowed us to progressively advance in our own meditation, our thoughts go to Georges Bastide. We think it apt to return to him. According to him, a philosophy is defined by its problem. To which one will respond, what and where are the problems of African philosophy? What is their specificity? Are they only peculiar to Africa or do other civilizations also

pose themselves the same problems? We know that a problem comes into existence when a conscience takes hold of it, poses it. Where, then, are the problems which Africans pose themselves?

In his 1947 introduction to P.Tempels' book, Alioune Diop writes the following lines:

What then, is more striking than the sight of distress: an abandoned being, stripped of all social guarantees, reduced to his own, naked liberty, to his original impotence and abandoned to the terror of Destiny?<sup>9</sup>

What characterizes our era is not only the conscience of becoming and the necessity for our language to dialecticize itself in order to be closer to reality; it is also and above all the discovery of a certain community of destiny of all human beings inhabiting the earth.

All of humanity vibrates like a gigantic spider web at the slightest jolts affecting it. The miners of Zambia or elsewhere may already know that the copper they are digging at the price of their blood and sweat serves not only to make belt buckles or electronic gadgets, but may also kill women, children, and the aged in Southern Vietnam or on the banks of the Jordan.

Should the idea come to them, Africans would certainly not be wrong in sending engineers, doctors, teachers, missionaries, and the technical advisers of the armies coming to Africa's aid back home in order to first discover what they really want. It is the whole of humanity which is summoned to redefine itself, to adjust within an original synthesis of its belief, knowledge, saying, and doing.

Even today, and even if philosophy should renounce being the exposé of a system, it may yet claim and try to be the indication of a salvation method. For if capitals no longer have the illusion of being the centre of the world and if the earth itself realizes that it is a mere speck of dust surviving miraculously in a galaxy neighbouring innumerable other galaxies, it means that it is incumbent on all people to say which use they will make of their liberty and which destiny they mean to choose.

But if at such a time philosophy still confusedly hears the call and henceforth doubts itself as a system more than anybody else would have thought to doubt it, it is still and above all the prophets of doom and the self-satisfied scholars whom everyone should mistrust.

Mention has already been made of the Third World's last chance. Tomorrow is already yesterday<sup>10</sup>, as they say. And the globe will be covered in corpses and all life eliminated by bombs seemingly burning with impatience in strategic places, surveyed by thousands of eyes or by biological weapons, although not one year passes without us reading the reports of endless meetings on the subject of nuclear armament restriction.

In 1964, Prof. F.Crahay wrote an article which many people are probably still unaware of and which is entitled 'Conceptual take-off, the preliminary to Bantu philosophy'.<sup>11</sup> We take the liberty of strongly recommending its reading to whoever is interested in the problem we have raised here.

Crahay is a serious author; his good faith cannot be doubted. For example, nobody could find fault with his three objections<sup>12</sup> against P. Tempels' book. Tempels lays down five conditions for the existence of African philosophy. It is enriching to read Crahay's objections.<sup>13</sup>



But to tell the truth, does one accede to concept and philosophy by renouncing myth? One would then have to admit that Socrates and Plato remained in the pre-conceptual stage! Have people forgotten the importance of mythical sequences in most of Plato's dialogues?

Does present European thought, reputed for having toughened reflexive and critical attitudes, not still carry vast myths with it? It is said that one only truly destroys that which one replaces. Can one talk about having gotten rid of myths when so many have been created? Crahay says that myth is tough. Is that only the case as far as Africans are concerned?

It is said that Africa needs a language of culture. There's a pretty myth! Three centuries ago, did the French language know that it would be what it is today? We know that Descartes wrote the *Discours* in French and the *Méditations* in Latin. They were not destined for the same public!

Languages only solve the problems posed to them by the people who speak them. If it is a fact that, today, Africans think and write in French, in English and maybe even in German, it is no proof at all that they will always do so. It is still up to them to say which will be the language of their culture. It is not language that conditions access to philosophy, it is thought. It is through the Arabic language that Europeans themselves rediscovered Aristotle!

While studying in Dakar (Senegal) in 1966, I had the opportunity of experiencing the first Black Arts festival. Thanks to the radio, I was able to follow the different speeches made during the inaugural session. Among other orators, I listened to André Malraux and would like, at this point, to reproduce the last part of his conference.

However, it may be that the author modified his text before giving it to the Festival organizers. As for us, the only document we have is in the form of a recorded cassette. We thus accept full responsibility for the punctuation and it is possible that we heard wrongly. The value of the document is nevertheless intact.

Sirs, what we call culture, is that mysterious force within ourselves of things that are much older and much deeper than ourselves and which, in the modern world, are our only help between the enormous forces of the dream factories. That is why Africa absolutely needs to re-establish its own patrimony, but at the same time needs to create Africa's patrimony and its own world patrimony.

We were told, and I know that I am going to offend some of you, let's try to rediscover the African soul which created the masks; through that soul, we will reach our African people. Ladies and Gentlemen, I don't believe a word of it! That which produced the masks, like that which once produced the cathedrals, is lost forever! What is true, is that this country is heir to these masks and may say that we have a relationship with them which no one else has, and when we look at them and ask them for lessons from the past, we know that they do not speak a lost language, but still speak and it is to us that they are speaking.

In this field, it is absolutely necessary that you take control of everything that was Africa. But take it knowing all the while that you are part of the metamorphosis. Knowing that while the Egyptians whom I have just seen, think they are the descendants of the Pharaohs, it is of no importance; what is

important, is that they refer to the Pharaohs and that they ask themselves: how can we be worthy of them?

For so many centuries we French thought of ourselves as the heirs of the Romans. What was Rome in France like, exactly? It was about people who had killed us! But the fact that we believed that we were Rome nevertheless made France the greatest Roman power.

You must not be mistaken about the reality of the old spirits. They are the true spirits of Africa. They were what they were, they have changed a lot. But they are still there and they will be there for you every time you need them and question them on a level which is yours and theirs at the same time.

It is not a question of rediscovering communion by studying bush ceremonies leading to knowledge and not to communion. It is about Africa being present, thanks to its art, in the treasure of world civilization and being free enough to see its own world past.

And here, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the most important thing I have to tell you: there is a type of universal illusion which results in people thinking that they are much less strong and much less free than they really are. It is not necessary for you to know how you will put your imaginary museum together, how you will create your cultural domain. Did you know how you would do your dance? Did you know what jazz would be like? Did you know that, one day, those miserable fetishes that were being sold like bundles of firewood would cover the world with their glory and would be bought by our greatest artists?

Here, the mystery of metamorphosis is something crucial. Africa is strong enough to create its own imaginary museum, on its own, on condition that it dares to do so. That's what it's about.

Two or three times in its history, my old country approached greatness: the times when, in the world's presence, it tried to teach liberty. Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to finish by saying: France's message is: may Africa conquer its freedom!

It now has to be said that it is not only by its art that Africa has to be present in the world. If that which created the masks and which, in days of old, created the cathedrals, is lost forever, that which must make today's world still needs to be discovered and created. What we find exciting, is that PHILOSOPHY could legitimately contribute to this recreation. But it has to be the philosopher's wish, without distinction of race or nation.

Which BANTU will one day give us a Bantu phenomenology?<sup>14</sup>

Maybe the time has come to take the author of this question, which one is in fact tempted to consider as a mere witticism, at his word. For if the pertinence of the question which African thinkers ask themselves (or rather would ask themselves, because it does not seem to be their main concern at the moment) namely whether Africa has a philosophy no longer needs to be established, and if this pertinence must give way to that of the question whether or not Africa should have a philosophy, that does not mean that all problems have been solved.

The question whether Africa should have a philosophy or not is a pertinent one and by posing it, the African thinker essentially remains within his/her rights as a thinker, not necessarily as an African.

However, establishing the pertinence of a question does not mean finding its answer. It would thus be a serious mistake to consider our attempt at establishing the pertinence of this question as a new war cry destined to regroup African philosophers and to ask them to urgently put together an African philosophy by writing philosophical texts which would be ensured of being considered as such. We only wanted to show that, in a way, Africa wonders whether it should have a philosophy.

But if our research on the essence of philosophy led us to conclude that there is more to be done on what is termed philosophy than what has already been done, a simple glance at today's human spectacle would be largely sufficient to prove that no philosophy should still be exhausting itself by claiming to belong to a race, nation, or state. Which does not at all mean that the artisans of the philosophy which our time seems to be waiting for (supposing that the object of the wait may still be called philosophy) should be without race or nation or not be from a state. Rather, it means that complacency regarding the peculiar, and the isolation which has always—and wrongly so—been associated with genius, will have to be banished.

On the contrary, if one has to say what use humanity thinks of making of its liberty and if all men/women have not only the right, but above all the obligation, to participate in such a task, those human beings who will choose to renounce that which distinguishes them from others, will certainly deprive the outcome of the project of as many riches.

But everyone knows that the problem of our time is still far from being posed in the terms implied by the attitude I am reflecting here. Everyone knows that people still persist in wanting to predict human destiny on earth in terms of numbers and graphics. Above all, everyone knows that the pretty expression, Universal rendezvous, still remains a poetry theme while human beings are living in misery, anguish, and slavery.

Griaule suggests:

Let us admit, along with father Tempels, that truth is difficult. The truth is that, midway through the twentieth century, at a time when 20 engineers on a facilities project are discussing the shape to be given to dredge buckets, at a time when the smallest piece of metal has its place within planetary mechanization, at a time when the lowest deputy prefect of a humble town is chosen with caution, this great thing, the encounter of two civilizations, is left to chance sensibilities, vocations, and privately organized individual interests.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, is it not true that without distinction of race or civilization, almost all of the world's scholars contribute in one way or another to the advancement of modern space aeronautics? Where, then, is the meeting-place of the globe's thinkers who are trying to express what humankind can and must do? Is it the UN or the national assemblies of the so-called great powers? There has probably never been as much concern about humankind as there is today. And yet, who in living memory would ever have imagined that it would take so many months to decide on the shape of the table around which people were planning to stop a war?

Not so long ago, newspaper jargon coined a new, fashionable word: conscientization. For me, this word has the ring of a whole programme. So much the better, then, if the construction of something which requires the collaboration of the conscientist African thinker no longer deserves the pretty term 'philosophy'. Because it is not so much love of wisdom that must be claimed as wisdom itself.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 For reasons of intelligibility, all notes and titles (except for Diogene) have been translated into English, even those of French reviews like *Présence Africaine*. In 'Brief sketch of Diola cosmological thought, African systems of thought', *Présence Africaine*, London, 1965:367.
- 2 L-V Thomas, *ibid.*: 366.
- 3 This grid appears in two writings of L-V Thomas:
  - (a) In an article entitled 'Philosophy of traditional African religion: A first approach', in *Afrique Document*, 196:64.
  - (b) In a more important work entitled 'five essays on African death'. Publications of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences of Dakar University (Senegal), *Philosophy and Social Sciences*, 3, Dakar, 1968:482.
- 4 Bolaji Idowu, E. *Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief*, Lagos: Longman, 1962:5 and those following.
- 5 Tempels, P. *Bantu philosophy*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1949:28.
- 6 Tempels, P. *op. cit.*: 28.
- 7 Cf. *Présence Africaine/African Presence*, 7, 1949:271–272.
- 8 *Bantu philosophy*, *Présence Africaine*, 1949:24.
- 9 Cf. the preface of Alioune Diop to 'Bantu philosophy', see above, 267–271.
- 10 Translator's note: play of words on the idiomatic expression, *n'est pas demain la veille*, literally: yesterday is not tomorrow, meaning that something will not happen in a hurry.
- 11 *Diogene*, 52, Oct–Dec 1965:61–84.
- 12 See above, Tempels, P. 328–329.
- 13 See above, Tempels, P. 334–344.
- 14 It is in fact with this question that Jacques Howlett ends his account of P.Tempels' *Bantu philosophy*, cf. *Présence Africaine*, 7, 1949:263.
- 15 *Ibid.*: 259.  
 Extract from *African philosophy*. To be and having to be (Zaire University Press). Altbach, P.G. 1984. The distribution of knowledge in the third world: A case study in neocolonialism', in P.G.Altbach, and Gail P.Kelly (eds.), *Education and the colonial experience*. New Brunswick (USA) and London: Transaction Books. 1984:230–231.  
 Appiah, A.K. 1992. *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## References

- Bolaji, I. 1973. *African traditional religion: A definition*. London: SCM Press.
- Bondy, A.S. 'The meaning and problem of Hispanic thought (Can there be a Latin American philosophy?)', in J.J.E. Gracia (ed.), *Latin American philosophy in the twentieth century*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1986:243.
- Brown, H. 1988. *Rationality*. London: Routledge.
- Brueggemann, W. 1977. *The land*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977:48.
- Busia, K.A. 1965. 'The African world view.' Paris: *Présence Africaine*, 4.
- Chafe, W. 1985. 'Linguistic differences produced by differences between speaking and writing', in D. Olson, N. Torrance, and A. Hildyard (eds.), *Literacy, language and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985:105–122.
- Chafe, W. and Danielewicz, J. 1987. 'Properties of spoken and written language', in R. Horowitz and J.S. Samuels (eds.), *Comprehending oral and written language*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1987:83–113.
- Danquah, J.B. 1968 (1944). *The Akan doctrine of God: A fragment of Gold Coast ethics and religions*. 2nd ed. London: Frank Cass & Co.
- Davis, S.T. 1983. *Logic and the nature of God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Derrida, J. 1976. *Of grammatology*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Descartes, R. 1951. *Meditations of first philosophy*. Tr. L. Lafleur. New York: Macmillan.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976 (1937). *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1980 (1965). *Theories of primitive religion*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Fanon, F. 1961. *The wretched of the earth*. (tr.) C. Farrington. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961:34.
- Gelb, I.J. 1963. *The study of writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goody, J. 1977. *The domestication of the savage mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goody, J. 1987. *The interface between the written and the oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goody, J. and Watt, I. 1963. 'The consequences of literacy', in J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in traditional societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968:27–68.
- Gracia, J.J.E. 1992. *Philosophy and its history*. New York: State University of New York Press. 1992:25.
- Gyekye, K. 1987. *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hanke, L. 1937. 'Pope Paul III and the American Indians.' *Harvard Theological Review*, xxx:71–72.
- Harris, M. 1969. *The rise of anthropological theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Havelock, E. 1963. *Preface to Plato*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Havelock, E. 1976 *Origins of Western literacy*. Toronto: Toronto Institute for Studies in Education.
- Havelock, E. 1982. *The literate revolution and its cultural consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Havelock, E. 1991. 'The oral-literate equation: A formula for the modern mind', in D. Olsen and N. Torrance (eds.), 1991:11–27.

- Hollis, M. and Lukes, S. (eds.) 1982. *Rationality and relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Horton, R. 1970. 'African traditional thought and Western science', in B.R. Wilson, 1970:131–171.
- Hountondji, P.J. 1976. *Sur la 'philosophie Africaine: Critique de l'ethnophilosophie*. Paris: Maspero.
- Hume, D. 'Of national characters', in F.N. Norton and R.H. Popkin (eds.), *David Hume: Philosophical historian*. New York: The BobbsMerrill Company, 1965:47.
- Idowa, E.B. 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. Lagos: Longman: SCM Press.
- Idowu, E.B. 1973. *African traditional religion: A definition*. New York: Orbis.
- Jones, W.R. 1977–1978. 'The legitimacy and necessity of black philosophy: Some preliminary considerations.' *The Philosophical Forum*, ix(2–3), 1977–1978:151.
- Kedourie, E. 1985. *Nationalism*. London: Hutchinson.
- Leibniz, G.W. 1951. 'Monadology', in *Philosophical writings by Leibniz*, Trs. M. Morris. London: Dent, 1970:3–20.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. *The savage mind*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1985 (1910). *How natives think*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Maquet, J.J. 1954. 'The kingdom of Ruanda', in D. Forde (ed.), *African worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954:164–189.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1990 (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. 2nd edn. London: Heinemann.
- McMillan, Carol. 1982. *Women, reason and nature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1982:1–15 and 80–151.
- Mill, J.S. 1875. 'On nature', in *Three essays on religion*. London: Longman.
- Minkus, H. 1984. 'Causal theory in Akwapun Akan philosophy', in R.A. Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. New York: University Press of America, 1984:113–147.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1994. *The idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Oguah, B.E. 1884. 'African and Western philosophy: A comparative study', in R.A. Wright (ed.), 1984:213–226.
- Okoye, F.C. 1972. *International law and the new African states*. London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1972:5.
- Olson, D. 1977. 'From utterance to text: The bias of language in speech and writing.' *Harvard Educational Review*, 47(3):257–281.
- Olson, D. 1988. 'Mind and media: The epistemic function of literacy.' *Journal of Communication*, 38(3):27–36.
- Olson, D. and Torrence, N. (eds.) 1991. *Literacy and orality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ong, W. 1977. *Interfaces of the word*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Ong, W. 1981. *The presence of the word*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ong, W. 1982. *Orality and literacy*. London: Methuen.
- Opoku, K.A. 1978. *West African traditional religion*. London: F&P International Private Limited.
- Osuagwu, I.M. 1999. *African historical reconstruction*. Imo State, Nigeria: Amamihe Publications. 1999:87, 94, 95, 96.
- p'Bitek, O. 1970. *Religion of the Central Luo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- p'Bitek, O. 1971. *African religions in Western scholarship*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- p'Bitek, O. 1975. 'African culture in the era of foreign rule', *Thought & Practice*, 2(1), 1975.

- Sawyer, H. 1970. *God: Ancestor or creator?* London: Longman.
- Scott-Littleton, C. 1985. 'Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and the concept of cognitive relativity.' Introduction to L. Lévy-Bruhl, 1985:v–viii.
- Sogolo, G. 1993. *Foundations of African philosophy*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Street, B. 1984. *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. 1988. 'A critical look at Walter Ong and the great divide.' *Literacy Research Center*, 4(1):1–5.
- Tannen, D. 1982. *Spoken and written language: Exploring orality and literacy*. Norwood: Ablex.
- Taylor, C. 1982. 'Rationality', in M.Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), 1982–105.
- Torrance, N. and Olson, D. 1985. 'Oral and literate competencies in early school years', in D.Olson, N.Torrance, and A.Hildyard (eds.), *Literacy, language and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985:256–284.
- Williams, R.A. 1990. *The American Indian in Western legal thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, B.R. *Rationality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1992/3. 'African philosophical tradition: A case study of the Akans.' *The Philosophical Forum*, xxiv(1–3), Fall-Spring: 1992–1993:41 ff.

## 2

# TRENDS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

### INTRODUCTION

The status of Father Tempels and ethnophilosophy in the discourse of African philosophy \*

MOYA DEACON

### THE CONCEPT OF ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

African philosophy can be identified as constitutive of a post-colonial quest for a uniquely African identity, which has become lost amid the brutality of the European rape of the African continent. The relevance of this reaction becomes clear in terms of Van Hook's view:

Questions concerning the existence of African philosophy are...perceived as reflecting a Western colonial bias that there is no such thing as, and has never been (and some would even say, cannot be) an African philosophy, because Africans are not rational or not as rational as Westerners, or do not have the temperament needed to produce philosophy (Van Hook 1993:30).

It comes as little surprise that African people should react to the colonial question in an attempt to reaffirm singularity, uniqueness, identity, and most importantly, a sense of self. African philosophy in its different guises can be recognized as being in reaction to the debased view of the African and his/her philosophy that has been, and that is still held by the Western world.

This reaction, however, does not always have the same form and contents: it shows a variety and often deep-seated differences. The debate in African philosophy shows great dilemmas and diversity. Oruka recognized the need for the discourse of African philosophy to become ordered and structured, and accordingly distinguished four trends as answers to the challenge to react to the colonial legacy. Oruka's original classification consisted of four diverging, yet related, trends, namely ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, nationalistic-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy. In this article the focus will be on ethnophilosophy; it is therefore not necessary to consider Oruka's later developments of his classification. I want to make the general point at the outset, however, that all these trends show the attribute of being responses to the question of the nature of African philosophy.

\* This article is taken from my unpublished MA dissertation, Deacon, 1996.



Ethnophilosophy can be recognized as the first rejoinder to the question on the nature of African philosophy. In terms of this response, African philosophy is viewed as totally obscure from its Western counterpart, this contrast being said to lie in the dissimilarity between the mindset of the two distinct peoples (Oruka 1991b:24). Ethnophilosophy rejects two spheres of Western philosophy, namely logic and individuality. In substantiation, Senghor's doctrine is referred to: Africa appeals to emotion, while the Greeks petition logic. European individuality is thus in opposition to the integral feature of African philosophy, which is communality. In short, Western philosophy is recognized as being scientific in nature, while African philosophy, in the ethnophilosophical sense, is regarded as being pre- or non-scientific (Oruka 1991b:20–21).

Exact examples of African philosophy, in the ethnophilosophical denotation, are recognized in the folk philosophy of a people, that is, in terms of the customs, traditions, and religions of a specific people (Oruka 1990:15). This is premised on the assumption that there is a metaphysical and ideological system embodied in the traditional wisdom and the institutions of the various African people, and this stands in direct contrast to the individual, rational, and critical elements displayed in European philosophy, it being the suggestion that the community, as a totality, can philosophize (Kaphagawani 1991:182). It is thus that ethnophilosophy defines African philosophy as:

...the reverse of the thought that comes as the outcome of theoretically and deductively reached inference. African philosophy is an existential experience common and obvious to all members of the stock. Basic logical principles in the West such as the principle of contradiction and of excluded middle have no room in African thought. The basic principle is that of a poetic self-involvement that defies any Western logical formulation (Oruka 1991b:21).

The majority of so-called professional philosophers in Africa reject the assumptions of ethnophilosophy (cf. Hountondji 1983), their premise being that philosophy is not a discipline that can depend merely on racial axioms. Philosophy, according to their view, is defined along the lines of rational, critical, rigorous, logical, and reflective investigation. However, it is assumed that African and Western philosophy differ due to the cultural, historical, and environmental differences manifest within the two philosophies; this can cause contrasts in the methodology employed, but not in the interpretation or character of philosophy as a discipline.

Oruka's classification of the trends in African philosophy is seemingly adopted, uncritically, by the majority of African philosophers as being a true rendition of the structure of African philosophy.<sup>1</sup> I however, have a number of objections to his classification: for one, he ignores, as I see it, *Négritude*, a most important and relevant approach to African philosophy. Is Oruka not thus ignoring the issue of African identity, which to my mind, plays a pivotal role in the debates in African philosophy, particularly in evaluating ethnophilosophy?

It can, furthermore, be asked whether African philosophy remains static, at all times, and in all places. I seriously doubt this. Although I believe that Oruka recognizes diversity in the discourse of African philosophy, his classification of the four trends implies a static notion of the tradition. I prefer to see them as different aspects of the

ongoing philosophical debate in African philosophy—as different attempts at a certain time to define African philosophy and as different ways of dealing with the legacy of colonialism.

A further implication of Oruka's classification which I find somewhat troubling, is the suggestion that African philosophy has followed a linear pathway, from the substandard trend of ethnophilosophy, to the exceptional professional philosophical trend. I cannot accept a linear approach to the development of African philosophy. The various trends have commenced at various, and sometimes diverging times, while the influences, challenges, and contexts forcing them into being should not be ignored. Each trend has a distinct interpretation as to the nature of African philosophy. The context of the origination of each of these trends should be readily understood in order to render full comprehension of their roles in the entire field of philosophy in Africa. This is what I intend doing for ethnophilosophy in what follows.

It is clear to me that Oruka's widely accepted classification is not flawless, but it obviously provides the discourse with a platform from which to interpret and understand the debate, and as such it has its value.

In terms of the bias held by a multitude of philosophers in the African philosophical discourse, Oruka's first trend, ethnophilosophy, is, in general, rejected as comprising a significant aspect of African philosophy, it being appraised as a degenerate, retarded, and debased contribution. The motivation behind this negative perspective can be found in the historical circumstance surrounding the inadvertent development of the trend: colonialism and the Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels' contribution, by means of the publication of his book, *Bantu philosophy* (1946), to and reaction against the colonialist venture and attitudes. Tempels was the accidental founder of the ethnophilosophical trend. As we shall see, it was not his aim to formulate a treatise that would cause great debate within the African philosophical discourse but this was the outcome of his project.

African philosophy, as debate and discourse, can be contextualized as an outcome of the historical circumstance on the African continent, that is, colonialism and the assumptions held by colonialists. Within this context, ethnophilosophy and Tempels find themselves both as victim and response. As victim, they are the main area of attack by African philosophers due to their supposed role in assisting the colonialist venture in the Belgian Congo. As a response, ethnophilosophy (i.e. Tempels) denies the assumed categories of barbarianism and primitiveness assigned to the African peoples by colonialist thinking, and asserts the potential of African peoples for philosophical thought (Bantu philosophy) albeit not in an accepted Western form. It is this situation that I want to investigate.

### THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF PLACIDE TEMPELS

In attempting an assessment of Tempels' position and function in the ethnophilosophical trend, and his profound influence in the formation of an influential humanistic religious movement in the Belgian Congo, the Jamaa movement, the history and context that surrounded and enfolded him, and his reactions to these phenomena, are not without their due significance. Moreover, if one is to venture forth to consider Placide Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* in any kind of detail, it must be conceded that Tempels had attained

great maturity, both in his relations with the indigenous folk of the Congo, as well as in his Christian convictions. 'Placide Tempels had not only travelled a great geographical distance in order to communicate with Congolese men and women...he had also travelled far in religion' (De Craemer 1977:12). It could, perhaps, even be said of Tempels, that his contact with the traditional Congolese brought him to a greater understanding and cognizance of his own religious position and convictions.

Placide Tempels was born in 1906 in Belgium. His teacher, Abbe H., exerted profound influence on Tempels' thought. Abbe H. stressed the relevance of love in interpersonal relations, while persuading his students of the benefits of being 'social' (De Craemer 1977:12). In 1924 Tempels entered the Franciscan Order, and in 1933 he applied for a missionary post in the Belgian Congo. From 1937 to 1946, Tempels worked primarily with the BaLuba people of the North Katanga province of the Congo. Tempels' contact with the BaLuba people is not without its significance, as *Bantu philosophy* resulted primarily from Tempels' interaction with them, while a vast majority of the adherents to the Jamaa movement came from the BaLuba culture (De Craemer 1977:13). The Jamaa movement can best be described as the confrontation and blending of Roman Catholic and Bantu African cultural and religious concepts (De Craemer 1977:1). The fundamental tenets lying at the basis of the Jamaa movement are the ideas of the unity and love between human beings.<sup>2</sup>

Tempels' life can be divided into three phases. The Katanga period, generally referred to as Tempels' 'priest phase', being the first of these. During this period he is said to have behaved as '...boss, lord and master of his church, who knows all, says all, while the faithful have only to listen and keep quiet' (De Craemer 1977:14). In adopting this imperious attitude, which had become implanted in Tempels' psyche by the popularly accepted colonialist thought of the time, Tempels had experienced his efforts in missionary work as being a dismal failure. It is clear that Tempels' despair at his failure in missionary work should be considered in terms of the context of the Belgian colonial policy of that specific time (De Craemer 1977:15).

The idea basic to colonial policy was the notion of 'civilizing' the Congolese masses. The 'civilizing mission', as it became known, was based on the assumption that European society was incomparably superior to African culture and practice, and in terms of this reasoning, '... European super-ordination and African subordination were institutionalized in all domains of Congolese life...' (De Craemer 1977:16). Due to the notion of institutionalized European superiority, brain-washed agents of the colonial era considered it to be their principled and most pertinent obligation to dispense to the Congolese masses the superior culture and moral values of the Western world (De Craemer 1977:16).

Tempels had thus arrived in the Congo, indoctrinated with colonialist viewpoints and opinions, and he performed his duties with this attitude. He became aware, however, that the conversion of Africans to Christianity was superficial, and his attempts thus a failure. During times of difficulty or burden, the African converts inevitably returned to their tried and trusted cultural patterns (De Craemer 1977:18). This is no better expressed than in *Bantu philosophy*: '...among our Bantu we see the évolués, the 'civilized', even the Christians, return to their former ways of behaviour whenever they are overtaken by moral lassitude, danger or suffering' (Tempels 1959:17-18). Tempels' discouragement at

the failure of his missionary programme can perhaps be ascribed to the appearance of a subconscious realization of the prejudice of superior colonialist ideas relating to the culture of the African peoples.

Tempels' perception of the superficiality of the conversion of the Africans can be said to have initiated his second stage of development. Tempels' 'adaptation phase' became notably influenced by 'adaptive' opinions present in Belgian colonial circles by the 1940s (De Craemer 1977:18). Individuals in the legal profession were among the main proponents of the 'adaption' theory, it being recognized by them '... that traditional Congolese law, like European law, could not be understood without reference to "certain general notions about [Congolese] political and social organisation and ontology"' (De Craemer 1977:19).

Being thus influenced by the notions of the 'adaptive' thinking of the time, and by his own perception of his missionary venture as a failure, Tempels began focusing on the African people, socially and anthropologically.<sup>3</sup> By 1943, Tempels was explicitly gathering information from the BaLuba people concerning their culture, beliefs, and customs (De Craemer 1977:21). By being socially involved with the BaLuba people, and being prepared to become educated in the culture and traditions of the group, Tempels realized that the genuine conversion of the African population demanded a method of incorporating the acceptance of the communion and humanity of the converts and the priest. Tempels perceived the desire of the converts to understand the priest, just as the priest, in Tempels' particular context, had become interested in having compassion with the converts (De Craemer 1977:23).

The significance of Tempels' 'adaption phase' lies in the fact that he was able to transcend the popular colonialist attitudes of the time. De Craemer tells us that Tempels:

...was willing and able to go so far in his relations with the Congolese as to reverse completely one of the primordial assumptions on which any form of colonialism or evangelism is based. This is the idea that one comes as a teacher and benefactor to a people who have not as yet either heard or absorbed the 'superior message' one brings (De Craemer 1977:24).

It was during this second phase that Tempels wrote *La philosophie Bantoue*. It first consisted of a series of articles written for *Band*,<sup>4</sup> and after modification, was published in book form.

Essentially, *Bantu philosophy* can be seen as the structured portrayal of Tempels' comprehension of the indigenous Congolese, attained through his intimate relationship with them. The treatise was greeted with hostility by the Catholic hierarchy in the Belgian Congo, it being such that the ideas contained in the work were contrary to the hierarchy's notion of the African. Tempels' publication outraged, in particular, the Catholic Bishop of Elizabethville. De Craemer outlines well the perspective of Jean Felix de Hemptinne, the Bishop of Elizabethville, concerning the position of the indigenous population of the Congo:

The Blacks had no writing, therefore they had no thought of civilization. One of his [de Hemptinne's] highest goals was to contribute to the achievement of a Latin, Christian civilization in Africa. He believed adamantly that whatever was

Congolese either had no bearing on what he defined as civilization or was incompatible with it, and thus, ideally, should be superseded by a combined missionary and colonial effort (De Craemer 1977:30).

The Bishop made efforts to have *Bantu philosophy* discontinued by attempting to have it proclaimed heretical by the Vatican. He failed in this. However, the Bishop succeeded in preventing Tempels from returning to the Congo after his leave of absence in 1946 (De Craemer 1977:27–30).

Tempels' 1946 leave of absence in Belgium took on the aspect of a temporary exile... [I]t was never described as such and was ambiguously imposed on him by his Franciscan superiors in Belgium, who for undisclosed reasons continually detained him from returning to the Congo mission (De Craemer 1977:31).

Tempels' absence from the Congo, however, was not without its own significance. Tempels' fortunate meeting with 'sister X' became pivotal in his life, being both personal and mystical in nature, and as a consequence, introduced the third phase of his life. De Craemer describes Tempels' relationship with 'sister X', and the development of new perceptions within the psyche of the priest, as the spring of Jamaa (De Craemer 1977:33). Tempels' rendezvous with 'sister X' brought about his realization that:

...man is created for the other, that man came only to self-realisation, to really being man, in encounter with the other. Man, in order to be really man, has to change, has to take the other into himself, and has to give himself to the other. Only then does man become truly man (De Craemer 1977:34).

In 1949 Tempels was given permission to return to the Congo. At first, he was delegated to various trivial assignments, in several locations, ultimately being allowed to settle at Ruwe in the Katanga province. De Craemer contends that:

[i]t was during this period in his missionary career that Tempels achieved what he considered to be a true encounter with [the] Congolese... [I]t was the culmination of all that he had learned and experienced from the first two phases of his life as a missionary, and from his meeting...with Sister X... [I]n his dialogue with [the] Congolese, he not only listened to their deepest thoughts and aspirations, and gave of himself to them in the same way...he also discovered with them a 'common truth' and a 'common being'... (De Craemer 1977:36).

Through this experience of a unique sense of 'unity', the Jamaa movement emerged (De Craemer 1977:37).

In commencing my discussion on Tempels' context and experiential history, I considered it possible that Tempels' relationship and contact with the traditional Congolese people rendered within him a greater understanding of himself, as person, and a heightened cognizance of his own religious position and meaning of the true Christian mission. In relating to the 'civilizing' mission of the Congolese through Christianization, Tempels identified the arrogance of colonialist missionaries in their ideologically laden

programme. Being a true Christian, Tempels realized that the form of Christianity he wished to impart held within it no hidden agenda, and was based on the mutual love and respect of himself and the Congolese population with whom he worked. Tempels' words are pertinent: 'I was supremely surprised to note that Christianity—the Christianity that I wished to teach—had just been born from this encounter' (quoted in De Craemer 1977:36).

Appiah (1992:137) claims: 'Contemporary philosophical discourse in the West is, like all discourse, the product of a history; and it is that history that explains why its many styles and problems hang together.' I intend to demonstrate that African philosophy, and ethnophilosophy as an aspect within this discourse, can only be appreciated if the historical circumstances surrounding these are discerned. If this should apply to philosophy, being a human activity, then what of the human beings participating in the discourse? Should their relevant historical context not also be given comprehension in the consideration of their specific and particular positions within an individual dialogue?

In reflecting on ethnophilosophy as a trend within the African philosophical discourse, the first name that pops to mind is that of Placide Tempels. Tempels' contribution to the trend is regarded by some African philosophers with reproach simply for the reason of Tempels' assumed support for the colonialists in their venture. As such, those philosophers of Africa who regard Tempels' contribution with reservation, certainly deem the historical circumstances surrounding him as pertinent. However, the historical context of the African philosophers themselves, necessarily dictates their specific interpretation of Tempels. The following quote from *Bantu philosophy* proves indispensable to the African philosopher's claim of Tempels' racism:

We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognise themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying 'you understand us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way we "know"' (Tempels 1959:36).

In considering this quote with adequate contextualization, and Tempels' suspected crime in abetting the colonialists, it somehow proves imperative that the philosophers in Africa, in order to assert their own autonomy in thought and philosophy, should stand against Tempels' words.

While attempting to be rigorous in inquiry, Tempels' role in the colonialist history of the Belgian Congo cannot be denied. However, what the African philosophers seemingly misinterpret are Tempels' aims and goals in the completion of *Bantu philosophy*.

In considering the picture painted by some African philosophers of Placide Tempels as an aide to the colonial conquest, the task of proving Tempels' innocence is not an easy one. Having considered the general history of the Congo, and the personal context of Placide Tempels, my conception of Tempels is that he himself was simply victim to the attitudes and processes of colonialism on the Africa continent.

During his initial period in the Katanga Province, Tempels attempted to conform to the controlling and dominant notion of the African as an inferior being, requiring guidance

by the more civilized European in order to gain a more correct aspect of humanness. Through his failure, Tempels recognized the inaccurate picture of the African, a more sympathetic stance consequently maturing in Tempels' mind. Indeed, the general image portrayed by De Craemer of Tempels is one of a sensitive and empathetic nature. It is thus that Tempels had no interest in the maintenance of the colonial regime further than his calling to bring the Word of God to the indigenous people of Africa.

Despite the fact that Tempels found himself caught between the tensions of the Catholic and Protestant missions and the Colonial Administration, he can be cited, in many respects, as being 'above' the accepted colonialist policies and missionary methods. In general, the missionary workers on the African continent brought the Gospel to the indigenous inhabitants cloaked by a Western perspective and prejudice (Van der Walt 1994:13). Tempels recognized the failure of his missionary approach lying in this very fact, realizing that in order to bring forth true conversion, there would have to be a complete reversal of the attitudes upheld by missionary workers, while a keen perception of the African world-view as being relevant and interesting would have to be developed. It was at this stage in Tempels' personal development that *Bantu philosophy* was written; not as an aide to colonialist policy makers, but as an attempt to highlight the notion of Bantu culture as having points of relevance which could assist in the conversion process. In this, Tempels was opposing the accepted policy of the Colonial Administration of the Congo, which accepted the African individual as being an empty vessel, requiring education in the spheres of religion and civilization in order to be rendered truly human.

Tempels' position becomes more evident when considered against the background painted by Van der Walt of the general pattern adopted by missionary workers. On arriving in the appointed village, the missionary worker inevitably builds a homestead. The home would in most cases, be constructed outside, and some distance from the village. The local dialect would be learnt, while the missionary would recruit a few 'disciples' for assistance in building the structures of a church and a school. In few instances, the missionaries become involved in health care, agriculture, and the provision of the basic amenities of water and roads (Van der Walt 1994:14–15). The prevailing perception Van der Walt holds relating to the missionary's obligation to the indigenous inhabitants is that '...the traditional people were pulled out of their traditional village milieu and culture. The missionary did not enter the African context, but he invited them out of their context to the Western one' (Van der Walt 1994:15).

Tempels' involvement with the indigenous population of the Congo stands in direct contrast to the manipulative situation described by Van der Walt of missions working on the African continent. Tempels not only resided with the traditional people in their villages, but was as fluent in the dialect as most indigenous BaLuba people were themselves. Of even greater consequence is the fact that Tempels related to his converts from within their cultural circumstances, and functioned in not rendering a cleavage between the people and the foundations which rendered them with their ultimate meaning.

This fact is clearly evident in Tempels' involvement in the Jamaa movement. Through this, the African 'convert' was not ripped from the frame of reference that renders his or her world meaningful. As a relationship between Catholicism and Bantu religious traits, the Jamaa sought to augment the world-view of Africans, rather than subtract the very

concepts that have rendered, throughout time, the existence of the African meaningful. Through the creative fusion of tradition and Western religion, Tempels achieved his goal of conversion. Indeed, through Tempels' very subjective, personal, and intimate involvement with the BaLuba people, he became changed, his religious experience being touched and amplified by the common ground of humanity shared by him and the BaLuba with whom he lived. Thus, in considering the total context surrounding Placide Tempels, a vastly different perspective can be recognized of the personality of the man who was called to write *Bantu philosophy*. An aide to the colonialist mission on the African continent, Placide Tempels was not.

### THE CONTEXT IN WHICH *BANTU PHILOSOPHY* WAS WRITTEN

In many respects, ethnophilosophy is regarded as being synonymous with Placide Tempels and his work, *Bantu philosophy*. The convictions in *Bantu philosophy* grew out of Tempels' missionistic distress. Tempels was of the opinion that the missionary and colonial undertakings were a dismal failure. The cause of this failure could be recognized in the fact that the basic premises governing the Bantu world-view and existence had not been taken into account in the conversion process, and for this reason, the missionaries had not been able to provide the Bantu with anything that could be assimilated in any proper manner (Tempels 1959:28).

As fundamental to his approach, Tempels identified the evolutionary development that is said to take place in all societies. In terms of this mechanism, societies, in their processes of growth and maturation, grasp principles that could ideally serve as mandates within a social system. The utility of these principles, having been realized, they become harmonized within a system, which can fundamentally be defined as '...a corpus of logically coordinated intellectual concepts...' (Tempels 1959:19).

In relating his fundamental notions on the evolutionary development of societies to the Bantu people, Tempels identified that '...all the customs...depend upon a single principle, knowledge of the Inmost Nature of beings, that is to say, upon their Ontological Principle' (Tempels 1959:33). Tempels concluded that most facets found in Bantu society exist intimately in relation to the system of principles, or philosophy, that is held by the group (Tempels 1959:35).

*Bantu philosophy* attempts to disclose the system of thought underlying traditional, indigenous African existence, and thus establish an accurate understanding of the African (Tempels 1959:21). This basic comprehension of the African world-view was deemed as being absolutely necessary for missionaries, and others, working with indigenous Africans (Tempels 1959:23–24). Therefore, the main directive and purpose of *Bantu philosophy* is, quite simply, '.. to understand *Bantu philosophy* attempts to disclose the system of thought underlying traditional, indigenous African existence philosophy, to know what their beliefs are and what is their rational interpretation of the nature of visible and invisible things' (Tempels 1959:35. Tempels' emphasis). By gaining an intimate and thorough 'understanding' of the Bantu people and their lived philosophy, Tempels suggested that Christian tenets, and Bantu ideas and beliefs become intertwined in the conversion process in order to render the transformation more effective.

The ideas contained in the above passage demonstrate well the necessity of



appreciating Tempels' work within the context of both his personal history and the colonial circumstance in which he was working. Without adequate contextualization, the above can well be interpreted as Tempels' contribution to the colonial conquest and subjugation of the African people. However, in considering the character of Tempels' supposed support for the colonial situation another picture inevitably comes to the fore. Bluntly, and quite unpretentiously stated, *Bantu philosophy* was, in actual fact, a critique of the colonial and missionary policy of the Belgian Congo.

The Colonial Administration of the Congo and the Catholic Church were of the opinion that no relevant principles nor ideas were contained in African culture. In fact, African culture was distinguished as being vastly inferior to European categories, and thus having no relevance, whatsoever, in the 'modern' world. (Of course, these notions supported conveniently the economic rape of the Congo, and indeed the entirety of the African continent.) Europeans considered the only humane procedure that could be taken with such 'barbaric' people was their enlightenment, through bringing to them the advantages of Christianity, and through Christianization, civilization. It was thus that the Church and the Colonial Administration recognized only a total transformation as relevant in the situation of the African.

Tempels' opposition to the ideas of the Church and the Administration of the Congo can be found in his declaration, through *Bantu philosophy*, of the existence of a profound culture and social system among the African people. Through asserting the existence of relevant and significant cultural principles, even a 'philosophy', Tempels was regarded by the Church and the Belgian State as being heretical. If Tempels' notions were correct, this fact would severely undermine the position of Belgium in the Congo (indeed, of all the European colonial powers), and in threatening the legitimacy of the colonial conquest, Tempels would, so they thought, be jeopardizing the missionary activities in the Congo.

*Bantu philosophy* can be seen as being thematically divided into two parts. The first theme embraces Tempels' motivation and justification for completing the work, as tersely explicated above. The second component is found in the explicit exposition of the philosophy of the Bantu people as experienced by Tempels through his intimate relationship with them. Having considered Tempels' impetus for completing *Bantu philosophy*, we now have to give attention to this rendition of Bantu philosophy.

### BANTU PHILOSOPHY À LA TEMPELS

The most fundamental and basic concept in Bantu thought is, according to Tempels, the 'vital force'. God is perceived as the one '...who possesses Force in himself. He is...the source of Force of every creature' (Tempels 1959:46). As a consequence of God's creative Force, everything on earth, that is, human, animal, vegetable, and mineral, have been endowed, essentially, with a vital force. Vital force is seen as comprising both positive and negative poles: each and every vital force has strength, and consequently, has the capacity of being rendered potent or impotent (Tempels 1959:56). Non-human forces have been designated by God as existing for the sole purpose of use by human beings in order to strengthen human vital force (Tempels 1959:46).

The notions of 'force' and 'being' are recognized as being intimately and essentially linked. Tempels contends that the '...Bantu speak, act, and live as if, for them, beings

were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: *Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force*' (Tempels 1959:51. Tempels' emphasis).

Forces are necessarily differentiated, the individual attributes of forces being clearly distinguished. The forces of humans and of objects are thus set apart. 'Muntu', in the human sense, signifies '...vital force, endowed with intelligence and will...', while 'bintu', in the sense of objects or things, are '...forces not endowed with reason, not living' (Tempels 1959:55). There exists, moreover, a contrast between the contingent or physical aspects of the being, and the actual 'force', that is, the innate nature of the force (Tempels 1959:54).

All forces are integrally connected, sharing an intrinsic relationship; thus the existence of the interaction between forces (Tempels 1959:58). Therefore, it is inevitable that '[n]othing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement' (Tempels 1959:60).

A hierarchical ordering of the forces exists. Forces are situated within the hierarchy according to the strength of their vitality (Tempels 1959:61). The hierarchical structuring of the universe is founded by God, who exists at the top due to the strength of his Force, followed by the archpatriarchs of the tribe, the founding members of the various clans, the dead of the tribe according to their eminence, and the living, who are also arranged according to a hierarchy. Beneath the human vital forces exist the forces of animals, vegetables, and minerals, each of which is classified according to its own hierarchical vital force (Okere 1983:2). The association of forces and the execution of vital influence operate according to set laws, and Tempels thus finds that the:

...Bantu universe is not a chaotic tangle of unordered forces blindly struggling with one another.... There are possible and necessary actions, other influences are metaphysically impossible by reason of the nature of the forces in question. The possible causal factors in life can be formulated in certain metaphysical, universal, immutable and stable laws (Tempels 1959:67).

Having established the basis of Bantu thought as being the concept of the vital force of all beings and objects, Tempels relates the functioning of this ontology to specific categories in Bantu existence, these being the areas of knowledge, ethics, and psychology. By doing such, Tempels recognizes the absolute immanence of the notion of vital force in all aspects of Bantu existence.

Wisdom or knowledge, as interpreted by the Bantu paradigm, is seen by Tempels as consisting in the '...Bantu's discernment of the nature of beings, of forces: true wisdom lies in ontological knowledge' (Tempels 1959:71). It is thus that Bantu knowledge is seen as being indisputably metaphysical in nature, as it relates to an intelligence of the forces, of the hierarchical ordering of the forces, their accord, and their association (Tempels 1959:73).

Knowledge, furthermore, conforms to the principle of hierarchy. God is recognized as being ultimate in his knowledge, because he '... knows all forces, their ordering, their dependence, their potential and their mutual interactions' (Tempels 1959:71). In the human realm, the elders in a community assume a hierarchical position superior to that of

the youth, for it is such that their greater age, experience and vital force bestow an eminent understanding of the nature of things (Tempels 1959:73).

The notion of vital force is closely related to the knowledge of human position and destiny in the universe.

The Bantu sees in man *the* living force; the force *or* the being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals and minerals. These lower beings exist by divine decree, only for the assistance of the higher created being, man (Tempels 1959:97).

Bantu conceptions of human psychology are indispensably linked to the central notion of the interconnections of vital force in the universe. The human being is recognized as not existing as an isolated unit, for human vital force would not survive as a specific and secluded entity, because no strengthening of vitality would then be able to occur. The human being is essentially recognized as being an integral part of a community in which reactions and interactions take place (Tempels 1959:103).

The fact of an explicit philosophy of good and evil, as manifest in Bantu society, was identified by Tempels in his relations with the BaLuba people. In terms of their ethical capacities, the Bantu were recognized in turning to their lived system of philosophy, and toward their knowledge of God, in order to extract their principles on good and evil (Tempels 1959:116). Tempels was thus brought to the comprehension that 'Bantu moral standards depend essentially on things ontologically understood' (Tempels 1959:121).

The philosophy of vital force is both significant and pivotal in Bantu ethical conceptions. The Bantu fundamentally reproach any actions that discount the strengthening of individual and communal vital force. The conduct condemned includes fraud, theft, dishonesty, adultery, and fornication, for these actions are said to exert destructive influences within the community, and influence negatively the vital force of each individual within the social group (Tempels 1959:118). It is such, therefore, that:

[e]very act, every detail of behaviour, every attitude and every human custom which militates against vital force or against the increase of the hierarchy of the 'muntu' is bad. The destruction of life is a conspiracy against the Divine Plan; and the 'muntu' knows that such destruction is...ontological sacrilege: that it is for that reason immoral and therefore unjust (Tempels 1959:121).

It is thus that Tempels found among the Bantu people a well-developed philosophy. This philosophy was perhaps one not impregnate with Western academic principles, but was found by Tempels to be holistic, pervasive, and influential in each and every aspect of Bantu existence, be it ethics or psychology. This understanding was gained through his residence with the BaLuba and through his intimate relationship with the Bantu people. The philosophy of the vital force of the Bantu was seen by Tempels as being the obstacle to the significant conversion of the Bantu, for it was such that the Bantu were hesitant to relinquish the assurance of this known and understood philosophical system (Tempels 1959:47). However, Tempels was not akin to the destruction of the ancient and trusted system, and in recognizing the inevitability of the Westernization of the Bantu,

considered it pertinent that the philosophy of the Bantu and the ideas of the Christian pervade and infiltrate each other in order to bring about the fertilization of both systems. Through his understanding of the general precepts of Bantu thought, it was Tempels' suggestion that:

[o]ur system of education, our civilising power, should learn to adapt themselves to this idea of vital force and fullness of life. So that it can at once burst into flower and purify itself, we must devote ourselves to the service of the life that is already theirs. The view of the world, the ideal for life, the moral system that we wish to teach them, should be linked up with this supreme final cause, this absolute norm, this fundamental concept: vital force (Tempels 1959:179).

### **BANTU PHILOSOPHY AND THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHERS**

The African philosophical community generally sees Placide Tempels as the founder of ethnophilosophy, while simultaneously being the hero and the miscreant of the debate. In the completion of *Bantu philosophy*, Tempels was not without his aims, but I doubt whether his intention was to spark a heated debate on the existence of African philosophy as a discourse. As hero, Tempels is seen as the Westerner who stepped out to affirm the notion of Africans having a philosophy. As miscreant, Tempels is invariably quoted:

We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, 'You understand us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way that we "know"' (Tempels 1959:36).

No matter what side the philosopher or the reader wishes to stand on, it should, and must be acknowledged that context was not without influence in the life and writing of Tempels. Tempels' existence was not without personal growth and development, and this very fact can be understood as being manifest in the conception of *Bantu philosophy*. Mudimbe's words sum this thought up appropriately: '*Bantu philosophy* could be considered a testimony to a revelation and as a sign of change in the life of Tempels...' (Mudimbe 1988:137).

In the very biased and narrow concept of the context of Tempels' life held by some contemporary African philosophers, one can recognize, in the critique of Tempels, the same contradictory formulation of victim and response as is held within the general notion of ethnophilosophy. As a victim, ethnophilosophy is seen as a contribution to the colonial tyranny and subjugation of Africa, for it is assumed to express the pre-logicality and primitiveness of Africans and their thought. As a response, ethnophilosophy is discerned as an attempt to overcome the degenerate sense in which African societies were regarded during the colonial era, by bringing forward the positive and cultural aspects of communities on the African continent. Tempels, as victim, is seen, through his propensity

of Catholic Belgian missionary, and author of *Bantu philosophy*, as *the aide, the assistant* to the colonial mission of the persecution of Africa by Europe. Tempels, as response, is seen, through the empathy and devotion to the BaLuba people, and his intimate involvement in the Jamaa movement, as *the reactionist, the one who stands out against* debased colonial ideas, through his writing of *Bantu philosophy*.

This very contradiction in attitudes found in contemporary African philosophy toward ethnophilosophy is thus transparent in the critique levelled by the participants in the discourse about Tempels and his work. In considering this, one indeed gains the uncomfortable sensation that the ideas and critique concerning ethnophilosophy in general, are in the same vein as those directed at Tempels. This can be nothing but dangerous. Tempels is implicitly held as synonymous with the concept and idea of ethnophilosophy. The idea of ethnophilosophy is consequently, due to the notions of Tempels and his assumed diabolic colonialist connections, regarded as being too degenerate to be regarded as a meaningful contribution to the discourse of African philosophy. Implicated in Tempels' perceived crime are all those who wish to contribute to the growth of the trend of ethnophilosophy. With this danger in mind, it would prove instructive to consider the critique of a few African philosophers of Tempels and of *Bantu philosophy*.

Hountondji can well be described as the predominant opponent of the ethnophilosophical trend, his publication, *African philosophy: Myth and reality* (1983), presenting itself as an extended critique of the ideas of ethnophilosophy, and specifically of Tempels. Presenting Hountondji's abundant arguments against Tempels is difficult without their context in *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. However, the main thrust of Hountondji's critique can be found in the following extract:

It is clear that it [*Bantu philosophy*] is not addressed to Africans but to Europeans, and particularly to two categories of Europeans: colonials and missionaries... Africans are, as usual, excluded from the discussion, and Bantu philosophy is a mere pretext for learned disquisitions among Europeans. The black man continues to be the very opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse (Hountondji 1983:34).

In this Hountondji identifies *Bantu philosophy* as a treatise merely addressed to the colonizers of the African continent through the publication's supposed debased aim of assisting the colonizers in bringing civilization to the barbarian, and through this indoctrination, to maintain the eternal servitude of the African for the benefit of the European. Through these actions, the convenience of maintaining the African as an exotic object, and not as a pertinent subject in his or her own discourse, serves to preserve the European in his or her superior and imperial disposition.

Is this harsh critique of Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* justified? I claim it not to be. Firstly, in considering the context of Tempels' life, his aim was not to assist the colonizer in the mission of subjugating the African. Tempels can be said to have recognized the injustice in the actions of the colonial regime. Hountondji claims the African, through *Bantu philosophy*, to be the object of definition, rather than a valued subject in a

discourse. The truth of Hountondji's claims are dubious, for *Bantu philosophy*, although being an attempt at understanding the African, was created and formed through Tempels' *active participation and discourse with the BaLuba people with whom he lived*. It is such that the individuals with whom Tempels formed a relationship and with whom he became integrated on a human level, participated, although anonymously and implicitly, in the writing of *Bantu philosophy*. Tempels himself advises that:

...we must ask the Bantu themselves the questions, 'How can these souls, or this force, *be able*, as you say, to act upon beings? How does this interaction with beings *take place*? How can the *bwanga* (magical medicine, amulet, talisman) heal a man, as you say it does? How can the *mfwisti*, the *muloji*, the caster of spells, kill you, even at a distance? How can a dead man be reborn? What do you understand by this rebirth? How can the initiation ceremony turn a simple human being into a *munganga*, a magical healer, or, as we make him to appear later on, a master of forces? Who initiates, the man or the spirit? How does the initiate acquire 'knowledge' and 'power'? Why does a malediction have a destructive effect? How is it acquired? Why is it that our catechumens on the eve of baptism come to us and say: 'No doubt our magical cures are potent, but we wish to forswear recourse to them?' (Tempels 1959:32–33, Tempels' emphasis).

Hountondji's remarks, should, however not be dismissed as simply constituting prejudiced and biased critique of Placide Tempels and *Bantu philosophy*. Hountondji's concerns are most relevant to the entire discourse of African philosophy and demonstrate, pertinently and clearly, the necessity of a specific and explicit philosophy of Africa. Despite the fact that Hountondji misinterprets the aims and character of Placide Tempels, he appreciates well the debased notions of the colonizers concerning the African individual as object and not subject. In this, Hountondji supports the African as rising from the label of the 'voiceless face' without civilization, in order to demonstrate the very voracity of the African continent, and the cultivation and sophistication of Africa in contrast to the barren notions evident in European enterprise.

Césaire is unconvinced of the innocence of *Bantu philosophy* and Tempels' endeavours in the Congo, it being his contention that *Bantu philosophy* was directed at creating a diversion. He declares that the work:

...diverts attention from the fundamental political problems of the Bantu peoples by fixing it on the level of fantasy, remote from the burning reality of colonial exploitation. The respect shown for the 'philosophy' and the spiritual values of the Bantu peoples, which Tempels turns into a universal remedy for all the ills of the then Belgian Congo, is astonishingly abstract...compared with the concrete historical situation of that country (quoted in Hountondji 1983:37).

Césaire may well be correct that *Bantu philosophy* merely lies in the area of fantasy, being abstract and not of worth to the practical and tangible situation in the Congo of that time. However, in his conception of *Bantu philosophy* as diversion, Césaire ignores Tempels' deeply religious motivation for the completion of the volume.

It is such that Tempels had recognized the fact of the ineffectiveness of the conversion of the Bantu people, and was thus proposing a method through which true conversion could take place. At this juncture, without entering into trite debate on the ethical and moral standing of the missionary worker in altering African conceptions of religion, it can be asked whether Tempels' aims were necessarily party to imperialist domination. It is my contention that Tempels' concerns were more with his own success as missionary, and not related to the notions of European imperialist domination. It is significant to note, in this respect, Tempels' banishment from the Congo by the Colonial Administration and the Catholic Church due to their notions of Tempels as posing a threat to their policies and practices. In considering, in all fairness, the context of Tempels' very personal and intimate religious experience of Christianity, his aim was simply to bring to the African his excitement for the Word of God, and did not have through this action as goal the domination of the African mind.

The issues prevalent in the notion of Tempels (and ethnophilosophy) as victim and response are manifest in Mudimbe's questioning of the impact of *Bantu philosophy* without the use of the concept of 'philosophy' in the title. 'Had Tempels chosen for his essay a title without the term "philosophy" in it, and had he simply organised his ethnographic data on Luba and commented upon them, his work would perhaps have been less provocative' (Mudimbe 1988:141). Tempels, in his specific use of the abstraction 'philosophy' presented to the colonial powers a dilemma, for if the African was recognized as having 'philosophy', the African could, by implication, be said to have civilization. This notion presented a threat to the superiority of the European, as justified by enlightenment philosophy, as well as to the economics of the colonial mission. In his presentation and interpretation of an African system of philosophy, Tempels, as a Westerner, revolted the African in his suggestion that 'only now', through the expertise of the European, could an African philosophy be made explicit. The African had well been aware, prior to the meddling actions of the European, of the existence of a philosophy. However, in not sharing the European need for an explicit philosophy in order to prove superiority in civilization and cultivation, the African execution of philosophy had rather proceeded in an implicit and sub-conscious fashion.

I have not summed up all that has been said and done on Tempels and *Bantu philosophy*. That will be an immense task. The reader may, furthermore, regard me as somewhat one-sided in regarding only the negative critique of Tempels and his work. In my concentration on the negative, I have attempted to highlight issues and attitudes prevalent in the discourse of African philosophy, both in terms of Tempels' participation as a missionary (which is not without its influence in the negative attitude of African philosophers toward Tempels), but also in terms of his publication of *Bantu philosophy*. In their relationship to Tempels, I give warning to philosophers in Africa to consider the individual, as well as the context in which they are situated. Without adequate and proper contextualization, Tempels is sadly misunderstood.

Furthermore, the past is what it is, and certainly not without its own interest. However, it must be asked of those regarding Tempels and ethnophilosophy as debased due to the conceived service of these in the subjugation of Africa, whether their conceptions are of value to the growth and development of the discourse and discipline of African philosophy. Is it not somehow conceivable that the utility of Tempels and

ethnophilosophy, as a culture philosophy, be recognized within the developing discourse? In the words of Irele:

The importance of Tempels' work in the intellectual history of Africa is difficult to overestimate. It is true that his *Bantu philosophy* remains within the stream of European discourse upon the non-Western world.... Moreover, it was conceived as part of a strategy for the spiritual conquest of Africa. But the concessions, which Tempels had to make, were on such a scale as to imply the total recognition of the African mind in its own individuality. Hence Tempels' work registers, despite the paternalistic tone of its expression, a decisive break with the ethnocentric emphasis of classical anthropology (in Hountondji 1983:17).

### THE STATUS OF ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

The following question can now be asked with reference to Oruka's classification: Can Oruka justifiably condemn ethnophilosophy to the degenerated state he implicitly assumes for the trend in his classification? The depreciated value of ethnophilosophy is the result of the trend's relationship to Tempels. Now, if one were to set apart Tempels and ethnophilosophy, what meaning, connotation, would the trend assume then? It would be none other than the semi-anthropological explication of the world-views of traditional African people. But this seemingly 'reduced' connotation does not have to detract from the potentially positive contribution that the project of ethnophilosophy can assume for itself. The influence of Tempels in the debate in African philosophy can certainly not be undermined, for the heated controversy which this modest priest has sparked has been influential in the lives and intellectual development of, most certainly, many philosophers of the African continent. But is it not time for the African philosophers to start 'disequating' the trend of ethnophilosophy from the person of Tempels? The intellectual benefit of this would be immense: Tempels, by virtue of his ambiguous stature as white Catholic missionary invariably lends to the ethnophilosophical context a negative connotation, while the work undertaken in this trend by various reputable philosophers is not, in all instances, worthy of the contempt in which it is held as constitutive of ethnophilosophy. The products of the semi-anthropological philosophers in the context of ethnophilosophy can present to the discourse of African philosophy both interesting and useful material on which to draw for analyses of the traditional and cultural manifestations of African existence. Much of Africa maintains, still, its traditional basis, and thus the contribution of ethnophilosophy, by means of the donation of 'raw' information and detail on traditional consciousness cannot be ignored. The potential in ethnophilosophy lies in the area of culture philosophy. In African philosophy it is precisely its cultural definition that proves the uniqueness of the discourse within the history of philosophy in the world. The fact that African philosophy cannot afford to ignore the cultural identity of the African has been recognized by various African philosophers, the most notable being Peter Bodunrin who (1991:77) states: 'The African philosopher cannot *deliberately* ignore the study of the traditional belief system of his people. Philosophical problems arise out of real life situations.' The assumption of ethnophilosophy as a lower station on the ladder of progress in African philosophy, is to



abandon the potential contribution that this trend lends to the entire discourse.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Serequeberhan in his article 'African philosophy: The point in question' (1991b), adopts Oruka's classification of the trends, as does Peter Bodunrin in 'The question of African philosophy' (1991); Keita in 'Contemporary African philosophy: The search for a method' (1991) quotes albeit briefly, Oruka's classification. Kaphagawani is too a proponent of Oruka's classification in 'Bantu nomenclature and African philosophy' (1991). I shall not continue to list those who accept Oruka's classification (seemingly) uncritically, as I believe the reader has sufficient justification for my statement.
- 2 This serves only as an outline of the Jamaa, and if further detail is required on the Jamaa movement consult De Craemer's work of 1977.
- 3 In using the word 'anthropological' in this context, I simply wish to state that Tempels regarded the culture and society of the BaLuba as being significant and interesting for his own inquiry. Tempels, as far as I am aware, never participated in formal anthropological study, either on a tertiary level, or with the BaLuba people.
- 4 *Band* was a Flemish language journal, published in Leopoldville.

### Francophone African philosophy

#### F.ABIOLA IRELE

The imaginative and intellectual writings that have come out of French-speaking Africa have tended to be associated exclusively with the Négritude movement and its global postulation of a black racial identity founded upon an original African essence. Beyond its polemical stance with regard to colonialism, the movement generated a theoretical discourse which served both as a means of self-validation for the African in particular and the black race in general. This discourse developed further as the elaboration of a new world-view derived from the African cultural inheritance of a new humanism that lays claim to universal significance.

Despite its prominence in the intellectual history of francophone Africa and in the black world generally, Négritude does not account for the full range of intellectual activity among the French-speaking African intelligentsia. The terms of its formulation have been challenged since its inception, leading to ongoing controversy. This challenge concerns the validity of the concept itself and its functional significance in contemporary African thought and collective life. It has involved a debate regarding the essential nature of the African, as well as the possibility of constructing a rigorous and coherent structure of ideas (with an indisputable philosophical status) derived from the belief systems and normative concepts implicit in the institutions and cultural practices subsisting from Africa's pre-colonial past.

The post-colonial situation has enlarged the terms of this debate in French-speaking Africa. It has come to cover a more diverse range of issues touching upon the African

experience of modernity. As an extension of the 'indigenist' theme which is its point of departure, the cultural and philosophical arguments initiated by the adherents of Négritude encompass a critical reappraisal of the Western tradition of philosophy and its historical consequences, as well as a consideration of its transforming potential in the African context. Beyond the essentialism implied by the concept of Négritude and related theories of Africanism, the problem at the centre of French-African intellectual preoccupations relates to the modalities of African existence in the modern world.

From this perspective, the movement of ideas of the French-speaking African intelligentsia demonstrates the plurality of African discourse, as shaped by a continuing crisis of African consciousness provoked by the momentous process of transition to modernity. A convergence can be discerned between the themes and styles of philosophical discourse and inquiry in francophone Africa and some of the significant currents of twentieth-century European philosophy and social thought engaged with the fundamental human issues raised by the impact of modern technological civilization.

Two dominant perspectives frame the evolution of contemporary thought and philosophical discourse in French-speaking Africa: the first is related to the question of identity and involves the reclamation of a cultural and spiritual heritage considered to be imperilled; the second relates to what has been called 'the dilemma of modernity' experienced as a problematic dimension of contemporary African life and consciousness.

### THE FRENCH COLONIAL CONTEXT

The development of philosophical discourse as a distinct current of intellectual activity in francophone Africa has run parallel to that of an innovative imaginative expression. Such development is bound up with the ideological project of an assertive cultural nationalism. The movement of thought that informs the process of self-reflection on the part of French-speaking African intellectuals, culminating in the idea of Négritude, derives its impulse from an affective response to the colonial situation. It reflects an effort to grapple with the multiple implications of the collective predicament that forms the larger historical context of the colonial experience, namely the violent encounter between Africa and Europe, and its concomitant ideological devaluation of the black race. These factors and the inherent discomforts of the immense process of social and cultural change have been determinants in the origin and evolution of what Robert July (1968) has called 'modern African thought'.

If the general circumstances of the historic conflict between Africa and Europe provide the sentimental hinterland from which the energy of intellectual activity in Africa derives, the specific orientation of contemporary thought in francophone Africa has been further conditioned by the sustained contact of its intellectual elite with the literary and philosophical traditions to which their French education gave them access. It is worthy of note that the cultural tenets of colonial administration in the areas of Africa under French and Belgian rule, and the educational system they inspired, were given coherence as functional elements of what was termed the policy of assimilation. The notion of the civilizing mission of European colonialism central to this policy was premised on the idea of the basic inferiority of African culture, which was in need of the redeeming function of Western civilizing values. Constraints of assimilation account for the

centrality in francophone African literature of the theme of alienation, which was given expression as a sense of dissociation from the moral and psychological security of defining origins. The imaginative exploration of this theme found its parallel in a conceptual engagement on the part of the francophone black (African and Caribbean) intellectual elite with the question of identity. The force of lived experience lent urgency to the thought-provoking question of existence. For the francophone African elite who were 'assimilated' but none the less preoccupied with interpreting and coming to terms with the colonial experience, intellectual activity could only proceed as a meditation upon the self in relation to a singular historicity.

Associated with the cultural malaise of assimilation was the negative image of Africa that was constantly projected by the Western texts on which was based much of the education of the francophone African elite. The ideological thrust of these texts is exemplified by the work of Pierre Loti (1888) and other writers associated with the so-called colonial novel. Their perspective helped to propagate the idea of Africa as a landscape whose inhospitable nature was reflected in the savage disposition of its indigenous populations (Fanouh-Siefer 1968). This literature was the symbolic expression of a European ethnocentrism that had been given philosophical respectability by Hegel, who excluded the African continent from his conception of the world historical process and the unfolding of the universal mind, the foundations of his philosophical system. Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1884) gave systematic form to the hierarchy of the races established as commonplace to European thought in his time, within which African and black races occupied the lowest level. However, it was left to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl to lend the authority of learned discourse to the great divide between the West and the rest of humanity affirmed in de Gobineau's essay. In the series of studies beginning with *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1912) and culminating in *La mentalité primitive* (1922), Lévy-Bruhl undertook to establish the disparity between Western and non-Western cultures at the level of the mental operations by which both were regulated. The term 'pre-logical mentality' which he proposed to describe the quality of mind of non-Western peoples was to have resonance beyond the discipline of anthropology. These and other works of the same tenor composed an articulated Western discourse on Africa, which emerged as the antithesis of Europe in the structure of ideas and images by which the colonial ideology was sustained.

### INTELLECTUAL RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL DISCOURSE

The counterdiscourse that was articulated by the francophone African elite in the 1930s was called into being by the demoralizing effect and egregious nature of this discourse of imperial hegemony. Their response was facilitated by the crisis of European civilization in the early twentieth century after the First World War. The disenchantment with the traditional humanism in Europe reflected in the literature and philosophy of the period provided an appropriate context for the note of dissidence voiced in the ideological writings of the colonized francophone black intellectual (Kesteloot 1965). Marxism and Surrealism were primary influences, but more pertinent were the formative roles played by French thinkers in the interwar years, which added a particular tone to the expression

of some of the leading figures in francophone African intellectual movements. Of special interest in this respect is the organic nationalism of Maurice Barrès and the anti-intellectualist philosophy of Henri-Louis Bergson (1950), both of whom bequeathed an ambiguous legacy of attitudes and ideas to the cultural nationalism of France's colonial subjects. While the conflation of race and culture provided an anchor in Barrès (1897) for an exclusive vision of the national community, Bergson promoted a special reverence for those non-cognitive modes of experience embodied in forms of artistic expression in reaction against the dominant rationalist tradition. Both laid the foundation for Senghor's later celebration of Négritude as a black racial endowment and provided the language for its formulation.

Paradoxically, the discipline of anthropology, in which a new spirit of cultural relativism had begun to prevail, provided the immediate source of intellectual armoury of the francophone African response to colonial ideology. The efforts of French scholars Robert Delavignette and Maurice Delafosse to explicate African forms of social and cultural expression and to accord them recognition culminated in Marcel Griaule's *Dieux d'eau: Entretien avec Ogotemeli* (1948). The articulation in this work of the elaborate cosmology of the Dogon, as related by the African sage Ogotemeli, revealed an evident symbolic architecture and conceptual organization in an African culture that advanced the case for a revaluation of the continent and its people.

### PLACIDE TEMPELS' BANTU PHILOSOPHY

Placide Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* (1945) was decisive in giving a philosophical orientation to the emerging discourse of cultural nationalism in francophone Africa. Tempels' objective was to reveal the existence of a reflective disposition among the Ba Luba, an ethnic group in the then Belgian Congo. He ascribed to them a collective philosophy distinguished by an ontology summed up in the following quotation:

I believe that we should most faithfully render Bantu thought in the European language by saying that the Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force (1945:35).

The passage makes obvious the derivation of Tempels' work from Bergson: the notion of 'vital force' by which he sought to characterize Bantu thought recalled the French philosopher's *élan vital*. Tempels' reconstruction of mental structure from 'collective representations' dear to Durkheim (1893) and his disciples in the French school of anthropology was an application of Lévy-Bruhl's method, although a reversal of its theoretical import and ideological implications. *Bantu philosophy* provided the model and conceptual framework for the construction of an original African philosophy and has remained a central reference of philosophical debate in Africa.

### NÉGRITUDE

It is against this historical and intellectual background that the concept of Négritude took

form. It was the eminent French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who was the first to give the concept extended philosophical formulation. His essay 'Orphée noir' (Black Orpheus) (1949) was an expansive reflection on the term which had been coined by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire in the context of his poem 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal' (Notebook of a return to my native land) (1939) to denote the advent of a liberated black consciousness. In the essay Sartre offered a definition of Négritude in Heideggerian/ Existentialist terms as 'the-being-in-the-world-of-the-Negro'. Extending this definition by reference to the orthodoxies of Marxism, he situated the racial consciousness designated by Négritude and the project of collective freedom it proclaimed in an historical perspective as a stage in a dialectic destined to be transcended by the advent of a classless and raceless world society.

Senghor's conception of Négritude both enlarges upon Sartre's definition and gives it a new orientation. Rather than a contingent factor of black collective existence and consciousness as with Sartre (for Senghor this aspect corresponds to what he calls 'subjective Négritude'), the concept denotes for Senghor an enduring quality of being constitutive of the black race and exempt from the exigencies of the historical process. The term further signifies a complex of objective factors that shape the African experience, embodied in forms of life on the continent and manifested in the modes of thought and feeling of its people, hence Senghor's definition of Négritude as 'the sum total of African cultural values' (1970). His theory of Négritude takes the form of an exposition of the African's distinctive manner of relating to the world. Appropriating Lévy-Bruhl's notion of 'participation', Senghor accords primacy to emotion as distinctive of an African mode of access to the world. Emotion is accorded special significance by Senghor; it is no longer merely a psychological state, but a mode of apprehension, a 'capturing of integral being—body and consciousness—by the indeterminate world' (1962:15). Senghor's thinking concerns itself with the opposition between both the mystical approach to reality that the developed emotion determines in the African, as well as the pure intellection that is held to be characteristic of the West and historically enshrined in the *cogito* of Descartes. According to Senghor, emotion is governed by intentionality and thus presents itself as a valid mode of cognition.

We have here the epistemological foundation of the African world-view and collective ethos as interpreted by Senghor, who posits in the African a total grasp of reality embracing the continuum from the realm of nature to the supernatural. The informing principle of this *Weltanschauung* and system of social organization emanating from it amounts to a spiritualism that invests all phenomena with a sacred character. Senghor has extended this idea into his theory of African socialism, presented as the social philosophy entailed by the theory of Négritude. Although commanded by practical considerations, African socialism as enunciated by him is a strategy for reconciling the imperatives of modernity—social and economic development in Western terms—with an African ethos. For Senghor (1961) this socialist ideal is governed by the need to infuse the humanizing values of traditional Africa into the new structures of collective life in the modern dispensation. Therefore, African socialism presents itself less as the construction of a concrete social programme than as an axiology.

Senghor's theory of Négritude developed as a function of his poetic vocation. Although in later works (Ndaw 1983) he restated his system of ideas to align it more

closely with the classical epistemology codified by Aristotle, the theory bears a close affinity with the various continental forms of *Lebensphilosophie* that have sprung up as a reaction to the instrumental reason of modern social organization. There is a sense in which Senghor's Négritude may be interpreted as an African version of Bergsonism: a verification in African form of the cultural expression of the idea of intuition as the sign of experience at the most profound level of consciousness.

### ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

Senghor's Négritude represents an effort to provide a comprehensive elucidation of African being. Despite its limitations and disputed status as philosophy, it marks, as D.A.Masolo has observed, 'the legitimate origin of philosophical discussion in Africa' (1994:10). The movement of self-definition it initiated led to the effort in francophone Africa to generate an African philosophy from anthropological literature pertaining to the traditional cultures on the continent. The school of thought spawned by this effort, known as ethnophilosophy, is represented by Alexis Kagamé's *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être* (Bantu-Rwandan philosophy of being) (1956), a work conceived as a verification and reformulation of Tempels' propositions in more rigorous analytical terms. Kagamé appealed to his native Rwandan language to reconstruct the philosophy underlying his people's world-view. From the root stem, 'ntu', signifying essence in general, Kagamé has deduced four fundamental categories of Bantu thought: man, being endowed with intelligence, or *muntu*; being without intelligence, such as animals, plants, minerals, or *kintu*; the spacetime continuum, or *hantu* and modality, or *kuntu*. According to Kagamé these terms function both as markers of implicit thought processes and vehicles of an explicit philosophical discourse demonstrable by reference to Rwandan oral tradition.

Kagamé's exposition is not intended as a reconstruction but as a description, *stricto sensu*, of an authentic system of Bantu thought, which corresponds with Aristotle's system for its translation into a non-African language and frame of reference. For this reason the work raises the question of language in African philosophy and the problem that Benveniste has identified as the relation between 'categories of language and categories of thought' (1966). Kagamé's pioneering effort was followed up by explorations of traditional systems of thought in the work of scholars who form what V.Y.Mudimbe has designated (1986) as Tempels' philosophical school. Composed mainly of central Africans and dominated by clerics, the major preoccupation of this school has been to identify those elements of the African personality compatible with Christian doctrine. Their endeavour has fostered the emergence of a theology that reconciles the West and Africa through a shared spirituality.

### CHEIKH ANTA DIOP

Ethnophilosophy, as a direct tributary of Négritude, seeks to define African identity in terms of an ontology. Another current of cultural nationalism, the historical school associated with the work and personality of the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, discovers this identity in what may be called an African *longue durée*. Diop is best

known for his book *Nations nègres et culture* (Black nations and culture) (1956), which advanced the thesis of ancient Egypt as an integral part of a black African civilization. The real significance of Diop's work resides less in the validity of his arguments and conclusions than in the development he gave to the thesis in subsequent works. In *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire* (Cultural unity of black Africa) (1959), Diop considered Africa as a single, unified cultural area on the basis of the continuity of cultural forms and value systems between ancient Egypt and indigenous civilizations throughout Africa. This argument was summarized in 'Égypte ancienne et Afrique noire' (1962). The philosophical implications of Diop's work emerge from the comprehensive vision of Africa's historical personality by which it is informed and its spirit of confrontation with Hegel's (1956) philosophy of history. The erudition and methodological effort he invested in constructing an 'historical sociology' aimed to restore Africa to an honourable place in universal history. As he says, 'Historical science cannot shed all the light one might expect it to cast upon the past until it integrates the African component of humanity, in proportion to the role it has actually played in history, into its synthesis' (1962:11). Diop's work established a line of historical reflection and research in francophone Africa, as exemplified in the writings of Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972), and especially Théophile Obenga, Diop's most accomplished disciple. His *L'Afrique dans l'Antiquité* (1970) represents a summation of the ideas and methods of the school spawned by Diop.

### THE CRITIQUE OF NÉGRITUDE

A reaction set in against the theory of a black racial self and the creation of an African collective identity propounded by Négritude and endorsed by ethnophilosophy. The critique of Négritude, which began in the 1950s with attacks on Sartre's (1949) definition by Albert Franklin (1953) and Gabriel D'Arboussier (1959), developed into controversy that has not subsided. The radical spirit of this critique was embodied in the works of Frantz Fanon, beginning with his analysis of the pathology of colonialism in *Black skin, white masks* (1952). This analysis took the form of a Hegelian enactment of the black subject's drama of consciousness, that of the struggle for recognition involved in the master/slave dialectic. Fanon's clinical perspective focused on the inward psychological depredations of colonial domination. The ethics of violence elaborated in *The wretched of the earth* (1961) springs from his conception of its restorative value for the colonized native. His uncompromising radicalism with its repudiation of mere culturalism endows violence with a transcendent significance: 'African culture will take concrete shape around the struggle of the people, not around songs, poems or folklore' (1961:164).

The critique of Senghor undertaken by Stanilas Adotevi (1972) owes its force to Fanon's example and to his disposal of identity as an issue worthy of moral concern and theoretical interest. Fanon's influence also accounts for the break with the spirit of cultural nationalism embodied in Négritude by the philosopher Marcién Towa (1971). His intransigence is displayed in the following terms: 'The transformation of one's present condition signifies at the same time the transformation of one's essence, of what is particular to the self, of what is original and unique about it, it is to enter into a negative relationship with the self (1971:41). This growing disaffection towards Negri

tude developed into a theoretical attack on ethnophilosophy as its outgrowth, marking a significant phase in the evolution of francophone African philosophy. Eboussi-Boulaga's initial objection to Tempels, whose philosophy he described as 'an ontological system that is totally unconscious, and given expression in an inadequate and incoherent vocabulary' (1968) extended in Towa's essay into a critical reappraisal of ethnophilosophy, culminating in an effort to demolish its conceptual edifice in Paulin Hountondji's *African philosophy: Myth or reality* (1983b). Hountondji's focus on the methodological procedures of the ethnophilosophers led him to discern a 'confusion of genres' in their attempts to construct a philosophical discourse from material with an ethnological interest. For him, ethnophilosophy was 'a hybrid ideological discipline without a status in the world of theory' (1983b:52). To the unanimism implicit in the conception of philosophy as a collective system of thought immanent in a people's culture, Hountondji opposed the criterion of philosophy as an explicit discourse and its rigorous character as a critical activity. He represented philosophy as a reflection on science considered as a significant component of modern culture and equated the philosophical enterprise with the development of science. The lack of scientific culture in Africa forced him to reach the conclusion that the continent is a long way from fulfilling the conditions necessary for philosophical practice.

Hountondji progressed from a narrow conception of philosophy to a broader view amounting to a form of pragmatism, involving an interrogation of the possible function of philosophy in the African context. A reappraisal of modes of scientific thought and practice in traditional Africa and a concern for their modernization and expansion in contemporary Africa have come to provide the principal orientation of his reflection, inspired by a sharper sense of the possible relation of philosophy to public policy and social practice. Therefore, the role of philosophy has come to include for Hountondji 'the analysis of the collective experience with a view toward a critique of everyday life' (1992:359). The political implications of such a critique, suggested by the work of Henri Lefebvre in France after the precedent of the Frankfurt school, are made clear.

The political dimension of Hountondji's critique is fully actualized in Achille Mbembe's 'Provisional notes on the postcolony' (1992:3–37). A phenomenology of political life in contemporary Africa, the essay emphasizes the introspective and critical character of intellectual activity in French-speaking Africa in the post-independence period as a function of the existential problems inherent in the process of transition in contemporary Africa. Beyond what has been called 'the crisis of relevance' in African philosophy (Oladipo 1992), this activity aims to lay the philosophical foundation for social development in Africa in pursuit of a new order of collective life, which Hountondji termed 'the Utopia of another society' (Mudimbe 1992:360).

## V.Y.MUDIMBE AND THE CRITIQUE OF AFRICANIST DISCOURSES

Mudimbe's work is significant in terms of the question of the relationship of discourse and constitution of thought with the ambiguous modernity of Africa. He delineated, after Foucault, an 'archaeology of African knowledge', motivated by the ambition to found a new African philosophy with an original register of enunciation, able to underwrite Africa's conceptual autonomy. In *L'autre face du royaume* (1973), he criticizes the



discourse of ethnology as an aberrant language.

*The Invention of Africa* (1988), Mudimbe's best-known work, is a development of this judgement and an examination of its implications for African expression in the modern world. In his view, the homology between the political and economic imperialism of the West on one hand and its 'epistemological imperialism' on the other, constitutes Africa as a province of a Western epistemological territory. The function of anthropology developed through the nineteenth century was to 'account for the normality, creative dynamism and achievements of the "civilized world" against the abnormality, deviance and primitiveness of the non-literate world' (1988:24). African studies formed part of this development. It has been so fully integrated into the Western order of discourse that the entry of Africans served to amplify the conceptual scope of this order in what Mudimbe calls a 'discourse of succession'. Mudimbe remarked that 'the main problem concerning the being of African discourse remains one of the transference of methods and their cultural integration in Africa' (1988:182). His solution was to adapt structuralism to the project of reconstruction in African philosophy. The structuralist method permits an escape from the constraints of a systematized rationality while affording an entry into the truth of the world: 'empirical categories can be used as keys to a silent code, leading to universals' (1988:35). It is unclear how this approach yields the 'absolute' or 'transhistoric discourse' that Mudimbe claims as the alternative to Western rationality. Despite what a commentator has called 'the ambiguous nature of the project suggested by Mudimbe' (Masolo 1991:109), the interest in Mudimbe's work resides in its account of the African intellectual adventure, which amounts to a vision of the African mind in its encounter with the Western world system.

### SUMMARY

The themes and positions reviewed provide the main lines of French African thought which have inspired a current of philosophical activity in Africa with its own style of discourse. This has prompted the view that the academic practice of philosophy in Africa is divided between the analytical tradition in anglophone Africa and the continental tradition in francophone Africa. Philosophical inquiry in both parts of Africa exhibits the three modes that Richard Rorty has identified in contemporary Western philosophy as 'science, metaphor, politics' (1991:9–26). Although French-speaking African philosophers do not employ the vocabulary of Anglo-American analytical philosophy, the debate on the epistemological status of traditional thought in Africa has involved them in a sustained reflection on the nature and scope of philosophy itself. Both sides in the debate have been obliged to undertake a clarification of the terms of their discourse, as with Kagamé, whose categories also receive some close technical scrutiny by Hountondji (1983:188–9). The debate has generated a metaphilosophy concerned with issues such as the relation of myth to metaphysics and the procedural questions touching upon the proper order of terms and concepts, as well as the conditions of philosophy as both a discipline and cultural practice. The debate assumes significance by reason of the comparative perspective it projects on the discipline, covering such questions as the meaning of concepts across cultures, leading ultimately to the problem of universalism.

Francophone African thought provides an African perspective on the relation between

'Thought and change' (Gellner 1965) demonstrated in the West by the progressive imbrication of social science with philosophy since Weber (1946): a development that points to a critical engagement with the whole range of political, social, cultural, moral, and aesthetic issues posed to modern awareness by the triumph of rationalism and the scientific revolution. The critical thrust of current debates associated with post-modernism concerning the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment reflects a sustained effort of internal reassessment in the West, a process in which the reappraisal of Western rationalism by Senghor and other French-speaking African intellectuals is profoundly implicated. As a 'strategy of differentiation' (Irele 1995:15–34), Négritude seeks to redefine the terms of the relationship between peoples and cultures within a comprehensive intelligence of the world. The metaphoric allure of a certain style of philosophical discourse identified by Rorty is captured in Négritude, whose speculative mode offers a challenge to the Western paradigm in rejection of its 'master narratives' (Lyotard 1979).

Beyond this polemical aspect of Négritude, which also informs Mudimbe's work, francophone African philosophy assumed a theoretical and historical interest in a global assessment of the dominant trends in modern philosophy and social thought. The commonality between such developments in Western thought exemplified by the Frankfurt school's critique of culture in modern industrial society, the Neo-Marxism of Henri Lefebvre, North American neopragmatism and 'communitarianism' bears witness to a renewed focus on first-order questions and on concrete issues of existence in the 'lifeworld' (Habermas 1985). The intersection between these trends in modern Western philosophy and intellectual activity in French-speaking Africa assumes a broad contemporary significance in this light, as under the pressure of historical experience, French-speaking African intellectuals have forced philosophy to confront anew the problems that presided at its origins in the West and which seem to govern its future direction.

#### Four trends in current African philosophy\*

##### H.ODERA ORUKA

The expression 'African philosophy' often animates the question 'What is African philosophy?' In an attempt either to answer this question or demonstrate examples of African philosophical thought, various proposals and findings have sprung up. A deeper analysis of them reveals the idea that there are generally two radically distinct senses or usages of the expression 'African philosophy'. In one sense, African philosophy is explained or defined in opposition to philosophy in other continents but in particular to Western or European philosophy. It is assumed that there is a way of thinking or a conceptual framework that is *uniquely* African and which is at the same time radically un

\*A slightly different version of this paper was read at the Commemoration of Dr William Amo Conference, Agaera July 24th–29th 1978. This version is for the 16th World Congress of Philosophy, African Philosophy Section, Düsseldorf, Sept. 1978.

European. So African philosophy is conceived as a body of thoughts and beliefs produced by this unique way of thinking. To the extent that European philosophy is known to manifest critical and rigorous analysis, and logical explanation and synthesis, African philosophy is considered to be innocent of such characteristics. It is considered to be basically intuitive, mystical, and counter or extra rationalistic.<sup>1</sup>

In the other sense, philosophy in general is viewed as a universal activity or discipline. And so its meaning (if not content) is believed to be independent of racial or regional boundaries and specialities. Philosophy is taken as a discipline that, in the strict sense, employs the method of critical, reflective, and logical inquiry. African philosophy then is not expected to be an exception to this meaning of philosophy. So the talk of a uniquely African conceptual framework or way of thinking (African mentality) with respect, at least, to the discipline of philosophy is not entertained. African philosophy is seen to exist not as a peculiarly African phenomenon (for most philosophical problems transcend cultural and racial confines), but only as a corpus of thoughts arising from the discussion and appropriation of authentic philosophical ideas by Africans or in the African context. African philosophy in this sense is considered in terms of African past, current, or potential contribution to philosophy in the strict meaning of the term. Philosophy as a discipline that employs analytical, reflective, and ratiocinative methodology is therefore not seen as a monopoly of Europe or any one race but as an activity for which every race or people has a potentiality.

Besides the two broad senses, one is likely to detect a third sense, i.e. one which consists of aspects of each of the two but which nevertheless is not yet clearly explicit or articulated. There are also of course significant differences within each of the senses.

But from all this myriad of differences on the issue of meaning and existence, four significant trends can be delineated: (1) Ethno-philosophy, (2) Philosophic sagacity, (3) Nationalist-ideological philosophy, and (4) Professional philosophy.

### ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY

If one presupposes that in philosophy the African conception and contribution have a completely different nature from those of other people and in particular from those of the Europeans, one is, as a matter of logical move, faced with the challenge to demonstrate the nature and uniqueness of the African contribution. In the demonstration two factors which are often associated with European or Greek thought, do readily become obvious targets of rejection. These are logic and individuality.

Léopold Senghor, for example, has argued that logic is Greek as emotion is African. European philosophy is also taken for granted to be individualistic, i.e. a body of thoughts produced or formulated by various individual thinkers. So communality as opposed to individuality is brought forth as the essential attribute of African philosophy. Fr. P.Tempels puts it in his mythological *Bantu philosophy*, the ‘wisdom of the Bantu based on the philosophy of vital force is accepted by everyone, it is not subjected to criticism’, for it is taken by the whole community as the “imperishable truth” (sic.) (1945:75).

Replacing logic (at least in the usual sense) and individuality with emotion and communality still leaves one with the challenge to show the exact examples of African

philosophy or at least the areas of African culture where it can be found. But here idiosyncracies of the traditional or communal African customs, poems, taboos, religions, songs, dances, etc. easily come up as undeniable candidates for what is required. These actually form a radical contrast with the rationalistic elements in a reflective, critical, and dialectical philosophy. And so the result usually is that African philosophy is identified with a communal or 'folk philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> The impression given is that a whole community can as a group philosophize, which is an open denial of Plato's maxim that the multitude cannot be philosophic. But perhaps this communal or group thought is not strictly speaking a philosophy but only 'ethno-philosophy', as my colleague Paulin Hountondji has described it.<sup>3</sup>

Most of those works or books (and the majority of them are works of anthropologists or theologians) which purport to describe a world outlook or thought system of a particular African community or the whole of Africa belong to ethnic-philosophy. Since the works are not strictly speaking philosophical, I have referred to those of them which explicitly claim to be philosophical as being philosophy only in the unique and 'debased' sense of the term (Oruka 1972 and 1975).

One great shortcoming of ethno-philosophy is that it is derived not from the critical but from the uncritical part of African tradition. A tradition or a culture often consists of critical and uncritical aspects. Thoughts or works of the individual man and women of intellect (sages, philosophers, poets, prophets, scientists, etc.) constitute the critical part of a tradition or culture while beliefs and activities of the type found in religions, legends, folk tales, myths, customs, superstitions, etc. constitute the uncritical part. Philosophy proper is always found in the critical, not uncritical, aspects of a people's tradition. The latter is usually only emotive, mythical, and unlogical. Even Europe has its uncritical tradition and it is interesting (as a contrast to what has been done in Africa) that we never look for European philosophy from the uncritical culture of Europe.

However, ethno-philosophy has provoked criticisms from rigorous philosophical circles and caused debates on the question of 'African philosophy'. Inasmuch as such criticisms and debates are instrumental in inspiring and shaping the development of philosophical thought in Africa, ethno-philosophy may not be without a useful role in African philosophical history.

### **PHILOSOPHIC SAGACITY**

One may maintain that African philosophy, even in its pure traditional form, does not begin and end in the folk thought and consensus; that Africans even without outside influence are not innocent of logical and dialectical critical inquiry, that literacy is not a necessary condition for philosophical reflection and exposition. On these assumptions one has a possibility to seek for and find a philosophy in traditional Africa without falling into the pitfall of ethno-philosophy.

Among the various African peoples one is likely to find rigorous indigenous thinkers. These are men and women (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education. But they are none the less critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgements by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of the communal consensus. They are capable of taking a problem or a concept and offer a

rigorous philosophical analysis of it, making clear rationally where they accept or reject the established or communal judgement on the matter. We have found that there are various sages with this critical and dialectical frame of mind in Kenya.<sup>4</sup> But we infer that there must be many such sages all over Africa. Their thought and ideas if properly exposed and written down would form an interesting aspect of current African philosophical thought and literature.

Philosophic sagacity, however, meets with two important objections:

- 1 that sagacity, even if it involves an insight and reasoning of the type found in philosophy, is not itself a philosophy in the proper sense, and
- 2 that a recourse to sagacity is a fall back on ethno-philosophy.

The answer to these objections can be found. Not all sages are free thinkers, but some combine the conventional quality of wisdom with the dialectical and critical attribute of free philosophic thinking. 'Philosophic sagacity', then, is only the critical and reflective thought of such sages. It differs fundamentally from ethnophilosophy in that it is both individualistic and dialectical. It is a thought or reflection of various known or named individual thinkers, not a folk philosophy and, unlike the latter, it is rigorous and philosophical in the strict sense.

Although most of this philosophy will not be found to take the form of conventional elaborate or long-winded philosophical arguments, most of it is explicitly expressed in the enthymematic form. But an enthymeme is a short-cut logical or philosophic argument in the exact sense of philosophy. Its full logical range can easily be uncoiled.

One of the tasks that modern students and teachers of philosophy in Africa may find rewarding, is to research into the sagacious thought and find out the aspects of it that are philosophical in the proper sense.<sup>5</sup>

### **NATIONALIST-IDEOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY**

It is sometimes conceived that in the modern world African philosophy, like African culture, can only be revived or authenticated on the basis of a truly free and independent African society. Thus in this sense the exact nature and existence of African philosophy would remain obscure unless we seek for it on the basis of a clear social theory for independence and the creation of a genuine humanist social order. Since colonialism was built on the ruins of what was supposed to be the cardinal ethical principle of traditional humanist Africa—communalism—the required social theory, it is argued, needs to embrace communalism as one of its basis tenets (Nkrumah 1964). In communalism the individual and society are said to have egalitarian mutual obligations: no individual would prosper at the expense of the society and the society would not ignore the stagnation of any of its members. In traditional Africa, Julius Nyerere argues, the individual was rich or poor only to the extent that the society was rich or poor, and vice versa (1968:9).

Most of the contributions to this trend of African philosophical literature have so far been politicians or statesmen. Some of the works in it are not in the strict sense, really philosophical. But it, however, differs from ethno-philosophy in several important respects. It does not, unlike the latter, assume or imply that European thought or

philosophy is radically different from or irrelevant to African thought.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the authors do not give the impression that the philosophy they are expounding is not theirs but that of a whole African community or continent. It is clear that this philosophy is claimed to be rooted in the traditional or communal Africa, but it is explicit that it is actually a philosophy of the individual author concerned. Thirdly, this philosophy is practical and has explicit problems to solve, namely those of national and individual freedom, whereas ethno-philosophy appears as apolitical and free-for-all metaphysics.

### PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY

This trend consists of works and debates of the professionally trained students and teachers of philosophy in Africa. Most of it rejects the assumptions of ethno-philosophy. Philosophy is conceived as a discipline or an activity whose meaning cannot depend just on racial or regional make-up. Philosophy is here taken in the strict sense in which it involves critical, reflective, and logical inquiry. Yet still it is maintained there must be a significant (not radical) difference between African philosophy and, say, European or Western philosophy. This difference it is believed, arises from cultural dissimilarities. However, it is admitted that cultural dissimilarities can cause disparity in philosophical priority and methodology but not in the nature or meaning of philosophy as a discipline. So in the professional literature African philosophy is seen as a whole, which includes what has been produced or can be produced by African thinkers or in the African intellectual context in any branch of philosophical thought in the strict sense. Therefore there is no reason why a work by an African thinker in, say, modern epistemology, metaphysics, or logic should not be seen as a part of African philosophy. In the 1730s a Ghanaian thinker, Dr William Amo, produced works on metaphysics, logic, and theory of knowledge while lecturing in the German universities.<sup>7</sup> It would be absurd to treat Amo's works simply as a part of the German philosophy and as having nothing to do with the African contribution to philosophy. His works should be seen as both a part of the German intellectual tradition which trained and inspired him, and African cultural history which caused Amo's travel to Germany and must have dictated his interactions with the Germans and choice of studies.

One criticism often labeled against professional philosophy is that it is Western or European not African. It is argued that a modern student or teacher of philosophy in Africa has, for historical reasons, been schooled in the Western logic and philosophy and learnt hardly anything about African philosophy. So the criticism goes, he comes and treats the latter from a purely European angle; he employs 'European logic' and principles to criticize or create what he likes to call 'African philosophy'.<sup>8</sup>

To this criticism there have been broadly two different responses. The first criticism comes from those philosophers who try to argue and offer historical proofs that Western philosophical thought as we know it today originated from ancient Egypt; and further that the thoughts of ancient Egypt are the heritage of black Africans.<sup>9</sup> The implication is that the black man has a share in the philosophy of modern Europe.

The second response comes from those who argue that knowledge and intellectual principles are never a monopoly of any one race or culture. That it is a historical law of intellectual development that intellectual offerings in a given culture are appropriated and

cultivated in other cultures. The Greeks borrowed and transformed the ideas of ancient Egypt. Northern Europe and America have done the same to the offerings of Greece. Therefore, seriously speaking, modern development in philosophy and logic, and in other fields of learning, are not an exclusive preserve of Europe or any other culture in which the developments have occurred. They are a preserve for any student of philosophy. And so they are relevant and subject matters even in African philosophical development. It is not therefore in this response accepted that African thinkers can only make their current and impending appropriation of European philosophical offerings relevant and indigenous if the ideas of ancient Egypt are a heritage of the African or black people. The appropriation should be seen as African by the ethics and historical law of intellectual development.<sup>10</sup>

### ENDNOTES

- 1 'European reasoning is analytical, discursive by utilisation; Negro-African reasoning is intuitive by participation' (L.Senghor, 1964:74).
- 2 Kwasi Wiredu (1979) has competently advised against this.
- 3 See for example Hountondji (1972 and 1976).
- 4 In 1974 and 1975 Prof. J.Donders and myself conducted research into the thoughts of the traditional Kenyan sages (cf. Oruka 1983 and 1991).
- 5 Prof Sumner of the Dept. of Philosophy, University of Addis Ababa seems to be engaged in this sort of research, as is evident in Sumner 1978. From his explanation in this article it appears his findings so far are on the thought of dead or legendary figures. This is in order, but one would wish that the research be extended even to the living sages.
- 6 Nkrumah (1964) treats a development of philosophical thought in Europe in a whole chapter with the conviction, I believe, that such thoughts are not a monopoly of Europe, and Nkrumah and his book are no less African in giving them such a treatment.
- 7 Translations of his works appeared at the Martin Luther University, Halle Wittenberg, Halle (Saale) 1968. For more about him see Brenrjes 1977 and Abraham 1962.
- 8 What is referred to here unfortunately as 'European logic' means actually no more than that it is a form of logic which is known to have been first formulated or discovered by a European. But this fact alone cannot make any principle of learning a monopoly of the person who made the formulation or the culture within which it was made. So when we talk of 'Aristotelian logic', for example, we mean or should mean no more than that Aristotle is given the honour of having first formulated or written down this form of logic. But we cannot, correctly, mean that this form of logic is uniquely Greek and must be strange, unknowable or irrelevant to other cultures.
- 9 See, for example, Keita (1979) and Oruka (1979).
- 10 Works of Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin (e.g. 1981) and, I would add, myself reflect this position.

## An alienated literature

PAULIN J.HOUNTONDJI

There are two ways of losing oneself: through fragmentation in the particular or dilution in the 'universal'. (Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (1956).)

By 'African philosophy' I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves.

Let us note that this definition begs no question, since the meaning of the qualifier 'philosophical' is irrelevant—as is, indeed, the cogency of the qualification. All that matters is the *fact* of the qualification itself, the deliberate recourse to the word *philosophy*, and whatever meaning that *word* may have. In other words, we are concerned solely with the philosophical intention of the authors, not with the degree of its effective realization, which cannot easily be assessed.

So for us African philosophy is a body of literature whose existence is undeniable, a bibliography which has grown constantly over the last thirty years or so. The limited aims of these few remarks are to circumscribe this literature, to define its main themes, to show what its problematic has been so far, and to call it into question. These aims will have been achieved if we succeed in convincing our African readers that African philosophy does not lie where we have long been seeking it, in some mysterious corner of our supposedly immutable soul, a collective and unconscious world-view which it is incumbent on us to study and revive, but that our philosophy consists essentially in the process of analysis itself, in that very discourse through which we have been doggedly attempting to define ourselves—a discourse, therefore, which we must recognize as ideological and which it is now up to us to *liberate*, in the most *political* sense of the word, in order to equip ourselves with a truly theoretical discourse which will be indissolubly philosophical and scientific.<sup>1</sup>

**ARCHEOLOGY: WESTERN 'ETHNOPHILOSOPHY'**

A forerunner of 'African philosophy': Tempels. This Belgian missionary's *Bantu philosophy* still passes today, in the eyes of some, for a classic of 'African philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is an ethnological work with philosophical pretensions, or more simply, if I may coin the word, a work of 'ethnophilosophy'. It need concern us here only inasmuch as some African philosophers have themselves made reference to it in their efforts to reconstruct, in the wake of the Belgian writer, a specifically African philosophy.

Indeed, *Bantu philosophy* did open the floodgates to a deluge of essays, which aimed to reconstruct a particular *Weltanschauung*, a specific world-view commonly attributed to all Africans, abstracted from history and change and, moreover, *philosophical*, through an interpretation of the customs and traditions, proverbs and institutions—in short, various data—concerning the cultural life of African peoples.



One can readily discern Tempels' motives. At first sight they appear to be generous, since he had set out to correct a certain image of the black person disseminated by Lévy-Bruhl and his school, to show that the African *Weltanschauung* could not be reduced to that celebrated 'primitive mentality' which was supposed to be insensitive to contradiction, indifferent to the elementary laws of logic, proof against the laws of experience and so forth, but that it rested, in fact, on a systematic conception of the universe which, however different it might be from the Western system of thought, equally deserved the name of 'philosophy'. At first sight, then, Tempels' object appeared to be to rehabilitate the black person and their culture and to redeem them from the contempt from which they had suffered until then.

But on closer scrutiny the ambiguity of the enterprise is obvious. It is clear that it is not addressed to Africans but to Europeans, and particularly to two categories of Europeans: colonials and missionaries.<sup>3</sup> In this respect the seventh and last chapter bears an eloquent title: 'Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilize'. In effect, we are back to square one: Africans are, as usual, excluded from the discussion, and *Bantu philosophy* is a mere pretext for learned disquisitions among Europeans. The black person continues to be the very opposite of an interlocutor; he/she remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse.<sup>4</sup>

What, then, is the content of this Bantu 'philosophy'? I shall not try to analyse the whole book but will content myself with a brief review of its main findings in order to confront them with the real discourse of African philosophers themselves.

According to Tempels (1961:35–36), Bantu ontology is essentially a theory of forces: Bantus have a dynamic conception of being, while the Western conception is static. For the black person, then, being is power, not only inasmuch as it possesses power, for that would merely mean that power is an attribute of being, but in the sense that its very essence is to be power.

For the Bantu [says Tempels] power is not an accident: it is more even than a necessary accident; it is the very essence of being—Being is power, power is being. Our notion of being is 'that which is', theirs is 'the power that is'. Where we think the concept 'to be', they make use (*sic*) of the concept 'power'. Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. Where we would say that *beings* are distinguished by their essence or nature, Bantus would say that *forces* differ by their essence or nature.

However, power so defined is not only a reality, it is also a value. The Bantu's entire effort is devoted to increasing his 'vital power', for all power can increase or diminish. This again, Tempels tells us, is opposed to the Western conception. As far as the European is concerned, one either possesses human nature or one does not. By acquiring knowledge, by exercising their will, by developing in various ways, people do not become more human. On the contrary, when a Bantu says, for instance: 'I am becoming strong' or when he says compassionately to a friend who has been struck with misfortune: 'Your vital strength is reduced, your life has been eroded' these statements are to be taken literally as implying an essential modification of human nature itself.

Another principle of this Bantu 'philosophy' is the interaction of forces. This

interaction, says Tempels, is not merely mechanical, chemical, or psychic, but, more fundamentally, it is akin to the metaphysical dependence which links the creature to the creator (in this sense that the 'creature is, by its very nature, permanently dependent on its creator for its existence and subsistence').

Yet another principle is the hierarchy of forces. An important one, this, since it is the foundation of social order and, so to speak, its metaphysical bedrock.

At the top of the scale, we are told, there is God, both spirit and creator.

Then come the forefathers, the founders of the various clans, the archpatriarchs to whom God first communicated the vital force.

Then there are the dead of the tribe, in order of seniority, these are the intermediaries through whom the elder forces exert their influence over the living generation.

The living themselves, who come next, are stratified 'not only by law but in accordance with their very being, with primogeniture and their organic degree of life, in other words with their vital power'.

Right at the bottom of the scale the lower forces, animal, vegetable, or mineral are also said to be stratified according to vital power, rank, or primogeniture. Thus, analogies are possible between a human group and a lower animal group, for instance: 'He who is the chief in the human order "demonstrates" his superior rank by the use of a royal animal's skin'. (This is the key to totemism, according to Tempels.)

Stress is laid on the internal hierarchy within the living group, a hierarchy founded, according to Tempels, on a metaphysical order of subordination. This order was in jeopardy every time the colonial administration imposed on a black population a chief who did not fit the norms of tradition. Hence the protests of the natives: 'So-and-so cannot be chief. It is not possible. Henceforth nothing will grow on our soil, women will no longer give birth and everything will be stricken with sterility'.

Finally, as the ultimate crown of this theoretical edifice, Bantu 'philosophy' emerges as humanism; 'creation is centred on man', and especially on the living generation, for 'the living, earthly, human generation is the centre of all mankind, including the world of the dead'.

If it be added that the interaction of all these forces, far from being haphazard, takes place according to strict and immutable laws (of which Tempels formulates the three most general), one is immediately aware of the miraculous coherence of this ontological 'system'—and of its great simplicity. However, its author assures us that it is the ultimate foundation of the entire social practice of the Bantus, of all Africans, and of all 'primitives' and 'clan societies'.

### POLITICAL CRITICISM

This is all very fine, but perhaps too good to be true. One is reminded of Césaire's massive criticism, grave in content, global in scope. While accepting some of Tempels' points, Césaire views his exposition as a politically oriented project and highlights its practical implications.

Césaire's criticism may be summed up in a sentence: Bantu 'philosophy' is an attempt to create a *diversion*. It diverts attention from the fundamental political problems of the Bantu peoples by fixing it on the level of fantasy, remote from the burning reality of

colonial exploitation. The respect shown for the 'philosophy' and the spiritual values of the Bantu peoples, which Tempels turns into a universal remedy for all the ills of the Belgian Congo, is astonishingly abstract (albeit perfectly understandable in view of the author's political lineage), compared with the concrete historical situation of that country. Further, when it is considered that 'the white man, a new phenomenon in the Bantu world, could be apprehended only in terms of the categories of traditional Bantu philosophy', that he was therefore, 'incorporated into the world of forces, in the position that was his by right according to the rationale of the Bantu ontological system', that is to say, as 'an elder, a superior human force greater than the vital force of any black man' (Tempels 1961:45), then the real function of Tempels' much vaunted respect for Bantu 'philosophy', and at the same time the relevance of Césaire's criticism becomes apparent. The humanist thinker throws off his mask and reveals himself as the guardian of the colonial order, and his hazy abstractions can be seen for what they are, concrete devices in the service of a very concrete policy which is nothing less than the preservation of imperialist domination. Césaire's irony can now be fully appreciated:

Bantu thought being ontological, Bantus are interested only in ontological satisfaction. Decent wages? Good housing and food? I tell you these Bantus are pure spirits: 'What they want above all is not an improvement in their material or economic situation, but recognition by the white man and respect for their human dignity, for their full human value'. In short, one or two cheers for Bantu vital force, a wink for the Bantu immortal soul, and that's that. A bit too easy, perhaps? (Césaire 1962:44)

Yet Césaire's criticism left the theoretical problem untouched, since, in his own words, his target was 'not Bantu philosophy itself, but the political use some people want to make of it'. The idea that there might exist a hidden philosophy to which all Bantus unconsciously and collectively adhered was not at issue, and Césaire's criticism left it unbroached. The theory has therefore remained very much alive; in fact, it has provided the motivation for all our subsequent philosophical literature. The history of our philosophy since then has been largely the history of our succeeding interpretations of this collective 'philosophy', this world-view which was assumed to be pre-determined, and to underpin all our traditions and behaviour, and which analysis must now modestly set out to unravel.

As a result, most African philosophers have misunderstood themselves. While they were actually creating new philosophemes, they thought they were merely reproducing those which already existed. While they were producing, they thought they were simply recounting. Commendable modesty, no doubt, but also betrayal, since the philosopher's self-denial in the face of his own discourse was the inevitable consequence of a projection which made him arbitrarily ascribe to his people his own theoretical choices and ideological options. Until now African philosophy has been little more than an ethnophilosophy, the imaginary search for an immutable, collective philosophy, common to all Africans, although in an unconscious form.<sup>5</sup>

## FROM TEMPELS TO KAGAMÉ: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

Such is the mainstream of African philosophy, which I must now endeavour to describe. Reference to Tempels enables us from the outset to see its essential weakness, to which I shall return. But fortunately there is more to African philosophy, even in its ethnophilosophical vagaries, than the mere reiteration of *Bantu philosophy*.

In the first place, its motivations are more complex. The aim is no longer to furnish European settlers and missionaries with an easy access to the black man's soul, raised to the status of unwitting candidate for 'civilization' and Christianization. African philosophers aim to *define* themselves and their peoples, in the face of Europe, without allowing anybody else to do it for them, to *fix* and *petrify* them at leisure.

Moreover, even if this attempt at self-definition maintains the fiction of a collective philosophy among our authors, they nevertheless show genuine philosophical qualities in the *manner* in which they claim to justify this fiction. The severe rigour of some of their deductions, the accuracy of some of their analyses, the skill which some of them display in debate, leave us in no doubt as to their status. They are certainly philosophers, and their only weakness is that the *philosophical form* of their own discourse has been created in terms of a myth disguised as a collective philosophy.

One example will suffice to illustrate this point: Kagamé, *La philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de l'être*, expressly and from the outset, establishes its point of view in relation to Tempels' work as an attempt by an autochthonous Bantu African to 'verify the validity of the theory advanced by this excellent missionary' (Kagamé 1956:8). Nor can it be denied that the Rwandais priest is often in accord with the Belgian missionary, particularly where we are concerned here.

1 The idea of an immutable, collective philosophy conceived as the ultimate basis of Bantu institutions and culture, recognized more or less consciously by every Bantu. 'Philosophical principles', writes Kagamé (1956:17, 23) '...are invariable: since the nature of beings must always remain what it is; their profoundest explanation is inevitably immutable'. And again, concerning his 'sources' of information: 'We shall have to resort to a kind of institutionalized record... Even if the formal structure of these "institutions" is not the expression of a philosophical entity, it may be shown to be a direct consequence of a mode of formulating problems which lies within the purview of philosophy'.

Let us note, however, that Kagamé is here much more subtle than Tempels. Unlike the Belgian missionary, he is duly wary of attributing to his fellow countrymen a philosophical *system* in the full sense of the word, with clearly and logically defined articulations and contours. All he admits to is a number of invariable 'philosophical principles' that give no indication of forming a system; and he willingly speaks of 'intuitive philosophy', as opposed to academic, systematic philosophy.

2 The idea that European philosophy itself can be reduced, in spite of its eventful and variegated history, to a lowest common denominator, namely the Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy. In fact, this second idea explains the first, since it underlay and triggered off the strategy of *differentiating* African 'philosophy' from European

philosophy.

On the other hand, as far as the *content* of this Bantu 'philosophy' is concerned, there are undeniable convergences between Kagamé and Tempels, especially as regards the Bantu conception of humankind.

- 3 The idea that man is indivisible, a simple unit, and not, as the Europeans believe, a compound of body and soul. Thus, Kagamé tells us that there is no word in Kinyarwanda to denote the soul, at least as long as the individual is alive.
- 4 The idea that God, and not the natural parents, is the real begetter and author of individual destinies.
- 5 The idea that people's names indicate their destiny.
- 6 Above all, the idea that humanity is at the centre of the Bantus' thoughts and preoccupations, to such an extent that other beings are conceived solely in opposition to it, as negations or inverted images of their own natures as thinking beings: things (*ibintu* in Kinyarwanda) are by definition beings deprived of intelligence, as opposed to humans (*umuntu*, pl. *abantu*), which are defined as the intelligent being.

As against these similarities, Kagamé does part company with Tempels (without expressly saying so) on a number of very important points.

In the first place, his method, which is founded on direct linguistic analysis, differs from Tempels' analysis. Among all the 'institutionalized records' of Bantu culture, Kagamé deliberately emphasizes language and its grammatical structure.<sup>6</sup> Hence perhaps the exceptional value of his book. Kagamé nags us—and in doing so renders us signal service—with the disturbing reminder that we might think very differently if we made systematic use of our mother tongues in our theoretical work. Indeed, the Rwandais philosopher is much more sensitive than was his Belgian predecessor to the contingency of language and the inevitable rooting of even the most abstract human thought in a world of pre-existing meanings.

More rigorous in method, Kagamé's analysis is also less ambitious in aim. It is offered to us expressly as a 'monograph' valid only for a specific geographical and linguistic area: Rwanda and its close neighbours. This is a far cry from Tempels' rash generalizations, with their claim not only to open wide the doors of Bantu philosophy but also to hold the key of all 'primitive' thought.

Moreover, it is obvious that Kagamé, while he joins Tempels in asserting the existence of a collective Bantu philosophy, carefully avoids confining it within a narrow particularism. On the contrary, he more than once emphasizes its universal aspects, by which it is linked with, among others, European 'philosophy'. For instance, he tells us that 'formal logic is the same in all cultures' and that concept, judgement, and reasoning have no Bantu, Eastern, or Western specificity: 'What is expressed on this subject, in any language of Europe or Asia, America or Africa, can always be transposed into any other language belonging to a different culture' (Kagamé 1956:39).

Kagamé is also peculiarly sensitive to those transformations of Bantu 'philosophy' which result from its contacts with European culture. To him these transformations appear profound and significant, whereas Tempels believed that 'acculturation' could never impart more than a superficial veneer. Thus, the Rwandais philosopher warns us (1956:27) 'You will not find, in our country at the present time, more than a few people who have not corrected their traditional views on the world and on the heroic style of the

past'. In particular, he insists at length on the innovations introduced by the missionaries into the vocabulary and even the grammatical structure of Kinyarwanda (Kagamé 1956:27, particularly 64–70). In this he shows himself sensitive to the internal dynamism and capacity for assimilation of his own culture—so much so that he himself gives us the facts with which to refute his own initial methodological assumption, posing the immutability of philosophical principles.

Such divergences are important and would suffice to differentiate Kagamé's work clearly from Tempels' work. But beyond these formal differences even more striking is the fact that the two authors, while both postulating the existence of a constituted Bantu philosophy, give different interpretations of its content. Thus (although his criticism remains general and is not directed overtly at Tempels) Kagamé in fact rejects the fundamental thesis of the Belgian missionary, according to which the equivalence of the concepts of being and power is the essential characteristic of Bantu thought. It is true that the Rwandais priest also recognizes a difference between the Aristotelian concept of substance and kindred concepts in Bantu thought. This difference is that the 'philosophy of European culture' tends to conceive being in its static aspect, while the philosophy of Bantu culture prefers to consider its dynamic aspect. But he states that this is only 'a slight nuance', for the two aspects remain complementary and inseparable in any mode of thought:

In both systems, indeed, there are inevitably a static and a dynamic aspect at the same time.

- 1 Any structure, considered apart from its finality, must appear static.
- 2 If you then consider a structure as having an end, as being structurally oriented to action or being used for an end, that structure will present its dynamic aspect.

It therefore follows that if the philosophy of Bantu culture is called dynamic, it must be remembered that it is in the first place static. If the philosophy of European culture is described as static, it must not be forgotten that it is in the second place dynamic. Let me summarize these two correlative aspects in a double axiom:

- 1 Operational predisposition presupposes essence.
- 2 Essence is structured in terms of its finality (Kagamé 1956:121–122).

While Tempels is not mentioned, the target of this critique is clear. But this is far from being the only divergence between Kagamé and Tempels. Many others occur in their interpretations of Bantu 'philosophy' even though they both suppose this 'philosophy' to be constituted and pre-existing, confined once and for all in the African's eternally immutable soul (Tempels) or at least in the permanent essence of his culture (Kagamé). Who is right? Which is the better interpretation? The choice is the reader's. Perhaps he will wish, in order to form his own opinion and close the debate, to return to the evidence itself and take cognizance of the original text of African 'philosophy', that secret text so differently interpreted by Tempels and Kagamé? This is what one usually does in Europe

(and even Asia) when, in the name of intellectual integrity, one studies an author or a doctrine with a view to arriving at one's own conclusion in the face of the 'conflict of interpretations'.<sup>7</sup> Only to return to sources can enlighten us. It alone can enable us to discriminate between interpretations and assess their reliability or simply their pertinence.

Unfortunately, in the case of African 'philosophy' there are not sources, or least, if they exist, they are not philosophical *texts* or *discourses*. Kagamé's 'institutionalized records', or those which Tempels had earlier subjected to 'ethnophilosophical' treatment, are wholly distinct from philosophy. They are in no way comparable with the sources which for an interpreter, of, say, Hegelianism, or dialectical materialism, or Freudian theory, or even Confucianism are extant in the explicit texts of Hegel, Marx, Freud, or Confucius, in their discursive development as permanently available products of language.

I can foresee an objection. Of course, I know that among Kagamé's 'institutionalized records' the products of language occupy a large place (proverbs, tales, dynastic poems, and the whole of Africa's *oral literature*). I shall even add that Kagamé's work is so exceptionally interesting precisely because of his extraordinary knowledge of the traditions, language, and oral literature of Rwanda.<sup>8</sup> But the point is that this literature—at least as it is presented by Kagamé—is *not* philosophical. Now, scientific method demands that a sociological document is interpreted *first* in terms of sociology; a botanical text (written or oral) first in terms of botany, histories first in terms of historiography, etc. Well then, the same scientific rigour should prevent us from arbitrarily projecting a *philosophical discourse* on to products of language which expressly offer themselves as something other than philosophy. In effecting this projection, Kagamé—and Tempels before him, along with those African ethnophilosophers who followed suit (we are less interested in the European variety)<sup>9</sup>—committed what Aristotle called (and Kagamé himself is rather fond of invoking Aristotle) a *metabasis eis allo genos*, i.e. a confusion of categories.<sup>10</sup> This leaves readers with no means of checking their interpretations. As the evidence derived from the 'institutionalized'—but not philosophical—'records' is inadequate, readers are brutally thrown back upon themselves and compelled to recognize that the whole construct rests on sand. Indeed, Kagamé, in spite of the very attractive qualities of his analysis and the relative accuracy of some of his sequences, has remained *on the whole* the prisoner of an ideological myth, that of a collective African 'philosophy' which is nothing but a revamped version of Lévy-Bruhl's 'primitive mentality', the imaginary subject of a scholarly discourse which one may regret Kagamé did not apply to something else.

Kagamé himself seems to have been aware of the difficulty, for he felt compelled, in order to render the idea of a collective philosophy plausible, to assume, at the beginnings of Rwandais culture, the existence and deliberate action of 'great initiators', intuitive philosophers who are supposed expressly to have formulated the principles of Bantu philosophy at the same time as they founded the institutions of that society (Kagamé 1956:37, 180, 187, and *passim*). But it is easy to see (and Kagamé himself can hardly have been taken in) that this assumption is gratuitous, even mythological. Moreover—and this is more serious—it does not even solve the problem but rather encloses us in a vicious circle. The alternatives are as follows. Either Bantu ontology is strictly immanent in the Bantu languages as such and contemporaneous with them (which Kagamé

expressly recognizes, since he infers this ontology from the grammatical structures of Kinyarwanda), in which case it cannot have been taught by 'initiators', who would have had to express themselves in these Bantu languages; or this philosophy really was taught at a particular point in time, and in this case it is not coeval with the Bantu languages but is a historical stage in Bantu culture, destined to be overtaken by history.

Either way, Bantu 'philosophy'<sup>11</sup> is shown to be a myth. To destroy this myth once and for all, and to clear our conceptual ground for a genuine theoretical discourse—these are the tasks now awaiting African philosophers and scientists. I will now seek to show briefly that these tasks are in fact inseparable from political effort—namely, the anti-imperialist struggle in the strictest sense of the term.

### THE UNSHACKLING OF DISCOURSE

I have quoted Kagamé only as an example. Despite his undeniable talent and his powerful theoretical temperament (which so brilliantly distinguishes him from some ethnophilosophers), it seems to me that his work simply perpetuates an ideological myth which is itself of non-African origin.

Unfortunately, Kagamé is not alone. A quick look at the bibliography suggested in endnote 1 is enough to show how much energy African philosophers have devoted to the definition of an original, specifically African 'philosophy'. In varying degrees, Makakiza, Lufuluabo, Mulago, Bahoken, Fouda and, to a lesser extent, William Abraham remain caught in this myth, however scientific and productive their research (remarkable in some cases), sincere their patriotism and intense their commitment may have been.<sup>12</sup>

Theirs is clearly a rearguard action. The quest for originality is always bound up with a desire to show off. It has meaning only in relation to the Other, from whom one wishes to distinguish oneself at all costs. This is an ambiguous relationship, inasmuch as the assertion of one's difference goes hand in hand with a passionate urge to have it recognized by the Other. As this recognition is usually long in coming, the desire of the subject, caught in his/her own trap, grows increasingly hollow until it is completely alienated in a restless craving for the slightest gesture, the most cursory glance from the Other.

For his part, the Other (in this case the European, the former colonizer) didn't mind a bit. From the outset he himself had instructively created a gap between himself and the Other (the colonized), as between the master and his slave, as the paradigmatic subject of absolute difference.<sup>13</sup> But eventually, as a gesture of repentance, or rather, to help allay his own spiritual crisis, he began to celebrate this difference, and so the mysterious primitive 'mentality' was metamorphosed into primitive 'philosophy' in the hard-pressed master's mystified and mystifying consciousness. The difference was maintained but reinterpreted, or, if one prefers, inverted; and although the advertised primitive 'philosophy' did not correspond to that which the colonized wished to see recognized, at least it made dialogue and basic solidarity possible.

It was a case, says Eboussi-Boulaga (1968) aptly, quoting Jankelevitch, of 'doubly interpreted misinterpretations', in which the victim makes itself the executioner's secret accomplice, in order to commune with him in an artificial world of falsehood.

What does that mean in this context? Simply that contemporary African philosophy,



inasmuch as it remains an ethnophilosophy, has been built up essentially *for a European public*. The African ethnophilosopher's discourse is not intended for Africans. It has not been produced for their benefit, and its authors understood that it would be challenged, if at all, not by Africans but by Europe alone. Unless, of course, the West expressed itself through Africans, as it knows so well how to do. In short, the African ethnophilosopher made himself the spokesman for All-Africa facing All-Europe at the imaginary rendezvous of give and take—from which we observe that 'Africanist' particularism goes hand in glove, *objectively*, with an abstract universalism, since the African intellectual who adopts it thereby expounds it, over the heads of his own people, in a mythical dialogue with his European colleagues, for the constitution of a 'civilization of the universal'.<sup>14</sup>

So it is no surprise, then, if this literature, like the whole of African literature in French (and to a lesser extent, in English), is much better known outside than inside Africa. This is due not to chance or to material circumstances only, but to fundamental reasons which proceed from the original destination of this literature.

Now the time has come to put an end to this scandalous extra-version. Theoretical discourse is undoubtedly a good thing; but in present-day Africa we must at all costs address it first and foremost to our fellow countrymen, and offer it for the appreciation and discussion of Africans themselves.<sup>15</sup> Only in this way shall we be able to promote a genuine scientific movement in Africa and put an end to the appalling theoretical void which grows deeper every day within a population now weary and indifferent to theoretical problems that are seen as pointless.

Science is generated by discussion and thrives on it.<sup>16</sup> If we want science in Africa, we must create in the continent a human environment in which and by which the most diverse problems can be freely debated, and in which these discussions can be no less freely recorded and disseminated, thanks to the written word, to be submitted to the appreciation of all and transmitted to future generations. These, I am sure, will do much better than we have.

This, obviously, presupposes the existence of freedom of expression, which in varying degrees so many of our present-day political regimes are endeavouring to stifle. But this means that the responsibility of African philosophers (and of all African scientists) extends far beyond the narrow limits of their discipline and that they cannot afford the luxury of self-satisfied apoliticism or quiescent complacency about the established disorder unless they deny themselves both as philosophers and as people. In other words, the theoretical liberation of philosophical discourse presupposes political liberation. We are today at the centre of a tangle of problems. The need for a political struggle makes itself felt at all levels, on all planes. I shall simply add that this struggle will not be simple and that clarity as well as resolve are needed if we are to succeed. The future is at stake.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Here is a minimal bibliography: W. Abraham, *The mind of Africa* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1962); Jean-Calvin Bahoken, *Clairières métaphysiques Africaines* (Paris: Présence Africaine 1967); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse sur le colonialisme* (Paris:

Editions Réclame 1950; Several reprints by Presence Africaine); Alioune Diop, “‘Niam M’ Paya ou de la fin que dévorent les moyens’, preface by P.Tempels, *La philosophie Bantoue* (Paris: Presence Africaine 1949); Fabien EboussiBoulaga, ‘Le Bantou problématique’, (Présence Africaine, no. 66 1968); Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil 1952); Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero 1968); Basile-Juleat Fouda, *La philosophie Négro-Africaine de l’existence* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Lille, Faculté des Lettres, 1967); Alexis Kagamé, *La philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de l’être* (Brussels 1956); Francois-Marie Lufuluabo, *Vers une théodicée Bantoue* (Tournai: Casterman 1962); Francois-Marie Lufuluabo, *La notion Luba-Bantoue de l’être* (Tournai: Casterman 1964); Vincent Mulago, *Un visage Africain du Christianisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine 1965); A. Makarakiza, *La dialectique des Barundi* (Brussels 1959); Alassane N’Daw, ‘Peut-on parler d’une pensée Africaine?’, *Présence Africaine*, no. 58 (1966); Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (Heinemann 1964); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Nation et voie Africaine du socialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine 1961); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté l’négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Seuil 1964).

The reader may also wish to include the present book and some earlier articles of mine: ‘Charabia et mauvaise conscience: Psychologie du langage chez les intellectuels colonisés’ (Présence Africaine, no. 61, 1967; ‘Pourquoi la théorie?’ *Bulletin de liaison de la Commission Inter-Africaine de Philosophie*, Société Africaine de Culture, no. 3 (Paris: Présence Africaine 1969); ‘Le problème actuel de la philosophie Africaine’, in *Contemporary philosophy. A Survey*, ed. Raymond Klibansky, vol. IV (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice 1971).

I have cited only African authors, in accordance with my definition of African philosophy. Non-African Africanists are not included. It is for the readers to judge whether I am justified after they have weighed my arguments.

But I have included West Indians like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. They are Africans of the Diaspora, and although they are not, and do not claim to be, philosophers, they afford us the means of conducting a fruitful political criticism of a certain form of philosophy.

To be complete the list should also include all the doctoral theses and other similar works by African students and researchers in philosophy, even if they bear on the most classical European authors, for they are works of philosophy by Africans. Our ‘naïve’ definition of African philosophy as a set of texts enables us to see the internal discords of that literature, torn between a tragic renunciation of African allegiances on the one hand and imprisonment within an ‘Africanist’ ideology, itself of non-African origin, on the other. The only reason, therefore, for not citing texts in this category is that I have not been able to make an exhaustive inventory of it or even a representative choice.

Finally, North-African literature is omitted for material reasons alone. It is, of course, an integral part of African literature in general, although it constitutes a comparatively autonomous subset, no less than the black African literature on which we focus here. One day it would be useful to investigate systematically the problem of the real unity which underlies the obvious differences between these two literatures.

- 2 Father Placide Tempels, *La philosophie Bantoue*, translated from the Dutch by A. Rubbens (Paris: *Présence Africaine*, 1949). A first translation had been published in 1945 by *Editions Lovania*, Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi). *Présence Africaine* has recently printed its third edition, which says a good deal!
- 3 Cf. Tempels, (1961:71). A better understanding of the field of Bantu thought is equally necessary for all those who are called upon to live among the natives. Therefore this first concerns colonials, but more especially those who are charged with the administration of clan law, in short all those who want to civilize, educate, raise the Bantus. But if this concerns all colonials of good will, it is addressed more particularly to missionaries.
- 4 In the last resort, this is perhaps the basic vice of ethnology in general (and not only of ethnophilosophy). Lévy-Bruhl's work at least had the method of displaying, in a naïve and clumsy way, how ethnological discourse has always depended on an ethnocentric attitude itself dictated by a concrete historical situation ('primitive' societies were in fact always societies dominated by imperialism). From this point of view, Lévy-Bruhl's belated self-criticism in his *Carnets* (Paris, 1949) is far from being as radical as is sometimes supposed, for it retains the central notion of 'primitivity and fails to explain the reasons for his earlier misconceptions. Many recent ethnologists have tried to practise a neutral ethnology, free of value judgements and of racism and ethnocentrism. This intention may be praiseworthy in itself, but it does not prevent ethnology, as a type of discourse, from resting, as much as ever, on an ideological foundation. Ethnology (or anthropology, or whatever we care to call it) always assumes what it wants to prove, i.e. a real distinction between its object and that of sociology in general, the essential difference between 'primitive' (or perhaps 'archaic') societies and other societies. On the other hand, it also attempts to abstract from the real power relationship between these societies and the others—in other words, imperialism. In any case, it is clear that the societies selected for study by anthropology are in fact always dominated societies and that the scholarly discourse of the anthropologist has meaning only in a scientific debate originating elsewhere (in the dominant classes of the dominating societies) and in which these peoples do not participate. More detailed analysis is, of course, necessary here.
- 5 This applies, of course, to only one of the currents of African philosophy. A glance at the bibliography above will show that it has always provoked contestations within African philosophy itself (within African *philosophical literature*) and that it coexists with other currents, though these are relatively insignificant.
- 6 Kagamé presents his analysis as a reflection on the particular structures of the Kinyarwanda language. These structures are seen as delineating a kind of articulation of reality, a sort of grid through which the Rwandais perceives the world. Hence the idea of constructing a table of Bantu ontological categories, doing for Kinyarwanda what Aristotle, according to Kagamé, did for Greek. The results of the inquiry are by no means unattractive. Kagamé proposes four Bantu metaphysical categories, which he aligns with Aristotle's categories in the following table:

1	<i>Umuntu</i> (pl. <i>abantu</i> ): man, being endowed with intelligence	{ {1 Substance {
2	<i>Ikuntu</i> (pl. <i>ibintu</i> ): thing, being without intelligence	{2 Time {3 Place
3	Ahantu: time-place	{4 Quantity {5 Quality {6 Relation
4	Ukuntu: modality	{7 Action {8 Passion {9 Position {10 Possession

This table calls for a number of remarks:

- (1) The first two categories fracture the unity of the Aristotelian concept of substance and make it appear irremediably ambiguous. Man and things are not part of the same genus but constitute two radically different genera. More accurately, man is the originary category in relation to which things are thinkable. These, by definition, are non-man, *ibintu*, beings without intelligence (a category which includes, let us not forget, minerals and vegetables, as well as animals).
- (2) The originary concept of man can only be defined in tautological terms. Man is the sole species of a unique genus. This is why Kagamé can write: ‘Some Europeans have taken great pleasure in the “naïvete” of the Bantus, when asked “*Umuntu ni iki?*” (“What is man?”). Called upon to give a definition of the being endowed with intelligence, our Bantus, after much embarrassment, ended up by answering: “*Umuntu, ni umuntu nyine!*” (“Man!”), precisely, is which meant something like this: By formulating the question, you have yourself given the answer, and it is impossible to explain further! You have stated the genus and the unique species! What would you answer if you were asked: “What is the rational animal (i.e. man)?”’ (Kagamé 1956:118)

We may ask ourselves, however, to what extent the Bantus’ embarrassment described here is not due rather to the intrinsic difficulty of the question asked (the most difficult of all questions, after all). The average European would certainly have been equally embarrassed and would have answered no less ‘naïvely than the Bantu, even though European languages enable the concept of man to be divided into simpler categories.

But perhaps the most serious difficulty concerns the interpretation given by Kagamé of Aristotle’s project (which inspired him). No doubt Aristotle’s ontology was connected with the structures of the Greek language, but this should not lead us, surely, to underestimate the originality of his project, which was intended not so much to explore the actual structures of the Greek language as to transcend all such contingencies by grounding language in a universal and necessary order.

- 7 The reader may have recognized here the title of a book by Paul Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interprétations* (Paris: Seuil 1969). Without any doubt, the problem of African 'philosophy' refers us back to the problem of hermeneutics. The discourse of ethnophilosophers, be they European or African, offers us the baffling spectacle of an imaginary interpretation with no textual support, of a genuinely 'free' interpretation, inebriated and entirely at the mercy of the interpreter, a dizzy and unconscious freedom which takes itself to be *translating* a text which does not actually exist and which is therefore unaware of its own *creativity*. By this action the interpreter disqualifies himself from reaching any truth whatsoever, since truth requires that freedom be limited, that it bow to an order that is not purely imaginary and that it be aware both of this order *and* of its own margin of creativity. Trust is attainable only if the interpreter's freedom is based on the nature of the text to be interpreted; it presupposes that the text *and* the interpreter's discourse remain rigorously within the same category, i.e. the same univocal field. Aristotle's doctrine of the 'genera of being' means just this.
- 8 Cf. Kagame's other works, particularly: *La poésie dynastique au Rwanda* (Brussels 1951); *Le code des institutions politiques du Rwanda précolonial* (Brussels 1952); *Les organisations socio-familiales de l'ancien Rwanda* (Brussels 1954).
- 9 European ethnophilosophy is still going strong. No wonder, if one remembers the praise lavished by a philosopher of Bachelard's (1949) rank (followed in this by Albert Camus, Louis Lavelle, Gabriel Marcel, Chombard de Lauwe, Jean Wahl, etc.) on a book as equivocal as *Bantu philosophy* (cf. Bachelard 1949). So, if we want to break out of the vicious circle of ethnocentric prejudice, must we indiscriminately praise any work, whatever its quality, which attempts, equivocally, a problematic rehabilitation of the black? The most serious aspect of the matter, in the case of the European *philosophers* (I mean the genuine ones), is that they flagrantly flouted the theoretical implications of their own philosophical practice, which obviously rested on responsible thinking, on theoretical efforts on the part of the individual subject, and so excluded the reduction of philosophy to a collective system of thought.
- The healthiest European reaction to Tempels' enterprise remains, as far as I know, that of Franz Crahay (1965). We shall return to this and explain its limitations. But more complete, more systematic and of exemplary lucidity, in my view, is the remarkable critique by the Camerounian Fabien EboussiBoulaga (1968). It may be worth adding that my criticism of Tempels, and also the article by Eboussi-Boulaga, is aimed in no way at the man but at his work, or rather at a particular idea of philosophy which has unfortunately become dominant since his time and which, if it is not destroyed once and for all, is likely to stifle any potential African creativity. All I want to do, therefore, is to clear the ground for a philosophical practice worthy of the name, based on rigorous scientific practice, and at the same time to provide a new reading of existing African philosophical literature and, by ridding it of its ethnophilosophical illusions, to show that this theoretical practice has actually already begun and needs only to liberate itself and to recognize its autonomy and its possible functions in a new Africa.

10 It would be an entirely different matter, of course, if Kagamé had succeeded in providing philosophical *texts* by African sages or in *transcribing* their words. His interpretation would then have been founded on actual philosophical discourses, universally accessible and verifiable.

This perhaps indicates an urgent task for present African philosophers: the systematic transcription of everything that can be recorded of the discourses of our ancestors, sages, and scholars who are still alive.

But here again, one must distinguish. The thought of an African sage, even if he purports to be the spokesman for a group, is not necessarily that of all the individuals in that group, and still less that of all Africans in general. Also if such discourses are to be transcribed, it should not be only for the sake of advertising them for the possible admiration of a non-African public but, first and foremost, so that they can be scrutinized by all contemporary Africans. In any case we can be grateful to Griaule (cf. 1948) for having so faithfully recorded the words of an Ogotemmelé. A transcript of this kind by a European ethnologist is infinitely more valuable than all the arbitrary fabrications by other 'Africanist' Europeans about the African soul or the Bantu world-view and all those impressionistic sketches of 'Dogon wisdom', 'Diola philosophy', etc.

At present I confine my discussion to the Bantu area, for the simple reason that it seems to have produced the most abundant philosophical or ethnophilosophical literature of *African* origin; and it is in this kind of *explicit discourse* that African philosophy must be sought: elsewhere we shall find nothing but the mirages of our desires, the fantasies of our regrets and nostalgias.

11 The reader will have immediately understood the discriminative (i.e. conceptual) use I make of the following terms: philosophy (without quotation marks) in the proper sense—a set of explicit texts and discourses, a literature intended as philosophy; 'philosophy' in an improper sense, as indicated by the quotation marks—the collective, hypothetical world-view of a given people; ethnophilosophy—a research resting, in whole or in part, on the hypothesis of such a world-view and the attempt to reconstruct a supposed collective 'philosophy'.

12 These, of course, are not at issue. Some of the authors mentioned are extremely instructive, and Africans will gain by reading them. My critique, I repeat, is not negative; but it is natural to demand more of those who have already given because we know they could do better.

13 This is the real meaning of Lévy-Bruhl's work. Cf. 1923 and other texts of the kind; cf. also all the ideological discourses collected by Césaire (1962) in that inspired anthology of follies.

14 The phrases '*rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir*', '*civilization de l'universel*', etc., are, of course, favourite expressions of Senghor.

15 Here lies the inadequacy of the analysis offered in Crahay (1965). The 'take-off' has already taken place. All people think conceptually, under all skies, in all civilizations, even if their discourse incorporates mythological sequences (like that of Parmenides, Plato, Confucius, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kagamé, etc.) and even if it rests *wholly* (as is nearly always the case) on fragile ideological foundations,

from which, of course, it must be liberated by critical vigilance. In this respect, there is nothing exceptional about African civilizations.

But Crahay ignores the real problem, which is the *choice of interlocutor* and the *destination of the discourse*. Mythical or scientific, ideological or critical, language is always forced by social discussion to improve itself and to pass by successive leaps through all levels of consistency and rigour. The main task in Africa is to subject language to social discussion and to allow it to develop its own history through writing and its necessary complement, political democracy.

16 We are, of course, considering science not in terms of its *results* (as a system of constituted truths), but as a *process*, as an actual search, as a project which takes shape within a society and which is always greater than its provisional findings.

African 'philosophy: Deconstructive and reconstructive challenges\*

LUCIUS OUTLAW

### THE SMELL OF DEATH

A forceful debate has been raging among intellectuals in Africa and Europe over the past forty years (and has now emerged in America) focused by questions ranging from 'Is there (such a thing as) an African philosophy?' 'Did (or do) traditional Africans have a philosophy?', 'Can there be (such a thing as) an African philosophy?', to 'What *is* African philosophy?' While these might appear to be benign queries which initiate and frame legitimate intellectual inquiry and discourse, for me they convey the putrid stench of a wretchedness that fertilizes the soil from which they grow. Why have such questions been asked? Why is the matter of 'African philosophy' nothing more than a simple truism, or at most heuristic for empirical identification followed by description and interpretation? More importantly, who initiated such questioning? And to what end? We can answer these last questions only by identifying the source of the stench of the former ones. That identification is what I shall offer in what follows.

The focus of my concern is indicated, in part, by the title of this essay, but in ways not all of which may be immediately apparent. The word 'Philosophy' has been set off by quotes to warn of a complex of problems. Without the quotes (or if read without seeing or registering the quotes), the title could be read as implying that, within 'Philosophy', an enterprise assumed to be unified by 'universal', 'necessary' principles and procedures, there are modalities and traditions that can be distinguished by their being 'African'.

For a brief moment, I do wish to invoke precisely this reading or understanding of the title. But only for a moment, and not in order to settle on this reading as promissory note for what is to follow. Rather, I wish to provoke such an understanding only to centre it as an object of discussion to be displaced or decentred (or 'deconstructed'). This is the move I have in mind and wanted to indicate it by a title that, through the force of punctuation,

\* This paper was originally published in *Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 5, *African philosophy*, edited by G.Floistad, pp. 9–44, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1987.

attempts to render 'Philosophy' problematic—or, more precisely, attempts to suggest how the term, as a referent for a discipline (as sets of concepts and conceptual strategies, practices, texts, figures, or persons—in short, a 'literary genre' (Rorty 1982:xiv)—is made problematic by the efforts of persons called 'African' to articulate what many of us call 'African philosophy'. Furthermore, I shall follow the practice of Rorty and use two versions of the term: 'Philosophy' and 'philosophy'. The first is used to refer to the enterprise as it has been characterized by the dominant voices, and as it has been practised by the dominant figures in the dominant traditions, throughout its western history; the second refers to an enterprise more critically self-conscious of its own historicity in ways that inform its practices and thus make it possible to identify other discursive modalities and traditions as appropriate instances of a refined notion of what constitutes philosophy, especially when these traditions and modalities are situated in non-European cultures.

But I wish to go further. While the title does not problematize 'African', there are, I think, ways that the contemporary African venture in philosophy does raise questions, implicitly and explicitly, about what it means—what is required—to be 'African', in ways not always seen by those forging the African pathway or who are involved in reclaiming and legitimating past intellectual achievements by Africans (which amounts to the same thing, in view of the history of Africa over the past century) as appropriate instances of philosophy.

Each of the key terms in 'African philosophy' is made problematic by the very efforts to carve out, uncover (and thus recover) distinctively African modalities or traditions in the complex enterprise of philosophy. In some ways this problematizing is not unique and is rather easily understood in its similarities with previous and contemporary ruptures in the history of Philosophy which have either occasioned or represented efforts to rethink and redefine 'Philosophy'. However, there are ways in which the question of 'African philosophy' challenges the very idea of Philosophy as it has been construed by the more dominant voices narrating the history and setting the agenda of philosophy in the West, and does so in a most radical fashion.

Just how radical is indicated, in all its wretched nakedness, in the very posing of the questions whether there is, was, or could ever be something legitimately termed 'African philosophy'. For the issues involved are only immediately concerned with disciplinary matters. The deeper issue is one with much higher stakes: it is a struggle over the meaning of 'man' and 'civilized human', and all that goes with this in the context of the political economy of the capitalized and Europeanized Western world. In light of the European incursion into Africa, the emergence of 'African philosophy' poses deconstructive (and reconstructive) challenges.

By calling such efforts 'deconstructive', I wish to associate them with a particular complex of practices within the enterprise of Western philosophy. One of the objectives of deconstruction is to critique and displace the absolutist metaphysics and epistemology which are thought to identify and provide knowledge of a rational order of axioms, first principles, and postulates that are the foundation of all that is, and of knowing what is. The point of deconstruction is to show that 'all philosophical systematizing is a matter of *strategy* which pretends to be based on a complete system of self-evident or transcendental axioms' (Ryan 1982:33–34, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> Having their bases in



philosophical strategies, such concepts are thus *constructions*, ‘a product of numerous histories, institutions, and processes of inscription’, which cannot be transcended by being conceived as absolute, self-evident and axiomatic (Ryan 1982:24). To deconstruct these concepts is to displace them into the fabric of historicity out of which they have been shaped and in which we, too, have our being (cf. Outlaw 1984:27–41); it is to become involved in ‘the unmaking of a construct’ (de Man 1971 quoted by Spivak 1976:xviii). Thus, in drawing on practices from within Western philosophy, I self-consciously attempt to ‘borrow from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself...’ (Derrida 1967 quoted by Spivak 1976:xviii).

However, ‘deconstruction’ is but another strategy by which to ‘read texts’, though one with a decidedly different self-consciousness and consequences, and with its own *logos*, whether ‘sous rature’ or not (cf. Spivak 1976:xviii). It is a strategy that, when signified by ‘deconstruction’, is principally identified with the work of Jacques Derrida, among others. But by no means am I claiming nor do I wish to imply—that efforts constituting ‘African philosophy’ are Derridian in nature or have their source in his work. Derrida himself would, I think, disallow any claim that would make him/his work a source, an origin, and, thus, an authority. A strategy of reading/understanding that displaces its ‘text’ into the historicity of its construction and maintenance neither originates in, nor is confined to, the work of Derrida. Rather, it is my contention that contemporary discussions about ‘P/philosophy’ in Africa have been ‘deconstructive’ *as a function of the historical exigencies conditioning their emergence*.

I shall begin with a sketch and a critique of what I have referred to as a dominant tendency or voice in Western Philosophy and attempt to show, first, how that tendency, when joined with other factors, structured the context and terms of the contemporary debate about ‘P/philosophy’ in Africa. Secondly, I shall characterize and discuss, under the headings of deconstructive and reconstructive challenges, various responses by Africans, and others, to the complex and infected situation.

The crux of my argument is that, in decisive ways, a number of the discursive practices we now identify as instances of ‘African philosophy’ have been deconstructive (and reconstructive), especially in their attempt to sanitize African intellectual practices of their necrophilia: that is, their concern to construct a self-image in the mirror of a decomposing, putrid, Greco-European philosophical anthropology that has been embodied in the dominant voices and traditions of Western Philosophy. Rather, in a number of ways, ‘African philosophy’ involves efforts to displace the dominant Grego-Eurocentric notions of ‘man’ and ‘civilized human’ by expanding their denotative ranges, and/or by redefining these notions, in part by particularizing them to African peoples such that it becomes possible to distinguish them from peoples of European descent and culture in non-trivial ways. A key point of this essay, on the way to a discussion of the challenges of African philosophy, is to characterize this ideal human and the wretchedness that has resulted from its imperialistic deployment, and to locate the source of the stench that continues to affect intellectual praxis concerned with African philosophy.

## ‘MANHOOD’ AND ‘RATIONALITY’: ‘PHILOSOPHY’ IN THE DOMINANT WESTERN NARRATIVES

The source of the stench is the rotting corpse of a particular complex multifaceted, projected (self-)image, that of the Greco-Roman/ European ‘rational man’, a self-image raised to the level of paradigm through the efforts of dominant figures in Western philosophy to identify the human *essence* (endeavours I refer to as ‘philosophical anthropology’), whose death has been brought about by the struggles of Africans (and others) for independence from European demonation. The construction of this self-image has sources in the works of Plato and Aristotle (and is revised and continued by Descartes, Kant, and others) with whom, in fact, Philosophy becomes the venture that appropriates to itself the sole right, responsibility, and capability of rising high enough to see<sup>2</sup> the foundational (that is, the absolute and unchanging) realities in terms of which this self-image was to be articulated. Further, with them Philosophy likewise appointed itself the sole custodian and guardian of this self-image.

The fulcrum of this multifaceted self-image is formed around the notions of *logos*<sup>3</sup> and *nous*<sup>4</sup> (or, in today’s language, ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’). Through these concepts, and with the help of others equally important (i.e. ‘truth’, ‘goodness’, ‘virtue’, etc) a fundamental, orienting, and ‘grounding’ linkage was made between the microcosm of human existence and the macrocosm of the cosmos, between the divining mind and/or the governing principles and processes of the universe and the mind as the *essence* of the human being: the structure of the cosmos is rational; humans reason, through *nous* or mind, and thus set into operation a dynamic structure whose principles of operation are the same as those structuring the universe; hence, the highest and most appropriate exercise of human reason or *logos* is to see and grasp those most fundamental structures of principles, and to bring human existence into accord with them. *Logos* is thought to be the ‘code’ of Being; the task of understanding (i.e. the proper and successful exercise of human *logos* or *nous*) is to grasp and decipher this code: Philosophy becomes identified with epistemology. (Rorty’s *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* offers an interesting critique of the extent to which this deciphering, characterizing itself most forcefully in the modern period as the *scientization* of Philosophy, has dominated the agenda of Western philosophy, and has dominated the self-image of philosophers committed to this agenda, such that they have construed the human mind, or human knowing, as the ‘mirror of nature’.)

This rationalistic facet of the self-image, and the practices which sustain and seek constantly to refine it, continue to be mediated through institutionalized discursive ventures, i.e. ‘disciplines’, with written texts functioning as a principal means of mediation, especially those of the ‘great masters’, who, in retrospect, have been accorded important roles in the casts of various schools and traditions narrated as the history of Western Philosophy. This self-image continues to be the dominant one among competing views within Philosophy, and in other disciplines (for example, theology, psychology, art, literature, and the natural and social sciences). Since the rise of modern Philosophy, beginning with Descartes in particular, the dominant philosophical self-image has been shaped by this mirroring of ourselves in a nature governed by *logos* or reason. The dominant voices in philosophy have thus been infected with logocentrism, or, in the

words of Foucault, with 'logophilia' (Foucault 1972:228): that is, the distorted and distorting over-commitment to *logos* or rationality where the objective is to 'know' with 'certainty' (which means, in my terms, to grasp and 'decode' the *logos* of Being). We are led to believe that the supposed certainty about matters of 'truth', 'knowledge', and 'certainty' elevates Philosophy to the status of 'queen of the sciences'. One of the consequences of this 'logophilia' has been a constant attempt by many of the mainstream figures in Western intellectual history (and, in some cases, in social and political praxis) to identify human *telos* with 'rationality', supposedly exemplified in the history and developmental trajectory of Western European peoples.

The heavily weighted logocentrism of the 'queen' of ventures of knowing that constitutes mainstream Western Philosophy, so insightfully described and criticized by Rorty (1979) (who continues a tradition of such critiques), is only a part of the problem, though a significant part. The assured 'certainty' of knowing the 'foundations' of the cosmos and of existence, the certainty of having grasped the *Truth*, provides a great deal of rationalizing support for the intellectual (and social-political) projects of the masters of Philosophy that very quickly transforms these possessors of Knowledge (if not always of knowing) into arrogant epistemologists and social, political, cultural imperialists. Supposed certainty regarding matters epistemological has tended historically to provide the basis for rank orderings within the realm of human affairs, with rationalizing support from philosophical anthropology. Those who know what knowing is quickly become those and only those who can know fully. Thus, deeply submerged among the facets of the constructed self-image that became embodied in the dominant voices of Western Philosophy is a generally unspoken, but nonetheless very much operative, key aspect of identity: male, rational male, of Greek (and subsequently European) descent! The 'queen' we discover, is in drag!

It is here, in the invention of *homo rationalis* as a distinctive human type (found only among persons of the appropriate gender and racial/ethnic pedigree), in this historicity of a particular complex tradition of discursive activities, that we find the birth of the 'man' whose rotting corpse has caused such a choking scent over Africa and the African diaspora, and continues to infect intellectual discourse, including discussions of African P/philosophy. For the ideal of the 'rational man', all the methodological strictures governing its articulation through Philosophy in the mode of epistemology notwithstanding, has been, in fact, the carrier of key elements of a particular *cultural* agenda. The notion of 'rationality' itself is always shaped and valorized by the discursive context within which it derives its meaning. Neither this context, nor the supposedly successful efforts of Philosophy as epistemology to articulate a historically (and thus culturally) neutral and universally binding framework for 'rationality' (as in efforts of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Descartes, among others), are free from the agendas which guide the architects and builders of such contexts or the social practices which sustain them. In fact, such discursive contexts, particularly those of philosophers, have tended to be devoted to the self-assigned tasks of defining and overseeing a society's (or a country's, or the world's) cultural and historical agenda.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they tend to be structures by what Foucault terms 'the rules of discursive control' (Foucault 1972:228).<sup>6</sup> Under particular circumstances, the certainty of 'grounded' Knowing (according to the terms of the discursive control of Philosophy in the mode of epistemology), embodied in

a dominant and dominating male, Eurocentric voice, quickly degenerates into self-assured arrogance.

Such was the case with the European encounter with the different others of Africa. There the voice of 'rational man' was heard to speak in the timbre of another facet of the self-image: the 'man' of Western Europe now elevated to the position of paragon of human development and existence. This form of self-image was off-loaded to Africa from the decks and bridges of slave ships and from inland caravans through rationalizations of greed and imperialism, under the camouflage of sacred texts and practices guided by the cross, the pseudo-science of the 'other' (i.e. early anthropology), and the outright practices of near genocide and domination. The most frequent rationalization offered was that the European encroachment on Africa brought 'progress', in the form of the spread of Christianity and 'rational' *civilization*, which would lead to the improvement of individual and social existence. By then Philosophy had become the well-entrenched, self-appointed guardian—and thus the highest expression—of this rationalization (and would remain so until it was displaced by the achievements of science and technology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

The effort to realize this deep-rooted project of Western 'civilization' was conditioned by a principle of discrimination, the basis of which is the racial/ethnic/sexual/cultural identity of the voice in which it is articulated: not all persons or peoples were thought to share the level of development and/or potential required to realize rationality, especially at its highest levels. When this principle of invidious discrimination was constructed and employed by the dominant voices in Western Philosophy, in its most stringent and explicit formulations it was averred that only certain restricted groups of individuals (for example, the free Greek male in Aristotle's *Politics*) or certain 'civilizations' (that of Europe, as Husserl claimed in his 'Philosophy and the crisis of European man' (Husserl 1964:155–165 esp.) had the wherewithal to engage in philosophical praxis. In even more pointed and restrictive claims by Hume (Popkin 1977–1978:211–226, and 1974) and Hegel, African peoples were explicitly denied the status of rational, historical beings (even though Hegel, to his credit, is the most important figure in Western philosophy in its post-Kantian developments to take history seriously as the inextricable context within which philosophizing takes place). Says Hegel:

Africa must be divided into three parts: one is that which lies south of the desert of Sahara—Africa proper—the Upland Africa (if we may so call it)...; the second is that to the north of the desert—European Africa (if we may so call it) ...; the third is the river region of the Nile...

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World—shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself- the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night... The second portion of Africa is the river district of the Nile—Egypt; which was adapted to become a mighty centre of independent civilization, and therefore is as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other parts of the world... This part was to be—must be attached in Europe...

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very

reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas—the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character...

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it—that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.

Having eliminated this introductory element, we find ourselves for the first time on the real theatre of History<sup>7</sup> (Hegel 1956:91–99).

This European, male-centred effort to construct a paradigm of human being and its developmental trajectory, a paradigm that both reflected and conditioned the self-image of those involved in articulating and institutionalizing it, involved another key element, one not discussed by Hegel, commitment to which is so deep that it is virtually taken for granted that its presence is necessary (though, perhaps, not sufficient) for a people to be termed ‘civilized’: that is, *writing*. Western philosophy after Socrates continues to be mediated through written texts, principally. Thus, it has been argued, people who do not write cannot engage in Philosophy, in the strict and proper sense. Even while this is argued, often by persons—including some contemporary African philosophers—who invoke Socrates and Plato as the founding fathers of *all*, not just of Western Philosophy, there is a bit of selective amnesia at work in the reconstruction of the history of Philosophy: missing from this argument is memory of the absence of any writings by Socrates, and of Plato’s own suspicion of writing (cf. Finnegan 1973).<sup>8</sup>

This orientation to Africa so poignantly expressed by Hegel was widely shared by many of its earliest European visitors (explorers, missionaries, seekers after wealth and fame, colonizers, etc.), whose travelogues and ‘reports’ served to validate the worst characterization as the European *invention* of Africa and Africans out of the racism and ethnocentrism infecting Europe’s project in its encounter with Africa as a different and

black other. In the years leading up to the 1895 partitioning of Africa (and continuing even today, in South Africa in particular), this orientation served to substantially rationalize and legitimate European racism and imperialism in Africa. The discursive practices sustaining the 'invented' African, combined with those of the dominant, logocentric voice narrating the history and agenda of Western Philosophy and conditioning its practices, which, in its male embodiment, was postured as the paragon of human development, were key elements of the historical context from which the discursive control emerged which set the terms of the contemporary debate about African philosophy.

## 'AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY': DECONSTRUCTIVE RUPTURES

### A father's legacy: Opening the field of discourse

The focus of the debate was the complex questions which asked, in various ways, whether African peoples had (or could have) developed anything termed 'Philosophy'. But this was only the surface issue. The deeper and more pressing question was whether Africans were fully human, as defined by the reigning Greek-cum-European paradigm.

This debate began in earnest in 1945, with the publication of *Bantu philosophy* by Placide Tempels, a Belgian priest. The book continues to be the subject of a great deal of controversy, to say the least. A careful reading of the work, conditioned by an understanding of the larger historical context in which it appeared (i.e. the then Belgian Congo—the Republic of Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo—in the colonial mid-1940s), and of Tempels himself, particularly his fate after its publication, should leave little doubt as to why *Bantu philosophy* is a deeply problematic and ambiguous book, further complicated by the intentions of its author. Consistent with one element of the European project in Africa, Tempels was concerned with 'raising' the Bantu, through education and Christianization to 'civilization'. On the other hand, Tempels advanced the then revolutionary (and even humane) claim that this 'civilizing' project could succeed only if Europeans understood the Bantu on the latter's terms, that is, in terms of what Tempels regarded as their indigenous 'philosophy'. Further, Tempels argued that African peoples should be respected, part of the necessary way of relating to people one seeks to 'civilize'.

Reactions to Tempels were swift, numerous, and momentous. Colonial authorities were not pleased: in a fundamental way, Tempels' approach challenged the rationalizations of the colonization, enslavement, and exploitation of Africans and the resources of Africa. For the same reason, however, a significant number of African intellectuals were very pleased: the humanity of Africans was defended and vindicated: Africans, too were reasoning beings, thus were human, even more importantly, since a European said so. Thirdly, a number of Europeans, who were more knowledgeable of, sympathetic to, and, even, more respectful of Africans, were happy to see their views confirmed in the recapitulations of African achievements in Philosophy, that most learned of modes of Western thought. Furthermore, there was the hope that Tempels' book would lead to positive influences in relations between Africans and Europeans.<sup>9</sup>

*Bantu philosophy* was thus an axial work. But its impact was such that it significantly

influenced the terms of the debate which it initiated: the conceptual strategies, the logocentric ideal, and the anthropological paradigm vested in its narrative voice were all from the cultural matrix of Europe. This was a matrix consciously mediated by Tempels (though not without serious ambiguity), and later by many African intellectuals who were socialized (i.e. 'educated') in European institutions, or institutions in Africa under the intellectual tutelage and administrative direction of Europeans. The continuation of this discursive control is revealed by the fact that what Tempels challenged through his work (as did others following him who continued to explore the matter of the 'philosophy' of particular African peoples, or all Africans in general, guided, in a number of important cases, by the approach he had taken) was the claim that Africans were inherently (or, according to a more generous and paternalistic criticism, 'due to their lack of development') incapable of the level of thought required for true Philosophy. The standards for 'true Philosophy' were those operative in the discourse of mainstream European philosophy.

An excellent example of a work invoking these standards is the essay by Crahay (1965), 'Conceptual take-off conditions for a Bantu philosophy', the published version of a 1965 lecture before a predominantly African audience during a conference held at the Goethe Institute in what was then called Leopoldville, Belgian Congo (now Kinshasa, DRC). Crahay was deeply critical of the extent to which Tempels' book, in his judgement, had been mistakenly and widely accepted as a work of Bantu philosophy, rather than 'an impetus' for such work. What he termed a 'frank appraisal' of *Bantu philosophy* required answers to two questions. The first was 'Does a Bantu philosophy, within the admissible sense of the term "philosophy", currently exist?' (Crahay 1965:56). This 'admissible sense' of philosophy he defined as 'explicit, abstract analytical reflection, sharply critical and autocritical, which is systematic, its human condition, and the meanings and values that it reveals' (Crahay 1965:57).

Crahay's second question was predicated on a negative answer to his first: 'In case the answer to the first question is negative, under what conditions could a Bantu philosophy be founded?' (Crahay 1965:56). In his judgement, there were certain 'conceptual conditions' necessary for the development of philosophy, conditions which, he said, were not then fulfilled by Bantu peoples: (1) dissociation of subject and object through reflection; dissociation of I and others; (2) dissociation of the natural from the supernatural, of technical action and acts of faith; dissociation of the concrete and the abstract leading to dissociation of the named object and the term; (3) dissociation of time and space; (4) development from a limited concept of corporal freedom to a mature concept of freedom involving a synthesis of corporal freedom, the faculty of decision, and the 'assumption of responsibility for one's actions and their rationally recognized consequences'; and (5) a desirable attitude, i.e. the avoidance of temptations of 'shortcuts' or the 'cult of difference' (Crahay 1965:69–71).

At the heart of Crahay's argument is his notion of 'philosophy within the permissible sense'. Even while he 'take(s) into account some innovations of contemporary philosophy and what makes for the originality of great philosophical traditions, other than the Western...' (Crahay 1965:57) when defining philosophy, in reality a complex history of differing traditions conditioned by the self-conceptions of their haspers and practitioners, he still manages to treat it as though it were 'Philosophy', a timeless unity

the essence of which is captured in his definition, the differences of innovations within and among the various traditions of philosophy in Western and non-Western traditions notwithstanding. His definition, in fact, is a particularly modernist recasting of the meaning of philosophy which, with Descartes, Locke, and Kant (among others), one would declare (as did Plato and Aristotle) that Philosophy in the mode of rationalist epistemology is the highest expression of human rationality, which both identifies and exemplifies the human essence. Further, Crahay's Crahay's 'conceptual conditions' for Philosophy are more than conceptual. They have to do with structural features of a group's life-world, and thus with their life-practices, with fundamental alterations of the ways persons or groups might go about their lives as indicated, for example, by his repeated demand for 'dissociation'. The practice of Philosophy on these terms requires a particular kind of being: the 'rational', 'free', isolated 'individual'; the decidedly Cartesian *cogito*.

Thus, it was within the context of a debate structured by these parameters that strategies emerged for establishing the humanity of Africans: it was to show, contrary to the picture of the 'invented' African that Africans also had produced 'Philosophies', i.e. 'rational' accounts of the world of lived experience, of the group or person, of the relations between the world and human existence, and 'rational' articulations of principles for guiding social existence. In short, the task was to establish that Africans, too, were appropriately to be placed in the premier category of European philosophical anthropology, that of 'rational man', a task that involved challenging the category category's denotative limits as set by the rules of control at work in the discursive practices of European Philosophy and in their implementation in European colonialism. One of the merits of Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* was its forcing of these issues.

The strategic, though limited, Tempelsian attack on the European 'man'; as the sole embodiment of human rationality was supported by the work of other scholars, European anthropologists and historians especially, who during the same period (1930s to 1940, and more recently), were themselves shedding light on the systems of thought of various African peoples (Allier 1929; Brelsford 1935, 1938; Griaule 1948; Radin 1927; and Bird 1980; Forde 1954; Fortes and Dieterlen 1965; Karp and Bird 1980). It was in this context that the voices of Africans concerned with the liberation of African peoples from colonial domination in general, and with the reclamation of African character and being as exemplified in various fields of endeavour in particular, including that of 'Philosophy', were raised in challenge to the European caricatures of black peoples, some of which efforts are now framed by the phrase 'African philosophy'. This framing gives identity to a new field of discourse which, simultaneously, is heavily conditioned by its European heritage (e.g. in calling itself 'Philosophy') while, in many instances, challenging this very heritage and its claims to Truth, exclusively, and thus, predominance.

### **Harvesting the legacy: Hybrids and new strains**

The business of identifying these challenges and discussing their deconstructive implications is enhanced by having 'maps' of the field and its contours. One sign of the relative maturity of African philosophy, its youth notwithstanding, is the extent to which critical self-consciousness with regard to its development has been displayed in the form



of articulations of various taxonomic overviews. But such efforts are not merely taxonomic (that is, descriptive) guides; they are also intended—or, even if unintended, they come to function—as rules governing discursive practices and the placement or distribution of labour in the field. For at the foundation of such efforts are definitions of what constitutes ‘Philosophy’ or ‘philosophy’; at the very least, they attempt to recapitulate the meanings various thinkers give to the term, either through explicit thematizations or as implicitly operative in their articulations. Thus, while we appreciate the usefulness of these taxonomies, we must not forget that they are themselves strategies whose object is achieved through their actualization; African philosophy as a field, that is, as a bounded unity with determinate contours and subregions (to play out the geographical metaphor), is constituted as such through the taxonomic/cartographic efforts.

Yet there is a further move usually made by our taxonomists/cartographers of the field: they include in the domain practices and traditions of discourse which were not themselves conditioned by an explicit sense on the part of the practitioners that they were involved in ‘philosophy’, however broadly or narrowly conceived. The delineation of the field as an explicit discursive context is thus achieved *ex post facto*. And, to that extent, the taxonomies which provide the boundaries and contours for the field themselves become part of that which they seek to define and describe. In what follows, I shall briefly survey several of these efforts at overviews as a way of coming to see the field and its contours as defined by the ‘grid’ the ‘cartographers’ have employed to distribute ‘forms’ of African philosophy based on analysis and interpretations of the articulations (verbal and/or written) of various persons.

Oruka (1978) has offered an interpretation which distinguishes four ‘currents’ in African philosophy:

- 1 ethno-philosophy—works or books which ‘purport’ ‘to describe a world outlook or thought system of a particular African community or the whole of Africa’, (p. 2);
- 2 philosophic sagacity—the thought of ‘rigorous indigenous thinkers... (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education. But they are nonetheless critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgements by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of the communal consensus’ (p. 3);
- 3 nationalist-ideological philosophy—the contributions, mostly, of politicians and statesmen who led the struggles for independence and ‘the creation of a genuine humanist socialist order’, though some of the works in this group are not ‘in the strict sense, really philosophical’ (p. 4);
- 4 professional philosophy—‘works and debates of the professionally trained students and teachers of philosophy in Africa’ (p. 5).

These categories are useful for initial surveys of the field of African philosophy, but they only provide a rough view of the landscape. Smet (1980), and Nkombe and Smet (n.d.) offer more insightful and nuanced mappings in their discussions of philosophical ‘trends’ in Africa.<sup>10</sup> The first (in the order in which they discuss them, not in their order of either historical appearance or importance) they term ideological. It is a trend that, for them, includes the works and figures Oruka groups in his national-ideological current (but goes further to include persons he might otherwise place in the professional current) as well as

other 'currents', 'traditions', or 'schools' of discourse: 'African personality';<sup>11</sup> Pan-Africanism;<sup>12</sup> Négritude;<sup>13</sup> African humanism;<sup>14</sup> African socialism;<sup>15</sup> scientific socialism;<sup>16</sup> Consciencism;<sup>17</sup> and 'authenticity'.<sup>18</sup> The rule for inclusion in this trend is that all the works and discussions are geared primarily to redressing the political and cultural situation of African peoples under the conditions of European imperialism, enslavement, and colonization.

Their second trend includes works which recognize the existence of philosophy in traditional Africa, examine its philosophical elements as found in its various manifestations, and systematically elaborate them as repositories of wisdom and esoteric knowledge (e.g. Kagamé). The principle criterion for placement in this category is the shared motivation to contest the pernicious myth that Africans are peoples of a decidedly 'primitive mentality'.

Smet and Nkombe's third trend, the critical school, is determined by the participants' reacting to the theses and projects of the ideological trend and the school that recognizes the existence of traditional philosophies. It is from this critical school that we get the label 'ethno-philosophy' being applied to the other two as a way of questioning their relevance and, especially, their validity as instances of philosophy proper (Mudimbe 1983:138). On the other hand, there are those in this group who likewise critique Western conceptions of science and philosophy.

Finally, the Nkombe/Smet taxonomy includes a fourth grouping, one they term the synthetic current. Here are to be found the works and practices of persons who are involved in, among other things, the use of philosophical hermeneutics in explorations of issues and in the examination of new problems, some of which emerge in the African context (e.g. Okere 1983).

This map of the boundaries and contours of the field of African philosophy is given even greater detail by Mudimbe's intimate, critical discussions. He identifies a first group (the principle of placement which Mudimbe uses being the idea that the participants make use of a 'wide sense'<sup>19</sup> of the term 'philosophy') that is made up of two subgroups: the ethno-philosophical,<sup>20</sup> which includes 'works arising from the need to express and to render faithfully the unity and the coherence of traditional philosophies...' and the ideologicophilosophical, which includes work 'qualified by an explicit intention to separate and to analyse present constraints of African society, marking the present and future situation, while remaining true to African ideals...' (Mudimbe 1983:142).

Finally, Mudimbe's second group is made up of persons whose works are structured by the notion of Philosophy 'in the strict sense' (i.e. in the sense articulated by Crahay). Again there are subgroupings. One comprises persons (e.g. Eboussi-Boulaga, Towa, and Hountondji) who are involved in reflections on the conditions of possibility of African philosophy; another, persons who reflect on the significance of Western science (Adotevi, Ngoma, Mudimbe himself). Writings in a third group (those of Atanganga, Njoh-Mouelle, and other writings of Eboussi-Boulaga), which involve reflections on philosophy 'as a critical auxiliary to the process of development', Mudimbe regards as 'high points' in the field. Finally, the works of Nkombe, Tshiamalenga, Leleye, Kinyogo, and others Mudimbe includes in the subgroup of writings which share a concern for philosophical hermeneutics (Mudimbe 1983:146).

Oruka, Smet, Nkombe, and Mudimbe—each employs some notion(s) of the meaning

of 'P/philosophy', even if, on their interpretations, they attempt to employ the term as it is used by those whom they situate in the field. Nonetheless, in every case, i.e. whether through the meaning(s) they give to the term, or on the basis of their interpretations of the works of others, or in terms of the actual efforts of those who do 'African philosophy', the consequences are the same: the *deconstruction* of Philosophy.

### **Oedipal moments and maturity: The unmaking and remaking of P/philosophy**

When read in the context of the history of Western Philosophy as narrated by the dominate voices and practised by the dominate figures in general, and against the explicit derogations of African peoples by a number of these figures in particular, the advent of discussions about 'African' P/philosophy is, by the force of historical contingencies, *necessarily* deconstructive: Philosophy, both as practice and accomplishment, had been reserved for the most capable few among the peoples privileged to be the 'agents of the universe',<sup>21</sup> peoples who had realized—in fact, were the embodiments of—the Greco-European paradigmatic forms of rational contemplation and understanding as the highest, most definitive, and most divine activities of which *true* humans are capable. Africans, in the mirror of this paragon of 'rational man', were not truly, fully human. Thus each instance of African philosophy—whether ethno-, ideological-nationalist, critical, or synthetic, is at the outset a deconstructive challenge: it decentres the concept of 'Philosophy' and its discursive practices into the history of their construction and maintenance, into the historicity of the philosophical anthropology that forms the fabric of their textuality and thus of the race/ethnicity, the gender, and the cultural agenda of the voices in which they became embodied, and the practices through which they were constituted and institutionalized.

That each instance of African philosophy is at the outset a deconstructive challenge is clear in the case of works in the category of ethnophilosophy (though not without serious problems). The discursive practices and texts grouped in this subfield have their source in, among other things, the desire to replace the caricature of the invented African with an image reconstructed (and rehabilitated) through the extension of the denotative range of the privileged category of 'rational human animal' to 'traditional' Africans. The effort to fulfil this agenda involves the explicit representation of the conceptual insights and practices of particular ethnic groups.<sup>22</sup> Here one concern—certainly a major effect—is to show the particularity of philosophy while supporting, at the same time, arguments on behalf of a reconstructed sense of universality. But the historical contexts within which many of the works in this subgroup emerged, and the agenda of the challenge, were to significantly influence the choice of strategies employed in the construction of the arguments supporting the presentations of African 'philosophies' or African 'thought': even when the arguments were not advanced by anthropologists themselves, the proponents tended to make use of ethnographic findings and/or the techniques of ethnographic description to identify the practices (linguistic, intellectual, and otherwise) and concepts of particular African peoples which, it was argued, embodied their 'P/philosophy'. Thus did works of this genre come to be labelled 'ethno-philosophy'.<sup>23</sup>

This ethno-philosophical challenge was given a tremendous boost by other historical

developments: i.e. the struggles for the liberation of the colonial states of Africa from European hegemony, struggles which were to culminate, beginning in the early 1950s, in the establishment of politically independent African nations. These developments had a profound impact on philosophical praxis in Africa. For the struggles harnessed into powerful political, social, and cultural movements the challenges on the part of many Africans and people of African descent (and some Europeans) to the 'invented African'. As part of this challenge, a number of important African thinkers/activists took up key terms in European discourses (socio-political, cultural, and disciplinary, including anthropology, religion, and philosophy) and challenged both the historical and social range of their applicability, and their very foundations.

An important example of this challenge is the critical examination of that central motif of Western Philosophy—the characterization of the fully developed human being as 'rational man' (an ideal silently and arrogantly embodied in the white races and ethnic groups of Europe, but a silence readily abandoned for boisterous and equally arrogant proclamation in Africa)—and the reconstruction of the different, yet fully human, African by the proponents of Négritude, one of the most deconstructive forms of African philosophy. In the words of Irele:

A distinctive vision of Africa and the black man, and of his relation to the world... stands at the very heart of the literature of Négritude and informs it in a fundamental way, provides what can be said to constitute the 'mental structure'...that underlies the imaginative expression of the French-speaking black writers, and which emerges with a sharp clarity in the ideological writings. The rehabilitation of Africa which stands out as the central project of Négritude thus represents a movement towards the recovery of a certain sense of spiritual integrity by the black man, as the definition of a black collective identity, as well as of a new world view, derived from a new feeling for the African heritage of values and of experience (1981:67–88).

In this view we have a major challenge to the notion and ideal of what it means for Africans to be human. Further, we have the reclamation of the place of Africans on the stage of human history, but now cast in roles defined by Africans who have structured those roles out of what they take to be the meanings of African history and existence, both of which are seen as decidedly different (or ought to be) from the history and existence of Europeans.<sup>24</sup> But the complex of strategies that we now refer to as Négritude involved much more than the rehabilitation of Africa. In addition to the construction of a philosophical anthropology carved out of African ebony, there was also an effort to displace from its dominating position, the paradigm of rationalist epistemology championed by Philosophy, by arguing in favour of an epistemology which had its basis in the African racial/biological-cultural life-world. In the words of Senghor, one of the initiators and chief theoreticians of the movement: 'Europeans' reasoning is analytical discursive by utilization; NegroAfrican reasoning is intuitive by participation...' (Senghor 1964:14 quoted by Oruka 1978:7) and, further: 'Knowledge coincides, here, with the being of the object in its discontinuous and indeterminate reality' (Reed and Wake 1976:30, quoted by Irele 1981:75). In addition, for Senghor and

other Négritude writers, the African historical-cultural life-world was shaped by the distinct values and aesthetics of African peoples. Part of the Négritude agenda was to identify the elements and practices constituting this life-world and to reclaim and rehabilitate it from the twisted amnesia of European colonialism and enslavement. Thus, in addition to arguments on behalf of an African epistemology, Négritude bequeathed African-centric aesthetics, axiology, and socio-political philosophy.

Like all discursive ventures, Négritude is not a homogeneous unity, nor is there consensus regarding the meaning of the term (Irele 1981:67). And there continue to be powerful (and sometimes persuasive) criticisms of Senghorian Négritude. Nonetheless, the Négritude arguments, fundamentally, involved a profound displacement of the African invented by Europeans. It is this African challenge and displacement, through radical critique and counter-construction, that has been most powerfully and influentially deconstructive: it is a direct attack on the assumed embodiment of the paragon of humanity in the whites of Europe, an attack which forces this embodiment back upon itself, forces it to confront its own historicity, its own wretched history, and the stench of the decay announcing its impending death. Perhaps no other European has articulated this experience better than Sartre:

Here...are black men standing, black men who examine us; and I want you to feel, as I, the sensation of being seen. For the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen. It was a seeing pure and uncomplicated; the light of his eyes drew all things from their primeval darkness. The whiteness of his skin was a further aspect of vision, a light condensed. The white man, white because he was man, white like day, white as truth is white, white like virtue, lighted like a torch all creation; he unfolded the essence, secret and white, of existence. Today, these black men have fixed their gaze upon us and our gaze is thrown back in our eyes; black torches, in their turn, light the world and our white heads are only small lanterns balanced in the wind... Being is black, being is of fire, we are accidental and remote; we have to justify for ourselves our customs, our techniques, our 'undercooked' paleness, our verdigris vegetation. By this steady and corrosive gaze, we are picked to the bone... If we wish to escape this fate which closes in upon us, we can no longer count upon the privilege of our race, of our colour, of our techniques. We shall be able to rejoin the human hegemony only in tearing off our white underclothing and in attempting simply to be men (1976:7–11).

The reconstructive aspects of this challenge are to be found in the self-definition, the specification, and reappropriation of an African authenticity and legitimacy, in the disproving—the displacing—of the inventive discourse, and, most importantly, in the efforts to reclaim control over African historicity and the interpretation of African history in general, and African philosophical history in particular (though it must be noted that there were/are persons in Africa for whom the task is that of proving themselves and other Africans to be worthy of assimilating into a humanity defined in Eurocentric terms).

The same is true for many of the other strategic projects grouped together as nationalist-ideological philosophy, and for a number of those which are part of the

critical, professional, synthetic groupings. In each of the complex of activities comprising these strategies there are particular works/strategies which are, in a very real way, classically deconstructive, in a Derridian sense: they preserve (are constituted by) the structure of 'difference'. For in each case, the object of the strategy—the articulation of a 'text' of 'African philosophy'—is constituted within the bounds of that which it challenges (i.e. Philosophy), but as both the same (philosophy) and different (African). Such works have their distinct identity, through the rules governing discourses of/about P/philosophy, only in their difference gained through an ineliminable relation with that from which it differs.

More examples of what I have been calling deconstructive challenges to Western Philosophy can be drawn from the various subfields or trends of African philosophy than space will allow me to pursue on this occasion. Toward a closing off of this discussion, I shall at least identify what I take to be other ruptures in the history of philosophy in terms of the efforts of various thinkers of African descent to reconstruct the history of African philosophy, efforts that are self-conscious in their challenge to the received wisdom of white lies about both Philosophy and Africa. Suffice it to say that the arguments in support of these claims are deeply problematic and are far from settled.

The reconstructive work of three persons is noteworthy here. First, that of James (1976). According to his arguments (poorly presented ones at that), Ancient African (i.e. Egyptian) philosophy was the precursor to and source of much or all of Greek philosophy. Olela (1981) continues this line of argument and adds a second claim, namely, that 'black [American] philosophy' is (and should be) reducible to African philosophy. Finally, Keita (1979) proposes the following periodization of African philosophy:

- 1 the classical period—a time, supposedly, when Egypt was peopled and governed by black Africans (for arguments on behalf of this thesis cf. e.g. Williams 1974 and Diop 1978)
- 2 the medieval period—one of Islamic influence on literate expression in North and Central Africa during the time of the 'medieval' states of Mali, Ghana, and Songhay; and
- 3 the modern period: '...less well developed than its two preceding moments, since philosophical traditions have become somewhat distorted as a result of the colonial experience. As a result, the best works, as is expected, are political and literary in nature' (Keita 1979:36).

The significance of these works, their limitations and controversial agendas notwithstanding, lies, in part, in the concern of the authors to take up the task of reconstructing the history of Western Philosophy as a direct challenge to the dominant narratives which have claimed Greece as its origin. In the narrative reconstructions of James, Olela, and Keita, we are taken back to Egypt—African Egypt, not the Egypt of Hegel that has been annexed to Europe—as 'source'. In light of the 'untruth' racking the embodiment of the mainstream narratives of Philosophy, this possibility is an issue of very real importance. It is to be hoped that it will soon receive the disciplined, systematic attention it deserves and requires.

### A LOGIC COME FULL CIRCLE

Finally, I will conclude by taking up, very briefly, one of the lines of development that indicates quite well something I referred to near the beginning of this essay, namely, which discussions of African philosophy render the notion of 'African' problematic in its own right.

The different strategies grouped together as ideological-nationalist philosophy—especially those of the Négritude authors—are the ones which have been most concerned with addressing the question of the meaning of 'African', especially through efforts directed at reconstructing and rehabilitating the 'African' while forging an identity and authenticity thought to be appropriate to the exigencies of 'modern' existence. And, as I have attempted to show, these efforts have their locus in, and derive their meanings from, the historical context of the institutionalization of the practices, and their rationalizations, of European racism and imperialism in the colonization of the African continent, and the enslavement and dispersal of Africans to the New World, and the mediation of these rationalizations in the self-appointments of mainstream figures of Western Philosophy and its historians.

But the concern has not been limited to national-ideological discussions. Even for those persons less concerned with rehabilitation and the formation of identity, and who are generally not concerned to deconstruct Philosophy (e.g. persons grouped in the categories of critical, synthetic, professional philosophy), there is, nonetheless, a need to circumscribe the (for them) proper meaning and bounds of 'African', a need to explain—if not justify- the meaning/use of the term 'African philosophy', a need, finally, that is required by the rules (and anthropological commitments) controlling the dominant traditions in Philosophy.

The ostensible issue is the meaning of 'philosophy'. And often it is the Crahayian definition (more or less) that is accepted as appropriate. For some persons, the field of 'African' philosophy is distinctive only to the extent that the persons involved in it 'just happen' (accidentally) to be African. Philosophy proper, it is said, is, as praxis, the same, regardless of where it is engaged in, or by whom: i.e. it is characterized by 'rationality' (in the mainstream sense) or 'science' (in an equally mainstream positivistic sense) and is thus universal, in both its unity and singularity and its empirical dispersion. While we might refer to the mainstream characterizations of philosophy as 'European', rationality is not the birthright of Europe, nor of the Greeks, but is a capability shared by all persons, their race of ethnicity notwithstanding. 'African' philosophy, then, by this argument, is distinguished only by the geographical origins of its practitioners, not by a content somehow made different by their 'Africanness' (à la the proponents of Négritude). Again, Hountondji is representative of persons holding this view:

What is in question here, substantially, is the idea of philosophy, or rather, of African philosophy. More accurately, the problem is whether the word 'philosophy', when qualified by the word 'African', must retain its habitual meaning, or whether the simple addition of an adjective necessarily changes the meaning of the substantive. What is in question...is the universality of the word 'philosophy' throughout its possible geographical applications.

My own view is that this universality must be preserved—not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another, but because these differences of *content* are meaningful precisely and only as differences of *content*, which, as such, refer back to the essential unity of a single discipline, of a single style of inquiry.

The essential point...is that we have produced a radically new definition of African philosophy, the criterion now being the geographical origin of the authors rather than an alleged specificity of content. The effect of this is to broaden the narrow horizon which has hitherto been imposed on African philosophy and to treat it, as now conceived, as a methodical inquiry with the same universal aims as those of any other philosophy in the world. In short, it destroys the dominant mythological conception of Africanness and restores the simple, obvious truth that Africa is above all a continent and the concept of Africa an empirical, geographical concept and not a metaphysical one (1983:56, 66, emphasis added).

I find this view particularly disturbing. But it is an excellent example of the manner in which the historical forces mediated in the language and discursive practices of Philosophy explode the limits of its structuring rules. As Hountondji plays out his argument, it quickly unravels. It takes only a few probing questions to uncover the fact that Hountondji uses ‘African’ as a signifier not just for *geographical* origins, but also for race/ethnicity. This attempt to circumscribe ‘African’ is frustrated by the play of forces that brings on a deconstructive encounter with the ‘white mythology’<sup>25</sup> infecting Philosophy. At the core of this mythology is a substance-accident metaphysics grounding a supplemental philosophical anthropology: the soul, consciousness, or the person is regarded as the *essence* of the human being; their race, ethnicity, or gender is secondary or accidental.

This is at best naïve. No living person is accidentally or secondarily African or European, that is to say, is of a particular race or ethnicity ‘accidentally’ while being a ‘person’ or ‘human’ *substantively*. While some important gains have been realized in the political arena with the help of the ‘substantive-accident’ and ‘universal-particular’ strategies of Western metaphysics, to forget that they are precisely *strategies* and use them to conceptualize concrete persons or peoples as though they capture and express differences of our effective history is to succumb to some of the worst seductions of the dominant voices of the mainstream Western Philosophy: the premature, false abstract universality of an equally false abstract humanity invoked prior to the holding of appropriate conversations in which all of the key issues, including ‘rationality’ and ‘human’, are themselves the first matters of discussion.

Again, there is serious naïvety with regard to the notion of philosophy as a single discipline having an ‘essential unity’ and a ‘single style of inquiry’. No serious, critical encounter with the history of Western philosophy can leave one with this view—unless, of course, this encounter is led by the historians of Philosophy. On the contrary, what a critical review of the various traditions grouped together as philosophy reveals is that many different strategies have been employed each generally claiming to be the correct



and most appropriate form. Thus the history is rich with palace revolutions. What is consistent is the use of 'philosophy' as the signifier for the discourse/strategy candidate, and, sometimes, the sharing of 'family resemblances' among various candidates. Only from the vantage point of great distance, with the perspectival distortion that accompanies it, do we group all of these candidates together and call it a 'single discipline'. The point of unity, perhaps, is that the participants in these discourses/strategy ventures, using what passes for them as the appropriate definition, call their doings 'philosophy'—or those of us constructing the history of such ventures do so in hindsight *using our definition*. There is no Platonic essence or 'essential unity' of philosophy, certainly no *single style* of inquiry.

Philosophy has been (and continues to struggle to be, in the rear-guard actions of various incarnations) one of the most privileged of disciplines, especially in its self-appointed role as guardian of the self-image of the brokers of Western history and culture. Were this not the case, there would have been no debate about 'African philosophy'. Thus, any discussion of *African* philosophy involves, *necessarily*, confronting this privileged self-image. It is this confrontation which problematizes 'African' and forces its deconstruction/reconstruction in its relation of difference with 'European'.

But this confrontation leaves the complex 'field' and history of Western philosophy—its past, its present, and its future—forever altered, in ways similar to (because part and parcel of) the alteration of the socio-political landscape between 'the West', Africa and the African diaspora. The fraudulent Greco-European monarchy philosophia is no more.

Does this mean that Philosophy is left without universality and unity? Yes. Does this mean that philosophy is without universality and unity? Yes, again; but it never had these characteristics, in the sense proclaimed by Philosophy. What the ruptures and challenges of African philosophy do mean is that unity and universality can only be achieved via the consensus of discursive practices, thus, that the achievement is always tentative, a result of pronesis. It is my hope that we find our way to this, and other important universals-through-consensus by way of open, 'edifying' discussion, in the words of Rorty, discussions in which all of the world's peoples are participants and which are conducted according to the best possible realization of Habermasian conditions for undistorted communication, not through an attempt to escape from key elements of our historicity—our race/ethnicity and gender included—no matter how well intended or how well rationalized through methodological moves fashioned while looking at ourselves in the mirror of nature, a mirror so captivating that it sometimes blinds us—or allows us to blind ourselves—to the inextricable historical, cultural, racial/ethnic, and gender components which give it its prismatic character.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 'In very broad terms, deconstruction consists of a critique of metaphysics, that branch of philosophy ...which posits first and final causes or grounds, such as transcendental ideality, material substance, subjective identity, conscious intuition, prehistorical nature, and being conceived as presence, from which the multiplicity of

- existence can be deduced and through which it can be accounted for and given meaning. Standard practice in metaphysics...is to understand the world using binary oppositions, one of which is assumed to be prior and superior to the other' (Ryan 1982:9).
- 2 For a discussion and critique of 'ocular metaphors' and their consequences in Western philosophy, see Rorty, 1979.
  - 3 A Greek word which, in the classical period, 'covered a wide range of meanings expressed by quite different words in most modern languages... *word, speech, argument, explanation, doctrine, esteem, numerical computation, measure, proportion, plea, principle...*' In Heraclitus' use of the term three ideas were combined: 'human thought about the universe, the rational structure of the universe itself, and the source of that rational structure'. The Sophists used the term for arguments and what arguments were about; Plato and Aristotle, on the other hand, used the word *nous*. The greatest extension of the term *logos* as a doctrine came with the Stoics for whom 'Logos was the principle of all rationality in the universe, and as such it was identified with God and with the source of all activity (Kerferd 1972a:83–84).
  - 4 'Homer used the term *nous* to refer to the mind and its functions generally, but in the pre-Socratics it became increasingly identified with knowledge, and with reason as opposed to sense perception. The term subsequently developed in two ways. For Plato it was equated generally with the rational part of the individual soul (*to logistikon*) [...]. Aristotle also considered *nous* as intellect distinguished from sense perception [...]. The idea of a cosmic or divine mind represents the other way in which the concept of *nous* developed [...]. The Stoics equated *nous* with the *Logos*, so that for them it was both cosmic reason and the rational element in man; the two streams of development were thus united' (Kerferd 1972b:525).
  - 5 '[...] this identification of rationality with the philosophical dogmas of the day reflects the fact that, since Kant, philosophy has made it its business to present a permanent neutral framework for culture. This framework is built around a distinction between inquiry into the framework for culture. This framework is built around a distinction between inquiry into the real—the disciplines which are on "the secure path of a science"—and the rest of culture. [...] If philosophy is essentially the formulation of the distinction between science and non-science, then endangering current formulations seem to endanger philosophy itself, and with it rationality (of which philosophy is seen as the vigilant guardian, constantly feuding off the forces of darkness)' (Rorty 1979:269).
  - 6 The rules for controlling discourse include the following: *exclusion* (prohibited words; division and rejection, e.g. reason vs. folly, rationality vs. irrationality, true vs. false); *internal rules* (commentary, the author as unifying principle; disciplines); *qualifications for participants* (verbal rituals; 'fellowships of discourse', i.e. writing, doctrinal groups; and social appropriation, or the social distribution of knowledge).
  - 7 Hegel's, *The philosophy of history* is produced from lectures delivered by him in the Winter of 1830–1831, though there had been previous deliveries in 1822–1823 and 1824–1825 (cf. Hegel 1956:xi-xiii). The fact that these ideas were expressed by a person who was to become one of Germany's and Europe's most famous

philosophers more than seventy years prior to the European cannibalization of Africa in 1895 should not go unnoticed.

8 An important discussion of this issue, as it relates to African literature.

9 In the words of Colin King (Tempels 1959:12): 'It is my hope that this translation will assist many to find, in the stimulating thought of Fr. Tempels' work, a key to a fuller understanding of African peoples and a deeper grasp of the truth that the true philosophy is that which both accepts and rejects all philosophies; but in regard to peoples, rejects none: accepting all as they are and as they will become'.

10 This discussion of the classifications of Smet and Nkombe is helped by the insightful discussions of my colleague V.Mudimbe.

11 The phrase is taken from a complex of arguments, the principle source of which are the speeches and writings of Blyden (cf. 1862, 1869a, 1869b, 1903, 1967, and Lynch 1978), who attempted to articulate the difference between Africans and Europeans in terms of the former's 'personality' (cf. also Nkrumah 1975:82).

12 ...an organized ideological and political tradition and movement that emerged in the late 1800s, at the instigation of Henry Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian lawyer, and later, W.E.B.Du Bois, African-American activist scholar and champion par excellence of the interests of Africans and people of African descent. The principal manifestations of the interests of the tradition were a series of conferences (1900, London) and congresses (1919, Paris; 1921, London-Brussels; 1923, London-Lisbon; 1927, New York; 1945, Manchester; and 1974, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania—the first Pan-African congress to be held on the continent of Africa), which called upon Africans and peoples of African descent world wide (hence Pan-African) to join together in an organized struggle to liberate the continent of Africa from European colonialism, and to free African peoples everywhere from domination and the invidious discrimination of racism (cf. Geiss 1974).

13 The 'Négritude Movement', as it has come to be called, takes its name from the central concept which, like Blyden's 'African personality', attempts to distinguish Africans from Europeans by defining the African in terms of the complex of character traits, dispositions, capabilities, natural endowments, etc., in their relative predominance and overall organizational arrangements, which form the Negro essence, i.e. our Négritude. Originating in literary circles, at the instigation of Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Négritude Movement quickly exploded the boundaries of these circles as the powerful political forces contained in its arguments played themselves out and took root in the fertile soil of the discontent of colonized Africa. This movement, as I will later argue, represents one of the major deconstructive challenges to Western Philosophy. Cf. Senghor 1975 and Diop 1975.

14 'African humanism' is another recurrent theme in discussion of the past quarter-century that has attempted to identify values and life-practices indigenous to African peoples which distinguish them, in non-trivial ways, from peoples of European descent. In the words of Buthelezi (1984:2): 'Long before Europeans settled in South Africa little more than three centuries ago, indigenous African peoples had well-developed philosophical views about the worth of human beings and about desirable community relationships. A spirit of humanism—called *ubuntu* (humanness) in the Zulu language and *botho* in the Sotho language—shaped the

- thoughts and daily lives of our peoples. Humanism and communal traditions together encouraged harmonious social relations.’
- 15 In some cases, discussions of African socialism are quite similar to arguments regarding African ‘humanism’ to the extent that the claim is made that the ‘traditional’ Africa (i.e., Africa before its colonization by Europeans) was indigenously ‘socialist’, prior to the discussions of Marx and other Europeans, in view of Africa’s ‘communal traditions’ (as Buthelezi puts it in the passage quoted above in note 14). In other discussions, the objective is to fashion a particularly *African* form of socialism, one more in keeping with the historical and cultural realities of black Africa. See, for example, Senghor 1962.
- 16 An expressly political/ideological venture that, in service to its conception of the goal of African liberation, involves the importation of the Engels/Lenin scientization of ‘Marxism’ and its consolidation and institutionalization in highly centralized, authoritarian, revolutionary political parties and movements.
- 17 The title of a book by Nkrumah, first president of the post-colonial independent state of Ghana. In this work Nkrumah (1970:74) offers what he terms ‘philosophy and ideology for decolonization’; ‘consciencism is the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism is that philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience’.
- 18 This is the name for yet another cultural nationalist programme which emerged during the period of anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Here again the objective is to argue on behalf of a complex of indigenous and/or reconstructed values, practices, and social arrangements which, supposedly, will best serve contemporary Africa. The chief proponent of this programme was Mobutu of the former Zaire.
- 19 Hountondji (1974:11–12) offers one such characterization: ‘In its popular meaning, the word “philosophy” designates not only the theoretical discipline that goes by the same name, but, more generally, all visions of the world, all systems of virtually stable representation that lie deep beneath the behaviour of an individual or a group of people... “Philosophy”, in that sense, appears as something which is held on to, a minimum system of creeds more deep-rooted in the self than any other systems... “philosophy”, in that sense, is more a matter of assumption than of observation ... It matters little whether the individual or society concerned are conscious or not of their own “philosophy”, in strict terms, spontaneous “philosophy” is necessarily unconscious... all told, it constitutes a testimony to the intellectual identity of the person or the group.’
- 20 Mudimbe (1983:149) takes care to note that, contrary to other African scholars (notably Hountondji and Towa), he does not employ ‘ethno-philosophy’ as a pejorative characterization: ‘I am using the term in its etymological value: ethnos-philosophia or Weltanschauung of a community’.
- 21 This is a phrase used by an astronomer colleague to characterize what he takes to be

the place and responsibility of scientifically rational humans (according to the now classical paradigm of positivistic science) in the scheme of cosmic evolution.

22 Again, Kagamé's works are representative. Others include: Gyekye 1975:45–53; Sodipo 1973:12–20; Ayoade 1979:71–89; and Minkus 1979:91–132.

23 The term 'ethno-philosophy' is problematic. It is used by some to classify a group of works which, it is argued, mistakenly attribute achievements in Philosophy to 'traditional' Africa. Hountondji (cf. 1974, 1983) is one of the leading proponents of this view. Tempels' *Bantu philosophy*, and the work of Kagamé (e.g. 1965) are, in this view, major perpetrators of this error. The argument, overly simplified, is the following: to say of 'traditional' Africans that they produced 'Philosophy' is to use the term in a wide and improper sense, to cover the taken-for-granted mores, customs, behaviour, etc. of a *group* of people. Tempels had said that the Bantu were not conscious of their 'philosophy', hence it was left for him (and others like him) to interpret the Bantu's philosophy for them. But, Hountondji, et. al., argue, Philosophy (à la Crahay, 1965) presupposes the critical selfconsciousness of an *individual*, as well as discussion and writing. Thus Tempels' and Kagamé's recapitulations of the life-practices and beliefs of the Bantu and Bantu-Rwanda peoples more closely approximate *ethnology* than philosophy. But, in their critical discussions of these matters, they—Tempels and Kagamé—are doing philosophy; the peoples they wrote about were not. Hence their writings (Tempel's and Kagamé's) are termed 'ethno-philosophy', a hybrid of ethnology and philosophy. This issue deserves space for its own discussion, more than it is possible to devote to it on this occasion. Suffice it to say that I, like Mudimbe (e.g. 1983), differ with Hountondji, et. al., on the use of 'ethno-philosophy' as a term of derision, or at least as a characterization which denies of 'traditional' Africans the capacity for and/or achievement of critical self-reflection. At the heart of the Hountondji criticism is a privileging of philosophy as Philosophy, as, in his words, *science*, and a privileging of writing as a necessity for the practice of Philosophy, and, the equally erroneously privileging of 'critical self-reflection' as something not yet achieved by 'traditional' Africans. No people who do not involve themselves in and succeed at reflecting on the nature and conditions of their life and, as a result, identifying rules, principles, values, etc., for the conduct of that life, which they then mediate to succeeding generations, will last more than one generation. Obviously, African people have been successful in this regard. And a great deal of ethnological literature provides ample evidence of the results of this kind of reflexive praxis among African peoples. Why, then, is it proper to deny of these peoples the recognition that they were participants in activities we now call 'philosophy'? At the very least, Oruka (1978) is on a more correct path with his category of 'philosophic sagacity'. Finally, *any* attempt to recount (i.e. to construct) a (as opposed to the) history of philosophy will be to reconstruct a history of philosophy as *practised by particular individuals who are part of particular cultural life-worlds*, and, thus, such a recounting will necessarily include (or presuppose) an 'ethnological' moment, the penetrating and equally deconstructive critiques of European ethnological practices in Africa by Mudimbe, Hountondji, and others notwithstanding. Furthermore, this recounting will be governed by what *we* (i.e., the person(s) doing the reconstructing) take the

word 'philosophy' to mean.

- 24 We must not overlook the contributions to this phase of the debate by European scholars such as Sartre (with his *Black Orpheus*, originally published as an introduction to a collection of Négritude writings) and Jahn (author of 'Ntu—African philosophy', a work which discusses the forging of the 'unity' of 'neo-African culture' in the contemporary period, i.e. the 1950s, the period of the Négritude movement).
- 25 'Metaphysics—the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason', Derrida 1982:207, 213, 271).

### References

- Abraham, W.E. 1962. *The mind of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Adotevi, S. 1972. *Négritude et négrologues*, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions.
- Allier, R.S.P. 1929 *The mind of the savage*. London: G.Bell and Sons.
- Appiah, K.A. 1992. *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. London: Methuen.
- Aristotle. 1924. *Metaphysics*, 2 vols. W.D.Ross (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ayoade, J.A.A. 1979. 'Time in Yoruba thought', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*, 2nd edn., Washington: University Press of America, 1979:71–89.
- Bachelard, G. 1949. 'Témoignages sur la philosophie bantoue du Pere Tempels'. *Présence Africaine*, 7, 1949.
- Barrès, M. 1897. 'Le roman de l'énergie nationale', *Les Déracinés*, I. Paris: Fasquelle; repr. Paris: Livre de Poche, 1967.
- Benveniste, E. 1966, 'Categories de pensée et catégories de langue', in *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966:63–74.
- Bergson, H.-L. 1950. *L'évolution créatrice*. Geneva: Albert Skira. Tr. A.Mitchell, *Creative evolution*. London: Macmillan, 1954.
- Bird, C.S. 1980. *Explorations in African systems of thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Blyden, E.W. 1862. *Liberia's offering*. New York: John A.Gray.
- Blyden, E.W. 1869a. *Liberia: Past, present and future*. Washington: Mc Gill & Witherow.
- Blyden, E.W. 1869b. 'The Negro in ancient history'. *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 71–93.
- Blyden, E.W. 1903. *Africa and Africans*. Proceedings on the occasion of a Banquet for Edward W. Blyden by West Africans in London. London: CM Phillips.
- Blyden, E.W. 1967 (1887). *Christianity, Islam and the Negro race*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University
- Bodunrin, P.O. 1981. The question of African Philosophy. *Philosophy*, Vol. 56:161–179.
- Bodunrin, P.O. 1991. 'The question of African philosophy', in T.Serequeberhan (ed.), *African philosophy: The essential readings*. New York: Paragon House, 1991:63–86.
- Brelsford, V. 1935. *Primitive philosophy*. London: John Bale.
- Brelsford, V. 1938. *The philosophy of the savage*. London: John Bale.
- Brenrjes, A.B. 1977. 'Anton Wilhelm Amo in Halle, Wittenberg and Jena'. *Universitas*, 6

(1).

- Buthlezi, M. 1984. 'The legacy of African humanism'. *Natural history*, 12:2.
- Carroll, D. 1995. *French literary fascism: Nationalism, anti-Semitism and the ideology of culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Césaire, A. 1939. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956, 1971. Tr. in English M. Rosello with A. Pritchard, *Notebook of a return to my native land*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Press, 1995.
- Césaire, A. 1962. *Discours 'sur le colonialisme*. 4th edn. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Crahay F. 1965. 'Conceptual take-off conditions for a Bantu philosophy'. *Diogenes*, Winter 1965, 52:55–78.
- D'Arboussier, G. 1959. 'Une dangereuse mystification: La théorie de la Négritude.' *Nouvelle Critique*, June: 34–47.
- Deacon, M.B. 1996. *African philosophy: From drums and masks to rationality?*, MA diss. Department of Philosophy, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- De Craemer, W. 1977. *The Jamaa Movement and the Church: A Bantu Catholic Movement in Zaire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delafosse, M. 1901. *Essci de manuel pratique de la langue Mandé Oumandingue*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
- De Man, P. 1971. *Blindness and insight: Essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1967. *L'Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil. English tr. *Writing and difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Derrida, J. 1982. 'White mythology: Metaphor in the text of philosophy', in Tr. A. Bass, *Margins of philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Descartes, R. 1949 (1641). 'Meditations on the first philosophy', in *A discourse on method*, London: J. M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1949:65–143.
- Diop, C.A. 1956. 'Nations nègres et culture'. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Diop, C.A. 1959. *L'unité culturelle de L'Afrique noire*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Diop, C.A. 1962. 'Égypte ancienne et Afrique noire.' *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire*, 24(3–4):449–574.
- Diop, C.A. 1975. 'Remarks on African personality and Négritude', in C.M. Mutiso and S.W. Rohio (eds.), *Readings in African political thought*. London: Heinemann, 1975:67–70.
- Diop, C.A. 1978. *The cultural unity of black Africa*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Durkheim, E. 1893. *De la division du travail social*. Paris. Tr. G. Simpson, *The division of labour in society*, New York: Free Press.
- Eboussi-Boulaga, F. 1968. 'Le Bantou problématique'. *Présence Africaine*, 66, 1968:4–40.
- Fanon, F. 1961. *The wretched of the earth*. Tr. C. Farrington, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fanon, F. 1986 (1952). *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Fanoudh-Siefer, L. 1968. *Le Mythe de nègre et de T Afrique noire dans la littérature française de 1800 a la deuxième guerre mondiale*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Finnegan, R. 1973. 'Literacy versus non-literacy: The great divide? Some comments on the significance of "literature" in non-literate cultures', in R. Horton and R. Finnegan (eds.), *Modes of thought: Essays on thinking in Western and non-Western societies*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973:112–144.
- Forde, D. (ed.) 1954. *African worlds: Studies in the cosmological ideas and social values of African peoples*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fortes, M. and Dieterlen, G. (eds.). 1965. *African systems of thought*. London: Oxford

University Press.

Foucault, M. 1972. 'The discourse on language', in *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Harper & Row.

Foucault, M. 1973. *The archeology of knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row.

Franklin, A. 1953. 'La Négritude: réalité ou mystification? Reflections sur "Orphée noir".' *Présence Africaine*, 14:287–303.

Geiss, I. 1974. *The pan-African movement*. New York: African Publishing Co.

Gellner, E. 1965. *Thought and change*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Gobineau, A. de. 1853–1855. 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines'. Paris: Didot, 3 vols; Tr. A. Collins, *The inequality of human races*, London: Britons, 1966.

Griaule, M. 1948. 'Dieux d'eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemmeli'. Paris: Editions du Chêne; London: Britons, 1966. 1st edn. Tr. R. Butler, 2nd edn. Tr. A.I. Richards and B. Hooke *Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An introduction to Dogon religions ideas*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Gyekye, K. 'Philosophical relevance of Akan proverbs'. *Second Order*, vi(2):45–53.

Habermas, J. 1985. *The philosophical discourse of modernity: Twelve lectures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1956. *The philosophy of history*. New York: Dover Publications.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1956 (1837). *The philosophy of history*. Tr. J. Sibree, repr. with intro, C.F. Friedrich, New York: Dover.

Horton, R. 1993. 'African traditional thought and Western science', in *Patterns of thought in Africa and the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 197–258.

Hountondji, P. 1972. 'Le mythe de la philosophie spontanée'. *Cahiers philosophiques Africains*, (1). English tr. 'The myth of spontaneous philosophy'. *Consequence*, 1 (Jan.–June), 1974:11–37.

Hountondji, P. 1974. 'The myth of spontaneous philosophy'. *Consequence*, 1:11–37.

Hountondji, P. 1976. *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. Tr. H. Evans and J. Ree. London: Hutchinson.

Hountondji, P. 1981. 'Que peut la philosophe?' *Présence Africaine*, 119:47–71.

Hountondji, P. 1983. *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/ London: Hutchinson.

Hountondji, P. 1991. 'African philosophy: Myth and reality', in T. Serequeberhan (ed.), *African philosophy: The essential readings*. New York: Paragon House, 1991:111–131.

Hountondji, P. 1992. 'Daily life in black Africa: Elements for a critique', in V.Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *The surreptitious speech*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Hountondji, P. 1994. 'Démarginaliser', intro to *Les savoirs endogènes*. Dakar: CODESRIA, 1–34.

Husserl, E. 1964. *Phenomenology and the crisis of philosophy*. New York: Harper & Row.

Irele, A. 1981. 'What is Négritude?', in A. Irele, *The African experience in literature and ideology*, London: Heinemann, 1981:67–88.

Irele, A. 1995. 'Dimensions of African discourse', in K. Myrsiades and J. McGuire (eds.), *Order and partialities: Theory, pedagogy and the postcolonial*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995:15–34.

Jahn, J. 1971a. 'Ntu—African philosophy', in J. Jahn, *Muntu: The new African culture*, New York: Grove Press.

Jahn, J. 1971b *Muntu: The new African culture*. New York: Grove Press.

James, G.G.M. 1976 (1954). *Stolen legacy*. Reprint, San Francisco: Julian Richardson



Associates.

- July, R. 1968. *The origins of modern African thought*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Kagamé, A. 1956. *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être*. Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966.
- Kagamé, A. 1976. *La philosophie bantu comparée*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Kaphagawani, D.N. 1991. 'Bantu nomenclature and African philosophy', in H.O.Oruka (ed.), *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies, 1991:179–196.
- Karp, I. and Bird, C.S. 1980. *Explorations in African systems of thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Keita, L. 1979. 'The African philosophical tradition', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. 2nd edn., Washington: University Press of America, 1979:35–54.
- Keita, L. 1991. 'Contemporary African philosophy: The search for a method', in H.O.Oruka (ed.), *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies, 1991:197–214.
- Kennedy, 1991. *Black writers in French: A literary history of Négritude*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Kerferd, G.B. 1972a. 'Logos', in P.Edwards (ed.), *The encyclopedia of philosophy*. New York: Macmillan/ London: Collier Macmillan, 1972 (1967), 5:83–84.
- Kerferd, G.B. 1972b. 'Nous', in P.Edwards (ed.), *The encyclopedia of philosophy*. New York: Macmillan/ London: Collier Macmillan, 1972 (1967), 5:525.
- Kesteloot, L. 1965. *Les écrivains noirs de langue Française*. Brussels: Institut Solvay.
- Ki-Zerbo, J. 1972. *Histoire de l'Afrique noire*. Paris: Hatier.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1912. *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Paris: F.Alcan; Tr. L.Clare, *How natives think*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1922. *La mentalité primitive*. Paris: Presses Universitaires, 4th edn. 1960; Tr. L. Clare, *Primitive Mentality*, New York: AMS Press, 1978.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1923. *La mentalité primitive*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Tr. L.A.Clare, *Primitive mentality*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1949. *Carnets*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Loti, P. 1888. *Le Roman d'un Spahi*. Paris: CalmanLevy, Tr. M.L.Watkins, *The romance of Spahi*, New York: Rand, McNaly and Co., 1890.
- Lynch, H.R. (ed.) 1978. *Selected letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden*. New York: KTO Press.
- Liotard, J-F. 1979. *La condition postmoderne*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, Tr. G.Bennington and B. Massumi, *The postmodern condition*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Masolo, D.A. 1987. 'Alexis Kagamé and African socio-linguistics', in G.Floistad (ed.), *Contemporary philosophy, vol. 5 African Philosophy*. Boston MA,; Kluwer, 181–205.
- Masolo, D.A. 1991. 'An archaeology of African knowledge'. *Callaloo*, 14(4):998–1011.
- Masolo, D.A. 1994. *African philosophy in search of identity*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Mbembe, A. 1992. 'Provisional notes on the postcolony'. *Africa*, 62(1):3–37.
- Minkus, H.K. 1979. 'Causal theory in Akwapim Akan philosophy, in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*, 2nd edn., Washington: University Press of America.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1973. *L'autre face du royaume*. Paris: L'Age d'Homme.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1983. 'African philosophy as ideological practice. The case of French-

- speaking Africa'. *African Studies Review*, 26(3/4):133–154.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1986. 'On the question of African philosophy: The case of French speaking Africa', in I.Mowoe and R.Bjornson (eds.), *Africa and the West: The legacies of empire*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986:89–120.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa: Ghosts, philosophy and the order of knowledge*, London: James Currey.
- Ndaw, A. 1983. *La pensée Africaine: Recherche sur les fondements de la pensée négro-africaine*. Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines.
- Nkombe, O. and Smet A.J. 'Panorama de la philosophie Africaine contemporaine'. *Recherches Philosophiques Africaines, Vol.3: Mélanges de Philosophie Africaine*. Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, n.d.:263–282.
- Nkrumah, K. 1964. *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*. London: Heinemann.
- Nkrumah, K. 1970. *Consciencism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Nkrumah, K. 1975. 'The African personality,' in G. M.Mutiso and S.W.Rohio (eds.), *Readings in African political thought*. London: Heinemann, 1975:75–82.
- Nyerere, J.K. 1968. *Ujamaa: Essays in socialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Obenga, T. 1970. *L'Afrique dans l'Antiquité*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Okere, T. 1983. *African philosophy: A historicohermeneutical investigation of the conditions of its possibility*. Washington: University Press of America.
- Oladipo, O. 1992. *The idea of African philosophy*. Ibadan: Molecular Publishers.
- Olela, H. 1979. 'The African foundations of Greek philosophy', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. 2nd edn. Washington: University Press of America.
- Oruka, H.O. 1972. 'Mythology as African philosophy', *East African Journal*, Oct. 1972.
- Oruka, H.O. 1975. 'Fundamental principles in the question of African philosophy'. *Second Order*, iv(1).
- Oruka, H.O. 1978. 'Four trends in current African philosophy', in A.Diemer (ed.), *Symposium on philosophy in the present situation of Africa Wednesday August 30 1978*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978:8–22.
- Oruka, H.O. 1979. 'The African foundations of Greek philosophy', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. Washington: University Press of America, 1979.
- Oruka, H.O. 1983. 'Sagacity in African philosophy'. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 23:383–393.
- Oruka, H.O. 1990. *Trends 'in contemporary African philosophy*. Nairobi: Shirikon Publ.
- Oruka, H.O. (ed.) 1991a. *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies.
- Oruka, H.O. 1991b. 'African philosophy: A brief personal history and the current debate', in H.O. Oruka (ed.), *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies, 1991:15–32.
- Outlaw, L. 1984. 'African and African-American philosophy: Deconstruction and the critical management of traditions', *The Journal* (The New York Society for the Study of Black Philosophy), 1(1), Winter–Spring 1984:27–41.
- Popkin, R.H. 1974. 'The philosophical basis of modern racism', in Warlton and Anton (eds.), *Philosophy and the civilizing arts*. Ohio: University Press, 1974.
- Popkin, R.H. 1977–1978. 'Hume's racism'. *The Philosophical Forum, Special Issue on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, ix(2–3) Winter–Spring, 1977–1978:211–226.
- Radin, P. 1927. *Primitive man as philosopher*. New York: Dover.

- Reed, J. and Wake, C. 1976. *L.S.Senghor: Prose and poetry*. London: Heinemann.
- Ricoeur, P. 1969. *Le conflit des interpretations. Esseu d'hermeneutique*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rorty, R. 1979. *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rorty, R. 1982. *Consequences of pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rorty, R. 1991. *Essays on Heidegger and others: Philosophical papers*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 9–26.
- Ryan, M. 1982. *Marxism and deconstruction: A critical articulation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sartre, J-P. 1949. *Orphée noir*, Paris: Gallimard; Tr. S. Allen, *Black Orpheus*, Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Sartre, J.-P. 1976. *Black Orpheus*. Tr. S.W.Allen, Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Senghor, L.S. 1961. 'Nation et voies africaines du socialisme'. Paris: Presence Africaine; Tr. M. Cook, *On African socialism*, New York: Praeger, 1964.
- Senghor, L.S. 1962. 'De la Négritude: Psychologie de Négro-Africain'. *Diogenes*, 37.
- Senghor, L.S. 1962. *Nationhood and the African road to socialism*. Tr. M.Cook, Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Senghor, L.S. 1964. *On African socialism*. Tr. M. Cook, New York: Praeger.
- Senghor, L.S. 1964. *Négritude et humanisme*. Paris: Editions de Seuil.
- Senghor, L. 1965 (1961). *On African socialism*. Tr. M. Cook, New York: Praeger.
- Senghor, L.S. 1970. 'Négritude: A humanism of the twentieth century, in W.Cartey and M.Kilson (eds.), *The African reader: Independent Africa*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Senghor, L.S. 1975. 'What is Négritude?', in G.M. Mutiso and S.W.Rohio (eds.), *Readings in African political thought*, London: Heinemann, 1975:83–84.
- Serequeberhan, T. 1991a. *African philosophy: The essential readings*. New York: Paragon House.
- Serequeberhan, T. 1991b. 'African philosophy: The point in question', in T.Serequeberhan (ed.), *African philosophy: The essential readings*. New York: Paragon House.
- Smet, A.J. 1980. *Histoire de la philosophie Africaine contemporaine: Courants et problemes*. Kinshasa-Limete: Department de Philosophie et Religions Africaines, Faculté de Theologie Catholique.
- Sodipo, J.O. 1973. 'Notes on the concept of cause and chance in Yoruba traditional thought', *Second Order*, ii(2):12–20.
- Spivak, G. 1997. 'Translator's preface', to J.Derrida, *Of grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sumner, C. 1978. 'The rise of philosophical thought in Africa'. Paper, Afro-Asian Philosophy Conference, Cairo, March 1978.
- Tempels, P. 1945. *Bantu philosophy*. Tr. C.King. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Tempels, P. 1959 (1946). *Bantu philosophy*. Tr. C. King, Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Tempels, P. 1961. *La philosophie Bantoue*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Towa, M. 1971. *Essai sur la prolématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*. Taoundé: CLE.
- Van der Walt, B.J. 1994. *The liberating message: A Christian worldview for Africa*. Potchefstroom: Institute of Reformational Studies.
- Van Hook, J.M. 1993. 'African philosophy: Its quest for identity, *Quest*, vii(1):28–43.
- Weber, M. 1948. *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*, Tr. H.H. Gerth and C.Wright

Mills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Williams, C. 1974. *The destruction of black civilization*. Chicago: Third World Press.

Wiredu, K. 1979. 'How not to compare African thought with Western thought', in R.A. Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. Washington: University Press of America, 1979:133–147.

Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wiredu, K. 1991. 'On defining African philosophy', in T.Serequeberhan (ed.), *African philosophy: The essential writings*. New York: Paragon House, 1991:87–110.

Wiredu, K. 1996. *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

### 3

## METAPHYSICAL THINKING IN AFRICA

### INTRODUCTION

#### Themes in African metaphysics

LEBISA J.TEFFO AND ABRAHAM P.J.ROUX

Why does lightning kill people and destroy property? Why are some people successful whereas others, despite their efforts, fail? Why do innocent and good people become ill and die? These and other similar questions show humankind's need to understand the world they are living in; to make sense of the kind of reality they find themselves in. People differ about the validity of these questions. In some communities they are seriously asked and answered. In others they are rejected as non-questions, as meaningless. Why is this? Because people have different conceptions of reality and of the interrelations between aspects of their world. People who ask the above questions have a teleological conception of reality, that is, reality hangs together because of aims; and it is driven by aims: there are no blind happenings but only planned action. Those who reject these questions as meaningless think of reality in mechanical terms, in terms of mechanical causation. That a house or a person was struck by lightning, has, according to them, to be understood in scientific terms, in terms of mechanical causation and not in terms of some or other aim behind it. Such thinking about reality, that is, such attempts to fathom what is real and what is not and what the ultimate nature of reality is, is metaphysical thinking. 'Metaphysics is that branch of philosophy concerned with the most fundamental questions: existence, essence, space and time, the nature of universals, cause and effect, etc.' (Sparkes 1991:207).

There are people who think that our perception of reality is an objective, almost mechanical affair; that what we see, taste, hear, and smell must be exactly the same for all. This view has long been rejected both on the basis of experience and with reference to the way in which we use our concepts. Our perceptions are influenced by our expectations, beliefs and emotions, but also by our conceptual schemes, our histories and social circumstances, and the language we talk. That is to say, the conception of the nature of reality varies from culture to culture, almost suggesting that different cultural communities live in different worlds.<sup>1</sup>

The above exposition leaves us with two serious problems:

- 1 If we are dealing with different conceptions of the world, is it possible for a person to know and to discuss other conceptions, or are we totally fenced in by our own conceptions? And if it is possible to know and discuss other conceptions, can this be of any use? Is it possible to change or even to replace a 'given' way of conceiving of reality?
- 2 Is it necessary to spend time on conceptions which we believe are wrong because they

clash with what is scientifically accepted?

We cannot go into these questions in depth but they take us to an important reason for making an issue of African philosophy. We shall therefore deal with them, albeit in a rather indirect and superficial way.

A dominant feature of philosophy, which until recently meant Western or European philosophy, is its theory of rationality. Rationality has been seen as a universal inherent ability of humankind to determine *the* truth. According to this theory, rationality is based upon logical deduction and strict rules of evidence; the distorting tendencies of affect must be avoided at all costs. This provides a method of investigation in which correct answers are thought to be rationally determined, that is, true. Rationality, therefore, is seen as the only avenue toward reliable knowledge, and also as being certain of success in yielding correct, final answers if its methods are promptly followed. This view has been severely criticized in recent times and it can now only be viewed with scepticism. Rationality is now (in post-modernity, as it is called) seen by many as a social process, i.e.:

...reason is neither necessary nor universal, but nor is it arbitrary, for it emerges in plural conversations, in which people together inquire, disagree, explain, or argue their views in the pursuit of a *consensual outcome*. Such an outcome is one that the participants, after careful deliberation of different opinions and alternative perspectives, are satisfied with for that moment in time (Higgs 1997:7).

The only condition for such a discussion is the possibility of communication. Communication can never be guaranteed—even among people with the same conceptual scheme. Miscommunication, and thus explanation and correction, is always possible. If the will to communicate is there, it is possible to cross even conceptual divides. Given this view of rationality and the logical possibility of open communication, such discussion—and particularly cross-cultural discussion—is possible, but what is important is that it is essential, because no one can claim that he/she is in possession of *the truth*.

Against this background Nordenbo has developed a pluralistic approach to cultures and frameworks, which he calls ‘alternativism’. He accepts that there are different cultures with different questions, answers, values, etc., and that it is possible to understand and communicate with other cultures. This then implies that for every position there are substantiated alternatives. Such alternatives thus have to be evaluated. He concludes:

...this...means that dangers of cultural chauvinism are avoided. Alternativism does not imply that a definite...belief is more sacrosanct than a[nother] view...; only a test of the views can substantiate their validity. Alternativism, in fact, implies a more modest ambition with regard to the possibility of creating an all-embracing cosmology. The recognition that alternatives can always be thought of with regard to the prevailing view liberates us from orthodox restraint on the one hand, but at the same time places us—intellectually speaking—in a little boat in the open sea with no safe harbour in sight (Nordenbo 1995:42).

## IS THERE AN AFRICAN METAPHYSICS?

There have been many attempts to show that there is one set of ideas which is common to the whole African continent and which may be termed 'African philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> In terms of this approach there must then also be a particular African metaphysics. As we saw in Chapter 2, this is only one of many different approaches to, or trends in, African philosophy. In fact, this approach has come in for severe criticism (see Neugebauer 1988, Withaar 1986, Van Niekerk 1991, and More 1996). In present-day philosophical activity on the continent there is a strong tendency to approach philosophy in a culture-specific way, that is, not to try and come up with views which are supposed to apply to all groups on the continent, but rather to describe and discuss the views of specific cultural groups such as the Akan, the Igbo, the Yoruba, or the Zulus, as for example in the analyses of the Akan/Yoruba conception of a person. People became wary of the vastness of the continent; what is the case in West-Africa need not be the case in Eastern or Southern Africa.

The question of the approach that should be followed when discussing philosophical problems in an African context is the theme of intense ongoing debate among African philosophers. We can say, however, that the culture-specific approach has much in its favour. For example, philosophical thinking in Africa is not fully documented and described, and it is dangerous to generalize before more progress has been made with these tasks. Furthermore, as was pointed out earlier, truth is a social construction. No person and no group can assume that the final word about any problem has been spoken. Any contribution which may help to further our understanding of reality should get a hearing. Wiredu (cf. 1996a:169–177 and 1996b:178), for one, is strongly in favour of this approach which he calls 'strategic particularism'. It thus seems risky to opt for an African metaphysics at this stage.

These considerations immediately reflect on the methodology of this article. In spite of the above arguments, we do not outline the metaphysical ideas of one cultural group nor do we work comparatively in this introduction. In fact, our approach here has much in common with ethnophilosophy. Moreover, there are also traces of the traditional approach, that is, the emphasis is on ideas which are seen as part of traditional Africa. We argue that, generally speaking, metaphysical thinking in Africa has features which make it a particular way of conceptualizing reality. Facets of this conceptual scheme are discussed with reference mostly to specific cultural groups. There is no denying that people who believe in witchcraft or a supreme being have particular conceptions of reality which include aspects such as causality, personality and responsibility, the nature of matter, and so forth. It is clear, and in the exposition we often show, that views which are called 'traditional' still play a role, indeed an important role, in the lives of Africans. Such views cannot be ignored because they also come into play when issues such as development, education, government, and legislation are discussed.

A further consideration is in place here. There is no reason why all peoples on a continent, or even all members of a cultural group, should think the same about metaphysical matters. In so-called Western philosophy there is no prevailing tradition of presenting and practising philosophy on ethnic or geographical lines. Although there is talk of Greek, British, French, or German Philosophy, the assumption is that these are

aspects of a common activity and parts of an ongoing tradition. An ethnic or a geographic classification such as this is then made for very specific reasons which are seldom of true philosophical nature. One of the reasons is that in philosophy we are concerned with general or universal matters. Epistemologists want to account for knowledge as such, not British or French knowledge, but knowledge in general. The moral philosopher wants to know about morality in general. Even if the outcome of the analysis is a moral relativism, it is not seen as relative in any way but as applying to all moral systems. In the case of metaphysics, the same principle applies. Talk about causality, God, personal identity, etc., is not supposed to apply only to Europe or Africa, or only to the British or the French or the Xhosa. The conclusions are supposed to be general in application. Even though the starting-point may be particular, because of different cultures, languages and customs, the outcome will be regarded as general. A generalized approach as such is therefore not out of order; even if a generalization is wrong, it can stimulate attempts to correct it. Claims to a common African philosophy are made here although we know that this is dangerous. A great deal of descriptive work still has to be done. One of our aims is to stimulate such descriptive research. Furthermore, given what has been said about the general nature of philosophical reasoning, the latter often works with possible conceptualizations. Descartes did not describe and reflect on a factual situation. In this sense, views held in Africa about metaphysical issues should be dealt with like any other views. What this means is that African views should be raised in general philosophical debates as possible views about these matters, and as based on arguments which should be considered as arguments. Irrespective of the factual correctness of the ascription of certain views to Africans in general, these views can and should be evaluated critically. This then is a further aim, to draw the readers into the ongoing metaphysical debate. This is what most writers about African metaphysics see as their aim, and a younger African philosopher such as Appiah (see, for example, Appiah 1992) is definitely pushing African philosophy in this direction.<sup>3</sup>

When we talk of the views of the Akan or the Yoruba this is not to be taken literally as meaning that every member of that group holds these beliefs or accepts these views. As with any group, we are dealing with general or majority trends. There will be people who reject such beliefs or who believe otherwise; intra-cultural debates also take place.

In summary, then, we may say that we aim at providing information about metaphysical thinking in Africa, and we believe that we are outlining and discussing views which are alive in a fairly large part of Africa and which can serve as representative of metaphysical thinking in Africa. We realize, however, that we are dealing with a vast continent and with many cultural groups and that it is dangerous to talk of African metaphysics and to ascribe views to all cultural groups. However, given the nature of philosophy, we do not see this as a problem. According to the literature the views discussed do have currency in Africa and they are views which need to be addressed in a discussion of metaphysical thinking.

Metaphysical discourse in Africa must be based on the African perception of reality as determined by a history, geographical circumstances, and such cultural phenomena as religion, thought systems and linguistic conventions entrenched in the African world-view. This implies that most metaphysical discourses on the continent have certain common features. Central to African metaphysics are religious beliefs relating to the



African conception of God, the universe and their interrelations. Further notions such as spirit, causality, person, space and time, and reality in their various conceptions play a significant role in the life of Africans as they grapple with existential realities through phenomena such as religion, ancestral veneration, witchcraft, magic, etc.

Furthermore, African metaphysics is holistic in nature. Reality is seen as a closed system so that everything hangs together and is affected by any change in the system. Withaar (1986:169) echoes Tempels (cf. More 1996:152) in arguing that African metaphysics is organized around a number of principles and laws which control so-called vital forces. There is a principle concerning the interaction of forces, that is, between God and humankind, between different people, between humankind and animals, and between humankind and material things. These forces are hierarchically placed, they form a 'chain of being'. In this hierarchy God, the creator and source of all vital forces, is at the apex. Then follow the ancestors, then humankind, and then the lower forces, animals, plants and matter. This system of vital forces constitutes a closed universe. When one element gains in force another has to lose it. For example, when someone gets ill, this means that he/she loses vital force, which has been taken from her/him in some or other way by someone/something else. In this way disasters such as illness and death are explained ontologically (metaphysically). Withaar (1986:169ff.) emphasizes that this system shows an almost unbreakable interrelation between God, the dead, the living and nature, but, as will become clear, the living person takes a central place in this system. The 'vital or life force' metaphysics put forward here is strongly questioned by More (More 1996:152) and Kaphagawani (1998), but the hierarchic structure and thus the holistic feature of African metaphysics are not.

To take up a question which was posed earlier, it should be noted that this kind of explanation is more fundamental than scientific explanations, and the latter cannot replace the first unless there is a change in the way in which reality is conceived. That is, scientific questions arise and answers to them are looked for in terms of such a more basic perspective.

Since metaphysical discourse is generally about non-physical aspects of phenomena that transcend space and time, the bulk of the subject matter of African metaphysics falls under the category that is traditionally described in Western metaphysics as 'supernatural'. Two considerations are important here. On the one hand, as will be emphasized repeatedly, dualisms which are the stock-in-trade of Western metaphysics, such as that between the natural and the supernatural and others such as those between matter and mind/soul/spirit, do not appear in African metaphysics. On the other hand, the possible misconception that life in traditional African culture is wholly enmeshed in metaphysical or magico-religious speculations has to be corrected. Much of the African way of life and day-to-day activities are based on empirically verifiable facts, independent of 'supernatural' influence. In fact, a feature of African metaphysics is that it has a strong empirical (i.e. based on experience) flavour. However, in seeking to come to terms with existential realities and in an effort to understand the universe, African cultures draw on explanatory models that may appear to be at variance with perceptual experience and the familiar principles of science. We can say that the African realizes the enormous complexity of the universe, and is aware that humankind and its world constitute an 'environment' much deeper than what the human senses can perceive. The

essence of African metaphysics, then, is the search for meaning and ultimate reality in the complex relationship between the human person and his/her total environment.

Causality plays an important part in metaphysical thinking. What it is for A to cause B, how we can be certain that A is the cause of B, how to find true causes of given events, are all standard metaphysical questions. Such questions gain a place in metaphysical thinking when they are asked about reality as such as, for example, asking about the origin (cause) of the world or of morality, which, for example, leads to the proposition that God is such a first cause. The same happens when we ask about the base (cause) of personal identity or of free will or of action, and then refer to the mind or the soul as such a cause. In African metaphysical thinking cause also plays a pivotal role. In fact, African philosophers such as Wiredu, Sogolo, and Appiah see an understanding of the African view on cause as the key to understanding African metaphysics. These writers point out that there is a difference between the Western view of causality which, according to them, is mechanistic, and the African view which is in general more teleologically inclined. Appiah's explanation shows that this links up with a basic feature of African metaphysics—the rejection of chance:

...what is most striking about the 'unscientific' explanations that most precolonial African cultures offer is not just that they appeal to agency but that they are addressed to the question 'Why?' understood as asking what the event in question was for. Evans-Pritchard in his account of Zande belief insists that the Azande do not think that 'unfortunate events' ever happen by chance; their frequent appeal to witchcraft—in the absence of other acceptable explanations of misfortune—demonstrates their unwillingness to accept the existence of contingency. But to reject the possibility of the contingent is exactly to insist that everything that happens serves some purpose: a view familiar in Christian tradition...or in the deep need people feel... for answers to the question 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' Zande witchcraft beliefs depend on an assumption that the universe is in a certain sort of evaluative balance...(Appiah 1992:171–172).

This leads Sogolo to distinguish between what he terms primary and secondary causality. What he terms 'secondary causality' is what Westerners usually understand as cause, that which brings about an event or a change, such as 'a petrol bomb caused the fire'. By calling these causes 'secondary, Sogolo indicates that they are not of primary concern to the African. The petrol bomb and the resulting fire are, so to speak, expressions of an aim which interrelates event (world) and person. Sogolo says:

Primary causes...are those predisposing factors not directly explicable in physical terms. Some of these take the form of supernatural entities such as deities, spirits, witches; others are stress-induced either as a result of the victim's contravention of communal morality or his strained relationship with other persons within his community (Sogolo 1994:215).

We shall return to this view of causality later.

This account of causality points at another feature of African metaphysical thinking: it

is social in nature. In fact, as will become clear in the discussion, it is difficult to distinguish metaphysics, social theory, and morality in African thinking because all philosophizing is communitarian in nature. This comes out very clearly in More's criticism of Shutte's use of the idea of vital force to characterize African metaphysical thinking. More asserts that:

*Siriti* in Sesotho [which Shutte translates as force, which More rejects] is not so much a metaphysical but a moral and social concept that has to do with observable behaviour patterns and human relationships (More 1996:152–154).

This also takes us back to a point made earlier that African metaphysics is basically empirical in nature.

## THEMES

### God

#### *God in African life*

In the past, various judgements—some of them contradictory—were made about the place of religion in the lives of Africans. According to Wiredu (1996b:178), who made an intensive study of religion in Africa and particularly of conceptions of God or a supreme being, Africans are seen as deeply religious with a strong belief in the existence of a supreme being. Wiredu (1995:313) argues, however, that the African approach is, generally speaking, more empirical in nature. He also shows the danger of rash generalization by pointing out that:

...some African peoples, such as the Luo of East Africa, do not seem to have any place for such a concept [the concept of God] in their (highly sophisticated) traditional thought. Significantly, the reason for the atheism...is cognate with the conceptual orientation underlying the particular conceptions of the supreme being held by those African peoples who make such a postulation in their communal philosophies. That cast of thought is preeminently empirical (Wiredu 1995:313).

#### *God as supreme being*

In spite of a strong sense of the goodwill of God, Africans do not accept *ad hoc* interventions by God in the order of nature. They have a strong commitment to the universal reign of law in all spheres of existence (Wiredu 1995:314). God is not apart from the world. Together with the world, God constitutes the spatio-temporal 'totality' of existence. As we saw earlier, the natural-supernatural dichotomy has no place in the African conceptualization of the universe. The thinking is hierarchical, with God at the apex and extra-human beings and forces, humans, the lower animals, vegetation and the inanimate world, in this order, as integral parts of one single totality of existence.

*God as creator*

God is seen as creator of the world but, because God is not outside the world, this cannot mean that he created the world out of nothing. God is seen as a kind of cosmic architect, 'a fashioner of the world out of a pre-existing manifold of indeterminacy (Wiredu 1995:313). This raises the question of the origin of the material which was necessary to fashion the world. Wiredu points out that for the Akan people, to which he belongs, this is a meaningless question:

The absolute nothingness entailed in the notion of creation out of nothing... scorns any...context. This abolition of context effectively abolishes intelligibility, as far as the Akan language is concerned (Wiredu 1996b:179).

More is involved here than just the peculiarity of a particular language. A point of general metaphysical interest is at stake here which also shows why and how African philosophy is part of philosophical reflection in general. Wiredu argues as follows:

...if a concept is incoherent within a given language, it does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with it, for it may be that the language in question is expressively inadequate. In the case of the concept of creation out of nothing, however, its coherence, even within English, is severely questionable. In English, the concept of 'there is'—note the 'there'—which is equivalent to 'exists', is quite clearly spatial. It is because the word 'exists' does not bear its spatiality on its face, that it has been possible in English to speak as if existence were not necessarily spatial without prohibitive implausibility. Besides, the maxim that *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (Out of nothing nothing comes), which, ironically, is championed by Christian philosophers such as Descartes, conflicts sharply with the notion of creation out of nothing. That nothing can come out of nothing is not an empirical insight; it is a conceptual necessity, just like the fact that two and two cannot add up to fifty. Thus to say that some being could make something come out of nothing is of the same order of incoherence as saying that some being could make two and two add up to fifty. Besides,...the causal connotation of creation is incompatible with the circumstance or rather, non-circumstance, of absolute nothingness. Causation makes sense only when it is, in principle, possible to distinguish between *post hoc* and *propter hoc* (i.e. between mere sequence and causal sequence). If there were one being and absolutely nothing besides him, then logically, that distinction would be impossible. If so, the notion of causation collapses and with it that of creation (Wiredu 1996b:179–180).

This is not the place to discuss these views in any depth. It should, however, be pointed out that the views about God as they are summarized here are problematic in various ways. We do not experience God in the normal way—we do not see God. That God exists, how God exists, and how God interacts with the world are all problems that need looking into.

### Ancestors

We have seen that the distinction between the natural and the supernatural does not exist for the African metaphysician. Another dichotomy which plays an important part in Western reflection, the distinction between the material and the spiritual, has no place either in African thinking. When it comes to immortality, at no stage does mortal life or immortal survival involve absolute immateriality. The ancestors interact with mortals, and because the world of the ancestors is ontologically both analogous and contiguous to that of the mortals, that is, there is no difference in kind between these worlds (as was pointed out, it is all one and the same world) there is no logical problem with this interaction; category problems do not arise; the actions of the ancestors are believed to be within the regular pattern of events. The immortals merely happen to occupy a higher status in the order of things than mortals.

Metaphysical thinking in the African context starts from social and moral considerations. In an attempt to account for social interaction or the breakdown of such interaction metaphysical ideas are developed. The ancestors are a striking example. Immortality is conceived in pragmatic terms. Survival is of no particular personal value. What is important, however, is that the deceased can assist the living sections of their families, and provide and exercise moral leadership among them. The ancestors thus have to do with group solidarity and tradition and in this way help to guarantee moral consistency.

How does communication between the living and the ancestors take place? It occurs through ritual and other similar practices. The ancestors are often discussed as part of African religion and seen as ancestor worship. It is, however, not a matter of worship but of veneration; the ancestors are integrated into ordinary life situations and their guidance in such situations is accepted as part of ordinary life.

The social, and particularly the moral importance of ancestor veneration, and with this the possession of ancestral land, is well illustrated by the Kikuyu or Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s. Davidson discusses this in a review of two books on this 'anti-colonial rebellion'. Davidson shows that the Kikuyu lost little land to settler expropriation:

But what they crucially did lose [*sic*] was all assurance of control over ancestral forests and fields that had been theirs from 'time out of mind'; they lost, it could be said, their environment.... The name that the forest fighters gave themselves was the Land and Freedom Army, the army of *ithaka na wiathi*. *Wiathi* emerges as the symbol of a strong inner compulsion, standing... for the moral agency that legitimises or at any rate sponsors maturity and self-respect, in line with Kikuyu ancestral concepts of the difference between good and evil, between success and failure, eventually between life and death.... Rather than 'atavistic' beliefs or superstitions [the way in which the colonists and the colonial government saw the motives of the rebels], or the brash claims of the nationalist agenda, it was *wiathi* that could challenge Kikuyu degradation and despair (Davidson 1994:12).

Davidson concludes:

...this sense of degradation, the product of dispossession, is the nearest we will get to an explanation of phenomena such as Mau Mau. As was the case among other subjected peoples, colonial dispossession led to a more or less complete disjuncture from previous Kikuyu history. With a contemptuously dismissive hand, the ancestors were banished to realms of impotence and anonymity from which there seemed no way of recalling them, and so, for 'the living and the yet unborn', there was no way of conserving the notion of community as these peoples had learned to understand it (Davidson 1994:12).

This then meant 'moral dislocation'. We can clearly see here how African thinking is community centred, and thus how closely together metaphysics, morality, and social theory are knit.

There is nothing wrong with honouring one's ancestors and using their lives and decisions as guidelines. But, in the end a decision is something personal which has to be taken with reference to the particular context and the relevant facts, and for which relevant reasons have to be given. There are also situations in which a break with tradition and existing beliefs and practices may be necessary. The 'revolution' in South Africa is a case in point where tradition and traditional ways of doing and judging had to be changed or at least critically evaluated. Moreover, the theory of immortality on which this veneration rests, can be questioned from at least two sides. What is it for an individual to be immortal? How can he/she be and remain the same in such a state? Can a person be a person and remain the same person without reference to ordinary situations and experiences? The believers try to meet this criticism by playing down the difference between the material and the spiritual, and saying that the ancestors have what the Westerner would call a material existence, and that this is still part of life as long as the ancestors have offspring and are remembered by them. Only after this does existence move to a different realm. For this existence it will be necessary to explain what is meant by the phrase 'remain part of life' because the ordinary ways of knowing of such participation and interaction, those of observation, direct discussion, and physical acts are not possible.

### **Witchcraft**

Witchcraft, magic, sorcery, and other such phenomena are normally not considered as objects of scientific study because they are not based on empirical observation. Indeed, by scientific criteria, these powers are rejected as unreal and belief in them is generally classified as irrational, if not outright unintelligible. Yet, the history of every human society shows evidence of such beliefs and practices, whether in the past or in contemporary times. The point then is that these paranormal activities are not an African peculiarity, although their strength and spread among African communities deserve special attention. In South Africa, particularly in the Limpopo Province, the authorities are concerned about the phenomenon of witchcraft and two investigations into it have been conducted, one by a commission of inquiry appointed by the government of the

Limpopo Province, and the other by a research team appointed by the Human Sciences Research Council. The Provincial Commission of Inquiry found that most people in the province believe in the existence of witches and in witchcraft (Ralushai et al. 1996:12); they go even further:

...it is quite clear that witchcraft as a phenomenon is still a factor to be reckoned with in other regions of South Africa.... witchcraft beliefs occur among people of all levels (Ralushai et al. 1996:57).

They found that executions of witches without formal trials by members of the community increased dramatically over the past ten years. Communities believe that witches destroy people's possessions and cause misfortune such as illness and death to their friends, enemies, and neighbours. 'Trials' and the resultant executions of witches often take place in the event of 'untimely death', for example in the case of a child. When someone is killed by lightning (as often happens in the Limpopo Province) it is also seen as untimely death and thus as the result of witchcraft. We can safely say that the belief in witchcraft is intense in most African societies and that people conduct their daily activities under tension, suspicion, and fears of bewitchment.

There are issues of genuine philosophical interest about the status and possibility of events attributed to witchcraft. The possibility of such acts, of course, presupposes that witches exist. But, first, we need to know the kind of entity that witches are supposed to be. Generally—and granting the possibility of local variations—the conception of witchcraft in Africa is that witches are normal human beings who operate mainly within the domain of their own extended family. Thus the suspected witch is usually a close or distant family member who is believed to harbour ill-feelings against her victims. Witches possess the extraordinary capacity of transforming themselves into disembodied forms or into animals. In their incarnates, and with their real bodies left behind, they can fly and move instantaneously from one point to another. And with these powers, they cause the death of people, make men impotent and women barren, and cause failure in all forms of human endeavour.

The actions of witchcraft are usually couched in a language well-nigh indistinguishable from the actions of normal persons. For instance, it is claimed that witches hold assemblies, prey on human bodies or suck the blood of their victims—claims that are obviously not intended to convey literal meanings. But to the believer, claims about witches and witchcraft are neither metaphorical nor mere symbolic representations. They are as real to the traditional African as scientific claims are to the modern scientist.

Sogolo thinks that to understand this phenomenon we have to refer to what he calls primary causes because a combination of the different categories of causes will provide a fuller explanation of this and other phenomena in African life. The kind of problem to which witchcraft is supposed to provide a solution draws on human relations, and it has thus to be understood in a meaningful cultural context. But then the question still remains: why link the misfortune to a specific person as the cause who has then to be executed for the alleged deed? What Sogolo (1994:205) calls 'a combination of the categories of causes' seems rather to be a confusion of the teleological and mechanical categories. The starting-point is teleological: why did this happen to me/at this stage/in

this way? Why did the lightning strike her? Why this death? These are attempts at integrating events at a higher level, to make sense of the event. This then changes to straightforward ‘mechanical’ causation: A killed my son/A is the cause of my failure/A caused the lightning to kill B. This can be linked with killings to get hold of *muti* (medicine) which functions within the ‘mechanical’ frame of causality: business people often look for a human skull to build into the foundation of a new shop to guarantee (i.e. to cause) good business; warm blood, it is believed, gives instant strength and ‘fresh’ genitals cause fertility. In other words, the quest for understanding is simply swapped for a desire to sniff out the cause.

Because we have to do, in the case of witchcraft, with perceptions based on a logical error (that making sense of an event is the same as finding the cause), neither the provision of facts (e.g. scientific schooling) nor punishment will change the situation. That is why the commission of the Limpopo Province recommended (Ralushai et al. 1996:61–62, 64–86) that rather than talk of the ‘suppression’ of witchcraft, for example in legislation, to change to ‘management/managing’ of the practice. Furthermore, medicine people should be encouraged to accept and comply with a code of conduct and to register with the Council for Traditional Healers. The Commission further recommended that the government start an intensive education programme ‘to free the inhabitants of the province from this belief’ (Ralushai et al. 1996:60). In this the Commission was right, but again such a programme will have to be carefully planned so as to deal with the real problems: the first is a logical one about confusing different kinds of questions, while the second is about human relations and the settlement of differences. The new school subject ‘Guidance and life skills’ could be of value here because it should also address the problem of the meaning of life; what kind of question this is, and how we are to handle it; that is, to see questions regarding so-called primary causes for what they are, to understand how we can try to answer them and what the status of proposed answers is.<sup>4</sup>

### Personhood

What is a person? Different answers have been given to this question. One of the best known is perhaps the answer of the French philosopher, René Descartes (1591–1650), that a person is a combination of two radically different sub-stances, matter (i.e. a body) which is extended in space, and mind with thinking as its essential characteristic and which does not occupy space. This theory brought a whole range of problems in its wake, such as that of the interaction between these two radically different substances (to account for human action for example), and that of other minds—how we can ever be sure of the other bodies we meet being ‘inhabited’ by minds? In general this is an unacceptable account of the nature of a person. Menkiti (1984:172) sees this as a reduction of the person to ‘some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory’.

In line with Wiredu’s suggestion of ‘strategic particularization’, the stratification of the person has received a lot of attention in African metaphysical thinking. A striking feature of these analyses is the differences between them. There are even contradictions between accounts of conceptions of the same cultural group. For example, Wiredu (1987) argues that thinking is not part of the spiritual aspect of the person. He even remarks that this



insight prevented the Akan from committing the category mistake of confusing concept and entity, as happened in the case of Western philosophy. Gyekye, again (1978), specifically makes thinking part of the spiritual aspect of the person. In spite of such differences, there are a few general points which can be made here.

### *The relational basis of selfhood*

In Western philosophy the starting-point for an account of personhood is usually epistemological and psychological. Knowledge is the 'possession' of a particular individual and the question then becomes how this knowledge can be accounted for, how the knower sees him/herself from the inside. In African thinking the starting-point is social relations—selfhood is seen and accounted for from this relational perspective. Kuckertz (1996:62) puts it like this:

African thought and philosophy on personhood and selfhood is that the 'I' belongs to the I-You-correspondence as a stream of lived experience without which it could not be thought and would not exist.

Although the community plays an important part, Raditlhalo (1996:123) states, for example:

A child is held to be the property of the community, and it is the community who are going to see to it that the individual child becomes a significant member of the community, an asset to all.

In similar vein Kuckertz (1996:62) emphasizes the following:

Certainly African thought appears to have greater ease of access to the relational existence of selfhood of human beings, without reducing them to mere products of any kind of collective or community...

### *Empirical considerations*

There are two issues of interest here. A lot of metaphysical thinking has to do with a lack of scientific knowledge. In other words, we have proto-theories to account for events in the world for which there is no generally accepted explanation. There is something of this in African accounts of the person. With more knowledge of anatomy, and particularly neurology, these views will change or simply vanish. However, this knowledge actually plays a negligible part here. What is at stake here again is the way of conceptualizing, of understanding human reality. As we saw in the previous paragraph the approach in African thinking is from the standpoint of interpersonal relations.

These interpersonal relations presuppose an empirical reality. In African thinking this plays an important role. Personal relations presuppose living people in interaction. What is it to be alive? There is a clear difference between living things and dead matter. There is a difference between a living and a dead person. Even among living things there are marked differences. What then is the cause of such differences? Africans postulate a life

principle, a 'spiritual' (quasi-material) entity, which brings about life and which is responsible for the particular kind of life, to account for these differences.

A problem with this supposition is that it leads to an infinite regress, however. To ensure life this entity itself must be alive, so a further entity is needed to account for its life and so on *ad infinitum*.

People have different personalities and character traits. Even though they are members of the same family or community and are raised in more or less the same way, individuals differ and they may differ radically. Why is this so? According to African thinkers this is because of another 'spiritual' aspect of the person. Often this is linked to God; it is said that this part of the person is placed there by God and is the basis of a person's immortality.

### *Dualism*

Although there are differences with reference to the constituting parts of a person, there is agreement that the person consists basically of a material aspect and a 'spiritual' aspect or aspects. We thus have a dualism with the resulting question of how these different aspects function together. According to Wiredu (1987:318), the question of interaction is not dealt with, but he also points out that we do not have the same kind of problem here as in the case of Descartes. Here it is stated from the start that these spiritual entities have material qualities; there is no radical or categorical difference between the spiritual and the material. This, however, raises other problems, such as the true nature of the spiritual and the necessity of postulating such entities if they are not really different; are there different kinds of matter?

More (1996:153) perhaps shows the way out of this difficulty. According to him (at least in the case of the Sotho people) the spiritual is not thought of as 'some inner force, a mysterious or ghost-like inner power or hidden operations of an occult power which governs the individual's various general behaviour'. His interpretation is behaviouristic in nature—not the postulation of entities in terms of metaphysical speculation, but what concepts refer to in actual communication. He says:

When we describe a person as being ambitious, generous, or even as having a 'good' or 'bad' character or personality...it is to refer to certain types of tendencies manifested by certain kinds of behaviour pattern which allow us to anticipate, with a reasonable amount of assurance, the individual's actions and reactions to a variety of circumstances and possible contingencies (More 1996:153).

This kind of interpretation is more in line with the so-called quest for primary causes, that is, an attempt to understand and integrate events into wider patterns. It is, however, not without problems. There is talk here of 'tendencies' and 'anticipation'. They must in turn be descriptions of behaviour that ascribe tendencies. This means that we do not have an explanation but only a theory about meaning. We know that this does not satisfy the metaphysically inclined.

*Destiny*

An important aspect of the African conception of a person is destiny, whose 'choice' or 'imposition' pre-determines for the person what he/she will be in life. A person's destiny determines his/her success or failure, his/her personality, luck or ill-luck. The available literature on the subject varies as to how an individual's destiny is allotted, whether it is a result of the person's own choice or through an imposition by another being.

The possibility that destiny could be an outcome of a person's own choice raises a fundamental problem. To be able to make a choice, one must have adequate information as well as a preference for the rational. All this certainly makes it most unlikely that an individual would opt for a destiny that is undesirable. On the other hand, if a person's destiny is an imposition, it has serious implications in matters of moral responsibility. Why should a person be held morally responsible for his/her actions if he/she had no choice in the making of his/her character and personality?

A greater conceptual problem arises from the issue of the alterability or otherwise of a person's destiny. If, indeed, the causes of our actions have been pre-ordained such that what will be will be, then why do we make efforts to alter pending misfortunes? One possible explanation has been that destiny does not amount to fatalism in which the person resigns him/herself to fate with respect to future situations. Among the Yoruba, for instance, it is believed that under certain conditions a person's destiny can be altered on earth, either for good or for bad. This sounds contradictory, but the main point of emphasis is on a person's moral character in the sense that destiny co-exists with freedom, morality, and responsibility. In Africa, the poverty of a lazy person is not blamed on destiny, nor is an offender spared punishment on account of his/her destiny. Some, in fact, argue that destiny among the Yoruba is conceived as a mere potentiality whose actualization depends on a person's human qualities. Others claim that a person's destiny merely determines the broad outline of his/her life and not the minute details. To that extent, the concept of destiny may be understood as a version of soft determinism.

Gbadegehin (1991:360–368) discusses all these problems in connection with, and also the possible interpretations of the idea of destiny. He concludes that destiny has two aspects, the individual's character and the influence of society, but in the end it is the influence and the demands of society that are really at stake:

Persons are what they are in virtue of what they are destined to be, their character and the communal influence on them.... A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute to the continued existence of the community.... The meaning of one's life is therefore measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence (Gbadegehin 1991:367).

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Henk Withaar (1986:164) identifies the problem of political and cultural identity in black Africa as the central problem of African intellectuals. This is an impossible enterprise without a serious reflection on basic metaphysical thinking. Maurier hits the nail on the

head when he says:

The awakening to a properly African conceptual framework will enable us to escape the 'imperialism' of Western thought, as the politicians might say. We will be better able to locate our concrete problems. The West has used an individualistic and objectivist framework, and that has given it a civilization where the individual is powerful, where liberty is a good that is absolute, where there is room for the play of free enterprise, where scientific and technological progress covers the world with its achievements. In Africa things are quite otherwise, since African civilization is characterized above all by solidarity, communitarianism, traditionalism, participation (1979:12, quoted in Withaar 1986:167).

This difference in perspective in thinking about reality poses both an internal and an external challenge. It is not enough for Africans to state that their perspective is a social or communitarian one; the views have to be explained, substantiated, and the implications for metaphysical thinking of such an approach have to be worked out. But the debate between African philosophers, and philosophers belonging to other traditions or cultures is as important—no culture and particularly no philosophical perspective can develop in isolation. Such communication poses the challenge to other traditions and particularly to European (Western) philosophers to note the differences in perspective and to take trouble to understand them. To interpret concepts such as God, spirit, cause, personality, immortality, etc., in the traditional Western way when dealing with African thinking, must result in miscommunication. Both these challenges need to be taken up to further the discussion and understanding of ourselves, our world and our relation to the world.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Two of the most renowned thinkers who accepted such cultural relativism were the philosopher, Hegel, and the anthropologist, Levi-Strauss. Hegel claimed:

...for, culture does not allow us to be judged from the outside with foreign yardsticks. Conceived as a way of life and a specific language game, every culture is closed in on itself (quoted in Nordenbo 1995:39).

Levi-Strauss puts it even stronger:

We...perceive our own identity as bound up with our culture... A meeting between two cultures resembles...two trains passing one another—they travel in their own directions, at their own pace. A person who sits in one of the trains is able to go into another compartment and talk with his fellow travellers but can get only a glimpse of the travellers in the other train (quoted in Nordenbo 1995:40).

Ironically both Hegel and Levi-Strauss studied other cultures in great depth and used

their findings in their respective historical and anthropological theorizing.

- 2 For example, Placide Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* (1959), Alexis Kagamé's *La philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de l'être* (1956), Leopold Senghor's *Les fondements de l'Africanité* (1967), John Mbiti's *African religions and philosophy* (1969).
- 3 It should be noted that Paulin Hountondji, in an argument against ethnophilosophy, takes an opposite view:

...it is urgent for African thought—in order to assure its own progress, its relevance to the problems of our societies—to remove itself from the Western philosophical debate in which it is submerged at present. It should stop languishing in the vertical dialogue of every African philosopher with his European counterpart, in order to shift from now on, following a horizontal axis to an internal debate in our societies concerning real philosophical problems, strictly geared to our actual preoccupations...we must from now on think for ourselves...and produce by so doing, new problem-fields, rooted in the concrete soil of our history of today (Hountondji and Zegeye 1989:13).

- 4 Hountondji would probably say that witchcraft must become the subject of philosophical analysis and debate. For him, to take folklore and popular modes of thinking seriously does not mean their blind acceptance; it should lead to a project of critical study 'destined to show, among other things, what in those cultural forms must be overcome in view of the real emancipation of the people' (Hountondji and Zegeye 1989:20).

### Ènìyàn: The Yoruba concept of a person

#### SEGUN GBADEGESIN

In this chapter, we are concerned with the issue of human existence. I would like to address the question 'What is a person?' Deriving either from introspective reflections or from observations of life, this question is a crucial one which any rational human being is bound to raise at some point. That some traditional thinkers in African cultures must have raised such a question should be obvious from an examination of the traditional conceptual schemes. I will limit myself here to Yoruba traditional thought, while exposing similarities and differences through comparison with the Akan conceptual scheme. The reason for this should be obvious. Being a Yoruba, I may claim to have an intuitive understanding of the Yoruba language; and this makes it easier for me to investigate the conceptual scheme derived from it. Secondly, the problem created by generalization for all traditional African societies has been demonstrated by several studies, and should be avoided. However, a comparison of the Yoruba and Akan views on these issues is perfectly in order, fortunately because there are philosophical studies of the Akan conceptual schemes on the same subject.

The Yoruba word for person is *ènìyàn*. However, *ènìyàn* has a normative dimension as well as an ordinary meaning. Thus it is not unusual when referring to a human being for an observer to say '*Ki i se ènìyàn*' (He/She is not an *ènìyàn*). Such a comment is a judgement of the moral standing of the human being who is thus determined to fall short

of what it takes to be recognized as such. I will come back later to the requirements of being, morally speaking, an *èniyàn*. In the Yoruba language greater emphasis is placed on this normative dimension of *èniyàn* than is perhaps placed on the concept of person in the English language. For now, however, I would like to address the issue of the structural components of the human person.

Among the terms that feature in discussions of the Yoruba concept of *èniyàn*, the following are prominent: *ara*, *okàn*, *èmi*, *orí*, though there is a lot of confusion about what each of these means and what relationship exists among them. One way to avoid or, at least, minimize confusion is not to start with English equivalents of these terms, but rather to describe their usages among the Yoruba and to relate them to each other in terms of their functional interdependencies. Besides helping us to avoid any inadequate prejudgements concerning resemblances between English-language and Yoruba-language philosophical discourses, this approach will also help throw light on the distinctiveness of Yoruba philosophical language.

*Ara* is the physico-material part of the human being. It includes the external and internal components: flesh, bone, heart, intestine, etc. It is described in physical terms: heavy/light, strong/weak, hot/cold, etc. Of course, sometimes its usage seems to suggest that it refers to the whole of the person, as when it is said: *Ara re lo mò* (She knows herself only—She is selfish). In such a usage, however, we can be sure that the intention is to convey the message that the person under reference is judged as having concern for his/her own body—without caring for others or even for his/her own real self. *Imotara-eni-nikan* is the Yoruba word for selfishness. The idea is that a selfish person is concerned with the well-being of his/her body only (as opposed to the spirit). This suggests that if human beings were to be concerned with their spirits, they would not be selfish. It is ignorance of what is required for true well-being that makes people selfish. The body is like a case which houses the senses, which also constitute its most important elements. It is also the window to the world. Through the senses, a person is acquainted with the external world. There is, indeed, no serious controversy on the nature of the body. It is also significant that the question whether a human person is all body or something else is not seriously raised by typical Yoruba thinkers because it appears too obvious to them that there is more to a person than the body.

However, reference to *ara* as a material frame does not do justice to its conception as the totality of the physical organs. Furthermore, and perhaps resulting from this, because different human beings have different bodily constitutions, they naturally adapt differently to different situations. A heavily built person will absorb external pressures differently to a lightly built person. Illness and health are functions of bodily constitution, and this is an important consideration in the traditional diagnosis of illness and counselling. Traditional healers take account of the physicochemical constituents of the human body.

Internal organs of the body are conceived as having their roles in the proper functioning of the person. For instance, the intestine plays a role in the physical strength of a person. A weak person is described as having only one *ifun* (intestine) or none at all. This is on the basis of an understanding that the intestine has an important role in building strength through its part in the metabolic activity of the body. A weak person is thus one whose intestine is not functioning well or who has none. In the same way, *opolo*

is recognized as the life-line of logical reasoning and ratiocinative activities. Located in the head, *opolo* controls the mental activities of human beings. A person who misbehaves is described as having no *opolo* or a malfunctioning *opolo*. A mentally retarded person is one whose *opolo* is not complete, while the insane is one whose *opolo* is disrupted. *Opolo* is thus a material component, and the functions and activities it performs are carried out and recognized on the physical plane. It can also be located in the head, and traditional psychiatrists generally identify a disruption in its functioning as a physical cause of mental illness. This, of course, does not rule out their also looking for extra-natural causes for such illness if, after a period of medication based on the theory of physical cause, the patient does not improve.

*Okàn* is another element in the structure of the human person. In the Yoruba language it appears to have a dual character. On the one hand, it is acknowledged as the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood, and it can be thus identified. On the other hand, however, it is also conceived as the source of emotional and psychic reactions. To encourage a person, one is asked to *Kíí lókàn* (strengthen his/her heart). A person who is easily upset is described as having no *okàn*; and when a person is sad, it is said that his/her *okàn* is disrupted. In this usage, then, it appears that the emotional states of persons are taken as functions of the state of their *okàn*. Is *okàn*, the seat or centre of conscious identity, then equivalent to the English concept of 'mind'? This is a difficult question for the reason that the Western concept of mind is itself ambiguous.

If we attend to the non-technical conception of mind, it means 'that which feels, perceives, wills, thinks'; or that from which thought originates. This is how *Webster's new international dictionary* defines it, reserving the technical sense for 'the conscious element in the universe (contrasted with matter)'. In the non-technical sense, the mind may be an entity but not necessarily in the Cartesian sense of 'that entity whose essence is thought'. That which is 'the subject of consciousness' may be a material entity. The dictionary does not give any clue as to its nature. On the other hand, the philosophic sense of mind which contrasts it with matter makes it more of an immaterial entity whose essence is thought. Since we are interested here in the question whether the Yoruba language entertains the concept of mind, we should attend to the non-technical sense. The question then is whether *okàn* is construed as 'that from which thought originates' in the language. This is an especially pertinent question since *okàn* is recognized as a material component of the body. So is it just that *okàn* is a material component whose activities have consequences for the psychic, emotional, and thinking states of a person, and is therefore responsible for them? Or is it that beyond the physical and visible *okàn* there is something invisible and perhaps non-physical which is responsible for all forms of conscious identity?

It appears to me that something of the latter is involved. The Yoruba word *okàn* translates as heart. Following the former suggestion, it would mean that the pumping and circulation of blood by the physical heart is construed as so crucial that its results are connected with the state of a person's thoughts and emotions at any point in time, and that, therefore, between *opolo* (brain) and *okàn* (heart), conceived in physical terms, we may account for the mental activities and emotional states of persons. Though reasonable, I think this is a far-fetched hypothesis for understanding the Yoruba views on the matter. The reason is as follows. Drawing this kind of connection between the activity and/or

state of the physical heart and the mental states of persons requires more than an intuitive understanding, and this requires adequate scientific knowledge which is not available to everyone, whether Africans or Westerners. This accounts for the non-physical conception of heart in the English language. Thus, after entering a technical zoo-logical definition as 'a hollow muscular organ which keeps up the blood circulation', *Webster's new international dictionary* gives the following, among others: 'the heart regarded as the seat of spiritual or conscious life; consciousness, soul, spirit. Hence, a faculty or phase of consciousness or its seat.' This suggests that beyond the physical organ, there is a source of conscious identity which is construed to be invisible and more or less spiritual.

In the Yoruba language, *igboiyà* (bravery), *èrù* (fear), *ifé* (love), *ikóríra* (hate), *ayò* (joy), *ibànújé* (sadness), *ojora* (cowardice) are different manifestations of the state of the person, and the *okàn* is identified as the basis for such conditions. A coward is an *alàlòkàn* (a person without a heart). But this cannot be taken literally as 'a person without the physical organ'. A stubborn person is *olókàn líle* (a hard-hearted person). In these cases, the reference is to the state of the person's conscious feelings, which is not identified with the functioning of the physical heart. Of course, the reference may not also be identified with a spiritual entity beyond the physical organ. There is no necessity about such identification, and reference to *okàn* in such statements may just be a manner of speaking, a metaphorical twist on language.

Yet, there appears to be even stronger evidence for suggesting that, in Yoruba language and thought, *okàn* is conceived as the source of thought, and that it therefore makes sense to speak of something like an invisible source of thought and emotions which is quite distinct from the physical heart. To refer again to *Webster's new international dictionary's* definition of mind in the non-technical (non-philosophical) sense, mind is 'that from which thought originates', 'the subject of consciousness', 'that which feels, perceives, wills, thinks'. Interestingly, Webster's adds the following: 'formerly conceived as an entity residing in the individual', which seems to suggest that it is no longer conceived as such. For the technical (philosophical) sense, the following is given: 'the conscious element in the universe (in contrast to matter).' If we focus on the non-technical sense, it would appear that mind refers to something which is the source of thought in a broad sense. Since the existence of thought in this sense is recognized in the Yoruba language, it would appear that we may indeed locate its source too.

The Yoruba word for thought is *èrò*. To think is to *ronú*, thinking is *ìrònú*. Etymologically, to *rò* is to stir; and *inú* is the inside. Thus to *ronú* is to stir the inside of a person; and *ìrònú* is, literally, stirring the inside. But this does not make sense unless we identify the inside as the receptacle for the various organs and therefore thought as an activity that belongs to the totality of the organs. This runs against the Yoruba view of the matter, however, and it means that an appeal to etymology will not help here. The question *Kíni èrò e?* means 'What are your thoughts?', and this compares with *Kíni ó wà lókàn re?* which means, literally, 'What is in your *okàn*?' or 'What are your thoughts?' This seems to suggest that the seat (or source) of *èrò* (thought) is somewhere close to, if not identical with, *okàn*. But, as we have seen, *okàn* translates as physical heart; and in view of the Yoruba understanding of the heart as the organ for pumping and circulation of blood, they are not likely to see it as the seat of conscious thought. There would seem, therefore, to be some other source for such activities, though perhaps closely related to





guarantees such con-conscious existence as long as it remains in force. As an affirmation of life, it also brings hope and makes desires realizable. Two claims have been made about the nature of *è mí*: it is spiritual and it has an independent existence. Both claims are subject to philosophical dispute. Firstly, it has been contested that *è mí* cannot be spiritual while it at the same time occupies space by being embodied. Secondly, the question of independent existence is disputed on the ground that it is not an entity but a force, and as such cannot have an independent existence. So we must address the question whether *è mí* is conceived as spiritual by the Yoruba, and, if so, whether such a conception is incoherent.

Frankly, attending to language alone by attempting to translate 'spiritual' into Yoruba is not of much help to the objector. The Yoruba dictionary translates spirit as *è mí*, spiritual as *ti è mí*, matter as *ohunkòhun tí a fì ojú rí, tí a sì fì owó kàn* (i.e. whatever we see with our eyes and touch with our hands) and material as *nkan ti ara* (that which pertains to the body). Furthermore, however, it seems clear that the Yoruba understand *è mí* as the lifeline of human existence. They understand it as a portion of *Olódùmarè*'s divine breath. But since *Olódùmarè* is also understood as spiritual, that portion of this source of being which is given to the human being must also be spiritual. It is also recognized that it is the possession of *è mí* that makes humans children of *Olódùmarè*. It is the logic of the source of *è mí*, therefore, that suggests its nature as spiritual. Unless we deny the spirituality of *Olódùmarè*, we cannot deny, without inconsistency, the spiritual nature of *è mí*.

Now, we have to address the other question regarding the incoherence of the belief: how can a spirit occupy space and still remain a spirit? It must be remarked that this is not an issue which engaged the attention of the traditional thinker. Yet, I think there are two approaches to the issue. Firstly, we may understand the reference to *è mí* as spiritual as in fact reference to an invisible entity and nothing more than that. The dictionary meanings cited above confirm this. On this showing, it may very well be that *è mí*, as a spiritual entity, is only invisible to the ordinary eyes and may contain quasi-physical attributes which make the idea of its occupation of space coherent. Indeed, this is how people understand free spirit (*iwin, òrò*) that feature in fairy tales. Also, the *è mí* of a witch is understood in this way: it can fly away at night to attend meetings with fellow witches. For this to be an adequate resolution of the issue, however, it has to be the case that the spiritual nature of the supreme deity is also understood in such a quasi-physical sense since, as we have noted, *è mí* is a portion of *Olódùmarè*. A second approach is to brush off the apparent inconsistency. On this showing, one may just understand *è mí* as the spiritual entity which, in virtue of this, has the capacity to change forms, unlike a material entity. So it could assume a physical nature when there is need for it, and revert to the spiritual nature thereafter. This would make it neither physical nor quasi-physical. It would just be that, by virtue of its spiritual nature (which presumably endows it with the power of changeability), it is capable of changing form. Again, this is how other free spirits are construed. And though *Olódùmarè* is sometimes presented as having transactions with human beings (in Ifá divination poetry), this is also understood in terms of the deity's spiritual nature. Indeed, the traditionally acknowledged ability of some special human beings to 'see' and 'communicate' with spirits does not suggest that such spirits have physical properties since they are supposed to operate beyond ordinary space.

Finally, there is the question of the independent existence of *è mí*. Thus, it has been suggested that if *è mí* is like a force injected into the body by the deity, then it can have no independent existence, and should be construed as just a principle or force which activates but which is not itself an entity. I think this is too far-fetched, however. As I remarked above, if we attend to the language, there is a difference between *è mí* and *è è mí*. The latter is identifiable empirically. But when the Yoruba say *è mí wa* (there is *è mí*), they mean more than 'there is breath'. It is also important constantly to bear in mind the religious aspect of this conception of a person. If the deity is believed to be spiritual and to have an independent existence, what difficulty is there for conceiving the independent existence of an *è mí* outside the bodily frame? Furthermore, if it is the *è mí* that is thought of as activating the human body, there also appears to be no problem conceiving its consciousness outside the body. If we do not deny consciousness to the deity, which is construed as spiritual (and therefore not in bodily existence), then having no body cannot be a basis for denying the consciousness of *è mí* which, again, is just an aspect of the deity.

*Orí* is another element in the make-up of the human person. *Orí* has a dual character. On the one hand, it refers to the physical head and, given the acknowledged significance of the head vis-à-vis the rest of the body, *orí* is considered vital even in its physical character. It is the seat of the brain and, from what we have observed earlier on about this, its importance cannot be over-emphasized. The postulation of a spiritual *orí* beyond this physical *orí* is in recognition of this. In any case, there is the conception of an *orí* which is recognized as the bearer of the person's destiny as well as the determinant of personality. How does this element come into the picture? Earlier on, I referred to the creative process of the human being as a combined effort of the deity and some subordinates. I mentioned only *Orisà-nlá* as the crafter of the body. The other is *Ajàlá*, the 'potter of *orí*'. The idea is that after *è mí* has been put in place, the newly created human being proceeds to the next stage—the house of *Ajàlá*—for the 'choice' of an *orí*. The *orí* is, as it were, the 'case' in which individual destinies are wound up. Each newly created being picks up his/her preferred 'case' without knowing what is stored there. But whatever is stored therein will determine the life-course of the individual in the world. It is thus the *orí* so chosen that, as the bearer of the individual's destiny, determines his/her personality.

There are conflicting accounts of the process of the choice of *orí* or, indeed, of its nature. Some accounts indicate that the *orí* itself, as a fully conscious personality-component of the person, kneels down to pick the destiny. Others, however, suggest that *orí* is chosen by the individual after he/she is animated by the deity with the supply of *è mí*. Both seem to be coherent accounts and may be made sense of by appeal to the language. Thus, the latter account may be defended on the grounds that it is derived from oral tradition as recorded in the Ifá divination poetry. Secondly, it appears to capture more clearly the idea behind the linguistic expression of the choice of destiny. For in the language, the process is described as the choice of *orí*, and *orí* is construed as an entity in which destiny is encased. That is, it is the *orí* that is chosen. The picture one gets from this latter account is that of numerous *orí*'s with different destinies or portions already wound up in them, and the individuals (*ara+è mí*) going to make a choice of any *orí* that appeals to them without knowing the destiny wound up in them.

The other account suggests that it is the *orí* itself, as a full personality, that kneels down to make the choice of destiny. This does not take into consideration the fact that a personality is not determined before the choice of destiny. It is the destiny or portion that is chosen that forms a personality. On the other hand, one way of reconciling the two positions is to reconstruct the former position which claims that it is the *ara+èní* that does the choice of *orí*. To do this one may allow that what is meant by the choice of *orí* here is that the individual (*ara+èní*) kneels down before *Olódùmarè* to choose, by verbal declaration, what he/she would be or do in the world. In other words, to choose one's *orí* simply means choosing one's destiny. In this case, there is no entity in any form, physical, quasi-physical, or spiritual which is picked up by the individual. He/she just speaks the words of destiny and these words are approved by the deity. This account looks a lot more coherent. For one thing, it allows us to avoid the problem of how an *orí*, whether physically or quasi-physically construed, can enter into the physical structure of the person so as to become part of his/her component. But though it avoids this problem, it raises a number of others. Firstly, it leaves no room for the deity that figures in the Yoruba account, namely *Ajàlà*, the potter of human *orí*. Secondly, it does not account for the fact that the Yoruba regard *orí* as a spiritual component of personality which is in fact, raised to the level of a personal divinity. Finally, if *orí*, as understood by the Yoruba, merely refers to the words of destiny as declared by individuals, then their constant reference to *orí* in supplications and the offerings of sacrifices to it should be judged a mistake. Yet, the fact remains that if it is a mistake, it is one which a typical Yoruba would rather make. The idea of *orí* as a spiritual component, chosen by the individual and having the power of a guardian and protector over him/her, seems too deep-rooted in the Yoruba world-view to be given up.

It is thus the *orí* so chosen, with the destiny wound up in it, that determines the personality of the individual. And though the *orí* is symbolized by the physical head, it is not identical with it. For the *orí* is construed as the inner—or spiritual—head (*orí-inú*). And as Abimbola (1971:80) has pointed out, '*orí* is regarded as an individual's personal divinity who caters for their personal interests'. As such, sacrifices are offered to it. This raises the question whether it is (or should be) regarded also as a component of the human person. I think it should indeed be regarded as a spiritual component of the person. To regard *orí* as a personal divinity is to underscore its primacy vis-à-vis the divinities. This is already indicated by what it means. As the bearer of one's destiny, it has the key to one's future success or failure, in which case it is indeed more important than the divinities. The saying, '*Orí l'á bá bo, a bá f òrìsà sílè*' (we thought to offer sacrifices to our *orí*, laying aside the *orìsà*'s) is indicative of the importance of a personality-determinant which means more to us than the divinities. Therefore, as the personality-determining element of the individual, *orí* is a spiritual component of his/her make-up. This way of putting the matter should take care of any puzzles that may arise from regarding the *orí* as a constituent of the human being. For instance, if destiny is the pattern of events that will unfold in a person's life history, how can any constituent of that human personality be said to bear it? The answer to this is that, as has been mentioned above, though *orí* is construed as a component of the person, it is also construed as a divinity, in which capacity it is spiritual. It is in this respect that it is said to bear the destiny of the person. Indeed, this is also the meaning of its spiritual nature. If

you perform an autopsy on a person, you are not going to be able to locate *orí* in addition to the physical head. So the *orí* that bears destiny is at once the personality component of the person (in the sense that it determines that personality), as well as a divinity, in which capacity it is more or less the guardian spirit of the person. Another term for it in the language is *enikejì* (the partner or double).

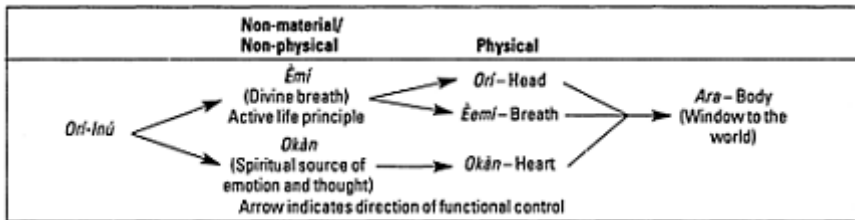
There are further problems with the concept. For instance, if the *ara* is physical body, how can it be available before birth to choose an *orí*? Or if the pre-natal *orí* is not the physical body, is it quasi-physical? Is the *è mí* that is involved in this combination of *ara* and *è mí* spiritual or physical? First, the time frame here is pre-natal. Activities like choosing an *orí* go on in the spirit world where the divinities and prospective human beings are construed of as engaging in all kinds of relationships and exchanges. In this world, anything is conceivable. Indeed, it will be recalled that a divinity (*òrìsà-nlá*) is postulated as responsible for moulding the human body. So it could be the physical body that is involved. Also there are images of physical activities presented: the newly formed *ara* with its associated deity-given *è mí* moves to the 'house' of *Ajàlá*, the 'potter of heads' who is responsible for the *orí*. It seems clear, however, that it is a combination of conceptualization and imagination that is brought into play here. On the one hand, there is a conception of a spirit world in which anything can happen. On the other hand, some of the things that can happen there are imagined on the basis of what is experienced in the physical world and are therefore endowed with its attributes. We may choose to impose the idea of a quasi-physical *ara* on this basis, and we may perhaps succeed in making the account look more coherent to us. However, we should note that such a reconstruction may fail to do full justice to the ideas as understood in the language.

We should next address the issue of the relationship between the so-far identified components of the person *ara*, *okàn*, *è mí*, and *orí*. From what has been said thus far, the following seems clear. Firstly, these components may be grouped into two: physico-material and mental-spiritual. *Ara* belongs to the first, *è mí* to the second, and *orí* and *okàn* have physical and mental aspects. Secondly, a mentalistic conception of *okàn* is postulated to account for the phenomenon of thought. Perhaps there is no need for such a postulation, but there is no doubt that it exists. We have seen that it also exists in the ordinary use of the heart in the English language. Thirdly, *orí* is also postulated as a spiritual entity (in addition to its meaning as physical head) to account for the phenomenon of destiny. There is no parallel to this postulation in the English language, and I consider it the distinctive aspect of the Yoruba concept of a person. Even when *okàn* is postulated to account for the phenomenon of thought, whatever it has to do with this and with the emotional state of a person cannot be separated from the *orí* as the bearer of his/her destiny. Therefore, *okàn*, as source of conscious thought and emotions, could be regarded as a subsequent (post-natal) expression of the destiny portion encased pre-natally in the *orí*. This may be explained as follows: *orí* determines the personality of the individual. The emotional states, on the other hand, are reflections and good indicators of the personality. *Okàn*, as the source of post-natal consciousness and emotions, therefore only reflects that which had been encased in the *orí* originally. In other words, *okàn* may be regarded as one of the avenues through which destiny unfolds in the post-natal existence of the person.

The symbolic representation of *orí* by the physical head is indeed indicative of how its

importance is construed. As the location of *opolo* (brain), the physical head is the seat of intelligence. The introduction of *orí* (inner-head and bearer of destiny) as a spiritual element is to suggest that there is more to what is seen to be going on, and this is the spiritual direction of the *orí*. Hence the idea of currying its favour.

*Ori* is therefore the determinant of the personality of the individual. The *è mí*, as the active life force supplied by the deity, is a common denominator. Though it guarantees existence and activates the lifeless body into consciousness, it cannot be the basis for identifying persons as individual selves because it is common to all. Furthermore, that *è mí* activates the lifeless body does not make it the locus of conscious identity because an individual may have *è mí* (as an activating life principle) and still not be conscious of his/her existence as a self. On the other hand, *orí* is identified with each person; it is an essential component of human personality. However, this does not make it the locus of conscious identity. Because of its spiritual dimension, *orí* functions as a remote controller of the person's fundamental activities, including thinking; but it is not itself the centre or seat of thought. The very thought of appealing to one's *orí* through sacrifice already presupposes the existence of the *orí* which is, in that case, the object of the thought. The subject of conscious identity responsible for the phenomenon of thinking, feeling, willing, and desiring, is in the Yoruba language, *okàn*, which would seem to correspond to the mind in English. The relationship, with directions of functional control may be represented as follows:



## COMPARISON WITH THE AKAN CONCEPT OF THE PERSON

The purpose of this comparison is to explore the similarities and differences between the Yoruba and Akan concepts of the person. For the most part, I adopt Gyekye's analysis of the Akan conception for this purpose with references to Wiredu's as necessary. I note also some major disagreements between the two Akan authors.

For the most part, there appear to be more similarities than differences between the two conceptions. The major difference is in the Akan conception of *okra* which is also regarded as the active life principle supplied by the deity, but which is, in addition, the bearer of destiny. It will be recalled that in the Yoruba conception *è mí*, which is the equivalent of Akan *okra*, is not the bearer of destiny. Something else, *orí*, is postulated for that. Furthermore, according to Gyekye, *okra* and *sunsum* (an immaterial entity responsible for thought) constitute a spiritual unity but they are not identical. There is a disagreement between Gyekye and Wiredu on the latter's account of the *okra* as 'quasi-physical' and his denial that *okra* is postulated to account for thought. Gyekye's point, which seems to indicate a correspondence between Yoruba and Akan thinking on the

matter, is that *okra* is believed by the Akans to be spiritual and not quasi-physical. But Wiredu has argued that the Akan *okra* is construed as quasi-physical and one reason he gives is that:

...highly developed medicine men are claimed to be able to enter into communication with an *okra*, and those that have eyes with medicinally heightened perception are said to be capable of seeing such things (Wiredu 1983:119–120).

My own initial reaction to this argument is that the fact that medicine-men enter into communication with *okra* should not suggest its having a quasi-physical nature because, after all, medicine-men are generally believed to have the ability to operate in the spiritual realm. However, in a private correspondence with me, Wiredu has further clarified his position on the matter. His point is this:

The eye is a sense organ and the concept of seeing is bound up with spaciality. However heightened the powers of an eye may become, if it *sees* something, that thing will have to be in space. In regard to any claim to see something, it must make sense to ask ‘Where is it?’ (Private exchange between myself and Wiredu).

He takes this to be a conceptual point. While I understand this conceptual point, it seems to me to miss the crucial point of the dispute which is that the herbalists, in such contexts, operate outside ordinary space and time, and that stories of para-physical sightings cannot be taken as evidence of a physical existence of the sighted beings. This is what the idea of extra-sensory perception is all about. If the concept of ‘seeing’ is involved, it is not ordinary seeing and is therefore not bound up with ordinary spaciality. Of course, scientists may deny the reality of such occurrences for the reason that there are no scientific proofs for them, but as Mosley (1978:12) has observed, the:

...idea that each individual has an aspect of his being that defies description in terms of the classical concepts of space, time, and matter, which is non-physical, but which can nonetheless affect physical manifestations, is an essential metaphysical assumption underlying the beliefs and practices of traditional magic.

On the other issue, it seems again that Wiredu’s account of thought, which he uses to deny that *okra* is distinguishable from soul, needs to be broadened. While I grant that the concept of soul, as it features in Christian and Western philosophy, is problematic in the context of African thought, it is not clear to me that, on the basis of the shared assumptions between Wiredu and Gyekye, they could not agree on the idea of an equivalence of *okra* and soul. For if thought refers to consciousness, and *okra* is the principle of consciousness, then it could be taken as the equivalent of soul. There seems to be a confusion, though, arising from Gyekye’s (1987:87,88,97) account of a spiritual unity of *okra* and *sunsum*. On the one hand, *sunsum* is responsible for thought in the narrow sense—as ratiocination (Gyekye 1987:88)—and at the same time it is the

'activating principle in the person' (Gyekye 1987:97). On the other hand, however, Gyekye also says that *okra* 'is the principle of life of a person' (Gyekye 1987:97). What *sunsum* does as the 'activating principle' is unclear, since *okra* is also regarded as the 'principle of life'. In the Yoruba conception, *è mí* as the activating principle brings the body to conscious existence and (as in the case of the *okra*) its departure from the human being is death.

Again, from the characterization of the *okra* as the bearer of destiny, it would appear that it (and not *sunsum*) should be regarded as the component on which 'one's health, worldly power, position, influence, success, etc. would depend' (Gyekye 1987:98). This is how *orí* (as bearer of destiny) is conceived in Yoruba thought. If *sunsum* is 'that which thinks, desires, feels', then it performs functions similar to that attributed to *okàn* by the Yoruba. But again, the Yoruba do not regard *okàn* as the determinant of health, worldly power, position, etc. In so far as these various components go, then, the following seems to me to be the picture from this comparison:

- 1 *Okra* seems the equivalent of *è mí*, but while *okra* is postulated as the bearer of destiny, *è mí* is not.
- 2 *Sunsum* (as that which thinks, feels, etc.) seems the equivalent of Yoruba *okàn*, but while *sunsum* is postulated as the determinant of power, success, and wealth, *okàn* is not.
- 3 *Okra* (in Akan) is postulated as responsible for activities for which the Yoruba postulate two parts (*è mí and orí*).

I wish to conclude this section with a few observations on Gyekye's argument to demonstrate the nature of *sunsum* as an immaterial element. To do this, Gyekye examines and attempts to debunk some anthropological accounts of *sunsum*. It is in this exercise that I find some of Gyekye's arguments unconvincing. It may very well be that the anthropologists are wrong in their accounts, but Gyekye's arguments fail to show this, at least in some cases.

The first position that Gyekye (1987:89) takes up is that which characterizes *sunsum* as 'something that perishes with the body'. What is interesting here is that Gyekye does not conclude his argument against Danquah (1968). Gyekye gives us only one premise in the form of a conditional: 'Now, if the *sunsum* perishes along with the body, a physical object, then it follows that it is also something physical or material.' And he goes on to show that this seems to be Danquah's position. And yet he does nothing more to show the incorrectness of this position.

Next, Gyekye argues:

- 1 The functions or activities attributed to the *sunsum* indicate that it is neither material nor mortal nor derived from the father.
  - a *sunsum* moulds the child's personality (Busia 1954)
  - b *sunsum* constitutes or determines a person's personality and character (Danquah 1968), etc.
- 2 Personality involves such characteristics as courage, thoughts, feelings, actions, etc.
- 3 Such qualities (courage, jealousy, gentleness, forcefulness) are psychological, not



sensible. Therefore:

4 If *sunsum* is what constitutes the basis of an individual's personality, it cannot be a physical thing.

I sympathize with this argument, but it is not convincing to ground the position that a 'material conception of *sunsum* is logically impossible'. For, suppose the function of *sunsum* is the development of personality, nothing prevents it from performing this function as a physical thing. Courage can be connected with a solid constitution of the physical *sunsum* which strengthens the psyche. To press his point here, I think Gyekye has to rely on how religious concepts filter into the people's understanding of these relationships. Just as I argued in the case of the Yoruba *okàn*, it seems to me that a purely physical concept of *sunsum* is not logically inconceivable even on Gyekye's grounds, unless it is argued that *sunsum*, like *okra*, is an aspect of the deity; and since the deity is spirit, *sunsum* must also be spirit. This may, in fact, be Gyekye's argument as the following seem to suggest:

1 Busia (1954) and others (e.g. Danquah 1968) claim that *sunsum* derives from the father and that it is therefore mortal.

2 But *sunsum* derives from the supreme being. Therefore:

3 It must be divine and immortal.

4 After all, trees, plants, and other objects also have *sunsum*.

5 But if *sunsum* derives from the father, these natural objects cannot have it.

6 Therefore *sunsum* does not derive from the father.

This argument could have nailed the point down at premise 3. Gyekye could simply have added that since *sunsum*, following its source, is divine and immortal, it must therefore be spiritual too. But Gyekye goes on to premise 4 which suggests that since trees and animals have *sunsum*, it could not derive from the father, apparently because trees and plants do not have fathers. But must trees have human fathers for their *sunsum* to be passed on to them? One would think that the reproductive activities of trees and animals are sufficient to pass on their *sunsum* to their offspring.

### THE CONCEPT OF DESTINY

As we have seen, the belief in predestination, expressed in the concept of *orí*, seems to suggest that the Yoruba have some anxiety about human helplessness in certain situations. However, this belief also expresses the people's conviction that human existence has meaning. It suggests, for instance, that human beings are not on a purposeless mission in this world; that they have a mission to fulfil, a message to deliver—which is the meaning of their existence—and that this mission has been fully endorsed by the creator. Whatever is (or is not) done by them should therefore be explained by appeal to this original mission. The concept of *orí* expresses this idea.

However, like most common cultural beliefs, there are a number of philosophical puzzles connected with this concept. Firstly, the relationship between *orí* and the concept of destiny has been variously conceived. There is need for clarification. Secondly, there is a problem with regard to the relationship between the beliefs in predestination, immortality, and reincarnation. Thirdly, there is the problem of the apparent contradiction

between the belief in predestination and the attribution of responsibility for actions to human beings. I shall take up these problems in turn.

*Orí* literally means head as has been seen above. Ordinarily, the physical head, in addition to its other functions, is used to carry things. It is the bearer of goods and commodities. Before the development of machines and vehicles, human portage was the mode of movement. Farm products were carried on heads to market centres or homes. The head therefore served an economic function. But more than this, the head is the location of important parts of the human body: the eyes, regarded by the Yoruba as *oba-ara* (king of the body) are located there; so is the brain, which controls intelligence and sanity. Perhaps, this special nature of the physical head suggests to the Yoruba the idea that it must also have a spiritual dimension. Thus, the physical head is believed to symbolize or represent an inner head which is the bearer of a person's destiny, and which therefore is the remote controller of one's endeavours in the world. It is this inner head which is referred to as *orí-inu*, or simply, *orí*. Therefore *orí* is not identical with destiny, though it is its bearer.

Destiny refers to the pre-ordained portion of life wound and sealed up in an *orí*. Human beings have an allotment of this destiny, which then determines what they will be in life—whether a success or a failure. Destiny determines the general course of life, and since *orí* is the receptacle and bearer of destiny it is also regarded as its controller. Hence the idea of appealing to one's *orí* to lead one aright. But how does an actual destiny get affixed to a particular human being? The procedure has been variously conceived, giving rise to three models of destiny. Firstly, there is the idea that the portion gets allocated to individuals as a result of their own 'choice', or rather, the 'choice' of their own *orí*. Hence the idea of destiny as *àkúnlèyàn* (that which one kneels down to choose). Secondly, there is the conception of destiny as the position which is affixed to an individual, not necessarily by his/her own choice. In this model, the individual kneels to receive the pre-ordained portion from the creator. Hence the idea of destiny as *àkúnlègbà* (that which one kneels to receive). Thirdly, there is the conception of destiny which seems to stand between the previous two. In this conception, though there is the idea of choice, the identity of the choice-maker is not clear—whether it is the individual or some other being making the choice for him or her. In addition, there is the idea of a fixation of the portion on the individual. This is the idea of destiny as *àyànmó* (an affixed choice).

In all these conceptions, there is a common thread, namely the fact that the individual is either the choice-maker or the passive receiver or the one for whom the choice is made and affixed. On the other hand, what is chosen—the portion of life—is wound up in the *orí* which is its bearer and therefore the object of choice or allocation. There is thus a close relationship between *orí*, the bearer, and *kádàrà* (destiny) the portion of life that is borne. This has led to the idea of speaking of *orí* as if it were the portion itself, or as if it had a great deal of influence on shaping the course of the destiny it is supposed to bear. Thus appeals and supplications are made to *orí* either to help win a particular battle, or succeed in a particular endeavour. It is believed that if one's *orí* is against one, there is no question of success. Perhaps there is a justification for this belief in the efficacy of *orí* to influence the course of destiny. After all, in the three variants of the conception of destiny discussed above, *orí* plays the role of bearer of destiny.

A word should be added here with regard to the question of the choice of destiny as

explicitly conceived in one of the variants discussed above. A Yoruba song expresses the idea of choice of *orí* as bearer of destiny thus:

Èmí' o mo ibi ol'órí nyan orí o

Mbá lò yan t'èmí

Ibi kan náà l'ati nyan orí o

*Kádàrà kò papò ni*

(I do not know where people with good *orí* choose their *orí*,  
I would have gone to choose mine there;  
But no! We choose our *orí* from the same source;  
It's only that our destinies are not identical.)

Again, this is a song expressing anguish. But the point that I want to make now is with regard to the element of choice referred to in the song. It has been argued that, strictly speaking, an individual cannot be said to have chosen a destiny. This is because, for there to be a choice, there has to be adequate information and rational preference; and, as some have argued, none of this is present in the conceptualization of the choice of *orí*.

Let us look at the problem more closely. The three procedures which have been identified as the manner in which *orí* and destiny get attached to a person are:

1 *àkúnlèyàn* (chosen while kneeling down)

2 *àkúnlègbà* (received while kneeling down)

3 *àyànmó* (affixed choice).

Of these, it is clearly the first that suggests the idea of an individual really making a choice. The second clearly does not; since it portrays the idea of an individual receiving the portion by receiving an *orí* (this is the version that agrees with the Akan concept of destiny). The third also does not clearly represent the individual as making the choice; it may be made by someone else and then affixed to him/her.

If we focus on the first version—*àkúnlèyàn*—we may now raise the question whether indeed there is a genuine choice. Firstly, let us have a picture of the individual who is to make the 'choice'. As we have observed before, the making of the human being is a collective effort of *Olódùmarè*, *Orisà-nlá*, and *Ajàlá*. *Orisà-nlá* makes the body (complete), after which *Olódùmarè* supplies the *èmí* (active life principle—divine breath). Then, this body plus life principle, who is now a quasi-conscious individual, moves to the house of *Ajàlá* who is the maker of *orí*. The mission is to have his/her portion of life. The individual portions of life are wound up in the various *orí*'s in different shades and colours, some over-burnt, some not properly done. Some of the *orí* look beautiful outside, but inside are full of 'worms'! Some of them look ugly, but inside are solid and neat. The insides are not accessible to the individual, but the outsides are. So, depending on the 'taste' of each 'body-life principle', that is the quasi-conscious individual, one of the *orí*'s is picked up. After picking it up, the conscious individual is ready to proceed to the gate-keeper of heaven. There the *orí* just picked starts automatically to replay the wound-up information about what its owner will be; after

which it is sealed again and the individual proceeds on his/her journey to the earth, on the way crossing the river of forgetfulness, which makes it impossible to remember what the *orí* had relayed at the gate.

We may now ask: is this a real choice? Obviously, if we are concerned with what is wound up inside the *orí*, the individual does not have adequate information. However, the question may be raised as to why we should be so concerned with what is wound up inside the *orí* if we agree that in the choice of a particular *orí*, the individual makes a choice on the basis of his/her taste. That this turns out to be harbouring a bad destiny, it may be urged, does not detract from the fact that *orí*, the bearer of this destiny, was chosen from among others. To press this argument, we may be asked to consider the analogous case of a game of lottery. You are presented with fifty-four numbers out of which six will be the winning numbers. On your own, you pick six numbers that appeal to you. Of course, you have no idea which numbers will win. But you happen to prefer the numbers you pick. If this is a blind choice, it remains your choice nonetheless. You did not choose to lose; you chose the numbers which you hoped would win. This may appear to be similar to what goes on in the choice of *orí*. A similar situation of choice is in the case of that of a spouse. Let us assume that we all make our choices on the basis of our taste, after some reflection. But it is also true that in most cases we do not reflect at all or at least not enough. Otherwise, the adage that love is blind would not make sense. Shall we say that in such cases we cannot be said to know every detail about our spouse and have therefore not made a choice in the real sense? It may be argued then that the important criteria are consciousness of the alternatives (in the case of destiny, the various *orís*) and one's own judgement as to the preferable alternative.

This is an interesting argument, but I do not think that it succeeds without further assumptions. It is true that if one is conscious of what one is choosing, then one cannot complain. And in a sense, it may also be true that the individual, at the point where the *èmí* is implanted, is conscious. However, there are problems. Firstly, it is not clear that the concept of taste is applicable here since the personality of a person plays a crucial role in his/her taste. Yet it is the *orí* itself that determines the kind of personality a person will have. Therefore one cannot be expected to have taste before one has made that 'choice' of *orí*. The choice is therefore blind in this respect. Secondly, it is not the *orí* in itself that is desired, if the concept of desire can even be applied here. Rather it is what is inside it. So, if what is inside is not known and there is no information about it, strictly there can be no choice. In other words, since the real object of choice is the destiny (life-portion) and not just the *orí* (as the carrier), we should expect more information on the former. Perhaps the important point about this concept is that the various destinies represent the various missions to be accomplished in the world, and the messages are to be borne by different individuals. The most that can be done is to seal them up in various receptacles which may then be 'chosen' so that there is no question of favouritism, and all the messages get delivered. But if the receptacles—*orí* as bearers of the destinies—are 'chosen' on the basis of the 'tastes' of individuals who make the 'choice', whatever is inside should be construed as having been 'chosen'. As should be clear, this way of putting it does not remove the fact of the blindness of the choice of destiny. More important is the fact that the analogy with the game of lottery will not work for one obvious reason. With regard to lottery, an individual may choose not to choose, but this is

not the case with destiny. You cannot refuse to choose an *orí* and this makes it a matter of forced choice in addition to its being a blind one.

The second problem I want to address is that of the relationship between beliefs in predestination, immortality, and reincarnation. The Yoruba believe that earthly death is not the end of life and that a person who has reached maturity before death will reincarnate in a different form in a later life. This is why dead ancestors are not forgotten and why newborn children may be named after a recently deceased older member of the family. With respect to the belief in destiny, this raises the question whether the original destiny allotted to the individual governs his/her later life or whether a new portion has to be allotted each time the *èní* is about to reincarnate. There seems to be not much reflection on this problem in traditional thought. The problem is this. In addition to the belief in destiny and reincarnation, there is the belief in divine sanctions in after-life. Thus any individual who grossly misbehaved while on earth will be punished at death and the *èní* of such a person may be made to inhabit the body of an animal to become a beast of burden in later life. In such a situation, the question arises whether the reincarnated *èní* will be expected to have a new portion (destiny) allotted to him/her or whether such a punishment will have been wound up in the original destiny. If the former is the case, it is quite possible that the new destiny so chosen may be a good one such that the reincarnated *èní* escapes the kind of punishment envisaged for such a wicked life, unless there is a way of teleguiding a reincarnated *èní* to pick the deserved destiny. Here, the idea of *àkúnlégbà* (that which is received while kneeling down) will seem to make sense. In other words, the second time around, it may have to be imposed as deserved. On the other hand, if the second alternative above is the case—subsequent punishment or reward for the first life is bound up with the original destiny—it follows that the individual has no chance of escaping the consequences of the original portion of his/her destiny. This may seem unfair; however, it is not even clear that we should consider it as punishment. For the suffering that the person now goes through in a subsequent life has already been included in the portion allotted to her/him originally and it is this original portion for the first life that is responsible for the behaviour that warrants the subsequent life's suffering.

There is, in addition to the above, the problem of the apparent contradiction between a belief in destiny and the practice of attributing responsibility to human agents, and the consequent apportioning of praise and blame. If a person is predestined to be a certain sort of person, can we at the same time hold him/her responsible for his/her actions? The problem is the subject of Rotimi's *The Gods are not to blame* (1971), a Yoruba adaptation of Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex*. The main character of the play, *Odéwálé*, is predestined to kill his father (the king) and marry his mother (the queen). This was the voice of the oracle as the child was born and given names. To avoid this unspeakable tragedy, the parents were advised to get rid of the child. They did not disagree. He was handed over to the palace messenger to take to the forest and kill. The messenger, on his own initiative, decided against killing the child. He gave him to a hunter from a far-away village where he could be raised without interacting with his real parents. However, the theme of an unchangeable destiny continued to sound as the boy grew. One day, he was informed by a soothsayer that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Thinking that he was living with his real parents, he voluntarily decided to leave home to avoid this

kind of tragedy befalling him. On his way, he was confronted by a group of people from another village in what looked like a royal tour. They were rude to him to the point of ridiculing his parentage. He was annoyed, drew the sword, and killed the leader of the team, the king. He was his real father. He went on his way until he got to his real place of birth. Meanwhile, the town was thrown into mourning for the loss of their king. They were also troubled by some marauders who took advantage of their being without a king. *Odéwálé*, the 'stranger', helped them to get rid of the marauders and to get their lives together again. Indeed, he was a symbol of struggle, an optimistic human being who would not resign himself to fate. Hear him:

Crossing seven waters  
 I, a son of the tribe of  
*Ijèkún Yemoja*,  
 found my way,  
 to this strange land  
 of *Kútújè*. I came  
 to see suffering,  
 and I felt suffering.  
 'Get up,  
 Get up,' I said  
 to them; 'not to do something  
 is to be crippled fast. Up, up,  
 all of you;  
 to lie down resigned to fate is madness. Up,

up, struggle: the world is  
 struggle' (Rotimi 1971:6).

He struggled against destiny. But did he succeed? For a while, it seemed he triumphed. As a reward for his help, he was made king of *Kútújè*. But he had to inherit the former king's widow, who was his real mother. In no time, things began to turn sour for the town. There was famine, pestilence, and death. The oracle had to speak and it spoke the unspeakable: the king was married to his mother. Now, who is to blame? The boy, the parents or the gods? The title of the play provides the answer—it is not the gods who are to blame. Is it then the helpless victims of an unwanted destiny who tried their utmost to prevent it? This is the problem.

The tendency is for us to try to make sense of this belief by drawing a distinction between fatalism and predestination on the one hand, and between strong destiny and weak destiny on the other. While fatalism (or strong destiny) presents the picture of a cut-and-dried portion of life, predestination (or weak destiny) leaves room for manoeuvres within the context of a general allotment of destiny. Thus, an individual destined to be rich cannot fold his/her arms every day and expect such a destiny to be fulfilled. Also, a person destined to be poor can turn things round by using her/his legs and brain, the symbols of industry and intellect. Again, there is the belief that the character of a person

may influence the fulfilment of his/her destiny, and if this happens, he/she is sure to be held responsible.

Though there is some sense in this reconciliation, it does not seem to me to solve the real problem. Indeed, one would expect that such factors as character, industry, or the lack of it, and mischief by others, can provide adequate explanation for significant events in a person's life, thus diminishing the importance of predestination as an explanatory model. But apparently the average Yoruba, like most Africans, is not satisfied with such explanations. After all, such factors may be present in other cases of other persons and different consequences may follow. It is especially in pathetic situations where a person cannot be wholly blamed for his/her misfortune that the Yoruba mind makes final recourse to explanation in terms of destiny: what is the case is what has to be since it has been so predestined. The difference between fatalism and predestination does not seem to be noticed in practice in such situations.

But these are only grave situations in which a person is known to have tried his/her human best to avoid misfortune. Thus, the poverty of a lazy person is not blamed on destiny, nor is a notorious robber spared punishment on account of destiny. This is where the question 'Why hold people responsible?', becomes legitimate. If a lazy person has chosen a destiny which makes him/her lazy, is it his/her fault? One way to make sense of this is to suggest that blame or punishment is not imposed by the community on their own; it is already included in the destiny chosen by the lazy person or the robber. That is, in the act of choosing the life of a robber, he/she must have chosen along with it the punishment that goes with such a way of life. On the other hand, if we go back to the original choice of *orí* which bears the different destinies, and we come to terms with the argument that, even if a choice of *orí* may be said to be made, the choice of a particular destiny has not been made, then it would seem to follow that the individual cannot also be said to have made a choice of the punishment that goes along, with his/her way of life.

A final problem with regard to this issue of destiny is the question of its changeability. Perhaps if destiny is changeable, then the responsibility belongs to the individual to make efforts to change a bad destiny. If he/she does not make such efforts, then she/he deserves the blame for any lapses. Is this the way the matter is expressed in the language? As we have discussed above, destiny is itself not easily appealed to. It comes into explanations when all else seems to have failed in spite of efforts. Thus a person avoids being killed in an automobile accident involving a mechanical fault only to be killed again when being conveyed to the hospital. How do we explain this but by saying that the person was destined to die that way. It was after all, not his/her fault. Could events have been changed? This is where the religious belief which feeds the concept of destiny creeps in. Before embarking on any important venture, a person is expected to consult with the god of divination to find out what will be the outcome. If the prediction is terrible, it will usually come with directions as to the kind of sacrifice to offer, and it is believed that a bad destiny may be changed if such a sacrifice is offered. If a person therefore refuses to find out what is in store for him/her, or to perform the necessary sacrifice, he/she cannot blame everything on destiny. This is one way in which it is believed destiny may be changed.

Another means involves the character of the person. A good destiny may become bad as a result of a person's own character. It seems then that destiny expresses only a

potentiality which may fail to be realized. This seems to account also for the belief in *esè* (leg) as an important element in human personality. *Esè* is the symbol of movement. If a person has a good destiny but is not dynamic, the destiny may not come to fruition. So individual destinies express the potentialities of becoming something, of accomplishing a task. If we look at the matter this way, the whole problem of responsibility and changeability appears to be resolved. But then the further question that emerges is this: What is the role of the concept of destiny? If character, industry, sacrifice and dynamism are essential to success, why may the concept of destiny not be eliminated? Again, this is the crux of the problem, but one that cannot be resolved easily. While this last point is understood by many Yoruba, they are not prepared to let go the concept of destiny. For, in the final analysis, neither good character nor dynamism nor industry guarantees success that is not encased in one's destiny.

### COMPARISON WITH THE AKAN CONCEPTION

The Akan conception of destiny, as presented by Gyekye (1987:104–128), seems to avoid these problems, though it has some of its own. For in this conception, it is not the individual who chooses a destiny. Rather, it is *Onyame*, the supreme deity, that imposes destiny, and the deity always imposes good destiny, which is unchangeable. If so, then there is no problem of apportioning blame or responsibility. But, as will be obvious, this hardly resolves the other problems.

The following are the essentials of this concept:

- 1 God imposes destiny.
- 2 Destiny is always good.
- 3 Destiny is unchangeable.

Given these three facts, one then needs to have a way of accounting for the existence of wickedness in Akan society, unless Gyekye is going to deny this exists. For if *Onyame* never imposes bad destiny, and destiny is unchangeable, from where do bad things come into the world? For Gyekye (1987:16) there is no need for anyone to change his/her destiny since it is good, and 'talk of changing destiny really refers to the attempt to better one's condition'. One may need to do this if one's path is 'strewn with failures, either because of his or her own actions, desires, decisions, and intentions or because of the activities of some supposed evil forces'. What is crucial here is the recognition firstly, that there may exist failures (which I suppose is bad, but not included in the message of destiny); and secondly, such failures may be caused by oneself (actions, intentions, desires, etc.) which seem to suggest that such things may cause a change in a good destiny or thirdly, that failures may be caused by certain evil forces. Are these evil forces human or natural? If human, and their nature is to cause misfortune for others, can we say that this is their own allotted destiny (in which case, there is bad destiny), or that their allotted good destiny has been thwarted (in which case destiny may be changed).

It appears to me that all three features that Gyekye attributes to the Akan conception of destiny can co-exist without tension only if there is no evil or wickedness in society. And this appears to me to be contrary to the facts of life. It is also no use treating such evils as accidents, for this begs the question. If the premature death of a decent young man at the



hands of a habitual hoodlum is an accident, which is not included in the destiny of either the young man or the hoodlum, the question of what the concept of destiny itself is supposed to account for has yet to be resolved, especially if we also believe in a good destiny which pertains to the key events of a person's life and is unchangeable. Obviously death is a key event, just as murder on the part of the hoodlum is.

### THE NORMATIVE MEANING OF ÈNÌYÀN

As can be seen from the foregoing, the concept of destiny is crucial in understanding the thought and practice of Africans in general. I have focused here on the Yoruba conception and it is clear that there is much in it that requires clarification and analysis. I would like to end this reading with a brief note on the normative understanding of *èniyàn*. As has been seen, destiny is construed as the meaning of a person—the purpose for which the individual exists as chosen by the other self and sealed by the deity. However, this purpose, though personal to him/her, cannot be separated from the social reality of which he/she is just a part. It is here that the limit of individualism may be found. The purpose of individual existence is intricately linked with the purpose of social existence, and cannot be adequately grasped outside it. Though destiny confirms the individual's personality, it also joins him/her to the community, and individuality and community thus become intertwined. Personality is rendered meaningful by appeal to destiny and community. This is because the individual is nurtured by the community, and the idea of destiny itself emanates from communal experience. It is a community-concept.

Persons are what they are by virtue of what they are designed to be; their character and the communal influence on them. It is a combination of these elements that constitutes human personality. The 'I' is just a 'we' from another perspective, and persons are therefore not construed as atomic individuals. A person whose existence and personality are dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute to the continued existence of the community. This is the normative dimension of the concept of *èniyàn*. The crown of personal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is therefore measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence. The question, 'What is your existence for?' (*Kini o wà fún?*) is not always posed. It is posed when a person has been judged to be useless to his/her community. It is therefore a challenge, a call to serve. It presupposes a conception of human existence which sees it as purposeful, and the purpose is to contribute to the totality of the good in the universe. This is achieved by a life of selfless devotion and sacrifice to the communal welfare. Here selfishness and individualism are abhorred and are expected to be superseded by a developed sense of community. But does this mean that the individual is therefore crushed under the heavy weight of the community and its moral order?

### The concept of cause in African thought

#### GODWIN S.SOGOLO

One of the puzzles yet unresolved by scholars seeking to understand traditional African belief-systems is how, in the explanation of observable events, disembodied or non-

extended entities (spirits, witches, ghosts, gods, etc. existing beyond the confines of space) can possibly be invoked as causes. The problem arises mainly due to the widespread mechanistic view of causality in which when C is said to be the cause of E, a necessary connection is assumed to exist between C and E in accordance with certain scientific principles subsumed under a general law. The literature on causality has appreciably expanded since Hume substituted his 'constant conjunction' for 'necessary connection', thereby denying cause and effect that connective power thought to exist between them.

I do not intend here to go into a philosophical excursus of all this, neither about what counts as a cause or an effect, nor about what constitutes a causal explanation in the scientific sense. Those concerned with these technical analyses would agree that the notion of causality is now so loose and varied in meaning that what counts as a causal explanation of an event would depend on factors such as:

- 1 The nature of the event to be explained.
- 2 Our interest in the event.
- 3 Whether the event has one cause or a multiplicity of necessary causes.
- 4 Whether, when the causes are more than one, they can be compatibly invoked.
- 5 Whether some of the causes are sufficient such that the others become unnecessary and superfluous, etc.

One other possibility is to conceive of a causal explanation as the sum total of the variety of possible causes (which, in some cases, are indefinite). In all, what seems obvious is that there are different conceptions of what constitutes a causal explanation.

In this discussion, I examine the nature and function of the varying explanatory models in traditional African thought. Based on a distinction drawn between two basic notions of causality, the primary (non-mechanistic) and the secondary (mechanistic), I analyse the corresponding features of two explanatory models which, quite often, appear to be mutually exclusive. I then attempt to show that the two kinds of explanation perform different functions which are complementary and non-mutually exclusive. With specific examples drawn from an African approach to the explanation of diseases, I then show how a combination of both the mechanistic and the non-mechanistic explanatory models provides a fuller, more comprehensive understanding than the exclusive use of either.

At first it would appear that claims in traditional African thought do not fall within the category of explanations generally associated with science-oriented thought systems. The reason for this is obvious. In seeking to understand events, as Horton (1970) points out, the prevalent explanatory models adopted by a given culture are determined by the peculiarities of that culture. Horton's main interest is to compare the forms of explanation in traditional African thought with those of Western science. His comparison is based on what he observes as essential similarities between the two thought systems. One essential similarity is that in both models one finds two 'distinct' but 'complementary' levels of thought and discourse, which Horton (1970:171) labels as the 'commonsense' and the 'theoretical'—or 'primary theory' and 'secondary theory' (Horton 1982:228). More specifically, what Horton regards as fundamental similarities in the explanatory models of the two systems are firstly, that both are primarily concerned with explanation, prediction, and control of natural phenomena, and secondly, that in doing so, they invoke

theoretical entities, albeit of different kinds. Horton, however, points out what he regards as a superficial differential based on the idiom or expression as derived from the cultural contexts—that science involves impersonal theoretical entities, while traditional thought draws on personal theoretical entities.

Our concern here is not with Horton's general points of similarity and difference between traditional African thought and Western thought. His ideas have been severally criticized and it is difficult to say who is right, Horton or his opponents. Surely, Horton is not wrong in his observation that all human societies, traditional or modern, have two levels of discourse, that of primary theory and that of secondary theory. He is also right about the basic characteristics he assigns to these levels of thought. As Horton (1982:229) explains, 'the entities and processes of primary theory are thought of as directly "given" to the human observer while those of secondary theory are thought of as somehow hidden'. He also thinks that primary theory lacks the "push-pull" causal vision' largely associated with secondary theory. In all, Horton's distinction boils down to nothing but the difference between common-sense explanation involving the use of materialobject language and theoretical explanation involving hidden mechanisms not susceptible to observation language.

The layman's explanation of day-to-day events both in traditional Africa and in the modern West stands for Horton's primary theory (although it is not clear why the term 'theory' is appropriate at this level). At the level of secondary theory, Horton thinks that traditional African religious explanations occupy the position which scientific explanations occupy in the West. His main concern, therefore, is to compare and contrast the two modes of thought at the secondary level. And as far as doing this is concerned, Horton's enterprise appears harmless, although it could be argued that any reason one might have for comparing traditional African religious thought with Western science should also serve as a reason for comparing Western religious thought (traditional or modern) with Western science, since by Horton's own classification, all religious forms are to be seen as secondary theoretical schemes. What is of substance to us here in relation to Horton's comparative analysis, is the claim he makes that although traditional thought and Western science are concerned with the explanation, prediction, and control of natural phenomena, the former is more successful in achieving these objectives than the latter.

Surely, the question of success or failure here depends on the function(s) assigned to the two modes of thought. Horton's assumption is that both traditional African thought and Western science are concerned with explanation, prediction, and control of natural phenomena. But, part of this basic premise is questionable. It is true that traditional African thought seeks to explain events and create order and regularity where there seems to be discord and irregularity, as Horton would put it. From this, we may also agree that both share in common the goal of prediction, since knowledge of past and present events may serve as a basis for predicting future ones.

But, we may understand past and present events, and be able to predict future ones without any interest or motivation directed at control. By their nature, traditional African explanatory models, unlike those of science, are not intended for the control of natural phenomena. One is tempted, no doubt, for example, to interpret oracular practices and belief in divination as efforts by traditional African practitioners to change the order of

nature. This is mistaken. The practitioner claims to be able to foretell the course of future events, and his/her prescription to a client is mainly one of how to avert such events. The practitioner does not attempt to change, stop, or control the normal course of events. The order of nature is believed to be laid down and it is not subject to change by mortals. However, it is believed that any human being adequately informed about such events can avert them by moving beyond their reach.

By way of analogy, what the African diviner aims at is similar to the objectives of modern preventive medicine. In orthodox preventive medicine, the practitioner merely seeks to protect a client from being afflicted by certain diseases. The practitioner knows that his/her client could catch malaria when bitten by the appropriate parasite-carrying mosquito. What he/she does, therefore, when prescribing a weekly dose of chloroquine, is not to stop the parasite from causing malaria but to ensure that the client is not predisposed to this disease. In the same way, the traditional African diviner claims to know that events of misfortune will always occur. He/she cannot stop them from occurring, but claims to be able to ensure that a client is not predisposed to such events. When the practice of divination in traditional Africa is seen in this way, it is clear, *contra* Horton, that traditional explanatory models are not intended for control of natural phenomena.

The more crucial point about the issue of success or failure of an explanatory model depends, as we said earlier, on the nature of the event to be explained and our interest in that event. In particular, the interest one has in an event influences and determines what one would regard as its cause—which makes it possible for a given event to be given a variety of causal explanations that are not necessarily mutually exclusive of one another. Troxell and Snyder (1976:54–59) have provided an interesting example of how a single event could attract different causal explanations. They take an imaginary incident of fire breaking out, which has caused considerable damage and whose cause is to be determined. Troxell and Snyder make us imagine that in the course of investigating the cause of the fire, fire fighters found that little children were playing with matches in the garage and that one of them, Bobby Jones, confessed to having lit a match which led to the fire breaking out. Now, according to Troxell and Snyder, the fire fighters in writing their report on the incident, would say ‘children playing with matches’ *caused* the fire. Their primary interest in the matter (as people whose profession it is to prevent the occurrence of fire breaking out) is to find out the kinds of human action that led to the fire, whether it was a case of arson, careless acts of drunken adults, children playing with matches, etc.

It is supposed, further, that a physicist was involved in the investigation. According to the authors, the physicist’s explanation of the cause of the fire would not only be different in kind but would include details which were of no interest to the fire fighters. The physicist’s report might say, for instance, that the fire was caused by a match being placed very close to some old newspaper which was, in turn, next to some cardboard boxes. He/she might even go further to explain the physical compositions of the materials involved—how their combustion was aided by the flow of certain gases and why fire had to spread in certain directions and not others, etc. It is not that fire fighters are ignorant of these details. These are simply not matters of interest to them, just as the aspect of the incident that has to do with human action is not of interest to the physicist.

So, in providing an explanation for the fire, we could say that for the fire fighters the 'cause' was 'children playing with matches', while for the physicist the 'cause' was the ignited match. But as Troxell and Snyder rightly point out, the fire fighters' explanation and that of the physicist are not in conflict. They simply complement each other in providing more details in the explanation of the fire outbreak. However, let us suppose further, say the authors, that a psychologist or a social worker was interested in the fire. The psychologist might be interested in the factors that could have led the children, particularly Bobby Jones, to the habit of playing with matches—he/she might find out that Bobby Jones's parents used to entertain him with match tricks. Or a social worker might look into the domestic circumstances that might possibly have led to these children being left alone—he/she could find out that their parents were so poor that material pursuit took so much of their time that the children were ignored. Both the psychologist and the social worker are thus likely to say that the parents were indeed the 'cause' of the fire. Troxell and Snyder even extended the example with more interesting elaborations—the anti-smoking campaigner who (believing that smokers are in the habit of leaving matches around that their children play with) could explain that smoking was the 'cause' of the fire. They even refer to the apparently remotest of possible causes, the position that a fundamentalist preacher might take, namely, that the birth of the children is the 'cause' of the fire, since if they had not been born in the first place, the incident would not have occurred.

Our interest in the details of the fire example is two-fold. Firstly, it shows the almost infinite kinds of 'causal' explanation that can be given for a single event. And because the explanations are of different sorts, the question of the superiority of one over the other is misplaced. The explanations provided by the fire fighters, the psychologist, social worker, anti-smoking campaigner, and the fundamentalist preacher, might appear to be out of tune with what, in scientific terms, is accepted as a causal explanation, but it is so only from the point of interest of the scientist. Besides, there is no consensus among scientists about the notion of causality or what should count as an adequate causal explanation.

The second crucial point about the example we have chosen is that the different explanations are complementary and non-mutually exclusive. In some sense, the chain of causes that led to the fire could be traced to the birth of the children, such that there is plausibility in saying that the birth of the children 'caused' the fire. And if it were true, as the psychologist or social worker would claim, that the children's habit of playing with the matches was acquired due to faults in their upbringing—faults caused by the parents—then, there is also a sense in which the parents could be said to be the 'cause' of the fire. All these causes do not exclude the fact that the children and the match are also the causes of the fire. This way, the causes of the fire number as many as the interests of those who seek to provide an explanation for it. And where causes do not exclude one another, we might say that when put together they constitute an adequate or complete explanation of the fire incident.

However, normally no problems would arise if the different explanations, causal or otherwise, of a given event or phenomenon were to share this complementary relationship. Problems arise when, as we said earlier, multiple causes are invoked as explanations, with some either incompatible with, or rendering others superfluous. The

history of science is replete with instances of phenomena that were at one time explained in supernatural terms but which at the dawn of experimental science had their scientific principles fully uncovered by scientists. In such instances, one could say that their scientific explanations either mutually exclude their supernatural interpretations or that the former have rendered the latter superfluous. This is what the growth of knowledge means—a gradual process of explaining phenomena that were at one time either inexplicable or inadequately explained. Within a given culture, it is generally assumed that the new explanations are true while those they replace are false, or that the new ones are superior to the old ones. But, as we have just seen, this is misleading since the explanations—although different in kind—may not necessarily stand as incompatible alternatives. In fact, the question of comparative truth-value or superiority of some over others does not arise because of the difference in their explanatory functions.

In traditional African thought, this non-commensurability in explanatory functions is most clearly manifest in the people's mode of explaining the causes of illness. Of course, in every culture, what counts as an acceptable explanation of illness is tied to the people's general conception of health and disease. To a great extent, it is dependent on their overall world-view. The firm assumption has always been that African cultures hold a *holistic* conception of disease or illness—people are considered ill if they display a state of unusual feeling, suffering pain or incapacitation, or being in danger of death or mutilation. Once day-to-day life activities (e.g. the ability to work or to perform other social duties) are affected by this general feeling, such a person is said to be ill, whether or not the causes are traceable to specific structural changes in the cells of the body. This holistic conception of health and illness—which may be considered unorthodox in modern medical practice—is firmly held among the Yoruba community of Nigeria. The Yoruba word *alafia*, which translates as 'health', according to Ademuwagun (1978:89) 'embraces the totality of an individual's physical, social, psychological and spiritual well-being in his total environmental setting'. Contrary to the claim by Lewis (1953:111) that 'it is the presence of disease that can be recognized, not the presence of health', the Yoruba believe that both states are recognizable, and in a negative terminology, they conceive of illness as *aisan*, which translates as the absence of health. Again, their holistic conception of health and sickness is reinforced when the Yoruba speak of the former state as when *ara* (body) is 'strong and active' and of the latter as when *ara* (body) is 'broken down' (Ademuwagun 1978:90). The main indicator of health or disease in Yoruba thought is thus the ability or inability to perform one's routine work, or adequate or inadequate performance.

An important aspect of the African conception of health and illness is that it is the whole human body—not merely certain parts of the body—that is considered either well or in a state of disease. Unlike in the West, where a patient consulting a physician often hints as to what part of the body he/she thinks is afflicted, the traditional African (except in the case of easily identifiable anatomical parts of the body or where there are external injuries due to an accident) is generally non-specific as to the part of the body afflicted by disease. And the healer who is consulted does not press for such specific information. This non-specificity in associating diseases with parts of the body is clear from the fact that, generally, traditional healers do not start their diagnosis of illness by a physical examination of the patient's body. Their primary concern is with the patient's

background in socio-cultural and in divine/supernatural relations. Thus a given illness or disease is generally explained by reference to several causes, some of which, in modern scientific thought, appear to be logically incompatible. An African healer may attribute a disease to a scientific/natural cause, not too dissimilar to the germ theory of modern medicine. Yet, the healer may also believe that the same disease is 'caused' by supernatural forces, and would then proceed to cure the disease in these two seemingly incompatible ways.

Normally, any such conception of illness that appeals to supernatural forces, deities, spirits, witchcraft, etc., is classified as a form of animism, which, in fact, is common in the history of every society. For example, early medical practice in Scotland took this form where, according to M. Clough (1981:183) 'healing lay in propitiating the powers (supernatural) against which the patient might have offended'. Such supernatural factors play an important role in almost all preliterate (ancient and contemporary) societies of the world. It is common for modern scientific thinkers to read irrationality into this supernatural approach to medical healing. However, in relation to the African conception of health and illness this impression is misleading. Although apparently animistic in outlook, the traditional African conception of disease or illness conforms, at least, in part, with the basic norms of modern medical practice. I shall return to this point shortly.

Basically, the causes of illness in traditional African thought fall into two major categories, the primary and the secondary. Care must be taken here not to confuse these two arms of explanation with Horton's broad distinction between levels of theoretical discourse. For clarity and ease of analysis, our primary and secondary causes are to be seen as a sub-division within Horton's category of secondary theory. Primary causes of illness are those predisposing factors not directly explicable in physical terms. Some of these take the form of supernatural entities such as deities, spirits, and witches; others are stress-induced either as a result of the victim's contravention of communal morality or his/her strained relationships with other persons within the community. Secondary causes, on the other hand, involve direct causal connections similar to the cause-effect relations of the germ theory in orthodox modern medicine. If, for instance, a person is suffering from stomach ache, acute diarrhoea, and vomiting, that person is suspected of having eaten 'poisoned' food. It has been reported that in Yoruba, *ete* (leprosy) is spread either by spiders, or through chewing sticks on which flies have landed, or by drinking 'local gin' (Maclean 1971:87). The Yoruba concept, *kokoro*, synonymous with 'germ' in English, suggests that there are in the culture non-metaphysical/causal explanations of disease. Such explanations may lack the theoretical details of modern medicine but they are, in principle, similar to diagnoses in modern medicine—their truth or falsity being irrelevant. Our main concern here is with primary causes of illness and their relationship with secondary causes.

Normally, any explanation that draws on supernatural forces is regarded as incompatible with the principles of science upon which modern medicine rests. In fact, the scientist would see such an explanation as a direct violation of the principles of science. The connection between the two is always missed. Yet modern medical practitioners would find the connection difficult to deny. They would agree, for instance, that stress reduces the natural resistance of the body against certain diseases, such that people in a state of stress are more susceptible to their affliction than those not socially

disturbed. It is perhaps important to distinguish the African conception of stress from the way it is conceived in the West. A business executive in the West could suffer from stress if his/her business were on the verge of collapse; a heavy day's work without rest could lead him/her into such a state. Or anxiety over possible contingencies could make the executive suffer from stress. In traditional Africa, stress is mainly due to a strained relationship either with one's spiritual agents or with other persons within one's community. It could also be due to a feeling of guilt arising from a breach of communal norms. For example, in some African groups, if a man were involved in an adulterous act with his brother's wife—whether or not this act were detected—the person would undergo stress, having disturbed his social harmony. If he cheated his neighbour, was cruel to his family or had offended his community, the anxiety that followed could take the form of phobias, either of 'bewitchment' or of the affliction of diseases. Such a person would feel vulnerable and this feeling alone could result in real vulnerability.

The parallel to this in modern orthodox medicine is the practice whereby medical scientists explain certain diseases by a conjunction of the germ theory and the patient's reduced resistance due to stress. The possible difference between this and the corresponding primary and secondary explanations of traditional African thought is that Western medical science has at its disposal a well systematized body of theories to follow, while the African system operates on a piecemeal basis of trial and error. It should be noted, however, that not all orthodox medical physicians are theoreticians in the scientific sense of the word. There are many whose practice is based on trial and error—they follow the germ theory without knowing or being able to articulate its mechanisms. In the same way, it could be said that the traditional African healer follows certain principles although he/she is unable to say exactly what these principles are. Unlike the modern physician who has to rely almost entirely on the pharmacological efficacy of drugs, cure for the traditional African healer is directed towards the two targets of primary and secondary causes. The healer may be confident of the pharmacological activities of his/her herbs, but that is not all. The herbs are efficacious, the healer believes, only if the primary causes have been taken care of. The herbalist is thus also a diviner, which gives his/her profession a metaphysical outlook. But, again, this could be misleading. The point is that the primary causes result in the weakening of the defence mechanisms of the body. Cure in this respect simply means restoring the body to a state of increased capacity to heal itself, a state in which the pharmacological efficacy of the drugs is maximized.

Again, there is a parallel of this kind of integrated approach in modern medical practice. The well-known *placebo* effect in orthodox medicine, in which confidence and positive belief—on the part either of the physician or the patient—produces a favourable effect, is well-nigh indistinguishable from the dual-approach of the African healer. Belief, here, must be distinguished from the mere unquestioning faith of the religious type. It has a psychological over-tone which leads to physically effective results. Both in African and modern medicine, the patient's belief that the physician is competent, and that the drug works, helps to restore his/her body to a state of harmony with the applied drug.

Psychological states, attitudes, and beliefs have been known to play significant roles in traditional African medicine; they now provide acceptable explanations for some of the ailments that have in the past been attributed mainly to supernatural forces. Carothers



claims (1953:121) that anxiety, for instance, which in Africa is believed to be an outcome of bewitchment, leads to phobias:

...whose physical symptoms take predominantly the forms of gastric and cardiac neuroses and of impotence. Anorexia nervosa or something akin to this, from time to time may be fatal. Fears that the food is poisoned may initiate the syndrome, but its continuance is governed by a feeling (a disguised depression) that the unusual struggle has been lost and the time has come to die.

It is clear from this why the diagnostic method is such that the primary cause (in this case, bewitchment, believed to be the cause of anxiety) must be counteracted first, or simultaneously with the secondary cause.

This, however, is not to say that the beliefs which inform the primary explanations are true, meaningful or even rational. The important point is that the beliefs are, as a matter of fact, held; also that they play an important role in the diagnosis of illness, and that they affect the pharmacological activities of drugs. Rowe stresses the importance of such beliefs in her critique of the orthodox approach in the psychiatric administration of psychotropic drugs. According to her (1980:110), it can be established:

...that if a person believes that he/she has a good reason to be anxious or depressed (this 'reason' may not be rational or even expressible in words) the drug does not change his/her belief and the effect of the belief overrides the effect of the drug.

Psychotropic drugs, she contends, are like aspirin which takes away the pain of toothache without healing the tooth.

There are conceptual difficulties with any such account which draws simultaneously on both natural and non-natural forces. Where the non-natural forces are social or psychological factors, the problems may be adequately handled by a psychoanalyst. But in Africa, where the causes of illness are a blend of supernatural forces (gods, deities, spirits, etc.) and natural forces (germs, parasites, *kokoro*, etc.) the apparent difficulty that emerges is similar to the body/mind problem, a sub-species of the general issue of how a nonphysical entity can possibly interact with a physical entity.

I have argued elsewhere (cf. Sogolo 1989:119–130) that a clear dichotomy between the natural and supernatural does not exist in African thought. Even if it does, the apparent conflict in the people's explanations of illness may still be resolved by invoking the difference in principle between primary causes and secondary causes. It could be said that a healer in tropical Africa, attending to a patient suffering from, say, severe cerebral malaria, is aware (if only vaguely) that the patient's ailment is caused by a parasite (secondary cause). But in a culture where almost everybody suffers repeatedly from bouts of malaria and where the disease is normally not severe, it is obvious why the patient's consultation is bound to move beyond the 'how' question to the 'why' question: 'Why such a severe attack and why me and not someone else?' These are quests for primary causes beyond the level of the physical. Note that in searching for answers to these questions, unlike in Western cultures, the concept of chance hardly plays any significant role (cf. Sodipo 1973:40–69).

The issues raised at the level of primary causes cannot be resolved by applying the canons of scientific reasoning. Indeed, viewed from the paradigm of science, some of the claims made are likely to sound meaningless, irrational, and false (if these terms are ever applicable). The crux of the matter is that the seeming conflict that exists between primary and secondary causes can be shown to be unreal, which is to say that there is no absurdity involved in an integrated diagnostic process which blends the natural with the supernatural, nor in a curative process involving the pharmacological activities of herbs and the appeasement of supernatural entities.

The whole point of this excursus into the two-dimensional approach to causal explanation in African thought is to provide a parallel to the example of the fire outbreak cited earlier. In both cases, what stands as an acceptable explanation depends on our interests in the matter. Just as the conjunction of the explanations by the fire fighters, the physicist, the psychologist, etc., provides a fuller explanation of the cause of the fire, so would the various ailments mentioned in Maclean's (1971) examples provide a fuller comprehension of the pharmacological powers of the drug.

Metaphysics, religion, and Yoruba traditional thought

OLUSEGUN OLADIPO

### **AN ESSAY ON THE STATUS OF THE BELIEF IN NON-HUMAN AGENCIES AND POWERS IN AN AFRICAN BELIEF SYSTEM**

In this reading, I examine the issue of the extent to which it is tenable to assert, as many experts on African traditional thought have done (Idowu 1962, Mbiti 1969, Opoku 1978), that Africans are religious in all things. I do this by considering the status of the belief in some non-human agencies and powers, for example, divinities, spirits, magic, witchcraft, etc. in the belief system of an African people, the Yoruba, who constitute an ethnic group in south-western Nigeria. I argue that this assertion is mistaken: first, because it is based on inadequate definition of religion which does not allow for a proper delimitation between the realm of the religious and the realm of the metaphysical; and, second, because it does not take proper cognizance of the fact that, although certain institutions or beliefs may have the same social usage in two societies, they may function differently in the explanatory schemes of these societies. Thus, in the second part of this paper, I attempt an analysis of 'metaphysics' and 'religion'. This is done with a view to providing a basis for the arguments in the third part in which I examine, in a critical manner, the status of the non-human powers and agencies, beliefs which, in the opinion of many writers on African belief systems, make Africans a profoundly religious people.

In his book entitled *The nature of things*, Quinton (1973:35) defines 'metaphysics' as 'the attempts to arrive by rational means at a general picture of the world'. The word 'rational' in this definition, according to him, rules out of metaphysics two things that are ordinarily taken to be part of its meaning. The first of these is any 'picture of the world that has been acquired by mere absorption from the surrounding intellectual atmosphere, the second being beliefs which 'rest simply on tradition and authority'. Thus, for

Quinton, although some general picture of the world which most people have can consist of metaphysical beliefs, such general pictures cannot be said to be part of metaphysics, because 'it has come into existence in a passive non-rational way' (1973:35). For him, therefore, most people are what he calls clients of metaphysics, not metaphysicians.

Quinton's view on the nature of metaphysics brings to the fore an important distinction that should be made between two senses of 'metaphysics', if that word is to have any determinate meaning. There is, first, the sense in which it connotes a general picture or conception of the world passively arrived at or acquired 'through mere absorption from the surrounding intellectual atmosphere' (Quinton 1973:35)—the broad, ordinary, first-order, sense of the term—and, second, the sense in which it connotes a rational reflection on the nature of existence or reality. This is the technical, strict, second-order sense of the term. In this second sense, although it is intelligible to talk of 'Aristotle's metaphysics', 'Russell's metaphysics', etc. it is not intelligible to talk of 'Greek metaphysics', 'Akan metaphysics', 'British metaphysics', etc. The distinction between the two senses of 'metaphysics' just isolated can be put in these terms: that whereas, in the first sense, metaphysics can be seen as a spontaneous conception and interpretation of the experience engendered by the continuous encounter between humankind and other elements of the world-process, it is, in the second sense—the technical sense—a systematic attempt at reflecting on the raw data presented by that experience in terms of comprehensible concepts, theories, and categories.

But why, it may be asked, do I bother myself with this distinction between two senses of the term 'metaphysics'? I do this, first, in order to make an important clarification. This is that this reading is not a work in 'Yoruba metaphysics' concerned with an enumeration of the non-human agencies and powers that feature prominently in Yoruba traditional thought and the nature of the belief in them. Rather, it is a systematic attempt, which relies on the tools of philosophical analysis, at examining the ontological status of these agencies and powers with a view to determining the extent to which belief in them can be said to make the Yoruba a profoundly religious people.

However, this distinction between two senses of 'metaphysics' is important in another respect. In the first sense of the term—the sense in which it connotes a general picture of the world and the place of the human being in it—every individual, indeed every society, can be said to have certain metaphysical beliefs. These are usually embodied in myths, folk-tales, proverbs, etc. The question, therefore, arises as to how metaphysical beliefs of this kind can be distinguished from religious ones. This question is important, since both systems of belief—the metaphysical and the religious—rely on entities which appear to be of the same kind in their explanation of the nature of the world-process and the place of human beings in it, a situation that may encourage the kind of confusion I indicated at the beginning of this reading. What, then, is 'religion'? And how is it to be distinguished from 'metaphysics' in its broad sense?

Now, it is a well-known fact that the term 'religion' is surrounded by a lot of definitional controversies. Whatever may be the nature of these controversies, one thing, however, is clear. It is that, for any definition of religion to be considered adequate, it has to be one that enables us to distinguish between what is religious and what is not. Yet, this is a requirement many definitions of religion fail to meet.

In attempting the analysis of 'religion', I begin with an assertion which, I think, most

people are likely to accept, perhaps as a truism. It is that the characteristically religious interpretation of experience is a product of human beings' efforts to determine their place in the world-process. This is a task which inescapably forces itself on our consciousness as we try to relate ourselves to other elements of the world-process. In an attempt to answer this riddle, we discover that we are dependent on some other elements of the process for our existence and this places limitations on our knowledge, our values, our identity, etc. Feuerbach (1957) is, therefore, right when he says that religion is identical with the distinctive human characteristic, which is self-consciousness—the consciousness which a person has of his/her nature.

But the recognition of one's limit within the world-process is not unique to the religious interpretation of experience. For everybody, even the atheist, seems to recognize these limits. It is precisely in recognition of these limits that some metaphysical interpretations of experience rely on certain non-human agencies and powers in explaining some experience. Thus, religion cannot be explained simply in terms of 'experience' as writers, such as Lewis (e.g. 1961), have done. For Lewis, what is to be emphasized in dealing with religion is religious experience. 'The core of religion', he (1961:266) writes, 'is religious experience'.

The emphasis on experience does not seem to provide an adequate characterization of religion. This is because it does not allow for a clear conception of the source of religious experience and the nature of the human response to it. Yet, these two things seem to be the most significant aspects of religion. Experience, we do know, is undifferentiated until it is interpreted. Usually, however, these interpretations differ from one individual to the other. It, therefore, appears that what differentiates 'religious experience' from other kinds of experience is not 'experience' as such, but the way it is interpreted. Now, the interpretation of experience embodies a set of beliefs which determines what the attitude of each individual to that which is thought to be the source and ground of experience as such will be. This suggests that the core of religion is to be found in the nature of the attitude which all individuals develop towards that consciousness of limitations in their power, in their knowledge, in their values, in their identity, etc. This, of course, is dictated by the nature of the interpretation which a person gives to this consciousness in terms of its source and ground. The keynote to the interpretation of religion, then, is the religious attitude.

To say this, however, is not to say that any attitude toward any object or anything can be termed 'religious'. Dewey, for instance, seems to take this position when he contends that the adjective 'religious' denotes 'attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed ideal' (1968:31) and, consequently, that 'any activity pursued on behalf of an ideal and against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring values is religious in character' (Dewey 1968:40). The implication of this definition of the adjective 'religious' is that systems of belief as varied as capitalism, communism, even apartheid, can be put in the same category as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, etc. Yet, we do know that the two sets belong to different conceptual categories. What is more, on this definition of the adjective 'religious', commitment to, and love of, things as varied as golf, motor cars, dogs, etc. can be termed religious, depending on the extent of one's commitment to them.

This characterization of the religious attitude is inadequate, and should, therefore, be

rejected on the following grounds. First, it blurs the distinction which we normally make between the religious and the non-religious, thereby running counter to our intuitive understanding of the nature of religion. The second ground, which is a corollary of the first, is that it is too broad to be of any use in the discussion of religion and its relation to other activities in human societies.

These criticisms against the definition of religion as attitude toward any object or anything applies to its characterization as 'that total conception of the universe and man's place in it without which a man or a body of men are like people wandering in the wilderness'. For, apart from conflating religion with metaphysics and thus getting us entangled in an avoidable conceptual muddle, this generalized notion also runs counter to our intuitive understanding of religion by interpreting it simply as a system of coherent beliefs.

Yet, this is the notion of 'religion' that seems to inform many researches on African worldviews—researches which purport to be works on 'African religion', but which, strictly speaking, are no more than descriptive accounts of different accounts of the universe as they are held in various African societies. Part 1 of Parrinder's *Religion in Africa* (1969), for example, is devoted to a discussion of issues as diverse (though not totally unrelated) as 'Literature and Art', 'Philosophy and Cosmology', 'Plurality, Powers of the Universe', 'Society and Morals'—in short, just anything that the author felt was relevant to the 'African world-view'. The same observation goes for Opoku's *West African traditional religion* (1978), Mbiti's *Introduction to African religion* (1975) and some other works of similar content. The implications of this inadequate conception of religion for the claim that Africans are in all things religious will be considered later.

For now we can only note that the keynote to the understanding of religion is the 'religious attitude'. But, at the same time, it has been pointed out that it is not every attitude to an object that can be regarded as a religious attitude. The question that arises then is this: how do we differentiate the typically religious attitude from any other attitude?

I want to say, without much hesitation, that what differentiates one attitude from the other is the 'object' to which it is directed as an attitude. For, although an attitude is primarily a reaction to an experience, what sustains it is not that experience which, in any case, is fleeting but that which is conceived to be the source of the experience. I am, therefore, in agreement with William James when he writes:

All our attitudes, moral, practical or emotional are due to objects of our consciousness, the things we believe to exist, whether really or ideally, along with ourselves. Such objects may be present to our senses, or they may be present only in thought. In either case they elicit from us a reaction...(1961:59).

Another issue we need to examine has to do with the nature of the 'object(s)' to which a typically religious attitude is a reaction. To do this, let us quickly recapitulate what was said on the nature of the experience that is produced by a person's encounter with other elements of the world-process. This encounter, it was noted, makes a person realize, as a conscious being, his/her limits within the process. With this realization comes, quite often, a feeling of dependence on something greater or more powerful than the person

him/herself. This we regard as the root of his/her being in, and to, which he/she has interest and commitment. A typically religious attitude can, therefore, be defined as that which is characterized by an interest in, and commitment to, that which is perceived to have the ontological significance of being the ground and source of sustenance of human existence. And, since this interest in, and commitment to, that being cannot but be manifested in certain practices in honour and acknowledgement of that being and his (*sic*) powers, we can refine our definition of the religious attitude to become: a devotional attitude to that which is perceived to have the ontological significance of being the ground and source of human existence and its sustenance. The typically religious attitude, thus, becomes a response to that 'thing' which is considered to be the ultimate reality and which, for that reason, is indestructible.

The objection could be raised that the idea of the transcendent or what Emile Durkheim (1975) calls 'the idea of mystery' is not essential to the definition of religion, the argument being that there have been, and probably there still are, some societies (the co-called primitive societies) which we shall be prepared to call religious, but which do not make any distinction between the natural and supernatural. So the definition of religion in terms of an ultimate reality can be seen as 'excluding...the greater part of the fact to be defined' (Durkheim 1975:9).

This argument misses the essential points of the definition of religion given in this reading. For, in this definition, what is essential to religion is the ontological significance of, and attitude to, that which is thought to be the ground of human existence and its source of sustenance. This ultimate reality does not have to be transcendent or mysterious in nature. If this is the case, then the absence of 'the idea of mystery' or the conception of a transcendent being from a people's conception of the universe does not make them a people without a religion.

It is for the same reason that we cannot even say that the definition of religion proposed in this paper does not square up with experience, because there are some religions—Buddhism, for example—which contain no idea of ultimate reality. Quite often, we make the mistaken assumption of thinking that such reality has to be transcendent before it can be so described. It need not be. The definition of religion given in this paper can, therefore, still be seen as taking care of a religion like Buddhism. In Buddhism, as we know it today, a divinity is seen in Buddha (the Enlightened One) and adherents of the religion surrender themselves to him.

But it could still be argued that the definition offered here is inadequate, because there are no common or peculiar characteristics which all religions possess. This objection fails. This is because it does not take sufficient cognizance of the role of concepts in the systematization or organization of experience. Fundamental concepts—and religion is one of them—demarcate ranges of meaning. They help to relate together ideas or things of the same kind, thereby enabling us to distinguish between ideas or categories of things in the universe (cf. Wilson 1986:44). That being the case, there seems to be no reason why it should not be possible to isolate the phenomena for which religion stands in terms of what they have in common, however concealed this may be. In any case, even if there are no common and peculiar characteristics which all religions possess, they can still be brought under one concept by virtue of the fact that they share some family resemblances.

It should now be clear that religion, unlike metaphysics, is not simply a way of looking at the universe; it is also a kind of attitude to something in terms of which human experience is explained. Thus, before the claim can be established that a particular group of people are religious in all things, we have to be able to show that those entities in terms of which they explain phenomena and their attitude to them are of a typically religious nature. The question that arises at this point, then, is the question of whether the entities which feature prominently in the explanatory schemes of the Yoruba are typically religious in nature, whether the people's attitude to them is also a religious attitude.

The major elements of the Yoruba conception of reality can be put under the following headings:

- 1 Belief in *Olódùmarè* (supreme being).
- 2 Belief in divinities and spirits.
- 3 Belief in ancestors.
- 4 Belief in other mystical powers, incantations, magic, and witchcraft.

*Olódùmarè* is regarded as 'the origin and ground of all that is' (Idowu 1962:18). This conception of him is reflected in the different qualities that are attributed to him. He is, for example, regarded as the creator (*Elédà*) and the maker (*Asèdà*) who is the origin and giver of life (*Elèmì*). Furthermore, he is regarded as the undying king (*Oba àikú*) whose habitation is the heaven above (*Oba Órun*) and who is over and above all divinities and men; a being whose work is done in perfection (*A-sè-kan-mà-kù*); a supreme judge who judges in silence (*Adàkédájó*); and the controller of man's destiny (Idowu 1962:39–42).

Next to *Olódùmarè* are the divinities (*Òrìsà*). These divinities fall into three different groups. In the first group are those that can be regarded as the primordial divinities, that is, those that are believed by the Yoruba to derive directly from *Olódùmarè*. Among these are *Òrìsà-nlà* (*Obàtàlà*), *Orunmilà*, ... *sù*, *Ógún*, and *Ódúdùwà*. The second group consists of deified ancestors such as *Sàngó* and *Òrìsà-Oko*. And the third group consists of personified natural phenomena—the earth, rivers, lagoons, mountains, etc.

As for the spirits (*Eborà* or *Imolè*), they are believed to be:

...dreadful divinities whose habitations were the thick, dark groves and unusual places; those who walk the world of men at night and prawl the place at noonday, the very thought of whom was hair-raising; to pass by whose groves was blood-curdling; with whom man feels compelled to make terms for his own safety; more propitiated out of fear than worshipped in reverence (Idowu 1962:62).

Of course, we also have other mystical powers particularly magic and witchcraft which, as Opoku (1978:10) puts it, 'are recognized and reckoned with for their ability to aid or harm man'.

The analysis of the nature of the entities mentioned above has to await another occasion. Suffice it to say, however, that it is the fact of belief in these entities that has made some writers on African belief systems to contend that the Yoruba are an 'incurably religious' people. Idowu, for instance, asserts:

The real keynote of the life of the Yoruba is neither in their noble ancestry nor in the past deeds of their heroes. The keynote of their life is their religion. In all things they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and the diviners whom they believe to be the interpreters of the will of the Deity... (1962:5).

However, I ask: to what extent can we regard these non-human agencies and powers which feature prominently in the explanatory schemes of the Yoruba as religious entities? Even if they are religious, can the attitude of the Yoruba to them be regarded as a typically religious attitude?

To answer these questions, I recapitulate very briefly, the salient features of a religious object, and the nature of that attitude to it which can be regarded as a typically religious attitude, which emerges from the earlier analysis of religion. There, it is noted that a typically religious object is that which has the ontological significance of being the ground of human existence and its source of sustenance, and, which, for this reason alone, is indestructible. A typically religious attitude is then defined as a devotional attitude to this kind of 'object'.

Now, if we examine the entities which feature prominently in the Yoruba traditional world-view—*Olódùmarè*, divinities, spirits, etc.—it should not be difficult to see that *Olódùmarè* can be regarded as a typically religious object. For, as I have pointed out, he is regarded by the Yoruba as the supreme being who is the ground of human existence and its source of sustenance. Although there may be no clear-cut practices that can be taken as symbolizing the expression of a devotional attitude to him, the mere fact that the people mention him in prayers and also regard him as the ultimate reality suggests that he is a religious object to which the people have a religious attitude. Indeed, it can be said that *Olódùmarè* is the ultimate point of reference of whatever may be called 'Yoruba traditional religion'.

As for the divinities, only the primordial ones, particularly *Òrisà-Òlà*, *Óguò*, and *ÓruÒmilà*, can be regarded as religious objects. This is because they are believed to assist *Olódùmarè* in various ways in his activities. But, when we consider the deified ancestors and personified forces, the story takes a different turn. These divinities, deified ancestors, and personified forces cannot be regarded as objects which have a typically religious nature. I do not think either that the attitude of the Yoruba to them can be regarded as being typically religious. There are many reasons for saying this.

First, many of these divinities are believed to be dependent on human beings: the strength and extent of their acceptance are determined by the number of devotees they have and the extent of their commitment to them. This situation is aptly revealed in this Yoruba saying: *Ibiti enià kósi kó si imalè* (where there is no man, there is no divinity) (Idowu 1962:63). Thus, the significance of each divinity in a community depends on the number of devotees it has. This, it seems to me, is the reason why the primordial divinities still enjoy some prestige in many Yoruba communities. Another manifestation of the dependence of these divinities on the people is the fact that it is their devotees that maintain their secrets, such that any betrayal of a divinity by its devotees simply reduces



it 'to an empty word, an object of ridicule' (Barber 1981:738). The story of the deification of Sangó (god of thunder) is very revealing in this respect. Sangó was a king of a town in Yorubaland called Oyó. He was a renowned warrior. However, Sangó was expelled from Oyó, because his rule was patently tyrannical. Having been deserted by his friends and his favourite wife (Oya), while he was going into exile, he hanged himself at a place called Koso. Those who saw his dead body began to spread the news of this sordid deed 'much to the embarrassment of his friends who resolved to put an end to the circulation of the scandal' (Fadipe 1960:263). And the way they went about doing this was by setting fire to the houses of their enemies. These people, on seeking help from Sangó's friends, were told that it was Sangó who caused the fire in reaction to the indiscretion of the people in spreading the news of Sangó's ignominious end. As a result, the people decided to retract the story by claiming that Sangó had not hanged himself (Johnson 1921:34). This, according to the story, was how Sangó became a deified ancestor. 'The raising of fire during thunderstorm' can, therefore, be seen as 'the principal device of the priests of this Òrìsà for keeping up the interest of the people in Sangó and their respect and awe for him' (Fadipe 1960:263).

Now, if these divinities or, at any rate, most of them can be seen to be highly limited in their powers and if they owe their 'existence' to the grace of their worshippers, then they cannot, in any way, be regarded as having the ontological significance of being the ground of human existence and its source of sustenance. For then they can be seen to be no more than mere instruments that can be used and discarded, depending on the circumstances and dispositions of their devotees. This, perhaps, explains the reason why many of them could not survive the influx of alien religious and cultural practices—an influx which, to say the least, marked a turning point in the historical evolution of many African societies.

Another reason why I do not think that these divinities are typically religious objects is the fact that they are considered as objects of veneration or fear simply on the basis of the people's perception of their utilitarian value, determined by the extent to which they are believed to have the power to aid or hinder human activities. Òrìsà Oko, for example, is a patron divinity of Yoruba farmers who, according to a Yoruba legend, once lived in a town called Irawo. He was sent away from his town, because he suddenly became leprosy. But, while in exile, the wife discovered that some fruits eaten and thrown away in the past grew and produced nourishing fruits of their kind. She, therefore, started cultivating crops and getting food to provide for herself and her husband. When the husband and his wife returned to Irawo (after the man had got himself cured), they taught the people their newly acquired knowledge, an act for which the people never forgot them after their death (Awolabu 1979:38).

It is, therefore, clear that many of the divinities that feature prominently in Yoruba explanatory schemes were made by human beings. This discussion has also shown one important feature of Yoruba traditional thought. It is that belief in the existence of these divinities is fundamentally pragmatic in nature. Many of these non-human agencies and powers are venerated or feared because they are believed to have certain powers for either doing good or harm to human beings. Once any of them is perceived to be unable to demonstrate these powers, it becomes not an object of veneration or fear but an object of ridicule. I find it difficult to arrive at any other interpretation of the Yoruba

cosmological world-view. For, in the words of Owomoyela:

What other reason could explain the actual worship of a disease like Sópónà (small pox) or such a destructive phenomenon as thunderbolt in the person of Sangó. Obviously the Yoruba came to the realization that it is wise and expedient to ingratiate themselves into the good graces of these terrible forces by worship or flattery (1981:27).

Senghor's (1976:38–39) observation that 'neither fear nor material cares dominate African religion...it is dominated by love and charity, which is love in action', is, therefore, mistaken. For, as this analysis has shown, the principal, if not the only, determinant of the attitude of the Yoruba to many of their divinities is their perception of the power of these divinities in enhancing or disrupting human activities. This kind of attitude can hardly be regarded as a typically religious attitude, unless, of course, we want to contend that religion is simply a matter of hard-nosed pragmatism anchored on expediency, which it is not.

Thus far the attempt has been to deny many of the divinities, particularly the deified ancestors, a religious status. It should be noted, however, that each of these divinities, if taken separately, could be religious objects. This would be the case if, for instance, their devotees see them (the divinities) as having the power of life and death over them. But it should be noted that a divinity is not religious, simply because it is being worshipped by a group of people. (If we adopt this criterion that anything that is being worshipped by a group of people is a religious object, then almost anything can be a religious object (and this will be conceptually unsatisfactory). A divinity's status as a religious object can only be determined in terms of its relationship to other objects of its kind in the belief system of the people concerned. In other words, the determination of the religious status of a divinity should have a point of reference. In the case of the Yoruba, this point of reference is Olódùmarè. Thus, any divinity that can be shown not to have a direct connection with him—and many of the deified ancestors do not appear to have this connection—whose existence or non-existence depends almost entirely on the whims and caprices of its believers, and whose qualities do not harmonize with his qualities, cannot, within this frame of reference, be a religious object. So the seeming contradiction involved in denying a divinity the status of a religious object is resolved by making a distinction between the mere fact that a divinity is worshipped by a group of people and the significance of this divinity within the religious frame of reference of the people.

Thus, it seems to me that, although the Yoruba may be described as being religious on the basis of the fact that they acknowledge the existence of a supreme being who is the ultimate reality and on whom human beings are believed to be dependent for their existence and also recognize some divinities as his ministers, there is obviously no ground for contending that religion pervades all their activities.

The tendency to regard the Yoruba and, indeed, Africans in traditional societies, as being profoundly religious can be attributed to a number of factors. There is, first, the perception that in these societies nature is deified and conceived as 'a living, divine organism, producing all things, all gods, men and animals, by generation' (Hooykaas 1972:9). It is for this reason that many other forces and powers, apart from whatever

entity they may regard as the supreme being, are recognized as being capable of influencing human activities. Another reason why many writers on African traditional belief systems hold the view that the Yoruba cosmological world-view is an incurably religious one has to do with the tendency of the Yoruba to see the work of *Olódùmarè* and the divinities in many occurrences. However, these reasons alone do not make the Yoruba a profoundly religious people. For, even if we grant that all the divinities are religious in character, the admission of this fact does not make the Yoruba religious in all things. There are certain aspects of their life, and their conception of health and illness, for example in which they are profoundly secular.<sup>1</sup>

Before concluding this reading, I should like to point out that the tendency to give a purely religious colouring to the metaphysical belief in non-human agencies and powers by the Yoruba is also not unconnected with the nationalistic promptings of some African writers. These writers, such as Idowu, for example, in reaction to certain ethno-centric distortions of African belief systems by early European travellers, missionaries, and anthropologists, would want to see the supreme being, the divinities, and other non-human powers as having the same ontological status and significance which their supposed equivalents have in Western societies. This nationalistic approach to the interpretation of African world-views has, however, led to a failure on the part of these writers to take proper cognizance of the fact that 'what appears to be the same social usage in two societies, may have different functions in the two' (Radcliffe-Brown 1952:184). They, therefore, assume that the belief in the existence of certain non-human agencies and powers (particularly the belief in a supreme being) in African societies is open to the same kind of interpretation as belief in such agencies and powers in other societies, presumably Western societies. Yet, the way the Yoruba conceive of them—*Olódùmarè* and the divinities—and the functions they perform in their explanatory schemes are sufficiently different from the way they are conceived in, and their function in, the explanatory schemes of other societies with which many writers on African belief systems are to compare African traditional societies.

I should, therefore, like to conclude by saying that the assertion that the Yoruba are in all things religious is based on:

1 A conceptual error, resulting from an inadequate, if any, analysis of what religion is.

2 Failure to note the important point that, although certain institutions or beliefs may appear to have the same social usage in two societies, they may function differently within the explanatory schemes of these societies.

It is, therefore, my belief that Africans may never have an adequate interpretation of African traditional belief systems until they embark on a rigorous analysis of the key concepts on which these interpretations are to be anchored. And, since I do not believe that sociologists are better equipped for this task than philosophers, I venture to say that the analysis of these key concepts, and religion is one of them, should be one of the major preoccupations of philosophers in Africa today.

## ENDNOTES

1 The Yoruba do not report to these divinities at first blush in explaining events.

Indeed the type of diagnosis of, and therapy for, an illness in the Yoruba traditional medical system is determined by the nature of the illness.

This paper was first presented at the Department of Philosophy Seminar, University of Ibadan, in December, 1985. It has since then been revised in the light of suggestions by P.O. Bodunrin, G.S. Sogolo, A.G.A. Bello and S. Gbadegesin. I am grateful to them all.

### Self as a problem in African philosophy

#### CHUKWUDUM B. OKOLO

One of the most persistent problems in philosophy, almost as old as the enterprise itself, is the nature of self—its status and its place in nature. One recalls the classical confession of Socrates: 'I can't as yet know myself.'<sup>1</sup> In modern times, Descartes, perhaps more than any other thinker, rekindled the problem with a new urgency in his soul-searching question: 'What then have I previously believed myself to be? Clearly, I believed that I was a man. But what is man?' (Descartes 1960:24). Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy threw the burden of self-inquiry back upon the inquiring self by regarding the anthropological question 'What is humankind?' as the great residual problem to be faced once analysis of the phenomenal world has been completed.

The search for self-knowledge has indeed become a challenge in practically all philosophical systems. 'An interest in philosophy should include an interest in the self', according to Castell's (1970, preface) firm conviction. And as Lefevre (cf. 1966) clearly points out,<sup>2</sup> this conviction seems fully validated, for in fact many systems of philosophy, as well as of theology, have different understandings of humankind. The point is, then, that in spite of the divided interests of philosophical inquiry these days, the problem of self-knowledge, or understanding of self, still commands a lot of attention and importance among philosophers. This was evident at the 1988 World Congress of Philosophy in Brighton, England, where the main theme was 'The philosophical understanding of human being' (*sic*); and as was expected, critical reflections on this topic came from a variety of philosophical systems, including African philosophy. In most systems, the question of self naturally generates interest, for, as pointed out above, in the thinking of philosophers like Kant the question of humankind is the most profound problem facing philosophy.

In recent times, not only has there been an increased interest in philosophy among Africans, but philosophers, mostly African, have shown particular interest in African philosophy, which has become an integral part of academic activities in African universities today. Bodunrin briefly chronicles its recent history and growth thus:

With independence also came an increase in the number of universities and the establishment of departments of Philosophy in them. Beginning from the early

1970s, there has been an upsurge of philosophical activities in Africa. The Philosophical Association of Kenya, the Nigerian Philosophical Association, the Ivory Coast Association of Philosophy Teachers, the Inter-African Council for Philosophy, to mention a few.... These Philosophical associations and journals have increased the contact between them (Bodunrin 1985, introduction).

One naturally expects interest in and serious discussion about African philosophy to dominate these 'philosophical activities'. It is therefore not surprising to realize that early attempts of African scholars to philosophize in an African context, i.e. on the African and his/her mode-of-being in the world, centred mainly on what constituted the existence and nature of African philosophy. Bodunrin himself clearly articulates the nature of the dialogue prevalent among African philosophers in the early to mid 1970s. 'These exchanges,' he (1985, introduction) says, 'have centered largely on the discussion of one compound question, namely "is there an African philosophy, and if there is, what is it?"'

With this marked and increasing interest in African philosophy, particularly among African scholars in recent times, one would expect the understanding of self in that system to be as problematic as in other philosophical systems. In fact, for some scholars the problem of *homo Africanus* (human being African) easily raises the problem of the existence or non-existence of African philosophy itself. For in their thinking, to speak of African philosophy is to discern clearly two distinct questions, namely, what specific African thinking qualifies as 'philosophy' and who exactly qualifies as 'an African? Africans are not one but many peoples and races with a diversity of cultural beliefs and traditions. Wright (1984:43–44), for example, plainly states the obvious by reminding us of the fact that there are 'over 40 different countries in Africa, each with a number of different language groups (Ghana, for example, has 95 distinct language groups).' There cannot be any such thing as 'African philosophy', sceptics conclude: if at all, it would be 'African philosophies'.

But the controversy on the existence or non-existence of African philosophy (the problem of nearly two decades ago) is not the subject of this paper, nor is the exact number of language groups which differentiate the African peoples. The object of this inquiry is rather the problem of *homo Africanus*, his/her nature and status as an individual. For regardless of the many differences among Africans in skin colour, language, and culture, to name a few, anthropologists today do not dispute the fact that black Africa, for example, exhibits a certain cultural unity. Indeed Maquet (1972:4) has clearly shown 'how analogous existential experiences of life in an isolated and difficult environment have slowly produced a unified African world distinct from and comparable to the Western and Asian World'. This unity, according to him, is not racial but cultural. It is Maquet's conviction that there are certain elements arising from culture which bind black Africans together and give them a common soul, so to speak. These common elements in their totality Maquet calls 'Africanity', which he briefly defines as 'the totality of cultural features common to the hundreds of the societies of Sub-Saharan Africa' (1972:54).

The point stressed here is that this common world of black Africans embodies a world-view as well as a philosophy, a metaphysics of reality as well as of self. It is the critique of the philosophy of this black world or of peoples of black Africa that is our

preoccupation in this paper. For, as Gyekye (1978:278) (from Ghana) rightly notes: 'Philosophy of some kind is behind the thought and action of every people. It constitutes the intellectual sheet-anchor of their life in its totality.' Our focus of interest, then, is on the problem of self in the African view of reality.

As in naturalistic philosophy, the best approach to the notion and problem of self in 'African philosophy'<sup>3</sup> is through its theory or metaphysics of reality as a whole. What exactly is the African's view of reality in general and of self in particular? What precisely are the problems that emanate from its metaphysics of self? These are the core areas of our inquiry. We proceed first by examining briefly the African view of reality.

### REALITY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

The traditional Africans easily belong to an idealist tradition in that for them the ultimate reality is spirit, God, or consciousness, not matter. This is to say that the African is not a materialist in the philosophical meaning of the term. Speaking, for instance, about the Igbos of Nigeria, Bishop Shanahan (quoted in Jordan 1971:115) was convinced that 'the average native was admirably suited, by environment and training for an explanation of life in terms of the spirit rather than of the flesh. He was not materialist. Indeed nothing was further from his mind than a materialistic philosophy of existence. It makes no appeal to him.'

As in the Platonic tradition, reality for the African is dualistic, namely, the invisible and the visible or the experienced universe. But unlike the instantiated world in Plato's theory of reality, for the African this world or the phenomenon is real, not a mere shadow of the invisible. In the invisible or immaterial universe, according to African ontology, dwell God, or the highest being; the ancestors, or souls of the heads of clans and of the departed relatives; and nature gods, or spirits. The material realm, on the other hand, contains human beings, animals, plants, and inanimate beings.

Placide Tempels, who pioneered important work in African philosophy with his publication of *Bantu philosophy* (1959), starts off the hierarchy of beings, which he calls 'forces', in this order: God (Spirit or Creator) then 'the first fathers of men, founders of the different clans'; below them 'come the dead of the tribe', the living dead (as these are called in contemporary African scholarship); the visible universe contains in its descending hierarchy human beings, animals, vegetables, and minerals (Tempels 1959:61-63).

The two orders of existence, in the African world-view, relate to and interact with each other. Hence, as in the naturalistic universe of John Dewey (1958), for example, the universe or nature for the African is also a series of interactions and interconnections. Life appears in its totality as one 'Great Chain of Being', to recall Lovejoy's great work (1960), with things ontologically related to one another. 'To exist means more than just "being there",' as Ruch and Anyanwu (1981) differently restate this African vision of reality. 'It means standing in a particular relationship with all there is both visible and invisible.' (1981:124). Placide Tempels' (1959:60) imagery is even more expressive: 'The world of forces (beings) is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole net-work.'<sup>4</sup>

The interactions and intercommunications between the visible created order and the

invisible world of God, spirits, and ancestors are possible only through human beings, the ontological mean between beings acting above and below them. In this sense, the human being in the African world-view is the centre of creation with intimate and personal relationships above and below him/her. They are aware also that they are being influenced by these other beings in the universe and that they influence them as well. 'It is right to hold that in the African thought, man (sic) sees himself as the Centre of the universe,' S.N.Ezeanya (1979:15) says. 'God has made him the focal point of the universe.'

Indeed, to highlight the centrality of the human being's position in the universe, scholars have often likened African cosmic vision to a great pyramid. 'At the apex was God, the Supreme Being/Parrinder (1970:85) writes. 'On the two sides were the great spiritual powers manifested in gods and ancestors, and at the base were the lower powers of magic. In the middle was man (sic) under the influence of many different kinds of powers.' This, again, establishes the fact that the human being, in African metaphysics of reality, is at the centre of the created order; humans communicate with other beings, particularly those of the spirit world, at the call of duties or in hours of need.

It is also to be noted that generally humanity's contact and communication with God and the spirit world are through many channels such as sacrifice, rituals, fortune telling, prayers, incantations, etc. Indeed, the gods and the spirits of dead relatives are never far away from the physical world of the African. 'Gods may be full of awe, but in the African universe, they are not unapproachable,' Nze rightly asserts. 'During life as well as during death, the Igbos (and other Africans as well) strive to have contact with god. This contact enables them to obtain better bargains. It is an occasion, a vehicle through which they acquire wisdom.' (Nze 1981:26). Of course many other benefits and blessings, in the understanding of the African, are obtained through contact with the gods who exist in order to share their gifts and powers with human beings.

The human being, in the African universe, is viewed as interacting with lower beings or forces as well, inanimate things such as lightning, thunder, etc. These forces at times act as agents of the unseen spirits to punish evil doers. Consequently such forces are also revered and worshipped. Even charms, amulets, witchcraft, etc. become serviceable to the African as definite ways of self-preservation (from the evil eye, for example), of guaranteeing success in his/her life's endeavour, or of inflicting evil on the enemy. The point we wish to stress is that the world of the spirits, human beings, and other lower organic and inorganic substances form the same totality of existing, interacting beings or reality.

We must note, however, that among Africans close interaction and communication exist between the living and their dead ancestors, or 'living dead', which are so called because, though dead, they are alive with their particular families. These unseen ancestors are part and parcel of their own physically living families and are often invited to family meals. These ancestors are not just ghosts or simply dead heroes, but, as Parrinder (1949:125) puts it, 'are felt to be still present, watching over the household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, giving abundant harvests and fertility'.

The 'living dead' and the physically living continuously populate and depopulate each other's realms. For the former, reincarnation is a necessary gateway for peopling the

earthly realm, just as for the latter, death is the necessary precondition for swelling the ranks of the dead. Indeed the African strongly believes that the same family structure operating in the visible world also operates in the invisible. Hence when one dies, one is believed to have gone to one's family in the spirit world. Consequently, in the African universe and in accord with people's beliefs, there are repeated interactions, communications, and even local permutations between the dead and the living; spirits and human beings.

We have thus given a brief sketch of African metaphysics of reality as an important key to the study of self and its problems. What has to be noted is that 'dynamic' rather than 'static' is a fundamental category for understanding the African view of reality. But we must make the following remarks. First of all, African metaphysics or theory of reality differs significantly from that of Aristotle, for instance, with its individuated, discrete existences—'substances' he called them—existing in and by themselves, separated from others.

Likewise, African metaphysics differs greatly from the naturalistic metaphysics of Dewey, Hook, Randall, Jr., and others, which admit of only one kind of reality in nature, namely, the seen, the tangible, the verifiable. Nature, for these naturalists, is strictly monistic, without any bifurcation or radical splits. Consequently there is nothing like God, spirit, or soul in their universe, if these words are taken to mean different kinds of beings from the material and the tangible. Nature, for naturalists, is an all-inclusive category. Nothing exists outside nature. It is all nature or nothing at all. Hence Randall (1944:367) vehemently maintains that 'naturalism is opposed to all dualisms between nature and another realm of being; to the Greek opposition between Nature and Art; to the medieval contrast of the natural and the Super-natural... to the dualism pervading modern thought between nature and man....' Humankind, God, Soul, and the spirit world are either naturalized within nature or they are non-existent.

From our brief review of African metaphysics, it is clear that this naturalistic view of things is poles apart from that of the African who strictly maintains the existence of both the spirit world and the material, physical universe, each distinct from but interacting with the other. The physical, material universe is real for the African, not just an epiphenomenon or shadow of the real, as Plato maintained in some of his dialogues.

Lastly, in characterizing African metaphysics, we mention briefly that unlike the existentialists, particularly the radical type, the African does not regard the universe as merely 'thrown' into being. The universe has a cause which is called 'God' in many diverse cultures. This God (*ens Supremum*, or highest Being) is the creator of the universe and governs it with his laws through the spirits, the ancestors, and the laws of the land.

### NOTION OF SELF

The major thrust of this paper, then, is to articulate the notion of self in African philosophy. We have seen that the essence of the African's cosmic vision is that the universe is not something discrete but a series of interactions and interconnections. This is equally the category of understanding self. Tempels expresses this mode of understanding self thus: 'Just as Bantu [Black African] ontology is opposed to the



European concept of individuated things existing in themselves, isolated from others, so Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual, as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings and from its connection with animals or inanimate forces around it' (1959:103). Individuals become real only in their relationships with others, in a community or a group.

It is the community which makes the individual, to the extent that without the community, the individual has no existence—a point well made by Mbiti in defining the being of an individual in African culture: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am,' (1969:108) an adaptation of Descartes' *cogito ergo sumi*. According to the former leader of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, the African is born socialized. For his part, Tom Mboya of Kenya equally stresses the African self as essentially social, a being-in-community: 'Most African tribes have a communal approach to life. A person is an individual only to the extent that he is a member of a clan, a community or a family' (1963:164–165). Tempels (1959:103) is even more insistent on this point: 'The Bantu cannot be a lone being. It is not a good enough synonym to say that he is a social being. No: He feels and knows himself to be a vital force, at this very time to be in intimate and personal relationship with other forces acting above him and below him in the hierarchy of forces.' He is also explicit about the fact that the human being, for the Bantu, never 'appears as an independent entity. Every man, every individual forms a link in the chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the descending line of his ancestry and sustaining below him the line of his descendants' (1959:108).

Thus self in African philosophy, as in the naturalistic metaphysics of John Dewey, for instance, is essentially social, person-in-relation-to-others, but with the notable distinction that the interconnections and relationships between self and others in African philosophy extend to the spirit-world, to dead ancestors, the 'livingdead'. By contrast, in Dewey's metaphysics the interconnections and relationships between self and reality as a whole are entirely within nature, not in another realm of reality.

### SELF AS A PROBLEM

Our summary view of self in African Philosophy is essentially social. The African is not just a being but a being-with-others. Self, or 'I' as we have seen above, is defined in terms of 'we-existence', just as much as 'we' in 'I-existence', through social interactions: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' Such a philosophy of self is bound to generate all sorts of problems with regard to the status of self as an individual, as an independent subject. Self in African philosophy, again as in Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics, is almost totally viewed from the 'outside', in relation to other, and not from the 'inside' in relation to itself. Self in many philosophic systems and according to most philosophers, however, is viewed as essentially independent, a subject rather than an object, a being with an inner core, an end in itself and free. Even though individual human beings belong to a class, yet experience shows that they cling to their own individualities as marks of distinct selves which they cannot part with nor allow to be merged with others. To ignore this aspect of self or to treat it inadequately would certainly constitute a weak spot in any philosophic system.

This is a big problem in Dewey's naturalistic philosophy, namely, the loss of the status and autonomy of the individual. It is the exact problem in both Hegel and David Hume. The individual appears evanescent in the treatment of self by these philosophers, almost on the verge of total disappearance as a subject and as a discrete entity. In African philosophy, self as a subject suffers this same fate; it is accounted for almost totally in terms of relation to others. It must be admitted, however, that in African philosophy self is not completely dissolved into an object. 'An individual existence has a double status and import', according to Dewey (1958:245): 'There is the individual that belongs in a continuous system of connected events... then there is the individual that finds a gap between its distinctive bias and the operations of the things through which alone its need can be satisfied. It is broken off, discrete because it is at odds with its surroundings.' It is indeed in this sense that self in African philosophy is not viewed totally from without, a mere aggregate of relationships, but is also regarded as 'discrete', 'broken off', in Dewey's vocabulary. These two aspects of self are of course phases of the same reality of an individual responding in action to the social stimuli of the environment.

Self as an individual in the African thought, as in many idealistic systems, is a psycho-physical being, an incarnate spirit, made up of two principal elements, namely, 'body' and 'soul', in familiar categories. Thus, in his thorough research of the concept of a person in Akan (Ghana) tradition, Gyekye is certain that 'the Akans hold a dualistic conception of a person. A person is constituted by two principal substances, one spiritual (immaterial) and the other physical (material)' (1978:282). Also, among the Igbos of Nigeria, belief in the two principal constituents of the human being, 'body' and 'soul', is well established in the people's concept of death. Thus Arize (1970:17) writes: 'When a person dies, his soul or spirit (*Mkpulu-obi, mmuo*) wanders till it is received into the blessed company of his forebears on condition that the relations on earth celebrate the full ceremonies. In some places this belief requires also that the person must have been a good man on earth or at least that a cleansing rite be performed over the corpse before burial.'

The status of self as an individual entity, then, is recognized in African philosophy, proof that self has somehow a double status—one as a being-in-relation-to-others, the other as unique and unduplicatable. One of the clearest ways the African establishes this fact of uniqueness, identity, and discreteness is through names. African names are not just mere labels of distinction, to differentiate, for instance, 'James' from 'John'. In African philosophy, as Tempels (1959:106) says, 'the name expresses the individual character of the being. The name is not a simple external courtesy, it is the very reality of the individual'. For instance, many African names point to the circumstances and conditions of particular individuals, to their family background, social status, etc. The name, in short, points to the self as an individual, to a particular person, indeed to who the particular person is.

This cognizance of an individual, unique self notwithstanding, the truth remains that violence is done to its status as an individual, as an independent self-consciousness. Self remains dominantly opaque, seen from the 'outside', so to speak, and in relationships with others. Consequently 'social' is the main category for understanding self, as indeed for all reality in African philosophy. It is the only authentic mode for the African to answer the all-important question in African philosophy, 'What or who is an African?'

As noted above, an attempt to dissolve self into mere or almost total relationships by any philosophic system would constitute a great failure of that system, which is why it is easy to understand Bernstein's (1966:176) summary verdict on Dewey's concept and treatment of self in his philosophy: 'I also think that the weakest part of Dewey's entire philosophy is his analysis of the self.' Likewise, it would be easy for critics to pass the same judgement on the concept and treatment of self in African philosophy.

With 'social' as the main category for understanding self, other problems such as 'freedom' and 'autonomy' surface. In his perceptive analysis of African communalism, or the African communal way-of-life, Nze raises the issue of individual liberty and freedom. 'A pertinent question may then be asked,' he says, namely, 'How free is the individual in African Communalism? If the individual is under the firm grip of a compulsion by his (sic) over dependence on and his over identification with the community, does he possess his liberty and freedom?' (1989:20). Nze appears not to have any difficulty in recognizing and acknowledging personal or individual freedom in African communal life. Individuals are free even though their will is determined by their community. As a member of the whole, they enjoy that amount of freedom which derives from the collectivity (Nze 1989:20). He is even more explicit of this fact in another place: 'Although the individual is swallowed by the society in African Communalism, he still enjoys his freedom and autonomy, since relationships and dependencies are reciprocal and indeed circular in movement; their flow is like that in the human circulatory system' (1989:22-23).

This view, however, is highly defective, at best an incomplete truth; for, at bottom, the seeming 'freedom' which the individual enjoys is ultimately and in reality a derivative one, dependent on and largely determined by the other, that is to say, by the community. Little or no room is left to the individual for initiative, spontaneity, responsibility, auto-decision, autodetermination, etc. which individuals cherish as individuals and which are the hallmarks of true liberty and autonomy.

Man has an intrinsic dimension to his being. He cannot be reduced merely to a set of extrinsic relations. He is a subject, not simply an object; an end in himself, not merely a means; self-determined, not merely other-determined; and so on. But the very opposite appears to be predominantly stressed in African philosophy. Consequently, to ignore or treat inadequately such values as personal initiative, responsibility, subjectivity, independence, etc.—values clearly cherished by individuals in practically all cultures—is to undermine the very roots of human freedom and autonomy. African philosophy appears to suffer from a significant weakness or blind spot on this important aspect of the self, and it is in this sense that we must say that the status of the self still remains problematic for it and needs further, more balanced development.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This was Socrates' response to the injunction 'Know thyself' given him at Delphi; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 230. An interpretation of this ethical maxim is given by Nilsson (1948:47ff.) as 'self-knowledge' in relation to the gods.
- 2 He (Lefevre 1966) fully discusses understandings of the human being in such

thinkers as Marx, Kierkegaard, Buber, Teilhard de Chardin, as well as Reinhold Niebuhr.

3 We thus make explicit in this reading that 'African' means black African; likewise, the concept of self is the black African's view of self and reality.

4 He also writes (1959:124): 'All creatures are found in relationship... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement.'

#### References

- Abimbola, W. 1971. 'The Yoruba concept of human personality', in *La notion de personne en Afrique noire*. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971:73–89.
- Ademuwagun, Z.A. 1978. 'Alafia—Yoruba concept of health: Implications for health education'. *International Journal of Health Education*, xxi(2):89–97.
- Appiah, K.A. 1992. 'The myth of an African world'; 'Ethnophilosophy and its critics'; 'Old Gods, new worlds', from *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*, in P.H.Coetzee and M.E.S van den Berg (eds.), *An introduction to African philosophy*, Pretoria: Unisa, 1995:1–13, 79–101, 154–184.
- Arize, F.A. 1970. *Sacrifice in Ibo religion*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press.
- Awolabu, J.O. 1979. *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites*. London: Longman.
- Barber, K. 1981. 'How man makes God in West Africa: Yoruba attitudes towards Orisa'. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 51(3).
- Bernstein, R.J. 1966. *John Dewey*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Bodunrin, P.O. (ed.) 1985. *Philosophy in African trends and perspectives*. Ife-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press.
- Busia, K.A. 1954. 'The Ashanti of the Gold Coast', in D.Forde (ed.), *African world: Studies in cosmological ideas and the social values of African peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954:190–209.
- Carothers, J.C. 1953. *The African mind in health and disease: A study in ethnopsychiatry*. Geneva: WHO. Monograph Series, 17.
- Castell, A. 1970. *The self in philosophy*. London: Macmillan.
- Clough, M. 1981. 'Early healing', in R.Passmore (ed.), *Proceedings of tercentenary congress on 6–11 September 1981*. Edinburgh: Royal College of Physicians, 1981.
- Coetzee, P.H. and Van den Berg, M.E.S. (eds.), 1995. *An introduction to African philosophy*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Danquah, J.B. 1968 (1944). *The Akan doctrine of God: A fragment of Gold Coast ethics and religions*. 2nd edn. London: Frank Cass.
- Davidson, B. 1994. 'The motives of Mau Mau'. *London Review of Books*, 24 February 1994:12.
- Descartes, R. 1960. *Meditations on the first philosophy*, rev. edn. Tr. and intro. L.J.Lefeur. New York: Library of Liberal Arts.
- Dewey, J. 1958. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Dewey, J. 1968. 'Religion and the religious', in G.L. Abernathy and T.A.Langford (eds.), *Philosophy of religion*, London: Macmillan, 1968:27–40.
- Durkheim, E. 1975. 'Concerning the definition of the religious phenomena', in W.S.F.Pickering (ed.), *Durkheim on religion*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

- Ezeanya, S.N. 1979. 'The contribution of African traditional religion to nation-building'. *Nigerian Dialogue*, 3(3):15.
- Fadipe, N.A. 1960. *The sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Feuerbach, L.A. 1957. *The essence of Christianity*. Tr. M.Evans. New York: F.Ungar.
- Gbadegesin, S. 1991. 'Ènìyàn: The Yoruba concept of a person', in P.H.Coetzee and M.E.S.van den Berg (eds.), *An introduction to African philosophy*, Pretoria: Unisa, 1995:335–368.
- Gyekye, K. 1978. 'The Akan concept of a person', in P.H.Coetzee and M.E.S.van den Berg (eds.), *An introduction to African philosophy*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1995:369–380.
- Gyekye, K. 1979. 'The Akan concept of person'. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 18:278.
- Gyekye, K. 1984 (1978). 'The Akan concept of a person', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. 3rd edn. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984:199–212.
- Gyekye, K. 1987. *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Higgs, P. 1997. 'A re-vision of philosophy of education in South African education'. Conference paper read at Faculty of Education seminar, Unisa: Pretoria, Unpublished.
- Hooykaas, R. 1972. *Religion and the rise of modern science*. Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press.
- Horton, R. 1970. 'African traditional thought and Western science', in B.R.Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970:130–171.
- Horton, R. 1982. 'Tradition and modernity revisited', in M.Hollis and S.Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982:201–260.
- Hountondji, P.J. and Zegeye, A. 1989. *Religion, magic and witchcraft: Structures of belief in everyday life*. Oxford: Hans Zeller.
- Idowu, E.B. 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman.
- James, C.L.R. 1980 (1977). *The future in the present*. London: Allison and Bursby.
- James, W. 1961. *The varieties of religious experience*. London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Johnson, S. 1921. *The history of the Yorubas*. Lagos: C.S.S.Bookshops, 1921:34.
- Jordan, J.P. 1971. *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. Dublin: Elo Press.
- Kagamé, A. 1956. *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être*. Brussels: Johnson.
- Kaphagawani, D.N. 1998. 'African conceptions of personhood and intellectual identities', in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J.Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A text with readings*, 1st edn. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998:169–176.
- Kuckertz, H. 1996. 'Selfhood and its reason to be', in J.G.Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings from the second colloquium on African philosophy*, Pretoria: Department of Philosophy, Unisa, 1996:57–66.
- Lefevre, P. 1966. *Understandings of man*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Lewis, A. 1953. 'Health as a social concept'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 4(2): 109–124.
- Lewis, H.D. 1961. 'Worship and idolatry', in H.D. Lewis (ed.), *Contemporary British philosophy*. 2nd edn. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961.
- Lovejoy, A.O. 1960. *The great chain of being: A study of the history of an idea*. New York: Harper Torch Books.
- Maclean, U. 1971. *Magical medicine: A Nigerian case study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Malherbe, J.G. (ed.) 1996. *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the second colloquium on African philosophy*. Pretoria: Department of Philosophy, Unisa.
- Maquet, J.J. 1954. 'The kingdom of Ruanda', in D. Forde (ed.), *African Worlds*. Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 1954:164–189.
- Maquet, J. 1972. *Africanity: The cultural unity of black Africa*. Tr. J.K.Rayfield, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mausser, H. 1979. 'Do we have an African philosophy?' in R.A.Wright (ed.), 1984. *African philosophy: An introduction*. 3rd edn., Washington: University Press of America, 1979:1–17.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1969. *African religions and philosophy*. 1st edn. London: Heinemann.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1975. *Introduction to African religion*. London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1990 (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. 2nd edn. London: Heinemann.
- Mboya, T. 1963. *Freedom and after*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Menkiti, I.A. 1984. 'Person and community in African traditional thought', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. 3rd edn., Washington: University Press of America, 1984:171–181.
- More, M.P. 1996. Review of A.Shutte, 'Philosophy in Africa'. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 15(4):152–154.
- Mosley, A. 1978. 'The metaphysics of magic: Practical and philosophical implications'. *Second Order*, vii(1,2):3–19.
- Neugebauer, C. 1988. 'Die "Akan-Philosophie"—Ihre Diskussion in der akademischen Philosophie in Ghana seit 1970'. *Conceptus*, 22(56):93–107.
- Nilsson, Martin P. 1948. *Greek poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nordenbo, S.E. 1995. 'What is implied by a "European curriculum"? Issues of Eurocentrism, rationality and education'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 21(1)37–46.
- Nze, C. 1981. 'Pragmatism and traditionalism in the concept of God in Africa'. *Uche*, 26.
- Nze, C. 1989. *Aspects of African communalism*. Onitsha, Nigeria: Veritas Publishers.
- Opoku, K.A. 1978. *West African traditional religion*. Accra: F&P International.
- Owomoyela, O. 1981. 'The pragmatic humanism of Yoruba culture'. *Journal of African Studies*, 3(3), Fall 1981.
- Parrinder, E.G. 1949. *West African religion*. London: Redwood Press.
- Parrinder, E.G. 1969. *Religion in Africa*. London: Penguin.
- Parrinder, E.G. 1970. 'Monotheism and pantheism in Africa'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 3(2):81–88.
- Quinton, A. 1973. *The nature of things*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Radcliff-Brown, A.R. 1952. *Structure and function in primitive society*. London: Cohen and West.
- Radithalo, S.I. 1996. "'Kenosi: I am alone". Philosophical imperatives of African names', in J. G.Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the second colloquium on African philosophy*. Pretoria: Department of Philosophy, Unisa 1996:123–127.
- Ralushai, N.V. et al. 1996. *Report of the commission of inquiry into witchcraft, violence and ritual murders in the Northern Province of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Randall, J. (Jr.) 1944. 'Epilogue: The nature of naturalism', in H.Krikorian (ed.), *Naturalism and human spirit*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1944:354–382.
- Rotimi, O. 1971. *The Gods are not to blame*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Rowe, D. 1980. 'Philosophy and psychiatry'. *Philosophy*, 55 (January 1980):109–112.
- Ruch, E.A. and Anyanwu, K.C. 1981. *African philosophy: An introduction to the main philosophical trends in contemporary Africa*. Rome: Catholic Book Agency.
- Senghor, L.S. 1967. *Les fondements de l'africanité*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

- Senghor, L.S. 1976. *Prose and poetry*. Ed and Tr. J. Reed and C.Wake, London, Nairobi, Ibadan and Lusaka: Heinemann.
- Sodipo, J.O. 1973. 'Notes on the concept of cause and chance in Yoruba traditional thought'. *Second Order*, 11(2):40–69.
- Sogolo, G.S. 1989. 'Doctrinal oppositions and religious conversion: The African experience'. *Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, xxi:119–130.
- Sogolo, G.S. 1994. 'The concept of cause in African thought', in P.H.Coetzee and M.E.S.van den Berg (eds.), *An introduction to African philosophy*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1996:203–221.
- Sparkes, A.W. 1991. *Talking philosophy: A wordbook*. London: Routledge.
- Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Troxell, E.A. and Snyder, W.S. 1976. *Making sense of things: An introduction to philosophy*. New York: Martin's.
- Van Niekerk, M. 1991. "'African thinking"—A critical discussion', in R.Hill, M.Muller, and M. Trump (eds.), *African studies forum*. Pretoria: HSRC, 1991:125–191.
- Wilson, J. 1986. *What philosophy can do*. Totowa, New York: Barnes and Noble.
- Wiredu, K. 1983. 'The Akan concept of mind'. *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, 3:113–134.
- Wiredu, K. 1987. 'The Akan concept of mind', in P. H.Coetzee and M.E.S.van den Berg (eds.), *An introduction to African philosophy*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1995:307–334.
- Wiredu, K. 1995. 'Metaphysics in Africa', in J.Kim and E.Sosa (eds.), *A companion to metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995:312–315.
- Wiredu, K. 1996a. 'Particularistic studies of African philosophies as an aid to decolonization', in J.G. Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the second colloquium on African philosophy*. Pretoria: Department of Philosophy, Unisa, 1996:169–177.
- Wiredu, K. 1996b. 'On decolonizing African religions', in J.G.Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the second colloquium on African philosophy*. Pretoria: Department of Philosophy, Unisa, 1996:178–193.
- Withaar.H. 1986. 'Wat is Afrikaanse filosofie?' *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*, 78(3):163–188.
- Wright, R.A. (ed.), 1984. *African philosophy: An introduction*. 3rd edn. Washington: University Press of America.

## 4

# EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE TRADITION IN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION  
African epistemology

DIDIER N.KAPHAGAWANI AND JEANETTE G.MALHERBE

### THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

The question whether or not there is an African epistemology cannot be addressed without due cognizance of the answer to the question whether or not an African philosophy exists. A negative answer to the latter would imply a negative answer to the former. Similarly, to assert the existence of an African philosophy is also to imply the existence of an African epistemology, to the extent that an African epistemology is a subset of African philosophy. The question of whether African philosophy exists has been discussed and debated for several decades in various forums by differing scholars. The general trend of thought has been that there is indeed such a thing as African philosophy. And since African philosophy encompasses all forms and types of philosophizing, it therefore follows that it does make sense to talk of an African epistemology, just as it is sensible to talk of African ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics for instance.

Having once decided that there is such an animal as African philosophy, one is naturally inclined to ask what it is like and how it differs from others of the breed. There have been roughly four kinds of answer given to the question of what character African philosophy has. These answers have been formulated as the 'standard positions' of ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, politico-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy (Oruka 1983:384). The conception of African philosophy that one favours from among these four will have a decided influence on what one takes an African epistemology to be. The ethnophilosopher, for instance, examines features of a culture like language and religious ceremonies, for clues to its philosophical systems, and so too its epistemology. The student of philosophic sagacity will find answers to questions about knowledge in what the wise elders of the tribe have to say about it; the politico-ideological philosopher typically has some social goal in mind in his theory of knowledge; the professional philosopher will want to study the international epistemological literature and keep abreast of the current academic debate on knowledge. Because the professional philosopher engages in a world-wide debate, his or her task is minimally contextualized and hardly has any specific cultural character. So an African philosophy and epistemology will have to be constructed with the possibilities for



cultural contextualization that the other three positions offer. We shall be concentrating here on the ethnophilosophical approach.

Now, there are two questions that need our attention: 'What is epistemology?' and 'What does it mean to call an epistemology African?' (We look more closely at the first question below and then concentrate on the second question in the remaining sections.) Epistemology is the study of theories about the nature and scope of knowledge, the evaluation of the presuppositions and bases of knowledge, and the scrutiny of knowledge claims. In short, epistemology is a branch of philosophy whose main focus is to analyse and evaluate claims of knowledge. And to the extent that all humans have the capacity to know, epistemology is universal regardless of culture, tribe, or race. However (and this is part of the answer to the second question) the means to, presuppositions and bases of knowledge claims vary from culture to culture. The ways in which an African comes to know, or claims to know, that something is the case might differ from the ways in which a Chinese or European, for instance, would arrive at and assert his or her knowledge claim.

In other words, although epistemology as the study of knowledge is universal, the ways of acquiring knowledge vary according to the socio-cultural contexts within which knowledge claims are formulated and articulated. It is from such considerations that one can sensibly talk of an *African articulation and formulation of knowledge*, and hence of an African epistemology. The phrase 'African epistemology', we should note, is being used in the generic sense in which the term 'African philosophy' is normally used, which does not deny that there are significant variations among the many cultures in Africa. But before coming to the specific question of what makes up the features of African epistemology, we need to consider what may reasonably be taken as the generic features of knowledge, and so as the common framework of any epistemology.

A fundamental question to address is what Africans mean and understand when they say that they know something. An analysis of some specific aspects of African cultures, including language (the meanings of philosophically important words, sentence structures, linguistic habits like proverbs and adages) and social convention (traditional ways of settling conflicts, educating the young, finding out about the world, using that knowledge) would no doubt assist us in coming up with some answers to this all-important epistemological question.

There are those who take a strong universalist line and deny that there are any distinctive cognitive principles belonging only to this society or that one. Their claim is that knowledge cannot differ from one society to the next. If we call something 'knowledge', then it is true for all people, anywhere, at any time. After all, say the universalists, aren't the criteria by which we decide the truth or falsity of a claim like 'It's raining', the same across all cultural contexts? And if this is so, then the epistemological character of all cultures is basically the same. There may well be ways in which communities differ with regard to the institution of knowledge, but these are not epistemologically important. Epistemology, wherever it is practised, is the same, and just as one does not get a distinctively Chinese or American or African mathematics, so too there is no such thing as a distinctively African epistemology, except insofar as it might be epistemological studies done on the continent of Africa.

On the other hand, there are those who take a strong relativist line, claiming that every

different ethnic group's knowledge is absolutely unique, and so its analysis of that knowledge, or epistemology, will be unique too. The study of each group's way of knowing will have its own appropriate terms and concepts, and a frame-work tailored exactly to that way of knowing, and so the epistemology of each cultural community will not be applicable to any other group or even recognizable by someone from another culture. It is actually misleading to speak of 'epistemology' as 'the study of knowledge' when there is no such single branch of study. So where the universalist denies that an African epistemology was possible, the relativist suggests that an African *epistemology* is just an empty term.

In what follows, in the practical project, that is, of discussing and exemplifying what an African epistemology actually is, we adopt a position midway between the two. To the degree that this project is successful, we shall see that there is both some universality to the phenomenon of knowledge as well as local variations in it which different cultural contexts generate.

### THE NETWORK OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

In any epistemological study you are bound to come across claims having to do with knowledge, justification, truth, belief, theory, ideas and intentions, explanation, understanding, experience, and human action. They may all be grouped loosely together under the heading of *rationality*. Rationality is that quality which enables us to achieve our goals and act successfully; it helps us to negotiate the immediate physical environment; it is the means by which we are able to form a reasonably accurate picture of our world; it is the framework within which we interpret and understand the behaviour of others. It is a highly desirable quality. To say of persons or actions that they are rational, is usually to be complimentary; conversely, the term 'irrational' normally expresses a negative judgement. This evaluative aspect of the concept of rationality is very important. It means that the rational is a kind of ideal representing the highest excellence in intellectual and epistemological matters. Because it is an ideal, we may not always be able to find it in the real world, or in actual behaviour and thinking, though we may recognize it as being present to a greater or lesser degree in particular cases, and we tend to make judgements that this theory, or action, or belief, or religion, or custom, or science, or even culture, is more (or less) rational than that one. Essentially, rationality is a goal which we strive to attain; it is a regulative ideal which directs our thinking and provides the standards by which we measure intellectual things as good or bad of their kind.

Rationality is closely connected to *knowledge*. Unless we have a true and reliable picture of how things are in the world around us—unless, that is, we have knowledge of the world—we are unlikely to have much success in acting. Knowledge is the means by which we direct our behaviour to achieve our ends most efficiently and successfully. Rationality of the kind which we humans strive for, is *epistemic rationality*, or rationality which aims at the truth and is based on knowledge.

Rationality is also closely connected to the idea of *justification*. If someone is rational in a belief (or action or assertion), then that person is able to say why he or she believes (or acts or states) as he or she does. To say why is to give one's reasons or justification. If

you believe (or do or say) something for no reason at all—if, on reflection, you just cannot find any reason to explain why you believe as you do, then you will know that your belief is irrational.

It needs to be pointed out that there are many kinds of thoughts other than beliefs, thoughts that do not need reasonable grounds to justify your having them. You may be daydreaming, and a series of pleasant images of yourself as a TV star, or scoring the winning goal in the Africa Cup final, drift about in your mind. If someone were to ask you on what grounds you were thinking these things, you would probably find it hard to answer, because these are not beliefs about how you or the world actually are; they are imaginings about how things might be. They are not factual thoughts and they do not make any claim of truth. A great deal of our mental life is taken up by other-than-true thoughts. Wishes, fears, hopes, imaginings, guesses, suppositions—all these are kinds of thoughts which carry no implication of aiming at the truth. If someone says: ‘I wish I were a TV star!’, it makes little sense to reply: ‘That’s not true’.

But beliefs are different. They do have at least an implication of truth; if you believe something, then you believe it to be true. If someone believes that she is a TV star, then we will be able to find out whether her belief is true or false; we will be able quite properly to ask her why she believes this. If she states: ‘I am a TV star’, it will make sense to say: ‘Yes, you truly are’ or ‘No, that’s not the case’, depending on whether she is one or not. We can also ask her on what grounds she believes this, and her justification for the belief, if it is good justification, will consist in giving us the evidence that there is for the truth of her claim. She has starred in a TV soap opera, say; her picture appears regularly in popular magazines; she was nominated for an acting award. It is in the nature of belief to aim at the truth, and when people say they believe something then they are committing themselves to the truth of whatever they believe. And when we are very sure that we have got a belief right and that it is true, we claim to *know* that something is the case. Two further concepts which are closely related to the concepts of knowledge and rationality, therefore, are the concepts of *belief and truth*.

### THE AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGIST’S TASK

Social epistemology, that is, epistemology deliberately situated in a particular cultural context, as African epistemology is, has an active role to play with regard to rationality. It is up to the philosopher to develop and exercise the concept of rationality appropriate to his or her society, to have a critical awareness of the intellectual and cognitive traditions of both his or her own society and of other societies. (Please note that the term ‘critical awareness’ does not *only* mean negative appraisal. It includes the appreciation and positive valuing of whatever is good in the tradition.) It is important that we be able to do this so that we can construct a sound intellectual identity for our society, one that meets the particular demands of our unique cultural context. It is also important so that we can hand on what is best in the tradition to our cognitive heirs in succeeding generations. Just as we are the recipients of the long-developed, ancient customs and beliefs of our ancestors, so our descendants will receive whatever tradition we hand on to them. We want to make sure it is a good legacy, that will serve them well in the future. So our situation in the historical context, as both inheritors and transmitters of an intellectual

tradition, makes it necessary for us to consider well what we commend as 'rational'.

This duty becomes all the more urgent in our present circumstances in Africa, where cultural evaluation is intensified by what we might call 'the C<sup>4</sup> factor': the Contemporary Confluence of Cultures on the Continent. The availability of a variety of options from other cultures provides a stimulus for discarding, from one's own culture, those practices, ideas, and traditions which have outlived their usefulness. It also means that the distinctive character of a particular ethnic group may come under threat, as people are seduced by fashions outside their own culture. If we are to shape a distinctive social and ethnic identity, we must resist the pull towards cultural assimilation (usually the assimilation of all others by one dominant culture), that C<sup>4</sup> brings with it. On the other hand, we must ensure that our African cultures are alive and progressive, renewing themselves by discarding outworn practices and ideas, taking what they need from other cultures to adapt to changing circumstances.

There are hosts of different cultures from every corner of the globe milling about at present on the continent of Africa, along with all the indigenous cultures. For our purposes, however, that is, for a broad consideration of African epistemology, it is possible to oversimplify this diversity, and look only at 'African traditional culture' and 'modern Western culture' as the two significant mainstreams. And on the point of cultural assimilation between these two, notice that the answer which we give to the question of whether knowledge, rationality and their associated concepts, are relative to various communities or common to all human beings (see above), is of crucial importance for everyone at present on the continent of Africa. If we deny, along with the relativist, that our ethnic group's way of knowing has anything in common with other groups, then we cannot look to other cultures for revisionary ideas, comparisons, or assessments of our intellectual life, but will have to struggle along on our own. If, on the other hand, we take up a universalist stance, then we will want to discard all traces of ethnic and cultural character as soon as possible—also undesirable. This is something we must be conscious of in deciding 'whether—and if so, how—our cultures are to become modern' (Appiah 1992:105).

## EPISTEMOLOGY AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

So far, we have been talking about rationality and its associated concepts in a perfectly general and unqualified way, as if they applied to all people at all times and places. In one way, they do. To be human is to be rational; to act is necessarily to aim at achieving some goal; to experience the world is to try to make sense of it and to try to acquire an accurate representation of it; to believe something is necessarily to accept its truth. In perceiving the immediate environment, for instance, nobody could deliberately set out to acquire false beliefs. Our eyes, ears, sense of smell, etc., are set up in such a way that they tell us (when they are working properly) how things in fact are. This is the case whatever continent we are on, no matter what language we use to express our experiences, and whatever the behavioural codes our society has taught us to respond in.

Similarly, to understand or explain a phenomenon in any cultural context is to bring it under a rational framework of some sort, whether the thing to be explained is a drought or the depression of a family member, and whether the explanatory framework is drawn

from modern meteorology, from traditional or contemporary religion, or from current psychological theory.

The way in which epistemic rationality and its related concepts are instantiated, 'filled out' as it were, the concrete content that they are given in terms of linguistic descriptions and social customs, varies a great deal from one cultural context to another. What counts as a good theory, or a widely accepted concept, or a satisfactory explanation, is different in contemporary industrialized Asia, say, from what it was in a rural community in Biblical Israel. The set of established facts accepted as true within the society (the so-called body of knowledge) will be vastly different in the two cases; the methods by which the knowledge is acquired will be different; and the ways in which it is certified as reliable fact (that is, its reasonable justification) will also be different.

The *social* philosopher works in the framework of societies and their characteristics. The things of interest here are the habits and customs, the religions, languages, belief systems, values, interests, preferred occupations, divisions of labour, in a particular culture. The *social epistemologist* or philosopher of knowledge, is concerned with the rational practices, values, institutions, etc., of a culture. What exactly are these things? You will get a more concrete idea of them from the readings accompanying this chapter, but for the moment, it will be useful to think of them as a collection of:

- 1 The well-established general beliefs, concepts, and theories of any particular people, in various fields—medical science, religion, child-rearing, agriculture, psychology, education, etc.
- 2 Their favoured ways, usually institutionalized in the society, of acquiring new knowledge and evaluating accepted fact, science being a prime example of such an institution.
- 3 The accumulated wisdom which they pass on to their youth in the form of proverbs, revered traditions, myths and folk tales.
- 4 The language of an ethnic group, the single most important repository of a society's accumulated knowledge.
- 5 Customs and practices in the areas of religion and judicial procedure.
- 6 The accepted authorities (whether people, institutions or texts), in matters of knowledge and belief.

All these can be regarded as the epistemic threads in the fabric of a culture.

The question that faces us here is: How are we to decide what is rational in the context of African culture? How are we to understand and apply the principles of rationality in an African context, so that we will have some yardstick by which to sort the rational from the irrational? How are we to assess the beliefs, theories, and explanations of traditional and contemporary African cultures? What are we to make of the practices, guiding principles, and social institutions that make up the epistemic threads in the fabric of a characteristically African society?

A word of warning: to speak of 'African culture' or 'a characteristically *African* society', is to make a huge generalization. Africa includes so many diverse peoples from such different backgrounds, that any generalization is bound to be an over-simplification. If we make claims about 'African' beliefs or religion or customs or knowledge, then those claims should, strictly speaking, be equally applicable to a community of Bedouin

tribesmen in the Sahara, to Ghanaian businessmen in Accra, to the Khoisan people of the Kalahari, to Ethiopian shepherds. It is obviously going to be very difficult to find general definitions that will cover this variety of cases. There will almost always be a counter-example to be found, to disprove the general claim. If the *only* thing that these various peoples and cultures have in common, is that they occur on the continent of Africa, if all that they share is a (very broad) geographical location, then it will not be possible to speak generally of African philosophy or rationality or religion or traditional lifestyle.

The assumption is usually made in contemporary philosophical writing, that we can be tolerant of differences on this point, and continue to speak of things African without having in mind an absolutely precise definition of what it means to be 'African'. One good reason for tolerating this vagueness, is that the criteria for what is characteristically African (in the various fields of philosophy), is just what is being debated. The central question is: 'What is *African* philosophy?' It does not do therefore, to press too hard for exact criteria of Africanness before we enter the debate. It will be better to rely on an intuitive understanding, a roughly acceptable meaning of the term 'African' as we go along, and see if, at the end of our considerations, we are in a better position to say what is characteristically African in epistemology, rationality, and philosophy in general.

The use of the term to cover different ethnic groups indigenous to the continent, for instance those listed above, is at any rate not a *contentious* generalization. It becomes contentious when people want to apply or withhold the description 'African' for political reasons, as when people or customs originating in cultures which are not indigenous, lay claim to being African, or when alien innovations are advocated as being preferable for the modern African to the traditional ways of his people.

Because of the sensitiveness of this issue, and the deeply held values it involves, it is very important to keep an open mind on the question of what is to count as an African culture/philosophy/religion, etc. It is also, and for the same reasons, very easy to harbour unnoticed assumptions on the point. The stand which you take on it marks your position in the traditionalist/modernist debate in African philosophy.

Roughly speaking, traditionalists say that only those cultures which were on the continent before the arrival of European colonizers, can properly speaking be called 'African'. Everything else is, by definition, an invasive alien influence which can only debase the purity, and destroy the pristine unity, of African traditional thinking, lifestyles, and values. The modernists, on the other hand, stress that the question of what is to count as African, is being asked *now*, and they believe that the C<sup>4</sup> factor cannot be ignored. The presence of alien cultures, whether for good or bad, is a fact that we must make the best of, say the modernists.

The traditionalist is essentially backward-looking and the modernist essentially forward-looking. This affects one's answer to the question of whether the culture of people from different continents, now living here, is to count as African. Of course, there is a clear sense in which people of European or Asian origin are not Africans, simply because they are Europeans and Asians. This is the sense reflected in the ordinary use of language. We do not without qualification call someone from Liverpool or New York, an African, unless perhaps that person is black, and then we would think of him or her as Afro-English or an Afro-American. This way of classifying people is traditionalist insofar as it looks to their *past*, at the historical traditions and cultural backgrounds from which

they have come, for clues to who they are. It is from this perspective that we see the people on the continent of Africa as *various*, as Chinese, Indians, Hollanders, Lebanese, English, Portuguese, Thais, Germans, etc., and from which we remark on the confluence of so many different cultures in Africa today. The modernist, however, looking to the future, will tend to say that anyone who has a commitment to living in Africa and so to contributing to the ongoing construction of African identity, has some grounds for claiming to be African. On this viewpoint, African culture already is 'modernized' with admixtures of Western and Asian cultures.

When it comes to the question of a contemporary African philosophy and epistemology, then the modernist will tend towards a 'professionalistic' view, while the traditionalist will favour the methods of sage philosophy or ethnophilosophy. Because the aim of this text is to sketch a characteristically African epistemology and the modernist/professionalist view tends to deny that there is a unique African character, we shall answer the question of African epistemology in terms that are basically ethnophilosophical.

### PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

African epistemology faces a number of problems. Firstly, if it has to be an epistemology worthy of the name, then African epistemology has to take into serious consideration both the similarities and differences in the varying conceptions of knowledge and truth in disparate African cultures. One possible way of solving this problem of specificity versus generality is suggested in the reading by Wiredu, which examines an important epistemological concept as it appears in an African language. What emerges is that the concept of truth is generally recognizable across different cultures (as many more words in the philosophical vocabulary). That this is so is proven by the fact that we have no difficulty in translating the English word 'truth' in various African languages, or in saying that 'truth' and 'nokware' mean roughly the same thing, i.e. refer roughly to the same concept. But it is only a rough similarity of meaning. There are differences and local peculiarities which make each of the three terms unique, and this is the value of 'particularistic' studies of philosophical concepts: that they show up subtle variations in old philosophical concepts.

A second problem is that, if African epistemology is to be of relevance to contemporary Africa, it has to cope with and assimilate whatever is assimilable from the advancements in science and technology of the West. Thirdly, there is in general among traditional African communities, an emphasis on age as a necessary condition for knowledge and wisdom. Such an emphasis denies epistemological authority to the young and able. It provides an epistemological monopoly to the old, a monopoly which might have been justified in traditional Africa, but one wonders whether it is tenable in contemporary Africa. The lines of the modernist/traditionalist debate show clearly in these last two problems and they are indeed inextricably intertwined around the central issue of cognitive cultural assessment and revision. Let us see how African epistemologists at present set about dealing with this issue.

## UNDERSTANDING THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES

We have been asking earlier whether African culture is, in fact, really suffused with a spiritistic character or not. The issue becomes rather different when we ask (as Wiredu does) questions like: 'Should African culture ideally be suffused with a spiritistic quality or not? To what degree should supernatural entities like ghosts, witches and spirits be present in contemporary African thinking? Are beliefs in such things compatible with modernization? On the other hand, is the wholesale revision of traditional thinking compatible with maintaining our African identity? What do we lose when we give up the time-honoured traditions of our ancestors?'. When questions like these are posed, the need for some kind of rational appreciation and assessment of customary magico-religious beliefs arises.

The factual question of whether African culture is essentially magico-religious in character, might be thought to be the work of scholars other than philosophers anyway. Surely it is up to psychologists to examine the thinking patterns of a representative sample of Africans, or anthropologists to give detailed descriptions of ethnic cultural patterns, and then in the light of this evidence to decide the matter. The philosopher's work is not *scientific* or *empirical*; it does not seek to investigate situations or establish facts. It is rather conceptual and argumentative in nature.

Further, someone might object that the whole question is rather out of date. Surely, in most African countries, and certainly in South Africa in the last years of the twentieth century, there are very few people left who are still completely convinced of the power of traditional spirits. People are modern, it might be said; they know all about the latest technologies. They work in a world of computers, cars, and cell-phones and they relax in a world of CDs, TVs and jet travel. Any remnants of customary thinking still in their lives, are just colourful and well-liked reminders of where they have come from.

There is no doubt that the average African in South Africa today is more or less modernized, in this sense: that she or he is familiar with most, or at least a good many, of the trappings of modern Western technological society. There is thus knowledge of Western culture on the part of contemporary Africans. But this is not a particularly interesting or significant fact. It is possible for someone to have knowledge of a culture, to live according to its norms and practices, and yet at the same time, to reject that culture. In urban East London, South Africa, there were (maybe still are) two distinct groups of amaXhosa, rural people of the Xhosa tribe who had come to work in the city (Mayer 1972). The one group, known as the 'red Xhosa', clung to traditional ways and though they knew everything they needed to know about European ways, they practised them just as far as they were obliged to and returned to tribal ways whenever they could. The other group, known as the 'school Xhosa', were just the opposite, in that they adopted European ways enthusiastically, and showed no preference for traditional customs. They continued to wear Western-style clothes and to eat Western food even when they returned to their homes in the country. The conclusion to be drawn from this, is that a person may have a thorough knowledge of a culture, even live within it, and yet assess it as undesirable and unacceptable; which brings us back to the philosophical question of how we should assess cultures, what criteria of judgement we should apply.



Notice that this need for rational appreciation does not usually arise for those people who have grown up and who live their lives within the boundaries of a particular culture. In a sense, they understand it very well, since their culture is intimately well known to them. The outside observer from another culture can never know it as the insiders do. In another sense, however, the people brought up in a certain tradition can never see it. They are blind to it just because it is, for them, the only way things could possibly be.

Consider a simple analogy. The people living in Durban are so used to a warm humid climate that they do not notice it. For them, a visitor's remark that the day is unbearably muggy and hot, may be surprising, since it appears to those used to local conditions, to be a fairly crisp and cool day. The Durbanite assesses particular weather conditions against the background of the general weather conditions in Durban, not some other place, as the visitor does. If you were to ask the Durbanite what the general weather conditions there are like, she would be inclined to reply: 'They're just the weather here.' To characterize them as hot and humid, she would have to have some wider standard against which to measure them. It's only in the context of national weather conditions, say, or Gauteng's weather conditions, where the temperature and humidity averages are moderate, that Durban by comparison appears hot and humid.

This notion of acclimatization works in the cultural context as well. People who have never experienced a culture other than their own, have no wider standard or more general background against which to think about and appreciate their own traditions. ('Appreciate', please note, does not mean only to think uncritically that something is wonderful. It means to have a fair, full, and conscious knowledge of both the good and bad points of a thing. Appreciation of the thought systems of a culture is the first condition for cognitive revision and renewal.) Suppose you were to ask a traditional witchdoctor from a remote rural community without any elements of contemporary urban life, a man thoroughly immersed in the lore of his calling, the question that we considered in the last section, namely, 'Is traditional thought essentially marked by belief in the supernatural?' You would probably be met with blank incomprehension. After all, from the witchdoctor's point of view, what other kind of thought is there, or *could* there be?

So critical apprehension of one's own ingrained cultural background is not easy. Nevertheless, epistemological revision of cultural traditions does take place, and when it does, there is usually one (or both) of these two factors at work: intellectual exploration or cross-culturation.

Who are the intellectual explorers, the 'intellectually adventurous' in Kwasi Wiredu's phrase?—the cognitive revisionists whose inner gaze is so clear and persuasive that people follow them against their habit? Obviously they will be the sages of a community, the so-called epistemic authorities of a society to whom we referred earlier. These are the people to whom others turn for knowledge and advice, and to find out what the tradition says on any question that needs answering. Epistemic authorities in the West tend to be the philosophers, historians, scientists, doctors, engineers and lawyers; in the East, they would include the gurus, astrologers, shamans, swamis, ayurvedic doctors, and scientists. But it takes more than just sagacity to engage in critical reflection on a tradition; not all sages are philosophic sages, and it is only the philosophic sages who are 'intellectually adventurous'.

In Africa, the sages are the elders of the tribe, people whose wisdom and knowledge of

the traditions, the folklore, the values, customs, history, habits, likes and dislikes, character and thought, of their people is very great. Sages are the mouthpieces of a culture. They are applied to by ordinary folk for authoritative judgements and decisions on various matters. The sages of African traditional society are a rich source of philosophical insights—the raw material of much work by professional African philosophers who aim at systematizing the folk philosophy of particular African societies, linguistic communities, or ethnic groups. Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* (1965) was an early recording of the thoughts of this remarkable Dogon hunter/sage. Odera Oruka (1983) recorded his conversations with the sages of Kenya, to provide a body of traditional thought which could serve as the basis for philosophical analysis and reflection, and sometimes he came upon a philosophical sage.

Indeed, as Oruka writes:

My real purpose in this project was to help substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African people were innocent of logical and critical thinking. Was traditional Africa a place where no persons had the room or mind to think independently and at times even critically of the communal consensus? If this claim were true, then it must follow that it is not possible to discover individuals in traditional Africa who can demonstrate their ability and practice in critical thinking. And whoever is considered a thinker or a wise man must simply be, at best, a good narrator of traditionally imposed wisdom and myths (Oruka 1987:51–52).

Oruka found among the sages of Kenya, many who were intellectually adventurous thinkers who not only know traditional thought thoroughly, but were able to suggest revisions of it. There are such individuals in every community now and again, and it is their thinking which moves the epistemological traditions of their culture forward. A society rich in such individuals will have a vital and progressive epistemology with a tradition of evaluation and renewal. Contemporary African philosophers like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Odera Oruka, Godwin Sogolo, Kwasi Wiredu, and many more, are such thinkers. They engage in sifting the wisdom out of their traditional culture: its linguistic usages, habits, proverbs, etc. Consider how Wiredu (in the reading in this chapter), undertakes a philosophico-conceptual study of truth in the particular context of the Akan culture. He is examining an important epistemic theme in his own culture. It is work which requires an insider's intimate knowledge of the culture. Much of the work of these African philosophers, however, also involves comparative analyses of Western, or European, and African concepts, as Wiredu's work on the Akan concept of truth once again shows. This brings us to the second factor which stimulates cognitive evaluation and revision within a culture, our old friend C<sup>4</sup>, or cross-culturation.

When different cultures meet and mingle, people automatically become aware of different sets of values and customs, of different conceptual possibilities. Their own cultural background is no longer the only one available to them. In terms of the weather-conditions analogy, when the Durbanite has lived in Gauteng for a while, she too may come to realize that Durban's weather is hot and humid. In a situation of cross-culturation, people can, if they choose, step into a different framework and look at their

own culture from a radically different viewpoint. This makes a fully-conscious appreciation of one's own culture possible for everyone, not only philosophical sages.

Appiah (1992) discusses Horton's characterization of traditional cultures as 'closed', that is, cultures 'in which there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets'. Appiah is critical of it, because according to him, even in precolonial African society, there was a fair amount of interaction, by way of trade, wars, and invasion, between different cultures. Note, however, that the availability of different viewpoints does not always ensure that use is made of them. A society may even be closed in a situation like C<sup>4</sup>.

For instance, there is much justification for saying that Western society, represented by colonial enclaves of the imperialistic European powers, was truly closed. The colonial administrators and adventurers who found themselves in Africa were careful to cocoon themselves in European culture. They wore European clothes (often in great discomfort), imported European foods, furniture, art, music, etc. They never lost sight of the fact that England/France/Italy/ Germany was home, and the source of that 'civilization' which it was their duty to uphold before the indigenous peoples of Africa. They almost never learned African languages. Their interest in those parts of Africa they occupied, was limited to the exploitable natural resources found there; they showed interest in the people of Africa chiefly insofar as they were relevant to that exploitation.

Colonial society thus deliberately shut itself off from the possibility of perceiving or experiencing cultural alternatives, and if this is the mark of a 'closed' society, then it was shut up tight. Horton claims that in 'scientifically-oriented cultures' such as those of Western Europe, such an awareness is 'highly developed' (quoted in Appiah 1992:125). Western society was thus 'open', while African society was 'closed'. It is difficult to understand such a remark from an African point of view.

Today, as a result of C<sup>4</sup>, there must be very few pockets of traditional culture on the continent totally untouched by foreign influences, and wholly unaware of the existence and general character of alien cultures—European, Middle Eastern, American, Indian, etc. It has been a feature of cultural interaction on the African continent, that indigenous cultures have been quicker to react, either to absorb or reject, foreign influences, than the invasive cultures, which as we noted, made a point of being impervious to African culture. If we can say that Africa is now in a post-colonial period of history, it is because indigenous culture has come back into its own. European culture, so far as it is still in evidence, has lost its continental hegemony and is developing here, not Eurocentrically but Afrocentrically, that is, in response to African rather than European influences.

The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a philosophy

MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

### **UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY**

*Ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *ubuntu*. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from

*ubuntu* with which it is connected indivisibly. *Ubuntu* then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology. If these latter are the bases of philosophy, then African philosophy has long been established in and through *ubuntu*. Our point of departure is that *ubuntu* may be seen as the basis of African philosophy. Apart from a linguistic analysis of *ubuntu*, a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a 'family atmosphere', that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa. No doubt there will be variations within this broad philosophical 'family atmosphere'. But the blood circulating through the 'family' members is the same in its basics.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, *ubuntu* is the basis of African philosophy.

In this chapter we shall focus upon the elucidation of the view that *ubuntu* is simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy. Just as the environing soil, the root, stem, branches, and leaves together as a one-ness give meaning to our understanding of a tree, so is it with *ubuntu*. The foundation, the soil within which it is anchored, as well as the building, must be seen as one continuous whole-ness rather than independent fragments of reality. Accordingly, African ontology and epistemology must be understood as two aspects of one and the same reality. We shall adopt a philosophical approach in our clarification of *ubuntu* philosophy.

In terms of geographic demarcation we agree partially with the delimitation of De Tejada (1979). Thus the *ubuntu* philosophy we are about to discuss 'goes from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar'.<sup>2</sup> However, this delimitation is questionable since the Sahara desert is not the indelible birthmark of Africa. For this reason, the meaning and import of human interaction before the birth of the Sahara desert must be taken into account. We shall not, however, pursue this line of inquiry in the present reading.

### PHILOSOPHY IN *UBUNTU*

It is best, philosophically, to approach this term as an hyphenated word, namely, *ubu-ntu*. *Ubuntu* is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *ntu-*. *Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity. *Ubu-* as enfolded be-ing is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*. At the ontological level, there is no strict and literal separation and division between *ubu-* and *-ntu*. *Ubu-* and *-ntu* are not two radically separate and irreconcilably opposed realities. On the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as a one-ness and an indivisible whole-ness. Accordingly, *ubu-ntu* is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people. It is the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology. *Ubu-* as the generalized understanding of be-ing may be said to be distinctly ontological. Whereas *-ntu* as the nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be the distinctly epistemological.

The word *umu-* shares an identical ontological feature with the word *ubu-*. Whereas the

range of *ubu-* is the widest generality, *umu-* tends towards the more specific. Joined together with *-ntu* then, *umu-* becomes *umuntu*. *Umuntu* means the emergence of homo-loguens who is simultaneously a *homo sapiens*. In common parlance it means the human be-ing: the maker of politics, religion, and law. *Umuntu* then is the specific concrete manifestation of *umu-*: it is a movement away from the generalized to the concrete specific. *Umuntu* is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge, and truth. This is an activity rather than an act. It is an ongoing process impossible to stop unless motion itself is stopped. On this reasoning, *ubu-* may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion. We propose to regard such incessant motion as verbal rather than the verb. *-ntu* may be construed as the temporarily having become. In this sense *-ntu* is a noun. The indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of *ubu-ntu* means, therefore, that *ubuntu* is a verbal noun.

Because motion is the principle of be-ing for *ubuntu*, do-ing takes precedence over the doer without at the same time imputing either radical separation or irreconcilable opposition between the two. 'Two' here speaks only to two aspects of one and the same reality. *Ubuntu* then is a gerund. But it is also a gerundive at the same time since at the epistemological level it may crystallize into a particular form of social organization, religion, or law. *Ubuntu* is always a -ness and not an -ism. We submit that this logic of *ub-ntu* also applies to *hu-* and *-nhu* in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. Therefore it may not be rendered as hunhuism<sup>3</sup> as Samkange (1980) has done. The -ism suffix gives the erroneous impression that we are dealing with verbs and nouns as fixed and separate entities existing independently. They thus function as fixations to ideas and practices which are somewhat dogmatic and hence unchangeable. Such dogmatism and immutability constitute the false necessity based upon fragmentative thinking. This latter is the thinking—based on the subjectverb-object understanding of the structure of language—which posits a fundamental irreconcilable opposition in be-ing becoming. On the basis of this imputed opposition be-ing becoming is fragmented into pieces of reality with an independent existence of their own.

Without the speech of *umuntu*, *ubu-* is condemned to unbroken silence. The speech of *umuntu* is thus anchored in, revolves around, and is ineluctably oriented towards *ubu-*. The language of *umuntu* 'relevates', that is, it directs and focuses the entire epistemological domain towards the ontology of *ubu-*. This it does by the contemporaneous and indissoluble coupling of *ubu-* and *umuntu* through the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu (motho ke motho ka batho)*. Although the English language does not exhaust the meaning of this maxim or aphorism, it may nonetheless be construed to mean that to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them. *Ubuntu*, understood as be-ing human (humanness); a humane, respectful, and polite attitude towards others constitutes the core meaning of this aphorism. *Ubu-ntu* then not only describes a condition of be-ing, insofar as it is indissolubly linked to *umuntu*, but it is also the recognition of be-ing becoming and not, we wish to emphasize, be-ing and becoming.

In this sense, it is simultaneously a gerund and a gerundive since the latter is implied in the imperative, *nga bantu*. In other words, be-ing human is not enough. One is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being. What is decisive then is to prove oneself to be the embodiment of *ubu-ntu (botho)* because the fundamental

ethical, social, and legal judgement of human worth and human conduct is based upon *ubu-ntu*. The judgement, pronounced with approval or disapproval respectively, is invariably expressed in these terms: *ke motho* or *gase motho*. In the original language, in this case the Sotho cluster in the Bantu-speaking grouping, these expressions may not be interpreted literally since in literal terms they mean he/she is a human be-ing or she/he is not a human be-ing. A literal interpretation boils down to an affirmation or negation of the obvious if we restrict ourselves to the biological definition of a human being. Even worse, the negation would ultimately be meaningless since its assertion neither abolishes nor alters the biological definition or nature of a human being. Thus the affirmation or negation of *ubu-ntu* (*botho*) is a metaphor for ethical, social, and legal judgement of human worth and human conduct. In the sphere of politics, the veritable arena for the making of law, *ubu-ntu* is reaffirmed as the basis of judgement in the three mentioned domains of human life by the maxim: *kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, meaning, the source and justification of royal power is the people.<sup>4</sup> Even here, *ubu-ntu* recurs with stubborn consistency because *ba-tho* (*ba-ntu*) is simply the plural form of *mo-tho* (*umu-ntu*). Accordingly, the sphere of politics and law is not only suffused with *ubu-ntu* but it is also based upon it. Cumulatively, these considerations together constitute the basis for our submission that *ubuntu* is the philosophical foundation of African philosophy among the Bantu-speaking peoples.

#### AGAINST THE FRAGMENTATION OF BE-ING

One of the primary functions of language is to break the silence of be-ing. Only if and after language has broken the silence of being is it possible to commence conversation with or about being. The following emerges in the execution of this function. We have the structure of the doer engaged in the activity of doing and, frequently the doing is directed towards the object. Thus we have the noun<sup>5</sup> (subject)—the verb<sup>6</sup>—the object as the apparent structure of language. This structure is supposed to be inherent to language. Furthermore, the general view appears to be that this apparent structure of language determines the sequence of thought. Thought is supposed not only to follow this pattern but also to reveal the separate and independent existence of the noun on the one hand and the object on the other. So the idea arises that the subject-object distinction is a fundamental and ineradicable ontological datum. According to this reasoning, the verb then functions as the vehicle of mediation between the subject and the object. On this reasoning, the logic of separate, distinct, and independent existence is already ontologically established. What is required, therefore, is only an elucidation of this logic.

Feeding upon this putative ontological verity, the elucidation unfolds in the positing of the noun as the source of all activity in relation to be-ing. This places the doer, the noun or subject, in the position of moulding and ordering be-ing. Be-ing as a wholeness is thus the object of the subject. Moulded being becomes then the reality. It becomes the representation and the order of be-ing because the represented shifts ordinary be-ing systematically to the remotest background. The do-ing, just like being as the possibility condition for moulding and ordering, recedes progressively and almost imperceptibly to the background. This obliviousness of do-ing and the imperceptible derecognition of be-ing as the possibility condition for moulding and ordering is what we mean by the

fragmentation of being as a wholeness.

Positing the noun as the source of all activity in relation to be-ing also involves the idea that the noun (subject)—in this case the human being—is the centre of the universe. This idea is, however, questionable because in all probability the universe has got no centre at all.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, neither as the noun nor the gerund may the doer be construed as the centre of the universe. The stubborn persistence and tenacity of this idea means that the human being, as the noun, is the causative factor in the establishment and preservation of political and social organization.

Seen from an ontological and epistemological point of view, the in-istence<sup>8</sup> of the subject through language, as the cause of political and social organization, is based upon a false opposition between be-ing and becoming. Instead of recognizing only be-ing becoming, that is, infrangible incessant motion, language insists upon the fragmentation of be-ing becoming into be! and becoming. The critical point to note here—and this is our view as well—is that: 'Being and Becoming are not to be opposed one to the other; they express two related aspects of reality'.<sup>9</sup> According to the imposed separation and opposition between be-ing and becoming, be! is order and becoming is chaos. The divide between the two is not only complete but it is perceived as a fundamental and irreconcilable opposition between them. This kind of opposition precludes the possibility of the birth of order out of apparent chaos. Order can therefore not come out of non-equilibrium perceived as chaos.

Be-ing becoming, the incessant flow of motion is perceived as chaos since it is considered to provide neither certainty nor equilibrium. The experience of non-equilibrium is thus the basic problem of human existence. To solve this problem language invokes the concept of order as the means to establish and maintain equilibrium in human relations. But since the projected order is based upon an unbridgeable opposition between be-ing and becoming, how then can 'order' come out of chaos? The question cannot be answered unless we ground 'order' in the very experience of fundamental disequilibrium in be-ing. By so doing we may well hold that order not only can but does indeed come out of apparent chaos.<sup>10</sup>

Language crystallizes into the imperative that be-ing becoming must be!, that is, it must cease becoming and remain only be!: it is. This be! it is; is a veritable caricature of be-ing becoming. It is the linguistic order which is no more than the fragmentation and thus a distortion of ordinary be-ing. The separation of be-ing becoming and the invention of the opposition, be-ing and becoming, through the insertion of be! is ontologically and epistemologically questionable. Pursuant to this line of question ing we propose to attempt an answer to the following question. What would reality look like if be-ing becoming were not at all fragmented? For a tentative but no less plausible answer we now turn to consider the rheomode language. The rheomode: The philosophical language of *ubuntu*. The rheomode is derived from the Greek verb 'rheo' meaning to flow. It is a 'new mode' of language '...trying to find out whether it is possible to create a new structure that is not so prone toward fragmentation as is the present one'.<sup>11</sup> It is a critique of a thought and language structure which assumes and imposes a strict divide and a necessary sequence in terms of subject-verb-object. It is an appeal for the understanding of entities as the dimensions, forms, and modes of the incessant flow of simultaneously multi-directional motion. This understanding speaks to be-ing rather than be! It sustains

and at the same time preserves the wholeness and not the whole of be-ing. Whole cannot appropriately describe be-ing since it already implies the fixation of be-ing and its replacement by being. Precisely because motion cannot be stopped, since in the very act of stopping motion is already present, we cannot talk about the whole of be-ing as though be-ing had attained to the state of complete stagnation: absolute rest. The suffix-ness is indispensable since it underlines the importance of this logical impossibility and puts into sharp relief the ancient opposition between motion and rest as principles of being.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the subject-verb-object linguistic structure that we have discussed already, the rheomode language takes the verb as its point of departure. In this way the incessant flow of motion as be-ing is preserved because the verb pertains to do-ing rather than do! Together the suffixes -ing and -ness preserve the idea of being as a whole-ness.<sup>13</sup> Since there is always the doer in the do-ing, the rheomode language understands the verb as the verbal noun, that is to say, the gerund.

In our view the verb not only presupposes but it is also the embodiment of the doer. The activity or action of the verb is, minus the effect of certain illnesses, inseparable from the doer. The doer do-ing; present continuous tense is in itself at any given moment the embodiment of the potentiality for an infinite variety of an unceasing activity of merging and converging. The present tense, being itself only a specific mode of incessant motion, is always continuous. To use a biological metaphor, we may say that the present continuous tense is like an infinite chain of dangling babies, youths, and adults all perpetually connected to their mothers through unseverable umbilical cords. Accordingly, we hold that the gerund rather than the verb is the ontological basis of the rheomode language.

The logic of *ubu-ntu* is distinctly rheomodic in character. It is the logic of and for the preservation of be-ing as a whole-ness. Accordingly, it is against the fragmentation of be-ing through language. The rheomodic character of *ubu-ntu* underlies the widely recognized view that the African philosophic view of the universe is holistic. Here it must be emphasized that the correctness of this view would be enhanced by discarding hol-ism as either the definition or description of the African philosophic view of the universe. Instead, the term holon-ness should be used. It is appropriate as it speaks directly against the fragmentation of be-ing, especially through language, and defines the African philosophic understanding of be-ing as a wholeness. Epistemologically, be-ing is conceived as a perpetual and universal movement of sharing and exchange of the forces of life. The African philosophic conception of the universe is, to borrow from the Greek, pantareic. On this view, 'order' cannot be once established and fixed for all time.<sup>14</sup>

The African philosophic conception of the universe is not only pantareic but it is musical as well. It is thus rooted in 'its musical conception of the universe'.<sup>15</sup> This makes it dynamic. We certainly agree with De Tejada's suggestion that the musical conception of the universe can result in two interpretations of the musical rhythm, namely, the rational and the emotional. However, we definitely disagree with his ascription of the 'emotional' as a distinctive feature of Bantu law and, by extension African philosophy. First, the ascription is an uncritical repetition of the tradition of philosophic racism in Western philosophy. The basic thesis of this tradition is that Aristotle's 'man is a rational animal' was not spoken of the African, the Amerindian, and the Australasian: all the indigenous people of their countries from time immemorial. De Tejada's not infrequent



use and appropriation of 'unserer Logik', 'unserer rationalen Logik'<sup>16</sup> coupled with his express ascription of Bantu thought to the 'magical' and the emotional speak to an exclusivism<sup>17</sup> which is psychologically more revealing. Historically, it is an inadvertent transmission of a fundamentally questionable tradition. Second, the ascription does to a large extent undermine his own powerful criticism of researchers and scholars of Bantu philosophy who were bent to find European thought patterns and institutions in Africa rather than recognize what Bantu philosophy was in its own right.<sup>18</sup>

Third, De Tejada's ascription is inconsistent with our understanding of be-ing as a wholeness. It undermines its own foundation because the African world-view upon which *ubuntu* philosophy is based is fundamentally holonistic. As such it is a criticism of fragmentative thinking; precisely what De Tejada has fallen prey to by maintaining a radical opposition between the 'rational' and the 'emotional'. African philosophy would not subscribe to the radical opposition between reason and emotion. Discourse on the psychosomatic is meaningful even to the Western mind. Understanding thought as a system means recognizing it as a whole-ness which includes not only the indivisibility but also the mutual dependence of the 'rational' and the 'emotional'.<sup>19</sup>

### **MUSIC: THE CONCEPTION AND HARMONY OF BE-ING IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

The dance of be-ing is an invitation to participate actively in and through the music of be-ing rather than being a passive spectator thereof. This explains the difference of both attitude and reaction towards music (the dance of be-ing) between the African and the non-Africans. For the Africans the invitation of the dance of being is undeclinable since it is understood as an ontological and epistemological imperative. Indeed, in Northern Sotho, for example, one of the Bantu-speaking languages, there is a saying that *Kosa ga e theeletse o e duletse* (you don't listen to music seated). This underlines the African attitude and reaction towards the dance of be-ing as an ontological and epistemological imperative to be in tune. To dance along with be-ing is to be attuned to be-ing.

Instead of understanding and underlining this African attitude towards music, the prevailing explanation holds tenaciously to the naive view that Africans are by nature a people governed by emotion. Hence, so the naive view continues, Africans spontaneously dance to music and the rhythm of their dance consistently rhymes with the music. Accordingly, so the naive view continues, Africans are persistently in search of harmony in all spheres of life. The conclusion that Africans are persistently in search of harmony in all spheres of life is pertinently true of African thought. The concrete expression of African thought is the continual quest for consensus aimed to establish harmony. Harmony gives excellence and beauty to music. To posit excellence as an aim and to actually achieve it is by every test a rational act. So it is also with the creation of beauty. Although aesthetic judgement might be spontaneous, it is by no means necessarily devoid of reason. The drum as a basic instrument in African music is a pertinent example here. The premises upon which De Tejada discusses Bantu thought are questionable insofar as they amount to the restriction of reason to the West. Our criticism in the context of this questioning applies to De Tejada's otherwise adequate description of the drum as the basic instrument in the Bantu understanding of be-ing as musical harmony.<sup>20</sup> Reasoned

spontaneity is a familiar theme in poetics. Accordingly, the African philosophic conception of the universe as a musical harmony cannot but be the expression of reason through emotion.

It is therefore understandable why many Africans not only display lack of interest in but also remain expressly surprised by the habit of non-Africans to be glued for hours as passive spectators to the musical rendition of Bach, Mozart, Händel, or Beethoven. The African surprise then speaks not only to attitudinal difference but more importantly, it reveals the underlying ontologico-epistemological difference. We are fully aware that the inherent limitations of our musical metaphor—after all non-Africans dance to pop and even Reggae music—might be somewhat exaggerated. However, we hold that passive spectatorship on hearing the music of be-ing is understandable only as a necessary posture for the fragmentation of be-ing. It is a prior and necessary condition for the fragmentation of be-ing. Despite its imagined necessity, this condition is by no means sufficient because the unlimitable elasticity, as well as the infinite resilience of be-ing guarantee the failure of every effort to fragment it.

### **THE RHEOMODE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR OVERALL WORLD-VIEW<sup>21</sup>**

One of the implications of the rheomode language for the dominant world-view based upon fragmentative thinking is that our idea of fact and truth must change. It is no longer unproblematical to hold that a 'fact' is an objective state of affairs susceptible to verification and, by implication falsification. To make such an assertion without reference to the relationship—and a complex one at that—between the supposedly objective state of affairs and the declarant is to ignore unduly a crucial dimension in the construction of 'facts'.<sup>22</sup>

Our idea of truth must be reviewed from the stand-point of rheomodic thought. According to rheomodic thought, truth may be defined as the contemporaneous convergence of perception and action.<sup>23</sup> Human beings are not made by the truth. They are the makers of the truth.

Even perception is not wholly neutral. In this sense it is more appropriate for humans to live the truth rather than living in and by the truth. The former captures the basic tenet of African philosophy, whereas the latter speaks to the prevailing feature of Western philosophy. To put it in another way; the expression 'African time' in its negative connotation, for example, misses the basic point pertaining to the philosophic difference between African and Western philosophy. For African philosophy human beings make time and they are not made by time. Therefore, it is both natural and logical to live time. But for Western philosophy primacy is accorded to living in time. Quite often time is already there as an empty space to be filled. Hence the proliferation of diaries to note appointments and all that needs to be done to fill up the space of time until death. (It is salutary to note that consonant with contemporary scientific research into time-space Western philosophy may in the long run persuade the Westerner to live time rather than live in it.)<sup>24</sup> Seen from this perspective, truth is simultaneously participatory and interactive. It is active, continual, and discerning perception leading to action.<sup>25</sup> As such, it is distinctly relative rather than absolute.

## THE METAPHYSICS OF *UBUNTU* PHILOSOPHY

*Umntu* is the embodiment of the ontology and epistemology of *ubu-*. *Ubu-* as the generalized and widest be-ing is marked by uncertainty. This is because it is by definition motion involving the possibility of infinite unfoldment and concrete manifestation into a multiplicity of forms and organisms. *Umntu* is one such organism in the whole-ness of be-ing as fundamental uncertainty.

A specific element of the experience and concept of whole-ness in *ubuntu* philosophy is the understanding of be-ing in terms of three interrelated dimensions. We find the dimension of the living—*umuntu*—which makes the speech and knowledge of be-ing possible. The second dimension is that of those beings who have passed away from the world of the living. These beings departed from the world of the living through death. It is thus understood that death has discontinued their existence only with regard to the concrete, bodily, and everyday life as we know it. But it is believed that death does not totally discontinue the life of these departed beings. Instead, they are believed to enter into and continue living in a world unknown to those left behind. On the ground of this belief the departed are called the living-dead (*abaphansi*). A rather contested term, ‘ancestors’ continues to be used as a synonym of the living-dead. The living-dead continue to live despite their departure from the world of the living. In this sense they are immortal. The third dimension is that of the yet-to-be-born. These are beings of the future. It is the task of the living to see to it that the yet-to-be-born are in fact born.

Because the *ubuntu* understanding of be-ing involves three levels of human ex-istence, we call it the onto-triadic structure of be-ing. Since two of these levels pertain to beings which are either unknown or unseen, we may refer to it as the ontology of invisible beings. The ontology of invisible beings is the discourse about the unknown from the stand-point of the living. The unknown remains unknowable on the side of the living. Yet, it is believable and because of this belief it has a direct influence on the life of the living. In this sense, the belief in the unknown unknowable is metaphysics. It is a claim, based upon belief, to knowledge about beings outside the domain of the world of the living. The ontology of invisible beings is thus the basis of *ubuntu* metaphysics.

According to the *ubuntu* understanding of be-ing, the world of metaphysics is the world of *u-nkulu-nkulu*: the greatest of the great; the ineffable. The ineffable is neither male nor female. But if it must be genderized at all it is female-male (hermaphroditic) according to the logic of *u-* (Nguni languages) or *mo-* (Sotho languages). The main point though is that *u-nkulu-nkulu* is neither definable nor describable. This preserves the essence of *u-nkulu-nkulu* as unknowable. Therefore, it is best to remain quiet about the unknowable and simply recognize the ineffability of *mo-dimo* (*unkulunkulu*). This, it is submitted, is a basic starting-point to explain why *ubuntu* philosophy and religion have got no theology.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE *UBUNTU* ONTO-TRIADIC CONCEPTION OF BE-ING

The nature of human relations in the world of the living is based upon and influenced by the onto-triadic understanding of be-ing. Uncertainty, fear, joy and sorrow, solitude and

companionship, ill and good health, are some of the phenomena which define the fundamental instability of the world of the living. The question is: how does one respond to the fundamental instability of being?

In *ubuntu* philosophy a human being in the world of the living must be *umuntu* in order to give a response to the challenge of the fundamental instability of being. *Umuntu* cannot attain *ubuntu* without the intervention of the living-dead. The living-dead are important to the upkeep and protection of the family of the living. This is also true with regard to the community at large. For this reason, it is imperative that the leader of the community, together with the elders of the community, must have good relations with their living-dead. This speaks to the *ubuntu* understanding of cosmic harmony. It must be preserved and maintained by translating it into harmony in all spheres of life. Thus African religion, politics, and law are based on and suffused with the experience and concept of cosmic harmony. Religion, politics, and law must be anchored upon the understanding of the cosmos as the continual strife for harmony. It is such anchorage which gives them authenticity and legitimacy. And this is the basis for consensus as the distinctive feature of *ubuntu* philopraxis. Peace through the concrete realization of justice is the fundamental law of *ubuntu* philosophy. Justice without peace is the negation of the strife towards cosmic harmony. But peace without justice is the dislocation of *umuntu* from the cosmic order.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Ki-Zerbo, J., quoted by De Tejada, F.E., in 'The future of Bantu law', in *ARSP*, Beiheft Neue Folge, 11, 1979:304.
- 2 De Tejada, F.E., *ARSP*, 1979, op. cit.: 304.
- 3 Samkange, S. and Samkange, T.M., *Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Graham Publishing: Salisbury, 1980.
- 4 For an extended discussion of this topic see Ramose, M.B., 'African democratic tradition: Oneness, consensus and openness: A reply to Wamba-dia-Wamba', in *Quest*, VI(2) December 1992:62–83.
- 5 We adopt the meaning of the term 'noun' as explained in the *Shorter Oxford English dictionary*, 3rd edn., II, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- 6 We adopt the meaning of the term 'verb' as explained in the dictionary referred to in note 5 above as well as that contained in *The Oxford dictionary of English*, 2nd edn., X, 1989.
- 7 Cantore, E., *Scientific man*, New York: ISH Publications, 1977:403.
- 8 I am indebted to Verhack for the hyphenated use of the term. It is clearly a departure from the ordinary usage in terms of spelling and meaning. However, as is evident in the present essay, Verhack and I do not necessarily attach the same meaning to the term. See, Verhack, L., 'Freiheit und Ek-in-sistenz', in E.Schadel and U.Voigt (eds.), *Sein-Erkennen-Handeln*, 7, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994:649–657.
- 9 Prigogine, I. et al. *Order out of chaos, Man's dialogue with nature*, London: Fontana, 1985:310.
- 10 Prigogine, I. et al., op. cit.:287.

- 11 Bohm, D. *Wholeness and the implicate order*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980:30–31.
- 12 Charles-Saunders Peirce states: ‘I start from and in and with and as Motion. For me, in the “spiritual” as well as the physical world, there is of course no Rest as the ultimate goal or as the antithesis of Motion. The changeless is less than the dead, it is the non-existent... I often say that I am determined to be free and free to be determined. Why? Because of the unnamed Third yet lying in the womb of Motion, to which both the determinate and the indeterminate have reference ... To me the idea of the new, the young, the fresh, the possible, are deeper than any time-import, and are indeterminate only in a special sense... The best I can do is say, “I wish of the Future, we could begin to talk of the Unreached as the Yet distant”’, in R.Kevelson, *Law as a system of signs*, New York: Plenum Press, 1988:v.
- 13 Bohm, D. *Wholeness and the implicate order*, op.cit.: 30.
- 14 Griaule, M. *Conversations with Ogotemmel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965:137.
- 15 De Tejada, F.E., *ARSP* 1979, op. cit.: 306–307.
- 16 De Tejada, F.E., ‘Bemerkungen über der Grundlagen des Banturechts’, *ARSP*, 46, 1960:522–523.
- 17 Adam, L., ‘Modern ethnological jurisprudence in theory and practice’, *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, Third Series, xvi, 1934:221.
- 18 De Tejada, F.E., ‘Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen des Banturechts’, *ARSP*, 46, 1960:510–514.
- 19 Bohm, D., *Thought as a system*, London: Routledge and Kegan, 1994:18.
- 20 De Tejada, F.E., *ARSP*, op. cit.: 1960:522–527.
- 21 This subtitle is borrowed verbatim from Bohm’s chapter 2 on the rheomode.
- 22 We have already stated our intention not to discuss the correspondence theory. However, we believe that Bohm’s critique of this theory, evidently from the perspective of rheomodic thought, is worth noting. See Bohm, D. *The undivided universe*, London: Routledge and Kegan, 1993:16–17.
- 23 Bohm, D. *Thought as a system*, op.cit.:181.
- 24 Kimmerle, H. ‘The concept of time as a key-notion for new ideas about development’, in S.B. Diange, and H.Kimmerle (eds.), *Time and development in the thought of Sub-Saharan Africa*, *Studies in Intercultural Philosophy*, 8, 1997:21.
- 25 Bohm, D. *Thought as a system*, op. cit.: 183.

### The concept of truth in the Akan language

#### KWASI WIREDU

Ask any ordinary Akan who speaks English what the Akan word for truth is and, unless he/she has made a special study of the matter, the chances are that the answer will be: *nokware*. In a certain sense this would be right. A little reflection, however, discloses a complication. The opposite of *nokware* is *nkontompo*, which means lies. But the opposite of truth is falsity, not lies.

What seems to have happened is that the Akan has correlated the word ‘truth’ with a

primarily moral, rather than cognitive concept of truth in the Akan language. There are three reasons why this occurred. First, the main preoccupation with truth in the traditional Akan society was moral. Second, the moral concept of truth presupposes the cognitive concept of truth; and third, the English word 'truth' itself is ambiguous. When high-minded publicists wax eloquent in praise of the eternal verities of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, what they have in mind in this reference to truth is truthfulness rather than truth. And it is not only in particularly high-minded contexts that 'truth' is used as a synonym for truthfulness; it is quite a common usage. So we have to say that our non-too-sophisticated Akan had some excuse for his/her translation.

It emerges, then, that *nokware* translates 'truthfulness' rather than truth in the cognitive sense. Naturally we must go on to show how the latter, i.e. the cognitive concept of truth, translates into Akan. But before then let us note one or two things about *nokware*. This word is made up of two words: *ano*, meaning literally mouth, and *koro*, meaning one. *Nokware*, then, means literally being of one mouth. Less literally, it means being of one voice. It is sometimes suggested that this oneness of voice refers to communal unanimity, so that the truth is that which is agreed to by the community. Obviously, the authors of this suggestion have failed to distinguish between *nokware* and the purely cognitive concept of truth. It is intelligible, though extremely implausible, to suggest that truth in the cognitive sense is constituted by communal agreement, but it is not intelligible at all to make the same suggestion about truthfulness. Truthfulness has to do with the relation between what one thinks and what one says. To be truthful is to let one's speech reflect one's thoughts. In this, what others think or say has no particular role to play. And this was not lost upon the traditional Akan. One can conceive of thinking as a kind of talking to oneself without embracing behaviourism; all that is needed is a little flight of metaphor. It then becomes possible to see truthfulness as saying unto others what one would say unto oneself. This is the oneness of voice that is etymologically involved in the word *nokware*.

The idea that truth (cognitive truth) consists in agreement among the members of a community is, in fact, far from the traditional Akan mind, for there is a sharp awareness of the disparity in the cognitive capabilities of the wise men of the community (the *anyansafo*) and the populace (*akwasrafo*). No elitist contempt for the populace is implied here. The Akan are communally oriented people, and consensus is one of their most prized values. Nevertheless, to make communal agreement the essence of truth is an epistemological aberration that cannot be imputed to the Akan.

Of course, truth has something to do with agreement, which is evident in the fact that to say of something that someone has said that it is true implies agreeing with him/her. This is agreement between two points of view which does not necessarily involve a whole community. But community-wide or not, agreement cannot be the essence of truth in the primary sense, for when there is agreement in cognition it is about something being so; the agreement is that something is so, i.e. that it is the case. It is this notion of something being so that connects agreement with truth at all. It is a notion that will loom large in our discussion of the concept of truth in Akan.

It is important to note that *nokware* (truthfulness) involves the concept of truth. To say that somebody is speaking truthfully is to say that the person genuinely believes what he/she is saying to be *true*. Moreover, it also implies that it is in fact true. Apparent

counter-examples are easily accommodated. If, for example, a man speaking sincerely says that there is a cat on the mat when there is, in fact, no cat on the mat, there is a sense in which he speaks truthfully. Certainly, we would not say that he was telling lies. But it would be misleading to say simply that he spoke truthfully when he said that there was a cat on the mat. The most that can be said is that he was being truthful in conveying the impression that he believed that the cat was on the mat.

It is the connection between truthfulness and truth that makes the ambiguity of the English word 'truth' so confusing when it comes to translating into Akan. To say that an *asem* (statement) is *nokware* implies that it is true (cognitively). And so long as one is preoccupied with the affirmative, one might be tempted to think that this is all it means. As soon, however, as one considers the negative, i.e. the case in which we say that something someone has said is not *nokware*, it becomes clear that there is also an element of moral comment in the use of *nokware*. There are a couple of words in Akan which have the same significance as *nokware*. There are *ampa* and *ewom*. *Ampa* implies truth but it has the same excess of meaning over 'truth' that 'truthfulness' has. The word is a unification of the phrase *eye asem pa*, literally 'it is a good piece of discourse'. *Ewom* literally means 'it is in it'.

It is now time to consider the Akan rendition of truth, in its purely cognitive sense. And here we meet with a remarkable fact, which is that there is no one word in Akan for truth. To say that something is true, the Akan say simply that it is so, and truth is rendered as what is so. No undue sophistication is required to understand that, although the Akan do not have a single word for truth, they do have the concept of truth. This concept they express by the phrase *nea ete saa* (a proposition which is so). The word *nea* means 'that which', *ete*, which is a form of 'to', which is the verb 'to be' in Akan, means 'is', and *saa* means 'so'. *Asem* is an all-purpose word which means in the present context, statement or proposition.

Notice that in the case of the adjective 'true', the Akan have a single word *saa* which provides a simple translation. (*Saa*, you will recall, means 'so'). But in English one has both 'is true' and 'is so', whereas in Akan one has only *te saa* ('is so'). This obviously does not indicate any insufficiency in the Akan language, for if 'is true' means the same as 'is so' then one can get along as well with any one of them as with both, as far as the making of truth-claims (i.e. 'is-so' claims) is concerned.

Another linguistic contrast between Akan and English is that there is no word in Akan for the English word 'fact'. A fact in Akan is simply that which is so (*nea ete sad*). Again no insufficiency is indicated; whatever can be said about the world in English using the word 'fact' can be said in Akan using the notion of what is so.

These linguistic contrasts have some very interesting consequences for the theory of truth. Consider the correspondence theory of truth. This is supposed to assert something like this: 'p is true' means 'p corresponds to a fact'. What does this come to in Akan? Simply that 'p *te sad*' which in truth, is nothing more than saying that 'p *te sad*' means 'p *te sad*'. In other words, the correspondence definition amounts to a tautology in Akan. In a certain sense, this might be taken as a verification of the correspondence theory, for it might be said that being a tautology is a specially splendid way of being true. Be that as it may, one thing that cannot be pretended in Akan is that the correspondence theory offers any enlightenment about the notion of being so.

This comes out even more clearly in connection with the following variant of the correspondence theory. Some proponents of the theory sometimes formulate it by saying that a proposition is true if and only if things are as they are said to be in the proposition. Now, as pointed out above, in Akan 'p *te saa*' translates as 'p is so', and this obviously is an abbreviation for 'what the proposition p says things are is as they are'. Accordingly, the theory reduces to tautology that things are as a proposition says they are if and only if things are as they are said to be in the proposition.

Aristotle's famous dictum about truth and falsity which provided Tarski's (1956) intuitive motivation in his semantic conception of truth is a close approximation to the formulation commented upon in the last paragraph. Aristotle says in his *Metaphysics*, 'To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true'.

This is very compressed phrasing, indeed. 'What is' in Aristotle's context, is of course, short for 'what is so'. Translating into Akan, then yields: 'To say of what is so that it is not so, or of what is not so that it is so, is (to say what is) not so, while to say of what is so that it is so, or of what is not so that it is not so, is (to say what is) so.' One can, perhaps, derive some lesson about double negation from this piece of discourse, but certainly no insight into the notion of something being so.

It seems, then, that there are some apparently important issues that can be formulated in English but not in Akan. Such, for example, is the question 'How are true propositions related to facts?' Since this is not because of any insufficiency in the Akan language it might be tempting, at least to an Akan philosopher, to suggest that the issues in question are not really philosophical issues but narrowly linguistic ones due to the character of the vocabulary of English. Now, although it is, I think, correct to say that a problem like the one about the relation between truth and fact arises out of the nature of the vocabulary of English, it does not follow that it is not a genuine philosophical issue in English. The concepts of truth and fact are among the most fundamental concepts of human thought. Without the notion of something being a fact or of a proposition being true thinking is inconceivable unless it be a mere succession of ideas, and even that can be doubted. It seems obvious then, that the relation between the terms 'truth' and 'fact' is a philosophical issue; for, of course, one cannot give a fundamental clarification of any of these foundational concepts in English without relating them one to the other. Yet, since these terms need not be both present in all natural languages, as the case of Akan shows, this task is not inescapable for the human mind. From which it follows that some philosophical problems are not universal. Of course, there must be others that are universal. It must, for example, be apparent from a remark just made that the clarification of the notion of something being so is a universal philosophical problem.

As the point that a problem may be genuinely philosophical and yet dependent on some contingent features of a particular natural language may possibly be controversial, I shall endeavour to reinforce it by analogy with a simple illustration still involving a linguistic contrast between English and Akan. In the English language there occur both the statement forms 'p is equivalent to q' and 'p if and only if q'. It seems obvious that any natural language should have the means of expressing the idea of equivalence; and, indeed, in Akan we have a way of doing so, albeit somewhat circuitously. We say of two equivalent statements that they have the same destination: *ne nyinaa kosi faako*—more



literally, 'they both reach the same place'. Since equivalence is distinct from identity of meaning, we might note, parenthetically that we have a different way of expressing the latter. We say *nsem no mienu ye baako*, the two pieces of discourse are one. The point now is that in Akan we have no such statement form as might be rendered as 'p if and only if q'. We can, of course, assert 'if p then q' (*se p a ende q*) and 'only if p then q' (*se p nkoara a na q*), and the conjunction of these two forms is equivalent to 'p if and only if q'. But the conjunction is not the same form as the biconditional. If we now assert that the statement form 'p if and only if q' is equivalent to '(if p then q) and (if q then p)' we are obviously asserting a logical truth in English, but no such logical truth exists in Akan. There is nothing necessary about the form 'p if and only if q', so that it might be thought obligatory that the Akan should have a phrase literally corresponding to it. Whatever can be expressed by means of that form can be expressed by the Akan way of expressing equivalence as indicated above. It follows that the question whether the relation between 'p if and only if q' and '[(if p then q) and (if q then p)]' is really one of equivalence is a genuine logical issue in English which is, nevertheless, not universal.

The analogy with the question of the relation between truth and fact is quite complete. Just as the relation between 'p if and only if q' and '[(if p then q) and (if q then p)]' is a genuinely logical question which is dependent on a contingent feature of English vocabulary (and that of any similar language) so is the relation between truth and fact a genuine philosophical issue dependent on the English language. And just as any reasoner in English, whether he/she be a native speaker or not, will have to be conversant with the logic of the two statement forms, so anybody essaying a theory of truth in the medium of the English language will have to give some attention to the relation between truth and fact. It may well be that there are—indeed I am sure that there are—ontological pitfalls into which native as well as non-native speakers of English are liable to fall in their thought about this relation.

There is a fairly obvious lesson that can be drawn from the foregoing observations. If some philosophical and logical problems—actually logical problems are philosophical problems—are relative to particular natural languages, then they cannot be as fundamental as those that are universal to all natural languages. Take, for example, the concept of implication. Any natural language will have to be capable of expressing this concept. Furthermore, if we use the term 'entailment' to refer to the relation between the premises and conclusion of a valid argument, then we can raise the question whether and how entailment can be defined in terms of implication. Such a question would be universal to all natural languages in the sense that it can be posed for any intuitively workable logic that may be constructed in any natural language. In comparison with this, the question of the relation between 'p if and only if q' and '[(if p then q) and (if q then p)]' is of very much less moment for the analysis of human reasoning.

Consider now the issue of the relation between fact and truth, on the one hand, and the problem of clarifying the notion of something being so, on the other. Since, as I have suggested above, no cogent thinking is possible without the notion of something being so but one can reason to one's heart's content in Akan without any recourse to any word or phrase separately standing for fact (that is, in addition to the term expressing the idea of being so), it follows that the second problem (that is, concerning being so), is more fundamental than the first (that is, as to the relation to truth of fact).

Suppose the problem of relating truth to fact is solved in the English language. Still, if there is a problem of truth in the Akan language at all—and there surely is—the position would be that the question has not even begun to be raised. In Akan the question would correspond to: ‘What is meant by saying that a statement is so, that is, what is meant by saying that things are as a statement says they are?’ It is here obvious that certain versions of the correspondence theory of truth can at best only be part of the fundamental problem of truth, not part of its solution. The correspondence theory begins to shape up as an attempted solution only when a certain account of the nature of facts is offered. Some accounts, whether correct or incorrect, will not satisfy this requirement. For example, defining ‘fact’ simply as ‘true proposition’ may be correct, but it would leave us exactly where we started in the matter of the more fundamental problem of truth. On the other hand, an ontological interpretation of ‘fact’ may take us somewhere, though not necessarily in a desirable direction. Suppose, for example, that facts are construed as interconnected objects of a certain sort, then to say that a statement corresponds to fact would mean claiming a certain relation between the statement and the interconnected objects in question. From the point of view of the Akan language this could be interpreted as saying that being so is a relation between a statement and a certain configuration of objects.

In the following passage taken from Russell’s *Philosophical essays* he seems to me to be advancing a theory of this sort:

When we judge that Charles I died on the scaffold, we have before us, (not one object but) several objects, namely, Charles I and dying and the scaffold. Similarly, when we judge that Charles I died in his bed, we have before us Charles I, dying and his bed... Thus in this view judgement is a relation of the mind to several other terms: when these other terms have *inter se* a ‘corresponding’ relation, the judgement is true; when not, it is false (Russell 1966:153).

(Note that since Charles I died many years ago, the objects which one is supposed to have before one’s mind when one makes a judgement now to that effect must be of a rather unearthly nature). Russell gave a somewhat more refined formulation of the correspondence theory in later life (cf Russell 1948:170). However, refined or not, it seems to me that when the correspondence theory is given meat in an ontological fashion it becomes open to fatal objections.

But it is not my intention to discuss the merits or demerits of the correspondence theory. I merely wish to make a metadoctrinal point which reflection on the Akan language enables us to see, which is that a theory of truth is not of any real universal significance unless it offers some account of the notion of being so. This some correspondence theories fail to do.

Let me in this connection make one or two comments about Tarski’s (1956) semantic conception of truth since it is closely related to the correspondence theory of truth and is, besides, of great independent interest. The apparent intuition which motivates Tarski’s theory is the same as that which underlies the correspondence theory at the level at which, as I have tried to show, it has a philosophical interest only relatively to the English

language and kindred languages. (Recall, in this connection, our comment on Aristotle's dictum.) Still, Tarski's theory—or a part of it—has the merit of providing a logically precise formulation of the idea of a statement being so, that is, the idea of things being as a statement says they are. A Tarskian 'T' sentence to the effect that 'Snow is white' is true if and only if 'snow is white' may be taken as a logically precise instantiation of the idea that to say that a statement is true is to say that things are as they are said to be in the statement. In Akan, since 'is true' is *te saa* which means 'is so', that is, 'is how things are', the Tarski sentence becomes 'snow is white' is as things are if and only if 'snow is white'. In this form the sentence sounds trivially truistic, and is indeed so, if it is intended even as a partial theory of truth. But it can acquire a more substantial significance if it is made the starting point of an inquiry into the status of the second 'snow is white' in the Tarski equivalence. This component gives a 'concrete' instantiation of the idea of something being so. If, as I suggest, the puzzle about truth is a puzzle about the notion of something being so, then the use of Tarski's equivalence (in this connection) can only be to provide us in its second component with a vivid instantiation of our abstract notion of something being so. Such presentation can concentrate the mind and possibly lead to an illuminating elucidation. However, in itself, Tarski's 'T' sentence, even as completed by the rest of the theory, can only provide a possible starting point in the solution of the problem of truth.

The other main theories of truth, namely, the pragmatic and coherence theories, do not suffer any trivialization on being translated into Akan but they take on a new look if they are measured against the task of elucidating the notion of something being so, which reflection on the concept of truth in the Akan language presses on our mind.

### Logic and rationality

#### GODWIN S.SOGOLO

There are several philosophical conceptions of human beings. One of such conceptions which remains vague is that humans are rational beings. And it points to a basic quality which all humans are thought to share in common. Not only are they all assumed to be rational, it is believed that their thought processes are essentially governed by the same principles. It is further believed that in some cultures these principles have been well systematized and expressly stated; that the individuals internalize them and that a few even preoccupy themselves with the business of thinking about these thought processes themselves.

Logic is one of the core areas of philosophy. Over the years it has been assumed that the ability to reason logically and to draw valid inferences is an essential characteristic of all human races. Philosophers, ancient and modern, have always worked along this presumption and in the comparative study of cultures the main aim of students is to satisfy themselves that all cultures operate within the framework of these logical principles. When confronted with a belief or some aspect of a people's thought, students are expected to test whether or not such cultural items conform with the canons of logic.

Aristotle was the first philosopher to systematize all forms of positive thinking about thought, the result of which was the invention of formal logic. Since then, formal logic

has had no rival except the introduction of dialectic logic in the Western Europe of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Even then, with this challenge and the radical idea that there are two forms of thought, the general belief remains that formal logic is indispensable for correct thinking; some would say it is the only way to correct thinking. Formal logic has thus been described as the systematic formulation of the instinctive logic of common sense.

There are three interrelated fundamental laws in formal logic. The first and most important of them is the law of identity, which simply states that a thing is always equal to or identical with itself (A equals A). The second law of formal logic is the law of contradiction, which strictly speaking is a negative formulation of the first law. The law of contradiction states that a thing cannot be unequal to or different from itself (A is not non-A). The third law referred to as the law of the excluded middle combines the first and the second. The law of the excluded middle states that if a thing is equal to itself it cannot be unequal to or different from itself (if A equals A it cannot equal non-A). By their formulations these laws imply absolute difference and absolute identity in which things are mutually exclusive. A thing cannot be two different and mutually exclusive things at one and the same time.

The example which Aristotle used in illustrating the principles of formal logic is of great relevance to our discussion. According to him:

A man cannot simultaneously apprehend first, that man is essentially animal, i.e. cannot be other than animal, and secondly, that man is not essentially animal, that is, that he is other than animal. That is to say, a man is essentially a man and can never be or be thought of as not being a man (Aristotle quoted in Novack 1975:21).

The reasoning seems self-evident and that indeed is the essence of formal logic. For thousands of years humankind has thought and acted in obedience to these laws even before they were systematically formulated. The reason is that they fit readily into our perception of the interrelationship of things in the universe.

Our conceptual experience compels us to accept the law of identity that definite objects and traits of things persist, that they maintain recognizable similarities despite the phenomenon of change. Common-sense experience tells us that essential continuity exists in nature and that the human mind has no choice but to reckon with this perceived continuity. The significance of formalizing our reasoning process is clear from what Novack says of the law of identity.

The law of identity directs us to recognize likeness amidst diversity, permanence amidst changes, to single out the basic similarities between separated and apparently different instances and entities, to uncover the real bonds of unity between them, to trace the connections between different and consecutive phases of the same phenomena. That is why the discovery and the amplification of this law was so epoch-making in the history of scientific thought and why we continue to honour Aristotle for grasping its extraordinary significance. That is also why mankind continues to act and to think in accordance with this basic law of formal logic (1975:24–25).

The appeal of formal logic to commonsense has been so overwhelming that for a long time it was thought that logical principles were prior to all experience and that they constituted 'the *a priori* order of the universe'.

It should now be clear why scholars of different ages and orientations have always felt the inclination to insist that for any form of thought or action to be judged intelligible or rational it has to conform to the rules of formal logic. Contemporary literature on human societies abounds with theories whose basic assumption is that there are these ineluctable logical principles by which all human experience must be assessed. In particular, the works of classical anthropologists dating back to the intellectualist school pioneered by Tylor and sociologists such as Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim, are clear manifestations of this assumption. For them, there is only one way of judging the intelligibility of any thought system and that is to see whether or not it conforms to the rules of formal logic.

Lévy-Bruhl (1923:21) seems to be more heavily influenced by this idea than his contemporaries in his general classification of human societies into two categories, those with a 'primitive mentality' and those with a 'civilized mentality'. Africans by this broad division fall into the former. But what is it, in Lévy-Bruhl's conception, that distinguishes the 'primitive' from the 'civilized'? The answer, according to him, is that the former is characterized by a pre-logical mode of thought while the latter is marked by logical thought. Lévy-Bruhl describes a prelogical thought as one that is unscientific, uncritical, and contains evident contradictions. People with such thought differ not in degree but in quality from those with logical minds.

It is not too clear what Lévy-Bruhl means by 'pre-logical'. He is quoted to have denied the equation of pre-logical either with a-logical or with anti-logical.

Prelogical does not mean alogical or antilogical. Prelogical, applied to primitive mentality, means simply that it does not go out of its way, as we do, to avoid contradiction. It does not always present the same logical requirements (Lévy-Bruhl 1923:21).

By this, Lévy-Bruhl seems to grant that these thoughts have their own logical principles, albeit of a different sort—what he calls the laws of 'mystical participation' (1923:21). He does not seem to insist too firmly on the qualitative peculiarities of these modes of thought. One possible interpretation is that the logic or reason Lévy-Bruhl finds in these thought systems is still in its rudimentary form, still infantile, so to speak.

Note that Lévy-Bruhl was writing in an era when the notion of evolution had its strongest grip on the minds of intellectuals—when almost everything, animal, man, and even thought, was placed in some position within the evolutionary hierarchy. Lévy-Bruhl possibly saw his comparative analysis of societies and their modes of thought as parallel to Darwin's theory of organic matter. The other possible reason why Lévy-Bruhl had to concede that there is some rudimentary form of logic among traditional people might be that he entertained some doubt about how a people totally devoid of reason or who perpetually live in a 'dream world' could have survived for so long.

However, no matter what concessions or modifications Lévy-Bruhl made, the fact is that he studied traditional thought purely as a formal logician. It is from this view-point that he finds contradictions in assertions such as when the Nuer says 'twins are birds' or

'crocodiles are spirits'. As Evans-Pritchard (1976) explains, the Nuer is not saying that twins are like birds, but that they are birds; he is not saying that crocodiles symbolize spirits but that they are spirits. From Lévy-Bruhl's point of view this is a clear violation of the rules of logic which do not permit a thing to be itself and yet another thing. The Nuer is therefore involved in contradiction by saying that a twin is a twin (A is A) and at the same time that a twin is a bird (A is non-A).

Lévy-Bruhl's suggestion is that such thought is intelligible only to a mind that applies the law of mystical participation. One is tempted to ignore Lévy-Bruhl as an obsolete thinker or simply as unhelpful in our bid to understand traditional modes of thought. But unfortunately, his notion of the law of mystical participation has been strongly echoed by Senghor, one of the greatest thinkers Africa has produced. For Senghor, the traditional man does not differentiate between the organic and the inorganic, between the subject and the object, between himself and the land he inhabits. Like Lévy-Bruhl, Senghor attributes some form of reason to the traditional man. Both insist that the traditional man's reasoning is of a different sort because it is determined by mystical representations. So, what Lévy-Bruhl calls the logic of sentiments' Senghor describes as 'intuitive reason'.

There is not much to hang onto from these unargued bold assertions of Lévy-Bruhl and Senghor. They, however, provide us with a very significant lead by insisting that the peculiar features of traditional thought which they talk about are not biologically or psychologically imposed but socially acquired. They are an inherent part of the social milieu into which individuals are born and which they leave behind when they die. To say that these modes of thought are superimposed on the minds of the individual is to evade our main concern which is with the structure of the mind that entertains such thoughts. However, recognizing the potency of society in moulding the mind of the individual, one is inclined to look at the matter via the social structure involved.

A number of attempts have been made to free traditional thought from the charge of irrationality. Of these the most forceful is the argument that different forms of life call for different paradigms of discourse. Following Wittgenstein's claim that the logic of our reasoning resides in the language we speak, Winch (1958) rejects any attempt to assess the rationality of the logic of science. Science, according to him, operates with its own concept of reality which is determined by a set of paradigms. In a different form of life such a language of discourse is inapplicable. Winch thus rejects Evans-Pritchard's view in which reality is seen as an independent standard of measure. Holding to this relativist position, Winch (1958) also rejects the claim by Lévy-Bruhl that there are some universal principles of reasoning by which any given thought system can be judged to be logical or illogical.

In Winch's view, there are different forms of life and each has its own criteria of assessing what is logically intelligible and what is not. He defines a form of life as a set of linguistic rules and practices with specific procedures for judging the validity or otherwise of given claims. In direct opposition to Lévy-Bruhl, Winch states his position that:

...criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of, and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life. It follows

that one cannot apply criteria of logic to modes of social life as such. For instance, science is one such mode and religion is another; and each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself. So within science or religion actions can be logical or illogical: in science, for example, it would be illogical to refuse to be bound by the results of a properly carried out experiment; in religion it would be illogical to suppose that one could pit one's own strength against God's; and so on. But we cannot sensibly say that either the practice of science itself or that of religion is either illogical or logical; both are non-logical (1958:100–101).

Here, Winch (1958:113ff) is speaking strictly about two forms of life, that of science and that of religion, and he is challenging the idea that the paradigm of the former is applicable to the latter. He does not also see any independent universe of discourse which can be applied in assessing the two forms of life.

In relation to traditional thought, Winch thinks that claims involving magic and witchcraft cannot be assessed in terms of either scientific conceptions or scientific standards of rationality. All such magico-religious beliefs have their own language of discourse and they can only be said to be intelligible or unintelligible when analysed in the context in which they are held. Also, these claims are not to be seen as truth-propositions, since they do not attempt to provide some quasi-scientific understanding of the world. In other words, the Western scientist and the Azande witch-doctor, for instance, are not making truth-claims vis-à-vis the same notion of reality.

This way of contrasting forms of life could be misleading, particularly when used as a means of differentiating between two cultures. Although from Evans-Pritchard's account, we are inclined to see the Azande system as typifying a magico-religious form of life, the truth is that the Azande, indeed all traditional systems, also have a non-magico-religious form. They provide descriptions of objects and explanations of events in theoretical categories not tied to magical or religious beliefs. The Azande have principles and beliefs about how to grow crops and how to hunt for animals. They know the kind of soil that will produce harvest and the place where, or season when hunting is most successful. They have knowledge of nutritional techniques, the food that nourishes and that which does not, that which is poisonous and that which is not. It would, therefore, be a mistake to suggest that in each of these areas of their daily activities, the Azande always resort to magical or religious explanations. The point is often made that the principles they apply are not always expressly articulated in theoretical forms. But the same may be said of Western societies—most Westerners go about their daily life applying principles which they do not consciously articulate.

The point being established is not merely that traditional cultures have more than one form of life and, therefore, more than one paradigm of discourse. It is that all cultures do. The world of the so-called scientific cultures has its own share of the forms that exist in traditional societies. This point has been emphasized by Wiredu:

Even Western scientists, fully convinced of the universal reign of law in natural phenomena, may pray to a supernatural being for rain and a good harvest. Those who are tempted to see in such a thing as witchcraft the key to specifically African thought—there is no lack of such people elsewhere as well as in

Africa—ought to be reminded that there are numbers of white men in London today who proudly proclaim themselves to be witches (1980:42).

It is thus clear how in every society people employ both scientific and non-scientific explanatory models in accounting for their world of common sense. Whatever contradictions there may be in the models applied should be seen as internal contradictions within a given culture rather than features for distinguishing between one culture and another. This is not to suggest that it is unenlightening to embark on cross-cultural comparison. It is simply that whatever can be derived from such an exercise can also be got from comparing modes of thought within one given culture.

At whatever level the comparison is done, Winch's (1958:40–42) insistence on the incommensurability of different forms of life still holds. His position is that the magico-religious form predominantly associated with traditional cultures has its own universe of discourse, its own conception of reality and criteria of rationality, all different from those of the scientific form of life. Winch (1958:100ff) sees each as a distinct form of social life whose practices and beliefs are intelligible only in the context in which they are held. This position has been criticized on several grounds, one of which is that it is too relativistic and that it makes impossible any kind of communication across cultures. Some of these issues will be examined in our discussion of cross-cultural rationality.

However, whatever the weaknesses of Winch's thesis may be, it is caution to those neo-Lévy-Bruhleans and followers of Senghor in Africa who with eagerness are seeking to revive the idea that the mind of the African is so intellectually malstructured that it does not accord with some presumed universal principles of reasoning. Such principles do not exist. The mind of the African is not structurally different from that of the Westerner. Also, the contextual contrast between Western thought and traditional African thought, which considers only the former as a suitable material for philosophical reflection, rests on false premises. The truth is that both are similarly marked by the same basic features of the human species. The difference lies in the ways the two societies conceive of reality and explain objects and events. This is so because they live different forms of life. And it is for this reason alone that an intelligible analysis of African thought demands the application of its own universe of discourse, its own logic, and its own criteria of rationality. The primary task of the African philosopher is to fashion out these unique working tools with which to unearth the complexities of the social form that confronts him/her.

The analysis of the ontological status of claims in traditional African thought involves matters of logic and forms of reasoning. Some philosophers argue, just as they do for truth and reality, that all men, no matter their cultural differences, share in common certain minimum criteria of logic and that in their reasoning they find such criteria compelling. Steven Lukes (1970) and Martin Hollis (1970) belong to this class of philosophers. They argue for the universality of certain logical rules and methods of drawing inference. For instance, they think that all rational people should recognize and follow the law of identity and non-contradiction—that nobody can afford not to see that 'the truth of P excludes the truth of its denial'. This involves the principle of non-contradiction in which two contradictory propositions cannot both be true. As we argued earlier in our discussion of the limitations of formal logic, this is mistaken.



In recent times, logicians have argued for a many-valued logic that recognizes more than two values. More important, it is clear from the familiar locutions we adopt in our ordinary discourse that these formal logical rules are freely violated while the intelligibility of our meaning remains unassaulted. Don't we normally say in answer to a question, 'yes and no'; don't we say that 'the statement is both true and not true'; that 'one statement is nearer the truth than another'; or that 'one proof is better than another'? Surely, when all these are put in the context of our discussion, the meanings remain consistent and coherent, such that no serious charge of logical contradiction can be raised.

However, Hollis' (1970) claim concerning inference goes beyond the simple violation of formal rules. His position is that there are certain patterns of inference which all rational people do, of necessity, follow. Hollis instantiates his point by using the logical form, 'If  $p$  and if  $p$  implies  $q$ , then  $q$ '. In his view, this *modus ponens* with  $\{(p.(p \supset q)) \supset q\}$  has a compelling force on all reasoning minds. It is one of the patterns of inference which is not context-dependent and as such all people are disposed to follow it whether or not they are able to articulate or provide an exposition of the principles involved.

Not only is it claimed that these basic patterns of logical inference are shared in common by humankind, it is expected that whenever their premises are presented in a syllogistic form of argument all people must, of necessity, accept the conclusion that follows. By the nature of the logical rules, the steps involved in arriving at the conclusion have no alternatives. Take the following: When you have ' $p \supset q$ ' and ' $p$ ' you must conclude ' $q$ '. The point Hollis (1970) is making is that given ' $p \supset q$ ' and ' $p$ ' every rational person is compelled to conclude ' $q$ '. He thinks that in studying the beliefs of an alien culture, the student and members of the community being studied do follow this pattern of inference since if they do not, cross-cultural understanding would be impossible.

In the context of Hollis' argument these compelling rules of logic and universal modes of inference are enough grounds for rejecting Winch's theory of relativism. He is postulating a common game whose rules are context-free and which all people play. Two important questions seem to arise from this. How did these rules come about? What happens if one of the parties involved refuses to obey the rules of the game? It is implicit from Hollis' universalist position that he would not concede the suggestion that his so-called universal rules of logic were socially acquired, since that would open the possibility that people in some cultures simply did not acquire them. The only alternative left for Hollis is to suggest that people adhere to the rule because it is part of their nature to do so; that people are biologically constituted in such a way that their brain is structured to follow given logical rules and patterns of inference. It is obvious that Hollis would not dare this suggestion for the simple reason that there is no way of establishing if it is right or wrong. Besides, it has not been possible for scientists, natural or social, to present a clear taxonomy of which of our qualities are biologically acquired and which are socially learned.

The issue of what happens if we refuse to follow the suggested rules of inference does not even arise considering the general problems that result from the justification of deduction. In Lewis Carroll's (1895) *What the tortoise said to Achilles*, the compelling force of *modus ponens*, which Hollis uses as an example, turns out to be questionable. In Carroll's analysis (cf. Winch 1958:55–57), Achilles presented the tortoise with premises of the form ' $p \supset q$ ' and ' $p$ ' but the tortoise refused to conclude ' $q$ '. Instead, the tortoise

turned the table against Achilles demanding why, in the first instance, he should accept Achilles' rule. Of course, Achilles could not provide an acceptable answer since he found himself justifying his rule by applying the very rule he was asked to justify. The point, as Barnes and Bloor (1982:41) put it, is that justifications of deduction themselves presuppose deduction. They are circular because they appeal to the very principles of inference that are in question'.

So, Hollis' universals of logic and reason are not, *of necessity* acceptable after all. It is true that logic presents us with a systematic framework, a pattern of reasoning that is accepted as intelligible. However, logical rules, like other conventional rules, are drawn up for those who wish to play the logician's game to learn and apply. Since they do govern most of our experimental world, as we tried to argue earlier, they cannot have a compelling force on all people. In fact, logical concepts and terms have assigned meanings and roles different from their usage in ordinary discourse. Logical connectives such as 'and', 'or', and terms such as 'if', 'then', 'entailment', 'implication', etc., are assigned technical meanings which deviate from their ordinary usage. To that extent, it is right to define logic as 'a learned body of scholarly lores...a mass of conventional routines, decisions, expedient restrictions, dicta, maxims, and ad hoc rules' (Barnes and Bloor 1982:41). There can be nothing universal about any drawn-up rules intended for reasoning in a given pattern; such rules cannot be compelling on all people. Hollis' claim about the universality of logical rules and modes of reasoning seems to be a relic of the traditional efforts by rationalists to justify faith in what they believe to be the supremacy of reason.

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES: KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

In ordinary discourse, whether in traditional societies or in modern science-oriented ones, we normally make claims applying 'know' and 'believe' without paying attention to any possible epistemological difference that may exist between the two concepts. So, if you ask a traditional African why he/she thinks that witches exist, you are likely to get two answers purported to be conveying the same meaning: either 'because I know that witches exist' or 'because I believe that witches exist'. This 'or' is an inclusive injunction, suggesting that he/she is either prepared to substitute one of the answers for the other or to hold both together without any change in meaning. The traditional African is, therefore, claiming to know and to believe the same thing at the same time. But this is not in accord with the epistemological doctrine which claims that we cannot know and believe the same thing at the same time. If I know *p* is *q*, I cannot at the same time believe that *p* is *q* and if I believe it, I cannot at the same time know it. The only possibility, according to this view, is that we can believe something at one time and know it at another time—that is to say that we move progressively from belief to knowledge.

It would appear therefore, that our traditional African who simultaneously claims to know and to believe that witches exist, has either not critically reflected on the matter to see that having moved to the point of knowledge his/her belief claim stands redundant or that his/her peculiar state of mind or the nature of his/her object of reference allows for both knowledge and belief to be simultaneously entertained. Note how viciously circular the answers are. In the strict sense the question, 'Why do you think X?' is not

satisfactorily answered by 'Because I know X' or 'Because I believe X'. Such an answer would be considered inadequate in the normal English linguistic convention. It is true that every linguistic convention has a way of accommodating vagaries of this sort. Still, it is possible that the problem we now associate with knowing and believing the same thing at the same time is one that is peculiar to the conventional rules of the English language and, therefore, nonexistent in other linguistic conventions. In Western philosophical tradition one of the dominant views, which in fact derives from common usage, is that knowledge is justified by belief. An Englishman therefore who receives the answer from the traditional African that witches exist because he knows/believes that they exist is inclined to regard it as lax, if not muddled.

The grounds upon which in normal English usage belief is held to be distinct from knowledge is that the former lacks the element of certitude associated with the latter. But Pritchard denies that the difference is one of degree. They are, according to him, different kinds of activity.

Knowing and believing differ in kind... To know is not to have a belief of a special kind, differing from beliefs of other kinds; and no improvement in a belief and no increase in the feeling of conviction which it implies will convert it into knowledge (1967:62).

Despite his claim of categorial difference between believing and knowing, Pritchard (1967:62) still grants that 'believing presupposes knowing' and that 'believing is a stage we sometimes reach in the endeavour to attain knowledge'.

He, however, makes the important point that truth or falsity should not be the criterion for distinguishing between knowledge and belief, since truth and falsity only apply to belief and not knowledge. His second point for holding to the distinction between belief and knowledge is that we recognize whichever one we entertain whenever it is entertained.

When we know something we...know that our condition is one of knowing that thing, while when we believe something we... know that our condition is one of believing and not of knowing: so we cannot mistake belief for knowledge or vice versa (Pritchard 1967:63).

Pritchard intends the italicized 'know' to mean consciously recognize. Even when Pritchard's distinction is restricted to the English linguistic convention his arguments are difficult to sustain: outside that convention they seem to fall flat. To say that no improvement in a belief can convert it into knowledge is to presuppose that no belief ever turns out to be true. This assaults the very concept of belief, namely, that it is either true or false. Without implying that 'belief is of the same genre as 'knowledge'', it is obvious that each of the two species belongs to different levels marked off by varying degrees of conviction. Take the following propositions expressing different degrees of belief and knowledge:

1 I think I believe X.

2 I am almost sure I believe X.

- 3 I surely believe X.
- 4 I think I know X.
- 5 I am almost sure I know X.
- 6 I surely know X.

Pritchard seems to think that no amount of pull can connect the surest belief, 'I surely believe X' with the least certain knowledge, 'I think I know X'. And this is where he goes wrong.

The factors that improve the certainty of my belief from (1) to (3) may, although not necessarily, be the same or similar to those that improve on my knowledge from (4) to (6). Where the factors are the same or similar, it is possible to improve on the surest level of belief (3) and elevate it, at least, to the level of the least sure knowledge (4). Or to reverse the argument, it should be possible, where the influencing factors are the same or similar, to relegate (where the factors backing a knowledge claim are weak) the least sure knowledge (4) to the surest level of belief (3). Briefly, the point is that once the grounds upon which we move from one level to another are the same in the two spectra, the same grounds should break the boundary between the two: it should be possible to move from (3) to (4), from belief to knowledge and vice versa. That possibility, it may be argued, depends on the influencing factors, whether they are ever the same in matters of belief and knowledge.

There are a variety of factors that sustain credulity or even strengthen our knowledge claims and beliefs. For this, numerous considerations are taken into account. In some cases the belief we hold or the knowledge we claim to have is expected to be supported by our perceptual experience. In others, all that is needed is that the believer or knower has sufficiently good reasons for whatever he/she claims to believe or know. Here 'good reason' may simply mean empirical evidence (direct or through testimony) or even some *a priori* logically deduced inference. In all, the main presupposition is that the belief or knowledge is rational or true. The point Pritchard seems to ignore in his distinction between belief and truth is that the considerations that support our belief could also be the same that lend support to our knowledge.

One thing that is clear about the relationship between knowledge and belief is that the former entails the latter. One cannot without absurdity claim to disbelieve what one knows to be true. The converse of this may not be straightforward but there is an important sense in which belief is accompanied by some form of knowledge although the belief itself is not construed as knowledge. Price's analysis of belief clearly illustrates this. 'Believing p', according to Price (1967:47), means:

- 1 Entertaining p together with one or more alternative propositions q and r.
- 2 Knowing a fact (or set of facts) F, which is relevant to p, q, and r.
- 3 Knowing that F makes p more likely than q or r, i.e., having more evidence for p than q or r.
- 4 Assenting to p; which in turn includes:
  - a the preference of p to q and r;
  - b the feeling of a certain degree of confidence with regard to p.

Here, our believing p derives from our knowledge of some facts F, which we consider to

lend more support to  $p$  than  $q$  and  $r$ . Although  $F$  is not enough to convert  $p$  to knowledge, the situation is conceivable where  $F_1 F_2 F_3 \dots F_n$  are overwhelming enough for  $p$  to be considered knowledge. The sense in which we can justifiably claim to know rather than merely believe  $p$  is that there is overwhelming evidence for our claim.

Pritchard's (1967:51) second claim is more problematic. He thinks that we can distinguish between knowledge and belief by consciously identifying which is which. When we know something, 'we know that our condition is one of knowing that thing', and when we believe something, 'we can know that our condition is one of believing and not of knowing'. It is true that we do regard certain conditions as those of knowing and others as those of believing but we are never sure of the correctness of our classification. If we were, the question of degrees of conviction and the doubt we entertain as to whether we truly believe what we claim to believe or whether we truly know what we claim to know, would not arise.

One crucial objection to Pritchard's claim is that we hold to certain beliefs which we never formulate to ourselves or even bring to consciousness. The critical examination of concepts such as belief, knowledge, truth, etc., is only done under peculiar circumstances such as when we embark on the kind of philosophical enterprise we are now doing. Normally, we have a great amount of unquestioning attitude to the norms, beliefs, and the principles we live by. We may grant that this general lack of scrutiny of concepts and notions varies from culture to culture but that it is a basic human trait is beyond doubt. The impression, therefore, that through some form of continuous introspective reflection we always know whether our attitude is one of knowledge or of mere belief is mistaken.

Besides, even if it were true, as Pritchard (1967:47) suggests, that we always undertake this kind of second-order thought, the process is susceptible to the error of taking belief for knowledge or knowledge for belief. Price (1967:51) provides an illustration of this possibility by citing the knowledge claim of the Middle Ages about the earth being flat. Going by Pritchard's view, this knowledge claim was expected to be accompanied by the conscious recognition by people of the Middle Ages that what they entertained was knowledge and not belief. But it has since been proved that, as a matter of fact, the earth is not flat. It is clear, therefore, that people in the Middle Ages did not know that the earth was flat. They merely believed that it was flat, but they mistook this belief for knowledge. For them to have known that the earth was flat, it had to be true that it is flat.

This example establishes several points: that we cannot through introspection distinguish between knowledge and belief; that it could lead to the error of taking belief for knowledge and vice versa. More importantly, the example shows the limitations of our knowledge claims—that most of what we claim to know may turn out to be mere belief. In saying this, of course, we may exclude certain kinds of knowledge, knowledge by immediate sense perception and their images, knowledge of our mental processes and perhaps also knowledge of mathematical and logical truths. The rest of our knowledge, it would seem, is liable to the kind of problem faced by the claim by men of the Middle Ages about the earth being flat. However, if this stretches the example beyond acceptable limit, it undoubtedly shows that the distance between knowledge and belief is not as wide as is sometimes presented. It also shows that the traditional African who interchangeably uses knowledge and belief, or simultaneously adopts both in his/her claims, is not as muddled as he appears.

There are important reasons why the distinction between knowledge and belief need not be pursued further here. As hinted earlier, it may simply be a peculiar feature of the English linguistic convention. And more importantly, the distinction does not seem to be pressed in the context of African thought. For the African, the most important concern seems to be whether a statement (be it knowledge claim or belief claim) is true or false. There was a surface brush on this in our discussion of the possibility of cross-cultural rationality. Although the issue of rationality is a matter of validity and logical inference, not of truth and falsity of propositions, Winch's (1958) theory of relativism spreads through both areas. Under what conditions can we say of a statement or claim that it is true or false? In traditional epistemological discourse, answers to this question would involve stating a variety of theories of knowledge, each depending on what we take truth to mean.

I.C.Jarvie summarizes Winch's thesis on truth as follows:

Whether a statement is true or false will depend upon what it means. What it means, in Winch's view, will depend upon how it is being used, how it functions as part of the form of life it belongs to. The notion then, of translating one form of life into the terms, concepts, preconceptions of another, does not make much sense. The way belief operates in a form of life is peculiar to that form of life. In particular, there is no reason to suppose that a statement true-to-them is translatable into a statement true-to-us; but if it is translatable into a statement true-to-us that does not show that it is false-to-them. One way or another, it makes no sense to talk of true or false *tout court* (Jarvie 1972:44).

This is the form of relativism in which what is true or false is culture dependent, one in which what is real or unreal depends on the paradigms and the linguistic convention of the culture in which the concepts are used. In other words, Winch is denying the concept of truth or falsity which is extra-linguistic and universal. This is what he regards as the 'senselessness' of trying to translate the truth propositions of one culture from the standpoint of another.

The most common example often used to illustrate Winch's doctrine is the Azande claim that witches exist. Whether or not this claim is true, says Winch (1958:100–101), the proof can only be established within the context of the Azande culture, applying their conception of truth and what the people mean when they say of a statement that it is true. According to him, it would be an error for an English-speaking investigator on the matter to analyse such a statement applying the English conception of truth and what it means in the English linguistic convention to say that a statement is true. This is what Winch means by saying that 'it makes no sense to talk of true or false *tout court*' (1972:44). There are no independent standards or criteria of truth applicable to all cultures. Winch is not saying that the Azande do not apply any standards; he is merely claiming that their standards are non-comparable.

In arguing for this position, Winch points to the difficulties that would arise if the truth or falsity of Azande statements were to be analysed from the point of view of scientific paradigms. To start with, our first assumption will be that Azande claims, like the claims of science, can be established to be true or false by scientific methods; that through

experimentation and the logic of scientific reasoning they can be shown to be true or false. This, according to Winch (1958), is an erroneous assumption since the Azande claims are neither scientific hypotheses nor parasitic on scientific principles. They are therefore not verifiable or refutable by scientific methods. Azande magic and claims about witchcraft are metaphysical, and metaphysical claims are irrefutable by science (Otubanjo 1983).

Furthermore, Winch (1958) sees Azande beliefs as being tied to a whole form of life and, as such, they cannot be disputed in isolation of the totality of the form of which they are an integral part. It is not certain whether Winch is right on this point. It should be possible to appraise any part of a given form of life insofar as we understand its relations to the other parts and to the whole. At least, this is done within the realm of science. Known scientific principles are used in ascertaining the validity or otherwise of novel claims. But Winch would be right if all he meant is that we cannot declare part of a people's way of life false, without relating it to other parts or its totality. His main emphasis is that the appraisal of whatever we do should not be conducted by applying part of an alien form of life. So, if part of the Azande form of life is to be judged true or false, it can only be done from the culture itself. It is the culture that is to appraise the truth or falsity of its own parts.

Anthropological literature, until recently, has given the impression that this process of internal assessment is absent in traditional thought; but on the contrary, a lot of it goes on. Evans-Pritchard (1976) claims that traditional people show no theoretical interest in exposing and extirpating inconsistencies in their beliefs. But his own report on the Azande shows that the people make conscious efforts at resolving conflicting claims. Although we said earlier that these claims are not scientific hypotheses to be proved true or false, Evans-Pritchard's account shows that when Azande pronouncements turn out to be false they embark on elaborate measures to explain why. The failure of their *benge* (poison) is followed by a series of ad hoc explanations, either that the substance used was bad, that the operator failed to follow the procedure, or that the whole ritual had been influenced by sorcery. It is not therefore correct to say that there is a total absence of theoretical interest or that traditional people do not make efforts to resolve inconsistencies. Note that the adoption of ad hoc devices for explaining failures and contradictions is common even in science-oriented cultures.

However, Winch's relativist theory about the incommensurability of truth claims and reality across cultures has been strongly criticized from different stand-points. Jarvie (1972), who gives Winch's ideas the most lucid exposition and who even claims to have developed on them, thinks that the ideas have major unacceptable implications. First, Jarvie (1972:46-54) argues that Winch is wrong in his claim that there are no universal standards both of rationality and of truth claims. In his view there are such standards and every culture (including traditional ones) possesses and applies such universal standards. Secondly, Jarvie objects to Winch's view that a culture can successfully appraise itself internally. In his view, the best interpretation of a culture is most likely to be given from outside that culture.

One of the major objections Jarvie (1972) seems to have against Winch is the latter's claim that Azande magic is core to Azande form of life and therefore not parasitic on some other principles by which it can be appraised. In Winch's argument, religion in the West is parasitic on science so that the former can be judged by the principles of the latter. He does not see this kind of relationship among the Azande. But Jarvie (1972) thinks that if Winch had looked closely enough the relationship he found in the English culture would have been seen among the Azande. The Azande, according to Jarvie, have magic but they do also have technology (which he equates with Western science) and it could be said (just as we say of Western religion) that Azande magic is parasitic on Azande technology. And although Jarvie thinks that there is a conceptual problem about some principles being regarded as parasitic on others, his main point is that we can use the standards of Azande technology in appraising Azande magic. That, it seems, would be acceptable to Winch since the appraisal is still done within the Azande context. But, Jarvie's final point would be that there is no essential difference between the principles of Azande technology and those of science so that if the former can be used in appraising Azande magic the latter also stands appropriate. He does not therefore see any reason why Winch should think that Azande magic cannot be analysed applying the principles of science.

Jarvie reinforces his disagreement with Winch on the same point with another argument. To say that traditional beliefs cannot be analysed with scientific concepts, argues Jarvie (1972:53), is to imply that there is no empirical content to traditional beliefs, and this is false. Here, Jarvie betrays a certain preconception to realism by claiming that 'the reality of the world is extra-linguistic', for 'if reality (or the world) shows itself *in the sense that language has*, then there is no such thing as a truth independent of the ideas and wishes of men'. It is clear from this that Jarvie accepts the correspondence theory of truth. But more specifically, what he is saying is that traditional people, like people elsewhere, make factual claims which are intended to reflect the actual world of existing things and that they believe that their claims can be true or false in the same sense in which statements are true or false outside their culture. 'Truth and consistency,' says Jarvie (1972:53), 'are qualities we attribute to statements apropos their relationship to this "external world"...true statements are true of this world; false statements are false of this world.' For Jarvie, therefore, concepts such as truth, falsity, reality, etc., have universal standards of measure and they are not culture bound as Winch claims.

Some of Winch's critics are more moderate. Steven Lukes (1970:208–213), for instance, concedes that certain criteria for appraising the truth of belief claims are context-dependent. He, however, thinks that there are others which are universal. Lukes thus makes the distinction between 'criteria 1', which he describes as universal and 'criteria 2', those that are culture-bound. On the former, Lukes' argument is that the existence of a common reality is a precondition for the understanding of any alien language. By this he means that any statement of truth in that language is translatable into ours and ours into theirs. Lukes points out that a culture must have the distinction between truth and falsity if we are to understand its language. Without this distinction we would not even be able to agree on the definition of our immediate objects of perception. Lukes (1970:208) supports this universal conception of reality by pointing out that any



culture that engages in prediction must presuppose a given reality. He thinks that all cultures do predict and more importantly that traditional and modern people 'predict in roughly the same way'. It is for this reason that they can learn each other's language because they share the same concept of reality. And in doing so, says Lukes, the criteria used must correspond to this independent reality.

Following almost a similar argument, Martin Hollis (1970:221–239) in his 'Reason and ritual' supports Lukes' universal conception of truth and reality. Across cultures, argues Hollis (1970:231), there is what he calls a 'common core' or 'rational bridgehead', the existence of which must be assumed *a priori* if communication between cultures is to be made possible. He describes this core or bridgehead as the basic assumption that in simple perceptive situations, people of different cultures perceive the same reality. From this they adopt standard meanings which make trans-cultural understanding possible. And like Lukes' 'criteria 2', Hollis (1970) allows for ambiguous situations which may lie outside the bridgehead situations in which supernatural, metaphysical, or ritual beliefs are expressed. But he thinks that the bridgehead even provides for some limited understanding and clarification of these ambiguous situations.

Lukes thus tends more to Winch than Hollis. His 'criteria 2' refers to situations in which beliefs held may be such that they violate the laws of logic. He describes such beliefs as 'mysterious' but admits the possibility of their having context-dependent criteria of truth. Lukes uses the example of the Nuer statement that 'twins are birds' and asks what criteria we can possibly apply in appraising the truth status of such a statement. His answer is that the criteria to be applied are different from those of his 'criteria 1', because the statement does not correspond to any reality. The criteria to be used 'are *in principle* neither directly verifiable nor directly falsifiable by empirical means. (They may, of course, be said to relate to "reality" in another sense; alternatively they may be analysed in terms of the coherent or pragmatist theories of truth)' (Lukes 1970:211). So, Lukes accepts that there are contextually given criteria by which beliefs (not only in traditional societies but in all societies) can be classified as 'true' or 'false'. But note the caution with which Lukes uses true and false in quotes in his 'criteria 2'.

All in all, the various critics of Winch seem to concede to him as much as they reject in his thesis. One thing, however, stands obvious, namely: that Winch's most violent critics are adherents of the correspondence theory of truth, the view that conceives of truth as 'the perceived and assured correspondence of thought to a reality independent of that thought'. This is no place to examine the merit of this theory. All that needs to be said is that it is no longer as compelling in philosophical circles as it was when it first appeared. In fact, one major reason why we need not discuss the correspondence theory of truth here is that it is parasitic on some preconceived notion of reality as understood in the context of Western philosophy.

But whether we judge Winch to be right and his opponents wrong or vice versa, the question of the truth or falsity of beliefs in traditional societies remains an internal problem; internal, that is to say, to the traditional person who lives by and confronts a world guided by these beliefs. Earlier, we conceded the possibility that traditional people may not engage in a constant reflection to see whether or not their beliefs truly reflect reality. That, as we said, is not peculiar to traditional people. Human beings generally do not engage in this kind of reflection as a matter of routine. They do so only when the

need arises. But it might immediately be pointed out that there is always the need for such conscious reflection to avoid the danger of living by false beliefs. The obvious answer is that all people, no matter their level of intellectual sophistication, still hold to certain false beliefs. It is true that some false beliefs are destructive to life while others are merely harmless. Any wise person ought to minimize those beliefs that are dangerous. This is not to suggest that traditional beliefs are false but harmless. It is merely to speculate that if these beliefs were false and destructive to life, most traditional societies would not have survived for so long.

Now, the nature of the belief we hold is mainly determined by its source of origin which incorporates the kind of evidence that sustains it. Epistemologists have identified four of such basic sources: perception, self-consciousness, memory, and testimony. The first three are firsthand sources while the last is second-hand. By far, most of the beliefs that attract the greatest doubt and scepticism are those based on testimony. It happens to be the case that the bulk of traditional African beliefs whose rationality and truth status are disputed derive from testimony. It has been argued earlier that there are beliefs derived from second-hand testimony whose credibility ranks even higher than those of firsthand sources. That it is so depends on several factors: the nature of the belief, the kind of evidence that is required to justify it, and what Price describes as 'Volitional and emotional factors' (Price 1967:48–49). In relation to traditional thought, the beliefs in question are mainly metaphysical and as we pointed out, there are problems about the kind of evidence that is required to justify them.

The important thing about the volitional and emotional factors of our beliefs is that they sometimes lead to a certain kind of attitude which throws overboard issues of evidence and justification. This attitude takes the form of unquestioning acceptance in which, according to Price (1967:47–48), 'we are not aware of the possibility that we may be mistaken' about the belief we entertain, a state of mind describable in several phrases, as 'taking for granted or acceptance', 'being under an impression that', or 'thinking without question'. Price labels this attitude 'acceptance' and thinks that although it is a genre of belief, it is distinct from belief proper. In 'acceptance' we do not feel any doubt and we entertain the attitude without questioning.

We just surrender ourselves to the proposition in a childlike and effortless way. Accordingly, we are unaware of the fact that the proposition may after all not be true. And if it turns out false, we feel a particularly disconcerting and painful shock, quite different from the mild surprise and disappointment which results from the unmasking of an ordinary false belief. It is like the shock of being suddenly waked from a dream (Price 1967:47–48).

The basis of the distinction between acceptance and belief, according to Price, is that the former is conceived as unreasoned absence of dissent while the latter is reasoned assent to an entertained proposition. 'There is deciding to act as if p was true, and there is the merely acting as if p was true from habit or possibly from instinct' (Price 1967:50).

Now, acting from habit or instinct is not distinct from acting according to tradition or the acquired norms of society. The attitude involved in all this is such that the concept of evidence or justification seems to play very little role. Surely, there could be some sense

in which one may call for evidence in the genre of belief called 'acceptance' but the kind of evidence involved is different from that usually given for a reasoned belief. Our perceptive experience may lead to the acceptance that *p* is true. But, as Price argues, we may not recognize that it is the experience that makes us accept *p* to be true. According to him, where this recognition is present and although we also recognize that *p* may be false, our attitude is one of belief.

Thus it is not true that in acceptance (or taking for granted) we have no evidence for what we accept; though we could have it, if we aroused ourselves from our unquestioning state of mind and consider critically what we are already conscious of (Price 1967:50).

The central proposition here is that beliefs in traditional cultures are predominantly of the kind Price calls acceptance. Their main sources are custom and tradition which the believers assimilate and adopt unquestionably and some of which their personal experience may have to reinforce. If the traditional person is pressed for evidence or justification, he/she may conjecture some possible reasons why his/her society has held to these beliefs but which, normally, are not regarded as a satisfactory explanation. Or it may simply be pointed out that they are part of a culture over which he/she has no choice but to adopt. Beyond that, there seems to be no other way of justifying these kinds of belief.

It is perhaps important to stress that this category of belief is not peculiar to traditional cultures although we may accept their greater predominance in these cultures. In science-oriented cultures, as Mounce (1973:147–162) points out, similar kinds of belief are entertained. Mounce's explanation of how such beliefs may be acquired is more psychological than social, akin to the way traditional people pick up similar beliefs through personal experience. Mounce (1973) illustrates this with two examples. The first is based on the general belief among the English people that the loss of a wedding ring is a bad omen for a married couple. This belief, says Mounce, is seen by some as absurd. But he makes us imagine a situation in which a couple has just lost a wedding ring. We should suppose, according to him, that soon after the loss the couple begins to experience unusual events which subsequently lead to the breakup of their marriage. Mounce thinks that the couple will find it difficult to resist the feeling of acceptance that the loss of a wedding ring is a bad sign. The second example used by Mounce is a belief that is usually associated with traditional people, the belief that one could harm one's enemy through what one does to his/her image or likeness. Mounce imagines an instance in which a modern science-oriented person could sincerely accept this belief which normally would be considered false. Mounce supposes a situation in which a person is asked to stick a pin on a sheet of paper with an excellent portrait of his mother. The person does so aiming at the right eye. Let us suppose, according to Mounce, that soon after this, the person is informed that his mother developed affliction on the right eye exactly at the time the person did the sticking. In Mounce's view, that person would find it difficult to resist the feeling of acceptance that there is a connection between his sticking a pin on the portrait and the actual affliction in the eye.

The crux of the matter here is that in both examples, the belief adopted or reinforced

may not be rational; it may not even be true that the loss of a wedding ring leads to the breakup of marriages nor does sticking a pin on a portrait cause physical injury. Yet we are led into accepting the connections because that is the way our minds work. Human beings are endowed with the emotional attitude which allows for the unquestioning acceptance of certain kinds of belief which are either assimilated from their cultures or based on the association of ideas. This acceptance is normally reinforced by the individual's psychological reaction to his/her personal experiences. This is not to be taken as a psychological deficiency. It is part of what makes us human.

To come back to traditional African thought, it should be realized that when beliefs of this sort are picked from one's culture or acquired through personal experience, what counts as evidence or justification becomes difficult to determine. Take the Yoruba adage: 'There was the cry of the witch yesterday; and the child died this morning; who does not know that the witch caused the death of the child?' Implied in this adage is the belief that a witch can cause the death of a child. If one were to demand from a Yoruba person the evidence for this belief, the answer would possibly be that in his/her culture the cry of a witch is associated with imminent misfortune. Inquiring further why this belief is adopted, is like asking why the person must accept the Yoruba culture to which he/she belongs. Or possibly, like Mounce's example of the person who stuck a pin on the mother's portrait, the Yoruba person might cite possible personal experiences which he/she has had and how they reinforced the belief that witches can cause people's death. Now, anybody who understood the source and emotional content of this kind of belief would hesitate to press for further evidence.

Finally, it is clear how complex the question of the truth or falsity of beliefs is, particularly across cultures. In any culture, people do believe not just what is mistaken or foolish but even what is absurd and unintelligible. For this reason the tempting inclination is to abandon all questions about the possibility of any universal criteria for the truth of people's beliefs. But this can only be done at great cost. There is the necessity for communication between cultures and this in turn calls for some standards, no matter how loose, by which people of one culture can understand people of another culture.

It is for this reason that in recent times some thinkers have appealed to the so-called Principle of Charity. What this means is that in judging the truth-status of beliefs outside one's culture, one should be maximally charitable. One should assume that a belief-claim coming from a culture we do not understand accords with the standards of one's culture and one should assume further that it is consistent and correct. Davidson even thinks that we have no choice but to make these assumptions in our attempt to understand the beliefs of other cultures. The Principle of Charity is 'forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters' (Davidson quoted in Lukes 1982:263). Note that this Principle has a normative character which tends to weaken its intellectual merit.

We would want to understand the truth of claims in cultures other than ours but many would insist that we can only be charitable on the truth of belief-claims when an initial foundation for confidence and trust has been built. There is charity in accepting novel claims in science because we are able to count on previous claims. Where no such foundation has been laid, there could be danger in applying the Principle of Charity. Besides, we can only be charitable in accepting the truth of a person's claim if it is

logically possible thereafter to investigate further whether what the person claims is truly so. But since we must accept the possibility of Winch's claim that we are never in a position to conduct such an investigation, the point of granting initial charity no longer arises.

## African heritage and contemporary life

SUBAIRI'B.NASSEEM

### AN EXPERIENCE OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHANGE

The purpose of this paper is firstly to elucidate some epistemological aspects of the African heritage; secondly, to examine some epistemological changes that have occurred in the African experience through the passage of time, from the classical to the contemporary; and thirdly, to suggest tentatively how some of the aspects of this epistemological African heritage may be nurtured for fusion with other contributions of non-African heritages. This fusion of philosophical traditions is envisaged in light of acculturation and enculturation in sociological synthesis as necessary for liberating some of the modern minds from the contemporary philosophy of ethnocentrism.

In fact, most of the contemporary problems of human, inter-state, inter-racial, and international relations arise due to either ignorance of or unsympathetic regard for the views of the 'Other'. Ofelia Schutte (1985) puts the point in its right perspective by asserting:

If philosophy is the love of wisdom, then its function cannot be merely to reproduce the discourse and assumptions of the established powers. On the contrary, its function is to penetrate through to the other side and to create favorable conditions for the other to come forward and express concerns, cares, disquietudes, and aspirations. In this process of recognizing and respecting the oppressed Other, the legitimacy of the Other's discourse must first be established.<sup>1</sup>

### CLASSICAL BACKGROUND

Archaeological (particularly paleontological) studies have suggested that the origin of humankind may have been in Africa. While these conclusions are not absolute assertions, Africa may, in the light of the available evidence, be regarded as the mother habitat of the humans. Africa may be the paleontologist's (earthly) 'Garden of Eden'. Though this 'Garden of Eden is in disrepair, much of the natural beauty is still there...but the scars of the original sin are in evidence'.<sup>2</sup>

On this continent, humankind has gone through a long history of evolution. The march through the several millennia of its existence has been characterized by a lot of thinking, a lot of doing, hence a lot of reflection and self-reflection. Consequently much experience has been transmitted from one generation to another. Generally many achievements and

failures 'have, however, been preserved through the remains of bones, tools, weapons, and later customs, languages, oral tradition, rock-paintings, the art of writing and so on'.<sup>3</sup>

These material and non-material achievements and failures have constituted the heritage of Africa. This is a heritage that has always defied mental abstraction and so as a concrete reality, it '...forms a long line which links African forefathers with their descendants...'.<sup>4</sup> The link has been more than just a chronological continuity. Apart from being a historical cord, the heritage as in the traditional past, was an intra-societal connective along both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. It was the media-culture in which members of the same society related to one another. It was the social medium in which various societies interacted either peacefully in agriculture and trade, hunting and gathering, marriage and divorce, birth and death ceremonies, or violently in executing collective policies of the armed kinsmen. These were policies for nation-building but at times they were policies for military aggrandizement, plunder, and raid.

These different and sometimes contradictory forms of interaction produced a heritage expressing all dimensions of human existence. The heritage is Africa's grand contribution to the contemporary sea of humanity's existence and their struggle for survival and perfection. The variegated aspects of this contribution (heritage) range 1) from art's aesthetic to its value as information brochure, 2) from political experiences of evolution and revolution to economic stability and problems of resource allocation, 3) from the historical tension between social philosophers' demand for collectivity to the retreating self of the artist, and 4) from reason's perennial stubbornness to seek explanation to the heart's deep-seated trust for the stable. Put together, all these contributions elicited an explanation and further inquiry from the African.

Explanation and enquiry presuppose knowing or assuming certain preliminary premises. Hence some of the fundamental questions that confronted contemporary students of African heritage are: How did the African know? What did they think they could know? How did they think they could know? Strictly, these questions really belong to the domain of epistemology.<sup>5</sup>

### THE PHENOMENAL CHARACTER

In the introduction, an allusion was made to the sociological diversities and therefore cultural pluralism in Africa. Nevertheless a multiplicity of the phenomenal does not inhibit an epistemology. We still can speak of 'African epistemology'. Such a univocal term draws from the ontological unity beneath the phenomenal. Therefore a cultural thematic approach, rather than a phenomenological approach may elucidate relatively similar epistemological experiences in traditional Africa. This relative similarity arises from the metaphysical oneness of the classical African past.

The discussion in this paper may appear rather contradictory, namely an ontological unity in spite of diversities. As a matter of fact resolution of such a philosophical conflict in African heritage does not call for a resort to *reductio ad absurdum*, for it is not a logical contradiction. The issue is really one of different stages.

Hence, whereas, ontologically we admit of unity, both phenomenologically and by cultural thematics, it is admissible, as John S. Pobee has observed:

...that homo Africanus is a multi-headed hydra, displaying varieties not only vis-à-vis the non-African but also vis-à-vis other species of homo Africanus.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the same author goes ahead to state:

The number of distinct languages is well above eight hundred... There are at least four major stocks of languages in Africa: Afroasiatic, Niger-Congo (formerly known as West Sudanic), Sudanic and Click. There are at least three cultural groups: Caucasoids, Negroids and Hamites.<sup>7</sup>

These diverse cultural linguistic features have evolved through time, greatly conditioned by the 'shrinking of the world' due to improved communication, since the change of a heritage is a slow process, some relics of the traditional epistemology still persist. But what characterizes this traditional aspect of thought? And from where does it (African epistemology) start?

### THE STARTING-POINT

The starting-point of an epistemology is a controversial issue in the history of philosophy. Without digressing too much, we wish to briefly point out that in the contemporary European philosophy epistemology is said to have started from the rationalist Descartes' postulate, *cogito ergo sum*—'I think, therefore I am'. Later European epistemologists took up their arguments from this dictum, either by affirmation (in the case of rationalists) or by denial (in the case of empiricists). Most recently we have philosophers of Western existentialist tradition. For them epistemology starts from the postulate, 'I rebel, therefore I am'.<sup>8</sup> But according to Senghor, Negro-African epistemology starts from the premise, 'I feel, therefore I am'.<sup>9</sup> The poet-philosopher holds the view that the African 'does not realize that he thinks; he feels that he feels, he feels his existence, he feels himself'.<sup>10</sup> Regrettably Senghor's views are really a reflection of his European scholarship. His philosophy of the emotive self is typical of French romanticism that has for long not only dominated French art, literature and philosophy but also captured the heart of the colonized African intellectuals.<sup>11</sup>

The starting-point of African epistemology, traditionally speaking should be the premise, 'We are, therefore I am'. The African philosophy is a collective mind and for the African, T pre-supposes a 'We', in fact 'I' is contingent upon 'We'. The starting-point of African epistemology is rooted in the ontology. The link between epistemology and ontology in the African heritage is not unique. Such a link is not only essential to the subject but also necessary insofar as:

...metaphysics is necessary for art, morality, religion, economics, sociology; for the abstract sciences, as well as for very branch of human endeavor considered from one practical angle. It is the foundation upon which one builds one's career consciously and unconsciously; it is the guide; the author of the human's interests; upon its truth or falsity depends what type of man you may develop into.<sup>12</sup>

In the words of an African philosopher can be found 'the singular and unique importance of African ontology in the overall treatment and understanding of African philosophy'.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore the epistemological view of the traditional African is consonant with his metaphysics. Whereas for the western thinker 'being' is 'that which is' or 'the thing insofar as it is', for the African 'being' is 'that which is force' or 'the thing insofar as it is force'. Hence being is inconceivable without it being force or inherently endowed with force. There is thus in-built motion. Of course the Supreme Force, the Supreme Agent of motion here is God.

Therefore the view adopted by African epistemology is that knowledge is (the) understanding of the nature of forces and their (cosmic) interaction. True wisdom, hence knowledge, lies in ontological knowledge; it is the intelligence of forces, of their hierarchy, their cohesion and their interaction'.<sup>14</sup> Just as we had noted that God is the Supreme Force, the Supreme Agent of motion, He:

...is also wisdom in that He knows all forces, their ordering, their dependence, their potential and their mutual interaction. A person is said to know or have wisdom in as much as he approaches divine wisdom. One approaches divine knowledge when one's flesh becomes less fleshy...i.e., the older a person gets, the more wisdom he has.<sup>15</sup>

This is the metaphysical rationale for the authority of the aged in African epistemology. It may serve to explain what Kwasi Wiredu has charged as 'authoritarianism'. Authoritarianism may be anachronistic in political and broad cultural sense. In the case of epistemology it is a feature that seems to predominate even the contemporary institutions of learning. In the modern parlance, it is often rationalized by the term 'experience' in its stead. Otherwise, traditionally the authoritarianism of the old or the aged provided the solidity, which solidity today comes about as a result of having seen more than one has read.<sup>16</sup>

To justify the case for epistemological authoritarianism, we may ironically revert to Kwasi Wiredu. He has rightly observed the concept in its historical perspective, bearing in mind the contemporaneous nature of the term:

Traditional society was found on a community of shared beliefs in the wisdom of age, the sanctity of chieftaincy and the binding force of the customs and usages of our ancestor. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that traditional systems of authority, both formal and informal, must have been left to be authoritarian within the traditional milieu itself.<sup>17</sup>

Change in the contemporary milieu calls for a reassessment of the epistemological status of this authoritarianism. After all, for the traditional and modern African the knowledge-process has undergone tremendous changes through history, while some relics of traditional experience have survived. Old and the new modes of thought have influenced one another both in method and value. The interconnectedness of the new and old requires a logical and rational scrutiny of the evermore complex problems of the contemporary person. This task requires what I will call 'interthinking'.

Here we should clarify two key terms: 'inter-connectedness' and 'interthinking'. The



former is the relation between ontology and epistemology (and in the case of this paper it is especially in philosophy); the latter is the conscious realization of this relation in time and space.

The former is a prerequisite for understanding a people's philosophy by transcending the phenomenal limits of the ethnologist. Cultural thematics attempts just this and it even goes beyond the limits set by the phenomenologist. It is in the light of this nexus that we understand a people's (African's) philosophy. As K.C. Anyanwu lucidly puts it:

We must know the basic assumptions, concepts, theories and world-view in terms of which the owners of the culture interpret the facts of experience. Without the knowledge of the African mind process and the worldview into which the facts of experience are to be fitted both the African and European researchers would merely impute emotive appeals to cultural forms and behavior suggested by some unknown mind.<sup>18</sup>

Interthinking provides the medium by which interdisciplinary intercourse and human interaction across accidental boundaries can be realized. A student of logic at Makerere University once observed that interthinking corrects the imbalance that has been perpetuated by the separation of the traditional epistemology and logic from the modern mode of rational or critical epistemology. It will also correct the imbalance by recasting the traditional authority that hitherto had held together the society. This is really where interthinking will give a modern solution to what otherwise would appear to be anachronistic. A reference to Kwasi Wiredu may elucidate this point. He observes that the influence of authoritarianism as a traditional feature has waned in the urban areas, (hence in the contemporary cultural condition). It is in these changed circumstances that the traditional culture is increasingly felt to be authoritarian. It may be said, thus, that the particular phenomenon of authoritarianism touched upon in the foregoing remarks is also an instance of an anachronism'.<sup>19</sup> Wiredu proceeds thus:

Paradoxically the authoritarianism mentioned above is closely connected with one of the strongest points of our culture, namely, the great value it places on what we might call communal belonging.<sup>20</sup>

In the African epistemology, interthinking is germane to the (philosophical) inquiry. Its importance ranges from interdisciplinary discourse to its definitive role in the paradigmatic horizon. As K. C. Anyanwu once again reminds us:

...it is impossible within the African cultural reality and experience to speak of art as if it were detached from religion; religion as if it were detached from mythology and speculative thought; speculative thought as if it were detached from mythical feelings and these feelings as if they were detached from moral principles and political ideas.<sup>21</sup>

In the African situation, it is important that interthinking assume, *inter alia*, a temporal character, namely, there is need to undertake a temporal voyage from the classical past to the present. An allusion was made to the vicissitudes of history. The historical changes

distorted much of the fabric of African society, along with its pattern of knowledge and search for knowledge. Thus the required interthinking takes into consideration the choice of pattern.

### THE PROBLEM OF THE PARADIGM

The search for knowledge is inherent in the human being. What separates or identifies us from other animals who also are believed to have intelligence is self-reflection, which includes curiosity to discover both the self and that beyond the self. This must occur in a definite paradigm—most specifically an epistemological paradigm. Since epistemology as a specialized discipline is really a result of the Western academic tradition, there is the danger of stating the Western view as if it were the African one. As we deal with African epistemology, it is pertinent to realize:

We are therefore entering into a cultural world whose philosophy of integration, whose principles of understanding and of aesthetic continuum differ completely from the Western ideas of what constitutes the trustworthy knowledge and reality.<sup>22</sup>

In view of this, an elucidation of paradigm is essential. The classical African philosophy postulates a concrete existence of 'humans and nature'. In African tradition there are 'two entities' only by 'conceptual numericality', not by separate ontological existence; their bifurcation is impossible. Therefore neither humans nor nature could be desecrated. Moreover, in this sacred unity humans and nature participate in the same locus without being opposites. So, like ethics among most traditional societies, epistemology really is inseparable from religious cosmology, there is neither a cosmology of a conventional type nor a cosmogony of a single source.

The all-inclusive role of the traditional religious cosmology provides room for the transcendental being in the epistemic experience and in the making of the cognitive content and structure of the African mind. In traditional African cosmology the divine partakes in the process of informing man either directly (through the 'dreams' of the sages) or by signs such as happenings in people's lives.

Since the African cosmology postulates 'a unitary as opposed to analytical world',<sup>23</sup> the traditional epistemology does not approach the problem of knowledge by dividing its domain into the rational, empirical and mystical. In both the intellectual and the concrete divisions of reality, the three traits of thought—rational, empirical, and mystical—constitute a single mode of knowing. Unlike the Western science paradigm that is overlaid with methodological and mathematical formulations, the traditional African paradigm transcends the outer reaches of formal logic. This supralogical feature of the African tradition has the strength of acknowledging the irreducible mystery of the transcendent, which, however incongruent, plays a role in African traditional epistemology rather akin or analogous to that of revelation in Islamic epistemology. It also plays a role similar to that played by the transcendental in modern Kantian and post-Kantian European philosophy. (Of course, revelation did play quite a significant role in European philosophy until recently when through scientific revolution Newtonian physics captured the mood of philosophical speculation.)

Insofar as the traditional epistemology is not a rigorous philosophical endeavour the supremacy of the transcendental has a disadvantage. Such an epistemology has the inherent weakness of surrendering easily to the divine wish the arduous task of logically unravelling the complex and difficult human problem.

The fallacy of appealing to authority is common in such an epistemology.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps this is the root of the epistemological authoritarianism to which we have frequently alluded. Although the elder could not be questioned in matters of knowledge, he was not a tyrant. The constraint on questioning was imposed by the degree of certainty essential in all religiously determined systems of thought. Moreover, at a socio-philosophical level, the elder was responsive to the societal demand for collective responsibility. Therefore, authoritarianism played a significant role in mitigating the harshness of the metaphysical dialectics regarding the axiological stability of society. The dialectical interplay between the 'flux of ontological dialectics' and the 'demand for axiological peace' perpetuated the sense of inquiry.

Epistemology in the tradition of African thought was neither a rigorous nor a deliberately pursued academic discipline (even in the European or Western tradition epistemology did not become popular and increasingly specialized until the 'collapse' of the major metaphysical systems in the face of philosophical scientism and Hume's thorough empiricist anticipation of logical positivism). Therefore in the former (African tradition), the urge for continuous assessment and re-assessment of the known—or that to be known—called for the participation of the subject. The subject was hardly in contradistinction to the object. In fact, there was no veil between the two. It is a feature of contemporary people rigidly to delineate the cognitive process in the subject as distinct from the object known.

Does this therefore mean that in traditional epistemology the subject and the object were so fused in their existential predication as to correspond to the pantheism of the contemporary mystic? If not, what was the subject-object relationship in traditional African epistemology?

### THE SUBJECT AND THE OBJECT

The immediate and mediate experiences of the African are characterized by a set of contradictions: 'one and many, individuality and universality, time and eternity, freedom and necessity, reason and sentiment'. These are contradictions not peculiar to the African experience. But in the West they have been bypassed (not resolved) by admitting a duality of experience: the subject and the object are conceived as two separate and independent entities. This dualist ontology has given rise to an epistemology split into rationalism and empiricism, subjectivism and objectivism. Humans are not only separated from nature, but also subordinated to it.

We had already said that in the African traditional thought humans and nature are not ontologically independent. For African epistemology 'man and nature are not two separate independent and opposing realities but the one inseparable continuum of a hierarchical order'.<sup>25</sup> Ontologically therefore, dualism simply could not be postulated in the African philosophic tradition. Whereas the rise of the same philosophic postulate in the Western tradition owes a lot to the dogma of intellectualism, and the Indian has to

escape the dilemma by denying the reality of the material world, the African seeks for the ego a centrality in the cosmic scheme in order to avoid the embarrassment of dualism and monism—be it idealist or materialist. As such, the notions of subjectivism and objectivism do not constitute any problem in African epistemology. The possibility of their emergence is subsumed under the unity of existence. The subject cannot know the object if it is detached.

The African maintains that there can be no knowledge of reality if an individual detaches himself from it... Knowledge, therefore, comes from the co-operation of all human faculties and experiences. He sees, feels, imagines, reasons or thinks and intuits all at the same time.<sup>26</sup>

The subject then is perpetually involved. He or she is not only seeing and thinking, but also experiencing and discovering. For him/her no knowledge of an object is possible without the object entering into experience. The cognitive process is not complete without the experiential. The self of the subject and the objective world outside of the self are really one. The former 'vivifies or animates' the latter.

Self experience and the experiencing self, being identical, occupy a central position in traditional African epistemology. This is consonant with ontology. It is not due, as Senghor has claimed, to providence having denied to the African the gift of 'analytical and discursive reason'. As propaedeutic to his ontology the African adheres to a cosmology which determines his epistemology, yet, it is a cosmology in which existence cannot be defined. Like Scottish philosopher theologian Scotus's absolute nature, it is neither universal nor concretely singular. As a result even the entities of subject and object can only be specified. This specification is due to the experiencing self realizing its own individuating activity in order to perceive and delineate the objects outside of itself.

The active-self is dominant in the scheme of traditional thought in Africa. For the African theoretical and practical philosophy are not autonomous, but logically and metaphysically fused in a single epistemological system. Hence, the ego that theorizes and the world in which this theory assumes practicality participate in a unitary culture-bound world-view. We are reminded that:

The African culture makes no sharp distinction between the ego and the world, subject and object. In the conflict between the self and the world. African culture makes the self the center of the world.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the self is not absolute and static. Being at the core of the unitary reality, it manifests 'a unitary process of matter-mind as a single universal process with diversities of form'.<sup>28</sup> The life-force of such a matter-mind manifests itself in 'politics, economics, religion, art, education, science, morals'.<sup>29</sup> This integrative character of the life-force perpetuates experience from one period to another. In the epistemic experience, it is a kind of temporal motion, an equivalent of French philosopher Bergson's *élan vital*. Here then is the possibility of epistemological change from the classical times to the contemporary. Hence, a consideration of an epistemological continuum is really an endeavour to cope with a fundamental philosophical change, on the one hand, and to contend with a crisis of paradigm on the other.

### CHANGE AND CRISIS OF PARADIGM

Contemporary times have witnessed a number of changes in the epistemology of traditional African thought. There have been two modes of changes: those due to the internal dynamics of the thought-system and only accentuated by elements of acculturation and changes brought about by the introduction of paradigm alien to the ontological base of the African world-view. As the latter is an historical exigency, the interconnectedness of the change and the paradigm is germane to our examination of the continuum of heritage in contemporary African thought.

Change and crisis illustrate the problematic nature of the epistemological continuum and call for serious negotiation in the exchange of philosophical ideas between the traditional and the modern minds. Lest the modern mind read its own philosophy into the traditional, scholars eager to retrieve and sustain the creative and philosophic heritage of the African past should take up the task where the factualists have left off without necessarily accepting the latter's conclusions. The state of mind of contemporary scholars makes this task urgent. For the contemporary African, scholarship is characterized *inter alia*; the following: first, a continuous recession of the traditional into the distant past; second, a present characterized by lack of clarity, third, a future devoid of logical predictability, fourth, absence of the certainty of the mystical; and fifth, the authority of the oracle.

On the other hand, spatial change has involved opening up the traditional thought system to a wider world of learning. This opening itself has activated the epistemological crisis for the movement of new methods of learning from one cultural area to another and involved two profound phenomena—psychic violence and literary revolution. The latter affected the cognitive content and structure of the African mind. With literacy the African acquired new spectacles through which he/she saw not only other worlds, but also his/her own world. The unfortunate impact upon African epistemology—indeed a characteristic of the continuum—was that the African lost his own subjectivity and objectivity, while acquiring some other person's (namely, the owner of the spectacles) subjectivity. This impact is aggravated by the failure of the dilettante to recognize that he/she is no longer himself. His/her universe is no longer a universe, but a 'multi-verse': the 'multiplicity' of the cosmos for the literate African is consonant with a 'mosaic culture' externally adopted and without roots in his own ontological and contingent constitution.

Hence literacy, rather than animating the distinctive participatory function of the African artist, introduces a kind of liberalism that reduces collective activity to bare theatrical stage. The 'orature' who provides the source of African philosophy and therefore the epistemic medium loses his or her vitality and richness. Only through the oral traditions—music, folk songs, myths—and other oral arts does the African utilize various means of knowing: knowing for the African could be achieved through imagination, intuition, and feelings.

Grace A.Ogot (1968) reminds us that African legends, folk songs, folk tales, and proverbs are living expressions of oral literacy activity and that the distinctive feature of this literature is that it represents a form of collective or group activity. Both the performance and the audience participate.<sup>30</sup> She proceeds to explain that committing 'orature' to writing individualizes the literature. This is a paradoxical feature of the

epistemological continuum. Philosophic ally, we wish to sustain the heritage in our contemporary milieu, yet to do so we must use literacy. And whereas the philosophy we wish to preserve and perpetuate is a collective mind, 'the writing and reading of a book are...individual acts'. Grace Ogot poses a series of rhetorical questions:

If traditional oral literature is to be ensured of continuity it has to be given the performance of the printed word. But will these literary transcriptions have the same meaning in what are vastly different contexts? What happens, for example, when a long spoken narrative is translated into writing? What happens to the warmth and richness of the speaking human voice? What happens to the sense of participation of the listener? How is the sustained attention of a reader to be maintained?<sup>31</sup>

The wisdom in Grace Ogot's words sinks deep into the heart when we realize the case of songs. For example, a student of African thought reading Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* either in the privacy of his bedroom or in the silence of the library at Makerere University does not perceive and conceptualize the original message of the song as would an illiterate Acholi boy listening to the natural tune of Okot's mother. Sometimes the student is influenced by non-Acholi concepts; and sometimes he relies outright upon the non-African intellectuals. But *Song of Lawino* is an Acholi expression of ideas arising out of Acholi cultural heritage, and the written *Song of Lawino* lacks the philosophic novelty of the oral 'Song of Lawino'. Similarly, unlike the student at Makerere University who is not an elite of his own society, the illiterate Acholi boys and girls in northern Uganda are the elite of their traditional society. Under the bright moonlight they participate in the 'get-stuck' dance and in the process come to understand the original message of the 'Song of Lawino' in its cultural chastity. Then they are able to internalize the values so that epistemology and axiology achieve practically total fusion. Lamentably, this is a feature of African epistemological heritage which the continuum lacks in spite of the power of literacy.

Such inadequacy is perpetuated, though Africa actually exudes two traditions of literacy, the Euro-Christian West and the Islamic. The contemporary failure to harness the two epistemological segments of our present heritage presents us with a challenge of three cultural and ideological segments, namely, 'traditional Africa, Islamic Africa, and Euro-Christian Africa'.<sup>32</sup>

### **THE CHALLENGE OF 'THE AFRICANS: A TRIPLE HERITAGE'**<sup>33</sup>

The introduction of Euro-Christian philosophical tradition in Africa brought in its wake Western scientific paradigm and its consequent disintegrative epistemology. The disintegrative tendency in Western epistemology relegates revelation to a position of benign dogma. This exposes all parts of the Western science paradigm to the actual or potential threat of eclectic change through successive determinist scientific revolutions, and this creates intellectual uncertainty. The latter consequent benefits the politician outside the objective scientific development, for the scientist accepts a direction, 'determined by the politicians' need to deter, wage or win wars, or the need to land on the

moon before anybody else'.<sup>34</sup> Whereas such a development deters people from focusing on the axiological axis of epistemology, it does not really make science 'value-free', but only alters the value people should cherish and so doing accentuates epistemological disintegration. Such paradigmatic and axiological disintegrations trace their roots back to the bifurcation of thought (and knowledge) into rationalism and empiricism, the identity of body and mind, and matter and spirit.

The Western trait of analytical, discursive, and rigorous logic helped open the African system of thought to a scientific system which hitherto had dominated Western philosophy. However, the opening was betrayed by those practising science who became exclusive and arrogantly banished revelation as an epistemic medium. When revelation became suspect in the eyes of the Western epistemologist he had either arbitrarily to introduce God in order to save himself from the wrath of the ecclesiastics or to push his philosophy to its logical conclusion by denying God as understood by the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. Contrary to those holding to the science paradigm, the medieval scholastic Islamic thinker would be able to see the parallel to revelation in the African sage-experience. This does not mean that revelation is analogous to the experience and sayings of the sage, for the ontology and theology of revelation are different from those of the sage, but traditionally the African sees in the latter a kind of 'revelation'.

A temporal intellectual reversal may help rehabilitate the over-used epistemology of revelation in Western and Westernized epistemologies. As Europe's intellectual invasion of traditional African thought was preceded by the coming of Islam could not the epistemic status of revelation in the Islamic tradition compensate for the elimination of the sage in the main stream of the African epistemological inquiry? This question presupposes other questions, namely where and when Islam and African traditional philosophy met, was there a crisis? The answer to the latter question will determine the former.

For purposes of brevity we shall take two areas in Africa. In the Eastern region, where Islamic scholarship was planted, most scholars were bent on cultivation of simple faith and worship. As a result in the coastal towns of Lamu and Malindi emphasis was placed mainly upon the exoteric dimension of Islam. The inner dimension was represented by the Sufi orders, coming mainly from the Sudan and the North-East Horn of Africa. Exotericism and Sufi wisdom were concerned respectively with Sharia and love for the transcendent. Their emphasis on the absolute unity of Allah (may He be exalted) clashed with the African concept of God. Since the pioneers of Islam in East Africa were not aggressive missionaries, the conflict between Islam and African traditional philosophy was minimized.

The actual philosophical conflict between Islam and African traditional belief was clearer in the Western Sudan. But more than an Islamic-African conflict, it had also elements of Greek thought. In the ancient Islamic University of Timbuktu, 'Aristotle was commented upon regularly, and the trivium and quadrivium were known as one does not go without the other. Almost all of the scholars were completely experienced in the Aristotelian Dialectics and the commentaries of formal logic'.<sup>35</sup> In such a curriculum the conflict was really threefold: Greek-African, the Islamic-African, and the 'ageless' Islamic-peripatetic debate.

It follows, therefore, that the two questions previously asked can best be answered negatively. The possibility of an Islamic-African resolution of the epistemic crisis is compromised by the divergent concepts of a unitary cosmology. The cosmology of the traditional African mind postulates a divine who can participate with the finite in the same locus. But the cosmology of Islam admits of no common locus for the divine Infinite and the contingent finite. The African mind proposes no single cosmogony, but the Islamic heritage has one single and absolute cosmogony. The latter heritage postulates a grand paradigm constituted of one that is revealed and another that is man-made science.

These conflicting systems of epistemology not only have baffled the university philosophers, but they also have stifled the actualization of the masses as a vital social force. The latter cannot fulfil themselves because they live now in an ideological uncertainty born out of the Triple heritage’.

### CONCLUSION

Along the epistemological continuum the heritage of the African has experienced profound changes. These occurred, first, with the Islamic intrusion, and, second, with the traumatic dissemination of the Western scientific tradition. In turn, these changes have crystallized a crisis. A reappraisal of this epistemological crisis will instill in the continuum a further philosophical inquiry. It will at the same time mitigate the harshness of the psychic violence resulting from the imposition of philosophical systems.

We see three traits in this philosophy: the rational-illuminative method of Islam, the analytical and discursive procedures of the West, and the culture-bound participatory tradition of Africa. All three should be studied as contributions to the federation of world cultures. This kind of philosophical ecumenism, without diminishing the distinctiveness of each viewpoint, calls for a sober and rational consideration of the ‘other’s’ philosophy in light of O.Reiser’s assertion that:

So many human questions have now become world problems, so complex and interconnected that to solve them requires a greater degree of interthinking than the human race has ever known before or is presently prepared to accept.<sup>36</sup>

To conclude:

It is no distortion to urge that the failure of the modern world is the failure of philosophy to live up to its historic role of providing synthesis, wisdom and logical guidance to our increasingly perplexed world.<sup>37</sup>

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Schutte, Ofelia. ‘Overcoming ethnocentrism in the philosophy classroom’, *Teaching Philosophy*, 8, 1985. Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 1985:143.
- 2 Mazrui, Ali A. *The African condition. A political diagnosis*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1980:22.



- 3 Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986:2.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Dr K.C. Anyanwu has summed up the crux of the inquiry as follows: 'How do the Africans know what they claim to know? What are their basic assumptions about the nature of things? What methods must the mind follow in order to arrive at what the Africans accept as a trustworthy knowledge of reality? What, in their experience, led to the beliefs they hold? What does experience mean to the African in the African culture? What place does the African occupy in the universe?' 'The African world-view and theory (of) knowledge' in E.A. Rush and K.C. Anyanwu, *African Philosophy*, Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1984:81.
- 6 Pobee, John S. *Toward an African theology*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1979:43.
- 7 Ibid.: 44. Compare this observation with the proverb of the Lugbara of North-West, namely, '*Aria a'anga ase a'ale ndo*' (The voice of birds in the wilderness is varied). An eminent student of Lugbara philosophy records the traditional comment that 'As each bird sings in its own way, so each person thinks and behaves in his own characteristic manner. The proverb testifies to this variety of opinions and character among humans.' The same proverb has been recorded with slight variation of local dialects as proverb No. 143 in A. T. Dalfovo, *Logbara proverbs*. Rome, 1984:98–99.
- 8 This dictum is attributed to Albert Camus. See Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam*, Tr. Ghulam M. Fayez, Mashhad, Iran: University of Mashhad Press, 1982:69.
- 9 Mazrui, Ali A. *Political values and the educated class in Africa*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1978:86.
- 10 Senghor, L.S. 'The spirit of civilization, or the laws of African Negro writers and artists.' Paris: Presence Africaine, special issue, June–November 1956:64, 71.
- 11 Senghor seems to have been influenced a great deal by André Gide. The latter is reported to have asserted: 'I feel, therefore I am'. See Ali Shariati, op. cit.: 69.
- 12 These are the words of David Hume as quoted in Henry Alpern, *The march of philosophy*. New York: Dial, 1934:99.
- 13 Onyewuenyi, Rev. Fr. Innocent Chilaka, 'Is there an African philosophy?' in Claude Summer (ed.), *African philosophy (La philosophie Africaine)*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1980:310.
- 14 Temple, Placide. *Bantu philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine, 1969:73.
- 15 Onyewuenyi, 1980:312.
- 16 Compare with the Lugbara proverb: '*Dri 'bi foro ngotia dria yo*' (No grey hair on a child's head). 'Grey hair is an indication of age and wisdom. By reminding a person that it is children who have no grey hair, the proverb intends to tell him that he should be wise and reasonable and not childish.' Relevant to epistemology, the proverbial implication here is that the greatness or authority of the aged is due to their wisdom. See proverb No. 249 in A.T. Dalfovo, op. cit.:144.
- 17 Wiredu, Kwasi. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980:4.
- 18 Anyanwu, op. cit.: 77.
- 19 Wiredu, Kwasi, 1980:4.
- 20 Ibid.: 5.

- 21 Anyanwu, op. cit.: 77–78.  
 22 Ibid.: 78.  
 23 Ibid.: 88–89.  
 24 Of course the appeal to authority becomes a logical fallacy when and where the authority appealed to is illegitimate.  
 25 Anyanwu, op. cit.: 87.  
 26 Ibid.: 94.  
 27 Ibid.: 86–87.  
 28 Ibid.: 98.  
 29 Ibid.  
 30 Ogot, Grace A. ‘The African writer’, *East Africa Journal*, 5, 1968:35.  
 31 Ibid.  
 32 Nkrumah, Kwame. *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*. Nairobi: Heinemann 1964:70.  
 33 I have derived the sub-title partly from Ali A. Mazrui’s *The Africans: A triple heritage*. London: BBC, 1986.  
 34 Siddiqui, Kalim. ‘Integration and disintegration in the politics of Islam and Kufr’, in Kalim Siddiqui (ed.), *Issues in the Islamic movement*, 1982–83, London: The Open Press, 1984:2.  
 35 Cited by Erica Simon, ‘Négritude and cultural problems of contemporary Africa’, Paris: Présence Africaine, 18, 1963:135. Also quoted in Ali A. Nazrui’s *Political values and the educated class in Africa*, op. cit.: 86.  
 36 Reiser, O. ‘World philosophy and the integration of knowledge’, in Franco Spisani (ed.), *International Logic Review*, 3, 1971:18.  
 37 Ibid.

#### References

- Adam, L. 1934. ‘Modern ethnological jurisprudence in theory and practice’, *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 3rd series, xvi: 1934.  
 Alpern, H. 1934. *The march of philosophy*. New York: Dial.  
 Anyanwu, K.C. 1984. ‘The African world-view and theory of knowledge’, in E.A.Rush and K.C. Anyanwu, *African philosophy*, Rome: Catholic Book Agency.  
 Appiah, K.A. 1992. *In my father’s house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 Barnes, B. and Bloor, D. 1982. ‘Relativism, nationalism, sociology of knowledge’, in M.Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982:21–47.  
 Bohm, D. 1980. *Wholeness and the implicate order*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
 Bohm, D. 1993. *The undivided universe*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
 Cantore, E. 1977. *Scientific man*. New York: ISH Publications.  
 Carroll, L. 1995 (1895) ‘What the tortoise said to Achilles.’ *Mind*, 104(416):691–693.  
 De Tejada, F.E. 1979. ‘The future of Bantu Law’, in *ARSP, Beiheft Neue Folge*, 11:304.  
 Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976. *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Griaule, M. 1965. *Conversations with Ogotemmelé*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hollis, M. 1970. 'Reason and rituals', in B.R. Wilson (ed.), 1970:231–239.
- Jarvie, I.C. 1972. *Concept and society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kimmerle, H. 1997. 'The concept of time as a keynotion for new ideas about development', in S.B. Diange and H. Kimmerle (eds.), *Time and development 'in the thought of Sub-Saharan Africa, Studies in intercultural philosophy*, 8, 1997.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1923. *Primitive mentality*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Lukes, S. 1970. 'Some problems about rationality', in B.R. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970:208–213.
- Lukes, S. 1982. 'Relativism in its place', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982:261–305.
- Mayer, P. 1972. *Townsmen and tribesmen*. Cape Town: Cambridge University Press.
- Mazrui, A.A. 1978. *Political values and the educated class in Africa*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Mazrui, A.A. 1980. *The African condition: A political diagnosis*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Mazrui, A.A. 1986. *The Africans: A triple heritage*. London: BBC.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1986. *Introduction to African philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Mounce, H.O. 1973. 'Understanding a primitive society.' *Philosophy*, 48(186):147–162.
- Nkrumah, K. 1964. *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Novack, G. 1975. *An introduction to the logic of Marxism*. New York: Pathfinder.
- Ogot, G.A. 1968. 'The African writer', *East Africa Journal*, 5, 1968.
- Onyewuenyi, Rev. Fr. I. 1980. 'Is there an African philosophy?' C. Summer (ed.), *African philosophy*. Addis Ababa: Ababa University.
- Orika, O.H. 1983. 'Sagacity in African philosophy'. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 22(4):383–393.
- Orika, O.H. 1987. 'African philosophy: A brief personal history and current debate', in G. Floistad, *Contemporary philosophy: A new survey*, vol. 5, *African philosophy*. Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987:45–77.
- Otubanjo, F. 1983. 'Rationality and irrationality in anthropological theories of religion.' *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, 3:99–112.
- Peirce, C.-S. 1988. 'Legal semiotics: The Peircean frame', in R. Kevelson, *Law as a system of signs*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Pobee, J.S. 1979. *Toward an African theology*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon.
- Price, H.H. 1967. 'Some considerations about belief, in A.P. Griffiths (ed.), *Knowledge and belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967:41–59.
- Prigogine, L, et al. 1985. *Order out of chaos, man's dialogue with nature*. London: Fontana.
- Pritchard, H.A. 1967. 'Knowing and believing', in A. P. Griffiths (ed.), *Knowledge and belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967:60–68.
- Ramose, M.B. 1992. 'African democratic tradition: Oneness, consensus and openness: A reply to Wamba-dia-Wamba', in *Quest*, vi(2):62–83.
- Reiser, O. 1971. 'World philosophy and the integration of knowledge', F. Spisani (ed.), *International Logic Review*, 3, 1971.
- Russell, B. 1948. *Human knowledge: Its scope and limits*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Russell, B. 1966. *Philosophical essays*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Samkange, S. and Samkange, T.M. 1980. *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*. Salisburg: Graham Publishing.
- Schutte, O. 1985. 'Overcoming ethnocentrism in the philosophy classroom', *Teaching*

- Philosophy*, Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati.
- Senghor, L.S. 1956. 'The spirit of civilization, or the laws of African negro writers and artists', *Presence Africaine, Special Issue*, June–November 1956.
- Shariati, A. 1982. *Man and Islam*, Tr. Ghulam M. Fayez. Mashhad, Iran: University of Mashhad Press.
- Siddiqui, K. 1984. 'Integration and disintegration in the politics of Islam and Kufr', in K.Siddiqui (ed.) *Issues in the Islamic movement: 1982–1983*. London: The Open Press.
- Simon, E. 1963. 'Négritude and cultural problems of comtemporary Africa' *Presence Africaine*, 18, 1963.
- Tarski, A. 1956. *Logic, semantics, metamathematics*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Tylor, E.B. 1924. *Primitive culture*. New York: Brentano's.
- Verhack, L. 1994. 'Freiheit und Ek-in-sistenz, in E. Schadel and U.Voigt (eds.), *Sein-ErkennenHandeln*, 7, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Winch, P. 1958. *The idea of a social science and its relation to philosophy*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



## 5

# MORALITY IN AFRICAN THOUGHT

### INTRODUCTION

Particularity in morality and its relation to community

PIETER H.COETZEE

Usually moral controversies are addressed from a particular stand-point within one of two broad approaches. One takes the concrete circumstances of moral agents to be decisive, thus offering decision procedures which run on such particularist contingencies as ethnicity, race, gender, culture, and language. The other approach abstracts from these circumstances in an attempt to find a universal stand-point, one operating with a minimal definition of what is morally relevant, such as rationality, or human nature, or the common factors in our understanding of moral problems.

The second of these broad approaches disclaims the possibility of particularism though there are at least three possible ways in which its attempts to give substance to universalism may be understood. On one line of argument rationality is the only attribute of human cognition which has moral relevance. Humans are simply systems of rationality and nothing more; all social and cultural particularity are mere moral irrelevant contingency. The right answers to moral controversies are the ones which rational agents in a given description of circumstances would endorse, not only for themselves, but for all other rational agents situated as they are (in relevantly similar circumstances)—simply on grounds of their common rationality. Another line of argument proceeds on the premise that moral questions are resolvable with reference to the notion of ‘the human condition’, which is generally defended as empirically established commonalities about the beings we are—‘facts’ about our common human nature. The fulfilment of certain basic needs (e.g. for health, happiness, etc.) are treated as necessary conditions of human flourishing, thus offering a cross-cultural grounding for morality, one which transcends whatever is accorded highest value in actual historical or cultural communities. Yet another line of argument attempts to root a form of universalism in the convergence of our common understanding of core moral propositions—propositions which prohibit things like murder, deception, betrayal, cruelty, torture, etc. It is possible—so it is argued—to extract a core of universal moral principles from this ‘common understanding’ and to ground a trans-cultural morality on it.

The first of our broad approaches places morality on a particularist footing, and treats moral theory as perspective driven. In the African context, the idea of a perspectival model is ascendant. Perspectival models fragment the moral geography, making moral philosophy radically pluralistic and heterogeneous. This fragmentation is reflected in two poles of opposition—between attempts to construct ethnic and non-ethnic perspectival models and between ‘left’ and ‘right’ interpretations of moral (communitarian) theory.

### SOME NECESSARY DEFINITIONS

The possibility of constructing perspectival models assumes the truth of two theses:

- 1 Philosophy (in Africa) is culture specific (there is no African philosophy which is not a product of cultural construction).
- 2 The moral domain admits a multiplicity of moral orders (there is no single moral order for all human beings).

A proper understanding of what these theses entail requires that we begin with definitions of concepts we must know to understand the idea of a perspectival model. At bottom, the notion of a perspectival model turns on other notions: culture, community, tradition, and the all-important idea of self-understanding.

The preferred and most useful definition of culture in the context of African philosophy is one which treats culture as a resource. Culture is an open-ended resource of social meanings on which members of a community draw to mediate the contingencies of their everyday lives.<sup>1</sup>

A culture denotes the resources of a community's material and moral<sup>2</sup> worlds. It is through these resources that a certain group of people delimit themselves as a cultural group. Delimitation implies drawing a boundary between members and strangers. Drawing a boundary implies a recognition that members owe certain things to one another which they do not owe to strangers (or do not owe strangers to the same degree). They owe to one another mutual provision of all those things for the sake of which they have separated themselves from everyone else and joined forces in the particular community which they in fact make up.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of mutual provision suggests the following definition of *community*. A community is an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life. The *common life* is any public discursive space which members construct through action-in-concert. It is constituted by a particular set of social meanings—i.e. shared understandings and interpretations of events to which members have access through their participation in the creation of their commonality. A communal or social identity is the community's characteristic way of life, one which members have sustained over some considerable period of time as an integrated cultural whole and to which members stand in a dialogical relation.

A *dialogical relation* supplies an interactive context which serves two purposes: first and foremost it is the context in and through which members actualize their social identity. The history of a person's life is the story of his or her transactions with the community's material and moral worlds, which, in effect, is the story of his or her relations with particular sets of social goods. Goods acquire social meaning from actual patterns of distribution,<sup>4</sup> and their meanings regulate social relations, which implies that the common life is a function of the distributive patterns and the social meanings of social goods. Second, an interactive context of the kind we have just considered is not only a determinant of (social) identity; it is also a determinant of choice.<sup>5</sup> Since the goods available to members are all goods *internal* to particular social structures, choice is

ultimately informed by the accumulated cultural capital. It is only within a culturally specified range of options that persons make decisions about life-plans. If all this is correct, identity and choice have cash-value for members with reference to particular sets of social meanings.

Choice and identity are informed by a community's accumulated cultural capital through the agency of a *tradition*. A tradition is a historically extended socially embedded narrative about the systems of thought (moral, political, epistemological, etc.) and social practices of a specific community.<sup>6</sup> The idea of a historically extended narrative stresses the role of traditions in contemporary community which lies in the possibility they create for interpretative continuity: the possibility of reinterpretation of exemplars from history connects contemporary events with the past, which means that the social meaning of any particular tradition is always open-ended. According to one moral tradition to which we shall pay attention a society is just if its social life is lived in accordance with its own self-understanding.<sup>7</sup> Such a tradition links justice to culture, yielding a cultural account of morality.

Traditions embody standards of excellence. We shall treat the idea of a commonality as a substantive conception of the good which defines a community's way of life. We shall accordingly treat the standards of a tradition as constitutive—in a substantive sense—of moral and political precepts. If this is correct members cannot be said to know their good prior to social interaction, and experience their good as constitutively bound to the good of the community. It follows that they look to community to understand their ends, and this is an appeal to the *self*-understanding of a community. Self-understanding is the logical product of shared understandings. Shared understandings are the bedrock of a community's cultural capital, providing at any given time in history:

- 1 An interpretative framework for the generation of social meaning.
- 2 A marker for the boundaries of social and moral identity.
- 3 A conception of the social processes by which material and moral goods are produced and distributed.

The integrated sum of these things we shall call a community's self-understanding.

### **THE PARTICULARITY OF A COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVAL MODEL**

Our typification of a communitarian morality will proceed in terms of the idea of social meanings rather than in terms of the moral codes specified by customary law. This way of proceeding will help us to establish two central lines of thought, one centring on the idea of a social practice, the other on practical reason:

- 1 A community's moral life is lived in conformity to established practices.
- 2 Models of the good life can be contested through culturally generated forms of criticism.

#### **Social conditions which unite a community's social and moral identity**

The particularity of one kind of communitarian model is perhaps best exemplified by



examining some of the essential social conditions that unite a community's *social* and *moral* identity.<sup>8</sup>

### *The social thesis*

It is a major assumption of the approach adopted here that the capacity for moral choice and development can only be exercised in a cultural setting which makes provision for its growth. Let us call this the social thesis. The social thesis describes the *self*-understanding of one kind of community and, as formulated below, shows one sense of the social meaning of a communitarian stand-point. According to the social thesis, an individual's choice of way of life is a choice constrained by the community's pursuit of shared ends. This pursuit of the common good is the primary goal of the political community and always takes precedence over the pursuit of individually chosen ends. Communal ends cannot—all other things being equal—be overridden or vetoed because shared ends have much greater weight (value) in the life of the community than other ends. The common good is conceived of as a good which fits the patterns of preferences of individual members; it is not a single good, but many goods, each fitting a sphere of social life and resting on a consensus (agreement) about its value. The common good, then, defines substantive conceptions about the good life—identified for application in specific social contexts. The good life for an individual is conceived of as coinciding with the good of the community, and a person's choice is highly or lowly ranked as it contributes to or detracts from the common good.<sup>9</sup>

### *The role of language*

The social thesis describes a linguistic community. A linguistic community has a history and various traditions (of morality and reasoning) which inform the narratives of individuals' lives and link them to those of their ancestors. Languages embody distinctive ways of experiencing the world and so play a crucial role in defining the experiences of a community as *their* particular experiences. Since language is a determinant of a particular outlook, it is one significant factor that shapes a way of life. Speakers communicate with one another about their common history and have access to the significance of events in it in a way not communicable to non-speakers, or in other languages. This means that language never is just a neutral medium for communication or for identifying the contents of actions—rather language itself is content, a value-laden reference for communal loyalties and animosities.<sup>10</sup>

### *Dialogical relation*

The social thesis also describes a community of mutuality, one in which each member stands in a dialogical relation to other members, i.e. a relation which requires the recognition of reciprocal obligations. In a community of mutuality, members recognize that since the (personal) projects they pursue, and through which they give meaning to their lives, are projects made available by a cultural structure, they have—all other things being equal—a duty to sustain these structures. Insofar as the recognition of the need to

preserve a cultural context is the prerequisite of a meaningful life, it derives from the social meaning of a socially embedded notion of obligation. We are interested in two kinds of socially embedded obligation. Primary obligations are owed, for instance, to people connected through kinship relations. This view is advanced by Kwasi Wiredu. The boundaries of kinship structures mark the boundaries of a member's (primary) moral obligations (who owes what to whom). Moral differentiations are embedded in social meanings: primary obligations, as distinct from secondary obligations (which are owed only to strangers) rest on a correlation between distributive patterns of social goods and filial relations which determine that distribution proceeds in accordance with what kin and kinship groups owe one another (loyalty, respect, honour, etc).<sup>11</sup>

*The community is the locus of deontology*

According to the social thesis the community (and not individual members) is the locus of deontology.<sup>12</sup> Argument about morality and reason takes place within traditions. A major assumption of this attempt to contextualize argument is that beliefs about morality and reason cannot be successfully justified in detachment from actual ways of life and the social meanings embodied in them. We cannot, for example, understand Akan beliefs about human rights without seeing how their conception is linked to their understanding of the relationship between the ontology of the human person and a system of entitlements; differentiation in the distribution of rights is rooted in differentiation in the ontological make-up of humans, which differentiation ultimately stems from kinship relations in the Akan social structure.<sup>13</sup> Nor, for example, can we understand Akan beliefs about justice without first seeing their understanding of the relationship between practical reason and the social meaning of consensus. It is only within a system of agreements, making possible agreed actions without agreed notions, that rational questioning in moral and political traditions take place.<sup>14</sup> A moral/political tradition will include an account of what moral/political reasonable belief and good reasoning is. There is no single African perspective on the problem of conflict resolution in this context. But Akan social meanings give recognition to a central idea: tension between tradition and critical reasoning must be looked at from a perspective which gives weight to social practice and to practical reason.<sup>15</sup> The tension at issue here is a familiar one: the longer a particular interpretation of a social practice goes back in time, the greater its historical significance. Traditions embody many years of communal effort and thought, and it is unlikely that a deeply held view will have failed to get something right regarding truth. But though deeply held views have historical depth in the sense just outlined, they are open to reinterpretation. Open-endedness is a general feature of African traditions, so there is in principle no difficulty with reinterpreting the notion of 'deeply held' to mean what is currently of greater importance or significance for a community (even if this conflicts with the commitments of a community's ancestors).

**Practical reason for self-in-community**

So, what is this perspective that balances reason against practice in the social meanings of Akan culture? The social thesis sketched above must now be amplified. We begin by

noting that membership of Akan society informs attempts at self-understanding and shapes self-identity insofar as personhood is something that has to be acquired (by becoming a member). According to this view—called the ‘processual’ view of the self—the concept of a person is a social concept.<sup>16</sup> Humans (Akan) undergo a process of social transformation until they attain full status as persons, and during this process of attainment the community plays the vital role of catalyst—of the prescriber of ends. Achieving the status of personhood is conditional on social achievements that contribute to the common good. For instance, the pursuit of a life of confirmed celibacy is regarded as failing in respect of perpetuation of the lineage (unless due to impotence) and so as deserving of moral condemnation. Similarly, any adult male who fails to amply provide his household fails to make a contribution to his lineage and so is subject to moral approbation. These failures are treated as instances of a general failure to live up to a moral precept which enjoins that all action ought to be directed at the harmonization of the interests of community members, which precept governs all interpersonal relations.

Not all humans (Akan) become persons in the normative sense just outlined. The potential to acquire personhood is given biologically. So the normative meaning of being a person has an ontological basis which is the same for everyone, and which is the ground for assigning rights and their corresponding obligations. A human is born from the union of a man and a woman. The woman contributes the *mogya* (the blood) and the man the *ntora* (the semen). These biological constituents of a person have social significance, the *mogya* being the basis of lineage identity, and the *ntora* the basis of membership of a kinship group. The unity of social and moral identity is reflected in the fact that lineage identities and kinship groupings are the loci of sets of rights and obligations. We may picture the lineage as a series of concentric circles of (matrilineal) kinship relationships, each circle being a set of rights and obligations and connected to other circles through the ‘blood’ ties of kinship, the whole being (or representing) various levels of relationships between lineage members.

Once integrated into a social structure, a person becomes the bearer of rights. The specifics of the structure determine his/her rights (and the corresponding obligations). The rights in question are all ‘role’-rights.<sup>17</sup> We exemplify as follows: to be a rights bearer requires a place in a social structure, and so rights can only be awarded to, and exercised by, persons occupying specific social roles. In this context rights are understood as justified entitlements: they are akin to statutes determining appropriate actions with respect to the distribution and reception of the material and moral goods of Akan society (who receives what from whom, and who owes what to someone else). They are justified with reference to the communal welfare, which is the final court of appeal in cases of conflict, the idea being that the harmonization of the interests of the community best secures optimal utility in respect of the overall welfare.

The social meaning of a ‘role’-right is a pattern of distribution of a social good within a social structure which determines the entitlements of the inhabitant of a structured role. Two examples<sup>18</sup> may help to illuminate this point. Kinship is the highest value in Akan culture and the lineage the most significant kinship grouping (because Akan society is matrilineal). But infants also have a social link to a patrilineal kinship group, which is acquired through the *ntora*, and which entitles the child during adolescence to receive sexual education from the father’s sister. Similarly, by virtue of internal constitution, this

time through the *mogya*, which secures membership of a lineage, every adult male has a right to land. Exercising the right devolves on performing duties: to sustain a household and make contributions to the welfare of the lineage through the products of his labour, i.e. conforming to an appropriate pattern of behaviour.

The force of the idea of an appropriate pattern of behaviour, implicit in exercising a 'role'-right, comes to this:<sup>19</sup> there is a connection between the good of a person *qua* aunt, father, educator, provider, etc. and his/her good *qua* specific pattern of behaviour and/or action of educating, providing, etc.—a connection such that were an aunt not to educate, or a father not to provide, he or she must either:

- 1 be denying that educating or providing was for their good *qua* aunt or father, or
- 2 be acting as persons not caring about his or her good *qua* member of the lineage.

The connection is given by a social meaning which inheres in a structured role and which defines the good of the person *qua* inhabitant of that role, or *qua* member of the lineage. If (1), an appeal to the self-understanding of the community and to consistency (i.e. to attempts within the community to conform practice to professed ideals) will settle the issue. If (2), an appeal to custom is called for (such persons are customarily designated *onye onipa* (non-persons)). The connection, given by a social meaning, helps us to recognize the necessity for rational action by someone inhabiting a structured role in which the material and moral goods of practice are distributed in accordance with the provisions of a rights-role. The imperative for rationality in the provisions of rights-roles are also the imperatives for rationality in the wider social picture. This is a matter of extrapolation—a rationality contextualized in the specifics of social life presents a picture of how the rational social life is conceptualized. We return to this shortly.

Social practice can hold rationality to a context, or to be more specific, to a tradition understood as a coherent system of thought. A successfully justified moral belief is one which rests on the unity of social and moral identity and therefore is one bringing together moral conviction and rationality. But though practical reason is tied to social practice, it is not the slave of practice, for practical reason can modify practice. This means that for the traditions, within which reason displays itself, to be good, they must supply the tools to meet the confrontations and challenges which their encounters with other traditions bring about.

How does reason modify practice? Earlier on we noted that justice is mediated through the relationship between practical reason and the social meaning of consensus. As we shall see, when we examine how rationality tests are generated, this relationship reduces the potential for conflict that may arise between the distributive patterns of specific social goods and the concomitant inconsistency in social practices. Justice—like any other social good—is best approached by examining the social structure within which it is produced and distributed. And the structures that matter here are the ones that make consensus possible.<sup>20</sup> A consensus denotes an agreement about the status of certain kinds of expectations and treatment as *rights*.

We explain as follows; the cash-value of a consensus depends on three interrelated considerations: the consensus must be dominant (i.e. reflect the considered judgement of the collective); it must be in step with the requirements of a communal good; members must affirm that it is constitutive of (and not in conflict with) their moral identity. These

considerations determine that consensus as agreement does not require unanimity, but simply a willingness to suspend disagreement, making possible common (political) action. The idea is to make possible 'agreed actions without necessarily agreed [substantive] notions' (Oladipo 1995:54 my insertion). How is it possible that participation in power triumphs over its appropriation? Earlier on we noted that a successfully justified moral belief is one resting on the unity of social and moral identity and therefore one uniting moral conviction and rationality. This is possible in a tradition which ranks kinship as its highest value.<sup>21</sup> Traditions which rank kinship highly make it a requirement of a consensus that it must affirm the moral identity of a people. Any agreement which denies moral identity thereby also denying social identity, is in conflict with established social meanings and for that reason cannot become a consensus. What does this entail for justice? Justice, it would seem, is the proper (appropriate) ordering of social goods in accordance with the meanings generated by role-structured actions within kinship groupings. And rights fit neatly into this context: they are the expectations of certain treatments which the occupier of a role may claim, and which he/she accords another occupier of a role.

The point made illustrates one sense in which justice is a harmony of social arrangements. But harmony is not given; it has to be worked, i.e. argued for. Argument is shaped by the relationship between practical reason and consensus, which is informed by an ideological perspective relating to the Akan conception of justice. The form of reasoning employed in consensus bargaining serves a moral and ultimately a social end. This end is 'the harmonization of the interests of the individual with the interests of others in society (Oladipo 1995:38) and requires, in the psychology of every rational agent, the motive of sympathetic identification. Wiredu (Oladipo 1995:36) describes this motive as 'a frame of mind which facilitates the mind's ability to contemplate with equanimity the possible abridgement of one's own interests in deference to the interests of others'.

Harmonization as a social end is common to all societies, and morality has to that extent a cross-cultural or non-relativized standard. This standard pushes practical reason into a teleological direction and generates rationality tests<sup>22</sup> which show how consensus works. If there is a conflict between social goods or between their distributive patterns, it has to be shown that a transition from one position to another represents a gain towards the harmonization of interests (which is a gain in moral understanding).

A gain has been made if the ascendent position can explain how to solve problems that have arisen in the traditional position and how it can accommodate or incorporate everything in this position which survives scrutiny by critical reasoning. This kind of reasoning or rational questioning goes on in the context of a fixed system of agreements which is a broad consensus about the practical value of reasoning aimed at uniting social and moral identity. The rational strength of a good argument is its persuasiveness to secure actual agreement in this regard. The central experience of morality is then a developed sense of communal unity and harmony. Reason shapes practice by balancing conflicting experiences against interests common to all, thus creating a sphere of shared experiences. This area of shared experience forms the basis or the heart of consensus, which is the possibility of common action without agreed notions.

If critical questioning takes place within a fixed system of agreements, then what is

moral argument about? Persons inhabiting structured roles, which form the social foundation of their moral and material rights and obligations, are interpreters of the social meanings they inherit. Interpretation itself allows for disagreement and dissent, and this creates the critical space needed for debate about social meanings. Wiredu (Oladipo 1995:33–52) identifies custom as the domain of contested dialogue over prescriptions and proscriptions regarding birth and death, work and leisure time, reward and punishment, relationships between the sexes and the generations.<sup>23</sup> Since moral judgements are relative to lifestyles, the domain of custom admits a relativism of judgements<sup>24</sup> rooted in a multiplicity of perspectives reflecting power differentials or status in the community. Such a relativism of judgements admits differing perspectives from which moral precepts may be interpreted or reinterpreted. For instance, in keeping with contemporary movements, Akan women view the world, as members of an oppressed sex, through the lenses of a traditional culture in which they are the unequal partner in a (marriage) relationship—unequal in the sense that their perspective has been defined for them by men. Attempts to define their own perspective requires a reconstruction of the social meaning of the marriage custom, with concomitant attitudinal changes towards birth control, abortion, sterilization, consensual sex, etc. Reconstructing social meanings introduces new or modified rights, articulated within the framework of a form of moral reasoning which accepts as a constant factor the idea of moral agency conceptualized as a structured role. This keeps moral agency within a definition of the good in terms of the harmonization of human interests, a notion driven by a community-centred focus in which no schism arises between the good of the individual and the good of the community, and no inconsistency arises between distributive patterns of social goods and social practices.

### **Interpreting particularity**

#### *Particularity vs relativism*

Any attempt to sketch a picture of difference and diversity in morality, and to present a view of an ethnic perspectival model, raises the problem of universals. Particularity separates group from group, yielding a multiplicity of perspectives. Wiredu's particularity, however, does not separate without linking all moral particularisms to a single defining characteristic of human existence as social existence. There is a source of normative values that is not relative *only* to the Akan culture in which they contingently reside. Common to all, and serving as the basis of a cross-cultural critique of moral practice, is the idea that morality is concerned with the harmonization of human interests or, more precisely, of the members of particular communities. A morally defensible culture will have this characteristic, though it will be variously understood and implemented in different cultures. 'Different peoples, groups...understand morality in different ways' (Flack and Pellegrino 1996:80). This must not be read as a defence of a cultural relativism of moral standards. Wiredu allows for the legitimacy of differing perspectives, in particular, differing *ethnic* perspectives, thereby accepting only a relativism of judgements. With this in mind, particularity must be understood in terms of the factors that determine how things will look to a percipient situated within the stand-

point of Akan ethics. For the factors shaping the particular Akan stand-point impart a determinate content, which is simply the view from the stand-point in question.

First and foremost among these factors sits a substantive value which, in the Akan hierarchy, yields a determinate content for all other values.<sup>25</sup> This is that:

### 1 Kinship is the highest value

Kinship is both a biological and a social category—so it is not surprising to find that the social dimensions of the Akan ethic are rooted in biological relationships (parental, filial). (1) focuses attention on ethnic particularism and would raise a problem were it not for an earlier observation: particularism must transcend its particularity at some point in order to bring a critical commentary to bear on society. The ethos of harmonization outlined above brings a valid critique to bear on (1), one which has universal significance as a critique of the moral misuses of the cultural constraints of role-structured obligations.

A second, but almost equally significant factor, is a characteristic of a tradition which values familial and community links over the (bare) individual in moral importance. This is that:

### 2 To have a moral identity is to be morally constituted through another

(2) is a premise relating to the metaphysics of the moral self, but like the biological premiss underlying (1), (2) also has a significant moral-social spin-off: persons in structured roles can have moral responsibility which they have not chosen by virtue of the obligations which attach to a role. But (1) alleviates the pain of (2): filial attachments set an ideal for particular roles, and a set of priorities with reference to the ideal, which enable the inhabitant of the role to rank-order obligations and carry them out accordingly. So the unity of social and moral identity, which brings together moral conviction and rationality, is preserved.

Third, the phenomenon of moral affirmation requires:

### 3 Reciprocity

Reciprocity is required as a functional requirement of role-structured obligations and ultimately as a value. As a social good, reciprocity is a value for autonomous agents. But autonomy is conceptualized in a context that shapes how persons are constructed as moral agents. The significant premise to which appeal has been made is that choice is a function of the self-understanding of a community and constrained by the social goods internal to its cultural structure. The good one has as an autonomous agent is presented in a context which determines how beneficial autonomy is to one, *qua* moral agent: one's autonomy has a high utility function within the moral requirements of one's role, if exercised in accordance with those requirements. Constrained choice is a typical feature of moral choice in any moral system. Thus to describe choice-making activities as being subject to constraints does not mean that agents have no choice. Autonomous choices are the choices made by independent and authentic agents—independent in the sense that their choice accords with what they would choose if their roles themselves were 'freely' chosen, and authentic in the sense that their choice accords with their status as constructed or shaped by a

given context. As such choices are honoured and agents respected.

Fourth, non-reciprocal actions are actions that fall outside the scope of choice under the given specified conditions, and so reciprocity requires:

#### 4 Autonomy

By implication, reciprocity also requires honour and respect.

It requires these specifically as functional requirements, and ultimately, as values.

### *Fluid and fixed constitution*

The picture that is emerging is one of an ethic shaped by cultural presuppositions which admits a diverse set of relevant conditions (rather than a specific set of necessary and sufficient conditions) of the moral. Cultural presuppositions constitute moral agents and their precepts: they are embedded in a cultural matrix that encodes them with meaning. The dynamics of a cultural matrix has great formative power over moral agents, specifically insofar as a way of life specifies the content of social relations, thereby specifying the moral precepts appropriate to role-structured agency. But, it is precisely because of this that we need a critique of social constitution—a way of deconstructing a formative force which, particularly under conditions of cultural ossification, tend to render autonomy and other dependent values functionally ineffective. So, how might we develop a social critique without losing what is characteristic of the ethic that the idea of constitution generates?

Societies particularize by making use of a range of informal interpersonal practices, created through conflict between the needs of agents to pursue local goals—which require spaces between families and kingroups on the one hand and society at large on the other—and a communal need for basic collective solidarity. We shall refer to these spaces collectively as civil society and to all individuated public spaces as civic society.<sup>26</sup> Civic society permits the growth of various solidarities among kingroups, usually in opposition to an established solidarity which is experienced as too distant and detached to maintain sociability in the realms where individuals interact. Civil society is best understood as an institutionalized correlate of political authority and cannot be defined in terms which express opposition to the state. Civic society, by contrast, is a form of social organization embedded within civil society acting as a counterbalancing force to civil society and to the state.

Civic society is the proper forum of renewal and the arena in which autonomy and kinship values engage in a dialectic, and converge in a 'bottom up' strategy for cultural and moral regeneration. Since civic society is managed by kingroups, the public spaces generated are small enough to permit social meanings and their interpretations to be contested and their import rewritten by persons in stable interaction with each other. Herein lies strength: a vigorous civic society ensures that regeneration is more or less an ongoing process. Autonomy is protected by the fact that the boundaries between civic and civil society create a legitimate private realm, which, by virtue of its oppositional nature, engages in critical dialogue with the public (civil) realm. This interactional process generates systems and patterns to which social actions conform, since it allows for



convergence between different constructions and interpretations of meaning.

One way of explaining how convergence is possible is to view each individual contribution to socially organized meaning as a 'network experience'.<sup>27</sup> The 'network experience'-idea is a useful explanatory model in societies which have a high degree of symmetry, i.e. reciprocity in the construction of relationships, a characteristic which Akan culture strongly exhibits. Networks are social relationships in which the production of meaning and interpretations of systems of production take place. A 'network experience' is an interactive context in which social meanings are produced and individuals' perspectives are shaped. A network of perspectives grows out of an exchange between perspectives, diffusing meaning from the local civic scene to civil society at large.

Individuals' perspectives, then, come to consist of the conceptions which they have come to construct or appropriate for their own use, as it were, but also of their perspectives on other perspectives—their approximate mappings of other peoples' meanings. And culture as collective phenomenon becomes the network of such perspectives (Kuper 1992:43).

The cultural content of one network is brought to bear on how social meaning is managed in another network, a process which culminates in creating mechanisms for the collective management of meaning—mechanisms which transmit a culture's precepts and reconstruct and renegotiate its social meanings. These are mechanisms *internal* to a cultural structure. In Akan culture they are provided by a system of neighbourhood mutual help. This system is rooted in reciprocity between kin and close friends which form networks of tightly knit interest groups, and expands into a system of local community cooperation. Neighbourhood mutual help creates community through circles of reciprocity and a sense of empowerment which grows up in the wake of one significant spin-off of reciprocal relations, namely confidence in sustainable regeneration.

Community created in this way has the power to resist and even subvert the normative hegemony of civil society. Though participation in kinship activities are not wholly voluntary, and though social roles are ascribed rather than 'freely chosen, the space created in the tension between civic and civil society holds a balance between the autonomy of kinship groups and their interaction with civil society. This is space in which kingroups strive to obtain a moral equilibrium, moral because they seek to balance their autonomy against the need for constructive interaction with civil society, and in the process affective ties, involving mutual respect and obligations, are generated. Reciprocity is a crucial element in the attempt to (re)define a morally balanced relationship between autonomous groups and to (re)-create a moral order and identity which includes all local communities. Ideally, such an order is the shared realm of socialibility which civil society should or ought to offer.

#### *Community as reference point*

The picture so far presented is one of an ethnic perspectival model of morality. This model does not proceed from any self-evident point of view. Rather, an ideology of its

own, namely the value of kinship relations—participates in the construction of the model itself. In other moralities highest value is accorded to autonomous individuals rather than kinship relations, or kin groups. Should we recognize this ascription of value to autonomous individuals as ideological, i.e. as specific to a particular kind of society, or, more narrowly to a particular society? If so, it must take its place as one perspective or point of view among many. Or, do we accord it the status of universal value? This is to ask whether we regard it as setting up a foundational truth in the search for knowledge about the nature of the moral.

If 'autonomous individual' is not defined sociologically, the very idea of a society tends to disappear. Society becomes simply a collection of autonomous individuals. Morality must then do with a different grounding if it is to erect a system which accords moral agency to individuals regarded as standing in mere interrelation with each other. One consequence, if not the most significant consequence, of treating the individual as the locus of deontology is that we must construct moralities for strangers as the primary object of our moral concerns. We then end up reducing the alien feel of alien social dimensions to the alien feel of the otherness of a single person, thus neglecting justification with reference to social relationships in favour of self-referential explanations. Individual self-reference leads to either nihilism or omnipotent subjectivity. If similarly atomized, the communal social dimension relativizes moral truth to a function of a particular social ideology. But these truths need not be mere relativisms. Consider how Wiredu approaches the issue of relativism:

It seems to me that at present there are not enough philosophically analytical studies of the traditional thought of the various peoples of Africa to support any very responsible or illuminating generalisations. The times, then, seem to call for ethnically specific studies. My own hope is that such inquiries would disclose a variety of philosophies, similar in some important respects, but distinct, nevertheless. It would be exceedingly useful, for example, to know from a philosophical elucidation of Yoruba or Mende or Luo or Banyonwardan conceptions of mind, as distinct from unanalytical narratives about their beliefs on the subject, *how the thought of other African peoples compares with that of Akans on the same matter* (Kwame, citing Wiredu 1995:125).

What could the value of such comparisons be? Wiredu's advocacy of particularist studies in philosophy points to a way of arriving at generalizations and discovering what is distinctive about philosophies in Africa. The basic idea comes to this: What is shared and attributed value in a society is best understood as distinctive, not only of the society in question, but also of the philosophy to whose creation it contributes, when compared with what is shared and valued in other societies, for in comparing we see differences, and, indeed, which differences should be compared and generalized over the specifics of social structures. Ultimately moral truth is understood in the context of a 'parts-to-whole' paradigm, and thus comprehended through the relations between (social) systems. Wiredu offers such a relational universal<sup>28</sup> for morality, conceived of as a...certain minimum of harmonization of interests...which serves a social end: this is to construct a...tolerable form of human social existence (Oladipo 1995:7).

## PARTICULARITY AND EMPOWERMENT

The proper role of particularity in morals may be described as one of empowerment. The desire for empowerment is a response to a lacuna and a way of unmasking the vacuity of a criticism. The lacuna appears when we consider that there is no way to know the correct background assumptions by which to identify, describe, and resolve moral controversies in the absence of the content-full contexts which social structures provide. But solutions based on the assumptions drawn from the specifics of social structures are not, as it is standardly claimed, full-blown relativisms which fail to transcend their own particularity and so fail to bring critical comment to bear on the very specifics from which the background assumptions are drawn. Social structures are not monolithic in the sense in which the criticism requires—for the following reasons.

The desire for empowerment can be satisfied in many ways. First, we are morally empowered to the extent that we find that a given set of social ends are reasons to prize things like harmony and kinship relations. This desire for empowerment can be addressed by an agent only in his/her capacity to recognize the moral relevance of a set of factors, but this skill is formed and acquired in community, i.e. in a context which supplies exposure to phenomena like power differentials and gender discrimination, and which treats such phenomena (in their appropriate contexts) as interpretations of social criticism. Non-contextualized accounts of moral agency alienate agents from their autonomy because it alienates them from the conditions that enable them to claim their lives as their own and to comprehend moral situations through their own self-understandings.

Particularity addresses the issue of empowerment through its concern for the applicability of moral precepts to a given constituency. Wiredu's conception of the moral terrain as a diverse set of relevant conditions, which makes space for customary rights to be understood as rights (because custom is included in morality), opens the door to a 'skills' interpretation of the task of moral education: education is development in competence for discerning the settings in which moral precepts apply. Given the appropriateness of the 'parts-whole' paradigm referred to earlier on, what begins as a moral dilemma for some individual is, in that paradigm, reconceived through interaction with others, and redescribed in terms which reveal the conditions that need to be identified for resolution to become possible.

The identification of particularity with a distinct community, formed by traditions and constituted by narratives, governs Wiredu's interpretation of the role of particularity in morality. It is, however, wrong to think of the public dialogue which our picture has presented as foundational in the modernist sense in which it operates under the constraints of neutrality, i.e. under a set of criteria neutral enough in its language to state *all* moral commitments. Public dialogue comes into existence whenever civic societies engage in debate, i.e. whenever they evaluate the validity of the social and political norms by which they live. There may be as many civic societies as there are public dialogues, but no debate abstracts so radically from the recognition of differences that parties to the debate are compelled by their language to consent to moral truths they do not hold or share. Dialogue, then, serves pragmatic ends—to identify the norms they think reasonable to abide by.

Second, generating agreement through the contested dialogue of a public debate has a significant spin-off which aids empowerment. Conceptions of the good life are privatized before being pushed out onto the agenda of the public dialogue, where they compete for validation. No belief to which anyone may be deeply committed—such as the belief that a sexual division of labour is morally wrong because it oppresses women and hinders their attainment of personhood—can be excluded, and so no-one is prevented from seeking the widest possible forum to arrive at a consensus. The contested dialogue of a public debate renegotiates and redefines the boundary between ‘private’ and ‘public’, since it helps to define the nature of the issues that get pushed onto the agenda of the public dialogue and since parties discover what their deepest disagreements or agreements are only once the process of public dialogue has run its course. It is appropriate to note that struggles to off-set the effects of power differentials in any context begin with a redefinition of what had previously been considered ‘private’ and therefore as not matters of public concern (i.e. not matters for debate on a public agenda). The ‘bottom-up’ strategy of renewal referred to earlier ensures that the boundary between ‘private’ and ‘public’ cannot be redrawn in such a way that it limits the reach of the moral particularity of civic society into civil society, which means that the boundary cannot prevent privately held values from becoming public shared norms, and therefore that it cannot limit civic autonomy. Indeed, where the boundary is drawn is a matter for negotiation, which rests on mutual consent arrived at by exploiting the relations of egalitarian reciprocity which is so characteristic of Akan culture.

The third point elaborates on the moral perspectives that arise from self-‘other’ relations within interactional social structures. Since kinship is the source of these relations, and hence the source of all moral perspectives, the self is morally required to view the ‘other’ as a concrete individual with a particular history, identity, and constitution. We might say the self is morally acquired to abstract from the commonality—which manifests at the level of civil society—to focus on the individuality of the other—as this manifests itself in the interactional civic structures made possible by kinship relations. Kinship structures are governed by relations of mutual (or complementary) reciprocity: each individual expects from the other forms of behaviour which grant recognition and confirmation of their concreteness and individuality. Differences do not separate—rather, they are both complementary and definitional, for they are bounded by kinship ties which fashion the circumstances of an individual’s life in relation to the circumstances of another’s as a coherent narrative.

Finally, we need to return to a point raised earlier, about the possibility of creating a commonality from a multiplicity of civic perspectives. Individuating characteristics are ascribed by kinship relations making possible coherent distinctions between individuals: they enter the moral arena in an undifferentiated condition, to become distinct and differentiated with respect to their identities and their interests. In their forum of actual contested dialogue they operate without any alien epistemic restrictions on their form of moral reasoning—restrictions on knowledge of themselves, their history, the specifics of their (civic) community, its structures, and their places within it. This forum privileges no-one and no subject matter. As pointed out in an earlier section, practical reason requires that there be a willingness to participate and a willingness to suspend disagreement (making possible agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions).

Besides the need to agree (in the sense just given) there is no privileged subject matter in contested dialogue: social goods and the desires for them are equally subjects of dispute. Insofar as the willingness to participate and suspend disagreement forms part of the social conditions which make contested dialogue possible, and insofar as these conditions act as constraints under which dialogue takes place and can be evaluated for fairness, they are privileged, though this, in itself, does not close any level of reflexivity to any agent. Such social conditions, form the backdrop of a fixed system of agreements within which contested dialogue becomes possible, and so help to link civic and civil society, bringing about a greater convergence of ‘...different flows of meaning’ (A.Kuper 1992:43). Under these conditions the underlying conceptions of the good life in contested dialogue become visible in a way not possible in moral systems requiring strict neutrality with respect to conceptions of the good life in the systems of reasoning employed. One might say that Akan conceptions are related to a specific understanding of the nature of human association, and so embedded in the concrete world.

### CONCLUSION

In Akan culture the public sphere of social life is diffused with particularistic considerations of kinship relations. The structure of these relations forms the ground of an ethic which grows from the precepts generated in a civic forum of actual debate into the norms of civil society, through a process of consensus. This bottom-up generation of norms ensures that the value of kinship relations remains the most significant social bond. This bond is the ground of a shared understanding of the value of belonging to Akan society itself. As a social bond kinship relations produce a sense of moral agency at a level of sociability (family and other sibling institutions) which ensure optimal efficacy for moral agency by virtue of a custom of complementary reciprocity. The social bond itself, and the conceptions of the good life which regulate civic institutions, are visible and comprehensible. Role-identification and a system of rejuvenating tradition through forms of practical reasoning embedded in the specifics of social structure, and borne of the self-understandings of a particular people, enables individuals to develop a coherent sense of self and of their community.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 This ‘resource’-view of culture derives from R. Thornton. *Culture: A contemporary definition*, in Boonzaier and Sharp 1988:17–28.
- 2 I am using the word ‘moral’ in its generic sense, to connote all normative endeavours, including natural science and epistemology.
- 3 I borrow this idea, its formulation, and the definition which follows from Walzer 1983:31–63.
- 4 I owe this insight to Walzer 1983:3–30. Wiredu, I am sure, will agree with me on its appropriateness in describing interactive relations based on kinship ties in a communitarian theory.
- 5 This idea derives from Kymlicka 1989:162–181. Again, I think Wiredu will agree

with me that it is appropriate in describing self-‘other’ relations in communitarian theory.

6 MacIntyre 1981 and 1989 suggests this definition.

7 This, again, derives from Walzer 1983:312–321. Wiredu defends much the same view.

8 Wiredu, in effect, defends this insight in Wiredu 1992b.

9 This is one of Wiredu’s theses in Wiredu 1992b.

10 This is another thesis defended by Wiredu 1995g, as well as ‘The need for conceptual decolonization in African philosophy’ in Oladipo 1995:22–32.

11 This too is Wiredu’s thesis as expressed in Wiredu 1992b and Wiredu 1992a.

12 This insight is due to Wiredu in Wiredu 1992b.

13 I am again indebted to Wiredu 1992b, as well as Wiredu 1995e.

14 I am indebted to Wiredu 1992b as well, as Wiredu 1995a.

15 I am indebted to Wiredu 1992b as well, as Wiredu 1992c.

16 See Wiredu 1992a.

17 I am here interpreting Wiredu. See Wiredu 1992a, as well as Wiredu 1990.

18 These examples come from Wiredu 1992a.

19 I am here interpreting Wiredu 1992a, as well as Wiredu 1990.

20 Here again I am interpreting Wiredu 1990, as well as Wiredu 1995d.

21 See Wiredu 1992b.

22 I am here interpreting Wiredu’s *Philosophy and an African culture*, 1980:2–50, and Wiredu’s *Canons of conceptualization*, 1993:450–476.

23 See Wiredu, *Custom and morality*. In Oladipo 1995:33–52.

24 I am here interpreting Wiredu’s ‘Custom and morality’, in Oladipo 1995. The distinction is between a relativism of standards and a relativism of judgements.

25 See again Wiredu 1992b and 1992a.

26 Here again I am interpreting Wiredu 1992c, as well as Wiredu 1992b

27 Here I am interpreting Wiredu at the hand of Hannerz, ‘The global ecumene as a network of networks’, in Kuper 1992:34–56.

28 This term is due to de Coppet, ‘Comparison, a universal for anthropology’ in Kuper 1992:73.

### The moral foundations of an African culture

#### KWASI WIREDU

Morality in the strictest sense is universal to human culture. Indeed, it is essential to all human culture. Any society without a modicum of morality must collapse. But what is morality in this sense? It is simply the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of the individual to those of others in society. This, of course, is a minimal concept of morality. A richer concept of morality even more pertinent to human flourishing will have an essential reference to that special kind of motivation called the sense of duty. Morality in this sense involves not just the *de facto* conformity to the requirements of the harmony of interests, but also that conformity to those requirements which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interests of

others even at the cost of a possible abridgement of one's own interests. This is not a demand for a supererogatory altruism. But a certain minimum of altruism is absolutely essential to the moral motivation. In this sense, too, morality is probably universal to all human societies, though, most certainly, not to all known individuals.

The foregoing reflection still does not exclude the possibility of a legitimate basis for differentiating the morals of the various peoples of the world. This is so for at least three reasons. First of all, although morality in both of the senses just discriminated is the same wherever and whenever it is practised, different peoples, groups and individuals have different understandings of it. The contrasting moral standpoints of humanism and supernaturalism, for example, illustrate this diversity. Secondly, the concrete cultural context in which a moral principle is applied may give it a distinctive coloring. Lastly, but most importantly, there is a broad concept of morals closely contiguous to the narrow one—which is what the two concepts of morality noted earlier on together amount to—in regard to which the contingencies of space, time, and clime may play quite a constitutive role. This appertains to the domain that, speaking very broadly, may be called custom. In view here are such things as the prescriptions and proscriptions operative in a community regarding life and death, work and leisure, reward and retribution, aspirations and aversions, pleasure and pain, and the relationships between the sexes, the generations and other social categories and classes. The combined impact of such norms of life and thought in a society should give a distinctive impression of its morals.

### AKAN HUMANISM

But let me start with the matter of conceiving morals. African conceptions of morals would seem generally to be of a humanistic orientation. Anthropological studies need substantial support to this claim. Nevertheless, the accounts are not always philosophically inquisitive, and I prefer, in elaborating on this characterization, to rely on my own native knowledge of the life and thought of the Akans of Ghana. On this basis, I can affirm the humanism in question more uninhibitedly. The commonest formulation of this outlook is in the saying, which almost any Akan adult or even young hopeful will proffer on the slightest provocation, that it is a human being that has value: *Onipa na ohia*. The English translation just given of the Akan saying, though pertinent, needs supplementation, for the crucial term here has a double connotation. The word (*o*)*hia* in this context means both that which is of value and that which is needed. Through the first meaning the message is imparted that all value derives from human interests and through the second that human fellowship is the most important of human needs. When this last thought is uppermost in consciousness an Akan would be likely to add to the maxim under discussion an elucidation to the effect that you might have all the gold in the world and the best stocked wardrobe, but if you were to appeal to these in the hour of need they would not respond; only a human being will (*Onipa ne asem: mefre sika a, sika nnye so; mefre ntama a, ntama nnye so; onipa ne asem*). Already beginning to emerge is the great stress on human sociality in Akan thought, but before pursuing this angle of the subject, let me tarry a while on the significance of Akan humanism.

One important implication of the founding of value on human interests is the independence of morality from religion in the Akan outlook: what is good in general is

what promotes human interests. Correspondingly, what is good in the more narrowly ethical sense is, by definition, what is conducive to the harmonization of those interests. Thus, the will of God, not to talk of that of any other extra-human being, is logically incapable of defining the good. On the Akan understanding of things, indeed, God is good in the highest; but his goodness is conceptually of a type with the goodness of a just and benevolent ancestor, only in his case quality and scale are assumed to be limitless. The prospect of punishment from God or some lesser being may concentrate the mind on the narrow path of virtue, but it is not this that creates the sense of moral obligation. Similarly, the probability of police intervention might conceivably give pause to a would-be safe breaker, though if he or she had any sense of morals at all it would not be thanks to the collective will of the police or even the state.

This conceptual separation of morals from religion is, most likely, responsible in some measure for the remarkable fact that there is no such thing as an institutional religion in Akan culture. The procedures associated with the belief in sundry extra-human beings of varying powers and inclinations, so often given pride of place in accounts of African religions, are in fact practical utilitarian programmes for tapping the resources of this world. The idea, in a nutshell, is that God invested the Cosmos with all sorts of potentialities, physical and quasi-physical, personal and quasi-personal, which human beings may bend to their purposes, if they learn how. Naturally, in dealing with beings and powers believed to be of a quasi-personal character, certain aspects of behaviour patterns will manifest important analogies to the canons of ordinary human interactions. For example, if you wanted something from a being of superhuman repute who is open to persuasion mixed with praise, pragmatic common sense alone would recommend an attitude of demonstrative respect and circumspection and a language of laudatory circumlocution reminiscent of worship, but the calculative and utilitarian purpose would belie any attribution of a specifically religious motivation. In fact, the Akans are known to be sharply contemptuous of 'gods' who fail to deliver; continued respect is conditional on a high percentage of scoring by the Akan reckoning.

In total contrast to the foregoing is the Akan attitude to the Supreme Being, which is one of unconditional reverence and absolute trust. Absent here is any notion that so perfect a being requires or welcomes institutions for singing or reciting his praises. Nor, relatedly, are any such institutions felt to be necessary for the dissemination of moral education or the reinforcement of the will to virtue. The theatre of moral upbringing is the home, at parents' feet and within range of kinsmen's inputs. The mechanism is precept, example, and correction. The temporal span of the process is lifelong, for, although upbringing belongs to the beginning of our earthly careers, the need for correction is an unending contingency in the lives of mortals. At adulthood, of course, as opposed to earlier stages in life, moral correction involves discourses of a higher level and may entail, besides the imposition of compensatory obligations (of which more later); but, at all stages, verbal lessons in morality are grounded in conceptual and empirical considerations about human well-being. All this is why the term 'humanistic' is so very apt as a characterization of Akan moral thinking. At least in part, this is why it is correct to describe that ethic as non-supernaturalistic in spite of the sincere belief in a Supreme Being.

Insofar, then, as the concept of religion is applicable to the Akan outlook on life and



reality, it can refer only to the belief and trust in the Supreme Being. In this respect, Akan religion is purely intellectual. In this respect too it is purely personal, being just a level of an individual's voluntary metaphysic, devoid of social entanglements. In truth, most Akans espouse that metaphysic as a matter of course. Akan conventional wisdom actually holds that the existence of God is so obvious that it does not need to be taught even to a child (*Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame*). Nevertheless, skeptics are not unknown in Akan society, and a time-honored policy of peaceful *laissez faire* extends to them as to all others in matters of private persuasion.

### DEFINING MORALITY

Morality too is intellectual, by Akan lights. Concrete moral situations in real life are frequently highly composite tangles of imponderables, and perceiving them in their true lineaments is a cognitive accomplishment in itself. So too is the sure grasping of first principles and their judicious application to the particulars of conduct. Morality is also personal, for in the last analysis the individual must take responsibility for his or her own actions. But surely morality is neither purely intellectual, for it has an irreducible passional ingredient, nor purely personal, for it is quintessentially social.

All these insights are encapsulated in various Akan maxims and turns of phrase. Recognition of the intellectual dimension of right conduct is evidenced in the Akan description of a person of ethical maturity as an *obadwenma*. This word means one possessed of high thinking powers. Literally, it says 'child, thinking child', in other words, a thinking child of the species. The Akans are no less emphatic in their articulation of their sense of individual responsibility. According to a very popular proverb, it is because God dislikes injustice that he gave everyone their own name (thereby forestalling any misattribution of responsibility). Along with this clear sense of individual responsibility went an equally strong sense of the social reverberations of an individual's conduct. The primary responsibility for an action, positive or negative, rests with the doer, but a non-trivial secondary responsibility extends to the individual's family and, in some cases, to the environing community. This brings us to the social orientation of the Akan concept of a person. We will not be able to elaborate it fully in the present discussion, but a crucial consideration will be adduced here. It is that, for the Akans, a person is social not only because he or she lives in a community, which is the only context in which full development, or indeed any sort of human development is possible, but also because, by his/her original constitution, a human being is part of a social whole.

The underlying doctrine is this. A person consists of three elements. One of these comes *directly* from God and is, in fact, a speck of the divine substance. This is the life principle. In virtue of this constituent all human beings are one; they are all members of the universal family of humankind whose head and spring is God. *Nipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma: obiara nnye asaase ba*. Literally: all human beings are the children of God; none is the child of the earth. The two remaining elements are more mundane in origin. There is what might be called the blood principle which derives from the mother and, somewhat more stipulatively, there is what might be called the charisma principle which comes from the father. The blood from the mother is what principally gives rise to a person's body. The biological input from the father is responsible for the degree of personal

presence that each individual develops at the appropriate stage. (This is what I would like the licence to call the individual's degree of charisma.) The ontological classification of these elements is not exactly straightforward. Suffice it to warn that the physical/spiritual dichotomy is unlikely to be a source of light in this connection. In any case, our interest here is in the social significance of those components.

Both the maternal and paternal contributions to the make-up of a person are the bases of membership in specific social units. The Akans being a matrilineal group, it is the blood principle that situates a person in the most important kinship unit, namely, the lineage or, more extensively, the clan. Through the charisma principle one is a member of a grouping on the father's side which, although largely ceremonial, is nevertheless the framework of a lot of goodwill.

The point now is that, on this Akan showing, a person has a well-structured social identity even before birth. Thus, when an Akan maxim points out that when a human being descends from on high he or she alights in a town (*se onipa siane fi soro a obesi kuro mu*) the idea is that one comes into a community in which one already has well-defined social affiliations. But society presupposes rules, and moral rules are the most essential of these. Since all rules have their rationale, a question that challenges the ethical imagination, especially one thoroughly impregnated with visions of the ineluctable sociality of human existence, is: What is the rationale of moral rules? Among the Akans some of the most profound philosophic conceptions are expressed by way of art motifs, and a celebrated answer to this question is offered in one such construct of fine art: a crocodile with one stomach and two heads locked in combat. The lessons are:

- 1 Although human beings have a core of common interests, they also have conflicting interests that precipitate real struggles.
- 2 The aim of morality, as also derivatively of statesmanship, is to harmonize those warring interests through systematic adjustment and adaptation. The one stomach symbolizes not only the commonality of interests, but also a natural basis for the possibility of a solution to the existential antinomy.

Two levels of solution are distinguishable, corresponding to a distinction foreshadowed in our opening paragraph. There is the level of prudence or enlightened self-interest and there is that of pure moral motivation. Both species of thought and intention may be equally adapted to securing the social good, the first through cool and calm ratiocination, the second through both rational reflection and human sympathy. But they evoke different appraisals from people of goodwill. There will always be something unlovable about correctness of conduct bereft of passion. A Ghanaian comedian puts it even more strongly. Speaking with a deliberately unidiomatic bombast, he opines: 'Ability without sentimentality is nothing short of barbarity.' Nevertheless, it appears that teachers of morals everywhere have tended to find prudential considerations more psychologically efficacious in moral persuasion than abstract appeals to goodwill. Certainly, Akan ethical reflection does not stay immobile at this level of ethics, but Akan discourse abounds in prudential maxims. Here are a few.

- 1 If you do not allow your neighbour to reach nine you will never reach ten (*Woamma wo yonko antwa nkrong a worentwa edu*).

- 2 Somebody's troubles have arrived; those of another are on the way (*Obi de aba; obi de nam kwan so*).
- 3 It is a fool that says, 'My neighbor is the butt of the attack not me' (Kwasea na ose, 'Ye de meyonko, yenne me').
- 4 The stick that was used to beat Takyi is the same that will be used to beat Nyankomago (*Abaa a yede boo Takyi no aa na ye de bebo Nyankomago*).
- 5 One person's path will intersect with another's before too long (*Obi Kwan nkye na asi obi de mu*).

That Akan ethics transcends this level of moral understanding is evident from other parts of their corpus of moral sayings. I will comment here on one particularly instructive form of moral expostulation. To a person whose conduct betrays obliviousness to the interests of others it is said, 'Sticking into your neighbor's flesh, it might just as well be sticking into a piece of wood' (*Etua woyonko ho a etua dua mu*), than which there can scarcely be a lower rating for a person's moral stature. On this reading of morals, the ultimate moral inadequacy consists in that lack of feeling which is the root of all selfishness. The implied imperative is: 'In all inter-personal situations put yourself into the skin of the other and see if you can contemplate the consequences of your proposed action with equanimity.' If we call the recommended frame of mind sympathetic impartiality, we may elicit from the Akan maxim under discussion the view that sympathetic impartiality is the first principle of all morals. This principle is the logical basis of the golden rule, or the obverse of it that is frequently heard in Akan ethical talk, namely, 'Do not do unto others what you would not that they do unto you' (*Nea wo yonko de ye wo a erenye wo de no mfa nye no*). More literally: What you would not find acceptable if it were done to you by another, do not do to him or her.) To be sure, this does not sound, even in our vernacular, as epigrammatic as the normal run of Akan apothegms, but it provides, nonetheless, a solid foundation for the definition of moral worth in its most edifying sense.

### ETHICS AND PRACTICE

The foregoing account of the Akan perspective on moral first principles, however brief, must form the basis of our next question, which is: 'In what basic ways do the Akans endeavour to translate their ethical understanding into practical fact?' In this regard the single most important consideration concerns the depth of the Akan sense of what we have called the sociality of human existence. Morality is, of course, necessarily social. Hence any group of humans that can be credited with any sense of morals at all—surely, a most minimal species credential—will have some sense of human sociality. But in the consciousness of moral humankind there is a finely graduated continuum of the intensity of this feeling which ranges, in an ascending order, from the austere delimited social sympathies of rigorous individualism to the pervasive commitment to social involvement characteristic of communalism. It is a commonplace of anthropological wisdom that African social organization manifests the last type of outlook. Akan society is eminently true to this typology.

What this means, more amply, is that Akan society is of a type in which the greatest value is attached to communal belonging. And the way in which a sense of communal belonging is fostered in the individual is through the concentrated stress on kinship

identity already adumbrated in our earlier allusions to the Akan concept of a person. Not only is there what might perhaps be called an ontological basis for this identity in terms of the constituents of personhood, but there is also a distinct normative layer of a profound social significance in that concept. Thus conceived, a human person is essentially the centre of a thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges revolving round levels of relationships irradiating from the consanguinity of household kith and kin, through the 'blood' ties of lineage and clan, to the wider circumference of human familiness based on the common possession of the divine spark.

In consequence of this character of the Akan concept of a person, habitual default in duties and responsibilities could lead to a diminution in one's status as a person in the eyes of the community. Not, of course, that becoming less and less of a person implies being thought more and more unworthy of human rights. On the contrary, there is a strong sense of the irreducibility of human dignity in Akan thought. However socially inept an individual may be, he or she still remains a being begotten of a direct gift of God incarnated through the intimacy of man and woman. He or she remains, in other words, a human being and as such is deserving of a certain basic respect and sympathy. Indeed, as soon as confirmed social futility begins to look pathologically chronic, animadversion quickly turns into solicitude, and any previous efforts in hortatory correction or in the application of more concrete sanctions are redirected towards rehabilitation, usually with the aid of indigenous specialists in bodily and mental health.

Nevertheless, any Akan steeped in the culture or even just sensitive to surrounding social norms constantly watches and prays lest he or she be overtaken by the spectre of loss of personhood (in any degree). More positively and also more optimistically, every cultivated Akan (*Okaniba*) sees life as a scenario of continual striving after personhood in ever increasing dimensions. The details of this life mission, so to speak, will also be the details of the Akan vision of the ethical life. We must here content ourselves with only broad outlines. But before going on, let us note that since two paragraphs ago our focus has been on ethics or morals in the sense in which morality is a matter of *mores* rather than of the categorical imperative or even of the less hallowed canons of prudence.

What, then, in its social bearings, is the Akan ideal of personhood? It is the conception of an individual who through mature reflection and steady motivation is able to carve out a reasonably ample livelihood for self, 'family, and a potentially wide group of kin dependants, besides making substantial contributions to the well-being of society at large. The communalistic orientation of the society in question means that an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his or her actions benefit others than him/herself, not, of course, by accident or coincidence but by design. The implied counsel, though, is not one of unrelieved self-denial, for the Akans are well aware that charity further afield must start at home. More pertinently, they are apt to point out that one cannot blow a horn on an empty stomach (*Yede ayaase na ehyen aben*). Still, an individual who remained content with self-regarding successes would be viewed as so circumscribed in outlook as not to merit the title of a real person.

Opportunities for other-regarding exertions in Akan society were legion in the past and remain so even now. By the very nature of the traditional economy, which was predominantly agricultural and based on individual self-employment, public works had,

as a rule, to be done by voluntary communal labour. Habitual absences or malingering or half-hearted participation marked an individual down as a useless person (*onipa hunu*) or, by an easily deduced Akan equation, a non-person (*onye onipa*). In contemporary Ghana (and Ivory Coast), where the Akans live, much of the public works are financed out of mandatory taxes and carried out by professionals with hired labour. Nevertheless, in the villages and small towns a significant portion of such work is still done by way of voluntary communal labour and a good proportion also through voluntary contributions of money and materials.

### SOME CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

Here comes a contemporary complication: with the growth of commerce and industry, including the industry of modern politics, a non-negligible number of Akans have become very rich. In the Akan manner, they make voluntary contributions of unprecedented magnitudes to their communities; and the communities, for their part, reciprocate in fine eulogistic style and lionize them in other ways too, as is traditional. So far so good, except for the following circumstance. Some of these rich people are known to have come by their assets through debatable techniques of acquisition. The unfortunate effects of this situation on the ideals of the young constitute some of the more intractable problems generated by the impact of industrialization on the Akan traditional ethic.

Another aspect of Akan communalism imperilled by modern conditions, through atrophy rather than adulteration, is the practice of neighbourhood mutual aid. This practice had its foundation deep in the Akan conception of values. It is relevant here to recall the Akan adage: *Onipa na ohyia* quoted early in this discussion. It was interpreted as affirming, through the semantic fecundity of the word *hyia*, both that human interest is the basis of all value and that human fellowship is the most important of human needs. The concept of *hyia* in the context of that adage is, in fact, a veritable mine of ethical meanings. In that context it also bears the seeds of another fundamental thought in the Akan philosophy of life, which is made explicit in the maxim: *Onipa hia moa*, meaning, by way of first approximation, 'a human being needs help'. The intent of the maxim, however, is not just to observe a fact, but also to prescribe a line of conduct. The imperative here is carried by the word 'hia', which in this context also has a connotation of entitlement: a human being deserves, ought, to be helped.

This imperative is born of an acute sense of the essential dependency of the human condition. The idea of dependency may even be taken as a component of the Akan conception of a person. 'A human being', says a noted Akan proverb, 'is not a palm tree so as to be self-sufficient': *Onipa nye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho*. Indeed, at birth, a human being is not only not self-sufficient but also radically self-insufficient, if one may be permitted the expression: he or she is totally dependent on others. In due course, through growth and acculturation, acquired skills and abilities will reduce this dependency but will never eliminate it completely. Self-reliance is, of course, understood and recommended by the Akans, but its very possibility is predicated upon this ineliminable residue of human dependency. Human beings, therefore, at all times, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, need the help of their kind.

One very standard situation in Akan life in which this truth was continually illustrated

was in traditional agriculture. As hinted earlier, this was generally based on smallholdings worked by individual farmers and their households. In such a mode of production recurrent stages were easily foreseeable at which the resources of any one farmer would be insufficient to accomplish with the required dispatch a necessary task—be it the initial clearing of the ground or the scooping out of, say, cocoa beans from great heaps of pods. In such moments all that was necessary was for one to send word to one's neighbours indicating the time, place, and the nature of help needed. Very much as day follows night, the people would assemble at the right time at the indicated place with their own implements of work and together help get the job done speedily and almost with festive enthusiasm, in full and warranted conviction that when their turn came the same gesture would be returned in exactly the same spirit. Anybody who availed himself of the benefits of this system and yet dragged his feet when the call came from others was liable to be convicted, at the bar of public opinion, of such fathomless degeneracy as to be branded a social outcast. The type of mutual aid here discussed probably occurs in varying intensities in rural communities all over the world, but in traditional Akan society it was so much and so palpably a part of working experience that the Akans actually came to think of life (*obra*) as one continuous drama of mutual aid (*nnoboa*). *Obra ye nnoboa*: Life is mutual aid, according to an Akan saying.

In recent times, however, amidst the exigencies of urbanization and the increasing—if not as yet preponderant—commercialization of agriculture, the ideology of mutual aid is losing some of its hold; and the spirit of neighbourhood solidarity, though by no means extinguished, is finding fewer sweeping avenues of expression. It has not escaped some leaders of opinion that the traditional ethos of mutual aid might profitably be channelled into a strong movement of modern cooperatives, but as yet organized effort in this direction is halting in momentum and paltry in results.

Nevertheless, in countless small ways the sense of human solidarity continues to manifest itself quite pervasively in the daily life of the Akans and of the peoples of Ghana generally, of whom these moral characterizations remain true, if not to the letter, then at least to the syllable. Happily too, the threat of individualism posed by urbanization has not as yet proved unduly deleterious to his national trait. Thus, even now, a Ghanaian in the countryside or in a large city, coming upon another human being, Ghanaian or foreigner, in some difficulty, will go well out of his/her way to help. As far as he or she is concerned, the bad person is exactly the one who would walk off on the excuse of some pressing business. Of course, if urbanization and other apparent concomitants of modernization are not controlled with conscious and rational planning based on the humane sensitivities of the communalistic ethic, then this fund of automatic good will dry up and African life will experience increasingly the Hobbesian rigours of a single-minded commercialism.

### KINSHIP AND MORALITY

The allusion to foreigners in the last paragraph prompts a further observation. The sense of human solidarity which we have been discussing works particularly to the advantage of foreigners, who, in the deeply felt opinion of the Akans, are doubly deserving of sympathy; on grounds, first, of their common humanity and, second, of their vulnerability

as individuals cut off for the time being, at any rate, from the emotional and material supports of their kinship environment. Accordingly, when some time ago an Akan guitarist and lyricist, Kwabena Onyina, sang *Akwantu ma sem: Akwantufo ye mmobo* (Think of the woes of travel: the plight of a traveller is rueful) he struck a sympathetic cord at the deepest reaches of the Akan consciousness. Gratiified visitors to Ghana have often been quick to acknowledge the benefits accruing.

Again, to pursue an allusion in the preceding paragraph: the notion of kinship support just mentioned is of the highest importance in the Akan communal set-up, for it is the basis of the sense of belonging which gives the individual much of his psychological stability. (This, incidentally, is why a traveller bereft of it struck the Akan so much as a hardship case.) It was also, conversely, the basis of a good proportion of the obligations in terms of which his moral standing was assessed. The smallest and the most intimate Akan kinship unit is the matrilineal household. This includes a person's mother and his mother's children, his mother's sisters and brothers, the children of the mother's sisters and, at the top, the grandmother. It is instructive to observe that the English words 'aunt' and 'cousin' fail to capture the depth of kinship feelings corresponding to the relations of mother's sister and mother's sister's children respectively, in spite of their mechanical correctness as translations. In the Akan language the words for mother and mother's children are the same as for mother's sisters and mother's sister's children. Since the relationships noted already comprehend quite a sizable community, especially if the grandmother concerned has been even averagely fertile, this guarantees that in the traditional setting an Akan child begins life with quite a large sense of belonging and a broad sweep of sympathies.

The next extension of the circle of the kinship relations just described brings us to the level of the lineage. Here the *basic* unit consists of a person's grandmother and her children and grandchildren, together with the grandmother's brothers and sisters and the children and grandchildren of her sisters. This unit quickly swells up with the culturally legitimate addition of grandmother's maternal 'cousins' and their descendants. From the point of view of a person's civic existence, this is the most significant circle of relations, for it was through the head of the lineage that, in traditional times, a person had his political representation. The lineage, as can easily be imagined, is a quite considerable group of people, but it is small in comparison with the maximal limit of kinship grouping, which is the set of all the people descending from one woman. The latter is the clan. For a quick idea of magnitude, consider that the Akans, now numbering in the region of seven million, trace their collective ancestry to seven women. Patently, individual Akans will never know all their relatives, but they can rest assured that they have a million of them.

For many practical purposes, however, it is the household and (basic) lineage circles of relations that have the most significance in terms of informal rights and obligations. Two illustrations must suffice here. Adult members of the lineage may be called upon each to make financial contributions to rescue one of the fold fallen on hard times, say, threatening insolvency. In view of the powers of arithmetic, this did not necessarily take a heavy toll of individual pockets. Moreover, it was not lost upon the reflective individual that he or she might conceivably have been the beneficiary.

The next illustration has to do with a lugubrious subject matter. Bereavement is one of the severest trials of the human psyche; unfortunately, it is recurrent. By both precept and

practice Akan traditional culture engages itself, preeminently, one might even say, with finding ways to soothe lacerated emotions in such crises. The lineage system incorporates in its arrangements just such a mechanism. In full operation everyone in the lineage is expected to play his part by word, song, dance, and material resource. Nor does the culture leave this to the lineage alone. Friends, neighbours, and even indirect acquaintances can always be counted upon to help in various ways to lighten the burden of sorrows. The framework for all this is the quite elaborate system of the Akan funeral. In spite of the excesses to which this institution has become subject through the rising tide of commercialism and egotistical exhibitionism, it remains an avenue for the expression of human solidarity at its most heartfelt depth. Proper participation thereto is, in Akan eyes, contributory proof of real personhood.

### CONCLUSION

It is clear from the foregoing that socialization in the broad context of the lineage can be a veritable school for morality in its Akan acceptation. It is through the kinship channels of the lineage set-up that the Akan sense of the sociality of human beings finds its most natural expression. Moral life in the wider community is only an extension of a pattern of conduct inculcated at the lineage level. The fundamental values, some of which we have already outlined above, are the same on the two planes, and may be briefly summarized. A communalistic orientation will naturally prize social harmony. A characteristic Akan, and, as it seems, African way of pursuing this ideal is through decision-making by consensus rather than by majority opinion. In politics—traditional African politics, not the modern travesties rampant on the continent—this leads to a form of democracy very different from the Western variety.

A thoroughgoing consensual approach to social issues can be expected to lead to corresponding procedures in other areas of social life too. A particularly interesting case relates to the Akan reaction to wrongdoing. Though the retributive spirit is not totally absent from reactions, especially at the state level, to some forms of wrongdoing, the predominant tendency is to seek compensation or reconciliation or, in cases where extra-human forces are thought to be estranged, purification. I abstain from using the word 'punishment' in this context advisedly, for given this last remark it may well be that there is no unproblematic rendition of this notion in the Akan conceptual framework. I cannot, however, pursue this question here.

A well-known feature of Akan morals is respect for age. This is intelligible not only from the fact that we are dealing with a society strongly based on kinship relations, which are naturally patterned into hierarchies based on age, but also because in traditional societies, which in part Akan society still remains, age is associated with knowledge, experience, and wisdom.

Akan moral thinking in regard to sex and marriage also deserves special mention. Here the humanistic and the communalistic aspects of the Akan outlook come into play with interesting results. Because only empirical considerations bearing on human interests are admitted in moral evaluation, such unconditional proscriptions of pre-marital sex as are found in Christian teaching are absent from the moral rules of the Akans. From their point of view, it would be irrational to stop a prospective couple from seeking full



knowledge of each other, moral, psychological, sexual, and so on. There is, of course, no sexual free-for-all; but, still, a nonfurtive relationship between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman need not be restricted to hugging. The only proviso is that it should be above board. On the other hand, the high value placed on reproductive fertility in a communalistic society based on single-family-unit agriculture will predictably lead to the greatest emphasis being placed on the desirability of marriage and procreation. So much is this the case that being married with children well raised is part of the necessary conditions for personhood in the normative sense. A non-marrying, non-procreative person, however normal otherwise—not to talk of a Casanova equivalent—can permanently forget any prospect of this type of recognition in traditional Akan society. The only conceivable exceptions will be ones based on the noblest of alternative life commitments.

To understand all these facts about the Akan conception of morals is not necessarily to understand the culture in its entirety, but it is to have some sense of its foundations.

### Person and community in African thought

#### KWAME GYEKYE

The existence of a social structure is an outstanding, in fact, a necessary feature of every human society. A social structure is evolved not only to give effect to certain conceptions of human nature, but also to provide a framework for both the realization of the potentials, goals, and hopes of the individual members of the society and the continuous existence and survival of the society. The type of social structure or arrangement evolved by a particular society seems to reflect—and be influenced by—the public conceptions of personhood held in the society. These conceptions are articulated in the critical analyses and arguments of its intellectuals.

Questions raised by the intellectuals, especially the moral and political philosophers among them, relate, in this connection, to the metaphysical and moral status of a person (or, self). The metaphysical question is whether a person, even though he/she lives in a human society, is a self-sufficient atomic individual who does not depend on his/her relationships with others for the realization of his/her ends and who has ontological priority over the community, or whether he/she is by nature a communal (or, communitarian) being, having natural and essential relationships with others. Moral questions, which may, in some sense, be said to be linked to, or engendered by, metaphysical conceptions of the person, relate to:

- 1 The status of the rights of the individual—whether these are so fundamental that they may not be overridden in any circumstances.
- 2 The place of duties—how the individual sees his/her socio-ethical roles in relation to the interests and welfare of others.
- 3 The existence and appreciation of a sense of common life or common (collective) good.

Moral or normative matters may be expressed in sophisticated and elaborate conceptual formulation; but as practical matters they have their best and unambiguous articulation

or translation in the actual way of life of a people—in the way individuals are expected or not expected to respond to one another in times of need, to spontaneously care for one another, and so on.

My intention in this paper is to explore the above questions which bear on personhood and community; how the two concepts feature and are understood in African culture will be my point of departure. In *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme* (1987) I discussed the concepts of individuality and communalism as they are understood in Akan philosophy in the traditional setting. I shall now, however, focus my attention mainly on the normative aspects of personhood and community.

### COMMUNITARIANISM IN AFRICAN SOCIO-ETHICAL THOUGHT

The communal or communitarian (I use the two words interchangeably) aspects of African socio-ethical thought are reflected in the communitarian features of the social structures of African societies. As remarked by many scholars or researchers on the cultures of Africa, these features are not only outstanding, but the defining characteristics of those cultures. The sense of community that characterizes social relations among individuals is a direct consequence of the communitarian social arrangements. This sense of community, according to Dickson, is a:

...characteristic of African life of which attention has been drawn again and again by both African and non-African writers on Africa. Indeed, to many this characteristic defines Africanness (1977:4).

According to Senghor:

Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individuals, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society (1964:93–94).

Kenyatta made the following observation with regard to the traditional life in Kenya:

According to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost he is several people's relative and several people's contemporary (1965:297).

Elsewhere Kenyatta observed the following:

Individualism and self-seeking were ruled out... The personal pronoun 'I' was used very rarely in public assemblies. The spirit of collectivism was (so) much ingrained in the mind of the people (1965:180).

The communitarian ethos of the African culture is also echoed in the works of some African novelists. Clearly, then, the African social structures with its underlying socio-ethical philosophy, was and very much still is, communitarian.

Now, what would be the conception of personhood held in such a communitarian socioethical philosophy? The question is appropriate and would need to be explored, for it is possible for people to assume offhandedly that with its emphasis on communal values, collective good, and shared ends, communitarianism invariably conceives the person as *wholly* constituted by social relationships; that it tends to whittle down the moral autonomy of the person; that it makes the being and life of the individual person totally dependent on the activities, values, projects, practices, and ends of the community; and consequently, that it diminishes his/her freedom and capability to choose or question or re-evaluate the shared values of the community.

The communitarian conception of the person needs to be critically and thoroughly examined before making a final judgement on those assumptions. In making the communitarian self, as variously understood in African culture, my point of departure, I shall set off from the views clearly expressed in an interesting paper published some time ago by Menkiti. Making Mbiti's (1970:141) understanding or assessment of the status of the person in African culture expressed in the statement 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1970:141) the basis for his analysis, Menkiti maintains that the African view asserts the ontological primacy, and hence the ontological independence, of the community. He says that:

...as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be (Menkiti 1984:171).

From this assumption, Menkiti infers the following:

- 1 That in the African view, in contrast with the Western one 'it is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, wills or memory (1984:172).
- 2 That the African view supports 'the notion of personhood as acquired' (1984:174,178-179).
- 3 That 'personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed' (1984:172).
- 4 That 'as far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail' (1984:173).

He infers the notion of an acquisition of personhood also from the use of the pronoun *it* 'in many languages, English included' (1984:173) to refer to 'children and new borns' (1984:173). I take issue with the views or conclusions expressed in (1) to (3), for they do not necessarily follow from the notion of the priority of the community. Menkiti's views on the metaphysical status of the community vis-à-vis that of the person and his account of personhood in African moral, social, and political philosophy are, in my opinion, overstated and not entirely correct, and require some amendments or refinements. I will in the fullness of time justify my criticisms of his views.

However, I should perhaps point out here that the metaphysical construal of personhood in African thought such as Menkiti's, which gives the community priority over the individual person, has a parallel in the conceptions of the social status of the

person held by some scholars, both African and non-African. Their position was grounded in the ideological choice of socialism—‘African socialism’—made by most African political leaders in the early days of political independence. Or, is it the case that the social conception of the individual’s status is a logical consequence of the metaphysical? The social conception holds a view of communitarianism which may be either radical and unrestricted or moderate and restricted, with either extreme or moderate socio-political consequences for the individual person. Thus, the advocates of the ideology of African socialism, such as Nkrumah, Senghor, and Nyerere, in their anxiety to find anchorage for their ideological choice in the traditional African ideas about society, argued that socialism was foreshadowed in the African traditional idea and practice of communalism (communitarianism). Thus, Nkrumah observed:

If one seeks the socio political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism... in socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances (1964:73).

And Senghor also opined:

Negro-African society is collectivist or, more exactly communal, because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals (1964:49).

These statements clearly suggest the conviction of these African leaders or scholars that the African social order, in the traditional setting, was communitarian and would, for that reason, easily translate into modern socialism. Hence the euphoric and unrelenting pursuit of socialism by most African political leaders for more than two decades following the attainment of political independence. But in as much as they do not appear to have allowed room for the exercise of individual rights, the view of communitarianism held by them may, most probably be said to be radical, excessive, and unrestricted—a view of communitarianism I find unsupportable.

Communitarianism immediately sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated, atomic individual. Consequently it sees the community not as a mere association of individual persons whose interests and ends are contingently congruent, but as a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/or non-biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals, and values. The notion of common interests and values is crucial to an adequate conception of community; that notion in fact defines the community. It is the notion of common interests, goals, and values that differentiates a community from a mere association of individual persons. Members of a community share goals and values. They have intellectual and ideological, as well as emotional, attachments to those goals and values; as long as they cherish them, they are ever ready to pursue and defend them.

It is an obvious fact, of course, that an individual human being is born into an existing human society and, therefore, into a human culture, the latter being a product of the former. As an Akan maxim has it, when a person descends from heaven, he/she descends into a human society (*onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom*). The fact that a person is born into an existing community must suggest a conception of the person as a

communitarian being by nature, even though some people insist on the individuality of the person. The communitarian conception of the person has some of the following implications:

- 1 That the human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, that is, that community life is not optional for any individual person.
- 2 That the human person is at once a cultural being.
- 3 That the human person cannot—perhaps must not—live in isolation from other persons.
- 4 That the human person is naturally oriented toward other persons and must have relationships with them.
- 5 That social relationships are not contingent but necessary.
- 6 That, following from (4) and (5), the person is constituted, but only partly (see below), by social relationships in which he/she necessarily finds him/herself.

The fundamentally relational character of the person and the interdependence of human individuals arising out of their natural sociality are thus clear. It is the necessary relationships which complete the being of the individual person who, prior to entering into those relationships, would not be self-complete for, as we are reminded by an Akan maxim, a person is not a palm tree that he should be self-complete or self-sufficient (*onipa nnye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho*). It is evidently true that in the social context, in terms of functioning or flourishing in a human community, the individual person is not self-sufficient; his/her capacities, talents, and dispositions are not adequate for the realization of his/her potential and basic needs. What accrues to a person's natural sociality—and hence natural rationality—provides the buttress indispensable to the actualization of his/her possibilities.

All this presupposes the priority of the cultural community in which the individual person finds him/herself. Yet, it might be supposed that if a community crucially consists of persons sharing interests and values in some sense, wouldn't this fact establish the priority of the individual rather than that of the community, and that therefore the community existentially derives from individuals and the relationships that would exist between them? We may here turn briefly, but critically, to the Akan maxim that says that one tree does not make or constitute a forest (*duo baako nnye kwae*). This means that for there to be a forest there should be a number of individual trees; the reality of the forest derives from the individual trees. In the context of the relationship between the individual and the community, the analogical meaning of the maxim is that one individual person does not constitute a community. Just as we would not speak of a forest where there is only one tree, so we would not—cannot—speak of a community where there is only one person. Even though existing or ongoing communities are of course of varying sizes, yet not even the smallest one is constituted by one individual person. According to the maxim, a community emerges, that is, comes into existence, with the congregation of individual persons: the priority of the individual vis-à-vis the derivativeness of the community appears implicit in the maxim.

The analogy the maxim seeks to establish between the forest and community, however, is a defective one, even though the notion of the metaphysical priority of the individual person implicit in the explanation of the maxim I have provided may be found attractive

by some people. The analogy is defective in that whereas the individual tree can grow in a lonely place, in isolation from other trees and, thus, without any relationship with them or assistance from them, an individual human person cannot develop and achieve the fullness of his potentials without the concrete act of relating to other individual persons. Also, whereas the individual person is born into an existing community, not into a solitary wilderness, and is naturally oriented toward other persons, the individual tree can sprout from, or be planted, in a lonely place. But it would be pointless to strain the analogy of the maxim whose intention is to establish that the whole is a function of its parts, and hence to establish the ontological derivativeness of the community.

The ontological derivativeness of the community, however, cannot be upheld. The reason is that the view of the priority of the individual, logically implied by the notion of the ontological derivativeness of the community, makes relationships between persons merely contingent, voluntary and optional. That conclusion may not yield or lead to the emergence of a community, which, however, is necessary as a basis, not only for defining and articulating the values and goals shareable by individual persons, but also for realizing the nature or possibilities of the individual person. The community alone constitutes the context, the social or cultural space, in which the actualization of the possibilities of the individual person can take place, providing the individual person the opportunity to express his/her individuality, to acquire and develop his/her personality and to fully become the kind of person he/she wants to be, i.e. to attain the status, goals, expectations to be, etc. The system of values which the person inherits as he/she enters into the cultural community and the range of goals in life from which he/she can choose—these are not anterior to a cultural structure but a function of the structure itself: they are therefore posterior to—indeed the products of the culture, i.e. the community. Thus, insofar as the cultural community constitutes the context or medium in which the individual person works out and chooses his/her goals and life plans, and, through these activities, ultimately becomes what he/she wants to be—the sort of status he/she wants to acquire—the cultural community must be held as prior to the individual.

### COMMUNAL STRUCTURE AND PERSONHOOD

The articulation of the ontological primacy of the community, the natural sociality of the human person, the organic character of the relations between individual persons, and the all-importance of the community for the total well-being or complete realization of the nature of the individual person—all this as explicated in the foregoing section certainly can give rise to a hyperbolic and extreme view of the functional and normative status of the community. The characterizations of the nature and status of the community just provided may be true; in fact they are true, to my mind. Yet one could err in at least some of the conclusions one may draw from them by overlooking the logic or relevance of attributes that can be delineated as belonging essentially to the human person *qua* person. A consideration of other aspects of human nature would certainly be appropriate: a person is by nature a social (communal) being, yes; but he/she is by nature other things as well (i.e. a person possesses other essential attributes). Failure to recognize this may result in pushing the significance and implications of a person's communal nature beyond their limits, an act that would in turn result in investing the community with an all-

engulfing moral authority to determine all things about the life of the individual person. One might thus easily succumb to the temptation of exaggerating the normative status and power of the cultural community in relation to those of the person, and thus obfuscating our understanding the real nature of the person. It seems to me that Menkiti succumbed to this temptation.

Menkiti in his interesting paper 'Person and community in traditional African thought' (1984) deploys arguments to prove that African thought considers personhood as something defined or conferred by the community and as something that must be acquired by the individual. In my critical examination of his paper I shall start with arguments that emerge out of his understanding of African cultural practices or beliefs and his attribution to African thought of an analysis of a characteristic of English grammar.

Menkiti, as I have already mentioned, infers the notion of acquisition of personhood from the use of the neuter pronoun 'it' in many languages, including English, to refer to children and new borns but not to adults. The point he wants to make is that the use of the neuter pronoun for children and new borns means that they are not yet persons—the community has not yet conferred personhood on them. They are now going through the 'process' of becoming persons. The inference Menkiti draws would most probably be incorrect for a number of African languages. It is surprising that an inference based on the characteristics of a non-African language is being regarded as having serious implications for African thought!

It would have been more instructive and appropriate for him to examine how the neuter pronoun 'it' functions in some African languages, and whether it functions in the same way in African languages as it does in English. What he says about the pronoun 'it' does not at all apply to the Akan language, for example: the neuter pronoun 'it' does not exist in this language for animate things. Thus: 'He is in the room' is translated in Akan as *ɔwɔ dan no mu*; 'she is in the room' as *ɔwɔ dan no mu*; and 'it (referring to a dog) is in the room' also as *ɔwɔ dan no mu*. However, 'it' is used for inanimate things. Thus, the answer to one question 'where is the book?' will be *ɛwɔ dan no mu*, that is, 'it is in the room'. Thus V is used as the neuter pronoun for only inanimate objects. Children and newly borns are of course not inanimate objects. Since the Akan neuter pronoun 'ɔ' applies to all the three genders (strictly only to a part, i.e. the animate part, of the neuter gender, though), it would follow, on Menkiti's showing, that not even the adult or oldest person can strictly be referred to as a person! For the answer to the question, 'where is the old man?' (if we want to use a pronoun) in Akan will be *ɔwɔ dan no mu*, that is, 'he/it is in the room'.

In Ga-Dangme languages, also in Ghana, the pronoun 'e' is used to refer to everything—stones, trees, dogs, and human beings (of both the masculine and feminine genders). The pronoun 'e' (it/he/she) is thus gender-neutral, encompassing all the genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. In this group of languages there is no pronoun used solely for inanimate objects, as there is in Akan, for the pronoun 'e' is used for both animate and inanimate objects. Clearly, then, neither the neuter pronoun in the Akan language for animate things, nor the gender-neutral pronoun in Ga-Dangme languages, gives an indication as to the real nature of its designatum. The argument that 'it' used of new borns and children (in the English language), implies that they are not yet persons

therefore collapses when examined in the context of these languages, for 'it' in Akan and Ga-Dangme languages is, as we have observed, used to refer to adults and older peoples as well as to children and new borns. Are those older people persons or are they yet to acquire their personhood? The semantics of the neuter pronoun in the African languages I have examined does not in any way lead to a view of non-person. Thus Menkiti errs.

Menkiti also argues that the relative absence of ritualized grief over the death of a child in African societies in contrast to the elaborate burial ceremony and ritualized grief in the event of the death of an older person, also supports his point about the conferment by the community of personhood status. It is not true that every older person who dies in an African community is given elaborate burial. The type of burial and the nature and extent of grief expressed over the death of an older person depend on the community's assessment, not of his/her personhood as such, but of the dead person's achievements in life, his/her contribution to the welfare of the community, and the respect he/she commanded in the community. Older persons who may not satisfy such criteria may in fact be given simple and poor funerals and attenuated forms of grief expressions. As to the absence of ritualized grief on the death of a child, this has no connection whatsoever with the African view of personhood as such, as alleged by Menkiti. It stems rather from beliefs about the possible consequences, for the mother of the dead child, of showing excessive grief: one belief, among the Akan people, is that excessive demonstration of grief in the event of the death of a child will make the mother infertile, as it will make her reach her menopause prematurely, another belief is that the excessive show of grief over the death of a child will drive the dead child too 'far away' for it to reincarnate, and so be reborn; and so on. These beliefs are of course superstitious, but that is beside the point.

Thus no distinctions as to personhood can be made on the basis of the nature and extent of ritualized grief over the death of a child or of an older person. A human person is a person whatever his/her age or social status. Personhood may reach its full realization in community, but it is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society. What a person acquires are status, habits, and personality or character traits: he/she, *qua* person, thus becomes the subject of the acquisition, and being thus prior to the acquisition process, he/she cannot be defined by what he/she acquires. One is a person because of what one is, not because of what one has acquired. Thus, the contrast Menkiti wants to establish between the African and the Western views of the nature of personhood by describing the former as 'processual' (Menkiti 1984:172) or 'some sort of ontological progression' (1984:173), and the latter as grounded on 'some isolated static quality' (1984:172) is, in my opinion, misguided.

However, there are some expressions in the Akan language, and judgements or evaluations made about life and conduct of people, which give the impression that it is the community that defines and confers personhood. When an individual appears in his conduct to be wicked, bad, ungenerous, cruel, selfish, the Akan would say of that individual, that 'he is not a human person' (*onnye' nipa*). Implicit in this judgement is the assumption that there are certain basic norms and ideals to which the behaviour of a person, *if* he/she is a person, ought to conform, and that there are moral virtues that the human person is capable of displaying in his/her conduct. And because the person is thought to be capable of displaying those virtues, it is expected that he/she would, when the situation arises, display them in his/her conduct and act in conformity with the



accepted moral values and standards. Considering the situations in which that judgement is made about persons, these norms, ideals, and moral virtues can be said to include generosity, kindness, compassion, benevolence, respect, and concern for others; in fact, any action or behaviour that conduces to the promotion of the welfare of others. And the reason for that judgement made of an individual is that that individual's actions and conduct are considered as falling short of the standards and ideals of personhood.

In Akan cultures, then, much is expected of a person in terms of the display of moral virtue. The pursuit or practice of moral virtue is held as intrinsic to the conception of a person. The position here may thus be schematized as: for any p, if p is a person, then p ought to display in his/her conduct the norms and ideals of personhood. Thus when a person fails to exhibit the expected moral virtues in his/her conduct, he/she is said not to be a person (*ōnye 'nipa*). The evaluative judgement opposite to the one we have been considering is, 'he is a person' (*oye' nipa*). The judgement here is not a descriptive one at all, though it can be used descriptively, for instance, to distinguish a human being from a tree. A descriptive use of that judgement would be obvious. It is, however, the normative form of the judgement that I am concerned to point out:

'he is a person', used normatively, means, 'he has good character', 'he is peaceful—not troublesome', 'he is kind', 'he has respect for others', 'he is humble' (Ahene-Affoh 1976:51).

The Akan, fully satisfied with, and profoundly appreciative of, the high standards of the morality of a person's conduct, would say of such a person: 'he/she is a real (human) person' (*ōye onipa paa*).

Now, the moral significance of 'denying' personhood to a human being on the grounds that his actions are dissonant with certain fundamental norms and ideals of personhood, or that he fails to exhibit certain virtues in his behaviour is extremely interesting and is worth noting. It means that human nature is considered in Akan culture to be essentially good, not depraved or warped by some original sin; that the human person is basically good, can and should do good, and should in turn have good done to him/her. It means, further, that the human person is considered to possess an innate capacity for virtue, for performing morally right actions and therefore should be treated as a morally responsible agent. I may here refer to the Akan maxim or belief that 'God created every man (to be) good' (*Onyome bōō obiara yee*). The meaning of the statement that 'God created every man good' is ambiguous. It is ambiguous with regard to a person's actually doing good, that is, actually behaving virtuously, and being capable of moral choice, that is, having the moral sense to distinguish between good and evil or right and wrong. In other words, it is not clear whether the statement means that a person is determined to do good, to pursue virtues, or that he/she is merely endowed with a sense of right and wrong. How do we interpret the meaning of the statement then? In view of a person's evil and unethical actions, the first alternative interpretation cannot be accepted as the correct meaning of the statement: the first alternative is plainly contradicted by the person's moral experience. The correct interpretation of the view that the human person was created a moral being then might be that he/she is a being endowed with moral sense and capable of making moral judgements. The human person can then be held as a moral agent, a

moral subject—not that his/her virtuous character is a settled matter, but that he/she is capable of virtue.

The foregoing discussion of some morally significant expressions in the Akan language or judgements made about the conduct of persons suggests a conception of moral personhood; a person is defined in terms of moral qualities or capacities: a human person is a being who has a moral sense and is capable of making moral judgements. This conception of a person, however, must not be considered as eliminating or writing off children or infants as persons even though they are not (yet) considered as moral agents, as capable of exercising moral sense. The reason is that, even though children are not morally capable in actuality, they are morally capable in potentiality. Unlike the colt which will never come to possess a moral sense even if it grew into an adult (horse), children do grow to become moral agents on reaching adolescence: at this stage they are capable of exercising their moral sense and thus of making moral judgements. Menkiti (1984:176) in fact accepts the characterization or definition of personhood in terms of moral capacities when he says:

The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhoods, *marked by an absence of moral functions, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one.*

This passage surely commits Menkiti to saying that a person is defined in terms of 'some isolated static quality'—the quality of moral sense or capacity in the African case—which he thought was a characteristic of Western conceptions of personhood!

Yet to explicate personhood in terms of moral capacities is not to imply by any means that it is the community that fully defines or confers personhood, even though it can be admitted that through such activities as moral instruction, advice, admonition, and the imposition of sanctions the community can be said to play some role in a person's moral life. Moral capacities as such cannot be said to be implanted or catered for or conferred by the community.

Now, I wish to turn briefly to other forms of judgements made about persons which are not particularly moral in nature. In the communal setting of the African life, an individual's social status is measured in terms of:

- 1 A person's sense of responsibility, expressed, in turn, through his/her responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group.
- 2 What a person has been able to achieve through his/her own exertions—physical, intellectual, moral.
- 3 The extent to which a person fulfills certain social norms, such as having a marital life and bringing up children.

Faced with such social demands and requirements, an individual would strive in several

ways to demonstrate his/her sense of personal responsibility, to achieve some measure of success in life, and to have a family (that is, immediate family). All these strivings are aimed at attaining some social status. The individual may fail in his strivings and, in the Akan community, for example, may consequently be judged as a ‘useless person’ (*onipa hun*), an opprobrious term. But it must be noted that what the individual would be striving for in all his/her exertions is some social status, not personhood. The strivings are in fact part of the individual’s self-expression, an exercise of a capacity he/she has as a person. And even if at the end of the day the person failed to attain the expected status, his/her personhood would not for that reason diminish, even though he/she may lose social respect in the eyes of the members of the community. So that it is social status, not personhood, at which individuals could fail. Menkiti is mistaken in thinking that individuals can fail at personhood.

The foregoing arguments I have deployed are intended to prove that the view, such as held by Menkiti, that personhood is defined or conferred by the communal structure, cannot be wholly true. This is so despite the natural sociality of the human person which at once places him/her in a system of shared values and practices and a range of goals—which, in short, places him/her in a cultural structure. I have made the observation that, besides being a communitarian being by nature, the human person is, also by nature, other things as well. By ‘other things’, I have in mind such essential attributes of the person as rationality, having a capacity for virtue and for evaluating and making moral judgements and, hence, being capable of choice. It is not the community that creates these attributes; it discovers and nurtures them. So that if these attributes play any seminal roles in the execution of the individual person’s life style and projects, as indeed they do; then it cannot be persuasively argued that personhood is *fully* defined by the communal structure or social relationships.

It is true that the whole gamut of values and practices in which the individual is necessarily embedded is a creation of cultural community and is part of its history. For this reason, it can be said that some of our goals are set by the communal structure. Yet the following questions may be asked:

- 1 Is it possible for the communal structure to set the whole or a seamless complex of the values, practices, and ends of the individual that will perfectly reflect the complexity of human nature, values, and practices at least some of which, we know, do change and so cannot be considered monolithic?
- 2 Does the communal, and therefore cultural, character of the self really imply that the self is ineluctably and permanently held in thrall by that structure?
- 3 Does the ethos of the communal structure preempt or permanently nip in the bud a possibly radical perspective on communal values and practices that may be adopted by a self?

All of these questions can be answered in the negative. The reason is that individual persons, as participants in the shared values and practices, and enmeshed in the web of communal relationships, may find that aspects of those cultural givens are inelegant, undignifying or unenlightening, and can thoughtfully be questioned and evaluated. The evaluation may result in the individual’s affirming or amending or refining existing communal goals, values, and practices; but it may or could also result in the individual’s

total rejection of them. The possibility of re-evaluation means, surely, that the person cannot be absorbed by the communal or cultural apparatus, but can to some extent wriggle him/herself out of it, distance him/herself from it, and thus be in a position to take another look at it; it means, also, that the communal structure cannot foreclose the meaningfulness and reality of the quality of self-assertiveness which the person can demonstrate in his/her actions. The development of human, i.e. communal culture results from the exercise by individual persons of this capacity for self-assertion; it is this capacity which makes possible the intelligibility of autonomous individual choice of goals and life plans. The fact of the changes that do occur in the existing communal values—for some new values are evolved as some of the pristine ones fall into obsolescence—this fact is undoubtedly the result of the evaluative activities and choices of some autonomous, self-assertive individual persons.

The capacity for self-assertion which the individual can exercise presupposes, and in fact derives from, the autonomous nature of the person. By autonomy, I do not mean self-completeness, but the having of a will, a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and to pursue them. (The word 'autonomy' consists of two Greek words 'autos' [self] and 'nomos' [rule]; thus, it means, self-governing, self-directing). The actions and choice of goals of the individual person emanate from his/her rational will. Thus, the self-determining is also self-assertive. The communitarian self, then, cannot be held as a cramped or shackled self acting robotically at the beck and call of the communal structure. That structure is never to be conceived as, or likened to, the Medusa head, the sight of which reduces a person to inactivity and supineness—in this case, cultural, or rational or intellectual supineness.

In concluding this section, then, I wish to say again that even though the communitarian self, such as is held in African moral and political philosophy, is not permanently detached from its contingent communal features and the individual is fully embedded or implicated in the life of his community, nevertheless the self, by virtue of—or by exploiting—its other natural attributes (beside the natural attribute of being communal) essential to its metaphysical constitution, can from time to time take a distanced view of its communal values and practices and reassess or revise them. This possibility implies that the self can set some of its goals and, in this way, participate in the determination or definition of its own identity. The upshot is that personhood can only be partly, never completely, defined by one's membership of the community. The most that can be said, in my view, is that the person is only partly constituted by the community. This view constitutes an amendment to Menkiti's position, put forward without any qualifications that the community fully defines personhood:

...in the African understanding human community plays a crucial role in the individual's acquisition of full personhood. (Menkiti 1984:179)

Menkiti's view of communitarianism, which appears to have support in the writings of African political leaders (whose view I adumbrated in my introductory remarks), appears to chime in with unrestricted or radical or excessive communitarianism. That view differs from the one I am putting forward which is that of a restricted or moderate communitarianism. It seems to me that restricted communitarianism offers a more

appropriate and adequate account of the self than the unrestricted or radical account in that the former addresses the dual features of the self: as a communal being and as an autonomous, self-determining, self-assertive being with a capacity for evaluation and choice. There are, to be sure, other reasons for preferring restricted or moderate communitarianism over unrestricted or radical communitarianism which I discuss in the section that follows.

### RIGHTS, DUTIES, AND THE COMMUNAL STRUCTURE

It might be supposed that communitarianism with its emphasis on, and concern for communal values will have no truck with the doctrine of rights, for that doctrine is necessarily an individualistic doctrine. Rights belong primarily and irreducibly to individuals; a right is the right of some individual. Yet the supposition that communitarianism will have no places or very little, if at all, for rights will be false both in theory and practice, especially in the case of restricted or moderate communitarianism.

Communitarianism will not necessarily be antithetical to the doctrine of rights for several reasons. In the first place, communitarianism cannot disallow arguments about rights which may in fact form part of the activity of a self-determining autonomous individual possessed of the capacity for evaluating or re-evaluating the entire practice of his/her community. Some of such evaluations may touch on matters of rights, the exercise of which a self-determining individual may see as conducive to the fulfilment of the human potential, and against the denial of which he/she may raise some objections.

Second, the respect for human dignity, a natural or fundamental attribute of the person which cannot, as such, be set at nought by the communal structure, generates regard for personal rights. The reason is that the natural membership of the individual person in a community cannot rob him/her of his/her dignity or worth, a fundamental and inalienable attribute he/she possesses as a person. Some conceptions of human dignity are anchored in theism, in the conviction that the dignity of the person is a natural endowment by God, the creator of humankind. One maxim of an African people whose social structure is communal has it that 'all persons are children of God; no one is a child of the earth' (*nnpa nyinaa ye Onyame mma; obiara nnye asase ba*). The insistent claim being made in the maxim that every person is a child of God does seem to have some moral overtones or relevance, grounded, as it must, on the belief that there must be something intrinsically valuable in God. A person, being a child of God, presumably by reason of having been created by him and regarded as possessing a divine spark called soul (*okra*), must be held as of intrinsic value, an end in himself, worthy of dignity and respect. It is possible to derive a theory of individual rights from theistic conceptions of the intrinsic worth of persons. One conception of rights famously known to be grounded on an act of God is in the preamble of the American Declaration of Independence (1776). We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they *are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...*

However, it is possible to derive a conception of human dignity and hence individual rights, not from theism, but from reflecting on human nature, particularly on the qualities that will dispose the human being to function at his/her best in human society and realize his/her full potentialities as a person. Thus the eighteenth-century German philosopher,

Immanuel Kant, on the basis of his rational analysis, grounds the notion of human dignity or intrinsic worth on the capacity of the person for moral autonomy, i.e. rational freedom. Thus conceived, argues Kant, the person ought to be treated as an end in himself:

Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end (1965:95).

Kant thus formulates his famous Categorical Imperative, considered by him as the supreme principle of morality, also as: 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but at the same time as an end' (1965:95). This leads Kant to a notion of moral rights which he refers to as 'innate rights' but which belong to everyone by nature and so could be called natural rights, which are our fundamental ethical end. Thus a conception of human dignity and moral or natural (human) rights which concomitantly flow from it can be reached through purely rational reflection on human nature. But howsoever the conception of human dignity or rights is derived, whether from theistic considerations or from sources independent of God, that conception is linked with, and in fact compels, the recognition of rights, and not only in an individualistic but also communitarian situation. In other words, the derivation of individual rights from naturalism (humanism) or supernaturalism cannot be confined to an individualistic framework; the derivation is not an activity or a characteristic or a possibility solely of an individualistic social ambience.

Third, at both the theoretical (conceptual) and practical level, communitarianism cannot set its face against individual rights. For, implicit in communitarianism's recognition of the dual features of the self as an autonomous, self-determining entity capable of evaluation and choice and as a communal being, is a commitment to the acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of the self and the moral rights which can be said necessarily to be due to it. The recognition by communitarian political morality of individual rights is a conceptual requirement. At the practical level communitarianism must realize that allowing free rein for the exercise of individual rights—which obviously includes the exercise of the unique qualities, talents, and dispositions of the individuals—will enhance the cultural development and success of the community. If communitarianism were to shrug off individual rights, it would not only show itself as an inconsistent moral and political theory, but in practical terms would also saw off the branch on which it was going to sit.

However, it can be said that restricted or moderate communitarianism is a consistent and viable theory, one that is not opposed to individual rights, even though it may, for a reason to be stated presently, consciously and purposively give greater attention or care to other communal values of the community. The foregoing discussion then, has, I hope, clearly shown the falsity of the view that communitarianism will have no, or very little place, for individual rights.

Having said all this, however, it must be granted that communitarianism cannot be expected to make a fetish of rights; thus rights talk will not be brought to the front burner of its concerns and preoccupations. The reason is not far to seek; it is deriveable from the

logic of the communitarian theory itself: it assumes an overwhelming concern for communal values, for the good of the wider society as such. Even so, the absorbing interest in the common good, in the provision for the social conditions which will enable each individual person to function satisfactorily in a human society, does not—should not—result in the gleeful subversion of individual rights. The reason is that even though rights belong primarily to individuals, as we said, nevertheless, insofar as their exercise will often, directly or indirectly, be valuable to the larger society, their status and roles must be recognized by communitarian theory. But the theory will disallow separating rights from the common values of the community and conferring on them a pre-eminent status. It must be noted that in any scheme of value ranking occurs or is resorted to when situations require that preferences for some values be made over other values. This is so whether the system of ethics is deontological (i.e. moderately deontological) or teleological. Thus, in the communitarian political morality, priority will not be given to rights if doing so will stand in the way of attaining a more highly ranked value or a more preferable goal of the community. Rights would not, therefore, be held as absolute in the communitarian theory, even though I think they will—in fact they should—have some place in that theory.

However, although it is conceivable, as has already been explained, that the communal structure will allow the exercise of individual rights, yet it can be expected that communitarianism would not suggest to individuals incessantly to insist on their rights. The reason, I suppose, is the assumption that rights, i.e. political, economic, social, are built into the ethos and practices of the cultural community. Thus, the economic, political, and social needs of the individual members, which are the concern of most individual rights, would be expected to have been recognized, if not catered for, to some degree of adequacy by the communitarian structure. Individuals would not have a penchant for, an obsession with, insisting on their rights, knowing that insistence on their rights could divert attention to duties they, as members of the communal society, strongly feel towards other members of the community. Rights and duties are not polar concepts, even though they could be: if I insist on my right to all my possessions or to all that has resulted from the exercise of my endowments, I may not be able to show sensitivity to the needs and welfare of others, even though showing sensitivity to the needs of others is an important plank in the ethical platform of communitarianism. The danger or possibility of slipping down the slope of selfishness when one is totally obsessed with the idea of individual rights is, thus, quite real. In a social situation that as a matter of ethical testaments stresses social relations, concern, and compassion for others, and other communal values, insistence on rights (some rights) may not be necessary.

However, while the communitarian structure would not have a fetishistic attitude to individual rights, it would certainly have one toward duties that individual members have or ought to have toward other—perhaps the least advantaged—members of the community. The communitarian theory will expectably give priority to duties rather than rights. Concerned, as it is, with the common good or the communal welfare, the welfare of each and every member of the community, communitarianism will, perhaps undoubtedly, consider duty as the moral tone, as the supreme principle of morality. By 'duty', I mean task, service, conduct, or function that a person feels morally obligated to perform in respect of another person or other persons. The duties, which some members

of the community feel they owe others by reason of our common humanity and should demonstrate in practice, are such as the duty to help others in distress, the duty not to harm others, and so on. Duties to the community as a whole or to some members of the community would not derive from a social contract between individuals. The contract theory is a contrivance for voluntary, not natural, membership of the community, regarded by some people as a mere association of individuals. In a communitarian framework, however, there would be no place for the contract theory to set forth the duties and rights of individuals who are to inhabit a society that is being contemplated.

Even though such duties as caring for one another, concern for the welfare and needs of others, may not be said to be idiosyncratic to the communitarian system alone and an individualistic system can also evince or practise them, it seems to me that the pursuit of those duties in the latter system will be less spontaneous and less successful because of its obsession with individual rights. And it appears that some of the American philosopher Rawls' notions treated in his monumental work will fit better in a communitarian framework than an individualistic one which he makes the basis of his arguments. Rawls makes the following statements:

The difference principle represents, in effect, an agreement to regard the distribution of natural talents as a *common asset* (1971:101).

In justice as fairness men agree to *share* one another's fate. In designing institutions they undertake to avail themselves of the accidents of nature and social circumstance only when doing so is for the *common benefit* (1971:102).

The two principles are equivalent...to an undertaking to regard the distribution of natural abilities as a *collective asset* so that the more fortunate are to benefit only in ways that help those who have lost out (1971:179).

The members of a community *participate in one another's nature*; we appreciate what others do as things we might have done but which they do for us (1971:565).

Rawls' language unmistakably resonates with communitarian expressions, meanings, and content.

The notions of 'sharing one another's fate', 'common assets', 'collective assets', 'common benefit', 'participating in one another's nature'—these notions and others related to them in Rawls' scheme will surely find a more ready embrace in the communitarian home than in the home artificially and instrumentally constructed by individuals in pursuit of their own egoistic advantages or ends. Those notions, it seems to me, are more appropriate, much less idealistic, for a communitarian political culture, where they will elicit greater significance and understanding and less philosophical controversy or resistance, than in a system, like Rawls', which seeks to give priority to individual rights rather than to duties. The point I am at pains to make, in other words, is that Rawls' essentially individualistic frameworks determinedly poised to secure and cordon off individual rights, can hardly provide an effective support for those 'communitarian notions' he so well articulates, let alone bring them to practical realization.

The question may be raised as to the justification for giving priority to duties over



rights in the communitarian political morality. The priority is, I think, based on, and is most probably required by, the demands of the relational character of the person in the wake of his natural sociality. The sociality of the person immediately makes him/her naturally oriented to other persons with whom he/she must live in relation. Living in relation with others directly involves a person in social and moral roles, duties, obligations, and commitments which the individual person must fulfil. The natural relationality of the person thus immediately plunges him/her into a moral universe, making morality an essentially social and trans-individual phenomenon focused on the well-being of others. Our natural sociality then prescribes or mandates a morality that, clearly, should be weighted on duty, i.e. on that which one has to do for others.

The success that must accrue to communal or corporative living depends very much on each member of the community demonstrating a high degree of moral responsiveness and sensitivity in relation to the needs and well-being of other members. This should manifest itself in each member's pursuit of his/her duties. Also, the common good, which is an outstanding goal of the communitarian moral and political philosophy, requires that each individual should work for the good of all. The social and ethical values of social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, compassion, and reciprocity, which can be said to characterize the communitarian morality, primarily impose on the individual a duty to the community and its members. It is all these considerations that elevate the notion of duties to a priority status in the whole enterprise of communitarian life.

It is often said that rights are correlated with duties, that if there are rights, then there must be corresponding duties, and vice-versa. This hackneyed statement seems to me not to be wholly true, certainly not true in aspects of moral relationships between individuals, or in cases where individuals feel they owe their community some duty or duties. It is true that if I have a right to education, then, it is the duty of someone, a parent or a local authority or the state, to provide what is necessary for my education; similarly, if I have the right to work it is the duty of the state to make jobs available for me. In such cases, where rights are asserted against the state or against some persons in specific roles or positions, the correspondence or correlation between rights and duties will clearly be on track. However, it is possible for a person to carry out a duty to someone else without our having to say that the duty was carried out because of the right of this other person, that is, the person for whose sake the duty was done. Here I am not thinking of what is called an act of supererogation—an act that a person does not have to do, even though it would be morally commendable if he/she did it. I am thinking, rather, of an act that a person morally feels he/she should do, and does it. It seems to me that communitarian ethics will rightly obliterate the distinction between duties and so-called supererogatory acts or acts of charity, and consider all of them as our moral duties. If I carry out a duty to help someone in distress, I would not be doing so because I think that someone has a right against me, a right I should help fulfil. I would be carrying out that duty because I consider that person as worthy of some moral consideration by me, as someone to whose plight I ought to be morally sensitive. (I am here not referring to duties enjoined upon persons by reason of certain specific social roles, positions or statuses they occupy in society.)

When we want to carry out some duties, especially of the positive kind, such as providing some aid to someone in distress looking after aged parents, conferring benefits,

we do not first ask ourselves whether the persons to whom we owe those duties have any rights against us and whether we should perform those duties because of their rights. People in societies in which the concept of rights has not gained (much) currency in their moral or political vocabulary, would carry out their duties to their fellow human beings, yet without the conviction that the latter have rights against them. Our positive duties toward others, then, are not based on their rights: it is not so much a consciousness of the rights of others as our moral responsiveness to their particular situations that impinges on our decision to carry out our duties toward them. This, I think, is generally true, and would be very much so in a social structure like the communitarian, which does not lay any particular stress on rights. A rider is, however, required here: negative duties, such as not to harm others, to refrain from killing or robbing others, do have corresponding rights. For, one's right not to be harmed imposes a duty on others not to harm one. Even so, it can be concluded that the correlation between rights and positive duties collapses and becomes a one-way, asymmetric relation, for as I have explained, there are duties without corresponding rights, as far as the individual moral agent is concerned. The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that it is possible for communitarian ethics to hold the moral status of duties in high esteem without this being mandated or induced by a consciousness of rights.

Yet in stressing duties to the community and its members rather than the rights of the individual members of the community, the communitarian political and moral theory does not imply, by any means, that rights are not important; neither does it deny duties to the self. As pointed out earlier in this section, communitarianism acknowledges the intrinsic value of the person and the moral rights that the acknowledgement can be said to entail.

Individual rights, such as the right to equal treatment, to our property, to freely associate with others, to free speech, and others, would be recognized by communitarianism, especially of the restricted or moderate type. However, in the light of the overwhelming emphasis on duties within the communitarian moral framework, rights would not be given priority over the values of duty and so would not be considered inviolable or indefeasible: it might on this showing, be appropriate occasionally to override some individual rights for the sake of protecting the good of the community itself. As an autonomous, self-determining being, the individual person must, within limits, care for his/her well-being or needs just as he/she cares for the needs of others. Altruistic duties cannot obliterate duties to oneself. This is because the pursuit of altruistic duties does not lead to the dissolution of the self. The individual person has a life to live, and so must have plans for his/her life and must see to the realization of those plans. The attainment of the goal imposes on the self the responsibility or duty to develop one's natural abilities. Therefore, the duty one has toward the community and its members does not—should not—enjoin one to give over one's whole life and be oblivious of one's personal well-being.

What the communitarian ethic will enjoin, then, is dual responsibility, a proposal—or better, an imperative—which on more than one occasion will be consistent in every way with the *dual* features of the human being I referred to earlier. The successful pursuit of the dual responsibility requires that, through the development of one's capacities and through one's own exertions and strivings, and hence through self-attention, the

individual person should him/herself attain some appropriate status socially, economically, intellectually, and so on. One is not saying that all the needs or interests of the individual person should be taken care of before he/she embarks on his/her duties and commitments to others. Yet it is surely a necessary requirement that the individual be in a position to do so—hence the need to carry out duties to him/herself. If the notion of duties to oneself, if self-attention, makes sense even in a communitarian context, as I maintain, so does the notion of individual rights, which, as a reflexive notion, must be conceptually linked to that of self-interest or, as I prefer to say, self-attention.

## CONCLUSION

Communitarian ethical and political theory, which considers the community as a fundamental human good, advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence, a life in which one shares in the fate of the other—bearing one another up—a life which provides a viable framework for the fulfilment of the individual's nature or potentials, a life in which the products of the exercise of an individual's talents or endowments are (nevertheless) regarded as the assets of the community as such, a life free from hostility and confrontation: such a life, according to the theory, is most rewarding and fulfilling.

It is the moderate or restricted version of communitarianism that, to my mind, is defensible and which I support and have argued for in this reading. It is not too clear which of the two versions, if any, is espoused in African cultural traditions. But the position I have taken generally appears to run counter to that of the African political leaders whose writings in the period following the attainment of political independence unmistakably suggest a radical or extreme type of communitarianism traced by them to African cultural traditions.

Moderate or restricted communitarianism gives accommodation, as has been shown, to communal values as well as to values of individuality, to social commitments as well as to duties of self-attention. Even though in its basic thrust and concerns it gives prominence to duties toward the community and its members, it does not—cannot—do so to the detriment of individual rights whose existence and value it recognizes, or should recognize, and for a good reason. I believe strongly that an ethical and political theory that combines the appreciation of, as well as commitments to, the community as a fundamental value, and the understanding of, as well as commitment to, the idea of individual rights will be a most plausible theory to support. Guided by the assumptions about the dual features of the self with an implied dual responsibility, it should be possible to deflate any serious tension between the self and its community.

### An Akan perspective on human rights

#### KWASI WIREDU

A right is a claim that people are entitled to make on others or on society at large by virtue of their status. Human rights are claims that people are entitled to make simply by virtue of their status as human beings. The question naturally arises, what is it about a

human being that makes him or her entitled to make the latter kind of claim? I intend to explore the answer to this question by looking principally at the Akan conception of a person.

The word 'Akan' refers both to a group of intimately related languages found in West Africa and to the people who speak them. This ethnic group lives predominantly in Ghana and in parts of adjoining Côte d'Ivoire. In Ghana they inhabit most of the southern and middle belts and account for close to half the national population of 14 million. Best known among the Akan subgroups are the Ashantis. Closely cognate are the Denkyiras, Akims, Akuapims, Fantes, Kwahus, Wassas, Brongs, and Nzimas, among others.<sup>1</sup> All these groups share the same culture not only in basics but also in many details. Although the cultural affinities of the various Akan subgroups with the other ethnic groups of Ghana are not on the same scale as among themselves, any divergences affect only details. Indeed, viewed against the distant cultures of the East and West, Akan culture can be seen to have such fundamental commonalities with other African cultures as to be subsumable under 'African culture' as a general cultural type.

### THE AKAN CONCEPTION OF A PERSON

The Akan conception of a person has both descriptive and normative aspects that are directly relevant not only to the idea that there are human rights but also to the question of what those rights are. In this conception a person is the result of the union of three elements, not necessarily sharply disparate ontologically, though each is different from the other. There is the life principle (*okra*), the blood principle (*mogya*), and what might be called the personality principle (*sunsum*). The first, the *okra*, is held to come directly from God. It is supposed to be an actual speck of God that he gives out of himself as a gift of life along with a specific destiny. The second, the *mogya* (literally, blood) is held to come from the mother and is the basis of lineage, or more extensively, clan identity. The third, the *sunsum*, is supposed to come from the father, but not directly. In the making of a baby, the father contributes *ntoro* (semen), which combines, according to the Akans, with the blood of the mother to constitute, in due course, the frame of the human being to come. The inherited characteristics of the new arrival are, of course, taken to be attributable to both parents. But the father's input is believed to give rise to a certain immanent characteristic of the individual, called the *sunsum*, which is the kind of personal presence that he or she has. This is one meaning of the word *sunsum*. In this sense, *sunsum* is not an entity, it is, rather, a manner of being. But it is assumed that there must be something in the person that is the cause of the characteristic in question. It is in this sense that *sunsum* names a constituent of the human person.

By virtue of possessing an *okra*, divine element, all persons have an intrinsic value, the same in each, which they do not owe to any earthly circumstance. Associated with this value is a concept of human dignity, which implies that every human being is entitled in an equal measure to a certain basic respect. In support of this the Akans say, 'Everyone is the offspring of God; no one is the offspring of the earth'. Directly implied in the doctrine of *okra* is the right of each person, as the recipient of a destiny, to pursue that unique destiny assigned to him by God. In more colloquial language, everyone has the right to do his/her own thing, with the understanding, of course, that ultimately one must bear the

consequences of one's own choices. This might almost be called the metaphysical right of privacy. It is clinched with the maxim, 'Nobody was there when I was taking my destiny from my God'.

Through the possession of an *okra*, *mogya*, and *sunsum*, a person is situated in a network of kinship relations that generate a system of rights and obligations. Because the Akans are matrilineal, the most important kinship group is the lineage, which may be pictured as a system of concentric circles of matrilineal kinship relation that, at its outermost reaches, can include people in widely separated geographic regions. In these outermost dimensions a lineage becomes a clan. Its innermost circle comprises the grandmother, the mother, the mother's siblings, her own children, and the children of her sisters. To this group, with the mother as the principal personage, belongs the duty of nursing an Akan newborn. The Akans have an acute sense of the dependency of a human being. On first appearance in this world, one is totally defenceless and dependent. This is the time when there is the greatest need for the care and protection of others and also, to the Akan mind, the time of the greatest right to that help. But this right never deserts a human being, for one is seen at all times as insufficient unto oneself. The logic of this right may be simply phrased: a genuine human need carries the right to satisfaction. The right to be nursed, then, is the first human right. In the fullness of time it will be transformed dialectically into a duty, the duty to nurse one's mother in her old age. 'If your mother nurses you to grow your teeth,' says an Akan adage, 'you nurse her to lose hers.' But there is another aspect to the nurturing of a human being he or she needs to be instructed in the arts of gainful living and this function the Akans ascribe to the father. To the father, then, attaches the duty to provide the child with character training, general education, and career preparation.

Through an individual's *ntoro*, the element contributed by the father to each biological makeup, one acquires a certain social link to a patrilineal kinship group, which, however, is much less important than one's matrilineal affiliations except for this: from the father's sister the child has the right to receive sexual education.

Earning a livelihood in traditional Akan society presupposed the possession of one basic resource: land. In an agricultural society like traditional Akan society, education profited a person little unless he could count on some land—land to till and land to develop. It is in this connection that we see an Akan person's most cherished positive right, the right to land. This right one has by virtue of membership in a lineage; it is a claim that one has primarily on one's lineage, but because of the state-wide significance of land, it is also, as I will explain later, a right that might be claimed against the state. We have already mentioned some quite important rights. These are rights, in the Akan perception of things, that people have simply because they are human beings. They are entitlements entailed by the intrinsic sociality of the human status. In viewing a human being in this light, the Akans perhaps went beyond Aristotle's maxim that human beings are political animals. To the Akans, a human being is already social at conception, for the union of the blood principle and the personality principle already defines a social identity. A person is social in a further sense. The social identity just alluded to is a kinship identity. But people live, move, and have their being in an environment that includes persons outside the kin group. They live in a town or city and they have to relate to that environment in definite ways. A well-known Akan maxim asserts that when a human

being descends upon the earth from above, he/she lands in a town. Membership in town and state brings with it a wider set of rights and obligations embracing the whole race of humankind, for the possession of the *okra*, the speck of God in man, is taken to link all human beings together in one universal family. The immediate concerns here, however, are with the rights of persons in the context of Akan society. In that society an individual's status as a person is predicated on the fulfilment of certain roles that have a reference to circles of relationships transcending the kin group. There is an ambiguity here in the use of the word person, the resolution of which will bring us to the normative conception of a person.

In one sense the Akan word *onipa* translates into the English word person in the sense of a human being, the possessor of *okra*, *mogya*, and *sunsum*. In this sense everyone is born a person, an *onipa*. This is the descriptive sense of the word. But there is a further sense of the word *onipa* in which to call an individual a person is to commend him/her; it implies the recognition that he/she has attained a certain status in the community. Specifically, it implies that he/she has demonstrated an ability through hard work and sober thinking to sustain a household and make contributions to the communal welfare. In traditional Akan society, public works were always done through communal labour. Moreover, the defence of the state against external attack was the responsibility of all. Good contributions toward these ends stamped an individual in the community as an *onipa*. Inversely, consistent default distanced him/her from that title. In this sense, personhood is not something you are born with but something you may achieve, and it is subject to degrees, so that some are more *onipa* than others, depending on the degree of fulfilment of one's obligations to self, household, and community.

On the face of it, the normative layer in the Akan concept of person brings only obligations to the individual. In fact, however, these obligations are matched by a whole series of rights that accrue to the individual simply because he/she lives in a society in which everyone has those obligations. It is useful in this regard to recall the fact, noted earlier, that the Akans viewed a human being as essentially dependent. From this point of view, human-society is seen as a necessary framework for mutual aid for survival and, beyond that, for the attainment of reasonable levels of well-being. A number of Akan sayings testify to this conception, which is at the root of Akan communalism. One is to the effect that a human being is not a palm tree so as to be sufficient unto him/herself. (The Akans were highly impressed by the number of things that could be got from a palm tree, not the least memorable among them being palm nut soup and palm wine.) A second saying points out that to be human is to be in need of help. Literally it says simply, 'a human being needs help' (*onipa hia moa*). The Akan verb *hia* means 'is in need of'. In this context it also has the connotation of desert, so that the maxim may also be interpreted as asserting that a human being, simply because he/she is a human being, is entitled to help from others. A further saying explains that it is because of the need to have someone blow out the speck of dust in one's eye that antelopes go in twos. This saying obviously puts forward mutual aid as the rationale of society.

Although the rights deriving from the general human entitlement to the help of their kind did not have the backing of state sanctions, they were deeply enough felt in Akan society. In consequence, such rights may be said to have enjoyed the strong backing of public opinion, which in communalistic societies cannot be taken lightly. However, at

this stage rights that appertain to political existence too must be looked at. If, as the Akans said, when a human being descends upon the earth, he/she lands in a town, the point is that he/she becomes integrated into a particular social and political structure. The specifics of that structure will determine his or her rights and obligations.

### THE AKAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The importance of kinship relations in Akan society has already been noted. This grouping provides the basic units of political organization. These units are the lineages. A lineage, to be sure, is all the individuals in a town who are descended from one ancestress. A clan includes all the lineages united by a common maternal ancestry. It is too large and too scattered to be the unit of political organization in spite of the real feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood that exist among its members. In every town there would be quite a manageable number of lineages. Each of them had a head, called *Abusuapanyin* (elder of the lineage), who was elected by the adult members of the group. Age was an important qualification for this position (just reflect on the title 'elder') but so also was wisdom, eloquence, integrity, and, in earlier times, fighting competence. The last qualification calls for a word of explanation. Every head of lineage was, ex officio, a military leader who led his lineage in a particular position in the battle formation of the Akan army. This was not a professional army but rather a citizen force. In battle formation the Akan army had the following pattern. The first line consisted of a number of small units of scouts. Behind them was a large column of advance guard. Next to it came the main body of infantrymen grouped in two large columns. Following after them came the rear guard, which was a very large column. If the chief himself was taking the field, his company occupied the position between the second main infantry column and the rear guard. Flanking this array of forces on both sides were the left and right wings, which were long columns of fighting men.<sup>2</sup> In view of the military significance of the lineage headship it was natural, in electing someone to that position, to bear in mind the question of his probable prowess in battle. More recently, however, this particular consideration has lost its urgency. The military-sounding names of the headships persist, though, to the present day. (For example, the head of one of the lineages is called *Kyidomhene*. *Akyi* means rear, *dom* means troops, and *hene* means chief; thus the title means chief of the rear guard.)

It is clear from this description, by the way, that not just military service but military service in a particular battle position or war capacity was a birth obligation in Akan society. Everyone had a part in the war effort. Even those able-bodied men who stayed behind in times of war while others marched to the front did so for a military reason—namely, to guard home. The chief of the home-guard lineage, called *Ankobeahene* (literally, did-not-go-anywhere chief), was quite an important leader. It did not escape the Akans that to commit every able-bodied man to the fray would be to guarantee a field day to any band of marauders on the home front. Also it struck them very forcibly that a situation in which a group of healthy men remained together with a very great number of women, temporarily unattended by their husbands, required wise governance. Women, as a rule, did not go into battle, though it should be recalled that at least one major Ashanti war with the British, the Yaa Asantewaa War of 1900, was fought under the inspiration

of a woman. For their part, the women prayed for the success of their men in the field, a function that was quite appreciated. Besides, they could act beforehand as motivators for their men, especially for any reluctant warriors among them.

If every Akan was thus obligated by birth to contribute to defence in one way or another, there was also the complementary fact that he had a right to the protection of his person, property, and dignity, not only in his own state but also outside it. And states were known to go to war to secure the freedom of their citizens abroad or avenge their mistreatment.

The ruling body of an Akan town was a council consisting of the lineage heads with the chief of the town in the capacity of chairman. The functions of the council were to preserve law, order, and peace in the town, to ensure its safety, and to promote its welfare. The office of a chief is hereditary but also partly elective. Some sort of an election is necessary because at any one time there are several people belonging to the royal lineage who are qualified by birth to be considered. The queen of the town (strictly, the queen mother) has the prerogative of selecting the best-qualified candidate, all things considered. But the final decision does not come until the council has assessed the candidate and indicated its approval. Such an approval, if forth-coming, seals the election, provided an objection is not voiced by the populace.

This last proviso is of special significance for the question of human rights, as will be shown later. In every town there was an unofficial personage recognized as the chief of the general populace. He was called *Nkwa-nkwaahene* (literally, the chief of the young men) and functioned as the spokesman of the populace. His position is described here as unofficial simply because, unlike most Akan political offices, it had nothing to do with his lineage; moreover, he was not a member of the chief's council. However, he had the right to make representations before the council on behalf of the young men of the town. In particular, if there were objections to a proposed chief among the populace, he made very forthright representations that, as a rule, prevailed. This is in conformity with the Akan principle that royals do not install a chief; it is those who have to serve him who do.

Beyond the political organization of the Akan town, a certain collection of towns constituted a division (*Oman*, literally, state) with a divisional council consisting of paramount chiefs. In an Akan territory of the proportions of Ashanti, paramount chiefs from a number of divisional councils served also as members of a confederacy council, which held sway over the whole nation.

## **RIGHTS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

This brings us, naturally, to political rights. It is clear from the foregoing that in principle citizens had a say, first in the question of who would exercise political power over them, and second in the issue of what specific policies were to be implemented in the town and, derivatively, in the state and nation. They had two avenues in this matter. They could work through their lineage head, who was duty-bound to consult them on all matters due for decision at the council, and they could work through the spokesman of the populace. The chief had absolutely no right to impose his own wishes on the elders of the council. On the contrary, all decisions of the council were based on consensus. The elders would keep on discussing an issue till consensus was reached, a method that contrasts with the



decision by majority vote that prevails in modern democracies. The rationale of decision by consensus, as can easily be inferred, was to forestall the trivialization of the right of the minority to have an effect on decision-making.

Once a decision had been reached in council by consensus, it became officially the decision of the chief, regardless of his own opinion. That opinion would already have been given consideration at the discussion stage, but no one encouraged him in any illusions of infallibility. Nevertheless, the chief was never contradicted in public, since he was a symbol of the unity of the council and was also perceived as the link between the community and its hallowed ancestors. Because of the great pains taken to achieve consensus, the council took a very severe view of a member who subjected any of its decisions to criticism in public. The leader of the populace was in a different position. Not being privy to the deliberations of the council, he had the fullest right to criticize any decisions unacceptable to his constituency, as did the members of that constituency. One thing then is clear here. The people's freedom of thought and expression went beyond the devices of any chief or council. Nor was there ever a doubt about the right of the people, including the elders, to dismiss a chief who tried to be oppressive. A cherished principle of Akan politics was that those who served the chief could also destool him. (The stool was the symbol of chiefly status, and so the installation of a chief was called *enstoolment* and his dismissal *destoolment*.) This was a process governed by well-defined rules. Charges had to be filed before appropriate bodies and thorough investigations made before a decision to destool or retain a chief was reached. Actually, as W.E. Abraham remarked, among the Akans 'kingship was more a sacred office than a political one'.<sup>3</sup> The chief was regarded as the 'spiritual' link between the people and their ancestors and was for this reason approached with virtual awe. But this did not translate into abject subservience when it came to political matters. Here the chief had to play the game according to the rules, and the rules were that he was always to act in conformity with the decisions of the council and eschew any wayward style of life. So long as he did so, he was held to be sacrosanct, but as soon as he violated this compact, he lost that status and could experience a rough time. When this factor is taken into account, the representative character of the Akan system looms even larger. The real power was in the hands of the elected elders of the various lineages. This conforms to the principle that people have a right to determine who shall exercise political power over them and for how long.

That principle links up with another important feature of the Akan constitution: its decentralization. At every level of political organization, the groups involved enjoyed self-government. Thus the lineage, together with its head, conducted its affairs without interference from any higher authorities so long as the issues did not have town-wide or statewide reverberations. Similarly, the town and the division handled all issues pertaining exclusively to their domains. Apparent here is the Akan conception of a right due to all human beings, the right of self-government.

This right of self-government was particularly important in the administration of justice. Because all kinds of cases arising in the internal affairs of a lineage, or sometimes in inter-lineage affairs, were left to lineage personnel to settle on a household-to-household basis rather than in the more formalized and adversarial atmosphere of a chief's court, many potentially divisive problems between people could be solved painlessly, often through mere verbal apologies or minor compensations. A salutary by-product of

this personalized way of settling cases was that it often brought a reinforcement of neighbourhood good will. This is not to suggest, though, that the official, state-level reaction to issues of wrongdoing and the like was excessively retributive. On the contrary, often the aim was to re-establish satisfactory relations between person and person, or person and ancestors, through compensatory settlements and pacificatory rituals.

### THE RIGHT TO A TRIAL

There are some interesting aspects of the Akan approach to punishment and related issues that could be gone into here, but from the point of view of human rights, the most important observation is that it was an absolute principle of Akan justice that no human being could be punished without trial. Neither at the lineage level nor at any other level of Akan society could a citizen be subjected to any sort of sanctions without proof of wrongdoing. This principle was so strongly adhered to that even a dead body was tried before posthumous punishment was symbolically meted out to him/her. The best-known example of this sort of procedure was the reaction to a suicide apparently committed to evade the consequences of evil conduct. The dead person was meticulously tried. If guilt was established, the body was decapitated. If the motive behind the suicide remained obscure, it was assumed to be bad and had the same result.<sup>4</sup> If the right of the dead to trial before punishment was recognized, could the living have been entitled to less courtesy? The modern misdeeds, on the part of certain governments both inside and outside Africa, of imprisoning citizens without trial would have been inconceivable in a traditional Akan setting, not only because there were no such institutions as prisons but also because the principle of such a practice would have been totally repugnant to the Akan mentality.

Perhaps I ought not to leave the topic of suicide without an Akan-oriented comment on the question of the right to die. This question is becoming increasingly urgent because of the technological facilities now available for prolonging life amid the terminal impairment of body and sometimes mind. It might be thought, from the drastic treatment of suicide just noted and from the Akan belief that the life principle in human beings is divine that the Akan mind would recoil from the idea that human beings might have a right to terminate their own lives under the circumstances in question. But the contrary is true. Death, in the traditional Akan understanding of the matter, cannot adversely affect the life principle, which is immortal; death only means the separation of that principle from the rest of the human system. The whole point of life consists in the pursuit of human well-being, both in one's own case and in concord with the well-being of others. When any such prospects are permanently eliminated by deleterious conditions, the artificial prolongation of painful life or, worse, of vegetative existence can make no sense to man, woman, ancestor, or God. In such circumstances respect for human beings would dictate the right to die in dignity. As for suicide, it was only those committed with known or presumed evil motives that elicited symbolic punishment. Such a thing as suicide committed from noble motives was not unknown in Akan society, and exculpatory maxims were not hard to find. According to one of the most characteristic of Akan sayings, 'Disgrace does not befit an Akan-born' (*Aninguase nfata okaniba*). More explicitly, the Akans often say, 'Death is preferable to disgrace' (*Aninguase de*

*afanyinam owuo*). Defeated generals were known to take this to heart. Rather than return home in disgrace, they frequently elected to commit suicide in the field.

### THE RIGHT TO LAND

As noted earlier, any human being was held, by virtue of his/her blood principle (*mogya*), to be entitled to some land. For the duration of his/her life any Akan had the right to the use of a piece of the lineage land. However, land was supposed to belong to the whole lineage, conceived as including the ancestors, the living members, and those as yet to be born. For this reason, in traditional times the sale of land was prohibited. And the prohibition was effective. But our ancestors reckoned without the conquering power of modern commercialism. Land sale is now a thriving racket in which chiefs yield no ground to commoners. As a foreseeable consequence, there are now many Akans and others who have no land to till or develop. Here then, sadly, is a human right, recognized of old, that seems to have been devoured by advancing time. In traditional times, land was regarded as so important an issue that matters relating to its ownership were not left to individual lineages alone. The chief, acting as usual on the advice of his council, had a certain right of redistribution. Normally, no lineage could be dispossessed of any of its land. But if large tracts of land in the possession of a given lineage remained untilled for a considerable time while another lineage by reason, say, of pre-eminent fertility was hard pressed for land to feed on, the chief could acquire a part of the unused land and allocate it to the group in need. The seeming inconsistency of this practice of land transfer with the notion that land ownership could not be changed because the land of the lineage belonged to past, present, and future members was resolved doctrinally as follows. The ancestors, indeed, retain *prima facie* entitlement to the land of their lineages. In general, lineage ancestors oversee the affairs of their living descendants. But just as in life the chief has the duty to see to the general welfare of the entire town or state, so also in the world of the dead the ancestors of the lineage of the chief, who remain chiefs even in their post-mortem state, have town-wide or state-wide concerns. In particular, they have an interest in seeing to the equitable use of the available land. Hence in redistributing land as indicated, the living chief, who is supposed to be a link between the people and the ancestors, would be carrying out the wishes of the latter. Note that this does not empower a chief to acquire land belonging to a given lineage for his own personal purposes. No Akan doctrine countenances that. A chief always had a liberal allotment of land from the original landholdings of his lineage in the first place, and from extensive plots set aside especially for the office of the stool in the second place. The first he could use in his own name; the second in the name of the stool. Notwithstanding the re-distributive rider just outlined, therefore, the right to land was a very solid right. At all events, no justifiable redistribution could leave an originally well-endowed lineage short of land for its own livelihood. This right, then, conceived in Akan terms as a human right, was claimed within the lineage, but for the reasons indicated it could also be claimed against the state.

The right to land was one of the deepest bases of attachment to particular locations. However, in spite of all the culturally ingrained love of consensus, there were times in the past when dissensions, even within a lineage, proved irresolvable. In the face of this kind

of situation some sections of the lineage preferred to move on in search of land and peace of mind. This was one of the ways in which some ethnic groups, the Akans in particular, became spread over great expanses of territory in the geographic area now called Ghana. Given this history, it is easy to understand that the right to remain in or leave a town or state would not be an issue for debate among the Akans. It was taken for granted.

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

My previous mention of the right to freedom of thought and expression referred to political issues. It is relevant, however, to ask whether the Akan system supported freedom of thought and expression in such areas as religion and metaphysics.

To consider religion first, there was no such thing as an institutionalized religion in Akanland. Religion consisted simply of belief and trust in, and reverence for, a Supreme Being regarded as the architect of the cosmos. The Akans took it to be obvious even to children that such a being existed. Witness the saying 'No one shows God to a child' (*Obi nykyere akwadaa Nyame*). However, I know of no sentiment in the Akan corpus of proverbs, epigrams, tales, and explicit doctrines that lends the slightest support to any abridgement of the freedom of thought or expression. As a matter of fact, sceptics with respect to religious and other issues (*akyinyegyefo*, literally, debaters) were known in Akan society, but no harm seems to have befallen them.

The belief in the assortment of extra-human forces (including the ancestors) that is so often mentioned in connection with Akan, and in general African, religion does not seem to me to belong properly to the field of religion. Be that as it may, one must concede that any person in Akan traditional society disagreeing fundamentally with the Akan world-view would have had a serious sense of isolation. Almost every custom or cultural practice presupposed beliefs of that sort. Yet if a person was prepared to perform his/her civic duties without bothering about any underlying beliefs, he/she could live in harmony with her kinsfolk in spite of his/her philosophical non-conformism. Here again, one may observe that persecution on grounds of belief is unheard of in Akan society.

The conflict between Christian missionaries and the chiefs of Ashanti in the early years of this century, when the campaign to convert the people of Ghana to the Christian faith was getting under way, provides an illuminating case study. In that conflict the Ashanti chiefs remained remarkably forbearing, merely insisting that all Ashantis, irrespective of their religious persuasion, should obey customary law. By contrast, the missionaries, without challenging the authority of the chiefs over the Ashanti people, objected to the participation of Ashanti Christians in any activities that seemed to be based on beliefs they regarded as incompatible with their faith, beliefs in what they called 'fetish'. Intellectually this issue has not been resolved even to this day. But the force of circumstances has seemed to give the upper hand, now to one party, and now to the other. By the 1930s and 1940s Christianity was in the ascendancy, and many of the chiefs themselves, including, a little later, the king of Ashanti himself, had become converts. Neither the psychology, nor the logic, nor the theology of such conversions was free from paradox. But it ensured the easing of the conflict by virtue of accommodations from the side of the Ashanti authorities. Then came political independence, and with it a certain reassertion of cultural identity on the part of the people, and, complementarily, greater

tolerance for African ways on the part of the Christian dignitaries, both foreign and native. As a result, practices like traditional drumming and the pouring of libation to the ancestors, which a few decades ago were proscribed by the missionaries for being fetishtinged, are now commonplace among Christians, sometimes even on occasions of Christian worship. In fact, one even hears of the Africanization of Christianity from some high-minded church circles. Evidently the wheel has turned 180 degrees, or nearly so.

In all this, two things stand out as indicative of the Ashanti (and, generally, Ghanaian) tolerance for different beliefs. First, there is the fact that a great many Ashantis, commoners and chiefs alike, found a way to embrace the new beliefs, while not erasing the older ones from their consciousness.<sup>5</sup> But second, and even more important, the Ashantis from the beginning were not much exercised about what actually went on in the minds of people in matters having to do with such things as their world-view. Their main concern regarding the early Ashanti converts was simply with their actual civic conduct. You can get people to do or not do specific things, reasoned the Akans, but you cannot guarantee that they will think particular thoughts. Hence the futility, from their point of view, of trying to interfere with freedom of thought. Confronted with any such attempt, an Akan would typically say to himself or to a confidant: *Me kose kose wo mitirim, meaning* (My real thoughts are in my own head), which by interpretation means, 'I carry in my own person proof of the futility of any attempt to control people's thinking'. Not only, then, is it wrong from the Akan stand-point to try to curtail freedom of thought; it is, by and large, futile.

From their tolerant attitude toward other people's religious beliefs, it is sufficiently clear that the Akans made no exceptions of subject matter in the question of the freedom of thought. When they said 'two heads are better than one' and 'one head does not hold council' in extolling the virtues of consultation, they were not thinking of politics alone. They were aware that other minds always have the potential to bring to light new aspects of things familiar or recondite. In metaphysical matters they left little doubt of their sense of the presumptuousness of dogmatism, for their metaphysicians often spoke in paradoxes and riddles, purposely inviting individual speculative ingenuity. Witness, for example, the following poser from a metaphysical drum text:

Who gave word to Hearing  
 For Hearing to have told the Spider  
 For the Spider to have told the maker of the  
 world  
 For the maker of the world to have made the  
 world?

## CONCLUSION

In summary, one finds a veritable harvest of human rights. Akan thought recognized the right of a newborn to be nursed and educated, the right of an adult to a plot of land from the ancestral holdings, the right of any well-defined unit of political organization to self-government, the right of all to have a say in the enstoolment or destoolment of their

chiefs or their elders and to participate in the shaping of governmental policies, the right of all to freedom of thought and expression in all matters, political, religious, and metaphysical, the right of everybody to trial before punishment, the right of a person to remain at any locality or to leave, and so on. Although frequently people who talk of human rights have political rights uppermost in their minds, some human rights do not fall within the purview of any constituted authority. In the last analysis, a people's conception of human rights will reflect their fundamental values, and not all such values will ever acquire the backing of institutional authority. In any case, this discussion does not pretend to have disclosed all the human rights generated by Akan values. Again, it is probably needless to point out that my outline of human rights is a portrayal of Akan principles rather than an assessment of Akan practice. One can assume, a priori, that in actual practice the reality must have been some sort of a mixture of both the pursuit and the perversion of precept. By way of empirical confirmation, let me mention, on the negative side, two examples—one a premeditated abrogation, the other a situational diminution of a human right. On the grounds that a deceased chief needed the services of attendants during his postmortem journey to the land of the dead, the Akans in former times would ritually kill some people on the death of an important chief for that function. Given the eschatology, the practice was logical. But the belief itself was an appalling contravention of the Akan precept that, as offspring of God, all human beings are entitled to equal respect and dignity. Not that the right to life, which is implicit in this idea of respect for persons, is absolute. In fact, only a little reflection suffices to show that every right is open to qualification in some circumstances. For instance, in certain easily imagined situations the right of self-defence will nullify an attacker's right to life. It is important to note, though, that a right can be overridden only by another right or some other kind of genuine moral principle. As for the specific question of human sacrifice, the principle of it is not unheard of in some other cultures that pride themselves on their belief in the sanctity of human life. Thus Christianity, for example, openly exults in the idea of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent deity ordaining his 'only begotten son' to be killed so that his erring creatures might thereby have the chance of salvation.

What then is so objectionable about the Akan custom in question, which, happily, no one now openly defends? The answer is simple. It is drastically lacking in fairness, and it flies in the face of the golden rule, which is as explicit in indigenous Akan ethical thinking as it is in Christian ethics. Indeed, the principle that all human beings are entitled to equal respect is only a special case of the golden rule. Obviously, equal respect here does not require that a murderer or a swindler be accorded the same deference as, say, an upright benefactor of humankind. What it means, nevertheless, is that in our reactions to the one class of persons just as much as to the other we should always imaginatively put ourselves in their shoes. In essence, then, equal respect is a requirement of sympathetic impartiality. Now the fact is that, in spite of the profound respect that the Akans had for their chiefs, few cherished the notion of being killed in order to have the honour of serving their chiefs on their last journey. Accordingly, sympathetic impartiality should have destroyed that custom before birth. In general, no rights can be justifiably superseded in a manner oblivious to the principle of sympathetic impartiality. If there is any absolute principle of human conduct, this is it.

The second traditional Akan situation uncongenial to a human right is seen in the Akan attitude to the freedom of speech of non-adults. It is easy to understand that in a traditional society both knowledge and wisdom would tend to correspond with age. Hence the deliverances of the old would command virtually automatic respect. But an unhappy consequence of this was that the self-expression of minors was apt to be rigorously circumscribed. Dissent on the part of a minor in the face of adult pronouncements was almost equated with disrespect or obstinacy. It would perhaps be excessive to call this a positive invasion of a human right. Indeed, given the traditional ethos, minors usually came to internalize the imperative of acquiescence. But in the modern context such an ethos must take on an aspect distinctly inconsonant with the rights of non-adults in the matter of the freedom of expression.

Probably every culture can be viewed as a matrix of forces and tendencies of thought and practice not always mutually compatible. The characterization of cultural traits, therefore, frequently has to take cognizance of countervailing factors. Nevertheless, the bent of a culture will, if anything, stand out in heightened relief in the full view of such facts. On the question of human rights it can justly be said that, notwithstanding any contrary tendencies, the principles of human rights enumerated here did motivate predominantly favourable practices in traditional Akan society. Moreover, from the perspective of those principles one can check how faithful certain claims in contemporary African politics are to at least one African tradition. Regrettably, I must content myself here with only one, brief, illustration.

Many African governments today (June 1988) are based upon the one-party system. There are both critics and defenders of that system in Africa, and in the resulting controversy human rights have almost always been at issue. In some one-party apologetics the suggestion is made not only that the system is hospitable to all the desirable human rights but also that traditional African systems of government were of the one-party variety, in a full-blown or an embryonic form. As far at least as the Akan tradition is concerned, I hope that this discussion demonstrates that both claims are contrary to fact. Although the Akan system was not of a multiparty type, it was not a one-party type either. The decisive reason why the Akan system is antithetical to the one-party system is that no such system can survive the right of the populace, organized under their own spokesman, to question the decisions of the ruling body or to demand the dismissal of its leader. Since the traditional system featured this right, it was neither a one-party system nor even a simulacrum of it. For the same reason it is not true that the one-party system is compatible with all human rights. On this showing, our traditional systems require close analysis from the point of view of contemporary existential concerns. Human rights are certainly among the most urgent of these concerns. That Africa has suffered human rights deprivations from various causes in the past, including particularly the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, is well-known history. It is surely an agonizing reflection that, aside from the vexatious case of apartheid, the encroachments on human rights in Africa in recent times have usually come from African governments themselves. To a certain extent the exigencies of post-independence reconstruction may account for this. But they cannot justify it. Nor, as just pointed out in the matter of the one-party system, can they be rationalized by appeal to any authentic aspect of African traditional politics, at least in the Akan instance. How to devise a

system of politics that, while being responsive to the developments of the modern world, will reflect the best traditional thinking about human rights (and other values) is one of the profoundest challenges facing modern Africans. A good beginning is to become informed about traditional life and thought.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 The Akans have, historically, been the subject of some famous anthropological, linguistic, and philosophical studies by foreign scholars, such as R.S.Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford University Press, 1923), and *Religion and art in Ashanti* (Oxford University Press, 1927); J.G.Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante language called Tsi (Twi)*, 2nd edn. (Basel, 1933); and E.L. Mayerowitz, *The sacred state of the Akan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951); and native scholars such as Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast native institutions* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1903); J.B. Danquah, *The Akan doctrine of God* (London, 1946); and K.A.Busia, *The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti* (London: Frank Cass, 1951). Two important recent philosophical studies are W.E.Abraham, *The mind of Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Kwame Gyekye, *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 2 W.E.Abraham has a memorable description of the Ashanti army in battle deployment in *The mind of Africa*, 1962:83–84. K.A.Busia gives an illustrated description in *The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti*, 1951:14.
- 3 Abraham, W.E. *The mind of Africa*, 1962:77.
- 4 See, for example, K.A.Busia, *The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti*, 1951:70–71.
- 5 Other Ashantis extended the same courtesy to Islam.

### The ethics of *ubuntu*

#### MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

We will approach the subject of *ubuntu* ethics first by providing a stipulative definition of ethics. On the basis of this definition we will show that the ethics of *ubuntu* rests upon a strong philosophical foundation. Our next step will be to show, by way of example, some aspects of the edifice of the ethics of *ubuntu*.

Ethics may be defined as the science of morality, that is, the study of the meaning of good and bad with reference to human behaviour. Ethics understood in this way has two interpretations.<sup>1</sup> The one is that it is a focus upon human moral behaviour as it manifests itself in practice. Through contrast and comparison of different moral behaviour the science of ethics provides an explanation for human moral conduct. The other meaning of ethics is that it is a philosophy, that is, a focus upon the specific principles underlying particular moral behaviour and a justification of those principles. Our contention is that *ubuntu* ethics is consistent with both senses of the meaning of the term ethics.<sup>2</sup>



## THE PHILOSOPHY OF *UBUNTU* ETHICS

In this section we will focus upon the philosophical foundation of the ethics of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* as a concept and experience is linked epistemologically to *umuntu*. On the basis of this link *umuntu* posits *ubuntu* as its basic normative category of ethics. Kagamé correctly suggests that *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu* are the four categories of African philosophy.<sup>3</sup> However, the enumeration is neither complete nor sufficient without the inclusion of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is the fifth basic category of African philosophy. It is the normative ethical category that prescribes and, therefore, should permeate the relationship between *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*.

The idea of the relationship between Kagamé's four categories and *ubuntu* must be understood from the perspective that African philosophy is consistent with the philosophic position that motion is the principle of be-ing. According to this understanding, the condition of be-ing with regard to every entity means that to be is to be in the condition of-ness. Whatever is perceived as a whole is always a whole-ness in the sense that it ex-ists and per-sists towards that which it is yet to be. Because this is the characteristic of every existing entity be-ing is to be understood always as a whole-ness. It is our contention that *ubu-ntu* underlines and is consistent with this philosophical understanding of be-ing.

It is best, philosophically, to approach this term as an hyphenated word, namely, *ubu-ntu*. *Ubuntu* is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *ntu-*. *Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity. *Ubu-* as enfolded be-ing is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*. At the ontological level, there is no strict and literal separation and division between *ubu-* and *-ntu*. *Ubu-* and *-ntu* are not two radically separate and irreconcilably opposed realities. On the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as a one-ness and an indivisible whole-ness. Accordingly, *ubu-ntu* is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people. It is the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology. *Ubu-* as the generalized understanding of be-ing may be said to be distinctly ontological. Whereas *-ntu* as the nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be the distinctly epistemological.

Talk about ontology and epistemology is meaningless if it precludes the actual existence of a living organism that actually perceives and is aware of its own ex-istence as well as that of others. *Umuntu* is the be-ing which renders the coincidence between ontology and epistemology meaningful. Through the faculty of consciousness or self-awareness, *umuntu* releases the speech of being and, pursues its rationality by means of dialogue of be-ing with being. The interaction of the latter—as an indivisible part of be-ing—with be-ing as a wholeness is the reason for our statement, namely, the 'dialogue of being with being'. We now turn to consider the meaning of the relationship between *ubuntu* and *umuntu*.

The word *umu-* shares an identical ontological feature with the word *ubu-*. Whereas the

range of *ubu-* is the widest generality, *umu-* tends towards the more specific. Joined together with *-ntu* then *umu-* becomes *umuntu*. *Umuntu* means the emergence of homo-*loquens* who is simultaneously a homo *sapiens*. In common parlance it means the human be-ing: the maker of politics, religion, and law. *Umuntu* then is the specific concrete manifestation of *umu-*: it is a movement away from the generalized to the concrete specific. *Umuntu* is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge, and truth. This is an activity rather than an act. It is an ongoing process impossible to stop unless motion itself is stopped. On this reasoning, *ubu-* may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion. We propose to regard such incessant motion as verbal rather than the verb. *-ntu* may be construed as the temporarily having become. In this sense *-ntu* is a noun. The indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of *ubu-ntu* means, therefore, that *ubuntu* is a verbal noun.

In the light of the above analysis of *ubuntu* and *umuntu*, we consider the following thesis questionable.

*NTU* is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. *NTU* is Being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern, rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. *NTU* is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.... *NTU* is what *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* all equally are. Force and matter are not being united in this conception; on the contrary, they have never been apart.<sup>4</sup>

In our view, it is not 'ntu' but 'ubu' which is the 'universal force' or the concept with the highest level of generality. We may turn to another Bantu language, Sepedi, to illustrate this. The Sepedi synonym for *ubuntu* is *botho*. The latter is also divisible into two words, namely, *bo-* and *tho*. We suggested that *ubu/bo-* is the concept with the highest level of generality. *Bo-* combined with *tlhale* yields the term *botlhale*. In line with the logic of *umu-*, *mo-* in Sepedi, the combination of *mo-* and *tlhale* yields the substantive, that is, the concrete specificity, *mothalefi*. *Bo-* combined with *kgomana* yields *bokgomana* and, the combination with *mo-* yields the substantive, *mokgomana*. These two examples show:

- 1 That *bo-* is abstract and general at the same time. Through combination with other words it retains and preserves its abstract character.
- 2 That *mo-* is oriented to the concrete. Through combination with other words it assumes a substantive character making it possible to specify its specific determinations. To specify the determinations, is, by definition to recognize the limitations of the substantive. This means that *mo-* has a rather restricted specificity and a limited range compared to *bo-*. Accordingly, the combination *bo-tho—ubu-ntu* is much more general and wider in scope than *mo-tho—umu-ntu*.

We conclude therefore that it is *ubu* and not *ntu* which is the 'universal force'.

Because motion is the principle of be-ing for *ubuntu* do-ing takes precedence over the do-er without at the same time imputing either radical separation or irreconcilable opposition between the two. 'Two' here speaks only to two aspects of one and the same reality. *Ubuntu* then is a gerund. But it is also a gerundive at the same time since at the epistemological level it may crystallize into a particular form of social organization,

religion, or law. *Ubuntu* is always a -ness and not an -ism. We submit that this logic of *ub-ntu* also applies to *hu-* and *-nhu* in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. Therefore it may not be rendered as *hunhuism*<sup>5</sup> as Samkange has done. The -ism suffix gives the erroneous impression that we are dealing with verbs and nouns as fixed and separate entities existing independently. They thus function as fixations to ideas and practices which are somewhat dogmatic and hence unchangeable. Such dogmatism and immutability constitute the false necessity based upon fragmentative reasoning. This latter is the reasoning—based on the subject-verb-object understanding of the structure of language—which posits a fundamental irreconcilable opposition in be-ing becoming. On the basis of this imputed opposition be-ing becoming is fragmented into pieces of reality with an independent existence of their own. The logic of *ubuntu* is towards -ness. This logic stands in opposition to the dogmatism of fragmentative reasoning. One of the first principles of *ubuntu* ethics is the freedom from dogmatism. It is flexibility oriented towards balance and harmony in the relationship between human beings and between the latter and the broader be-ing or nature.

The foregoing means that the ethics of *ubuntu* can stand on its own and has done so in the past. In terms of its philosophical perspective and historical evolution, the ethics of *ubuntu* cannot be reduced to one essence. Yet, Augustine Shutte's exposition of the *ubuntu* ethic does exactly that: it is an attempt to reduce the ethics of *ubuntu* to one essence, namely, 'the community. Using body imagery and random selection to identify the essence of *ubuntu* ethics, Shutte writes:

One has to distinguish the heart of *UBUNTU* from its various outward manifestations.... In this book I am going to use two ideas about human nature, one European, the other African, as a foundation for an ethic of *UBUNTU* for a new South Africa.... The European idea is the idea of freedom, that individuals have a power of free choice. The African idea is the idea of community, that persons depend on other persons to be persons. I will use these two ideas to construct an ethic of *UBUNTU* that is true to the African tradition but which can also be applied to the new world that European science and technology is in the process of creating.<sup>6</sup>

We find his exposition problematical on three grounds, namely methodological, semantic, and historical. The following considerations pertain to methodology. Shutte approaches the question of *ubuntu* ethics from the point of view of the stranger to *ubuntu*. He avers:

In my church community and in my work as an academic, as well as in social and political contexts, I came into contact with many people with a traditional African cultural background.... But apartheid had made this difficult for most of my life. Now, however, I was struck by something about those who had grown up in this culture, something not easy to define but nevertheless real. I can only describe it as a spirit, a shared way of seeing the world and relating to people. It was to this spirit and this vision that I later learnt to give the name *UBUNTU*.<sup>7</sup>

As a stranger, Shutte stands at least one remove away from *ubuntu*. This distance

between himself and *ubuntu* means that he is standing on a platform of experience, an epistemological par-adigm which must reflect some minimum difference between itself and *ubuntu* epistemology. To some extent his epistemological platform determines his way of looking at *ubuntu* and interpreting it. Shutte then is looking at *ubuntu* and interpreting it from the point of view of a 'European'. This he admits freely in these terms:

I have done my best to be true to the different traditions, the African and the European. Because I myself have been brought up and educated in the European tradition, I have been especially careful to test what I have written on African colleagues and friends.<sup>8</sup>

Shutte not only admits that he is looking at *ubuntu* from the point of view of the European, but he also acknowledges that the African and European cultural traditions are 'different'. Having acknowledged this difference, Shutte does not answer the question why it is necessary, as he does, to metamorphoze—as Thomas Aquinas did the philosophy of Aristotle in order to make it christian—*ubuntu*. His thesis of the metamorphosis of *ubuntu* is stated in these terms:

The concept of *UBUNTU* has become for me the key to answering these questions.... The word *UBUNTU* means humanity. The concept of *UBUNTU* embodies an understanding of what it is to be human and what is necessary for human beings to grow and find fulfilment. It is an ethical concept and expresses a vision of what is valuable and worthwhile in life. This vision is rooted in the history of Africa and is at the centre of the culture of most South Africans. But the values that it contains are not just Africa. They are values of humanity as such, and so universal. And it is my view that the understanding and vision of humanity embodied in the concept of *UBUNTU* is something of vital importance to the contemporary world, not just to contemporary South Africa but to all the rest of the nations as well, developed or undeveloped.

Ethics, as a branch of philosophy, is always critical. So what I am presenting is a critical interpretation of both traditions, the African and the European. But my ultimate aim is creative rather than critical. I want to create and apply an ethic of *UBUNTU* that is based on the genuinely universal insights of European and African thought, which, because the insights themselves can be reconciled, will be able to reconcile the different elements of a new South African culture.<sup>9</sup>

To argue as he does that (1) the insights of the *ubuntu* ethic are not African but universal: (2) it is not his intention to give an exposition of *ubuntu* but rather to use its insights creatively: is at best to conceal the philosophic character of *ubuntu* and, at worst to deny that *ubuntu* has any philosophic character at all. To dissolve the specificity of *ubuntu* into abstract 'universality' is to deny its right to be different. It is to accord unduly primacy to the universal over the particular. This dissolution neither enlightens nor closes the question of universals and particulars. In fact, Shutte's appeal to creativity ironically brings this question to the fore precisely because it cannot validly be assumed that from *ubuntu* he is creating out of nothing. Moreover, his status as the 'creator' from outside the

*ubuntu* epistemological paradigm cannot mean that he is creating out of nothing. The fact that he stands as an outsider in relation to *ubuntu* means that *ubuntu* exists beside and independently of him. *Ubuntu* exists already as something and not nothing. Therefore the creative act of Shutte cannot be creation out of nothing. Thus his act of creation turns out to be the changing of *ubuntu* into something that it was not. In other words, Shutte's declared creativity is the metamorphosis of *ubuntu*. The question remains: why is this metamorphosis necessary?

Shutte's thesis of the metamorphosis of *ubuntu* is problematical also at the semantic level. In the light of our submission that *ubuntu* philosophy proceeds from the premise that motion is the principle of be-ing, the thesis that *ubuntu* means 'humanity' is questionable. Surely, 'humanity' as an abstract idea is conceptually different from human-ness. The former is the inhabitant of Plato's world of Ideas in which the ideas are stagnant, immutable, and eternal. But the universe of -ness is characterized by dynamism, change, and temporality. It is therefore problematical to accept Shutte's meaning of *ubuntu* as consistent with the philosophic perspective from which the concept proceeds. Without the resolution of this problem it is clear that his exposition of the ethic of *ubuntu* is fundamentally flawed.

Shutte's exposition of an ethic of *ubuntu* is also problematical from the point of view of history. Although he concedes that 'the vision of *ubuntu* is rooted in the history of Africa and is at the centre of the culture of most South Africans', he does not show an appreciation of the meaning of history from the point of view of 'the culture of most South Africans'. This lack of appreciation comes out clearly in his thesis posited as follows.

I am thinking especially of the history of the present post-apartheid situation of our country. Central to this was the manner in which people from different parts of the world came together in this southernmost part of Africa. The San, the Khoikhoi, the various Bantu peoples, Europeans of various nationalities, and people from a variety of Eastern lands, met and began to live side by side in this place. What strikes one most profoundly about the original meetings is the almost total lack of understanding (including, of course, the understanding of language) between the groups involved.<sup>10</sup>

First. The above thesis is an echo of the preamble to the 1961 Constitution of South Africa. There the European conqueror claims title and sovereignty over the territory of the indigenous conquered peoples. The European conqueror's claim rests on two foundations. The one is that the territory is a gift from 'God'. The same 'God' offered this gift by allowing the unjustified use of the violence of colonization. According to the conqueror, this unjustified use of violence crystallized in the so-called right of conquest. In the name of this questionable right the indigenous conquered peoples lost their title and sovereignty over their territory. Upon this questionable right both the old colonial and the 'new' post-1994 South Africa are built. Surely, it is misleading to disguise the unjustified violence of the colonization of what has come to be known as South Africa as some kind of friendly meeting of peoples who decided to 'live side by side in this place'. Shutte's contention that South Africa is still in the making.

It is this that is so clear in the case of South Africa. South Africa is a name for something that is still in the process of being made. It is a strange, vague name for it.... This shoreline meant that the peoples that came by land could go no further. It also meant that peoples from other lands could come here.<sup>11</sup>

This cannot be taken seriously unless it (a) unmasks the unjustified violence of colonization and, (b) questions the 'right of conquest' on ethical and political grounds.

Second. Shutte's depiction of South Africa as *terra nullius*—a virgin territory open for occupation by anyone—is a faithful and uncritical restatement of the dogma of the history of South Africa according to the conqueror.

Third. Shutte's failure to problematize the unjustified violence of colonization together with his reaffirmation of the dogma of the history of South Africa according to the conqueror, reveal an ethical insensitivity towards the legitimate moral and political claims of 'the San, the Khoikhoi, (and) the various Bantu peoples'. To invoke *ubuntu* in the light of this ethical insensitivity is to undermine the philosophy as well as the ethics of *ubuntu*. On the basis of our considerations pertaining to methodology, semantics, and history, we conclude that Shutte's undertaking to offer an ethic of *ubuntu* is fundamentally flawed philosophically, historically, and ethically. However, his insights with regard to the right to property are laudable and deserve serious consideration from the point of view of the ethics of *ubuntu*.

### UBUNTU THROUGH THE FAMILY

The family is as old as humanity. Yet, what this means precisely differs from one culture to the other. For some love is the basis of the family. It is love which must lead to marriage followed by the procreation of children. Marriage according to this understanding of the family must be monogamous. For others love between partners plays a role but is not necessarily decisive for the formation of the family. Marriage, followed by procreation, also belongs to this understanding of the family. However, marriage here need not be monogamous. That marriage should not of necessity be monogamous is one of the ancient practices of *ubuntu* philosophy. The family on this understanding is still to be governed by one of the basic ethical maxims of *ubuntu*, namely, *motho ke motho ka batho*.<sup>12</sup> This maxim underlines the vital importance of mutual recognition and respect complemented by mutual care and sharing in the construction of human relations. According to this understanding of the family, it is unethical to withhold or to deny *botho/ubuntu* towards a member of the family, in the first place and, the community at large. In other words, charity begins at home.

Acting according to this maxim in a context dominated by the precepts of the free enterprise economic system brings about a number of problems. First is the distinction in this context between employment and labour. The former are reasonably assured in a formal manner of the means to subsist while the subsistence of the latter is left to the vagaries of chance. For this reason the latter find it ethically acceptable to approach their employed members of the family to seek help. The employed family members tend to respond positively in compliance with the maxim that *motho ke motho ka batho*. However, they realize in the course of time that their means remain limited and they can

therefore not help all the members of the family, the extended family. Yet, the urge to maintain *ubuntu* also remains alive. In the face of this tension, a resolution must be found. One way of doing so is to make it possible for other family members to find employment. Then there is the charge of nepotism. Nepotism solves the problem from one point of view but invites criticism from another. As though this is not enough, the already employed would even try and make it possible for members of their community to find employment. Since the community is constituted by a network of interrelated families this practice soon invites the criticism of ethnocentricity. Quite often these criticisms are much louder than the reasons underlying the practices. No doubt the criticisms are legitimate since no single family or community has the right to subsistence by way of denying the same right to others.

The tension that leads to the criticisms may rightly be attributed to cultural differences. However, the problem is much more than cultural. It is this philosophically. The idea of the family is meaningful only if it is understood as some kind of enclosure. It is mother, father and child. No one outside of this can claim to be mother, father or child in the same way to exactly the same people. Also, the idea of community implies some kind of enclosure. Thus the procedure is to name, to take possession and, to enclose. This is what we call bounded reasoning. Humans and, even 'god', all proceed along the path of bounded reasoning. The philosophical problem is not with bounded reasoning as such but with the reason and the effects of the exclusion of others. *Ubuntu* ethics takes cognance of this. It resolves the problem of exclusion in bounded reasoning by prescribing mutual recognition and respect complemented by mutual care and sharing. Thus *motho ke motho ka batho* is the maxim that prescribes permeable and not impermeable boundaries.

## ENDNOTES

1 'Ethiek', *Winkler Prins encyclopedie*, Achtste Deel, Amsterdam/Brussel: Elsevier, 1950:327–328.

2 The following is the meaning of ethics as provided in our stipulative definition.

'Hence ethics may be defined as the science of the moral rectitude of human acts in accordance with the principles of natural reason. Logic and ethics are normative and practical sciences, because they prescribe norms or rules for human activities and show how, according to these norms, a man ought to direct his actions. Ethics is pre-eminently practical and directive; for it orders the activities of the will, and the latter it is which sets all the other faculties in motion.... Moreover, ethics not only directs a man how to act if he wishes to be morally good, but sets before him the absolute obligation he is under of doing good and avoiding evil.

A distinction must be drawn between ethics and morals, or morality. Every people, even the most uncivilized and uncultured, has its own morality or sum of prescriptions which govern its moral conduct. Nature has so provided that each man establishes for himself a code of moral concepts and principles which are applicable to the details of practical life, without the necessity of awaiting the conclusions of science. Ethics is the scientific or philosophical treatment of morality.' *The Catholic encyclopedia*, vol. 5, London: Caxton Publishing Company, 1909:556.

- It is common cause that the concept of science is contestable, for example, in the light of feminist epistemology. Without an exposition of the issues contested— primarily because the discussion will be unduly repetitive—we submit that there is no basis for excluding the ethics of *ubuntu* from the realm of ‘science’.
- 3 Kagamé, A. *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l’etre*, Doctoral dissertation presented to the Gregorian Pontifical University, Rome 1955:99–119.
  - 4 Jahn, J. *Muntu*, Tr. M.Grene, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958:101
  - 5 Samkange, S. and Samkange, T.M. *Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Salisburg: Graham Publishing, 1980.
  - 6 Shutte, A. *Ubuntu: An ethic for a New South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001:10.
  - 7 Shutte, A., op. cit.: 8.
  - 8 Shutte, op. cit.: 10.
  - 9 Shutte, A. op. cit.: 2 and 10–11.
  - 10 Shutte, A. op. cit.: 191.
  - 11 Shutte, A. op. cit.: 185.
  - 12 Ramose, M.B. ‘Specific African thought structures and their possible contribution to world peace’, in H.Beck and G.Schmirber (eds.), *Creative peace through encounter of world cultures*, 9, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995:230.

Primacy of the ethical order over the economic order: Reflections for an ethical economy

MUSAMBI MALONGI YA-MONA

Let us start with an assessment: when a person observes the phenomena appearing in the exercise of economic activity with proper judgement, on a national as well as international level, he/she will certainly be led to establish that, notwithstanding the favourable aspects they present, through all types of machinations, economic programming often succeeds in mutilating people when it is not orientated according to ethical demands.

Thus, when trying to look at the relation between the ethical and the economic order, our main preoccupation is to try and show that, given the ambiguity of the exercise of economic activity, which can enslave people as well as liberate them, it is important for the ‘economic circuit’ to be ordered and directed from the start by ethics in a direction corresponding to human dignity.

Reflecting on the relation between what is ethical and what is economical assumes that one order is not purely and simply covered by another, and that there is even less of a synonymous link: but rather, on the contrary, a certain heterogeneousness. Thus, before reflecting on the primacy of ethics and the obligations resulting from it, we are going to briefly examine the finality and the functioning of economic activity so as to have a good understanding of the role which moral philosophy will play within the ‘economic circuit’.

Thus, as one can see, our comments have a three-part structure: the first questions the meaning, or even better, the finality of economy and attempts to give a brief description of the different levels of the economic process; the second examines the relation between



ethics and economics and highlights the primacy of the moral over the economic order, thus justifying the moral obligations—the object of the third part—which should order and direct economic programming in view of the creation of a society with a human face: it is the task of what, by lack of another term, we shall call an ‘ethical economy’.

## THE ECONOMIC ORDER

### Economic finality and the economic circuit

Life in society poses numerous problems to human beings. If one considers the criterion of urgency (and not of importance), it would appear that the priority problem remains that of subsistence: what must be done to ensure survival? How does one regulate labour to produce that which is necessary to live? That is an economic problem. On this subject, two questions may be asked: what is the true finality of economy? And how does it work?

Along with Jean-Marie Aubert (1971) one may say that, in general, economic activity affects people’s search for well-being on earth, their temporary happiness, on a level of goods necessary for their subsistence and development.<sup>1</sup>

Material production is of vital importance to human life. In fact, to ensure his/her survival, a human being must have food, clothes, medicine, and other goods obtained by his/her economic activity. Material goods thus form the physical substratum of human life.

The importance of economic activity is not limited to the simple satisfaction of vital needs; for beyond the latter, the overflow of (cultural and spiritual) needs can only be met by the mediation of material realities entering the ‘economic circuit’. Examples include the extension of culture, freedom of information, and even religious life and education, which all need the mediation of material goods (books, printing presses, audio-visual means, etc). Through this mediation, economic activity conditions needs which are not of an intrinsically economic order. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that economic activity is dependent on human dignity. If it stopped at this strictly indispensable but nevertheless inferior level, if it concentrated on consumption in its purest form, it would be reprehensible, because it would relegate and lose the meaning of human dignity; it would be the predominance of *having* over *being*.

Before the ultimate term of economic activity, goods destined to satisfy certain needs follow a process called the *economic circuit*, which includes various stages which we will briefly ponder upon.<sup>2</sup>

Flung into the world, people must use the goods which they find in nature to ensure and guarantee their survival. However, except for those civilizations who have remained at the hunter-gatherer and fishing stage, those goods initially provided by nature need to be transformed, adapted, and especially *humanized* the mediation of labour (agriculture and industry).

Moreover, considering the fact that produced goods are not available everywhere and not proportionally available to the same extent everywhere, economic activity cannot be limited to production. Produced goods must be distributed and must reach consumers. Consumption, which is the ultimate end of economic activity, thus assumes the

distribution or circulation of goods. And as the population increases, as humans progress according to degrees of civilization, their needs grow in number and variety, necessitating increased production and distribution.

This kind of distribution can only be achieved by a complex circulation network of different types of goods, intertwining and linking production places to consumption places. In other words, the same people, who are obviously specialized in the production of a certain category of goods, consume other types of goods, produced by other people. Consequently, distribution can only be done by way of exchanges between individuals who, seen from different angles, would be producers and consumers in turn. This perpetual exchange, which is called commerce, assumes a means of making it possible: money.

What is more, the use of such a means of exchange assumes that the economic value of individual goods may be determined, thus allowing comparison with other goods, constituting the price problem.

This exchange process is made possible thanks to money, leading to an important result: it is not enough to produce and to distribute, the consumer must also be able to obtain the necessary goods, i.e. must have the buying power which comes essentially from contribution in whichever capacity to production, a form of revenue.

It is this process from production to consumption, bringing social and moral problems along with it, which may be called the *economic circuit* in technical terms. It allows us to understand how the economy really works. One could certainly mention cases which are not connected in this way or, if one likes, do not follow the same process as the one we have just presented. In particular, it is the case in a subsistence economy where every family tries to produce just enough for their own subsistence. It is no less true that this pattern remains the general process followed by modern economies, even in cases where a traditional system still survives.

On different levels of the economic circuit—production, distribution, circulation, commercialization, and consumption—we are powerless observers, on a national as well as international level, of the many examples of machinations which have a tendency to serve the interests of a few individuals or industrialized countries, whose conditions of existence are in shameful contrast (in their insensitive but guilty eyes) to those of the quasi-totality of the mass, condemned to live their daily life under threat and in close proximity to death.

If we focus our attention on the exercise of economic activity on a national as well as international level, we would be led to conclude that many (foreign or national) economic operators and economically developed countries are less concerned about the real needs of the population than about their own interests. For them, the prior question is not to ascertain whether a product satisfies the population's real and legitimate need, if it is good or bad for consumption, and to tell the truth, if it contributes to making people more human; their prior question is rather to ascertain whether the product in question will sell or not, if enormous benefits will be reaped from it or not. That, to us, implies diverting the true finality from economic activity.

On an international level, it is commonplace to observe that most Third World projects receiving support from industrialized countries tend to serve the interests of the latter. These interests may be of an ideological or socio-economical order, or even both at the

same time.

According to R.Dumont (1982):

The European Development Fund (EDF/FED) gives priority to infrastructures, hospitals and luxury stadiums, and especially to export products. It thus gave ample financing to palm oil plantations, from Ivory Coast to Dahomey, which certainly contributed to the development of the production of fatty substances—but also contributed to a drop in their prices on the world market. Which earned the Common Market much more than what it invested: another example of generosity yielding good returns.

In Togo in 1974, the Fund only financed coffee and cocoa, to create a certain abundance which would be favourable to buyers; subsistence crops, which are still widely lacking, were not financed.<sup>3</sup>

Alcoholic beverages, tobacco...never fail to find a propitious market in the Third World and especially in Africa.

International fields of commerce and international cooperation abound with examples of machinations which tend to serve the interests of industrialized countries: under-paying agricultural and mineral raw materials, over-invoicing the finished products and the capital goods manufactured by factories in economically weak countries.

Brokerages, insurances, banks, commercial commissions, patents, technology transfers and other invisibles continually renew these forms of exploitation. The powers control the Third World's economic situation, from the granting of the capital which is necessary for industrialization to the markets which are necessary for the distribution and sale of production; markets open and close in front of us according to the interests of rich countries.

In 1984, the Executive Council ordered the closing of a pharmaceutical depot, called CIDC, for having circulated expired fagyls which had already cost the lives of four inhabitants of Kinshasa. In a report dated 15 November 1985, the same Executive Council of Zaire cited an important batch of medicine which had expired in 1984; medicine which an inside company apparently sold to the ONPTZ's Hospital Centre. Eleven days later, a communication broadcast on Zaïrian radio and television cited the distribution of 500 mg ampicillin bearing no indication as to the manufacturer and the country of origin. In passing it must be noted that this product was already being circulated and administered in various health centres of Kinshasa, as well as in the interior of the country. The big problem is not only on the level of control mechanisms of local or imported products, but also on the level of the economic circuit agents.

At present, it is no exaggeration to assert that technical and scientific progress have attained such levels that it is possible, in many cases, to manufacture efficient products, durable devices... Paradoxically, we are witnessing a proliferation of inefficient products, or let's say less efficient ones, and of devices that cannot last long. Manufacturing efficient products and resistant devices would lower the demand and thus compromise the interests of the manufacturers and merchants.

These considerations, however selective and brief, are testimony enough of the many examples within the economic circuit of practices which, far from contributing to the

promotion of human dignity, reinforce the dehumanization process even further.

Luckily, people are not beings to be passively subjected to their own existence. They are responsible for their own destiny, they must discover their purpose for themselves and organize the means to achieve it. Henceforth they are led to pass a value judgement on reality, particularly on the economic realities in reference to their ideas about their dignity, their destiny, and the meaning of life. Above all, they must attempt to create, by means of elements already in existence or which have to be invented, an economic order which responds to this dignity and this destiny.

Thus, on a judgement level as well as on an action level, we are faced with the necessity of promoting a certain human ideal and consequently, a certain conception of Good and Evil, of Just and Unjust. In other words, we refer to a certain philosophy, to certain morals.

#### **PRIMACY OF WHAT IS ETHICAL OVER WHAT IS ECONOMICAL<sup>4</sup>**

Any person, group, or society implements a certain number of rules, ideals, and prohibitions which allow them to be structured and to advance gradually towards what seems to be the most desirable state. And so much the better, because few things are as destructive for an individual or a group than to be abandoned without a compass or a point of reference in a normative desert, i.e. in a context where everything is indistinct, where everything is supposed to be the same. To refer to certain norms, to an ideal, even if it is to oppose or to transgress, already situates you in a moral relation. Thus, nobody can do without morality, i.e. a field of values to which one refers to construct one's life, whether these values are expressed or not. Each of us feels the obligation to build our life. Each of us feels that we should subject ourselves to certain needs in order to find fulfilment.

Polin (1968) asserts:

In the broadest sense, ethics firstly appears to be a set of meanings and values destined to describe, understand, define...man's action through which he freely establishes and situates himself, in comparison with others and with the world...

5

The role of ethics is to meditate, to define, and to appreciate in terms of good and evil the intentions, the acts and the works of an individual considered in his/her own right or along with others. As Thévélot (1982) expresses it so well, it proposes to reflect on the conditions and the ways which allow all people within their own reality to fully become people along with other people. He pursues this by saying that the principal aim of moral philosophy is the person's happiness, it is the most harmonious development possible of the whole person and of all people.<sup>6</sup> It is no different for R.Le Senne (1967), for whom moral philosophy is a more or less systematized set of ideal determinations, rules or aims which, through his/her action, the 'I' must actualize in life to give it more value.<sup>7</sup>

Moral philosophy, the science of what is good and of the rules of human action, seeks to answer the question of the human being's true destiny. And one may say that every time we reflect on our life and on the meaning we want to attribute to it, we pose a moral

problem.<sup>8</sup> Moral philosophy is the practical science of human action, and endeavours to adjust the individual's life according to the ideal of the community to which he/she belongs; in short, it seeks to inform the individual's conduct in its totality.<sup>9</sup>

Jean-Marie Aubert (1971) insists that:

Moral philosophy must study man in his entirety, in relation to his destiny, either as an individual, or as a social being. Under the latter aspect, one must *distinguish several levels of social activity*...in view of integrating each level into a cohesive vision and establishing a hierarchy of the corresponding goods offered to man.<sup>10</sup>

Among these levels of social activity upon which moral philosophy rests, the economic level must be mentioned as a mediation of the connection between man and things.

But there is more. Jean Ladrière evokes another reason in favour of the link between the ethical and economic orders to the extent that the latter offers the former a terrain in which to take root. In fact, in *Social life and destiny*, we read the following:

Ethical principles are not pure principles; they make sense only to the extent that they are destined to inform effective human conduct, thus to the extent that they are related to concrete situations. From this point of view, one may say that the economic order is a supplier of *matter* as well as a type of domain of incarnation to an ethical order, at least in part, to the extent that it represents an effective link with things and that it implements interhuman relations which are relative to the disposition of things.<sup>11</sup>

And the same author continues as follows:

A human being can only aim for the good which characterises him as a human being through concrete mediations which, in a way, provide the said good with the stuff it must be made of, and amongst these mediations are those of economic activity. Also: conscience...cannot come to itself and get an active hold on itself except through mediations bringing into play its connection with the world, i.e. its relations with things and with other consciences. Our consciences are not pure; our becoming beings endowed with conscience is subjected to determinations, under-estimating the role of which will lead to misunderstanding the true nature of our condition.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, given the ambiguity of the exercise of economic activity, which can subject us as well as liberate us, it is important that economic activity in general and production in particular be directed by ethics from the start, in a sense assigned to human dignity. Hence the subordination of economics to ethics.

Moreover, economic activity can be the source of very serious alienations and injustices<sup>13</sup>, and thus of immorality if not directed according to ethics as a practical science of our action. Aubert (1970) notes:

The moral reflection on economic activity accentuates a basic truth...to wit that the economic order cannot result from a play of mechanical forces, but has an *own finality* which gives it its full meaning, and which means serving man at all stages of the economic circuit.<sup>14</sup>

Many economists are beginning to foresee that the foundation of the economy is extra-economical and that its field is of a metaphysical order, which brings us back to recognizing the necessity of an ethical reflection on the object of economy.

Moralists may certainly be incompetent in the domain of economic technique. It nevertheless remains their responsibility to provide the moral principles to guide economic actions, to judge the extent to which existing practices and economic structures correspond to the moral ideal of the community; lastly, bearing competent economists in mind, to recommend solutions corresponding most to moral norms.

Doesn't Van Baelen (1968) write that 'The moralist's responsibility is to help his contemporaries in their search for a responsible way of taking charge of their earthly life'?<sup>15</sup>

We have just shown, for three main reasons, how and why it seems justified to us to assert the primacy of ethics over economics. We have also tried to determine, on a general level, the role of moral philosophy when confronted by economic reality. In both cases, we have remained on a theoretical level. We now want to direct our attention to the concrete obligations which should preside over the exercise of economic activity so as not to forget that the finality of economy is in fact the human being and that the economic circuit must function in such a way that human dignity is safeguarded.

### **A FEW MORAL IMPERATIVES FOR A HUMANIZING ECONOMIC ACTION**

Morality manifests itself by an imperative expressed in precepts: this imperative is accompanied by an inner constraint: I must do this, I must do that; and I experience inner pressure which leads me to conform my action to the precept. Morality is essentially normative. The moral precept corresponds to the demands of the good or straight life.

The finality of moral obligations is to prescribe the behaviour to adopt in the face of concrete life situations. These obligations, gradually elaborated through contact with the lessons learnt from experience in specific situations, serve as mediation between general values of justice, love...and particular situations of human existence. On this point, R.Le Senne (1967) writes:

Obligation is the mediation through which the I of value, adapting Absolute moral authority to the present situation, commands the empirical I as to what must be done to increase his value participation. In this way, conscience becomes moral will, i.e. self-control.<sup>16</sup>

In the following lines we shall attempt to propose a few moral obligations which should command economic action, allowing the latter to remain a means with which to render a better service to the whole of humankind and to all people.

### **OBLIGATION TO RESTORE AUTHENTIC MEANING TO ECONOMIC ACTIVITY**

The first responsibility consists in restoring authentic meaning, or better still, finality to economic action; the search for well-being on a goods level necessary for people's subsistence and development; all in all, to serve people, as we are reminded by Socrates and Plato (in the *Republic* and the *Laws*), Aristotle and the Stoics, following the moral decadence caused, from the fourth century before Christ onwards, by the ever-increasing importance of the powers of money and individualism (growth of private riches). Once the obligation to restore the finality of the economy is postulated, an attempt should be made to safeguard human dignity through different stages of the economic circuit. Thus, for example, before producing a new object, the preliminary question, contrary to what is done today, is not to ask oneself if the envisaged product will sell or not, whether it will show enormous benefits or not, but rather to know whether the product on display will answer to people's real and legitimate needs, if it is good or bad for consumption, and whether it contributes to making a person more of a person in the specific case of the search for well-being on a goods level, necessary for people's subsistence and development. This reflection may be extended to all stages of the economic circuit: production, distribution, commercialization, and consumption. In other words, it is about tuning the economy to the human being's fundamental values.

A company that, intentionally and cheaply, manufactures and circulates inefficient or less efficient products with the undisclosed objective of always ensuring a clientele; a company that organizes shortages by wrongfully stockpiling goods with the obvious intention to cause a profitable price-rise; a company that enjoys distributing products which it knows to have expired...; we consider these companies to be immoral. The society that knows this is happening and takes no initiative to curb this blight is also immoral, because it is committing a moral error by omission.

When political leaders formulate no policies for humanizing economic actions, when they put no operative structure in place to secure the condition and the efficiency of national and imported products even when they have the possibility to do so, when they put no reliable mechanism in place to control commercial activity, when, through open-day politics, they authorize the importation of products which cannot even be consumed in the country of origin, when they don't protect or encourage the consumption of local products that are richer and more nourishing than similar, but imported products—such as Bumba and Idiofa rice compared to white American rice, when they subject ethics to economics, as far as principles or the exercising of functions are concerned, thus institutionalizing the primacy of *having* over *being* and consequently the reign of money; we ask ourselves whether these political leaders still have a moral sense? And what about their compatriots who don't lift a finger to undertake any revolutionary action, do *they* still have a moral sense?

### **OBLIGATION TO FULL SELF-DEVELOPMENT BY THE SELF**

Human beings are not inert beings, once and for all abandoned in the world. It is said that the human being is perpetually in a state of becoming. Participating in the universe of

life, we are destined, through the potentialities we possess over and above the means which modern science and technique put at our disposal, to grow and develop. But the typical trait of this development, differentiating the human being from all other living beings, is that he/she has to fulfil it him/herself, freely. Although we emphasized above that the human being is the finality of economy, one must not, however, lose sight of the fact that we are also its agent, its artisan. Every person thus has the responsibility of developing economically, as he/she is called on to become more of a human being. Unjustified, idle attitudes are immoral, as they transgress the obligation of full self-development by the self.

### **THE RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT**

Consequently, as employment is an essential element of this vocation, the right to employment is a moral obligation which demands to be taken into consideration by those responsible for the economy before the right to capital (Van Baelen 1968);<sup>17</sup> and beyond that, to restore the authentic sense of work, that is to say a means for the human being to perfect him/herself and not a factor of or if one prefers, a place of enslavement.

...the aspirations of workers...are not limited to the existence of a right to employment in order to earn a living; they also concern the contents of this employment: improving the working conditions (rate reductions, improved hygiene and security), reducing working hours, aspiring to a less fragmented job which thus offers more responsibilities and initiatives, eliminating the function of simple implementation.<sup>18</sup>

### **THE OBLIGATION OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT BY UNIVERSAL COLLABORATION AND CO-PARTICIPATION**

It is commonplace to show to what extent human relationships are often marked by egotism; it is just as commonplace to show how relations between rich and poor countries are often dictated by a search for profits and the latter feeling themselves dominated by the former. We have seen, in fact, that the field of international commerce is full of examples of machinations tending to serve only the interests of rich countries.<sup>19</sup> However, one of the characteristic signs of our time is humanity's conscience. Thus, as may be read in Paul Foulqué's *Thoughts and action* (1962):

Since their origin, nations have generally tended to live shut off and set against one another. This has caused a state of conflict resulting from the opposition of interests and blind hate maintained by racial or national prejudices. Due to travelling and information speed and the world character of economic facts and of war itself, contemporary man has become aware that the different nations of the globe constitute a unity. Formerly, humanity had only an abstract meaning: the nature of that which makes man. Its concrete meaning—a group of nations and people...has become familiar to us.<sup>20</sup>

Together with this awareness, universal collaboration must effectively become feasible



thanks to prodigious technical progress. Because of the growth of objective culture and of the in-depth conscience of the equality of all people, universal collaboration must now become a true moral duty. Every person, every human group, every country must serve the world community.

According to Foulqué (1962):

It is a fundamental demand for countries to search for human well-being in harmony with the world community's interests. The inhabitants of rich countries must understand that their economic and cultural activities must have a positive influence on world prosperity.<sup>21</sup>

R.Coste's (1964) declaration echoes these sentiments:

Like economies, civilisations are henceforth united on all levels. Especially when it is a small country, development can only take place in connection with a large group of others, where the law of complementarity will be played out. Individualism, refusing this solidarity, is harmful to the very person practising it.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, it can be easily noted that when our behaviour is considered as a whole, we address our fellow citizens as someone calling on another's sense of responsibility. Whether a person is white, black or yellow, he/she appears to me as a subject, a true fellow citizen, an original being. What is more, from this fellow citizen comes an imperative call to be responsible; I feel and know myself to be obliged to break out of myself and to be good to him/her. To my great surprise I see that by responding to this call, I am fulfilled on a personal level.

Such behaviour, through which one renounces one's egotism and one's independence and becomes a dynamic element within a greater unity, assumes accepting dialogue, silencing one's touchiness, looking for equitable compromises, understanding self-sacrifice, all in all, resolutely opting for a shift away from the central T.

Rich countries, by taking the rule of domination as the guiding principle of their relations with the Third World, commit immoral acts along with the political leaders of the poor countries under their control, because they are transgressing the duty of universal co-participation and collaboration based on justice. All acts which tend to use aid as an ideological weapon are also immoral.

### **OBLIGATION TO DIFFUSE A SPIRIT OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

International organizations must work for and see to the dissemination of a spirit of fair international cooperation. Their energetic intervention in times of international tension will make the peoples of the world aware of their common destiny.

The inhabitants of economically weak countries must participate according to their capacity in their country's material and cultural progress. Among other things, that supposes going back to the roots of their world conception, transforming their social and political structures and lastly, making rational use of production factors.

The obligation of getting involved in the spatio-temporal universe is becoming particularly urgent for the inhabitants of economically weak countries because many of them lead a daily life of threats and proximity of death.

### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THIRD-WORLD POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

In conclusion, the rulers of so-called Third World countries have a responsibility to make sure that political, social, and economic measures are taken for the establishment of a harmonious, fraternal, and intimate co-existence, as well as the proportional co-participation of their compatriots.<sup>23</sup> The only plan capable of setting the economies of the Third World and of Africa in particular in motion would be one which would entail the total commitment of a government and of a people, born of the conscious choice of practicable actions and deliberate sacrifices.

These are some, probably the most significant, of the moral obligations which must, in our opinion, command and guide economic activity for the establishment of a society with a human face, i.e. a society where human dignity remains the preoccupation of each and everyone. That, according to us, is the task of ethical economics, which must start with fundamental values (justice, love, solidarity...) and try to translate them into concrete social situations by precise precepts in view of economic action aligned to human dignity.

What can be retained from this communication?

Morality is indispensable for maintaining and then elevating humanity to a level which is superior to that resulting from pure spontaneity, from nature only. One may scorn morality and education, the formation of tendencies which ensure peace, justice, the mutual benevolence of human beings...but one must expect to pay for this scorn with the decomposition of those virtues which make up the generosity of an individual, the perpetuity of a people, the love of humanity.

Notwithstanding these qualities, morality presents some weaknesses concerning the respect and application of its principles. For this reason, we think that it is principally the responsibility of the political order, because of its specific role of guarantor of justice within the economic order and great regulator of the economic circuit, to watch over the respect of moral values and the application of the guiding, ethical principles, in pursuit of economic action which is truly human. In fact, no other social institution exerts as much influence on the economy as the government.

This is not only true of so-called totalitarian regimes where the State tries to tackle the whole economy; it is also true of countries where a mixture of socialism and capitalism reigns. The State and its politics have a decisive influence on the economy's profile.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Aubert, J.M. *Pour une théologie de l'âge industriel. Eglise et croissance économique* [For a theology of the industrial age. Church and economic growth], Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1971:154.

- 2 The following comments were developed from two works by Aubert. A similar description can be found in Albertini.  
 Aubert, J.M. *Morale sociale pour notre temps* [A social moral for our time] (Le mystère chrétien/The Christian mystery), Tournai, Desclé, 1970:7–9.  
 Idem, *Pour une théologie de l'âge industriel*, 1971:155–157.  
 Albertini, J.M. *Les mécanismes du sous-développement* [The mechanisms of under-development], avec la collaboration de M.Auvolat, F.Fille, F. Lerouge et J.B.Mathieu, Paris, Ed. Economie et Humanisme/Les éditions Ouvrieres, 1973.
- 3 Dumont R. and Mottin, M.F. *L'Afrique étranglée. Zambie, Tanzanie, Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert* [Africa in a stranglehold. Zambia, Tanzania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde islands] Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1982, completely revised, corrected and updated, 1982:25–26.
- 4 The terms ethical and moral are used as synonyms here.
- 5 Polin, R. *Ethique et politique* [Ethics and politics], Paris: Sirey, 1968:101.
- 6 Thévélot, Xa. *Repères éthiques pour un monde nouveau* [Ethical reference points for a new world], s.l., éditions, Salvador, 1982:13.
- 7 Le Senne, R. *Traité de morale générale* [Treatise of general moral philosophy], Paris, PUF, 1967:22.
- 8 Julia, D. *Dictionnaire de la philosophie* [Dictionary of philosophy]. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1964:187.
- 9 Well, E. *Philosophie morale* [Moral philosophy], Paris: Vrin, 1969:71, 145.
- 10 Aubert, J.M. *Pour une théologie de l'âge industriel* [For a theology of the industrial age], 1971:153–154.
- 11 Ladrière, J. *Vie sociale et destinée* [Social life and destiny] (Sociologie nouvelle. Theories), SI, Duculot, (nd.) 111.
- 12 Ibidem: 111.
- 13 As regards alienations and injustices resulting from economic activity, interesting reading is to be found in:  
 Aubert, J.D. *Morale sociale pour notre temps* [Social ethics for our time], 1970:72–74.  
 Idem. *Pour une théologie de l'âge industriel* [For a theology of the industrial age], 1971:160–161.  
 Bigo, P. *L'Eglise et la révolution du Tiers-monde* [The Church and the Third World revolution], Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1974.  
 Ziegler, J. *Main basse sur l'Afrique. La recolonisation* [Hands on Africa: Recolonisation], (Points actuels), Paris: Seuil, 1980.
- 14 Aubert, J.M. *Morale sociale pour notre temps* [Social ethics for our time], 1970:160.
- 15 Van Baelen, L. *Morale de développement. Le problème des pays en voie de développement* [The ethics of development. The problem of developing countries]. Preface by Janssens, translated from the Dutch by Vankrunkelsven, Lyon, Editions Xavier-Mappus, 1968:9.
- 16 Le Senne, R. op cit.: xv.
- 17 Van Baelen, L. op. cit.: 126.
- 18 'How to live, produce and work differently, elements of an auto-administrative

programme proposed by the PSU', Paris: Editions Syros, 1978:131.

19 On this point, one may read:

Albertini, J.M. *Les mécanismes du sous-développement* [The mechanisms of under-development] Garaudy, R. *Appel aux vivants* [Calling the living], Paris: Seuil, 1979.

Dumont, R. *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* [Black Africa is off to a bad start], (Points), Paris, Editions Du Seuil, édition Revue et Corrigée, 1973.

Lacoste, Y. *Les pays sous-développés* [Under-developed countries], (Que sais-je?), Paris: PUF, 2me ed., 1960.

Ziegler, J. *Main basse sur l'Afrique. La recolonisation* [Hands on Africa. Recolonisation]

20 Foulque, P. *La pensée et l'action* [Thoughts and action], Paris, Editions de l'Ecole, 1962:394.

21 Van Baelen, L. op. cit.: 135.

22 Coste, R. *Morale internationale. L'humanité à la recherche de son ame* [International morality. Humanity's search for its soul], Paris-Tournai: Desclee de Brouwer, 964, 1964:546–547.

23 Van Baelen, L. op. cit.: 131.

#### References

- Abraham, W.E. 1962. *The mind of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ahene-Affoh. 1976. *Twi Kasakoa ne Kasatome Aborow Bi*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation (in Akan language).
- Albertini, J.M. 1973. *Les mécanismes du sous-développement* [The mechanisms of under-development], avec la collaboration de M.Auvolat, F.Fille, F. Lerouge et J.B.Mathieu, Paris, Ed. Economie et Humanisme/Les éditions ouvrières, 1973.
- Aubert, J.M. 1971. *Pour une théologie de l'age industriel. Eglise et croissance économique* [For a theology of the industrial age. Church and economic growth], Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.
- Aubert, J.M. *Morale sociale pour notre temps* [A social moral for our time] (Le mystère chrétien/The Christian mystery), Tournai, Desclé, 1970:7–9.
- Bigo, P. 1974. *L'Eglise et la revolution du Tiers-monde* [The Church and the Third World revolution], Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Boonzaier, E. and Sharp, J. 1988. *South African keywords: The uses and abuses of political concepts*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Busia, K.A. 1951. *The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti*. London: Frank Cass.
- Coste, R. *Morale internationale. L'humanité a la recherche de son ame* [International morality. Humanity's search for its soul], Paris-Tournai, Descle, 964, 1964.
- Dickson, Kwesi A. 1977. *Aspects of religion and life in Africa*. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. The J.B.Danquah Memorial lectures series 10.
- Dumont, R. 1973. *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* [Black Africa is off to a bad start], (Points), Paris: Editions Du Seuil, éditions Revue et Corrigée, 1973.
- Dumont R. and Mottin, M.F. 1982. *L'Afrique étranglée. Zambie, Tanzanie, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert* [Africa in a stranglehold. Zambia, Tanzania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde islands] Paris: Editions du Seuil,

- 1982, completely revised, corrected and updated, 1982.
- Flack, H.E. and Pellegrino, (eds.) 1996. *AfricanAmerican perspective on biomedical ethics*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- Foulque, P. 1962. *La pensée et l'action* [Thoughts and action], Paris: Editions de l'Ecole.
- Garaudy, R. 1979. *Appel aux vivants* [Calling the living], Paris: Seuil.
- Gyekye, K. 1987. *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jahn, J. *Muntu*, Tr. M.Grene, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961.
- Julia, D. 1964. *Dictionnaire de la philosophie* [Dictionary of philosophy]. Paris: Librairie Larousse.
- Kagamé, A. 1955. *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être*, Doctoral dissertation presented to the Gregorian Pontifical University, Rome, 1955.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1965. *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. Tr. H.J.Paton. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- Kenyatta, Jomo. 1965. *Facing Mount Kenya*. New York: Vintage.
- Kuper, A. 1992. *Conceptualizing society*. New York: Routledge.
- Kwame, S. 1995. *Readings in African philosophy*. Maryland: University Press of America.
- Kymlicka, W. 1989. *Liberalism, community and culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lacoste, Y. 1960. *Les pays sous-développés* [Underdeveloped countries], (Que sais-je?), Paris: PUF, 2me ed. 1960.
- Ladrière, J. *Vie sociale et destinée* [Social life and destiny] (Sociologie nouvelle. Theories), SI, Duculot, (nd.) 111.
- Le Senne, R. 1967. *Traité de morale générale* [Treatise of general moral philosophy], Paris: PUF.
- MacIntyre, A. 1981. *After virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- Mbiti, John S. 1970. *African religions and philosophy*. New York: Doubleday and Company.
- Menkiti, I.A. 1984. 'Person and community in African traditional thought', in R.A.Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction*. Washington: University Press of America.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. 1964. *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*. London: Heinemann.
- Oladipo, O. 1995. *Kwasi Wiredu*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Polin, R. 1968. *Ethique et politique* [Ethics and politics], Paris: Sirey.
- Ramose, M.B. 1995. 'Specific African thought structures and their possible contribution to world peace' in H.Beck and G.Schmirber (eds.), *Creative peace through encounter of world cultures*, vol. 9. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Samkange, S. and Samkange, T.M. 1980. *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*. Salisburg: Graham Publishing.
- Senghor, L.S. 1964. *On African socialism*. Tr. Mercer Cook. New York: Praeger.
- Shutte, A. 2001. *Ubuntu, an ethic for a new South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Thévélot, Xa. 1982. *Repères éthiques pour un monde nouveau* [Ethical reference points for a new world], s.l., éditions, Salvador, 1982.
- Van Baelen, L. *Morale de développement. Le problème des pays en voie de développement* [The ethics of development. The problem of developing countries].

- Preface by Janssens, translated from the Dutch by Vankrunkelsven, Lyon, Editions Xavier-Mappus, 1968.
- Walzer, M. 1983. *Spheres of justice: A defence of pluralism and equality*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Well, E. *Philosophie morale* [Moral philosophy], Paris, Vrin, 1969.
- Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture. Proceedings of the 2nd Afro-African philosophy conference October/November 1983*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1990. 'An Akan perspective on human rights', in A.A.An-Niam and F.M.Deng, *Human rights in Africa: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Washington: Brookings Institution.
- Wiredu, K. 1992a. 'The African concept of personhood', in H.E.Flack and E.D.Pellegrino, (eds.), *African-American perspectives on biomedical ethics*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1992b. 'The moral foundations of African culture', in H.E.Flack and E.D.Pellegrino, *African-American perspectives on biomedical ethics*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1992c. 'Problems in Africa's selfdefinition in the contemporary world', in K. Wiredu and K.Gyekye, *Person and community*. Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Wiredu, K. 1993. 'Canons of conceptualization.' *The Monist*, 1(4), 1993.
- Wiredu, K. 1995a. 'Are there cultural universals?' *The Monist*, 78(1), 1995.
- Wiredu, K. 1995b. 'The concept of mind with particular reference to the language and thought of the Akans', in S.Kwame, *Readings in African philosophy*. New York University Press of America.
- Wiredu, K. 1995c. 'The concept of truth in the Akan language', in S.Kwame, *Readings in African philosophy*. New York: University Press of America.
- Wiredu, K. 1995d. 'Democracy and consensus in African traditional politics: A plea for a non-party polity', in O.Oladipo, *Kwasi Wiredu*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1995e. 'Custom and morality: A comparative analysis of some African and Western conceptions of morals', in O.Oladipo, *Kwasi Wiredu*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.
- Wiredu, K. 1995f. 'On decolonizing African religions', in J.G.Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the 2nd colloquium on African philosophy held at the University of South Africa, October 1995*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Wiredu, K. 1995g. 'Particularist studies of African philosophies as an aid to decolonization', in J.G. Malherbe (ed.), *Decolonizing the mind. Proceedings of the 2nd Colloquium on African philosophy held at the University of South Africa, October 1995*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Ziegler, J. 1980. *Main basse sur l'Afrique. La recolonisation* [Hands on Africa: Recolonisation], (Points actuels), Paris: Seuil.

## 6

# RACE AND GENDER

### INTRODUCTION

South African women and the ties that bind

JENNIFER R. WILKINSON

Hopes were high when after decades of enforced separation, women from across the colour line in South Africa who were concerned about their position as women and about the oppression of women, were finally able to meet as colleagues in 1990 when apartheid officially came to an end. The first notable occasion was the Women and Gender conference in Durban in 1991, followed soon after by the Lawyers for Human Rights conference in Cape Town. Then in 1992 the opportunity arose for South African women to attend the first African Women's Diaspora in Nigeria. At last South African feminists, as a group, could meet their African counterparts to the North.

Although South African passport holders had previously been barred from travelling in most of Africa, whites would in any case not have been welcome. Blacks would have been well received but there were many barriers preventing them from visiting African and other countries.<sup>1</sup> So when the restrictions were removed, white delegates saw a unique opportunity to meet fellow Africans from whom they had been kept apart, while the black delegation welcomed the chance to establish relationships with other women in Africa who had identified with them in the South African struggle for liberation.

But these early post-apartheid encounters, rather than being the eagerly awaited chance for women to come together to find strategies for fighting oppression against women, were riddled with confusion and conflict. Instead of uniting in a common cause, those who attended found themselves caught up in misunderstandings, accusations, standoffs, and tears. The major areas of dispute that surfaced in Durban were the paucity of black women delegates, the perceived objectification of black women by white academics, and the fact that the conference did nothing to affirm black women. Even more serious was the claim that sisterhood was a myth because it did not recognize the differences and the conflicts between the different women (Bazilli 1991a:44). Instead of the expected reconciliation, lines were drawn between academics and activists, white and black women, and the relevance of academic conferences versus the need for political engagement. These unresolved issues also served to taint the Lawyers for Human Rights conference but instead of being analysed and clarified there, led to further soul searching and more emotive debates as the white delegates tried to explain their position and to apologize for the injustices against black women. But, however well intentioned, this did nothing to resolve the disputes.

Divisive and disappointing as these occasions were, they were nothing compared with the near disaster of the almost aborted Nigerian Diaspora. The South African women saw this as an opportunity to meet and share ideas with fellow African women from whom

they had been kept apart because of the racist policies of the Pretoria government. For all of them it signalled that they could now join other African women in a united fight for liberation. However, they were in for a rude shock. When they arrived they encountered not only fellow Africans but also African American women who had come to Africa to look for their roots and to unite with their African sisters—even though for most of them this was a first visit to Africa. They in turn did not expect to come to Africa to meet white South Africans who, to the chagrin of the Americans, seemed to think that they had a greater claim than they did to African heritage.

Accused of racism and colonialism by the Americans, the white South African women—many of whom had chosen to present papers about black women in an attempt better to understand their subjects—were slated for assuming not only that they could represent black women's experiences but also for thinking that they could talk on behalf of black women. In their turn, the South Africans refuted the Americans' right to dictate to them. Anger, bitter recriminations, and the threat by the Americans to boycott the event if the white South Africans participated, almost forced the closure of the conference. Support for the white women, however, came from an unexpected source when the 'Euro-African' women (Thompson 1992:66), that is, African women who had been living in exile in Europe, arguing on the grounds of the non-racist policies of the African National Congress, lobbied for the white women's right to participate. Eventually, after arguments that raged well into the early hours and largely thanks to the intervention of the mainly black Namibians and the Nigerian hosts, it was agreed that the white women could stay but on two conditions. First, they had to sign a joint statement in which they acknowledged (1) their privileged status, (2) that there had to be transformation to 'facilitate the visibility of women who had previously been discriminated against' (Thompson 1992:67), (3) that strategies had to be found to address the gap between academics and activists, and (4) that there have indeed been a significant number of white scholars who have made a contribution to the transformation of society. In addition, they had to agree to let their black colleagues read their papers for them.

Although the black South Africans stood by their white colleagues in Nigeria, once back home they too accused them of insensitivity and of perpetuating colonialist attitudes.<sup>2</sup> The white delegates, expecting to be welcomed as fellow Africans, were shaken by the events and by what they saw as a misinterpretation of their intentions, as well as by the fact that foreigners could claim to be African while they who had been born and bred on the continent, were regarded as having no such right. Back in South Africa where heated debate followed, Lurnka Funani (1992:63–64) summed up the problems in the following way:

The question that tore the conference apart was 'Should white women present papers about black women's experiences? This question was raised by an Afro-American. Before this question was addressed, the next question was asked, 'What do American women know about the struggle in Africa?'

Although differently phrased, these questions point to the same problems that caused the rift in Durban and Cape Town but it was the wake-up call from Nigeria that showed women in South Africa that they were not united against a common oppression. In fact,



they were deeply divided about their understanding of the nature of this oppression as well as about how it could and should be addressed. A combination of white guilt and black indignation meant that although the underlying issues that came to head were fiercely argued and debated, in the heat of the moment, these were never really properly identified and therefore could not be adequately addressed. But the main points of dispute that did emerge from these confrontations were the assumptions of white women to talk for and on behalf of black women, the division between activism and academia, and the relevance of feminism in South Africa. And despite the professed non-racialism of both white feminists and black activists, the lines that were drawn were indeed racial.

At the same time, however, there was the recognition that there had to be co-operation across the racial divide. South Africa was embarking on the historic process of establishing a truly democratic society that required a new constitution and a Bill of Rights. Women knew that if they did not work together and become part of this reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa they would lose a unique opportunity. They had to unite to overcome their oppression and to ensure equal rights in the new constitution and in the new democratic dispensation. In fact, women around the world looked to the women of South Africa to set the example by leading the way in securing effective equality for women. So in 1992 the Women's National Coalition—thanks mainly to the efforts of the African National Congress Women's League—the first truly national women's movement, was launched with the aim of driving the campaign for a Charter for Women's Effective Equality. A united effort cutting across political, racial, cultural, and class divides was made to elicit from women of all walks of life what they wanted in the constitution that would make a real difference to their lives. The success of the campaign that reached over two million women, culminated in the official handing over of the Charter to then President Mandela on National Women's Day 9th August 1994. In addition and with the WNC as support and instigator, women lobbied the negotiations between the various political parties for a new form of government, and the structure of the new democracy and constitution. They also ensured that women actively participated in the process. Although denied full delegate status, as a result of the pressure they exerted on those taking part in the talks, they were allowed to have observers who carefully monitored the process and who made considerable input on gender issues—mainly behind the scenes.

The result is that South Africa has one of the most progressive and gender-sensitive constitutions in the world, as well as the highest number of female parliamentarians, of whom several are cabinet ministers. A woman was also elected speaker of the house. Legislation is in place banning all forms of discrimination—including that based on gender—and, on paper at least, women have achieved the equality for which they worked so hard. But in spite of the apparent unity of the WNC, the divisions marring those earlier occasions did not disappear and the present truce remains uneasy with women reluctant to upset the fragile racial concord by initiating open and honest discussion. One manifestation of the thinly disguised tensions has been the arguments in the press following the recent recriminations by a senior male politician against white women for not attending the 2000 Women's Day celebrations.<sup>3</sup> Another threat to women's unity is the emphasis on racialism with President Mbeki taking a leading role in the attempts to come to terms with and mend the growing rift between black and white. But with the

current move for an African Renaissance aimed at making the twenty-first century the century of Africa now gaining momentum, women in South Africa have another chance to seize the historic moment. However, they will need to understand what lies at the root of their conflicts if they are to avoid the old antagonisms and to be sidetracked by divisive issues—however serious these may be. Already concentration on racism threatens to shift the debate from what really underlies the difficulties that first surfaced in 1990 to the wider issue of who has the right to be called an African. Unless women refocus their energies the considerable gains will be lost as women's concerns become subsumed under the larger male-dominated arena of the African renewal that includes establishing African identity.

In order to avoid this scenario it is necessary to dig beneath the issues as identified. Ironically on one hand they are indeed racial but on the other hand it would be shortsighted to think that in being racial they are merely about skin colour.

Although the success of the WNC and the campaign for Women's Effective Equality showed that unity is possible when there is a common goal, once these were achieved that unity proved short lived. There are indeed many inter-racial and cross-cultural initiatives driven by women, including attempts to stop the violence against women and children, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. But here the enormity of the problems and the urgency with which they need to be addressed tend to over-ride ideological and other differences. Hence these simmer beneath the surface and could explode at any time. This reading will mainly be an attempt to diagnose the problems lying at the heart of the disputes by focusing on the issues that I think underlie the others as they have been identified, so that the debate can move forward and so that feminism can play a meaningful part in ensuring that the twenty-first century is the African century. Once some of the confusions are removed I think it will be possible for feminism to find its right place within the changing South African scenario and to take a leading role in the renewal of Africa. First though, I shall try to show that conflict arose because of misunderstanding and because the subsequent arguments have therefore failed to come to grips with what it means to say that white women have no right to speak on behalf of black women and that, in rejecting feminism as irrelevant in Africa, the ties that bind feminism to Africa and African values have been overlooked. I also want to show that many of the accusations and counter-accusations depended on the assumptions that both the white women and the African Americans brought with them as part of the unconscious conceptual baggage of the past. These included the fact that the African Americans had an outdated and one-sided view of feminism and the further fact that there were implications of which they were probably unaware underlying the arguments of the white South Africans. These, analysis shows, made their own position untenable.

Looking back with the benefit of this hind-sight and without being clouded by the emotive smokescreen, it now seems inevitable that there would be a gap between academics and activists, and that the Americans would react vehemently to the white delegates in Nigeria.

Although the intention may have been innocent and no harm meant, when white women thought that it was legitimate for them to talk about women of another colour they had no idea that they would be accused of arrogance. On the contrary, being acutely aware of their lack of knowledge about black women and deeply sensitive of the

thorniness of the terrain, they felt that as women in Africa, they wanted to be part of the experience of being African—even if they were not black. They had read and researched in depth, and as one person has since commented, she felt both nervous but at the same time empowered that women could now have this opportunity to share their experiences.<sup>4</sup> They also wanted to come to understand something about the black woman's experience so that there could be points of contact between the races. It must be remembered that at that time South Africa was emerging from a long period of forced separation with blacks and whites being deliberately kept apart. Most association across the colour line had been strictly controlled and was in general confined to the madam/master and servant relationship. The few whites who defied the law were seriously endangered, many imprisoned and some forced into exile. Although towards the late 1980s it was clear that the system would have to radically alter, meaningful exchange, although slowly becoming more frequent, was still the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, strict censorship kept most South Africans ignorant of the writings and ideas of those black people who were either in exile or imprisoned for their political beliefs.

Against this background, white feminists brought up on a diet of international feminism, and wanting to share experiences with the black women from whom they had been apart, thought that they must have something in common with one another simply by virtue of the fact that they were all women but with the extra bond of all being African. Hence the shock when they were accused of perpetuating colonialist attitudes and their very presence in Nigeria questioned—especially when this came from women who had never before been in Africa. At the same time for some of the black South Africans who had spent many years in exile, this was a triumphant return to their motherland.

It does seem harmless as well as obvious to think that despite differences in skin colour there must be something that all women as women share and that women are alike in some important ways and hence that reconciliation between women should start from this foundation. If to study the writing of black women in order to get a feel for what it is like to be a black woman assumes that there is a mutual womanness, then it follows that this can be a common platform from which these differences can be explored while also using it to continue the struggle against women's subordination. There was also no reason to think that this must necessarily mean that since an irrelevant difference, namely skin colour, had been the past reason for them being kept apart, this should still be used as a divisive tactic. The hope was that if it could not be ignored then it needed to be overcome. But there was also the appreciation that differences contribute to the richness and diversity of women's lives and to the various ways of experiencing and fighting what seems to be a universal type of oppression. Thus discussion about these differences, it was thought, would enrich the kinds of approaches that will best ensure women's liberation.

But the African American women in particular who, unlike their Nigerian hosts, were not concerned about the niceties of being hospitable, took an entirely opposing view. They, as black women, had already in their own country rejected precisely the type of feminism and the attitudes they took the white South Africans to be bringing to Nigeria. This understanding of feminism was epitomized by the rallying call that had gone out to the women of America most forcibly articulated by Betty Friedan as the 'problem that

has no name' and with which South African feminists were assumed to identify simply because, like the women who had embraced Friedan in the USA, they were white and middle class rebelling against the constraints of being housewives:

It is urgent to understand how the very conditions of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non-existence, nothingness in women. There are aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of self or T without which a human being, a man or a woman, is not truly alive. For women of ability, in America today, I am convinced that there is something about the housewife state itself that is dangerous (Friedan quoted in hooks, Pearsall 1992:166).

It is therefore understandable that they would reject feminism and the presumption that it has something of value to offer women other than privileged white middle class, mainly academics. But if this was the reason that they denied the white South Africans the right to participate in the conference then they were viewing these women with the conceptual baggage that included an outdated understanding of what feminism had really come to mean, while also refusing these women the chance to demonstrate what they really thought and why they were there.

In 1984, when bell hooks, in reaction to feminism as first articulated by Friedan, claimed that in her *Feminist theory: From margin to center* spoke on behalf of thousands of African American women when she argued that Betty Friedan's 'problem that has no name', that is, that her description of the plight of American women, was not an assessment of the lives of all women per se but really a description of the particular class of women to which she herself belonged.<sup>5</sup> And it is true that the large numbers of women who are most victimized by sexist oppression, were precisely those who had the least power to change their situation because they 'are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually...[and they] accept their lot without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage' (hooks 1992:165). Hooks argued further that beneath these feminist descriptions of women's oppression was the unforgivable lack of realization that the suffering of these women was being made invisible by the very voices that presumed to speak on their behalf. By these invisible women she meant the African Americans.

Although not denying that specific problems of leisure class housewives' did indeed merit concern hooks (1992:166, 167, 168) maintained that:

Like Friedan before them, white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware of the extent to which their perspective reflects race and class biases, although there has been greater awareness of biases in recent years. Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries...

...A central tenet of modern feminist thought has been the assertion that 'all

women are oppressed'. This assertion implies that women share a common lot, that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women. Sexism as a system of domination is institutionalized but it has never determined in an absolute way the fate of all women in this society. Being oppressed means the absence of choices...

...middle class white women were able to make their interests the primary focus of feminist movement and employ a rhetoric of commonality that made their condition synonymous with 'oppression'. Who was there to demand a change in vocabulary? What other group of women in the United States had the access to universities, publishing houses, mass media, money?

It is therefore fair to think that ironically when they came to Africa to seek their roots, the Africa American women encountered what they saw as a manifestation of the very form of feminism and feminist consciousness—as articulated by hooks—which they deplored. Although the alternate would be to ascribe their reaction to a racist knee jerk, it would be naïve to think that racism was irrelevant. Insult must have been added to injury because this feminism was brought to Nigeria by the women who were perceived to be the supreme examples of recipients of racial and colonial privilege, all of which they had enjoyed at the expense of the very women about whom they intended to speak. What they did not realize though was that in refusing to allow the white South Africans to speak through their papers they stand accused of the same kind of conceptual colonialism whites had imposed on the local people when they first settled in Africa. Unable to see Africa in terms other than those they imported with them, these settlers had been blind to the situation as it really was. For example, unable to recognize the artifacts used in rituals as art they found no art; misunderstanding the African metaphysic that includes all beings in a holistic framework, they thought that Africans were heathens and ances-tor worshippers. Centuries later the African American women in Nigeria, informed by a conceptual framework that included a version of feminism long discarded, categorized the white South Africans as feminists of the ilk identified by hooks years earlier—without even looking at the papers the women had prepared. However naïve they may have been about their own acceptance and place in Africa, these women had read, rejected, and moved on from their original sympathy with that brand of feminism and instead were searching for something more relevant that could include the complex context of the lives of women in Africa. Hence the eagerness with which they grasped the chance to meet fellow Africans whose lives, they knew, were so different from their own.

But if feminists in the USA—where at least there was communication and a certain amount of cross-cultural contact—had been oblivious to their own presuppositions and what these implied then, given the success of apartheid policies in keeping the races separate, it would have been extremely unrealistic to expect South African feminists during those dark years to fully appreciate the complexities of the conceptual framework with which they approached both feminism and the situation of their black country women. Acknowledging difference by specifically researching black women's experience but thinking that at least as women they must share common burdens in fact put them in

an impossible situation. On the one hand, if they celebrated difference then there was the inevitability of hierarchies—anathema to feminism and more particularly in South Africa where white supremacy at the time presented a very real danger of perpetuating the old stereotypes. On the other hand, when they were interpreted within the violently anti-feminist conceptual framework of the Americans, their rather hesitant subscription to at least a core of sameness resulted in being castigated for arrogance and insensitivity. Spelman (1998:3) identifies this as the paradox lying at the very heart of feminism and which threatens to tear it apart. ‘Any attempt to talk about all women in terms of something we have in common’, she says, ‘undermines attempts to talk about the differences among us and vice versa’.

But it seems almost too obvious to be debatable that women as women, regardless of race or class, have certain like problems and hence must have certain common goals. These have after all, been identified and endlessly debated. And, so the argument goes, if women are to be liberated then surely the factors that divert the struggle away from what unites them as women should be put aside in order to concentrate on the shared burdens. Rape, violence against women—including domestic violence—insidious and hidden forms of workplace discrimination, as well as other forms of remaining systemic oppression based on gender cut across racial and other lines and can be identified and targeted. If women allow race and class to divide them, then not only will racial concerns in particular confuse the gender issues, a wedge will be driven between them making combined efforts more difficult and so playing into the hands of the common enemy, namely male chauvinism—a classic case of divide and rule. Janet Radcliffe Richards (1984:17), for example, has argued that it is a mistake to shift to racial and class divisions and away from the concerns that unite women because ‘Feminism is not concerned with a group of people it wants to benefit but with a type of injustice it wants to eliminate’. In order to fight a type of injustice, unity from those who suffer that injustice is needed because then if each woman does what she can do according to her abilities, training, and capacity to fight these forms of discrimination, the total of the many talents and resources can be utilized in a combined drive. This will be greater than the sum of the different parts if women work in separate and separated groups. So instead of seeing themselves in conflict, it follows that white and black, academics and activists, should rather pool their disparate talents and expertise to play different roles, each adding her own special contribution to the overall elimination of injustice. Race and racial differences should be recognized as irrelevant in the united effort to end gender oppression. In addition, women in other developing countries, especially in South America, had warned South African women not to be persuaded to put women’s issues aside until the fight for national liberation was won. Experience had shown that they would be in danger of losing ground in their own struggle because liberation inevitably resulted in one male-dominated regime simply being replaced by another.

Although the conceptual tidiness of this argument is appealing, a brief examination of the history of women’s oppression in South Africa shows that it must be rejected: (1) it overlooks the fact that the kind of oppression suffered by white and black women in South Africa was radically different, (2) it isolates gender from other factors that form part of our make-up as human beings and so denies that gender depends on a process of socialization. However, the alternate position is not desirable either.

*1 Forms of oppression*

The kinds of oppression suffered by white and black women in South Africa were very different indeed. It was not just that black women also suffered because they were black; rather the kind of oppression they suffered as women depended very much on the colour of their skins.<sup>6</sup>

In South Africa's racist past, white and black were kept separate by draconian legislation with all whites enjoying privileges not accorded to any black person, male or female. In this situation white women shared the same kind of injustices as their American and European counterparts. They did not have equal educational, employment, and economic opportunities with their men folk and like American women; they bore the brunt of child-rearing and housekeeping duties. Hence in the sixties and seventies there had been a strong identification with Betty Friedan and other American feminists who wanted more out of life than marriage, a husband and children when this 'more' was taken to be a fulfilling career outside the home:

So in the seventies and early eighties, feminism in South Africa as in the USA, endorsed mainly by educated middle-class white women with academics leading the way, embarked on the struggle for the liberation of women so that they could enjoy the privileges that until then had been the prerogative of men. They took on the boardrooms, the academy and the church and slowly, in line with feminism in other Western countries, began to make some progress as in increasing numbers they went out to work—often less from financial necessity than for personal satisfaction. But the few women who reached positions of relative power found that the battle was far from over as they now had to contend with entrenched male attitudes at work and received little assistance from husbands and partners at home. Furthermore, numerous forms of sexist legislation remained on the statute books. The issues were much the same as women in developed countries experienced legal inequality, gender exclusive language, unequal pay, the male culture in all workplaces, masculine resentment and, of course, unequal distribution of domestic labour. But unlike women in other countries they were fortunate to have cheap domestic help to lighten their burden and to free them for the fight for gender equality. Most white households in South Africa employed black women as domestic servants who cleaned, cooked, and looked after children while their white employers could look for the fulfilment of a career or could pursue their studies so that they could obtain the professional qualifications that would enable them to lead fuller lives. Most homes also had black male assistance in the form of gardeners who could also perform the heavier menial duties of cleaning windows, polishing floors, and washing cars.

Because of the racial policies of the time there was a clear and established hierarchy: white males were at the top followed by white females, then black males with black females occupying the bottom position. The complexities of this arrangement are usually overlooked when assessing forms and amount of redress owed by or to the various groups and terms like the 'triple burden'—race, gender, and class—when talking about black women's oppression tend to confuse rather than clarify the situation. First, the nature of the injustice suffered by black women differed radically from that of whites. Second, the position they had in the hierarchy coupled with the racial laws of the time meant that their

blackness served to obscure their gender from their white male oppressors. As a result it is not surprising that black and white women were at odds when they tried to find consensus on what the needs of women were that had to be addressed as well as the form that had to take.

If, as hooks (Pearsall 1992:167) claims, 'oppression means lack of choices' then in apartheid South Africa the choices white women strived for were far beyond the bounds of possibility for the black women in the country. With no option under the Bantu education system but to attend inferior schools and with little or no further educational opportunities, they struggled to survive in the harsh conditions of the townships usually without running water or electricity. Alternately they stayed home in the rural areas with sole responsibility for child rearing while the men went to the cities to look for jobs or were recruited for the mines. Employment was limited to domestic labour (where they worked long hours so that white women could pursue the careers that would lead to fulfilment), the factory shop floor or as lowly paid receptionists and telephone operators. Those who were more fortunate trained as nurses and teachers but all of them had to find unsatisfactory arrangements for their own children and still had their own full share of domestic duties. Many would have to rise before day-break to catch buses for the journey to their places of work and returned long after dark. In addition they often suffered harassment by police and security forces. Then, as the easiest target for the frustrations of their men folk, they were often beaten and abused at home. Struggle for them meant trying to survive against the unbearable odds of disease, violence, and despair in conditions of abject poverty.

A growing black middle class (encouraged by the government of the day who realized that relative economic stability would breed complacency against the rising black consciousness) gave a few black women and men the opportunity to enrol at what are now known as the Historically Black Universities that were established to keep black and white students apart and to ensure that black tertiary education remained inferior.<sup>7</sup> As apartheid began to fray at the edges, some men and even fewer women did manage to get special dispensation to attend prestigious institutions like the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town. In general though the women were poor, uneducated, and badly treated by their men folk. It is little wonder that even had they heard of it, the feminism of the time had no relevance whatsoever for them.

However, in the highly charged political atmosphere of the seventies and eighties many women, especially students, became part of the freedom struggle by joining organizations such as the Black Consciousness Movement and the Azanian Students Organization where they worked for national liberation.<sup>8</sup> After the student uprising of 1976 and the resultant massive crackdown, and then in a lesser second wave when President P.W.Botha's infamous Rubicon speech heralded the banning of most anti-apartheid bodies, there was a marked exodus as students and young leaders in particular, left South Africa to go into exile where, thrust into the diaspora, they continued the struggle for freedom. Of those who left, some were educated abroad in places as diverse as England, Canada, America, and the former USSR, as well as in a number of African countries.<sup>9</sup> It was in this context of activism that a feminist consciousness was gradually awakened but its roots and concerns were very different from the feminism embraced by white South African women.



The example of one black woman who has become a role model for all South African women is perhaps a story of a particularly unique person but nonetheless captures the kind of experience these young women had as they began to perceive that as women they were not participating equally in the liberation of the country. Mamphela Ramphele (Pityana et al., 1991) writes graphically of how, as a member of the Black Consciousness Movement, and ignorant of the literature on feminism, she became aware of sexism within the liberation movements.<sup>10</sup> The BCM, originally a student organization, in trying to reconstruct blacks 'in their own image' (Pityana et al. 1991:217), encouraged a positive self-image among young blacks, thereby giving women the confidence to be more assertive and to look for space in which they could use their intellect. But Ramphele soon discovered that she lacked the eloquence, self-confidence, and the dedication of men like Steve Biko who led the movement. Although at first she played only a supporting role, as her confidence grew she learnt to be tough and to hold her ground against her male colleagues. But it did not take long to discover that her growing assertiveness did not always stand her in good stead with her male colleagues. By striving to be as 'good as any man' she and some other females were granted 'honorary' male status and some of the taboos against women—including smoking in public and the custom of excluding women from some forms of communal eating—were lifted for them. But, as she says (Pityana et al., 1991:220–221):

...these challenges to male privilege did not represent a systematic departure from traditional gender relationships, but only served to undermine the tradition for the benefit of those who were prepared to take risks in challenging sexism at a personal level. Interpersonal relationships remained largely unchanged, with the man as the dominant partner, and many women remained trapped in unsatisfactory relationships that violated their dignity as people.

Feminism, which was then sweeping through the USA, had very little impact within BC ranks or on my own personal journey at that stage. This was partly because of lack of access to the relevant literature, on account of censorship, but also because feminism was seen as irrelevant to the needs of blacks in South Africa. The feminist movement was dismissed as a 'bra-burning' indulgence of bored, rich white Americans.

She describes how women were involved in the movement because they were black and were fighting the common enemy of white racism. Gender as a political issue was hardly raised at all. It was, rather, a process of trying to cope with and interpret experiences of the time and in that context. Intellectual understanding only came afterwards.

In the meantime, while the liberation struggle was mainly confined to blacks, most white women were unaware of the dynamics of the gender relationships that were emerging in isolation from their own interpretation of women's oppression. In their desire to understand more about the experience of black women with whom they were unable to discuss and exchange experiences, academics researched and wrote about black women writers and artists. Aware of their own ignorance and careful not to offend they were shocked at the hostility with which they were confronted because they were perceived as taking it upon themselves to talk on behalf of black women about whom

they were accused of knowing nothing. In the heady optimism of 1990 after the end of Apartheid when women came together to meet as 'equals', the disappointment at the realization of the width of the gap between them was profound indeed.

In this situation white men were clearly at the top of the hierarchy, as in the USA and Europe, and although they were guilty of the same forms of oppression against women as in these developed countries, the situation in South Africa was more complicated by the nature of the hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> Although white women were unjustly treated by their men folk, because of their racial superiority, their place in the hierarchy was above that of black men in the system, and so these women were superior to black men and were not oppressed by them. Instead, white women being higher placed were in a position to oppress black men—not because they were men but because they were black. Black women, who were at the bottom of the pile, were in turn, oppressed by black men because they were women. But they were also oppressed by white women, not because they were women but because they were black. The maids and madam syndrome may recently have become the subject of a comic strip but the reality was that white women expected their domestic servants to work long punishing hours so that they could pursue their own careers. Even the most sympathetic white women employed black domestics to make their own burden easier rather than to prevent unemployment. Then, black women were also oppressed by white men. But this was not because they were women but because they were black. Like black men they were subjected to innumerable forms of humiliation including the necessity of carrying the hated pass, were harassed, and if imprisoned it was invariably because they infringed the many and complex racial laws. It is not just that the strict laws against inter-racial sex and marriage kept white men from entering into liaisons with black women which would have had the result that they would have seen these women as partners and then would have treated them as they treated white women, white men did not even view black women as women. In the main they were domestic servants. Although the position for black women was worse in the South African context, the American Barbara Smith's succinct summing up of the situation when she looks at her own position as an African American applied equally:

When you read about Black women being lynched, they aren't thinking of us as females. The horrors that we have experienced have absolutely everything to do with them not even viewing us as women (Spelman 1998:37).

Thus when black women were denied employment and education opportunities this denial was for a different reason from that of white women. It was because they were black. Ironically, the much-lauded support given by white women to black women in the now famous 1956 march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the carrying of passes by black women, was to demonstrate against a racial injustice. White women were never subjected to the same indignity.

## *2 Isolating gender*

Part of the neatness of the argument that women should concentrate on gender equality and not allow other factors to divert them, is also part of the reason that it must be

rejected. This is because of the implication that a person's gender can be separated from their race and from other factors contributing to their identity as a person.

If gender can be addressed separately from all the other aspects of our identities then gender oppression can also be separated from other forms of oppression. This implies that black women suffer two different kinds of oppression—one because they are black and another because they are women. So they are both like and unlike black men and like and unlike white women. And although white women can and have supported their black counterparts (as in the anti-pass demonstrations) it is in fighting gender injustice that they are seen to have a universal goal. So in not experiencing racial oppression white women have a common bond with white men, but in sharing the atrocities of sexism, they can identify with black women as women. Hence, the argument goes, just as black men and women can unite to fight against racial injustice, so black and white women must be able to unite to fight against women's oppression. The combined strength women have can only be realized when their racial differences are put aside—just as the combined strength of both black men and women in the struggle against apartheid was crucial in bringing an unjust form of government to an end.

But to separate gender from race is not just to assume that white and black women experience the same kind of gender oppression—which clearly they did not—it is also to assume that gender is not a social construct.

Despite feminism's distrust and rejection of essentialism the search for a common bond does separate gender from race and then as Spelman (1992) argues, implies that gender must be some kind of essential property that we have. This would mean that it must be the same kind of property as our biological sex and this would mean that when one is born a female one is also born a woman because one's gender, that is, one's womanness would be as much a part of one's biology as one's sex and this would mean that there would be as many sexes as there are genders. But how then could we account for men, women, and the many shadings in between which have little or no direct relation with biological make-up?<sup>12</sup>

As it is though, feminists as anti-essentialists endorse Simone de Beauvoir's observation (1976:295):

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces the creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Gender in any case is a term coined precisely to show that when we talk of men and women in this context we are not talking about biological sex. The whole point of talking about gender at all, feminists argue, is because social aspects of sexual difference cannot be ignored in our construction as men or women and that the concepts 'man' and 'woman', unlike 'male' and 'female', are in fact social constructs with political inferences and are not biological referents. Although nature may have made me female, nurture has ensured that I have become a woman. But if nurture makes us women then the woman a white female becomes must be very different from the woman a black female becomes. The reaction to white women's assumption that they could talk on

behalf of black women can therefore also be seen as an implicit rejection of the essentialism they were seen to be endorsing in thinking that black women are like them except for the fact that they have a black skin, although this was not articulated at the time. In other words, white women stood accused of the mirror syndrome—when I look in the mirror I see myself but with a black skin.

Being born female and becoming a woman can be attributed to a variety of interlocking influences and it would be unrealistic to try to list them all. However, there are some that are especially relevant in making black South African women in particular, different from their white counterparts and vice versa.

In the first place, to become a woman is to be the other with respect to the dominance of the male perspective on the world. As feminists have been arguing for decades, in a world recorded, interpreted, and understood from the male point of view, women are seen as the oppositional polarity. Hence to be the other is not to be what is given in the first place and therefore is not to be accorded priority so allowing the dominant perceptions and discourse to remain in place. This is why women's experiences and interests are not taken seriously and why women's ways of thinking are undervalued. The other, being different and in opposition, is always inferior to and less valuable than the self. One of the problems of otherness in not being captured within the prevailing conceptual schemes is to be marginalized so either remaining invisible or else becoming a threat. So for a white woman to become the other is to be seen in contrast to white male dominance and to be left out of the prevailing masculine conversation.

However, for black women the situation becomes more problematic and more complex. In the first place to be black and African is already to be the other within the still prevalent Western world-view because the world has been explained and elaborated within the Western framework where the concepts and consequent interpretations brought to bear on Africa and its peoples, were themselves part of the process of colonization. But being invisible to white males as a woman means that she is not even considered a threat to white male privilege. However, within the hierarchy she does become the other for black men. And so her place with respect to black men is similar to that of white women and white men. Unlike a white woman, however, who is also in a position of relative privilege because of her race, she once more becomes the other as a black woman.

In a position of otherness, experiences will be different from the experiences of those who are the initial given and against whom one is measured and judged. But if being a white woman means experiencing the world as the other with respect to white male privilege, it follows that being a black woman is to experience the world as the other to black males and being black is in addition to be the other for white woman. Hence the violent reaction when white women are perceived to speak about them and for them. And in the early nineties at least, white women with their access to technology and current academic and other institutionalized infrastructures did try to dominate the women's movement in South Africa.<sup>13</sup> However, the shifting balance of power under the democratic dispensation is bringing changes although there are still some white women who have difficulty coming to terms with it, so creating a new kind of tension.

It would be foolish to ignore the role that the political scenario in apartheid South Africa played in the engendering of the various members of the female population. We have already seen how feminism shaped the consciousness of those white women who

from their position of relative privilege took up the banner of women's liberation as it was imported from the USA and Europe. And we have seen how for a particular black woman her own realization of the subjugation of women was formed within the highly politicized atmosphere of the black liberation movements. Many others, when they returned from exile or were released from prison after the unbanning of the ANC—or else who had managed to stay out of the clutches of the security forces—and who were acutely aware of the hardship endured by black women in this country, turned their attention to finding ways of relieving the terrible conditions under which these women had lived for so long. While white academics and other feminists continued to research, unravel, and analyse gender issues and to fight the battle for equality, especially in the workplace, together with women from the townships and the rural areas, these returning emigres and other activists used existing structures such as township church groups to lobby for clean water, decent health care, better educational facilities, and a fairer distribution of land. So when women came together in Durban and Cape Town their conceptions of oppression and their agendas for change were worlds apart.

A particularly important part of becoming either a woman or a man in South Africa that is still at the root of many misunderstandings, are the deep cultural differences between the various races. White South Africans owe their heritage to the world-view that has been inherited from the Greeks, influenced by Cartesian dualism, Kantian rationalism, and the resultant liberalist values of individualism. Coupled with this is a belief in the free market and capitalism, majoritarian forms of democracy, competitiveness, and notions of excellence based on personal endeavour. Children are taught to respect the rights of others while learning to stand on their own feet. Although boys rather than girls are encouraged to become independent, the over-riding ethos is that of Western individualism. This is of course tempered by the variations within the different white groupings that in turn are language based, but by and large both of these embrace common notions of what counts as right and wrong.<sup>14</sup>

The culture of black South Africans traditionally bears little resemblance to that of the whites. Despite urbanization and Westernization, their roots are in the African holistic metaphysics that includes the ancestors and numbers of other beings. Concomitant with the communitarian notion that a person is a person because of other persons is the conception of socially and culturally embedded personhood.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has explained the central notion of one form of this anti-Cartesian notion that 'I am because you are', also known as *ubuntu*, as:

...the essence of being human, it is part of the gift Africa will give to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours. When I dehumanize you, I inexorably dehumanize myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and, therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community, in belonging (Mulernfo, 2000:57–58).

Hence the importance of values like striving for personal growth through working for the

common good, consensual, participatory forms of democracy and the sociology of knowledge. Rather than seeing the other person as the individual bearer of rights, self-respect and respect for others is dependent on being an integral part of the community. It follows that children respect their elders and are expected to look after the young and the old with these duties overriding any personal ambition.

Then there is the role of mothering—crucial in the engendering of males and females. If mothers encourage their children to become the kinds of people who will be able to cope within their social environment, then white and black South African children will learn very different coping mechanisms. Young white girls are taught the niceties of good social behaviour to enable them to become both supporters of their men folk and more recently as increasing numbers of feminists have taken on the role of motherhood, to strive for personal fulfilment. Young black girls, on the other hand, learn how to care for the weak and the aged, to share equally with an extended family and to respect custom and tradition, although given the history of political upheaval, they have also learned to extend this consciousness to the wider context—first to black liberation and more recently to black empowerment. On the one hand therefore will be the pressure of the search for individual excellence with personal value often measured in terms of success; on the other hand there will be the need to be an integral part of a community where one's value as a person depends on responding to communal responsibilities and performing one's community duties. It is interesting that during the battle for liberation the black family became the centre and the site of the struggle while white families were often fiercely divided or else tended to close their eyes to the momentous events happening on their doorsteps. It is also noteworthy that when asked whom they most admire and whom they would like to emulate, black women usually cite their mothers and grandmothers. White women still express the fear that they will become like their mothers!

Although this has been only a brief sketch of the contexts in which black and white females in South Africa have acquired their identities as women, it must be obvious that as women they can have little in common. And it is not surprising that cohesion and unity has proved impossible except when the chips are down and they can identify a common purpose and when achievement of that goal is in sight. It should also be evident, if something of a shock, to accept that from the black women's point of view at least, white feminists have been guilty of precisely what they have been fighting against: the hegemony of the dominant voice. Only this time it is not male but white feminist dominance that is accused of marginalizing the other, silencing her and making her invisible. And just as feminists rejected—the often unconscious—male oppression so black women are reacting against perceived white women's—unintended—silencing of their voices.

Given this scenario, the future for women's unity looks bleak. On the one hand, unity demands recognizing sameness but on the other, in the diversity of South Africa, it must acknowledge difference. And now women must unite in order to ensure that they are not subsumed by the growing urgency evident in the racial debate and they must take their place together to become part of the African Renaissance within the context of globalization. But although we have seen the pitfalls in assumptions of sameness, to cooperate with the acceptance of difference will inevitably result in hierarchies.

Although in the past white women have been accused of trying to dominate the women's movement in South Africa, at this stage in our history it is difficult to say how this hierarchy will shake down in the contemporary scenario.<sup>15</sup> But, in any case, what is clear is that hierarchies are anathema to feminists as well as to the broader women's movement in South Africa where its overwhelming numbers are black and the emphasis is on African values of co-operation and participation.

Before despairing, however, it is worth taking another look at feminism and to put it into context. I have indicated that the interpretation of feminism that drove women apart is in fact an early and a narrow view that has already largely become outdated. At one extreme it became a sellout and feminism was incorrectly identified with the super woman syndrome as women took on the corporate and other corridors of power as personified by individuals like Margaret Thatcher. But feminism was never meant to replace one type of hegemony with another and as Treblicot (in Pearsall 1992:395) points out:

...to be a feminist is to care about women, and it is arbitrary to limit our concern to just those aspects of our sufferings and limitations which arise from a particular cause; so feminism, it seems to me, must be concerned with all the harm done to women, regardless of its source.

Although feminism can indeed be seen as the search for personal fulfilment and as attempts to obtain legal and political rights for women, it has also always been concerned with bringing a different set of values and a different meaning to what has in the past been a male-oriented world emphasizing aggression, power, and competition between individuals. Feminism rejects these excesses of rational individualism that have led to selfishness and greed and in the search for a more humane world, embraces caring for others, the importance of relationships, participation, mutual support, and co-operation. Women's experiences in the home have taught them that these are the values which work best in the family situation and these are the values they have brought with them into the workplace. In researching women's decisions when faced with the dilemma of abortion—one of the few experiences when women have to make their own decisions—Carol Gilligan (Pearsall 1992) in a series of interviews with women who had to decide whether or not to have an abortion, has identified care, responsibility, and relationships as the core of a feminist ethic. In other words, women do not look for ethical rules or universal principles but decide after considering the extent of harm to themselves and others, their duty and responsibilities to their families and others (including the foetus), as well as the effect their decision will have on relationships. Research has also shown that women in the workplace have replaced attempts to fit into a man's world with their own brand of inclusiveness and a participative form of management where decisions, wherever possible, are based mainly on consensus and after consultation. Instead of trying to control, they recognize the importance of cooperation. These more humane traits are transforming management from the old transactional style to the openness of transformational collaboration.

It is noteworthy that already in 1991 Bazilli, in quoting B.Kgositsile, was urging South African women to move on from a conception of feminism that was 'blurred by the

spectre of “Western feminism” (1991b:7) and to develop a South African feminism that can be an ‘emancipatory project, the essence of which is social justice’ (1991b:4).

Although the notion of a specific South African feminism might run the risk of ignoring the forces of globalization, it does not take much insight to realize that feminism when seen in this broader context, far from being alien to African ways of life, in fact has much in common with the communitarian ethos.<sup>16</sup> If we understand the African Renaissance to mean the renewal of African values that have been eroded and defiled by years of colonialism and imperialism and feminism to be ‘an emancipatory project whose essence...is social justice’, then feminism, instead of standing in opposition actually already perpetuates what has been defined in a 1999 version of the Vision, Mission, and Objectives of the African Renaissance as:

...a shift in the consciousness to re-establish our diverse traditional values and in particular *ubuntu*, embracing the individual’s responsibility to the community and the fact that he [sic] is, in community with others, the master of his own destiny.

President Mbeki himself, its main proponent, has been said to interpret the African Renaissance as:

...the source of revival for the African continent. He argues that the main reason for this renaissance in the African continent is that there is a need to empower African people to free themselves from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism that they went through and to situate themselves on the global stage as equal and respected contributors to, as well as beneficiaries of, all the achievements of human civilization. Just as the continent was once the place of the origin of humanity and an important contributor to civilization, this should empower Africa to help the world rediscover *the oneness of the human race* (Mulernfo 2000:47). (my emphasis)

Contemporary feminism, when looked at as empowering women to free themselves from the neo-colonialism of male patriarchy, can be seen to be bound to the communal solidarity of African humanism by common values and purposes. Hence it seems to be the perfect vehicle for achieving the regeneration of Africa. If this is to be within the context of globalization then people will no longer be isolated individuals but will become part of a global community and hence ways must be found to ‘help rediscover the oneness of the human race’. Surely there is no better alliance than feminism and the African Renaissance.

Looking back it now seems obvious that previous conflicts between women were not about the friendly face of feminism that should be so at home in Africa but were instead based on simplistic stereotyping—mainly a result of misperceptions and ignorance that in turn can be blamed on the long years of enforced separation. If we take the trouble to look properly at what it is happening in South Africa as members of the various race groups find themselves having to co-operate in a rapidly changing situation and with African values now superseding liberalist individualism, we can see that both black and white women should be comfortable with the growing emphasis on community, support



and solidarity. Feminist views, after all, are not that different from African humanist communitarianism with its emphasis on relationships and the welfare of the group overriding individual glory and honour.

In fact, the mores to which both feminism and African humanism are so vehemently opposed are already being replaced through the combined processes of Africanization and feminization. The result is that feminism, as it embraces and develops the values it shares with Africanism, has never been more relevant in ensuring that women in Africa can justifiably assert their right to play a central role in the African Renaissance.

But feminism has an even more important role in this transformation than simply becoming an adjunct of the renewal of African values. Unless the hoped-for Renaissance is appreciated within the forces of globalization, there is a very real danger of a conservative interpretation of the African form of communitarianism as returning to tradition with women being persuaded to assume traditional roles of subservience in the name of preserving cultural values. Anecdotal evidence shows that most young black women, as they take their place in the commercial, economic, academic, and political arenas although concerned with the same issues as white women, now have the added burden of the pressure to preserve their culture. Arguing on the grounds of the deterioration of the family and the resultant increase in crime, traditional leaders (all male) have been in the forefront of the move back to cultural norms (as opposed to the renewal of traditional values in the context of globalization) urging men and women not to forget their roots. Although many of these traditions emphasize *ubuntu* and in its various forms some of them include the fact that respect for women was circumscribed by certain conditions like their primary role being to bear children. There is also the issue of forms of customary marriage—including polygamy as practised in some tribes but that modern African women see as a form of subordination. In addition, they fear that paying *lobola* (a form of bride price) will further encourage outdated conceptions of their identity. Then there have been outrageous claims by some men that what the women condemn as sexual harassment is really part of their culture. In embracing feminist conceptions of gender equality these young women are strongly resisting what they see as yet another attempt to force them back into the dark ages before women's liberation. They need the empowering framework of feminism epitomized in the refusal to be silenced, as well as the support of all women to ensure that their voices are heard in this new version of the struggle against oppression.

If women can come to see that contemporary feminism can be used to steer the African Renaissance away from conservative attempts to hijack it and towards renewal, then feminism will be able to take a lead in reconciliation as it consolidates and uses the values of communal solidarity to build the nation. Women and Africans now have the chance to demonstrate what they have always embraced: support, relationships, and the pursuit of the common welfare. It is worth remembering that in Nigeria it was the African women in the face of fierce opposition and who, as later debates showed, despite their own reservations about the intentions of the white delegates, demonstrated both the humaneness of African humanism and the greatest strengths of feminism by supporting the right of the white South Africans to be there and to speak for themselves. This generosity of one towards another, in demonstrating the African belief in allowing everyone their say and which women at their best are capable of showing to others but

which has been over-shadowed by misunderstanding and mistrust, is surely what the spirit and the empowering force of the African Renaissance is all about.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 The situation in South Africa regarding travel was both complex and confused. Black persons were often refused passports, especially if it was suspected that they had political motives for travelling. Although they would have been welcomed in other African states, the blanket ban on South African passport holders meant that they were also effectively barred from most of Africa as well.
- 2 The debates in a number of issues of the feminist journal *Agenda* after the Nigerian conference demonstrate the depth of the misunderstandings and the degree of confusion and anger.
- 3 In 2000 the minister of Safety and Security castigated white women for not attending rallies in honour of Women's Day, effectively accusing them of racism.
- 4 Discussed in conversation with Pamela Ryan, a delegate to the conference.
- 5 Friedan's *The feminist mystique* became one of the most widely read feminist works and was widely influential in awakening the feminist consciousness.
- 6 I owe this argument to Spelman in *Inessential woman*.
- 7 On the grounds of separate development, the apartheid government was responsible for establishing several universities exclusively for black students in what were then known as the homelands, such as Transkei and Venda. It is a well-known fact that these received a fraction of the funding of the white universities. The situation is still a problem for the new ANC government.
- 8 Many prominent activists cut their political teeth in the trade unions where they became aware of sexism in the movements and so embarked on the dual struggle for national and gender liberation. Well-known examples are Patricia de Lille, at present a Pan-African Congress MP; and the late Feroza Adam who was tragically killed in a road accident shortly after taking her seat in parliament in 1994.
- 9 The ANC endorsed a policy that as many of its members as possible should be properly educated. Exiles were educated abroad while many prominent leaders studied while in prison. Lindiwe Zulu, the present deputy speaker of the Gauteng Legislature, for example, was educated first in one of the neighbouring countries and later in Moscow where she received a Master's Degree in journalism after first having to learn the language. Later she joined the fighting forces Umkhonto we Siswe (Spear of the Nation) as a guerilla.
- 10 Dr Ramphela has had a remarkable career. A medical doctor, she was banned and banished to a remote part of the country. Later she became the first woman and the first black person to be appointed Vice-Chancellor of a major tertiary institution, namely, the University of Cape Town. She is currently Managing Director of the World Bank.
- 11 Affirmative action, as part of the programme of transformation, is changing the demographics of the workplace although most senior management positions are still held by white men.

- 12 Although I do not argue the point here I would support the view that race, like gender, is not a biological feature but a social construct.
- 13 Speaking from personal experience, initially white women did dominate the movement because they possessed most of the technical equipment and transport facilities. It is probably also justifiable to accuse them of assuming that they also had the expertise. They were, however, proven mistaken as black women rapidly demonstrated leadership and organizational qualities acquired as members of the political movements that they had to organize in secret. Others had received training and experience abroad, especially working for the ANC in exile.
- 14 It would be a gross oversimplification to think that Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites in South Africa were alike. The former's roots, mainly in Holland, Germany, and France have long since been replaced by a form of South African identity with strong religious and family ties. The latter, who came from British stock, tended to embrace these customs and ways of life.
- 15 Various suggestions have been made for a more relevant form of feminism in South Africa, such as Womanism and Black feminism, but as Hendricks and Lewis have argued (1994), all of these are in danger of perpetuating problems already evident in the types of feminism they are proposed to replace.
- 16 As the racial demographics change to become more representative, black women are increasingly entering the workplace and taking on positions of power. In addition, sheer numbers mean that they are the highest percentage of South Africans.

Should women love 'wisdom'?

GAIL M.PRESBEY

### **EVALUATING THE ETHIOPIAN WISDOM TRADITION**

In the face of a world academic community which has been sceptical regarding the existence of a written philosophical tradition in Africa, Claude Sumner of Addis Ababa University has devoted over forty years to finding and studying Ge'ez philosophical texts in Ethiopia, as well as exploring a now written oral tradition of proverbs. Sumner's position on written texts is unique within the debate on African philosophy. Most of the focus of the debate has been on whether or not there is a written tradition of philosophy in Africa. Some suggest that some ancient Egyptian texts are indeed philosophy, and therefore count as the earliest written philosophy (Karenga, James). For those sceptical of the philosophic import of the Egyptian texts, the search is constrained to the last fifty years of professional philosophers writing in or about Africa, both its concepts and its existential situation. Sumner adds a new dimension by championing a collection of written texts from medieval and early modern Ethiopia. He explains that the texts are written in Ge'ez, and are sometimes free translations of earlier Arabic or Greek texts; however, Sumner has argued that their translation turns them into a unique Ethiopian contribution. For example, he argues that the Ethiopian translator, under the influence of

the home-grown Ethiopian Orthodox Church, turned Skendes, the main character in *Life and maxims of Skendes*, into a Christian (Sumner 1981:120). This Ethiopian Skendes is portrayed as deeply sensitive, thoughtful, and perceptive; in fact Sumner argues that the Ge'ez version is the most perfect, most morally exalted, and most chastened compared to the Greek and Arabic versions of the Skendes story (Sumner 1981:131).

That there have been such texts takes on added importance in the context of a debate where philosophers, many of them African themselves (like Okolo 1990:27–28; and Hountondji 1983:33), insist that the history of African philosophy can only be traced back to, at most, the last fifty years. The debate has, for the most part, assumed that written texts are superior to wisdom passed orally, this is a contention that I have debated at length elsewhere (Presbey 1996). However, Sumner has the strength of being able to point to medieval and early modern texts from Africa; thus even the most sceptical critic of oral philosophy must pause at his findings.

The story of Skendes is just one of five texts that Sumner has collected in *Classical Ethiopian philosophy*. He has also completed a five-volume series entitled *Ethiopian philosophy*, in which each volume is devoted to analysing the texts. Sumner acknowledges that those who hold a narrow definition of philosophy as critical and introspective would only see one of his texts, *The treatise of Zera Yacob* (a seventeenth-century text), as philosophy. Yet Sumner feels that the neglected texts he has uncovered, as well as proverbs, form part of a sapiential or 'broad philosophy' tradition dating back hundreds of years. Sapiential philosophy is found in the forms of sayings, maxims, exhortations, and proverbs (Sumner 1985:8). Sumner clearly advocates the value of this tradition. He also clarifies that these sapiential texts possess a logic which might evade the casual reader. Calling it 'figurative logic', and finding it in proverbs as well as his texts, he demonstrates how written texts based on the form of oral discourse (such as Walda Heywat, who imagines objections to his views and replies to them) nevertheless put forward reasoned arguments in the logical form of ABA. Sumner also argues that some treatises, such as one by Zera Yacob, portray a 'religious rationality', that, while not secular as is Descartes' rationality, are nonetheless rational (Zera Yacob 1976:26–46). Therefore, Sumner's attempt to broaden the definition of philosophy by increasing our notions of forms of logic holds a unique position in the larger debate. I have discussed Sumner's innovations regarding the definition of philosophy with more detail elsewhere (Presbey 1990).

Another key aspect of sapiential philosophical literature is its focus in topic. The texts Sumner treats concern what he calls 'the art of living' (Sumner 1986:50); they focus on ethical issues, on knowledge that can be put to good use (Sumner 1974:100; Sumner 1985:8). While not being exhaustive of all philosophical topics, Sumner nevertheless insists on the importance of these ethical topics to philosophy. While acknowledging the impact the sapiential tradition has had in Ethiopia, some of Sumner's African colleagues have had reservations about its value. Samuel Wolde-Yohannes, in particular, agrees that the sapiential tradition has had a large impact upon Ethiopian culture, through the influence of the Christian church which has been in Ethiopia at least since King Ezana confessed to the faith in AD 341. However, Wolde-Yohannes (1994/95:319–321) expresses regret that a more critical Ethiopian philosophy, based on individual reflection on a wide range of philosophical topics, had not developed instead. Others, Sumner

notes, see the wisdom tradition as contrary to the needs of modern, independent Africa; like Nkrumah and Fanon, they view Africa's uncritical traditional wisdom as part of the very weakness which left it an easy prey to colonization (Sumner 1991:57–58).

Some contemporary African philosophers had, ten to twenty years ago, expressed their disappointment at those academics who seemed to glorify and enshrine African cultural ideas and practices, without subjecting them to rigorous and rational scrutiny, in the name of a kind of nationalistic pride. Both Wiredu and Hountondji wrote books in the seventies and eighties that pointed out irrational aspects of African practices and beliefs, suggesting that some old values were outdated and had to go. While many had popularly interpreted the authors as saying the past should be forgotten, they have each taken pains to clarify that they think studying African traditional thought is worthwhile and important. As Wiredu cautions, however, studies of traditional African philosophy should not just be expository and clarifying, but also reconstructive, 'evaluating our heritage in order to build upon it' (Wiredu 1995:17). As Hountondji explains, The real issue is not whether African philosophy exists, but what use Africans today decide, in full lucidity and responsibility, to make of their traditions of thought...' (Hountondji 1996:88). So we can consider that a project like Sumner's, of not just championing texts of the past as relics, but of analysing texts and evaluating them, would be a worthy project within the field of African philosophy.

While Sumner excels in certain forms of analysis of texts, he has not focused on whether the wisdom put forward in the texts has a relationship to political and social power. Feminist criticism offers a source of hesitations about the 'wisdom' traditions of Africa. Several of Sumner's texts are pious treatises that advocate a Christian life. Certainly the Ethiopian wisdom tradition, as is the case with so many other wisdom traditions, whether Egyptian, Biblical, or otherwise, provides excellent examples of virtuous conduct regarding, for example, compassion toward others, selfless hard work, truthfulness, humility, perseverance in the right, thrift, and generosity. One who lived by its maxims would in many ways live a virtuous life by most standards. However, it would be a mistake to accept a tradition because of its authority without subjecting it to scrutiny and evaluation.

We can easily understand the potential ambivalence of a contemporary Ethiopian woman toward the wisdom tradition when we consider her role in the institution which has fostered and transmitted it, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the one hand, she is likely to be a frequent participant in the many long religious ceremonies of her Church. If living in a rural area, she may still seek advice from the male rural elders—advice steeped in this very wisdom tradition, regarding how she should live her life, including her sex life with her husband, complete with reference to proverbs and tradition; a recent Oromo play entitled 'Guulaa Bulaa' illustrates this point (Yaadasan). On the other hand, she is not allowed, despite her piety, to play any leading role in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and, as we shall see, the traditional wisdom consulted by the elders regards her nature as weak or wicked. Accordingly, her place in society is rigidly delineated. Viewing her obvious attachment to her Church and its wisdom tradition, an outside critic is likely to speak of brainwashing or subtle manipulation by the dominant ideology. If she herself should become critical, she would be faced with the dilemma of Yenti of the I. Singer novel (and the subtext of the Streisand film): can a woman love the wisdom

embodied in her religious tradition while refusing to accept the subservient role that same wisdom assigns her?

Sumner has defined wisdom as the sumtotal of things worth knowing (Sumner 1985:8). In the case of the Ethiopian wisdom tradition, as with other traditions, this paper will argue that some of what calls itself 'wisdom' is not wisdom at all, but an unfair and inaccurate denigration of women. Descriptions put forward as neutral, factual accounts of women's nature and behaviour are often sexist perspectives which flourish in a patriarchal society. Certain passages cannot stand up to rational scrutiny, whether Cartesian or figurative, since they are based on biased accounts written from a male point of view. It is therefore important when studying or promoting a wisdom tradition to encourage a critical attitude, and reject narrow-minded chauvinism when it shows itself in however 'holy' a guise. This reading will first examine Sumner's approach toward the rather problematic 'wisdom' about women in the Ethiopian sapiential tradition. Particular attention will be paid to his analysis of *The life and maxims of Skendes*. While Sumner recognizes the shortcomings of Skendes' 'wisdom' about women, it will be argued that his championing of the sapiential tradition makes him unduly reluctant to take the tradition to task for its chauvinism. In particular, his Freudian analysis of Skendes condemns Skendes as a neurotic individual, while leaving the society which spawned him and the tradition which praised him untouched by criticism. Instead, the post-structural and feminist analysis of Sumner's colleague Yeshe H.Mariam will be invoked to supply the critical feminist perspective lacking in Sumner's work (Mariam 1995). Parallels to other African thinkers who have dealt with the issue of negative proverbs about women in their traditions will be made. The paper will conclude by arguing for the worth of studying the corpus of Ethiopian wisdom literature, on the grounds that understanding a culture's 'presuppositional states' is always worthwhile and indeed connected to future concrete action for change.

One of Sumner's Ge'ez translations, *The life and maxims of Skendes*, is an ample source of 'wisdom' about women, and thus a convenient starting point for our study. As a young student, Skendes was scandalized by the wise philosophers' saying that 'all women are prostitutes'. In disbelief Skendes decides to test the truth of this maxim by trying it out on his mother. He conceals his identity and finds that, indeed, his own mother is willing to accept money to sleep with him for one night. While his mother had first vehemently refused the offer when her maid conveyed the message, she was later wooed by the maid's account of the handsomeness of her suitor. He spends the night with her, kissing her breasts, but going no farther. Because of his experiment's success, he concludes that the philosopher's maxim is true (Sumner 1985:168–173).

However, this story goes on to convey both tragedy and Skendes' later success in life. In the morning the mother questions her companion, asking with concern if he were not pleased with her. Skendes then explains 'I am your son'. Upon the news, his mother runs out and hangs herself. Skendes, surprised at what has happened, blames his tongue and its utterance for the death of his mother, and so sentences himself to a life of silence. But this silence only intrigues others, and when the Emperor finds out that even under pain of death, Skendes will not say a word, Skendes is newly esteemed as a wise man, and the Emperor asks to receive counsel from him on all important matters. The rest of the book is the record of Skendes' wisdom on a myriad of topics, including his insights regarding

women.

From a critical viewpoint, and certainly from a feminist viewpoint, Skendes' actions are morally problematic. Skendes' attempt at empirical verification of the maxim falls short of scientific method. He very subjectively decides that a test on one person, his mother, is all that is needed; perhaps because he egoistically believes that his mother would be least susceptible to such temptation. He therefore concludes that if she were to succumb, all other women would as well. Or, it could be that men might be prone to negative valuations of women, but stop short from condemning all women, because of the esteem in which they hold their mothers. Showing that one's own mother is as weak or fallen as all other women makes judgements against women complete and universal.

Also missing from the experiment is any sensitivity to the double standard to which men and women are often held regarding sexual issues. Is the maxim regarding 'prostitutes' limited to all women, because it is known that there are some men who will not accept money to sleep with a woman? To charge that 'all women and all men are prostitutes' wouldn't make sense, because men's moral worth in society is not routinely tested by whether they will resist offers of money to sleep with women. The economic background is missing as well. Women more often than men find themselves in financial straits, especially in male-dominated economies. This contextual factor would help explain why they would be more likely to accept pressure to have sex for money, and less likely to have the spare cash needed to encourage men to sleep with them for money.

Perhaps the moral distinction present in the contemporary West between a licentious woman and a prostitute (who has sex with men for money) is not made in the Ge'ez story. Sumner notes that the word *zamawyat* used in the maxim 'all women are prostitutes' is used in the Ethiopian Bible to refer to all libidinous acts contrary to nature (Sumner 1981:233). Indeed, in the story Skendes' mother seems to be more motivated by the handsomeness of her suitor, and is at first offended by the idea that she should accept money. Nevertheless she does not refuse the money. It seems clear that Skendes' mother is not being condemned with all women for her love of 'easy money' but rather for her uncontrolled lust for handsome men. However, even understood in the sense of lust, there is still a double standard. Do we think that men as a whole are easily able to refuse the sexual advances of beautiful women? If not, shall we say 'All men are prostitutes as well as women'?

Although Skendes, on being asked to define man and woman, finds some shortcomings in men (such as weakness and instability), he depicts woman as a more conscious and active evil:

Woman is the object of man's yearning; when she dines with him, she is a beast; when she rises from bed, a lioness; when she dresses up, a serpent; she is a disaster for all men; she is constantly intent upon destruction; she spreads war and evil; she is an insatiable animal, the object of man's yearning; she is like plundering beasts, worse than wild animals and snakes; she is evil, more malignant even than the lioness; her fruit is the poison of snakes and dragons; she excites deadly thoughts; she daily brings forth calamity; she is an imposed necessity, she generates evil (Sumner 1985:187).

Florence Hetzler, one of the few women philosophers to comment upon Sumner's work, takes issue with Skendes' definition of women. She points out that it is from women that the Emperor and Skendes and all men are born (Hetzler 1991:33). Such descriptions today encourage one to ponder, in what sense are such contributions 'wisdom?' Sumner has defined wisdom as the inclination and steady purpose of putting knowledge to good use (Sumner 1985:8). Insofar as Skendes puts to good use his 'knowledge' that all women are prostitutes and shuns them, he conforms to this definition. The Emperor certainly admires Skendes for his contribution to knowledge (Sumner 1985:176, 180, 197). What needs to be analysed, later in this paper, is the structure of domination which accepts such dubious 'knowledge' and 'puts it to good use'.

But first, what comment does Sumner offer regarding the importance of the message of Skendes? He does not say that Skendes is right regarding his estimation of women's nature. He chooses to analyse the Skendes story as an example of the Oedipus Complex. Skendes both loves and hates his mother; he wants to put her on a pedestal, and debase her at the same time (Sumner 1981:232). Of course, according to this analysis, Skendes himself is not consciously aware of his motivations. His true motives only become obvious to Sumner and others with the benefit of psychoanalytic theory. Sumner contends that Ethiopians should be proud that their heritage includes one of the few written versions of the Oedipus story (Ethiopian Herald 1981:1). However, is this analysis satisfactory?

The Freudian analysis avoids the question of how Ethiopian society as a whole regards women. Firstly, the emphasis on Freudian psychology turns Skendes into an individual with a complex or neurosis: he is immature, infantile insofar as he has not passed through a stage that most boys grow out of (Sumner 1981:227–228, 234). Skendes can therefore be written off as perverted, as the exception in Ethiopian society. In fact, that is how he is sometimes interpreted in popular Ethiopian culture by those who do not want Skendes' various virtues to become a challenge to their lifestyle. As Dr Kirefe-Rigb Zelleke found in his study, many prostitutes in contemporary Ethiopia have decorated their rooms with an embroidered saying that warns 'Don't be like Skendes', meaning don't engage in unusual sexual positions (Sumner 1981:236).

The Skendes story differs from the Greek Oedipus tragedy. In the Greek version, Oedipus is pitied because his life is ruined by what he has done. But Skendes is catapulted to fame and success by his experiment with his mother. He suffered from the memory of the death of his mother (who committed suicide as soon as Skendes had revealed his identity to her the morning after his experiment). However, he curiously protected himself from realizing an accurate account of his role in her death, by blaming only one body part, his tongue, for having uttered the words 'I am your son'. In the early stages after the death, it is this act alone for which he feels guilt, and not the scenario that preceded it, for he can observe an immediate connection between the two events. When Skendes finally communicates to the King the circumstances of his mother's death, he protects himself from any small part of blame in her death, through a reasoned argument contemplating necessity. He argues that the death was the outcome of a chain of coincidental events, thus severing any form of causality, and therefore blame, between his own words and actions to his mother and her resultant suicide. His parable of the 'milk-bearer' is wholly inappropriate as a parallel to his own actions. While the milk-



bearer of history, in feeding guests milk which she does not know is accidentally poisoned, is engaging in an act of gracious hospitality that would be praised in most circumstances, Skendes is instead engaging in deception, incest, and payment for sexual favours—all morally unacceptable behaviours. The resulting suicide of his mother, while not foreseen by him, is triggered by his unacceptable actions as well as her shame at having cooperated with him in forbidden deeds (Sumner 1985:178–180). Surprisingly, the outcome of his experiment and his mother's expression of her shame does not lead Skendes to question the universality of the maxim which he confidently verified, and which he continues to believe after her death.

Not only does Sumner's psychoanalytic study turn Skendes into a neurotic exception (thereby releasing Ethiopian cultural sexism from the need to change), but Sumner departs from Skendes' own view that 'no one is to blame', and ends up suggesting that the blame for the tragedy lies with the mother. Sumner notes that according to his interpretation of Freud, to consider all women as prostitutes is a sign of a severe form of fixation on one's mother. This often happens when mothers relate to their sons in a smothering and destroying way (Sumner 1985:229). Such an argument would trace the mother's demise to the fruits of her own earlier smothering relationship with her son. But there is no evidence in the story regarding Skendes' mistreatment by his mother during childhood.

The Freudian analysis often goes directly against the reading of the text; supposedly such a reading is justified by the fact that characters do not reveal their true, inner, subconscious motives for action, but only their conscious motives which are expressions of denial. For example, Skendes is angered when he hears the philosophers say all women are prostitutes (a statement which would include his mother); the Freudian interpretation would have to say he's denying how happy he is to hear that his mother is available to himself (Sumner 1985:168; Sumner 1981:231–232). Again, after Skendes has sent the maid with the message of the offer to his mother, he states that he will rejoice in his mother's virtue if she turns down the offer; and if she says yes, then he will be satisfied that the philosophers are indeed a sound source of wisdom. The Freudian analysis has to say that his true happiness would be if he were to be able to sleep with his mother—the one thing that Skendes denies is a motive of his at all (Sumner 1981:170). Such an analysis turns Skendes into a liar and self-deceiver, when the text presents him as an earnest young man in pursuit of knowledge. Even the later Amharic version, which is less chaste than the earlier Ge'ez text, states regarding the meeting of mother and son, that 'she had carnal desire while he had spiritual love for her' (Sumner 1981:122). To this day Skendes' message is a living tradition, and he is a role model for monks, insofar as he encourages monks to keep their distance from dangerous women (Sumner 1981:120).

Sumner insists that the Ethiopian version of the story presents Skendes as a Christian. Yet there may be many subtle ways in which Skendes is still advocating an Arabic view of women. Fatimah Mernissi has put forward distinctions between Christian/Western and Islamic/Arabic versions of women's subjugation. According to her, Islamic societies do not see women as inherently weak or inferior (as in the West); rather they are potentially equal, and are feared because of their power to seduce men. Men fear 'fitna', a word used both to describe, on the one hand, disorder or chaos, and also a beautiful woman (with the connotations of 'femme fatale'). Moroccan folk culture and proverbs are filled with

parallels between loving a woman and losing one's mind. Men are warned to stay away from married women, 'who are considered to have more difficulties in bearing sexual frustration' (Mernissi 1976:27-45). Which of these two views is more prevalent in Ethiopia? The Ethiopian text of *Life and maxims of Skendes*, perhaps influenced by its Arabic forbearer, puts the woman in the role of sexual aggressor. She is lustful while Skendes remains relatively unmoved (Sumner 1985:172-173). And later, in his maxims, Skendes proclaims 'The lust of a woman (as compared) with that of a man is in the ratio of ten to one' (Sumner 1985:216). However, when asked to account for this great difference between men and women considering that they have one nature as human beings, Skendes points to the fact that women give birth to children. Earlier he had decided that his mother was as lustful as she was, because God had placed such a drive in her and in all women to safeguard the future of the human race (Sumner 1985:176, 180). This view according to Mernissi is found similarly in Islam.

Turning his attention from Skendes, Sumner finds the same emphasis on the evil woman in the earlier *Book of the philosophers*. He notes that in that sixteenth-century book, there is an avoidance of reductive dualism (which would equate women with evil), due perhaps to the fact that the text is a collection of the thoughts of various authors. Therefore, while the evils of the bad woman are elaborated in a way similar to Skendes, there is also mention of the good woman who brings into her house 'the harmony, peace, and order we observe in a serene sunny sky (Sumner 1995:326). Feminists like Fatimah Mernissi would be quick to point out that in the tradition found in the Middle East and Africa, women are rewarded with the moral title of 'good' only when they conform to their social role of being deferential housekeepers. For example. The *Book of the philosophers* says, 'Grace after grace is granted the woman who is reserved and good and patient, who holds her tongue (which, besides is) of no value'. However, there are passages which counsel genuine care for one's wife. 'Consider your wife as one of the organs of your body. Man and wife are one body. Let a man respect his wife like an angel'. This passage is followed by warnings against evil women and prostitutes (Sumner 1985:108, 104). In contrast to Skendes, who counsels men to avoid marriage to avoid sorrow (Sumner 1985:199) the seventeenth-century Ethiopian thinkers Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat encourage marriage as a way to happiness. They rebel against the Laws of Moses which consider a woman unclean if she is menstruating. Yacob states that he treats his wife as an equal and not as a maidservant. With a touch of tenderness, Yacob describes this relationship:

...she was not beautiful, but she was good-natured, intelligent, and patient... Hirut, as soon as she became my wife, loved me greatly and was very happy. Formerly, she was looked down upon in the house of Habtu, and men in the house made her suffer. But since she loved me so, I took the decision in my heart to please her as much as I could, and I do not think that there is another marriage which is so full of love and blessed as ours (Sumner 1985:248).

Walda Heywat complements Yacob's views, and goes so far as to say that 'Marriage is the most beautiful and the greatest of all the mysteries of nature; more than them all it helps mankind and its entire life; it manifests the creator's wisdom and renders glory to

him...' 'Draw near your wife marvelling at and praising your creator...', Heywat exhorts. Men should try to please their wives and make them happy (Sumner 1985:276, 278). Similarly, Mernissi finds in the Islamic writings of Abu-Hamid al-Ghazali the belief that sexual pleasure is meant by Allah as a foretaste of heavenly bliss (Mernissi 1976:29). However, this is not proof of women's equality. Heywat counsels men to marry women eight to ten years younger than themselves. Although his reasoning is that women reach 'the nubile age' quicker and subsequently age faster, it may be that the slight biological differences in this area cannot justify such a wide age difference. More likely social practices determine this age gap (Sumner 1985:277). It is Sumner's own appraisal that only Zera Yacob holds the position that men and women are equal.

However, we can say that the reason these two authors praise women and marriage so much is that they were social critics of their times. In addition to rebelling against the religious sectarianism that was then prevalent, they also spoke out against the popular views and derogatory treatment regarding women, especially found in the monastic tradition. Samuel Wolde-Yohannes notes that while the sapiential tradition has permeated Ethiopian culture, the critical evaluations of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat found no popular following in Ethiopia (Wolde-Yohannes 1994/95:319–321). Perhaps these two authors posed a threat to the religious powers that be. Sumner suggests as much in an interview with an enthusiastic Marxist, who was scanning Ethiopian history looking for positive role models for their new Marxist government. The reporter sees Zera Yacob as one who criticized the Church and the ruling class, who opposed the feudalist system, and denounced the exploitation of the people by the Church (Zera Yacob 1976:2).

Sumner finds negative views of women in his book, *Oromo wisdom literature, vol. 1: Proverbs*. Sumner found sixteen Oromo proverbs on the topic of women, and almost all are wholly negative. It is said that a woman cannot manage the household, let alone public affairs. 'Only one proverb, out of the sixteen devoted to Woman, admits, as a concession to male "superiority", that it may be advantageous to have a woman in the house' (Sumner 1995:327). This one positive reference is to the companionship that a wife can provide.

However, the category of 'woman' is not alone in being represented one-sidedly by proverbs. Sumner notes that while there are fifty Oromo proverbs for 'vice', there are only eight for 'virtue'. Likewise, there is only one proverb on reality, while fifteen are on appearances; one proverb on moderation, while thirteen are on excess, etc. Does this context ameliorate the seeming one-sided negativity of the proverbs on women? Sumner says of these one-sided cases, 'That does not mean that the idea of the contrary is unknown, but only that proverbs that would make up an axis of reference for the opposite notion either were not collected or were never formulated...the opposite, although being well known, did not become the subject of a proverb' (Sumner 1995:292–293). The question is, why not? By examining closely related literature from a vastly different perspective, Yeshe H.Mariam raises further questions about the worth of wisdom. Her M.A. thesis analyses the Amharic-language proverbs regarding women, thus complementing Sumner's collection of Oromo proverbs. Whereas Oromo-speaking peoples make up about 40 per cent of Ethiopia's population, Amharic-speaking people make up about 30 per cent of the population. But her analysis, much unlike Sumner's, is based on post-structural theory. Noting definitions by Firth, for example, who calls

proverbs a 'jewel of truth', and an 'outspoken piece of wisdom', she is concerned that such expressions are seen to connote the idea of the objectivity of truth. Instead, she focuses on the role of proverbs of telling others what to do. Yeshe H. Mariam suggests that proverbs do not represent the viewpoints of the entire society, but instead articulate the interests of the dominant group. Particularly, proverbs on women are based on the views of the dominant group in patriarchal societies. Proverbs reinforce the patriarchal system through indoctrinating the minds of the people and normalizing patriarchal views (Mariam 1995:5–7). Discourse, including proverbs, are linked to techniques of control. Institutions wield their power through processes of definition and exclusion. They reach to the unconscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. This approach draws heavily on Foucault, who noted that while the power relations of discourse may find their expressions at the institutional level, nevertheless power at the localized level is very crucial. We could therefore say that the ability of proverbs to influence men (and women) regarding their attitude toward women, play just as crucial a role in oppression as the institutional structures that suppress women. In fact, power relations aren't always obvious; instead they are masked. They affect desire, so that one's oppression is not always obvious. Language and socio-cultural codes are slowly legitimized, until they're seen as 'normal' (Mariam 1995:17–19).

For Foucault, truth and power are mutually produced. Each society has its regime of truth; 'the types of disclosure which it accepts and makes functions as true' (in Mariam 1995:19). This clearly goes against the own representations of proverbs as expressions of self-evident truths. Yeshe Mariam explains that post-structural theory shows that language does not just represent reality. It distorts reality through its implicit ideology. Meaning is constructed; 'presenting itself as a transparent medium, language disguises its function as a meaning constituting system'. There is no determinism in this view of language, for it is possible to 'reconstruct those meanings that are not compatible with the structures in which we live'. In other words, dominant discourse is not the only discourse (Mariam 1995:12–15). Since statements and beliefs are historically bound, they may change (Mariam 1995:16). Therefore negative proverbs regarding women are not inevitable, but can be challenged by a new social reality, made obsolete or replaced by new ones.

Yeshe Mariam raises the question, do proverbs reinforce the existing patriarchal system in Ethiopia? According to her observations, in contemporary Ethiopian society, women for the most part find their lives limited and constrained. Men's work consists of soldiering, plowing, and mercantile affairs, while women labour in all other categories, including agricultural work, reproduction, and raising of children, and work in the home. Women are subjected to circumcision and early marriage. Across Ethiopia women are considered a source of contamination of men unless they perform cleansing rituals after childbirth, menstruation and sexual intercourse (Mariam 1994:59). Yeshe Mariam suggests that in her society, 'the perception of women as weak in character justifies their control by the society at large' (Mariam 1995:6).

It was the recent socialist government headed by Mengistu that dramatized the plight of women's 'two-fold oppression' and insisted it would abolish inequality through the formation of women's groups. However, these groups were mostly ways of pooling extra labour from women, to make supplies to send soldiers during the war effort, etc (Mariam

1994:60–61). This would suggest that more than official institutional change is needed to challenge negative views of women. Although the official sloganeering of the government might change into a view that supports the freedom and equality of women, a change is needed on the micro-level, on the level of individuals' attitudes as they are shaped by language and other practices of culture. Yeshe Mariam notes that even the recent proverbs on women that incorporate the gadgets of modern technology into their metaphors still contain the same outdated notions of women.

Women's reality has changed from the one depicted in many proverbs about women, and yet there are very few proverbs to depict this new reality. Divorce instigated by women is on the rise in the Amhara communities, and this is made possible partly by women's economic independence. Yeshe Mariam insists that divorce does not carry a social stigma. There is one proverb written from a woman's point of view which suggests that if one's husband mistreats one, the best thing to do is to leave (divorce) him: 'When a peasant gets sated he beats you with ploughshare; leave him and come home, let him bake his own K'it'a' (Mariam 1994:51; Appendix, proverb 257).

The role of women as mothers has always been ambiguous in proverbs. Although women were shut out of the public realm and consigned to the home, there would at the same time be proverbs that suggested that women were incapable of managing the home, and were also poor disciplinarians of their children. In other words, they were not accorded competence in their own realm. Yeshe Mariam notes a proverb of rebellion regarding the idea that women should not have to find their entire worth in the rearing of children: 'Who has been buried in her children's hide?' (Mariam 1995:51; Appendix, proverb 258). Other contradictions lie in the fact that while women are belittled for being cowards, when a woman does courageously act she is often criticized (Mariam 1995:42–43, 77).

Sumner insists that proverbs are for the most part universal. Certainly Mineke Schipper's collection of African proverbs on women entitled *Source of all evil* suggests that Ethiopia is not unique in its preponderance of negative proverbs about women (Schipper 1991). Yeshe Mariam's interpretation of proverbs which sees them as manifestations of dominant power structures and not as timeless verities would encourage us to see proverbs as dynamic, capable of change as women redefined themselves and transformed the structures of society. And yet, she notes, women's discourse has lagged behind their experience. The present patriarchal discourse no longer describes women's experiences adequately (Mariam 1995:75–76, 79). And yet Schipper asserts that 'oral literature...can never be pinned down once for all on the basis of form, content, or perspective. Depending on societal changes, stories are adjusted in various different directions' (Schipper 1996:162).

A political analysis of proverbs and traditional African wisdom in general is not a new topic to Sumner. In fact, in an essay in which he summarizes various presentations made at a conference on African philosophy which he organized in 1976, he conveys the ideas of Niamkey Koffi and Toure Abdou of the Ivory Coast. Koffi and Abdou argued that philosophy itself springs from the will of a social group to dominate. Philosophies are apologetic, meant to make the rule of elders in the gerontocratic order look like sound thinking. Therefore African traditional philosophies emphasize ethnic and brotherly solidarity, and the primacy of age as a source of wisdom. The values of loyalty, filial

piety, obedience, and procreative fecundity, are reinforced to give power to the gerontocratic order. Conflicts with parents are interpreted as being due to sorcery. In this way the political authority is regarded as a manifestation of heavenly will (Sumner 1978:116–117). Although Koffi and Abdou focus on gerontocracy and not the sexism within gerontocracy, it could be added that what Koffi and Abdou say about gerontocracy could also be said about ‘wisdom’ regarding women. The broad wisdom tradition of Ethiopia emphasizes vices of women so that women will be seen as needing to subject themselves to men’s rule. Since Sumner wrote the summary, he is obviously familiar with this approach of analysis, but chooses not to use this approach himself. Whether he should have done so will be one of the issues treated in the conclusion of this paper.

If the tradition in Ethiopia up to the present time (with the notable exceptions of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat) insists on women’s inherent negative and dangerous traits, a scoffer could argue, why should anyone study such views? Indeed, exposing sexism in African culture is a project that has not always been looked upon with enthusiasm. Kirsten Hoist Petersen has explained that the goal of the wave of writing about Africa that began in the 60s was to ‘show both the outside world and African youth that the African past was orderly, dignified and complex and altogether a worthy heritage’. Such an emphasis meant that women’s place in society (centring on the home) was presented in such a way as to fight against cultural imperialism. For example, Lawino, the hero of Okot p’Bitek’s poem (p’Bitek 1972), became such a symbol of resistance, she became a ‘holy cow’. Petersen charges that ‘in refusing to admire Lawino’s romanticized version of her obviously sexist society one tears away the carpet from under the feet of the fighter of cultural imperialism’ (Petersen 1995:251–254).

Several African women have done specific studies of the forms that women’s social oppression has taken within the wisdom myths and proverbs of their societies. For example, Kavesta Adagala of Kenya notes that patriarchal economic domination inherent in the gendered division of labour has its roots in the oral literature of the various ethnic groups making up Kenya. She explains that ‘the activities, role and participation of men in society and in the natural environment have been accorded higher status while women’s activities, roles and participation have been downgraded as expressive, spontaneous, unsystematic and intuitive’ (Adagala 1992:53). For example, men are awarded exclusive land rights because in many communities the legends surrounding the founding of the community regard men as those who first found and tamed the land on which the group settled. There are also stories in which women, when entrusted with jobs like tending cattle, acted irresponsibly, thus justifying the exclusive male ownership of cattle. She therefore concludes that ‘more fundamental than the division of labor by sex, and thus management of natural resources by sex, there exists the division of the ownership of natural resources by sex’ (Adagala 1992:55–57, 71).

In addition to the study by Adagala, Adefioye Oyesakin’s study on Yoruba proverbs on women show that the wisdom tradition sees women as ‘agents of indiscipline’ and the source of most moral problems in the society. Such studies suggest that if society is morally deteriorating, it must be due to the ‘weak links’ of the moral order—the women. However, it is doubtful that the many problems facing Nigeria today—military rule, abuse of human rights, bribery and corruption can be traced to the actions of women denounced in their proverbs. Amba Oduyoye has done a study of Asante proverbs on

women. The proverbs put forward the idea that all actions of note and merit are done by men. Her study is complemented by the findings of Safo Kwame, who says that Akan proverbs put forward the view that 'all women are equally unfaithful, bad, or even worthless'. This conception of women as greedy parasites, as put forward in the proverbs, 'is inconsistent with most Akan's conceptions of their mothers who are obviously women' (Kwame 1995:261). Although Kwame insists on the universality of women's subjugation, he admits that such subjugation can take different forms, according to specific historical and social conditions (Kwame 1995:264). Therefore one could still make meaningful distinctions, as Mernissi suggested, between Christian and Islamic forms of women's oppression. Different social conditions could also lead to different strategies for improving women's lives.

Florence Dolphyne of Ghana argues that the priorities of Western feminist movements and African women's movements are not the same. Whereas Westerners think African priorities should be the eradication of polygamy and female circumcision, Dolphyne thinks development in general, literacy skills and economic well-being for women should be the highest priority; if these priorities are met, problems of polygamy and female circumcision will take care of themselves (Dolphyne). Likewise, Marie Pauline Eboh of Nigeria explains that Black Womanists, who are unlike white feminists, know that men are central to their lives, as husbands, brothers, and sons. African women are not apprehensive of wifehood and motherhood. 'The success of African womanism derives from the discovered awareness by women of their indispensability to the male,' Eboh explains. This assurance of indispensability then serves as an anchor for their liberating actions (Eboh 1992:211).

Leonard Harris describes studies in the implicit or commonly-held values of societies as necessary steps before change can be contemplated. The value of philosophical anthropology lies in its deriving presuppositional state understanding from cultural and linguistic reality. Social identity crises happen when presuppositional states are challenged. He insists that it is indeed of pragmatic value to study the 'presuppositional states' of communities in order to understand what kind of future change is possible, and how one would best approach change in order for it to be understandable and acceptable for one's community. Therefore he does not see a necessary conflict of interests, but rather a complementarity between those who want to study the philosophies of African ethnic groups and those who want social change (Harris 1980:190-191).

In addition to the question of how much we should want to accept or reject of the wisdom tradition, there is the question of how much moral condemnation to heap upon those who had upheld or still uphold the views of women's inferiority. After all in 1996, after many decades of consciousness-raising by an active women's movement, it is easier to spot the shortcomings and the blatant lies regarding some of the sayings on women. But, should the author of the Skendes story be held accountable to today's standards? Should Sumner, writing his commentary in 1981 in Ethiopia be found lacking for his ignoring of post-structuralist theory? Here, the time-factor plays a big role. Sandra Harding argues that the sex/gender system of domination has become visible 'only now' (Harding 1983:311). If this is true, it would become problematic to accuse authors of the past of neglecting it in their research.

Ethicist Jeffrey Stout makes some helpful distinctions regarding moral rightness or

wrongness, and the justification for holding a moral position. One may be justified even if wrong, he states, because whether one is justified in one's views depends upon one's epistemic circumstance. Especially when one goes back in time, one can't expect historical thinkers to have as sophisticated an argument regarding a moral position as we do now with the benefit of hind-sight and years of experience (Stout 1990). So while his actions may have been morally wrong, it may be possible for Skendes to escape 'epistemic blame' for the way he treated his experimental subject, his mother, for it is only recently that we have come to know the various psychological damages that can beset a subject—especially one who has not first consented to the experiment.

Seyla Benhabib, in a 'Methodological preamble', states that it is unfair to engage in what she calls 'the self-righteous dogmatism of the latecomers', who 'juxtapose the misunderstandings of the past to the truths of the present'. She complains of this undertaking, 'if we approach tradition and thinkers of the past only to "debunk" them, then there really is no point in seeking to understand them at all' (Benhabib 1995:6). In light of this criticism, the approaches of Sumner and Yeshi Mariam seem complementary. Sumner does not dismiss the worth of the classical Ethiopian texts and oral traditions, because of their harsh views on women. As Sumner explains, the texts raise significant questions. Bachmann describes the text on Skendes as full of enlightening insights, and excellently composed (Sumner 1981:81, 221). Luigi Nusco considers the texts gathered by Sumner to be instructive and 'morally healthy, because many rules of practical life and moral behaviour...are still valid' and are 'spiritual food for our young generation' (Nusco 1976:260). However, not all aspects of the messages are equally healthy. The analysis that Yeshi Mariam provides is also needed, for such an analysis is missing in Sumner's accounts. Perhaps what is needed in the future is a study of what aspects of the wisdom tradition women find particularly fulfilling in their own lives. Which proverbs do they turn to, for what kind of guidance?

This study has shown that the work of Claude Sumner and Yeshi Mariam separately play an important role in understanding Ethiopia's past and present, in order to shape its future. They are the present-day Zera Yacobs, analysing the accepted verities of their times to see if they stand up to the scrutiny of reason. They can learn from each other, and we can learn from both of them. Their studies will be of benefit to the Ethiopia of the future.

Race, culture, identity: Misunderstood connections

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

### 'SPEAKING OF CIVILIZATIONS'

In 1911, responding to what was already clear evidence that race was not doing well as a biological concept, W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American sociologist, historian, and activist, wrote in *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, which he edited:

The leading scientists of the world have come forward...and laid down in



categorical terms a series of propositions<sup>1</sup> which may be summarized as follows:

1 It is not legitimate to argue from differences in physical characteristics to differences in mental characteristics...

2 The civilization of a race at any particular moment of time offers no index to its innate or inherited capacities...<sup>2</sup>

And he concluded: 'So far at least as intellectual and moral aptitudes are concerned we ought to speak of civilizations where we now speak of races.'<sup>3</sup> I have argued before that Du Bois's proposal to 'speak of civilizations' turns out not to replace a biological notion but simply to hide it from view.<sup>4</sup> I think there are various difficulties with the way that argument proceeded, and I should like to do better. So let me try to reconstruct a sociohistorical view that has more merit than I have previously conceded.

Among the most moving of Du Bois's statements of the meaning of 'race' conceived in sociohistorical terms is the one in *Dusk of dawn*, the 'autobiography of a race concept', as he called it, which he published in 1940. Du Bois wrote:

The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group, vary with the ancestors that they have in common with many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery, the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.<sup>5</sup>

For reasons I shall be able to make clear only when I have given my account, Du Bois's own approach is somewhat misleading. So 'instead of proceeding with exegesis of Du Bois, I must turn next to the task of shaping a sociohistorical account of racial identity. Still, as it turns out, it is helpful to start from Du Bois's idea of the 'badge of colour'.

## **RACIAL IDENTITY AND RACIAL IDENTIFICATION<sup>6</sup>**

I have argued (Appiah and Gutmann 1966) that Jefferson and Arnold thought that when they applied a racial label they were identifying people with a shared essence. I have argued, also, that they were wrong—and, I insist, not slightly but wildly wrong. Earlier in American history the label 'African' was applied to many of those who would later be thought of as Negroes, by people who may have been under the impression that Africans had more in common culturally, socially, intellectually, and religiously than they actually did. Neither of these kinds of errors, however, stopped the labelling from having its effects. As slavery in North America became racialized in the colonial period, being identified as an African, or, later, as a Negro, carrying the 'badge of colour', had those predictable negative consequences, which Du Bois so memorably captured in the phrase 'the social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult'.

If we follow the badge of colour from 'African' to 'Negro' to 'coloured race' to 'black' to 'Afro-American' to 'African-American' (and this ignores such fascinating detours as

the route by way of 'Afro-Saxon') we are thus tracing the history not only of a signifier, a label, but also a history of its effects. At any time in this history there was, within the American colonies and the United States that succeeded them, a massive consensus, both among those labelled black and among those labelled white, as to who, in their won communities, fell under which labels. (As immigration from China and other parts of the 'Far East' occurred, an Oriental label came to have equal stability.) There was, no doubt, some 'passing'; but the very concept of passing implies that, if the relevant fact about the ancestry of these individuals had become known, most people would have taken them to be travelling under the wrong badge.

The major North American exception was in southern Louisiana, where a different system in which an intermediary Creole group, neither white nor black, had social recognition; but *Plessy v. Ferguson* reflected the extent to which the Louisiana Purchase effectively brought even that state gradually into the American mainstream of racial classification. For in that case Homer Adolph Plessy—a Creole gentleman who could certainly have passed in most places for white—discovered in 1896, after a long process of appeal, that the Supreme Court of the United States proposed to treat him as a Negro and therefore recognize the State of Louisiana's right to keep him and his white fellow citizens 'separate but equal'.

The result is that there are at least three sociocultural objects in America—blacks, whites, and Orientals—whose membership at any time is relatively, and increasingly, determinate. These objects are historical in this sense; to identify all the members of these American races over time, you cannot seek a single criterion that applies equally always; you can find the starting point for the race—the subcontinental source of the population of individuals that defines its initial membership—and then apply at each historical moment the criteria of intertemporal continuity that apply at that moment to decide which individuals in the next generation count as belonging to the group. There is from the very beginning until the present, at the heart of the system, a simple rule that very few would dispute even today; where both parents are of a single race, the child is of the same race as the parents.

The criteria applicable at any times may leave vague boundaries. They certainly change, as the varying decisions about what proportion of African ancestry made one black or the current uncertainty as to how to assign the children of white-yellow 'miscegenation' demonstrate. But they always definitely assign some people to the group and definitely rule out others; and for most of America's history the class of people about whom there was uncertainty (are the Florida Seminoles black or Indian?) was relatively small.<sup>7</sup>

Once the racial label is applied to people, ideas about what it refers to, ideas that may be much less consensual than the application of the label, come to have their social effects. But they have not only social effects but psychological ones as well; and they shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects. In particular, the labels can operate to shape what I want to call 'identification'; the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects—including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to available labels, available identities.

Identification is central to what Ian Hacking has called 'making up people'.<sup>8</sup> Drawing on a number of examples, but centrally homosexuality and multiple personality

syndrome, he defends what he calls a 'dynamic nominalism', which argues that 'numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labelling them'.<sup>9</sup> have articulated a dynamic nominalism about a kind of person that is currently usually called 'African-American'.

Hacking reminds us of the philosophical truism, whose most influential formulation is in Elizabeth Anscombe's work on intention, that in intentional action people act 'under descriptions'; that their actions are conceptually shaped. It follows, of course, that what people can do depends on what concepts they have available to them; and among the concepts that may shape one's action is the concept of a certain kind of person and the behaviour appropriate to that kind.

Hacking offers as an example Sartre's brilliant evocation, in *Being and nothingness*, of the Parisian garçon de café: 'His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly, his eyes express an interest too solicitous for the order of the customer.'<sup>10</sup> Hacking comments:

Sartre's antihero chose to be a waiter. Evidently that was not a possible choice in other places, other times. There are servile people in most societies, and servants in many, but a waiter is something specific, and a garçon de café more specific...

As with almost every way in which it is possible to be a person, it is possible to be a garçon de café only at a certain time, in a certain place, in a certain social setting. The feudal serf putting food on my lady's table can no more choose to be a garçon de café than he can choose to be lord of the manor. But the impossibility is evidently of a different kind.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of the garçon de café lacks, so far as I can see, the sort of theoretical commitments that are trailed by the idea of the black and the white, the homosexual and the heterosexual. So it makes no sense to ask of someone who has a job as a garçon de café whether that is what he really is. The point is not that we do not have expectations of the garçon de café: that is why it is a recognizable identity. It is rather that those expectations are about the performance of the role; they depend on our assumption of intentional conformity to those expectations. As I spent some time arguing earlier, we can ask whether someone is really of a black race, because the constitution of this identity is generally theoretically committed; we expect people of a certain race to behave a certain way not simply because they are conforming to the script for that identity, performing that role, but because they have certain antecedent properties that are consequences of the label's properly applying to them. It is because ascription of racial identities—the process of applying the label to people, including ourselves—is based on more than intentional identification that there can be a gap between what a person ascriptively is and the racial identity he performs; it is this gap that makes passing possible.

Race is, in this way, like all the major forms of identification that are central to contemporary identity politics; female and male; gay, lesbian, and straight; black, white, yellow, red, and brown; Jewish-, Italian-, Japanese-, and Korean-American; even that most neglected of American identities, class. There is, in all of them, a set of theoretically

committed criteria for ascription, not all of which are held by everybody, and which may not be consistent with one another even in the ascriptions of a single person; and there is then a process of identification in which the label shapes the intentional acts of (some of) those who fall under it.

It does not follow from the fact that identification shapes actions, shapes life plans, that the identification itself must be thought of as voluntary. I don't recall ever choosing to identify as a male;<sup>12</sup> but being male has shaped many of my plans and actions. In fact, where my ascriptive identity is one on which almost all my fellow citizens agree, I am likely to have little sense of choice about whether the identity is mine; though I can choose how central my identification with it will be—choose, that is, how much I will organize my life around that identity. Thus if I am among those (like the unhappily labelled 'straight-acting gay men', or most American Jews) who are able, if they choose, to escape ascription, I may choose not to take up a gay or a Jewish identity; though this will require concealing facts about myself or any ancestry from others.

If, on the other hand, I fall into the class of those for whom the consensus on ascription is not clear—as among contemporary so-called biracials, or bisexuals, or those many white Americans of multiple identifiable ethnic heritages<sup>13</sup>—I may have a sense of identity options; but one way I may exercise them is by marking myself ethnically (as when someone chooses to wear an Irish pin) so that others will then be more likely to ascribe that identity to me.

### DIFFERENCES AMONG DIFFERENCES

Collective identities differ, of course, in lots of ways; the body is central to race, gender, and sexuality but not so central to class and ethnicity. And, to repeat an important point, racial identification is simply harder to resist than ethnic identification. The reason is twofold. First, racial ascription is more socially salient; unless you are morphologically atypical for your racial group, strangers, friends, officials are always aware of it in public and private contexts, always notice it, almost never let it slip from view. Second—and again both in intimate settings and in public space—race is taken by so many more people to be the basis for treating people differentially. (In this respect, Jewish identity in America strikes me as being a long way along a line toward African-American identity; there are ways of speaking and acting and looking—and it matters very little whether they are 'really' mostly cultural or mostly genetic—that are associated with being Jewish; and there are many people, white and black, Jewish and Gentile, for whom this identity is a central force in shaping their responses to others.)

This much about identification said, we can see that Du Bois's analytical problem was, in effect, that he believed that for racial labelling of this sort to have the obvious real effects that it did have—among them, crucially, his own identification with other black people and with Africa—there must be some real essence that held the race together. Our account of the history of the label reveals that this is a mistake; once we focus, as Du Bois almost saw, on the racial badge—the signifier rather than the signified, the word rather than the concept—we see both that the effects of the labelling are powerful and real and that false ideas, muddle and mistake and mischief, played a central role in determining both how the label was applied and to what purposes.

This, I believe, is why Du Bois so often found himself reduced, in his attempts to define race, to occult forces; if you look for a shared essence you won't get anything, so you'll come to believe you've missed it, because it is super-subtle, difficult to experience or identify; in short, mysterious. But if, as I say, you understand the sociohistorical process of construction of the race, you'll see that the label works despite the absence of an essence.

Perhaps, then, we can allow that what Du Bois was after was the idea of racial identity, which I shall roughly define as a label, R, associated with ascriptions by most people (where ascription involves descriptive criteria for applying the label); and identifications by those that fall under it (where identification implies a shaping role for the label in the international acts of the possessors, so that they sometimes act as an R), where there is a history of associating possessors of the label with an inherited racial essence (even if some who use the label no longer believe in racial essences).

In fact, we might argue that racial identities could persist even if nobody believed in racial essences, provided both ascription and identification continue.

There will be some who will object to my account that it does not give racism a central place in defining racial identity; it is obvious, I think, from the history I have explored, that racism has been central to the development of race theory. In that sense racism has been part of the story all along. But you might give an account of racial identity in which you counted nothing as a racial essence unless it implied a hierarchy among the races;<sup>14</sup> or unless the label played a role in racist practices. I have some sympathy with the former strategy; it would fit easily into my basic picture. To the latter strategy, however, I make the philosopher's objection that it confuses logical and causal priority; I have no doubt that racial theories grew up, in part, as rationalizations for mistreating blacks, Jews, Chinese, and various others. But I think it is useful to reserve the concept of racism, as opposed to ethnocentrism or simply inhumanity, for practices in which a race concept plays a central role. And I doubt you can explain racism without first explaining the race concept.

I am in sympathy, however, with an animating impulse behind such proposals, which is to make sure that here in America we do not have discussions of race in which racism disappears from view. As I pointed out, racial identification is hard to resist, in part because racial ascription by others is so insistent; and its effects—especially, but by no means exclusively, the racist ones—are so hard to escape. It is obvious, I think, that the persistence of racism means that racial ascriptions have negative consequences for some and positive consequences for others—creating, in particular, the white-skin privilege that it is so easy for people who have it to forget; and it is clear, too, that for those who suffer from the negative consequences, racial identification is a predictable response, especially where the project it suggests is that the victims of racism should join together to resist it. I shall return later to some of the important moral consequences of present racism and the legacy of racisms of the past.

But before I do, I want to offer some grounds for preferring the account of racial identity I have proposed (Appiah and Gutmann 1996), which places racial essences at its heart, over some newer accounts that see racial identity as a species of cultural identity.

## CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AN AGE OF MULTICULTURALISM

Most contemporary racial identification—whether it occurs in such obviously regressive forms as the white nationalism of the Aryan Nation or in an Afrocentrism about which, I believe, a more nuanced position is appropriate—most naturally expresses itself in forms that adhere to modified (and sometimes unreconstructed) versions of the old racial essences. But the legacy of the Holocaust and the old racist biology has led many to be wary of racial essences and to replace them with cultural essences. Before I turn to my final cautionary words about racial identifications, I want to explore, for a moment, the substitution of cultures for races that has occurred in the movement for multiculturalism.

In my dictionary I find as a definition for ‘culture’ ‘the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.’<sup>15</sup> Like most dictionary definitions, this is, no doubt, a proposal on which one could improve. But it surely picks out a familiar constellation of ideas. That is, in fact, the sense in which anthropologists largely use the term nowadays. The culture of the Asante or the Zuni, for the anthropologist, includes every object they make—material culture—and everything they think and do.

The dictionary definition could have stopped there, leaving out the talk of ‘socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, insinuations’ because these are all products of human work and thought. They are mentioned because they are the residue of an older idea of culture than the anthropological one; something more like the idea we might now express with the word ‘civilization’; the ‘socially transmitted behaviour patterns’ of ritual, etiquette, religion, games, arts; the values that they engender and reflect; and the institutions—family, school, church, state—that shape and are shaped by them.<sup>16</sup> The habit of shaking hands at meetings belongs to culture in the anthropologist’s sense; the works of Sandro Botticelli and Martin Buber and Count Basie belong to culture also, but they belong to civilization as well.

There are tensions between the concepts of culture and of civilization. There is nothing, for example, that requires that an American culture should be a totality in any stronger sense than being the sum of all the things we make and do.

American civilization, on the other hand, would have to have a certain coherence. Some of what is done in America by Americans would not belong to American civilization because it was too individual (the particular bedtime rituals of a particular American family); some would not belong because it was not properly American, because (like a Hindi sentence, spoken in America) it does not properly cohere with the rest.

The second, connected, difference between culture and civilization is that the latter takes values to be more central to the enterprise, in two ways. First, civilization is centrally defined by moral, and aesthetic values; and the coherence of a civilization is, primarily, the coherence of those values with each other and, then, of the group’s behaviour and institutions with its values. Second, civilizations are essentially to be evaluated; they can be better and worse, richer and poorer, more and less interesting. Anthropologists, on the whole, tend now to avoid the relative evaluation of cultures, adopting a sort of cultural relativism, whose coherence philosophers have tended to doubt. And they do not take values as more central to culture than, for example, beliefs,

ideas, and practices.

The move from 'civilization' to 'culture' was the result of arguments. The move away from evaluation came first, once people recognized that much evaluation of other cultures by the Europeans and Americans who invented anthropology had been both ignorant and biased. Earlier criticisms of 'lower' peoples turned out to involve crucial misunderstandings of their ideas; and it eventually seemed clear enough, too, that nothing more than differences of upbringing underlay the distaste of some Westerners for unfamiliar habits. It is a poor move from recognizing certain evaluations as mistaken to giving up evaluation altogether, and anthropologists who adopt cultural relativism often preach more than practise it. Still, this cultural relativism was a response to real errors. That it is the wrong response doesn't make the errors any less erroneous.

The arguments against 'civilization' were in place well before the mid-century. More recently, anthropologists began to see that the idea of the coherence of a civilization got in the way of understanding important facts about other societies (and, in the end, about our own). For even in some of the 'simplest' societies, there are different values and practices and beliefs and interests associated with different social groups (for example, women as opposed to men). To think of a civilization as coherent was to miss the fact that these different values and beliefs were not merely different but actually opposed. Worse, what had been presented as the coherent unified world-view of a tribal people often turned out, on later inspection, to be merely the ideology of a dominant group or interest.

But the very idea of a coherent structure of beliefs and values and practices depends on a model of culture that does not fit our times—as we can see if we explore, for a moment, the ideal type of a culture where it might seem to be appropriate.

### A COMMON CULTURE

There is an ideal—and thus to a certain extent imaginary—type of small-scale, technologically uncomplicated, face-to-face society, where most interactions are with people whom you know, that we call 'traditional'. In such a society every adult who is not mentally disabled speaks the same language. All share a vocabulary and a grammar and an accent. While there will be some words in the language that are not known by everybody—the names of medicinal herbs, the language of some religious rituals—most are known to all normal adults. To share a language is to participate in a complex set of mutual expectations and understandings; but in such a society it is not only linguistic behaviour that is coordinated through universally known expectations and understandings. People will share an understanding of many practices—marriages, funerals, other rites of passage—and will largely share their views about the general workings not only of the social but also of the natural world. Even those who are sceptical about particular elements of belief will nevertheless know what everyone is supposed to believe, and they will know it in enough detail to behave very often as if they believed it, too.

A similar point applies to many of the values of such societies. It may well be that some people, even some groups, do not share the values that are enunciated in public and taught to children. But, once more, the standard values are universally known, and even

those who do not share them know what it would be to act in conformity with them and probably do so much of the time.

In such a traditional society we may speak of these shared beliefs, values, signs, and symbols as the common culture; not, to insist on a crucial point, in the sense that everyone in the group actually holds the beliefs and values but in the sense that everybody knows what they are and everybody knows that they are widely held in the society.

Now, the citizens of one of those large 'imagined communities' of modernity we call 'nations' need not have, in this sense, a common culture. There is no single shared body of ideas and practices in India, or, to take another example, in most contemporary African states. And there is not now and there has never been a common culture in the United States, either. The reason is simple; the United States has always been multilingual, and has always had minorities who did not speak or understand English. It has always had a plurality of religious traditions; beginning with American Indian religions and Puritans and Catholics and Jews and including now many varieties of Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Bahai, and so on. And many of these religious traditions have been quite unknown to one another. More than this, Americans have also always differed significantly even among those who do speak English, from North to South and East to West, and from country to city, in customs of greeting, notions of civility, and a whole host of other ways. The notion that what has held the United States together historically over its great geographical range is a common culture, like the common culture of my traditional society, is—to put it politely—not sociologically plausible.

The observation that there is no common American national culture will come as a surprise to many; observations about American culture, taken as a whole, are common. It is, for example, held to be individualist, litigious, racially obsessed. I think each of these claims is actually true, because what I mean when I say there is no common culture of the United States is not what is denied by someone who says that there is an American culture.

Such a person is describing large-scale tendencies within American life that are not necessarily participated in by all Americans. I do not mean to deny that these exist. But for such a tendency to be part of what I am calling the common culture they would have to derive from beliefs and values and practices (almost) universally shared and know to be so. And that they are not.

At the same time, it has also always been true that there was a dominant culture in these United States. It was Christian, it spoke English, and it identified with the high cultural traditions of Europe and, more particularly, of England. This dominant culture included much of the common culture of the dominant classes—the government and business and cultural elites—but it was familiar to many others who were subordinate to them. And it was not merely an effect but also an instrument of their domination.

The United States of America, then, has always been a society of many common cultures, which I will call, for convenience, subcultures, (noting, for the record, that this is not the way the word is used in sociology).

It would be natural, in the current climate, with its talk of multiculturalism, to assume that the primary subgroups to which these subcultures are attached will be ethnic and racial groups (with religious denominations conceived of as a species of ethnic group). It



would be natural, too, to think that the characteristic difficulties of a multicultural society arise largely from the cultural differences between ethnic groups. I think this easy assimilation of ethnic and racial subgroups to subcultures is to be resisted.

First of all, it needs to be argued, and not simply assumed, that black Americans, say, taken as a group, have a common culture; values and beliefs and practices that they share and that they do not share with others. This is equally true for, say, Chinese-Americans; and it is a fortiori true of white Americans. What seems clear enough is that being an African-American or an Asian-American or white is an important social identity in the United States. Whether these are important social identities because these groups have shared common cultures is, on the other hand, quite doubtful, not least because it is doubtful whether they have common cultures at all.

The issue is important because an analysis of America's struggle with difference as a struggle among cultures suggests a mistaken analysis of how the problems of diversity arise. With differing cultures, we might expect misunderstandings arising out of ignorance of one another's values, practices, and beliefs; we might even expect conflicts because of differing values or beliefs. The paradigms of difficulty in a society of many cultures are misunderstandings of a word or a gesture; conflicts over who should take custody of the children after a divorce; whether to go to the doctor or to the priest for healing.

Once we move from talking of cultures to identities whole new kinds of problems come into view. Racial and ethnic identities are, for example, essentially contrastive and relate centrally to social and political power; in this way they are like genders and sexualities.

Now, it is crucial to understanding gender and sexuality that women and men and gay and straight people grow up together in families, communities, denominations. Insofar as a common culture means common beliefs, values, and practices, gay people and straight people in most places have a common culture; and while together in a shared adoptive family—with the same knowledge and values—and still grow into separate racial identities, in part because their experience outside the family, in public space, is bound to be racially differentiated.

I have insisted that we should distinguish between cultures and identities; but ethnic identities characteristically have cultural distinctions as one of their primary marks. That is why it is so easy to conflate them. Ethnic identities are created in family and community life. These—along with mass-mediated culture, the school, and the college—are, for most of us, the central sites of the social transmission of culture. Distinct practices, ideas, norms go with each ethnicity in part because people want to be ethnically distinct; because many people want the sense of solidarity that comes from being unlike others. With ethnicity in modern society, it is often the distinct identity that comes first, and the cultural distinction that is created and maintained because of it—not the other way around. The distinctive common cultures of ethnic and religious identities matter not simply because of their contents but also as markers of those identities.

In the United States, not only ethnic but also racial boundaries are culturally marked. In *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*,<sup>17</sup> Ruth Frankenberg records the anxiety of many white women who do not see themselves as white 'ethnics' and worry, therefore, that they have no culture.<sup>18</sup> This is somewhat puzzling in people

who live, as every normal human being does, in rich structures of knowledge, experience, value and meaning; through tastes and practices; it is perplexing, in short, in people with normal human lives. But the reason these women do not recognize that they have a culture is because none of these things that actually make up their cultural lives are marked as white, as belonging specifically to them; and the things that are marked as white (racism, white privilege) are things they want to repudiate. Many African-Americans, on the other hand, have cultural lives in which the ways they eat, the churches they go to, the music they listen to, and the ways they speak are marked as black; their identities are marked by cultural differences.

I have insisted that African-Americans do not have a single culture, in the sense of shared language, values, practices, and meanings. But many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture by definition; jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African-American, whether she likes it or knows anything about it, because it is culturally marked as black. Jazz belongs to a black person who knows nothing about it more fully or naturally than it does to a white jazzman.

### WHAT MATTERS ABOUT CULTURE: ARNOLD AGAIN

This view is an instance of what my friend Skip Gates has called 'cultural geneticism'.<sup>19</sup> It has, in Bertrand Russell's wicked phrase, 'the virtues of theft over honest toil'. On this view, you earn rights to culture that is marked with the mark of your race—or your nation—simply by having a racial identity. For the old racialists, as we saw, your racial character was something that came with your essence; this new view recognizes that race does not bring culture, and generously offers, by the wave of a wand, to correct Nature's omission. It is as generous to whites as it is to blacks. Because Homer and Shakespeare are products of Western culture, they are awarded to white children who have never studied a word of them, never heard their names. And in this generous spirit the fact is forgotten that cultural geneticism deprives white people of jazz and black people of Shakespeare. This is a bad deal—as Du Bois would have insisted. 'I sit with Shakespeare', the Bard of Great Barrington wrote, 'and he winces not'.

There is nothing in cultural geneticism of the ambition of the rigour of Matthew Arnold's conception, where culture is, as he says in *Culture and anarchy*, 'the disinterested and active use of reading, reflection and observation,'<sup>20</sup> and what is most valuable to us in culture, in the anthropological sense, is earned by intellectual labour, by self-cultivation. For Arnold, true culture is a process 'which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit',<sup>21</sup> whose aim is a 'perfection in which characters of beauty and intelligence are both present', which unites, 'the two noblest of things',—as Swift, who of one of the two, at any rate, had himself all too little, most happily calls them in his *Battle of the books*,—'the two noblest of things, sweetness and light'.<sup>22</sup>

Arnold's aim is not, in the proper sense, an elitist one; he believes that this cultivation is the proper aim of us all.

This is the social idea; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality.

The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.<sup>23</sup>

If you have this view of culture, you will think of cultural geneticism as the doctrine of the ignorant or the lazy, or at least of those who pander to them. And it is a view of culture whose adoption would diminish any society that seriously adopted it.

Not only is the conflation of identities and cultures mistaken, the view of cultural possession that underlies that error is the view of the Philistine, who, in Arnold's translation of *Epictetus*, makes 'a great fuss about exercise, a great fuss about eating, a great fuss about drinking, a great fuss about walking, a great fuss about riding. All these things ought to be done merely by the way; the formation of the spirit and character must be our real concern'.<sup>24</sup>

### IDENTITIES AND NORMS

I have been exploring these questions about culture in order to show how unsatisfactory an account of the significance of race that mistakes identity for culture can be. But if this is the wrong route from identity to moral and political concerns, is there a better way?

We need to go back to the analysis of racial identities. While the theories on which ascription is based need not themselves be normative, these identities come with normative as well as descriptive expectations; about which, once more, there may be both inconsistency in the thinking of individuals and fairly widespread disagreement among them. There is, for example, a very wide range of opinions among American Jews as to what their being Jewish commits them to; and while most Gentiles probably don't think about the matter very much, people often make remarks that suggest they admire the way in which, as they believe, Jews have 'stuck together', an admiration that seems to presuppose the moral idea that it is, if not morally obligatory, then at least morally desirable, for those who share identities to take responsibility for one another. (Similar comments have been made increasingly often about Korean-Americans.)

We need, in short, to be clear that the relation between identities and moral life are complex. In the liberal tradition, to which I adhere, we see public morality as engaging each of us as individuals with our individual 'identities'; and we have the notion, which comes (as Charles Taylor has rightly argued)<sup>25</sup> from the ethics of authenticity, that, other things being equal, people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already really are. It is because someone is already authentically Jewish or gay that we deny them something in requiring them to hide this fact, to 'pass', as we say, for something that they are not. Charles Taylor has suggested that we call the political issues raised by this fact the politics of recognition; a politics that asks us to acknowledge socially and politically the authentic identities of others.

As had often been pointed out, however, the way much discussion of recognition

proceeds is strangely at odds with the individualist thrust of talk of authenticity and identity. If what matters about me is my individual and authentic self, why is so much contemporary talk of identity about large categories—race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality—that seem so far from individual? What is the relation between this collective language and the individualist thrust of the modern notion of the self? How has social life come to be so bound up with an idea of identity that has deep roots in romanticism with its celebration of the individual over against society?<sup>26</sup>

The connection between individual identity, on the one hand, and race and other collective identities, on the other, seems to be something like this; each person's individual identity is seen as having two major dimensions. There is a collective dimension, the intersection of her collective identities; and there is what I will call a personal dimension, consisting of other socially or morally important features of the person—intelligence, charm, wit, cupidity—that are not themselves the basis of forms of collective identity.

The distinction between these two dimensions of identity is, so to speak, a sociological rather than a logical distinction. In each dimension we are talking about properties that are important for social life. But only the collective identities count as social categories, kinds of person. There is a logical category but no social category of the witty, or the clever, or the charming, or the greedy, people who share these properties do not constitute a social group, in the relevant sense. The concept of authenticity is central to the connection between these two dimensions; and there is a problem in many current understandings of that relationship, a misunderstanding one can find, for example, in Charles Taylor's recent (brilliant) essay *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*.

### AUTHENTICITY

Taylor captures the ideal of authenticity in a few elegant sentences: There is a certain way of being that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way... If I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life.<sup>27</sup> To elicit the problem, here, let me start with a point Taylor makes in passing about Herder: 'I should note here that Herder applied his concept of originality at two levels, not only to the individual person among other persons, but also to the culture-bearing people among other peoples. Just like individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, its own culture.'<sup>28</sup> It seems to me that in this way of framing the issue, less attention than necessary is paid to the connection between the originality of persons and of nations. After all, in many places nowadays, the individual identity, whose authenticity screams out for recognition, is likely to have an ethnic identity (which Herder would have seen as a national identity) as a component of its collective dimension. It is, among other things, my being, say, an African-American that shapes the authentic self that I seek to express.<sup>29</sup> And it is, in part, because I seek to express my self that I seek recognition of an African-American identity. This is the fact that makes problems; for recognition as an African-American means social acknowledgement of that collective identity, which requires not just recognizing its existence but actually demonstrating respect for it. If, in understanding myself as African-American, I see myself as resisting white norms, mainstream American conventions, the racism (and, perhaps, the materialism or the individualism) of white culture', why should

I at the same time seek recognition from these white others?

There is, in other words, at least an irony in the way in which an ideal—you will recognize it if I call it the bohemian ideal—in which authenticity requires us to reject much that is conventional in our society is turned around and made the basis of a ‘politics of recognition’.

Irony is not the bohemian’s only problem. It seems to me that this notion of authenticity has built into it a series of errors of philosophical anthropology. It is, first of all, wrong in failing to see what Taylor so clearly recognizes, namely the way in which the self is, as he says, dialogically constituted. The rhetoric of authenticity proposes not only that I have a way of being that is all my own but that in developing it I must fight against the family, organized religion, society, the school, the state—all the forces of convention. This is wrong, however, not only because it is in dialogue with other people’s understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity (Charles Taylor’s point) but also because my identity is crucially constituted through concepts (and practices) made available to me by religion, society, school, and state, and mediated to varying degrees by the family (Hacking’s point about ‘making up people’). Dialogue shapes the identity I develop as I grow up; but the very material out of which I form it is provided, in part, by my society, by what Taylor calls its language in ‘a broad sense’.<sup>30</sup> I shall borrow and extend Taylor’s term ‘monological’ here to describe views of authenticity that make these connected errors.

I used the example of African-Americans just now, and it might seem that this complaint cannot be lodged against an American black nationalism; African-American identity, it might be said, is shaped by African-American society, culture, and religion. ‘It is dialogue with these black others that shapes the black self; it is from these black contexts that the concepts through which African-Americans shape themselves are derived. The white society, the white culture, over against which an African-American nationalism of the counterconventional kind poses itself, is therefore not part of what shapes the collective dimension of the individual identities of black people in the United States.’

This claim is simply wrong. And what shows it is wrong is the fact that it is in part a recognition of a black identity by ‘white society’ that is demanded by nationalism of this form. And ‘recognition’ here means what Taylor means by it, not mere acknowledgment of one’s existence. African-American identity, as I have argued, is centrally shaped by American society and institutions; it cannot be seen as constructed solely within African-American communities. African-American culture, if this means shared beliefs, values, practices, does not exist; what exists are African-American cultures, and though these are created and sustained in large measure by African-Americans, they cannot be understood without reference to the bearers of other American racial identities.

There is, I think, another error in the standard framing of authenticity as an ideal, and that is the philosophical realism (which is nowadays usually called ‘essentialism’) that seems inherent in the way questions of authenticity are normally posed. Authenticity speaks of the real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express. It is only later, after romanticism, that the idea develops that one’s self is something that one creates, makes up, so that every life should be an artwork whose creator is, in some sense, his or her own greatest creation. (This is, I suppose, an idea one of whose sources is

Oscar Wilde; but it is surely very close to the self-cultivation that Arnold called 'culture'.)

Of course, neither the picture in which there is just an authentic nugget of selfhood, the core that is distinctively me, waiting to be dug out, nor the notion that I can simply make up any self I choose, should tempt us. We make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society—in ways that I pointed out earlier. We do make choices, but we don't determine the options among which we choose.<sup>31</sup>

If you agree with this, you will wonder how much of authenticity we should acknowledge in our political morality; and that will depend, I suppose, on whether an account of it can be developed that is neither essentialist nor monological.

It would be too large a claim that the identities that claim recognition in the multicultural chorus must be essentialist and monological. But it seems to me that one reasonable ground for suspicion of much contemporary multicultural talk is that the conceptions of collective identity they presuppose are indeed remarkably unsubtle in their understandings of the processes by which identities, both individual and collective, develop. The story I have told for African-American identity has a parallel for other collective identities; in all of them, I would argue, false theories play a central role in the application of the labels; in all of them the story is complex, involves 'making up people', and cannot be explained by an appeal to an essence.

### BEYOND IDENTITY

The large collective identities that call for recognition come with notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves; it is not that there is one way that blacks should behave, but that there are proper black modes of behaviour. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping the life plans of those who make these collective identities central to their individual identities; of the identifications of those who fly under these banners.<sup>32</sup> Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts; narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories. In our society (though not, perhaps, in the England of Addison and Steele) being witty does not in this way suggest the life script of 'the wit'. And that is why what I called the personal dimensions of identity work differently from the collective ones.

This is not just a point about modern Westerners; cross-culturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story—my story—should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important. It is not just gender identities that give shape (through, for example, rites of passage into woman- or manhood) to one's life; ethnic and national identities too fit each individual story into a larger narrative. And some of the most 'individualist' of individuals value such things. Hobbes spoke of the desire for glory as one of the dominating impulses of human beings, one that was bound to make trouble for social life. But glory can consist in fitting and being seen to fit into a collective history; and so, in the name of glory, one can end up doing the most social things of all.

How does this general idea apply to our current situation in the multicultural West? We live in societies in which certain individuals have not been treated with equal dignity because they were, for example, women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because, as Taylor so persuasively argues, our identities are dialogically shaped, people who have these characteristics find them central—often, negatively central—to their identities. Nowadays there is a widespread agreement that the insults to their dignity and the limitations of their autonomy imposed in the name of these collective identities are seriously wrong. One form of healing of the self that those who have these identities participate in is learning to see these collective identities not as sources of limitation and insult but as a valuable part of what they centrally are. Because the ethics of authenticity requires us to express what we centrally are in our lives, they move next to the demand that they be recognized in social life as women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because there was no good reason to treat people of these sorts badly, and because the culture continues to provide degrading images of them nevertheless, they demand that we do cultural work to resist the stereotypes, to challenge the insults, to lift the restrictions.

These old restrictions suggested life scripts for the bearers of these identities, but they were negative ones. In order to construct a life with dignity, it seems natural to take the collective identity and construct positive life scripts instead.

An African-American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive black life scripts. In these life scripts, being a Negro is recorded as being black; and this requires, among other things, refusing to assimilate to white norms of speech and behaviour. And if one is to be black in a society that is racist then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require that one be treated with equal dignity despite being black; for that will require a concession that being black counts naturally or to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected as a black.

I hope I seem sympathetic to this story. I am sympathetic. I see how the story goes. It may even be historically, strategically necessary for the story to go this way.<sup>33</sup> But I think we need to go on to the next necessary step, which is to ask whether the identities constructed in this way are ones we can all be happy with in the longer run. What demanding respect for people as blacks or as gays requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay; there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options. The politics of recognition requires that one's skin colour, one's sexual body, should be politically acknowledged in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And 'personal' doesn't mean 'secret' but 'not too tightly scripted', 'not too constrained by the demands and expectations of others'.

In short, so it seems to me, those who see potential for conflict between individual freedom and the politics of identity are right.

## WHY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS MATTER

But there is a different kind of worry about racial identities; one that has not to do with their being too tightly scripted but with a consequence of their very existence for social life. We can approach the problem by asking why differences between groups matter.

This is, I think, by no means obvious. If some minority groups—Korean-Americans, say—do especially well, most people feel, ‘More power to them’. We worry, then, about minorities that fail. And the main reason why people currently worry about minorities that fail is that group failure may be evidence of injustice to individuals. That is the respectable reason why there is so much interest in hypotheses, like those of Murray and Herrnstein, that suggest a different diagnosis. But let us suppose that we can get rid of what we might call Sowellian discrimination; discrimination, that is, as understood by Thomas Sowell, which is differential treatment based on false (or perhaps merely unwarranted) beliefs about the different average capacities of racial groups.<sup>34</sup>

Even without Sowellian discrimination socioeconomic disparities between groups threaten the fairness of our social arrangements. This issue can be kept clear only if we look at the matter from the point of view of an individual. Suppose I live in a society with two groups, blacks and whites. Suppose that, for whatever reason, the black group to which I obviously belong scores averagely low on a test that is genuinely predictive of job performance. Suppose the test is expensive. And suppose I would have, in fact, a high score on this test and that I would, in fact, perform well.<sup>35</sup> In these circumstances it may well be economically rational for an employer, knowing what group I belong to, simply not to give me the test, and thus not hire me.<sup>36</sup> The employer has acted in a rational fashion; there is no Sowellian discrimination here. But most people will understand me if I say that I feel that this outcome is unfair. One way of putting the unfairness is to say, ‘What I can do and be with my talents is being held back because others, over whose failings I have no control, happen to have the characteristics they do’.

Capitalism—like life—is full of such unfairness; luck—from lotteries to hurricanes—affects profit. And we can’t get rid of all unfairness; for if we had perfect insurance, zero risk, there’d be no role for entrepreneurship, no markets, no capitalism. But we do think it proper to mitigate some risks. We think, for example, that we should do something about bad luck when it has large negative effects on individual people, or if it forces them below some socioeconomic baseline—we insure for car accidents, death, loss of home; the government helps those ruined by large-scale acts of God. We don’t worry much about the chance production of small negative effects on individuals, even large numbers of individuals.

It is at least arguable that in our society the cost to competent, well-behaved individual blacks and Hispanics<sup>37</sup> of being constantly treated as if they have to measure up—the cost in stress, in anger, in lost opportunities—is pretty high.<sup>38</sup> It would be consistent with a general attitude of wanting to mitigate risks with large negative consequences for individuals to try to do something about it.<sup>39</sup>

This specific sort of unfairness—where a person is atypically competent in a group that is averagely less competent—is the result, among other things, of the fact that jobs are allocated by a profit-driven economy and the fact that I was born into a group in which I am atypical. The latter fact may or may not be the consequence of policies adopted by



this society. Let's suppose it isn't; so society isn't, so to speak, causally responsible. According to some—for example, Thomas Sowell, again—that means it isn't morally responsible, either; you don't have to fix what you didn't break.

I'm not so sure. First, we can take collective responsibility, 'as a society, for harms we didn't cause; as is recognized in the Americans with the Disabilities Act. But second, the labour market is, after all, an institution; in a modern society it is kept in place by such arrangements as the laws of contract, the institution of money, laws creating and protecting private property, health and safety at work, and equal employment laws. Sowell may disapprove of some of these, but he can't disapprove of all of them; without all of them, there'd be no capitalism. So the outcome is the result not only of my bad luck but of its interaction with social arrangements, which could be different.

Thus once we grasp the unfairness of this situation, people might feel that something should be done about it. One possible thing would be to try to make sure there were no ethnic minorities significantly below norm in valuable skills. If the explanation for most significant differences between groups is not hereditary, this could be done, in part, by adopting policies that discouraged significant ethnic differentiation, which would gradually produce assimilation to a single cultural norm. Or it could be done by devoting resources most actively to the training of members of disadvantaged groups.

Another—more modest—move would be to pay special attention to finding talented members of minority groups who would not be found when employers were guided purely by profit.

A third—granted once more that the differences in question are not largely hereditary—would be to explore why there are such differences and to make known to people ways of giving themselves or their children whatever aptitudes will maximize their life chances, given their hereditary endowments.

Fourth, and finally, for those differences that were hereditary it would be possible to do research to seek to remedy the initial distribution by the genetic lottery—as we have done in making it possible for those without natural resistance to live in areas where malaria and yellow fever are endemic.

Each of these strategies would cost something, and the costs would be not only financial. Many people believe that the global homogenization of culture impoverishes the cultural fabric of our lives. It is a sentiment, indeed, we find in Arnold 'My brother Saxons have, as is well known, a terrible way with them of wanting to improve everything but themselves off the face of the earth; I have no passion for finding nothing but myself everywhere; I like variety to exist and to show itself to me, and I would not for the world have the lineaments of the Celtic genius lost.'<sup>40</sup> The first strategy—of cultural assimilation—would undoubtedly escalate that process. And all these strategies would require more knowledge than we now have to apply in actual cases so as to guarantee their success. Anyone who shares my sense that there is an unfairness here to be met, an unfairness that has something to do with the idea that what matters is individual merit, should be interested in developing that kind of knowledge.

But I want to focus for a moment on a general effect of these four strategies. They would all produce a population less various in some of the respects that make a difference to major socioeconomic indicators. This would not mean that everybody would be the same as everybody else—but it could lead to a more recreational conception of racial

identity. It would make African-American identity more like Irish-American identity is for most of those who care to keep the label. And that would allow us to resist one persistent feature of ethnoracial identities; that they risk becoming the obsessive focus, the be-all and end-all, of the lives of those who identify with them. They lead people to forget that their individual identities are complex and multifarious—that they have enthusiasms that do not flow from their race or ethnicity, interests and tastes that cross ethno-racial boundaries, that they have occupations or professions, are fans of clubs and groups. And they then lead them, in obliterating the identities they share with people outside their race or ethnicity, away from the possibility of identification with Others. Collective identities have a tendency, if I may coin a phrase, to ‘go imperial’, dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are.

In policing this imperialism of identity—an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else—it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics, mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism—and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go—let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies.

### IN CONCLUSION

Much of what I have had to say in this essay will, no doubt, seem negative. It is true that I have defended an analytical notion of racial identity, but I have gone to worry about too hearty an endorsement of racial identification. Let me quote Matthew Arnold again, for the last time: ‘I thought, and I still think, that in this [Celtic] controversy, as in other controversies, it is most desirable both to believe and to profess that the work of construction is the fruitful and important work, and that we are demolishing only to prepare for it.’<sup>41</sup> So here are my positive proposals; live with fractured identities; engage in identity play; find solidarity, yes, but recognize contingency, and, above all, practice irony.<sup>42</sup> In short I have only the proposals of a banal ‘post-modernism’. And there is a regular response to these ideas from those who speak for the identities that now demand recognition, identities toward which so many people have struggled in dealing with the obstacles created by sexism, racism, homophobia. ‘It’s all very well for you. You academics live a privileged life; you have steady jobs, solid incomes; status from your place in maintaining cultural capital. Trifle with your own identities, if you like; but leave mine alone.’

To which I answer only, my job as an intellectual is to call it as I see it. I owe my fellow citizens respect, certainly, but not a feigned acquiescence. I have a duty to reflect on the probable consequences of what I say; and then, if I still think it worth saying, to accept responsibility for them. If I am wrong, I say, you do not need to plead that I should tolerate error for the sake of human liberation; you need only correct me. But if I am

right, so it seems to me, there is a work of the imagination that we need to begin.

And so I look forward to taking up, along with others, the fruitful imaginative work of constructing collective identities for a democratic nation in a world of democratic nations; work that must go hand in hand with cultivating democracy here and encouraging it everywhere else. About the identities that will be useful in this project, let me say only this; the identities we need will have to recognize both the centrality of difference within human identity and the fundamental moral unity of humanity.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This claim was prompted by G.Spiller, ed., *Papers in inter-racial problems communicated to the first universal races congress held at the University of London*, July 26–29, 1911 (London: P.S.King and Son, 1911). Republished with an introduction by H. Aptheker (Secaucus, NJ.: Citadel Press, 1970).
- 2 Du Bois, W.E.B., ‘Races’, in *Writing in periodicals* edited by W.E.B.Du Bois, Vol. 1, 1911–1925, compiled and edited by Herbert Aptheker (Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1983), 13.
- 3 Ibid.: 14.
- 4 ‘The uncompleted argument: Du Bois and the illusion of race’, re-printed from *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985). In “‘Race”, writing and difference’, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 21–37. Lucius Outlaw has remonstrated with me about this in the past; these rethinkings are prompted largely by discussion with him.
- 5 Du Bois, *Dusk of dawn: An essay toward an autobiography of a race concept* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940). Reprinted with introduction by Herbert Aptheker (Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1975), 116–117.
- 6 I am conscious here of having been pushed to rethink my views by Stuart Hall’s Du Bois lectures at Harvard in the spring of 1994, which began with a nuanced critique of my earlier work on Du Bois’s views.
- 7 See Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, (Coahuila) and Texas* (Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech University Press, 1993).
- 8 Hacking, Ian, ‘Making up people’ reprinted from *Reconstructing individualism: Autonomy, individuality and the self in Western thought*, ed. Thomas Heller, Morton Sousa, and David Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), in *Forms of desire: Sexual orientation and the social constructionist controversy*, ed. Edward Stein (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69–88 (page references are to this version).
- 9 Ibid.: 87.
- 10 Cited in *ibid.*: 81.
- 11 Ibid.: 82.
- 12 That I don’t recall it doesn’t prove that I didn’t, of course.
- 13 See Mary C.Waters, *Ethnic options: Choosing identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).
- 14 This is the proposal of a paper on metaphysical racism by Berel Lang at the New

School for Social Research seminar 'Race and philosophy' in October 1994, from which I learned much.

15 *American Heritage Dictionary III for DOS* (3rd ed.) (Novato, Calif.: Wordstar International Incorporated, 1993).

16 The distinction between culture and civilization I am marking is not one that would have been thus marked in nineteenth-century ethnography or (as we would now say) social anthropology: culture and civilization were basically synonyms, and they were both primarily used in the singular. The distinctions I am making draw on what I take to be the contemporary resonances of these two words. If I had more time, I would explore the history of the culture concept the sort of way we have explored 'race'.

17 Frankenberg, Ruth. *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

18 The discussion of this work is shaped by conversation with Larry Blum, Martha Minow, David Wilkins, and David Wong.

19 Gates means the notion to cover thinking in terms of cultural patrimony quite generally, not just in the case of race. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose canons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

20 Arnold, *Culture and anarchy*, 119.

21 *Ibid.*: 33.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

23 *Ibid.*: 48. The phrase 'sweetness and light' is from Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the books* (1697). The contest between the ancients (represented there by the bee) and the moderns (represented by the spider) is won by the ancients, who provide, like the bee, both honey and wax-sweetness and light. Sweetness is, then, aesthetic, and light intellectual, perfection.

24 Arnold, *Culture and anarchy*, 36.

25 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'the politics of recognition'*. With commentary by Amy Gutmann, ed. K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

26 Taylor reminds us rightly of Trilling's profound contributions to our understanding of this history. I discuss Trilling's work in chap. 4 of *In my father's house*.

27 Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 30.

28 *Ibid.*: 31.

29 And, for Herder, this would be a paradigmatic national identity.

30 The broad sense 'cover[s]' not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the languages of art, of gesture, of love, and the like' (32).

31 This is too simple, too, for reasons captured in Anthony Giddens's many discussions of 'duality of structure'.

32 I say 'make' here not because I think there is always conscious attention to the shaping of life plans or a substantial experience of choice but because I want to stress the anti-essentialist point that there are choices that can be made.

33 Compare what Sartre wrote in his 'Orphée noir', in L.S. Senghor, ed., *Anthologie de*

*la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malagache de Langue Francaise*, xiv. Sartre argued, in effect, that this move is a necessary step in a dialectical progression. In this passage he explicitly argues that what he calls an ‘antiracist racism’ is a path to the ‘final unity...the abolition of differences of race’.

34 ‘Once the possibility of economic performance differences between groups is admitted, then differences in income, occupational “representation”, and the like do not, in themselves, imply that decision-makers took race or ethnicity into account. However, in other cases, group membership may in fact be used as a proxy for economically meaningful variables, rather than reflecting either mistaken prejudices or even subjective affinities and animosities.’ Thomas Sowell, *Race and culture*, 114.

35 You need both these conditions, because a high score on a test that correlates well for some skill doesn’t necessarily mean you will perform well. And, in fact, Sowell discusses the fact that the same IQ score predicts different levels of economic success for different ethnic groups; *ibid.*: 173, 182.

36 Knowing this, I might offer to pay myself, if I had the money: but that makes the job worth less to me than to members of the other groups. So I lose out again.

37 Let me explicitly point out that many of these people are not middle class.

38 I actually think that there is still rather more Sowellian discrimination than Sowell generally acknowledges; but that is another matter.

39 It will seem to some that I’ve avoided an obvious argument here, which is that the inequalities in resources that result from differences in talents under capitalism need addressing. I agree. But the argument I am making here is meant to appeal to only extremely unradical individualist ideas; it’s designed not to rely on arguing for egalitarian outcomes directly.

40 Arnold, *On the study of Celtic literature*, 11.

41 *Ibid.*: ix.

42 See, for example, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony and solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and my review of it: ‘Metaphysics’ *Ed.*, *Village Voice*, September 19, 1989:55.

Visualizing the body

OYÈRÓNKÉ OYÉWÙMI

## WESTERN THEORIES AND AFRICAN SUBJECTS

The idea that biology is destiny—or, better still, destiny is biology—has been a staple of Western thought for centuries.<sup>1</sup> Whether the issue is who is who in Aristotle’s polis<sup>2</sup> or who is poor in the late twentieth-century United States, the notion that difference and hierarchy in society are biologically determined continues to enjoy credence even among social scientists who purport to explain human society in other than genetic terms. In the West, biological explanations appear to be especially privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race, or class. Difference is expressed as degeneration.

In tracing the genealogy of the idea of degeneration in European thought, J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander Gilman noted the way it was used to define certain kinds of difference, in the nineteenth century in particular.

Initially, degeneration brought together two notions of difference, one scientific—a deviation from an original type—and the other moral, a deviation from a norm of behaviour. But they were essentially the same notion, of a fall from grace, *a deviation from the original type*.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, those in positions of power find it imperative to establish their superior biology as a way of affirming their privilege and dominance over ‘Others’. Those who are different are seen as genetically inferior, and this, in turn, is used to account for their disadvantaged social positions.

The notion of society that emerges from this conception is that society is constituted by bodies and as bodies—male bodies, female bodies, Jewish bodies, Aryan bodies, black bodies, white bodies, rich bodies, poor bodies. I am using the word ‘body’ in two ways; first, as a metonymy for biology and, second, to draw attention to the sheer physicality that seems to attend being in Western culture. I refer to the corporeal body as well as to metaphors of the body.

The body is given a logic of its own. It is believed that just by looking at it one can tell a person’s beliefs and social position or lack thereof. As Naomi Scheman puts it in her discussion of the body politic in pre-modern Europe:

The ways people knew their places in the world had to do with their bodies and the histories of those bodies, and when they violated the prescriptions for those places, their bodies were punished, often spectacularly. One’s place in the body politic was as natural as the places of the organs in one’s body, and political disorder [was] as unnatural as the shifting and displacement of those organs.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz remarks on what she calls the ‘depth’ of the body in modern Western societies:

Our [Western] body forms are considered expressions of an interior, not inscriptions on a flat surface. By constructing a soul or psyche for itself, the ‘civilized body’ forms libidinal flows, sensations, experiences, and intensities into needs, wants... *The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into. Social law is incarnated, ‘corporealised’ [;] correlatively, bodies are textualised, read by others as expressive of a subject’s psychic interior.* A storehouse of inscriptions and messages between [the body’s] external and internal boundaries... generates or constructs the body’s movements into ‘behavior’, which then [has] interpersonally and socially identifiable meanings and functions within a social system.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, since the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded, the body is always in view and on view. As such, it invites a gaze, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation—the most historically constant being the gendered gaze. There is

a sense in which phrases such as ‘the social body’ or ‘the body politic’ are not just metaphors but can be read literally. It is not surprising, then, that when the body politic needed to be purified in Nazi Germany, certain kinds of bodies had to be eliminated.<sup>6</sup>

The reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight.<sup>7</sup> The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin colour, and cranium size is a testament to the powers attributed to ‘seeing’. The gaze is an invitation to differentiate. Different approaches to comprehending reality, then, suggest epistemological differences between societies. Relative to Yoruba society, which is the focus of this book, the body has an exaggerated presence in the Western conceptualization of society. The term ‘world-view’, which is used in the West to sum up the cultural logic of a society, captures the West’s privileging of the visual. It is Eurocentric to use it to describe cultures that may privilege other senses. The term ‘world-sense’ is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups. In this study, therefore, ‘world-view’ will only be applied to describe the Western cultural sense, and ‘world-sense’ will be used when describing the Yoruba or other cultures that may privilege senses other than the visual or even a combination of senses.

The foregoing hardly represents the received view of Western history and social thought. Quite the contrary; until recently, the history of Western societies has been presented as a documentation of rational thought in which ideas are framed as the agents of history. If bodies appear at all, they are articulated as the debased side of human nature. The preferred focus has been on the mind, lofty and high above the foibles of the flesh. Early in Western discourse, a binary opposition between body and mind emerged. The much-vaunted Cartesian dualism was only an affirmation of a tradition<sup>8</sup> in which the body was seen as a trap from which any rational person had to escape. Ironically, even as the body remained at the centre of both sociopolitical categories and discourse, many thinkers denied its existence for certain categories of people, most notably themselves. ‘Bodylessness’ has been a pre-condition of rational thought. Women, primitives, Jews, Africans, the poor, and all those who qualified for the label ‘different’ in varying historical epochs have been considered to be the embodied, dominated therefore by instinct and affect, reason being beyond them. They are the Other, and the Other is a body.<sup>9</sup>

In pointing out the centrality of the body in the construction of difference in Western culture, one does not necessarily deny that there have been certain traditions in the West that have attempted to explain differences according to criteria other than the presence or absence of certain organs; the possession of a penis, the size of the brain, the shape of the cranium, or the colour of the skin. The Marxist tradition is especially noteworthy in this regard in that it emphasized social relations as an explanation for class inequality. However, the critique of Marxism as androcentric by numerous feminist writers suggests that this paradigm is also implicated in Western somatocentricity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the establishment of disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, which purport to explain society on the bases of human interactions, seem to suggest the relegation of biological determination in social thought. On closer examination, however, one finds that the body has hardly been banished from social thought, not to mention its role in the constitution of social status. This can be illustrated in the discipline of sociology. In a

monograph on the body and society, Bryan Turner laments what he perceives as the absence of the body in sociological inquiries. He attributes this phenomenon of 'absent bodies'<sup>11</sup> to the fact that 'sociology emerged as a discipline which took the social meaning of human interaction as its principal object of inquiry, claiming that the meaning of social actions can never be reduced to biology or physiology'.<sup>12</sup>

One could agree with Turner about the need to separate sociology from eugenics and phrenology. However, to say that bodies have been absent from sociological theories is to discount the fact that the social groups that are the subject matter of the discipline are essentially understood as rooted in biology. They are categories based on perceptions of the different physical presence of various body-types. In the contemporary US, so long as sociologists deal with so-called social categories like the underclass, suburbanites, workers, farmers, voters, citizens, and criminals (to mention a few categories that are historically and in the cultural ethos understood as representing specific body-types), there is no escape from biology. If the social realm is determined by the kinds of bodies occupying it, then to what extent is there a social realm, given that it is conceived to be biologically determined? For example, no one hearing the term 'corporate executives' would assume them to be women; and in the 1980s and 1990s, neither would anyone spontaneously associate whites with the terms 'underclass' or 'gangs'; indeed, if someone were to construct an association between the terms, their meanings would have to be shifted. Consequently, any sociologist who studies these categories cannot escape an underlying biological insidiousness.

This omnipresence of biologically deterministic explanations in the social sciences can be demonstrated with the category of the criminal or criminal type in contemporary American society. Troy Duster, in an excellent study of the resurgence of overt biological determinism in intellectual circles, berates the eagerness of many researchers to associate criminality with genetic inheritance; he goes on to argue that other interpretations of criminality are possible:

The prevailing economic interpretation explains crime rates in terms of access to jobs and unemployment. A cultural interpretation explains crime rates in terms of access to jobs and unemployment. A cultural interpretation tries to show differing cultural adjustments between the police and those apprehended for crimes. A political interpretation sees criminal activity as political interpretation, or pre-revolutionary. A conflict interpretation sees this as an interest conflict over scarce resources.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, on the face of it, all these explanations of criminality are non-biological; however, as long as the 'population' or the social group they are attempting to explain—in this case criminals who are black and/or poor—is seen to represent a genetic grouping, the underlying assumptions about the genetic predisposition of that population or group will structure the explanations proffered whether they are body-based or not. This is tied to the fact that because of the history of racism, the underlying research question (even if it is unstated) is not why certain individuals commit crimes; it is actually why black people have such a propensity to do so. The definition of what is criminal activity is very much tied up with who (black, white, rich, poor) is involved in the activity.<sup>14</sup> Likewise,



the police, as a group, are assumed to be white. Similarly, when studies are done of leadership in American society, the researchers ‘discover’ that most people in leadership positions are white males; no matter what account these researchers give for this result, their statements will be read as explaining the predisposition of this group to leadership.

The integrity of researchers is not being questioned here; my purpose is not to label any group of scholars as racist in their intentions. On the contrary, since the civil rights movement, social-scientific research has been used to formulate policies that would abate if not end discrimination against subordinated groups. What must be underscored, however, is how knowledge-production and dissemination in the United States are inevitably embedded in what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call the ‘everyday common sense of race—a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world’.<sup>15</sup> Race, then, is a fundamental organizing principle in American society. It is institutionalized, and it functions irrespective of the action of individual actors.

In the West, social identities are all interpreted through the ‘prism of heritability’,<sup>16</sup> to borrow Duster’s phrase. Biological determinism is a filter through which all knowledge about society is run. As mentioned in the preface, I refer to this kind of thinking as body-reasoning;<sup>17</sup> it is a biologic interpretation of the social world. The point, again, is that as long as social actors like managers, criminals, nurses, and the poor are presented as groups and not as individuals, and as long as such groupings are conceived to be genetically constituted, then there is no escape from biological determinism.

Against this background, the issue of gender difference is particularly interesting in regard to the history and the constitution of difference in European social practice and thought. The lengthy history of the embodiment of social categories is suggested by the myth fabricated by Socrates to convince citizens of different ranks to accept whatever status was imposed upon them. Socrates explained the myth to Glaucon in these terms:

Citizens, we shall say to them in our tale, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold, silver, to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron; and the species will generally be preserved in the children... An Oracle says that when a man of brass or iron guards the state, it will be destroyed. Such is the tale; is there any possibility of making our citizens believe in it?

Glaucon replies, ‘Not in the present generation; there is no way of accomplishing this; but their sons may be made to believe in the tale, and their sons’ sons, and posterity after them’.<sup>18</sup> Glaucon was mistaken that the acceptance of the myth could be accomplished only in the next generation; the myth of those born to rule was already in operation; mothers, sisters, and daughters—women—were already excluded from consideration in any of those ranks. In a context in which people were ranked according to association with certain metals, women were, so to speak, made of wood, and so were not even considered. Stephen Gould, a historian of science, calls Glaucon’s observation a prophecy, since history shows that Socrates’ tale has been promulgated and believed by subsequent generations.<sup>19</sup> The point, however, is that even in Glaucon’s time, it was more than a prophecy, it was already a social practice to exclude women from the ranks

of rulers.

Paradoxically, in European thought, despite the fact that society was seen to be inhabited by bodies, only women were perceived to be embodied; men had no bodies—they were walking minds. Two social categories that emanated from this construction were the ‘man of reason’ (the thinker) and the ‘woman of the body’, and they were oppositionally constructed. The idea that the man of reason often had the woman of the body on his mind was clearly not entertained. As Michel Foucault’s *History of sexuality* suggests, however, the man of ideas often had the woman and indeed other bodies on his mind.<sup>20</sup>

In recent times, thanks in part to feminist scholarship, the body is beginning to receive the attention it deserves as a site and as material for the explication of European history and thought.<sup>21</sup> The distinctive contribution of feminist discourse to our understanding of Western societies is that it makes explicit the gendered (therefore embodied) and male-dominant nature of all Western institutions and discourses. The feminist lens disrobes the man of ideas for all to see. Even discourses like science that were assumed to be objective have been shown to be male-biased.<sup>22</sup> The extent to which the body is implicated in the construction of socio-political categories and epistemologies cannot be overemphasized. As noted earlier, Dorothy Smith has written that in Western societies ‘a man’s body gives credibility to his utterance, whereas a woman’s body takes it away from hers.’<sup>23</sup> Writing on the construction of masculinity, R.W. Connell notes that the body is inescapable in its construction and that a stark physicalness underlies gender categories in the Western world-view: In our [Western] culture, at least, the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex.<sup>24</sup>

From the ancients to the moderns, gender has been a foundational category upon which social categories have been erected. Hence, the gender that has been the cornerstone of much of Western political theory, was male, despite the much-acclaimed Western democratic traditions.<sup>25</sup> Elucidating Aristotle’s categorization of the sexes, Elizabeth Spelman writes: ‘A woman is a female who is free; a man is a male who is a citizen.’<sup>26</sup> Women were excluded from the category of citizens because ‘penis possession’<sup>27</sup> was one of the qualifications for citizenship. Lorna Schiebinger notes in a study of the origins of modern science and women’s exclusion from European scientific institutions that ‘differences between the two sexes were reflections of a set of dualistic principles that penetrated the cosmos as well as the bodies of men and women’.<sup>28</sup> Differences and hierarchy, then, are enshrined on bodies; and bodies enshrine differences and hierarchy. Hence, dualisms like nature/culture, public/private, and visible/invisible are variations on the theme of male/female bodies hierarchically ordered, differentially placed in relation to power, and spatially distanced one from the other.<sup>29</sup>

In the span of Western history, the justifications for the making of the categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ have not remained the same. On the contrary, they have been dynamic. Although the boundaries are shifting and the content of each category may change, the two categories have remained hierarchical and in binary opposition. For Stephen Gould, ‘the justification for ranking groups by inborn worth has varied with the tide of Western history. Plato relied on dialectic, the church upon dogma. For the past two centuries,

scientific claims have become the primary agent of validating Plato's myth'.<sup>30</sup> The constant in this Western narrative is the centrality of the body; two bodies on display, two sexes, two categories persistently viewed—one in relation to the other. That narrative is about the unwavering elaboration of the body as the site and cause of differences and hierarchies in society. In the West, so long as the issue is difference and social hierarchy, then the body is constantly positioned, posed, exposed, and re-exposed as their cause. Society, then, is seen as an accurate reflection of genetic endowment—those with a superior biology inevitably are those in superior social positions. No difference is elaborated without bodies that are positioned hierarchically. In his book *Making sex*,<sup>31</sup> Thomas Laqueur gives a richly textured history of the construction of sex from classical Greece to the contemporary period, noting the changes in symbols and the shifts in meanings. The point, however, is the centrality and persistence of the body in the construction of social categories. In view of this history, Freud's dictum that anatomy is destiny was not original or exceptional; he was just more explicit than many of his predecessors.

### **SOCIAL ORDERS AND BIOLOGY: NATURAL OR CONSTRUCTED?**

The idea that gender is socially constructed—that differences between males and female are to be located in social practices, not in biological facts—was one important insight that emerged early in second-wave feminist scholarship. This finding was understandably taken to be radical in a culture in which difference, particularly gender difference, had always been articulated as natural and, therefore, biologically determined. Gender as a social construction became the cornerstone of much feminist discourse. The notion was particularly attractive because it was interpreted to mean that gender differences were not ordained by nature; they were mutable and therefore changeable. This in turn led to the opposition between social constructionism and biological determinism, as if they were mutually exclusive.

Such a dichotomous presentation is unwarranted, however, because the ubiquity of biologically rooted explanations for difference in Western social thought and practices is a reflection of the extent to which biological explanations are found compelling.<sup>32</sup> In other words, so long as the issue is difference (whether the issue is why women breast-feed babies or why they could not vote), old biologies will be found or new biologies will be constructed to explain women's disadvantage. The Western preoccupation with biology continues to generate constructions of 'new biologies' even as some of the old biological assumptions are being dislodged. In fact, in the Western experience, social construction and biological determinism have been two sides of the same coin, since both ideas continue to reinforce each other. When social categories like gender are constructed, new biologies of difference can be invented. When biological interpretations are found to be compelling, social categories do derive their legitimacy and power from biology. In short, the social and the biological feed on each other.

The biologization inherent in the Western articulation of social difference is, however, by no means universal. The debate in feminism about what roles and which identities are natural and what aspects are constructed only has meaning in a culture where social categories are conceived as having no independent logic of their own. This debate, of

course, developed out of certain problems; therefore, it is logical that in societies where such problems do not exist, there should be no such debate. But then, due to imperialism, this debate has been universalized to other cultures, and its immediate effect is to inject Western problems where such issues originally did not exist. Even then, this debate does not take us very far in societies where social roles and identities are not conceived to be rooted in biology. By the same token, in cultures where the visual sense is not privileged, and the body is not read as a blueprint of society, invocations of biology are less likely to occur because such explanations do not carry much weight in the social realm. That many categories of difference are socially constructed in the West may well suggest the mutability of categories, but it is also an invitation to endless constructions of biology—in that there is no limit to what can be explained by the body-appeal. Thus biology is hardly mutable; it is much more a combination of the Hydra and the Phoenix of Greek mythology. Biology is forever mutating, not mutable. Ultimately, the most important point is not that gender is socially constructed but the extent to which biology itself is socially constructed and therefore inseparable from the social.

The way in which the conceptual categories sex and gender functioned in feminist discourse was based on the assumption that biological and social conceptions could be separated and applied universally. Thus sex was presented as the natural category and gender as the social construction of the natural. But, subsequently, it became apparent that even sex has elements of construction. In many feminist writings thereafter, sex has served as the base and gender as the superstructure.<sup>33</sup> In spite of all efforts to separate the two, the distinction between sex and gender is a red herring. In Western conceptualization, gender cannot exist without sex since the body sits squarely at the base of both categories. Despite the pre-eminence of feminist social constructionism, which claims a social deterministic approach to society, biological foundationalism,<sup>34</sup> if not reductionism, is still at the centre of gender discourses, just as it is at the centre of all other discussions of society in the West.

Nevertheless, the idea that gender is socially constructed is significant from a cross-cultural perspective. In one of the earliest feminist texts to assert the constructionist thesis and its need for cross-cultural grounding, Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna wrote that 'by viewing gender as a social construction, it is possible to see descriptions of other cultures as evidence for alternative but equally real conceptions of what it means to be woman or man'.<sup>35</sup> Yet, paradoxically, a fundamental assumption of feminist theory is that women's subordination is universal. These two ideas are contradictory. The universality attributed to gender asymmetry suggests a biological basis rather than a cultural one, given that the human anatomy is universal whereas cultures speak in myriad voices. That gender is socially constructed is said to mean that the criteria that make up male and female categories vary in different cultures. If this is so, then it challenges the notion that there is a biological imperative at work. From this stand-point, then, gender categories are mutable, and as such, gender then is denaturalized.

In fact, the categorization of women in feminist discourses as a homogeneous, bio-anatomically determined group which is always constituted as powerless and victimized does not reflect the fact that gender relations are social relations and, therefore, historically grounded and culturally bound. If gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave in the same way across time and space. If gender is a social construction,

then we must examine the various cultural/architectural sites where it was constructed, and we must acknowledge that variously located actors (aggregates, groups, interested parties) were part of the construction. We must further acknowledge that if gender is a social construction, then there was a specific time (in different cultural/architectural sites) when it was 'constructed' and therefore a time before which it was not. Thus, gender, being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, it is logical to assume that in some societies, gender construction need not have existed at all.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the significance of this observation is that one cannot assume the social organization of one culture (the dominant West included) as universal or the interpretations of the experiences of one culture as explaining another one. On the one hand, at a general, global level, the constructedness of gender does suggest its mutability. On the other hand, at the local level—that is, within the bounds of any particular culture—gender is mutable only if it is socially constructed as such. Because, in Western societies, gender categories, like all other social categories, are constructed with biological building blocks, their mutability is questionable. The cultural logic of Western social categories is founded on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization of the social world. Thus, as pointed out earlier, this cultural logic is actually a 'bio-logic'.

### **THE 'SISTERARCHY': FEMINISM AND ITS 'OTHER'**

From a cross-cultural perspective, the implications of Western biologic are far-reaching when one considers the fact that gender constructs in feminist theory originated in the West, where men and women are conceived oppositionally and projected as embodied, genetically derived social categories.<sup>36</sup> The question, then, is this: on what basis are Western conceptual categories exportable or transferable to other cultures that have a different cultural logic? This question is raised because despite the wonderful insight about the social construction of gender, the way cross-cultural data have been used by many feminist writers undermines the notion that differing cultures may construct social categories differently. For one thing, if different cultures necessarily always construct gender as feminism proposes that they do and must, then the idea that gender is socially constructed is not sustainable.

The potential value of Western feminist social constructionism remains, therefore, largely unfulfilled, because feminism, like most other Western theoretical frameworks for interpreting the social world, cannot get away from the prism of biology that necessarily perceives social hierarchies as natural. Consequently, in cross-cultural gender studies, theorists impose Western categories on non-Western cultures and then project such categories as natural. The way in which dissimilar constructions of the social world in other cultures are used as 'evidence' for the constructedness of gender and the insistence that these cross-cultural constructions are gender categories as they operate in the West nullify the alternatives offered by the non-Western cultures and undermine the claim that gender is a social construction.

Western ideas are imposed when non-Western social categories are assimilated into the gender framework that emerged from a specific sociohistorical and philosophical

tradition. An example is the 'discovery' of what has been labelled 'third gender'<sup>37</sup> or 'alternative genders'<sup>38</sup> in a number of non-Western cultures. The fact that the African 'woman marriage',<sup>39</sup> the Native American 'berdache',<sup>40</sup> and the South Asian 'hijra'<sup>41</sup> are presented as gender categories incorporates them into the Western bio-logic and gendered framework without explication of their own sociocultural histories and constructions. A number of questions are pertinent here. Are these social categories seen as gendered in the cultures in question? From whose perspective are they gendered? In fact, even the appropriateness of naming them 'third gender' is questionable since the Western cultural system, which uses biology to map the social world, precludes the possibility of more than two genders because gender is the elaboration of the perceived sexual dimorphism of the human body into the social realm. The trajectory of feminist discourse in the last twenty-five years has been determined by the Western cultural environment of its founding and development.

Thus, in the beginning of second-wave feminism in Euro-America, sex was defined as the biological facts of male and female bodies, and gender was defined as the social consequences that flowed from these facts. In effect, each society was assumed to have a sex/gender system.<sup>42</sup> The most important point was that sex and gender are inextricably bound. Over time, sex tended to be understood as the base and gender as the superstructure. Subsequently, however, after much debate, even sex was interpreted as socially constructed. Kessler and McKenna, one of the earliest research teams in this area, wrote that they 'use gender, rather than sex, even when referring to those aspects of being a woman (girl) or man (boy) that have been viewed as biological. This will serve to emphasize our position that the element of social construction is primary in all aspects of being male or female'.<sup>43</sup> Judith Butler, writing almost fifteen years later, reiterates the interconnectedness of sex and gender even more strongly:

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as a cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given surface (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced.<sup>44</sup>

Given the inseparability of sex and gender in the West, which results from the use of biology as an ideology for mapping the social world, the terms 'sex' and 'gender', as noted earlier, are essentially synonyms. To put this another way: since in Western constructions, physical bodies are always social bodies, there is really no distinction between sex and gender.<sup>45</sup> In Yoruba society, in contrast, social relations derive their legitimacy from social facts, not from biology. The bare biological facts of pregnancy and parturition count only in regard to procreation, where they must. Biological facts do not determine who can become the monarch or who can trade in the market. In indigenous Yoruba conception, these questions were properly social questions, not biological ones; hence, the nature of one's anatomy did not define one's social position. Consequently, the Yoruba social order requires a different kind of map, not a gender map

that assumes biology as the foundation for the social.

The splitting of hairs over the relationship between gender and sex, the debate on essentialism, the debates about differences among women,<sup>46</sup> and the preoccupation with gender bending/blending<sup>47</sup> that have characterized feminism are actually feminist versions of the enduring debate on nature versus nurture that is inherent in Western thought and in the logic of its social hierarchies. These concerns are not necessarily inherent in the discourse of society as such but are a culture-specific concern and issue. From a cross-cultural perspective, the more interesting point is the degree to which feminism, despite its radical local stance, exhibits the same ethnocentric and imperialistic characteristics of the Western discourses it sought to subvert. This has placed serious limitations on its applicability outside of the culture that produced it. As Kathy Ferguson reminds us:

The questions we can ask about the world are enabled, and other questions disabled, by the frame that orders the questioning. *When we are busy arguing about the questions that appear within a certain frame, the frame itself becomes invisible, we become enframed within it.*<sup>48</sup>

Though feminism in origin, by definition, and by practice is a universalizing discourse, the concerns and questions that have informed it are Western (and its audience too is apparently assumed to be composed of just Westerners, given that many of the theorists tend to use the first-person plural ‘we’ and ‘our culture’ in their writings). As such, feminism remains enframed by the tunnel vision and the bio-logic of other Western discourses.

Yoruba society of southwestern Nigeria suggests a different scenario, one in which the body is not always enlisted as the basis for social classification. From a Yoruba stance, the body appears to have an exaggerated presence in Western thought and social practice, including feminist theories. In the Yoruba world, particularly in pre-nineteenth-century<sup>49</sup> Yoruba culture, society was conceived to be inhabited by people in relation to one another. That is, the ‘physicality’ of maleness or femaleness did not have social antecedents and therefore did not constitute social categories. Social hierarchy was determined by social relations. As noted earlier, how persons were situated in relationships shifted depending on those involved and the particular situation. The principle that determined social organization was seniority, which was based on chronological age. Yoruba kinship terms did not denote gender, and other non-familial social categories were not gender-specific either. What these Yoruba categories tell us is that the body is not always in view and on view for categorization. The classic example is the female who played the roles of *oba* (ruler), *omo* (offspring), *oko*, *aya*, *iyà* (mother), and *alàwo* (diviner-priest) all in one body. None of these kinship and non-kinship social categories are gender-specific. One cannot place persons in the Yoruba categories just by looking at them. What they are heard to say may be the most important cue. Seniority as the foundation of Yoruba social intercourse is relational and dynamic; unlike gender, it is not focused on the body.<sup>50</sup>

If the human body is universal, why does the body appear to have an exaggerated presence in the West relative to Yorubaland? A comparative research framework reveals

that one major difference stems from which of the senses is privileged in the apprehension of reality—sight in the West and a multiplicity of senses anchored by hearing in Yorubaland. The tonality of Yoruba language predisposes one toward an apprehension of reality that cannot marginalize the auditory. Consequently, relative to Western societies, there is a stronger need for a broader contextualization in order to make sense of the world.<sup>51</sup> For example, If à divination, which is also a knowledge system in Yorubaland, has both visual and oral components.<sup>52</sup> More fundamentally, the distinction between Yoruba and the West symbolized by the focus on different senses in the apprehension of reality involves more than perception—for the Yoruba, and indeed many other African societies, it is about ‘a particular presence in the world—a world conceived of as a whole in which all things are linked together.’<sup>53</sup> It concerns the many worlds human beings inhabit; it does not privilege the physical world over the metaphysical. A concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality promotes what can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye; it misses the other levels and the nuances of existence. David Lowe’s comparison of sight and the sense of hearing encapsulates some of the issues to which I wish to draw attention. He writes:

Of the five senses, hearing is the most pervasive and penetrating. I say this, although many, from Aristotle in *Metaphysics* to Has Jonas in *Phenomenon of life*, have said that sight is most noble. But sight is always directed at what is straight ahead... And sight cannot turn a corner, at least without the aid of a mirror. On the other hand, sound comes to one, surrounds one for the time being with an acoustic space, full of timbre and nuances. It is more proximate and suggestive than sight. Sight is always the perception of the surface from a particular angle. But sound is that perception able to penetrate beneath the surface... Speech is the communication connecting one person with another. Therefore, the quality of sound is fundamentally more vital and moving than that of sight.<sup>54</sup>

Just as the West’s privileging of the visual over other senses has been clearly demonstrated, so too the dominance of the auditory in Yorubaland can be shown.

In an interesting paper appropriately entitled ‘The mind’s eye’, feminist theorists Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontkowski make the following observation:

We [Euro-Americans] speak of knowledge as illumination, knowing as seeing, truth as light. How is it, we might ask, that vision came to seem so apt a model for knowledge? And having accepted it as such, how has the metaphor colored our conceptions of knowledge?<sup>55</sup>

These theorists go on to analyse the implications of the privileging of sight over other senses for the conception of reality and knowledge in the West. They examine the linkages between the privileging of vision and patriarchy, noting that the roots of Western thought in the visual have yielded a dominant male logic.<sup>56</sup> Explicating Jonas’ observation that ‘to get the proper view, we take the proper distance’,<sup>57</sup> they note the passive nature of sight, in that the subject of the gaze is passive. They link the distance that seeing entails to the concept of objectivity and the lack of engagement between the T



and the subject—the Self and the Other.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the Other in the West is best described as another body- separate and distant.

Feminism has not escaped the visual logic of Western thought. The feminist focus on sexual difference, for instance, stems from this legacy. Feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow has noted the primacy and limitations of this feminist concentration on difference:

For our part as feminists, even as we want to eliminate gender in-equality, hierarchy, and difference, we expect to find such features in most social settings...We have begun from the assumption that gender is always a salient feature of social life, and we do not have theoretical approaches that emphasize sex similarities over differences.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, the assumption and deployment of patriarchy and ‘women’ as universals in many feminist writings are ethnocentric and demonstrate the hegemony of the West over other cultural groupings.<sup>60</sup> The emergence of patriarchy as a form of social organization in Western history is a function of the differentiation between male and female bodies, a difference rooted in the visual, a difference that cannot be reduced to biology and that has to be understood as being constituted within particular historical and social realities. I am not suggesting that gender categories are necessarily limited to the West, particularly in the contemporary period. Rather, I am suggesting that discussions of social categories should be defined and grounded in the local milieu, rather than based on ‘universal’ findings made in the West. A number of feminist scholars have questioned the assumption of universal patriarchy. For example, the editors of a volume on Hausa women of northern Nigeria write:

A preconceived assumption of gender asymmetry actually distorts many analyses, since it precludes the exploration of gender as a fundamental component of social relations, inequality, processes of production and reproduction, and ideology.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the question of asymmetry, however, a preconceived notion of gender as a universal social category is equally problematic. If the investigator assumes gender, then gender categories will be found whether they exist or not.

Feminism is one of the latest Western theoretical fashions to be applied to African societies. Following the one-size-fits-all (or better still, the Western-size-fits-all) approach to intellectual theorizing, it has taken its place in a long series of Western paradigms—including Marxism, functionalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism—imposed on African subjects. Academics have become one of the most effective international hegemonizing forces, producing not homogeneous social experiences but a homogeneity of hegemonic forces. Western theories become tools of hegemony as they are applied universally, on the assumption that Western experiences define the human. For example, a study of Ga residents of a neighbourhood in Accra, Ghana, starts thus: Improving our analysis of women and class formation is necessary to refine our perceptions.<sup>62</sup> Women? What women? Who qualifies to be women in this cultural setting, and on what bases are they to be identified? These questions are legitimate ones

to raise if researchers take the constructedness of social categories seriously and take into account local conceptions of reality. The pitfalls of preconceived notions and ethnocentricity become obvious when the author of the study admits:

Another bias I began with I was forced to change. Before starting fieldwork I was not particularly interested in economics, causal or otherwise. But by the time I had tried an initial presurvey,...the overweening importance of trading activities in pervading every aspect of women's lives made a consideration of economics imperative. And when the time came to analyse the data in depth, the most cogent explanations often were economic ones. I started out to work with women; I ended by working with traders.<sup>63</sup>

Why, in the first place, did Claire Robertson, the author of this study, start with women, and what distortions were introduced as a result? What if she had started with traders? Would she have ended up with women? Beginnings are important; adding other variables in midstream does not prevent or solve distortions and misapprehensions. Like many studies on Africans, half of Robertson's study seems to have been completed—and categories were already in place—before she met the Ga people. Robertson's monograph is not atypical in African studies; in fact, it is one of the better ones, particularly because unlike many scholars, she is aware of some of her biases. The fundamental bias that many Westerners, including Robertson, bring to the study of other societies is 'body-reasoning', the assumption that biology determines social position. Because 'women' is a body-based category, it tends to be privileged by Western researchers over 'traders', which is non-body-based. Even when traders are taken seriously, they are embodied such that the trader category, which in many West African societies is non-gender-specific, is turned into 'market women', as if the explanation for their involvement in this occupation is to be found in their breasts, or to put it more scientifically, in the X chromosome.<sup>64</sup> The more the Western bio-logic is adopted, the more this body-based framework is inscribed conceptually and into the social reality.

It is not clear that the body is a site of such elaboration of the social in the Ga world-sense or in other African cultures. This warrants investigation before one can draw conclusions that many studies are drawing on gender in African cultures. Why have African studies remained so dependent on Western theories, and what are the implications for the constitution of knowledge about African realities? Contrary to the most basic tenets of body-reasoning, all kinds of people, irrespective of body-type, are implicated in constructing this biologically deterministic discourse. Body-reasoning is a cultural approach. Its origins are easily locatable in European thought, but its tentacles have become all pervasive. Western hegemony appears in many different ways in African studies, but the focus here will be on the hand-me-down theories that are used to interpret African societies without any regard to fit or how ragged they have become.

### **WESTERN HEGEMONY IN AFRICAN STUDIES**

An assessment of African studies as an interdisciplinary field will reveal that it is by and large 'reactionary'.<sup>65</sup> Reaction, in essence, has been at once the driving force of African studies and its limitation in all its branches. It does not matter whether any particular

scholar is reacting for or against the West; the point is that the West is at the centre of African knowledge-production. For instance, a whole generation of African historians have reconstructed African history, complete with kings, empires, and even wars, to disprove European claims that Africans are peoples without history.<sup>66</sup> In other fields, a lot of ink has been spilled (and trees felled) to refute or support assertions about whether some African peoples have states or are stateless peoples. Now, in the closing years of the twentieth century, arguably the hottest debate in African studies is whether Africans had philosophy before European contact or whether Africans are best described as 'philosophyless' peoples.<sup>67</sup> This is perhaps the most recent phase in an old Western concern with the evolving status of African primitivism, where the indices have moved from historylessness to statelessness and now to philosophylessness.

Whether the discussion focuses on history or historylessness, on having a state or being stateless, it is clear that the West is the norm against which Africans continue to be measured by others and often by themselves. The questions that inform research are developed in the West, and the operative theories and concepts are derived from Western experiences. African experiences rarely inform theory in any field of study; at best such experiences are exceptionalized. Consequently, African studies continue to be 'Westocentric', a term that reaches beyond 'Eurocentric' to include North America. The presence of Africans in the academy is important in and of itself and has made possible some important changes. However, it has not brought about fundamental changes—despite the sociology-of-knowledge thesis and the politics of identity.<sup>68</sup> That the Euro-American scholar is Westocentric needs no comment. But what accounts for the persistent Westocentricity of a lot of African scholarship?

This question is posed against the background of a debate among African scholars about the inability of many studies conducted by Africans to grapple with the real issues facing African countries. A number of African thinkers have tried to explain why many studies conducted by Africans fail to deal with those issues. The argument has been put forward that many writings by Africans are too focused on exhibiting Africa as different from Europe, instead of dealing with those real issues. Africa is undoubtedly in the midst of a crisis of global proportions, and this fact has lent an urgency to self-examination by African intellectuals. I shall call one group of scholars the anti-nativists<sup>69</sup> because of their very critical stance toward any espousals of an African culture. The other group, who entertain a notion of an African way of being, are referred to as nativist<sup>70</sup> in their orientation. For the anti-nativist, the problem of the avoidance of central issues stems from the fact that many African thinkers are cultural nationalists; the charge is that these thinkers are unwilling to acknowledge Africa's failures and European technological superiority and thus focus simply on how different Africa is from the West. The anti-nativists argue further that the nativists set themselves apart from the West in order to shore up their self-esteem. Literary critic Abiola Irele sums up this anti-nativist viewpoint very well:

The whole movement in modern African thought has been to define this identity (African id, located in traditional culture). The intellectual reaction to our humiliation under the colonial system and to our devaluation has consisted in *affirming our difference from the white man the European. This conscious effort*

*of differentiation has produced the well-known ideologies of African personality and négritude. In Senghor's formulation of the latter, the idea of the African identity takes the form of an irreducible essence of the race whose objective correlative is the traditional culture. This essence is held to confer an estimable value upon our past and to justify our claim to a separate existence. The whole movement of mind in Black cultural nationalism, from Blyden to Senghor, leads to a mystique of traditional forms of life.*<sup>71</sup>

In this article, 'In praise of alienation', Irele suggests that African intellectuals are unduly holding on to their culture. His solution is to accept Africa's defeat and 'alienation' and embrace Europe in all its grandeur and scientific capacity. Only then will Africa have the modern tools to confront its predicament. While no one can deny the myriad problems facing Africa today and the need for leadership, intellectual and otherwise, critical thinkers like Irele have misdiagnosed the source of Africa's problem. The solution they proffer, therefore, is suspect. The foundation of Africa's problem is its close identification with Europe, which is the source and the rationale for continued Western dominance of African peoples and African thought.

My point here, then, is that African thought (from Blyden to Senghor; through Kagamé, Mbiti, and Idowu; to Irele, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Oruka, and Wiredu), whether nativist or anti-nativist, has always focused not on *difference* from the West but on *sameness* with the West. It is precisely because African intellectuals accept and identify so much with European thinking that they have created African versions of Western things. They seem to think that the European mind-set is universal and that, therefore, since Europeans have discovered the way the world works and have laid the foundations of thought, all that Africans need to do is to add their own 'burnt' bricks on top of the foundation. Senghorian négritude, for example (one of the earliest modern African intellectual movements), far from being an exercise in difference, is actually a result of Senghor's acceptance of European categories of essence, race, and reason and the linkages among the three. Senghor asserts that since Africans are a race like Europeans, they must have their own brand of essence. The fact that these are European-derived categories is not given enough consideration. Body- or race-reasoning, after all, is not rational; it is not rational or reasonable to declare somebody a criminal just by looking at his face, something racists do relentlessly. Stanislaus Adotevi is correct when he writes that 'négritude is the last-born child of an ideology of domination... It is the *black way of being white*'.<sup>72</sup>

The problem of importing Western concepts and categories into African studies and societies takes a decisive turn in the work of a number of African feminist scholars. I find this development particularly unfortunate because this new generation of scholars has the potential to radically transform African studies, which has by and large mirrored the androcentrism of its European origins. Using all sorts of Western models, writers like Tola Pearce and Molará Ogundipe-Leslie have characterized Yoruba society as patriarchal. Their mastery of Marxism, feminism, and structuralism is dazzling, but their understanding of Yoruba culture is seriously lacking. Samuel Johnson, a pioneering Yoruba intellectual, wrote of late nineteenth-century Yorubaland that 'educated natives of Yoruba are well acquainted with the history of England and with that of Rome and

Greece, but of the history of their own country they know nothing whatever!<sup>73</sup> More than a century later, Johnson's lament remains relevant. More recently, philosopher and art historian Nkiru Nzegwu clearly framed the problem by asserting that when a number of African feminist scholars rushed to characterize indigenous society 'as implicitly patriarchal, the question of the legitimacy of patriarchy as a valid transcultural category of analysis was never raised... The problem of evaluating Igbó and Yoruba cultures on the bases of their cultural other (the West) is that African societies are misrepresented without first presenting their positions'.<sup>74</sup>

Pearce's description of the Yoruba household as consisting of 'a patriarch, his wives, his sons, and their wives'<sup>75</sup> sounds like a depiction of the pater familias of the Greeks or a description of Abraham's family in the Bible and makes me wonder whether she has ever observed an indigenous Yoruba lineage or has read earlier accounts of the Yoruba family by N.A.Fadipe<sup>76</sup> or Johnson.<sup>77</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, in a 1994 collection of mostly outdated essays, defines the Yoruba institution of *ilémosú* as one in which women are left on the marriage shelf (*ilémosú* is an institution whereby daughters return to their natal families after marriage and make the family home their lifelong residence). She says, metaphorically, that the institution leaves women 'growing fungi on their bodies in the house'.<sup>78</sup> It is difficult to account for her interpretation of *ilémosú*; what it shows, however, is her flippant attitude toward Yoruba culture—she has not bothered to ascertain the nature and the meaning of the institution. The major limitation of Ogundipe-Leslie's collection of essays is that she provides no cultural context for her claims. Because gender is pre-eminently a cultural construct, it cannot be theorized in a cultural vacuum, as many scholars tend to do. Indeed, one of the useful things that African feminists can learn from their Western 'sisters' is the painstaking archaeological approach with which many of them have conducted studies that have elucidated Western culture in previously unimaginable ways. African feminists can learn a lot from the methods of feminist scholarship as they have been applied to the West, but they should scorn methods of Western, imperial, feminist Africanists who impose feminism on the 'colonies'. African scholars need to do serious work detailing and describing indigenous African cultures from the inside out, not from the outside in. To date, very little has been written about African societies in and of themselves; rather, most scholarship is an exercise in propounding one newfangled Western model or the other. The frame of reference of a culture has to be identified and described on its own terms before one can make the sort of gratuitous claims that are being made about patriarchy and other social ills.

In Yoruba studies, the manifestation of this preoccupation with finding African equivalents of European things did not originate with feminists. It is apparent in the work of an earlier generation of scholars such as the theologian E. Bolaji Idowu. He writes on religion that 'if they [Europeans] have God, we have Olodumare; if they have Jesus Christ, we have Ela the god of salvation, same as them'.<sup>79</sup> The theme is manifested in the work of the anti-nativists when they describe African thought as pre-philosophic and pre-scientific or claim that Africa is late to philosophy. Whether the charge is that Africa was too early or too late in doing philosophy, the idea is that the Western type of philosophy is a human universal. Such thinking suggests that Africa is the West waiting to happen or that Africa is like the West, albeit a preformed or deformed West. With this evolutionary

bent, anti-nativists anthropologize Africa and deny its coequality with the West.<sup>80</sup> There is nothing wrong with Africans affirming their humanity and a common humanity with their nemeses (i.e. Westerners); this affirmation was, indeed, necessary. The problem is that many African writers have assumed Western manifestations of the human condition to be the human condition itself. To put this in another way: they have misapprehended the nature of human universals.

Many African scholars, then, have simply failed to distinguish between universals and Western particulars. That human groups have a remembered past is a universal; that the Sumerians developed writing and produced written history at a certain period in time is a particular manifestation of this. That people organize themselves is universal; that they do so under the structure of a state or some other specific form of organization is a particular. That they organize production and reproduction (marriage) is a universal; that in certain places or during certain epochs production and reproduction appear to be separated and separable are particulars. Exchange has always been the universal; sex, cowry shells, gold, money, and credit cards are a few of its particulars. Self-reflection is integral to the human condition, but it is wrong to assume that its Western manifestation—written philosophy—is the universal. In the era of global capitalism, Coca Cola is universal, but it is hardly inherent in the human condition. To help avoid this confusion, a linguistic distinction should be made between ‘*universal*’ as a *metaphysical term* referring to an inherent truth and ‘*universal*’ as a *descriptive term*.

Modern African studies have remained dominated by Western modes of apprehension of reality and knowledge-production for a number of reasons. From a materialist perspective, Western dominance in academics is only a reflection of Western global economic and cultural dominance. But that is not an adequate explanation because there are non-Western regions in the world beyond Africa where indigenously grounded studies and concerns have developed to a considerable degree.<sup>81</sup> In the case of Africa, explanations about this dependency on the West have focused on the colonial mentality of African intellectuals, the politics of research funding, and the common class interests or privileged position of intellectuals wherever they are found. These explanations have validity. There is, however, another reason that is rarely acknowledged, and even when it is highlighted, its effect is underestimated: that is, the nature of the academy, especially its logic, structure, and practices. At the core of the problem is the way in which business is conducted in the knowledge-producing institutions; the way in which the foundational questions that inform research are generated in the West; the way in which theories and concepts are generated from Western experiences; and the way in which scholars have to work within disciplines, many of which were constituted to establish dominance over Africa and all of which have logics of their own quite distinct from questions about the social identity of scholars. The point is that as long as Africans take Western categories, like universities, bounded disciplines, and theories, for granted and array themselves around them—for or against does not matter—there can be no fundamental difference in scholarship among these practitioners of knowledge, no matter what their points of origin.

My claim here can be illustrated with reference to the debate about African philosophy. In an anthology entitled *African philosophy: The essential readings*, Tsenay Serequeberhan, the editor of the volume, notes that only African scholars are represented

in the book; he goes on to defend what he calls the exclusionist policy:

In my perception, this exclusionist approach is necessary—at least at this time in the development of African philosophy—precisely because African philosophers need to formulate their differing positions in confrontation and in dialogue *on their own, that is minus foreign mediators/moderators or meddlers*. African philosophers must engage in a theoretical threshing in confrontation and dialogue on their own.<sup>82</sup> (emphasis added)

Looking at the papers in the collection, no matter their ideological bent, one finds that they quote Lévy-Bruhl, Descartes, Kant, Plato, and Tempels, to mention a few names. These authors are, obviously, not Africans. Europeans, in other words, were not excluded; they might be dead Europeans, but they are still setting the agenda and consequently the terms of discourse. In fact, the question should be asked as to who made these congregated Africans philosophers. How were they initiated? By the so-called mediators/moderators and meddlers?<sup>83</sup> These questions are pertinent since there were some real unnamed and unacknowledged exclusions being practised in the assembling of the anthology. These other exclusions should be part of the discussion because they underscore very graphically the dilemmas of African scholarship.

This practice of excluding non-Africans as contributors while at the same time accepting the Western/academic terms of discourse as givens is problematic and unrealistic. It should be obvious that it is next to impossible to create an African theoretical space when the ground of discourse has been crowded by the DWEMs—dead, white, European males.<sup>84</sup> The ‘culture wars’ over what should be included in the canon and indeed the curriculum in universities in the United States in the 1980s underscored this point. Let me be clear about what the concern is here. It is not that Africans should not read whatever they please—in fact, we must read widely in order to be able to face the challenges posed by late twentieth-century global capitalism. The point is that the foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination.

At the level of intellectual production, we should recognize that theories are not mechanical tools; they affect (some will say determine) how we think, who we think about, what we think, and who thinks with us. Sometimes scholars seem to forget that intellectual tools are supposed to frame research and thinking. As long as the ‘ancestor worship’<sup>85</sup> of academic practice is not questioned, scholars in African studies are bound to produce scholarship that does not focus primarily on Africa—for those ‘ancestors’ not only were non-Africans but were hostile to African interests. The foundational questions of research in many disciplines are generated in the West. A recent anthology entitled *Africa and the disciplines* asks the very Westocentric and ridiculous question: What has Africa contributed to the disciplines?<sup>86</sup> (Following the logic of the question, consider what Africans contributed to craniometry—our heads; and to French *anthropologie*—our butts!)<sup>87</sup> The more important issue for Africa is what the disciplines and the practitioners of disciplines like anthropology have done *to* Africa.<sup>88</sup>

In general, African intellectuals seem to underestimate or fail to grasp the implications

of academic practices for the production of knowledge. Research, teaching, and learning in academic institutions are not innocuous business practices. Kwame Anthony Appiah makes this point in an essay reflecting on the limitations of what he calls the nativist critique of the West in the field of African literature:

The Western emperor has ordered the natives to exchange their robes for trousers: their act of defiance is to insist on tailoring them from homespun material. Given their arguments, plainly, the cultural nationalists do not go far enough; they are blind to the fact that their nativist demands inhabit a Western architecture.<sup>89</sup>

Appiah's own unabashed and uncritical acceptance of the West and his dismissal of Africa are understandable given his matrilineal descent lines,<sup>90</sup> but this is hardly the solution for other African scholars whose *abusua* (matrilineage) is located on African soil, not in England. It is remarkable that despite Appiah's anti-nativist stance in relation to African culture, he is an unapologetic nativist himself. Appiah is a Euro-nativist; what he opposes is African nativism. His privileging of European categories of thought and practice (such as patrilineality) over Akan matrilineality in his book *In my father's house* attests to his erasure of the norms of his father's house (African norms) and the imposition of the values of his mother's house (Anglo-Saxon norms) on Africa.<sup>91</sup>

Appiah, however, makes a valid point when he notes that many African critics of the West fail to realize that acceptance of the Western 'architecture' at one level necessarily means embracing the 'furnishings' also. In short, certain things go with the territory—academic and otherwise. To think that one can inhabit the territory and then change the rules is a fallacy because the rules and the territory are not separable; they are mutually constituting. The one does not exist without the other.

That said, the position of Appiah and other anti-nativists is still deeply flawed, in part because of a huge oversight. The anti-nativist admonition that Africa should embrace the West as a new strategy for the future is flawed because this is actually what African leaders have done in the past and where we still are at present: that is, in the critical embrace of the West. Embracing the West is nothing new; it is actually a failed programme of action. The idea that Africa can make a choice about whether it wants to embrace the West or not is a displaced metaphor. The point is that Africa is already locked in an embrace with the West; the challenge is how to extricate ourselves and how much. It is a fundamental problem because without this necessary loosening we continue to mistake the West for the Self and therefore see ourselves as the Other.

Appiah makes the claim that the nativist call for Afrocentricity in the reading and writing of African literature fails to appreciate the multiplicity of the heritage of modern African writers and hence fails to see that, for example, 'Soyinka's reference to Euripides is as real as his appeal to Ógún'.<sup>92</sup> Appiah himself, however, fails to understand the nature of Soyinka's references to Ógún and Euripides. The problem is not Soyinka's appeal to Euripides; the problem is Appiah's failure to grasp that Soyinka's appeals to Euripides and Ógún are not of the same order.<sup>93</sup> To take a cue from Yoruba culture: in the practice of Yoruba religion, despite the 401<sup>94</sup> *òrìsà* (gods) to which anybody can appeal, all lineages and individuals have their own *òrìsà* that they propitiate first before



they appeal to the other gods. They secure their own base first, and it is only after this has been done that they can join in the worship of other gods. There is no question that people can and do change their gods; the fallacy here is the idea that one can start with multiple gods. There is always a privileging going on, whether this is acknowledged or not. Ógún and Euripides cannot be passed off as an expression of ‘on the one hand and on the other hand (*otoh-botoh*)—one must be a foundational “god”.’

More fundamentally, Appiah fails to grasp that almost all institutionally privileged African scholars are being trained in the Western tradition; there is hardly any training at the academic level in African traditions and cultures. Because of this, it is rare if not impossible to find scholars who can discuss Ógún with the same sophistication and depth of knowledge with which they discuss Zeus. It is no wonder then that for many African intellectuals, Africa remains only an idea. Philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe’s experience is telling enough. In his appraisal of anthropological texts on Luba peoples, Mudimbe poses the following question, ‘Whence comes my authority?’ He answers:

It is true that I am not an anthropologist and do not claim to be one. I spent at least ten years of my life studying ancient Greek and Latin for an average of twelve hours each week, with more than that amount of time devoted to French and European cultures, before being eligible for a doctorate in philology (Greek, Latin and French) at Louvain University. I do not know many anthropologists who could publicly demonstrate a similar experience about their specialty in order to found their authority in African studies.<sup>95</sup>

The more interesting question is this: What is Mudimbe’s own claim to authority in African studies? He confesses that this authority rests on ‘my Luba-Lulua mother, my Songye father, the Swahili cultural context of my education in Katanga (Shaba), the Sanga milieu of my secondary education’.<sup>96</sup> The contrast between his sources of knowledge about the West, on the one hand, and Africa, on the other, is striking. Knowledge about the West is cultivated over decades, but knowledge about Africa is supposed to be absorbed, so to speak, through the mother’s breast milk. I have nothing against mothers (I am one myself). But while we as African scholars are busy developing the ‘mother of all canons’, who do we suppose will develop the knowledge-base for transforming Africa? Of course, one cannot dismiss the knowledge of one’s culture acquired during the crucial formative years. Neither can the possession of the mother tongue be overstated as a key to the understanding of a culture. Even so, many Western-educated Africans do not stay long enough with their mothers to absorb the essentials of an African education. Like Mudimbe, many enter European-derived boarding schools or monasteries at an early age, embarking on a life-long process of absorbing European cultures at the expense of their own. Like Appiah, they may have been tucked away behind ‘the hibiscus hedge’ and subsequently sent to school in Europe while Africa unfolded in the march of history.

It is crucial that our knowledge of Africa be continuously cultivated and developed; it should not be reduced to the level of the instinctual or the primeval (primitive), as some anti-nativist/Euro-nativist would like. Too many Africans display a lack of knowledge of African cultures, while revelling in their knowledge of European classics and dead

languages. Mudimbe himself noted that his European ‘codisciples’ went through the same kind of training as he for the specialization in philology.<sup>97</sup> Apparently, their mothers’ milk was not enough as a source of knowledge about their European culture; they still had to spend a life-time studying it.

As a prologue to his acclaimed book *The invention of Africa*, Mudimbe disseminates what he calls the ‘good news’—that the African now has ‘the freedom of thinking of himself or herself as the starting point of an absolute discourse’.<sup>98</sup> His claim is surprising given that the content of his book does not derive epistemologically from Africa and is heavily dependent on European thought. This is hardly the multicultural heritage that Appiah wants us to believe obtains in African studies. It is clearly a Western heritage and explains why Ógún does not stand a chance against Zeus and why Africa remains merely an idea in the minds of many African scholars. Of course, in reality Africa continues to unfold in the march of history. The original human history at that!

### WRITING YORUBA INTO ENGLISH: PROPAGATING THE WEST

To demonstrate concretely the implications for scholarship of the uncritical acceptance of Western categories and questions in the study of African societies, I will now address a specific regional discourse, Yoruba studies.<sup>99</sup> Yoruba discourse in English is a particularly good place to examine the problems of Westcentricity in the determination of research questions, because scholars of Yoruba origin are very well represented. As an anthropologist in a recent monograph put it, ‘Western scholars don’t write about the Yoruba; they write with the Yoruba’.<sup>100</sup> Prepositions aside, the reverse is more the case—Yoruba scholars write with the West about Yoruba. This is revealed in the failure to take Yoruba language seriously in Yoruba scholarship—the language is that of West. The lack of interest in the Yoruba language beyond ‘fieldworkese’ is not surprising, since African studies is one of the few areas in the academy where one can claim to be an expert without the benefit of language competence.<sup>101</sup> African nationalities are said to be based on language groups, but the marginalization of language in African studies belies this fact. One wonders whether the endurance of the nebulous category ‘Africa’ as the unit of analysis in many studies is related to these facts. No doubt, there is some research that necessitates using Africa as the unit of analysis; however, at this point in the history of the scholarship, Africa, as Paulin J. Hountondji observes, is best used as a descriptive geographic term.<sup>102</sup>

Regional studies that are based on particular cultural groups are essentially exercises in translation at different levels: translation from oral to written; translation from one culture to another; and finally translation from one language to another. Each category—written, oral, culture, language—is permeated with all sorts of unstated assumptions, and each move is fraught with potentials for missteps. Language is crucial, and Marc Bloch’s observation about the problem that discounting language poses for historians is relevant: ‘What an absurd illogicality that men who half the time can have access to their subject only through words, are permitted, among other deficiencies, to be ignorant of the fundamental attainments of linguistics!’<sup>103</sup> Another absurdity is that Yoruba scholars continue to build knowledge about our society in the English language. This theatre of the absurd expands with the realization that many Africans come to know their societies

only through what Western anthropologists and missionaries have written about them.

Against this background, the lack of critical studies on Yoruba language, despite the expansion of the corpus, is shocking. This is not a minor problem—the lack of appreciation that language carries with it the world-sense of a people has led to the assumption that Western categories are universal. In most studies of the Yoruba, the indigenous categories are not examined but are assimilated into English. This practice has led to serious distortions and quite often to a total misapprehension of Yoruba realities. The implications of this situation are not just semantic, however, but also epistemological, in that they have affected the type of knowledge that has been produced and who has done the producing in Yoruba written discourse. A thorough analysis of the language is essential to the construction of knowledge about the Yoruba in English. That this has never been done calls into question findings in various disciplines, and this shall be illustrated in subsequent chapters. Granted, linguists have done some studies on the Yoruba language, but language study cannot be confined to linguists. All researchers, regardless of discipline, are translators in one way or another, and this must be borne in mind in the practice of research. In Yoruba studies, historians translate the oral traditions of the *arókin* (royal bards); orature critics translate *oríkì* (praise poetry); and those in religion may translate Ifà divination, poetry, or the chants of Sàngó devotees. These are just a few examples that show the futility of imposing Western disciplinary boundaries on Yoruba knowledge. Malian philosopher Amadou Hampate Ba underscores the holistic nature of African oral traditions:

Oral tradition is the great school of life, all aspects of which are covered and affected by it. It may seem chaos to those who do not penetrate its secret; *it may baffle the Cartesian mind accustomed to dividing everything into clear-cut categories*. In oral tradition, in fact, spiritual and material are not dissociated.<sup>104</sup>

The problem of gender and its constructs in Yoruba language, literature, and social practice calls for immediate attention. Yoruba language is gender-free, which means that many categories taken for granted in English are absent. There are no gender-specific words denoting son, daughter, brother, or sister. Yoruba names are not gender-specific; neither are *oko* and *aya*—two categories translated as the English husband and wife, respectively. Given that anatomic categories are not used as social categories, it is clear that apprehending the gender of particular individuals or personages in a different time period and across space is at best an ambiguous adventure. In the discipline of history, for example, how should dynastic lists popularly known as ‘kings’ lists’ (which have been generated by historians for different Yoruba polities) be interpreted? Many contemporary historians have assumed that, with a couple of exceptions, all the rulers on the lists are male, but what is their basis for this assumption? At the very least, the basis of assigning sex to each ruler has to be explained for the period during which there were no written accounts. Given the gender-free terms *oba* (ruler) and *alààfin* (ruler), historians should provide evidence for such gender assumptions.

Yoruba scholar of religion Bolaji Idowu was forced to deal with the question of gender in his study of Yoruba religion. He found that there were two different oral traditions about the sex of Odùduwà, the Yoruba progenitor; in one tradition he/she was said to be

male, and in the other he/she was female.<sup>105</sup> Idowu suggests that the confusion about the sex identity of Ódùduwà may be due in part to language in that the liturgy that refers to Ódùduwà as mother also calls the progenitor lord' and 'husband'. Idowu translates the beginning of this liturgy as follows:

O mother, we beseech thee to deliver us;  
 Look after us, look after (our) children;  
 Thou who art established at Ado...

Idowu continues: 'But yet, as the ritual ballad is recited, we hear phrases like "my lord" and "my husband", and such phrases strongly indicate that a god is being addressed.'<sup>106</sup> It is apparent that Idowu erred in thinking that the presence of the word 'husband' constituted evidence of maleness, since the Yoruba word *oko*, translated as the English 'husband', is a non-gender-specific category encompassing both male and female. Thus Ódùduwà can be 'husband', lord, and mother. This suggests that Idowu accepted the English category unquestioningly, despite his own awareness of Yoruba culture. Idowu is not an exception; in fact, he typifies the process of patriarchalizing Yoruba history and culture. In many intellectual writings, the male is assumed to be the norm, just as in the West. In the case of historical events and personages, the process has been achieved primarily through translation. That *oba*, which means 'ruler' (non-gender-specific) in Yoruba, has come to mean 'king' in Yoruba discourse (whatever the historical time period) is symptomatic. Ade Obayemi, another Yoruba scholar, demonstrates this problem glaringly. In his discussion of the historical records regarding the person of Oduduwa, he writes: Taken together, existing genealogical or sex placings of Oduduwa do not and cannot on their own take us far in any attempt to definitively fix his position vis-à-vis other *heroes, kings, or legendary figures*' Obviously, even as Obayemi declaims fixing gender identity, he does so with the help of the English language.<sup>107</sup>

Gender as an analytic category is now at the heart of contemporary Yoruba discourse. Yet very little has been done to untangle this web of Yoruba/English mistranslations. Gender has become important in Yoruba studies not as an artifact of Yoruba life but because Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western pattern of body-reasoning. This pattern is one in which gender is omnipresent, the male is the norm, and the female is the exception; it is a pattern in which power is believed to inhere in maleness in and of itself. It is also a pattern that is not grounded on evidence. Based on a review of the existing literature, it does not appear that Yoruba scholars have given much thought to the linguistic divergence of Yoruba and English and its implications for knowledge-production.

Different modes of apprehending knowledge yield dissimilar emphases on types and the nature of evidence for making knowledge-claims. Indeed, this also has implications for the organization of social structure, particularly the social hierarchy that undergirds who knows and who does not. I have argued that Western social hierarchies such as gender and race are a function of the privileging of the visual over other senses in Western culture. It has also been noted that the Yoruba frame of reference was based more on a combination of senses anchored by the auditory. Consequently, the promotion in African studies of concepts and theories derived from the Western mode of thought at

best makes it difficult to understand African realities. At worse, it hampers our ability to build knowledge about African societies.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Compare Thomas Laqueur's usage: 'Destiny is anatomy', which is the title of chapter 2 of his *Making sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- 2 Spelman, Elizabeth, *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988:37.
- 3 Chamberlain, J. Edward and Gilman, Sander, *Degeneration: The darker side of progress*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985:292.
- 4 Scheman, Naomi, *Engenderings: Constructions of knowledge, authority, and privilege*. New York: Roudedge, 1993:186.
- 5 Grosz, Elizabeth, 'Bodies and knowledges: Feminism and the crisis of reason/in Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist epistemologies*. New York: Routledge, 1994:198; emphasis added.
- 6 Scheman, *Engenderings*.
- 7 See, for example, the following for accounts of the importance of sight in Western thought: Hans Jonas, *The phenomenon of life*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966; Donald Lowe, *History of bourgeois perception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- 8 Compare the discussion in Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, 'The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology,' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, n.s., 1 (March 1987):7-41.
- 9 The work of Sander Gilman is particularly illuminating on European conceptions of difference and otherness. See *Difference and pathology: Stereotypes of sexuality, race, and madness*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985; *On blackness without blacks: Essays on the image of the black in Germany*. Boston: G.K.Hall, 1982; *The case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and identity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993; *Jewish self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the hidden language of the Jews*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- 10 See, for example, the following: Linda Nicholson, 'Feminism and Marx', in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, eds. *Feminism as critique: On the politics of gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; Michele Barrett, *Women's oppression today*. London: New Left Books, 1980; Heidi Hartmann, 'The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union,' in Lydia Sargent, ed. *Women and revolution: A discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*, Boston: South End Press, 1981.
- 11 Turner, Bryan, 'Sociology and the body', in *The body and society: Explorations in social theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984:31.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Duster, Troy, *Backdoor to eugenics*. New York: Roudedge, 1990.
- 14 Ibid.

- 15 Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard, *Racial formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routedge, 1986. Compare also the discussion of the pervasiveness of race over other variables, such as class, in the analysis of the Los Angeles riot of 1992. According to Cedric Robinson, 'Mass media and official declarations subsumed the genealogy of the Rodney King Uprisings into the antidemocratic narratives of race which dominate American culture. Urban unrest, crime, and poverty are discursive economies which signify race while erasing class' ('Race, capitalism and the anti-democracy', paper presented at the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, University of California-Santa Barbara, winter 1994).
- 16 Duster (Backdoor) points to the widely held notion that diseases as well as money 'run in families'.
- 17 Compare Cornel West's concept of racial reasoning in *Race matters*. New York: Vantage, 1993.
- 18 Cited in Stephen Gould, *The mismeasure of man*. New York: Norton, 1981:19.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 A recent anthology questions the dominant self-representation of Jews as 'the People of the Book' and in the process attempts to document a relatively less common image of Jews as 'the People of the Body'. The editor of the volume makes an interesting point about 'the [Jewish] thinker' and his book. He comments that the thinker's book 'is evocative of...wisdom and the pursuit of knowledge. In this way, the image of the Jew (who is always male) poring over a book is always misleading. He appears to be elevated in spiritual pursuit. But if we could peer over his shoulders and see what his text says, he may in fact be reading about matters as erotic as what position to take during sexual intercourse. What is going on in "the thinker's" head or more interestingly in his loins?' (Howard Elberg-Schwartz, 'People of the Body', introduction to *People of the body: Jews and Judaism from an embodied perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). The somatocentric nature of European discourses suggests that the phrase the 'People of the body' may have a wider reach.
- 21 Attention to the body has not been smoothsailing in feminism either. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- 22 Virginia Woolf had summed up the feminist position succinctly: 'Science it would seem is not sexless; she is a man, a father infected too' (quoted in Hillary Rose, 'Hand, brain, and heart: A feminist epistemology for the natural sciences', *Signs* 9 (1) 1983:73-90). See also the following: Sandra Harding, *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986; idem, ed., *The racial economy of science*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Donna J. Haraway, *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nature in the world of modern science*. New York: Routledge, 1989; and Margaret Wertheim *Pythagoras' trousers: God, physics and the gender wars*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- 23 Smith, Dorothy E., *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987:30.
- 24 Connell, R.W., *Masculinities*. London: Polity Press, 1995:53.

- 25 Okin, Susan, *Women in Western political thought*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979; Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.
- 26 Quoted in Laqueur, *Making sex*, 54.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Schiebinger, Lorna, *The mind has no sex? Women in the origins of modern science*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989:162.
- 29 For an account of some of these dualisms, see 'Hélène Cixous,' in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French feminisms: An anthology*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- 30 Gould, *Mismeasure of man*, 20.
- 31 Laqueur, *Making sex*.
- 32 See Kessler, Suzanne J. and McKenna, Wendy, *Gender: An ethno-methodological approach*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978.
- 33 For elucidation, see Jane F. Collier and Sylvia J. Yanagisako, eds., *Gender and kinship: Essays toward a unified analysis*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- 34 Linda Nicholson has also explicated the pervasiveness of biological foundationalism in feminist thought. See 'Interpreting gender,' in *Signs* 20 (1994):79–104.
- 35 Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*.
- 36 In the title of this section, I use the term 'sisterarchy'. In using the term, I am referring to the wellfounded allegations against Western feminists by a number of African, Asian, and Latin American feminists that despite the notion that the 'sisterhood is global', Western women are at the top of the hierarchy of the sisterhood; hence it is actually a 'sisterarchy'. Nkiru Nzegwu uses the concept in her essay 'O Africa: Gender imperialism in academia', in Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, ed., *African women and feminism: Reflecting on the politics of sisterhood*. Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, forthcoming.
- 37 Lorber, *Paradoxes of gender*, 17–18.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 See Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. London: Zed Books, 1987, for an account of this institution in Igboland of southeastern Nigeria. See also Melville J. Herskovitz, 'A note on "woman marriage" in Dahomey', *Africa* 10 (1937):335–341, for an earlier allusion to its wide occurrence in Africa.
- 40 Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 24–36.
- 41 Nanda, Serena, 'Neither man nor woman: The Hijras of India', in Caroline Brettell and Carolyn Sargent, eds., *Gender in cross-cultural perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993.
- 42 Rubin, Gayle, 'The traffic in women', in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an anthropology of women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.
- 43 Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 7; Laqueur, *Making sex*.
- 44 Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990:7.

- 45 In her study (*Male daughters*) of the Igbo society of Nigeria, anthropologist Ifi Amadiume introduced the idea of 'gender flexibility' to capture the real separability of gender and sex in that African society. I, however, think that the 'woman to woman' marriages of Igboland invite a more radical interrogation of the concept of gender, an interrogation that 'gender flexibility' fails to represent. For one thing, the concept of gender as elaborated in the literature is a dichotomy, a duality grounded on the sexual dimorphism of the human body. Here, there is no room for flexibility.
- 46 The 'race and gender literature' is grounded on notions of differences among women.
- 47 See, for example, Holly Devor, *Gender blending: Confronting the limits of duality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989; Rebecca Gordon, 'Delusions of gender', *Women's Review of Books* 12(2) (November 1994):18–19.
- 48 Ferguson, Kathy, *The man question: Visions of subjectivity in feminist theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 7.
- 49 My use of the nineteenth century as a benchmark is merely to acknowledge the emerging gender configurations in the society, the process must have started earlier, given the role of the Atlantic slave trade in the dislocation of Yorubaland.
- 50 See chapter 2 for a full account of Yoruba world-sense as it is mapped onto social hierarchies.
- 51 This is not an attempt on my part to partake of some of the reductionist discussion about the 'orality' of African societies in relation to 'writing' in the West; nor is it the intention of this book to set up a binary opposition between the West and Yorubaland, on the one hand, and writing and orality, on the other, as some scholars have done. There is a huge literature on writing and orality. A good entry point into the discourse, though it is an overly generalized account, is Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. New York: Methuen, 1982. For a recent account of some of the issues from an African perspective, see Samba Diop, 'The oral history and literature of Waalo, Northern Senegal: The master of the word in Wolof Tradition', Ph.D. diss., Department of Comparative Literature, University of California-Berkeley, 1993.
- 52 See Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An exposition of the Ifa literary corpus*. Ābàdàn: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- 53 Amadou Hampate Ba, 'Approaching Africa,' in Angela Martin, ed., *African films: The context of production*. London: British Film Institute, 1982:9.
- 54 Lowe, *History of bourgeois perception*, 7.
- 55 Keller, Evelyn Fox and Grontkowski, Christine, 'The mind's eye', in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering reality: Feminist perspectives on epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and philosophy of science*. Boston: Reidel, 1983:208.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Jonas, *Phenomenon of life*, 507.
- 58 Keller and Grontkowski, 'The mind's eye'.
- 59 Chodorow, Nancy, *Feminism and psychoanalytic theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989:216.
- 60 See Amadiume, *Male daughters*, and Valeric Amos and Pratibha Parma,



'Challenging imperial feminism', *Feminist Review*, (July 1984):3–20.

61 Coles, Catherine and Mack, Beverly, eds., *Hausa women in the twentieth century*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991:6.

62 Robertson, Claire, *Sharing the same bowl: A socio-economic history of women and class in Accra, Ghana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984:23.

63 Ibid.: 25.

64 For example, Bessie House-Midamba and Felix K.Ekechi, *African market women's economic power: The role of women in African economic development*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995; Gracia Clark, *Onions are my husband: Accumulation by West African market women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

65 I mean this in the sense of being reactive; I do not mean it in the Marxist sense of being retrogressive, although such a reading too is possible.

66 On the Æbādàn school of history, see Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist history: A critique*. London: Zed Press, 1981. The UNESCO series on African history was also a response to the charge that Africans are people without history.

67 See the following volumes for some of the debates: Paulin J.Hountondji, *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. London: Hutchinson, 1983; Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and African culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980; P. O. Bodunrin, *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and perspectives*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1985; Tsenay Serequeberhan, ed., *African philosophy*. New York: Paragon House, 1991.

68 In general, sociology of knowledge speaks to the issues of knowledge-formation, social identity, and social interests. According to Karl Mannheim, 'persons bound together in groups strive in accordance with the character and position of the groups to which they belong to change the surrounding world.... It is the direction of this will to change or to maintain, this collective activity, which produces the guiding thread for the emergence of their problems, their concepts, and their forms of thought' in *Ideology or Utopia?* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936:3.

69 See Hountondji, *African philosophy*, as an example of an anti-nativist orientation.

70 An example of a nativist response is Oyekan Owomoyela, 'Africa and the imperative of philosophy: A skeptical consideration', in Tsenay Serequeberhan, ed. *African philosophy*. New York: Paragon House, 1991.

71 Irele, Abiola, 'In praise of alienation', in V.Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The surreptitious speech: Présence Africaine and the politics of otherness, 1947–1987*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; emphasis added.

72 Quoted in Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone literature and anthropology in Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990:18.

73 Johnson, Samuel, *The history of the Yorubas*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921:vii.

74 Nzegwu, Nkiru, 'Gender equality in a dual-sex system: The case of Onitsha.' *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 7(1) January 1994:88, 91.

75 Pearce, Tola, 'Importing the new reproductive technologies: The impact of underlying models of family, females and women's bodies in Nigeria' (paper

- presented at the World Institute for Development Economics Research Conference, 'Women, equality and reproductive technology,' Helsinki, August 3–6, 1992).
- 76 Fadipe, N.A. *The sociology of the Yoruba*. Ābādàn, Nigeria: Ābādàn University Press, 1970.
- 77 Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*.
- 78 Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar, *Re-creating ourselves: African women and critical transformations*. Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1994:212.
- 79 Idowu, E.Bolaji, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman, 1962.
- 80 Fabian, Johannes, *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- 81 Here I am thinking specifically of the Indian subcontinent.
- 82 Serequeberhan, *African philosophy*, xviii.
- 83 It is obvious that their qualification for membership rests on Western credentials. This too is a fundamental issue that needs to be problematized given their nationalist concerns.
- 84 This was an acronym that developed in the 1980s out of the cultural wars/canon wars, which was a struggle over what should constitute the 'canon' in the humanities in universities in the United States. For some of the relevant issues, see Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Loose canons: Notes on the culture wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- 85 Here I am alluding to the tradition of the founding fathers, who constituted the primary concerns of each discipline way before Africans, members of a dominated group, could participate. In women studies the same tradition is maintained with founding mothers.
- 86 Bates, Robert; Mudimbe, V.Y.; and O'Barr, Jean, eds., *Africa and the disciplines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- 87 I am alluding to 'Hottentot Venus', the African woman who was exhibited in Europe in the nineteenth century, her buttocks being the curiosity. See Sander Oilman, 'Black bodies, white bodies', in Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed., *Race, writing, and difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Oilman notes that the lines of discovery from the secrets possessed by 'Hottentot Venus' to twentieth-century psychoanalysis runs reasonably straight (257).
- 88 Given the role of anthropology as the handmaiden of colonization, it is surprising that this issue is underanalysed by the editors of the volume.
- 89 Appiah, Kwame Anthony, 'Out of Africa: Topologies of nativism', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 12(1) Fall 1988:153–178.
- 90 I want to acknowledge Nkiru Nzegwu especially here, for her contribution in our many discussions of the issue of the subversion of matrilineal principle as an erasure of Akan cultural norms.
- 91 This section, in particular, benefitted from the many discussions I had with Nkiru Nzegwu.
- 92 Appiah, 'Out of Africa'.
- 93 Ali A.Mazrui's notion of Africa's triple heritage seems to suffer from the same kind of diminution of Africa. See Mazrui, *The Africans: A triple heritage*. New York: Little Brown and Co., 1986.

- 94 See Ulli Beier, *Yoruba myths*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980; Wande Abimbola, 'Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline', *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, I(1) 1983:1–11.
- 95 Mudimbe, V.Y. *Parables and fables: Exegesis, textuality, and politics in Central Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991:24.
- 96 Ibid.: 125.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Mudimbe, V.Y. *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988:200.
- 99 Yoruba studies encompass work on Yoruba peoples in West Africa and in the Yoruba diaspora, including Brazil and Cuba. Apart from English, it incorporates a number of European languages, including French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Studies in English dominate: that is, most of the scholars do their major work in English. I am most concerned with Yoruba discourse in English. For definition and issues in Yoruba studies, see A.I Asiwaju, 'Dynamics of Yoruba studies', in G.O.Olusanya, ed., *Studies in Yoruba history and culture*. Ābādān: University Press Limited, 1983.
- 100 Apter, Andrew, *Black critics and kings: The hermeneutics of power in Yoruba society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- 101 A similar point is made in Oyekan Owomoyela, *Visions and revisions: Essays on African literatures and criticism*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
- 102 Hountondji, *African philosophy*.
- 103 Bloch, Marc, *The historian's craft*. New York: Knopf, 1954:68–69.
- 104 Ba, Hampate, 'Approaching Africa', 8; emphasis added.
- 105 Idowu, *Olodumare*, 27.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Obayemi, Ade, 'The phenomenon of Oduduwa in Ife history', in I.A.Akinjogbin, ed., *The cradle of a race: Ife from the beginning to 1980*. Lagos: Sunray Publications, 1992:66; emphasis added.

Essence of cultures and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism

UMA NARAYAN

In recent decades, feminists have stressed the need to think about issues of gender in conjunction with, and not in isolation from, issues of class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and have forcefully illustrated that differences among women must be understood and theorized in order to avoid essentialist generalizations about 'women's problems' (Anzaldúa 1987; hooks 1981; Lugones and Spelman 1983). The feminist critique of gender essentialism does not merely charge that essentialist claims about 'women' are over-generalizations, but points out that these generalizations are hegemonic in that they represent the problems of privileged women (most often white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual women) as paradigmatic 'women's issues'.

Such essentialist generalizations result in theoretical perspectives and political agendas that efface the problems, perspectives, and political concerns of many women who are

marginalized in terms of their class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. For instance, analyses that trace women's subordination to their confinement to domestic roles and the private sphere can constitute problematic essentialist generalizations if they ignore that the links between femininity and the private sphere are not trans-historical but have arisen in particular historical contexts. Thus, while the ideology of domesticity may have immured many middle-class women in the home, it also sanctioned the economic exploitation of women slaves and working-class women, whose most pressing problems did not result from their confinement to the private sphere.

Committed to the development of transnational and global feminist perspectives, feminists have often specifically reiterated the need to take account of national and cultural differences among women, in order to avoid essentializing analyses that pay inadequate attention to the concerns of women in Third World contexts. I am sympathetic to such feminist theories and political agendas need to be responsive to the diversity of women's lives, both within and across national contexts. However, I believe that this feminist injunction to attend to 'differences among women' sometimes takes questionable forms. I will argue that feminist efforts to avoid gender essentialism sometimes result in pictures of cultural differences among women that constitute what I shall call 'cultural essentialism'. In the first section of this reading, I will describe some problematic similarities between 'gender essentialism' and 'cultural essentialism' and will try to uncover some reasons why analyses that try to avoid 'gender essentialism' might end up subscribing to 'cultural essentialism'. In the second section, I will describe some important features of essentialistic pictures of 'cultures' and suggest some moves that facilitate feminist challenges to such pictures. In the third section, I will critically engage versions of cultural essentialism that arise from progressive segments of the political spectrum. In the fourth and final section, I will explore the implications of my critique of cultural essentialism for issues of cultural relativism. Throughout the essay, my goal is to argue that essentialist notions of 'culture' pose particular problems for Third World feminist agendas.

### **GENDER ESSENTIALISM AND CULTURAL ESSENTIALISM**

One important instance in which the injunction to attend to differences among women can lead to problems is when this project is carried out in a manner that avoids essentialism about women by replicating essentialist notions of 'cultural differences' between 'Western' and 'Non-Western' cultures. The project of attending to differences among women across a variety of national and cultural contexts then becomes a project that endorses and replicates problematic and colonialist assumptions about the cultural differences between 'Western culture' and 'Non-Western cultures', and the women who inhabit them. Seemingly universal essentialist generalizations about 'all women' are replaced by culture-specific essentialist generalizations that depend on totalizing categories such as 'Western culture', 'Non-Western cultures', 'Western women', 'Third World women', and so forth.

Although often motivated by the injunction to take differences among women seriously, such moves fracture the universalist category 'Woman' only slightly, because culture-specific essentialist generalizations differ from universalistic essentialist

generalizations only in degree or scope, and not in kind. The resulting portraits of 'Western women', 'Third World women', 'African women', 'Indian women', 'Muslim women', or the like, as well as the pictures of the 'cultures' that are attributed to these various groups of women, often remain fundamentally essentialist. They depict as homogeneous groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent. Numerous examples of such generalizations are criticized by Chandra Mohanty, who points out that each of the texts she analyses assumes 'women' have a coherent group identity within the different cultures discussed, prior to their entry into social relations. Thus, Omvedt can talk about 'Indian women' while referring to a particular group of women in the State of Maharashtra, Cutrufelli about 'women of Africa', and Minces about 'Arab women', as if these groups of women have some sort of obvious cultural coherence (Mohanty 1991:70).

There are a number of similarities between gender essentialism and cultural essentialism. While gender essentialism often proceeds to assume and construct sharp binaries about the qualities, abilities, or locations of 'men' and 'women', cultural essentialism assumes and constructs sharp binaries between 'Western culture' and 'Non-Western cultures', or between 'Western culture' and particular 'Other' cultures. In both cases, the discursive reiteration of such 'essential differences' operates in a manner that helps construct the senses of gender identity and of cultural identity that shape the self-understandings and subjectivities of different groups of people who inhabit these discursive contexts. With both gender essentialism and cultural essentialism, discourses about 'difference' often operate to conceal their role in the production and reproduction of such 'differences', presenting these differences as something pre-given and prediscursively 'real' that the discourses of difference merely describe rather than help construct and perpetuate.

While gender essentialism often conflates socially dominant norms of femininity with the problems, interests and locations of actual particular women, cultural essentialism often conflates socially dominant cultural norms with the actual values and practices of a culture. While gender essentialism often equates the problems, interests, and locations of some socially dominant groups of men and women with those of 'all men' and 'all women', cultural essentialism often equates the values, world-views, and practices of some socially dominant groups with those of 'all members of the culture'. For instance, Mary Daly's chapter on 'Indian suttee' (1978) reproduces an essentialist picture of 'Indian culture' both by ignoring that *sati* was not a practice ever engaged in by 'all Indians' and by effacing the history of criticisms and challenges posed to this practice by various groups of Indians (Narayan 1997).

Given the similarities between cultural essentialism and gender essentialism, it is interesting to encounter culturally essentialist generalizations being generated as a result of self-conscious feminist attempts to avoid gender essentialism, something that happens not infrequently in classrooms and conferences, as well as in academic texts. Why is it that attempts to avoid gender essentialism sometimes generate rather than deter cultural essentialism? I believe that part of the explanation lies in the prevalence of an incomplete understanding of the relationship between 'gender essentialism' and 'cultural imperialism'. The gender essentialism perpetuated by relatively privileged subjects, including Western feminists, is understood to be a form of 'cultural imperialism',

whereby privileged subjects tend to construct their 'cultural Others' in their own image, taking their particular locations and problems to be those of 'All Women'. This account ignores the degree to which cultural imperialism often proceeds by means of an 'insistence on Difference', by a projection of Imaginary 'differences' that constitute one's Others as Other, rather than via an 'insistence on Sameness'. Failing to see that 'cultural imperialism' can involve both sorts of problems, attempts to avoid the Scylla of 'Sameness' often result in moves that leave one foundering on the Charybdis of 'Difference'.

Reducing 'cultural imperialism' to the problem of 'the imposition of Sameness' conceals the importance of the role that sharply-contrasting essentialist pictures of 'cultural differences' between 'Western culture' and its various 'Others' played during colonial times, both in various justifications for colonial rule and in the scripts of various nationalist movements that challenged and sought to overthrow colonialism, pictures that resurface in post-colonial attempts at engaging with issues of cultural difference. A post-colonial feminist perspective that strives to be attentive to differences among women without replicating such essentialist notions of cultural differences needs to acknowledge the degree to which the colonial encounter depended on an 'insistence of Difference'; on sharp, virtually absolute, contrasts between 'Western culture' and 'Other cultures'. After all, Kipling's lines 'Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet' (Kipling 1944:233) were written at a historical moment when East and West were engaged in a seriously protracted encounter.

This frequently reiterated contrast between 'Western' and 'Non-Western' cultures was a politically motivated colonial construction. The self-proclaimed 'superiority' of 'Western culture' functioned as the rationale and mandate for colonialism. The colonial self-portrait of 'Western culture' had, however, only a faint resemblance to the moral, political, and cultural values that actually pervaded life in Western societies. Thus liberty and equality could be represented as paradigmatic 'Western values', hallmarks of its civilizational superiority, at the very moment when Western nations were engaged in slavery, colonization, expropriation, and the denial of liberty and equality not only to the colonized but to large segments of Western subjects, including women. Profound similarities between Western culture and many of its Others, such as hierarchical social systems, huge economic disparities between members, and the mistreatment and inequality of women, were systematically ignored in this construction of 'Western culture'.

The colonial picture of the sharp contrasts between 'Western culture' and its Others also resulted in seriously distorted representations of various 'colonized cultures', often as a result of the prejudiced and ideologically motivated stereotypes held by Western colonizers but also as a result of anti-colonial nationalist movements embracing and trying to revalue the imputed facets of their own 'culture' embedded in these stereotypes. Thus, while the British imputed 'spiritualism' to Indian culture to suggest lack of readiness for the this-worldly project of self-rule, many Indian nationalists embraced this definition in order to make the anti-colonialist and nationalist argument that 'our culture' was both distinctive from and superior to 'Western culture'. As a result of this colonial process, sharply contrastive essentialist pictures of 'Western culture' and of various colonized 'national cultures' were reiterated by both colonizers and the colonized, both of

whom failed to register the degree to which their very constitution as or 'Non-Western' subjects resulted from these putative contrasts between 'cultures'.

Given that many Third World countries are still subject to economic domination and political intrusion and control by Western powers in post-colonial times, political resistance to such domination and intrusion from a variety of points in the political spectrum is often articulated in terms that replicate problematically essentialist notions of 'Western culture' and particular 'Third World cultures'. Both Western and Third World feminists who often have legitimate worries about Western imperialism and valid concerns that feminist agendas pay attention to differences among women sometimes unfortunately tend to articulate these concerns in ways that replicate rather than challenge these essentialist notions of 'Western culture' and 'Third World cultures'.

While culturally essentialist feminist representations of 'Third World cultures' sometimes depict the practices and values of privileged groups as those of the 'culture as a whole' (as Daly does in her discussion of sati), equally essentialist representations are produced when the 'Representative Third World Woman' is modelled on marginalized and underprivileged Third World women. The latter sort of representation effaces Third World heterogeneity as effectively as the former, and bears the marks of a curious asymmetry, in that the most underprivileged of Western women are seldom cast as 'Representative of Western Culture'. Chandra Mohanty accounts for this asymmetry when she points to how several Western feminist texts work to produce the image of an 'average Third World woman'.

This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'Third World' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty 1991:56).

Cultural essentialism often poses a pressing problem for feminist agendas in Third World contexts, given that essentialist constructions of particular Third World 'cultures' often play a powerful ongoing role in political movements that are inimical to women's interests in various parts of the Third World. These essentialist portraits of culture often depict culturally dominant norms of femininity, and practices that adversely affect women, as central components of 'cultural identity'. They often equate women's conformity to the status quo with 'the preservation of culture' and cast feminist challenges to norms and practices affecting women as 'cultural betrayals'. In such essentialist constructions of culture, norms, and practices affecting the social status and roles of women are often represented as of central import to the task of 'resisting westernization' and 'preserving national culture', 'reducing Third World feminist contestations of local norms and practices pertaining to women as Betrayals of Nation and Culture'. When essentialist definitions of Third World cultures are cloaked in the virtuous mantle of resistance to Western cultural imperialism, Third World feminists and others who contest prevailing norms and practices are discursively set up in the roles of 'cultural traitors' and 'stooges of Western imperialism'. In addition, essentialist pictures of 'national culture and traditions' often operate to justify the exploitation, domination, and marginalization of religious and ethnic minorities, and members of socially

subordinate castes and the poor; and they are used to dismiss a variety of political demands for justice, equality, rights, or democracy as symptoms of the 'cultural corruption' wrought by 'Western ideas' (Mayer 1995; Howard 1993). These moves are often startlingly exemplified in the political rhetoric and manoeuvres of many Third World fundamentalist and conservative political movements.

Given that essentialist definitions of culture are often deployed in ways that are detrimental to the interests of many members of the national community, including various groups of women, I would argue that feminists have a serious stake in challenging such definitions. Viable post-colonial feminist perspectives need to engage in rethinking the prevailing portraits of 'Western culture' and of different Third World cultures, rather than assisting in their replication and reification by conflating political resistance to Western domination and intrusion with essentialist notions of 'cultural difference' and 'cultural preservation'.

### **CULTURALLY ESSENTIALIST MANOEUVRES AND FEMINIST CHALLENGES**

In the previous section, I attempted to call attention to similarities between cultural essentialism and gender essentialism, and to analyse why some feminist attempts to avoid gender essentialism result in replicating cultural essentialism. I have also argued that essentialist notions of culture pose particular dangers for Third World feminist agendas. In this section, I shall focus on Third World contexts and present some of the 'moves' that are predominantly (but not exclusively) deployed by fundamentalists to replicate essentialist representations of culture that are detrimental to the interests of women. I shall also delineate some 'counter-moves' that might facilitate Third World feminist challenges to such essentialist pictures of culture. In so doing, I hope to point to anti-essentialist ways of thinking about 'cultural differences' that would, I believe, better serve the interests of a progressive post-colonial feminist perspective.

A useful general strategy for resisting cultural essentialism is the cultivation of a critical stance that 'restores history and politics' to prevailing ahistorical pictures of 'culture'. Essentialist pictures of culture represent 'cultures' as if they were natural givens, entities that existed neatly distinct and separate in the world, entirely independent of our projects of distinguishing between them. This picture tends to erase the reality that the 'boundaries' between 'cultures' are human constructs, underdetermined by existing variations in world-views and ways of life; representations that are embedded in and deployed for a variety of political ends. Essentialist representations of culture eclipse the reality that the labels or designations that are currently used to demarcate or individuate particular 'cultures' themselves have a historical provenance, and that what they individuate or pick out as 'one culture' often changes over time.

Anti-essentialist feminists can counter this static picture of culture by insisting on a historical understanding of the contexts in which what are currently taken to be 'particular cultures' came to be seen and defined as such. For example, while a prevailing picture of 'Western culture' has its beginning in ancient Greece and perhaps culminating in the contemporary United States, a historical perspective would register that the ancient Greeks did not define themselves as part of 'Western culture', an appellation that seems



to have arisen only with the advent of European colonialism, and that 'American culture' was initially as likely to be distinguished from 'European culture' as assimilated to it qua 'Western culture'. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the term Western as used to refer to Europe in distinction to the 'Eastern' or 'Oriental', begins around 1600, a testimony to its colonial origins. An anti-essentialist perspective would also realize that many of the texts, artifacts, and practices ranging from ancient to modern times that are classified today as parts of 'Indian culture' are 'held together' by a label whose historical vintage is the British colonial period. This label is connected to the historical unification of an assortment of political territories into 'British India', a union that enabled the nationalist challenge to colonialism to emerge as 'Indian' and to stake its claim to self-government on the basis of a 'national culture' (Narayan 1995). Thus, an anti-essentialist understanding of culture should emphasize that the labels that 'pick out' particular 'cultures' are not simple descriptions we employ to single out already distinct entities. Rather, they are fairly arbitrary and shifting designations, connected to various political projects that had different reasons for insisting upon the distinctiveness of one culture from another. Cultures are not pre-discursively individuated entities to which 'names' are then bestowed as simple labels', but entities whose individuation depends on complex discursive processes linked to political agendas.

Moreover, this historical sensibility also needs to be attentive to the historical and political processes by which particular values and practices have come to be imputed as central or definitive of a particular 'culture'. The 'individuation' of a culture often proceeds precisely by casting certain values and practices as 'constitutive and central elements' of the culture in order to distinguish it from 'other cultures'. Instead of seeing the centrality of particular values, traditions, or practices to any particular culture as given, we need to trace the historical and political processes by which these values, traditions, or practices have come to be deemed central constitutive components of a particular culture.

The feminist usefulness of both these moves is best illustrated by a concrete example. I will focus on the practice of sati (suttee), the immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, which was constructed as a central component of 'Indian culture' in colonial times, and is deployed in the political rhetoric of contemporary Hindu fundamentalists as an icon of the 'Good Indian Woman', even as widow immolation has all but disappeared as a practice. An important question that feminists need to ask about sati is how and why this particular practice which is not engaged in by the vast majority of Hindu communities, let alone all Indian ones, and which was the exceptional rather than routine fate of widows even in the few communities that practised it, came to be regarded as a 'Central Indian Tradition'. The answer lies in complex nineteenth-century debates on the practice between British colonials and Indian elites that constituted sati as a 'central and authentic Indian tradition', a process interestingly described in Lata Mani's 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on SATI in Colonial India' (1987). As a result of this debate, sati came to acquire, for both British and Indians, for its supporters as well as opponents on both sides, an 'emblematic status'—becoming a larger-than-life symbol of 'Indian Culture' in a way that radically transcended the reality of its limited practice. Even for many Indian reformers opposed to the actual practice, sati became a lofty symbol of 'ideal Indian womanhood', indicating a feminine nobility and devotion to

family deemed uncharacteristic of Western women.

This colonial history helps explain why sati has become a politically salient symbol of 'Indian culture' available for deployment by Hindu fundamentalists today. However, this colonial history also operated in a manner that obscured and concealed its role in the production of sati as a 'Central Indian Tradition'. It operated so as to 'naturalize' the status of sati as a 'core Indian Tradition', implying that this status was obvious and pre-given and that the discursive colonial contestation only described and confirmed its status rather than created it. What resulted was an uncritical acceptance of sati as an 'Authentic Indian Good Tradition' or a 'Morally Heinous Bad Tradition'. This situation threatens to foreclose political challenges to the very status of sati as a 'Central Indian Tradition'. Feminists of Indian background have been among the few voices to help call into question sati's very status as an 'Indian tradition' by excavating the historical colonial context that 'produced' this status (Mani 1987; Kumar 1994; Oldenburg 1994).

A historical essentialist picture of cultures also obscure the degree to which what is seen as constitutive of a particular 'culture' and as central to projects of 'cultural preservation' changes over time. Thus, essentialist notions of culture often rely on a picture that presents cultures not only as 'givens' but as 'unchanging givens'. Obscuring the reality of historical change and the political contestations with which it is entwined promotes a static and 'fixed' picture of particular cultures, whereby their Values, practices, and traditions', as well as their sense of what their culture amounts to and what its 'preservation' entails, appear immune to history. I believe that a historically informed and anti-essentialist feminist vision requires that we learn to see cultures as less rigid and more suffused by change than they are often depicted.

Many Third World feminist analyses are vitally useful in drawing attention to how dominant members of a culture often willingly change or discard what were previously regarded as 'important cultural practices', and willingly change or surrender various facets of such practices when it suits them, but resist and protest other cultural changes. The changes that are resisted tend to be changes that pose a threat to aspects of the dominant members' social power, and are often changes pertaining to the status and welfare of women. For instance, Olayinka Koso-Thomas' work reveals that in Sierra Leone, virtually all the elaborate initiation rites and training that were traditional preliminaries to female circumcision, and that lasted from one to two years, have fallen by the wayside because people no longer have the time, money or social infrastructure for them. However, the practice of excision itself, abstracted from the whole context of practices in which it used to be embedded, is still seen as a crucial component of 'preserving tradition', obscuring the degree to which other aspects of the tradition have been given up (Koso-Thomas 1987:23). I believe that feminist contestations of what are designated as 'traditional cultural practices' need to be alert to such synecdochic moves whereby 'parts' of a practice come to stand in for a whole, because such substitutions invariably conceal various concrete social changes.

The synecdochic substitution that enables a radically changed cultural practice to masquerade as an 'unchanging practice that is being culturally preserved' can also obscure relatively uncontested changes in 'traditional practices' that have had substantial detrimental effects. For example, in the case of female circumcision in Sierra Leone, the disappearance of the initiation period seems to have modified the practice for the worse.

The age at which excision is carried out has drastically decreased. It is now carried out on girl children rather than on teenagers, since girls no longer need to be old enough to learn the rituals and undergo the training which used to be constitutive facets of the practice (Koso-Thomas 1987:23). Understanding and describing such facts of cultural change critically and politically is a crucial component of a feminist contestation of political agendas that rely on essentialist notions of 'culture'.

Feminist attention to such aspects of cultural change can help call attention to a general process that I call 'selective labelling', whereby those with social power conveniently designate certain changes in values and practices as consonant with 'cultural preservation' while designating other changes as 'cultural loss' or 'cultural betrayal' (Narayan 1997). The deployment of 'selective labelling' plays a powerful role in the facilitation of essentialist notions of culture because it allows changes that are approved by socially dominant groups to appear consonant with the preservation of essential values or core practices of a culture, while depicting changes that challenge the status quo as threats to 'cultural preservation'. Feminist attention to 'selective labelling' can help underscore that those with social power often abandon or modify traditions when it suits them, and often do so in a manner that leaves these modifications unmarked as instances of 'cultural change' and insulated from social debates about 'Westernization' or 'cultural preservation', but where continuing adherence to female genital mutilation is represented as crucial to 'preserving culture'. Similar arbitrariness is displayed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, which is obsessed with forcing women back to their 'traditional place' but appears to have no qualms about the cultural effects of its massive reliance on foreign or Western-produced armaments to maintain state power.

Sensitivity to 'selective labelling' can also enable feminists in different national contexts to draw attention to the extensive changes that have occurred in the lives of women and in practices affecting women that were once regarded as problematic but have come to be regarded as acceptable cultural modifications by large segments of the population. For instance, public education for women, initially seen as culturally problematic by various segments of the Indian elites, became transformed, in the course of roughly two generations, into something not only permissible but virtually the norm for the daughters of these families. A good proportion of the Indian bourgeoisie today no longer endorse the 'tradition' of marrying off girls just past puberty, but still raise the spectre of 'cultural betrayal' when some of their daughters challenge the tradition of arranged marriages. These examples show how saddling women with the primary responsibility for 'cultural preservation' might remain a relative constant, even as prevailing notions of what women need to do to 'preserve culture' change over time. The examples illustrate how feminist perspectives are empowered when criticisms of the adverse effects of particular 'traditions' on women combine with a critical stance toward ahistorical and essentialist pictures of those 'traditions'.

### **PROGRESSIVE VERSIONS OF CULTURAL ESSENTIALISM**

Third World feminist struggles against various forms of political fundamentalisms often confront essentialist notions of culture that cast fundamentalists as 'defenders of national culture and traditions' and represent Third World feminists as cultural traitors corrupted

by the seduction of 'Western values'. However, fundamentalists are not the only ones who subscribe to and deploy essentialist pictures of culture. Essentialist notions of culture are held by people who occupy a wide range of places on the political spectrum. Progressive Western and Third World subjects, too, sometimes uncritically endorse essentialist notions of what 'Western culture' or a particular 'Third World culture' amounts to. Like many ideological notions, the widespread acceptance of essentialist ideas of culture results from how obvious these ideas appear to a great many people. These ideas can inform people's thought without actually being subject to thought. As a result, Third World feminists themselves have not necessarily been immune to essentialist pictures of culture, especially to essentialist notions of the differences between 'Western culture' and particular 'Third World cultures'. I would argue, for instance, that feminist discourses that have asserted women's equality' to be a 'Western value' whose extension to Third World contexts is 'a culturally imperialist theme imposed by the first World', (an assertion made by Non-Western governments and feminist activists in the context of the 1975 International Women's Year conference) risk replicating essentialist notions of 'culture'.

Another example of cultural essentialism emanating from progressive parts of the political spectrum can be found in the contention, by feminists and others, that 'human rights' are a 'Western concept' whose extension to Third World contexts constitute an illegitimate 'imposition of 'Western values.' For instance, Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab have denied the legitimacy of employing Western cultural values to judge the institutions of non-Western cultures, insisting that the imposition on Third World societies of norms taken from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights amounts to moral chauvinism and ethnocentric bias (Pollis and Schwab 1979). Such claims comprise problematic instances of cultural essentialism.

The assertion that 'equality' and 'human rights' are 'Western values' is surely complicated by the historical reality that Western doctrines of equality and rights coexisted for decades with support for slavery and colonialism, and that equality and rights were denied to women; to racial, religious, and ethnic minorities within Western nations; and to virtually all subjects of colonized territories. It is only as a result of political struggles by these various excluded groups in both Western and Non-Western contexts that doctrines of equality and rights have slowly come to be perceived as applicable to them, too. Thus, one could argue that doctrines of equality and rights, rather than being pure 'products of Western imperialism' were often important products of such struggles against Western imperialism. Notions of equality and rights have often been significant in these struggles, and have long since embedded themselves in the vocabularies of Third World political struggles. Claims that 'equality and 'rights' are 'Western values' risk effacing the vital role that such notions have played and continue to play in those movements (Narayan 1993; Mayer 1995). In general, the origins of a practice or concept seldom limit its scope of relevance. Borrowing the ideas, practices, artifacts, and technologies of Others, assimilating them, and transforming them are ubiquitous processes, and hardly unique to Third World contexts. Entities of non-European origin that have been assimilated into 'Western culture' over time include items as disparate as gunpowder, compasses, Christianity, and coffee.

Feminist claims that 'equality' and 'rights' are 'Western values' also risk echoing the

rhetoric of two groups of people who, despite their other differences, share the characteristic of being no friends of feminist agendas. The first and what I shall call Western cultural supremacists', whose agenda of constructing flattering portraits of 'Western culture' proceeds by claiming ideas of equality, rights, democracy, and so on as 'Western ideas' that prove the West's moral and political superiority to all 'Other' cultures (Bloom 1987; Schlesinger 1992). The second are Third World fundamentalists who share the views of Western cultural supremacists that all such notions are 'Western ideas'. Fundamentalists deploy these views to justify the claim that such ideas are 'irrelevant foreign notions' used only by 'Westernized and inauthentic' Third World subjects and to cloak their violations of rights and suppression of democratic processes in the mantle of cultural preservation (Howard 1993; Mayer 1995).

Certainly, Third World feminists have legitimate concerns about how some Western feminists understand and unpack notions of 'women's equality'. And they have legitimate worries that some Western feminist human rights agendas might ignore or slight the problems and concerns of various groups of women in their national contexts. However, such conflicts and differences are often not well captured by characterizing them as differences between 'Western' and 'Third World' understandings of these concepts. Sucheta Mazumdar succinctly characterizes the dangers of deploying such essentialist moves even when characterizing genuine conflicts and divergences between Western and Third World feminists.

The UN Decade for Women was problematic for international women's solidarity. Many US and European feminists with a poor understanding of class, ethnicity, and international political realities simply replayed colonial stereotypes of Third World nations, were extremely patronizing of women from these nations, and often made no effort to separate the foreign policy objectives of their national governments from those of an internationalist women's movement. Third World women, for their part, rightly found this objectionable, and withdrew into a Third Worldist stance, replete with the rejection of feminism as a Western construct, omitting the fact that there is no such thing as 'the Western woman'... This fed popular male perceptions, both the liberal and the left in Third World nations, that the women's movement was some concoction of female alienation in a commodity economy, and that it had no relevance in the collectivist ethos of Third World nations (Mazumdar 1994:268–269).

Interpretations of ideas such as rights and equality that are insensitive to the predicaments and vulnerabilities of members of socially marginalized groups, including women, do not emanate only from Western contexts; for instance, right-wing and fundamentalist movements in Third World contexts use notions of rights and equality for their own ends (Hasan 1994:xix). Today, a good many problematic political visions cut across national and geographical boundaries, as do valuable ones. I believe feminists are often better served by analyses that concretely show the particular ways that specific interpretations of rights or equality might be inadequate than by interpretations that criticize these notions for being 'Western'.

Furthermore, notions such as rights and equality are seriously contested within both Western and Third World contexts, with the result that there is hardly one 'Western' or 'Third World' or 'Indian' vision of these concepts (Kiss 1997). Differences about the significance, implications, and applications of these terms exist within Western and Third

World national contexts, as well as cut across them. In *Hypatia* (13(2)), Susan Okin reveals the political struggles it has taken, and continues to take, to revise human rights doctrines to take account of women's gendered vulnerabilities, in both Western and Third World contexts (Okin 1998). Her analysis suggests that politically detrimental and politically valuable understandings of human rights have existed in both Western and Third World contexts.

I would strongly endorse Ofelia Schutte's desire, also expressed in *Hypatia* (3(2)), for a post-colonial feminist perspective that acknowledges the reality of colonialism and the fight against it (Schutte 1998). Post-colonial feminists have good reason to oppose many of the legacies of colonialism, as well as ongoing forms of economic exploitation and political domination by Western nations at the international level. However, I do not think such an agenda is well served either by uncritically denigrating values and practices that appear to be in some sense 'Western' or by indiscriminately valorizing values and practices that appear 'Non-Western'. Political rhetoric that polarizes Western' and 'Non-Western' values risks obscuring the degree to which economic and political agendas, carried out in collaboration between particular Western and Third World elites, work to erode the rights and quality of life for many citizens in both Western and Third World contexts. Such polarizations detract attention from Realpolitik-driven collaborations that result in Western economic and military support for brutal and undemocratic Third World regimes, many of whom spout 'anti-Western cultural preservation' rhetoric even as they remain deeply enmeshed in economic, political, and military collaboration with Western nations.

Political rhetoric that polarizes 'Western' and 'Non-Western' values is dangerous in Third World contexts in which progressive and feminist agendas often contest policies that are backed not only by Western powers but by local elites and nation-states. Feminists must keep in mind that a value or practice's being 'Non-Western' (either in terms of its origin or its context of prevalence) does not mean that it is anti-imperialist or anti-colonial, let alone compatible with feminist agendas. Feminists must also remember that a value or practice's being 'Western' in its origins does not mean that it can play no part in the service of anti-colonial or post-colonial feminist agendas—as Okin's discussion of international human rights discourse demonstrates (Okin 1998).

### **CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND CULTURAL ESSENTIALISM**

Many feminists are tempted to regard relativism as 'a weapon against intellectual tyranny because they share Lorraine Code's sense that it is 'demonstrably preferable to imperialist alternatives that recognize no limits' (Code 1998). Many feminists regard relativism as an antidote to 'affirmations of universal sameness' that permits those who are privileged 'to claim to have access to the one true story' (Code 1998). Relativism appears to be a useful deterrent to Western feminist inclinations to speak for or about women situated elsewhere or differently as though they were 'just like us'. I agree that one can continue to find feminist analyses in which inattention to differences among women facilitates the assumption that 'they are just like us' and results in attempts to speak for or about 'all women' without sufficient attention to their differences.

However, as my discussion in the first section of this essay indicates, I am reluctant

simply to equate this problem that constitutes a central concern for contemporary feminist analysis, with the phenomenon of 'cultural imperialism' as such. Part of what gives me pause in making this equation is my sense that 'cultural imperialism' as it functioned in colonial times had a quite different logic, which denied rather than affirmed that one's Others were 'just like oneself'. I do not wish to deny that the agendas of the colonizing powers required some projection of 'Sameness' on colonized peoples. The 'civilizing mission' of colonialism, including the project of converting 'the natives' to Christianity and the project of drawing colonized populations into European economic and political arrangements, did involve assumptions about forms of 'Sameness' that would enable these populations to benefit from 'becoming like Westerners' in these ways. However, even these projections of Sameness involved seeing Others as only 'deficient examples of the same' (Lange 1998). Without this difference of 'deficiency, the colonized populations' need for the colonial tutelage of Western nations would be undermined. The projected 'Sameness' was merely an underlying potential in the colonized that signifies their ability to benefit from the 'progress' conferred by colonial rule.

The colonial willingness and eagerness to speak 'for and about Others', and the colonialists' conviction with views that insisted on the colonized Others' difference from, and inferiority to, the Western Subject. While 'assumptions of sameness' might well be the hallmark of one problematic tendency that haunts contemporary feminist analysis, I believe it is a serious mistake to take this 'assumption of sameness' as the singular defining feature of 'cultural imperialism' when 'assumptions of difference' have played a substantial role as well. Once it is recognized that 'assumptions of difference' have been deployed for cultural imperialist ends no less expeditiously that 'assumptions of sameness', the temptation to relativism that is motivated by a desire to avoid cultural imperialism ought, I believe, to considerably weaken. An 'insistence on cultural difference' was even more characteristic of the colonial project than gestures towards 'sameness', an insistence that helped to cover over the sad similarities of ethnocentrism, androcentrism, classism, heterosexism, and other objectionable 'centrism' that often pervaded both sides of this reiterated 'contrast' between 'Western culture' and its several 'Others'.

My analysis underscores how much colonial mandates, as well as the political visions of contemporary Third World fundamentalisms, rely on a picture that focuses on 'essential differences' between Western and particular Third World cultures. Insofar as versions of relativism subscribe to these colonial pictures of 'essential differences' between cultures, relativism becomes a danger rather than an asset to feminist agendas. My previous analysis demonstrates how representations of particular Third World 'cultures' that appeal to relativist notions that 'our values and ways of life are distinct from those of Western Others, and constitute our national identity and authenticity can be at least as detrimental to the interests of many Third World women as any 'affirmations of universal sameness'.

Many versions of relativism rely on a picture of 'cultures' that I previously criticized as culturally essentialist, a picture in which cultures appear neatly, prediscursively, individuated from each other; in which the insistence on 'Difference' that accompanies the 'production' of distinct 'cultures' appears unproblematic; and the central or constitutive components of a 'culture' are assumed to be 'unchanging givens'. Such

relativist pictures of cultural differences are, I believe, both empirically inaccurate and inimical to the interests of post-colonial feminists. Rather than embracing relativism, anti-imperialist post-colonial feminism is better served by critically interrogating scripts of 'cultural difference' that set up sharp binaries between 'Western' and various 'Non-western' cultures. Such interrogation will reveal both sides of the binary to be, in large measure, totalizing idealizations, whose Imaginary status has been concealed by a colonial and post-colonial history of ideological deployments of this binary.

For reasons suggested by the preceding remarks, I am not convinced by Lorraine Code's position that with respect to dismantling the master's house 'relativism...may not be able to do it all, but it is demonstrably preferable to the alternatives' (Code 1998). Third World feminist political struggles are often painfully aware that there are a number of 'master's houses'. Some of these houses are owned not by 'Western' masters but are part of the local real estate, while others have deeds so intricate that it is difficult to unravel how much they are the properties of local' or 'Western' masters. In their attempts to dismantle a number of these 'master's houses', Third World feminists often discover that forms of cultural relativism have an important place in the tool-kits of local masters, leaving feminists susceptible to attacks as 'Westernized cultural traitors' who suffer from a lack of appreciation for 'their traditions' and respect for 'their culture'. Forms of relativism have often enough functioned to strengthen the hand of a variety of masters. Feminists cannot afford only to be wary of 'universal' claims, but must seek to understand the variety of dangerous ideological uses to which forms of both 'universalist' and 'relativist' claims can be put.

I would argue that what post-colonial feminists need to do is not to endorse 'cultural relativism' but to resist various forms of cultural essentialism, including relativist versions. In addition to the strategies I previously mentioned, feminists need to resist cultural essentialism by pointing to the internal plurality, dissension and contestation over values, and ongoing changes in practices in virtually all communities that comprise modern nation-states. This critique of cultural essentialism would reject the idea that there is anything that can solidly and uncontroversially be defined as 'Indian culture' or 'African culture', or 'Western culture' for that matter. It would proceed by challenging a 'picture of the world' that some versions of cultural relativism assume to be true: that there are neat packages called 'different cultures', each of which is internally consistent and monolithic, and which disagrees only with 'Other cultures'.

The position I am endorsing does not deny the existence of 'cultural differences' *per se*. It would be foolish to deny that there are practices in certain contexts that are absent in others, and values that are endorsed in some quarters that are not endorsed in others. Rather, the position I endorse denies that 'actual cultural differences' correspond very neatly to the packages that are currently individuated as 'separate cultures' or manifest themselves as evenly distributed across particular 'cultures'. It insists that virtually all contemporary contexts are full of political debate and dissension about their practices and values, and it refuses to grant any of these perspectives the status of being the sole 'authentic representative' of the views and values of a particular culture. It suggests that wariness about projected imaginary 'essential differences' might better facilitate our taking account of the multiplicity of real differences in values, interests, and world-views that traverse contemporary national and transnational contexts. I believe that the



exchanges between various feminist discourse communities that Jaggar analyses (Jaggar 1998) are crucial sites for clarifying the nature and import of a multiplicity of real differences that might mark feminist agendas in different national contexts, even as they provide spaces for contesting essentialist notions of 'cultural differences'.

While critical of particular pictures of 'cultural differences' that underlie certain forms of cultural relativism, my counter-picture does not suffice to answer many important questions that arise in philosophical discussions about relativism. It remains agnostic, for instance, on the question of whether there is one neat and complete universal set of values that ought to command everyone's assent, but optimistic about the prospects for making many of the values that inform progressive politics and feminist agendas meaningful and efficacious in a variety of global contexts.

I would like to end by clarifying the connections between my critique of cultural essentialism and my stance on 'generalizations' about cultures. Discussing the issue of gender essentialism, Okin argues that 'the feminist anti-essentialist critique was at times carried to the extreme of asserting that no generalizations at all could be made about women' (Okin 1998). Does a commitment to opposing cultural essentialism entail a commitment to the extreme view that no generalizations at all can be made about 'cultures'? It is my view that neither anti-essentialism about gender nor anti-essentialism about cultures entails an absolute prohibition on generalization, because all generalizations are not equally problematic. I would argue that there are significant differences between generalizations such as the statement of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which asserts, 'Women continue to be discriminated against all over the world as regards the recognition, enjoyment, and exercise of their individual rights in public and private and are subject to many forms of violence' (Bunch 1994:35).

The former generalization is not only empirically false but also offensive and dangerous. The latter is both arguably true and politically useful in calling attention to human rights violations against women in a multiplicity of national contexts. The latter sort of generalization does not entail, and should not be taken to entail, the absence of variations within and across national contexts in the form of human rights violations that confront different groups of women. The claim that virtually every community is structured by relationships of gender that comprise specific forms of social, sexual, and economic subjection of women seems a generalization that is politically useful; it also leaves room for attention to differences and particularities of context with respect to the predicaments of different groups of women. I believe that the items on Martha Nussbaum's list of important human capabilities and functions are also generalizations of the latter sort, for she intends the list to 'allow in its very design for the possibility of multiple specifications of each of the components' (Nussbaum 1995:93).

I believe that anti-essentialism about gender and about culture does not entail a simple-minded opposition to all generalizations, but entails instead a commitment to examine both their empirical accuracy and their political utility or risk. It is seldom possible to articulate effective political agendas, such as those pertaining to human rights, without resorting to a certain degree of abstraction, which enables the articulation of salient similarities between problems suffered by various individuals and groups. On the other hand, it seems arguably true that there is no need to portray female genital mutilation as

an 'African cultural practice' or dowry murders and dowry-related harassment as a 'problem of Indian women' in ways that eclipse the fact that not all 'African women' or 'Indian women' confront these problems, or confront them in identical ways, or in ways that efface local contestations of these problems.

The anti-essentialist perspective I advocate does not endorse the view that the existence of cultural and other 'differences' renders equally suspect each and every sort of generalization or universalistic claim. Kwame Anthony Appiah makes a useful point when he reminds us that 'it is characteristic of those who pose as anti-universalists to use the term universalism as if it meant pseudo-universalism... What they truly object to—and who would not?—is Eurocentric hegemony posing as universalism' (Appiah 1992:58). I would add that many of the essentialist pictures of Indian culture' and the like that I critique are forms of what one might call 'pseudoparticularism'—equally hegemonic representations of 'particular cultures' whose 'particularism' masks the reality that they are problematic generalizations about complex and internally differentiated contexts. Besides, even the injunction to attend to a variety of 'differences' can hardly avoid the universalistic cast of a general prescription, and no political agenda can avoid general normative assessments of the salience and weight of particular kinds of 'differences'.

Given the significant dangers that varieties of cultural essentialism pose to feminist agendas, I believe that the development of a feminist perspective that is committed to anti-essentialism both about 'women' and about 'cultures' is an urgent and important task for a post-colonial feminist perspective. Such a perspective must distinguish and extricate feminist projects of attending to differences among women from problematically essentialist colonial and post-colonial understandings of 'cultural differences' between Western culture and its 'Others'. This essay is a contribution to the project of thinking about how contemporary feminists can resist reified and essentialist pictures of 'cultures' and of 'cultural contrasts' between 'Western culture' and 'Third World cultures', and submit them to critical interrogation.

The colour of reason: The idea of 'race' in Kant's anthropology

EMMANUEL C.EZE

## INTRODUCTION

In his important book, *This is race*, Earl W. Count observes that scholars often forget 'that Immanuel Kant produced the most profound raciological thought of the eighteenth century'.<sup>1</sup> This scholarly forgetfulness of Kant's racial theories, or his raciology, I suggest, is attributable to the overwhelming desire to see Kant only as a 'pure' philosopher, preoccupied only with 'pure' culture—and colour-blind philosophical themes in the sanctum sanctorum of the traditions of Western philosophy. Otherwise, how does one explain the many surprised expressions I received while researching this work: Kant? Anthropology? Race? The Kant most remembered in North American academic communities is the Kant of the *Critiques*. It is forgotten that the philosopher

developed courses in anthropology and/or geography and taught them regularly for forty years from 1756 until the year before his retirement in 1797.<sup>2</sup> Speaking specifically about anthropology, Kant himself wrote in the introduction to his *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*:

In my occupation with pure philosophy, which was originally undertaken of my own accord, but which later belonged to my teaching duties, I have for some thirty years delivered lectures twice a year on ‘knowledge of the world/namely on Anthropology and Physical Geography. They were popular lectures attended by people from the general public. The present manual contains my lectures on anthropology. As to Physical Geography, however, it will not be possible, considering my age, to produce a manual from my manuscript, which is hardly legible to anyone but myself.’<sup>3</sup>

It was Kant, in fact, who introduced anthropology as a branch of study to the German universities when he first started his lectures in the winter semester of 1772–1773.<sup>4</sup> He was also the first to introduce the study of geography, which he considered inseparable from anthropology, to Königsberg University, beginning from the summer semester of 1756.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his career at the university, Kant offered 72 courses in ‘Anthropology’ and/or ‘Physical Geography’, more than in logic (54 times), metaphysics (49 times), moral philosophy (28), and theoretical physics (20 times).<sup>6</sup> Although the volume *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* was the last book edited by Kant and was published toward the end of his life, the material actually chronologically predated the *Critiques*. Further, it is known that material from Kant’s courses in ‘Anthropology’ and ‘Physical Geography’ found their way into his lectures in ethics and metaphysics.

What was Kant’s fascination for anthropology? What does Kant mean by ‘anthropology’? How is this discipline connected to ‘physical geography, and why did Kant conceive of anthropology and geography as twin sciences? More specifically, what are the substantive anthropological theories on race propounded by Kant? In order to establish a framework for an adequate appreciation of Kant’s contribution to anthropology and the theory of race in general, we will in this reading rely on copious but neglected works and notes he prepared and used in his lectures in the area: *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*,<sup>7</sup> *Physische Geographie*,<sup>8</sup> *Conjectural beginning of human history* (1785),<sup>9</sup> ‘Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrassen’ (1785),<sup>10</sup> ‘On the varieties of the different races of man’ (1775),<sup>11</sup> and the *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*’ (1764).<sup>12</sup> Although there has been critical interest in Kant’s anthropology among scholars as diverse as Max Scheler,<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger,<sup>14</sup> Ernst Cassirer,<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault,<sup>16</sup> Frederick van de Pitte,<sup>17</sup> and so forth, there is no evidence that this interest bears upon Kant’s racial theories. Two recent articles, Ronald Judy’s ‘Kant and the Negro’<sup>18</sup> and Christian Neugebauer’s ‘The racism of Kant and Hegel’,<sup>19</sup> are relevant explorations of Kant’s racial and racist statements, but each of these discussions of the matter is either too theoretically diffuse and unfocused on Kant’s substantive themes on race (‘Kant and the Negro’) or insufficiently rooted in the rich and definite anthropologico-conceptual framework purposely established by Kant himself for his

raciology ('The racism of Kant and Hegel'). The following discussion, while relying on Kant's texts and the critical literature, seeks to focus analytical attention on (1) Kant's understanding of anthropology as a science, (2) his doctrine of 'human nature' and (3) the idea and theory of 'race' and racial classifications established on the basis of a specific conception of 'human nature'. In turn, we shall critique Kant on (1) through (3), and conclude with a general appraisal of the philosophical and the cultural-political significance of Kant's philosophy of race.

### KANT'S UNDERSTANDING OF ANTHROPOLOGY

The disciplinary boundaries established for 'anthropology by Kant and the eighteenth-century writers are radically different from whatever one may assume to constitute the contour of the discipline today.<sup>20</sup> One cannot understand the peculiar nature of 'anthropology as Kant understood it except in conjunction with his idea of 'physical geography'—although his conception of 'geography' is equally historically distant from us. According to Kant, 'physical geography' is the study of 'the natural condition of the earth and what is contained on it: seas, continents, mountains, rivers, the atmosphere, man, animals, plants, and minerals.'<sup>21</sup> 'Man' is included in his study because humans are part and parcel of nature. But within 'man', nature is manifest in two ways, or in two aspects: externally (as body) and internal (as soul, spirit). To study 'man' in nature, or as part of nature, is therefore to study the two aspects of nature contained, revealed, or manifested in the human entity. While the one human aspect of nature (or natural aspect of the human) is bodily, physical, and external, the other is psychological, moral and internal. In Kant's conception and vocabulary, 'physical geography' and 'anthropology' combine to study 'man' in these two aspects; 'geography studies the bodily, physical, external aspect of 'man,' and 'anthropology' studies the psychological, moral internal aspect. This is why Kant called physical geography and anthropology 'twin' sciences. Kant believed that, together, both disciplines would pursue and provide a full range of total knowledge on the subject of 'man':

The physical geography, which I herewith announce, belongs to an idea (Idee) which I create for myself for purposes of useful academic instruction, and which I would call the preliminary exercise in the knowledge of the world...Here before [the student] lies a twofold field, namely nature and man, of which he has a plan for the time being through which he can put into order, according to rules, all his future experiences. Both parts, however, have to be considered ... not according to what their objects contain as peculiar to themselves (physics and empirical knowledge of soul), but what their relationship is in the whole in which they stand and in which each has its own position. This first form of instruction I call physical geography...the second anthropology.<sup>22</sup>

Thus while anthropology studies humans or human reality as they are available to the internal sense, geography studies the same phenomena as they are presented or available to the external sense. For example, in concrete terms, since human bodies belong to the physical world and are perceptible to the external senses (the eyes, for example), Kant's study of race and racial classifications on the basis of physical characteristics (skin

colour, to be precise) was done under the disciplinary domain of 'geography'.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Kant's study of the internal structures which condition the human being as a moral entity and which are therefore susceptible to development of character (or more perfectibility) comes under the disciplinary domain of 'anthropology'. While geography studies the human being as a physically given, anthropology studies the human being as a moral agent (or 'a freely acting being').<sup>24</sup>

In his book *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, Kant focused on the study of the human being as a moral agent. The human individual is a moral agent because one is capable of experiencing oneself as an ego, and 'I', who thinks (self-reflects) and wills. It is this capacity for consciousness and agency that elevates the human being beyond the causality and determinism of physical nature in which the individual is nevertheless implicated by embodiment:

The fact that man is aware of an ego-concept raises him infinitely above all other creatures living on earth. Because of this, he is a person; and by virtue of this oneness of consciousness, he remains one and the same person despite all the vicissitudes which may befall him. He is a being who, by reason of his preeminence and dignity, is wholly different from things, such as the irrational animals whom he can master and rule at will.<sup>25</sup>

What confers or constitutes the ego, or 'personhood', for Kant, is therefore the ability to think and will, and this ability, in turn, is what makes the person a moral agent. As a moral agent, the person is majestically raised not only above mere (bodily) physical nature but indeed 'infinitely above all other creatures living on earth'. Thus, for Kant, the domain of the body (physical) is radically (qualitatively and otherwise) different from the domain of the soul (spirit, mind) or of moral agency.

Kant recognizes that the moral domain, or that sphere which constitutes the individual as 'person' and as beyond mere thing, is also part of nature. But Kant argues that the unique quality of this (human) aspect of the world transcends mere nature. A recognition of the reality and the uniqueness of the moral domain therefore justifies Kant's designation of his anthropology as 'pragmatic':

A systematic doctrine containing our knowledge of man (anthropology) can either be given from a physiological or pragmatic point of view. Physiological knowledge of man aims at the investigation of what Nature makes of man, whereas pragmatic knowledge of man aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being.<sup>26</sup>

The distinction between 'what Nature makes of man' and what man makes of himself is central to understanding the relationship between Kant's anthropology and geography. While one generates pure (scientific, causal) knowledge of nature, the other generates pragmatic (moral, self-improvement) knowledge of the human. In the study of the human, however, both disciplines merge, or rather intersect, since 'man' is at once physical (bodily) and spiritual (psychological, moral). Thus, for Kant, 'geography' can be either physical or moral. In its physical aspect, geography studies humans in their physical/bodily (for example, 'racial', skin-colour) varieties, whereas in its moral aspects,

geography studies human customs and unreflectively held mores which Kant calls 'second nature'.<sup>27</sup> 'Anthropology', too, can be either pragmatic or physiological, as it studies humans as moral agents or as part of physical nature. In sum: pragmatic anthropology studies the inner realm of morality, the realm of freedom; physiological anthropology encompasses humans as part of unconscious nature; and geography studies humans both in their empirical (bodily/physical) nature and in their collective, customary aspects. Or stated otherwise, physical geography studies outer nature and provides knowledge of humans as external bodies: race, colour, height, facial characteristics, and so forth, while pragmatic anthropology provides knowledge of the inner, morally conditioned structure of humans (practical philosophy provides moral knowledge and orientation as to what the destiny of human existence and action ought to be). The interrelatedness of geography and anthropology and moral philosophy is evident throughout Kant's lectures. As late as 1764, Kant himself had not separated anthropology from geography and thus included 'moral anthropology' under the broader designation of 'moral and political geography'. Moral philosophy presupposes physical geography and anthropology, for while the first two observe and provide knowledge of 'actual behaviour of human beings and formulates the practical and subjective rules which that behaviour obeys', moral philosophy seeks to establish 'rules of right conduct, that is, what ought to happen'.<sup>28</sup>

Kant's study of anthropology is not peripheral to his critical philosophy. We recall that Kant often summarized his philosophy as the attempt to find answers to the 'two things that fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, namely: the starry heavens above and the moral law within'.<sup>29</sup> While the 'starry heavens above' refers to physical nature, under the causal law (and studied by physics), 'the moral law within' is the domain of freedom, of the human individual as a moral entity. For Kant, Newtonian physics had achieved spectacular success in terms of understanding the deterministic laws of physical nature, but philosophy had been unable to establish an equivalent necessary and secure grounding for morality and moral action. Faced with the metaphysical 'dogmatism' of the rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz) on the one hand, and the debilitating scepticism of Hume's empiricism on the other, Kant, against the rationalists, argues that the mathematical model they propose as ideal for metaphysical and moral inquiry is untenable primarily because mathematics studies ideal entities, moving from definitions by purely rational arguments to apodictic conclusions. Metaphysics, Kant argues, must proceed analytically (especially after Hume's attack on metaphysical dogmatism) in order to clarify what is given indistinctly in empirical experience. The true method of metaphysics,' Kant concludes, 'is basically the same as that introduced by Newton into natural science and which had such useful consequences in that field.'<sup>30</sup>

But there is a problem here: unlike physical nature, the object of Newton's physics, God, freedom, and morality, and the immortality of the soul—the traditional 'objects' of metaphysics—are not objects of empirical experience. This situation, potentially, would, in metaphysical matters, lead to radical scepticism à la Hume. However, while insisting with Hume that speculation must be based on experience, and always checked against experience, Kant reflected Hume's radical scepticism and sought with the structures of human experience fixed, permanent, and enduring structures that would ground moral

actions as law. The *Critique of pure reason* and the subsequent *Critiques* can be studied not only from a negative stand-point of showing what is impossible to pure reason but, from this anthropological perspective, as a positive attempt to find in the subjectivity of the human structure a specifically human, inner nature upon which to found moral existence as necessity.<sup>31</sup> It was from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that Kant was inspired to locate this 'fixed point of nature [from] which man can never shift'.<sup>32</sup>

### KANT'S DOCTRINE OF 'HUMAN NATURE' BASED ON HIS READING OF ROUSSEAU

Kant succinctly defines 'nature' as 'the existence of things under law'.<sup>33</sup> In the announcement of his anthropology lectures for the academic year 1765–1766, Kant stated that he would set forth a 'new' method for the study of 'man', a method based not just on the observation of humans in their varying historical and contingent forms, but on that which is fixed, permanent, and enduring in human nature.<sup>34</sup> In this announcement, Kant does not mention Rousseau by name, but he describes the method he would teach as a 'brilliant discovery of our time',<sup>35</sup> and, in the comments on the lecture notes, he explicitly states that 'Rousseau was the very first to discover beneath the varying forms which human nature assumes the deeply concealed nature of man and the hidden law in accordance with which Providence is justified by his observations'.<sup>36</sup> It is certain that Rousseau's most influential writings were already published in the 1770s when Kant was grappling with the problems of necessary foundations for metaphysics and morality. Rousseau's *Discourse on the arts and the sciences* was published in 1750. The second 'Discourse', *Discourse on the origin of inequality among men*, was published in 1758. The most famous Rousseau work, the *Social contract*, appeared in 1762, the same year as *Émile*, the book on education. The *New Héloïse* appeared in 1761. These texts contain Rousseau's extensive speculations on 'human nature', and evidence abounds that they impressed Kant greatly and influenced his own philosophical development.<sup>37</sup> In order to understand Kant's positive articulation of the permanent and enduring 'human nature', we must examine his reading of Rousseau. Kant found in Rousseau's writings the idea of a fixed essence of 'human nature', which provided the needed shore for grounding metaphysical and moral knowledge. What were Rousseau's views on 'human nature'? Rousseau writes in the opening paragraph of *On the origin of language* that 'speech distinguishes man among animals'. In the same text, Rousseau links the origin of speech with the origin of society: language is 'the first social institution'.<sup>38</sup> Language and society are linked and inseparable because 'as soon as one man was recognized by another as a sentient, thinking being similar to himself, the desire or need to communicate his feelings and thoughts made him seek the means to do so'.<sup>39</sup> But in Rousseau's view language and society, as human creations, are not natural: they are artificial, invented. Language and society come into being when, and are signs of the fact that, a 'pure state of nature' has been transgressed and a radically different dispensation, state of human nature, has dawned. For Rousseau, a 'pure state of nature', the condition of *l'homme naturel*, is radically different from a 'pure state of human nature', which is the condition of the civil, socialized *l'homme de l'homme*. Speech and society are proper to civilized humanity. Rousseau admits that it is conceptually impossible to grasp the cause or the origin and the

nature of this revolutionary transition from non-articulate speech (gestures, hollering) to articulate speech (languages, symbols) as a means of communication.<sup>40</sup> Given the fact that one cannot obtain factual information or explanation of the transition from *l'homme naturel* to *l'homme de l'homme*, Rousseau proposes to imagine such a state as a hypothesis for explaining the origin and development of civilization. According to him:

We will suppose that this...difficulty [of explaining origin] is obviated. Let us for a moment then take ourselves as being in this vast space which must lie between a pure state of nature and that in which languages had become necessary.

When Rousseau can locate himself in the 'vast space' between a 'pure state of nature' and human nature, he can imagine the moment when society was constituted and postulates that from one side of the divide to the other there was 'a multitude of centuries' marked by distinct evolutionary steps. One cannot, however, ascertain factually what, when or where, these stages were.<sup>41</sup> Both in the *Origin of language* and in the *Origin of inequality*, Rousseau postulates that one stage that ought to have existed between the 'pure state of nature' and the constitution of society was the 'age of huts'.<sup>42</sup> The 'age of huts' is the age of the 'primitives', and Rousseau describes the primitive age as a time when 'sparse human population had no more social structure than the family, no laws but those of nature, no language but that of gesture and some inarticulate sounds'. It is only after this primitive stage that communication grew from gesture to language, and community life from family to civil society, giving rise to morality, law, and history.<sup>43</sup>

Now, in his anti-Enlightenment writings, Rousseau employed his hypothetical views of the evolution of humans for critical purposes. In the *Social contract*, for example, Rousseau states that 'man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains'. By this he means that in nature, or in the state of nature, humans are born free, independent, self-sufficient, innocent, and uncorrupted. It is society and culture that have put humans in bondage: ruled by laws not of one's own making, oppressed by others, wretched, and torn between one's natural inclinations, on the one hand, and social and conventional duties on the other. By nature, human existence is raw and rustic, but good and happy. Culture and civilization have imposed constraints and domesticated the individual so that development of the mind in the arts and sciences has made humans civilized and dependent, oppressed, unhappy, and immoral. In fact, Rousseau's first *Discourse* was written for an Academy of Dijon essay competition on the question: 'whether the progress of the arts and sciences has tended to the purification or the corruption of morality'.<sup>44</sup> In his essay, which won the first prize, Rousseau argues that culture and civilization are destroying human nature because achievements in the arts and sciences are blindly rewarded at the expense of and to the detriment of moral cultivation. Society and civilization breed evil and therefore are enemies of 'true' (read: natural) humanity and mores. Using this hypothetical and ideal image of natural, Rousseau claims to have uncovered the disfigurements that human nature has undergone in the name of civilized society:

Deep in the heart of the forest [of Saint German] I sought and found the vision of those primeval ages whose history I barely sketched. I denied myself all the



easy deceits to which men are prone. I dared to unveil human nature and to look upon it in its nakedness, to trace the course of times and of events which have disfigured man (*l'homme de l'homme*) with natural man. I pointed out the true source of our misery in our pretended perfection.<sup>45</sup>

Rousseau's contention is that civilization may have added many dimensions (such as articulate language and the culture of arts and sciences) to the reality of human existence, but, as 'artificial' overlays, they do not add anything of worth to the moral vocation of the human; in fact they may detract from it. Because civilization is artificial and superficial, it burdens that which is truly human in the individual.

Although some aspects of Rousseau's writings seem to advocate a rejection of civilization and a return to the 'natural state', others (such as found in the main arguments of the *Social contract*) refuse a wholesale rejection of civil society, attempt to justify the transition from nature to culture and organized society, and inquire into what kinds of social structures would be appropriate to develop, rather than corrupt, the 'true' nature of 'man', which is human freedom and 'natural goodness'.<sup>46</sup>

But if artificial civilization corrupts the 'natural state' and natural goodness in 'man', what, precisely, constitutes this 'original', good, and uncorrupted 'natural state' of humanity? In Kant's reading of Rousseau's *Origin of inequality*, the 'nature' to which 'man' ought to return is not some precivilization, happy, primitive state, but a genuine cultivation of those high capacities that are specific to humans. Likewise, in his interpretation of *Émile*, Kant did not think that Rousseau intended to alienate humans from civilization or suggest that humans return to the Olduvai gorge. In his lectures in anthropology, Kant declares that:

One certainly need not accept the ill-tempered picture which Rousseau paints of the human species. It is not his real opinion when he speaks of the human species as daring to leave its natural condition, and when he propagates a reversal and a return into the woods. Rousseau only wanted to express our species' difficulty in walking the path of continuous progress toward our destiny.<sup>47</sup>

After he had accurately given a summary of three of Rousseau's major works (*Discourse on the arts and the sciences*; *Discourse on the origin of inequality*, and *Julie*) as lamenting 'the damage done to our species by (1) our departure from Nature to culture, which weakened our strength; (2) civilization, which resulted in inequality and mutual oppression; and (3) presumed moralization, which caused unnatural education and distorted thinking', Kant proceeded to deflate any positive, self-sustaining, and autonomous significance one might attribute to the three texts and their claims. In Kant's reading, the three works are merely a prelude to Rousseau's later works, which give more positive humanizing characterization and value to society, culture, and civilization. According to Kant:

[The] three works which present the state of Nature as a state of innocence... should serve only as preludes to his [Rousseau's] *Social contract*, his *Émile*, and his *Savoyard vicar* so that we can find our way out of the labyrinth of evil into

which our species has wandered through its own fault.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously operating from the premise that the 'state of nature' is (at least) also a realm of 'evil', Kant interprets the thrust of Rousseau's body of work not as suggesting that we return to a 'pure,' innocent human 'state of nature', but rather as inviting us to make humanity and goodness out of ourselves. In Kant's words: 'Rousseau did not really want that man should go back to the state of nature, but that he should rather look back at it from the stage he has now attained.'<sup>49</sup>

There is, then, in Kant, a clear distinction between a raw 'state of nature' and a 'state of human nature' which 'man...has now attained'. Indeed, for Kant, if the 'state of nature' is a state of evil, it is 'human nature', as moral nature, which offers the possibility of the overcoming of evil.<sup>50</sup>

For Kant human nature, unlike natural nature, is, in essence, a moral nature, so that what constitutes human nature proper is not, as the ancients may have believed, simply intelligence or reason, but moral reason—the capacity to posit oneself rationally as a moral agent. Humans, in the state of nature, are simply *animale rationabile*; they have to make of themselves *animale rationale*. The idea and effort of 'making of oneself' is a specifically historical and moral process. Moral capacity means that humans can posit goals and ends in their actions because they make choices in life, and choices are made in the function of goals. Intimately connected with the idea of moral reason, then, is the capacity for action directed toward self-perfectibility, or the faculty of self-improvement. Kant writes that the individual 'has a character which he himself creates, because he is capable of perfecting himself according to the purposes which he himself adopts'.<sup>51</sup> The 'goal' of society and civilization is therefore tied to the destiny of the species: 'to affect the perfection of man through cultural progress'.<sup>52</sup>

Kant's peculiar appropriation of Rousseau was, and still is, controversial.<sup>53</sup> Kant's Rousseau is not the Rousseau who became known as advocating a return to the life of the 'noble savage'—that is, the Rousseau who advocated passion and instinct against reason and became the hero of the Storm and Stress movement. Rather, Kant found in Rousseau a 'restorer of the rights of humanity'<sup>54</sup>—but a humanity defined as social, civilized, and moral. In the *Anthropology*, Kant explicitly writes:

Man, on account of his reason, is destined to live in a society of other people, and in this society he has to cultivate himself, civilize himself, and apply himself to a moral purpose by the arts and the sciences. No matter how great his animalistic inclination may be to abandon himself passively to the enticements of ease and comfort, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by actively struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature.

Humanity is clearly demarcated away from and against the natural state and elevated to a level where it has necessarily to construct in freedom its own culture. For Kant, it is this radical autonomy that defines the worth, the dignity, and therefore the essence of humanity. Pragmatic anthropology as a science has as its object the description of this essential structure of humanity and its subjectivity. Anthropology's task is to understand and describe 'the destination of man and the characteristic of his development'<sup>56</sup> as

rational, social, and moral subject. Pragmatic anthropology is meant to help 'man' understand how to make himself worthy of humanity through combat with the roughness of his state of nature.<sup>57</sup> Kant's anthropological analysis of the 'essence of man', accordingly, starts not from a study of the notion of a prehistorical or precivilization 'primitive' human nature, but rather from the study of the nature of 'man' qua civilized. To study animals, one might start with the wild, but when the object of study is the human, one must focus on it in its creative endeavours that is, in culture and civilization—for 'civilization does not constitute man's secondary or accidental characteristic, but marks man's essential nature, his specific character'.<sup>58</sup>

In the *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, in which he draws a radical distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' nature, Kant argues that humans are essentially different from brutes because humans possess an inner nature, or character. He defines character in three senses: as natural disposition, as temperament, and as rational/moral. The first two refer to humans in their passive, bodily capacity, as subject to physical/causal laws of external nature (or 'what can be done to man'), while the last refers to the human 'as rational creature who has acquired freedom' and relates to 'what he himself is willing to make of himself through categorical self-regulation'.<sup>59</sup> It is 'character' in this moral sense which distinguishes human nature from animal nature:

Here it does not matter what nature makes of man, but what man himself makes of himself, for the former belongs to the temperament (where the subject is merely passive) and the latter shows that he has a character.<sup>60</sup>

A moral character is conscious of itself as free: free to choose or to posit/orient oneself and one's actions toward specifically human goals and destiny. The ability to posit specifically human goals signifies and reveals a teleologically compelling process that transcends the world of pure causality or causal inclination. Freedom, as a horizon for destined action, places humans under another kind of 'law', over and above the determinism of external nature. The destiny of the individual is to realize fully one's freedom by overcoming the 'rawness' of nature, which, in moral terms, means to realize good out of (inherent) evil.<sup>61</sup> Exploiting his running dialogue with Rousseau for the explication of what he assumes to be the fundamental human condition, Kant states:

The question arises (either with or against Rousseau)...whether man is good by nature or bad by nature... [A] being endowed with the faculty of practical reason and with consciousness [is]...subject to a moral law and to the feeling (which is then called moral feeling)... This is the intelligible character of humanity as such, and thus far man is good (by nature) according to his inborn gift. But experience also shows that in man there is an inclination to desire actively what is unlawful. This is the inclination to evil which arises as unavoidably and as soon as man begins to make use of his freedom. Consequently the inclination to evil can be regarded as innate. Hence, according to his sensible character, man must be judged as being evil (by nature). This is not contradictory when we are talking about the character of the species because it can be assumed that the species' *natural destiny* consists in continual progress toward the better.<sup>62</sup>

The human project, then, is to overcome the state of nature by human nature, to overcome evil by good. In this project of overcoming 'raw' nature and the inherent condition of evil, history, Kant implies, is on the side of humanity –for humans are the only animals with history; indeed history or historicity, and arts and culture, are the reality and the outcome of the human moral essence and condition. The possession of moral character therefore 'already implies a favourable disposition and inclination to the good', while evil (since it holds conflict with itself and does not permit a permanent principle) is truly without character.<sup>63</sup>

To conclude, it should be obvious from the foregoing exposition of the theoretical ground-work of Kant's philosophical anthropology that the disciplinary and conceptual boundaries Kant established for his practice of physical geography cum anthropology follow closely upon his general procedure of philosophical inquiry. Maintaining the distinction between what in his system is the 'phenomenal' and the 'ideal', Kant, in his reception of Rousseau, seems to split Rousseau's ideas into the 'historical' (the phenomenal) and the 'hypothetical' (the ideal). Rousseau's ideas about the 'primitive' origin and development of human nature, for example, are interpreted by Kant to be merely hypothetical, not theoretical. For Kant, such a hypothetical ideal (in this case, a model of humanity) is useful only for the regulation of moral life or, as he read it into Rousseau's work, the functional critique of modern society. One cannot fail to notice, however, that Kant himself elevated and reinterpreted Rousseau's supposedly hypothetical, or ideal, assumptions as to the origin and development of European civilization into a general statement on humanity as such.

Yet for Kant, human nature, or the knowledge of human nature, does not derive from empirical cultural or historical studies. History and culture are inadequate to understanding human nature because they deal only with the phenomenal, accidental, and changing aspects of "man", rather than with the essential element in man: his ethical... nature'.<sup>64</sup> Thus, according to Kant, while physical and racial characteristics as aspects of the physical nature are studied or established by 'scientific reason', moral nature, or rational character, which constitutes humanity proper, is the domain of pragmatic anthropology leading to practical/moral philosophy.

## **KANT'S IDEA OF 'RACE'**

### **The taxonomy**

We saw in the preceding sections of this chapter that for Kant physical geography, in conjunction with anthropology, is supposed to provide a full range of total knowledge on the subject of 'man'. Specifically, physical geography, which studies outer nature, provides knowledge of humans as external bodies: colour, height, facial characteristics, and so forth, while pragmatic anthropology provides knowledge of the inner, morally conditioned structure of humans. In the *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, especially section 4 ('Of national characteristics'), which essentially belongs to geography and anthropology, Kant, following Hippocratic lines, outlines a geographical and psychological (moral) classification of humans. From the geographic stand-point, just

as other biological phenomena such as animals are divided into domestic and wild, land, air, and water species, and so forth, different human races are also conceived of as manifesting biologically original and distinct classes, geographically distributed. Taking skin colour as evidence of a 'racial' class, Kant classified humans into: white (Europeans), yellow (Asians), black (Africans), and red (American Indians). 'Moral' geography (which might as well be called 'cultural' geography) studies the customs and the mores held collectively by each of these races, classes, or groups. For example, some elements in the 'moral geography' taught by Kant included expositions on culture, such as the 'knowledge' that it is customary to permit theft in Africa, or to desert children in China, or to bury them alive in Brazil, or for Eskimos to strangle them.<sup>65</sup> Finally, it is the domain of moral philosophy to show, for example, that such actions, based upon unreflective mores and customs, natural impulses (or 'the inclination to evil'),<sup>66</sup> and/or the 'commands of authority', lack 'ethical principles' and are therefore not properly (i.e. essentially) human.<sup>67</sup> Unreflective mores and customs (such as supposedly practised by the non-European peoples listed by Kant) are devoid of ethical principles because these people lack the capacity for development of 'character', and they lack character presumably because they lack adequate self-consciousness and rational will, for it is self-reflectivity (the 'ego concept')<sup>68</sup> and the rational principled will which make the upbuilding of (moral) character possible through the (educational) process of development of goodness latent in/as human nature.

From the psychological or moral stand-point, then, within Kant's classification the American (i.e. in the context of this discussion, American Indian), the African, and the Hindu appear to be incapable of moral maturity because they lack 'talent', which is a 'gift' of nature. After stating that 'the difference in natural gifts between the various nations cannot be completely explained by means of causal [external, physical, climatic] causes but rather must lie in the [moral] nature of Man himself',<sup>69</sup> Kant goes on to provide the psychological-moral account for the differences on the basis of a presumed rational ability or inability to 'elevate' (or educate) oneself into humanity from, one might add, the rather humble 'gift' or 'talent' originally offered or denied by mother nature to various races.<sup>70</sup> In Kant's table of moral classifications, while the Americans are completely uneducable because they lack 'affect and passion', the Africans escape such a malheur, but can only be 'trained' as slaves and servants:

The race of the American cannot be educated. It has no motivating force, for it lacks affect and passion. They are not in love, thus they are also not afraid. They hardly speak, do not caress each other, care about nothing and are lazy.<sup>71</sup>

However,

The race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honor.<sup>72</sup>

The meaning of the distinction that Kant makes between ability to be 'educated' or to educate oneself on the one hand, and to 'train' somebody on the other, can be surmised

from the following. 'Training', for Kant, seems to consist purely of physical coercion and corporeal punishment, for in his writings about how to flog the African servant or slave into submission, Kant 'advises us to use a split bamboo cane instead of a whip, so that the 'negro' will suffer a great deal of pains (because of the 'negro's' thick skin, he would not be racked with sufficient agonies through a whip) but without dying'.<sup>73</sup> To beat 'the Negro' efficiently requires 'a split cane rather than a whip, because the blood needs to find a way out of the Negro's thick skin to avoid festering'.<sup>74</sup>

The African, according to Kant, deserves this kind of 'training' because he or she is 'exclusively idle', lazy, and prone to hesitation and jealousy, and the African is all these because, for climate and anthropological reasons, he or she lacks 'true' (rational and moral) character:

All inhabitants of the hottest zones are, without exceptions, idle. With some, this laziness is offset by government and force... The aroused power of imagination has the effect that he [the inhabitant] often attempts to do something; but the heat soon passes and reluctance soon assumes its old position.<sup>75</sup>

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Kant is able to hold the above views about the African because, thanks to transatlantic mercantile slave trades, Kant sees and knows that, in fact, African slaves are flogged, 'trained' in his words, as European labour. More generally, and from a philosophical perspective, and perhaps in a more subtle way, Kant's position manifests an inarticulate subscription to a system of thought which assumes that what is different, especially that which is 'black', is bad, evil, inferior, or a moral negation of 'white', light, and goodness. Kant's theoretical anthropological edifice, then, in addition to its various conscious and unconscious ideological functions and utilities, had uncritically assumed that the particularity of European existence is the empirical as well as ideal model of humanity, of universal humanity, so that others are more or less less human or civilized ('educable' or 'educated') as they approximate this European ideal.

In his 'orientalist' inscription of the Asian into his system, Kant writes of 'the Hindus' that they do have motivating forces but they have a strong degree of passivity (*Gelassenheit*) and all look like philosophers. Nevertheless they incline greatly towards anger and love. They thus can be educated to the highest degree but only in the arts and sciences. They can never achieve the level of abstract concepts. A great Hindustani man is one who has gone far in the art of deception and has much money. The Hindus always stay the way they are, they can never advance, although they began their education much earlier.

And just in case anybody missed it, Kant reminds us that 'the Hindus, Persians, Chinese, Turks and actually all oriental peoples belong' to this description.<sup>76</sup>

It is, therefore, rather predictable that the only 'race' Kant recognizes as not only educable but capable of progress in the educational process of the arts and sciences is the 'white' Europeans. In an important single sentence, Kant states: 'The white race possesses all motivating forces and talents in itself; therefore we must examine it somewhat more closely.'<sup>77</sup> Indeed, in his lectures and in the *Anthropology*, Kant's

preoccupation can be summarized as: an exercise in the sympathetic study of European humanity, taken as humanity in itself, and a demonstration of how this 'ideal' or 'true' humanity and its history is naturally and qualitatively (spiritually, morally, rationally, etc.) and quantitatively (bodily, physically, climatically, etc.) superior to all others.

The position on the psychological-moral status of the non-Europeans assumed by Kant in his lectures and in the *Anthropology* is consistent with his more explicitly colour-racial descriptions in other writings. We recall that for Kant the ultimate scientific evidence for racial groups as specie-classes is manifest and obtained primarily externally by the outer sense, from the colour of the skin (thus the suitability of the discipline of physical geography for this branch of study).<sup>78</sup> Physical geography, according to Kant, deals with 'classifying things, with grouping their external attributes, and with describing what they are in their present state'.<sup>79</sup> In the essay 'On the varieties of the different races of man', Kant gives a variation on the classification of races he had done in the *Observations* by making explicit the geographic element of climate, but the dominant variable here is the colour of skin. Kant's hierarchical chart of the superior to the inferior hues of the skin is as follows:

STEM GENUS: white brunette

First race, very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold.

Second race, Copper-Red (America), of dry cold.

Third race, Black (Senegambia), of dry heat.

Fourth race, Olive-Yellow (Indians), of dry heat.<sup>80</sup>

The assumption behind this arrangement and this order is precisely the belief that the ideal skin colour is the 'white' (the white brunette) and the others are superior or inferior as they approximate whiteness. Indeed, all other skin colours are merely degenerative developments from the white original.<sup>81</sup> That Kant seriously believed this can be seen in a story he tells about the process by which the 'white' skin turns 'black'. In the *Physische Geographie*, Kant states that at birth the skin colour of every baby of every race is white, but gradually, over a few weeks, the white baby's body turns black (or, one presumes, red or yellow): 'The Negroes are born white, apart from their genitals and a ring around the navel, which are black. During the first month blackness spreads across the whole body from these parts.'<sup>82</sup>

When Kant waxed more 'scientific', and over a period of more than ten years, he switched from this to other kinds of 'theory' to explain why the non-European skin colours are 'red', 'black', and 'yellow' instead of 'white'. In 1775 he attributed the causes of 'red', 'black', and 'yellow' skin colours to the presence of mineral iron deposits at the subcutaneous level of the body.<sup>83</sup> Then by 1785 he argues that the presence of an inflammable 'substance', phlogiston,<sup>84</sup> in the African's blood makes the skin colour 'black' and, by analogy and extrapolation, is assumed to be responsible for the skin colour of other 'races' as well.<sup>85</sup> To whatever cause Kant attributed the differences in skin colour and therefore of 'race' or 'racial' distinctions, he nevertheless maintained throughout a hierarchical extrapolation of these colour differences.<sup>86</sup> Kant attributes the presumed grades of superiority or inferiority of the race to the presence or absence of 'true talent', an endowment of 'nature' which marks as well as reveals itself as marker of

race in/as skin colour. While maintaining the usual four categories of the species (European, Asians, Africans, and Americans), Kant explains:

In the hot countries the human being matures earlier in all ways but does not reach the perfection of the temperate zones.

Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of Talent. The Negroes are lower and the lowest are a part of the American peoples.<sup>87</sup>

This hierarchical colour/racial arrangement is clearly based upon presumed differing grades of 'talent'. 'Talent' is what which, by 'nature', guarantees for the 'white', in Kant's racial rational and moral order, the highest position above all creatures, followed the 'yellow', the 'black', and then the 'red'. Skin colour for Kant is evidence of superior, inferior, or no 'gift' of 'talent', or the capacity to realize reason and rational-moral perfectibility through education. Skin colour, writes Kant, is the marker of 'race' as specie-class (*Klassenunterschied*),<sup>88</sup> as well as evidence of 'this difference in natural character'.<sup>89</sup> For Kant, then skin colour encodes and codifies the 'natural' human capacity for reason and rational talents.

Kant's position on the importance of skin colour not only as encoding but as proof of this codification of rational superiority or inferiority is evident in a comment he made on the subject of the reasoning capacity of a 'black' person. When he evaluated a statement with the comment: 'this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid'.<sup>90</sup> It cannot, therefore, be argued that skin colour for Kant was merely a physical characteristic. It is, rather, evidence of an unchanging and unchangeable moral quality. 'Race', then, in Kant's view, is based upon an ahistorical principle of reason (Idee) and moral law.

### **'RACE': A TRANSCENDENTAL?**

Kant's classificatory work on race, however, ought to be situated within the context of prior works in the area, such as the descriptions of the 'system of nature' that the natural historians Buffon, Linnaeus, and the French doctor François Bernier had done in the preceding years. Buffon, for example, had classified races geographically, using principally physical characteristics such as skin colour, height, and other bodily features as indices.<sup>91</sup> According to Buffon, there was a common, homogeneous human origin so that the differences in skin and other bodily features were attributable to climatic and environmental factors that caused a single human 'specie' to develop different skin and bodily features. In Buffon's view, the concepts of 'species' and 'genra' applied in racial classifications are merely artificial, for such classes do not exist in nature: 'in reality only individuals exist in nature',<sup>92</sup> Kant accepted the geographical classes—in which case the distinctions would be historical, contingent and ungrounded as logical or metaphysical necessity. According to Kant, the geographical distribution of races is a fact, but the differences among races are factors. Race and racial differences are due to original specior class-specific variations in 'natural endowments' so that there is a natural 'germ' (*Keim*) and 'talent' (*Anlage*) for each (separate) race.<sup>93</sup>

Kant's racial theories, then, follow more closely those of Linnaeus than of Buffon.



Linnaeus had classified races on the basis of a variety of characteristics: physical, cultural, geographical, and ‘temperamental’ (melancholic, sanguine, choleric, and phlegmatic).<sup>94</sup> Kant essentially reproduces this schema in his *Anthropology*.<sup>95</sup> In many favorable references to Linnaeus’s *Systema naturae*, Kant shares with Linnaeus a passion for architectonics in taxonomy: nature is classified into the universe, humans, plants, rocks and minerals, diseases, etc. Yet, Kant regarded Linnaeus’s classificatory ‘system’ as ‘artificial’. Kant criticized the ‘system’ for being a mere synthetic ‘aggregate’ rather than an analytically, logically grounded system of nature. After mentioning Linnaeus by name, Kant critiques the taxonomist’s work:

[O]ne should call the system of nature created up to now more correctly an aggregate of nature, because a system presupposes the idea (*Idee*) of a whole out of which the manifold character of things is being derived. We do not have as yet a system of nature. In the existing so-called system of this type, the objects are merely put beside each other and ordered in sequence one after another... True philosophy, however, has to follow the diversity and the manifoldness of matter *through all time*.<sup>96</sup>

For Kant, in short, Linnaeus’s system was transcendently ungrounded. In Kant’s view, scientific knowledge has to have a transcendental grounding, for it is such a foundation that confers upon scientific knowledge the status of universality, permanence, and fixity. Linnaeus’s system also needs to be provided with such universal, necessary reason, which would give it the required transcendental foundation. Indeed, Cassirer is of the opinion that in his *Critique of judgement*, Kant was supplying precisely that which he found lacking in Linnaeus: logical grounding for natural and racial classification.<sup>97</sup>

Over and beyond Buffon or Linnaeus, Kant, in his transcendental philosophy (e.g. *Critique of pure reason*), describes ways of orienting oneself geographically in space, mathematically in space and time, and, logically, in the construction of both categories into other sorts of consistent whole. In the *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, a work which ought to be considered as primarily anthropological, Kant shows the theoretic transcendental philosophical position at work when he attempts to work out and establish how a particular (moral) feeling relates to humans generally, and how it differs between men and women, and among different races.<sup>98</sup> For example, ‘feeling’ as it appears in the title of the work refers to a specific refinement of character which is universally properly human: that is, belonging to human nature as such. And we recall that for Kant ‘human nature proper’, then whatever dignity or moral worth the individual may have is derived from the fact that one has struggled to develop one’s character, or one’s humanity, as universal. Kant states:

In order to assign man into a system of living nature, and thus to characterize him, no other alternative is left than this: that he has a character which he himself creates by being capable of perfecting himself after the purposes chosen by himself. Through this, he, as an animal endowed with reason (*animale rationabile*) can make out of himself a rational animal (*animale rationale*).<sup>99</sup>

‘Character’, as the moral formation of personality, seems to be that on which basis

humans have worth and dignity, and one consequence of this is that those peoples and 'races' to whom Kant assigns minimal or pseudo rational-moral capacity—either because of their non-'white' skin colour (evidence of lack of 'true talent') or because of the presence of phlogiston in their blood or both—are seriously naturally or inherently inferior to those who have the 'gift' of skin colour, the absence of phlogiston in their blood, and the superior European civilization.<sup>100</sup> While the non-European may have 'value', it is not certain that he or she has true 'worth'. According to Kant:

...everything has either a value or a worth. What has value has a substitute which can replace it as its equivalent; but whatever is, on the other hand, exalted above all values, and thus lacks an equivalent...has no merely relative value, that is, a price, but rather an inner worth, that is dignity... Hence morality, and humanity, in so far as it is capable of morality, can alone possess dignity.<sup>101</sup>

If non-white peoples lack 'true' rational character (Kant believes, for example, that the character of the Mohr is made up of imagination rather than reason)<sup>102</sup> and therefore lack 'true' feeling and moral sense,<sup>103</sup> then they do not have 'true' worth, or dignity. The black person, for example, can accordingly be denied full humanity, since full and 'true' humanity accrues only to the white European. For Kant, European humanity is the humanity *par excellence*.

In reference to Kant's *Critique of judgement*, a commentator has observed that Kant conceptualized reflective judgement as constitutive of and expressing a structure of properly universal human 'feeling' rather than merely postulating a regulative idea for knowledge. This position that reflective or the properly human expression of judgement is constitutive of feeling 'is tantamount to introducing an anthropological postulate, for constitutive of feeling which is universal implies a depth-structure of humanity'.<sup>104</sup> Whether this 'depth-structure' of humanity is understood as already given or as potential, it is obvious that the notion derives from Kant's appropriation and reinterpretation of Rousseau, for whom there is a 'hidden' nature of 'man' which lies beyond the causal laws of (physical) nature, not merely as an abstract proposition of science, but as a pragmatically realizable moral universal character.

Kant's aesthetics both in the *Observations* and in the *Critique of judgement*, therefore, harbour an implicit foundation in philosophical anthropology.<sup>105</sup> The discussions presented in Kant's texts on feeling, taste, genius, art, the agreeable, the beautiful, and so forth, give synthesis to the principles and practices that Kant had defined as immanent to and constitutive of human inner nature as such. A transcendently grounded structure of feeling, for Kant, guarantees the objectivity of the scientific descriptions (distinction, classification, hierarchization, etc.) by conferring upon them the quality of permanence and universality, and it is on this score that Kant believed that his own work overcame the philosophico-logical weakness he detected and criticized in Linnaeus.

Kant's idea of the constitutively anthropological feeling thus derives from his conception of the reality of 'humanity itself', for 'feeling' reveals a specific, universal character of the human essence. Kant stated: 'I hope that I express this completely when I say that [the feeling of the sublime] is the feeling of the beauty and worth of human nature.'<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, in his racial classifications, when he writes in the *Observations*

that the 'African has no feeling beyond the trifling', Kant, consistent with his earlier doctrines, is implying that the African barely has character, is barely capable of moral action, and therefore is less human. Kant derived from Hume 'proof for the assignment of this subhuman status to 'the Negro':

Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality; even among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.<sup>107</sup>

Although Kant cites Hume as the confirming authority for his view of the black, a careful reading shows that Kant, as with Linnaeus' system, considerably elaborated upon Hume by philosophically elevating Hume's literary and political speculations about 'the Negro' and providing these speculations with transcendental justifications. For example, when Hume argues that 'the Negro' was 'naturally' inferior to 'the White', he does not attempt a transcendental grounding of either 'nature' or 'human nature,' while Kant does. 'Human nature', for Kant, constitutes the unchanging patterns of specie-classes so that racial differences and racial classifications are based a priori on the reason (*Vernunft*) of the natural scientist.

## CRITIQUE OF KANT'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND RACIOLOGY

### The doctrine of 'human nature'

Although he did not borrow blindly from Rousseau, Kant's conception of human nature is problematic on many grounds, and the development of some of the problems in Kant can easily be traced to their sources in Rousseau's original conceptions. An example of such a problematic is the distinction between the primitive 'man in a state of nature' and the civilized European 'state of human nature'—a typical Rousseauian distinction—upon which Kant capitalized, in his admittedly peculiar reading of Rousseau, to articulate and ascribe a specifically moral essence to human nature.

Now, in his own writings, Rousseau was never clear, or at least consistent, as to whether his distinctions between *l'homme naturel* and *l'homme de l'homme* are grounded or not in factuality. In one place, Rousseau writes that his notion of the 'natural man' is simply an invention of the imagination that leaps beyond ascertainable facts in order to make possible the construction of an ideal past with which to critique the present 'enlightened' European society. According to this Rousseau (in *On the origin of inequality*, for example), the idea of the primitive, uncivilized 'natural state of man' is imaginary because we cannot observe humans in 'a pure state of nature': there simply is not such a human state, for we have always known humans in society and can observe them only as such. If this is the case, it follows that the primitive condition eludes

empirical investigation and therefore must be imagined, and the interpretation of human nature that flows from the fictional posit of 'the primitive' must, of necessity, be merely hypothetical. In Rousseau's own words:

Let us begin, then, by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigation into which we may enter, in treating this subject [of the idea of primitive 'man' in the state of nature], must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasoning, calculated to explain the nature of things rather than to ascertain their actual origin, just like the hypothesis which our physicists daily form about the formation of the world.<sup>108</sup>

Rousseau, then was aware of the fact (as he expressly declared) that he was supplying an imaginative description and interpretation of a 'state of nature' and a state of 'primitivity' that perhaps never existed. He was simply positing an idea that might help the European man to interpret his current civilization.

But there is another Rousseau, a Rousseau who claims to be a natural historian who has given a scientific and factual historical description of the evolution of humanity. In fact, earlier in the same text quoted above, Rousseau states: 'O man, whatever country thou belongest to, whatever be thy opinion, hearken: *behold thy history, as I have tried to read it*, not in the books of thy fellows who are liars, but *in nature*, which never lies.'<sup>109</sup> Rousseau in this passage implies that he is doing a scientific description of 'nature'—a 'history of nature as natural historians (such as Buffon, Linnaeus, or Bernier) did. Furthermore, at the end of his life, in a general review of his own work, in *Rousseau: Judge of Jean-Jacques*, Rousseau explicitly maintains this position of the natural historian when he describes himself as the first truthful 'historian of human nature'.<sup>110</sup>

Despite Cassirer's argument that Kant 'never attributed' such historical 'value' to Rousseau's doctrine of the origin of the nature of 'man' (Cassirer's argument is based on the claim that Kant 'was too acute a critic not to see the contrast between ethical truths based on reason and historical truths based on facts'), the case is not that clear. While it might be granted to Cassirer that 'Kant framed no hypotheses concerning the original state of mankind', there is no evidence that he did not use one in his anthropology and raciology. Kant, I argue, used both the first and the second Rousseau. In 1786, when he wrote the 'Conjectural beginning of human history', Kant explicitly put a disclaimer in the preface: he was doing a 'mere excursion' of the imagination accompanied by reason.<sup>111</sup> But as in Rousseau, Kant's writings are neither clear nor consistent on this position. While his theoretical considerations concede that his own and Rousseau's account of the origin and development of history and humanity are 'conjectural', Kant's practical uses of the same theories thoroughly ignore and blur such distinctions between the conjectured and the factual. In both Rousseau and Kant, theoretical and the methodological prudence are quickly overrun by the pragmatics and the exigencies of either social criticism or anthropological and geographical knowledge production. For example, despite the theoretical disclaimer in the 'Conjectural beginning,' Kant in his geography and anthropology (see *Physische Geographie*) uses the conjectured, hypothetical speculations ('mere excursions' of reason) as resources for establishing the

supposed evidentiality of 'race' as transcendental, ahistorical idea of specie-class. Thus, 'race' as an a priori idea is founded on nature, where 'nature' is defined as 'the existence of things under law'.<sup>112</sup>

Kant contradicts himself because, on the one hand, he insists (theoretically speaking) that his conjectural narrative about the beginnings and development of 'human history' is what it claims to be: conjectural. But, on the other hand, in his raciology Kant hierarchically posits first the American Indian, then 'the Negro' and the Asian as 'primitive' and inferior stages of humanity, for humanity proper is embodied only in the history of European life-formation (or, more accurately, in the existence of the white European male). How could Kant assume that this classification of humans according to race and racial distinctions (skin colour assumed as external proof and evidence) is based on an idea 'inevitably inherited by Nature'—that is, a priori, transcendently grounded and immutable? If 'race', according to Kant, is a principle of nature, a natural law, then, the so-called subhuman, primitive, and characterological inferiority of the American Indian, the African, or the Asian is a biologically and metaphysically inherited (arche) type.<sup>113</sup>

Christian Neugebauer seems to have in mind the impossibility of consistently justifying Kant's elevation of the concept of 'race' to a transcendental, even from within the infrastructures of Kant's *Critiques*, when he argues that Kant's raciology is at best 'ambiguous' on the question of whether or not Kant's idea of race is transcendently hypostatic. According to Neugebauer:

It is a priori impossible that the term race is an idea much less a principle or law. If it is an idea then Kant has produced the fallacy of hypostatizing an idea. In conclusion, race cannot be a well-established term in reason without ambiguity in regard to Kant's [theoretical] edifice.<sup>114</sup>

Just as Rousseau recognized the hypothetical nature of his 'man in a natural state', but proceeded to build historical and social-political sciences upon them, Kant, building upon this tradition of contradiction or confusion, undermines his enunciated principles through an overtly prejudicial and tendentious interpretation of non-European 'races', peoples, and cultures. Neugebauer clearly points out that, because of such inconsistencies and contradictions, 'the Kantian can no longer hold firm to Kant's statements on the Negro [or other "races"] and further cannot expect further support from the master' on the issue.<sup>115</sup>

### Essentialism

The issue raised above by Neugebauer as to whether or not Kant 'hypostatized' the idea of race should lead us to ask two related but more controversial questions: namely, (1) is Kant's theory of 'human nature' essentialist? And (2) is Kant's conception of 'race' essentialist? The answers to these two different questions need not be the same. Regarding the first, if we mean by 'essentialism' the postulation of a substance or a thing as the inherent, permanent, inalienable reality that makes an object what it is, then Kant may not be an essentialist. But insofar as one can speak of ideals and ideas, particularly

transcendental ideas, as essentialized, then Kant is an essentialist. Kant is not an essentialist in the first sense because, although he characterizes human nature as permanent, fixed, and unchanging or enduring, the interpretation of 'human nature' derived by Kant from Rousseau (unlike other interpretations, perhaps) does not advocate any substantive or substantified condition in which humans existed, from which they have fallen, or to which they are supposed to return or recover. Rather (the essence of) 'human nature' for Kant is a teleology, a goal, a destiny—or that which humans ought to become.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, Kant may be an 'essentialist', but what he essentializes is not a specific what of 'man', but—albeit, a specific—what for. Although Kant believed that Rousseau had discovered 'the "real man" beneath all the distortions and concealment, beneath all the masks that man has created for himself and worn in the course of his history', this 'real man', the 'true' nature of 'man', for Kant does not consist in what one is but in what one ought to become. What is essential here in the end of 'man'.<sup>117</sup> Humans do not have an already given, or ready-made, static essence; they have an ethical one: transcendental, universal, transcultural, and ahistorical. Kant, if anything, is a normative essentialist. He appropriated from Rousseau the idea that *l'homme naturel* has an essence, but interpreted this 'essence' in a teleological and ethical sense.

But, if Kant's doctrine of 'human nature' is only normatively or prescriptively (rather than descriptively) essentialist, what about his racial theories? What for Kant is the 'essence' of race? When Kant argues on the subject of race that the seed of 'talent', or higher rational achievement, is what distinguishes the 'white' from the 'black' race,<sup>118</sup> what does he mean by 'talent'? Is it something acquired, subject to historical contingency and transformation, or is it a substance fixed, permanent, and inherently present or absent in the races? Kant's long citation from Hume's 'Essay on national character' in the *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime* is supposed to 'prove' that the Negro lacks 'talent'—'taken' here understood as an 'essential', natural ingredient for aptitude in higher rational and moral achievement. According to Kant: 'among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior [natural] gifts [of 'talent'] earn respect in the world', while no Negro has 'presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality'.<sup>119</sup> Kant is hereby suggesting that there is an essential and natural 'gift' that those who are 'white' inherently have and those who are 'black' inherently lack—and the evidence for this 'natural endowment' or the lack thereof is the skin colour, 'white' or 'black'.<sup>120</sup> This natural 'gift', a racial essence the presence and absence of which distinguishes the white from the black, according to Kant is 'fundamental' and 'appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour'.<sup>121</sup> Since skin colour seems to be the empirically determining factor of the presence or absence of the natural 'gift' of talent, and talent constitutes the racial essence, it is fair to conclude that the essentialism of Kant's raciology is biologically rooted. Thus, Kant's idea of 'race' is not only transcendentially hypostatized but also biologically essentialized. Because 'race' is an idea as well as a substan(ce)tified natural (colour) reality, Kant is able to claim that the mixing of races is a contravention of the laws of nature. According to Kant: 'Instead of assimilation, which was intended by the melting together of the various races, Nature has here made a law of just the opposite.'<sup>122</sup> If we recall that for Kant 'Nature' is ahistorically conceived as a quasi-Platonic archetype and,

like the Platonic Ideas, it constitutes unchanging patterns of specie-classes, then Kant's essentialism becomes patent.<sup>123</sup> Racial differences and racial classifications, Kant claimed, are based a priori on the reason (*Vernunft*) of the natural scientist so that what the natural scientist does (a biologist, for example) is simply categorize species into their 'Natural' (read: a priori, prefixed, rational) classes (such as race).<sup>124</sup>

### Critique of sources

One must ask: what were Kant's sources of information on non-European peoples and cultures? As a philosopher notorious for his provincialism, how did Kant manage to accumulate so much 'knowledge' of Africa, Asia, and the Americas? One obvious source is books—and there were in Kant's time numerous published accounts of 'other lands' in travel literatures, both serious and light, as well as fictions and novels that exploited emerging interests in the exotic stories of explorers, missionaries, and fortune seekers.<sup>125</sup> As Van de Pitte reminds us, Kant was a voracious reader who was just as comfortable with the scientific speculations of his time as with 'the light novels'.<sup>126</sup> From Kant's own writings, we have evidence at least that he read travel novels, such as *Captain James Cook's voyages* (1773), and Kant's readings of such material found their way, and of course as confirming 'evidence' and 'proofs', into his lectures in anthropology and geography.

For example, in one of his lectures, Kant found in Cook's travel writings on Tahiti evidence to prove the veracity of a 'Russian' wisdom that (1) wives enjoy being beaten by their husbands because it proves to the women that their husbands are jealous, and (2) jealousy is proof of marital fidelity on the part of the husband. Conversely, if the man does not show sufficient jealousy and sufficient attention, the woman, so Kant's story goes, becomes a public property for all men who inevitably want to 'gnaw' at the now free 'bone'.

The old Russian story that wives suspect their husbands of keeping company with other women unless they are beaten now and then is usually considered to be a fable. However, in Cook's travel book one finds that when an English sailor on Tahiti saw an Indian chastising his wife, the sailor, wanting to be gallant, began to threaten the husband. The woman immediately turned against the Englishman and asked him how it concerned him that her husband had to do this! Accordingly, one will also find that when the married woman practises obvious gallantry and her husband pays no attention to it, but rather compensates himself with drinking parties, card games, or with gallantry of his own, then, not merely contempt but also hate overcomes the feminine partner, because the wife recognizes by this that he does not value her any longer, and that he leaves her indifferently to others, who also want to gnaw at the same bone.<sup>127</sup>

It seems to be that overall, insouciant of the exaggerations and the sensationalisms of European mercantilist, civilizationist, and missionary-evangelist heroics fiction that pervade much of eighteenth-century accounts of European encounters with the rest of the world, Kant believed that travel stories provided accurate or factual information for academic science.<sup>128</sup> While acknowledging that 'travel' by the scholar him/herself (or what one might call 'fieldwork' today) is an ideal way to gather knowledge of other cultures, Kant argued that reading travel books (regardless of their Eurocentric audience-

appeal and their intended purpose: namely, propagandistic justification of foreign expansionism and exploitation) can legitimately substitute for fieldwork. It did not seem to matter for Kant's anthropology or physical geography courses whether the research-scholar simply read in a travel novel, or actually saw in situ, that it is customary to desert children in China, to bury them alive in Brazil, for the Eskimos to strangle them, or that 'the Peruvians are simple people since they put everything that I handed to them into their mouths'.<sup>129</sup> Kant writes: 'Travel is among the means of enlarging the scope of anthropology *even if such knowledge is only acquired by reading books of travel*.'<sup>130</sup> It is common knowledge that one of the reasons why Kant never left Königsberg throughout his professional life was because he wanted to stay in the seaport town to meet and gather information from seafarers. For even before the publication of any of the *Critiques*, Kant was already nationally known in Germany and he turned down attractive job offers from several universities, such as Halle and Berlin. Königsberg, as a bustling international seaport, was ideal for acquiring all sorts of information about the world and other cultures from travellers: merchants, explorers, sailors, etc. May writes that during Kant's time Königsberg 'was well-situated for overseas trade, and for intercourse with different countries and with peoples of diverse languages and customs'.<sup>131</sup> In the *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, in what appears to be an attempt to justify why he is qualified to teach cultural anthropology, Kant states:

A large city like Königsberg on the river Pregel, the capital of a state, where the representative National assembly of the government resides, a city with a university (for the cultivation of science), a city also favoured by its location for maritime commerce, and which, by way of rivers, has the advantages of commerce both with the interior of the country as well as with neighbouring countries of different languages and customs, can well be taken as an appropriate place for enlarging one's knowledge of peoples as well as of the world at large, where such knowledge can be acquired *even without travel*.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, with travel books and a city like Königsberg (through both of which Kant could look at the rest of the world from a pristinely neutral Eurocentric perspective) at his disposal, Kant must have felt that he had all the preparation he needed for academic understanding of and teaching about all the peoples and cultures of the world.

This highly unorthodox nature of Kant's sources for anthropological theories was common knowledge both within and outside of the university. In his lecture announcements, Kant frequently acknowledged that he would be lecturing from his private notes.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, he was granted state permission to do this. In a letter from the Ministry of Education, and on the strength of the argument that the 'worst' source was 'better than none', Von Zeditz, the Minister of education, wrote:

The worst compendium is certainly better than none, and the professors may, if they are wise enough, improve upon the author as much as they can, but lecturing on dictated passages must be absolutely stopped. From this, Professor Kant and his lectures on physical geography are to be excepted, as it is well known that there is yet no suitable textbook in this subject.<sup>134</sup>



With this kind of backing, Kant had every institutional cover and caché that allowed him to transform, in lively and entertaining lectures meant to delight both the students and the public,<sup>135</sup> hearsay, fables, and travel lore into instant academic science. Kant's reliance on explorers, missionaries, seekers after wealth and fame, colonizers, etc., and their travelogues provided, or served to validate, Kant's worst characterizations of non-European 'races' and cultures.

On one reading, then, we might be tempted to believe that Kant's 'theory of race' as contained in his anthropological and cultural-geographical writings was simply a provincialist's recycling of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, fuelled during Kant's time by the travel narratives of eighteenth-century Europeans who had economic and imperial political and cultural ambitions in other lands. Under this reading, Kant would be merely carrying forward the tradition of racism and ethnocentrism familiar to us from the literary and political writings of a Montesquieu, Locke, or Hume. While this interpretation may not be totally without merit, I want to argue, however, that it would be consequence to the study of 'race' or to the problem of European ethnocentrism in general. Strictly speaking, Kant's anthropology and geography offer the strongest, if not the only, sufficiently articulated theoretical philosophical justification of the superior/inferior classification of 'races of men' of any European writer up to his time. This is evident, for example, in the title of his essay 'Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace', which Kant explicitly states he was moved to write in order to clear the conceptual confusions that had developed in the field since the increase in the number of explorations and empirical observations on the different parts of the world.<sup>136</sup> Walter Scheidt is correct, I believe, when he notes that Kant produced 'the first *theory* of race which really merits that name'.<sup>137</sup>

The highly theoretical and transcendental nature of Kant's treatment of the idea of 'race' makes it impossible to understand those (such as Willibald Klinker)<sup>138</sup> who would argue that Kant's writings on race should not be taken philosophically seriously because Kant's interest in anthropology and cultural geography was supposedly mere 'pastime' or 'mental relaxation' exercise. This estimation of Kant the geographer and anthropologist is untenable because it is impossible to prove that Kant's physical geography and anthropology are marginal to the overall humanistic project of his critical philosophy. The geography and the anthropology writings may have been marginalized by the critical reception of Kant in our time, but they were neither marginal to Kant's teaching and professional philosophical career nor inconsequential in our day to any attempt at a coherent understanding of Kant as a cultural thinker. The attempt to trivialize Kant's contributions in anthropology and geography may stem either from the fact that the content of his speculations in the area—which were questionable in the first place—might have been superseded by subsequent and current disciplinary, methodological, and other advances in the fields. It may also be explained as a result of the embarrassing difficulty of ignoring the inconsistencies and the contradictions presented by the (supposedly) 'non-critical' anthropology and cultural geography writings to the unity of Kant's better-known transcendental theoretical projects. On closer examination, however, Kant's racial theories, which he reached through a concern with geography, belong in an intimate way to Kant's transcendental philosophy, or at least cannot be understood without the acknowledgment of the transcendental grounding that Kant explicitly

provides them.<sup>139</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It should be obvious that what is at stake in our critique of Kant is, as Lucius Outlaw pointedly states, the ‘struggle over the meaning of man’,<sup>140</sup> or the project of defining what it means to be(come) human. In 1765 Kant wrote:

If there is any science man really needs, it is the one I teach, of how to fulfill properly that position in creation which is assigned to man, and from which he is able to learn *what one must be in order to be a man*.<sup>141</sup>

It is clear that what Kant settled upon as the ‘essence’ of humanity, that which one ought to become in order to deserve human dignity, sounds very much like Kant himself: ‘white’, European, and male.<sup>142</sup> More broadly speaking, Kant’s philosophical anthropology reveals itself as the guardian of Europe’s self-image of itself as superior and the rest of the world as barbaric. Behind Kant’s anthropology is what Tsenay Serequeberhan characterizes as ‘the singular and grounding metaphysical belief the European humanity is properly speaking isomorphic with the humanity of the human as such’.<sup>143</sup> This universalist conjunction of metaphysics and anthropology is made possible by a philosophy which understands itself as the lieu of logos so that philosophical anthropology becomes the logocentric articulation of an ahistorical, universal, and unchanging essence of ‘man’. The so-called primitives surely ought to be wary of such Kantian ‘universalist-humanoid abstraction’,<sup>144</sup> which colonizes humanity by grounding the particularity of the European self as centre even as it denies the humanity of others. And lest it be forgotten, nothing that I have said here is particularly new. Friedrich Gentz, who studied with Kant at Königsberg between 1783 and 1786, pointed out that, if the goal of Kant’s anthropological theories were realized, it would ‘compact the whole species into one and the same form’, a dangerous situation which would destroy diversity and the ‘free movement of the spirit’—for anyone who disagreed with Kant’s compact would be ‘treated as a rebel against fundamental principles of human nature’.<sup>145</sup>

\* The editor and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint this chapter from *Blacknell Review*, 38(2).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Earl W.Count, *This is race: An anthology selected from the international literature on the races of man*. Schuman, New York, 1950:704.
- 2 See Paul Gedan, Notes to Kant’s *Physische Geographie*, in *Immanuel Kant, Gesammelte Schriften*, 24 vols (Reimer, Berlin, 1900–1966). Hereafter cited as GS. Citations from *Physische Geographie* are based primarily on the English translations contained in J.A.May, *Kant’s concept of geography and its relation to recent geographical thought* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1970); some citations are from other sources (see n 8, below). Some of the translations are either my own or my adaptation of other translations.

- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, tr. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL, 1978), p. 6n. Hereafter cited as *Anthropology*.
- 4 Ernst Cassirer, Rousseau, Kant and Goethe, tr. James Gutmann et al. (Harper, New York, 1963), p. 25. Hereafter cited as RKG.
- 5 May, *Kant's concept of geography*, 4. Hereafter cited as KCG.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 See n. 3, above.
- 8 Of which only the introduction is available in English; see the appendix in May, KCG. Because a complete compilation of Kant's texts of the *Physische Geographie* is not available in English, I have relied on several sources for my references to the texts. In addition to May (see n. 2, above) these sources are Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften* (see n. 2, above); Kant's *Philosophische Anthropologie: Nach handschriftlichen Vorlesungen*, ed. Friedrich Christian Starke (Leipzig, 1831); Christian Neugebauer's quotations from Kant's *Physische Geographie*, which are cited from the *Kant—Ausgabe der Philosophischen Bibliothek* edition, ed. K.Vorlander (Leipzig, 1920). Neugebauer's selections are contained in his essay 'The racism of Kant and Hegel,' in H.Odera Oruka (ed.), *Sage philosophy: Indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy* (Brill, New York, 1990:259–272). In the following notes, the source and, when applicable, the translator of each citation from the *Physische Geographie* is indicated.
- 9 In Immanuel Kant, *Kant on history*, tr. Emil L. Fackenheim, ed. Lewis White Beck (Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1963), pp. 63ff.
- 10 Kant's *Philosophische Anthropologie*, ed. Starke.
- 11 Translated by Count in *This is race*, 16–24.
- 12 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, tr. John T.Goldthwait (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1960). Hereafter cited as *Observations*.
- 13 See his reading of Kant in *Formalism in ethics and non-formal ethics of value*, tr. S.Frings Manfred and Roger L.Funk (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1973).
- 14 See his study of Kant in *Kant and the problem of metaphysics*, tr. Richard Taft (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1990).
- 15 Cassirer, R.K.G.; see also Cassirer, *Kant's life and thought*, tr. James Haden (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1981).
- 16 Foucault translated the *Anthropologie* into French, and in the translator's notice announced that he would write a full-length book on the subject of Kant's anthropology. There is, however, no evidence that he accomplished this project.
- 17 Frederick P.van de Pitte, *Kant as philosophical anthropologist* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1991). Hereafter cited as KPA. See also Van de Pitte's preface to the 1978 Southern Illinois University Press edition of the *Anthropology*.
- 18 Ronald Judy, 'Kant and the Negro', *Society for the Study of African Philosophy (SAPINA) Newsletter* 3 (January–July 1991).
- 19 Neugebauer, 'The racism of Kant'.
- 20 For example, Kant's work *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* is today

- routinely classified and catalogued in libraries under the subject heading 'psychology'.
- 21 Immanuel Kant, 'Entwurf und Ankündigung. Eines Collegii der physischen Geographie' (1757), GS, vol. 3; the section on man is on pp. 311–320.
- 22 Immanuel Kant, 'Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Mensch', GS, vol. 2, p. 443n.
- 23 In the *Anthropology* Kant writes that knowledge of the races of man, which he regards as 'products of the play of Nature', is not yet pragmatic (anthropologic), but only theoretical (geographic) knowledge of the world' (p. 4).
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 3. Kant's 'anthropology,' then, emerges as having two aspects: the descriptive, empirical geographical and cultural) and the moral, pragmatic (philosophical). While one aspect examines the human in its—in Kant's vocabularies—phenomenal, accidental, or historical aspect, the other looks at the human from the point of view of that which is properly, or essentially, human or moral. The latter (moral-philosophical) aspect of anthropology is therefore co-constitutive of Kant's more general quest to establish that which is permanently or enduringly human, and it is here that Kant's idea of anthropology is woven into his critical philosophy.
- 25 *Ibid.*: 9.
- 26 *Ibid.*: 3.
- 27 *Ibid.*: 5.
- 28 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on ethics* (1765–1766), tr. Louis Infield, ed. Paul Menzer (Methuen, London, 1930:2).
- 29 See 'Kant' in Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A history of philosophy*, 4th edn. (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1988).
- 30 GS, vol. 2, 286.
- 31 Indeed, it can be argued from Kant's writings that anthropology is the key to any attempt at understanding the unity of his philosophy. In the lectures on logic, where he gives an integrated view of philosophy, Kant placed anthropology as the capstone of all the other branches of the discipline. While the question 'What can I know?' belongs to metaphysics, 'What ought I to do?' to moral philosophy, and 'What may I hope?' to religion, the key question, 'What is man?' belongs to anthropology. Kant explicitly comments that the first three divisions 'might be reckoned under anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last'. See Kant's *Introduction to logic*, tr. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Longmans, Green, London, 1885:15). For a detailed study of anthropology as the key to a unitive view of Kant's critical philosophy, see Van de Pitte, KPA, as well as his preface to the *Anthropology* (1978 edition).
- 32 Notes written into Kant's own copy of the *Observations* (1764): 'Where shall I find fixed points of nature which man can never shift and which can give him indications as to the shore on which he must bring himself to rest?' (GS, vol. 20:46).
- 33 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of practical reason*, tr. Lewis White Beck (Macmillan, New York, 1993:153–154).
- 34 GS, vol.2:311.
- 35 *Ibid.*: 312.
- 36 *Ibid.*, vol. 20:58.
- 37 Kant biographers, such as Cassirer, record that in Kant's Spartan study, there was

only one ornament on the wall: the portrait of J.-J. Rousseau. It is also reported how Kant, the model of punctuality in his daily promenade, but engrossed in the study of Rousseau's *Émile* when it first appeared, forgot his daily walk (see Cassirer, RKG, 1–2). Kant himself also poignantly testifies to the influence of Rousseau in setting the direction for his philosophical anthropology. For example, in the *Fragments* edited by Hartenstein, Kant writes: 'I am myself by inclination a seeker after truth. I feel a consuming thirst for knowledge and a restless passion to advance in it, as well as satisfaction in every forward step. There was a time when I thought that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind... Rousseau set me right... I learned to respect human nature' (GS, vol. 7:624; my emphasis).

38 J.-J. Rousseau, *Essay on the origin of language*, tr. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1986).

39 Ibid.: 5. When Rousseau further reflects on the problem of the exact relationship between language and society, speech and community, he writes: 'For myself, I am so aghast at the increasing difficulties which present themselves, and so well convinced of the almost demonstrable impossibility that languages should owe their original institution to merely human means, that I leave, to any one who will undertake it, the discussion of the difficult problem, which was most necessary, the existence of society to the invention of language, or the invention of language to the establishment of society' (151).

40 Rousseau criticizes writers such as Condillac who erroneously believed that they understood the cause and the genesis of such revolutionary phenomena; they are wrong because they merely project into this unknown primordial past 'ideas taken from society'.

41 Robert Derathé, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1976:231).

42 For a detailed analysis and critique of the discrepancies and similarities of Rousseau's views on the question of the different stages in the evolution of language and society in the *Origin of language* on the one hand and in the *Origin of inequality* on the other, see Derrida, *Of grammatology*, esp. pt 2.

43 Our interpretation may be a little too tidy if we locate the 'age of huts', the primitive time, as the middle point from 'state of pure nature' to 'society'. In the *Origin of language*, the 'age of huts' was located by Rousseau much closer to the unknown and unknowable 'pure state of nature'. There he wrote: 'I consider primitive the period of time from the dispersion of men to any period of the human race that might be taken as determining an epoch' (31, n. 1). Hence, the 'age of huts' is specifically defined out of history, and the 'primitives' out of historicity, as they would lack historical consciousness. It is necessary to keep this in mind when we study Kant's appropriation of Rousseau in his definition of what constitutes 'human nature' and in his hierarchical gradation of 'races' and cultures as 'primitive' or 'advanced' under the influence of Rousseau's definitions.

44 Frederick Copleston, *A history of philosophy*, vol. 6, Wolf to Kant (Newman, Westminster, MD, 1964:69).

45 J.-J. Rousseau, *The confessions*, tr. W. Conyngham Mallory (Brentano, New York, 1928), ch. 8.

46 Since there is no ‘natural’ right to legislate for society—for society is ‘artificial’ or conventional, while individuals are ‘born free’—the only legitimate way to secure at the same time collective existence and freedom is through self-legislation. The *Social contract* proposes a creation of a collective or ‘general will’, a ‘corporate capacity’ called the state, an embodiment of the collective, moral will. The individual ‘puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will’, and, within the corporate capacity, where he is received as an indivisible part of the whole, one would share in the power of the state both as citizen and as subject, making as well as obeying laws in which one, as part of the ‘Voice of the people’, has legislated. See the discussion of Rousseau’s *Social contract* in Coppleston, *History of philosophy*, pp. 81ff. The influence of Rousseau’s *Social contract* in Kant can be seen in Kant’s ethical concepts such as the relationship between the universal ‘good will’ and the ‘categorical imperative’. See, for example, Van de Pitte, KPA, 55. Cassirer also argues ‘that Rousseau not only influenced the content and systematic development of Kant’s foundation of ethics, but that he also formed its language and style’ (RKG, 32).

47 *Anthropology*, 243.

48 *Ibid.*: 243–244.

49 *Ibid.*: 244.

50 In the *Anthropology* Kant stated: ‘What is characteristic of the human species in comparison with the idea of other possible rational beings on earth is this: Nature implanted in them the seed of discord [evil] and willed that from it their own reason would bring concord [good]’ (238).

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 See, for example, Peter Gay’s preface to Cassirer’s RKG, as well as the various interpretations of Rousseau in certain essays contained in this volume.

54 Cassirer, RKG, 13.

55 *Anthropology*, 241–242.

56 *Ibid.*: 241.

57 *Ibid.*

58 GS, vol. 20:14. In fact, it is in society/culture/civilization that the human comes to its proper or essential own by revealing itself as an ethical and moral content (Wesen). See Cassirer, RKG, vol. 22, or Van de Pitte, KPA, 50–51.

59 *Anthropology*, 3. It is important to keep in mind this definition of ‘character’ and the specifically human, as it is necessary not only for a full appreciation of Kant’s theory of human nature, but also for his ranking-ordering of Asians, Africans, and American Indians as ‘inferior’ rational/moral human beings in comparison with white Europeans.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Again, according to Kant, ‘What is characteristic of the human species in comparison with the idea of other possible rational beings on earth is this: Nature implanted in them the seed of discord and willed that from it their own reason would bring concord’ (*Anthropology*, 238).

62 *Ibid.*: 240–241; my emphasis.

63 Ibid.: 238.

64 Van de Pitte, KPA, 51.

65 See Immanuel Kant, 'Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse' (1785), in Fritz Schultze, *Kant und Darwin: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Entwicklungslehre* (Dufft, Jena, 1875).

66 *Anthropology*, 241.

67 See *Lectures on ethics of the years 1765–1766*.

68 *Anthropology*, 9.

69 See Kant's *Philosophische Anthropologie*, ed. Starke, 352; my translation.

70 Kant writes: 'When a people does not perfect itself in any way over the space of centuries, so it is to be assumed that there exists a certain natural pre-disposition (Anlage) that the people cannot transcend.' 'Wennsich ein Volk auf keine Weise in Jahrhunderten vervollkommet, so ist anzunehmen, daß es schon in ihm eine gewisse Naturanlage gibt, welche zu ubersteigen es nicht fahig ist' (ibid.; my translation).

71 'Das Volk der Amerikaner nimmt keine bildung an. Es hat keine Triebfedern, denn es fehlen ihm Affekt und Leidenschaft. Sie sind nicht verliebt, daher sind auch nicht furchtbar. Sie sprechen fast nichts, lieblosen einander nicht, sorgen auch fur nichts, und sind faul' (ibid.: 353, my translation).

72 'Die Rasse der Neger, könnte man sagen, ist ganz das Gegenteil von den Amerikanern; sie sind voll Affekt und Leidenschaft, sehr lebhaft, schwatzhaft und eitel. Sie nehmen Bildung an, aber nur eine Bildung der Knechte, d.h. sie lassen sich abrichten. Sie haben viele Triebfedern, sind auch empfindlich, fürchten sich vor Schlägen und thun auch viel aus Ehre' (ibid.; my translation).

73 Neugebauer, 'The racism of Kant', 264.

74 'Die Mohren...haben eine dicke Haut, wie man sie denn auch nicht mit Ruthen, sondern gespaltenen Röhren peitscht, wenn man sie zühtigt, damit das Blut einen Ausgang finde, und nicht unter der Haut eitere' (ibid.; my translation). Given that whips do indeed break the skin, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Kant's promotion of the split cane is to ensure a larger, more gaping wound. If the passage just quoted by Neugebauer (n. 73) was drawn from the same source as mine, rather than from a combination of references, his interpretation would be understandable from this perspective.

75 Quoted in ibid.: 264, my translation.

76 'Die Hindus haben zwar Triebfedern, aber sie haben einen starken Grad von Gelassenheit, und sehen alle wie Philosophen aus. Demohngeachtet sind doch zum Zorne und zur Liebe sehr geneigt. Sie nehmen daher Bildung im höchsten Grade an, aber nur zu Künsten und nicht zu Wissenschaften. Sie bringen as niemals bis zu abstrakten Begriffen. Ein hindostanischer großer Mann ist der, der es recht weit in der Betrugerei gebracht und viel Geld hat. Die Hindus bleiben immer wie sind, weiter bringen sie es niemals... Dahin gehören die Hindus, die Perser, die Chinesen, die Türken, überhaupt alle orientalischen Völker' (Kants philosophische Anthropologie, ed. Starke, 352 and 353; my translation).

77 'Die Rasse der Weißen enthält alle Triebfedern und Talente in sich; daher werden wir sie etwas genauer betrachten müssen' (ibid.: 353; my translation).

78 One of Kant's earliest essays on race, 'On the varieties of the different races of

man', was written in 1775 as an announcement for his lecture on physical geography.

79 Kuno Fischer, *A critique of Kant*, tr. W.S.Hough (Swan, Sonnenschein, Lowrey, London, 1888:67–68); quoted in May, KCG, 6.

80 Kant, 'On the different races of man,' 23.

81 Kant may have got this idea from the work of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), the German naturalist to whose work on racial classifications Kant refers on page 211 of the *Anthropology*. According to Blumenbach, who placed skin colour as the highest racial category (see his treatise *On the natural variety of mankind* (1775) (Longman, Green, London, 1865), there are five races, but only three of them are basic. The 'Caucasian' is the 'most beautiful...to which the pre-eminence belongs'; The 'Mongolian' and the 'Ethiopian' races are 'the extreme degenerations of the human [read: white] species'. The remaining two races, the 'American' and the 'Malay', are simply transitory stages of degeneration from the white to respectively, the Malay and the Ethiopian (x–xi).

82 'Die Neger werden weißgeboren, außer ihren Zeugungsgliedern und einen Ring um den Nabel, die Schwartze sind. Von diesen Teilen aus zücht sich die Schwärze im ersten Monat über den ganzen Körper.' Quoted in Neugebauer, 'The racism of Kant,' 265; my translation. Neugebauer, following V.Y.Mudimbe, accurately points out that a century and a half earlier, a missionary named F.Romano wrote the same opinion as the one held by Kant on the origin of the 'black' skin: 'I naturali del Congo sono tutti di color nègre chi pui, e chi meno;... Quando nascendo, non sonso negri ma bianchi, e poi a poco a poco si vanno facendo negri.'

83 'For good reason,' writes Kant, 'one now ascribes the different colour of the plants to the differing amounts of iron precipitated by various fluids. As all animal blood contains iron, nothing prevents us from ascribing to the different colors of the human races the same cause. In this way the base acid, or phosphoric acid...reacts strongly with the iron particles and turns red or black or yellow.' 'Man schreibt jetzt mit gutem Grunde die verschiedene Farben der Gewächse dem durch unterschiedliche Saft gefüllten Eisen zu. Da alles Thierblut Eisen enthält, so hindert uns nichts, die verschiedene Farbe dieser Menschenrassen ebenderselben Ursache beizumessen. Auf diese Art würde etwa das Satzäure, oder das phosphorische Säure, oder...die Eisentheilchen im Reichtum roth oder Schwarz oder gelb wiederschlagen.' See Kant's 'Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen,' in Schultze, Kant und Darwin, 58–79; my translation.

84 *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1963) defines 'phlogiston' as 'the hypothetical principle of fire regarded formerly a material substance'.

85 'Now the purpose [of race] is nowhere more noticeable in the characteristics of race than in the Negro; merely the example that can be taken from it alone, justifies us also in the supposition of seeing an analogy in this race to the others. Namely, it is now known that human blood becomes black, merely by dint of the fact that it is loaded with phlogiston...Now the strong stench of the Negro, which cannot be removed through any amount of washing, gives us reason to suppose that their skin removes a great deal of phlogiston from the blood and that nature must have organized this skin in such a way that the blood can be dephlogistonized to a much greater degree than is the case with us.' 'Nun ist dieses Zweckmäßige zwar an der



Eigenthümlichkeit keiner Rasse so deutlich zu beweisen möglich, als an der Negerrasse; allein das Beispiel, das von dieser allein hergenommen worden, berechtigt uns auch, nach der Analogie eben dergleichen von den übrigen wenigstens zu vermuthen. Man weiß nämlich jetzt daß das Menschenblut, bloß dadurch, daß es mit Phlogiston überladen wird, Schwarz werde... Nun giebt schon der starke und durch keine Reinlichkeit zu vermeidende Geruch der Neger Anlaß, zu vermuthen, daß ihre Haut sehr viel Phlogiston aus dem Blute wegschaffe, und daß die Natur diese Haut so organisiert haben müsse, daß das Blut sich bei ihnen in weit größerem Maße durch sie dephlogistiren könne, als es bei uns geschieht' (Kant, 'Von den Rassen der Menschen,' in Schultze, *Kant und Darwin*, 150; my translation). In the *Anthropology*, Kant speaks of 'innate, natural character which, so to speak, lies in the composition of the person's blood' (235).

86 Anyone interested in exposing or refuting, perhaps with recent developments in science as background, the bogus nature of Kant's ideas about 'race' and 'racial' differences should see some excellent work of Kwame Anthony Appiah: for example, his recent *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992), esp. chs 1 and 2: 'The invention of Africa' and 'The illusions of race'. I am here more directly concerned with Kant's hierarchical interpretation of skin colours, or 'race', and his philosophical justification of the interpretation.

87 'In den heissen Ländern reift der Mensch in allen Stücken früher, erreicht aber nicht die Vollkommenheit temperierter Aonen. Die Menschheit ist in ihrer größten Vollkommenheit in der Rasse der Weißen. Die gelben Inder haben schon geringeres Talent. Die Neger sind tiefer, und am tiefsten steht ein Teil amerikanischen Völkerschaften' (Kant, *Physische Geographie*, quoted in Neugebauer, 'The racism of Kant', 264; my translation).

88 Kant states: 'that which the sun implants in the skin of the Negro in Africa, and thus that which is only accidental to him, must fall away in France and only the blackness will remain which is his by birth, and which he reproduces, and which alone can thus be used as a difference in class'. 'Denn das, was in Afrika der Haut des Negers die Sonne eindrückte, und was also ihm nur zufällig ist, muß in Frankreich wegfallen, und allein die Schwärze übrigbleiben, die ihm durch seine Geburt zu Teil ward, die er weiter fortpflanzt, und die daher allein zu einem Klassenunterschied gebraucht werden kann' ('Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse', in Schultze, *Kant und Darwin*, 136; my translation and emphasis).

89 In the same essay, Kant argues that skin colour is also 'die Spur dieser Verschiedenheit des Naturcharakters' (ibid.:138).

90 Quoted in Richard Popkin, 'Hume's racism', *The Philosophical Forum*, 9(2-3) (Winter-Spring 1977-1978:218). See *Observations*, 113.

91 *Histoire naturelle* (1749-). See excerpts in Count, *This is race*, 3ff.

92 Ibid.

93 Kant, 'Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse,' GS, 8:98.

94 *Systema naturae* (1735). See the discussion of this work by Walter Scheidt in his essay 'The concept of race in anthropology,' in Count, *This is race*, 354ff.

95 See *Anthropology*, 196-202.

- 96 Quoted in May, KCG, 260–261; my emphasis.
- 97 According to Cassirer, Kant, in the Critique of judgement, was playing the role of ‘logician to Linnaeus’ descriptive science’. See Ernst Cassirer, *The problem of knowledge: Philosophy, science and history since Hegel*, tr. William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1950), 127.
- 98 *Observations*, 1.
- 99 *Anthropology*, 239.
- 100 In moral terms, those considered ‘uncivilized’ by Kant, since they do not have ‘true’ moral character, also lack ‘true’ historicity. They are therefore subhuman and inherently nearly totally evil. (Or as Rudyard Kipling would later put it poetically: the African is ‘half devil and half child’. See T.S.Eliot, *A choice of Kipling’s verse* (Doubleday, New York, 1962:143).
- 101 Quoted in Cassirer, RKG, 11.
- 102 As set forth in *Physische Geographie*; see Neugebauer’s exposition of this in ‘The racism of Kant’, 264.
- 103 Kant writes that ‘the difference in the organization/structure of Negro skin from that of ours is apparent even in the realm of feeling’. ‘Überdem ist die Verschiedenheit der Organisation der Negerhaut von der unsrigen, selbst nach dem Gefühle, schon merklich’ (‘Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse’, in Schultze, *Kant und Darwin*, 151; my translation).
- 104 Forrest Williams, ‘Anthropology and the critique of aesthetic judgement,’ in *Kant Studien*, 46, 1954–1955:173.
- 105 For an extended examination of the interrelation of anthropology, race and aesthetic theory in eighteenth-century German thought, see Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, Edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Bewußtsein und Geschichte der Deutschen* (Junius, Hamburd, 1993).
- 106 *Observations*, 51.
- 107 *Ibid.*: 110–111.
- 108 J.-J.Rousseau, *Discourse on the origin of inequality*, tr. Ilse Barande et al. (Payot, Paris, 1965:175–176).
- 109 *Ibid.*: 170; my emphasis.
- 110 Quoted in Cassirer, RKG, 24. Scholars and critics of Rousseau have pointed out these inconsistencies in Rousseau’s writing. For example, Derrida in his study of Rousseau in *Of grammatology* writes that ‘the difference among all Rousseau’s texts is subtle, perhaps unstable, always problematic to this point’ (231). Cassirer also addresses this issue by characterizing it as ‘an ambiguity which had always made it hard to understand [Rousseau], and still does today (RKG, 24).
- 111 Kant, *On history*, tr. Beck, 53ff.
- 112 See extensive discussion of this issue in the section titled ‘Kant’s doctrine of human nature,’ above.
- 113 See the discussion in the section titled ‘Kant’s idea of “race”’, above.
- 114 Neugebauer, ‘The racism of Kant’, 265.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 Cassirer captures this succinctly when he states: ‘Kant looks for constancy not in what man is but in what he should be’ (RKG, 20).

- 117 As Cassirer points out, ‘Kant esteems Rousseau for having recognized and honoured man’s distinctive and unchanging end (ibid.: 23).
- 118 *Observations*, 110–111.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Have the words ‘black’ and ‘white’ retained in English the moral ascriptions that they harboured for Kant and the natural historians? For example, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* anthropomorphically ascribed to the term ‘black’ connotations such as: outrageously wicked; a villain; dishonorable; expressing or indicating disgrace, discredit, or guilt; connected with the devil; expressing menace; sullen; hostile; unqualified; committing a violation of public regulation; illicit; illegal; affected by some undesirable condition, and so on. On the other hand, ‘white’ is ascribed with connotations such as: free from blemish, moral stain or impurity: outstandingly righteous; innocent; decent; in a fair upright manner; a sterling man, and so on.
- 121 *Observations*, 111.
- 122 *Anthropology*, 236.
- 123 See also quotations from Kant’s ‘Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse’ in this essay, in the first part of the section on ‘Kant’s idea of “race”’, above.
- 124 Neugebauer points out that ‘to Kant, race, as soon as it is established as such, contains an unchangeable quality’ (‘The racism of Kant’, 253).
- 125 For an examination of the reception of travel literature in eighteenth-century German thought (especially Herder), see Uta Sadjı, *Der Negermythos am Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts in Deutschland: Eine Analyse der Rezeption von Reiseliteratur über Schwarzafrika* (Lang, Frankfurt, 1979).
- 126 Van de Pitte, KPA, 49.
- 127 *Anthropology*, 217–218n.
- 128 For a study of the kind of ‘padding’ for all sorts of purposes that travel narratives were subject to, see, for example, a study of the memoirs of Glückel of Hameln in Natalie Z. Davis, *Women on the margins* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, M.A., forthcoming).
- 129 *Physische Geographie*; quoted in May, KCG, 262.
- 130 *Anthropology*, 4; my emphasis.
- 131 May, KCG, 5.
- 132 *Anthropology*, 4n.; my emphasis.
- 133 See May, KCG, 4.
- 134 Quoted ibid.
- 135 Van de Pitte points out that Kant’s lectures in anthropology were ‘popular, in both senses’ (KPA, 11).
- 136 See Schultze, *Kant und Darwin*.
- 137 Walter Scheidt, ‘The concept of race in anthropology,’ in Count, *This is race*, 372; my emphasis.
- 138 Willibald Klinke, *Kant for everyman*, tr. Michael Bullock (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1952:22 and passim).
- 139 The cultural-ideological and the geopolitical significance of Kant’s raciology—a topic which I am currently addressing elsewhere—must as well be situated within

this larger theoretical context of Kant's transcendental philosophy.

- 140 Lucius Outlaw, 'African philosophy: Deconstructive and reconstructive challenges', in Guttorm Floistad (ed.), *Contemporary philosophy: A new survey*, 5, *African philosophy* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1987:9–44.
- 141 GS, 20:45; my emphasis.
- 142 Kant's *homo rationalis* is a 'distinctive human type (found only among persons of the appropriate gender and racial/ethnic pedigree) in the historicity of a particular complex or tradition of discursive activities'; see Outlaw, 'African philosophy', 219. For a critique of Kant's anthropological and ethical theories about women, see, for example, Jean Grimshaw's *Feminist philosophers: Women's perspectives on philosophical traditions* (Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1986) or the several excellent essays in Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers (eds.), *Women and moral theory* (Rowman and Littlefield, Savage, MD, 1987).
- 143 Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African philosophy: The essential reading* (Paragon, New York, 1991:7).
- 144 Wole Soyinka, *Myth, literature, and the African world* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976:ix).
- 145 Quoted in Steven Lestition, 'Kant and the end of the enlightenment in Prussia', *Journal of Modern History*, 65, March 1993:57–112; see particularly 95–96.

#### References

- Adagala, Kavesta. 1992. 'Mother Nature, patriarchal cosmology and gender', in G.E.M.Ogutu, ed., *God, humanity and Mother Nature*. Nairobi: New Era/Masaki Publishers.
- Alcoff, L.M. 1998. 'What should white people do?' *Hypatia*, 13:6–26.
- Aniagolu, C. 1998. 'The first Africanist womanist workshop.' *Agenda*, 37:96–100.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1992. *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bazilli, S. 1991a. 'Feminist conferencing.' *Agenda*, 9:44–52.
- Bazilli, S. (ed.). 1991b. *Putting women on the agenda*. Braamfontein: Raven Press.
- Benhabib, Seyla. 1995. 'The pariah and her shadow: Hannah Arendt's biography of Rahel Varnhagen.' *Political Theory* 23(1):5–24.
- Benjamin, J. 1995. 'Don't call me a feminist.' *Agenda*, 27:90–93.
- Bloom, Allan. 1987. *The closing of the American mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bunch, Charlotte. 1994. 'Strengthening human rights of women', in Manfred Nowak ed., *World conference on human rights Vienna 1993: The contributions of NGOs reports and documents*. Vienna: Manzschke Verlags und Universitätsbuchhandlung.
- Code, Lorraine. 1998. 'How to think globally: Stretching the limits of imagination.' *Hypatia* 13(2):73–85.
- Daly, Mary. 1978. 'Indian suttee: The ultimate consummation of marriage', in *Gyn/Ecology: The MetaEthics of radical feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- De Beauvoir, S. 1976. *The second sex*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Dolphyne, Florence Abena. 1995. 'Polygamy and the emancipation of women: An

- African perspective', in Safo Kwame, ed., *Readings in African philosophy: An Akan collection*. New York: University Press of America, 235–250.
- Eboh, Marie Pauline. 1992. 'The woman question: African and Western perspectives', in Herta Nagl-Docekal and Franz M. Wimmer, eds., *Postcoloniales Philosophieren: Afrika*. Weiner Reihe, Bd. 6, Oldenbourg Verlag, Vienna/ Munich, 206–213.
- Friedan, B. 1963. *The feminine mystique*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Funani, L. 1992. 'Nigerian conference revisited.' *Agenda*, 15:63–68.
- Gilligan, C. 1992. 'In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality', in M. Pearsall (ed.), 1992. *Women and values*. Wadsworth: Belmont.
- Harding, Sandra. 1983. 'Why has the sex/gender system become visible only now?' in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering reality: Feminist perspectives on epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and philosophy of science*. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 311–342.
- Harris, Leonard. 1980. 'Romanticism and scientism in Africa.' *Presence Africaine*, 113:175–192.
- Hasan, Zoya, ed. 1994. *Forging identities: Gender, communities and the state in India*. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Hawley, John Stratton, ed. 1994. *Sati, the blessing and the curse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hendricks, C. and Lewis, D. 1994. 'Voices from the margins.' *Agenda*, 20:61–75.
- Hetzler, Florence. 1991. 'Ethiopian cultural heritage: Art and philosophy', in Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner *Books for life*. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 29–43.
- hooks, bell. 1981. *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, bell. 1992. 'Black women: Shaping feminist theory', in M. Pearsall (ed.), *Women and values*. Wadsworth: Belmont.
- Horn, P. 1991. 'The way forward to the emancipation of women.' *Agenda*, 10:53–66.
- Horn, P. 1995. 'Where is feminism now?' *Agenda*, 26:71–74.
- Hountondji, Paulin. 1983. *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP.
- Hountondji, Paulin. 1996. 'Intellectual responsibility: Implications for thought and action today', in *Proceedings and addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 70 (2):77–92.
- Howard, Rhoda. 1993. 'Cultural absolutism and the nostalgia for community.' *Human Rights Quarterly* 15:315–338.
- Jaggar, Alison. 1998. 'Globalizing feminist ethics.' *Hypatia* 13(2):7–31.
- James, David. 1995. "'The instruction of Any" and moral philosophy', in Albert Mosley, ed., *African philosophy: Selected readings*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 147–155.
- Joseph, G. and Lewis J. 1986. *Common differences: Conflicts in black and white feminist perspectives*. Boston: South End Press.
- Karenga, Maulana. 1990. *The book of coming forth by day: The ethics of the declarations of innocence*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press.
- Kipling, Rudyard. 1944. 'The ballad of East and West', in *Rudyard Kipling's verse*. New York: Doubleday.
- Kiss, Elizabeth. 1997. 'Alchemy or fool's gold: Assessing feminist doubts about rights', in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan eds., *Reconstructing political theory: Feminist perspectives*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Koso-Thomas, Olayinka. 1987. *The circumcision of women: A strategy for eradication*.

London: Zed Books.

- Kumar, Radha. 1994. 'Identity politics and the contemporary Indian feminist movement', in Valentine Moghadam ed., *Identity politics and women: Cultural reassertions and feminisms in international perspective*. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Kwame, Safro. 1995. 'Feminism and African philosophy', in Safro Kwame, ed. *Readings in African philosophy: An Akan collection*. New York: University Press of America, 253–265.
- Lange, Lynda. N.de. 'Burnt offerings to rationality: A feminist reading of the construction of indigenous peoples in Europe Dussel's theory of modernity.' *Hypatia* 1998:13(3).
- Lugones, Maria C. and Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1983. 'Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism, and the demand for "The Woman's Voice".' *Women's Studies International Forum* 6(6):573–581.
- Mani, Lata. 1987. 'Contentious traditions: The debate on SATI in Colonial India.' *Cultural Critique*, Fall: 19–56.
- Mariam, Yeshi Hable. 1994. 'Ethiopian women in the period of social transformation.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29.44, 29 Oct.:59.
- Mariam, Yeshi Hable. 1995. 'A critical analysis of Amharic proverbs on women.' M.A. thesis, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Mernissi, Fatimah. 1976. *Beyond the veil: Male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*. Rev. ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Mayer, Ann Elizabeth. 1995. *Islam and human rights: Tradition and politics*. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Mazumdar, Sucheta. 1994. 'Moving away from a secular vision? Women, nation, and the cultural construction of Hindu India', in Valentine Moghadam ed., *Identity politics and women: Cultural reassertions and feminisms in international perspective*. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (eds.), *Third World women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1993. 'What do rights have to do with it? Reflections on what distinguishes "traditional non-Western" frameworks from contemporary rights-based systems.' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24(2):186–199.
- Mulernfo, M. 2000. *Thabo Mbeki and the African Renaissance*. Pretoria: Aetna Press.
- Narayan, Uma. 1995. 'Eating cultures: Incorporation, identity and "Indian food".' *Social Identities* 1(1):63–88.
- Narayan, Uma. 1997. *Dislocating cultures: Identities, traditions and Third World feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Narayan, Uma. 1998. 'Essence of culture and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism.' *Hypatia*, 13:86–106.
- Nusco, Luigi. 1976. 'To what extent is it possible to speak of an Ethiopian philosophy?' *Abba Salama*, vii:258–261.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. and Glover, Jonathan, eds. 1995. *Women, culture and development*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Oduyoye, Amba. 1979. 'The Asante woman: Socialization through proverbs.' *African Notes* 8.1:5–11.
- Okin, Susan Moller. 1998. 'Feminism, women's human rights, and cultural differences.' *Hypatia* 13(2):32–52.

- Okolo, Chukwudum. 1990. *Problems of African philosophy and one other essay*. Cecta (Nigeria) Ltd. Engugu Nigeria: Cecta.
- Oldenburg, Veena Talwar. 1994. 'The continuing invention of the Sati tradition', in John Stratton Hawley, ed. *Sati, the blessing and the curse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oyesakin, Adefioye. 1985. 'Women as agents of indiscipline in Yoruba traditional poetry', in *Nigeria Magazine*, 53:38–43.
- p'Biket, Okot. 1972. *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Petersen, Kirsten Hoist. 1995. 'First things first: Problems of a feminist approach to African literature', in Bill Ashcroft et al., eds. *The postcolonial studies reader*. New York: Routledge, 251–254.
- Pollis, Adamantia and Schwab, Peter. 1979. *Human rights: Cultural and ideological perspectives*. New York: Praeger.
- Presbey, Gail. 1990. 'Ways in which oral philosophy is superior to written philosophy: A look at Odera Orika's rural sages' in *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, Fall 1996.
- Presbey, Gail. 1996. "'Broad" and "strict" distinctions in Claude Sumner's works in Ethiopian and African philosophy.' Paper presented at conference, Pan-African Symposium on 'Problematics of an African philosophy: Twenty years after (1976–1996)'. Addis Ababa University, December.
- Radcliffe Richards, J. 1984. *The skeptical feminist*. Penguin Books: Middlesex.
- Ramphele, M. 1991. 'The dynamics of gender within black consciousness movements: A personal view' in N.Piyana, M.Ramphele, M.Mpumlwana, and L.Wilson (eds.), *Bounds of possibility: The legacy of Steve Biko and black consciousness*. Cape Town: Crede Press.
- Safro, K. 1990. 'On African feminism: Two reasons for the rejection of feminism.' *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 15:1–7.
- Schipper, Mineke. 1991. *Source of all evil: African proverbs and sayings on women*. Nairobi: Phoenix.
- Schipper, Mineke. 1996. 'Emerging from the shadows: Changing patterns in gender matters.' *Research in African Literatures*, 27(1): 155–171.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr. 1992. *The disuniting of America: Reflections on a multicultural society*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Schutte, Ofelia. 1998. 'Cultural alterity: Cross-cultural communication and feminist thought in North-South contexts.' *Hypatia* 13(2):53–72.
- Singer, Isaac B. 1983. *Yentl, the Yeshiva boy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Smith, B. (ed.) 1982. 'All the women are white, all the men are black, but some of us are brave', *Black Women's Studies. Monthly Review Press*.
- Spelman, E. 1998. *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Stout, Jeffrey. 1994. *Ethics after Babel*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Sumner, Claude. 1974. *Ethiopian philosophy, Vol. I, The book of the wise philosophers*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press.
- Sumner, Claude. 1978. *Ethiopian philosophy, Vol. III: The treatise of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.
- Sumner, Claude. 1978. 'Seminar on African philosophy, Addis Ababa University, 1–3 December 1976' *Abba Salama*, ix:104–152.
- Sumner, Claude. 1981. *Ethiopian philosophy, Vol. IV: The life and maxims of Skendes*.

Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1985. *Classical Ethiopian philosophy*. Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Co., 1994. The same title published in Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1986. *The source of African philosophy: The Ethiopian philosophy of man*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1986.

Sumner, Claude. 1991. 'Problem of an African philosophy', in Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner, eds., *Books for life*. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 44–71.

Sumner, Claude. 1995. *Oromo wisdom literature, Vol. 1: Proverbs, collection and analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Turnsa Foundation.

Tee, R. 1996. 'Recognizing difference.' *Agenda*, 26:44–47.

Thompson, E. 1992. 'Mad women in the tropics.' *Agenda*, 15:62.

'Volume IV on Ethiopian philosophy comes out'. *Ethiopian Herald*, xxxvii (1), 4 June 1981, 1(5).

Wiredu, Kwasi. 1995. *Conceptual decolonization in African philosophy*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications.

Wolde-Yohannes, Samuel. 1994–1995. 'Western philosophical tradition and Ethiopian sapiential tradition.' *Ethiopian review of cultures: Religious studies in Ethiopia and Eritrea, A symposium*, Special Issue, 317–326.

Yaadasan, Fayyisaa. 1996. 'Guulaa Bulaa', Oromo play performed in Addis Ababa 24 March 1996.

'Zora Yaqob's philosophy of protest' 1976. *Ethiopian Herald*, 21 Nov. 2(5).





# JUSTICE AND RESTITUTION IN AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

INTRODUCTION  
Historic titles in law

MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

## INTRODUCTION

Scientific and technological progress in our time create and enhance opportunities for business. Education is closely linked to its potential and actual contribution to the advancement of business. Business and management are the clarion call of economic globalization. It is as though economics in the form of market or economic fundamentalism<sup>1</sup> is all that matters in the life of humanity. The market has become both the substance and the means to money-making. In our time, 'the hallmark of the current form of global capitalism, the feature that sets it apart from earlier versions, is its pervasive success: the intensification of the profit motive and its penetration into areas that were previously governed by other considerations.... It is no exaggeration to say that money rules people's lives to a greater extent than ever before'.<sup>2</sup> Ethics is relegated systematically to the background on the plea that the laws of economics are objective and therefore value-free. The study of history is considered unimportant because it does not contribute directly and immediately to productivity in business. Yet future historians are more than likely to insist that the sovereignty of money was part of the identity of our time. History, in other words, is one of the vehicles humanity uses to describe and define its identity. Given that identity can play a decisive role in individual and collective life, it is questionable to relegate the study of history to the fringes of what it means to be a human being. History is crucial to the construction of individual and collective identity.

History is replete with examples showing that human beings have used ownership or occupancy of land as part of the definition of their identity. This is hardly surprising if one considers the intricate and indissoluble connection between land and life. It is precisely because of this vital connection that some human beings chose death to the loss of their land. For them to be landless is to be dead, since loss of land is equal to being cut off from the means to stay alive. This reasoning has become the basis for the assertion of the right to land. Since the formation of political communities the assertion of the right to land has been tightly linked to territorial and political sovereignty. Thus the violation of the right to sovereignty constitutes an injury to either territorial or political integrity or it is a simultaneous injury to both territorial and political rights. In the case of Africa the violence of the unjust wars of colonization was the violation of both the territorial and the

political rights of the African peoples. By adopting the technique of government instead of state succession, decolonization was a device to protect and perpetuate the privileges acquired through conquest in the unjust wars of colonization. This imposes—in the name of historical justice—the necessity upon Africa to correct the situation. It is in the sphere of historic titles in law and, ironically the law of the conqueror, that Africa can find a corrective which will reverse the adverse effects of the logic of the unsustainable claim to the ‘right of conquest’. It is to be particularly noted that at decolonization most African countries urged for state succession as the optimal way forward. However, they yielded reluctantly to pressure in accepting the injurious option of government succession. This did not eliminate the African quest for historical justice in the concrete form of state succession. Accordingly, the theme of historic titles in law would form the basic discourse of African politics since decolonization. This discourse would manifest itself in a variety of ways. For example, it would be the call for the redrawing of the boundaries within Africa, advocacy for a new international economic order, the assertion of the right to development, the call for the cancellation of Africa’s foreign debt and, the demand for compensation as a result of slavery and the colonization of Africa. These discourses on historic titles in law form the subject matter of this section. The recurrence of this theme in African politics may be attributed to two factors. One is that especially the adverse effects of colonization continue to be part of the reality in Africa despite decolonization. Another is that the African political leadership appears to be either unable or unwilling to pursue resolutely the path of historical justice. Let us consider South Africa as an example.

Technically the decolonization of South Africa occurred in 1961 when the country assumed the status of a republic. For the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonization the attainment of the republican status was yet another reassertion of the unsustainable ‘right of conquest’. The claim to this right by the conqueror is historically prior to the imposition of apartheid. Yet, conventional wisdom held erroneously and persistently that apartheid was the basis of the struggle in South Africa. In the course of this struggle the United Nations defined apartheid as a crime against humanity. When the new dispensation was introduced in South Africa in 1994 a strange thing happened to this crime. By means of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission the crime was not commuted but forgiven. Thus the crime came to be seen merely as an inhuman act performed in good faith. As such it was considered to be innocent and the perpetrator was deemed innocent on condition that there be full disclosure. This was undoubtedly a disfiguration of the crime. It was the condonation of the injustice of colonization and the crime of apartheid. It is significant that the basis of forgiveness for the crime and the mechanism to achieve it were decided upon by the political leadership of the colonized dehumanized by apartheid. The decision was not based on consultation with the conquered by way of a referendum, for example. Forgiveness was endorsed by the political leadership in the name of the conquered. This remains a curious deviation from standard practice with regard to humanitarian international criminal law. In this legal context crimes against humanity have resulted in the Nuremberg, Tokyo, Hague, and Arusha trials.

## ENDNOTES

1 Kelsey, Jane. *Economic fundamentalism*, London: Pluto Press, 1995:2.

2 Soros, G. *The crisis of global capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998:75.

I conquer, therefore I am the sovereign: Reflections upon sovereignty, constitutionalism, and democracy in Zimbabwe and South Africa

## MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

The present essay is about sovereign title to territory and its constitutional implications for contemporary Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is a philosophical analysis of the history, politics, and the constitutionality of the law underlying the democratic dispensation in the two countries. It does not purport to be a juridical analysis in the first place. Instead, it will focus upon the area of tension resulting from the inclusion of some 'natural facts' and the exclusion of others from the universe of juristic facts. The purpose of this focus is to show that what people hold to be natural or fundamental justice does not always coincide with justice according to law. Legal justice will remain a contested area for as long as it does not coincide with the ordinary perceptions of natural or fundamental justice. We shall focus specifically upon historic titles in law and state recognition in the context of international law. In this context we shall consider if and to what extent the fact of conquest, in the history of the voyages of 'discovery' and colonization, has been included or excluded from the universe of juristic facts. To answer the question what are the implications of either inclusion or exclusion we shall analyse the political significance of sovereignty in relation to both the conquered indigenous peoples and their conquerors. The thesis we wish to defend is this: under whatever conception of law, the claim that the conquerors of the indigenous peoples of South Africa and Zimbabwe are the legal successors in title to wholesome and absolute sovereignty over these peoples is unsustainable either on the plea of Papal mandate, 'discovery' or the 'right of conquest'. Therefore, justice demands the restoration of title to territory to the indigenous conquered peoples as well as restitution to them.

Jurists invariably argue that moral considerations fall outside the scope of law. Law is one thing and morality another, so the argument goes. If this is a plea for the independence of the juridical method then it is understandable. However, the plea for methodological purity is not tantamount to a denial that the order that law seeks to establish and maintain is ultimately the moral commonwealth. Accordingly, law cannot totally avoid being the expression of the moral convictions of a given society. Law therefore has a necessary minimum content of morality. For this reason both the necessity and the desirability of certain laws are not in the first place the exclusive initiatives of the legal order. On the contrary, the moral commonwealth is the inescapable source of the necessity or desirability of specific laws. Accordingly, the efficacy of these latter is judged not only according to juridical criteria but also on the basis of morality. This judgement from outside the legal framework speaks precisely to the exclusion of certain

'natural facts' from the universe of juristic facts' and the tension that results from such exclusion. We now turn to identify the conqueror and consider the context within which the urge to conquer was nurtured.

## THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF COLONIZATION

### Reason and unreason

One of the lines that the conqueror drew is that between reason and unreason. Aristotle, one of the major figures in ancient Western philosophy, reaffirmed this line through his definition of 'man'. According to him, man is a rational animal. Those animals whose being or nature includes reason as their distinctive characteristic fall within his definition. They are therefore human beings, or 'man'. Any other animal which might look like a human being but be without reason does not qualify as a human being. It is properly an animal with unreason. So the line between reason and unreason was drawn. This line indicated not only the boundary between reason and unreason but it also assigned<sup>1</sup> competences, rights, and obligations in agreement with reason and unreason respectively.<sup>2</sup> In this way it established the nature of the relationship between those inside and those outside the line of reason. The right to freedom and the competence to exercise one's will were assigned only to rational animals. In their relationship with one another rational animals had the obligation to recognize, respect, and protect the right to freedom and freedom of the will. But animals with unreason could neither claim the competences nor the rights that did not belong to them by nature. Therefore, in their relationship with rational<sup>3</sup> animals, the animals with unreason were disallowed in advance to demand obligations that befit only rational animals. This heritage<sup>4</sup> from Aristotle is the philosophy that was deeply rooted in the mind of the conqueror. In essence this philosophy denied humanity to all animals with unreason. By definition such animals could not and did not qualify to be human. This philosophy was actually applied when the conqueror came into contact with the African,<sup>5</sup> the Amerindian,<sup>6</sup> and the Australasian. According to the conqueror, Aristotle's definition that man is a rational animal excluded the African, among others. The exclusion meant the African was to be treated only as an animal because by nature the African was an animal with unreason. Accordingly, it was necessary and proper to conquer and enslave the African. I think, therefore, I conquer and enslave is the practical application by the conqueror of Descartes', 'I think, therefore, I exist'.<sup>7</sup> No wonder then that conquest and the slave trade have been the main features of the relationship between the conqueror from the West and the African, especially the sub-Saharan African.

### Civilization and barbarism

Having thus made the exclusive claim to reason, the conqueror argued that one of the competences of reason is to conquer nature. Nature was to be investigated in order to use it to improve the quality of human life. There could be no other option since the conquest of nature was a necessary response to the urge to survive individually and collectively. Any advancement designed to improve the chances of survival came to be called

progress. Sustained progress growing in depth and complexity came to be known as civilization. This was possible on condition that the agent was a rational animal.<sup>8</sup> Animals with unreason could not make progress. They could therefore not attain any civilization.<sup>9</sup> This line between civilization and barbarism was an extension of the boundary between reason and unreason. The conqueror claimed the status of being the possessor of a superior civilization. Accordingly, when the conqueror encountered the African their respective competences, rights, and obligations were already predetermined. The conqueror was civilized and the African was the barbarian. So in the view of the former possession of a superior civilization imposed the duty to civilize the barbarian.<sup>10</sup> The line between civilization and barbarism thus established the relationship of superior and inferior. Accordingly, the conqueror had competences and rights against the African but without any obligations to the African. This was a one-way relationship which precluded the possibility of reciprocity. The African had only obligations towards the conqueror but no rights.

### **Fidels and infidels**

Another line which the conqueror drew was that between the fidels and the infidels. This line is the special area of religion. God, however understood, is at the same time the subject and the object of any religion. The main point to grasp here is that from the beginning of time all human beings around the world tried to make sense of the experience of death. Does death mean a total, complete, and irreversible end of individual life? Does it mean the return to the purposeless darkness of the nowhere from which we come? The experience of death brings humanity face to face with uncertainty. Can we be sure of why we were born and what is our destiny when we die? God is an invention of the human mind to answer these questions. An invention because the existence of god cannot be proved or disproved. It is something that rests on faith. Because of this, god belongs to the sphere in which the idea of proof does not make sense. God belongs to the sphere of metaphysics.<sup>11</sup> Since the experience of death cuts across geographical, cultural, and gender boundaries, it is clear that in the beginning there were gods. This is true of the conqueror as well. The conqueror's long tradition of the mythic gods of the pagan world was interrupted and discarded to a large extent when christianity replaced it.

Christianity justified its abandonment of paganism by appeal to reason and revelation. The former was used to show that irrationality was the basis for belief in the mythic gods. These gods were at best the highest form of aesthetic expression and, at worst mere objects of superstition. Reason therefore justified distraction from them. They had to be abandoned. This was strengthened by the claim that god had now revealed himself through Jesus. Since this provided certainty about the being and the destiny of humanity, it was no longer necessary to have faith in the mythic gods. The conviction here was that the god of Jesus was the one and only true god and this justified the burial of all other gods and their replacement by the god of Jesus.

It is remarkable that the justification of christianity side-stepped commonsense questions by demanding first faith in Christ before attempting to answer the questions. In this way theology clothed religion with the dignity of science. Rationality and, not irrationality as in the past, thus became the complement of religion. Yet, a commonsense

look at some of the miracles of the christian religion shows that there is no difference in insight with regard to all the religions christianity was determined to bury. For example, the story of the virgin birth (immaculate conception) is quite problematical from a commonsense point of view. First of all, it is hardly convincing to argue that Mary got married to Joseph in order to prove to him every day the virtue of virginity. In their time marriage was recognized as the key to sexual intercourse. It is still recognized as such in other parts of the world. Even in the so-called permissive societies the debate about pre-marital sex is still alive. It speaks to the recognition that marriage is the key to sexual intercourse. In addition, Joseph was expected to accept without objection that Mary had a secret meeting with the invisible angel Gabriel who told her that she would be pregnant and the child would be the son of god. If Mary knew beforehand that she would have such a secret meeting, did she disclose this to Joseph before they got married? If she did not have such foreknowledge why did she reportedly preserve her virginity? The Bible refers to the brothers of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Whose sons were they?<sup>13</sup> Second is the miracle of the resurrection. All that lives must die. Jesus lived and died. But we are informed he rose from the dead and thus was Christ.<sup>14</sup> The Bible speaks of the empty tomb in which Jesus was buried. But what about the emptying of the tomb? How and when did Jesus leave the tomb? Instead of providing an answer to these questions, we are referred to the story of the unbelieving Thomas. This underlines the priority of faith<sup>15</sup> over reason. Accordingly, the line of demarcation here is not rationality and irrationality but faith and reason. And faith requires reason in order to understand the object of its belief. But reason does not require faith in order to understand the object of its knowledge. It is precisely in the domain of religion that the conqueror's exclusive claim to reason becomes clearly doubtful. The universality of death as we explained above must mean also the universality of reason wherever there are human beings. The possibility to invent one's own god is an expression of reason and freedom of the will. Thus even the conqueror's exclusive claim to freedom rests on a very weak foundation. The god of Christ is first and foremost based on faith. This is true of all other gods whoever they may be. And so the conclusion that the god of Christ is the only true god cannot hold even if it rests on revelation because the miracles connected to this cannot withstand the test of commonsense. This remains valid even if theology calls the failure to withstand the test of commonsense mystery or miracles. All it means is that a mystery is a dogmatic statement intended, either by design or default, to block further inquiry. Whereas a miracle is another name for theologized superstition. There is therefore no justification for drawing the line between fidels and infidels meaning christians and peoples of other religions. In effect the determination of christianity to bury all the other gods is misplaced arrogance, irresistible absolutism and, intolerance nurtured by dogmatism.

### **Just and unjust war**

War was known in the broad geographic expanse inhabited by the conqueror. Its causes and objectives differed according to time and place. And so was its devastation too. In time principles governing the humanization of war were established. These drew the line between just and unjust wars. The latter expression refers in the first place to the permissibility of war (*ius ad bellum*). It lays down the conditions to be fulfilled before

resort to war may be justified. In the second place it refers to principles regulating the conduct of war (*ius in bello*). We shall give a brief outline of this according to Thomas Aquinas. His exposition of the doctrine of the just war is the continuation of a long established tradition. This tradition existed before the onset of the voyages of discovery.

According to Aquinas, war may be said to be just when (1) it is waged at the command of the sovereign; (2) there is a just cause (*iusta causa*); (3) there is the right intention (*intentio recta*).<sup>16</sup> These principles are predicated on the premise that all other means of peaceful resolution of the conflict have been exhausted. The principles must be simultaneously present and verifiable in any single act of war for it to qualify as just. The following are some of the problems associated with these principles. The principle that only the sovereign may declare war lends credence to the suggestion that war is exclusively a matter between sovereign powers. But the right to self-determination and humanitarian intervention call this exclusivity into question.<sup>17</sup> The principle of the just cause means that war may be initiated in order to: (1) repel an injury (*ad repellendas injurias*); (2) gain vindication against an offence such as national honour (*ad vindicandas offensiones*); redress an injury or regain the thing lost (*ad repetendas res*). Any one of these may constitute sufficient cause on the basis of which war may be declared. We shall argue that vindication against an offence and recoverability (*ad repetendas res*) together underlie the ongoing struggle over land in Zimbabwe. The principle of the right intention speaks to the motivation to do good and avoid evil. Accordingly, if war is waged in order to do evil it is immediately impermissible. Impermissibility for Aquinas had theological<sup>18</sup> connotations as well.<sup>19</sup> This underlines one of the major difficulties concerning the right intention. The reason for war is to be determined exclusively by those who decide to wage it. Invariably, they would argue that the other side is in the wrong. Yet, the other side can make exactly the same claim because it is also entitled to an exclusive determination of the reason for war. Self-defence which is almost spontaneous and natural may be invoked by either side. In view of the nature and quality of nuclear weapons the invocation of self-defence<sup>20</sup> as the reason for resort to nuclear war is academic and thoroughly problematical.<sup>21</sup>

Once real war breaks out moral laws continue to speak. This is the sphere of humane conduct during war (*ius in bello*). One of the moral laws in this context is that war should stop as soon as the aim for which it was waged is achieved. Another is that only those human beings—mainly soldiers—and other objects necessarily connected to the waging of war may be attacked. This is the principle of non-combatant immunity which does not allow attacking old people, children and women, for example. Similarly, bestiality and cruelty such as torturing the defenceless, raping and injury to human dignity are also prohibited. The principle of proportionality is particularly pertinent here as it prescribes only the use of necessary force to achieve the legitimate aims of war. It implies the principle of the double effect which stipulates that in pursuing a good aim which at the same time includes unavoidable evil then the lesser of the two evils must be chosen.<sup>22</sup> Thus both the *ius ad bellum* and the *ius in bello* are together an attempt to make unavoidable war as human as possible.



### A meridian line decides the truth and defines justice

The conqueror also drew lines such as the rayas and amity lines. ‘Geographically, these amity lines ran along the equator or the Tropic of Cancer in the south, along a degree of longitude drawn in the Atlantic Ocean through the Canary Islands or the Azores in the west, or a combination of both. It was forbidden, under any pretext, to shift the western meridian beyond the Azores. At this “line” Europe ended and the “New World” began.... Beyond the line was an “overseas” zone in which, for want of any legal limits to war, only the law of the stronger applied. The characteristic feature of amity lines consisted in that, different from the rayas, they defined a sphere of conflict between two contractual parties seeking to appropriate land precisely because they lacked any common presuppositions and authority...the only matter (the parties) could actually agree on was the freedom of the open spaces that began beyond the line. This freedom consisted in that the line set aside an area where force could be used freely and ruthlessly.... The general concept was then necessarily that everything which occurred “beyond the line” remained outside the legal, moral, and political values recognized on this side of the line.’<sup>23</sup> Thus reason, morality, civilization, law, and justice was the identity of those this side of the amity line, that is, the conqueror. Lawlessness, ruthlessness, and injustice was the identity of the conqueror beyond the amity line since, in the view of the conqueror, that zone was characterized by unreason and barbarism. Thus the meridian line decided the truth and defined justice about those this side and those beyond it. It reaffirmed the conventional truth that the conqueror had sole and exclusive power. It arbitrarily defined justice as that which was due only to the conqueror and thus imposed no obligation on the part of the conqueror to reciprocate. It follows that fraud, forgery, and the use of brute force as a means of conquest were the recognized method of acquisition of title to the territory of the indigenous conquered peoples. By virtue of this conquest the sovereignty of the indigenous conquered peoples was supplanted and their title to territory extinguished. Historically, this happened to both South Africa<sup>24</sup> and Zimbabwe.<sup>25</sup> The question then is: may lawlessness, utter disregard for morality, manifest injustice, and the unprovoked use of armed force vest perpetually and irreversibly in the conqueror title to the territory of the conquered as well as absolute sovereignty over them? This is clearly a normative question, which may be considered either from a moral or a juridical perspective. We will pursue the latter perspective though not exclusively. According to the law of the time the answer could be only in the affirmative. It was this: a meridian line decides the truth and defines justice. At bottom this answer means that an injury inflicted malevolently may change into a right and transform the original injustice into justice (*ex injuria ius oritur*). Thus legality was conferred upon conquest. The meridian line drawn by the conqueror established and upheld the maxim that the threat or the actual use of physical force is the true foundation of law—*auctoritas non veritas facit legem*.

### Summary

The above is a brief statement on the intellectual heritage of the conqueror prior to the onset of the voyages of discovery. The drawing of lines defined identities and determined

the power relations between them. The question of power is therefore part and parcel of the drawing of lines. The crucial line is that between reason and unreason. It denied the humanity of all other human beings in other parts of the earth. This justified West European conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity. This was so because the just war doctrine did not apply to human-like animals endowed with unreason. The laws of natural or fundamental justice could not and would not be applied to such human-like animals.

### SOVEREIGNTY SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME

It may well be worth our while to recognize as van Kleffens reminds us, that: ‘The word “sovereign” for the highest, supreme power in a given legal order may have been a product of the feudal age, but the notion it represents had forced itself upon the human mind ever since men began to establish independent political groups, and that goes back to the dawn of time. It cannot be emphasized enough that there was sovereignty and there were sovereigns long before these terms were coined,...’<sup>26</sup> The point of van Kleffens’ reminder is that we take note of both the notional status of sovereignty as a philosophical concept and its historical evolution. Philosophically, there was sovereignty before the term was coined. The coinage was an affirmation of the historical reality of sovereigns. These terms are interwoven with the construction of both individual and collective identity. To tell someone, ‘Ngoni is my son’ is to describe the relationship between Ngoni and myself. But this descriptive statement is at the same time normative insofar as it identifies Ngoni as son and me as the father. The normative significance of this identity is that it establishes a boundary, a line of demarcation between all other boys who are not my sons and all other senior males who are not Ngoni’s father. In this way the norm draws the line. By so doing, it includes and excludes at the same time. Such inclusion also defines the rights and obligations that attach to the relationship of father and son. At the same time it excludes everyone outside this relationship from claiming similar obligations and rights from the same father and son. The crucial point to grasp about this exclusion is that it is not by necessity equal to the denial of similar rights and obligations in a parallel relationship. But it has the potential to actively deny similar rights to those outside the line. However, all it states is that within this particular boundary there are rights and obligations open only to those inside. Indeed even god draws lines.<sup>27</sup> The creation story in Genesis portrays god drawing lines in the construction of the identity of the various species. To each species she assigned characteristics, competencies, rights, and obligations exclusively their own. These remain in agreement with the identity of each species. One of the crucial lines that god drew is that between heaven and hell. Sure this is the ultimate line: the line between life and death; the line of divine justice. The point of this illustration is to show that human beings organize life by drawing lines all the time in everyday life. So did the conqueror. For the conqueror the logic of drawing lines served as the basis of the ideology which maintained that those on the other side of the line could not and did not have similar rights to those this side of the line. The main question then is not about the drawing of lines but whether or not doing so results in justice to others. Justice because injustice can lead to a life and death struggle. The construction of identity and the drawing of boundaries coincide in the single,

contemporaneous, and simultaneous act of inclusion and exclusion. This is what we call bounded reasoning. Independent political groups could hardly claim their independence if they lacked substantive identity found within specific boundaries. Thus the notion of sovereignty predates the coinage of this term at a particular point of history. There was sovereignty and there were sovereigns since the beginning of time. Regardless of the historical coinage of the word 'state' sovereignty is held by a people in perpetuity.<sup>28</sup> For us then there is a philosophical grounding for the quest for historical justice.

### UNIVERSAL SOVEREIGNTY WITHOUT TERRITORY

The 'Donation of Constantine' is the highpoint of the struggle for power between Constantinople and Rome.<sup>29</sup> Having emerged the victor of this struggle Rome invoked the Petrine Commission<sup>30</sup> and on this basis asserted its sole and exclusive right to universal spiritual sovereignty. The universalist thrust of this spiritual sovereignty covered all the inhabitants of the earth. Since the sovereignty here is by definition spiritual—and, the spirit if any exists at all is by definition metaphysical—it was unnecessary for Rome, the universal spiritual power (*potestas spiritualis*) to make any territorial claims. The inhabitants of the earth could, theoretically, retain sovereignty over their territory provided they submitted unconditionally their spirits to the extraterritorial metaphysical sovereignty of the Pope. One basic problem with all the successors of Peter was that even they were unable to submit their spirits unconditionally to the metaphysical sovereignty of the Pope. The reason was that their spirits could be found nowhere. Thus the only way to imagine this metaphysical sovereignty was to recognize that to be human is to be an embodied being. This meant that the spiritual sovereign had to deal with bodies located in space and time. Being fixed or located in a territory (territoriality) thus became a factor which the spiritual sovereign had to contend with in order to realize the mandate from Christ. This ultimately led to clashes between the papacy and earthly princes and kings. It is clear then that the idea of universal sovereignty without territory is imaginary and metaphysical. Its impact can still be felt from the manner and extent to which the voyages of discovery and colonization affect, in the present case, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

### THE PAPAL MANDATES: DISCOVERY AND COLONIZATION

For as long as the authority of the papacy was recognized by the earthly rulers, it was the former who played an important role in legitimizing the voyages of discovery. Intent upon honouring the mandate of Christ to go and teach all the world, the papacy authorized the voyages of discovery. The yet to be discovered had only one right, namely, to submit to christianity or die.<sup>31</sup> Thus the bulls of Pope Nicholas V—*Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) gave the kings of Portugal the right to dispossess and enslave Mahometans and pagans. *Dum Diversas* clearly specifies the right to invade, conquer, expel, and fight (*invadendi, conquirendi, expugnandi, debellandi*) Muslims, pagans, and other enemies of Christ (*saracenos ac paganos, aliosque Christi inimicos*) wherever they may be. Christian kings could thus occupy pagan kingdoms, principalities, lordships, possessions (*regna, principatus, Dominia, possessiones*) and

dispossess them of their personal property, land, and whatever they might have (*et mobilia et immobilia bona quaecumque per eos detenta ac possessa*). They also were given the right to put these peoples into perpetual slavery (*subjugandi illorumque personas in perpetuam servitutem*).<sup>32</sup> Following upon the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope Alexander VI issued the bull *Inter caetera divinae* (May, 4 1494) authorizing the overthrow of paganism and the establishment of the christian faith in all pagan nations.<sup>33</sup> All these bulls sanctioned disseizin and killing, among others, if the prospective converts refused to become christians.<sup>34</sup> The voyagers modified the papal mandate by claiming title to the territory of the conquered as well as sovereignty over it even if the conquered accepted christianity. Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Bartholomew Diaz all derived indirectly from the papal bulls their permission for the voyages of discovery. They were the bearers as well as the disseminators of the tradition of conquest, inhumanity, and disregard for justice. Following upon a heated debate between Sepulveda and Las Casas in Valladolid, Spain in 1550, Pope Paul III issued the bull, *Sublimis Deus*. It declared expressly that 'all men are rational animals'.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, it erased the dividing line between reason and unreason among human beings. But the deletion of this line did not eradicate the conqueror's conviction that only some men are rational animals. This conviction survived the conquest of South Africa and Zimbabwe by the Dutch and the British. We still live with it today. It is expressed by dividing lines such as the First and the Third World,<sup>36</sup> the North and South countries, rich and poor countries, as well as white and black people. In this way the power relations of superior and inferior persist. Thus conquest by the Dutch and the British did not depart from this tradition. Instead it refined and solidified it. It confirmed and established the doctrine that the 'right of conquest' meant that loss of title to territory and sovereignty over it were irreversible and permanent. This doctrine acquired the status of a juristic fact. The law recognized it. This recognition thus entailed the dissolution of the sovereignty of the indigenous people over their territory. It also entailed, at independence, granting formal equal constitutional status to both the successors in title to the 'right of conquest' and the conquered indigenous people. In this way injustice came to be constitutionalized. The conquered people continue to remember this original injustice. They are like christians who continue to remember the original sin committed by Eve and Adam millions of years ago. The sin of these supposed original parents does stick even to their unborn innocent children. The beneficiaries of the 'right of conquest' are visible, active in their enjoyment of the benefits and, objectively identifiable. On what ground can they plead innocence and declare that their present privileged position has nothing to do with their historical ancestry? Instead of seeking baptism to restore friendship with god, the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe demand justice: the return of their land and full sovereignty over it. It is precisely this memory of the original injustice which prompts them to seek justice beyond the Lancaster Agreement.

### HISTORIC TITLES IN LAW

Among the modes of acquisition of territory possession since time immemorial, conquest and effective occupation are recognized by international law. Conquest may be legal if it satisfies the requirements prescribed. We shall consider the legality of conquest in the

light of a radical questioning of the legal maxim that *ex injuria ius oritur*. The questioning is in fact its opposite, namely, that malevolent injury may not change into a right nor may it transform an injustice into justice (*ex injuria ius non oritur*). The first maxim is a plea to deal with a factual situation as we find it without questioning its historical, political, and moral foundations. With particular reference to conquest this legalistic view holds that 'if conquests by their nature form a legitimate right of possession to the conqueror, it is indifferent whether the war be undertaken on just or unjust grounds'.<sup>37</sup> This concession of law to conquest regardless of the morality or justice thereof is challenged and opposed by the second maxim.<sup>38</sup>

Hall, quoted in McMahon, defines conquest as the taking of property of one state by the conquering state. The same conquering state then proceeds to claim sovereignty over the property (territory) thus taken away and to impose its will upon the conquered inhabitants. Once this claim to newly acquired sovereignty is acknowledged and established without further challenge or opposition then title to territory as well as sovereign rights come to be vested in the conquering state.<sup>39</sup> McMahon is critical of this definition of conquest. He argues that its particular weakness lies in the fact that it omits to mention that usually appropriation with regard to conquest is either an act of the actual use of armed force or the threat to use such force. Consequently, he continues, violent seizure is an indispensable element in any definition of conquest. Even if the condition arising from conquest may be sustained for a long time, it does not necessarily follow that conquest then is perfected into a legal right. This latter is specifically an argument against acquiescence<sup>40</sup> prescribed by international law as one of the necessary elements to change conquest initially ungoverned by law into a right transforming an original injustice into justice. Accordingly, injustice may not supersede justice only because the injustice has prevailed for a long time.<sup>41</sup> Hall's argument here can therefore not hold because 'the general principle of law is that a right cannot arise from a wrong. Hence all the cases of revival or survival of State sovereignty despite conquest and annexation can also be explained by the maxim *ex injuria ius non oritur*. A claim to territorial title which originates in an illegal act is invalid'.<sup>42</sup> If one were to argue that at that time there was no law<sup>43</sup> and therefore no justice<sup>44</sup> beyond the meridian line then the conclusion is not that territory acquired then may be retained by the conqueror. Why should the reverse, namely, the return of territory to its original owners thereby restoring their sovereignty be necessarily precluded?

### NEW LINES AND OLD TRUTHS BEYOND THE MERIDIAN LINE

The conquerors resolved their conflicts arising from appetite for more land<sup>45</sup> beyond the meridian by arbitrarily<sup>46</sup> drawing more lines dividing up the disputed<sup>47</sup> territories between themselves. This criss-cross of arbitrary lines was done without consultation<sup>48</sup> and with no regard for the sovereignty<sup>49</sup> of the indigenous conquered people. It was simply assumed that the original lawlessness was changed into lawfulness conferring the so-called right of conquest upon the conqueror. Similarly, it was taken for granted that the lapse of time had transformed the original injustice into justice. It was equally forgotten that international law this side of the meridian line recognized possession from time immemorial as legitimate ground for title to territory. But the memory of the

indigenous conquered peoples was neither dimmed nor obliterated by decades and centuries of subjugation. They remembered that their title to territory—in this case South Africa and Zimbabwe—is deeply rooted in the unfathomable past in which their forebears occupied the territory and exercised absolute sovereignty over it. Accordingly, they were and remain by right of ancestry the rightful heirs to territory and they are the absolute sovereign over it. Therefore, under whatever conception of law, the claim that the conquerors of the indigenous peoples of South Africa and Zimbabwe are the legal successors in title to wholesome and absolute sovereignty over these peoples is unsustainable either on the plea of Papal mandate, ‘discovery’ or the ‘right of conquest’. Memory evoked the old truth that the land and sovereignty over it belong to the indigenous conquered peoples.<sup>50</sup> On the basis of this truth these peoples recognized the injury and the injustice done to them through conquest: the use of armed force ungoverned by law, morality or humanity. Awareness of this truth impelled them to seek justice in the form of the reversion of title to territory to its rightful holders—the indigenous conquered peoples—the restoration of absolute sovereignty over the same territory and restitution. Implicit in this quest for justice is the assertion of the right to self-determination. ‘It need scarcely be added that the transition from colonial status to independence is not regarded as secession, whether or not it is achieved by force of arms, but rather as the “restoration” of a rightful sovereignty of which the people have been illegitimately deprived by the colonial Power concerned.’<sup>51</sup> On this basis effective occupation and the lapse of time would not necessarily eliminate permanently this original right to territory and absolute sovereignty over it. ‘The use of the right of self-determination can be important as regards title. As a manifestation through international recognition of a legal rule it is important as a constituent of statehood. As such it may deny title in situations of effective control and it imposes a duty in particular circumstances to transfer territorial sovereignty’.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore submitted that despite the irrelevance<sup>53</sup> of population in the legal determination of statehood, the demand for title to territory and sovereignty over it by the indigenous conquered peoples of South Africa and Zimbabwe is vital and pertinent to the legal determination of statehood. It is an exigency of natural or fundamental justice. It is the foundation upon which the use of armed force against colonization in its various formations and manifestations is built. Since this is a statement of principle, it remains to show how in practice the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe and in South Africa to a ‘multiracial democracy’ answered to these exigencies.

### FROM RHODESIA TO ZIMBABWE

Mason identified conquest as the basic problem in what is now known as Zimbabwe.<sup>54</sup> The conqueror in this case was the same as in South Africa. Thus the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of conquest remain the same. When the conquest was changed into a right and the injustice transformed into justice, the conqueror in Rhodesia was—prior to 11 November 1965—recognized as an international personality<sup>55</sup> albeit in a limited way. However, the recognition became rather strained when Rhodesia unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom on 11 November 1965. The referendum of June 20, 1969 to turn Rhodesia into a republic thereby dissolving every connection

with the British monarchy was supported only by the Rhodesian conqueror. 'In effect, the referendum result forced the British Government and others to concede that they held responsibility without power... Responsibility without power had been an apt description of the relationship with Rhodesia of successive British Governments since 1923'.<sup>56</sup> The strain pertaining to the continued recognition of the conqueror's Rhodesia was more respect for the sovereignty of the United Kingdom<sup>57</sup> than for the fact that extinctive prescription meant injury and injustice to the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe.<sup>58</sup> The latter drew the conclusion to assert their right to historic title through both peaceful means and the use of armed force. This led to internal unsuccessful constitutional<sup>59</sup> engineering and ultimately to a series of peace negotiations culminating in the Lancaster House Agreement.

The Lancaster Agreement paved the way for the transition from Zimbabwe-Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. The Agreement was made possible when the major parties to the conflict accepted, with qualification, the reversion of sovereignty to the United Kingdom. There was thus a return to legality in the sense that the United Kingdom was recognized<sup>60</sup> by the international community as the sovereign of Rhodesia. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia being the result of the illegal unilateral declaration of independence by the government of Ian Smith on 11 November 1965 did not acquire international personality and was therefore not recognized as the legal sovereign of Rhodesia. This remained the position despite the co-option of Bishop Muzorewa's party and his ascent to the premiership. The price that the Smith government was prepared to pay for this co-option was, among others, the renaming of the country to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Perhaps inadvertently for both sides this name is particularly significant in that it described the major parties to the conflict in the country. The name also identifies the basic meaning that each party ascribes to the country. For the indigenous conquered people the proper name of the country is Zimbabwe, the country that belongs to them and over which they hold title to sovereignty by virtue of ancestry from time immemorial. For the conqueror the name of the country is Rhodesia in memory of Cecil John Rhodes. Through the actions of this latter the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe lost their title to territory and sovereignty over it. The successors in title to Rhodes, including the government of Ian Smith, were determined to preserve and maintain their inherited title to Rhodesia and their sovereignty over it. From this point of view, it is clear that the basic problem in the country was right from the first contact with Rhodes the question of title to territory and sovereignty over it. Did the Lancaster Agreement provide a solution to this problem?

At Lancaster House the British government prescribed a settlement.<sup>61</sup> This consisted of (1) an entrenched 'Declaration of Rights', and (2) loans to the new government of Zimbabwe. The 'willing seller', 'willing buyer' principle was established to defend the 'property' rights of the conqueror in Rhodesia. Under pressure, not least from the Heads of state of the Front Line States, the Patriotic Front reluctantly accepted this particular agreement. It was not the first time that the British government imposed this kind of agreement on African states.<sup>62</sup> In this way the latter were forced to accept extinctive prescription as an irreversible and immutable fact. Yet, the sense of an injured consciousness and the injustice of extinctive prescription did not become completely and permanently erased from the memory of the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe.<sup>63</sup>

Did the government of Zimbabwe provide a solution to the question of title to territory and sovereignty over it after the expiry of the Lancaster Agreement? Our argument with regard to both questions is that the Lancaster Agreement did not provide a solution to the question of title to territory precisely because the British government neither raised nor entertained the question. At the expiry of the Lancaster Agreement the government of Zimbabwe did not provide a solution to the problem first by omitting to raise the question afresh and, second by addressing it as a matter of private law with particular reference to the right to property, especially the ownership of land. By so doing the government of Zimbabwe reduced the question of collective right to a matter of individual right. The problem with this reduction is that it implicitly condones the principal myth of the Lancaster Agreement, namely, that sovereignty can be conferred without the simultaneous recognition that the sovereign holds, either potentially or actually, title to a specific territory.<sup>64</sup> This myth and the inherent injustice that attaches to it is the legacy of the Lancaster Agreement. It is the ghost that continues to haunt decolonization in Africa and many other formerly colonized countries. The United States of America, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are notable exceptions. The government of Zimbabwe still has the task to replace this myth with reality, namely, the restoration of title to territory to the indigenous conquered people and the necessity for the reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest.<sup>65</sup> Only in this way can restitution and reparation as exigencies of historical justice be realized in Zimbabwe. The implications of this resolution for the rest of Africa speak for themselves.

### SOVEREIGNTY OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

Article one of the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition states that 'every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental faculties'.<sup>66</sup> The declaration is specific on the point that this right is 'inalienable'. It is a right which even the holder may not transfer to another. Any transfer of this right would mean that the holder places themselves in a position in which it is impossible for them to fend for themselves. Yet, no one needs the prior permission of another to make sure that they continue to live.<sup>67</sup> Seeking permission from another to continue to live is to treat that other as the source of our life having sole authority to decide if we may continue to live. But such treatment cannot be conferred on another human being—even our parents—because we all did not choose to be born. We did not choose the necessary connection between life and death. Life for all of us is gratuitous. It is something we have without having done anything special to deserve it. It is by chance that it is ourselves in this world and not someone else instead of us. We therefore have an equal right to life. It is a right conferred not by any individual or the state. Other individuals and the state have only the duty to recognize, respect, and protect this right. For this reason 'If the citizens of a State—that is to say, families—on entering into association and fellowship, experienced at the hands of the State hindrance instead of help, and found their rights attacked instead of being protected, such associations were rather to be repudiated than sought after'.<sup>68</sup> Food is produced on and from the land. No land, no food. Thus there is an indivisible connection between land and life in the organic biological sense. Life without food is not



possible biologically. Land, food, and life are thus connected inseparably. In this sense the right to land means at the same time the right to food and life. Accordingly, the primary and fundamental egoistic proclamation that each individual can make against the community without moral embarrassment is the assertion of the right to food.<sup>69</sup> It is this indivisible interconnection between land and life which makes the right to food inalienable.<sup>70</sup> To take away the land of another is to deprive them of an indispensable resource of life. Also to deny someone access to land is to exclude them from the means necessary to sustain life.<sup>71</sup> Through conquest the conqueror in Zimbabwe violated this inalienable right of the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe. This violation brought about conflict between the conqueror and the conquered. The former transformed this violation into justice and thus resolved to make it irreversible and permanent. The latter continue to regard the original violation as injustice and maintain that it is reversible and temporary.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF RECOVERABILITY

He who denies another by force access to land that originally and rightfully belonged to them provokes the necessity for self-defence on the part of those so deprived. According to the theory of the just war, the forcibly deprived may invoke the principle of recoverability (*ad repetendas res*) if every other peaceful means to resolve the conflict fails. The principle of recoverability holds that access to or ownership of land is such that there is a direct and immediate link between land and the preservation of life. For this reason the use of force, including the possibility of killing, is justified in order to recover lost land.<sup>72</sup> Of course, all the other principles of the theory, namely, the right intention, proportionality, and non-combatant immunity apply. The conquered people of Zimbabwe either expressly or by implication invoked this principle at the start of the first chimurenga<sup>73</sup> war. The war did not achieve this particular aim. The second chimurenga war did not achieve this particular aim either. It enabled political independence but denied economic independence as well. It also facilitated the renaming of the country to Zimbabwe. The transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was thus another new stage in the struggle to recover land lost by conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity.

### THE CHIMURENGA WAR

A lot of effort was made to resolve the conflict over land recovery by peaceful means. When this path failed to yield the desired results it was decided to turn to war. The primary aim of the second chimurenga or liberation war was to recover the land lost at conquest and to regain sovereignty over it. Without this the goal of economic independence would remain a permanent mirage. Other aims of the war were the elimination of racial discrimination. The aims of the war were many and concurrent. The war continued until the conqueror recognized the need for a negotiated resolution of the conflict. The first crucial step in this was the Rhodesian conqueror's admission that sovereignty vested in the United Kingdom. Strictly, this recognition was equal to the admission that the United Kingdom was the ancestral conqueror.<sup>74</sup> It was from this ancestral conqueror that the Rhodesian government usurped sovereignty and title to

territory. Thus the Rhodesian government claimed, illegally, to be the successor in title to the United Kingdom's sovereignty. The claim was contested by the United Kingdom and the international community. Accordingly, the Rhodesian state was denied international personality. The legal point here is that although 'an entity may have all the objective characteristics which international law prescribes for statehood. This does not make it an international person. It merely has the capacity to be recognized as an international person. It is only when it is accorded recognition that it will have international personality, i.e. be the bearer of rights and duties in international law'.<sup>75</sup> Because Rhodesia did not have international personality, it was not recognized by the United Kingdom and the international community. Thus the insistence on the return to legality actually meant the recognition of the United Kingdom's 'right of conquest' with regard to Rhodesia.<sup>76</sup> This could not have been the meaning that the indigenous Zimbabweans attached to 'the return to legality. The chimurenga war was in the first place a challenge to the 'right of conquest' whether it vested in the United Kingdom or its successor in title, Rhodesia. However, under pressure from the Front Line States the continuation of this challenge had to be through negotiations. Thus the Patriotic Front reluctantly<sup>77</sup> participated in the negotiations which culminated in the Lancaster Agreement. It is to be noted specially that at the time of the negotiations the United Kingdom exercised sovereignty based upon the original conquest unguided by law, morality, and humanity. The United Kingdom's 'right of conquest' was a juristic fact. The Lancaster Agreement did not question it. Instead, it was used as the foundation for the constitution of Zimbabwe. Through the constitutionalization of the 'right of conquest' the United Kingdom conferred equal formal status to the conqueror and the conquered. In this way it ignored the question of historic justice and dissolved it into the precarious legal equality between the conqueror and the conquered in Zimbabwe. By this mechanism the sovereignty of the United Kingdom over Rhodesia was extinguished. It was transferred fully to the Rhodesians and partially to the indigenous Zimbabweans. For the latter, the sovereignty conferred was limping in the sense that it was not the express reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to them over their territory. This was so because the transfer of political power did not mean the extinction of British sovereignty based on the 'right of conquest'. At independence sovereignty was transferred only to its successors in title, namely, the Rhodesians. Thus only the Rhodesians, having a claim to the nationality of the United Kingdom by virtue of ancestry, acquired full sovereignty over Zimbabwe. Yet, reversion to unmodified and unencumbered sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest was the basic demand of natural justice due to the indigenous Zimbabweans. This they did not achieve at independence. The only way to realize this was to make the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe a matter of state succession.

The transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was a movement away from the status of a colony to sovereign independence. Because of the so-called right of conquest the conquered people did not form part of the sovereign character of Rhodesia. The rise of Zimbabwe brought with it a new constitutional quality to the older character of Rhodesian sovereignty. By so doing, it inscribed a new identity to the new state, Zimbabwe. Thereby it abolished the old state of Rhodesia. It is submitted therefore that the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was a matter of state succession and not

government succession as the Lancaster Agreement prescribed. It is worth noting the following reflections in connection with our submission. 'The question whether a state gaining territorial sovereignty (the successor state) inherits, together with the territory concerned, the rights and obligations of another state (the predecessor state) arises if this latter is actually to be considered extinct. This question leads to the problems of state succession. The significance of the question is not only theoretical but practical. The fact is that international law does not provide that territorial changes shall have an effect implying the automatic and unconditional devolution, in all cases, of rights and obligations together with the territory concerned. The establishment of the identity of a state is therefore important because in this case the continuance of rights and obligations does not become questionable... As regards the particular types of territorial changes the answer is unambiguous: the states emerging from colonial status to independence are new subjects of international law; the problems to be solved in connection with them are those of state succession'.<sup>78</sup> Treating the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe as a question of government succession conferred only formal legal equality between the Rhodesians and the Zimbabweans. This legal equality meant that the conquered would accede, on an equal plane, together with the conqueror to the rights and obligations of Rhodesia.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the former had not enjoyed the full benefits of either in the time of Rhodesia. This basic injustice was built into the constitutional structure provided by the Lancaster Agreement. Zimbabwe was thus necessarily destined to seek a remedy to this injustice.

### **TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY OR LAND REFORM?**

In this section we wish to show that focus upon 'land reform', 'land resettlement' was the primary preoccupation of the government of Zimbabwe since 1980. It could not be otherwise because this was part of its obligations under the Lancaster Agreement. Three years into independent Zimbabwe, the British government threatened to withdraw a part of its aid on land resettlement. In response the incumbent President, then Prime Minister Mugabe, left no doubt about who are the rightful owners of Zimbabwe. He vowed, 'swearing by the name of the legendary anti-British spirit medium Ambuya Nehanda... that his government would confiscate white-owned land for peasant resettlement if Mrs Thatcher suspends promised British compensation... If they do that we will say Well and good, you British gave us back the land because you never paid for it in the first place. The land belongs to us. It is ours in inheritance from our forefathers' '<sup>80</sup> Seventeen years on the same President upholds the same position. The deed is now being suited to the word and so the position is implemented practically. This is consistency and not opportunism. Only unhistorical imagination can regard this as part of the election manifesto to improve the chances of the ruling party to win the elections scheduled for June 2000.

'Since the mid-1980s the Government has danced defensively around the question of land reform until Independence Day in April 1993 when President Mugabe forcefully argued that land redistribution was fundamental and had to be implemented speedily. His speeches emphasized the important role that land plays in reconciling blacks and whites, in resolving the National Question by providing land rights for the majority and in guaranteeing the rural poor the basic means of their survival. Given the potentially

explosive consequences of not addressing these issues in a controlled and fair manner, the President affirmed the central role that the state, as a sovereign entity, needed to play in land reform.<sup>81</sup> Indeed beginning from 1980, there are four five-year phases of the land reform and resettlement programme mapped out by the government of Zimbabwe. But October 1998-September 2000 are earmarked specifically as 'two-year phasing'.<sup>82</sup> This focus intensified over the years and has now reached its highpoint since about February 2000. Yet, this means a shift of focus from the primary issue, namely, the return of the land to its original rightful owners—the indigenous Zimbabweans—and the restoration of their full sovereignty over it. This is the basic right of title to territory by virtue of ancestry. It imposes the imperative for the reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest. It is crucial to rectify the scale of priorities by according primacy to this basic right. Once the land has been returned to its original rightful owners and sovereignty over it has been restored to them, it follows that in their capacity as the sovereign people of Zimbabwe may take appropriate legal measures to have 'land reform' and 'land resettlement'. Thus the one does not exclude the other. It is therefore not a question of either the one or the other. It is a question of both together but according to their order of priority. For this order to be logically valid and historically true, the return of the land and the restoration of sovereignty must be first. But mixing up the priorities actually blurs the issues and blunts the edge of the sovereign to cut and slice the necessary legislation.

### **FORGET ABOUT THE PAST**

Forget about the past is the main message of acquisitive or extinctive prescription. The problem with this message is that it makes an unequal and unjust demand. The conqueror is asked to forget about the past on the understanding that the benefits of conquest in an unjust war shall accrue exclusively to him. On the other hand, the conquered is asked to forget about the past on condition that they renounce their right to seek a remedy to the injustice of conquest in an unjust war. According to this message, justice is due only to those who acquire their rights through the use of physical military force. Thus the holder of military superiority may impose his will on the conquered and call this will law. Yet, there is no in-built guarantee that anyone will forever remain the military superior. Therefore, if time and circumstances permit, the conquered may reaffirm their right to seek a remedy to the injustice of conquest in an unjust war. This means replacing coerced renunciation with determined reaffirmation of their right to restore justice. Memory is the key to this. It serves to remind the conquered about the original injustice. The reminder preserves the determination to restore justice. The reminder is a message about a vital part of their identity, namely, a people conquered in an unjust war.<sup>83</sup> From this point of view, 'forget about the past' is also a demand to erase specific traits from one's identity. Some identity traits may be dispensed with and others are regarded as indispensable. Instead of giving up the latter, people would rather sacrifice their own lives. The right to seek a remedy to the injustice of conquest in an unjust war is an indispensable identity trait of the conquered people. The underlying reason for this is that to renounce this right is to deny that all human beings are equal in their humanity. This denial does not mean that some human beings are more equal than others. Even more, it means that a line is

drawn between humans and non-humans. All humans are equal but non-humans cannot by their very nature claim equality with humans. By preserving the memory of the injustice of conquest in an unjust war, the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe—and, indeed the indigenous conquered people anywhere in the world—actually uphold their right to equality. They reaffirm their humanity by refusing to be placed in the category of non-humans. We submit therefore that the message of ‘forget about the past’ is an unjustified attempt to wipe out history. It is also philosophically unsustainable because (1) it is a one-sided drawing of lines giving privilege the status of a right; (2) it is a unilateral construction of the identity of ‘the other’; (3) it is the forced transmutation of an injustice into justice. It must be replaced by, ‘thou shalt not kill memory’. The indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe have decided to abide by this latter precept.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, they are pursuing justice beyond the Lancaster Agreement.

### RELIGION AND POLITICS

African traditional religion<sup>85</sup> continues to play a vital role in the private and public lives of many an African. Those Africans converted to other non-African religions such as christianity are not necessarily free of at least the impact of African traditional religion on their lives.<sup>86</sup> In their observance of their new-found religion they cannot but take African traditional religion into account. Among others, this means considering it negatively as ‘superstition’ and thus constantly rejecting it. By so doing, they recognize its presence and influence on their lives. The religious culture of spirit mediums<sup>87</sup> is very deeply-rooted in the life of the indigenous Zimbabweans. The spirit mediums continue to be regarded as indispensable links with the living-dead (ancestors). These mediums even have names. However, as a rule they are not addressed directly by their names. Rather, their actual name is often preceded by a title of respect. This is the case, for example, with the spirit medium, Nehanda. Her title of reverence is Ambuya, meaning, grandmother. ‘Nehanda has always been a woman, and affectionately called, ambuya, grandmother, by all her Zezuru adherents in Central Mashonaland among whom this particular one operated during the rebellion.’<sup>88</sup> Thus the spirit-mediums like Nehanda were present to the Zimbabweans in times of drought, famine or other natural disasters. They were also present to the people in matters of war and peace; in politics. That is why they feature in the ‘rebellion’ of 1896. They are thus present in all the spheres of the people’s life. For this reason, ‘Nehanda was of the same mould as the famous holy men and women about whom we read in Christian literature. She was reportedly simple, ascetic, and averse to public acclaim. And yet she had an influence over her followers that, in its own Shona way, would have been comparable to that of Mahatma Gandhi. Before her Shona men and women of every rank humbled themselves as if they were of no consequence whatever because in their eyes she was god’s lieutenant and the intermediary between god and his people and also the intermediary between them and their ancestors. Indeed, they felt that she was above everyone throughout the country, black and white, above the Church as well as the Government. Little wonder that she was so exalted and her person was shrouded in such deep mysteries and secrets, open only to the very few Shona men representing the tribes whose allegiance she enjoyed.’<sup>89</sup> Accordingly, only those with blind bravery and asinine courage would dare to disobey

the guidance from Ambuya Nehanda. Obedience to her guidance came before everything else because, 'The word of the mediums was as good as law,..., speaking with the authority of the spirits of the dead on matters of freedom, life and death'.<sup>90</sup> No wonder then Ambuya Nehanda played such a crucial role in the second chimurenga war.<sup>91</sup> This, as we have already suggested, was in the first place the war for the return of the land to its original rightful owners and the restoration of sovereignty to them. The religious basis of the war becomes apparent in the words of Jakobo. He was speaking at a family occasion having an unmistakable national significance. Jakobo addressed the gods thus: 'For reasons we have never been able to understand, you permitted this ngozi to fall upon us... You allowed victory to go to them rather than to us... You must know better than we do that we shall always need care, succour and safeguards against the machinations and knavishness of the white men who say they are our masters and come into our homes as it pleases them to make criminals of us...'<sup>92</sup> Resentment of 'the white men' and the will to defy them are unmistakable in Jakobo's address to the gods. Thus conquest in an unjust war has remained the basic theme of the politics of Zimbabwe.

The role of African traditional religion did not end at independence in 1980. One of the living reminders of this is the inscription of the Hungwe, called the Zimbabwe bird by non-Africans, in the national flag of Zimbabwe. The Hungwe also appears on many other sites of national importance. This is no accident. For the indigenous Zimbabweans, the Hungwe is a sacred bird. 'Chaminuka's medium,...interpreted the squawkings of Hungwe, Shirichena, Shiri yaMwari—the Celestial fish eagle, the Bird of Bright Plumage, the Bird of Mwari—on its annual visit to the shrine, as pronouncements of the deity.... It is also possible that these birds, some of which have a crocodile carved onto the base of their supporting columns, were the symbolic representations of the godhead himself.'<sup>93</sup> There is little doubt then that there is profound religious symbolism surrounding the Hungwe. It is regarded as the vital messenger from the living to the living-dead<sup>94</sup> (the spirits, the gods or ancestors) and from the latter to the living. A message from the Hungwe may be disregarded only at the risk of provoking the wrath of the gods. The Hungwe is a vivid reminder of the role and influence of religion in the national politics of Zimbabwe. To all governments of Zimbabwe since 1980 the Hungwe carries the message from the gods that there is still unfinished business with regard to the Lancaster Agreement. The gods had willed a partial victory by conceding the Lancaster Agreement. But they shall be appeased and remove the ngozi (bad luck, curse, catastrophe) they have cast upon the indigenous Zimbabweans only if the latter remedy the original injustice of conquest by recovering their ancestral land and regaining sovereignty over it. And so they have sent the Hungwe to sing this song to every indigenous conquered Zimbabwean: 'the gods shall never sleep until the land is returned to its original rightful owners and full sovereignty over it is restored to them'. Thus the government of Zimbabwe, irrespective of the Mugabe Presidency, has the religious duty to engage in the politics that will put the gods to sleep.

In the light of the above, the government of Zimbabwe has got two tasks. The first is the return of the land to its original rightful owners and the restoration of their sovereignty over it. The second is the land reform and resettlement programme. This programme must be understood as a compelling state interest. That is to say, the state of Zimbabwe must launch and realize the objectives of this programme if it wants to

preserve internal security, social stability and the promotion of sustainable economic well-being for all its citizens.

### **THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LAND REFORM AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME**

The Lancaster Agreement did not address the question of title to Zimbabwean territory and sovereignty over it. Instead of dealing with this as the yet to be achieved primary aim of the chimurenga war, both the government of Zimbabwe and the people approached it as a question of private law with special reference to ownership of land. Thus the focus was on land reform and resettlement. It was therefore easy to identify farms on which the landless could be resettled and engage in agricultural activity. The following are the objectives of the land reform and resettlement programme. 'To acquire 5 million hectares from the Large Scale Commercial Farming sector for redistribution. To resettle 91 000 families and youths graduating from agricultural colleges and others with demonstrable experience in agriculture in a gender-sensitive manner. To reduce the extent and intensity of poverty among rural families and farm workers by providing them adequate land for agricultural use. To increase the contribution of agriculture to GDP by increasing the number of commercialized small scale farmers using formerly under-utilized land. To promote the environmentally sustainable utilization of land. To increase conditions for sustainable peace and social stability by removing imbalances in land ownership.'<sup>95</sup>

The land reform and resettlement programme was not without problems. The first challenge through the courts occurred when the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No. 11, 1990 was contested. Section 6 of this Amendment contained an ouster of the jurisdiction of the courts in these terms: 'and no such law shall be called into question by any court on the ground that the compensation provided by that law is not fair.' The challenge to this focused on the right to property and protection against compulsory acquisition of property. Further, it questioned whether designation of land without compensation amounts to acquisition of interest in property without payment of compensation. It also questioned the constitutionality of Part IV of the Land Acquisition Act 3 of 1992 of the 1980 Constitution of Zimbabwe.<sup>96</sup> The court was not called upon to decide the issue of historic titles in law. Rather it was called upon to determine the legality of the government action basing itself on a constitution which was founded on the dubious assumption that the 'right of conquest' was legally and equally valid for all parties to the conflict. It was held on the basis of the doctrine of eminent domain that the state was entitled to acquire land in terms of the disputed provisions. In this particular case the judge answered the question: who is the rightful owner of Zimbabwe? As noted, the court was not called upon to adjudicate the dispute as a species of historic titles in law. But the full answer of the judge deserves verbatim quotation. 'But the fact of the matter is that the facts that make land acquisition for resettlement a matter of public interest in Zimbabwe are obvious that even the blind can see them. These facts make the resettlement of the people a legitimate public interest. In my view, anybody who has lived in Zimbabwe long enough needs no affidavit to know the following facts, which are common knowledge, which make acquisition of land for resettlement imperative in public interest. These are: once upon a time all the land in Zimbabwe belonged to the

African people of this country. By some means foul or fair, depending on who you are in Zimbabwe, about half that land ended in the hands of a very small minority of Zimbabweans of European descent. The other half remained in the hands of the large majority, who were Africans. The perception of the majority of Africans was that the one-half in the hands of the minority was by far the better and more fertile land, while the other half, which they occupied, was poor and semi-arable. It is also common knowledge that, when the Africans lost half their land to the Europeans, they were paid nothing by way of compensation... Attempts to redress the land issue by peaceful means were not successful. The Africans took up arms and armed struggle ensued. The Lancaster House agreement marked the end of the armed struggle and the transfer of political power to the Africans. The Constitution that came out of the Lancaster House agreement imposed certain restrictions regarding the redistribution of land. As of now, the perception still exists that still large portions of the land remains in the hands of a small minority of European descent while the majority of the Africans are still crowded in semi-arable communal land. The majority of the Europeans who own land are able and willing to release some of the land to resettle Africans. They are willing to sell it to a cash-strapped Government at a premium. On the other hand, the majority Africans who are still crowded in the communal areas are more than anxious to be resettled on land they see as their own taken from them wrongly in the first place. They see no merit in having to pay for land that was taken from them without compensation in the first place.<sup>97</sup> The judge makes the following crucial observations. (1) That all the land of Zimbabwe belonged to the Africans since time immemorial. Ancestry since time immemorial is thus the legal basis of their title to Zimbabwe territory and their sovereignty over it. But the Africans lost their title and sovereignty 'by means foul or fair', meaning by conquest in an unjust war unguided by law, humanity, and morality. As a result title and sovereignty vested in the Rhodesians. (2) The Lancaster Agreement marks the end of a protracted armed struggle aimed specifically to regain title to territory and recover sovereignty over it. The Agreement did not meet these specific aims. Instead, it imposed the duty upon the people and government of Zimbabwe to purchase back their own land. The inherent injustice of this duty to purchase back is that 'when the Africans lost their land to the Europeans, they were paid nothing by way of compensation'. But the government of Zimbabwe did, in the name of the 'Africans', condone this injustice as part of the Lancaster constitution. (3) The 'Africans', evidently in possession of insufficient information about the Agreement and, hardly in a position to understand all its implications, gave the government the benefit of the doubt. But in doing so, they were, right from the beginning 'more than anxious' to be resettled on land they regarded as their own. As they were 'more than anxious', their patience ran out as the government delayed to deliver on its promise. (4) They therefore resolved to pursue, within the framework of land resettlement and reform, the aim of acquiring land for themselves. This obviously shifted focus away from the question of land as a matter of collective sovereign right to the issue of the individual right to private property. This shift of focus was based on the conviction of the 'Africans' that the land on which they wished to be resettled was 'their own taken from them wrongly in the first place. They see no merit in having to pay for land that was taken from them without compensation in the first place'. Thus from the point of view of the 'Africans' the government was wrong in principle and in fact to condone the injustice of



'purchasing back'—the 'willing seller, willing buyer' clause—enshrined in the Lancaster constitution. Clearly, the constitution and the law based upon it did not shake their conviction that the land belongs to them. The constitution and the law were simply a mystery<sup>98</sup> that often obscured the truth of their conviction. No doubt none of the 'Africans' needed the label 'war veteran' in order to understand this plain and manifest injustice. (5) The land reform and resettlement programme is a compelling state interest, that is, an 'imperative in public interest'. In these circumstances, the government was now placed in the position to catch up with the ways and means of 'Africans' to acquire their land without the obligation to pay anyone for such acquisition. (6) One of the necessary implications of this reasoning is that if there should be any talk of compensation at all then such compensation is owed, in the first place, to the 'Africans'. This already lays the basis for restitution and reparation as exigencies of historical justice.

The government of Zimbabwe took stock of this experience. This is apparent in President Mugabe's foreword to the launch of phase II of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme. 'Zimbabwe's independence negotiations in 1979 nearly floundered because of differences on how to redress the land problem. The justiceability of land acquisition and compensation on a willing-seller—willing-buyer basis remains a problem. The Lancaster House Constitution provided for market-based and negotiated land sales. The key nations which brokered Zimbabwe's independence negotiations promised to provide the finance needed for land acquisition and redistribution on the basis of this approach. The Government of Zimbabwe transferred over three million hectares of land to over 71 000 families on this basis since 1980. However, inadequate international support and limited national resources for land purchases, and a number of legal, administrative, and logistical constraints limited the pace and quality of land redistribution. As a result, racial imbalances in land ownership and use, and associated poverty remain entrenched in the country. The continuation of this state of affairs poses a threat to social stability.' The President thus made the following points. (1) There were differences on how to resolve the problem of redress with regard to the land. The compromise solution to this problem did not meet the demands of fundamental justice as seen by the conquered. This is borne out by the fact that the Lancaster constitution consists of an inherent injustice. Since he described this as a 'problem', it clearly means that a remedy must be found for the injustice. (2) Funding received from various sources enabled the government to acquire some land and resettle some families. Problems surrounding acquisition on the basis of the Lancaster constitution resulted in the government not meeting the desired objectives. It is significant that the President does not mention corruption as one of the problems. Yet, it is common cause that some government Ministers would not come out with clean hands if investigated. The arrest of Minister Kumbirai Kangai in this connection attests to this observation. Moreover, both the draft Bill and the corresponding new law on the question of land acquisition provide for the establishment of 'an Anti-Corruption Commission'. This clearly means that the government is determined to put its own house in order for the sake of making the programme a success. In the past the government of Zimbabwe under President Mugabe established the Sandura Commission to investigate corruption. As a result some government Ministers lost their posts. Therefore, the intention to set up yet another 'Anti-Corruption Commission' is a normal part of the political life of Zimbabwe. It hardly

qualifies as opportunism. (3) The problem is cast in terms of race categories rather than the conquered and the conqueror. Our problem with the former is that it fails to capture the historical moment and nature of the conflict, namely, conquest in an unjust war. Furthermore, it can be used to promote racism and encourage racial disharmony. (4) The land reform and resettlement programme is a compelling state interest. Against this background, the government of Zimbabwe prepared a referendum seeking the opinion of the population with regard to—among others—compulsory acquisition of land.

The referendum returned a negative result. A referendum does not have the force of law in Zimbabwe. It therefore is not binding on the government. In view of the fact that the majority of the population in Zimbabwe is illiterate, using the referendum technique is rather questionable. Since the conviction of the 'Africans' that Zimbabwe is their land remains strong and undiminished, it is doubtful that they preferred to abandon this conviction simply because it was presented to them in the form of a referendum. It is clear then that the referendum was a tactical error. First, it was presented to a populace the majority of whom simply did not understand and appreciate its significance. Second, it was a mistake to ask for a yes or no vote on the referendum as a whole. If each item were to be voted for separately and counting were also done on the basis of each item it is more than likely that the result on the land question would have been positive. As a follow up to this the legislature in Zimbabwe proposed a Bill subsequently enacted into law, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 16) Act, 2000. Section 16A deals with 'Agricultural land acquired for resettlement' and, subsection 1 hereof provides as follows.

In regard to the compulsory acquisition of agricultural land for the resettlement of people in accordance with a programme of land reform, the following factors shall be regarded as of ultimate and overriding importance:

- (a) under colonial domination the people of Zimbabwe were unjustifiably dispossessed of their land and other resources without compensation;
- (b) the people consequently took up arms in order to regain their land and political sovereignty, and this ultimately resulted in the Independence of Zimbabwe in 1980;
- (c) the people of Zimbabwe must be enabled to reassert their rights and regain ownership of their land;

and accordingly:

- (i) the former colonial power has an obligation to pay compensation for agricultural land compulsorily acquired for resettlement, through a fund established for the purpose; and
- (ii) if the former colonial power fails to pay compensation through such a fund, the Government of Zimbabwe has no obligation to pay compensation for agricultural land compulsorily acquired for resettlement.

According to the title of this section the main topic is the acquisition of 'agricultural land for resettlement'. Yet, the first factor, refers to the dispossession of land in the sense of the entire territory. This includes 'agricultural land'. This latter is therefore part of the whole. The reference means then that unjustified land dispossession is one of the

'ultimate and overriding' factors to be taken into account with regard to the acquisition of 'agricultural land'. The question is this: since unjustified land dispossession covered the whole land why restrict land acquisition to 'agricultural land' only? This question is reinforced by factor (b) which states expressly that according to the people, the 'ultimate and overriding' aim of the armed struggle was 'to regain their land and political sovereignty. Thus the restoration of title to territory and the recovery of sovereignty over it were the heart and soul of the struggle for Zimbabwe. Accordingly, 'the people of Zimbabwe must be enabled to reassert their rights and regain ownership of their land'. But the Lancaster constitution did not make the realization of the basic aim of the armed struggle possible. In recognition of this the legislature in Zimbabwe has placed the onus for compensation of 'agricultural land' compulsorily acquired on 'the former colonial power', that is, the United Kingdom. If the latter fails to pay compensation then 'the Government of Zimbabwe has no obligation to pay compensation'. By this the legislature recognized the mistake of the Lancaster compromise Agreement. It accordingly determined to rectify this mistake by holding the former colonial power responsible for compensation. Even this is still a far cry from the exigencies of restitution and reparation being the necessary demands of historic justice. This can neither be new nor surprising. After the end of the second world war, the Adenauer government in Germany agreed to pay reparation to the Jews. The state of Israel benefitted from this agreement. The agreement bound unborn Germans. The basis for this agreement having the power to impose an obligation upon the unborn was moral and not legal. Accordingly, the Zimbabweans may assert their right to restitution and reparation.

Subsection (2) weakens and blurs the above reasoning. It reads as follows:

'In view of the overriding considerations set out in subsection (1), where agricultural land is acquired compulsorily for the resettlement of people in accordance with a programme of land reform, the following factors shall be taken into account in the assessment of any compensation that may be payable—

- (a) the history of the ownership, use and occupation of the land;
- (b) the price paid for the land when it was acquired;
- (c) the cost or value of improvements on the land;
- (d) the current use to which the land and any improvements on it are being put;
- (e) any investment which the State or the acquiring authority may have made which improved or enhanced the value of the land and any improvements on it;
- (f) the resources available to the acquiring authority in implementing the programme of land reform;
- (g) any financial constraints that necessitate the payment of compensation in instalments over a period of time; and
- (h) any other relevant factor that may be specified in an Act of Parliament.'

The basic problem with this subsection is that it concedes payment of compensation. Clearly, the legislature may not repudiate the 'obligation' to pay compensation and at the same time with regard to the same subject uphold and accept the duty to pay compensation. It is true that land dispossession was in the first place unjustified. It is also true that the loss of land and other resources by the people was not met with compensation by the former colonial power. Now what is the justification for the

legislature's preparedness to consider 'the assessment of any compensation that may be payable'? This question falls off and the paradox disappears only if the legislature proceeds from the assumption that the former colonial power is willing to honour the obligation to pay compensation. In that case, the assessment of any compensation payable is legitimate since the compensation will be coming from the former colonial power and not from the people of Zimbabwe.

As the legislature was busy making laws, the people were continuing to occupy farms owned by Zimbabweans of European descent. The occupations were not without violence. In view of this unfolding situation the British government disclosed that it had a contingency plan to receive at least twenty thousand Rhodesians into the United Kingdom. Instead of helping the situation this announcement exacerbated it. First, it was ill-timed as it came at a time when Britain was tightening all screws to make asylum into the country least attractive. Second, if it is true that freedom conferred can never be revoked<sup>99</sup> then it is difficult to understand why Britain is concerned primarily and exclusively about the well-being of Rhodesians in Zimbabwe. What about the indigenous Zimbabweans whose farms have also been occupied? Third, Britain used ancestry as the foundation of its readiness to receive the Rhodesians back home. The Rhodesians thus hold an historic title to British nationality. In this way the United Kingdom confirmed, perhaps inadvertently, that historically the conqueror does not belong to Zimbabwe. Rhodesia was the home the conqueror established in Africa through conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity.<sup>100</sup> This memory of the past is the underlying meaning of the readiness of the United Kingdom to receive at least twenty thousand Rhodesians. Other European Union countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand, have since declared themselves ready to receive some Rhodesians as well. But the United Kingdom is not the only country with a good memory of its history. The indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe have an equally good memory. They also remember that Zimbabwe belongs to them from time immemorial. Ancestry is the anchor of history from which they claim title to Zimbabwe and sovereignty over it. Britain did not deal with this at Lancaster. But this did not erase it from the memory of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe.

## REPARATIONS

Conquest in an unjust war remains the basis for the argument for reparations to the indigenous Zimbabweans. According to the technical understanding of reparations, the latter would still be bound to pay reparations to the conqueror regardless of the fact that the war was unjust in the first place.<sup>101</sup> The argument that reparations are due only to the conqueror is no longer sustainable. Why should the conqueror receive reparations for waging an unjust war in the first place? In the case of Zimbabwe and the rest of formerly colonized Africa there is simply no basis for the argument that these peoples provided the conqueror with just cause to wage war on them. When the conqueror invaded them they acted in self-defence but were defeated. They may not therefore—in the name of reparations—be held responsible for the loss of life and material suffered by the conqueror. They owe the conqueror no reparations. In order to strengthen this argument it is important to consider the question of responsibility for reparations with regard to the

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is something to be said for the argument that Japan was the author of its own destruction during the Second World War. Equally true is the fact that the adverse effects of the bombing of the two cities are still felt more than fifty years after the war. Who now is responsible for the betterment of the lives of the non-combatants not yet born but are currently affected by the previous bombings? Our point here is to show that the logic of reparations cuts across in two ways. Depending on the circumstances, reparations may be due to the conquered. It is not only the conqueror who is invariably entitled to reparations.

The above reasoning applies to the struggle in Zimbabwe for the reversion to unmodified and unencumbered sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest. By necessity it includes reparations to the indigenous Zimbabweans. Yet, as we have already shown, the Lancaster Agreement provided for the exact opposite. This is unsustainable because of its inherent injustice. It is precisely the perception by indigenous Africans of this kind of injustice that gradually led to the Kampala conference in April 1994 on reparations to Africa. Both conquest in an unjust war and the African slave trade formed the bases for the necessity to demand reparations. 'The consequences of both enslavement and colonization are not merely themes for plenary lectures at African Studies conventions, but also the malfunctioning colonial economies in Africa and the distorted socioeconomic relations in the African diaspora. Hence the malevolent continuities of both colonialism and racism.... The inspiration behind the reparations movement was not change but continuity. It was the persistence of deprivation and anguish in the black world arising directly out of the legacies of slavery and colonialism.'<sup>102</sup> Reparations are due to Africa as a matter of fundamental justice. The former colonial conqueror has the duty to do justice to the conquered by paying reparations. The conquered have a right to justice and the conqueror has the duty to perform. For this reason it is not up to the conqueror to change this question of right to one of privilege. If this happens then the conqueror would have been granted a blank cheque to make concessions to justice in a unilateral way. Thus doing justice to the conquered would be a matter of convenience and not compliance with duty.

Reparations are also due to Africa in order to provide 'a symbol of international and racial reconciliation for future amicable interaction'.<sup>103</sup> The unfolding struggle for land in Zimbabwe fits perfectly into this demand. In this sense Zimbabwe is the African pioneer engaged in the endeavour to make the demand for reparations a living reality. 'Reparations...serve as a cogent critique of history and thus a potent restraint on its repetition. It is not possible to ignore the example of the Jews and the obsessed commitment of survivors of the Holocaust, and their descendants, to recover both their material patrimony and the humanity of which they were brutally deprived... The closeness to, or distance from, a crime whose effects are still recognizable in the present is no argument for or against the justice of reparations... Justice must be made manifest either for all, or not at all.'<sup>104</sup>

### **THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In the beginning the indigenous conquered people of South Africa pursued the path of peace<sup>105</sup> in their quest for historical justice. After an assessment of the efficacy of this

path it was decided to reinforce it by resort to the use of armed force.<sup>106</sup> In the face of this the conqueror persisted in perfecting the means of oppression and suppression. In this regard the conqueror's South Africa received extraordinary assistance from her Western allies.<sup>107</sup> The declaration policy of the latter censured oppression and suppression. This did not deter these allies from according the conqueror's South Africa full and complete status of international personality. On this basis South Africa enjoyed membership of international organizations such as the United Nations including a special relationship with NATO under the auspices of SACLANT (the Supreme Allied Command in the Atlantic).<sup>108</sup> The declaration policy of South Africa's Western allies was on the whole far from consistent with its action policy. Juridically, the conqueror's South Africa was considered in no way defective with particular reference to title to territory and sovereignty. Precisely because of this the Act of Union in 1910, the Republican status acquired in 1961 after the dismemberment of South Africa from the Commonwealth, Bantustanization, and the 1983 constitution were all regarded as evolutionary phases of South African constitutionalism. Criticism of any of these developments was more political than juridical. The reasoning underlying the juridical view appears to be this. Conquest does not necessarily and immediately vest title to territory in the conqueror. The latter may, however, exercise immediately absolute sovereignty over the territory. Either through acquiescence<sup>109</sup> or lapse of time title to territory may eventually vest in the conqueror. From this moment the superior claim to their territory by the indigenous conquered peoples becomes extinguished.<sup>110</sup> Thus extinctive prescription eliminates the superior claim of the conquered and renders it obsolete. Accordingly, a legal prohibition is imposed upon the conquered never ever to revive their claim to territorial title and sovereignty over it.<sup>111</sup> At the same time this prohibition perfects the conqueror's acquisition of territory by conquest. In this way the universe of juristic facts excludes, discards and ignores a matter of natural and fundamental justice. Extinctive prescription or the statute of limitation created a specific and definite area of tension precisely by the exclusion of a matter which for the indigenous conquered peoples is a question of natural and fundamental justice. This tension is sharpened particularly by the fact that the conception of law of the indigenous conquered peoples does not recognize the statute of limitation. 'Prescription is unknown in African law. The African believes that time cannot change the truth. Just as the truth must be taken into consideration each time it becomes known, so must no obstacle be placed in the way of the search for it and its discovery. It is for this reason that judicial decisions are not authoritative. They must be able to be called into question.'<sup>112</sup> So it is that even at the juridical level there is a conceptual clash. This would certainly exacerbate the tension created by the exclusion of a matter of fundamental justice.

The exclusion made it relatively easy to urge, on political grounds, for the extension of democracy to the indigenous conquered people. This, so the argument continued, would be achieved through the abolition of the 1983<sup>113</sup> constitution and its replacement by a new constitution. It was thus predetermined in advance that the new constitution would exclude and ignore the question of the reversion of title to territory as well as the restoration of sovereignty over it. Thus the basis and parameters of transition to democracy in South Africa were laid down.<sup>114</sup> This was the case also with regard to the negotiations leading to the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe.

## THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

There were only two major parties to the negotiations leading to a new South Africa. These were the conquered people on the one side and the conqueror on the other. The former term is preferred because it is historically appropriate and at the same time avoids an ethnic perspective to the problem. It includes expressly the indigenous peoples, the Coloured people, the Indian people, and all other peoples who though not vanquished at the onset of 'discovery and colonization, were nevertheless subjugated by the conqueror. Accordingly, the characterization of the parties as it is done here is deliberately neutral as to race; a term which continues to be almost at the centre of contemporary South African and Zimbabwean politics. Another observation we wish to make is that the claim to title to territory and sovereignty over it is far from a demand to restore honour to an attenuated prestige. It may, however, not be denied that this is a secondary. The quest for justice in the form of restoration of title to territory and sovereignty over it is primarily predicated on the premise that land is the indispensable resource<sup>115</sup> for the sustenance of human life.<sup>116</sup> The right to life<sup>117</sup> is inseparable from the right to land. It is the most fundamental in the sense that it is the basis for and precedes all other human rights.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, talk about human rights must recognize that there were human beings and human rights long, long ago before the term 'human rights' was coined.

In the 'negotiations' leading to the new South Africa there were two contending paradigms, namely, the decolonization and democratization paradigms.<sup>119</sup> The former speaks to the restoration of title to territory and sovereignty over it. It includes the exigency of restitution. It would bring the conqueror to renounce in principle and expressly title to South African territory and sovereignty over it. In this way sovereignty would revert to its rightful heirs. The conqueror's South Africa would be dissolved. This would then lay the basis for state succession.<sup>120</sup> The legal consequences flowing from total state succession<sup>121</sup> or the Nyerere doctrine<sup>122</sup> (the clean slate doctrine) would then follow. By its nature then the decolonization paradigm is contrary to and inconsistent with the conqueror's claims pertaining to extinctive prescription. By contrast, the democratization paradigm conforms to and is consistent with the conqueror's claims concerning extinctive prescription. It proceeds from the premise that given the evolutionary character of constitutionalism in South Africa, the major weakness of the 1983 constitution consists in the exclusion of the indigenous conquered peoples. Therefore, democracy will be achieved through the inclusion of the latter in the new constitution. In this way non-racialism would be one of the hallmarks of the new constitutional dispensation. In its determination to achieve victory over apartheid, the democratization paradigm lost sight of the fact that the land question was a basic issue<sup>123</sup> long, long before apartheid was born. Despite this oversight, democratization won the day and so the question of title to territory and sovereignty over it did not become an integral part of the 'negotiations' agenda.

In these circumstances it was relatively easy for the conqueror to realize the resolve to defend and consolidate all the benefits resulting from extinctive prescription. To this end the conqueror argued for the abolition of the principle of the sovereignty of parliament. This was rather odd since the sovereignty of parliament was a basic constitutional principle<sup>124</sup> in South Africa for as long as the conqueror held sole and exclusive political

power. This principle did not become suddenly inadequate. Instead, the conqueror feared that the indisputable numerical majority of the conquered people would probably abuse the principle. To avert this abuse abolition was considered the best solution. The conqueror's fear was based on the experience of its own abuse of this principle. It was pertinently observed in this connection that: 'Several modern critics of the South African constitution have argued cogently that the foundation fathers of the Union created the wrong sort of constitution for this sort of country, urging that greater decentralization (...) plus the incorporation in the written constitution of a bill of rights enforceable by a more independent judiciary endowed with testing power, all established on a much broader basis of popular consent, would have made it a more acceptable and enduring document. With these opinions we need not quarrel. The absence of safeguards of this sort resulted in the attribution of supremacy to a legislature which is not and never has been thoroughly representative, and which has since shown a disposition to use that supremacy with singular lack of restraint.'<sup>125</sup>

In an effort to win the support of the numerical majority population in the country, the conqueror appealed to *ubuntu*<sup>126</sup> and used it tactfully to remove the causes of its own fear. Here it is important to understand that the majority of the South African population continues to be nurtured and educated according to the basic tenets of *ubuntu*, notwithstanding the selective amnesia of a small segment of the indigenous elite. For example, *ubuntu* was included in the interim constitution to justify the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>127</sup> Yet, the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission cannot be said to be the expression of the will of the conquered people of South Africa. This is because the necessity was a unilateral decision by the political leadership of the conquered people. The people themselves were not consulted, by way of a referendum, for example. From this point of view the decision was democratic and, therefore, it was not the execution of the will of the conquered. This is in sharp contrast to the leadership of former President De Klerk who in the heat of the 'negotiations' leading to the 'new' South Africa fielded a referendum exclusively to the conqueror in order to obtain a fresh mandate for specific items to be negotiated. So the appeal to *ubuntu* is hardly convincing especially because the term was excluded from the final constitution. Why? *Ubuntu* was again invoked by the Constitutional Court delivering the judgment that capital punishment is unconstitutional.<sup>128</sup> With respect, the invocation of *ubuntu* in this case was *obiter dictum* as the same conclusion could have been reached without recourse to *ubuntu*. Knowing why and how the death sentence affected mainly the conquered people in the past, the conqueror once again was driven by fear in opting for the abolition of the death sentence. These transparent tactics apart, it is curious that the final Constitution should remain completely silent about *ubuntu*. If a constitution is at bottom the casting into legal language of the moral and political convictions of a people then the mere translation of Westminster and Roman Law legal paradigms into the vernacular languages of the indigenous conquered people is not equal to the constitutional embodiment of their moral and political convictions. There is no a priori reason why *ubuntu* should not be the basic philosophy for constitutional democracy in South Africa.

Contrary to its rejection of this in the past, the conqueror now urged for the Constitution as the basic law of the country. The essence of the argument here is that the



Constitution as the basic and supreme law of the country shall be above the law-making power vested in parliament. The laws enacted by parliament shall, in principle, always be subject to their conformity and consistency with the Constitution. Parliament would therefore be the prisoner of the Constitution whose principles<sup>129</sup> possessed the character of essentiality<sup>130</sup> and immutability. What then is the meaning of popular sovereignty in the form of representative parliamentary democracy? Without attempting to answer this question it is clear that the option for Constitutional supremacy by the conqueror was not simply a matter of juridical considerations. The cumulative result of the conqueror's arguments and tactics is that the democratization paradigm carried the day. Its success was in fact the victory of extinctive prescription. Thus the injustice of conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity was constitutionalized. This constitutionalization of injustice places the final Constitution on a precarious footing because of its failure to respond to the exigencies of natural and fundamental justice due to the indigenous conquered people. But the constitutionalization of an injustice carries within itself the demand for justice. Accordingly, the reversion of title to territory and the restoration of sovereignty over it did not die at the birth of the new Constitution for South Africa.

### ***MOLATO GA O BOLE: CHALLENGING EXTINCTIVE PRESCRIPTION***

The paradox of democratization and independence in both South Africa and Zimbabwe is that the compromises that the political representatives of the conquered peoples made are philosophically and materially inconsistent with their people's understanding of historical justice. Philosophically, the peoples hold that *molato ga o bole*, that is, extinctive prescription, is untenable in the African understanding of law. Until and unless equilibrium is restored through the restoration of title to territory and the reversion of sovereignty over it even the best constitution would be fragile for lack of homegrown credentials.<sup>131</sup> Landlessness resulting from the arbitrary definition of truth and justice according to the meridian line is the immediate material effect of this clash at the philosophical level. In terms of immediacy therefore it is understandable to urge for the redefinition of property and land reform.<sup>132</sup> But these are manifestations of the fundamental problem of the restoration of title to territory and the reversion of absolute sovereignty over it.<sup>133</sup> That 'in general the doctrine of reversion to sovereignty does not apply to sub-Saharan Africa' is an untenable thesis. The authority upon which the learned author relies for this thesis is burdened with an unmistakably cursory and superficial knowledge of African history. Nonetheless, he proceeds from such knowledge to draw sweeping conclusions about unspecified 'African Rulers' and 'African Chieftains'. It is also crystal clear that the authority is committed to the untenable view that because Western Europe had a supposedly superior civilization it therefore had the right to colonize.<sup>134</sup> The thesis that the reversion to sovereignty is neither relevant nor applicable to sub-Saharan Africa is philosophically untenable and historically empty. It is therefore submitted that the restoration of title to territory and the reversion of sovereignty over it is the basic problem.

It is still problematical that even in this second phase the government of Zimbabwe continues to deal with this problem as a matter of conflict of rights in the sphere of

private property rights. This has led the government to enact a new law permitting land acquisition without compensation. Critics of this law argue that the legislature decided on this enactment contrary to the result of the referendum. What the critics omit to mention is that according to the law of the land, a referendum has got no legal force. Whatever the result it is not legally binding on the government. And the government is not necessarily the legislature. In addition, the critics fail to appreciate the fact that the majority of the indigenous conquered people in Zimbabwe are illiterate especially with their lack of understanding of the dominant epistemological paradigm of the conqueror. Against this background, it is not difficult to see that the very idea of a referendum was essentially a tactical blunder since its import could not be properly appreciated. Another blunder was at the scientific level. It was inappropriate to seek a vote on the referendum as a whole without at the same time determining that the counting will be on each issue separately. Alternatively, the people should have been asked to cast multiple votes by way of giving an answer to each item on the referendum. Since neither of these was pursued, it is fair to conclude that scientifically the referendum contained fatal flaws. No wonder then that the people went ahead and occupied land as though there never was a referendum. The critics of the government argue that such occupation is in violation of the human rights of the land 'owners'. It is important to determine if the critics belong historically to the category of the conquered or the conqueror. On the basis of such a determination it is worth reminding the critics that long before the coinage of the term 'human rights' there were human beings and these were surely not without rights. Did the conqueror show respect for any of these rights when lawlessness, lack of morality, and inhumanity were the main features of the original conquest leading to the acquisition of territory beyond the meridian line? The British government has not made matters easy by announcing the existence of an emergency plan to receive about 20 000 Rhodesians back into the United Kingdom. No doubt this announcement is tantamount to the British government's admission that there are Rhodesians in Zimbabwe who have a claim to British nationality by right of ancestry. Ironically, it is precisely the right of ancestry upon which the indigenous conquered peoples of Zimbabwe rely to urge for the exigencies of historical justice. Both the Zimbabwean government's approach and the British government's reaction to it exacerbate the conflict. But even without this it is clear, at least for those like the present writer who took time to be in the midst of the so-called ordinary people in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, that people have finally decided to go their own way to solve the problem. Following their conversations in public transport, under the tree talk, in amusement centres and private homes, there is no doubt that people argue for title to territory and sovereignty over it. This boils down to nothing less than reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree lost at conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity. It must be stated in fairness to the Patriotic Front that on this point it was long, long ago at one with the peoples. 'The Patriotic Front relinquished under pressure many of its fundamental tenets during the conference... As the government of Zimbabwe, it must operate under a constitution not entirely of its own choosing.'<sup>135</sup> There is evidence that both the Pan Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Organization of South Africa concur with the peoples on this point. Unlike, the Patriotic Front, the Pan Africanist Congress did not pursue this point at the 'negotiations'. Despite its non-participation in the 'negotiations', the Azanian

People's Organization did not—even in its campaign at the last general elections—present title to territory in its election manifesto. As the political leadership in both countries continues to pursue the resolution of this conflict within the narrow and untenable epistemological paradigm of the conqueror, their peoples chartered their own route through the *matyotyombe* phenomenon which is common to both South Africa and Zimbabwe. (*Matyotyombe* is a Xhosa term that refers to a complex combination of dirt, despondency, miserability, poverty as well as unacceptable exposure to very serious health risks. In short, it refers to a condition unfit for human habitation but human beings nonetheless find themselves in that condition.) The option for *matyotyombe* is a radical questioning of the juridical epistemology of the conqueror. It is a rejection of a situation of basic injustice protected by a constitution without homegrown credentials. It is the refusal to grant such a constitution the power to preempt, proscribe, and nullify the exigencies of justice due to the conquered people.

### THE REVERSION TO UNENCUMBERED AND UNMODIFIED SOVEREIGNTY

For the conquered people 'democratization' or independence would be incomplete and meaningless if it excluded the reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as was lost at conquest ungoverned by law, morality, and humanity. *Matyotyombe* is the people's expression of this; a guide to the political leadership. It is a Xhosa word designating conditions of squalor. It is descriptive of a situation of extreme poverty, dirt, and moral degradation. It signifies conditions unbefitting to human habitation and derogatory of human dignity. Concretely, this refers to houses, shacks built of ordinary plastic wood, corrugated iron, mud or even bricks. The size and structure of these edifices reflect anything but a home. Safety for the dwellers is, to say the least, lowest.

The problem with *matyotyombe* is that they proliferate relentlessly in all directions. They penetrate any area and freely fix themselves. They even fix themselves on no man's land which subsequently turns out to be another's 'private property'. The latter then defines *matyotyombe* dwellers as squatters. Both the legality and the justice of the claimant's right to 'private property' are assumed to be valid even for the so-called squatters. The injured party then seeks a remedy through the courts. The latter invariably hand down eviction orders. These evoke defiance instead of obedience from the dwellers. The reason for this may be found in the Sotho term for the same *matyotyombe*, namely, *baipei*. The latter is descriptive of people who have fixed and settled themselves into a particular place. The idea of being fixed to a place in the sense of belonging to it as of right underlies the meaning of *moipei* being the singular of *baipei*. *Baipei* does not fix themselves at any place as though they are in search of any space: a void without any history. *Baipei* assert their right to a place and not a space and the whole of South Africa is this place because it is 'space which has historical meaning, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken and which have established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny...a yearning for a place is a decision to enter history with an identifiable people in an identifiable pilgrimage'.<sup>136</sup> The

pilgrimage for the restoration of title to territory and the reversion of unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty over it is spearheaded by the *baipei*. Slowly the government of Zimbabwe has joined this pilgrimage of the people. It needs, however, to rid itself of the burden of dominance by the juridical paradigm of the conqueror especially with regard to the putative eternity and immutability of 'property rights'. With particular reference to both rural and urban land both the governments and the courts of Zimbabwe and South Africa must, at the very minimum, recognize and accept together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Brazil that: 'The right to make use of urban land to guarantee adequate housing is one of the primary conditions for creating a life that is authentically human. Therefore when land occupations—or even land invasions—occur, legal judgments on property titles must begin with the right of all to adequate housing. All claims to private ownership must take second place to this basic need.... We conclude that the natural right to housing has priority over the law that governs land appropriation. A legal title to property can hardly be an absolute in the face of the human need of people who have nowhere to make their home.'<sup>137</sup>

### **CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POST-CONQUEST SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE**

We have shown that conquest unguided by law, morality, or humanity is the original basis for the conqueror's claim to title to territory by appeal to extinctive prescription. Such a claim is, from the point of view of the conquered, untenable even if one were to appeal to Papal mandate, discovery or the mission to civilize. The posterity of the original conqueror is therefore not the legal successor in title to absolute sovereignty. Extinctive prescription is inconsistent with the legal philosophy of the indigenous conquered people. It is also contrary to natural and fundamental justice. Accordingly, the restoration of title to territory and the reversion of unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest remains the basic demand of justice due to the indigenous conquered people. This includes the exigencies of restitution and reparations. The restoration of title to territory and the reversion of sovereignty as already indicated constitute the inescapable basis for a post-conquest South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Primarily for the convenience of the conqueror, apartheid was presented as the main problem in South Africa. By the time apartheid appeared in 1948, title to territory and sovereignty over it had established itself as the main problem in the country at least two and a half centuries back. The elimination of apartheid solved the problem only by conferring limping sovereignty over the indigenous conquered peoples. The elimination of apartheid is not an answer to the question of the reversion of unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree of sovereignty as was lost at conquest unguided by law, morality, or humanity. The transition to Zimbabwe also conferred limping sovereignty to the indigenous conquered people of the country in the same way as in South Africa. Thus a post-conquest South Africa and Zimbabwe is yet to be born in the form of a veritable state succession rather than government succession as it is at present the case in both countries. To argue otherwise is to condone the questionable maxim that *ex injuria ius oritur*. State succession must ensue with the express and unequivocal declaration by the conqueror renouncing sovereignty over territory. This is

inescapably necessary in order to dissolve the categories of conquered and conqueror. But the dissolution does not create automatically equality of condition in material terms. For this reason restitution and reparation arise as distinct necessities of historical justice. If this is a novelty in international law, there surely is nothing to suggest that the corpus of this law is comprehensive, exhaustive, and definitive. The ordinary consequences of state succession must follow thereby delivering the conquered of the burdens which they neither created nor benefitted from. This would create space to work out a home-grown post-conquest constitution. Restitution and reparation must be counted among the basic pillars of the post-conquest constitution. Instead of taking up the offer to return to Britain or other ancestral homelands, the former conqueror under the guise of a citizen second to none could be part of this constitution-making. A post-conquest constitution for South Africa and Zimbabwe—indeed for the rest of formerly colonized and enslaved Africa—would be predicated on the necessity to rectify the injustice of the past. Justice as equilibrium would, on this basis, appear to be an acceptable premise of constitution-making. Remove the element of responsibility then justice as experience and concept becomes totally devoid of meaning. Therefore, ‘reparations...as a structure of memory and critique, may be regarded as a necessity for the credibility of Eurocentric historicism, and a corrective for its exclusionist world-view...what really would be preposterous or ethically inadmissible in imposing a general levy on South Africa’s white population?’<sup>138</sup> This measure of restitution surely applies to Zimbabwe and seems a better option to the current land acquisition process. It is salutary to note that many academics from within the ranks of the conqueror have already raised the possibility of wealth tax. Prominent among them is the Stellenbosch University academic Professor Sampie Terblanche whose testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the question of wealth tax deserves much more than a cursory study.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Hume, D., ‘Of national characters’, in F.N. Norton and R.H. Popkin, eds., *David Hume, philosophical historian*, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965.
- 2 McMillan, Carol, *Women, reason and nature*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1982.
- 3 Lange, Lynda, ‘Woman is not a rational animal’, in Sandra Harding and M.B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering reality*, Dordrecht: Reidel Publishers, 1983:1–15.
- 4 Hanke, L., *Aristotle and the American Indians*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959:ix.
- 5 Mudimbe, V.L., *The invention of Africa*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1988.
- 6 Williams, R.A., *The American Indian in Western legal thought: The discourses of conquest*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- 7 Dussel, E., *Philosophy of liberation*, Tr. Aquilina and Christine Morkovsky, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1985:3.
- 8 Popkin, R.H., ‘The philosophical bases of modern racism’, in C. Walton and J.P. Anton, eds., *Philosophy and the civilizing arts*, Athens: Ohio University Press,

1974:128–129.

9 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the philosophy of world history*, Tr. H.B.Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975:190.

10 Schmitt, C., ‘The land appropriation of a new world’, *Telos*, 109, Fall 1996:30.

11 Gilson, E., *God and philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941:141.

12 Ruether, Rosemary, ‘The collision of history and doctrine: The brothers of Jesus and the virginity of Mary’, *Continuum*, 7(1) 1969:94–96.

13 Novak, A.J., ‘The virgin birth: ad Ruether’, *Continuum*, 7(3) 1969:443–452.

14 Ware, R.C., ‘The resurrection of Jesus, II: Historical-critical studies’, *The Heythrop Journal*, xvi(2) April 1975:177.

15 Ware, R.C., ‘The resurrection of Jesus, 1: Theological orientations’, *The Heythrop Journal*, xvi(1) January 1975:26–27.

16 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. 40,1.

17 Ramose, M.B., ‘Only the sovereign may declare war and NATO too’, *Studia Moralia*, 38, 2000.

18 Russell, F.H., *The just war ‘in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975:258–291.

19 Steenbergen Van, F., ‘The reading and study of St Thomas’, *Theology Digest*, iv(3), 1956:166–169.

20 That ‘limited nuclear war’ is a military illusion is a point that requires no special pleading. It is copiously documented. Again, the rationality of nuclear weapons lies precisely and only in their non-use. Accordingly, any use of these weapons will overstep the bounds of rationality. This is the essence of the well-documented rationality of the irrationality argument. Nuclear war would be irrational because it would defeat all the aims pursued by such warfare. A war that guarantees that there will be no survivors can hardly claim to be a defensive war. Yet, in answer to the following question: is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstances permitted under international law?, the International Court of Justice held as follows. ‘There is in neither customary nor conventional international law any specific authorization of the threat or use of nuclear weapons; There is in neither customary nor conventional international law any comprehensive and universal prohibition of the threat or use of nuclear weapons as such; A threat or use of force by means of nuclear weapons that is contrary to Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter and that fails to meet all the requirements of Article 51, is unlawful; A threat or use of nuclear weapons would be compatible with the requirements of the international law applicable in armed conflict, particularly those of the principles and rules of international humanitarian law, as well as with specific obligations under treaties and other undertakings which expressly deal with nuclear weapons; It follows from the above-mentioned requirements that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law, However, in view of the current state of international law, and of the elements of fact at its disposal, the Court cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake; There exists an

obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.' Quoted from Burroughs, J., *The legality of threat or use of nuclear weapons*, Munster: LIT, 1997:21–22.

21 For an extended discussion of this topic see, Ramose, M.B., *The legalistic character of power in international relations: A philosophical essay on the ethics of defence in the nuclear age*, unpublished Doctoral dissertation presented to the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), Leuven, Belgium, 1983.

22 Mangan, J.T., 'An historical analysis of the principle of the double effect', *Theological Studies*, x(1) 1949:42.

23 Schmitt, C., 'The land appropriation of a new world', *Telos* 109, Fall 1996:36–37.

24 Troup, F., *South Africa*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975:33 and 53.

25 Mason, P. *The birth of a dilemma: The conquest and settlement of Rhodesia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Palley, Claire, *The constitutional history and law of Southern Rhodesia 1888–1965*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966. It is significant that the first chapter of this book deals primarily with the drawing of lines by and among the European powers with regard to the demarcation of their respective 'spheres of influence'. The latter was the exclusive zone of the particular European claimant. In the second place we read about land purchase arrangements with local chiefs' as though the chiefs had put their land to sale out of goodwill. Almost nothing is said about why and how the conqueror finally had access to the chief. It is instructive though to compare the so-called land purchase arrangements with local chiefs with what transpired in the acquisition from the indigenous Indians of United States and Canadian territory by the conqueror from Europe. See in this connection:

Lysyk, K., 'The Indian title question in Canada: An appraisal in the light of Calder', *La Revue du Bureau Canadien*, LI, 1973:450–480.

Calder, V. et al. 'Attorney-General of British Columbia 34 D.L.R. (3rd) 1973.

Uzoigwe, G.N., *Britain and the conquest of Africa: The age of Salisbury*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974.

Quinn, D.B., *England and the discovery of America 1481–1620*, New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1974.

26 Van Kleffens, E.N., 'Sovereignty and international law', *Recueil de Cours*, 82, 1953:11–12.

27 This is intended solely as an example. It is not an argument from authority. As such it is not intended to suggest that since god does draw lines the creatures of this god have no other choice but to do the same.

28 Thompson, Janna, 'Land rights and Aboriginal sovereignty', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 68(3) 1990:316.

29 The 'Donation of Constantine' is a vital ingredient in the papal struggle to extricate itself from the *respublica Romana*. Although the document is widely regarded as a forgery and a fraud, it played a significant role and perhaps even a decisive one in emancipating the papacy from the *respublica Romana*. It also assisted the papacy to lay claim to supreme authority in Latin Christendom. Since the detailed history

relating to these questions is outside the scope of the present essay, we direct the interested reader to the following:

Ullman, W., *The growth of papal government in the Middle Ages*, London: Methuen, 1955:75–83.

McIlwain, C.H., *The growth of political thought in the West*, New York: Macmillan, 1932:270–271.

Carlyle R.E. and Carlyle, A.J., 'A history of medieval political theory in the West', vol. 1, Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons Ltd, mcmxlii, 158.

Spruyt, H., *The sovereign and its competitors*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994:45.

30 Here we refer specifically to Matthew xvi, 18–19. Without any attempt at an exegetical exposition of this verse, we suggest that these words mean that Peter's authority to rule the Christian com-monwealth is derived directly and immediately from Christ who is god. Therefore, Peter-pope may not be judged by anyone on earth (*papa a nemine judicetur*). This claim notwithstanding, the problem of succession to Peter arose. The core of the problem was the argument that since the very words of Christ were addressed directly and specifically to Peter, the Petrine Commission ceased with the death of Peter. Consequently, the successors of Peter were not entitled to the authority contained in the commission. Moreover, Peter himself had not provided for the transfer of his authority. The document known as the 'Epistola Clementis' purports to answer this argument. For a detailed treatment of this see: Ullman, W., *The church and the law in the Middle Ages*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1975:295–317.

31 Williams, R.A., *The American Indian in Western legal thought: The discourses of conquest*, Oxford: University Press, 1990:67.

32 Mudimbe, V. L., 'African gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge: An introduction', *African Studies Review*, 28(2/3) 1985:151–153.

33 Mudimbe, V. L., *The invention of Africa*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988:45.

34 It is important to note that in March 2000 Pope John-Paul II openly and publicly asked for forgiveness for such abuses by the Roman Catholic Church. The apology could certainly have been more specific. At the same time it is curious that in asking for forgiveness the Pope mentioned nothing about the Church's readiness to consider restitution and reparation. Yet, it is customary in the Catholic Church that at confession absolution is accompanied by some burden in the form of three Hail Marys, for example, or Our Father once. Surely, redemption by Christ does not mean reconciliation and forgiveness eliminating freedom and, therefore, absolving all human of the responsibility to choose either eternal bliss or condemnation.

35 Hanke, L., 'Pope Paul III and the American Indians', *Harvard Theological Review*, xxx 1937:71–72.

36 The designation, 'first/third world' clearly preserves the hierarchy of superior and inferior. At the same time it is not necessarily free of racism. A pertinent argument in this connection reads as follows: 'by 1648 there was ample evidence that civilisation was rapidly supplanting Christianity as standard of moral assessment of non-Christian states. This continued to be the case long after Christianity had ceased



to be a relevant factor in international relations, with a hard residue of Augustinian exclusiveness and Aristotelean superiority surviving in the attitudes of European powers towards political communities encountered in their expansion overseas. This was partly reflected in the terms contained in so-called capitulation treaties. The same mentality was epitomised in the treaty relationship between European colonial powers and African tribal chiefs, who were refused recognition as subjects of international law. It survived the termination of the colonial, mandate and trusteeship systems in the second half of the twentieth century to resurface in the form of growing racial prejudice against those originating in the former “uncivilised” fringe. In our days, lurking behind an outward benevolence, it is manifested in a generally condescending attitude towards what we are now pleased to call the “underdeveloped countries” or, relegating it instinctively to the bottom of the scale, the “third world”.

Parkinson, F., *The philosophy of international relations*, Beverly Hills, London: Sage Publications, 1977:24–25.

37 McMahan, M.M., *Conquest and modern international law: The legal limitations on the acquisition of territory by conquest*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940:44.

38 Blum, Y.Z., *Historic titles in international law*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965:4.

39 McMahan, M.M., *Conquest and modern international law*, 1940:8.

40 MacGibbon, I.C., ‘The scope of acquiescence in international law’, *The British Year Book of International Law*, 1954:143.

41 Waldron, J., ‘Superseding historic injustice’, *Ethics*, 103 October 1992:15.

42 Cattani, H., *Palestine and international law: The legal aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict*, London: Longman Group Ltd., 1976:110.

43 Hyde, C.C., ‘Conquest today’, *American Journal of International Law*, 30 1936:471.

44 Schwarzenberger, G., ‘Title to territory: Response to a challenge’, *American Journal of International Law*, 51 1957:314.

45 Fisch, J., ‘Africa as terra nullius: The Berlin Conference and international law’, in S.Forster, W.J.Mommsen, and R.Robinson, eds., *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The German Historical Institute* London: Oxford University Press, 1988:347–375.

Wesseling, H.L., ‘The Berlin Conference and the expansion of Europe: A conclusion’, S.Forster et al., op cit. 1988:528–540.

46 Robinson, R., ‘The Conference in Berlin and the future in Africa, 1884–1885’, S.Forster et al., op cit. 1988:1–32.

47 De Courcel, G., ‘The Berlin Act of 26 February 1885’, S. Forster et al., op cit. 1988:247–261.

48 Gann, L.H., ‘The Berlin Conference and the humanitarian conscience’, S.Forster, et al., op cit. 1988:321–331.

49 Uzoigwe, G.N., ‘The results of the Berlin West Africa Conference: An assessment’, S.Forster et al., 1988:542.

50 Memory is what urged the Jewish people to insist that historical justice demands that the state of Israel be established. This happened finally in May 1948. Similarly,

after more than six hundred years the memory of the two main ethnic groups in Kosovo impels each group to claim sovereignty and title to Kosovar territory. This has led to several bloody struggles. One of them led to the bombardment of Belgrade by NATO. Despite the heavy heat and suffocating smoke of the bombs, the struggle for title to Kosovar territory continues as though NATO never dropped a single bomb. Memory also led to the war for the Falklands Islands (Malvinas) between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The latter conceding China's memory and claim to historical justice eventually recognized Chinese title and sovereignty over Hong Kong. On the basis of these few examples, it surely cannot be seriously argued that the indigenous conquered peoples of South Africa and Zimbabwe are incapable of remembering their history. Accordingly, their memory urging them to insist that historical justice demands the return of the land to its rightful owners and the restoration of their sovereignty over it may not be regarded as either irrational or exceptional. Yet, sustained efforts continue to be made to ensure that these demands of historical justice are eternally erased from the memory of the indigenous conquered peoples of Zimbabwe and South Africa. For this reason academic and by no means disinterested South African historiography remains committed to challenging the validity of the more than obvious veracity of the proposition that there are to this day identifiable original and, therefore, rightful owners of the territory on the one hand and those who are the beneficiaries of conquest on the other. This debate apart, conquest in the colonization of South Africa finds memorable expression in the following. The Khoikhoi sued for peace, and tried to regain rights to their pastures, "standing upon it that we (the Dutch) had gradually been taking more and more of their land, which had been theirs since the beginning of time... Asking also, whether if they came to Holland, they would be permitted to do the like". The Commander argued that if their land were restored there would not be enough grazing for both nations. The Khoikhoi replied "Have we then no cause to prevent you from getting more cattle? The more you have the more lands you will occupy. And to say the land is not big enough for both, who should give way, the rightful owner or the foreign invader?" Van Riebeeck made it clear "that they had now lost the land in war and therefore could only expect to be henceforth deprived of it... The country had thus fallen to our lot, being justly won in defensive warfare and...it was our intention to retain it.' Quoted from Troup, Freda, *South Africa*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975:33 and 53. To date the beneficiaries of this conquest have reaffirmed the intention to retain the land and never return it to its rightful owners. The same beneficiaries persist in the argument that the Bantu-speaking peoples have no just title to the territory since they have taken it away from the Khoisan. This argument is based on a mistaken understanding of the meaning of 'indigenous conquered peoples of South Africa'. It is clearly the conqueror's one-sided and self-interested misrepresentation of the history of South Africa. Even if the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa might have taken the land from the Khoisan it does not follow that two wrongs make a right. If the Khoisan have been conquered in an unjust war, it is essential that they themselves should say so and declare their solution. Any other interest party purporting to act in their name must show why and what interest they have in the

matter. They must also prove that they act on the express request of the Khoisan.

51 Emerson, R., 'Self-determination', *American Journal of International Law*, 65(3) July 1971:465.

52 Shaw, M., *Title to territory in Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986:23.

53 Marek, Krystyna, *Identity and continuity of states in public international law*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968:127–128.

54 Mason, P., *The birth of a dilemma: The conquest and settlement of Rhodesia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958:209–210.

55 Devine, D.J., 'The status of Rhodesia in international law', *Acta Juridica*, 1974:111.

56 Kirkman, W.P., 'The Rhodesian referendum: The significance of 20 June 1969', *International Affairs*, 45(4) October 1969:648.

57 McDougal, M.S. and Reisman, W.M., 'Rhodesia and the United Nations: The lawfulness of international concern', *The American Journal of International Law*, 62, 1968:10–11.

58 It is significant that the Zimbabwean novelist, Vambe, in his novel, *An ill-fated people*, uses the expression, 'the conquered people' with reference to the indigenous Zimbabweans at least more than twenty times.

59 Harris, P.B., 'The failure of a "Constitution": The Whaley Report, Rhodesia 1968', *International Affairs*, 45(2) April 1969:235.

60 Devine, D.J., 'The status of Rhodesia in international law', *Acta Juridica* 1974:111.

61 Davidow, J. *A Peace in Southern Africa: The Lancaster House conference on Rhodesia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Law School, 1990:56.

62 Commenting on the imposition of a similar solution by the British government on Kenya, Makonnen argued appositely that: 'Kenya paid compensation for land reacquired from the "alien" land holders...the British Government provided Kenya with loans from its own sources and also from the World bank, in order to finance the compensation for the transferred alien property, which amounted in fact to outright repurchasing of Kenya by the Kenyans.' Makonnen, Y., *International law and the New States of Africa*, 1983:363–364.

63 Mandaza, I., 'Reconciliation and social justice in Southern Africa: The Zimbabwe experience', in M.W.Makgoba, ed., *African Renaissance*, Mafube: Tafelberg, 1999:90.

64 Our understanding of title to territory is that the concept is much more than a reference to a geographically identifiable entity. It includes the people who may be defined as the sovereign. Such a definition must take into account, especially, the historical basis of the right to sovereignty. 'Territory is, of course, itself a geographical conception relating to physical areas of the globe, but its centrality in law derives from the fact that it constitutes the tangible framework for the manifestation of power by the accepted authorities of the State in question. The principle whereby such a State is deemed to exercise exclusive power over its territory can be seen as a fundamental axiom of classical international law. Territory therefore plays not only a definitional role, but a constitutive one historically as well. It is the link between a people, its identity as a State, and its international role.'

- Shaw, M., *Title to territory in Africa*, London: Clarendon Press, 1986:1–3.
- 65 Consonant with the ideology that the meridian line decides the truth and defines justice it was claimed that the West had the sole and exclusive right to colonize. The basis for this claim was that only the West had a superior civilization. The supposed exclusive right of the West to colonize denied in advance that the peoples of Africa could have sovereignty over territory to which they held title. Accordingly, the question of the reversion of unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to Africa as at precolonization was held not to arise. It is unnecessary to argue the ignorance about African history on the part of the proponents of this thesis. Suffice it to state that the thesis is philosophically untenable and historically empty. Among the proponents of this thesis are:  
 Alexandrowicz, C.H., ‘New and original states: The issue of reversion to sovereignty’, *International Affairs*, 45(3) July 1969:471–473. Devine, D.J., ‘The status of Rhodesia in international law’, *Acta Juridica* 1979:403.
- 66 UNGAR 3348 (xxix) 1974.
- 67 Donnelly, J., *The concept of human rights*, London/Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985:3.
- 68 *Rerum Novarum*, pars. 10 and 35. To be read in conjunction with par. 43 of *Mater et Magistra* and pars. 9 and 11 of *Pacem in Terris* in D.J.O’Brien and T.A.Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995.
- 69 Donnelly, J., *The concept of human rights*, 1985:13.
- 70 Waldron, J., *The right to private property*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983:103.
- 71 Fanon, F., *The wretched of the earth*, Tr. C. Farrington, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965:34.
- 72 Sullivan, S.J., *Killing in defense of private property*, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976.
- 73 Beach, D.N., “‘Chimurenga’”: The Shona rising of 1896–97’, in G.Maddox, and T.K.Welliver, eds., *Colonialism and nationalism in Africa*, New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993:395–420.
- 74 This point is expressed in the following legal language. ‘As far as international law is concerned, there can be no doubt that a mother state is competent to grant independence to a colony or other dependency or to a part of the territory. There can be no doubt that the United Kingdom claims to be such a mother state exercising sovereignty over Rhodesia. This claim to sovereignty over Rhodesia is recognized by practically all other states. It cannot, therefore, be doubted that the United Kingdom has the competence to grant independence to Rhodesia. Were such a grant to be made, other states need not necessarily recognize Rhodesian independence.’  
 Devine, D.J., ‘The status of Rhodesia in international law’, *Acta Juridica*, 1979:352.
- 75 Devine, D.J., ‘The status of Rhodesia in international law’, *Acta Juridica*, 1973:144.
- 76 The author cited here does not problematize the ‘right of conquest’. Instead it is relegated to the sphere of ‘moral considerations’. These are supposed to be irrelevant to law because they do not have the status of juristic facts. The ‘right of conquest’, on the other hand, is a juristic fact cognizable by law regardless of its moral propriety. Here we part ways with the law. Our point is that all juristic facts have a minimum content of morality even if this might be ignored by the law. The

criteria, if any, by which the law elevates 'natural facts' to the status of juristic facts are, at the very minimum, characteristically without a common standard.

Accordingly, juristic facts are not necessarily the best measure of justice in a given situation. The 'right of conquest' is one such juristic fact. The citation that follows implies that the law takes cognizance of the 'right of conquest'. 'As far as international customary law is concerned, there is no restriction on the power to grant independence, and it is possible for a mother state to establish a newly independent state in which a minority government prevails. In customary law, the United Kingdom could therefore grant independence to Rhodesia on any terms it wished without infringing any international obligations. The competence to grant independence has however been modified by conventional obligations binding the United Kingdom by virtue of the Charter of the United Nations.'

Devine, D.J., 'The status of Rhodesia in international law', *Acta Juridica*, 1979:359.

77 Jaster, R.S., 'A regional security role for Africa's front line states: Experience and prospects', Adelphi Papers, Number One Hundred and Eighty, London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1983:15.

78 Bokor-Szego, Hanna, 'Identity and succession of states in modern international law', *Questions of International Law*, 3, 1986:18 and 40.

79 The transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was a movement away from the status of a colony to sovereign independence. Because of the so-called right of conquest based on the ideology of the meridian line, the conquered people did not form part of the sovereign character of Rhodesia. The rise of Zimbabwe brought with it a new quality to the older character of Rhodesian sovereignty. By so doing, it inscribed a new identity to the new state, Zimbabwe. Thereby it abolished the old state of Rhodesia. It is submitted therefore that the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was a matter of state succession and not government succession as the Lancaster Agreement prescribed. It is worth noting the following reflections in connection with our submission. 'The question whether a state gaining territorial sovereignty (the successor state) inherits, together with the territory concerned, the rights and obligations of another state (the predecessor state) arises if this latter is actually to be considered extinct. This question leads to the problems of state succession. The significance of the question is not only theoretical but practical. The fact is that international law does not provide that territorial changes shall have an effect implying the automatic and unconditional devolution, in all cases, of rights and obligations together with the territory concerned. The establishment of the identity of a state is therefore important because in this case the continuance of rights and obligations does not become questionable... As regards the particular types of territorial changes the answer is unambiguous: the states emerging from colonial status to independence are new subjects of international law; the problems to be solved in connection with them are those of state succession.'

Bokor-Szego, Hanna, 'Identity and succession of states in modern international law', *Questions of International Law*, 3, 1986:18 and 40.

80 *The Guardian*, 10 October 1983.

81 Moyo, S., *The land question in Zimbabwe*, Harare: SAPES Books, 1995:2.

82 Zimbabwe Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, (LRRP Phase II), Land

Task Force Report, 8 October 1998.

83 The Zimbabwean historian-novelist, Lawrence Vambe, writes the following about the memory the indigenous Zimbabweans have with regard to their status as a conquered people. 'Madzidza had very little to say, except from time to time to remind anyone willing to listen that these were rotten times, unlike the good old days when there were no policemen, no money-hungry governments and therefore no taxes to pay to anyone. It was a fair point, but hardly one to give comfort to anybody. Nor did it alter anything, save only to increase the sense of bewilderment and defeatism which overtook every member of the family circle as well as most of the adult population in Mashonganyika village, who took Mizha's peremptory arrest as a gruesome reminder of our conquered status... Understandably, the conversation concentrated on a broad recapitulation of some of the highlights of the 1896 rebellion, its causes, effects and aftermath... Listening to these reminiscences, as I did on numerous occasions, I formed the clear impression that the VaShawasha looked at white people and their ways as a perpetual pestilence.... As most people of Mizha's and Jakobo's generations claimed to have had personal experience of this bloody confrontation between black power and whiter power which so decisively changed the fortunes of the Shona and the Ndebele people in my country, the amount of firsthand information available on the subject in the village was immense and colourful. Each man claimed to be a war veteran,... Each time I listened to this account, a whole world of human savagery, misery, injustice, blood and death was revealed to my mind.'

Vambe, L., *An ill-fated people*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972:19–20, 22–23.

84 No doubt it is not only the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe who understand the deeper meaning of this precept and live by it. The Maoris in New Zealand, the Indians in Canada and the United States, and the Aborigines in Australia also act according to this precept. Similarly, memory is what urged the Jewish people to insist that historical justice demands that the state of Israel be established. This happened after many centuries of struggle. The preservation of the state of Israel remains a vital interest of the Jewish people. Significantly, one interesting documentary film in this regard is entitled, 'IZKOR', meaning, remember. During the first half of the year 2000 an international conference was held in Stockholm, Sweden, aimed at finding means to assist future generations to remember the holocaust. The point about this was that by remembering, the future generations would be placed in a position to avoid repeating the same. Thus memory may serve as a means to uphold the claims of justice and to absolve the guilty by making them meet the demands of justice. The same logic underlies the struggle for Kosovo. After more than six hundred years the memory of the ethnic Albanians and that of the Serbs impels each group to claim title and sovereignty over Kosovar territory. This has led to several bloody struggles. One of them led to the bombardment of Belgrade by NATO a year ago. Despite the heavy heat and suffocating smoke of the bombs, the struggle for title to Kosovar territory continues as though NATO never dropped a single bomb. Memory also led to the war for the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) between Argentina and the United Kingdom. China's

memory led finally to the recognition by the United Kingdom that sovereignty over Hong Kong must revert to China. Some of these memories span over centuries. The memory of the life of Jesus is two thousand years old. Yet it dominates the global calendar. Just think of the Christmas and Easter holidays, for example. Moreover, we are told that the highpoint of the Catholic church service is the moment of the consecration; the change of ordinary bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. It is more than significant that at this moment the last words in the consecration of each species are: 'whenever you do thus, do it in memory of me...*in me memoriam facieties*.' Finally, what would the West lose if Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were to be completely excluded from any and all teaching of philosophy? In view of these considerations, 'forget about the past' is an unsound devaluation of history, it rests on a dubious pedagogical claim and, is philosophically unsustainable. There is thus no reason why the indigenous conquered people of Zimbabwe should simply 'forget about the past'.

85 Bolaji Idowu, E., *African traditional religion*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973.

86 Gehman, R.J., *African traditional religion in biblical perspective*, Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989:15–22.

87 The meaning and place of spirit mediums in African traditional religion is, as Vambe as well as other scholars on this subject note, a 'complex' matter. Chaminuka and Nehanda are not the only known spirit mediums in the traditional religion of Zimbabwe. However, they are said to have distinguished themselves from amongst other spirit mediums and, in consequence, have become prominent. Similarly, Hungwe, the Zimbabwe bird, is not the only known bird regarded as sacred in the traditional religion of Zimbabwe. But it seems to have assumed the position of prominence as well. Like Nehanda, it is regarded as a special messenger in the two-way traffic between the living-dead and the living. In naming the birds that are thought to have this role, Daneel—to whom we shall refer specifically below, places the Hungwe first. It is uncertain if Daneel's naming follows a deliberate order of priority. This notwithstanding, it is significant that the Hungwe is named first. This is underlined by the fact that the rear outside cover of Daneel's book carries the images of the Hungwe and the crocodile beneath carved in one and the same stone. It is far from our intention to delve into any depth with regard to the traditional religion of Zimbabwe. Our intention is limited to extracting insights and beliefs from this domain and showing their relevance as well as significance to the theory and practice of politics in Zimbabwe. It stands to reason that this kind of extrapolation can hardly be limited to Zimbabwe. It applies to the whole of Africa.

88 Vambe, L., *An ill-fated people*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972:118.

89 Vambe, L., *An ill-fated people*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972:179.

90 Vambe, L., *An ill-fated people*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972:54.

91 Lan, D., *Guns and rain, guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985:4–5.

92 Vambe, L., *An ill-fated people*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972:20–21.

93 Daneel, M.L., *The god of the Matopo Hills*, The Hague: Mouton, 1970:24.

- 94 Ramose, M.B., *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books, 1999:88–92.
- 95 Government of Zimbabwe, Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, Phase II, A Policy Framework, June 1998:3.
- 96 1994 (2) ZLR 294 (H).
- 97 1994 (2) ZLR 307–308 (H).
- 98 Van Horn, Alison, ‘Redefining property: The constitutional battle over land redistribution in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of African Law*, 38(2) 1994:159.
- 99 Ndlwana v Hofmeyr, *NO and others* 1937 229 (AD) 237.
- 100 Mason, P., *The birth of a dilemma: The conquest and settlement of Rhodesia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958:209–210.
- 101 Honig, F., ‘The reparations agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany’, *American Journal of International Law*, 48 1954:567.
- 102 Mazrui, A.A., *Global Africa: From abolitionists to reparacionists*, Paper presented at the Seventh Pan African Congress, Kampala, Uganda April 3–8, 1994.
- 103 Tibamanya Mwene Mushanga, *Africa should demand reparation for slavery and colonial exploitation*, Paper presented to the Seventh Pan African Congress, Kampala, Uganda April 3–8 1994:17.
- 104 Soyinka, W., *The burden of memory, the muse of forgiveness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999:83–84 and 91.
- 105 Karis, T. and Carter, G.M., *From protest to challenge*, vol. 2, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1973.
- 106 Benson, M., *The struggle for a birthright*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Limited, 1963.
- 107 Cervenka, Z. and Robers, B., *The nuclear axis*, London: Julian Friedman, 1978:57–310.  
*The Star*, February 20, 1980:21.  
Barnaby, F., *Nuclear proliferation and the South African threat*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977:19.
- 108 Wall, P., ed. *The Indian Ocean and the threat to the West*, London: Stacey International, 1975:39–66.  
El-Khawas, M.A. and Cohen, B., ed. *The Kissinger study of Southern Africa*, Westcort, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1976:39–40.  
Crocker, C., ‘Western interests in Southern Africa’, *Survival* xxiii(6), London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981:279.
- 109 MacGibbon, ‘The scope of acquiescence in international law’, *The British Year Book of International Law*, 1954:143.
- 110 Blum, Y.Z., *Historic titles in international law*, 1965:6.
- 111 Johnson, D.H.N., ‘Acquisitive prescription in international law’, *The British Year Book of International Law*, 1951:337.
- 112 M’Baye, ‘The African conception of law’, *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law*, vol. II, 1974:147.  
M’Baye’s understanding of African law with regard to prescription is confirmation of a similar understanding forty years earlier. It was expressed in these terms, ‘A debt or a feud is never extinguished till the equilibrium has been restored, even if



- several generations elapse...to the African there is nothing so incomprehensible or unjust in our system of law as the Statute of Limitations, and they always resent a refusal on our part to arbitrate in a suit on the grounds that it is too old.' Driberg, J.H., 'The African conception of law', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, vol. xvi, 1934:238.
- 113 Booysen, H. and Van Wyk, D., *Die '83 grondwet*, Johannesburg: Juta, 1984.
- 114 The ANC seems to have accepted these premises without question. See, 'African National Congress Draft Proposals for the Transition to Democracy, Transition to Democracy Act, 5 RADIC' 1993:208–224.  
For an earlier discussion of the ANC constitutional proposals, see, for example: Corder, H. and Davis, D., 'The constitutional guidelines of the African National Congress: A preliminary assessment', *The South African Law Journal*, 106, 1989:633–647.
- 115 Jonsson, U., 'The socio-economic causes of hunger', in A.Eide, W.B.Eide, S. Goonatillake, J.Gussow, and O.Omawale, eds., *Food as a human right*, Tokyo: The United Nations University, 1984:24.
- 116 Fanon, F., *The wretched of the earth*, Tr. C. Farrington, Harmondsworth, Middlesex England: Penguin Books, 1965:34.
- 117 Ramcharan, B.G., 'The right to life', *Netherlands International Law Review*, vol. xxx 1983:297–329.
- 118 'Rerum Novarum' par. 10, in D.J.O'Brien and T.A.Shannon, eds., *Catholic social thought*, New York: Orbis Books, 1995:18. See also in the same book, 'Mater et Magistra' pars. 35 and 43, as well as 'Pacem in Terris' pars. 9 and 11.
- 119 Rantete, J.M., *The African National Congress and the negotiated settlement in South Africa*, Pretoria: J.L.van Schaik, 1998:xv–xix.
- 120 Brierly, J.L., *The law of nations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963:144.  
Marek, Krystyna, *Identity and continuity of states in public international law*, 1968:5–6
- 121 O'Connell, D.P., *State succession in municipal and international law*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967:4.  
Von Glahn, G., *Law among nations*, New York: Macmillan 1986:111–113.
- 122 Makonnen, Y., *International law and the new states of Africa*, UNESCO, *Regional participation programme for Africa*, Addis Abeba 1983:133.
- 123 Sebidi, L.J., 'The dynamics of the black struggle and its implications for black theology', in I.J. Mosala and B.Tlhagale, eds., *The unquestionable right to be free*, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986:26.
- 124 *Harris v Minister of the Interior* 1952 (2) SA 428 (A). *Minister of the Interior v Harris* 1952 (4) SA 769 (A).
- 125 Davenport, T.R.H., 'Civil rights in South Africa, 1910–1960', *Acta Juridica*, 1960:13.
- 126 Ramose M.B., *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 1999.
- 127 The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995. Case CCT 17/96.
- 128 *S v Makwanyane and Another* 1995 (3) SA 391 (CC).

- 1995 (6) BCLR 665 (CC) at pars 224–227; 241–251; 263 and 307–313.
- 129 Wiechers, M., ‘Namibia: The 1982 constitutional principles and their legal significance’, *South African Yearbook of International Law*, vol. 15 1989/90:321.
- 130 *Kesavananda v State of Kerala* A.I.R 1973 S.C. 1461.  
For an extensive discussion of this case see Morgan, D.G., ‘The Indian “essential features” case’, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 30, 1981:307–337.
- 131 Van Horn, Alison, ‘Redefining “property”: The constitutional battle over land redistribution in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of African Law*, 38(2) 1994:160.
- 132 MacGarry, B., *Land: For which people*, Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1994.  
Riddell, R., *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: The land question*, Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1978. Moyo, S., *The land question in Zimbabwe*, Harare: SAPES Books, SAPPHO, 1995.
- 133 Devine, D.J. ‘The status of Rhodesia in international law’, *Acta Juridica*, 1979:403.
- 134 Alexandrowicz, C.H., ‘New and original states: The issue of reversion to sovereignty’, *International Affairs*, 45(3) July 1969:471–473.
- 135 Davidow, J., *A peace in Southern Africa*, 1990:98.
- 136 Brueggemann, W., *The land*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977:5.
- 137 May, R.H., *The poor of the land*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1991:122.
- 138 Soyinka, W., *The burden of memory, the muse of forgiveness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999:39 and 25.

### Producing knowledge in Africa today

#### PAULIN J.HOUNTOND JI

Allow me to pay homage to the man after whom this series of lectures was named. Bashorun M. K.O. Abiola has been in detention for 134 days, that is more than four months, since June 24, 1994. I had the opportunity and honour to meet him about two years ago, when I headed the Department of Culture and Communications in Benin and was in charge of a project known as ‘The Slave Route Project’, which was similar to Bashorun Abiola’s campaign for reparations. Mr Abiola visited Benin and had long talks with president Soglo.

Without interfering with the domestic affairs of any particular country, but also without seeking to pour oil on the fire, let me mention that it is a shame for Africa and for human civilization at the end of the twentieth century that a man should be arrested for winning elections. Every additional day Bashorun Abiola spends in detention makes the crisis more serious and more intolerable.

Whatever difficulties they face, however complex the national situation, present rulers in Chief Abiola’s country should realize that they are making a martyr at their own expense and that their interest is to release, as early as possible, a man whose innocence is evident to all. What in the eyes of non-Nigerians still makes Nigeria a great country and a model to all Africa is certainly not a reign of sheer force but the tenacity and courage of Nigerian democrats in their continuing struggle for human rights and the rule

of law. The ultimate judge remains History. I am sure I express the feelings of a vast majority of scholars and intellectuals inside and outside Africa.

### **LET NIGERIA BE NIGERIA AGAIN! LET AFRICA BE AFRICA AGAIN!**

In examining knowledge production, we should look in two different and complementary directions. First, we should pay attention to a specific aspect of underdevelopment. I tried to do this five years ago, in a lecture delivered at Cornell University and then at Ohio State University in November 1989 on 'Scientific Dependence in Africa Today'.

Secondly, we should pay attention to what is going well. We should acknowledge achievements and work in progress and seek how to cope with present difficulties and develop new strategies for overcoming dependence. We should promote scientific and technological innovation and self-reliance as means to meet, first and foremost, Africa's own needs.

Let me first look in the first direction. I will start from where I stood five years ago, in the aforementioned lecture published in the Fall 1990 issue of *Research in African Literatures*. I argued that scientific and technological activity, as practised in Africa today, is just as 'extroverted', or externally oriented, as economic activity. Most of the shortcomings that can be identified should not be perceived, therefore, as natural and inevitable. They should be traced back, on the contrary, to the history of the integration and subordination of our traditional knowledge to the world system of knowledge, just as underdevelopment as a whole results, primarily, not from any original backwardness, but from the integration of our subsistence economies into the world capitalist market. My argument went through a number of steps which I would like to recall briefly.

First, with respect to modern science, the heart of the process is neither the stage of data collection nor that of the application of theoretical findings to practical issues. Rather, it lies between the two, in the stages of theory building, interpretation of raw information, and the theoretical processing of the data collected. These stages lead to more or less complex experimental methods and machinery. Based on these procedures, statements are produced.

Second, the one essential shortcoming of scientific activity in colonial Africa was the lack of these specific theory-building procedures and infrastructures. Only the initial and final stages of the whole process were developed. No facilities for basic research, no laboratories and no universities existed in colonial Africa. We only had centres for so-called applied research that allowed, first, the feverish gathering of all supposedly useful information, aimed for immediate exportation to the so-called mother country and, second, an occasional, hasty and limited application of metropolitan research findings to some local issues.

Third, this theoretical vacuum was substantially the same as the industrial vacuum that characterized economic activity in the colonies. Laboratories were missing, just as industrial plants were. In the field of knowledge, dependencies were reduced to immense data banks, storehouses of bare facts and information reserved for exportation to the ruling country. There is a global parallelism, a striking analogy between the two sorts of activity.

Fourth, beyond mere parallelism, I argued that both activities could be seen, in the last analysis, as identical. Scientific activity is but a specific mode of economic activity in the wider sense of the word, that is, the overall process of the human transformation of nature including production, consumption and exchange of goods. In the usual and narrower sense, economics is concerned only with material goods and therefore with such activities as agriculture, industry, and commerce. But, in the wider sense, it is concerned with both material and non-material goods. Science, as we said, is the production of a specific kind of statement: non material goods. It is, therefore, part and parcel of economy in the wider sense.

Fifth, economics in the narrower sense remains basic and plays a paradigmatic role visà-vis all other aspects or levels of human productive activity. In other terms, the mode of production of material goods determines, in the last instance (to use Marx's words) or becomes a model for the other form of production, that of immaterial goods.

Sixth, theories of underdevelopment based on evolutionist assumptions, as propounded by Rostow, Leibenstein and some others, do not allow real understanding of the so-called economic backwardness of Africa and the Third world. The historical approach to underdevelopment, as propounded by authors like Immanuel Wallerstein, André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin and others, is much more enlightening. It views underdevelopment as an effect of domination, the result of accumulation on a world scale, entailing forced integration of subsistence economies into the world capitalist market. In these conditions, at the level of surface description, the main feature of an underdeveloped economy appears to be extroversion, i.e., production of luxury goods aimed at satisfying, first and foremost, the needs of consumers in industrial metropolises, instead of local mass consumption (Rostow 1960; Leibenstein 1957; Wallerstein 1974; Frank 1970; Amin 1970).

Seventh, the same approach can be applied, by analogy, to what might at first sight appear as scientific and technological backwardness. Instead of interpreting the facts from an evolutionist standpoint, it would be enlightening to replace the present stage of affairs in Africa into its historical context and view present-day shortcomings and weaknesses in the field of knowledge as a result of peripherization, that is, forced integration into the world market of concepts, a market managed and controlled by the North, just as the other world market, that of material goods. On a descriptive level, underdevelopment in the field of science and technology should also be characterized, as in the field of economics in the narrower sense, as an extroverted activity.

This is approximately where I stood five years ago in my attempt to define the historical background and design a conceptual framework for the analysis of what I considered scientific underdevelopment or, more exactly put, scientific dependence. I went further than forging out concepts. I tested these concepts by trying to identify in present-day Africa as many indices as possible of scientific extroversion, of which I found thirteen.

First, almost all our research equipment, from the most sophisticated down to the simplest instruments, are made in the North. Second, despite the growth of libraries and publishing houses in our countries, we are still dependent on an international scientific information system based in and largely controlled by the North. Third, as a consequence of this, no African scholar can claim to be doing top-level research without travelling

back and forth from South to North, resulting in a type of institutional nomadism. Fourth, the much talked about brain-drain should not be perceived as an evil per se or an independent phenomenon, but as a borderline case of this institutional nomadism. Fifth, the theoretical work now developing in the South is still mainly bound to a kind of insularity, in the sense that research programmes, units, and facilities are still not aimed at answering the needs and concerns of the societies that host them, and behave like artificial islands floating on the surface of a sea without any roots in the soil at the bottom. Sixth, the international division of scientific labour is still reinforced by a widely spread prejudice, even among scholars and political leaders in the South, against basic research.

Seventh, the need to secure an audience or readership, a legitimate need, often leads Southern scholars to a type of mental extroversion. They are pre-oriented in choosing their research topics and methods by the expectations of their potential public. Eighth, as a consequence of both this mental extroversion and prejudice against theory, African scholars are often tempted, especially in the social sciences, to lock themselves up into an empirical description of the most peculiar features of their societies, without any consistent effort to interpret, elaborate on, or theorize about these features. In so doing, they implicitly agree to act as informants, though learned informants, for Western science and scientists.

Ninth, scientific research is often directly put in the service of economic extroversion, as was the case, till recently, of agronomic research. Tenth, the development, within Western science, of a discipline or group of disciplines known as ethnoscience, including ethnobotany, ethnozoology, ethnomathematics and the like, shows the only kind of relationship that could exist in the context of domination, between so-called modern science and so-called traditional knowledge, where the latter is either marginalized or, better still, eaten by the former. We have been experiencing for almost a hundred years (the word ethnobotany was coined in 1895 and the word ethnoscience not earlier than 1950) a sort of scientific cannibalism.

Eleventh, mastering foreign languages is still an absolute prerequisite for access to any research activity in most African countries. This; too, is a sign of continuing dependence. Twelfth, scientists from Africa and the Third World are much busier getting involved in a vertical exchange and dialogue with scientists from the North than in any horizontal exchange with their fellow scholars from the South. The lack, or poor development of internal scientific discussions and debates within and between our scientific communities, the general stampede of our scholars for individual acknowledgment by the North—which, of course, is not really their fault—is also a sign of continuing dependence.

Thirteenth, most professors or heads of our universities and research centres acquired their degrees from Western universities. When they happen to be good scholars, they can play an exceptional role in pulling the whole institution upwards, both through their own example as first class scholars and their efforts to organize the local scientific community. Conversely, when they happen to be bad scholars, they can become national disasters and unintentionally foster what I termed a system for the reproduction of mediocrity, and therefore, the continuation of dependence.

Among the conclusions I drew from this analysis, at least two points deserve being recalled. First, having noted that the study of the relationship between science and society

is the specific object of a fairly new discipline, known as the sociology of science, I observed that this relationship has only been examined for some sixty years, within industrial societies, and that better attention should be paid to the particular conditions of the production of knowledge in developing countries as well as the scientific and technological relations of production on a world scale. Second, I recalled some of the misunderstandings that developed around the critique of ethnophilosophy and called for its deepening into a wider critique of ethnoscience as a whole and, more generally, a critique of the entire process of marginalization.

Almost each point in this Ithaca-Columbus paper calls for further elaboration and discussion. I have, through other essays, brought about some of the revisions and new evidence required to support these basic views (Hountondji 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1994). I have also come across publications that look in the same direction, for instance the excellent paper by Olufemi Taiwo, 'Colonialism and its aftermath: The crisis of knowledge production', published in Callaloo (1993). I remain convinced that a good analysis and description of scientific dependence or, more generally, of the state of modern scholarship in Africa and its relationship both to Northern scholarship and to traditional knowledge procedures in Africa, needs to be developed to allow a correct diagnosis and adequate definition of new objectives and tasks.

Let us make it clear that, if this were our last word, if we do not go further than this diagnosis, we would be feeding that discourse of recrimination so familiar to Africa, by which we constantly tend to reject onto others the responsibility for all our misfortunes and misdeeds. Yesterday it was imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, today it is the World Bank and the IMF, tomorrow it will probably be new incarnations of the same demon. We would be feeding, on the other hand, the discourse of Afro-pessimism, so fashionable today within larger and larger circles in the West, among people who, first, overlook the history and ongoing problems of their own societies and, secondly, fail to replace Africa within the context of her history and complex relationship with the rest of the world.

The real question, once a diagnosis has been made, is: What to do? How far did the dependence machine succeed in crushing all initiative and stifling all indigenous activity? Which islets of such creativity, which skills, which domains of knowledge, have remained untouched, and can they not only be safeguarded, but developed, improved, updated, and actively reappropriated? In the field of so-called modern science and technology, what is occurring in Africa? What are the research programmes, what are the findings, what important results have been achieved during the past years? Given the fact that we have not cared, until now, to set up a strategy that could allow us to utilize our research findings for our own sake, what can be done to correct this state of affairs and start at last capitalizing, managing, mastering, and occasionally applying our own as well as other people's findings to improve the quality of life in our countries?

If I could answer all these questions, I would not be far from a demigod. Instead, I would like to say a few words on the issue of traditional knowledge.

I initiated a research programme on the subject with the support of the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar. The outcome was a collective book published under the title, *Les savoirs endogènes: pistes pour une recherche* (1994). I am not going to summarize it here. I do not think it says the

last word on the subject. But I do believe we need a renewed, systematic reflection on the status, the mode of existence, the scope and limits and the perspectives of development of so-called traditional knowledge.

My colleagues and I felt that the word 'traditional' would incline the reader to perceive this kind of knowledge as something fixed, immutable, and reluctant to change over the centuries. We preferred the word 'endogenous' to dwell on the origin of a cultural product or value that comes from, or at least is perceived by people as coming from inside their own society, as opposed to imported or 'exogenous' products or values—though we should admit, in a sense, that there is no absolute origin at all, and the concept of endogeneity itself should therefore be relativized.

The logic of marginalization, as developed through centuries of forced integration, including the slave trade, colonization, and neo-colonization, has not succeeded in blowing out our age-old heritage of knowledge, both practical and theoretical. If this had been the case, we should no longer have any handicraft, any weaving, any pottery, any basket-making, any cooking, any metallurgy, any rainmaking technique, any 'traditional' medicine and pharmacopoeia, any divination system, any counting system, any botanical and zoological taxonomy or any original teaching methods and procedures. All of these and much more still exists and needs to be discovered or rediscovered (Ichitchi 1994; Zaslavsky, 1973). My colleague, Goudjinou P. Mètinhoué, an historian and contributor to *Endogenous knowledge*, rightly speaks of 'the immense field of traditional techniques', and he is running in collaboration with another historian, François de Medeiros, and an archaeologist, Alexis Adandé, a research programme on 'material civilization' in the Gulf of Benin (Mètinhoué 1994).

That such material civilization should have survived clearly indicates the failure of attempts at cultural cannibalism or ethnocide at which I previously hinted. It also calls for an effort to look deeper into the past than the last five centuries, and consider the tragedy of the slave trade as well as subsequent events, as accidents happening to an age-old civilization or, in other terms, experiences by Africa herself.

Cheikh Anta Diop appealed for such a view of African history (1954, 1967, 1973, 1981). It entails a complete reversal of the usual perspective. It leads once more to the relativization of the phenomenon of underdevelopment, not only by viewing it as the result of an historical process as seen before, but by replacing the process itself into a wider, deeper long-term history that makes it appear, finally, as an episode limited in time and therefore, due to be overcome.

Among the innumerable techniques and skills developed in the past, quite a number have now been forgotten. Alexis Adandé humorously recalls, in *Endogenous knowledge*, a saying that became widely spread throughout French colonies in Africa during the campaign before General de Gaulle's referendum of 28 September 1958. Opponents to self-determination used to say: You don't even know how to make a needle, how can you want independence? The outcome of this referendum showed how efficiently this kind of propaganda worked, except in Sékou Touré's Guinea. People, as well as their political leaders, had simply forgotten that they themselves had developed, for thousands of years before colonization, a strong and wealthy iron industry. The iron industry included not only secondary metallurgy, consisting of transformation of the metal as blacksmiths do, but also primary metallurgy, or the extraction of iron from iron ore. Scientists have now

localized very precisely quite a number of sites, for instance in Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, and Mali, where this extraction took place (Adandé 1994).

That such an active industry should have fallen into oblivion shows how much human civilizations are constantly threatened by the risk of historical regression. It also shows how urgent it is to set up devices and procedures for retrieving, recollecting, and critically reappropriating all that can be useful and relevant to present-day problems in our age-old heritage. It shows how urgent it is to help Africans recover self-confidence after centuries of inferiorization and racism. This is an important task for African and Africanist scholars.

Another problem exists. Why is positive knowledge in Africa so often mingled with mythical beliefs and practices? Why does the 'traditional' healer always begin this cure by an invocation to gods, spirits, and the ancestors and by all sorts of less intelligible incantations? Why does he prescribe specific rituals to his patient just as he prescribes leaves, roots, decoctions, or other ingredients? Why is the Ifa diviner so convinced that, when he throws his kola nuts or his cowries, or his rope, his hand is secretly guided by deities which preside over humans' fates? Why, if this form of geomancy, as my colleague Victor Houndonoubo puts it, is in the last analysis the vehicle of a complex mathematical knowledge, why not develop this knowledge for its own sake and rid the horizon of all these gods and goddesses (1994)?

In connection with this, why, instead of giving simple, clear, and straightforward answers to questions, do some practitioners tend to blame people who dare to ask questions, and threaten them with all sorts of evils and misfortunes? In other terms, why is knowledge reserved for initiates—why try, by all means, including intimidation, to exclude non-initiates?

These facts should not be interpreted as Lévy-Bruhl did, by reference to a so-called primitive mentality, supposedly unable to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural (1910, 1931). My hypothesis is that, first, in oral civilizations, there are quite a number of mnemotechnic means to ease and facilitate memory. Personification of basic categories, including the mythical projection of configurations of the divination material into deities, might be one of these mnemotechnic devices. Secondly, the esoteric, initiatic form of specialized knowledge and the many devices of intimidation and exclusion used to keep it secret may be perceived as a form of protection of intellectual property and copyright in civilizations where, despite the lack of legal and social protection of invention, inventors needed, as in any other country, to earn a living from their specific competence.

The degree of optimism or pessimism about Africa's future depends on how far one looks behind and recalls historical achievements and experience. As Aimé Césaire declared at the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, 'La voie la plus courte vers l'avenir est celle qui passe par l'approfondissement due passé'. The deeper you look into the past, the shorter your way to the future (1956).

Considering only the present state of affairs in Africa, whether in the fields of knowledge or economic, political, social and cultural life, may lead to fatalism and despair. One has questioned, however, the origin of this situation and discovered the hidden dynamics behind it, the slow process that led to where we are, once the whole ugliness is inserted into its overall context, it begins to lose its appearance of being



eternal and inevitable. It can be realized at last that all that has begun at a given time is also likely to have an end.

The historical, neo-Marxist approach to underdevelopment allows such an enlightening of the present by the past (Amin 1970; Frank 1979). What I tried to do is to extend it beyond the restricted area of economics where it originally developed to another important though long-neglected field, that of knowledge.

Nevertheless, this kind of approach, if not taken with care, can lead to mistaking the part for the whole. I had to take into account, therefore, forms of knowledge—much more informal and in many respects, much older and more deeply rooted than the institutional, so-called modern form of knowledge, that is, science and technology as recently extended to our countries through centuries of integration. This wider perspective allows further relativization of present-day incoherences. It reinforces self-confidence and trust in Africa's capabilities and future.

In short, we are faced today in the field of knowledge with a twofold task. First, we have to appropriate, assimilate and make entirely ours, with lucidity and critical mind, all the international heritage now available including the very process of scientific and technological innovation. Secondly, after critically assessing, testing and updating, reappropriate our own ancestral heritage and the creativity, adaptability, and ability to innovate that made our ancestors what they were. This is not traditionalism, but the exact opposite.

I am not sure whether the way out of dependence lies, as was recently said, in delinkage or disconnection as an antidote to world capitalist integration (Amin 1985). But I do believe that, at least in the field of knowledge, a sort of reconnection might prove necessary and urgent with both old traditions of creativity and, beyond the scraps of knowledge now imported from the North, the overall strategy of research and innovation that made them possible.

### Reconciliation and social justice in southern Africa: The Zimbabwe experience<sup>1</sup>

IBBO MANDAZA

We will ensure,' Mugabe told the nation, 'that there is a place for everyone in this country. We want to ensure a sense of security for both the winners and the losers.' There would be no sweeping nationalization; the pensions and jobs of civil servants were guaranteed; farmers would keep their farms; Zimbabwe would be non-aligned. 'Let us forgive and forget. Let us join hands in a new amity.'

PRIME MINISTER  
ROBERT MUGABE  
4 March 1980

## **THE LIBERAL FOUNDATIONS OF RECONCILIATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

‘General Pinochet must be brought to justice,’ explains an angry former Chilean exile in London, ‘so that those who have abused human and democratic rights, whether in the past as is the case of Pinochet, in the present, or in the future, will realise that there is a cost, indeed a price to be paid, for such acts against humanity, ... It is both a moral and ethical issue...’

Pinochet came to power in Chile in September 1973, in a military coup supported by the United States and other hawks of the Cold War, ousting and killing socialist President Salvador Allende. The following 17 years, particularly the first decade of that period, saw thousands of deaths and disappearances in Chile. There was a wave of protest by numerous human rights groups the world over. But, in general, Western governments looked on passively and many, like that of Margaret Thatcher, were wont to pat Pinochet on the back for moving Chile from (socialist) ‘chaos’ to (capitalist) ‘prosperity’.

In 1990, Pinochet relinquished power to civilian rule, in a transitional arrangement that accorded him immunity from charges of genocide, torture, and murder. Subsequently, he was appointed a ‘life senator’ in the Chilean parliament, among the necessary prices that the new democratic dispensation in Chile had to pay in order to pacify the Pinochet militarist camp and thereby buy a lifeline during the transition. It was against this background of southern African-type ‘reconciliation’ that Pinochet hoped that the past could be buried, his murderous regime forgotten, and his newly found ‘elder statesman’ status acknowledged by all in the international community. As is well known now, not until his visit to Britain in mid-October 1998 was Pinochet arrested, following a Spanish judge’s application to have him extradited to Spain to face charges relating to the murder of 79 Spanish citizens during the Chilean dictatorship.

Whatever the outcome of the Pinochet case, there are obvious lessons regarding democracy and human rights issues, and possibly also the precedent on the basis of which leaders and regimes the world over might henceforth be held more accountable long after the ‘amnesties’ or reconciliation exercises have achieved their immediate political, social and even economic objectives in a given transition. For southern Africans in particular, there is still hope for those—and there are many—who feel cheated by the kind of reconciliation exercises that accompanied the formal end of white settler colonialism and apartheid in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa.

However, the real danger of such reconciliation exercises as we have so far witnessed in southern Africa is not that the murderous butchers of yesterday have been let off scot-free in a number of glaring cases involving the deaths of so many patriots, including women and children. First, it has to do with the individualization of colonialism and apartheid, the reduction of whole systems of oppression and exploitation into the mere requirement that such individual representatives of white settler colonialism and/or apartheid as the unrepentant Ian Smith or P.W.Botha be held accountable for the abuse of human and democratic rights. This is the abstraction of human and democratic rights—and of reconciliation and social justice—from both power and class relations, away from the imperative of resolving the national question, namely the political, social and economic questions which were inherent in white settler colonialism and/or apartheid,

and in the pursuit of which resolution the struggle for national liberation was waged.

It is because of the incomplete resolution of the national question that reconciliation and social justice become part of that new vocabulary that characterizes the political discourse in southern Africa, the new ideology that masks the reality of power relations during the so-called transition from white minority rule to black majority rule, the new dispensation or the new non-racial democracy. For, as we shall try to demonstrate in this paper, reconciliation is seldom the slogan of those who have succeeded in overcoming and conquering the historical, political, and economic odds of yesterday. More often than not, it is the mourn of the weak, even when pronounced from positions of apparent moral and political superiority over the oppressors and exploiters of yesterday. The reconciliation exercise, therefore, serves largely a political function, facilitating the necessary compromise between the rulers of yesterday and the inheritors of state power, within the context of incomplete decolonization. Conversely, it is inconceivable that African leaders would be preaching reconciliation in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa if they had won outright on the battlefield and were therefore able to fulfil the agenda of the liberation struggle. It is not difficult to understand why the imperative of social justice—which must include both political and economic emancipation for the majority—cannot be achieved in the pre-emptive conditions of reconciliation.

The emphasis on human rights and democracy to the exclusion of demands for fundamental transformation also has to do with a second factor, namely the dominance of the liberal paradigm in South Africa in particular. It does not alone explain the failure to see through the agenda of the nationalist struggle in that country nor the dominance of the ideology of reconciliation and social justice. In Zimbabwe, for example, there was less liberalism and more of the bold and radical African nationalist assertiveness; yet even that has not been sufficient to ensure the resolution of the national question in Zimbabwe. In the context of South Africa, liberalism simply reinforces the skewed perception of a country less to do with Africa than any other part of the universe, including Latin America. As Mahmood Mamdani stated in his critique of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa:

This claim that apartheid was no more than a harsh and cruel dictatorship, a terror machine, a gross denial of human rights, is a diminished truth.

This diminished truth is established through an analogy with Latin American dictatorships. Before the establishment of the TRC there were two conferences held in South Africa by non-governmental organizations, chaired by Alex Boraine, the Vice Chair of the TRC. These conferences brought together the Church and some of the political activists with some Latin American human rights activists, particularly from Chile and Argentina. The conferences enthusiastically embraced the analogy between South Africa and Latin America.<sup>2</sup>

These perceptions reflected more than conventional liberalism in terms of its European and American antecedents. For even conventional liberalism shares a strong sense of social justice: not so much the 'eye for an eye' or 'tooth for a tooth' as preached and practised by Judaism, but nevertheless a firm demand for accountability and appropriate

punishment for those who have erred against society. Hence, for example, the Nuremberg trials that followed the Jewish holocaust of the Second World War. Throughout the history of conflict elsewhere in the world, punishment was meted out through the terms and conditions attendant to those adversaries who had caused and lost the war. Likewise, the nature and content of any new dispensation in history is normally premised on the displacement or far-reaching transformation of the previous era. Hence the French and Bolshevik revolutions. The African nationalist struggles of southern Africa were inspired by similar objectives and goals of a new era.

That the former oppressors and exploiters of the apartheid era were not viewed as the vanquished in 1994 was not just an outcome of an incomplete war of revolution in South Africa. It had to do with the enduring dominance of a disposition that runs deep in the history and development of African nationalism in South Africa, particularly within the African National Congress (ANC). This is the distinguishing feature between African nationalism in South Africa (and in Namibia and Zimbabwe to some extent) and its expression elsewhere on the continent, even though the differences are those of degree rather than kind. It is that which prompted Ali Mazrui to write about what he termed 'Africa's short memory of hate':

Cultures vary considerably in their hate-retention. The Irish have high retention of memories of atrocities perpetrated by the English. The Americans have long memories of atrocities committed against them by the Turks in the Ottoman Empire. The Jews have long memories about martyrdom in history. On the other hand, Jomo Kenyatta proceeded to forgive his British tormentors very fast after being released from unjust imprisonment. He even published a book entitled *Suffering without bitterness*. Where but in Africa could somebody like Ian Smith, who had unleashed a war which killed many thousands of black people, remain free after black majority rule to torment his black successors in power whose policies had killed far fewer people than Ian Smith's policies had done? Nelson Mandela lost twentyseven of the best years of his life. Yet on being released he was not only in favour of reconciliation between blacks and whites. He went to beg white terrorists who were fasting unto death not to do so. He went out of his way to go and pay his respects to Mrs Verwoerd, the widow of the architect of apartheid. Is Africa's memory of hate sometimes 'too short'?<sup>3</sup>

What Mazrui refers to as the 'division of labour between black political power and white economic privilege' describes the kind of political and economic compromises which constituted the settlement in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa. In Mazrui's words, 'The white man said to the black man: "You take the crown and I will keep the jewels".' As stated before, it is a compromise not only imposed by historical circumstances but also one which the new African state has no power to challenge, in the short to medium term, for fear of hostile reaction at home and abroad. Perhaps these are the same circumstances that allow for the implied insult, contained in the TRC Report (1998), in the attempt to equate apartheid and the liberation struggle.

However, there is a third factor which is also part of the liberal and African nationalist baggage and accounts for the ideology and practice of reconciliation: the class question.

Reconciliation represents the class fulfilment of those who make it immediately in the new dispensation. Having made it into the new state and into State House in particular, the African nationalist petit bourgeoisie is only too content to forgive as the necessary price for attaining the class goal after so many years of struggle, imprisonment, and self-denial. Reconciliation is the forgiveness of a small elite that inherits state power without the fulfilment of social justice for the majority. For this reason, reconciliation is neither durable nor sustainable. As the case of Zimbabwe illustrates, it is both an ideology and a policy that becomes increasingly untenable as the social demands of the mass of the people grow bigger and louder, in an economy that remains essentially narrow-based and of a colonial nature.

Lastly, reconciliation is usually confined to white-black relations, sometimes to the exclusion of that which might be desirable between black and black during the transition. So it is that differences between the departing colonial master or apartheid leader and the incoming African nationalist leader are more easily resolved and reconciliation established than is the case between African leaders—even those, as that period in Zimbabwe's post-independence history illustrates with respect to the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), who will have jointly been the main agency for the liberation process. This is part of the legacy of race, colour and class in southern Africa.

### **THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLICY OF RECONCILIATION**

The historical and political bases of this kind of transition that has now become almost peculiar to southern Africa is to be found in the political economy of the subregion in particular and of Africa in general. Two factors require emphasis for the purpose of this analysis. First, the process whereby Africa—and southern Africa in particular—was incorporated into the global economy, beginning with the era of European expansion in the fifteenth century, the intensification of the transatlantic slave trade, the formal colonization of the continent in the nineteenth century, and the extent to which Africa is more an extension of Europe, especially in economic terms, than a region with any significant level of autonomy, even less so during this period of neocolonialism and globalization. Africa as a geopolitical concept cannot be understood except through an analysis of the various historical, political, and socio-economic factors that have over the last five centuries defined the continent. This includes and accounts for the post-colonial state, which is modelled on the (European) bourgeois state but without a national bourgeoisie that would otherwise provide it with an anchor class and even a semblance of autonomy vis-à-vis international capital or the global hegemony of the developed world. In short, it is a hostage state, weak, and dependent.

As a geopolitical construct, southern Africa reflects the historical and socio-economic forces that almost succeeded in moulding it into a white dominion, similar to Canada, New Zealand, or Australia. Southern Africa as we know it today is the outcome of the historical interaction between such external factors that are so integral in the current transition from white minority rule to black majority rule and the complex internal dynamics that are characterized by the politics of reconciliation between the former white

rulers and the emergent black petit and compradorian bourgeoisie. This is the post-white settler colonial situation that I described in an earlier work and to which I return shortly in an account of Zimbabwe. On the one hand, it is one that represents the worst and weakest form of the post-colonial state in Africa: a hostage state caught between the former white settlers who will continue to wield economic and (therefore also) political influence for the foreseeable future, and the current economic globalization that does not afford the new African rulers the space and leverage with which to launch even the semblance of a national agenda, let alone autonomous development. On the other hand, it is, like all other post-colonial states, the focal point of the nation-state-in-the-making, essentially bourgeois in orientation and, as such, an affirmation of the fact that the dominant agenda of the African nationalist struggle was embourgeoisement, that is, seeking to 'take over' literally from the white settler bourgeoisie.

The relative weakness of both the emergent African bourgeois classes and the nation-state-in-the-making is reflected in the apparent confusion over policy during the transition, evidenced in both the persistent schizophrenia that characterizes the African petit bourgeoisie and the new but strange political vocabulary and discourse that threw up its own lexicon: non-racial democracy, affirmative action, indigenization and, of course, reconciliation. All these terms and slogans reflect the inherent weakness of the ruling class, and the circumstances of the transitional arrangement that saw Zimbabwe, Namibia, and the new South Africa born. Accordingly, central to the compromise and reconciliation are two factors. First, the historical intersection in the development of southern Africa between the external forces (in the form of the particular interests and objectives of mercantile and modern-day capitalism) on the one hand, and the growth and assertion of white minority power on the other. Second, the lack of an anchor class, in the form of an African bourgeoisie capable of instituting a national agenda and thereby challenging vested interests and effecting the required level of economic transformation and redistribution. For the destruction of African kingdoms and other feudal states in southern Africa meant also the systematic economic dispossession of the people, of land and wealth, seldom, if ever, to be recovered fully even under post-colonialism or post-apartheid. Africans found themselves snatched out of a feudal era that under normal circumstances might have developed a national bourgeoisie; assigned to the status of dispossessed peasants, urban workers, and an assorted middle class of teachers, nurses, clerks and petty traders; largely at the service of the colonial or apartheid masters; prohibited from and unable to compete with the latter in any sector of the economy, and, in most cases, completely landless and deprived of the full potential with which to participate fully and equally in the new dispensation of the post-white settler colonialism.

The loss of political power and independence under colonialism had such devastating consequences on the economic front in Africa that even in post-colonialism or post-apartheid these are far from being overcome. This accounts for Africa's failure to assert its identity as it ought to in international affairs. It explains why Africa is so marginalized in the global economy, vulnerable and dependent on extractive and export-oriented economics. This is why Africans resort to reconciliation instead of demanding reparations and compensation for the five centuries during which they endured and lost so much at the hands of other peoples and continents. Significantly, the organization of African Unity subcommittee established in 1993 to pursue the issue of Reparations for Slavery

and Colonial Exploitation has failed to make progress, preempted by both the lack of consensus over this course of action on the part of the member states themselves and the current vulnerability of the continent vis-à-vis relentless globalization. What the likes of Nkrumah and Nyerere referred to in their characterization of the post-colonial situation becomes poignant in the southern Africa situation. In the words of Nyerere:

The reality of neocolonialism quickly becomes obvious to a new African government which tries to act in economic matters and in the interest of national development and for the betterment of its own masses. For such a government immediately discovers that it inherited the power to make laws, to direct the civil service, to treat with foreign governments and so on but it did not inherit effective power over economic developments in its own country. Indeed it often discovers that there is no such thing as a national economy. Neocolonialism is real.

### **ZIMBABWE: THE TENSION BETWEEN RECONCILIATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The following account on Zimbabwe is an illustration of the historical, political, and economic circumstances under which an African government, even one born out of the process of an apparently radical and socialist-oriented national liberation struggle, is compelled into compromising its economic and social agenda, and thereby imbibes the ideology of reconciliation. The class basis of the ideology of reconciliation is illustrated in the political deal between the emergent African petit bourgeoisie that inherited state power in 1980 on the one hand, and, on the other, the enduring economic power of the former white settler factor, buttressed and guaranteed by the external forces who brokered the Lancaster House Agreement on Zimbabwe. Also outlined is the attempt at the trade-off between reconciliations as that which ensures and guarantees continuity of the economic structures of white settler colonialism, and a social development programme in the pursuit of social justice, on the basis of which the Africans were supposed to ‘catch up’ through donor support in such sectors as education and health.

As in all such transitions in southern Africa, the problem of continuity has both internal and external dimensions and manifests itself in a variety of forms, including a constitutional framework in which the Bill of Rights—contained in all the settlement constitutions of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa—reinforces old relations of production as well as the unequal structures of ownership. These, in turn, characterize the structure of production and the continuation of an extractive and export-oriented economy, at the expense of industrialization.

Against this background, it is not surprising that attempts at transformation in Zimbabwe appeared to have been confined mainly to social services—that is, education, health, and housing. These much-needed programmes in turn impacted negatively on an already restricted and narrow-based economic system. As a result, the major achievements in education, health, and other human development-related fields have become discordant with the economy, which has been unable to expand nor accommodate such challenges. This has resulted in the growing budget deficit and the

rise of the debt crisis. The country has been compelled to borrow repeatedly in order to contain the budget deficit, while attempting to sustain an acceptable level of social and economic activity.

By the turn of the 1990s, Zimbabwe had to resort to structural adjustment programmes in an attempt to resolve the spiralling economic crisis. The real danger now is that the negative consequences of globalization are reinforcing the internal and external structures of continuity and underdevelopment, threatening to plunge more and more people into deepening poverty, unemployment, and social strife. All this compounds the challenge for human development, good governance, and social justice. In the final analysis, the post-colonial state is one subjected to the worst dilemma: caught between the requirements of an international community and the social demands of the mass of the people.

All this represents the tension between reconciliation and social justice, to the point where they become contradictory and even irreconcilable. But this tension expresses itself in that between the political and economic requirements of reconciliation on the one hand, and the class aspirations of the emergent African petit bourgeoisie, increasingly impatient at the slow pace of the process of embourgeoisement and anxious to 'take over' from the former white settlers in every sector of the economy. With the passage of time into the postcolonial period, reconciliation becomes untenable against the background of calls for indigenization and the popular demand for the resolution of such key outstanding issues from the national question as the land question.

The current debate on the land issues in Zimbabwe represents the broader political and economic dynamics of the post-colonial state: it is imbued by the historical legacy of white settler colonialism and the inherited economic and social structures that are associated with it, and its persistent and pervasive role within both the state itself and the society at large, as a viable conduit through which external factors can compromise and control the state. But it is a state which provides a framework within which the leading sections of the African petit bourgeoisie can also find fulfilment of their class aspirations as they enter the arena that was hitherto restricted and confined largely to the white classes.

Coming as it did almost 20 years after political independence, the current 'land war' in Zimbabwe might be viewed as the desperate act of a government besieged by both an economic crisis and a decline in popularity, and therefore seeking to restore its legitimacy and image. This may be true especially if one includes in such an assessment the overall failure of Mugabe's government in resolving this key question that underpins all else on the economic front. In reality, however, it does demonstrate the political expediency that undergirded the policy of reconciliation at independence in Zimbabwe: the need to overlook in 1980 what Mugabe angrily described as 'colonial settler robbery' in 1997, in a reference to the pattern of land ownership in which almost 50 per cent of the agricultural land is still owned by less than 5 000 large commercial-scale farmers, mostly whites, while more than 8 million peasants are crowded on the remaining largely arid land:

'We are now talking of the conquest of conquest, the prevailing sovereignty of the people of Zimbabwe over settler minority rule and all it stood for, including



the possession of our land.' To the applause of the 5 000 participants from all the provinces, Cde. Mugabe declared: 'Power to the people must now be followed by land to the people.'<sup>4</sup>

The leaders of the largely white Commercial Farmers' Union tried in vain to remind Mugabe that he had in the early 1980s 'persuaded' white farmers 'to stay on the land as long as we wanted'. Ever since 1987, therefore, the number of occupations ('squatters') of white commercial farms has increased and threatens to become a major problem unless the new land reform programme, announced at the donors' land conference in Harare, takes shape and begins to resolve the land question.

To the extent that the emergent African bourgeoisie is the main driving force behind both the 'land war' and the call for indigenization, it does threaten the policy of reconciliation in the pursuit, real or mythical, of attaining social justice and rectifying the 'historical injustice' inherent in the Lancaster House Agreement on Zimbabwe. However, the fact that Mugabe's government had to go slow on the process of land reform begun in 1997, including the need of an international donors' conference on the subject, does indicate its vulnerability to vested interests at home and abroad.

### **THE LANCASTER HOUSE AGREEMENT ON ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY IN COMPROMISE AND RECONCILIATION**

Zimbabwe was colonized into Southern Rhodesia in 1890, as part and parcel of that process that saw the partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 and prompted Cecil John Rhodes, after whom the colony was named, into his dream of a British colonial empire stretching from the 'Cape to Cairo'. The rest of the history of this colony is well known; the main features might be summarized as follows:

- The colonization process, in the circumstances of the determined and aggressive group of colonialists against African resistance, was bloody, rapid, and almost total in its impact on the entire colony. Within three years of the occupation in 1890, the Ndebele Kingdom had been destroyed, the resistance of the Shona and Ndebele uprisings of 1896–1897 had been suppressed in an extremely brutal manner, and an elaborate framework of colonial settler administration had penetrated almost every corner of the country. White settler colonialism was almost complete in its domination: political, economic, social and cultural.
- The belief that Southern Rhodesia possessed enormous mineral resources was in fact the major and immediate impetus of the colonial occupation that saw the British South Africa Company wishing to establish a 'second Rand' north of the Limpopo. The belief turned out to be misinformed, even though it had by the turn of the century attracted an unusually large and strong white settler group into the country—the largest in any colonial territory in Africa south of the Sahara and north of the Limpopo. So the British South Africa Company felt compelled to speculate in land on a large scale, and in this began the process of the dispossession of the African people of their land. This culminated in the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and related legislation to ensure an expanding supply of labour and to pre-empt competition between the races in all aspects of the economy. In this way the rise of a significant African bourgeois class

was pre-empted, while it was determined that even the African petit bourgeoisie would be weak, the African wage-earning class disorganized and rendered incoherent for a long time to come, and the peasantry subjected to serious impoverishment and gradual proletarianization.

- At first an expression of protest, the rise of African nationalism later developed into an open challenge to colonialism in the demand for national independence. But this is an African nationalist movement that develops against the background of British paternalism and liberalism, for a long time able neither to recognize the umbilical relationship between the metropolitan power and white settler colonialism nor to develop a political and ideological framework within which to forestall neocolonialism.

It was against this background that the Lancaster House Conference on Zimbabwe was convened during the last quarter of 1979, after more than a decade of bloody armed struggle and attempts at concluding an 'internal settlement'—including the one that saw the establishment of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia under the partnership of Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Ian Smith in April 1979—that sought to pre-empt the mainstream liberation movement in the form of ZANU and ZAPU. The later two had constituted a Patriotic Front (PF) during the last years of the armed struggle and presented themselves as such at the Lancaster House Conference, pitted against the 'internal settlement' leaders and the British authorities who had, as the formal colonial power, placed themselves in the position of 'umpire'.

A major factor in the settlement or compromise that would emerge at the Lancaster House Conference was the role of the Frontline States, the group of African states—consisting of Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, and Botswana—that had variously provided support and/or rear bases for the Zimbabwean liberation movement. Because of the Rhodesian cross-border raids, the war had from 1977 onwards been extended to the Frontline States of Zambia, Mozambique, and Botswana. In particular, the economies of Zambia and Mozambique were seriously disrupted and their political stability equally threatened. The Frontline States were therefore as much in need of a settlement as the forces that were directly involved in Zimbabwe.

All forces and parties involved in the Zimbabwe debacle were sorely in need of a settlement: the Smith-Muzorewa group, because they could not stop a war that might soon engulf them; South Africa, because it could not continue to support the Rhodesian war indefinitely and therefore welcomed a chance that might legitimize the internal settlement and thereby hopefully also buy time for apartheid; the PF, because it had not yet completely won the war against the Smith-Muzorewa regime and therefore needed this opportunity to isolate the regime and emerge as the legitimate African nationalist leadership in the Zimbabwe situation; and the imperialists (Britain and its ally, the United States), because this offered the most favourable opportunity to get all concerned to accept a compromise whose elements had been on the table since the genesis of the Anglo-American proposals in 1976. No doubt many an African nationalist felt uncomfortable about both the course and outcome of the conference, and Robert Mugabe himself would express disquiet and anxiety at the dangers inherent in the entire affair:

Yes, even as I signed the document I was not a happy man at all. I felt we had

been cheated to some extent...that we had agreed to a deal which would to some extent rob us of the victory that we had hoped to have achieved in the field.

But so opportune was the Lancaster House Conference that none of the actors and forces dared let it fail. Even before the conference resumed in September, it was clear to the PF leaders and their entourage in London that this was the final chance. It was a point of no return.

Tongogara also wanted to conclude a settlement. 'We just have to have a settlement. We can't go back empty-handed...'

The Lancaster House Agreement constituted a substantial setback for the PF, at least in terms of the broad objectives that the national liberation movement had set for itself in the course of the armed struggle. First, the white settler colonial state was not to be dismantled. On the contrary, it was to remain largely intact. The ceasefire agreement would ensure that the guerrillas would not pose a threat; accordingly the PF's 35 000 guerrillas were to be isolated in assembly points scattered around the country. A British governor would represent the return of British rule for a brief period, to ensure that a suitable and acceptable black government came to power. In turn, the British governor would make sure that the state machinery—the army, the police, the prisons, the public service, the airforce, the judiciary, and so forth—remained in white hands throughout the transition period. Britain was back in control of its colony, backed by a white settler colonial state apparatus, and with the help of a Commonwealth force of 1 200 men and about 500 British policemen. To add insult to injury, the future government of Zimbabwe would have to guarantee the pensions of Rhodesian civil servants and citizenship to all white residents.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This paper, prepared for the African Renaissance Conference, was also delivered at the Sam Nolutungu Memorial Lecture Series, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 19 November 1998.
- 2 *Southern African Politics and Economics Monthly (SAPEM)*, 11(10), August/September 1998:15.
- 3 *SAPEM*, 11(9) July/August 1998:18.
- 4 *The Herald*, 6 December 1997.

Rescuing the post-colonial state of Africa: A reconceptualization of the role of the civil society

EGHOSA E.OSAGHAE

There is general agreement that the post-colonial African state, which refers to the corpus of governmental structures, regimes and governance in the post-independence country, is flawed, weak, and ineffective.<sup>1</sup> The mostly negative epithets that have been invented to characterize it—soft, underdeveloped, irrelevant, weak, swollen, illegitimate, rogue, etc.—speak volumes of the incapacities of the state. The very existence of the state has

even been questioned, as it is said to be 'fictitious' and, more recently, it has been described as 'failed' or 'collapsed'! If the state is so fundamentally flawed, that, according to Jackson and Rosberg<sup>2</sup>, its survival in several countries has to depend on its formal juridical elements (notably recognition in international law of sovereignty), rather than core empirical elements (internal legitimacy, effective governmental structures, and ability to protect citizens), what do we do with it? Ditch it and find a replacement, as seems to be advocated by critical members of the international donor community and others who celebrate the 'discovery' of civil society, the non-state section of the public realm, as the alternative engine room and spearhead of development? Or find ways of rescuing it, on the grounds that no matter how flawed the state may be, there can be no substitute for its role as the established reference point of identity for citizens in the world system and the only institution with sovereign power to act authoritatively to ensure peace, order, stability, and development within a given territory. For rather obvious reasons, the second option is the only option. Civil society or any other alternative site to the state can only complement the efforts of the state, it cannot replace it.

Taking this as a point of departure, the argument advanced in this reading is that, given its crucial roles, the post-colonial African state should be salvaged and that civil society has a crucial role to play in this regard. To be able to make and sustain this argument, a different conceptualization of civil society from the dominant neo-liberal view that pitches civil society as alternative, rival, even opposed to the state, is called for. The neo-liberal conceptualization evolved and has been popularized within a narrowly defined ideological and historical moment, one which sees civil society as the spear-head and defender of economic and political liberalization. But surely, civil society, even from the point of view of the historical and theoretical experiences of Western society which inform the postulates, has a much more enduring life and a more nuanced relationship with the state. For the question may be asked, where was civil society before liberalization, and what would be its role after the project is completed? Rather than approach civil society in this fleeting and mechanistic manner, the approach of this reading is to focus on what to me is the fundamental *raison d'être* of civil society: its role in the formation and reformation processes of the state. If, indeed, as Ndegwa's study of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kenya reveals, liberalization and democratization are not the driving forces of civil society they are assumed to be, then surely the relevance of civil society has to be searched for elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Central to the reconceptualization of civil society is the submission by Fatton who, following Hegel, Montesquieu, and Gramsci, asserts that '...the state is transformed by a changing civil society, civil society is transformed by a changing state. Thus state and civil society form a fabric of tightly interwoven threads, even if they have their own independent patterns'.<sup>4</sup> For state and civil society to 'form a fabric of tightly interwoven threads', however, it is necessary that they evolve from the same social formations and are fed by shared culture and world-views. This gives the state the capacity to express the common good and makes it possible for civil society constituents to cultivate the sense of state ownership and commitment they need to partake in the formation and reformation of the state.

Such sense of ownership has been difficult, even lacking, in many African states, a point Ayoade aptly captures in the imaginative title of his seminal contribution 'States

without citizens'.<sup>5</sup> This is largely due to the exclusion of critical segments of civil society from the formation of the contemporary state in the colonial era, and its reformation in the period after independence. Some of these subsequently retreated from the state and polity into alternative sites of empowerment and self-defence, while others opposed the state. The state has demonstrably been the worse for it, deprived of legitimation and a public ethos that is conducive to its inclusiveness, democratization and effectiveness. It is precisely how to close the ensuing gap between state and civil society to enable civil society to play its role in the much needed reformation of the pathological post-colonial state that this reading addresses.

That role has to involve setting of the rules and ethos of public conduct and governance, the harmonization of organizing principles of the state with those of society at large, and the restructuring of the state to reduce its vulnerability to sectional capture and its transformation into a credible agent of distributive justice. The problem with extant conceptualizations of civil society in Africa is that they recommend the parallel development of civil society and, perhaps inadvertently, the widening of the gap between it and the state. It goes without saying that civil society conceived this way cannot play the reformative roles we are talking about. Hence the need to reconceptualize the role of civil society in state- (and nation) building in post-colonial Africa.

### **A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY (IN AFRICA)**

The intellectual pedigree of civil society shows that both as an analytical construct and the realm of concrete action, civil society has usually been brought back in during periods of cataclysmic transformation which often culminate in state formation and reformation. The golden age of civil society in Western thought indeed followed the French revolution which marked the overthrow of the feudal state and the rise of the bourgeois state. It is in character therefore that civil society has entered African discourse at a time of massive political and economic change in various parts of the continent, the way it did earlier in Eastern Europe and Latin America.

To this extent, the relevance of civil society to Africa cannot be denied, in spite of the reservations by scholars who query the true intentions of the civil society project because of the uses to which it has been put by Western hegemonists. From the perspective of civil society, the importance of the ongoing socio-political and economic change in Africa lies in the opportunity it provides for the post-colonial state which, like its colonial forebear, is a derooted other, to be appropriated by alienated citizens, and reformed to serve their interests rather than those of the global capitalists who created it. For, at the core of the problems of the state is the absence of a claim to its ownership by the vast majority of citizens who have continuously been treated as subjects and consequently lack the requisite stakes to claim ownership. As we analyse in the next section, the ownership crisis took its roots from the anomalous origins of the state in the colonial period, and has persisted because the state continues to be colonial in character. The opportunity provided is for the colonial state to be unbundled and a proper state built on the stakes of citizens constructed in its place. Civil society constitutes the avant-garde of this process.

But what exactly is civil society? How is it conceptualized in Africa? Does that

conceptualization fit the role we have defined for it? Civil society is usually defined in contradistinction to the state, as the arena of the public realm where individual and group autonomy (but not disconnection) from the state is articulated and defended, and where collective action is taken to ensure that the state expresses the common good or general will. In empirical terms, it comprises the broad range of voluntary organizations (professional organizations, labour unions, social movements, student, youth, women's and cultural organizations, etc.) which cherish autonomy from the state, but at the same time participate directly or indirectly in its structuration. This definition is admittedly derived from Western experience where the *raison d'être* of civil society has historically centred on the protection of individual and collective freedom. For the ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, the task of civil society was to protect the freedom embodied in the private realm from the intrusions of the state in the public realm. The need for freedom, especially the right to property, increased after the rise of the powerful state in Western Europe, which Hobbes described as a Leviathan. It was the search for institutional checks to the assault of the totalitarian state that led Alexis de Tocqueville into interrogating the pluralist voluntary associations as the mainstay of civil society in the USA. Gramsci's projection of civil society as the site of counter-hegemony is also to be seen in the same light. The phenomenology of the consciousness of freedom which, for Hegel, underpins civil society, is not however the exclusive preserve of Western society. It has also been the springboard of civil society in Africa's history. Peter Ekeh, for example, has traced the development of the principle of kinship which is crucial to civil society structuration to the search for freedom beyond the state.<sup>6</sup> Voluntary self-help communal associations evolved under similar circumstances in the colonial period.<sup>7</sup>

Freedom is not, however, an end in itself. In the absence of a state capable of actualizing freedom, it is meaningless to talk of freedom. Freedom is therefore to be seen as a matter of stake-holding, on the basis of which individuals organize to ensure that the state is responsive to the general will. Political philosophers, however, differ on how this is (to be) done. Social contract theorists, for example, assume a sequence in which the state came into being only after a political (call this national) society had evolved to mediate relations between society as a whole and the Commonwealth. For Hegel, sequence mattered less than the fact that the state and civil society continuously engage in the transformation of each other. Indeed, for Hegel, civil society needs the state to thrive:

In civil society as Hegel describes it, the assumption is always made that there is a state which establishes the law, gives the law validity, maintains peace and order, passes a social policy and guarantees the effectiveness of social institutions. Only when this is taken as assumed can members of early capitalist society pursue their private ends, without taking cognisance of the liberal legal state in which they live.<sup>8</sup>

Hegel is even more specific on the interdependence of state and civil society:

...quality of rights can be actualized. But a modern state is the first prerequisite for this.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel's conception is certainly more relevant to my immediate purpose, especially as it is

further assumed that the intercourse of transformation between state and civil society is a continuous and ongoing process.

What can be surmised from all that has been said so far is that the state evolves from within its society and that civil society is the source of legitimacy for the state. The role of civil society in this process is four-fold: to set the public agenda as embodied in the common good; to set the rules and ethos of public conduct; to mediate relations between state and society; and to ensure that the state reflects the social reality and is committed to the pursuance of the public good which is unlikely without the guarantee of freedom. The end-product and implications of these are well summarized by Hegel:

The network of governmental and political institutions of the stage—its constitution—is [then] typically a product of history and expresses the culture of a particular nation—its values, religious beliefs, views about the world, traditions and customs... The values of the national community and the operations of its central government are linked together through mediating institutions (such as corporations, estates and the representative system), which ensures that the activities of the government broadly express the basic ideals and interests of groups within the community or its individual members. *If such mediating links do not exist or cease to perform their proper function, the nation or its important sectors become alienated from the government and the integrity or independence of the political community is jeopardized.*<sup>10</sup>

It is this aspect of civil society which has so far been neglected in civil society discourse in Africa that I wish to examine as the key to salvaging the post-colonial state in Africa. The argument, to repeat, is that as constituted at present, the vast majority of the people remain alienated from the post-colonial state which is a colonial imposition and is incapable of expressing the basic ideals of the community. The state has accordingly to be reconstructed, and the on-going processes of socio-political and economic change provides a golden opportunity for doing so.

But the prevalent conceptualization of civil society in Africa is not capable of positioning it to play its historical role in this process.<sup>11</sup> Civil society is presented as a rival site of development and empowerment to the inefficient state, and its constituents are encouraged to retreat or detach themselves from the state, thereby further alienating them and making the state less relevant. Indeed, the objective of the international donor community which funds the various NGOs appears to be the further weakening of the state which is now by-passed in matters of delivery of social services. Also, the range of activities of the more politically active constituents, typically human rights and prodemocracy movements, are restricted to opposition to the stage—indeed Bayart makes consciousness of opposition to the state a key criterion of membership in civil society.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the relevance of civil society is narrowed to the enthronement of liberalization and democratization.<sup>13</sup>

But overall, the most serious short-coming of extant approaches to civil society is the attempt by the West and international donor community to create a ‘new’ civil society in African countries to serve, it seems, their own purposes rather than the interests of the African peoples. This certainly informs the inclusion of international NGOs and other

external actors in the civil society action set in Africa. The actions of Western capitalist powers can be seen as a continuation of the pattern of control established under colonialism, and the logic seems to be that since the state is no longer a viable ally, the way to retain control over the affairs of these countries is to capture the soul of civil society as well. It is on such grounds that many scholars have opposed the entire civil society project, with many asking, like Chris Allen<sup>14</sup>, 'Who needs civil society?' This exercise has unfortunately taken attention away from the need to critically interrogate the concept. From all that has been said, Africa needs civil society, but a civil society that is built on its own terms and is therefore capable of autonomous action in the task of reconstructing the state.

So how is civil society to be conceptualized to make it relevant for the role of reconstructing the state? The premise for reconceptualization is that civil society has itself to be brought back in, which implies its own reconstruction. This is not to suggest that civil society did not previously exist in Africa or that it has necessarily been weak—after all it led the assault on the colonial state and has engaged the post-colonial state in various ways. Rather, it is to emphasize that for purposes of appropriating the state, civil society has to first become a national society able to articulate the common good, as well as common values and ethos, which as yet does not exist in most African countries. It is only on this basis that it can enter into a new social contract and ensure meaningful restructuring of the state. We shall return to this point in the concluding part of this reading, but to conclude this section, we shall outline the following ingredients for reconceptualizing and restructuring civil society.

First and foremost, the broad range of the intercourse between the state and civil society has to be recognized. As Gramsci warns 'One should not think of the distinction between civil society and state as though the[re]...is a clearly defined boundary between them...it is possible for an organization to embody relations belonging both to civil society and the state. This applies especially to schools, universities and other educational institutions'.<sup>15</sup> In the particular case of Africa where the post-colonial state is omnipresent and, à la Gramsci's integral state (i.e. state plus civil society) which Bayart<sup>16</sup> refers to as the totalizing state, has sought to subjugate the entire spectrum of the public realm under its control, opposition or exit is not always a realistic option. In fact, Post argues that the state-civil society dichotomy is not relevant to Africa.<sup>17</sup> Creative forms of engaging the state, including collaboration, have to be considered. The point in all this is of course that everything that promotes the cultivation of a sense of belonging to the state has to be encouraged, without unduly compromising the autonomy of civil society.

Next, the scope of civil society should not be restricted to constituents that are relevant only to the immediate needs of liberalization and democratization, typically those that are formally organized. Two things are called for here. First, the fact has to be recognized that civil society is not new in Africa. It should be remembered that coalitions of civil society constituents spearheaded the anti-colonial movement that won independence. That history should inform the (re)structuration of civil society if we are to deal with the question of ownership of the state. Second, there should be an inclusive conception which recognizes that civil society is the arena of rivalries, contestations, and conflicts since, as Gramsci reminds us, although concentrated in the state, relations of power are diffused in the social relations of civil society as well.



Thus, ‘...it is not only the sphere of class struggle; it is also the sphere of all the popular democratic struggles which arise out of the different ways in which people are grouped together—by sex, race, generation, local community, region, nation, and so on’.<sup>18</sup> This means that social movements, ethnic organizations and other so-called divisive groups which are derivatives of power relations have a place in civil society. The point is not to deny that consensus which is the hallmark of the existence of a national society is crucial to the efficacy of civil society, but to emphasize that consensus is a negotiated outcome (this is in contrast to the state which employs coercive means to deal with conflicts). But negotiation cannot take place where there is exclusion.

Finally, civil society has to be seen as the province of the people. It is all right to emphasize class structuration as Fatton<sup>19</sup> does, but the bourgeois conception that civil society is the estate of the middle class cannot suffice for Africa where the fundamental problem of ownership cuts across all segments of society. Studies of social movements across the continent indicate this much.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is the ordinary people, especially those in the rural areas, who have been neglected by the state since colonial times, that need to appropriate the state. Even though they have lived mostly in autonomy-seeking parallel structures, the notion of freedom has remained abstract to most ordinary people. The peopleness of civil society also requires the assertion of its autonomy from global control, if civil society is not to follow the paths treaded earlier by the state or arrive at a dead-end with its reconstruction project. As is argued in the next section, externalization has made it difficult to transform the peripheral post-colonial state from within because the impetus for doing so lies outside the control of the ruling classes in Africa. It would be a tragedy if civil society was also to lose control to external forces.

Having established the need for a reconceptualization and the ingredients for doing so, we next turn to examine the malcontents of the post-colonial state. In particular, we are interested in how the gulf separating the state from civil society evolved, and why it was difficult for the state to be appropriated by the citizens in the first decades of independence.

### **THE PATHOLOGY OF THE POST-COLONIAL STATE: STRUCTURALISM VERSUS EXTRANEITY**

What is wrong with the post-colonial state, why does it need formation, and what is the point of entry for civil society in that reformation process? We begin with a brief overview of the pathologies of the post-colonial state. Three decades of independence have produced striking common trends and tendencies that suggest the possibility of theorizing an African state, as indeed authors like Bayart have attempted to do.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of this theory is a problematic and ineffective state which fails to satisfy the empirical criteria of modern statehood (legalrational authority, a modicum of national loyalty, internal legitimacy, effective and responsible government, etc). Even sovereignty, which is basic to the existence of the state, is problematic. How sovereign, for example, are states that have lost control over policy-making, especially in fiscal, monetary and trade matters, to the World Bank/IMF, and have to depend on aid from these bodies and other international donors to fund their budgets?

The empirical referents of the weakness of the state are well known, and need only be spelt out here in broad outline. They include the following:

- economic marginality and underdevelopment worsened by the debt overhang and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) whose market reforms have so far brought little succor to impoverished citizens;
- political instability, involving disorderly succession to power, with the ever-present danger of state dissolution as a result of internal strife, civil war and zero-sum political competition;
- the predominance of neopatrimonial and authoritarian rule, and sectional capture of state power over constitutionalism, rule of law and democratic institutions;
- pervasive corruption which has imperilled the over-bloated governmental sector which is unable to discharge its responsibilities to citizens even in the most basic areas such as protection of life and property and provision of basic social services; and
- a chronic crisis of legitimacy which, as the end-product of all that is wrong with the state, involves massive withdrawal of support from citizens, many of whom retreat from the state, and incessant challenge or opposition to state authority by members of aggrieved, marginalized, and excluded groups.

What is of interest to us, however, is not so much how weak the post-colonial African state is, but why this is the case. Does it have to do with underlying African social structure and political culture (call this the structural view), or is it a product of the flawed construction of African political economic reality by the forces of global capitalism as manifested in the colonial state whose problems were inherited at independence, and the constrained milieu within which the post-colonial state operates (the so-called theory of extraneity)? Jean-Francois Bayart, a foremost champion of the structural view rejects the theory of extraneity on the following grounds:

Perhaps the theory...mistakes the exceptions for the rule. The state in Africa... should not be considered *a priori* as a simple product of the colonial period. Many political systems existed...before Western colonization...when the colonialists effectively acted as a demiurge...by creating most of the sub-Saharan African states, they did not do so *ex nihilo*; and colonial creations were also subject to multiple acts of *reappropriation* by indigenous social groups. Therefore, these states, which are reputed to be artificial, rest in reality upon their own social foundations...<sup>22</sup>

Although the conclusion lacks sufficient grounds from the preceding statements, Bayart's argument does have some validity. The reference to reappropriation especially means that we should not make light of the fact that even if the state was wholly a colonial creation, it has, over the three decades of independence, metamorphosed into an African state. The norms that govern public conduct for example, are more reflective of indigenous values than they are of colonial, let alone Western values. Yet, the point of this reading is that that reappropriation, if that is what it really is, is too tentative and ineffectual to be of any consequence.

More fundamentally, Bayart is right that, in the light of long-term historical analysis

(*longue durée*), dating back to the pre-colonial period, the contemporary state was not a wholly colonial creation. In British and French colonies at least, African elites as members of legislatures and through the nationalist political parties played important roles in the acts of creation or the transformation of the state. Indeed, the granting of independence in several colonies was preceded by negotiations and pacting on the shape of the state and diarchical arrangements between colonial administrators and the African political elite which afforded the opportunity to the latter to craft the state in their image. Finally, professor Ali Mazrui also made the point in his famous BBC documentary on Africa that the social formations in contemporary Africa are a product of a triple heritage: Westernization, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous forces.

But whatever the merits of the structuralist view, it is guilty of down-playing the power of global capitalism in shaping the manifest destiny of African (and other Third World) states as peripheral capitalist formations, and the epochal consequences of colonialism. The point is that these states were created to play specific roles (typically sources of raw materials and markets for finished products) in the global capitalist order and, by the very acts of their creation and integration, it has been difficult for the state to be appropriated by the vast majority of citizens themselves. Contrary to the view of the structuralists, the transfer of power to Africans at independence did not mean any fundamental change in the structure of the state; instead, as Davidson puts it, the transfer was a transfer of crises.<sup>23</sup> Without necessarily discounting the responsibility of Africans themselves for the pathologies of the state, the theory of extraneity holds that the problems of the post-colonial state can only be understood by interrogating the anomalous foundations laid under colonialism. For this, we have to interrogate the colonial state.

The creation of the colonial state did not follow the dictates of any of the classical theories of the state, which hold that states evolve from within society and reflect the historical experiences and ideals of society. The state was instead imported wholesale (bureaucracy, army, legislature, police, and other apparatuses) from the mother colony without due regard to African social structure or needs; even the boundaries of the state were determined arbitrarily. Without structural roots in society, the state was, as Goran Hyden says, 'a balloon in the sky'.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely this fundamental disjuncture between state and society that laid the foundations for the anomalies that continue to disenable the post-colonial state.

Let us take the crises of national cohesion and legitimacy. Although imported from metropolitan Europe, the colonial state was bereft of the national principle of the modern nation-state already established with the emergence of unified Germany and Italy. By lumping together diverse groups within artificial boundaries and keeping them divided, the colonial state left to its post-colonial successor the daunting task of holding what were in effect artificial nation-states together.

The colonial state also suffered from a fundamental crisis of legitimacy, as it alienated the vast majority of the very people to whom the state in theory belonged. The interests and rights of the colonized, the vast majority of whom were subjects rather than citizens, were not only subordinated to those of the colonizers, their welfare counted for very little, at a time when the rights of citizens and the welfare state were well under way in Europe. Infrastructure and social services (roads, schools, health centres, etc) were developed only to the extent that they served the colonial enterprise. Otherwise the main function of

the colonial state was the maintenance of law and order to facilitate the exploitation of resources. This was through the most violent and authoritarian means possible. Thus the major encounters most ordinary people had with the state came through its authoritarian and terrorist agents and activities: 'Between colonizer and colonized there [was] only room for forced labour, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, arrogance...brainless elites, degraded masses.'<sup>25</sup>

The lot of the political elite was only a shade better to the extent that the most pliant of them were co-opted, along with traditional authorities, into the colonial regime. But even so, severe restrictions were placed on political activities, especially those involving organized labour and (radical) political parties, while the colonial economy was dominated by a few European trading companies and entrepreneurs. It is this form of limited and guided participation that structuralists cite as evidence that Africans were involved in the acts of state creation. It is forgotten that the colonizers were fully in control and never failed to remind the ambitious elites of this fact as the British did when Obafemi Awolowo and other elites of the Western region threatened to secede from Nigeria if Lagos was not made a part of the region. They were reminded they were not in the federation by choice and that force would be used to keep the region in. The roles played by the political elite are obviously exaggerated by the structuralists.

By the very nature of its imposition and externalization then, the colonial state alienated the ruled, denigrated the norms of accountability and responsiveness in governance, and foreclosed the democratization of the state even when it was possible for indigenous elites to participate in the processes of state-building. The effect of all this was that the colonial state was a state the vast majority of the people could neither identify with, nor claim ownership of. They accordingly retreated into alternative sites and networks of self-defence, self-help development, and empowerment. These included, in the main, the various ethnic, kinship, women's youth, and professional associations that were formed in the urban areas to provide the welfare and social security the state was unable or unwilling to provide. The political elites did well to capitalize on the disclaimer of the state in the struggle to terminate colonial rule. They promised not only to appropriate the state, but to pursue the common good. But this promise did not include the transformation of the state, which meant that the anomalous colonial state was preserved. All that mattered was to gain the political kingdom:

What fired the activists...was never an imagined spectacle of the beauties of the sovereign nation-state, but the promise that the coming of the nation-state would strike away the chains of foreign rule and all that these had meant in social and moral deprivation.<sup>26</sup>

In the final analysis, the explanations offered by structuralism and extraneity actually complement each other. On the one hand, extraneity unravels the deep roots of the pathologies of the post-colonial state while, on the other, structuralism shows why the pathologies have been aggravated in the post-independence period. The theory of extraneity is however more relevant to the present discourse because it addresses the question of ownership of the state. This is the point of entry for civil society which was not allowed to blossom and play its rightful role in the process of state formation—setting

the normative agenda and the rules of social coexistence of the diverse and competing groups. Although there were important differences in the extent of tolerance by the various colonial regimes which have had a lasting effect on the character and effectiveness of civil society,<sup>27</sup> the consequences were more or less similar. The colonial regime was intolerant of the nascent civil society structures organized around the nationalist movements which contested its claims to power. In effect, the normative, material, and social rules governing the state were imposed on an alienated civil society rather than set by it, thereby making legitimacy a problematic attribute of the state *ab initio*.

### CIVIL SOCIETY TO THE RESCUE

The challenge of the post-independence era in Africa has been that of legitimizing and transforming the state which steadily took over the entire spectrum of the public realm, and established itself as the sole determinant of material reproduction. With such power and presence, it was dangerous to let the state remain alien and unappropriated. The anti-colonial coalitions of political parties, labour, youth, women, ethnic organizations and so on, that held the promise for the creation of a national society as well as the laying of new foundations for reconstructing the state, did not last for too long after independence. The ostensible urgent drive to develop and keep the fragile nation-state from disintegration led to the adoption of one-party systems, military interventions, and an authoritarian assault on all forms of opposition. Some of these were rationalized on the grounds of aligning the state to society through dubious indigenous ideological inventions like African socialism, humanism, and African democracy, whose real objectives centred on justifying the claims to power by the new power holders. The totalizing project subsequently embarked upon by the state saw the decimation of the nascent civil society. There was to be little or no room for independent media; labour had to submit to the national will defined by the state; local private capital beyond the control of the state was not welcome; ethnic and other divisive organizations were suppressed, etc. As Ekeh summarizes:

...the state barred other groups from using the political space of the political domain, exceeding the claims of the colonial state in this regard. At any rate, the postcolonial state has come to assume that the political space of the public domain can only be used at its pleasure and that permission to use it can be revoked on its own sole judgement.<sup>28</sup>

All this meant that the ideals of independence and the opportunity for reconstructing the state had been subverted by the survivalist designs of the new men of power and members of the predator ruling class whose 'heritage' and 'destiny' it was to rule their countries.<sup>29</sup> What should have been a reformation process at best became a hijacked class project. What followed was a worsening of the crisis of ownership. As a result of the patrimonialist systems which quickly replaced the fragile constitutional orders inherited at independence, the question of ownership and belongingness to the state became reduced to the holdership of power and the ability to attract competitive pay-offs. In the absence of a national society and abiding public morality, this only served to divide

society, heighten the stakes of the struggle for power as the state became increasingly vulnerable to sectional capture, and further alienate and exclude large segments of the citizenry. While most of those alienated persisted in retreating from the state, some of the excluded groups became separatist and demanded the right of self-determination. For these segments, the post-colonial state clearly needed to be reconstructed, but as long as freedom (and autonomy) continued to be denied, the basis for peaceful articulation and redress-seeking did not exist.

The implication of all this is that for the most part of the post-colonial period, the state remained a colonial state, a balloon hanging above society, that was incapable of expressing the common good and serving the interests of the citizenry. It remained in essence an illegitimate state. This was the situation until the political implosions of the 1980s and 1990s that were provoked by a combination of internal and global factors, and marked what has been called the 'second independence movement' in Africa. Not unexpectedly, the implosions put the continued survival of some of the states which were embroiled in intractable civil wars, but in almost all cases it also held the promise for the reconstruction of the state on terms determined by civil society coalitions which, for the first time, enjoyed the freedom of political space.

This was the lesson of the sovereign national conferences in Benin, Togo, Cape Verde, the former Zaire, Congo, and so on, notwithstanding their scuttling by anti-democratic forces. The development has been very conducive to the emergence of national societies as witnessed in the new coalitions of civil society constituents reminiscent of the nationalist movements of the colonial period, in which narrow interests are subordinated to the collective good, which in this case includes the ouster of discredited regimes. The participation of previously excluded and marginalized segments in these coalitions and the gradual emergence of consensus on a key number of issues and expectations with regard to the shape of the state (these represent stake-building) signify that, finally, the cultivation of a sense of ownership has come within reach. The process is, however, a slow and gradual one whose outcome cannot be guaranteed, but the new quest for freedom and autonomy of space (as for example represented by the independent media), the increased openness with which the 'national question' is discussed, and the demands for a new ethos of public conduct that emphasizes accountability and responsiveness, are positive indicators of the potential directions in which civil society can move. Where state power holders have been adamant to change, violent conflicts have ensued, but even this is more positive than negative.

All this probably explains why, unlike the past when separatist agitations and exit were considered major instruments of political contestation, organized groups are now more willing to insist on their right of belongingness to, and ownership of, the state. This is a significant development when contrasted with the prevalent attitudes toward the state dating back to colonial times which Ekeh has captured as follows:

Stretching back to European colonialism in Africa...the state has claimed ownership of the civic public domain. There has not been a republican assertion of ownership of the civic public domain and its political space by citizens. That remarkable anger of the ordinary man and woman...against public officials who transgress on their public trust has been largely absent from Africans because

ordinary persons assume that the public domain in which the state operates does not belong to them.<sup>30</sup>

The probability is high that, with the developments in the civil society that we have discussed, the question of ownership of the state is on its way to being fully resolved. Given the abortion of the state reformation project that was expected to follow independence, the question may be asked how long the changes we have referred to would last. According to Keller ‘...the pattern has consistently been for civil society to retreat into limbo once victory has been secured or when defeat is certain, only to emerge again when another crisis occurs that seems unmanageable for existing political institutions’.<sup>31</sup> This may very well be so, but our conceptualization of civil society assumes that the intercourse with the state is on-going and imminent because the struggle for freedom which fires civil society is a continuous process.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Doombos, 1990.
- 2 Jackson and Rosberg, 1982.
- 3 Ndegwa, 1996.
- 4 Fatton, 1995:67.
- 5 Ayoade, 1988.
- 6 Peter Ekeh, 1990, 1994.
- 7 Osaghae, 1998.
- 8 Uting, 1984:217; also Poggi, 1978.
- 9 Uting, *ibid*.
- 10 Peiczynski, 1984:266 [emphasis added].
- 11 See, for instance, the collection of essays in Harbeson et al., 1995.
- 12 Bayart, 1986.
- 13 Cf. MacMahon, 1997 and Osaghae, 1997 for a critique.
- 14 Chris Allen, 1997.
- 15 Simon, 1982:71.
- 16 Bayart, 1993.
- 17 Post, 1991.
- 18 Simon, 1982:69.
- 19 Fatten, 1995.
- 20 Cf. Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1995.
- 21 Bayart, 1991,1993.
- 22 Bayart, 1991:52–53 [emphasis added].
- 23 Davidson, 1992.
- 24 Goran Hyden, 1983:19.
- 25 Césaire, 1972:21.
- 26 Davidson, 1992:164.
- 27 Widner, 1994.
- 28 Ekeh, 1994:7.

29 Awolowo, 1947.

30 Ekeh, 1994:12.

31 Keller, 226.

### Neo-dependency and Africa's fragmentation

ALI A. MAZRUI

An end of colonial rule is not synonymous with independence. In this reading we propose to look at one implication of this statement. We might start from the truistic premise that there are degrees of independence. What we should go on to ask is whether there are gradations of colonial status as well. Is the condition of being a 'dependency' relative? Is there such a thing as a state of neo-dependency—a status below the level of meaningful sovereign initiative but disguised as something higher?

One affirmative answer came from the All-African People's Conference held in Cairo towards the end of March 1961. The conference gave collective recognition to a relatively new concept in African nationalistic thought. The name given to this idea was 'neo-colonialism'. As for the phenomenon which the term designated, it was viewed by the conference as indirect political and; economic manipulation, designed to perpetuate external control in Africa in more subtle ways.<sup>1</sup> Neo-colonialism is then the actual activity of manipulation which an external power might carry out or attempt to carry out. But we might use 'neo-dependency' to describe the status of an African country which was being so manipulated.

Perhaps no term in African nationalistic vocabulary has had a harder time establishing its respectability among Western audiences than has the term 'neo-colonialism'. There are reasons for this linguistic handicap. Perhaps before we analyse the term itself we should evaluate its 'social standing' as a concept of diplomatic discourse.

One handicap which the term has suffered from is precisely its etymological nearness to the word 'colonialism'. This has tended to give the term 'neo-colonialism' a ring of obsolescence. The British, for example, are reconciled to the end of colonialism. They therefore cannot see how the mere prefix of 'neo-' can save African protests from being a simple case of flogging a dead imperial horse. Moreover, these particular Anglo-Saxons are in any case instinctively prejudiced against new English words which are not English-born.

Across the English Channel, however, the reaction against the term 'neo-colonialism' might arise out of a simple continental attachment to 'precise' definitions. 'What does it mean?' a continental European might ask—convinced a priori that it could not mean anything. M.Spaak was unhappy once about the lack of a precise definition of 'neo-colonialism'.<sup>2</sup>

Yet we need to remember that what is vague is not necessarily meaningless. In trying to determine how meaningful 'neo-colonialism' might be, we propose in this reading to test the term against a specific type of relationship which some nationalists have described as 'neo-colonial'. The relationship in question is African association with the European Economic Community. At the time that Britain was applying for membership of the Community, most of Commonwealth Africa declared its opposition to being



institutionally associated with the European Community. And the opposition was, in part, based on the assumption that African associates of the EEC were in effect neo-dependencies. How meaningful was that assumption? And how was it related to the weakness which seemed implicit in the fragmentation of the African continent into small states?

Yet before the term ‘neo-colonialism’ can be tested against this particular issue of African association with the EEC a minimal definition is called for. And one definition we might use-fully examine lies in Nkrumah’s description of neo-colonialism as ‘a logical development of the discredited theory of indirect rule’.<sup>3</sup>

In a sense this does indeed shift the problem of definition on to the concept of ‘indirect rule’. But some idea of Lugard’s policy preferences is perhaps all we would need for our purposes. In regard to Northern Nigeria Lugard felt that it was ‘desirable to retain the native authority and work through and by the native emirs’.<sup>4</sup> In regard to the internal control of Uganda, Lugard asserted that ‘the object to be aimed at in the administration in this country is rule through its own executive government’.<sup>5</sup>

It was presumably on such evidence, on paper and in practice, that Nkrumah worked out his own definition of indirect rule—in his own words, ‘to let the African Chief appear nominally in control while actually he was manipulated from behind the scenes by the colonial Power’.<sup>6</sup> Neo-colonialism is, then, a more refined form of this process. The African ‘Chief is now granted a flag, a national anthem and a seat in the United Nations—but essentially he is still being manipulated behind the scenes either by the former master or by a new one. The nature of the strings of manipulation has changed from ‘the rights of conquest’ to ‘the rights of he who pays the piper’. In both instances it is a case of appearing to grant formal autonomy, and even proclaiming to the world that the Africans were free, whereas in practice Africa’s rulers remained Europe’s subjects.

Curiously enough there were times when Lugard himself, perhaps only as an answer to world criticism of British annexations, talked as if indirect rule as practised in the colonies amounted to giving back the country to its own people, as independence is supposed to amount to today. In 1938, for example, Lugard was addressing a Conference in Oxford in these terms:

When lately Britain protested against Italy’s attack upon Abyssinia, it was argued that during this era of acquisition she had done the same thing herself... [as in the case of] the conquest of Ashanti, the protectorate over Uganda, and the overthrow of Fulani Rule in Northern Nigeria. Putting aside the fact that the action was in each case practically forced upon us, we may remind our critics that in every instance without exception the country was restored to its previous rulers.

This, of course, fell short of what today would be called even formal independence—the native rulers were reinstated with powers only restricted in the interests of justice and good government.<sup>7</sup>

Within his ideological responses in turn, what Nkrumah feared a generation later was a policy of having African rulers reinstated by formal independence—‘with powers only restricted in the interests of “justice” and good business’. But if neo-colonialism is

something new, and is to be distinguished from old colonialism by its indirectness what was 'direct' about the colonialism of old—if it worked though 'a system of indirect rule'? Can the ideological analyst penetrate into the comparative logic of the two concepts?

When colonialism in the old days used Chiefs it was, as Lugard has told us, primarily for internal rule. What was to be direct and absolutely certain was the issue of 'sovereignty residing in Britain. 'Undisputed sovereignty was one of Lugard's principles', his biographer has, as we have noted, emphasized.<sup>8</sup> And in its international sense, particularly in the case of the self-governing colonies like Southern Rhodesia at the present day, the residual core of sovereignty which still remains with Britain is the right to conduct the international affairs of the territory, and to speak for it to the world at large.

Neo-colonialism, however, is a reshuffling of roles between the new 'Client Chief of an African country and the big power behind him. Sovereignty in its international sense is, in fact, passed on to the Chief—and more often than not the big power under neo-colonialism sets about manipulating the Chief not so much in the Chief's relations with his own people as in his relations, in the Cold War context, with other states. As of old the big power is still the power behind the Chief's stool, but as of now the power is more interested in the directives the Chief gives to his Foreign rather than to his Home Secretary—except insofar as domestic policies have vital foreign implications.

For this control of foreign policy the neo-colonial power may indeed pay. In fact, the whole concept of neo-colonialism leaves the United States just as vulnerable to African attacks as the ex-colonial powers themselves. The suspicion is that the big powers are trying to buy allies in the cold war—and to such bids Nyerere, for one, has retorted that although Africans desired to be friendly to every country, 'we have no desire to have a friendly country choosing our enemies for us'.<sup>9</sup>

The one major issue on which the client Chief's domestic policy may get mixed up with the foreign policy he is intended to pursue is the whole question of what system of government to adopt. Of course, underlying Lugard's whole idea of 'Indirect Rule' is that people should be ruled through institutions they can understand. And yet when, on attainment of formal independence, Africans proceeded to discard the imported models of government and start experimenting with new ones, the Westerner all too often concluded that this was the thin end of the wedge that would not only destroy democracy but introduce communism into the African country. Certainly the Americans have not always distinguished between Eastern-oriented foreign policies and new systems of government within the newly independent states. And, in the words of Chester Bowles:

When we relate all our [American] actions to the presence or absence of a Communist threat in any nation, we tend to turn communism into a natural resource like uranium or petroleum which may be exchanged for dollars at the United States treasury.<sup>10</sup>

If neo-colonialism in this sense means pouring money into a poor country in order to control it politically, it presents another significant contrast to colonialism of old. Today it is not very often that one hears the argument of 'exploitation for European interests' used by defenders of colonialism. In the new climate of opinion, that seems more like

something a prudent imperialist might cover up with other arguments—such exploitation having now become more a weapon of attack against colonialism than a shield in its defence.

And yet at the turn of the century Sir Harry Johnston, for example, could—without a trace of cynicism—put forward as a sound British policy that a territory like India was to be ruled in such a way that:

The European may come in small numbers with his capital, his energy and his knowledge to develop a most lucrative commerce and obtain products necessary to the use of his advanced civilization.<sup>11</sup>

On Africa, Sir Harry put forward this exploitation argument in defence of colonization in even clearer terms. He said:

Since we have begun to control the political affairs of parts of West Africa and the Niger Basin our trade with these countries, rendered secure, has risen from a few hundred pounds to about six million pounds. This is sufficient justification for our continued government of those regions and their occasional cost to us in men and money.<sup>12</sup>

The point to remember is that Sir Harry was not being defiantly honest and blunt. His line of defence was not unrepresentative of his time. How representative he was can be further illustrated by a reference to what an opponent of colonization across the Atlantic was saying some years later. Frederick Starr, in the first of that series of articles on the Congo in the *Chicago Tribune* of half a century ago, maintained that he did not approve of ‘the exploitation of native population by outsiders for their own benefit’.

‘Nor do I feel’, he said, ‘that even the development of British trade warrants interference with native life, customs, laws and lands.’ If the ‘even’ in the sentence—used, as it was, without any undue cynicism—is not sufficiently revealing, Starr makes matters plainer by adding: ‘I know, however, that these views are unpopular and heretical.’<sup>13</sup> Starr’s stand on exploitation is not ‘heretical’ by today’s standards. And this change even by itself is a measure of the difference between old colonialism and at least one form of contemporary neo-colonialism. When Sir Harry Johnston argued that six million pounds a year for British enterprise justified ‘our continued government’ of West Africa, he was in effect saying that it was worth establishing political control in order to get money out of a country. When John Foster Dulles argued to the United States Senate that it was ‘enlightened [American] self-interest’ to give aid—with political strings attached—he was, in fact, saying that it was worth putting money into a country in order to establish political control. Not all conditional aid is necessarily ‘neo-colonial’ but Dulles did tend to think of aid as a manipulative device. Here then was a reversal of means and ends between classical colonialism and at least one form of contemporary neo-colonialism. And if Persia’s Dr Amini, when resigning as Premier in July 1962, could demand as of right more American money for Persia because of Persia’s position in the cold war, then here also was, in a sense, a reversal of roles between exploiter and exploited.

But the position is made more complicated by Dr Amini’s claim that the neutrals got

more money than a committed country like Persia.<sup>14</sup> If freedom from old colonialism then meant, in part, freedom from exploitation by the big powers, freedom from neo-colonialism now could have the more positive quality of being freedom to exploit the big powers—to sell a recurrent danger of communism to Western countries and a tantalizing hope for communism to Eastern. And if ‘enterprise’ in competition with, or at the expense of other lands is to be praised by the norms of Sir Harry Johnston, to be ‘noncommitted’ in foreign policy is not entirely unenterprising. As Nkrumah put it, it was ‘nonalignment in action’ to accept eighteen million pounds from the United States and Britain for the Volta River Project while negotiating with Russia for a project to develop power from the Bui. It had become possible for a small country, if uncommitted, ‘to enter into financial and commercial relations of such magnitude with foreign powers without in the least affecting its independence’.<sup>15</sup>

The qualification that must now be put forward is that this reversal of roles between exploiter and exploited is best exemplified only in those former colonial territories that have turned out to have little else to auction but their foreign policies. In those countries which still have resources which Western countries need or want, the old idea of legitimizing Western control in terms of Western economic interests has yet to disappear. Sometimes such arguments are even addressed to Africans themselves, and sometimes by people whose sincerity and lack of material interest in the resources are not in question. Where a case can be made that the exact location of the resources was not inhabited, the case for colonial exploitation is easier still. Even bishops, addressing their multiracial flock in a place like Rhodesia, have been known to argue that colonization is, or could be, ‘everything that is praiseworthy if it involves ‘the appraisal and harnessing and making’.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, the bluntness of Sir Harry Johnston is much rarer now than it was in his time, if for nothing else than the fact that colonization now, unlike in his time, has to be defended against more critics than those of the metropolitan countries themselves. And even these latter are more numerous now than they were in Sir Harry’s day.

Nevertheless, in business circles, for example, it has perhaps continued to make sense to justify Western control in terms of productivity, security, prices—‘Supervised child care at Bakwanga diamond mine is one way of raising Bantu health and productivity levels’, the argu-ment would go; but more important for productivity was the denial of political rights. After all, when in 1952 the Bantu of Kenya were already enjoying some political rights, atrocities ensued—and atrocities are regrettable because ‘the economy is affected, the Bantu’s stake is reduced, the British stake unimpressive, and the free world, which needs strategic materials, is poorly served’.<sup>17</sup>

It is such business circles which in 1962 rallied to a Katanga lobby in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the United States. And it is perhaps their vested interests that would seek to ensure that, in Nkrumah’s words, ‘the new Balkan States of Africa will not have the independence to shake off the economic colonial shackles...’<sup>18</sup>

It is up to the Africans themselves to seek ways of loosening these shackles. Nkrumah himself has tended to argue not so much to the effect that economic cooperation between Africans must look forward to political integration but almost to the effect that there cannot be meaningful economic cooperation between Africans unless there is political integration. The reasoning involved is that short of a political union there would remain,

among other things, fratricidal competition between Africans themselves—and within the language of an ‘indivisible’ Africa fratricide is little short of suicide.

Given, however, that Nkrumah is almost the only African leader who would argue that African unity must *begin* with political integration, Ghana under him had to settle for other forms of a ‘beginning’. In 1962 she looked upon the easing of customs ‘barriers’ between herself and the Upper Volta, and the declaration of Tema as a free port for all African states, as among ‘practical steps towards the creation of an African Customs union’.<sup>19</sup> With this Nigeria’s Nnamdi Azikiwe agreed.

‘Another economic factor which can bring political unity nearer is the establishment of a common market’, the Nigerian went on to add.<sup>20</sup> And in April 1962, Ghana, for one, was already committing herself to plans for the formation—at least with the other Casablanca Charter States—of an African Payments Union, a Permanent Council for African Economic Union and Economic and Technical Co-operation.

Yet while Nkrumah was giving support to the idea of an African Common Market, he was at the same time voicing objections to the European common market. It is with the arguments which surrounded the latter issue that we should now concern ourselves. For our purposes the period which best illustrated the neo-colonial fears of Commonwealth Africa was the period between Britain’s submission of her application for EEC membership in 1961 to President de Gaulle’s veto against British entry in January 1963. Three attitudes were discernible among those Africans who were critical of the idea of African association with the European Economic Community. One attitude was hostile to the very notion of a united Europe—the hostility arising in part out of a suspicion of the Community’s motives. Another attitude was to the effect that Europe could do what it wanted but Africa should be no part of it. The third and more realistic attitude was the hope that Africa should benefit by the increased wealth of a united Europe—but not on the formal standard terms and institutional ties implicit in associate membership as then defined for Africa. These three stands were not necessarily taken by different people but were sometimes discerned in the arguments put forward by the same leaders.<sup>21</sup>

It is not the purpose of this reading to disentangle those attitudes. What we need to note is that in each attitude there did recur the fear that Africa might remain economically backward—and therefore subject to manipulation by those on whom the viability of her economy depended. The fear that Europe’s union might retard Africans’ economic development rested on the estimated impact that Europe’s union might have, firstly, on closer integration between African countries, and secondly, on the type of economy which would characterize the African continent.

On the issue of Europe’s impact on prospects for unity in Africa, a study made in 1961 put forward the suggestion that ‘there is a much greater hope of unity in Africa if the ex-French and ex-British territories are all on a par in their relationship with Europe’.<sup>22</sup> But French-speaking Africa was already enjoying associate membership with the European Common Market, while English-speaking Africa could only do that if Britain decided to join the European Six and if the Six decided to give Britain’s former colonies the same terms as the former French and Belgian colonies. If African unity then depended on African countries being ‘on a par in their relationship with Europe’, and if the parity of relationship open was associate membership of the EEC, then African unity was becoming dependent on decisions which were to be made in Brussels, London, and

some other European capitals. Of course, all would be well from this point of view if all the African countries decided to devise a parity of relationship with Europe that entailed renunciation of associate membership by those who already had it. But the temptation to remain associate members was already too great for those who were already in the club.

Indeed, in 1962 the French-speaking areas were so jealous of their status that they rigorously opposed allowing Commonwealth countries to benefit from preferences and aid provided under the Rome Treaty unless, in the words of an Ivory Coast diplomat, 'they become members of the club'.<sup>23</sup> As often as not they were less generous than that. A review of events pointed out that on the question of giving similar associate status to Commonwealth African countries France and the existing AOT object, as preference loses its value when it is more widely extended.<sup>24</sup> This made it difficult for African states to achieve parity of relationship with Europe even if those who opposed the European Common Market swallowed their pride and applied for association.

Then there were some of the legal implications of the Rome Treaty itself vis-à-vis any changes of political boundaries in Africa. In 1961 Tom Soper drew attention to the fact that only that part of Somalia which was once Italian could legally participate in the benefits of the Treaty of Rome; and if any grants under the special development fund were made, they were legally to be spent only on the ex-Italian part of the now single Republic of Somalia. There was then the proposed union of the former French and former British Cameroons pending. 'It is not at all easy to see how all this would be sorted out with the proposed union...or with any possible wider associations among ex-British and ex-French territories', Soper commented.<sup>25</sup> But if it was not sorted out in advance, it could be seen as a possible obstacle to such 'wider associations'.

Soper himself argued that because the Rome Treaty required associate members to extend the most favoured nation treatment to each other, it, in effect, required of them to 'create the basis of a Common Market among themselves in Africa'. Considering this, Soper maintained that the Rome Treaty 'provided a positive incentive for closer union among African countries'.

But, like the Aga Khan at a Commonwealth Day reception in Cambridge, Soper made a lot of the argument that 'economically... Europe and Africa have become naturally complementary'—and went on to point out that trade between African countries was negligible and likely to remain so for many years partly because 'their products are similar'.<sup>26</sup>

What value was there in the Rome Treaty's 'incentive' to get the Africans to form a basis of a Common Market of their own? If such a basis was important when the Rome Treaty helped to create it, it was surely important if the Africans were to create it on their own initiative. Nor was it self-evident that if countries produced 'similar products' then there is little value in having a common market. After all, the whole idea of that Principle in the Rome Treaty which stood for 'the establishment of a system ensuring that competition in the Common Market is not distorted'<sup>27</sup> was based on a recognition of the obvious fact that the economies of European countries were substantially competitive. That was the whole point of bringing down tariff barriers which were intended to protect the domestic industries of each member, and was the whole point of the affirmation of the principle of fair competition as recognized by the Declaration of the Heads of the States forming the European Economic Community. Indeed, many of the European countries

were competitive both in their industrial and in their agricultural produce. And a convincing case had yet to be made that while it benefitted them to have a Common Market in spite of producing similar products, it would harm Africans to have a Common Market because they were producing similar products. The range of potential specialization in agricultural produce was indeed narrower than the range in industrial, but given an open market specialization was possible at least on a region-to-region basis in Africa. Certainly a convincing case had yet to be made for the proposition that while Europe would benefit by having a common policy as a basis for selling their cars to outsiders, West African countries would suffer by having a common policy for selling their cocoa to outsiders.

For the more purely psychological reasons for an African's objection to the European Common Market, one must examine some of the presuppositions of African nationalism itself. Nationalism derives sustenance either in opposition to or competitively with other nations. As we have seen, nationalism in Africa sprang out of a philosophy of what Nkrumah simply called 'the right of a people to rule themselves'<sup>28</sup> It would be a mistake to suppose that such a philosophy must necessarily form a part of every instance of nationalism. The philosophy of the right to self-rule may be a negligible factor in a nation to whom such a right is not at issue. German nationalism, for example, may well have derived sustenance at one time not so much out of a philosophy that the Germans had a right to govern themselves as out of a conviction that they had a right to govern others—though the latter, no doubt, presupposed the former. French nationalism in the colonial wars of Indo-China and Algeria was also rooted not in a belief in some universal right to self-rule but in a conviction of a French right to rule others. In the words of Premier Mamadou Dia of Senegal, Europe was the 'mother of nationalism and...by a strange destiny, mother of colonialism'.<sup>29</sup> The scramble for Africa more than half a century ago was thus a clash between a number of European nationalisms quarrelling between themselves in pursuit of the colonies. Out of these European nationalisms of ruling others, then, empires were built. And now out of the African nationalism of self-rule empires have disintegrated. What has been crucial in the two types has been the impetus of opposition to, or rivalry with, other nations.

African nationalism started with the element of opposition rather than rivalry as its sustenance. With the attainment of at least formal independence by most of Africa, African nationalism has needed in part a change of diet. To change the metaphor, the theme of opposition has been slowly retreating to give way to a growing impetus of rivalry. To the extent that there is now a Nigerian nationalism and a Ghanaian nationalism, the rivalry may be strictly inter-African—motivated by what the nationalists themselves would condemn as the aforesaid fratricidal and suicidal instincts. To the extent that there is an African nationalism, however, the rivalry is primarily with the Western Europe which had once ruled Africa—not so much a rivalry to maintain equality but a rivalry to achieve equality with Europe.

And yet, thanks to the emergence of the temptation to be associated with Europe economically, the furthest in Pan-African sentiment that a hundred parliamentarians from French-speaking Africa could go at a conference with the EEC European Parliament in June 1961 was that the new association envisaged for 1962 should be open to all African states 'on condition that none of them should belong to another economic group whose

objectives were incompatible with those of the association itself.<sup>30</sup> This might have been implicit in the logic of economic competition. But it made it difficult to construct an African unity which was designed to build up Africa to a level of competitive economic equality with Western Europe.

Another factor involved was that although the Pan-Africanists originally viewed unity as a means for achieving equality with Europe, it was originally a case of creating a united Africa to be the equal of a divided Europe. That this would have fallen short of a conclusive assertion of racial equality in, say, technological aptitude was not fully apprehended. What was inspiring was the relative immediacy of the prospect in the eyes of the Pan-Africanists. But by 1961 the idea of a European Common Market, with a partially accepted aspiration to create a fuller European Community later, was more clearly seen to militate against the aspiration of trying to achieve an African equality with the old divided Europe.

Moreover, there had been, in the language of African unification, the implied assumption that even if a united Africa, materially on a par with a divided Europe, did not establish African equality in technological achievement, it would have established African superiority in moral terms. The (Nigerian) Action Group Policy Paper on a West African Union issued in 1960 could thus view the creation of such a Union as a means by which Africans were to have proved to the world that 'Negro States, though the last to come, are the first to use their brains for the conquest of the forces that have kept men apart'.<sup>31</sup> Such Negro States would have been almost the first multilingual sovereign states formally to renounce their sovereignty for the unity of at least one group of peoples. And to that extent they would have established a superiority over a Europe which in recent times had had two enormously costly 'civil' wars, more literally fratricidal as well as suicidal—a Europe which still remained in acute competition with itself both internally and in the advantages that each segment of Europe sought from the outside world.

The European Economic Community now would still leave Europe competitive internally, but by gradually achieving a harmonization of European interests externally, it showed signs of outpacing the Africans to the distinction of being the first in this kind of achievement. The moral superiority that the African had hoped to accomplish by the mere act of uniting—regardless of what the unity itself could in turn accomplish materially—was being neutralized as a motivating aspiration of African nationalism.

In those African countries with white settlers articulate enough to ridicule African hopes for unity, the frustration felt by the Pan-African nationalist could be particularly keen. The *Sunday Post* of Nairobi, Kenya, is not the only organ of settler opinion that has taunted Africans with remarks like:

If Europe, which has been a continental entity for well over a thousand years, heir to the even older civilizations of Greece and Rome, and unified by the Christian faith is, even now, only groping towards unity, it is absurd to suppose that primitive Africa can do better.<sup>32</sup>

Such racial taunts were, of course, older than the European Economic Community. With some African nationalists it even became a matter of racial vindication to achieve unity



before 'civilized' Europe achieved it—and thus establish that Africa had a greater capacity for transcending 'primitive tribalism' than the Europe that had taunted and laughed at Africa for that very tribalism for so long.

And should that African nationalist belong to a country like Kenya where even territorial unity was yet to be achieved, his sense of wounded frustration could be greater. To him, as to Tom Mboya, it was now 'ridiculous and hypocritical' to talk about the fragmentation of Kenya when 'even in Europe the trend today is for a people to work together in unity'.<sup>33</sup> Unity had become the twin paramount African political value to Freedom in the wake of decolonization. Tanganyika had the two values together—*Uhuru na Umoja*, Freedom and Unity—for its national motto. The Ghana-Guinea Union declared its motto as 'Independence and Unity'. And the Charter of Casablanca pledged its signatories 'to promote the triumph of liberty all over Africa and to achieve unity'.

About a year before the Casablanca Conference the Action Group of Nigeria was in its turn arguing that their own sovereignty was not to be an end in itself but a means towards ends which included winning respect for people of African descent 'by the creation of a Negro world'.<sup>34</sup> Part of the reasoning involved was that, given that civilization was the sum total of a people's development, and the real importance of a people in the world was to be judged by their contribution to the sum total of human achievement, the Action Group concluded that 'we must ensure that we make a distinct and worthwhile contribution to the civilization of the world'.<sup>35</sup> For Nigerians to make that contribution, Nigerians had to unite. But in itself Nigerian unity, as just another nation-state, could not be distinctive. For Africans to make a contribution Africans had to unite—and even by itself that was to be a distinct contribution since it was then expected to be virtually unprecedented, at least as a conquest of multi-tribalism and multi-lingualism.

This is the frustrating significance which came to be implicit in the European Community in relation to what would have been the *intrinsic* value of African unity as a moral achievement. But what of the significance of the emergence of a united Europe in relation to the *instrumental* value of African unity?

This side of the question has already been touched upon but it needs elaboration. It needs, first of all, to be stressed that the Action Group was not unrepresentative of African nationalistic thinking in viewing the first end of African sovereignty as being to bridge in the shortest possible time the technological gulf between Africa and the more developed world.<sup>36</sup> If a United Europe would make the gulf between Africa and the richer nations even greater, that fact alone could be enough to make it psychologically difficult for a proud African to welcome with enthusiasm the prospect of a united Europe. Even as matters now stand the gap between the rich nations that are already in economic orbit and the poor ones that have yet to take off is growing wider rather than narrower—and without a united Europe it is already true that this gap is one of the dominant issues that are bedevilling international politics, and may continue to do so as the century wears on. If the development of the Western world has sparked off what Adiai Stevenson called 'a revolution of rising expectations',<sup>37</sup> the more developed the Western world becomes, the higher will rise the expectations of the poor countries—and the greater will be the gulf in those countries, firstly, between the aspirations they have and the actualities they face, and, secondly, between themselves and the richer nations abroad.

When Commonwealth Africa was discussing the implications of the EEC at the time

Britain applied for membership, it did indeed seem unfair to expect Europe to remain technologically static just in order to enable the poorer parts of the world to catch up with it. And yet there did remain in the logic of European unity the aforesaid opposition to, or rivalry with, non-Europeans. In part, this was rivalry with other primarily white countries like the North American ones or the Soviet Union. Indeed, these white rivals are the short-term rivals. But other future rivals were under review. Writing for the *New York Times* in December 1961 James Reston claimed that Britain believed in a continuing dialogue with the Russians for considerations of future protection against the pressure of races far more numerous than the white races. Looking at the same long-range future, a French official, talking to Reston, forecast that ‘the great conflict at the end of the century will not be ideological, but racial’.<sup>38</sup>

Reston himself conceded that all this might be wrong but, in his own words, ‘it is being said, not by broom philosophers, but by some of the most influential officials in the Western world’. And the late Hugh Gaitskell, also addressing Americans in 1962 in reference to underdeveloped countries, expressed the fear lest the European Common Market should develop into something ‘inspired by its own form of nationalism behind a high tariff wall’.<sup>39</sup>

But even if Reston was merely theorizing, Gaitskell unduly fearful, and the issue of race undiscussed in the councils of Europe, that issue was still, in the estimation of many Africans, implicit in the logic of European plans. Inevitably Europeans had both a geographical and a racial identity. In relation to Americans, Europeans might be little more than inhabitants of another continent—cousins, perhaps, across the Atlantic. In relation to Africans or Asians, however, Europeans were both inhabitants of another continent and members of another race or group of races. European competition with Africans, actual or presumptive, could not therefore free itself from a racial tinge, and the racial element could gather momentum as the competition becomes less presumptive and more actual. Europe could for the present show a generous inclination to admit African countries to associate membership of the Common Market. But the United Nations Commission for Africa expressed a widespread fear when it said:

If the associated countries were to try to diversify their economies by increasing the protection of their local industry against the competition of the EEC countries, it is doubtful if the EEC countries would continue to offer the same advantages to the export of primary products by the associated countries.

In other words, associate membership presupposes, in effect, that African countries shall be primary producers. And the Commission goes on to note that there is a danger that the associated African countries might prefer the shortrun advantages of tariff concession from the EEC to the long-term advantages of industrial expansion.<sup>40</sup>

If this were to happen, nationalists in Africa may well view associate membership of the European Common Market as just a glorified, twentieth-century version of a role that was assigned to Africans way back from the slave days. ‘Hewers of wood’ Africans could remain indefinitely if producers of raw materials they remained perpetually—such at least was the reasoning of Ghana’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom when he addressed fellow Africans in London in the spring of 1962.<sup>41</sup>

A Western critic like Tom Soper might, however, retort: 'If wood is wanted and people are prepared to pay for it, I fail to see what is lost by being a hewer of it.'<sup>42</sup> Producing raw materials was itself a scheme of development—or could be. The Western capital that, in the nineteenth century, went seeking raw materials in the colonies was an instrument for development in those colonies themselves, and there developed what has been called an 'inter-dependence' between a metropolitan centre of industry and a colonial periphery of producers of raw materials.

There have, however, been significant changes since then that have not always been properly understood in this connection. An article on EEC associate membership in 1961 drew attention to the fact that while prices of manufactured goods had been moving slowly upwards for a decade or more, the trend of primary products over the same period has too often been downwards. And yet the same article found it possible to argue that it was not European groupings which threatened the African economies as this instability of commodity prices.<sup>43</sup> If a European grouping could be instrumental in at least delaying the emergence of African manufactured goods and prolonging African dependence on unstable commodities, it was difficult to avoid viewing the European grouping as a threat to Africans' ultimate economic interests.<sup>44</sup> There was at least a measure of plausibility in the observation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa that unless certain precautions were taken 'association with EEC can easily tend to perpetuate economic dependency and thus turn out to be a long-term disadvantage to the country concerned'.<sup>45</sup>

All this relates to the significant shift which had taken place in the old 'interdependence' between a Europe in the grip of an industrial revolution on the one hand, and its sources of raw materials in the colonies on the other. In the initial stages of that 'interdependence' Europe needed her colonies more than the colonies consciously needed Europe. But from about the 1930s Europe's internal production had grown more rapidly than its need for imports, and some of the previously imported raw materials could by 1960 be produced within the West's own frontiers. Barbara Ward, who has studied the economics of under-development in relation to the richer countries, draws attention in 1962 to the emergence of such items as artificial rubber, new fabrics for textiles, petro chemicals and 'conceivably even ersatz chocolate'. She noted that the Western world's 'pull of development' on the outside world had declined in magnitude since the early days of the West's economic expansion. We have been filling the gap with extraordinary economic assistance,' she says. 'But we do not look on this "job" as a settled commitment. It is still a precarious expedient; and in any case it is too small'.<sup>46</sup>

If Western aid was a precarious expedient and arises substantially out of a conceivably transient ideological division within the white world itself, the African in 1962 had no way of knowing for certain how much longer that aid would be forthcoming. If Western technology had already produced a number of substitutes for raw materials, the African had no way of telling how many other Afro-Asian primary products would become dispensable in the wake of a stronger Europe. There was, of course, the need for food in Europe. But the Economic Community's plans to increase 'the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture' were already being interpreted as a sign of the quest for a more self-sufficient Europe even in terms of agricultural products. This is not to mention President Kennedy's vision of an Atlantic Community which could add the food

surpluses of North America to the self-sufficiency of an integrated white world. Given all this, Africa as a whole might learn too late that she could not, in Nkrumah's words, improve even her standard of living by remaining an agricultural continent indefinitely or 'improve the skill and ingenuity of her peoples by keeping them solely as workers in rural areas'.<sup>47</sup>

Within the context of this reasoning, the European Common Market was a new emphasis that 'class' or national-income divisions on the global scale partly coincided with race divisions as between white and coloured peoples. And to the extent that the European Common Market had already tempted the bulk of the French-speaking African countries with the carrot of associate membership, and might tempt others, that Market could be taken as one of those devices which Sékou Touré had already condemned as calculated 'to make of all Africa the continent of the proletarian peoples'.<sup>48</sup>

Proletarianism on this inter-continental scale differed from its position in inter-class struggles within national boundaries or within the industrialized region of the world by itself. Unlike the Marxist proletarian, the African had more to sell than his labour. He might have the mines of Katanga or of what was then Northern Rhodesia. He might have the agricultural products of Ghana, Nigeria, and the French-speaking areas. He might be concluding his own commercial and industrial agreements—and might even appear to be the very image of a Marxist bourgeois. The point at issue was not whether he had nothing more to sell than his labour, but what price was paid for that labour for what it helped to produce. Nor was this a simple case of the labour theory of value, for what African labour produced in Africa was primarily African not only because African labour produced it, but also, perhaps more important, because the African continent was where the resources were located.

Should the Western community become self-sufficient even in the primary products that African labour produced, or should it devise substitutes for them, that Western Community would ultimately buy African only if that was cheaper than the alternative. And the African might well have to sell at that price. To look at the problem from another angle, if Africa itself was far from self-sufficient in industrial products, if it failed to industrialize by succumbing to the belt of associate membership of the European Community, then the continent as a whole would remain no more than a cheap African market for that European Common Market. There would indeed be an exchange of products. The African may retain that appearance of a bourgeois doing business with another bourgeois. But the basis of that exchange would be a new form of exploitation. It would, if you will, be the neo-exploitation of post-colonial days.

Marx predicted that the poor in the Western world would get poorer, and the rich richer. This did not convincingly come about—and Lenin produced imperialism as the means by which the Western workers were saved from the abject poverty that was predicted for them. Now the Western empires were disintegrating. What could save the Western worker from the long-expected impoverishment under capitalism was allegedly this neo-exploitation of the underdeveloped world that was emerging after 1960. Most African leaders are socialists of one shade or another, though it is not certain how many of even the Marxists among them view this new phenomenon as an extension of Lenin's theory of imperialism. What is certain is that there are some even today who would agree with Nkrumah that:

The Treaty of Rome...can be compared to the treaty that emanated from Berlin in the nineteenth century. The former treaty established the undisputed sway of colonialism in Africa; the latter marks the advent of neo-colonialism in Africa... [and] bears unquestionably the marks of French neo-colonialism.<sup>49</sup>

What the Africans therefore needed was a central authority of their own to coordinate their economic and political defence against this threat.

An interesting point that emerged in all the discussion surrounding the EEC is that Nkrumah's line of reasoning was not far removed from the sort of reasoning involved in the plans of the Europeans themselves—to *defend* Europe against something approaching neo-colonialism. That is to say, that whether certain Europeans admit it or not, or want to do anything about it or not, or even consciously realize it or not, Europe was beginning to feel the need for the kind of centralized authority that Nkrumah envisaged for Africa. And Europe felt that need partly because it found itself already with a centralized authority—only this authority was from outside Europe. This was certainly a line that a European federalist might frankly take in the face of the situation that confronted Europe following World War II. Altiero Spinelli, for example, pointed out in 1962 how economic reconstruction after World War II required a central authority for Europe which would distribute aid in a way which would promote a balanced recovery of the various countries; how the political reconstruction of Germany had to take place in such a way as not to generate mistrust and disagreement between victors and vanquished; and how military defence and related foreign policies had to be harmonized. But, argued, Spinelli:

Europe, founded on the principle of national sovereignties, was organically incapable of undertaking such tasks alone. The American hegemony, willingly accepted by the European states in the dramatic period after the war, supplied the supranational power which Western Europe needed but did not possess,<sup>50</sup>

What this meant was that the Europeans were having to give up a little of their old sovereignty—but to someone outside Europe. Certainly in the area of foreign and military policy, each European government was having to exercise its responsibilities substantially through the Atlantic Alliance—an alliance which Spinelli described as 'not a classical alliance but rather a true military confederation'.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, the United States, too, had commitments to this alliance. But, unlike its European allies, America had such a dominant place within the alliance that it was able to preserve a 'substantial measure of its sovereignty'.<sup>52</sup> If the original American colonies then united in order to preserve their collective sovereignty as against Europe, they had more than just succeeded. The supranational authority they had created for themselves had finally gone towards making their collective self a super-national power on the world scene. Created as a defence against Europe, that collective self was now a defence *for* Europe. And it was on Europe that the agony of choosing had now fallen: the choice 'between two forms of supranational power—one constituted by American hegemony, the other by an over-all European government'.<sup>53</sup>

This choice that Spinelli saw as facing Europe continues to bear a resemblance to the choice which Nkrumah saw as facing Africa—if for the notion of an American hegemony

in Europe is substituted the notion of a European or white hegemony in Africa. There is the further difference that whereas Europe's dependence on America is, at its most obvious, dictated by military considerations, Africans dependence on Europe is more in the field of economic needs. But the essential resemblance in choices is still there—such that a De Gaulle can at one and the same time look forward to the expendability of the American presence in Europe and work to make indispensable a European presence in Black Africa.

It is such comparability in situations which might now make it possible to *translate* the term 'neo-colonialism' and make it more meaningful to Western ears. To General de Gaulle an African nationalist might say that what he meant by decrying 'neo-colonialism' was that he was as keen to eliminate or mitigate the European hegemony in Africa as the General himself was keen to eliminate or mitigate the American hegemony in Europe.<sup>54</sup>

To Britain the African might similarly have to invoke an ideological translation which could command comprehension in the context of Britain's own historical experience. The African might make the observation that since Britain ceased to be a full 'giant' herself internationally, she has sought to be part of another 'giant'—first by a 'special relationship' with America, then by seeking membership of the European Community, and back to the Anglo-American special relationship again and now perhaps slowly back to Europe. Because Britain is indeed both 'European' and 'Anglo-Saxon', the belief of being part of either or both 'giants' should be relatively easy to cultivate. But being tied to a 'giant' with which one cannot convincingly identify oneself is what can so easily become a status of neo-dependency.

As for getting himself understood by Walter Hallstein, President of the EEC Commission, an African nationalist might simply say that he shared the view which the Professor expressed to Americans when he visited them in April 1962. On Europe's relationship with America, Hallstein had argued that a 'partnership cannot be founded on disproportionate economic ability and resources'.<sup>55</sup> The African, too, feared a so-called partnership so founded.

But perhaps the easiest translation of 'neo-colonialism' which an African could make is if he was trying to communicate his sensitivities to a Latin American. Given the probable ideological responses of a Latin American in the context of his own historical experience, all that the African nationalist would need to say to define 'neo-colonialism' is to explain that he did not want to see Africa play a Latin America to Europe's United States. 'I have forebodings about Europe becoming the Colossus of *our* North', a Nkrumah might assert.

Translated in these terms perhaps even M. Spaak might be less exasperated about the absence of a clear-cut definition of 'neo-colonialism'.

Africa's jargon is indeed different from De Gaulle's, from Hallstein's, from the idiom of Britain under Macmillan, and from the language of Latin American nationalists. But perhaps there is a level of experience on which their instincts become substantially similar. The impulse to escape from a state of neo-dependency, or to resent such a state while it lasts, is perhaps one such level of comparable experience. And one possible form of escape continues to be the conquest of fragmentation within one's own region of the world.

Yet even unity would not be enough. It would still be pertinent to ask this question:

How can Africa overcome her economic weakness without first going through the stage of economic dependence on others? This is the dilemma which will confront nationalists for a generation to come. A military regime in Ghana might restore cordiality with the West. A dynamic political regime in Tanzania might explore new relationships with the East. Nigeria might associate herself with the European Economic Community while Zambia contemplated withdrawing from the Commonwealth. A profound ambivalence will persist for years to come in Africans relations with those who are more powerful than she is. Perhaps there is something to be said for this ambivalence. To be in need of help and afraid of help might well be the essence of dignified indigence.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 For the relevant resolutions of the All-African People's Conference in Cairo (23–31 March 1961) see Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A short political guide*, esp. 254–257. See also H.A. Philby, 'Africans switch attack to neo-colonialism', the *Observer*, London, 2 April 1961.
- 2 See *The Times*, London, 2 October 1962.
- 3 Nkrumah, Address to the National Assembly on African Affairs (Accra), 8 August 1960. (Ghana Government Publication GP/A283/ 20,000/8/60–61), 9.
- 4 Cited by Margery Perham, *Lugard, The years of authority, 1898–1945*, London: Collins, 1960:567.
- 5 *The dual mandate in British tropical Africa*, Edinburgh and London: W.Blackwood, 2nd ed., 1923:60–62.
- 6 Address to the National Assembly..., 8 August 1960, op. cit.
- 7 Lugard's Inaugural Speech at the Oxford University Summer School in Colonial Administration (Second Session, 27 June–28 July 1938). Proceedings printed for Oxford University Press by John Honson, 1938.
- 8 Perham, op. cit.: 148–149.
- 9 See the *New York Times*, 19 December 1961.
- 10 'A revolution intended for all mankind', the *New York Times Magazine*, 10 December 1961.
- 11 *A history of the colonization of Africa by alien races*, op. cit.: 279.
- 12 *Ibid.*: 280.
- 13 Starr and his articles are singled out for two primary reasons—firstly, because he was addressing a traditionally 'anti-imperialist' people and yet could still speak of his 'anti-exploitation' views as heretical. And secondly, because views frankly expressed in newspapers are a better guide to the accepted norms of an age than a confidential dispatch about where British interests lie on a colonial issue. The tone of Starr's articles was, in fact, in partial defence of how Léopold ruled the Congo—at a time when even those who approved of colonization in principle were critical of the Belgian. Starr virtually says that he is against exploitation, but if it has to be done, the way in which it was done in the Congo was not unduly bad. *Chicago Tribune*, 20 January 1907.
- 14 See *The Times* (London), 18 July 1962.

- 15 'Achievements of 1961', the President's Christmas broadcast to his nation, 22 December 1961. Text used is that of the Supplement to *Ghana Today*, 3 January 1962.
- 16 *Peace through justice*, op. cit.: 27–28. It must be pointed out that the bishops went on to say that the exploitation of these resources must take into account the rights of the indigenous people, though what these rights were was not clearly defined.
- 17 This particular example of the businessman's reasoning is drawn from Herbert Solow, 'The Congo is in business', *Fortune*, November 1952, 106. A glance at more recent issues of business publications of this kind will show that there has not been much change in attitude by and large.
- 18 Address to National Assembly on African Affairs, 8 August 1960, op. cit.: 14.
- 19 See *Ghana Today*, 11 April 1962.
- 20 This is from the Nigerian Governor-General's address to the Committee of African Organizations in London on 12 August 1961. See also Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Nigeria speaks* (Speeches selected by Sam Epelle) Lagos: Longman, 1964), esp. 107.
- 21 For an analysis of these three stands see my article 'African attitudes to the European economic community', *International Affairs*, London, 38(1), January 1963.
- 22 *Barclays (DCO) Overseas Review*, 1961. See *Africa Digest*, ix(6), June 1962:207–208.
- 23 Quoted by Nora Beloff in her 'Why the six fell out with the Africans', the *Observer*, 7 July 1962.
- 24 *Barclays Review*, op. cit.
- 25 See his 'Africa and the Common Market', *The Listener*, 10 August 1961.
- 26 Ibid. As for the Aga Khan's version of the argument, this was 'I do feel very strongly that—economically speaking—Western Europe and Africa are largely complementary and each would benefit enormously from a free expansion of trade and mutual aid... And if this means a transformation—and close co-operation, leading perhaps even to the amalgamation of the British Commonwealth and the French Community—then I believe the price is worth paying, because it will be an association based not on common ideals (for those will take time to evolve) but on solid mutual interest'. See H.H. the Aga Khan, 'The Great Gamble—in Africa', *Commonwealth Journal* (Journal of the Royal Commonwealth Society), v(4), July–August 1962:187.
- 27 Part One of the Treaty, Principles, Article 3 (f).
- 28 'The problem of Africa, looked at as a whole, is a wide and diversified one. But its true solution lies in the application of one principle, namely, the right of a people to rule themselves.' Nkrumah to the Fifteenth Session of the General Assembly, New York, 23 September 1960. See the edition of the *Ghana UN Mission*, op. cit.: 10.
- 29 *The African nations and world solidarity* (Translated from the French by Mercer Cook) London: Thames & Hudson, 1962:3.
- 30 This rendering is from *Africa Digest*, ix(6), June 1962:205.
- 31 See p. 6 of the Policy Paper.
- 32 'Caretaker', the *Sunday Post*, Nairobi, 4 March 1962.



- 33 Address to the United Kenya Club, Mombasa, Kenya, 10 January 1962. See *Mombasa Times*, 11 January 1962.
- 34 Action Group Policy Paper on the West African Union, op. cit.: 1.
- 35 Action Group Policy Paper on the Scientific and Cultural Development of Nigeria, 1960:1–2.
- 36 Policy Paper on the West African Union, op. cit.: 1.
- 37 Barbara Ward attributes the actual authorship of this now famous phrase to Stevenson. See her *The rich nations and the poor nations*, New York: Norton, 1962:23. Nkrumah in his speech to the Resumed Session of the Fifteenth General Assembly, on 7 March 1961, referred approvingly to an article by Stevenson in the *Sunday Times* (London) in which Stevenson ‘pointed out the absolute madness of partitioning Africa economically along the pattern established in Europe’.
- 38 ‘The Problem of Race in World Politics’, 15 December 1961.
- 39 Speech at luncheon of the New York Liberal Party, 18 February 1962. See ‘Danger of EEC “nationalism”,’ news report in the *Guardian* (Manchester), 19 February 1962.
- 40 See ‘The Impact of Western European integration on African trade and development’, UN Economic and Social Council document E/CN. 14(72), 7 December 1960.
- 41 See *Ghana Today*, 28 February 1962.
- 42 ‘Africa and the Common Market’, op. cit.
- 43 The *National and Grindlays Review*, 1961. See *Africa Digest*, June 1962:206–207.
- 44 The Aga Khan in his address at Cambridge (*Commonwealth Journal*, op. cit.) argued that Africa needed a market like the European Common Market for its primary products and yet conceded that ‘it is an alarming but salutary thought that a fall in the world prices of coffee, cocoa, sisal, copper or vegetable oils can wipe out almost overnight the gains achieved by millions of pounds worth of direct economic aid’. In view of the vulnerability of the prices of these products, delay in diversifying Africa’s economies could hardly be deemed to be in Africa’s interests, economic or political.
- 45 UN Document on EEC, op. cit.
- 46 *The rich nations and the poor nations*, op. cit. : 31–34.
- 47 See *Ghana Today*, 28 February 1962. There would, of course, be some tropical products that the Western world could not produce itself. But if the West really needed them, they would presumably seek to buy them whether Africa as a whole was in associate membership with Europe or not. Africa would then be in competition with other tropical countries. And a united Africa—not desperately dependent on the sale of the agricultural produce—should be in a better position to compete with other tropical countries.
- 48 ‘Africa’s Destiny’, *Africa speaks*, op. cit.: 37. At the Cairo Conference of the Casablanca Group of African States Touré argued that in his mind there was no basic difference between themselves and the Monrovia Group of African States—all Africans were at least united in their common plight of underdevelopment and poverty. They should therefore have a common policy of inter-African aid and understanding. Touré was particularly concerned about the need for a common

economic policy.

49 Address to Ghana National Assembly, 30 May 1961, op. cit.

50 'Atlantic pact and European unity', *Foreign Affairs*, 40(4), July 1962:543–544.

Altiero Spinelli was at the time Delegate General of the Congress of the European People and Secretary General of the Italian branch of the Movement of European Federation.

51 'The Atlantic Pact is a defensive alliance among sovereign states, but is fundamentally different from the traditional alliance common in European history. The latter remained dormant, as it were, until the common enemy had committed an act of aggression. In the meantime each ally carried out its own foreign and military policies, free from any specific commitment toward its partners. In letter, the Atlantic Pact conforms to this conception, but in reality it has rapidly gone beyond it...NATO is not a classical alliance but rather a true military confederation—an association of states that have decided on common defence of particular territories, for which purpose they have created representative bodies, as well as various common military services and a common strategy. As with other confederations which have meant something in history, this one is viable only because it contains one member 'more equal than others'—indeed, a super-power.' Ibid.: 542–543.

52 Ibid.: 544.

53 Ibid.: 545.

54 David Thompson discussed this French desire to 'assert independence abroad' in, among other places, his article 'De Gaulle's wider aims in Europe', *The Times*, London, 12 September 1962.

55 See the *EEC Bulletin*, 5, May 1962:6.

## References

- Adandé, Alexis. 1994. 'La métallurgie "raditionnellé" du fer en Afrique occidentale', in Paulin J. Hountondji (ed.) *Les savoirs endogènes: Pistes pour une recherche*. Dakar; CODESRIA, 57–75.
- Allen, C. 'Who needs civil society?' [review article] in *Review of African Political Economy*, 73:1997.
- Amin, Samir. 1970. *L'accumulation a l'échelle mondiale*. Paris: Anthropos.
- Amin, Samir. 1985. *La déconnexion*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Ayoade, J.A.A. 1988. 'States without citizens; An emerging African phenomenon', in Rothchild and N.Chazan (eds.), *The precarious balance: State and society in Afr boulder: Lynne Rienner*.
- Bayart, J-F. 1986. 'Civil society in Africa', in P.Chabal (ed.), *Political domination in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayart, J-F. 1991. 'Finishing with the idea of the Third World: The concept of the political trajectory', in J.Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World politics*. London & New York: Longman.
- Bayart, J-F. 1993. *The state in Africa: The politics of the belly*. London & New York: Longman.
- Césaire, A. 1956. 'Culture et colonisation', *PresenceAfricaine* Special issue (June–Nov).
- Césaire, A. 1972. *Discourse on colonialism*. New York & London: Monthly Review

Press 1972.

Davidson, B. 1992. *The black man's burden: Africa and the curse of the nation-state*. London: James Currey.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1954. *Nations nègres et culture*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1967. *Antériorité des civilisations nègres*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

Diop, Cheik Anta. 1973. 'La métallurgie du fer sous l'ancien empire égyptien', *Bulletin de l'IFAN* 35/3:532–547.

Diop, Cheik Anta. 1981. *Civilisation ou barbarie*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

Doombos, M. 'The African state in academic debate: Retrospect and prospect.' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28(2):1990.

Ekeh, P.P. *Colonialism and social structure in Africa: An inaugural lecture*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983.

Ekeh, P.P. 'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa.' *Comparative studies in society and history* 17(1):1990.

Ekeh, P.P. 'Ethnicity and civil society in Africa.' Paper presented at the conference on African perspectives of civil society. Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, May 1998.

Fatton, R. jr. 'Africa in the age of democratization: The civic limitations of civil society.' *African Studies Review*, 38(2):1995.

Frank, André Gunder. 1970. *Le développement du sous-développement: L'Amérique latine*. Paris: F. Maspero.

Gosselin, Gabriel (ed.) 1988. *Les nouveaux enjeux de l'anthropologue—Autour de Georges Balandier*. Bruxelles: Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie 3–4.

Harbeson, J.W., Chazan, N., and Rothchild, D.S. (eds.) 1995. *Civil society and state in Africa*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Harbeson, J.W., Chazan, N., and Rothchild, D.S. (eds.) 1995. 'Historical and cross-cultural contexts of civil society in Africa.' Paper presented at USAID Workshop on 'Civil society, democracy and development in Africa', Washington DC (June 1994).

Houndonougbo, Victor. 1994. 'Processus stochastique du Fâ: Une approche mathématique de la géomancie des côtes du Bénin', in Paulin J. Hountondji, ed. *Les savoirs endogènes: Pistes pour une recherche*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 1988a. 'L'appropriation collective du savoir: Tâches nouvelles pour une politique scientifique', *Genève-Afrique* 27(1):49–66.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 1988b. 'Situation de l'anthropologue africain: Note critique sur une forme d'extraversion scientifique', in Gabriel Gosselin, ed. *Les nouveaux enjeux de l'anthropologue-autour de Georges Balandier*. Bruxelles: Revue de l'Institut de sociologie, 98–108.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 1990. 'Scientific dependence in Africa today', *Research in African Literatures* 21(3):5–15.

Hountondji, Paulin J. 1992. 'Recapturing', in V.Y. Mudimbe, ed. *The surreptitious speech, Presence Africaine and the politics of otherness: 1947–1987*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 238–244.

Hountondji, Paulin J. ed. 1994. *Les savoirs endogènes: Pistes pour une recherche*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Hyden, G. 1983. *No shortcuts to progress: African development management in perspective*. London: Heinemann.

Iltting, K.-H. 1984. 'Hegel's concept of the state and Marx's early critique' in Z.A. Peiczynski (ed.), *The state and civil society: Studies in Hegel's political philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Jackson, R.H. and Rosberg, C.G., 'Why Africa's weak states persist: The empirical and the juridical in statehood' in *World Politics* 35(1):1982.
- Keller, E.J., 'Liberalization, democratization and democracy in Africa: Comparative perspectives.' *Africa Insight* 25(4):1995.
- Kelsey, Jane, *Economic fundamentalism*. London: Pluto Press, 1995:2.
- 'Kinship and civil society in post-colonial Africa' (mimeo).
- Leibenstein, H. 1957. *Economic backwardness and economic growth*. New York: Wiley.
- Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1910. *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Paris: Alcan.
- Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1931. *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*. Paris: New edition, Presses universitaires de France, 1963.
- Mamdani, M. and Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. (eds.), 1995. *African studies in social movements and democracy*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- McMahon, E.R. 1997. 'The "new" civil society and democratic transitions in Africa', in R.A. Siddiqui (ed.), *Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s: Challenges to democracy and development*. Westport: Praeger.
- Mètinhoué, Goudjinou P. 1994. 'L'étude des techniques et des savoir-faire: Questions de méthode', in Paulin J. Hountondji, ed. *Les savoirs endogènes: Pistes pour une recherche*. Dakar: CODESRIA, 37–56.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. ed. 1992. *The surreptitious speech. 'Presence Africaine' and the politics of otherness: 1947–1987*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Ndegwa, S.N. 1996. *The two faces of civil society: NGOs and the politics in Africa*. West Hartford: Kumarian Press.
- Osaghae, E.E. 'The role of civil society in consolidating democracy: An African comparative perspective.' *Africa Insight* 27(1):1997.
- Peiczynski, Z.A. 1984. 'Nation, civil society, state: Hegelian sources of the Marxian non-theory of nationality', in Peiczynski, ed., *The state and civil society: Studies in Hegel's political philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Post, K. 1991. 'The state, civil society and democracy in Africa: Some theoretical issues', in R. Cohen and H. Goulbourne eds., *Democracy and socialism in Africa*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Rostow, Walt Whitman. 1960. *The stages of economic growth: A non-Communist manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simon, R., 1982. *Gramsci's political thought: An introduction*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Soros, G., *The crisis of global capitalism*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998:75.
- Taiwo, Olufemi. 1993. 'Colonialism and its aftermath: The crisis of knowledge production.' *Callaloo* 16(3):891–908.
- Tchichi, Toussaint Yaovi. 1994. 'Numérations traditionnelles et arithmétique moderne', in Paulin J. Hountondji, ed. *Les savoirs endogènes: Pistes pour une recherche*. Dakar: CODESRIA, 109–138.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. *The modern world system*. New York: Academic Press.
- Widner, J.A. 1994. 'Political reform in Anglophone and Francophone African countries', in J.A. Widner, ed., *Economic change and political liberalization in sub-Saharan Africa*. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zaslavsky, Claudia. 1973. *Africa counts: Number and pattern in African culture*. Boston: Prindle, Weber, Schmidt.



## 8

# AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION

Later Marxist morality: Its relevance for Africa's post-colonial situation

PIETER H.COETZEE

Marx's polemic against exploitation focuses centrally on the idea that capitalism not only betrays the inviolability of the human individual, but also prevents the realization of 'man's' true nature as 'species-being' and the realization of the kind of community appropriate to this nature, thus preventing the freeing of human potential from the structural force of capital. I examine this polemic with reference to the views of African philosophers (Hountondji and others) on Africa's exposure to neo-colonial exploitation, extracting from it a view of morality as a plea for a 'humanly human life'. I advance some considerations for acceptance of this plea as a basis for dealing with European domination, and I extract from it the grounds for an argument justifying Africa's claim to compensation for European exploitation.

### UNDERSTANDING EXPLOITATION

The concept of exploitation is central to later Marxist accounts of how neo-colonialism maintains the gap between oppressors and oppressed in Africa. A true description of the face of contemporary Africa, says Hountondji (1996:170), must include a mention of 'the bare hands of men and women so exploited and mystified that they make themselves active accomplices of their executioners'. And since the concept of exploitation is central to their condemnation of neo-colonialism, I propose to examine it with a view to understanding its moral implications.

### THE STRUCTURAL FORCE THESIS

Holmstrom (1997) offers a good starting point. Holmstrom (1997:22), accepting the labour theory of value as a given, argues that the worker sells her capacity of labour power to the capitalist. Labour power generates two kinds of value, the value of labour power for the worker and surplus value for the capitalist. The former is produced in satisfying the subsistence needs of the worker and her dependants; the latter is produced in that portion of the workday after subsistence needs have been satisfied, and is the source of profit (exchange value). The worker is paid only for the labour value she produces; her time spent producing surplus value is unpaid, but this fact 'is concealed by the wage relationship' (Holmstrom 1997:79). The relationship between worker and capitalist is hardly one of free exchange between equals; indeed 'the exchange is an unfree one, because it is based on force' (Holmstrom 1997:79).

Reiman's (1997:154) 'force-inclusive definition' of exploitation includes the idea of structural force. 'A society is exploitive when its social structure is organized so that unpaid labour is systematically forced out of one class and put at the disposal of another' (Reiman 1997:154). Force is structural, internal to the workings of the capitalist system, and not external support to a distribution which benefits one class at the expense of another. Reiman (1997:158) defends the notion of 'labour time'—what workers give in production is their time and energy—as the appropriate measure of the value that produced things have as a result of being produced, a notion he calls the 'general labour theory of value' (Reiman 1997:158) and which he contrasts with the 'special' theory (Reiman 1997:158) which assumes that the market value of produced things is a function of the time spent on their production. The general theory, claims Reiman (1997:158), is the minimum necessary to make the concept of surplus value imply unpaid labour (if we grant the assumption that it does not presuppose the validity of any system of ownership). Unpaid time is given in production in the sense that it is 'used up', is 'life itself spent' (Reiman 1997:158). This category of unpaid labour is extracted by force that is "structural", both in its effects and origins' (Reiman 1997:160). The workers, non-owners of the means of production, are forced to work *for* the small class of owners (though not forced by them) 'in order to get a crack at living at all' (Reiman 1997:160). The force at issue here is generated by the structure of the institution of private ownership, which is to say the crucial category of unpaid labour is forced from them by the class system itself, and this force affects individuals 'by imposing an array of fates on...[them]' (Reiman 1997:160), in particular the inability to use the surplus of their labour to improve their condition. As a leverage over them to which they are vulnerable in virtue of their position in the structure, structural force determines 'a *range* of things they can do, with options outside this range...[being] prohibitively costly' (Reiman 1997:162). Force, apparently, works through '*predictable* free choices' (Reiman 1997:164), and that is why the way force works in capitalism remains unseen. It is, however, as a class that unpaid labour is forcibly extracted from the workers and transferred as surplus value to the capitalist class.

The 'force'-thesis divides into two claims. First, the synchronic claim is that the structure of capitalism—specifically the institution of private ownership—forces non-owners to sell their labour to owners of the means of production (Reiman 1997:177). The synchronic claim places selling in a time-frame—'something like the time it takes from satiation to the onset of the pains of starvation (or some other pressing need), since that is the time by which, deprived of means of production (and of savings produced by them), ...[a worker] will be compelled to sell his labour power' (Reiman 1997:177). The diachronic claim maintains that the structure of capitalism compels non-owners to remain members of their class and therefore, given that their position is unchangeable, they remain subject to structural force.

Diachronic force, like synchronic force, however, *is* structural force. According to Reiman (1997:179–180) the synchronic claim is the important one. It is by itself sufficient to support the Marxist charge that capitalism is a form of slavery. Selling labour power involves giving away an uncompensated amount of it, and this is true irrespective of the period for which they are compelled to sell. (How severely they are enslaved is obviously influenced by the truth of the diachronic claim). By itself the

synchronic claim is also sufficient to support the Marxist claim about how capitalism works economically. The diachronic claim is sociologically interesting, understood as a claim about how the working class reproduces itself. But it depends on the synchronic claim for its sense and coherence. The falsity of the synchronic claim would destroy Marxist analyses of the capitalist mode of production, and by implication, the truth of the diachronic claim. The moral significance of the diachronic claim also depends on the truth of the synchronic claim, but the synchronic claim has moral significance in its own right independently of the diachronic claim. (More of this below.)

### PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EXPLOITATION

Dymski and Elliott (1997:203) support Reiman's force-thesis but they note that in Marx the issue of exploitation is raised in two contexts, one in which capitalist mastery over a working class is effected through productive use of resources, which Marx calls 'primary exploitation' (Dymski and Elliott 1997:203), and another in which mastery is posited without productive use of resources, the latter being 'secondary exploitation', a 'purely distributive phenomenon' (Dymski and Elliott 1997:203). They point out that Reiman errs in that his 'force-inclusive' concept is too narrow. Primary exploitation involves 'class monopoly over the physical means of production and a regime of alienated labour and domination *both inside and outside the enterprise*' (Dymski and Elliott 1997:203, my emphasis). Exploitation, in the sense Reiman does not sufficiently emphasize is human and social exploitation, involving alienation and domination in a wider, extra-economic context. The wider concept of exploitation (as I shall argue below) takes in Hountondji's concept of 'culturalism' as vehicle of exploitation on a scale Dymski and Elliott (1997:203) argues is in place 'both inside and outside' the physical means of production.

#### Primary exploitation

Casal (1998:143) explains the global reproduction of class structures as a coincidence of neocolonialism. The global structure of international relations, claims Casal, is organized in such a way that the interests of the colonial powers are protected at the expense of 'productive progress' (Casal 1998:143) in Africa and other Third World societies. Casal (1998:143) identifies two ways in which the exploitive practices of international capital work. 'The neo-colonial powers maintain their position, first of all, by transmitting to the exploited societies the infrastructure (the functional prerequisite) required to enter a more advanced stage.' But this transmission has 'undesirable consequences' (Casal 1998:144) for the less developed societies. The higher technology imports supplant the lower technology on the home front, thus at once destroying homegrown technology (of an appropriate level of development for the home society) and increasing the dominance of the alien powers in the sense that the supporting technologies convert home economies into supplier economies whose productive units are controlled by international capital (Casal 1998:145).

Alternatively, the neo-colonial powers transplant 'an economic structure, which generates the previously absent tendency to productive progress [in the host country], but—in effect—this transplant exploits the resources of the host country' (Casal



1998:247). In this process 'colonists strip the conquered territories of their resources, and use them for their own development' (Casal 1998:147). This is effected through control over 'authoritarian regimes which supplant nationalist movements or alliances with elites concerned with their own short-term, class-interests rather than with their country's long-term prospects of development' (Casal 1998:147). Dominance over the host country of the kind described here places it in a position in the world market 'from which it is very difficult to develop and successfully compete' (Casal 1998:147). A pattern of 'undesirable consequences' (Casal 1998:144) is repeated in the one-way direction of surplus value: from periphery to the metropolis (Casal 1998:147), which translates to 'from exploited class to exploiting class' (the latter including the native elites in the host countries).

Internationalization binds various indigenous or domestic bourgeoisies in Third World countries to capital 'they do not control' (Resch 1999:353), creating an international division of labour and rendering terms like foreign and indigenous capital irrelevant. The bourgeoisie in the Third World do not achieve a degree of autonomy comparable to its counterpart in the First World, the main reason being that the Third World economic base cannot grow beyond the limits imposed by its position within the international division of labour (Resch 1992:354). The predominance of multinational capital, removed from national identifications and constraints, pursues labour exploitative policies with the assistance of representative governments which sanction and legitimize the process.

Mandaza (1999:82) sees Africa in its neo-colonial condition as an 'extension of Europe', without any significant autonomy. The emergent black '*petit and compradorian bourgeoisie*' (Mandaza 1999:83) in the African nation states are the outcome of external factors integral to the transition from white to black rule and the 'politics of reconciliation' between the former white rulers and the current black ones. Their post-colonial state in Africa is thus a 'hostage state' (Mandaza 1999:83) caught between white settlers who have economic power (and thus wield political influence disproportionate to their numbers), and economic globalization driven by the former colonial powers. Within this context of 'incomplete decolonization' (Mandaza 1999:79), a difference blind, liberal paradigm, emphasizing human rights and democracy resists 'fundamental transformation' (Mandaza 1999:79) for instance, in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The politics of reconciliation explain 'the failure to see through the agenda of the nationalist struggle...[and its emphasis on] the ideology of reconciliation' (Mandaza 1999:79). If we look through the agenda of the nationalist struggle, we see the class question. We see that reconciliation represents 'the class fulfilment of those who make it immediately in the new dispensation' (Mandaza 1999:81). Their immorality is reflected in their willingness to forgive their oppressors in exchange for state power 'without the fulfilment of social justice for the majority' (Mandaza 1999:81). Acceptance of state power without economic control merely reinforces 'old relations of production as well as the unequal structures of ownership' (Mandaza 1999:85), thus exposing black people to the structural coercion inherent in capitalism.

Samir (1997:306) echoes this line of thought. Independence brought no change to the exploitive mode of integration of Africa into the world capitalist system. Samir (1997:307–308) argues that the agricultural revolution in Africa has been derailed by the 'super-exploitation of the African peasants' labour' by the local classes who act as...

[world capitalism's] relay'. Interference by Capital in the organization of production compels farmers to specialize in crops Capital requires, bought at prices which undersell the peasant's labour power. Formal ownership of the land is thereby 'emptied of its genuine content' (Samir 1997:308). Worse still, the 'green revolution' (Samir 1997:310) strengthened capitalist control over the farmers by first integrating production in the 'upstream' (Samir 1997:311) monopolies, and then subjecting farming to industry-'downstream' (Samir 1997:311) food processing monopolies. The effect of 'agro-industrial integration' (Samir 1997:311) was simply one of 'transforming the benefit of peasant surplus labour to the monopolies' (Samir 1997:311), and foreign capital who control the monopolies.

### Secondary exploitation

#### *Exploitation and knowledge production in Africa*

In The Second Bashorun M.K.O.Abiola Distinguished Lecture', Hountondji (1995) offers argument in support of the idea that scientific activity in Africa is just as 'externally oriented' (Hountondji 1995:2) as economic activity, serving Europe rather than Africa. The integration of traditional knowledge into the world system of knowledge has set Africa in a position of underdevelopment and backwardness in relation to Europe. We should, argues Hountondji (1995:3), view underdevelopment as an effect of domination and exploitation, in the context of a historical approach, entailing the integration of subsistence economies into world capital. And we should allow for a parallel in the field of scientific and technological endeavour, i. e. we should view weakness in the field of knowledge as the result of 'peripherization' (Hountondji 1995:3) due to a knowledge market controlled by the metropolitan worlds. If we grant this, the following indices of 'scientific extroversion' (Hountondji 1995:4) are apparent.

- Because of the lack of specific theory-building procedures and infrastructures, which are needed to interpret raw information and process raw data, Africa has inherited from the metropolitan worlds only centres for applied research, and these are concerned only with the gathering and exportation of knowledge and information useful to Europe. The result? In the field of knowledge, dependency on Europe developed. Centres for applied research became 'immense data banks, storehouses of bare facts and information reserved for exportation to the ruling country' (Hountondji 1995:2-3).
- Scholars in Africa have done a kind of 'mental extroversion' (Hountondji 1995:4), choosing research programmes answering only to the expectations of the metropolitan worlds. So the theoretical work done in Africa has become bound to 'a kind of insularity' (Hountondji 1995:4) in the sense that the research done by Africans in Africa does not answer to the needs and concerns of Africans. The result? African scholars do no 'basic research' (Hountondji 1995:4), and scientific endeavours in Africa are put in the service of 'economic extroversion' (Hountondji 1995:4).
- The kind of relationship that developed between modern science and ethno-science is one in which the latter is 'eaten by the former' (Hountondji 1995:4).

- Scientific researchers in Africa now engage only in ‘vertical exchange’ (Hountondji 1995:9) with researchers in Europe and not with ‘horizontal exchange’ (Hountondji 1995:9) with fellow researchers in Africa.

*Exploitation in Hountondji’s ‘culturalism’*

‘Culturalism’ (Hountondji 1996:160) is the term Hountondji employs to denote a peculiar form of neo-colonialism, driven by complicity between African nationalists and Western ethnologists, and emphasizing the cultural aspect of foreign domination at the expense of other aspects, the economic and political in particular. Culturalism is in fact an ideological system because ‘it produces an indirect political effect. It eclipses, first, the problem of effective national liberation and, second, the problem of class struggle (Hountondji 1996:162). This ‘indirect political effect’ is achieved in two ways. In the guise of cultural nationalism, culturalism drastically simplifies the national culture, ‘schematizes and flattens it in order to contrast it with the colonizer’s culture, and then gives this imaginary opposition *precedence* over real political and economic conflicts’ (Hountondji 1996:162). In the independent African countries culturalism takes the form of a backward-looking cultural nationalism, ‘flattening the national culture and denying its internal pluralism and historical depth’ (Hountondji 1996:162), in order to divert the attention of the exploited classes from the real political and economic conflicts which divide them from the ruling classes under the fallacious pretext of their common participation in “‘the” national culture’ (Hountondji 1996:162).

The cultural nationalism of independent African countries is presented, falsely, as a ‘deceptive singular’ (Hountondji 1996:160), closed, homogeneous and monolithic—‘flat... strongly simple and univocal’ (Hountondji 1996:160), ‘petrified in a synchronic picture’ (Hountondji 1996:160), which strips it of ‘the fruitful tensions by which is it animated’ (Hountondji 1996:160), and which neglects its most significant characteristic, its status as ‘the unfinished history of a...contradictory debate’ (Hountondji 1996:161). Thus schematized African cultures are exploited, in essentialist comparisons with European cultures which reveal that ‘the moment of colonization’ (Hountondji 1996:161) was the only important division in the history of the continent. The net effect of culturalism has been a retreat by the cultural nationalists to a *false pluralism*, an escape from the ‘psychological and political rape perpetrated upon them by Western imperialism’ (Hountondji 1996:164) into imaginary cultural origins, the so-called traditional (pre-colonial) political organization of pre-colonial African society. This is a retreat into a state of psychological arrest, perpetuated by the myth that non-Western societies are ‘simple’ at the level of ideology and belief, as well as into false sociology: ‘pluralism does not come to any society from outside but is inherent in every society’ (Hountondji 1996:165). This retreat blinds Africa to the fact that the ‘decisive encounter’ (Hountondji 1996:165) is not between Africa and Europe, but between ‘Africa and itself (Hountondji 1996:165). False pluralism has bequeathed a legacy amounting to an artificial choice between ‘cultural “alienation”’ (which is supposedly connected with political betrayal) and ‘cultural nationalism’ (the obverse of political nationalism and often a pathetic substitute for it) (Hountondji 1996:166). True political nationalism requires important conditions: ‘African culture must return to itself, to its internal

pluralism and to its essential openness' (Hountondji 1996:166). But this homecoming has to be fought for on political grounds, on grounds of class pluralism—the tension between an exploiting and an exploited class—a class struggle which 'knows no frontiers' and takes precedence over the conflicts between nations or ethnic groups (Hountondji 1996:167).

The later Nkrumah—of the 1970 edition of *Consciencism*—says Hountondji, correctly identified the class struggle in Africa as the central cause of its depressed economic and political condition, but fell victim to the fallacy of unanimism, the false ideology of cultural nationalism—the belief that cultural nationalism 'aims at restoring the lost unity of African consciousness' (Hountondji 1996:149). The 1970 edition, unlike the earlier one, boldly proclaimed 'the universality of the class struggle (previously denied)' (Hountondji 1996:146), manifesting as neo-colonial exploitation, a 'class struggle on an international scale' (Hountondji 1996:135, citing Nkrumah). Nkrumah erred in thinking that this class struggle had been 'introduced into Africa from the outside' (Hountondji 1996:137), that it is a feature only of contemporary African society and was not also a feature of the traditional structures (Hountondji 1996:142–143). 'Culturalism' is the cause of the error. Nkrumah's acceptance of the 'classic ethnological ideology' (Hountondji 1996:148), that pre-colonial Africa had a single ideology, led him to identify the pluralism of creeds, ideologies and cultural currents in the traditional, the Euro-Christian and the Muslim regions of Africa as the cause of a crisis of identity (Hountondji 1996:149), one to be remedied by a unifying ideology, a 'philosophy of consciousness' (Hountondji 1996:149) called 'Consciencism'. Ideological falsity of this kind is *the cause of the phenomenon of culturalism* used so effectively to eclipse the problem of class struggle (Hountondji 1996:162). In the *Postscript to African philosophy: Myth and reality*, Hountondji laments that Africa has 'failed to develop...[the Marxist] heritage' and notes that intellectuals are powerless to prevent it from being taken over shamelessly by completely 'cynical and reactionary political groups...for whom dialectics is a subtle way of justifying their own impatience and thirst of power' (Hountondji 1996:183).

A second but no less serious error was Nkrumah's blindness, introduced by his culturalism, to the intensity of the class struggle in Africa. Nkrumah acknowledged that colonization created an indigenous class 'associated with social power and authority' (Hountondji 1996:150, citing Nkrumah), but his focus was on its function as a 'conveyor belt of European civilization' (Hountondji 1996:150) rather than its 'exploitive role' (Hountondji 1996:150) in economic and political affairs. The cultural conflict which preoccupied Nkrumah, however, was nothing less than a 'sublimate form of a class struggle' (Hountondji 1996:150). But even Nkrumah, argues Hountondji (1996:151), steeped in the fallacy of culturalism, cannot hide his awareness of the real issues—'[t]he real order (economical and political) can...be detected behind his cultural discourse'.

### EXPLOITATION—THE MORAL PARADIGM

Marxism, says Hountondji (1984:113), was discovered at a particular point in the anti-colonial struggle, and served as a theoretical and ideological foundation for resistance precisely because it provided Africa with a better understanding of colonialism as a

historical process. Even in Nkrumah 'Marxism is but a theoretical tool, a means towards understanding and explanation' (Hountondji 1984:114). Viewed in this way, Marxism served the black peoples, not the black peoples Marxism, and it served them by bringing them as 'exploited classes to a clear awareness of this fact' (Hountondji 1984:117).

How did Marxism bring on an informed awareness of colonialism as a historical process?

My thesis is that later Marxist morality is relevant to our understanding of the exploitation phenomenon. As I judge there are two aspects to the moral implications of exploitation that need to be highlighted, the moral struggle for recognition, and the moral struggle for flourishing, which is the struggle to realize the conditions needed for a *humanly* human life to be possible. In the next section I touch on some points of later Marxist morality which aid me in demonstrating the thesis.

### **Superseding the morality of the downtrodden**

Marx's notion of 'species-being' encapsulates the ideal person in whom personal and communal life merges into a 'perfect unity' (Femia 1999:42), described by Femia (1999:42) as the 'internalized identity of each person with the social totality'. The human personality, dependent as it is 'on the material conditions which determine their production' (Femia 1999:43, citing Marx), is wholly constituted by the 'ensemble of social relationships' (Femia 1999:44), by which is meant that agency is selfless, other-regarding, indifferent to sectional ties and private interests, and disposed to endorsing communal solidarity.

According to Churchich (1994:34) the Marxist picture of a truly human morality is prefigured by the morality of the 'toiling classes' (Churchich 1994:37), and will be the morality of the future classless society. This picture gives prominence to 'collective morality' (Churchich 1994:65), implicitly contains premisses which argue for 'the primacy and supremacy of collectivism', and treats the community 'as the principal moral and social agency' (Churchich 1994:165). Churchich identifies two themes in Marx's collective morality. The first, called the 'ethics of social structure' (Churchich 1994:34) treats morality as grounded in socio-economic structures and as generated by 'material causes'—'the economic relations in which men live and work' (Churchich 1994:63). The content of morality is a function of 'the totality of common interests and the sum total of social and economic relations' (Churchich 1994:35). The second is in Marx's scheme a 'second-best' morality, and consists of Marx's critique of the 'negatively individualistic' (Churchich 1994:34) morality of the ruling class which subjects morality to class interests, treating it as 'an object of commerce' (Churchich 1994:36, citing Marx). Bourgeois morality has alienating consequences—'man feels outside himself (Churchich 1994:65, citing Marx)—a condition Marx believes will be overcome only once capital's position as mediator between workers and their needs is challenged and overthrown. Then 'the moral standard determined by the given stage of social evolution will become the "individual's very own standard"' (Churchich 1994:138) and then the 'ethics of social structure' can come into play. In Churchich's (1994:138) view, Marx's charge of exploitation, understood as a moral concept, is rooted in this vision of human emancipation.

Kamolnick (1998:345) underscores Churchich's picture of an emancipating morality. The 'species-essence thesis' (Kamolnick 1998:345), which is Marx's vision of the social arrangements needed to effect a fit between person and community, states Marx's '*mostfundamental and distinctly Marxian*' (Kamolnick 1998:346) reasons for rejecting bourgeois norms as incompatible with 'man's' special-essence, viz., 'their utter *dehumanizing* consequences for and on *humanly* human life' (Kamolnick 1998:146). Marx's commitment to the overthrow of capitalist society cannot be grounded, argues Kamolnick (1998:347), on the basis of 'a separation of private conscience from...the... normative, prescriptive dimensions of a disalienated, *humanly* human life'. Collective morality is based on this disalienated condition of human life. And the overriding condition is the non-alienability of labour, understood as the intrinsic absolute value of human life, as opposed to alienated labour which is the 'labour-power'—commodity generated by capitalist exploitation. The 'exclusively human' (Kamolnick 1998:352) form of labour liberates in the sense that it enables the worker to realize 'a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*' (Kamolnick 1998:352, citing Marx), and in realizing his own purpose he realizes 'the true realm of freedom...[which then] can blossom forth' (Kamolnick 1998:352, citing Marx).

The 'ethics of social structure' is an evolutionary stage superseding the stage of 'second-best' morality. The transition is marked by the appearance of the phenomenon of disalienated labour. If all this is correct, we may say, with Bidet (1998:417) that the core of *class* morality is a universalizable viewpoint—the viewpoint '*of those below, that of the exploited and dominated*'. The possibility of offering this viewpoint as the core moral concept of class morality depends on making explicit assumptions about the appropriate conditions for a human being to tolerate. Insofar as those conditions require for their realization the negation of alienated labour, they negate the force of the core moral concept of class morality. In its place Marx sets up a morality for a distinct '*humanly human life*' (Kamolnick 1998:346), one in which two strains are dominant. The first centres on '*the concept of intrinsic human dignity or worth*' (Churchich 1994:139) actuated in a class-independent communist community; the second encapsulates the values of a certain kind of community, viz. *communism*.

### THE MORAL STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION AND FLOURISHING

Assume, as I have suggested thus far, that neo-colonialism in Africa manifests as the condition of 'second-best' morality. And assume further that Africa aspires to the 'ethics of social structure'—the point of emancipation. Now, allow that the time frame between the 'second-best' condition and the realization of the 'ethics of social structure', is the time needed for Africa to escape or end exploitation, and that the failure thus far to do so repeats the cycle of the synchronic interpretation of exploitation. Since the truth of the diachronic interpretation depends on the truth of the synchronic interpretation, it follows that the diachronic interpretation is also applicable to Africa in its neo-colonial situation, which is to say that under neo-colonialism Africa reproduces the conditions under which it remains entrapped in exploitation. What is the moral significance of these interpretations?

The synchronic and the diachronic claims invoke the idea of a universalizable moral

viewpoint—the viewpoint of ‘those below’. Consider that the universalizable viewpoint claims universality for the moral wrongness of exploitation. Under this viewpoint the relevant moral property of exploitive practices is the suffering of patients. If adopting the moral point of view is consistent with extending recognition to Africans as suffering patients, and if this description is also consistent with their self-recognition, we can say that the mass African, in her *class* morality, judges herself—and is judged by others—in terms of the universalizable ethic encapsulated in the moral viewpoint of ‘those below’. The viewpoint of ‘those below’ drives the moral struggle for emancipation, and this is the precursor struggle which serves the ends of the final struggle, the creation of the conditions needed for a *humanly* human life to flourish. Endorsing the viewpoint of ‘those below’ as a moral truth fits the synchronic and the diachronic interpretations of exploitation. To simplify matters I shall refer to the two respective interpretations as claims which require moral responses. The diachronic claim is that the structure of capitalism compels the exploited to remain entrapped in exploitation. It depends for its truth on the truth of the synchronic claim—the claim that the exploited have no choice but to remain entrapped in a cycle of structural force. What are the essentials of the imputed moral awareness?

First, Reiman (1997:183) treats the synchronic claim as sufficient, by itself, to support the Marxist charge that capitalism is a form of slavery. How severely the exploited are enslaved obviously depends on the truth of the diachronic claim. Reiman qualifies the implied compulsion by adding that ‘capitalist slavery is freer than classical slavery’ and that ‘capitalist slavery is less awful than classical slavery’. Now, if the picture of primary exploitation sketched by Casal (1998), Mandaza (1999), and Samir (1997) is correct, the exploited have no choice but to remain enslaved. The structural force of Capital in its synchronic sense is simply too great. Yet the argument does not stop there. It is significant that being exploited in line with the structural force of the synchronic claim leaves the exploited with only so much choice ‘as is compatible with their deploying themselves among the fates before them in roughly the same way their forcer wants’ (Reiman 1997:183). So there is choice, but having so little means that it is not irrational for the exploited to give it up (Reiman 1997:183). They give it up because they are vulnerable in virtue of their position in the global picture which determines ‘a *range* of things they can do, with options outside this range...prohibitively costly’ (Reiman 1997:162).

Second, the structural force of the synchronic claim is fuelled by Capital’s ideological dominance (the very dominance that ensures the truth of the diachronic claim). To see what is involved here consider again Hountondji’s view that domination of the African populace by the neo-colonial African elite is necessary for the coercive extraction of surplus value and for the maintenance of their power, but that the extraction on which power depends is driven by the false ideology of ‘culturalism’.

Ideology functions as ‘a socially structured symbolic system constituting or “interpellating” human individuals as social subjects’, a function it performs from ‘its social basis in specific institutions or “ideological apparatuses”’ (Resch 1992:159). Resch (1992:215) explains ideology as the way in which men and women are formed in order to participate in a ‘process of which they are not the makers’. The process is ‘interpellation’, the making of the subject. The individual is ‘always already subject’ (Resch 1992:210) in

the sense that she is enmeshed in the practices of 'ideological recognition' (Resch 1992:210). The dominant ideology, the ideology of the ruling class, inscribed in concrete social practicals and institutions, effectively guarantees that individuals are interpellated in such a way that they 'will reproduce the existing relations of production' (Resch 1992:211). The 'material existence' of an ideological apparatus (Resch 1992:213) is the maker of working class 'experiences of exploitation' (Resch 1992:226) as distinct from the 'theory of the exploitation' (Resch 1992:226, citing Althusser). As Resch makes Althusser's point, 'it is not by Marxism that the proletariat discovers that it is exploited'; however, it is by 'Marxism that it learns the mechanism and the modalities of its exploitation' (Resch 1992:226).

The existence of ideological hegemony of the kind under consideration, and its 'mechanisms' and 'modalities', is the cause of the phenomenon of 'culturalism' used so effectively to eclipse the problem of class struggle (Hountondji 1996:162). The eclipse, notes Hountondji (1996:164), brings on the false pluralism of the neo-colonial elite, and an exploitable state of psychological arrest which blinds Africans to the fact that the decisive encounter is not between Africa and Europe, but between 'Africa and itself' (Hountondji 1996:165). The failure to see through the deception reinforces the 'classic ethnological ideology' (Hountondji 1996:148) which Western ethnographers in alliance with the neo-colonial African elite have fostered onto Africa, thus bending Africa's cultural life to the requirements of synchronic exploitation, causing 'economic extroversion', as much as 'mental extroversion' (Hountondji 1996:4). It is this 'extroversion' into which the African subject is 'interpellated', making self-recognition in terms other than that of the 'classic ethnological ideology' difficult to escape. So economic enslavement is completed by enslavement of the soul. Africans, says Hountondji (1983:47), have learnt 'how dangerous it can be for one man to wait for another to provide him with a certificate of humanity. And it is this lesson that must now not be unlearned. Africa should not measure itself against Europe in areas Europe has created historically. Africans are aware that in the fields of scientific and technological endeavour 'historic Europe...is today, and until further notice, almost unbeatable' (Hountondji 1983:47). Even in the social and human sciences there are no researchers of significance—'contemporary Africa could offer but very little, and even nothing' (Hountondji 1983:47). Africa, however, does not 'wish to catch up with anyone. But we want to walk always, night and day, in the company of man, of every man' (Hountondji 1983:48, citing Fanon).

Third, in the neo-colonial context Africa has a problem to salvage its ancient heritage. The success of ethnographers' exploitation of ethnophilosophy as tool of 'mystification', says Hountondji (1996:171), is 'the secret of our defeat by the West' (Hountondji 1996:172). Since it is no longer possible for the tradition of Ur-African philosophies to serve purposes of demystification, having lost its 'critical charge, its *truth*' (Hountondji 1996:171), to 'the weight and concrete methods of...oppressive and repressive [neo-colonial state] apparatuses' (Hountondji 1996:181), Africa must for the sake of its own real liberation 'take up European science and technology (Hountondji 1996:172) which means putting to work 'the European concept of philosophy that goes hand in hand with science and technology' (Hountondji 1996:172). The prime task of philosophy in Africa is to 'contribute to the development of science' (Hountondji 1996:175). Hountondji



(1996:97) approvingly cites Althusser: '[T]he great philosophical revolutions are always the sequel of great scientific revolutions, so that philosophy is originally linked, in its growth and evolution, with the birth and development of the sciences' (Hountondji 1996:97).

Emancipation is, in Hountondji's view, driven by the progress of science in Africa as much as by the need to organize society along lines that recognize the tradition yet improve on it in ways capable of coping with the pressures of modernization. Yet in this endeavour reappropriating Africa's own ancestral heritage becomes problematic. The risk of overvaluing the cultural and technological products of Africa's erstwhile masters endangers the possibility of achieving an appropriate balance between the conservation of a heritage and the adoption of an alien one. How much tradition will the progress of science erode? In the exploitive position Africa currently lies entrapped in, the balance is in favour of the rapid erosion of tradition. Breaking the fetters of exploitation presents a view of a possible world in which Africans gain greater control over the conservation of their traditions, on terms appropriate to Africa's needs for modernization. Africans, thinks Hountondji (1995:9), must marry their desire to save their ancestral heritage with their desire to appropriate the international heritage, including the processes of scientific and technological innovation. But the marriage, it seems, must be effected on terms acceptable to Africans, for otherwise how could the moral norm encapsulated in the idea of a *humanly* human life be grounded and take root? This spectre is, if Hountondji is right, the ideal that Marxist theory has enabled Africans to see and pursue.

Fourth, the precursor struggle, the struggle for recognition, establishes the groundwork for a settling of accounts with Africa's former masters. If we allow that the universalizable moral viewpoint of 'those below' morally binds patient and agent, then the former colonial powers, now operating in Africa under a neo-colonial guise, have a moral responsibility to compensate Africa for centuries of exploitation. How might a justifying argument be mounted? The synchronic and diachronic claims suggest such arguments. The synchronic argument looks like this.

- 1 Africa has no choice about being entrapped in exploitation.
- 2 A condition of 'no choice' obtains because synchronic force is too great.
- 3 Synchronic force places Africa in the service of Europe.
- 4 But this is unpaid service.
- 5 Therefore, to escape the injustice of non-payment, Africa must be compensated.

The diachronic argument may be stated thus.

- 1 Africa reproduces the conditions under which it renders unpaid service to Europe.
- 2 Ending those conditions is impossible (because diachronic force is too great).
- 3 Therefore, to escape the injustice of non-payment, Africa must be compensated.

Compensation for a history of exploitation is a very complex undertaking. The African Reparations Movement (ARM)<sup>1</sup> appeals to a variant of the diachronic argument. The voices of ARM, in Africa and the African Diaspora, are voices making moral claims taking as their point of departure the conditions needed for the realization of the ideal of a *humanly* human life for the exploited peoples of Africa. The variant argument runs like this:

- 1 Since the onset of colonialism, Africa has reproduced the conditions under which it renders unpaid service to Europe.
- 2 Ending those conditions is impossible (because of synchronic and diachronic force).
- 3 Over centuries Africa has accumulated much overdue payment.
- 4 Therefore, to escape the injustice of past and present non-payment, Africa must be compensated for all unpaid service.

## END NOTES

- 1 Visit the web site address of ARM: [www.arm.arc.co](http://www.arm.arc.co)

### Rethinking communities in a global context

#### D.A.MASOLO

Any new theory can be also good only to the extent that it sheds new light on previous perceptions of its subject matter. Recent schemes and approaches in social theory have greatly changed how we think of the relations between individuals and groups to which they claim belonging, and of the structures and roles of those social groups. The growth of technology, its impact on global economy, and the resultant politics have all combined to effect in the twentieth century unprecedented national and transnational movements of people, groups, and individuals. One of the major changes of theoretical and cultural significance resulting from these social mobilities is the idea of community and its cognate concept of culture, but also the idea of liberalism which recent debate strongly invokes. Can one be a liberal and also claim membership to one or more specific cultural communities at the same time? Are sentiments of bounded identity really contrary to reason and morality? This reading aims at surveying the multiple and different notions and experiences of community as functions of current forces of global political economy.

The referent of the term 'community' has constantly shifted and changed at the same time and rate as the factors that influence social orders themselves. Like most other social units, the topology of 'communities' has been subject to the prevalent modes of economic production and distribution of goods; and because these basic human activities determine the degree of the stability with which people either remain in groups or operate as individuals as a way to maximize the effectiveness and security of their participation, it can be said that 'communities' differ in their structures with changes in individual persons' participative choices and responses to and within given political, economic, and other forms of cultural contexts. Conceptualizations of the structures and functions of 'communities' are in this way the product of their times, the function of how prevailing circumstances are themselves conceptualized and defined; and there is not one but multiple approaches and definitions that the study of 'communities' has produced.

Even the very methodologies which inform and guide how we think of social realities are often themselves outcomes of specific theoretical choices, preferences and convictions made possible by the historical character of knowledge. This is not to subtract anything from the character of the social sciences since Comte's *Course de*

*philosophie positive* inaugurated scientific study of social phenomena. But the objective to produce social knowledge modelled after the natural sciences competes with practical human spontaneity that continues to challenge the capacity of science to explain, predict, and order our conceptualization of social reality. 'Community', or 'communities' in its plural, is one of those ideas and categories of social reality which continue to pose tremendous definitive problems for those who study society.

Until recently, the social science understanding of community has tended to regard it as a typical specific (or one of a kind), as a social unit or entity endowed with stable and recognizable features which, like those of its type, are regulated by general laws which simultaneously account for their differences and similarities. In both their synchronic structures and diachronic mutations and regenerations, communities were viewed as subject to some 'natural' laws which regulate social phenomena. This view, taken from the tradition in the history of science which assumes a regularity in the growth of science and the construction of society based thereon, is shared by several fields of the social sciences like sociology, economics, political science and others, but also by structuralist linguists like Noam Chomsky.<sup>1</sup> In the framework of the social sciences, the aim is to identify a finite principle which is generative of the infinite and complex products of a unit (of society or, in Chomsky's theory, mind). While social scientists operate on the assumption that the evolution of social phenomena follows distinguishable patterns within a causal chain, Chomsky's theory of language stands close to their assumption by virtue of his belief that knowledge of language is structurally represented in the minds of individual speakers. In other words, he believes that because the grammatical rules or principles are not consciously known and cannot be explicitly stated by the speaker-hearer, they must be unconsciously, or tacitly, known. Against this dominant tradition in the history of science, Thomas Kuhn<sup>2</sup> posed a conception of the history of science as, like the history of society itself, discontinuous, as punctuated by conceptual leaps and transmutations which he called 'scientific revolutions'. What Kuhn gave, in effect, was an elementary periodization for the history of any science. After its foundation a science will be characterized by a series of periods of unspecified length in which some major scientific achievement provides the methods, conceptual apparatus, and standards of validity which govern the research practice of the whole 'scientific community' engaged in this particular scientific specialism.

That much can also be said of social theory. Taking reductionism for precision, social scientists have in several ways tried to place a grip on the general character of community as a social unit separable from others by form and definition. According to sociologists, the characteristics of community include commonly shared geographic place, a consciousness of kind, a totality of attitudes, a common lifestyle, the possession of common ends, and local self-sufficiency among others. In purely socio-economic terms, such characterization of community could indicate a separation between community and city, signalling the impact of industrialization on the conceptualization of new social reconfigurations. In other words, with the coming of industrialization and liberalism, the term 'communities' came to be associated with marginal populations living in relatively small groups at the periphery of the growing urban populations. They were regarded to be less sophisticated and as primarily engaged in the traditional farming economics with only limited supply merchantships to cater for local needs, the majority of which were

supplied by single General Stores per community. Then there might be a single grocery store, a single barber shop, a single school, one, two or three churches, and such like service and supply stores shared by all inhabitants. In contrast to the cities, individuals in communities were embedded in them rather than stand out as atomic members held together only by systems of enforceable laws aimed at creating and maintaining order. Although such communities may have had symbolic representations of law and order, they were part of their communities and their stature in them may have stood more for a sense of internal assurance against the outside than for law within. Because people tend to know or at least epistemologically recognize each other, the values and principles which engender and sustain law and order in these types of communities are generated through a sense of mutual recognition, respect, and feeling empathy toward each other. Individuals are born into these communities and become the natural vehicles for their reproduction over time. Such communities are still frequent, and they litter much of rural America and Europe. Their populations often do not exceed five to six thousand inhabitants.

But the American social scene makes the configuration of communities even more interesting. The history of the race factor in America has tended to reproduce, in rural and urban settings, groupings of people based not only on the traditional socio-economic indices but also, and perhaps mainly, on their race. In much of the rural South in Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and other southern states, communities are often socially painted different colours. In the cities, communities and neighbourhoods are marked from each other not purely along the socio-economic lines of liberal capitalism. They are clearly demarcated, first and foremost, along colour lines. In private and public institutions, personnel logs are still kept largely by racial groupings. In hospitals and detention institutions, charts are kept to trace characteristics of people, their behaviour, crimes and diseases, by racial groupings so as to facilitate the ability to create community data banks which trace 'racial traits'. With increase in migrations, race-based patterns of groupings and city structuralizations appear to give a false vindication to the sociological view(s) of community as focused on characteristics of natural homogeneity among inhabitants. What may appear to be free choice of one's neighborhood is invariably a constrained compliance with limited selections based on socially embedded and institutionally supported racism.

Various populations of the non-Western world, especially in Africa and Latin America, present yet another sense of community. With the growth of the disciplines of social and cultural anthropology, some of the sociological characteristics mentioned above were hastily applied to the description of whole African populations as 'communities' despite their large populations which sometimes reached 100 000 strong or more, and occupying territories as large as the entire state of South Carolina or the country of Switzerland. The difference between Western communities and their African counterparts, it was thought, was due to the differences in the economic dynamics that moulded them. While Western communities were the function of the dynamics of advanced industrial economies, those of Africa and Latin America were held together by kinship systems put in place by nature-dependent primitive economics. The sole index that appeared to inform social anthropologists in their descriptions of say African societies as 'communities' was common language. It was the sole invariant that connected what were sometimes widely

dispersed and politically loosely organized social systems. Yet even social anthropologists are by no means consistent or agreed among themselves about their usage of the term. However, a few factors became clear to social anthropologists regarding the boundaries separating different communities. Each had not only its own language, they also had separate political organizations under separate and sovereign authorities irrespective of how these were defined and symbolized.<sup>3</sup>

But because social anthropology flourished in close relationship with and within the framework of the political economy of colonialism, the imperial tool of the liberal capitalism of Western Europe, it produced a structural political planning system that has become useful to the racially multi-polar society in America, especially in its urban planning. In the colonial system, the 'communities' were thought of as self-sustaining socio-political and cultural units with (semi-) autonomous local power systems capable of working more effectively on their own due to the already existing (traditional) power hierarchies. The assumption was that, while the logic of labour relations in advanced capitalist economies structures its participant individuals into groups based on the nature of their labour and levels of income, and the groups of individuals together forming a society (*Gesellschaft*), communities (*Gemeinschaft*) are held together by world-views defined by metaphysical values and ritual which tie people into a common bond. The idea of the ritual self-regulation of communities was particularly important for colonial administration, for it quickly formed the basis of the British colonial system of indirect rule. Where there was no local system of centralized authority to absorb the rising local pressure against colonial administration, the colonial system created and imposed one.

The objectives for the creation of semi-autonomous communities in the above circumstances is quite clear. In the last decade of apartheid, the minority white regime in South Africa attempted but failed to institute a system of federated racial states by urging local African leaders to accept a homeland system which would give them a measure of limited political autonomy over their tribal territories. The lure was mainly to the powerful Zulu leaders to take the offer as an opportunity, for them, to continue to practise their traditional monarchical system with minimal interference. The real reason and opportunity, however, belonged elsewhere.

Fragmentation of society into communities has become a key urban planning and control tool in liberal capitalist societies today. The USA in particular finds it an effective tool in the management and sustenance of the status quo. As groups defined in terms ranging from ethnicity to race and to social class, neighbourhood communities have become a trendy notion of urban, regional, and global policing and delivery systems. Under thin veils, communities are described in liberal capitalist systems as groupings of people that provide ways to '[maximize] participation and political efficacy, particularly at the local level. This allows individuals to develop a clear idea of their interests as well as the means necessary to realize them. [But], as needs are developed locally, [wider and] global criteria for distribution collapse'.<sup>4</sup> By giving neighbourhoods some measure of autonomy—often fictitious—through their participation in the keeping of law and order at the local level in exchange for social amenities and services, neighbourhood communities can be more effectively contained and better supervised; their confrontation capacity is considered minimized and therefore less threatening to the overarching power system. Those of us who speak from the colonial context know for sure the 'flaws of this

British-type divide-and-rule or indirect-rule style'. It is flawed because it is based on the mono-optical view, developed by social anthropologists for the liberal colonial capitalists but also strongly present in the American urban settings today, that communities are systems in which the reproduction of power structures is the primary concern. It assumes that when communities make demands they do so for a place in an accepted scheme rather than for the revision of the scheme itself. But because the distribution of power is often an autonomous issue in politics, it has been easy for entrenched and dominant power systems like the colonial and apartheid systems in Africa, and the white power system in America, to sell off the idea of political autonomy to groups targeted for marginalization as a way of keeping them off limits from other goods with which political power is crucially associated. In its desire, not so much to give autonomy to native South African ethnic groups as to protect the privileges of the minority white population, the apartheid system struggled for decades to institute the home-land system for indigenous South Africans in order to both separate and keep them out of the minority white enclaves. The prospect of preserving the traditional monarchy in which he would continue to play a visible role of chief easily lured Mangosuthu Buthelezi into largely supporting the apartheid regime against the radical liberation movements led by the ANC of Nelson Mandela. Elsewhere in Kenya in 1904 and 1911, Maasai Laibons (ritual and political leaders) were conned into thumbing their consent on treaties with the British which were immediately used to expunge them not only from the vicinity of Nairobi but from the entire highland plateau area that soon became the White Highlands' with indigenous people transformed into either squatter-labourers or criminal trespassers in lands they had known as their homes for centuries. By these political fiats in the form of treaties, people were herded into groups and other forms of alliances in ways that never were. Administrative boundaries were drawn to keep together and separate from others what the British, through their social anthropologists, believed were autonomously homogeneous communities.

Again, the idea of community as a homogeneous social unit of sorts has been an important aspect of American urbanization since the 1930s. The racism and impoverishment that pushed blacks out of the rural South entrapped them into ghettos in the industrial cities of the North. Segregation and inability to afford better housing forced black populations into squalidness where they lived together in pin-down parts of the cities like people hurdled together by nature. Jews have had similar racially discriminatory treatment in the USA, especially between 1880 and the late 1960s. But while Jewish people have benefitted greatly from the anti-discrimination laws of the 1960s and 1970s, African-descended Americans and other so-called people of colour have continued to be subjected to prevalent, subtle, and sometimes open racially discriminatory practices. Ironically, while struggle to success amid adversity has kept Jewish Americans connected around the nation through strong community commitment, continued struggles of African-Americans against persistent discrimination bind some into a commitment to a sense of community, but the same also tear away others. Oftentimes, African-Americans are visibly at a loss regarding where to throw their efforts, or what to emphasize in order to garner a solid sense of direction in the ranks. The result is the sense of vulnerability and constant position-changing that characterize African-American politics.

Either America has refused or it has utterly failed to move from mere desegregation to integration. Racial discrimination still defines the attitudes and practices with which planning for such public amenities and services like education, housing, and employment is executed. The resultant demarcations of the American social world almost unstopably engender the impression that communities are natural entities, because they appear tied to race, and that therefore people are born into and embedded in communities at birth and genealogically. The American population thus also fails to move from a complex of primitive and plural *Gemeinschaften* to a single *Gesellschaft*.

Under the above circumstances, the idea of community has once more become a key term for urban planners. As city governments face criticisms and blame for the neglect of the inner city residents and facilities in a manner that appears directly related to the surge of urban crime, the idea of 'community projects' has, to many politicians and other policy activists, become a way to express (political) recognition of the complaints of Other citizens. The response, which appears to value the notion of community projects based on the view that positive responsiveness can only be generated through participation, has its undersides. It tends to equate the financing of community projects to foreign aid, called outreach programmes in soft language. Like foreign aid donors, financiers and managers of community projects, often from the wealthier white communities and entrepreneurs or from white-dominated city government agencies, tend to regard recipients in poorer minority neighbourhoods as consumers of goods they have not helped produce, thus pushing even further the sense of alienation among members of economically disadvantaged communities.

Then, finally, there is another and new category of communities based on a critical review of the Lockean theory of the mass society as a moral political body capable of safeguarding the moral legitimacy of the state as weak and inadequate. This position argues that small organized social groups, formed as either rights-based communities or other forms of compact interest groups, have replaced Locke's political society as the most effective bodies for negotiating or pressing for the enactment of laws in recognition of the rights of groups where denied or absent. As recently argued by Michael L. Gross<sup>5</sup> this is a shift away from the Lockean view of grounding legitimate challenge to existing political authority in both intersubjective consensus (the Body of the People) and the objective authority of God in heaven. In Gross's view, due to the evergrowing complexity of interests as well as the cognitively complex feature of political cognition itself, the Body of the People is no longer definable with consistency and accuracy. Hence its effectiveness in safeguarding the integrity of the state through political action has been eroded considerably. Strong political morality now abides with small, well-organized interest groups which combine the moral aggressiveness and epistemological demands of Locke with the ability to move citizens to action—marches, strikes, and other forms of expressing protests and dissent like talk shows, lobbying, and other high-visibility forms of manageable social action. The reason small groups represent the strong model of political morality in Gross's view is that in them moral principles are often held up high through sustained, articulate, and convincing epistemological arguments. This is certainly another level of social evolution, an attractive model of liberal democratic values at work. But it does not work equally for all interest groups. In situations where separate communities do not share equal access to the same channels of self-

representation and argumentation, or do not or are not likely to have the same effect on the institutions to be lobbied and controlled, Gross's theory of strong political morality can only be an avenue to even greater social and civil inequities. Two examples come fast to mind. In several African countries where the political parties controlled by dictatorial rulers either have monopoly over or practice unchecked censorship over the organs of public information, groups classified—by reason of their demands alone—as anti-government can never gain a platform to present their positions in any form. In the USA, racial minorities have for centuries been denied access to the corridors of power where recognitions of rights and policies are influenced through both lobbying and direct purchases. Rather, recognition of various rights demanded by racial minorities have been handed down piecemeal as tokens of liberal moral gestures of courage by those seeking race-based votes. By contrast, other interest groups like gay-lesbian organizations, groups representing Jewish interests of various kinds, have had far greater success in their campaigns in relatively shorter times than African-Americans have been arguing their cases. This is often the way things go in Gross's model, but they do not have to. Strong political morality may be more beneficial to strong communities which already wield recognized and not easily compromisable power bases. Those who have watched South Africa's attempts to push itself to a post-apartheid level of social cohesion and integration will ponder why the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation is so seriously hampered in its endeavours. The government of South Africa has openly admitted that it cannot carry out justice against those guilty of apartheid crimes in fear of the possible economic and possibly also political backlash from the reactions of the white minority. Political and economic entrenchment, or some form of (claim-unrelated) power base appears to be a useful but perhaps not necessary condition for the attainment of the political moral strength that Gross attributes to small and epistemologically sophisticated groups.

The weakness of Gross's theory lies in the fact that it is descriptive rather than conjectural. For that reason, it selectively takes into account only those groups—like religious freedom and sexual orientation groups—which have scored a noticeable degree of success in their campaigns but ignores those—like civil rights and anti-racism groups—whose campaigns have lasted unsuccessful centuries despite the morally obvious nature of their goals. At another level, Gross's theory does indeed claim a conjectural stand when he argues that as a general principle, mass society can no longer be relied upon, like Locke did, as the subject of collective action for checking the excesses and shortcomings of government. He rightly recognizes that his rational model of collective action might work only if its incentives already assume the existence of a context which determined their efficacy. As Gross says, 'Altruism, normative duty, and fairness are operative relative to a particular set of "significant others" whose interests are weighed with one's own, whose leaders and norms are authoritative, and among whom mutual feelings of fidelity and fairness run high'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, for the rational model of collective action to work, there must be another form of 'communal feeling', of common belonging among the participants of the group. Although small groups united solely by shared interests of moral nature, by intellectual convictions, are for Gross the ideal (perfect) communities, they emerge only at that ideal stage when individuals are able to 'ignore calculations of expected utility'.<sup>7</sup>

Gross's theory, like Locke's, is evolutionistic. Strong political morality is the function



of an increase in social complexity—such as the rise of once unknown or tabooed claims of moral and legal rights for individuals and groups—and epistemological sophistication in political cognition. This complexity of the nature and knowledge of society has rendered the Lockean mass political body ineffective as an agent of political moral control. Locke's single political community now has been replaced by a multiplicity of political communities defined by varieties of moral claims and beliefs which are only shared by relatively small groups. Also, in the place of mass protests available to Locke's political community as the effective means for bringing change, the effectiveness of small interest-group communities is based on convincing moral and legal arguments besides protest marches and other forms of contemporary available forms of campaigns.

Despite its clear historical analysis and description of political evolution in the Western world over the past 400 years, his vision, like Locke's, can barely be applied to political realities outside the historical and geographical confine of the West. It assumes some specific political choices in place only in the West and not in many other places. In sub-Saharan Africa, for which I can dare to speak with some degree of generalization, Gross's model of strong political morality does not yet work. A variety of factors might be responsible. First, there is a sense in which the instruments of the strength of strong political morality attributed to small groups by Gross, such as epistemologically demanding moral reasoning, is radically divorced from how policies are influenced in the political arena outside the West. First, it assumes that individuals have only themselves, as individuals, on the one hand, and the state or political institution, on the other, on which to make moral demands. In several non-Western societies, particularly in Africa, individuals are strongly bound to specific cultural norms which limit their ability to openly make certain demands. Those who lead the institutions of society on which such demands could be made are themselves most likely to be supporters of such cultural sanctions of certain freedoms—like abortion rights and gay-lesbian rights—which feature prominently in Gross's theory. Such strong cultural sanctions make it hard for individuals to connect with others who share their interests and choices, hence making it nearly impossible to form the kind of communities described by Gross. Hence Gross's view that 'informational benefits, solidary rewards, norms of personal identity, democratic citizenship, and social justice'<sup>8</sup> are sufficient value-incentives to draw individuals into the membership of interest-group communities is only relatively plausible. In these alternative political arrangements, political change, and most other changes in the public civic arena, are not produced through the agency of social entities acting as moral communities. Public policy changes are still considered possible only as a result of mass action, through the force of the anonymous. Even the voices of the representative few acquire weight mostly when they are considered to be backed by movements, real or possible, whose strengths lie largely in their sizes and numbers. Although this scenario applies more to societies still struggling with sweeping political changes like in the Third World and the regions formerly under the Soviet Union, it applies well to the USA too, where racial minority groups often have to resort to mass demonstrations to press their political demands because they are always unlikely to get moral attention.

What the alternative political arrangement produces can sometimes be considerably different from what Gross's theory presents. Under Gross's idea of strong political morality, groups can attain the objects of their interests without necessarily weakening

the state. In fact, the formation of moral groups is made possible by the fact that the state, the liberal democratic state, has managed to evolve into an entity that is totally morally dependent on the individual subject or small groups of them. So it provides on the basis legitimate demands. Its own legitimacy is built on the ability to meet the demands of the citizens. But in the African configuration, the strengths of communities often stand in disproportionate relation to the strength of the state. People depend on the state and its institutions, rather than the other way round. But the state delivers only in return for loyalty, a value held so dear especially by those communities who consider their loyalty or other form of support crucial to the stability of the state and its institutions. Hence the stronger the communities, the more endangered the state becomes. The collapse of several African states has at least partially often been caused by rivalries deeply rooted in ethnic struggles for greater or total monopoly of key public interests. This patronage system is pretty well linked to the colonial indirect rule strategy in which rewards with appointments of individuals to key state positions was directly linked to their ability to deliver the loyalty of their ethnic-cum-political-and-economic cleavages in which both patron and client bind themselves in mutual dependence. The individuals in this arrangement may change—only occasionally, of course—but the arrangement remains pretty much in place. Several texts document details of this precarious balance of power.<sup>9</sup> These works are significant in one important sense: that although they see the ‘societies’ as constantly in opposition and threatening to the state, they do not deem the former as headed toward extinction. Their pessimism lies in their belief that the societies are constantly undermining each other and the state in an endless search for a balance.

The examples given above vindicate Benedict Anderson’s now classic view that communities are imagined, that they are creations or phantoms of dominant political discourses and practices of power. But while the examples and Anderson’s view define communities as social units which acquire sense only within political discourses and systems, there is a rival view of community produced by evolutionary political science theory which regards the large African ‘communities’ of social anthropologists to be in opposition to and in the path of the evolution of the nation-state as a higher socio-political entity. To be sure, social anthropologists were not indifferent to this view. Their description of African communities as representations of different power systems did not preclude the belief that they were inferior to the nation-state. In fact, the belief was that with time, the autonomous power systems of the communities would eventually dissipate as the state became centralized and more powerfully established and people would transfer their allegiance to the authority of the nation-state directly. Those of us from the so-called Third World are aware of how this evolutionary notion of community once formed the conceptual apparatus for critiquing the slow generation of nationalism in Africa. In these critiques, Africa’s social reality of communities, or ethnic groups, or tribes, as one may wish to call them, was deemed as the antithesis to the emergence of the European-style billed as modernity: that the birth and growth of nations comes in a disproportionate relation to the decline of tribes or communities. Hence the conditional proposal that if Africans should will to sustain the colonially invented nation-state, then they should willfully suppress the political strength of the tribes or communities. Those who subscribe to this view frequently blame Africa’s economic and political crises on the evils considered to be endemic to the political significance of tribe such as tribalism,

nepotism, regionalism, and so on. Leaders who publicly show allegiance to and identity with their respective communities are frequently accused of failure to lift themselves out of community-based politics as a condition for elevating oneself into the arena of nation-building. Such leaders are accused of ethnocentrism in the narrow sense of social anthropologists.

But problems with ethnocentrism are not limited to the encumberment of the nation-state. Pan-humanist or universalist moral theorists indeed argue that any form of social or political enclosure, such as ethnocentrism or nationalism, hinders the development of true moral and cognitive values. In other words, it may lead to moral and cognitive relativism. One remembers here the debate on the opposition between universalism and relativism and how it consumed so much intellectual energy in the 1980s. Current debates (e.g. Nussbaum and Cohen,<sup>10</sup> and Cheah and Robbins<sup>11</sup>) which oppose the categories of ethnicity and nation, nation and the globe, are only reformulations of the same old problem of the opposition between the particular and the universal. Their strength lies in the ability to situate moral discourse within the wider context of the sociality of humans which has been made more complex due to the effect of recent and ongoing technological and economic growth in the West and Japan. These growths have made it possible to interrogate old moral and other society-related theories which now appear to have depended for their strength on the idea of social closures. Among such questions are the following: how do we define people culturally today in the face of easy migrations of individuals and groups across geographical, social and bodily boundaries? While easy and intense migrations have definitely created a sense of cosmopolitanism, does it necessarily negate the ability to be or become nationalistic? What happens to nationalism? Is nationalism fake in the same measure that cosmopolitanism is real? Can we be both simultaneously? Which of the two truly grounds acceptable moral reasoning? What are the consequences of either?

While keeping in mind the injustices and other evils against humanity resulting from calls by the world's political leaders as a result of unwarranted ethnocentrism at the expense of greater social values, I worry also of other assumptions underlying the claim that identities based on community and those based on nation-state, or, by extension, that patriotism (or nationalism) and cosmopolitanism, are incompatible. It is hard for me to imagine an argument that would successfully defend the claim that one cannot give allegiance to being, for instance, a Zande and a Sudanese at the same time, or that doing so inexorably limits our ability to develop truly human values that are universal. It worries me because for such a claim to succeed it would have to also successfully argue that social identities, such as being Zande or Sudanese, are inalienable, ontologically determining and mutually exclusive conditions which no one person can possess together at the same time.

Martha Nussbaum<sup>12</sup> argues that nationalism, and by extension other bounding identities, limit our ability to develop true moral values. While commenting on Rabindranath Tagore's novel, *The home and the world*, she writes:

I believe that Tagore sees deeply when he observes that, at bottom, nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are not alien to one another, but akin—that to give support to nationalist sentiments subverts, ultimately, even the values that

hold a nation together, because it substitutes a colourful idol for the substantive universal values of justice and right. Once someone has said, I am an Indian first, a citizen of the world second, once he or she has made that morally questionable move of self-definition by a morally irrelevant characteristic, then what, indeed, will stop that person from saying, as Tagore's characters so quickly learn to say, I am a Hindu first, and an Indian second, or I am an upper-caste landlord first, and a Hindu second? Only the cosmopolitan stance of the landlord Nikhil—so boringly flat in the eyes of his young wife Bimala and his passionate nationalist friend Sandip—has the promise of transcending these divisions, because only this stance asks us to give our first allegiance to what is morally good—and that which, being good, I can recommend to all human beings.<sup>13</sup>

Like most philosophers who follow the dictate of the principle that once a principle of action in the social world is discovered to have the capacity to produce results contrary to the ideal aspirations of the dominant theory then it should be rejected, Nussbaum too argues that in a world geared toward bridging at least most differences between peoples across borders, all types of bounded identities should at least take a secondary place to the value of a boundless society. Given the amount of evil which allegiance to various forms of bounded identities has produced in recent history, her point does not require emphasis. She does well to place the blame on ideology, an important aspect of which is education and its role in creating and instilling in the minds of young generations the imbalances in the sentiments about our identities as local and global citizens. But against her own case, the position questions the 'how' and goals of education rather than the hierarchical differences of the various (and opposing) categories of identity of peoples.

Needless to say, educational systems have often managed to produce in people the phantoms of the ideological frameworks which draw up their policies. If Nussbaum is right that '[t]hrough cosmopolitan education, we learn more about ourselves',<sup>14</sup> then, ironically, colonial education, with its emphasis on the colonizer, produced the unintended product in the colonized by making him more humane and more universally oriented than the colonizer himself and his history remained. In other words, the colonized was able to cast his gaze away from himself without casting out his self-image.

But how exactly are communities formed and sustained? Recent debates on the nature of communities were made current by and continue to draw from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined communities*.<sup>15</sup> But birds of all feathers have since learned to feed on Anderson's grains. Before Anderson made current the idea of community as imaginary, however, there was Pierre Felix Bourdieu. Bourdieu's pervasive thesis is that what constitutes the cultural world assumed to be common for actors who together, in reciprocity, produce communities, is part of the actors' effects. For Bourdieu, cultural knowledge, such as knowledge of ritual, is a kind of practical knowledge based on the same schemes of habitus as daily life in which the patterns of ritual and daily activities interpenetrate and interact to create the cultural significance of the lived-in world. In Bourdieu's social world or habitus, ritual, language, actors, and agency, all play specific and open-ended roles in the creation of the worlds that structure the social world into units of specific modes of rationality, legitimation, power, and social action.

It is obvious that the key notion in Bourdieu's practical logic, *habitus*, leads to his emphasis on cross-contextual links. As a set of generative schemes of perception, action, and appreciation that are learned and reinforced by actions and discourses produced according to the same schemes,<sup>16</sup> *habitus* is applied equally in agricultural labour and calendrical rites, in daily interaction and ceremonial action. This wide-ranging application of a small set of schemes gives practical logic its approximate cohesion, its 'fuzzy' regularity. Social phenomena exist and can only be understood relationally, that is, as they occur in diachronic and synchronic relation to other sociological phenomena. Notions of good taste in clothes, for example, are a product of the social position of the person who holds the beliefs or, more exactly, who practises a certain way of dressing, and of their relation to other beliefs and practices that are consciously or unconsciously aspired to or rejected as strategies in a struggle for recognition and acceptance in a particular place and role in society, these notions and practices can only be understood if all such relations are taken into account.

There is no doubt that Bourdieu's analyses of the Kabyle socio-cultural world is often meticulously described with rich accounts of ritual, language, and agency through which the systemic structure of practice is produced. But due precisely to the emphasis on the synchronic structure and logic of the production of this social world, the *habitus* appears to lose focus on the process of the production. As a result, 'his relational understanding [of interpenetration of cultural contexts] tends to displace other associations that rely less extensively on interreferencing, positive meanings that do not rely on oppositions to other schemes or objects'.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, Bourdieu's theory assumes a single linguistic marketplace and a single set of values that are recognized and shared by all concerned. It ignores the multidimensional world in which people inhabit diverse social relations contemporaneously, or frequently migrate between them. In other words, Bourdieu does not take into consideration the real and figurative multilingual capacity of individuals to engage in discourses across diverse cultural fields. The Marxist framework which makes it possible for Bourdieu to lose focus on the process through which social worlds are open-endedly produced—because it shifts attention to power structure within limited contexts—also leads him to a deterministic view of cultural institutions as windows through which classifications and definitions of peoples and societies can be observed. It defines cultural institutions as units of power, the power to represent and to sustain the status quo: to reproduce structures of belief and experience through which cultural differences are understood. An overview of Bourdieu's system would then produce an image of communities as collectible, exhibitable, and manageable social units, juxtaposed but unconnected one to the other.

Gross's theory of strong political morality has one major advantage over Bourdieu's *habitus*. The sense of moral communities that he works with need not be taken to refer only to geographically situated social units. Rather, they are characterized only by shared beliefs and actions in ways that bring personal identity into a stereotyped connection and solidarity with other moral reasoners 'firmly anchored in tight social networks'.<sup>18</sup> He writes:

While solidarity benefits and, in particular, personal identity incentives are enhanced by conventional moral development, close friendship networks, and

social interdependence, none of these factors affects the strength of post-material incentives. Instead, these incentives, characterized by norms of citizenship and universal moral duty, are closely tied to post-conventional moral preferences and a firm rejection of pre-conventional norms. They address autonomy and motivate individuals to act regardless of the actions and opinions of others.<sup>19</sup>

One of the things that the above statement implies is that one does not have to share all the beliefs of the other members of a moral community to become one of them in a specific regard. Responsiveness to selective incentives would be sufficient to constitute one type of such community. Also, this makes it possible for one individual to become a member of multiple communities characterized by a diverse array of interests which are co-ordinated through different relevant groups.

In real life, at least in the kind presupposed by Gross, and which is in several ways similar to that inhabited by most of those who debate these issues in the academy, individuals cross boundaries to participate in as many actions of different activist interest groups as may be related to or urge their moral stands and demands for change. Gross's historical observation is correct that such cases are many and may keep multiplying with the course of social evolution. Much of this may be dependent on the growth of knowledge and its impact on economies which then result in continuous reconfigurations of social roles, connections, and relations. The result is that an increasing number of people find themselves performing increasingly variant roles in the course of their active lives without renouncing any. For example, many of us inhabit by day communities defined by our professionally specific and institutionally connected and coordinated interests and add on or return to differently characterized communities by evening without retiring the former. While some of those evening communities make complete connections with others in their vicinity, others reconnect long distances of geographical separations through a variety of symbolic and ritualistic means such as language, dress, music, religion and other forms of both spontaneous and organized activities. I believe that these moments do not negate each other, at least not significantly enough to make it impossible for individuals and groups to participate in a number of them either simultaneously or alternately. I sit in my office and rotate in my chair to admire the rich multiplicity of what the room brings in between the walls without overburdening them with the contradiction between the particular and the universal, the patriotic and the cosmopolitan. The ability to play a CD of my Luo music while working on a philosophy paper, one that even cites references to a work by some British philosopher I do not care about except for his or her ideas that reach me in their abstracted and symbol-based medium of a book, makes no conditional demand upon me that to participate in one I must first abandon the other. I can be both Luo and a member of the academic community of the University of Louisville at the same time without a burden. I can be, and in fact I am, a patriot and cosmopolitan, a nationalist and ethno-centric at the same time. Where is the universal dress, and who shall be its universal tailor? Where is its universal pattern? Each of these identities occurs within and is sustained by a series of mental acts with which I transfer from one set of memorable symbols to another. It is a way in which I construct my multiple histories which share and compete for embodiment in the same

self. Remember that oftentimes the music may vary from being Luo to Congolese, and occasionally even to Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart. Those behaviours, the act of listening, the claim of involvement and enjoyment of the musical pieces, an occasional fall into a trance of dance in response to some Kwasa Kwasa beat, are all ways in which I am drawn into and from one or the other of the multiple worlds of my everyday experience. Yet, whoever passes by my door and catches a glimpse of me in my office most probably situates me within one or several aspects of the institutional constructs at that time, with their idea of who I am closely related to a set of character dispositions, acts, roles, behaviours which to them are what makes sense as to who and what kind of person they imagine me to be, and why I am there at all in the first place. If I speak, an additional factor of this social imagination is quickly prompted by my accent which frequently solicits the question 'Where do you come from?' The fact that I might be seated there immersed in a world where being Luo might be the primary experience going through my mental processes would be completely hidden to those who in advance did not know of this aspect of my identity. Also experiencing being Luo is not consistently my primary experience at all times. But at will I may invoke it as my primary root. Each encounter requires a leap from one to other modes of self-experiencing. Assuming that actual mutually responsive behaviour, acting and getting responses, like in dialogical speech, is crucial but not necessary for making part of Bourdieu's habitus—because, for example, we still claim and get claimed as belonging to some group even when removed from the scrutiny and glare of others—then we can make part of any and many groups by means, not only of shifting our participatory behaviour from one set of the conventional behaviour patterns by which belonging to such a group is recognized, but also by believing that we continue to be disposed to comply with the conventions which we share with other people with whom we belong to other groups. In other words, individual identities and experiences never derive entirely from single segments of society. An individual can, in the space of a short time, move back and forth between emphasizing one or other part of their identity that comes from membership of either a national, professional, ethnic, or social community. Those who travel far to relocate home or frequently change jobs as participants in modern and aggressive economies know first-hand the toils of re-adjustments at professional and social levels. The pains of children's re-adjustments at school and in neighbourhood age-groups are well known to parents who undergo these transitions.

We can infer two things from the above: first, that communities are dialogically rather than ontologically constituted; second, that one can be part of multiple communities simultaneously—such as being both patriotic and cosmopolitan, or Luo and Kenyan, and others, all at one and the same time. Appiah puts it aptly thus:

The cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people...

In a world of cosmopolitan patriots, people would accept the citizen's responsibility to nurture the culture and politics of their homes. Many would, no doubt, spend their lives in the places that shaped them; and that is one of the

reasons local cultural practices would be sustained and transmitted. But many would move, and that would mean that cultural practices would travel also (as they have always travelled). The result would be a world in which each local form of human life was the result of long term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization: a world, in that respect, much like the world we live in now.<sup>20</sup>

Our own example above testifies to the cosmopolitanism that Appiah's father had wisely spoken of. It typifies the ever and increasingly changing socio-cultural character of the *kosmou* in which we represent the migratory roots of the change. Those who remain in their home-country experience identity shifts of a briefer order. According to Karp:

We experience these identities not as all-encompassing entities but through specific social events: encounters and social settings where identities are made relevant by the people participating in them. Communities are often thought of as things and given thinglike names such as 'the Irish', 'the blacks', 'the Jews', 'the WASPs'. But they are actually experienced as encounters in which cultures, identities, and skills are acquired and used. These settings can involve communal groups as small and intimate as the nuclear family or as large and institutional as the convention of a professional society. People form their primary attachments and learn to be members of society in these settings, which can be referred to collectively as the institutions of civil society.<sup>21</sup>

There are many examples that amplify further the flexibility of the idea of communal belonging as based on Bourdieu's action-response model; and such examples might amplify also the idea that one person can identify with multiple action-response communities at the same time. In the domain of religion, several families are made up of members who belong to or are related to people who profess Islam, Christianity and perhaps other modes of life that run on different spiritual tracks. Members of such households learn to relate to each other according to each person's or group's religious requirements in belief and conduct while breachlessly keeping their own. They learn to perform in the common place, but also when and how to retreat to their own respective domains of belief and behaviour.

This may be an over-idealization of religious convivance. Indeed much of our history is inherited from the effects of religious intolerance—wars, persecutions, and other forms of domination of those that either profess different things or none at all. There could not be a better time to directly point at religious intolerance in the world than now with the resurgence of religious extremist and fundamentalist movements which stretch from Afghanistan to Algeria to Sudan. As Nussbaum<sup>22</sup> points out, religion has been made a source of acts which from different theoretical or cultural value perspectives may seem to be great injustices committed against various groups of people, especially women and children. It is indeed a wonderful idea to point out, not only that some things in other cultures are radically different from our own, but also that they might not be right from our own positions. Exchanges between cultures is at least in part how cultural evolutions occur in history. The point, however, is not to mete out quick condemnations in such cases as is frequently done in imperialistic rhetoric disguised as universal moral duty.



These, we have seen, are often the best avenues for propping hardline conservative nationalist sentiments as forms of protection from unwarranted advocacy of cultural invasions and violations of the sovereignty of nations far from our own. The problem with Nussbaum's otherwise worth considering prescriptions—and this may also apply to Gross's idea of strong political morality—is that small groups of activists from distant lands often attempt to carry out revolutions in distant societies with little or no regard at all for the complex social and historical circumstances surrounding such problems.

The same agency with which people shift between different group identities provides the capacity with which they transform the cultures of those groups as much as the beliefs and practices already existing in those groups contain the individuals and groups who so move by forcing them to re-adjust. In 1966 and 1967, respectively, the late renowned Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek published *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, two separate but dialogically related monologues about conservative ethnocentrism on the one hand, and pluralist blending of traditions on the other. While in the first song *Lawino*, by far an ultra-conservative and defender of her people's traditions, argues for the separate African and Western cultural integrities, *Ocol*, her husband, an erudite elite open to other values and modes of thought, sees no contradiction in his being both an *Acioli* and an educated Ugandan politician. His lifestyle makes him capable of adopting seven new values into his life and relating to people from other cultures as a true cosmopolitan. The type of cultural debate that p'Bitek's texts prompted in the context of Africans' reconsideration of their identities within a changing world has recently been rekindled by Nussbaum's (1996) well-noted essay and subsequent debate on 'Patriotism and cosmopolitanism'.<sup>23</sup>

Nussbaum's essay raises as many questions as it answers others, both old and new. First it evokes the old question, part of which we already made reference to above in regard to the claim that patriotic sentiments limit people's ability to develop universally applicable moral values like justice and respect for humanity. Those who defend this view—and I do not separate myself from them by use of the distancing expression 'those'—can cite the gross abuses to humanity such as the holocaust, the Somalias, the Rwandas, the Balkans, and so on, as horrors that can emerge out of emphasis on the primacy of the particular when applied to fragmented socio-political orders. But I want to put emphasis on 'can emerge' rather than 'do emerge'. One of the questions that arise here is whether or not epistemological categories can and/or should be applied with wholeness to how we evaluate the worth or moral quality of social, political, and cultural processes with strict regard to their capacity to generate desirable moral goods. Another question is whether, based on historical evidence to the effect that emphasis on social fragmentations have caused calamities in the cases cited, it follows that patriotic sentiments are therefore bad, or whether the only way to prevent a repetition of such calamities is to recommend the eradication altogether of the bounded social groups which give rise to patriotic rather than cosmopolitan sentiments.

A response is not hard to get: celebrations of own culture need not lead to conflict with others merely on the basis of difference. While it is true that abuses of the reality of cultural differences have led to calamities, it is also true that abuse and violence against those unlike us is neither a necessary nor desirable part of the idea of difference. We must not lose track of the possibility that the kind of calamities we so readily cite have in some of these cases been caused by the desire for universality, by a drive to create a

homogeneous and universal sense of belonging.

Also, it should not be forgotten that people who live in culturally pluralist societies know and recognize the transcendence of the reality of the nation-state over the many ethnic groups that may socially and politically constitute it, and the greater vastness of the globe than their national limitations. Negotiations and contestations of the legitimacy of the nation-state along ethnic lines are often based on a desire for a political order that first, foremost and transparently respects merit above ethnic balance. Needless to say, ethnic balance far too frequently arises as a major political demand for public distributive fairness in ethnically pluralist societies. In those that I know, ethnic balance is never an independent value pursued for its own sake; it is an ancillary political value, after and dependent on the primacy of merit, and it becomes an issue only where there already is a claim of an apparent violation of meritocracy. How meritocracy is practised and justice is sustained is the struggle of every nation and part of every organized society's challenge in the distribution of public resources and goods. But in the manner of human weakness, especially at the political level, pride in one's ethnicity might unnecessarily be brought to bear on how one thinks and acts in the political arena. But it need not be so. I sure know of people most proud and loving of their ethnicities and who take every opportunity to express that pride and love, but who also, at the same time, are ardent believers in merit and justice. These people not only pride in being first members of their ethnic community and only secondarily members of their nation-state and thirdly citizens of the world, they even compete among themselves for who shall best embody the values of their beloved ethnic group. But they do not have to, and they do not, say 'My country [or community], right or wrong'.<sup>24</sup> They do not appear to need a lesson in cosmopolitanism in order to develop a love for humanity. There is need to realize that local people know far too well that they live in a cosmos and confront it everyday. As the celebrated Martiniquean man of Letters Aimé Césaire said once, 'there are two sure ways to lose oneself: either by bounding oneself in the windowless particular, or by throwing oneself into the unidentifiable universal'. He surely realized and wisely hinted at the compatibility between the local and global, the patriotic and cosmopolitan.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of language: Its nature, origin, and use*, New York: Praeger, 1986.
- 2 Thomas Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- 3 Meyer Fortes and E.E.Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African political systems*, London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.
- 4 Michael L.Gross, *Ethics and activism: The theory and practice of political morality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997:239.
- 5 Ibid.: 239.
- 6 Ibid.: 108.
- 7 Ibid.: 108.
- 8 Ibid.: 108.

- 9 Sandra T. Barnes, *Patrons and power: Creating a political community in metropolitan Lagos*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Thomas M. Callaghy, *The state-society struggle: Zaire in a comparative perspective*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Joel S. Migdal, *Strong societies and weak states: State-society relations and state capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Donald Rothchild and N. Chazan (eds.), *The precarious balance: State and society in Africa*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988.
- Donald Rothchild and V. Olorunsola (eds.), *State versus ethnic claims: African policy dilemmas*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983.
- 10 Martha C. Nussbaum and J. Cohen (eds.), *For love of country: Debating the limits of patriotism*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- 11 Pheng Cheah and B. Robbins (eds.), *Cosmopolitanisms: Thinking and feeling beyond the nation*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- 12 Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Patriotism and cosmopolitanism', in N. Nussbaum and J. Cohen (eds.), *For love of country: Debating the limits of patriotism*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996:2–17.
- 13 Ibid.: 5.
- 14 Ibid.: 11.
- 15 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso Books, 1983.
- 16 Pierre F. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990:14.
- 17 Corrine A. Kratz, *Affecting performance: Meaning, movement, and experience in Okiek women's initiation*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994:31.
- 18 Gross, op. cit.: 218 (note 4).
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Kwame A. Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan patriots', in J. Cohen (ed.), *For love of country: Debating the limits of patriotism*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996:22–23 (an expanded version printed in Cheah and Robbins (eds.), op. cit. (note 15)).
- 21 Ivan Karp, Introduction: Museums and communities: The politics of public culture', in I. Karp, C. Mullen Kreamer, and S. D. Lavine (eds.) *Museums and communities: The politics of public culture*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992:3–4.
- 22 Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Feminist Internationalism (The Seeley Lectures in Political Theory, Cambridge University): Lecture 3—The role of religion' (unpublished at the time of citation), 1998.
- 23 Nussbaum, op. cit. (note 16).
- 24 Appiah, op. cit.: 24 (note 24).

## Globalization and African Renaissance: An ethical reflection

M.F. MUROBE

This reader evaluates the viability of the African Renaissance in the context of

globalization. Globalization implies our relatedness and interrelatedness politically, economically, socially, and environmentally. The idea that everything is related and interrelated with everything else should thus form the basis for a global ethics.

However, globalization is not so much an option for African and other Third World countries as an imperative—they are pulled into global political, economic, and cultural relationships without their consent. Global wealth is unevenly distributed, while globalization is being seen as a refined version of colonialism. Rather than fostering a sense of common belonging in the global village, neo-liberal economic practices are bringing us back to the Darwinian jungle in which everything exists in a perpetual state of competition in pursuit of self-interest.

In Africa, there are two competing schools of thought in response to globalization. The first is Afro-pessimistic, asserting that Africa has failed to establish itself in a decisive way as an efficient member of the global economic system. Consequently, Africa finds itself increasingly marginalized because of continuing economic crises. According to the proponents of this school of thought, Africa's problems emanate from both the political and economic front. Politically, while there is a global move towards liberalism, Africa has been caught in the problem of 'the privatization of the state' and 'the liberalization of the economy'. As a result, there is no symbiotic relationship between economics and politics.<sup>1</sup> Related to this school of thought is the European-diffusionism theory, which sees the rise of Europe to world dominance as attributable to a unique European quality of race, environment, and culture, while progress for the rest of the world results from the diffusion of European civilization. Europe thus sets the pace for global civilization. Moreover, Afro-pessimists give us a picture of an Africa that has been completely incapacitated, where everything is dark and gloomy.

The second African view of globalization is that of cultural vindicationists. They have been successful in their deconstructionist efforts of what they perceive as the Western project of cultural bastardization of Africa through the use of colonial institutions and the hegemony of Western culture in African lives. The weakness of the cultural vindicationists is that, while they have been prolific in their deconstructionist project, they do not offer an alternative ethical theory and practice for Africa. The idea of globalization, moreover, poses a threat to the cultural vindicationists in the sense that globalization is evolving towards the idea that no culture is a closed system. The internationalization of exchanges between people now embraces all nations and cultures without exception.

The idea of the African Renaissance comes as an antithesis to the Afro-pessimist thesis. The African Renaissance is 'Afro-optimistic', and can only be realized through the social, economic, and political regional integration of African states. If the idea of Renaissance is to be brought to fruition, three transformations are necessary for the survival of Africa in the global village. Firstly, the politics of the 'privatization of the state' which has characterized African politics must be superseded by a politics that takes into account the socio-economic and political aspirations of the people. Secondly, this can only be achieved when African economies and politics are regionally unified to the extent that a single currency is formed. Thirdly, a paradigm shift in relations between people and the environment needs to form part of the new social, economic, and political arrangement. This can only happen within the ethical genre of relatedness and inter-

relatedness.

### THE ETHICS OF RELATEDNESS AND GLOBALIZATION

In a time when the world is seen as a global village, with neo-liberal capitalism as the only acceptable economic system, our ethics has to be situated within relatedness and interrelatedness. Exploring the ethics of relationships reveals what kinds of relationships are being fostered in the world today. In neo-liberal capitalism, relationships are motivated by interest or profit. The free market is seen as a sufficient mechanism to guarantee the well-being of society. At the same time, with the globalization of capital, the traditional concept of the state as a sovereign entity is being eroded, largely due to transnational corporations becoming dominant influences in the market to the extent that they are able to evade political and social accountability. Some economists see the present global market as an historical epoch that will bring about freedom for the individual from institutional relationships.<sup>2</sup>

This market ideology is being advocated by neo-liberal economists as the only source of salvation for African states. What we need to consider is that African countries and other poor countries could be victimized by this relationship, which is characterized by fierce and vicious competition. The success of powerful countries is based on their ability to prey on the economic and political weaknesses of poor countries. It is their own survival they are mostly concerned with rather than that of the poor countries. To ensure their own survival, for instance, European countries have mobilized their capital to form a union. The USA has responded by initiating selective trade agreements with other Third World countries. These initiatives point to the evolution of a politics of survival. This politics of survival is based on the conviction that all human societies flourish through a process whereby strong countries take advantage of weak countries in pursuit of their own good. The politics of greed and competition has been part of Western civilization for several hundred years. The metaphor of the survival of the fittest, of life as a Darwinian jungle, haunts much of our neo-liberal economic language.<sup>3</sup> The necessary consequence of weakness and failure is extinction. As early as the eighteenth century, a Dutch physician, Bernard de Mandeville, suggested strongly that it was greed and other 'abominable vices' that enabled the flourishing of wealth. While these were seen by moralists as private vices, they were also considered public virtues.<sup>4</sup>

Politically, the ideal in neo-liberal economic theory is that the primary function of government is to remove whatever shields protect weak and ill-adapted industries. Our global politics has been caught up with the fatalistic philosophy of *laissez-faire*. J.K. Galbraith argues that the philosophy of fatalism inherent in *laissez-faire* advocates that any interference in the market will have harmful effects. We must let the market work under its principles and all will come right in the end: 'Economic life has within itself the capacity to solve its own problems and for all to work out best in the end.'<sup>5</sup> This philosophy encourages us to think only in the short term, for, as Keynes said, 'In the long run we are all dead'. Karl Marx, in turn, notes the element of Greek tragedy embedded in the *laissez-faire* market economy:

Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world which he has called up by his spells.<sup>6</sup>

The assumption is that the market is a given tragedy of our existence.

The conviction that has emerged among neo-liberal economists is that since the market is a phenomenon of tragedy, it also follows that the welfare of society can only be achieved through self-interest. Thus one finds Frank Field advancing the thesis that only within a system reflecting self-interest can altruism be sustained in the long run. Field argues that self-interest and altruism need to be held in balance, with self-interest being the dominant value. He warns that if altruism is given too prominent a role, the likelihood is a political backlash which endangers the very operation of altruism within public welfare.<sup>7</sup> The tragedy is that self-interest is incompatible with altruism. This contradiction becomes an unresolved moral conflict in the sense that one who sacrifices his or her interests for the good of others will end up being seen as acting primarily for his or her own self-interest. But field and other neo-liberal economists do not see this moral conflict. To caricature this form of reasoning, we can say that we should be grateful to the selfish and greedy individuals of our society. It is their selfishness that sustains altruism. This is clearly a mockery of our moral sentiments, and reveals that the doctrine of self-interest is actually built on fallacious grounds.

It should be noted that many scholars believe that globalization entails the universalization of self-interest in international relations. Recently, wars have been fought in pursuit of the self-interests of certain countries. Realists argue that the conduct of international relations is not a matter of applying moral principles to the affairs of nations, but pursuing one's national self-interest. Ethical realists, in contrast, argue that there is no ethical principle which guides international relations among states. The idea that nations relate to each other in terms of self-interest is unethical because national self-interest cannot bring about solidarity at the global level. Gordon Graham argues that the economic policies of a particular country are not concerned with the well-being of another country, but with its economic self-interest. According to Graham, a politician who goes about promoting the interests of another country will be abusing power in the sense that s/he is not bound to promote the interests of another country. In other words, national interest in economic relations is morally neutral—it has nothing to do with ethical considerations.<sup>8</sup>

However, in this form of argument, it becomes difficult to argue for common interest at the global level in the sense that the present reality of globalization seems to go against an ethical theory which espouses the idea that national interest is neutral. The pursuit of national self-interest by the economically advanced countries has been experienced by African and other Third World countries as having a negative impact on global relationships. If we see globalization as implying that we are related and interrelated, it becomes nonsensical to talk of national interest apart from the global implications of this interest. Taking into consideration the fact that the world has become a giant market, responsible governments have to realize that their national interests are inter-twined. Instead of talking of national interest, we should perhaps talk of global interest so that we

might be able to come up with a global ethics.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, this global ethics has to arise from a conscious realization of the fact that our existence depends on the well-being of the whole. In this global consciousness there is an ethical attempt to transcend national self-interest and patriotism.

Most ethicists tend to see patriotism as the same as altruism, but I would argue that the two should be distinguished. In patriotism we tend to identify with a group, and see its fortunes to some degree as our fortunes. Socially, patriotism becomes an expression of the group's self-interest against the interest(s) of those who are classified as not belonging. Patriotism thus implies seeing one's country or race as possessing some superiority over any other race. The ethical implication is that one feels less obliged to help people of other countries than one's own fellow citizens. The bias of our ethics in respect to loyalty to the group as a whole shows itself in the high praise accorded to patriotism. We disapprove of selfish behaviour, but encourage group selfishness when it is called patriotism. In contrast, ancient thinkers such as the Stoic philosophers saw their loyalty as belonging to the world community instead of the state they were born in.<sup>10</sup> However, our contemporary understanding of patriotism is that it rests on the survival instinct. If we take globalization to imply that no one exists outside of relationships, we are also prone to see patriotism as a misplaced sentiment. A world where no one is 'outside' becomes one where a patriot cannot avoid communicating with others in many alternative cultural ways of life. To a patriot, the dialogic relation established is one that presumes the separateness of the 'alien'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, to foster a global ethic on the paradigm of relatedness and interrelatedness we need to go beyond patriotism. We need to see ourselves as belonging to a larger reality beyond that which is contextual. We need to learn to think of those people who stay in lands far away from our own as our relatives regardless of language, colour, and culture. This can only be possible when globalization is essentially 'action at distance'.<sup>12</sup>

This idea is contradicted by those scholars who postulate the survival of one's culture as the goal of all living. In this form of reasoning one's culture is seen as in a state of competition with other cultures. Its survival is premised on its ability to outsmart other cultures. This is the impression one gets from B.F. Skinner: 'Our culture has produced the science and technology it needs to save itself. But if it continues to take freedom and dignity, rather than its own survival, as its principle value, then it is possible that some other culture will make a greater contribution in the future.'<sup>13</sup> The salient feature of Skinner's argument is that of cultural competitiveness as important for national survival. Instead of seeing globalization in terms of cultural competitiveness, we should attempt to see globalization in terms of multiculturalism based on the ethos of dialogic engagement. In this dialogic engagement we should cultivate an outlook based on the idea that no culture has the monopoly on truth, but that each culture is nourished and invigorated by constant dialogue with other cultures. In practice, this implies a global effort to build a common ethical point of view around the idea of our common belonging—that we belong to each other as human beings and to the environment. However, any attempt to campaign for a global ethics remains Utopian to the arch-advocates of self-interest. Their argument is that the demise of socialism and the resultant globalization of capitalism justifies their intuition that self-interest has a survival value in the long run.

## GLOBALIZATION AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC THEORY OF SELF-INTEREST

Various postmodernist economists argue that those countries which are economically successful have a strong moral basis and operate within a strong moral framework. Their notion of 'a strong morality is actually based on the Darwinian concept of 'the survival of the fittest':

For human beings it is the struggle rather than the achievement that matters; we are made for action, and the achievement can prove to be a great disappointment. The ambition, whatever it may be, sets the struggle in motion, but the struggle is more enjoyable than its own result, even when the objective is fully achieved.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason, the struggle for survival and competition is seen as the primary characteristic of our global relationships. The question is: can there be an alternative to this global Darwinian jungle? Heinrich Gossen thinks not:

Organize your actions for your own benefit. God implanted self-interest in the human breast as the motive force of progress. By following self-interest we follow God's will. Going against self-interest only inhibits God's plan... How can a creature be so arrogant as to want to frustrate totally or partially the purpose of his creator?<sup>15</sup>

Neo-liberal economists see self-interest as a mechanism of natural selection as propounded in Darwin's *Origin of species*. What this means is that those individuals who control the rules of the global economy, its language and logic, its resource allocation, its markets, will survive in the long run. It logically follows that poor countries are endangered species. Indeed it is their perishing which gives progress to the rich countries. Darwin insinuated the undesirability of the existence of the poor when he said that: 'With savages, the weak in body are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibited a vigorous state of health.' For Darwin, this was a natural process of elimination which should not be interfered with through welfarism, a negative intervention against natural selection. His abhorrence for welfarism comes out strongly when he says that:

We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save life of every one to the last moment. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.<sup>16</sup>

According to Darwin, our humanitarian efforts to build a compassionate and sympathetic society are the very causes for the propagation of endless misery. The ideal would be that



poor people should be left for nature to take its course. When bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank advise governments to cut spending on social welfare, are they motivated by a lack of morality, the Darwinian theory of natural selection, instead of a morality of our common belonging? In global neo-liberal economic relations, an ethic of common belonging remains illusory: firstly, global relationships are still dichotomized between the G7's affluent economic 'gangsters' and the rest of the world. Secondly, most Third World countries have been kept in the captivity of perpetual debt. Thirdly, the current neo-liberal economic theory does not concur with the new science and the new biology which seem to advance the idea that all life is held together with a thread of interconnectedness.

If reality is related and interrelated to everything else, it follows that the present dualistic economic and political system should be substituted with another, more holistic, economic model. From denying relationships among people, neo-liberal economic theory, modelled on the Darwinian paradigm, denies relatedness between people and the environment. Our present global socio-economic and political structure encourages the externalizing and objectifying of human beings and the environment. It accentuates the competitive element, and equates self-interest with the common good. This juxtaposition also distorts the capacity of objective thinking so that even much of what passes for science is tainted by ideology.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, neo-liberal economics sees the environment as existing independently of economic activities. Its relationships with the environment are ambivalent in that economic activities are derived from the environment and yet the environment is not seen as a partner in creativity. Alfred North Whitehead sees this as 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. He traced this back to Adam Smith, the father of classical liberal economics. Whitehead defines the fallacy of misplaced concreteness as 'neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought'.<sup>18</sup>

Neo-liberal economic theory as a science is entirely based on deductive reasoning whereby generalizations are taken as absolutes. This type of reasoning takes the particular and makes it the universal. In so doing the particular remains unaccounted for in relation to the whole. According to Whitehead, 'this methodology of reasoning requires the limitations involved in the abstract. Accordingly, the true rationalism must always transcend itself by recurrence to the concrete in search of inspiration. A self-satisfied rationalism is in effect a form of anti-rationalism.'<sup>19</sup> In relation to other disciplines, neo-liberal economic theory seems to have found an ally in mathematics as if economics has nothing to do with human beings. When dealing with human beings, it sees them as closed entities interacting with each other in pursuit of self-interest. For the neo-liberal economic methodology to prevail, it needs individuals rather than societies. The neo-liberal economy sees the market as a place where individuals express their freedom to choose what kind of product they prefer. It is also presumed that the market should not be interfered with since it naturally distributes resources spontaneously.<sup>20</sup> The role which is attributed to the market echoes Adam Smith's famous 'invisible hand'. Smith believed that the free market mechanism operating under the laws of demand and supply would naturally lead to the flourishing of the common good of society. David Hume expressed the same conviction in his essay 'On the independency of parliament', arguing that when a government fixes the checks and balances of the constitution, every

person should be seen as existing self-interestedly, and the individual's actions have no end apart from private interest.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, it was self-interest which gave rise to parliamentary politics. The political participation of citizens in politics is motivated by the need to safeguard and advance one's self-interest. The role of the government becomes that of protecting the individual's self-interest. Those who see the government as there to promulgate laws of its own are misguided in the sense that they simply do not understand the basic feature of human nature. Moreover, any attempt by government to come up with rules to organize society is actually illusory, for the reason that 'man of system' as Smith called him, 'seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges different pieces upon a chess-board in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislator might choose to impress upon it'.<sup>22</sup> This implies that the wealth of nations is not based on governmental planning, but on the freedom of individuals to exchange, specialize, and extend their markets. While engaging in the pursuit of their self-interests, individuals or nations end up promoting the common good. Smith's moral paradigm was that of participants in a system that moralized self-interest within a free market system without government intervention.

I would argue, in contrast, that the global market is an expression of relationships in which individuals make political and economic decisions that produce economic and political consequences. When the USA was considering the African Growth Opportunity Act aimed at creating investment funds and developing a free trade agreement with Africa, President Clinton expressed the spirit of the legislation as follows: 'We are going to pay more attention to those who are making the right political and economic reforms. We want to help the magnets of change. Sub-Saharan Africa is still a largely untapped market of 600 to 700 million people.' Lawrence Summers is reported to have said to the US Congress that: 'It leaves one with a sense of tremendous opportunity and potential'.<sup>23</sup> This example shows that economically powerful countries do give shape to the political and economic design of poor countries—be it for good or bad.

Two mechanisms which are used by economically powerful countries to bring about this effect are aid and investment. With these two mechanisms, powerful countries pronounce damnation or blessings on poor countries! Their intention is not to promote the well-being of Africa, but to persuade Africa to embrace the liberal market system. The market, being driven by self-interest, cannot accommodate the interests of the majority of people who have no access to a basic livelihood. In fact, the market depends on a society's readiness to sacrifice its citizens. This has been a crucial issue in IMF and World Bank lending policies. At the 'micro-economic level', these financial institutions insist that African governments should cut welfare spending, and not interfere with the market. At the 'macro-economic level', governments should allow the mobility of capital. It is only upon the fulfilment of these policies that loans are given, depending on the economic performance of the country in question.<sup>24</sup> The aim of these lending policies is to advance the liberalization of the economy and the mobility of capital—the lending policies are basically modelled on the needs of the liberal economies of the North.

The economic dominance of the developed countries thus did not come about as a result of a spontaneous order, but through an extensive exploitation of natural resources,

guided by the logic that these resources would never end. However, resources are finite, which implies that scarcity of resources will eventually lead to the collapse of the global free market system. An economic system based on self-interest, for this reason, cannot bring about the global common good. Such an economic system will ultimately militate against itself in the long run. An alternative ethical paradigm that is able to address the concerns of globalization has to emerge from a world-view based on relatedness and interrelatedness. Africa's economic and political well-being does not lie in subsuming the neo-liberal economic system under the ambit of globalization as the proponents of Afro-pessimism would have us believe. They argue that the global economic liberal ethos is contradicted by the logic of African politics.

### **SITUATING THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE WITHIN THE DISCOURSE OF AFRO-PESSIMISM**

The argument enshrined in the Afro-pessimist thesis is that Africa's problems emanate from the political and economic front. Politically, while there is a global move towards liberalism, Africa has been caught in the double-bind of the privatization of the state and the liberalization of the economy. Consequently, the advocates of this thesis argue that there is no symbiotic relationship between economics and politics, and, furthermore, that the global liberal economic ethos is incompatible with African political practices.

Ali Mazrui, in his article 'Seek ye first the political kingdom', argues that African politicians gave primacy to politics over economics.<sup>25</sup> Too much emphasis on politics led to the deterioration of the economy. But Mazrui sees the African economic turmoil as the consequence of the colonial design, arguing that colonial rule created an educated political elite without creating an economic vanguard for Africa's development. Colonialism also failed to transfer the skills of production from colonial institutions to an independent Africa. As he puts it:

Africa's industrial capacity to use its own minerals is pathetic. Even our capacity to dig for these minerals without foreign equipment, expertise and organization, is astonishingly modest. The continent still produces from its mines what it is unable to use; and imports for use what it is unable to produce.<sup>26</sup>

Within the Western tradition, in contrast, economic principles gave rise to political arrangements.

This creates the problem of incompatibility between African politics and the tradition of liberal economics. The economic institutions which Africa inherited from colonialism were built on neo-liberal economic principles, and cannot be run efficiently under political totalitarianism. The tendency in African politics has been to encourage economic competition while suppressing political competition. The consequences of this glaring mismatch, as Mazrui sees it, were that:

...the continent had received Western consumption patterns without Western productive techniques. Western tastes without Western performance, urbanization without industrialization, capitalist greed without the atonement of

efficiency.<sup>27</sup>

The implication is that Africa can only bring about genuine transformation if it models its political and economic practices on the Western economic and political liberal ethic.

A factor vitiating against African Renaissance emanates from the relationship between economic and political liberalization. In some instances, political pluralism tended to be economically destabilizing. In such countries, there has been a genuine moral dilemma: the choice between political freedom or economic development. Sometimes the IMF and World Bank have preferred to finance military regimes rather than those which were democratically elected, with the aim of encouraging economic liberalization. Africa is thus at risk of economic dependency on the one hand and economic decay on the other.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, Africa has remained an economic patient breathing under the life-support machine of the IMF, World Bank, and other foreign donors.

However, while the Afro-pessimist thesis is valid, it is limited, primarily due to its failure to provide a political and economic alternative. If we are to use this thesis in relation to what has been said about the current global ethic, it provides us with a solid background on which we should endeavour to build our vision of the African Renaissance. In other words, the political and economic well-being of Africa has to be initiated within Africa itself. The African Renaissance has to start with the idea that Africa is endowed with a creative potential which can make a difference to its people and the global village at large.

But there is another side to the Afro-pessimist thesis. This version is a refined form of racism, asserting that the African moral outlook is incompatible with economic development. For example, Stephen Theron sees the economic problems of Africa as emanating from African cosmology. He argues that the African ethical maxim of *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu* is faulty:

Quite simply, if a person is a person through persons then no one is a person. The closest thing to a person would seem to be the tribe. For the proverb certainly does not simply say, nor does it mean that a person only comes to be through other persons. Rather, it says that among the appearances of human beings only those are persons, and thus possessed of the corresponding dignity, who are in a certain relation with other persons (circularity remains), who are not, for example, cut off from the tribe.<sup>29</sup>

Theron's extremely Afro-pessimist thesis has some metaphysical assumptions. The first is that the African collective outlook towards life is out of touch with reality. The second is that seeing a person as belonging to society swallows the individual into the collective, thereby depriving him or her of uniqueness. In other words, it is the doctrine of atomic individualism upon which Africa has to develop its moral cognition of what it means to be human, if it wants to guarantee economic progress and development. In a way, for there to be an African Renaissance, the African moral understanding of a human being has to be rejected. As he puts it:

A sound philosophy of personality, that is, has to be biologically, not socially, still less tribally based. Then the invidious question, who is or is not a person,

just does not arise. As for the ethical implications, the proverb simply side-steps the slow Western development of the idea of personal responsibility. One cannot even drive a car safely unless the driver realizes that it depends on him and him alone whether the car stays on the road. The proverb teaches Africans to evade responsibility, rather, to hide behind the collective decision of the tribe.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, for there to be development in Africa, Africans need to conceptualize a human being as a biological entity who pursues his or her own interests for his or her own survival. Theron sees this as a moral maxim upon which technological advancement has to be premised. For him, Africa cannot achieve technological advancement within its ethical paradigm of collectivism as espoused in the proverb of *Ubuntu*. But Theron's analogy of a car that stays on the road because of the individual's realization of his (or her, it should be added) responsibility towards it gives us an easy weapon to destroy his doctrine. For the car to stay on the road, it also depends on factors outside of the individual: the safety of the road surface, the attentiveness of other drivers, weather conditions, and so on. Theron talks of individual responsibility as if these factors do not exist. A proper understanding of responsibility should be that which sees the individual's well-being as immersed in a web of relationships. In a world which has increasingly become ravaged by economics and politics of self-interest, African Renaissance has to make recourse to its ethical values enshrined in *Ubuntu*. I would go so far as to argue that the African concept of *Ubuntu* should be the basis upon which all political and economic discourse should be predicated.

### THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND CULTURAL VINDICATION

The African Renaissance should also be seen in the context of the vogue for cultural vindication. Cultural vindication was expressed in the concept of *négritude* by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sedar Senghor as an attempt to communicate with the Western world. Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* and Kenneth Kaunda's *A humanist in Africa* also attempt to vindicate the African ethos against the onslaught of colonial political and economic arrangements. A classic example of this onslaught can be found in Hamilton Johnston's book, *A history of Africa by alien races*:

The Negro, more than any other human type, has been marked by his mental and physical characteristics as the servant of other races... In his primitive state he is born a slave. He is possessed of great physical strength, docility, cheerfulness of disposition, a short memory for sorrows and cruelties, and an easily aroused gratitude of kindness and just dealing. He does not suffer from homesickness to the over-bearing extent that afflicts other peoples torn from their homes, and provided he is well fed, he is easily made happy. Above all, he can toil hard under the sun and in the unhealthy climates of the torrid zone. He has little or no race fellowship, that is to say he has no sympathy for other Negroes; he recognizes, follows, and imitates his master independently of race affinities.<sup>31</sup>

It was characteristic of the colonizers to evaluate people who did not share their value systems as pagan, barbaric, primitive, and savage. Within this evaluation of other people,

there is an epistemological fallacy of mental superiority: the white man is best suited to working things out with his intellect while the African has to toil it under the sun. The same sentiment is expressed by Lord Leverhuime:

Now the organizing ability is the particular trait and characteristic of the white man... I say this with my little experience, that the African native will be the best, and live under the larger conditions of prosperity when his labour is directed and organized by his white brother who has all these million years' start ahead of him.<sup>32</sup>

Cultural vindicationists were horrified by this ideology built on the belief that European people were superior to all other peoples. At the heart of this ideology was the racist conviction that Africans were like children—immature and un(der) developed. This belief promoted asymmetrical relationships between Europe and non-European countries. All countries of the world were seen as gradually moving towards the adoption of the European ethos. International morality implied shared moral norms among European countries. This belief is popularly known as 'European Diffusionism'. It can be seen in the work of Afro-pessimist scholars who have developed the habit of tracing African economic history from the time of colonialism and not before, arguing that Europe is developed because of an inherent economic ethos which Africa has to subsume if it is to achieve economic development. At the centre of this theory is the idea that 'the world as a whole has one permanent centre from which culture-changing ideas tend to originate, and a vast periphery changes as a result (mainly) of diffusion from the centre'.<sup>33</sup>

In reaction to European diffusionism, African cultural vindicationists saw the communal outlook of African people as providing fertile grounds for socialism. This can be deduced from the writings of former leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Tom Mboya, Kenneth Kaunda, Léopold Senghor, and Kwame Nkrumah.<sup>34</sup> They argued that in the African traditions there is an understanding of wealth as being at the service of the community rather than for the benefit of individuals; therefore capitalism was incompatible with traditional African society. Nyerere puts it strongly: Traditionally we lived as families, with individuals supporting each other and helping each other on terms of equality... This attitude is basically what we mean by saying that traditionally African society was a socialist society.<sup>35</sup> Nyerere's argument gives the impression that the African ethic of collectivism was a relic of the past which needs to be exhumed and applied to the present. Tom Mboya, in turn, argued that socialism had existed in traditional African society even though there was a lack of a name for it. Mboya argues: 'I have not suggested that we have to go delving into the past seeking socialism. It is a continuing tradition among our people.'<sup>36</sup> Similarly, instead of arguing for socialism as an ethic of the past, we find Senghor arguing that it exists within African society: 'Negro African society is collectivist, or, more exactly, communal because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals... Africa had realized socialism before the coming of Europeans but we must renew it by helping it to regain a spiritual dimension.'<sup>37</sup> What Senghor found lacking in Western socialism was the spiritual aspect which he saw as embedded in African collectivism. While Senghor linked socialism to the ethic of collectivism, Kwame Nkrumah linked it to democracy as two aspects of

socio-economic and political life rooted in African ethics:

Democracy has been always for us not a matter of technique but more than technique—a matter of socialist goals and aims. It was, however, not only our socialist aims that were democratically inspired, but also the methods of their pursuit were socialist.<sup>38</sup>

Nkrumah deliberately linked socialism to democracy with the intention of differentiating African socialism from Western socialism. Within the history of Western political thinking and practice, democracy has been coupled with liberal capitalism in such a way that the politics of democracy is synonymous with capitalist economic practices.

Instead of arguing explicitly about socialism, some African cultural vindicationists prefer to argue for African humanism as the starting point for economic and political transformation. For example, Kenneth Kaunda has argued that, ‘The tribal community was an inclusive society. By this I mean the web of relationships which involved some degree of mutual responsibility was widely spread’.<sup>39</sup> But the idea of situating economic discourse in the African ethic of relatedness upsets the dualistic debate of socialism versus capitalism. As an example, in neo-liberal economic theory, economic rules are applied in a mechanical way as if they are independent of human beings; socialism tends to relegate human aspirations to material satisfaction, a characteristic which capitalism and socialism seem to share.

However, the problem with the thesis of the African cultural vindicationists lies within the logic of subsumptive rationality. According to this logic, if an economic feature counted in favour in situation B because of reasons XYZ, we should also conclude that all economic features with reasons XYZ will count in favour in situation C. To upset this kind of logic, we simply have to note that there are no realities which are constant. If we see globalization as implying relatedness and interrelatedness, we should account for culture in terms of change or becoming. The idea of globalization challenges African cultural vindicationists to go beyond cultural self-vindication. The problem which they overlook is that the economic and political problems of Africa are mostly from within rather than from outside. For Africa to be able to assume a meaningful neighbourliness in the global village there is an urgent need for it to reorganize itself. For this reason, I would like to turn to the idea of African Renaissance as a plausible ethical solution for the survival of Africa in the global village.

### **ETHICAL PREREQUISITES FOR AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

If the idea of African Renaissance is to be brought to fruition, three transformations are needed in Africa. Firstly, the ‘privatization of the state’ which has characterized African politics since independence must be superseded by a politics that takes into consideration regional population composition.<sup>40</sup> The politics of the privatization of the state which most politicians in Africa are dedicated to is a glaring contradiction of the principles of neo-liberal economics—which African states have also embraced. The privatization of the state gives us the impression that morality and politics are incompatible in the sense that politicians act for their own personal self-interest rather than for the common good. The ideal which had previously inspired African nation-building has been that of:

building of states and national communities, building economies able to satisfy the needs of the people and weaving a network of inter-African and international relations that would help to realize the global political options, while at the same time transforming the values that underlie international transactions.<sup>41</sup>

This ideal has never been realized due to personal ambitions on the part of African leaders. Sometimes this ambition has resulted in identifying the political party with the state, thereby doing away with the ethos of multi-partyism. This, for instance, was the legacy of Julius Nyerere:

Now that the colonialists have left, there is no longer any division between the rulers on the one hand and the ruled on the other... Multi-partyism is a luxury that we in Africa cannot afford. We have too little time and there is too much to do to allow ourselves such an idle pastime.<sup>42</sup>

Sekou Toure expressed the same logic when he argued that the State must identify itself with the party so as to form the unbreakable trilogy of people, party and state.<sup>43</sup> In this context, universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation. The morality of our common belonging or our relatedness and interrelatedness is relativized as the individual statesman takes the public good as synonymous with his or her private self-interest. While morality demands that we ask whether this politics is in accord with moral values, private owners of the state are primarily concerned with a particular political act on the premise that it enables the re-embedding of the power of state. In such arrangements, state power is the statesman's power. For private owners of the state, power has a dual function. Those who are attracted by it are prepared to be destroyed by it as well as to destroy those who do not submit to it. Power can only be maintained when the public is made to understand that it originates from a single source, and is preserved through the cutting of communication. This lack of communication makes citizens wholly dependent on the one who has information.

The exercise of power has been excessive within African domestic politics but extremely weak internationally. Ki-Zerbo, Mazrui, Wondji, and Boahen argue that African Renaissance can only be possible within the paradigm of 'a new capitalist ethic', and not through privatization: 'Privatization on its own does not make an African economy produce more. The prestige motive operates both privately and at the state level, ominously eating away into the resources of the country.'

The global Western call to privatization is intended to bring about the profit motive in African countries, but the consumption motive prevails. These authors argue that capitalism came to Africa without the Protestant ethic of 'work and frugality', but rather 'with the imperative of acquisition':

The white man himself in Africa set a dangerous example. He never washed his own clothes, or cooked his own food, or polished his own shoes, or made his own bed, or cleaned his own room, or even poured his own gin and tonic! The luxurious aristocratic life of white settlers as they played masters to African servants was detrimental to the spirit of the capitalism the white man himself had arrived with.<sup>44</sup>



According to these authors, this was the incarnation of the spirit of consumption without hard work and saving. The colonial-settler's means of acquiring wealth gave impetus to the idea that entrepreneurship is similar to acquisitiveness. For an independent Africa, the goal became acquiring wealth for individual personal aggrandizement regardless of the means or consequences to the common good. The nationalist liberation sentiment, based on the idea of reclaiming stolen land, poses an ethical dilemma for development and creativity in Africa. On the one hand, we can judge it an ideal worth striving for in the sense that it entails equitable distribution of land among citizens. However, it also creates the impression that development entails going backwards by reclaiming the past. While the past has an objective immortality, it can only enable economic development when brought into a new creative synthesis with the present.

But Africa also needs a creative ideology which can facilitate the political and economic integration of African states on a regional basis. Colonial rule brought together people who had previously lived separately, and divided people who were once united. This created ethnic tensions and conflicts of values. The solution lies in purposeful regional integration and a shared experience of ideas and values.<sup>45</sup> The problem which needs to be re-evaluated is that of ethnicity. The idea of categorizing Africans in terms of tribes and ethnic groupings was a colonial invention, if not a political ideology aimed at promoting and perpetuating the policies of separateness. Terrence Ranger argues that the term 'tribe', used to denote group identity, was devised by missionaries and colonialists as an organizing concept. During the colonial era, Africans were classified in tribes for the sake of political and ideological expedience. Tribes were defined as cultural units, possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established customary law. Ranger argues that:

The reinforcement of ethnicity and greater rigidity of social definition were the necessary and unplanned consequences of colonial economic and political change—of the break up of internal patterns of trade and communication, the defining of territorial boundaries, the alienation of land, the establishment of Reserves. But some part of them were the result of conscious determination on the part of the colonial authorities to re-establish order and security and a sense of community by means of defining and enforcing tradition.<sup>46</sup>

British indirect rule, for instance, divided people into reserves or homelands where they were organized in terms of tribes. The aim of indirect rule was to turn African people into labour units, to selectively promote the interests of the colonizers and to ward off political pressure that might arise from Africans. What motivated colonial powers to create native reserves was thus the advancement of their own economic and political interests. At the same time, the colonial powers were afraid to live in harmony with indigenous people for fear of competition with those whom they judged inferior. This idea comes out strongly in the two objectives spelt out for the establishment of Native Reserves:

Firstly, the full economic development of the native in such a way that they will come as little as possible in conflict or competition with the white man socially, economically and politically, and to see the reserves as a home for the

progressive as well as for the conservative native, a background with which the progressive native will be in harmony, a focusing point for progressive native ideas.<sup>47</sup>

Another reason which has been suggested by psychologists as the reason for the ideology of separate existence, had its origins in Europe's ethic of the self. The encounter with people who understood themselves collectively must have been a maddening experience. Ania Loomba has suggested that:

The individual European faces the alien hordes, and if he identifies with them, if he transgresses the boundary between 'self' and 'other', he regresses into primitive behaviour, into madness...there was a great concern to describe and pathologize Africans in general in order to then define the European as inherently different.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, for colonial people—who came from a cultural background which taught them that they were 'selves'—the encounter with a culture which reminded them of relatedness would have left them with no option but to reassert themselves as autonomous 'selves'. The idea of dividing African people into ethnic groupings was to protect the 'self from being engulfed by the other'. In this way, the 'other' would exist separately but at the same time contribute to the economic well-being of the 'self through labour.

But there are African scholars who argue that ethnicity is inherent to African people and that African politicians use it as a tool to achieve and control political power.<sup>49</sup> If ethnicity is a political resource tool for African politicians, one would expect African politicians to bear the moral responsibility of ending it. During the struggle against colonialism African politicians were able to mobilize support beyond ethnic boundaries. Given the history of African politics, can—and will—African politicians do that again? If they managed to attain power through manipulating ethnic sentiments, to encourage them to see beyond ethnicity would actually be encouraging them to commit an act of political suicide.

Globalization, by implying that cultures influence each other consciously and unconsciously, calls for a response which goes beyond ethnic politics. The African Renaissance should also go beyond ethnic politics by aiming at the regional integration of African states into a union. What would be the economic, political and social implications of an integrated Southern Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, West Africa and North Africa? African nationstates on their own are too superficial to enable a genuine political and economic transformation. These divided states are predatory in terms of both socio-economic and political development, and are not viable without international economic aid. Africa has the resources to reverse this sorry story by pooling its resources for a greater common good. Bringing such a vision to fruition calls for vocational politics rather than professional politics. By vocational politics, I mean that type of politics that transcends the individual politician's self-interest, enabling the politician to sacrifice his personal good to the common good. In contrast, professional politics is primarily motivated by the survival instincts of the individual politician. In this paradigm, politics becomes a game, in which there are no ethical consequences for one's actions. The common good is reduced to the individual's self-interest. Our experience of African

politics has shown that politics has been divorced from ethics or *Ubuntu*.

But the socio-economic theory of self-interest cannot bring about the common good. The survival of African states can only be guaranteed if there is regional political and economic integration. In this way, then, the African Renaissance should imply a moral and political renaissance.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Mazrui, A.A. 'Towards the year 2000', in A.A. Mazrui and C.Wondji (eds.), *General history of Africa: VIII Africa since 1935*, Los Angeles: James Currey, 1999:923–924.
- 2 Davidson, J.D. and Rees-Mogg, W. *The sovereign individual: The coming economic revolution: How to survive and prosper in it*, London: Macmillan, 1997:82–114.
- 3 Radcliffe, T. *Sing a new song: The Christian vocation*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1999:13–15.
- 4 Mandeville, B. *The fable of the bees: Or private vices, Publick Benefits*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1732:18–36.
- 5 Galbraith, J.K. *The culture of contentment*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992:79.
- 6 Singer, P. *How are we to live? Ethics in an age of self-interest*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1995:33.
- 7 Field, F. 'Altruism, self-interest and the sustainability of welfare'. *The Month*, (12), 1999:461.
- 8 Graham, G. Ethics and international relations, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997:26–30.
- 9 Kung, H. (ed.). *Yes to a global ethic*, London: SCM Press, 1996.
- 10 Singer, P. *The expanding circle: Ethics and sociobiology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1987:51–52.
- 11 Beck, U.Giddens, A., and Lash, S. *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.
- 12 Ibid.:96.
- 13 Skinner, B.F. *Beyond freedom and dignity*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1988:181.
- 14 Davidson and Rees-Mogg 1997:354.
- 15 Gossen, H.H. *Laws of human relations and the rules of human action derived therefrom*, Boston: MIT Press, 1983.
- 16 Lux, K. *Adam Smith's mistake: How a moral philosopher invented economics and ended morality*, London: Shambhala, 1990.
- 17 Cobb, J.B. Jr, 'Process theology and the environmental issues', *The Journal of Religion*, (60), 1980:440–458.
- 18 Quoted in H.E.Daly (ed.). *For the common good: Redirecting the economy toward community, the environment and a sustainable future*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994:36.
- 19 Ibid.: 38.
- 20 Smith, A. *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, R.H.Campbell and A.S. Skinner (eds.), New York: Liberty Press, 1969:456.
- 21 Green, T.H. and Grose, T.H. *Essays moral, political and literary*, London:

- Longman, 1898:117–118.
- 22 Smith, A. *The theory of moral sentiments*, New York: Liberty Classics, 1969:380–381.
- 23 Scholz, D. ‘Markets for people or people for markets’, *Mukai: Bulletin of Theological Reflections*, (15), September 1995:23–35.
- 24 Mosley, P. (ed.), *Aid and power: The World Bank and policy-based lending*, London: Routledge, 1991:65–112.
- 25 Mazrui, A. and Wondji, C. (eds.), *General history of Africa: VII Africa since 1935*, California: James Currey, 1999:105–126.
- 26 Ibid.: 921.
- 27 Ibid.: 922.
- 28 Ibid.: 923–924.
- 29 Theron, S. *African philosophy and the Western tradition: An essay in self-understanding*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995:34–365.
- 30 Ibid.: 35.
- 31 Davis, H. A nation is a nation is a...’, *African Affairs*, 72(289), 1973:385.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Blaut, J.M. *The colonizer’s model of the world: Geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history*, London: Macmillan, 1993:69.
- 34 Kaunda, K. *A humanist in Africa*, London: Camelot Press, 1966; Mboya, T. *Kenya Weekly News*, Nairobi, 2 August 1963; Nyerere, J.K. *Freedom and socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; Nkrumah, K. *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*, New York: International Publishers, 1964.
- 35 Nyerere 1968:198.
- 36 Mboya, T. *Transition*, Kampala, 3(11), November 1963:6.
- 37 Senghor, L.S. *On African socialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965:29.
- 38 Nkrumah 1964:155.
- 39 Kaunda 1966:29.
- 40 Mazrui 1999:923–924.
- 41 Ki-Zerbo, J., Mazrui, A., Wondji, C., and Boahen, A. ‘Nation-building and changing political values’, in *General history of Africa VIII: Africa since 1935*, California: James Currey, 1999:470.
- 42 Nyerere 1968:48.
- 43 Toure, A.S. cited by L.Sylla, 1977:245–247.
- 44 Ki-Zerbo et al. 1999:493–494.
- 45 Ibid.: 496.
- 46 Ranger, T. ‘The invention of tradition in colonial Africa’, in T.Ranger and E.Hobsbawn (eds.), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993:243.
- 47 Wilson, N.H. ‘The development of native reserves’, *The Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual*, 1923:87–88.
- 48 Loomba, A. *Golonialism/postcolonialism: The new critical idiom*, London: SCM Press, 1998:137–138.
- 49 See, for example, M.Sithole, ‘The salience of ethnicity in African politics: The case

for Zimbabwe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, xx(3-4), 1985:187.

### Alienation and the African-American experience

HOWARD MCGARY

The term 'alienation' evokes a variety of responses. For liberals, to be alienated signals a denial of certain basic rights, for example the right to equality of opportunity or the right to autonomy.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, progressive thinkers believe that alienation involves estrangement from one's work, self, or others because of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> However, recent discussions of alienation have cast doubt on whether either of these theories totally captures the phenomenon. Drawing on the experiences of people of colour, some theorists maintain that to be alienated is to be estranged in ways that cannot be accounted for by liberal and Marxist theories of alienation.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of alienation is often associated with Marx's conception of human beings in capitalist societies. However, non-Marxists have also used the term alienation to explain the experiences of human beings in relationship to their society, each other, their work, and themselves. But liberal theories of alienation have been criticized by Marxists for two reasons. First they see liberal theories of alienation as describing a psychological condition that is said to result from a denial of basic individual rights rather than the result of a systematic failure. Second, liberals have an account of human nature that is historical, one that fails to consider the changes in human nature that result from changes in social conditions.

For the Marxist, alienation is not simply a theory of how people feel or think about themselves when their rights are violated, but an historical theory of how human beings act and how they are treated by others in capitalist society. The Marxist theory of alienation is an explanatory social theory that places human beings at the centre of the critique of socio-economic relations. Marx's human being is not a stagnant given, but a product of an explanatory social theory. For Marx, alienation is something that all human beings experience in capitalist societies; it is not something that certain individuals undergo because they are neurotic or the victims of some unjust law or social practice.

It is clear that African-Americans have not always been recognized and treated as American citizens or as human beings by the dominant white society. Both of these forms of denial have had serious negative consequences and numerous scholars have discussed what these denials have meant to African-Americans and to the rest of society. However, it does not directly follow from the fact of these denials that African-Americans are alienated because of these things. In this paper, I shall attempt to understand this new challenge to the liberal and Marxist theories of 'alienation' and its impact, if any, on the masses of African-Americans.

### THE NEW ACCOUNT OF ALIENATION

According to the new account of alienation that is drawn from the experiences of people of colour, alienation exists when the self is deeply divided because the hostility of the dominant groups in the society forces the self to see itself as loathsome, defective, or

insignificant, and lacking the possibility of ever seeing itself in more positive terms. This type of alienation is not just estrangement from one's work or a possible plan of life, but an estrangement from ever becoming a self that is not defined in the hostile terms of the dominant group.

The root idea here is not just that certain groups are forced to survive in an atmosphere in which they are not respected because of their group membership, but rather that they are required to do so in a society that is openly hostile to their very being. The hostility, according to this new account of alienation, causes the victims to become hostile toward themselves. Those who are said to be alienated in this way are thought to be incapable of shaping our common conception of reality and thus they play little, if any, role in their self-construction. The self is imposed upon them by social forces, and what is even more disturbing, no individual self can change the social forces that impose upon members of certain groups their negative and hostile self-conceptions.

Is this new account of alienation just another way of saying that people of colour have had their humanity called into question? We might begin to explore this question by examining the claim that having one's humanity recognized and respected means having a say about things that matter in one's life, and having such a say means that one is unalienated. To be more specific, having opinions about things and the ability and freedom to express one's opinions is the mark of the unalienated person. This response is helpful, but it does not fully capture what recent writers have meant by alienation. It assumes that the alienated self is secure, but constrained by external forces that prevent the person from becoming fully actualized: from having one's voice recognized and respected in the moral or political process.

The above account of what it means to recognize and respect a person's humanity fails to fully appreciate that human selves result, at least in part, from social construction. How we define who we are, our interests, and our relationship with others, involves a dynamic process of social interaction. To assume that what recent writers have meant by alienation is the failure by some to be able to express and have their opinions heard misses the mark. This view of things assumes that (1) people are clear about their interests, but have not been allowed to express them, and (2) those who have power and privilege will be able to understand and fairly assess claims made by those who lack power and privilege if they were only allowed to express their opinions. Even if (1) and (2) are true, we still have not captured what recent writers have meant by alienation. This account focuses incorrectly on what the self is prevented from doing by forces external to it. However, the new account of alienation primarily concentrates on the fragility and insecurity of the self caused by the way people who are victims view and define themselves. According to this view, even if the external constraints were removed, the self would still be estranged because it has been constructed out of images that are hostile to it.

One might think that this new account of alienation is not saying anything new because Americans (including African-Americans) have always believed that people should be free to decide what kind of persons they want to be provided that in doing so they don't violate the rights of others. At least in principle, Americans have endorsed this idea. If this is so, what is new in these recent accounts of alienation? Perhaps we can gain some insight into this question by taking a closer look at the African-American experience.

African-Americans have had a paradoxical existence in the United States. On the one

hand, they have rightfully responded negatively to the second-class status that they are forced to endure. On the other hand, they believe that America should have and has the potential to live up to the ideas so eloquently expressed in the Bill of Rights and in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I have a dream' speech.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that there was a time when African-Americans were prevented from participating in the electoral process and from having a say in the shaping of basic institutions. Many would argue that there are still barriers that prevent African-Americans from participating in meaningful ways in these areas. If this is so, does this mean that most (many) African-Americans are alienated from them-selves and the dominant society?

African-American leaders from the moderate to the militant have emphasized the importance of African-Americans' making their own decisions about what is in their interests.<sup>5</sup> The right to self-determination has been seen as a crucial weapon in the battle against the evils of racial discrimination. These thinkers have also recognized that one must have an adequate understanding of one's predicament if one is to devise an effective strategy for overcoming the material and psychological consequences of racial injustice. Insight into the African-American experience has come from a variety of sources. Some of these insights have been offered by social and political theorists, others have been advanced in literature and the arts.

Ralph Ellison, in his brilliant novel, *The invisible man*, describes what he takes to be a consuming evil of racial discrimination.<sup>6</sup> According to Ellison, African-Americans are not visible to the white world. They are caricatures and stereotypes, but not real human beings with complex and varied lives. In very graphic terms, Ellison reveals what it is like to be black in a world where black skin signifies what is base and superficial. Ellison skillfully describes how blacks are perceived by white society, but he also tells us a great deal about how blacks perceive themselves. It is clear that African-Americans have struggled to construct an image of themselves different from the ones perpetrated by a racist society, but this is not an easy thing to do. W.E. B. Du Bois spoke to the struggle and the dilemma that confronts African-Americans when he identified what he called 'the problem of double-consciousness' in *The souls of black folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.<sup>7</sup>

Du Bois is pointing to what he takes to be the mistaken belief held by many blacks and whites, namely that a person cannot be both black and an American. According to Du Bois, for far too many people this was a contradiction in terms. Du Bois strongly disagreed and spent a great deal of his energy arguing against this conclusion. But why this false view was held by so many people can be traced to an inadequate conception of what it means to be 'black' and what it meant to be 'American'. According to Du Bois, race and class exploitation contributed greatly to these false conceptions. For Du Bois, it was no surprise that African-Americans had such a difficult time identifying their true interests.

### THE LIBERAL RESPONSE

Liberal political theorists rarely discuss alienation. This is in large part because alienation is seen as something that comes from within. For them alienation often is the result of injustice, but even so, it is something that can be overcome if only the individual would stand up for her rights. Liberals may realize that this might come at some serious personal cost to the individual, but they believe that the individual can and should bear these costs if they are to remain autonomous unalienated beings. For example, liberals often sympathize with white, highly educated, wealthy women who live alienated lives, but they believe that it is within the power of these women to end their estrangement or alienation even though it may be extremely difficult for them to do so. The critics of the liberal account of women's oppression have argued that liberals fail to see that capitalism and the negative stereotyping of women causes even educated and economically secure women to be at the mercy of sexist practices and traditions.

The critics of liberalism have also argued that liberalism places too much emphasis upon individuality and thus the theory fails to recognize how our conceptions of who we are and what we see as valuable are tied to our social relations. They insist that we are not alone in shaping who we are and in defining our possibilities. Society, according to these critics, plays a more extensive role than liberals are willing to admit.

Although liberals have recognized the alienation that people experience in modern society, their individual rights framework has not readily lent itself to an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon. I disagree, however, with the critics of liberalism when they contend that the individual-rights framework is inadequate to describe the nature of alienation. I shall attempt to show that liberals can describe the nature of alienation in capitalist society even though the theory is inadequate when it comes to addressing what the liberals must admit to be a violation of important rights.

Liberal theorists might characterize this new form of alienation in terms of a denial of the rights to such things as autonomy and self-determination and claim that these denials rob persons of their freedom. Alienation on their account is just another way of saying that people are unfree and further that they don't appreciate that this is so. But if the liberal response is to be helpful, we need to know more precisely in what sense alienation is a denial of important rights, for example the right to be free.

In what sense is the alienated person unfree? Can a person be alienated even if she has basic constitutional rights, material success, and a job that calls upon her abilities and talents in interesting ways? Some theorists think so. If alienation is a lack of freedom as the liberal theory suggests, in what sense are the people who have constitutional rights and material well-being unfree? The liberal theorist Joel Feinberg has discussed the lack of freedom in terms of constraints.<sup>8</sup> If we define alienation as a constraint, then alienated persons are unfairly constrained in the ways that they can conceive of themselves in a culture that defines them in stereotypical terms. But what are these constraints? To borrow Feinberg's terminology, are these constraints external or internal? According to Feinberg, 'external constraints are those that come from outside a person's body-cum-mind, and all other constraints, whether sore muscles, headaches, or refractory "lower" desires, are internal to him'.<sup>9</sup>

If we employ the language of constraints to understand alienation as a kind of



unfreedom, should we view this unfreedom in terms of external or internal constraints or both? On a liberal reading of Du Bois's and Ellison's characterizations of the African-American experience, this experience is characterized by a denial of opportunities because of a morally irrelevant characteristic, a person's race. It is plausible to interpret them in this way because this is clearly one of the consequences of a system of racial discrimination. However, I believe that they had much more in mind. The focus on the denial of opportunities is the standard liberal way of understanding the consequences of racial injustice. This is why you find liberal writers like Feinberg discussing freedom in terms of the absence of constraints and John Rawls concentrating on designing social institutions such that offices and positions are open to all under conditions of self-respect.<sup>10</sup> The focus by liberals has been primarily on what goes on outside of the body-cum-mind.

This is not to say that they completely ignore such psychological harms as self-doubt and a lack of self-respect that can result from injustice. In fact, Feinberg notes that things like sickness can create internal constraints which serve to limit a person's freedom.<sup>11</sup> Rawls, as well, appreciates the impact that injustice can have on a person's psyche. Thus he spends some time expounding on the connection between justice and a healthy self-concept.<sup>12</sup> He argues that in a just society social institutions should not be designed in ways that prevent people from having the social bases for self-respect. So both Feinberg and Rawls recognize that such things as freedom and justice go beyond removing inappropriate external constraints. But nonetheless, I don't think that Feinberg and Rawls can fully capture the insight offered by Du Bois and Ellison because their emphasis on the external constraints causes them to underestimate the internal ways that people can be prevented from experiencing freedom.

Since Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative freedom, liberals have recognized that such things as ignorance and poverty can limit a person's freedom.<sup>13</sup> Recognition of the limitations caused by internal constraints has led some liberals to argue that a society cannot be just if it does not address internal constraints on people's freedom. Such liberals would be open to the idea that an examination of the African-American experience would reveal the obvious and subtle ways that a lack of education and material well-being can lead to a sense of estrangement, a lack of self-respect. They would argue that this is true even when formal equality of opportunity can be said to exist. On their view, the real problem is not the lack of laws that guarantee equality under the law, but finding ways to make real these guarantees. For them it is not so much how African-Americans are viewed by the rest of society, but rather that they should be treated in ways that make it possible for them to act and choose as free persons. According to this view, things are just even if people are hated by the rest of the community, provided that they are guaranteed equal protection under the law and steps are taken to ensure real equality of opportunity. These liberals insist that there is a large area of human affairs that should escape government scrutiny. In these areas, people should be able to pursue their own conceptions of the good provided that they don't cause direct harm to others. I should add that these liberals also believe that those who fail to provide such necessities as food and education to those who are in need of them cause direct harm by failing to do so.

However, some communitarian critics of liberalism have argued that this way of

understanding the requirements of justice underestimates the importance of how we form a healthy self-concept in a community.<sup>14</sup> They emphasize the importance of being seen and treated as a full member of society as opposed to a person who must be tolerated. They question the wisdom and usefulness of attempting to find impartial norms that will guarantee each person the right to pursue his own unique conception of the good constrained by an account of the right defined by impartial reasoning. This concern has led some communitarians to reject the search for impartial ideals of justice in favour of a method of forging a consensus about justice through a process of democratically working across differences through open dialogue. According to this view, we will not be able to put aside our partialities, but we can confront them through discourse.

Communitarians would contend that African-Americans or any minority group that has been despised and subjugated will feel estranged from the dominant society if they are merely tolerated and not accepted and valued for their contributions. They believe that the liberalism of Feinberg, Rawls, and Nozick can at best produce toleration, but not acceptance. But this view, of course, assumes that we can identify some common goods (ends) to serve as the foundation for our theory of justice. This is something that liberals who give priority to the right over the good deny.

The communitarians, whether they realize it or not, have pointed to a persistent problem for African-Americans—the problem of recognition. How do African-Americans become visible in a society that refuses to see them other than through stereotypical images? One need only turn to the history of black social and political thought to see that African-Americans have wrestled with the question of what the appropriate means are for obtaining recognition and respect for a people who were enslaved and then treated as second-class citizens. Some argued that emigration was the only answer, while others maintained that less radical forms of separation from white society would do. Others contended that blacks could obtain recognition only if they assimilated or fully integrated into white society.<sup>15</sup> Neither of these approaches so far have been fully tested, so it is hard to say whether either approach can adequately address the problem of the lack of recognition for blacks in a white racist society.

The new alienation theorists believe that liberals cannot adequately describe or eliminate the kind of estrangement experienced by African-Americans and other oppressed racial groups. Is this so? Yes and no. I shall argue that liberals can describe the experience of estrangement using the vocabulary of rights and opportunities, but I don't think that they can eliminate this experience and stay faithful to their liberal methodology.

Typically when we think of a person being denied rights or opportunities we think of rather specific individuals and specific actions which serve as the causes of these denials. For example, we might think of a specific employer refusing to hire a person because he or she is black. The black person in this case is denied job-related rights and opportunities by a specific person. But even if we changed our example to involve groups rather than individuals, the new alienation theorists would maintain the experience of estrangement that they describe goes beyond such a description. According to their account, African-Americans who have their rights respected and don't suffer from material scarcity still are estranged in a way that their white counterparts are not.

Are these theorists correct or do prosperous and highly regarded middle-class and

wealthy African-Americans serve as counterexamples to the above claim? Don't such persons enjoy their rights and opportunities? If not, what rights and opportunities are they being denied? I believe that rights and opportunities are being denied, but it is more difficult to see what they are in such cases. I think that liberals can contend that middle-class and wealthy African-Americans are still alienated because they are denied their right to equal concern and respect in a white racist society. Even though they may be able to vote, to live in the neighbourhood of their choice, and to send their children to good schools, they are still perceived as less worthy because of their race. The dominant attitude in their society is that they are less worthy than whites. The pervasive attitude is not benign. It acts as an affront to the self-concept of African-Americans and it causes them to expend energy that they could expend in more constructive ways. The philosopher Laurence Thomas graphically described this experience in a letter to the *New York Times*.<sup>16</sup>

For example, African-Americans are too aware of the harm caused by being perceived by the typical white as thieves no matter what their economic and social standing might be. African-Americans, because of the dominant negative attitudes against them as a group, are denied equal concern and respect.

It is difficult to see that this attitude of disrespect is a denial of rights because we most often associate political rights with actions and not with attitudes. In fact, it sounds awkward to say that I have a right that you not have a certain attitude towards me. This statement seems to strike at the very heart of liberalism. However, in reality it does not. Liberals can and do say that human beings should be accorded such things as dignity and respect, and they believe that this entails taking a certain attitude or having dispositions towards others as well as acting or refraining from acting in particular ways.

So, it is not that they cannot account for the particular estrangement that blacks experience because of the attitude of disrespect generated by the dominant society, but that they don't seem to have the theoretical wherewithal to resolve the problem.

Since liberals assign great weight to individual liberty, they are reluctant to interfere with actions that cause indirect harm. So even though they recognize that living in a society that has an attitude of disrespect towards African-Americans can constitute a harm, and a harm caused by others, they are reluctant to interfere with people's private lives in order to eliminate these harms.

How can liberals change white attitudes in a way that is consistent with their theory? They could mount an educational programme to combat false or racist beliefs. Liberals have tried this, but given their strong commitment to things like freedom of thought and expression, and the fact that power and privilege is attached to seeing non-whites as less worthy, educational programmes have only had modest success in changing white attitudes. Critics of such educational programmes argue that these programmes can never succeed until racism is seen as unprofitable.

Let us assume that the critics are correct. Can liberals make racism unprofitable and respect individual liberty, one of the cornerstones of their theory? There are two basic approaches available to liberals: they can place sanctions on all harmful racist attitudes or they can provide people with incentives to change their racist attitudes. But in a democracy, the will of the majority is to prevail. If the attitude of disrespect towards African-Americans is as pervasive as the new alienation theorists suggest, then it is

doubtful there will be the general will to seriously take either of the approaches. I don't think that liberals can eliminate harmful racist attitudes without adopting means that would be judged by the white majority as unjustified coercion. However, they can adequately describe the alienation that African-Americans experience even if they cannot eliminate it.

### THE MARXIST ACCOUNT

The Marxist explanation of the African-American condition assumes that the problems experienced by this group can be traced to their class position. Capitalism is seen as the cause of such things as black alienation. For the Marxist, a class analysis of American society and its problems provides both a necessary and sufficient understanding of these things. According to the Marxist, alienation—be it black or white—is grounded in the labour process. Alienated labour, in all of its forms, is based in private property and the division of labour. On this account, if we eliminate a system of private property and the division of labour, we will eliminate those things that make alienated relations possible.

The Marxist does recognize that political and ideological relations can and do exist in capitalist societies, and that these relations do appear to have the autonomy and power to shape our thinking and cause certain behaviours. But, for the Marxist, these relations only appear to be fundamental when in reality they are not. They can always be reduced or explained by reference to a particular mode of production. Racism is ideological; an idea that dominates across class lines. However, class divisions explain racial antagonisms, it is not the other way around.<sup>17</sup> But Marxists don't stop here. They also contend that in order to eliminate racism, we must eliminate class divisions where class is defined in terms of one's relationship to the means of production.

Classical Marxists would oppose the new account of alienation advanced by recent theorists. The classical Marxists would insist that all forms of alienation, no matter how debilitating or destructive, can be explained in terms of the mode of production in which people are required to satisfy their needs. For them, it is not a matter of changing the way blacks and whites think about one another or the way blacks think of themselves because ideas don't change our material reality, relationships with others, or our self-conceptions. Our material conditions (mode of production) shape our ideas and our behaviour.

On this account, African-Americans are estranged from themselves because of their labouring activity or lack of it. They view themselves in hostile terms because they are defined by a mode of production that stultifies their truly human capacities and reduces them to human tools to be used by those who have power and influence. This all sounds good, but many black theorists (liberal and progressive) have been sceptical of this account of the causes and remedy for black alienation and oppression. They argue that the conditions of black workers and white workers are different and that this difference is not merely a difference in terms of things like income and social and political status or class position. The difference cuts much deeper. In a white racist society, blacks (workers and capitalists) are caused to have a hostile attitude towards their very being that is not found in whites. The new alienation theorists contend that the classical Marxist explanation of African-American alienation is too limiting. It fails to recognize that alienation occurs in relationships apart from the labour process. W.E. B. Du Bois,

although a dedicated Marxist, claimed that the major problem of the twentieth century was race and not class. Some theorists have contended that Marxists are too quick in dismissing the significance of race consciousness.<sup>18</sup> I think the facts support their conclusion. In the next section, I will focus directly on this issue of African-American alienation.

### AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND ALIENATION

I believe that the atmosphere of hostility created against African-Americans by our white racist society does amount to a serious assault on the material and psychological well-being of its African-American victims. I also believe that this assault can, and in some cases does, lead to the types of alienation discussed above. However, I disagree with those who conclude that most or all African-Americans suffer from a debilitating form of alienation that causes them to be estranged and divided in the ways described in the new account of alienation. I also reject the implication that most or all African-Americans are powerless, as individuals, to change their condition. The implication is that group action as opposed to individual effort is required to combat this form of alienation. There is also the implication that revolution and not reform is required in order to eliminate this form of alienation.

I don't wish to be misunderstood here. It is not my contention that capitalism is superior to socialism, but only that it is possible for African-Americans to combat or overcome this form of alienation described by recent writers without overthrowing capitalism.

Are African-Americans, as a group, alienated or estranged from themselves? I don't think so. Clearly there are some African-Americans who have experienced such alienation, but I don't think this characterizes the group as a whole. African-Americans do suffer because of a lack of recognition in American society, but a lack of recognition does not always lead to alienation. Even though African-Americans have experienced hostility, racial discrimination, and poverty, they still have been able to construct and draw upon institutions like the family, church, and community to foster and maintain a healthy sense of self in spite of the obstacles that they have faced.

Although African-Americans have been the victims of a vicious assault on their humanity and self-respect, they have been able to form their own supportive communities in the midst of a hostile environment. During the long period of slavery in this country, African-Americans were clearly in an extremely hostile environment. If there ever was a time a group could be said to be the victims of the assault caused by white racism, slavery was such a time. Slaves were denied the most basic rights because they were defined and treated as chattel. Some scholars, like Stanley Elkins, have argued that slavery did cause African-Americans as a group to become less than healthy human beings.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, there is a group of scholars who argue that slaves and their descendants were able to maintain healthy self-concepts through acts of resistance and communal nourishment.<sup>20</sup> I tend to side with this latter group of scholars.

What is crucial for the truth of their position is the belief that supportive communities can form within a larger hostile environment that can serve to blunt the assault of a hostile racist social order. This, of course, is not to say that these communities provide

their members with all that is necessary for them to flourish under conditions of justice, but only that they provide enough support to create the space necessary for them to avoid the deeply divided and estranged selves described in some recent work on alienation.

The history and literature of African-Americans is rich with examples of how communities have formed to provide the social and moral basis for African-Americans to have self-respect even though they were in the midst of a society that devalued their worth. Once again, I think it bears repeating. I don't deny that a hostile racist society creates the kind of assault that can lead to alienation, but only claim that this assault can be and has been softened by supportive African-American communities.

The sociologist Orlando Patterson disagrees. Patterson has argued that African-Americans are alienated because slavery cut them off from their African culture and heritage and denied them real participation in American culture and heritage. He characterizes this phenomenon as 'natal alienation'.<sup>21</sup> African-Americans, on Patterson's account, feel estranged because they don't believe that they belong. They are not Africans, but they also are not Americans. One might argue that the present move from 'black American' to 'African-American' is an attempt to address the phenomenon of natal alienation. According to Patterson, the past provides us with crucial insight into the present psyches of African-Americans. On his view, the fact of slavery helps to explain the present condition and behaviour of African-Americans, including the present underclass phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

I disagree with Patterson's conclusions. He falls prey to the same shortcoming that plagues the liberal and the Marxist accounts of the African-American experience. They all fail to appreciate the role of ethnic communities in the lives of individuals and groups. Although Du Bois never played down the horrors and harms of racism, he refused to see the masses of black people as a people who were estranged or alienated from themselves. In fact, in his *Dusk of dawn*, Du Bois describes how black people have been able to draw strength from each other as members of a community with shared traditions, values, and impulses.<sup>23</sup> Being anchored in a community allows people to address and not just cope with things like oppression and racism.

The work of the historian John Blassingame can also be used to call into question Patterson's natal alienation thesis and it also provides some support for the importance of community in the lives of African-Americans. Blassingame argued that even during the period of slavery, there was still a slave community that served to provide a sense of self-worth and social cohesiveness for slaves. In my own examination of slave narratives, first-hand accounts by slaves and former slaves of their slave experiences, I found that all slaves did not suffer from a form of moral and social death.<sup>24</sup> By moral and social death, I mean the inability to choose and act as autonomous moral and social agents. Of course this is not to deny that slavery was a brutal and dehumanizing institution, but rather that slaves developed supportive institutions and defence mechanisms that allowed them to remain moral and social agents.

But what about the presence of today's so-called black underclass? Does this group (which has been defined as a group that is not only poor, poorly educated, and victimized by crime, but also as a group suffering from a breakdown of family and moral values) squarely raise the issue of black alienation or estrangement? Some people think so. They argue that Patterson's natal alienation thesis is extremely informative when it comes to

understanding this class. Others reject the natal alienation thesis, but remain sympathetic to the idea that where there once was a black community or institutions that served to prevent the erosion of black pride and values, these structures no longer exist to the degree necessary to ward off the harms of racism and oppression. In *The truly disadvantaged*, William J. Wilson argues that large urban African-American communities are lacking in the material and human resources to deal with the problems brought on by structural changes and the flight of the middle class.<sup>25</sup> According to Wilson, these communities, unlike communities in the past, lack the wherewithal to overcome problems that are present to an extent in all other poor communities. If Wilson is correct, the resources may not exist in present-day African-American communities to ward off the assault of a hostile racist society. I am not totally convinced by Wilson's argument, but I think his work and the work of the supporters of the new account of alienation make it clear that there needs to be further work which compares African-American communities before the development of the so-called black underclass with urban African-American communities today.

At this juncture, I wish to distinguish my claim that supportive African-American communities have helped to combat the effects of a racist society from the claims of black neoconservatives like Shelby Steele. In *The content of our characters*<sup>26</sup> Steele argues that African-Americans must confront and prosper in spite of racism. Steele's recommendations have a strong individualist tone. He argues, like Booker T. Washington, that racism does exist but that African-Americans who are prudent must recognize that if they are to progress, they must prosper in spite of it. In fact, Steele even makes a stronger claim. He argues that African-Americans have become accustomed to a 'Victims status' and use racism as an excuse for failing to succeed even when opportunities do exist.

I reject Steele's conclusions. First, I don't think that individual blacks acting alone can overcome racism. Individual blacks who succeed in this country do so because of the struggles and sacrifices of others, and these others always extend beyond family members and friends. Next, I reject Steele's claim that the lack of progress by disadvantaged African-Americans is due in any significant way to their perception of themselves as helpless victims. Such a claim depends upon a failure to appreciate the serious obstacles that African-Americans encounter because of their race. Even if it is true that African-American advancement is contingent on African-Americans helping themselves, it does not follow that African-Americans should be criticized for failing to adopt dehumanizing means because they are necessary for their economic advancement.

African-Americans should not be viewed as inferior to other groups, but they should also not be seen as superior. Racial injustice negatively impacts the motivational levels of all people. African-Americans are not an exception. Steele makes it seem as if poor and uneducated African-Americans lack the appropriate values to succeed. He contends that the opportunities exist, but that too many African-Americans fail to take advantage of them because they cannot break out of the victim mentality. I reject this line of reasoning. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> this way of thinking erroneously assumes that most disadvantages result from a lack of motivation. In reality, it would take exceptional motivational levels to overcome the injustices that African-Americans experience. Because some African-Americans can rise to these levels, it would be unreasonable to

think that all could. Steele underestimates the work that must be done to provide real opportunities to members of the so-called black underclass who struggle with racism on a daily basis.

I would like to forestall any misunderstandings about my emphasis on the role that supportive communities play in the lives of oppressed groups. I am not maintaining that African-Americans don't experience alienation because they are able to draw strength from supportive communities. My point is that supportive communities can, in some cases, minimize the damaging effects caused by a racist society. Nor is it my intention to deny that African-Americans and other groups must constantly struggle to maintain a healthy sense of self in a hostile society that causes them to experience self-doubt and a range of other negative states.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Liberal thinkers tend to argue that alienation results when human beings can no longer see themselves as being in control of or comfortable in their social environment, and they contend that this discomfort occurs when crucial rights are violated, for example, the right to autonomy. In an interesting twist on the liberal position, Bruce A. Ackerman argues in *Social justice and the liberal state*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980, esp. 346–347, that the right to mutual dialogue is necessary to protect the autonomy of individuals in a community.
- 2 See, for example, John Elster (ed.), *Karl Marx: A reader*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986, Chapter II; Bertell Oilman, *Alienation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) Part III; Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels reader*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978:73–75, 77–78, 252–256, 292–293.
- 3 See Frantz Fanon, *Black skin/white masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967, Chapter 1; June Jordan, 'Report from the Bahamas', *On call*, Boston: South End Press, 1985:39–50.
- 4 The famous speech delivered by Martin L. King, Jr. at the March on Washington, D.C., August, 1963.
- 5 See Howard Brotz (ed.), *Negro social and political thought 1850–1920*, New York: Basic Books, 1966.
- 6 Ralph Ellison, *The invisible man*, New York: New American Library, 1953.
- 7 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The souls of black folk*, New York: New American Library, 1969:45.
- 8 Joel Feinberg, *Social philosophy*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973, Chapter 1.
- 9 Feinberg, *Social philosophy*, 13.
- 10 John Rawls, *A theory of justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, Section 67.
- 11 Feinberg, *Social philosophy*, 13.
- 12 Rawls, *Theory of justice*, 440–446.
- 13 Isaiah Berlin, *Two concepts of liberty*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.



- 14 See Alasdair Macintyre, *After virtue*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, Chapter 17; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the limits of justice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982:59–65, 173–175.
- 15 Howard McGary, Jr., ‘Racial integration and racial separatism: Conceptual clarifications’, in Leonard Harris (ed.), *Philosophy born of struggle*, Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1983:199–211.
- 16 Laurence Thomas, in *The New York Times*, August 13, 1990.
- 17 See Bernard Boxill, ‘The race-class question’, in Harris, *Philosophy born of struggle*, 107–116.
- 18 See, for example, Howard McGary, Jr., ‘The nature of race and class exploitation’, in A. Zegeye, L.Harris, and J.Maxted (eds.), *Exploitation and exclusion*, London: Hans Zeil Publishers, 1991:14–27; and Richard Schmitt, ‘A new hypothesis about the relations of class, race and gender: Capitalism as a dependent system’, *Social Theory and Practice*, 14(3) 1988:345–365.
- 19 Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A problem in American institutional and intellectual life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- 20 John Blassingame, *The slave community: Plantation life in the Antebellum South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, esp. 200–216.
- 21 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and social death*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- 22 Orlando Patterson, ‘Towards a future that has no past: Reflections on the fate of blacks in America’, *The Public Interest*, 27, 1972.
- 23 W.E.B.Du Bois, *Dusk of dawn*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987, esp. Chapter 7.
- 24 See Howard McGary and Bill E.Lawson, *Between slavery and freedom: Philosophy and American slavery*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- 25 William J.Wilson, *The truly disadvantaged*, • Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- 26 Shelby Steele, *The content of our characters: A new vision of race in America*, New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1990, especially Chapters 3 and 4.
- 27 Howard McGary, ‘The black underclass and the question of values’, in William Lawson (ed.), *The underclass question*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992:57–70.

‘African Renaissance’: A northbound gaze

MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

### THE AFRICAN ROOTS OF THE ‘RENAISSANCE’

Biological anthropologists, linguists, and historians might find difficulty in supporting a research proposal seeking to establish that *ubuntu* is deeply rooted in the Indo-European languages. The same kind of caution and reserve might be expressed with regard to the claim that the deepest roots of the term ‘renaissance’ are to be found in the soil of the

ancient languages of Africa or the Ur-Bantu. What would justify this initial reaction of scepticism? The research proposal first. There are two basic reasons for this scepticism. One is that *ubuntu* does not appear at all either as a group or a branch of the Indo-European languages. It does not appear, for example under the Anatolian, Italic, or Germanic groups. It is thus not even remotely connected to the Latin and its modern representatives, namely, the Romance languages consisting of French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. So the search for the roots of *ubuntu* in this direction is problematical since there is no apparent basis for the assumption that its ancestry lies in these languages. Another reason is that the single language from which the Indo-European languages evolved is unrecorded and split into a number of dialects by about the 3rd millennium BC.<sup>1</sup> Thus the two basic reasons together mean that the principal problem is both methodological and historical. By what method could we piece together the pieces of an ancient unrecorded language? Since the languages that evolved from the original do not themselves suggest any historical connection with *ubuntu*, what is the point of establishing a connection from the position of a historical void? What is the reason for uprooting *ubuntu* and trying to implant it within a historical soil unsuitable for its growth and development? Is there anything unnatural about its natural environment from which it continues to grow and develop from the beginning of time? Second, exactly the same questions apply, in reverse order, to the claim that the deepest roots of the term 'renaissance' are to be found in the soil of the ancient languages of Africa or the Ur-Bantu. Our first basic point then is that there are methodological and historical obstacles which need to be overcome before we can be comfortable about the use of the term, 'African Renaissance'. The discomfort stems from the fact that using this term before the obstacles are overcome is at the same time denying that the African experience is the appropriate source from which we can choose a key concept to understand and interpret African politics. Does Africa not have the right to choose such a key concept from its own historical experience? Why the persistence of this Northbound gaze? The philosophical and political implications of this denial are what we wish to explore in some detail.

### RENAISSANCE OR RENASCENCE?

Most dictionaries and other standard reference works distinguish between the Renaissance and the *renascence*. The first remarkable point is that most of them concur that the distinction lies in the first place in the appearance of the two words. The first appears with the capital letter 'R' and the second with the small letter Y. However, most dictionaries concur that at one level, the two words share a common meaning, namely rebirth, renewal, or revival. Even at this level, none appears willing to deprive the first of the capital letter 'R'. This means that there is another level of meaning at which *renascence* cannot have the same meaning as the Renaissance. It is the level at which the Renaissance is an historical concept signifying a specific period<sup>2</sup> in the history of Europe. It is specifically a European historical movement which originated in Italy and spread through other parts of Europe. It is noteworthy that even Italian standard reference works reserve the capital letter 'R' to this phenomenon, namely, the *Rinascimento*.<sup>3</sup> In using the capital 'R' for *Renascence*, Matthew Arnold acknowledged that 'I have ventured to give

to the foreign word Renaissance an English form'.<sup>4</sup> Arnold's venture does not neglect to grant the capital letter 'R' to his Renaissance. As an historical concept the Renaissance is deeply rooted 'in Europe'<sup>5</sup> and has Europe as its primary reference point. Other parts of the world are its secondary reference point insofar as it ramified to them and had an impact on them.<sup>6</sup> It follows then that as an historical concept, the Renaissance must retain the capital letter 'R'. Specific philosophic currents were special features of this history. In this sense the Renaissance was also a philosophical movement. Conceptual clarity can be preserved and a lot of confusion avoided if any other period of revival anywhere in the world could be given another name than the Renaissance. But this is not the virtue of the 'African Renaissance'.

The term 'African Renaissance' does not appear as a specific entry under this title in the eight-volume *Cambridge history of Africa*. Nor does it appear anywhere in the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Africa south of the Sahara*. It also does not appear in Jean Jolly's three-volume *Histoire du continent Africain*. It is more than curious to note that the 'African Renaissance' does not feature specifically under this title as a topic in any one of the eight volumes of the UNESCO *General history of Africa*? Could it be that the galaxy of experts responsible for this undoubtedly erudite work on the history of Africa had all forgotten that Africa also had the Renaissance? Perhaps it was not a question of collective amnesia. The experts simply did not predict that the 'African Renaissance' was yet to come. What appears in this eight-volume series is Abdel-Malek's 'The renaissance of Egypt'.<sup>8</sup> This is clearly specific and limited in scope than the general and all-embracing 'African'. Furthermore, the author of this entry does not give reasons for his adoption of the term 'renaissance'.

However, he is careful not to use the capital letter 'R'. Why this borrowing which creates conceptual unclarity and sows confusion? Matthew Arnold did not venture into wholesale borrowing but adapted the Renaissance to his native language. Even this option appears to have been foreclosed to the 'African Renaissance'. The question is: is there something unnatural about the natural environment of Africa such that the history of Africa cannot be described and defined by concepts originating from Africa?

## THE REGENERATION OF AFRICA

In this section we propose to place in historical perspective the current and problematical 'African Renaissance'. The point is also to establish a context within which the two questions contained in the two paragraphs of the preceding section could be answered. Africa continues to have periods of rebirth, of revival. Africa has its own renaissance. Among the earliest traces of this is the thesis of 'African regeneration'. This was posited by the South African, Pixley ka Isaka Seme in an article in *The African abroad*, April 5, 1906.<sup>9</sup> According to Seme, Africa should not be compared to Europe. The reason is that comparison assumes that there is a 'common standard' and this exists, if at all, only in an imperfect way. Since Africa cannot be and is not identical to Europe, so Seme continues, it is best to judge Africa in its own right than by reference to Europe as the standard for Africa. He then enumerates some of the historical and cultural monuments of Africa which 'are the indestructible memorials of their [her] great and original genius'. Already in 1906 Seme wrote that the African 'giant is awakening!... A great century has come

upon us. No race possessing the inherent capacity to survive can resist and remain unaffected by this influence of contact and intercourse, the backward with the advanced'. In declaring the dawn of this century Seme had at the same time fallen victim of his own caution and warning. By reference to 'the backward with the advanced', he had compared Africa to Europe. Yet, he decried comparison between the two. What 'common standard' did he use for the comparison? Clearly, the attraction to the North, the Northbound gaze was already very much alive in Seme and, many others then, as the whole tenor of his article shows. Despite his falling victim to his own caveat, Seme's warning deserves serious consideration. The twentieth century regeneration of Africa is for Seme a period of optimism reflecting the glory of the rising sun of Africa from all the comers of the African experience. For Seme, the regeneration of Africa means:

...the entrance into a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence. The basic factor which assures their regeneration resides in the awakened race-consciousness. This gives them a clear perception of their elemental needs and of their undeveloped powers.... The African people, although not a strictly homogeneous race, possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallizing itself into one common controlling idea.

Here we find a great omission which is at the same time a loss. It is the fact that Seme does not identify and specify the 'common fundamental sentiment' which the African people are said to possess. Is this loss irretrievable? Seme emphasises that the African regeneration means that 'a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world.... The most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic—indeed a regeneration moral and eternal!' From Seme's thesis we can extract the following as the features of the twentieth-century African renaissance:

- 1 Africa has the right to establish its own credentials and must be judged in its own right,
- 2 There is tension between Africa asserting the right to be herself from the standpoint of the African experience and the temptation to abandon this in favour of understanding Africa according to the standard imposed by Europe,
- 3 There is a common fundamental sentiment that all Africans possess. Apparently this is the humanism that will be the hallmark of the 'new civilization',
- 4 The 'rising sun' evokes the imagery of light penetrating and replacing darkness. The regeneration of Africa is the age of light overcoming darkness. It is crucial to understand that for Seme the term African excludes the non-African, that is, the European.

Almost thirty years after Seme launched the theme of the African regeneration, the same thread was picked up by Gilbert Coka. This appeared in the form of an article under the title, 'The African liberator, our message', published in *The African Liberator*, October 1935.<sup>10</sup> Coka notes in his article that the imminent outbreak of the Second World War contains the possibility to liberate the African. 'The hour of African freedom has struck. ... But this good time coming, will not come of its own volition. It will be brought by Africans themselves....' In order to translate this hope into reality, Coka urges the

Africans to free themselves of pettiness and inferiority complex. This is necessary for African unity and solidarity. These will encourage and strengthen self-reliance among Africans. Because of the very high premium he places upon the achievement of these aims, Coka criticizes uncritical Africans who imitate the non-Africans. 'We take the monkey apings of our so-called distinguished men for progress. There is no progress in Africans aping Europeans and telling us that they represent the best in the race, for any ordinarily well-trained monkey would do the same.' He urges Africans to realize that the philosophy of imitation and obsequious behaviour is in reality a sign of lack of confidence in oneself; it is the supreme expression of inferiority complex. Self-confidence and self-reliance are the cure to both the African and the non-African because the latter 'respect Africans who work out their salvation'. In pursuing their quest for liberation Africans are urged by Coka to always take into account the fact that 'Money at present is the ruling power of the world'. Therefore, the just wage and the just price are some of the indispensable items in the struggle for liberation. Coka's vision of liberation includes 'equal democratic rights for all South Africans irrespective of colour, creed, or race...' Like Seme before him, Coka declares the African renaissance: 'Africa is opening another era in human history.' The following are the features of the twentieth-century African renaissance as perceived by Coka.

- 1 Liberation is a necessity and Africans must be the authors of their own liberation. An essential corollary to this is that Africans must have confidence in themselves, be self-reliant and act in unity and solidarity,
- 2 The abandonment of imitative or mimetic<sup>11</sup> philosophy and its corresponding action,
- 3 Recognition of the status and influence of money in the conduct of domestic and international politics,
- 4 The establishment of a colour-blind, rights-based democracy regardless of creed.

It is significant that Coka does not include gender equality in his vision of liberation. Seme and Coka concur on the dawn of a new Africa. They also agree on the point that the African experience is the fertile ground from which the new Africa can and must draw inspiration, in the first place. Coka expressly calls this the liberation of Africa. Thus liberation stands out as one of the specific features of the African renaissance. Despite the apparent contradiction in Seme, he is like Coka, against mimetic philosophy and its corresponding action. They thus share the implication of this position, namely, that as a human being the African is second to none and must therefore assert this right to equality with utmost self-confidence. Africa has the prior and exclusive right to determine its own destiny even in the sphere of international relations.

Outside of South Africa and even earlier than Seme and Coka, Edward Wilmont Blyden stood out as an exponent of the 'regeneration of Africa'. Having established his sojourn in Liberia in 1850, Blyden argued that the former slaves returning to Africa from the United States of America would, together with the indigenous West African peoples, set the regeneration of Africa in motion. Blyden posited the thesis that the regeneration of Africa should acknowledge cultural differences among the races. Upon these differences Africa should assert its dignity and build its personality. He was thus a 'Pan-Negroist'.<sup>12</sup> He argued that Africa should draw from the African experience to build the image of an African church, to construct African history and culture, and to draw up an African

educational curriculum. When colonialism became firmly established in the West Africa region around 1900 there was a shift of emphasis from the cultural to the political aspects. This meant that strategies of resistance to colonial rule became the primary issue. In this sense the theme of the liberation of Africa became one of the specific features of the regeneration of Africa even before it was espoused by Coka. The period of the regeneration of Africa, represented by Blyden, Seme, and Coka may thus be said to come to a close after the end of the Second World War. Decolonization was the next period.

### THE 'NEW AFRICAN RENAISSANCE'

With the advent of Nkrumah we come to the express use of the term the 'new African renaissance' by an African Head of State. In his celebrated *Consciencism*,<sup>13</sup> Nkrumah writes:

In the new African renaissance, we place great emphasis on the presentation of history. Our history needs to be written as the history of our society, not as the story of European adventure. African society must be treated as enjoying its own integrity, its history must be a mirror of that society, and the European contact history must find its place in this history only as an African experience, even if as a crucial one. That is to say, the European contact needs to be assessed and judged from the point of view of the principles animating African society, and from the point of view of the harmony and progress of this society.

It is significant that Nkrumah refers to the 'new African renaissance' as if there were the 'old' one in the past. But the idea that there was an 'old' African renaissance is not supported, for example, by the UNESCO General History of Africa. So why the use of the word 'new? The answer is to be found in the fact that the text used by the present writer has the term 'renaissance' with the small letter V. Two inferences can be made from this. One is that the use of the word 'new' is intended to distinguish the African renaissance from the European Renaissance. The latter is the old Renaissance and the former the new. Another is that the term 'renaissance' is spelt with small letter 'R' precisely to underline the distinction between the African renaissance and the European Renaissance. In this way Nkrumah has shown awareness of the historical and philosophical problems pertaining to the use of the capital letter 'R' with reference to the history of Africa. By so doing, he had at the same time avoided the philosophical problems connected to such usage. We therefore submit that the 'new African renaissance' of Nkrumah refers to the rebirth and renewal of Africa. It is thus analogous to the 'regeneration of Africa' espoused by Blyden, Seme, and Coka. What then are the main features of Nkrumah's new African renaissance?

It is the period which accords primacy to the African experience. It is thus the reaffirmation of the thesis that the African experience can be and should be the primary source from which to draw concepts to understand and interpret its politics, history, and philosophy, to name but a few. The principles animating African society should be used as the basis for rebuilding Africa and also for judging it. The point that there are principles animating African society is the reaffirmation of the insight expressed earlier by Seme, namely, that there is a common fundamental sentiment which Africans possess.

We have noted already that Seme appears to have African humanism in mind. On the basis of a philosophical analysis of *ubuntu*, the present writer has reservations about the suffix '-ism' attached to human-ism, hunhuism or *ubuntuism*.<sup>14</sup> Having noted this reservation, the present writer submits that Nkrumah's 'principles animating African society' refer to African 'humanism'. In answer to the question whether or not these principles should be preserved, Kwasi Wiredu replied: 'It would profit us little to gain all the technology in the world and lose the humanist essence of our culture.'<sup>15</sup> Nkrumah recognized Africa's encounter with Europe, Christianity, and Islam. He maintained, however, that this encounter should be seen as part of the African experience. It should not be allowed to assume primacy over the African experience. Nor should it serve as the superior standard by which to understand and interpret the African experience. In this way Nkrumah rejected mimetic philosophy and its corresponding action. This is underlined by his thoroughgoing reaffirmation of the dignity of the African person in his celebrated, 'The African personality' appearing in his *I speak of freedom*. Here Nkrumah leaves no doubt of his conviction that as a human being, the African is second to none. Like his predecessors in the period of the regeneration of Africa, he emphasized the necessity for unity and solidarity among Africans. It is to Nkrumah's credit that this culminated in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity.

Nkrumah's new African renaissance is the period of the phased achievement of freedom. The first phase is the achievement of political freedom to be followed by the economic. Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you is the well-known prescription of Nkrumah's philosophy for decolonization. It is curious that Nkrumah adopted this separation and timing in spite of his acute awareness that the political kingdom without the economic is empty.<sup>16</sup> The unfolding experience of Africa proved Nkrumah's prescription to be 'partially right'.<sup>17</sup> The lesson from this experience is that the attainment of political independence is inseparable from economic independence. Laying down the foundation of economic independence must thus be part and parcel of the moment of political independence. It may not be postponed. The curious point is that many other African states, including South Africa, which attained independence afterwards ignored this lesson. They preferred Nkrumah's prescription and this is called appositely by Mazrui, 'Kwame Nkrumah's immortal imperative'. In theory and practice this prescription meant (1) condonation of the injustice of conquest based on lawlessness, inhumanity, and lack of morality. This is the conquest of the meridian line drawn arbitrarily by the European conqueror to demarcate and define the sphere of truth and justice. Beyond that line these were inoperative. As Carl Schmitt put it:

...the only matter (the parties) could actually agree on was the freedom of the open spaces that began beyond the line. This freedom consisted in that the line set aside an area where force could be used freely and ruthlessly... The general concept was then necessarily that everything which occurred 'beyond the line' remained outside the legal, moral and political values recognized on this side of the line.<sup>18</sup>

Lawlessness, inhumanity, and lack of morality were allowed beyond the meridian line, the line that experienced the voyages of discovery and colonization. The basic flaw of

this condonation is that the attainment of political independence was nowhere in formerly colonized Africa the reversion to unencumbered and unmodified sovereignty to the same quantum and degree as at conquest.<sup>19</sup> Thus Africa acquired limping<sup>20</sup> sovereignty burdened in particular by the inheritance of an unpayable foreign debt owed to its former conqueror. Makonnen makes a relevant point with regard to Kenya.

Kenya paid compensation for land reacquired from the 'alien' land holders... the British Government provided Kenya with loans from its own sources and also from the World bank, in order to finance the compensation for the transferred alien property, which amounted in fact to outright repurchasing of Kenya by the Kenyans.<sup>21</sup>

This point, however, applies to the whole of decolonized Africa precisely because state succession was not the basis for granting independence to African states. This is not only incomprehensible but also basically unfair because:

...the question whether a state gaining territorial sovereignty (the successor state) inherits, together with the territory concerned, the rights and obligations of another state (the predecessor state) arises if this latter is actually considered to be extinct. This question leads to the problems of state succession... The states emerging from colonial status to independence are new subjects of international law; the problems to be solved in connection with them are those of state succession.<sup>22</sup>

Why was the state of the conqueror not considered extinct at independence? The attainment of political independence in formerly colonized Africa was thus a transition from slavery by coercion to slavery by consent, (2) the loss of an opportunity to demand restitution and restoration. These are the plain demands of natural justice arising from unjustified conquest based on lawlessness, inhumanity and lack of morality. The question is: can the new African renaissance provide a remedy for these mistakes?

Three clerics Smangaliso Mkhathswa, Maurice Ngakane, and Allan Boesak also used the term 'Renaissance'. They were the motor and organizers of a conference, the 'Black Renaissance Convention'. This was held in Hammanskraal, South Africa in 1974. It is significant that these clerics opted for 'Black' instead of African. However, the pre- and post-conference documentation does not offer an argument devoted specifically to this choice. The Reverend Allan Boesak's predilection for 'Black' crystallized in the publication of his Doctoral dissertation the subtitle of which contained the significant words, 'black theology and black power'.<sup>23</sup> In time he and the first-mentioned cleric abandoned 'Black' and opted for 'African' through their membership of the African National Congress. The present writer is unaware of a written argument by either justifying the choice for 'African'. Since the focus of their 'Renaissance' was rather diffuse and blurred, there is no point in bringing it under the prism of critical analysis. Suffice it to state that their use of the term leads directly to the historical and philosophical problems we have dealt with above. Their importance lies then in helping us determine the frequency of the term 'African Renaissance'.

President Thabo Mbeki can be said to be the second African Head of State to use the



term the 'African Renaissance'. It is thus the third time, counting from Nkrumah, that this term is used. Is it the multiple resurrection of the renaissance? A Northbound gaze which is impossible to discard? Or, is it an indication that some of the problems that have been noted already in the period of the regeneration of Africa remain unsolved? The ideas of President Mbeki about the 'African Renaissance' can be gathered partly from his own writings and partly from his foreword, singular and plural, to other works by Africans. For example, his foreword to *Mokoko*,<sup>24</sup> edited by Makgoba, contains some of his ideas on the 'African Renaissance'. The book is the product of a conference held recently under the same title.<sup>25</sup> One of the key ideas of President Mbeki's 'African Renaissance' is Africa first. We see this translated into practice in the South Africa that he is leading. For example, a study of the composition of key functionaries in his Office and his advisers shows that primacy is accorded the African. Similarly, the enactment of the Equity Act is not only a question of according primacy to the African but also of rectifying plain and manifest injustice. The President is yet to address the *matyotombe* phenomenon; the so-called squatters problem.<sup>26</sup> It is curious that the Africans refuse to be called squatters. They prefer to call themselves *baipei*.<sup>27</sup>

The Africa of which South Africa forms part also deserves primacy. It is the Africa of the Southern African Development Community, the Africa of War in the Congo, Ethiopia versus Eritrea, the troubles in the Sudan, deepening poverty and increase in preventable deaths, the Africa plagued with Aids, it is the Africa of disjointed Reconciliation, it is the Africa of racial strife and tension, the Africa which has caused 'donor fatigue' and has thus been renamed the forgotten continent. It is the Africa that is stampeded by globalization. It is the nuclear weapons free Africa. Yet, the inescapable victim of an irrational nuclear war to be waged exclusively by non-Africans. It is the Africa still licking the wounds of Nkrumah's deadly prescription. Perhaps the time has come to move beyond the new African renaissance because it is no longer the correct instrument to deal with all these problems. Even if we may retain the small letter Y in our use of the renaissance, the closeness with the capital letter is a source of discomfort. It is the temptation to fix our gaze to the North. Continuing in this way is problematical because even the European Renaissance did come to an end. It was followed by the Enlightenment,<sup>28</sup> the Age of Reason.<sup>29</sup> It was the age when authority was challenged and superstition was reportedly eliminated from European culture. It was the time when human beings dared to reason. And this was always reasoning from their own experience first of all. If we retain the 'renaissance' and thus preserve our Northbound gaze it should come as no surprise that the North should insist on continuing to be in the leadership. The justification, though questionable, is on hand: 'you are still in the renaissance we have long made the transition to man as a rational animal. We have established ourselves in the Age of Reason. We are entitled to universal leadership.' Since reason is not an exclusive European or Northern quality, the time has come for Africa to move beyond the renaissance. It is time to enter the period of the birds.

### MOKOKO

*Mokoko* is the Sotho language term for a cock. It is also the title of the book by Makgoba. The title is apposite because in many cultures the crow of the cock carries the

significance of a warning or the fulfillment of a prophecy. For example, we read in the Bible that by the time the cock crows Peter will have betrayed Jesus. Indeed when the cock crowed Peter remembered with regret that the words of Jesus had come true. In African culture the early morning crow of the cock proclaims the passage from darkness to light. It is the message of the beginning of a new day, a new life. And everyone is invited to rise up to the occasion and be an active part of the new life. Indeed, the 'Makgoba affair' that happened in the University of the Witwatersrand spread throughout South Africa like a conflagration. It was the real crow of *Mokoko*. It raised many issues concerning the nature and function of a university. Issues under debate ranged from an honest presentation of a curriculum vitae, transformation, affirmative action, the maintenance of educational standards to the preservation of social and political values. It raised basic questions about the meaning and function of the South African society. The land question, though raised expressly in the book, received the least attention. Another issue which received the least attention was the question if the African is also a rational animal. Before the start of the voyages of discovery, Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal was deeply rooted in the European culture.<sup>30</sup> When the voyagers met other human-like animals, they refused to attribute rationality to them. Aristotle's definition was given a restrictive interpretation. Only the European was held to be the rational animal. Combined with the ideology that law, morality and humanity did not apply beyond the meridian line, this restrictive interpretation of Aristotle justified conquest and slavery the other side of the meridian line. The universalist impulse to turn everyone in the world into a Christian brought about an unintended challenge to the restrictive interpretation. It was this. If only some men are rational animals then it is irrational to christianize human-like animals. The best course is to leave the human-like animals to their own devices and stop to christianize them. The debate in 1550 at Valladolid, Spain, between Sepulveda and Las Casas, was the highpoint of this dilemma. In the result Pope Paul III issued the bull, *Sublimis Deus*.<sup>31</sup> This declared expressly that 'all men are rational animals'. It thus justified christianization. Yet, its necessary implication, namely, that law, morality and humanity also apply to the African, was not recognized. The conviction that 'man' is a rational animal was not spoken of the African had acquired the status of an ineradicable superstition. It is precisely this superstition that lay at the heart of the Makgoba affair. We are here not concerned with the pros and cons of the individual struggle. The Makgoba affair was not just the simple struggle of an individual against a big institution. It was the struggle for the assertion of the right of the African as a human being second to none. It was the struggle for the right of the African to be African in Africa. It was the struggle for the reaffirmation of the dignity of the African; of the African's right to give primacy to the African experience in Africa. By this struggle Makgoba ushered in the Mokoko period, the period beyond the 'African Renaissance'.

### HUNGWE—THE ZIMBABWE BIRD

*Hungwe* is the Shona name for the bird regarded as sacred among the Shona. It is to the indigenous Zimbabwean what the cross is to a Christian. The *hungwe* is an indispensable point of contact with the ancestral gods: the gods who gave the land to the indigenous

Zimbabweans from time immemorial. The land and sovereignty over it were lost at conquest based on lawlessness, inhumanity, and lack of morality. In time the conqueror returned—under the Lancaster Agreement—the land half-heartedly to its original rightful owners. This did not please the ancestral gods. They instructed the *hungwe* to sing from the national flag of Zimbabwe. It sang from all other places and sites where it was perched. The song was, ‘the gods shall never sleep until the return of the land to original and rightful owners’. Neither the government nor the indigenous Zimbabweans could ignore this song. They could not erase from memory the injustice of unjustified conquest based upon lawlessness, inhumanity, and lack of morality. When the people took action to remedy this historical injustice they unintentionally assisted the United Kingdom to remember the conquest of Rhodesia. In memory of this conquest, the United Kingdom declared herself ready to receive back to their ancestral home, Great Britain, at least twenty thousand Rhodesians. The present writer does not accept that the approach of the Zimbabwean government on the return of the land is the correct one. It contains basic flaws which call for urgent remedies. The first is that by going along with the situation initiated by the people the government has reduced the matter of the collective right of the indigenous Zimbabweans to a simple question of private law. It has become the question of the right to private property with particular reference to the land. Second, the violence that accompanies land occupation is unjustified. It should be clear then that the song of the *hungwe* shall survive President Mugabe. It is indifferent to the outcome of the forthcoming elections. It is a demand from all the ancestral gods of Africa that a remedy to Nkrumah’s prescription is long overdue. This is the significance of the *Mokoko-Hungwe* period of African history and politics. It is the period of the birds. It is the hour to assert and reaffirm the dignity of the African precisely by seizing the initiative to remedy historical injustice with historical justice. It is the season of the return of the land to its original rightful owners; the period of reversion to unmodified and unencumbered sovereignty. It is the age of restitution and reparation to Africa. It is the age of African memory functioning as the critique of history. Thus ‘reparations,...as a structure of memory and critique, may be regarded as a necessity for the credibility of Eurocentric historicism, and a corrective for its exclusionist worldview...what really would be preposterous or ethically inadmissible in imposing a general levy on South Africa’s white population?’<sup>32</sup> Sure the question applies to all decolonized Africa.

## CONCLUSION

We have argued that the marriage between African and ‘renaissance’ is an uneasy one. It is a marriage that is full of historical and philosophical problems. The attempt to implant the ‘renaissance’ into Africa is an implicit denial of Africa’s right to choose from her experience terms and concepts that can be used to understand and interpret African history and politics. At the same time this denial is a covert adherence to the linear interpretation of history. Thus one of the results of the fixation of the African gaze to the North is that Africa thereby concedes prominence and leadership to the North. This marriage must be dissolved because there is no philosophical and historical justification for it. The humanity and dignity of the African is second to none. African history has yielded and continues to yield fertile experience from which to extract key analytical

concepts. Even if we were to concede the period of the African ‘renaissance’ this has passed. It is now superseded by the *Mokoko-Hungwe* period. The period in which the question of historical justice has emerged in very sharp relief. It is the period for Africa’s reversion to unmodified and unencumbered sovereignty. It is the period of restitution and reparation to Africa.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 *The new encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 6, 15th Edn., 1987:295–296.
- 2 *The Cambridge modern history*, vol. I, ‘The Renaissance’, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902:532.
- 3 *Enciclopedia Italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, xiv, mcmxxxvi:346.
- 4 *The Oxford English dictionary*, vol. xiii, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989 (see ‘Renaissance’).
- 5 *Standard dictionary of the English language, International edition*, vol. 2, New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1966, (see ‘Renaissance’).
- 6 *The Cambridge modern history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902:7–66.
- 7 Here the present writer refers to both the UNESCO/Heinemann and the Curry editions of this series.
- 8 Abdel-Malek, A. 1989, ‘The renaissance of Egypt, 1805–81’, in J.F.Ade Ajayi, (ed.) *General history of Africa*, vol. VI, California: Heinemann, UNESCO, 1989:325–355.
- 9 Seme, Pixley ka Isaka. 1972. *The regeneration of Africa*, in T.Karis, and G.M.Carter (eds.) *From protest to challenge*, vol. I, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 69–71.
- 10 Coka, G. 1973. ‘The African liberator, our message’, in T.Karis, and G.M.Carter, (eds.) *From protest to challenge*, vol. 2, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 16–18.
- 11 Ramose, M.B. 1999a. *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 128–135.
- 12 Van Hensbroek, P.B. ‘African political philosophy, 1860–1995’, dissertation presented to the University of Groningen for the attainment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1998:52.
- 13 Nkrumah, K. 1979. *Consciencism*, Panaf Books Ltd., London, 63.
- 14 Ramose, M.B. 1999a. *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 49–66.
- 15 Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 21.
- 16 In his foreword to Oginga Odinga’s *Not yet Uhuru*, Nkrumah writes: ‘A turning point has now been reached in Africa’s history. After years of patient effort to achieve the total political and economic emancipation of the continent by peaceful means, only limited results have been achieved, and it has become essential to adopt a more militant and positive strategy.... A Union Government of Africa backed by

organised military power with sound continental economic planning is bound to compel nations outside Africa to respect our collective interests... Although political independence is a noble achievement in the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism, its effectiveness is superficial unless economic and cultural independence is also achieved.'

- 17 Mazrui, A.A. 1993. 'Seek ye first the political kingdom', in A.A.Mazrui and C.Wondji (eds.) *General history of Africa*, vol. viii, California: Heinemann, UNESCO, 105–126.
- 18 Schmitt, C. 1996. 'The land appropriation of a new world', *Telos*, 109, 36–37. The following, from the already cited *The Cambridge modern history*, portrays and underlines the meaning of the meridian line during the so-called voyages of discovery. The tidings of his voyage were joyfully received both in Spain and at Rome; and a petition was preferred to Pope Alexander VI for a confirmation to the Spanish Crown of the district comprising the newly-found islands, subject only to the rights of any Christian communities which might happen to be included in it. In answer to this two separate bulls were issued. One simply contained the confirmation desired; the other was framed in similar terms, but limited the area of Spanish enterprise to a meridian line to be drawn one hundred leagues west of the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands.'
- 19 We hold, contrary to Alexandrowicz, that a proper understanding of conquest beyond the meridian line cannot but construe such reversion as an exigency of natural and fundamental justice. See Alexandrowicz, C.H. 1969. 'New and original states, the issue of reversion to sovereignty', *International Affairs*, 45(3):471–473.
- 20 Ramose, M.B. 1999b. 'Sovereignty and constitutional democracy: South Africa and Zimbabwe', *Thamyris*, 6(2):168–175.
- 21 Makonnen, Y. 1983. *International law and the new states of Africa*, UNESCO, 363–364.
- 22 Bokor-Szego, Hanna. 1986. 'Identity and succession of states in modern international law', *Questions of International Law*, 3:18 and 40.
- 23 Boesak, A.A. 1984. *Farewell to innocence, a socioethical study on black theology and black power*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. Boesak, A.A. 1977. *Afscheid van de onschuld, een sociaal-ethische studie over zwarte theologie en zwarte macht*, Tr. Frese, Like. Kampen: Kok, 1977.
- 24 Makgoba, M.W. 1997. *Mokoko: The Makgoba affair*, Johannesburg: Vivvii Publishers.
- 25 There are various possibilities for dialogue with most of the essays contained in the book mentioned. However, a dialogical encounter has been avoided deliberately in order to (1) make as complete a statement as possible on the perspective adopted here; (2) to question at least the implicit assumption, apparent in almost all the essays, that the usage 'African Renaissance' is historically and philosophically unproblematical. See Makgoba, M.W. 1999. *African Renaissance, the new struggle*, Cape Town: Mafube, Tafelberg.
- 26 Gutto, S. and Roux, T. 2000. 'Our northern neighbour offers key lessons for SA, write Shadrack Gutto and Theunis Roux', *Business Day*, 18 April.
- 27 Ramose, M.B. 1999b. 'Sovereignty and constitutional democracy: South Africa and

Zimbabwe', *Thamyris*, 6(2):179–180.

28 Copleston, F. 1964. *A history of philosophy*, vol. 6, Part II, New York: Image Books, 207–209.

29 Kant, I. 1959. *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals and what is enlightenment?*, Tr. L.W.Beck, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 85.

30 Hanke, L. 1959a. *Aristotle and the American Indians*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., ix.

31 Hanke, L. 1937b. 'Pope Paul III and the American Indians', *The Harvard Theological Review*, xxx:71–72.

32 Soyinka, W. 1999. *The burden of memory, the muse of forgiveness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 39 and 25.

### Négritude and the gods of equity

#### WOLE SOYINKA

The continent of Africa in itself has remained a contentious object of contemplation and reference for black Americans and West Indians since the nineteen-twenties. What is Africa to me?' was a question that inspired more than mere poetry and rhetoric—it informed, in one way or another, the socio-political existence of many. The paradox in several opposing attitudes—when we look at the polemics that ushered in the age of Négritude from the late twenties, in France especially—is that, without awareness of the fact, the rebels against the assimilationist tendency—René Meril, Etienne Lero, Léon Damas, etc.—were actually within the same camp as those identified objects of their contempt, the champions of assimilation such as the poet Gilbert-Gratiant, whose 'This is my climate...the atmosphere of France' reads like an unconscious parody of Mark Anthony's 'This is my space'. This ironic link was that neither side, coming from totally incompatible ideological preferences, actually recognized in themselves subjects caught within the colonial vice. The French assimilés adopted the identity of France without qualification, indeed with pride and protectiveness; the 'rejectionists', to whom the former were simply despicable lackeys and would-be black Frenchmen, were equally content to remain within the French national identity, never questioning its validity or potent contradiction to their mission of race retrieval. This blind spot in the latter group is easily explained. They were trapped within the raging ideology of the day, Marxism, a universalism that united the oppressed everywhere, without reference to colour, race, or nationality. Thus, unlike their African compatriots, they did not stop to question their objective status as colonial appendages. Decolonization was simply not on the agenda of Francophone Caribbean, certainly not on the same level of intense awareness as we find among the colonial holdings of the French in Africa, and must be ranked even lower in comparison with the Anglophone. Although they also pressed the banner of artistic liberation—surrealism—into service as a counter to the stultifying bourgeoisification of the established, or up-and-coming African elite, it proved, because of its origination and allegiances, only slightly less than a willing surrender of the opportunities of a novel (or retrieved) identity in opposition to the established identity of others—which, in this case, was—like the artistic banner—European. Communism, surrealism, and Freud the

European medicine-man—a perfect cocktail for nationalist amnesia! The reference points, and co-opted sources of the rejectionists did diverge drastically—they were certainly pioneering, more defiant and self-authenticating from those of the genteel upholders of the status quo, yet both groups took their authority from the world ordering of yet again—the other. And there, of course, all common ground between these two camps—assimilationists and rejectionists—must be seen to terminate.

That there was an objective, historical, and therefore intellectual acceptance by the ‘radical Africans’ in the Diaspora of a necessary recourse to Africa is beyond question. Even so, we recognize that among the French African nationals and those of the Caribbean—if we may treat them for now as one group apart from the black American writers—there were also crucial degrees of difference in their respective creative ‘Négritudinization’. Politically, such differences virtually did not exist. Across the board within Africa, that is, throughout the literary and nationalist circles of colonial Africa, the situation of the black man, and the struggle of black leaders such as Marcus Garvey—and indeed, of other charismatic champions who came later, such as the Rev Adam Clayton Powell—occupied the same territory of political consciousness as the tribulations of a Jomo Kenyatta or the calvary of Patrice Lumumba. Mississippi, Alabama, Harlem—these were household names, on the continent, that narrated the black man’s odyssey. Within the creative-intellectual class, however, especially among the poets, there were differences. The Francophone writer-intellectual did absorb and respond to these racial assaults through the creative milieu to a greater degree than did the Anglophone. The latter appeared to find a more congenial medium of protest and rejection in nationalist politics—and the reason is to be found in the already stated contrast between the colonial policies of the French (or Portuguese) and the English. The impact of this difference is reflected in the relative emphasis given by these two principal groups of victims to art and culture as instruments of politics and liberation, long before Amílcar Cabral adapted the Marxian discourse on culture to the liberation strategies of Guinée-Bissau.

The French employed a system of governance by what they called *départments*—the colonies, in other words, were treated as overseas departments of France itself. The colonial subjects were considered—or, more accurately, governed—as French citizens. Many of these figures were educated in France—from childhood, that is, unlike the British colonials who usually went to the United Kingdom only at the level of higher institutions. Even where the French colonial obtained his secondary—that is, high school—education in his own country, the curriculum was such that the school could very easily have been situated in metropolitan France. My ancestors, the Gauls...even some of the more conservative Francophone poets, felt humiliated to be compelled to intone such passages of educational initiation, meant for a different race and place; it featured constantly in rejectionist tirades and parodies. The British, by contrast, had no intention of insinuating such ideas of a shared ancestry into the minds of their subjects.

Intellectual interaction between French Caribbean subjects and the African—Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, etc.—was consequently much more fluid and constant than between Anglophonia and Africa, that is, between Jamaica, Trinidad, or Barbados in the Caribbean, and Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, etc. on the continent. It is true that the British did import a handful of administrators, judges, and educationists from the Caribbean into their African possessions—today’s shared existence of such family names

as the Moores, the Thompsons, Cokers, etc. had its origins in this selective expatriation. For the French, however, it was regular policy. The black French Caribbean not only administered colonies, some headed military forces of subjugation for recalcitrant kingdoms. Others were noted artists, teachers, and scientific researchers. René Maran of Martinique, the famous, or—from other points of view—infamous author of *Batouala*, was a notable product of this system, so were Paul Nizer from Guadeloupe and Felix Eboué of French Guiana. The latter even earned the distinction of being buried at the Pantheon—for his political service to the French motherland in Africa. That posthumous distinction was only a kind of canonization of a living reality—a reality that placed the confluence of creative and political tributaries from French Caribbean and French Africa, carefully nurtured by the colonial midwife, in Paris. The British were far more bashful in encouraging fraternization on this level, fearful perhaps that the subversive germs from one part of the world might infect the other and thus create unwanted problems for the imperial mandate.

Next, let us recall the frequent incursions of the United States into the Caribbean. In 1915, and later 1927, the United States invaded Haiti—an intervention that would be replayed, albeit under different circumstances, seventy years later. There were also the US recurrent interventions in Cuba, with extended periods of occupation—cultural compact with the Caribbean therefore rode on the back of militarist adventure; the United States proved an unwitting disseminator of the spores of nationalism and—Négritude! The invasion of Haiti had deep political and philosophical consequences, for instance, for the young poet and novelist Jacques Roumain who studied both in Paris and New York. His works came to the notice of Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook, who returned the compliment of Flavia-Leopold's and Senghor's translations of black American writers with their own translations of the Francophone. Jacques Roumain, already resentful of this violation of his natal space, a resentment that was augmented by his identification with the injustice under which his racial kin laboured within the United States, would become increasingly radical and turn toward communism as a salvationist creed. That formative response of Jacques Roumain was not unique.

We can see therefore the route by which both French and Spanish Caribbean came to French Africa—via Paris—and why the wind of the Harlem Renaissance was felt so strongly in the café sidewalks and student attics where Africa's future Francophone poets huddled together to debate *la condition humaine*. Then there was the Marcus Garvey phenomenon also, a movement that straddled both the United States and the Caribbean—Franco-, Hispano-, and Anglophone alike. The work of Jean Price Mars, the Haitian doctor, anthropologist, and passionate Africanist—*Ainsi Parla l'Oncle* (Thus spake uncle)—exerted great influence on Jacques Roumain, René Depestre, and their circle of radical nationalists, which was in turn transferred to Africa via Paris. Thus spake uncle' remains a visceral call to a reconstitution of the authentic African psyche, and spoke to the French Caribbean—let us insert this footnote again—in a way that Du Bois's *The souls of black folk*<sup>1</sup> could never emulate. Du Bois's work was directed more at the sociological condition of the black man in America, unlike Jean Price Mars's work, which targeted the psychological nerve. This restitutive anthropological *mani festo* was the element that was missing in the American response to Négritude. Yes, Langston Hughes and others did translate the Caribbean authors, published them in *The crisis of*



*Harlem renaissance*, and even came under some influence of their thinking, but the American black writers had already mapped their course, had issued their manifestos long before Etienne Lero's *Légitime défense*. Claude McKay's *Banjo* was circulating among the young Francophone literati and Senghor would later translate Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Jean Toomer—never mind that he found American poetry 'non-sophisticated', or that Césaire would find in it 'rhythms of juvenile spontaneity'—these were proposed as virtues, the very virtues they sought to free their own work from the restrictive moulds of their French exemplars. Nothing of the dimension of this literary cross-pollination ever took place between the Anglophone Caribbean and black America on the one hand, and Anglophone Africa on the other. (There was, of course, no Alioune Diop in the British Isles, no inspired vision that could lead to the founding of a British *Présence Africaine!*) What we observe indeed is a paradox, that despite the United States being an English-speaking country, her black writers moved to develop a deeper creative and intellectual intimacy—via French Caribbean and Paris—with French Africa than they did with the British.

### CULTURAL ASSIMILATION—THE POLITICS OF THE 'REFUSENIKS'

Language, therefore, it does appear, is not everything, and we may bear this in mind in attempting to place emphasis on the peculiar circumstances that made the Francophone writer respond to the colonial experience through literary tools and an artistic movement, unlike his Anglophone counterpart. It was not simply that Négritude appeared, in the main, to have created a philosophical divide between the two; what is interesting is that 'Négritude', or indeed any school or creative manifesto, was born in one, but not the other. This is where we may find clues to the differentiation. Cultural resistance manifested itself in the Anglophone territories in more overt ways, and almost always on the actual soil of the colonies. There were certainly more newspapers and journalists per square foot in Lagos, Freetown, and Accra than you would hope to find in a square mile of Dakar, Abidjan, or Gabon, and nearly every one of them bristled with challenges to the anomalies and injustice of their colonial present.

Négritude—by any other name: it was in colonial Nigeria that the cultural liberation movement 'Boycott the Boycottables' was launched by that nationalist firebrand, Mazi Mbonu Ojike—one could claim that Mbonu Ojike's movement served the same purpose in Nigeria as Damas's 'inflammatory' lines from *Pigments* that led to the rejection of military draft in Ivory Coast. Ojike's gospel—which may have owed its inspiration to Ghandi's war against the British textile industry—was that Africans had become too dependent on European tastes, commodities, and culture. Anything that came from that other world was to be discarded—wherever possible—in favour of the local equivalent—clothing, shoes, food, ornaments, music, and—language. Ojike even proposed the abandonment of the English language and a return to indigenous languages for all internal communication.

Even the anti-colonial literature that emerged from this phase was not seriously considered as innovative or inspiring. These writers were considered forerunners to the tepid—though fiercely nationalistic—poetry of a group that came to be known within

(Nigerian) Anglophonia as the ‘Pilot’ poets—versifiers such as Dennis Osadebey or—a name that should be familiar to all students of colonial politics—Nnamdi Azikiwe. They were called Pilot poets because they represented the early wave of published poets—from Nigeria at least—and their verses were published in a pioneer journal that started out in Ghana, moved to Nigeria, and was then known as *The West African Pilot*. Wisely, such poets decided that their real metier lay in direct politics, and Azikiwe, also known as ‘Zik of Africa’, went on to immortalize his nationalism in the rhetorics of identity phrased in the language of ‘African irridentism’ and ‘political risorgimento’. He formed a political party, became a regional prime minister, and, later, served as the first Governor-General of an independent Nigeria.

Négritude. The African Personality. Authenticité. Back to Africa. Church of Ethiopia...etc., etc., etc. Even allowing for the opportunism that is embedded in some of these and allied rallying cries for a new socio-cultural order—and I believe that we can all agree to dismiss out of hand the Mobutu fabrication of authenticité, or the Eyedema mimic Africanité -allowing for the purely rhetorical and diversionary ploys of any summons to an identity recovery, every one of such manifestos directly implicates culture, and traces the trajectory of such culture backward into historic antecedents. This, really, is how the questions begin, how the ‘givens’, the supervening arches of contemporary cultural constructs may be invalidated as lacking any authority in precedence, antiquity, and even—universality. Within Anglophone Africa, there was no shortage of these prospecting excursions into the subsidence of the past.

Within the Anglian outstation, however, the Paris equivalent, black London failed to produce the equivalent of *Légitime défense* or *L’étudiant noir*, although, of course, there was no shortage of nationalist pamphlets on colonial issues—or indeed on the rise of European fascism. Nigerian students were among volunteers for the International Brigade—one of them was a prince from my own hometown, Abeokuta. Researchers have found the Whitehall archives a fruitful hunting ground for numerous letters of protest, denunciations, and proposals on British colonial policies, covering almost every subject—education, trade, the Second World War, etc. The invasion of Ethiopia—then Abyssinia—was another important catalyst in the upsurge of cultural nationalism among the Anglophones, but we shall hardly encounter any literary reflection of this in the poetry of the period, even though it fuelled the cultural discourse of intellectuals such as Edward Blyden or Casely Hayford. The inauguration of the pan-African conferences in Manchester did throw the British West Indians together with their African counterparts for the first time in any structured interaction, but the resultant manifestos and plan of action were—political. No literary movement was born as a result of this seminal reunion of a people that had been thrust apart for centuries. Paris was a study in contrast, but, as we have outlined, this says as much for the temper of these two cities as it did for the colonial subjects who invaded them.

Paris was, after all, the intellectuals’ and artists’ melting pot of the world—to what other city did even the Russian emigrés flee, both under the Tsar and then, later, after the triumph of the Bolsheviki, to get away from the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’? And the black Americans found the cosmopolitan flavour of Paris extremely congenial—for similar and different reasons—Richard Wright, Mercer Cook, James Baldwin, Samuel Allen, or—from the world of theatre and entertainment—Josephine Baker and a trickle of

jazz musicians that would later swell into a veritable stream. They did not choose Britain, which one would have expected to be preferable, from the language point of view. There was, of course, less overt racism in Paris, less obvious attitudes of discrimination. And I proposed, in my last lecture, the little-considered factor of a sense of affinity, of fellow-feeling between two sets of citizens at a second (internal) remove. Citizens, but not quite—one through the unfinished business of slavery, the other through an act of administrative legerdemain that conferred citizenship but recognized only subjects. Whatever the explanation, it was to Paris that they flocked. A notable exception was perhaps Paul Robeson. Yet even he, despite frequent visits to England, in concert and in theatrical performances on the British stage—in memorable roles such as Othello and Emperor Jones—even Paul Robeson did not really become part of the British artistic life. He was a familiar figure at the West African Students' Union, interacted with some of the most notable scions of Yorubaland who conferred on him the traditional title—Babasale of Lagos—but he had no influence whatever on a black artistic and intellectual community—because one did not exist. And Paul Robeson was also a frequent visitor to Paris, to sing at the fêtes of the Internationale and parley with officials of the Communist Party, of which he had become a member.

Those university and polytechnic students in England had only one ambition—to obtain their degree and return home. Home was not the United Kingdom. That was the essential difference between Paris and London, between the political and cultural policies of both colonial powers toward their subjects. For many of the intellectual elite of the French colonial empire, home was indeed Paris. The colonial departments of France elected black representatives into the French Assembly—Senghor and Aimé Césaire, Bernard Dadie of the Ivory Coast, Léon Damas from French Guiana, Rabemananjara of Madagascar, and a host of others were elected to the French Assembly. It would be impossible to find an ancestor of Wole Soyinka elected into the British House of Commons during this same period! The British Parliament kept its subjects at a distance. The reflection of black Diaspora in intellectual awareness therefore tended to be, for the Anglophone, largely political—a concern with the end of colonialism and the advent of national independence. The British colonial was not, like the French intellectual rebels, concerned with liberation from another culture, for the simple reason that, in the main, he had no experience of a cultural loss or alienation. It was this mood that you will find reflected in the journals of the period and the genre of mostly agitprop literature that I have already referred to, including poetry of a rather middling literary quality in some of the aforesaid journals.

The French intellectual was—as a result of these policies—a deracinated individual. French colonial intent was to turn its captive intellectuals into Frenchmen and women, to assimilate them into French metropolitan culture—and, for nearly one long century, it worked! The rebellion against this policy, one that found it difficult to express itself in political action—the French were ruthless colonizers!—commenced after the military conquests cited by Samuel Allen, and found its outlet in the much safer battleground of culture, fuelled by its contact with American writers and intellectuals, and the immediacy of the more cruel and overt racial negation experienced by their kinfolk in the United States. This was quite a potent mixture, one that would affect even the more accommodating Senghor. For others, it aroused the battle cry of identity in a far more

direct language that would occasion grief for some of the practitioners, including spells in French prison for racial incitement. So, the battleground of culture was not really as safe as we may have appeared to present it. The ‘love’ of Senghor’s expression for the French nation was an ambiguous relationship whose obverse stung several of his contemporaries—stomping the same cultural and intellectual battleground—into increasingly aggressive positions.

Etienne Lero, the uncompromising one, articulated this relationship most fiercely in the one-time manifesto of his group, *Légitime défense*: it rejected the French Parnassian tradition of poetry and exhorted its readers to seek their models of inspiration from Surrealism—and from the literature of the American Negro Renaissance. *Légitime défense*, even more than *L’edudiant noir* of Aimé Césaire and Senghor, was so confrontational in its denunciation of French assimilationist policy, so politically leftist in orientation—it endorsed communism as the path of liberation for the black race and all humanity—that it was banned by the French government after its very first issue. Jacques Roumain, Etienne Lero, René Depestre are not so well known as Senghor, Damas, and Aimé Césaire but, without question, this trio—and also some of the better-known names—represented the non-negotiable sector of the province of Négritude.

In Léon Damas, for instance, we encounter even the undisguisedly anti-French dimension of Négritude in an exhortation to Senegalese soldiers not to rush to the defence of France or consider her war with Germany any of Africa’s business. Invade Senegal/cried Damas, and he meant invade and conquer colonial Senegal, recover the authentic Senegal from her colonial domination—not merely of nation but of culture:

To the Senegalese veterans of war  
 To future Senegalese soldiers  
 To all the Senegalese veterans or soldiers  
 That Senegal ever will produce,  
 To all the future veterans  
 Former and future regulars  
 What-do-I-care future former....

Me/I say SHIT/and that’s not half of it

Me/I ask them to/shove/their  
 Bayonets/their sadistic fits/the feeling  
 /the knowing/they have/filthy/dirty  
 /jobs to do

Me/I ask them/to conceal the need  
 They feel/to pillage/rape/and steal  
 To soil the old banks of the Rhine anew....

Me/I call on them/to leave the Krauts  
 In peace.

This, need one comment, is a far cry from Senghor's benediction on the Seine—that placid symbol of French cultural inspiration, of its bourgeois-artistic, as well as its radical artistic soul. Léon Damas's poem was considered treason. Unlike Senghor, Damas does not call on any christian god to assist him in reining in his serpent of hate for the white race—he unleashes it in full venomous lunges:

My hatred grows  
around the edges of their villainy  
the edges of the gunshots  
the edges of the pitching  
of the slave ships  
and the fetid cargo of the cruel slaves

White

My hatred swells  
around the edges of their culture  
the edges of their theories  
the edges of the tales  
they thought they ought  
to stuff me with.

Oppose Damas's response to their 'theories' and their 'culture' to Senghor's prayer for the redemption of 'France, who expresses the right way so well'. Damas is not prepared to grant even that intellectual concession to France. In yet another poem, 'So often', he declaims:

And nothing  
nothing would so calm my hate

as a great  
pool  
of blood  
made  
by those long sharp knives  
that strip the hills of cane  
for rum

Unfortunately, this is not the kind of writing from the contribution of Léon Damas to Négritude literature that finds its way into the mainstream anthologies. The more transparent, obvious, and rather sentimental verses of his black assertion tend to find more ready space:

Give my black dolls back to me  
 So that I can play with them  
 the simple games of my instincts

instincts that endure  
 in the darkness of their laws  
 with my courage recovered  
 and my audacity  
 I become myself once more  
 myself again  
 out of what I used to be  
 once upon a time/once  
 without complexity...

Ay, there's the rub, there is the major bone that stuck in the throats of the anti-Négritude writers. 'Give my black dolls back to me', I wish to play, 'the simple games of my instincts' 'what I used to be/once/without complexity.' In such lines, we encounter the disquieting other side of Léon Damas, seemingly—that is, when taken out of context. There we find him out of tune with radical militants such as René Depestre, Aimé Césaire, etc. there he appears to have fallen into the trap of the Négritudinist summons to something worse than a paradisaical idyll—a state of infantile regression, no less. Unless one sees the poetic output of Damas as a whole, unless one situates such occasional slips into jejune romanticism within his rejectionist, non-assimilationist, and rounded political intelligence, one reads immediately only the tract of Négritude at its most superficial and undialectical.

Foul! cried the opposition in response to such versification. This was playing the European game of racial condescension. In their ears rang the Albert Schweitzer doctrine: the black man is my brother, but a junior one. The black man is simpleminded like a child. A creature of instincts, not of rationality. Any complex processes of phenomena elude him. Aimé Césaire, even within the context of his brilliant epical indictment of history, his celebration of the black man's combative destiny, has been propagated largely through those passages that appeared to be an endorsement of the David Humes, the Gobineaux, and other philosophical racists:

Aeia for those who never invented

anything  
 Who never explored anything  
 Who never conquered anything

This, many pointed out—and quite rightly—was a travesty of the black man's history. Without calling it by name, Kwame Nkrumah opposed such a doctrine with the political

and historic construct of the ‘African Personality’, set up ideological schools that traced the origin of mathematics to the black man and credited none but the black race with the construction of the pyramids. So did scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop who was not merely a Francophone, but also a Senegales, that African end of the axis of Négritude. So it was not just a Francophonie versus Anglophonie affair. But what claims precisely did the Négritudinist proselytizers establish, in order to balance this seeming negation of the black man’s contribution to world culture? Aimé Césaire was certainly not proposing a void to counter the overproductivity of the European. Neither was Senghor. What they proposed, quite simply, was a revaluation of neglected humanistic properties. A mystic wisdom that defied materialism and, of course, in Senghor’s case, a priestly benediction—an infinite capacity for reconciliation.

### DOLLS OF INNOCENCE OR MASKS OF ASSERTION?

The clock—a mechanistic invention, and a linear apprehension of time—was to be discarded, smashed. Let the European inventorial mind be controlled by time; the black race was the fount of timelessness and thus the guardian of the very immensity of creation. What is not subject to regulation or measure is infinite, and this was appropriated as the province of the black race’s essential being. Bernard Dadie, for instance:

I have carried the world since the dawn  
of time  
and in the night my laughter at the  
world  
creates the day

His black hands, Bernard Dadie proclaims, may be calloused from the injustice of history but even deeper than Aimé Césaire’s fingerprints on the skyscrapers of New York:

I plunge them/into the earth/into the  
sky/into the light of Day/into the  
Diamonds of night  
I plunge them into the morning dew/  
  
into the gentle Twilight  
into Past Present Future

Or Birago Diop’s justly famous *Soufflés*, sometimes published in English as ‘Breath’, or ‘Spirits’—or as ‘Ancestors’—in Langston Hughes’ translation—but one that may justly be considered the poetic exegesis of animism within the movement, that unique spirituality of the African that establishes a continuum between the worlds of the living,

of the ancestor, and the unborn. The animist grace is made to imbue the Négritudinist sensibility with an essence that was safe from appropriation by the European or the christian, yet contested the combined hierarchies of their materialist orientation on the one hand, and their spiritual ordering of the world on the other. This essence is rooted in the rituals and observances of African societies even till today, lies at the heart of their artistic intuitions, and establishes a solvent for pantheistic resolution of all spiritual urgings:

Listen to Things/More often than  
 Beings/Hear the voice of fire/  
 Hear the voice of water/Listen in the  
 wind/To the sigh of the bush/  
 This is the ancestors breathing  
 Those who are dead are not ever gone  
 They are in the darkness that grows lighter

And in the darkness that grows darker  
 The dead are not down in the earth  
 They are in the trembling of the trees  
 In the groaning of the woods  
 In the water that runs  
 In the water that sleeps  
 They are in the hut, they are in the crowd  
 The dead are not dead.

This mysticism bears no relation whatever, and owes nothing to the European Surrealist venture that formed yet another paradoxical tributary to the Négritude movement—we shall touch on the nature of that paradox in a moment. Birago Diop's mystical exploration of the African world-view was a total derivation from source and from source alone—he was, it should be noted, a veterinarian who spent a lot of time among his people, in the neglected rural areas. Birago was no frustrated creature of French alienation. This background distinguished his poetry from, for instance, that of Rabiariavello, the tragic Madagascan poet, who was a product of the movement, but not truly a part of it. Rabiariavello occupied a very special creative space, unique to himself, and untouched by many of the social concerns that relieved other poets from the danger of alienation and a total retreat into a solipsistic creative existence. We point to Rabiariavello—and Surrealism—only as a productive instance of the many tributaries that flowed into, and the branches that sprouted from, a movement that was not quite as homogeneous as many critics sometimes present it as being. Rabiariavello's true mentors and models were Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire, with whom he shared, in the words of Ulli Beier, 'a disgust of reality. This response to reality was, of course, of a different order from the animism of a Birago Diop, who sought to penetrate beneath reality to extract an other-reality that is interwoven with the physical, and opens itself to a pantheistic universalism. Senghor attempted to distinguish it from surrealism by naming



it surreality, while I once manufactured ‘animysticism’ as my contribution to this quest to trap the ineffable in the concreture of words—I doubt if any ‘naming ceremony’ will ever prove lasting, or satisfying.

If Rabiariavello’s poetic bent led him to a self-absorption of which social challenges bounced easily, with social indifference, the same was hardly true of his neighbour islander, Edouard Maunick, of Mauritius, whose self-definition—in contrast to the majority of the Négritude poets—took a rather cavalier, yet tortured attitude to the past:

I no longer need the past/To stand up  
in the present.

Now, reminding ourselves that Edouard Maunick was part Indian, part French, and part African—a common enough mongrelism on the little island of Mauritius—almost in equal parts, we see indeed that Négritude posed a subjective problem for quite a number of its adherents. Maunick solved this very simply by declaring: *J’ai choisi d’être nègre* (I choose to be black)—in his poem of the title ‘Seven sides and seven syllables’ from *Carousels of the sea*, applying, in effect, the arbitration of the sword to the external imposition of a Gordian knot, and proposing a direct solution to a questionable dilemma of choice. That question appears settled, but Maunick does return to it in various forms, and with occasional ambivalence or, more accurately, qualifications:

If I could find a kingdom  
Between midday and midnight

I would go forth and proclaim  
My mixed blood to the core

And, still from the same poem ‘Seven sides and seven syllables’

I the child of all races  
soul of India, Europe,  
my identity branded  
in the cry of Mozambique

The summation remains the same, however, and Maunick proceeds to identify with—as indicated in that last line—and react to the political plight or adventure of the community of race. When you share identity with ‘the wretched of the earth’, other identities take second place or appear comparatively academic. Maunick belongs to the second generation of Négritude poets, by the way, after Senghor, Damas, Césaire, etc. His visit to Yorubaland (in Nigeria) in the early sixties—his first ever—merely intensified a

choice that he then extended to cover the entire racial experience wherever it was to be encountered. Personal humiliation was identified with distant assaults—like the lynching of Emmet Till—the young boy whose alleged crime was that he smirked or whistled at a white prostitute. This was a traumatizing incident of race aggression that moved him to bitter lines, as it did an impressive number of poets within the movement. Its tragedy and timing posed a racial challenge, providing an immediacy that yanked both the first generation Négritude poets and their successors from their more abstract preoccupations—Aimé Césaire, David Diop, Léon Damas, and all. Or Tchikaya U'Tamsi from the Congo, whose own route to reconciliation and forgiveness we have already remarked, and is reflected in the elegiac tone, an intensely controlled anger, of his own lines to Emmet Till:

I am not longer master of my time  
 Master of these greynesses of time  
 What flowers can I weave for Emmet Till

the child whose soul in mine  
 lies bleeding....

I die alone from pride  
 I leave to Emmet Till his death  
 from horror at myself

Even more lacerating is the rage of an Aimé Césaire, of Birago Diop, or, most belligerent of all the Négritude responses to such assaults, the poetry of René Depestre. Using the voodoo gods of his Haitian island as a structure of revenge, Despestre's *Epiphanies of the voodoo gods* makes a visitation to an imaginary Alabama family and avenges the humiliation of the black race. It should be noted that *Epiphanies* is, to widen its thrust unambiguously, actually a section of the collection, *A rainbow for the christian west*—with its paradoxical symbolism that merges with yet cancels the accommodativeness of a Senghor—'no more floods, the fire next time'.

One by one the gods emerge, and no prince of peace any of these, but agents of retribution... Atiibon Legba from the Guinea, Ogun Ferraille, and Shango from the Yoruba, Damballah-Wedo from Dahomey, Agassou, and that original creation of the islands themselves, Baron Samedi. The concourse is for a time of reckoning, not of understanding or reconciliation. The warsome face of Négritude is unleashed by René Depestre, unrelieved by any tender lyricism:

I am Agaou native of Guinea  
 My lizard when he bites white flesh  
 Does not let go until the  
 Thunder of the revolution grows

I know the art of binding up  
Your rains, your prejudice, your fantasies

I am Baron-la-Croix  
The dog that howls at death  
In your garden is me  
The black moth  
That flies about the table is me  
One word too many and I'll transform  
Your little southern lives  
Into as many crosses  
Forged in the iron of my soul

There is no comparable work on that theme from Anglophone Africa—to find equivalents of response, you must research the journals, and the proletariat pamphlets whose contents were not truly considered as inspired or inspirational literature. But let us also include a little of the prose-poem sections of the same work to provide the full inquisitional temper of this out-pouring of an embittered soul, one that co-opts mythology directly into the services of a revolutionary reversal against the oppressor. It is taken from the section, 'The bath at dawn'.

Now, dear Alabama family, drop your last illusions at my feet! I am going to dissolve all the white dirt that human folly has accumulated even in your hearts. I am a god in sixteen persons and tens of other minor loas pulse on the same wave length as my blood. I make the tour of your house mounted on a magnetic goat. Look at the eyes of my phosphorescent mount. They ask you the following two questions: What have we done, we, the wretched black men of the earth, for these Whites to hate us so? What have we done, Brother Depestre, to weigh so little on their scale.

Thus, in direct terms we encounter the same question that was being asked—in various degrees of passion—by the liberation movement within the United States, a question that was either presented in rhetorical fashion, or one whose answer was deflected into artistic channels; for even if no answer was ever really expected, if the answer remained unfathomable to the oppressed black mind—and why should it not remain so, since, until the white encounter, such a mind had no concept of itself beyond a daily apprehended human repletion, creative and intellectual certitude of its existence and valoration—it remained a puzzle that had to be exorcised. It was no accident that a near identical phrasing appeared in that same *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*:

...when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering...  
when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year son asking in agonising  
pathos: Daddy, why do white people treat coloured people so mean?

For both priest and poet, for both poet of vengeance and priest of remission, this was an

underlying question and recognition that launched the quest for Négritude. The Negro past', 'Egypt, of the black Pharaohs', 'Black consciousness', 'Black is Beautiful', 'the African Personality', etc.—and Négritude the creative sanctuary—they are all responses that lament of a René Depestre and others, in varying degrees of anguish and bewilderment: 'What have we done, we, the wretched black men of the earth, for these whites to hate us so? What have we done...to weigh so little on their scale?' It then moved beyond the rhetorical stage and sought answers. It was phrased as a liturgy of racial exorcism and, for the victims of French colonial alienation, Négritude provided the vessel of the exorcist creed, extolling the recovery of identity. And even those who, like Edouard Maunick, claimed:

I no longer need the past

To stand up in the present

Nonetheless do go on to declare:

Identity is proof of the grandeur of man

While Aimé Césaire sweeps up all the negative imagery that had ever been bestowed on his race and declares: Yes, if you do persist in such negative attribution, let that indeed be the identity. But now it is I who will it. I refurbish it all in the light of recognition, of acceptance. I refurbish it and transform it through the magic of the creative intellect. I bless the labour, the degradation. I baptise it all Négritude and I define it within the totality of my image. The world that has been produced, after all, by the self-proclaimed superior world, does not exist, could not have existed without that denigrated presence, so let us celebrate it even as once given by—the other!

And I tell myself Bordeaux and Nantes  
and Liverpool and New York and San  
Francisco  
there is no place on this earth without my  
fingerprinting,  
and my heel upon the skeleton of skyscrapers

Who can boast of more than I?

I accept... I accept... I accept...entirely  
without reserve  
my race that no ablution of hyssop and  
lilies could purify  
My race corroded with stains,

Ripe grape for drunken feet  
Queen of sputum and leprosies  
Of whippings and scrofula...

I accept, yes, says Césaire, your impositions and your definition. The distillation of it all has gone, however, into an insurgent weapon of self-recognition, affirmation, and proud annunciation:

Those who invented neither gunpowder  
nor compass  
Those who never knew how to conquer  
steam or electricity  
those who explored neither seas nor sky  
But those without whom the earth would  
  
not be earth...

Or to revert to the earlier particularisms, those without whom San Francisco would not be. Not San Francisco, not Liverpool, nor Paris. My fingerprints are everywhere, declares the poet, my creative sweat is mixed up in its mortar. And within such a summative understanding, much can be forgiven even of negative hyperbole, otherwise known as poetic licence. 'Reason is Greek, emotion African' is one of the most notorious of such hyperbolic manichaisms, but if we penetrate into the heart of the poetry of what can be interpreted as racial slander, if we expand, just for the sake of argument, Jean-Paul Sartre's dialectical situating of Négritude as anti-racist racism, we begin to appreciate such hyperboles as metaphorical weapons forged in the heat of contestation.

Let us put it this way: it is as if you persist in calling me an idiot. For a long time, I protest, then, one day, I discover a way of silencing you. I startle you by responding, one unexpected day, with the joyous shout: yes, of course I am an idiot, but, for a start, have you read Dostoyevsky's *The idiot*? Now, that would be more than sufficient for a non-African black who has only attained the confidence of Négritude via the filter of European humanities. Imagine, however, if he was also a Yoruba, or has acquired sufficient weaponry from the armoury of Yoruba humanities! Again, twisting the blade of denigration from the hand of the racist, he would demand, 'And what do you know of the deity Obatala, the god and protector of albino, the cripple, and other disadvantaged of humanity? What do you know of that mysterious confidant of the gods, the "touched by the gods" whose interior language of communication you interpret as idiocy?' The 'idiot' did not await the birth of 'political correctness', the coy acknowledgment of the impaired of society under cosmetic names in order to be admitted into the world of the 'norm', or the privileged. His being was from the beginning, and society recognized him as one of the children of the gods, and not even of a lesser' one. Césaire's embrace of the negativism of others, which he then addressed as a 'positive' of his race's a priori, was ultimately unanswerable—'his (the black's) treasure lies in those depths disdained by

others’.

The wounds of that ‘disdain’, however valiantly its depths are appropriated and willed into its own antithesis through the transfiguring power of poetry, remain part of the scars of African history. It is futile to pretend that the scars are not real, or that contemporary actualities, like the effects of a change of weather on certain dormant, or muted ailments, do not reopen such wounds. While ‘the children of a lesser god’, secure within their world ordering, may dismiss the other’s contraction or belittlement of their universe, the fact remains that the other has impinged on it in a way that permanently precludes the solace of remaining within the secure isolation of its own precedent world order, or whatever vestiges of it are left. In short, the effects of that ‘disdain’ appear permanent, inescapable; they are to be read in a thousand and one actualities that plague the continent, and can be measured in the retardation of social existence against the visible prosperity of the other on a shared planet. Memory, however fitfully obscured, retains a record of that inequity—inequity because the prosperity of one is not unrelated to the circumstances of the spiritual and material impoverishment of the other. This is no newly discovered wisdom. Let us remind ourselves of the existence of a vast array of works that exist on this theme through the appropriate choice of two (non-black) scholars who, three-quarters of a century ago, reinforced the convictions of these pioneers of race-retrieval that crystallized in *Négritude*—Delafosse and, yet again, Georges Hardy. The former wrote (in 1922), of the pre-islamic African state, as it existed in 1353, that is, before the commencement of the Arab slave raids and later, European, and colonization:

...a real state, whose organisation and civilisation could compare favourably with that of Moslem kingdoms and of the same period.

while Georges Hardy (1927) bluntly declares:

Islam began the work of destruction...but Europe did a better job...not only by separating and destroying the races, but by systematically disorganising...

It is always useful to recall that the acknowledgment of a history of ‘disdain’ has not been limited to the memory of its victims alone, nor to the passion of their poets and griots, scholars, and ideologues.

### A LESSON FROM THE BALAFON

Let us take ourselves back to that pre-enslavement season of a continent, to that pre-islamic period of African statehood from which Delafosse selected his example. During that century—indeed, for some time before—and for centuries that would follow, quite a few empires would rise and fall—Ghana, Mali, Songhai, etc. Mali is the centre of our interest for now—then known as the Mandingo empire. It is the year 1230, or thereabouts, and a war is fought between Soundiata Keita and Soumare Kante, the king of Soso. In the famous battle of Kirina, King Soso is defeated by Soundiata. You will find the details of that battle in the epic of Soundiata. That narrative, like the legend of Chaka the Zulu, remains to African literature what the Viking sagas are to Scandinavian countries, the Arthurian legends to the European, or the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad* is to

contemporary world literature.

It is not, however, the battle or the literary classic itself, or the feats of empire-building that constitutes our point of reference, but a little musical instrument called the Sosso-Bala. This instrument had been made by Soumare Kante himself toward the end of the twelfth century. Legend has it that its fabrication was inspired by genies, and that it is endowed with a supernatural, even sacred character. Soumare Kante became so enamoured of this creation of his that he reserved to himself the right to play it, exclusively.

After the battle of Kirina, however, this instrument, the balafon, fell to Emperor Soundiata as a war trophy. He placed it in the custody of his personal griot, Bala Fasseke Kouyate. For eight centuries, the family of Bala Fasseke has remained guardian of the sacred instrument, which, however, remains the property of the descendants of Soundiata Keita. It is the symbol of the Mandingo empire, which once covered today's republic of Guinea and neighbouring territories. That instrument remains today under the personal charge of the Republic of Guinea.

Now what has the Sosso-Bala got to do with poetry, Négritude or anti-Négritude, with the Muse of remission, or the deities of rigorous equity? A lot, actually. Quite a lot. The immediate connection is that I first set my eyes on this famous instrument in, of all places, Paris. This was the instrument's first ever outing since it fell to Emperor Soundiata—the guardians have never permitted it to leave its place of habitation since it came into their custody. An exception was made on this occasion, however, for none other than Léopold Sédar Senghor, whose ninetieth birthday we had all gathered to celebrate. The balafon, like the kora, not only has inspired much of Senghor's poetry, but is constantly celebrated in his works. Both the balafon and the kora—but the kora especially—are instruments that often accompany the griot—the original poet, epic narrator, and custodian of history of the peoples of this part of the world. The poetry of Senghor is propelled—as has been perceptively remarked by analysts of his works—by the pulsating energy of the traditional griot, a leaping rhythm of self-surmounting ocean waves that is brought to the service of a variety of themes and subjects, even non-African ones. It was only fitting that this rare presence—the Sosso-Bala—should provide the climax, the *pièce de résistance* of the three-day celebration.

Fortunately, the ancestors were in favour—they were naturally consulted through divination rituals. It was one thing for UNESCO, which keeps record of tens of thousands of such patrimonies—from the monumental to the miniaturized—it was one thing for UNESCO to take the initiative, and for the government of the Republic of Guinea to give its assent, or indeed the insurance companies to agree to insure such a priceless object for heaven knows how much—all that came to nothing if the rituals were not made, and positive auguries obtained from its divine protectors.

Well, what was the crowning moment like? We had waited in great anticipation. The Sosso-Bala was in fact a day late—the ancestors obviously operate a different time schema from airlines but, finally, a group of five musicians appeared on stage. A long piece of cloth was laid on the ground and then—in came the balafon, swathed in nothing more than what looked like a casual dust sheet or a woman's light wrapper. It was carried under the armpit just like any other instrument of its kind—the balafon is quite lightweight as you know—just a xylophone. Pieces of wood laid over an array of

irregular sized gourds—the resonance chambers—and beaten by two sticks with rounded heads. The wood appeared unpolished, revealed no suggestion of pedigree timber, the strikers were neither ebony nor ivory.

Yet there, right before us, lay eight centuries of history, poetry, of pride, inspiration, and sacred heritage. A simple, unassuming xylophone that was, however, born out of conflict, of a bloody struggle for power and the travails of nation-building, yet innocuous in its appearance, at once an embodiment of history, yet insulated from it, giving off its own statement of harmony and resolution that constitutes both its reality and innate contradiction. That balafon was redolent with ancestry, a survivor of much bloodshed and human loss, before and beyond the incursion of aliens east or west, of even yet unresolved conflicts, a statement of the complementary truths of strife and harmony—indeed, to revert to my own symbolic world of deities—a testament again of Ogun, the god of war and destruction, of the lyric and creative spark, a protagonist into unsuspected realms of existence and consciousness—including the world of moralities.

It struck me, on first reflection, as a perfect metaphor for literature itself—and especially for literature that is the product of crisis—both the crisis of some origination that is external to the literature itself and that—the more common—of crisis within the creative being. But then, I was in the process of preparing a lecture titled ‘Literature in crisis/and this was a haunting metaphor that was clearly in search of an anchor and was quickly grabbed by the first viable corner. Today, I am inclined to expand that metaphor beyond literature, and the claims of the present co-option are certainly even more firmly grounded; it is merely returning the metaphor to its source or, as Senghor might prefer to phrase it, to a ‘Négritude of the sources’ - in this case, the Muse of Reconciliation, of which Senghor is himself the lyric acolyte.

And the sound? Well, again, an anti-climax. It was no Stradivarius of xylophones. A crisp, aged tonality, but nothing extraordinary, no mystic resonance such as the flute of Orpheus was reputed to have had, or the magic pipes of Akara-ogun in that Yoruba classic, *The forest of a thousand daemons*. A few tentative notes, welling into a confident seam, then the voice of the female griot joined in, filling the auditorium with the plenum of history from which that instrument, the choir on stage, and we the black listeners had emerged, but the resultant harmony was one that enfolded the gathering in a mantle of humanity that excluded none, neither the colonizers nor the colonized, neither the slavers nor the enslaved, the disdainers or the disdained. That moment was the obverse face of the earlier narrated sensations of the Ouidah slave route, yet it settled into a near identical residuum of that earlier experience. It was a dirge of ancestral severance, of loss too great to quantify, only benumbing, yet filled with evocation of a quiescent triumph that is an extract of human resilience, of a shedding of individuation into a tide of universal affirmation of a humane oneness.

Perhaps it is within this territory that lodges the impulse of forgiveness, since oneness eschews distinctions and makes war and peace, creativity and destruction, guilt and innocence, Négritude and tigritude, Senghor and Depestre ...all facets of an irreducible humanity and thus steers that dichotomized, even fragmented entity toward a resolution within an anterior harmony. I do not really know, and I possess neither wish nor temperament to abandon the continuing, combative imperatives of the dialectics of human history. But such glimpses and echoes of the possibilities of harmonization do



surface periodically as consolation, and can open up horizons for a humanized vision. Within such a context, the Sosso-Bala becomes an unsolicited metaphor for the near intolerable burden of memory, a Muse for the poetry of identity and that elusive 'leaven' in the dough of humanity—forgiveness, the remission of wrongs, and a recovery of lost innocence.

## ENDNOTES

1 *Three negro classics*, ed. John Hope Franklin, Avon Books, 1992.

### Globalization and *ubuntu*

MOGOBE B.RAMOSE

Once upon a time it was believed and known that our planet was a flat rectangle. From the four corners of the earth the angels would blow their trumpets at the end of time in order to raise the dead. Punishment was imposed and considerable suffering was brought to bear upon those who challenged this belief with the argument that the earth is round or spherical. Ultimately, knowledge triumphed over belief. Was this shift of paradigm the historical and intellectual inauguration of globalization? As if to commemorate this shift of paradigm, John Donne, the metaphysical poet, appositely wrote in the *Holy sonnet VII*, 'At the round earth's imagined corners'. This paradox was in a way reminiscent of the tension between belief and knowledge. If belief, however justified, is ultimately metaphysical by character, then knowledge as a verifiable<sup>1</sup> claim to truth<sup>2</sup> is by nature empirical. The metaphysical and the empirical share one thing in common: they are both utterances or claims made by an embodied<sup>3</sup> human being embedded in the empirical world. On this basis, the separation of the metaphysical and the empirical is no more than a matter of conceptual neatness which belies the ontological character of the human being as an organic oneness.<sup>4</sup> If metaphysics and questions pertaining to empirical knowledge (epistemology) belong to the province of philosophy, then globalization as the contemporaneous coincidence of and tension between belief and knowledge may be considered to be a legitimate philosophical issue. It is precisely as a philosophical problem that we propose to deal with globalization.

That the individual is embedded and conditioned within, in and by experience, means for us that philosophy is rooted in experience as well. For us, philosophy is not a mysterious eruption of concepts from outer space having no connection with our empirical world even though they impinge upon it. Neither do we consider philosophy to be a flight to the abstract and the abstruse thereby obscuring and mystifying issues. For these reasons, we shall give an exposition of the experience of globalization first. Thereafter we shall bring philosophical reasoning to bear upon it.

## GLOBALIZATION AND PHILOSOPHY

Having noted the ontological organic oneness of the metaphysical and the

epistemological, we will proceed from being embedded in the experiential world as a human being. The meaning and interpretation of the particular experience—in this case globalization—shall constitute the distinctive philosophical character of our essay. Accordingly, we shall be concerned with questioning the bases, the validity, and the tenability of the presuppositions as well as the presumptions of the experience that goes under the name globalization. The effects of this experience shall be considered as questions of justice in both the political and the economic spheres. Therefore, we shall begin by presenting some of the features of this experience, including questions arising in connection with those features. To this we propose to make one exception, namely, the submission that at bottom globalization is, philosophically speaking, the paradox of drawing and demolishing boundaries at the same time. We have in mind here not only physical and geographical boundaries, but intellectual and cultural ones as well. This paradox shall be stated in the form of the following question: if reasoning and acting on the basis of already drawn and yet-to-be drawn boundaries speak to the reality of being-human-in-the-world, can we then find an argument for the validity and applicability of bounded reasoning which could justify the ‘us’ and ‘them’ division among and between human beings? Implied in this question is the recognition that quite often, the drawing of boundaries is connected to at least two claims. One is the claim to exclusive possession or ownership and another is the claim to sole entitlement and competence to decide and exercise control over a particular circumscribed area. Lurking behind these claims is absolutism and dogmatism. Demanding that one’s position be recognized as the centre towards which all else must move and being tenaciously fixed upon this demand is the hallmark of dogmatic absolutism. This is the common feature of the so-called three great monotheistic religions of the world.<sup>5</sup> Theirs, separately, is the one and only ‘god’ besides whom the existence of another deity is an impossibility. We use the term, economic fundamentalism, in this sense. In terms of its thought structure and orientation, it is absolutist and dogmatic like the three monotheistic religions. Its ‘god’—money—commanding the relentless pursuit of profit at whatever cost, demands only obedience from its creatures.

The invention of money was predicated on the intention that it was a means to an end. Indeed, money continues to be the means to realize multiple ends. However, economic fundamentalism has arguably reversed this logic. Its commandment is that money shall be an end in itself. Profitability, or the insatiable urge to make more and even more money at whatever cost, is the apotheosis of money as an end in itself. Money has become the ‘god’ towards which everything must move and before whom everyone must submit. In this sense, we wish to borrow and endorse the insight that: the invention of money is the original sin of economics.

For us, bounded reasoning, that is, reasoning and acting on the basis of already drawn and yet-to-be-drawn boundaries, attests to the experience that everything is in a flux; a condition of incessant change and changeability because motion<sup>6</sup>, and not rest, is the principle of being. To be is to be in the condition of -ness rather than -ism. This is the ontological basis for the ensuing tension between -ness and -ism. The tension arises as soon as we attempt to construct social reality on the proposition that there is a radical division and irreconcilable opposition between -ness and -ism. On this reasoning, the flux of being necessitates the search for stability. This culminates in the attainment of an -ism.

The -ism is then construed to be the reality not only in contrast, but also in opposition to be-ing as -ness. Dogmatic absolutism feeds upon this philosophic outlook to reality. We suggest that the purported radical division and irreconcilable opposition between -ness and -ism is at best putative and, at worst, false. Instead of advancing a sustained argument, we shall be content to underline the insight that a philosophic outlook on reality based upon -ness can avert dogmatic absolutism only if the logic of -ness is fully appreciated. Surely, -ism is only a moment but not the elimination or replacement of -ness. By way of illustration, we shall present an *ubuntu* philosophy of human rights. The purpose of the presentation is to raise instead of answering the following question: can *ubuntu* philopraxis be one of the answers to contemporary economic fundamentalism in the form of globalization?

*Ubuntu* is ontologically a -ness and not an -ism. As such it is epistemologically oriented towards the construction of knowledge which is undogmatic by character. Accordingly, the fundamental philosophical distinction between *ubuntu* human rights philosophy and economic fundamentalism is that dogmatic absolutism is virtually alien to the former and germane to the latter. *Ubuntu* is one of the core philosophical concepts and organizational principles of the Bantu-speaking peoples. These peoples must, in the face of economic globalization, cement strong ties of solidarity among themselves first. Here, the desideratum for solidarity is indeed the construction of a boundary, and so bounded reasoning is neither alien nor necessarily repugnant to *ubuntu* philosophy. But the delimitation of boundaries here is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Therefore, the Bantu-speaking peoples must remain open to collaborate with all human beings the world over, who are determined to replace the deadly dogma of economic fundamentalism with the life-giving logic of -ness, putting the preservation of human life through sharing before the relentless pursuit of profit. *Feta kgomo o tshware motho.*

### RUMOURS OF GLOBALIZATION

In this section we propose to discuss 'globalization' without problematizing the usage itself. This is the reason why we prefer the title of the sub-section because it is intended to suggest that we are not yet in a position to confirm the veracity of 'globalization'. What we are dealing with therefore, in what follows, is only the rumours of globalization. In following the rumours of globalization we propose to focus upon the family as a separate item. This is because (1) like religion, the Western concept of family, is closely intertwined with the philosophy of the economy in the free enterprise system. (2) The intertwining generates and feeds upon the concepts of citizenship and nationality. (3) The assertion of the right to found a family is recognized as an entitlement requiring no prior permission from anyone. Customarily, though not necessarily, the right to found the family is concretized through marriage, be it monogamous or polygamous. The very act of founding the family and the conclusion of marriage establish boundaries. Within these boundaries are the couple, together with their children. Outside these boundaries is the sphere of the rest of humanity. Thus bounded reasoning belongs to the family and marriage as well as citizenship and nationality. The relevance of these concepts to our investigation of bounded reasoning speaks for itself. If the right to found a family is a human right, then the incursion of globalization into this sphere must be judged in terms

of human rights. The paragraphs that follow contain rumours concerning the incursion of globalization into the boundaries of the nation, the family, and marriage.

The urge to broaden trade<sup>7</sup> and the expansion of religion, especially Christianity and Islam, together constitute the foundation of globalization. We propose to focus on Christianity since its meaning and impact upon globalization continues to be comparatively wider in scope than the Islamitization of the world. We are thus aware that we are opting for a 'Eurocentric' perspective on world history. However, our option disclaims the position that European history is synonymous with world history.<sup>8</sup> Neither do we hold that the best in terms of goods and values can be found only from European history and culture.

Both trade and religion occur within a specific cultural context. Their extension beyond their original cultural boundaries means that they can serve as vehicles for the transmission of culture. Since culture, broadly defined, includes politics, it follows that both religion and trade were contemporaneously the embodiment of a particular political ideology and the transmitters thereof. On this reasoning, globalization may be cultural, religious, political, and economic. It is worth stressing that this demarcation into specific areas in no way precludes overlapping, convergence, mutual reinforcement and even organic unity among them. The question is: what happened or happens when diverse cultures, religions, political and economic systems meet one another? Whenever this occurred, the result has often been a relationship of dominance and subservience between and among peoples. In the spheres of religion,<sup>9</sup> culture<sup>10</sup> and politics<sup>11</sup>, including economics, we may describe the situation as a condition of epistemological dominance endeavouring to suppress the quest for mutual recognition and parity.<sup>12</sup> In the sphere of trade, we propose to describe this as one economic-political system oriented towards the domination of others primarily for its own benefit.<sup>13</sup> The will to domination rests on the implicit argument that all humanity can, and must live under one economic and political 'truth'. This 'truth' is based on the West's unilateral definition of both experience and knowledge. It is the purpose of the present chapter to examine the validity of this argument in relation to globalization.

## ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

The roots of contemporary globalization lie deeply embedded in the rise of industrialization, particularly in the United Kingdom and the subsequent world-wide spread of the British economic model through colonization.<sup>14</sup> Commercial links were forged between the colonized and the colonizing power. The former were distinct territorial entities whose sovereignty had been abolished by the so-called right of conquest.<sup>15</sup> This occurred in the context of the voyages of 'discovery'.<sup>16</sup> When sovereignty was regained either through decolonization or war of independence economic links survived. At that time, the bond between territoriality and sovereignty was strong in such a way that the respective sovereigns could credibly exercise sovereignty over economic activity within their territory. They were thus in a position to regulate economic activity within in a manner that impinged upon their external economic relations with other sovereign states. In this way the cohesion between sovereignty and the nation-state assured the sovereign the position of a major player in the sphere of

international economic relations. There was, however, a price to be paid for this, namely, democratic accountability and responsiveness to the exigencies of social justice.<sup>17</sup>

This situation changed when money (currency) acquired the ability to move on a 24-hour basis at the speed of light in relation to all other economic commodities. This was facilitated by the electronic revolution in particular. This new form of colonialism, supported by the unrelenting search for cheap labour, ushered in both the dislocation and the fragmentation of the productive activity from one centre to multiple peripheries. Network<sup>18</sup> became the new operative and regulative concept guiding the production of goods. The label, 'Made in Italy, for example, conceals the complex history of the production network underlying the finished product. Armed with the production network and impelled only by the search for the highest profit in the shortest possible time, the currency market abolished the boundaries between nation states and challenged the sovereign authorities of the nation states to relinquish or relax their strong control over their economies. This was the necessary condition the currency market imposed upon those nation states that wanted to benefit from their services. Thus, deregulation stepped in and joined network as the regulative and operative concept of internal and external economic activity. Deregulation rests upon the presupposition, indeed, the principle that everything is marketable. And, marketability in terms of the free enterprise economic system (capitalism) is indissolubly linked to profitability. Even human labour, available from the labour market, will fetch a price only if it is deemed profitable. In the final analysis, the marketability of everything means the commoditization of everything for the sake of maximum profit. If souls exist at all, even they are marketable because they can be exchanged for money and over-abundant luxury. Thus, all forms of corruption are consistent and compatible with the logic of unrestricted financial power.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, dislocation of industry, deregulation, network and the making of maximum profit whatever the costs, together constitute the dogma of the religion<sup>20</sup> of economic fundamentalism.<sup>21</sup> The high priestesses and priests of this religion preach only one gospel and worship only one god, namely, the profitability of the market. For them the market is the financial power to sustain the contraction of space, time, and politics regardless of the human and environmental consequences. The making of boundless profit is their main pursuit. Blessed then are the makers of infinite profit, for they have replaced the illusion of eternal heaven with the everlasting profitability of the market.

### **GLOBALIZATION AND THE FAMILY**

The experience and concept of the family will be problematized in this section. The purpose of the problematization is twofold: it is to show that economic fundamentalism prefers and even prescribes the family based upon monogamous marriage. It is also to create the basis for the argument that human rights is the proper foundation and context for the assessment and evaluation of globalization. The family in monogamous marriage is comparatively easy to control and adjust to the requirements of the market forces. The mechanism for such control and adjustment is the juridification of the relationship between parent and child. To the extent that the family precedes juridification, it is said to be natural.<sup>22</sup> The male and female whose sexual contact has resulted in the birth of the child are called respectively, father and mother.<sup>23</sup> Juridification has since extended and

expanded the scope of this natural relationship to include a single male or female who adopts the child formally, or, in the case where maternity or paternity arises, from artificial insemination. According to juridification, a parent is either a male or a female who, on the basis of coitus or other methods resulting in the claim to have a child, submits this claim for recognition by the law. Here, it is possible to see that what in the one case might be regarded as a natural fact—coitus resulting in the birth of a child, and in another case a technological fact—becomes transmuted into a juristic fact. Thus, a natural fact is elevated to the status of a juristic fact. This elevation finds expression in Article 16, Section 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State/This assertion of the right to found a family means that the family is part and parcel of the human rights discourse. It means then that if and when the family comes into contact with globalization then the latter must be examined under the prism of human rights discourse. The idea of the family as a 'basic unit' of a social group and the political order in the form of 'the State' speaks to the organic relationship between the family, citizenship, and nationality. Thus globalization is concerned with the family and the nation-state.

Whereas Article 16, Section 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to found the family and stipulates the protection of this right by both society and the 'State', Section 1 of the same Article recognizes 'the right to marry and to found a family'. Since the 'and' here is by no means an idle insertion, it follows that marriage and the family may be considered to be separate and distinct. This is of crucial importance because it also shows that the section is not committed to any specific form of 'marriage' or 'the family' in the legal sense. It needs no special pleading to suggest that this is consistent with the recognition, protection, and respect for other related human rights, for example, the right to choose the form of marriage conforming to one's religion. Globalization's predilection for monogamous marriage as the only 'civilized'<sup>24</sup> locus of the family—does not necessarily prove recognition, protection and respect for the freedom to choose one's form of marriage. It found solid foundation and fertile ground for its supercilious attitude in Western philosophy which, through a long historical line traceable to antiquity,<sup>25</sup> prefers to define marriage proper as monogamous.<sup>26</sup>

The family, that is, the blood relationship between mother, father and child, is in the first place natural and only secondarily legal. It may also be understood in the wider sense comprising other blood relatives apart from parents and children. In the course of history,<sup>27</sup> legal marriage<sup>28</sup> emerged and assumed the role of regulating family relations.<sup>29</sup> Some legal marriages are exclusively monogamous but others are not. Whereas Christianity<sup>30</sup> insists upon the former, Islam, for example, maintains the contrary. In both instances, however, the legal marriage was closely connected to the prevailing economic system. It is precisely this connection between religion-based monogamy, economics, and politics which facilitated both the consolidation and the expansion of trade within and beyond the confines of Great Britain.<sup>31</sup> It also continues to help in the consolidation of globalization.

Monogamous legal marriage was firmly established when industrialization assumed greater visibility and had a significant impact on social life. At that time husband and

wife relations were structured upon the assumption that the husband was superior to the wife. This assumed superiority of the husband accorded him dominance in the domestic sphere. The operative legal principle here was marital power which assured the legal minority of the wife during the subsistence of the marriage. The same attribute of the superiority of the husband, coupled with the denial of the woman's right to vote,<sup>32</sup> enabled the husband to assume the position of privileged prominence in public life. The legal domestication of the wife was to be used by growing industrialization to preserve the structural inequality between husband and wife and to grant the husband increased economic power at the expense of the wife. Together with the children, the wife was simply an appendage of her husband appositely called a 'dependant'. With the rise of feminism, the continued existence of this juridical and economic inequality came under threat. Women questioned and rejected the philosophical<sup>33</sup> bases of the superiority of the male and, by extension, the husband.<sup>34</sup> In effect, the critique urged for the recognition of the woman's right to vote and thereby open the way for her participation in public life. It also questioned and rejected the validity of the privileged economic power of the husband.<sup>35</sup> Here, it is pertinent to note that one stream of feminist thought argued only for integration<sup>36</sup> into the existing economic system, whereas the other rejected the basic premises of the same system.<sup>37</sup> According to the latter, even the husband and, therefore, the family was used as a 'resource' to sustain a system which put profit before respect for the dignity of both human labour and the family. The reproduction of children was construed as the unpaid labour which husband and wife performed to assure the survival of the system by guaranteeing it the supply of young and fresh labour. The problem then was therefore a systemic one since neither the abolition of the dogma of male superiority nor the integration of women would remove economic exploitation<sup>38</sup> and restore both respect and protection of the dignity of human labour and the family.<sup>39</sup> The free enterprise economic system rejected this argument. It opted for the integration of women and concretized this through anti-discrimination legislation containing the prohibition on negative exclusion based on sex.<sup>40</sup> Positive discrimination promoting the advancement of women concealed and condoned the moral guilt of the system. Through the integration of women on this basis, the system was reinforced and thus assured of its continued survival.

The intensification of globalization brought the temporary marriage between women and the free enterprise economic system under strain. Women discovered that participation in both public life and economic activity quite often resulted in disproportionate gain and benefit more favourable to the holders of unrestricted economic power. Even the option for spinsterhood did not necessarily result in an equitable sharing of the burdens and benefits of economic prosperity between themselves and the holders of this kind of financial power. Married women were not necessarily better off either. For one thing, they realized that despite their freedom to exercise their reproductive right, child-bearing and child-rearing proved to be financially very expensive in the circumstances. The proverbial 'certainty' that legal marriage provided turned out to be particularly elusive at the dissolution thereof. The promise of marriage as a lifetime meal ticket at divorce often included conditionalities which offended against personal self-esteem and the right to exercise emotional freedom without fear of legal or social censure. For another, they realized that at marriage taxation was comparatively more

burdensome than at spinsterhood. Thus, monogamous marriage within this system lost most of its attractiveness. Accordingly, cohabitation without legal marriage became a viable and practical option. Indeed, even prostitution or 'the sex industry became a positive alternative for an increasing number of women'<sup>41</sup> thus becoming a shield against the crushing aggression of economic fundamentalism. Even this appears to be a lost struggle as globalization intensifies the feminization of poverty. And so, like some men before them, women recognized that although legal marriage was a voluntary act, the juridical construction of the married couple was a function of the economic system which subordinated the interests of their amorous union to the imperatives of the logic of unrestricted financial power. In the result, the birth rate in most Western economies decreased.

One would have thought that the decrease in the number of children and the corresponding increase in the number of old people would be a welcome development to the holders of unrestricted financial power. Yet, the contrary is true. The latter did not consider that the inherent necessity for structural unemployment integral to the free enterprise economic system could be tackled by deploying the already available unemployed youth. In terms of the logic of this system, this would be a short-sighted and temporary solution because even the already available youth would ultimately have to be replaced when they became unemployable. Therefore, the reproduction of 'human resource capital' is an inevitable necessity without which the system cannot survive. For the system, monogamous legal marriage is the optimal site for the reproduction of 'human resource capital'. It is also the best, though quite often the most ill-equipped site for the absorption of the structurally unemployed. Accordingly, the 'return to family values' is the slogan of contemporary globalization intent on keeping the exercise of unrestricted financial power intact. Paradoxically, the family in this context is simultaneously the redeemer and the victim of globalization.

The dominant financial powers are reluctant, for a complex variety of reasons, to replenish their diminishing 'human resource capital' with children from areas of the globe where the birth rate is on the increase. One reason for this reluctance is the scourge of Aids. So far their attempts to deal with this problem in those parts of the world have not been significantly successful. For example, with regard to sub-Saharan Africa, their attempts continue to be less successful. The following are some of the reasons for this lack of success. The African cultural background has not been taken seriously into account with regard to anti-Aids campaigns. People have unduly assumed that the dangling of a few condoms in public sex education lessons is culturally sound. It is also assumed, with dubious justification indeed, that preaching the gospel of adherence and 'fidelity' to only one partner is a morally sound prescription that could assist the struggle against Aids. The fact that legal monogamous marriage in principle permits divorce is by itself a serious indictment against this prescription. Furthermore, for a people whose cultural background permitted and still continues to permit the marriage of more than one wife or husband at the same time, the prescription sounds hollow. It appears to be without legitimacy and credibility. This is the more so because in this culture of marriage, sexually transmitted diseases were by no means alien. Nor are they necessarily exclusive to such a culture. However, they were not attributable to the having of multiple spouses in the first place. In fact, the permissibility of divorce in monogamous legal marriage is in



a sense an endorsement of the same principle that one may have multiple spouses. Whereas Arab and sub-Saharan African cultures permit the having of multiple spouses at the same time, Western culture permits only one spouse at a time. In order to have had more than one it is obligatory to divorce. The difference then is one of timing rather than principle. Loosening one's grip on this timing may sometimes lead to impeachment. So while the scourge of Aids speaks against the profitability of replenishing the diminishing Western population with children from those areas, the population decrease itself is a clear and present danger threatening the survival of unrestricted financial power. This threat notwithstanding, most of the countries demanding the unrestricted exercise of financial power are bent on tightening their laws on asylum. The aim here is to render the intake of refugees difficult and minimal. This is yet another diminution of the chances to replenish their decreasing populations. Other things being equal, the option to refuse immigration to these countries may, in the circumstances, be used as a weapon to fight globalization. Similarly urging for a rethink of the monogamous legal marriage as a condition for reproduction might become an important contribution in the struggle against globalization. This struggle in particular is not predicated on the irrational desire to obliterate the human species deliberately from the face of the earth. On the contrary, it feeds upon the seeming irrationality of human sexuality having as its basis:

...the wisdom of the demiurgic principle... [which has engraved in the very being of each human being] the 'sting' of desire... So that experiencing this sting, even those animals that are incapable of understanding the purpose of Nature in her wisdom—because they are young, foolish [*aphrona*] or without reason [*aloga*] do in fact accomplish it. By their intensity the aphrodisia serve a rationality which those who engage in them do not even need to know.<sup>42</sup>

### CRITIQUE OF THE GLOBALISTS' GLOBALIZATION

Could globalization have occurred without the knowledge that our planet is spherical like a globe?<sup>43</sup> This question is intended to show that globalization both as an experience and as a concept is problematical. Taking our cue from the rumours in the preceding sections, we now turn to problematize and critique globalization.

Many dictionaries and handbooks concur that to globalize means to make world-wide in scope and application. So globalization is a metaphor for the aspiration and the determination to render an idea or a way of life applicable and functional throughout the world. Every single part of the world must therefore be the same by functioning according to a specific idea or system of ideas. Therefore, homogenization (samenization) may be identified as one of the intentions of globalization. Most of our contemporary world consists of nation states. In order to achieve samenization, globalization must penetrate these nation states. But has penetration not already occurred and, is it not continuing through internationalization? What, if any, is the distinction between globalization and internationalization? At first sight the difference lies in scope because the latter is not by definition bound to the aspiration of world-wide scope and application. However, practice seems to lead to a contrary conclusion. For example, by appeal to universality, internationalization under the aegis of the United Nations

Organization has produced many instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose aspiration and determination to be world-wide in terms of scope and application is beyond doubt. In this sense, internationalization is, despite its definitional limitation, like globalization because in practice it tends to replace the restrictive ‘between’—inter—with the wide and comprehensive ‘all’. By this mechanism of replacement through the appeal to universality, internationalization goes further, conceptually, than globalization. This is because the concept of the universe comprises the whole cosmic system of matter and energy of which the Earth is a part. Only religion, like Christianity, can be universal in this sense because its claims concerning the origin and destiny of humanity ultimately pertain and apply to all that there is. But internationalization’s recourse to universality is not religious in this sense. Therefore, the trajectory of its far-reaching conceptual distance is limited by the finitude of the nation states on our planet. Under the guise of globalization, economic fundamentalism has appropriated the claims of religion already referred to. But the appropriation is unsustainable since in terms of applicability, globalization is definitionally restricted to our planet.<sup>44</sup> Its range of application cannot conceptually and does not practically extend beyond the Earth. On this basis, globalization is already a false religion.

The universalist perspective of international-ization—the ‘moon’ treaty notwithstanding—would seem to be of no practical use beyond the confines of our planet. Accordingly, universalization is, for practical purposes, limited by the aim of homogenization here on earth and not in heaven. Although globalization, internationalization and universalization are conceptually distinct, they all share, in practice, the common aim to homogenize the globe. Homogenization implies at best the metaphorical breaking down of boundaries. This happened in history when traders around the world broke down the boundaries by the permission, as it were, of the sovereign. The latter exercised decisive control over economic activity within and across its boundaries. We gather from the rumours in the preceding sections that demolition of boundaries is one of the effects of globalization. Another is that it has significantly weakened the sovereign’s right to exercise decisive control over economic activity within its own borders. At the global level, the sovereign is rumoured to be reduced to the position of a powerless spectator. We start with the last.

### **THE WEAKENING OF SOVEREIGNTY**

The globe itself has no frontiers. Boundaries exist within the globe. Therefore, the flight of capital at whatever speed is always across borders with the clear aim of escaping from the grip of the particular sovereign. Since this latter is not a global but a concrete particular sovereign, it is false to claim that it is powerless as though it already possessed the attribute of global sovereignty. In other words, the claim that the sovereign is reduced to the position of a powerless spectator can be sustainable only if it refers to a global sovereign who clearly does not exist. With regard to the second rumour, it is true that globalization has significantly weakened the sovereign’s right to exercise decisive control over internal economic activity. But the vitiation of control is certainly not equal to the termination thereof. What is clear though is that because of globalization, new questions concerning the meaning of sovereignty arise. In this sense, we are in the phase of an

interpretative crisis with regard to sovereignty.<sup>45</sup> Concerning the first rumour, we suggest that globalization is a late comer with regard to the breaking down of boundaries. Moreover, globalization is the demolisher of boundaries only in the metaphorical sense explained above. Before (economic) globalization colonization went beyond the metaphorical demolition of boundaries. Resting its title to newly acquired territories on the questionable 'right of conquest', colonization literally abolished the boundaries. Colonization not only threatened but it actually abrogated the sovereignty of the indigenous conquered peoples. For us, social and political institutions of other kinds, even if they were not or are not state formations but exercise functions similar to those attributed to the modern state, are sovereign as well.<sup>46</sup> At decolonization only limping or defective sovereignty was restored to the indigenous conquered people. Their sovereignty remains defective because their newly acquired sovereignty was already burdened with economic bondage to the former colonial ruler.<sup>47</sup> Economic dependence was so engrafted into political sovereignty that the exercise of the latter remains circumscribed. It is therefore crucial to note that at least two types of sovereignty are threatened by globalization, namely, presumably integral sovereignty and defective sovereignty. Deterritorialization and the vitiation of sovereignty are not the special features of globalization.

After the violent demolition of boundaries by colonization, the possession of and the threat by the major nuclear powers to use these weapons remain a veritable deterritorializing factor. Instead of leading to the end of sovereignty, this condition in international relations resulted in the condonation and affirmation of the sovereign state as the ineliminable actor in the conduct of global affairs. This is manifested, for example, by the complex and protracted negotiations pertaining to SALT I and II (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks Agreements). The demise of the Socialist Bloc, together with the end of the Cold War, brought about not the contraction but the proliferation of sovereign states. In these circumstances, only an all-out nuclear war shall obliterate sovereignty. But since the possession of these weapons is subject to the self-imposed law of rationality<sup>48</sup> commanding the non-use of these weapons under any circumstances, the prospect for the obliteration of state sovereignty is not only remote and elusive, but also unreal.<sup>49</sup> Globalization is unlikely to alter this situation even if it may forge a close and strong alliance with any major nuclear power. For as long as the law of rationality holds with regard to the possession of nuclear weapons, it is doubtful that any major nuclear power will fail to persuade globalization to submit to this law out of pure self-interest. Instead of stumbling any major nuclear power into irrationality and thus down the precipice of nuclear omnicide, globalization is likely to obey the law of rationality as propounded by a particular sovereign major nuclear state. So, it is that even along the most delicate and deadliest of paths, globalization is already circumscribed by the imperatives of rationality even though it may refuse to recognize them as yet. Globalization's option for rationality shall mean submission to governance by the sovereign.

### **TOWARDS A GLOBAL ECONOMY**

Globalization is a process and not yet an accomplished fact. Therefore, it is inappropriate

to construe the world-wide economy as already a globalized economy.<sup>50</sup> For one thing, even the blind can see that the largest majority of humanity lives by the side of, and not through a globalizing economy. For as long as the marginalized majority of humanity exists in the sphere of subsistence economy—which of course benefits the tiny minority living in the restricted sphere of an internationalized economy—it remains problematical to speak of a globalizing economy, and illusory to claim that a globalized economy already exists. By marginalizing this large segment of humanity, globalization has thereby begun to undermine its power to demolish boundaries. This is because the marginalized, being victims of exclusion, will question both the title of globalization to exclude them and the injustice pertaining to their marginalization.

The ideology of socialist revolution may have few takers but one should not imagine that the world's poor will remain cowed or passively accept their poverty... A world of wealth and poverty, with appalling and widening differences in living standards between the richest and the poorest nations, is unlikely to be secure or stable.<sup>51</sup>

Our second remark pertains to the experience and concept of sovereignty. There is a long and complex history behind the experience and concept of sovereignty.<sup>52</sup> However, it is widely acknowledged that the Westphalian treaty of 1648<sup>53</sup> marks the birth of the sovereign nation state. The *ubi regio, eius religio maxim*, echoed more than a hundred years later by the *uti possedetis, ita possedeatis maxim* at the independence of Latin American countries, may be said to define the thought structure of sovereignty. This thought structure pertains to the assertion of the right to draw boundaries and the attendant entitlement to exercise sole authority and control in the specific area delimited by the boundaries. Bounded reasoning in this sense then is at the core of the experience and concept of sovereignty. It is our submission that this fundamental thought structure with regard to the meaning of sovereignty has not changed regardless of the vitiation thereof and the challenges faced by a particular sovereign state. Furthermore, since an ineliminable component of the state is the people—call them nation, if you prefer—it is clear that in contrast to the easy mobility of capital, the majority of people remain territory bound. Employees are much less mobile than the capital which controls them.<sup>54</sup> They are therefore compelled to build their lives within the territory in which they find themselves. This means also that the global pretensions of globalization impact upon them at the local territorial level, and the commonsense reaction is to seek solutions first at that level.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore with their state that they will interact. Globalization as a 'state without boundaries' is somewhat inaccessible and intangible to allow for real dialogue and interaction.<sup>56</sup> Once again, the people's recourse to the state means then that the end of sovereign statehood is unlikely.<sup>57</sup> One consequence of this is that globalization will invariably land within the boundaries of a sovereign state and must submit to the will of the particular state to govern, not only its people, but also the agents of globalization. In this way, we come to the issue of the governance of globalization. Our thesis here is that the 'global economy will remain a mirage if it permits economic globalization to become the unbound Prometheus free from the reins of governance. To introduce and underline the importance of this issue we will give a philosophical basis for discourse on

human rights, and then focus upon the meaning of the market in the free enterprise economic system and its implications for the human right to life.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In this section we propose to provide the basis as well as the context within which to assess and evaluate globalization. Our purpose is also to bring into sharp relief the experience and concept of the right to life,<sup>58</sup> since it is in the first place this particular right which is called into question by economic globalization.

All theories of human rights regard the fact of being human—humanness—as their starting point. Human rights theories then proceed to ascribe value to or determine the worth of the fact of being human. It is precisely at this level of valuation that disputes arise concerning the meaning of human rights. Accordingly, it is value orientation to humanness which constitutes the foundation of conflicting theories of human rights. What we wish to underscore, without digressing into the philosophically important discussion of the ‘is-ought’ question, is that axiological positions which hold a specific vision of what concrete reality ought to be in the sphere of human relations, are in essence, decisions<sup>59</sup> about the value to be attached to humanness. In this sense, human rights are definite axiological decisions. Human relations is the major context as well as the primary focus of human rights. In spite of their differences in perspective and emphasis, all theories of human rights share one fundamental characteristic in common, namely, that the fact of being a-living-human being deserves recognition by all other human beings. Furthermore, this recognition must be understood to mean both respect for and protection of the fact of being a-living-human being. In this sense, all theories of human rights are ultimately concerned with one fundamental basic human right, namely, the right to life. In its material aspect as well as existential mode, this right involves the freedom or liberty of the individual human being to strive constantly towards the defence and protection of its life. The activity of human freedom in this strife means labour as a teleological positing: that is, a purposive human activity oriented towards the preservation of individual life in the first place. This latter must be understood as auto-poiesis in the broad sense, and, more specifically, as the human right to work. Accordingly, by the right to life we understand a fundamental indivisible integral quartet of rights, namely, the human rights to life, freedom, work, and property. Because of their indivisible character, these rights constitute a wholeness. For this reason, a holistic approach to human rights is to be preferred.

Our understanding of the human right to life as defined above is that in the political sphere, a right is a principle of morality and justice recognizing that each and every individual may engage in activity to acquire and own the necessities to stay alive by imposing limitations upon others in pursuit of such activity.<sup>60</sup> The primary and fundamental egoistic proclamation that each individual can make against the community without moral embarrassment is the assertion<sup>61</sup> of the right to food. This latter is a fundamental right which gives meaning and content to the right to life. Discourse on the right to life always presupposes, and is linked, to the right to food. In the sphere of human relations, the imposition of restrictions on others in pursuit of one’s activity to acquire and own the necessities of staying alive must satisfy two criteria. First, it must accord

with the community's or society's sense of what is good, that is, it must conform to the social morality. Second, it must satisfy the demands of natural justice in general and in particular those of distributive justice.<sup>62</sup> The demands of distributive justice must be satisfied on the understanding that this concept presupposes that: (1) human beings are of equal worth with regard to their humanness. In a fundamental sense, no single human being has a superior and exclusive right to life than all other human beings. No single human being holds a prior, superior and exclusive title deed to the inalienable right to subsistence. Consequently, all human beings deserve equal concern even though they may receive unequal recognition.<sup>63</sup> (2) Distributive justice presupposes also the relative scarcity of material resources that may be acquired and owned in order to actualize the human right to life. It is a moot point whether, in given conditions, scarcity is artificial or real. Because of scarcity, rules of distribution must be formulated and observed in order to satisfy each and every individual's claim to the right to life. Without this, the most powerful or the craftiest among individuals will succeed to satisfy the demands of their right to life but always at the expense of the weaker ones. Distributive justice therefore requires rules of distribution of the necessary resources to stay alive because the life of every individual is always of equal worth to any other human life. On this understanding, the right to life is prior to the establishment of a community or society. The question of rights and justice arises at the establishment of society. Society comes into being as a result of (1) labour as a teleological positing,<sup>64</sup> and (2) the consent of its members to have their right to life exercised according to specific rules. When society comes into being, the prior right to life is neither annulled nor created by society. Instead, society recognizes the right and proceeds to devise mechanisms for the protection and control of the right to life. In this sense, the right to life is an exclusive entitlement.<sup>65</sup> The voluntary consent of its members to have their right to life (subsistence), exercised according to specific rules, is the essence of the contractarian theory of the state.<sup>66</sup> Considered in relation to labour as a teleological positing, the substance of the contract theory of the state is, in the first instance, the human right to life. The actualization of this right means unimpeded access to food even though this may be subject to specific rules. It is hardly conceivable, therefore, that in assuming membership of a state, human beings can willingly enter into a contract negating and abrogating their right to life in the sense of denying themselves the natural duty to acquire and own the necessities of staying alive. There is no doubt, therefore, that:

All human life involves the use of material resources and some of the most profound disagreements among human beings and human civilizations concern the basic principles on which this is to be organized. The allocation of material resources,...is a primal and universal concern of human societies.<sup>67</sup>

Seen from this perspective, the purpose of the state is to create and safeguard the conditions necessary for the peaceful exercise of the human right to life. The state is by no means the government. However, the government acting in the name of the state cannot validly confine itself to the maintenance of law and order, insisting upon formal equality before the law, and in the process disregard the human right to life.

The right to food<sup>68</sup> is a fundamental human right. All other 'traditional' fundamental

rights or basic liberties revolve around and derive their proper significance from the right to food. The widespread tendency to classify and categorize human rights does not of necessity warrant a hierarchization of human rights. This tendency classifies and hierarchizes human rights in terms of first, second and third, even fourth generation rights. The inalienable right to subsistence is said to fall under the second generation rights. This putative genealogy of rights corresponds to a large extent to specific phases of constitutionalization and industrialization in the West. There is thus a link, for example, between the state of the economy at a given moment and the birth of specific rights. Rights then are regarded as creatures or products of the economy. Is this view tenable? It is this questionable understanding of rights which the West appears intent on imposing upon others in the name of democratization, universalization of human rights, and globalization. But the particular experience and history of the West cannot be a credible or absolute substitute for the history of the whole world. Underlying this tendency is the practice of absolutizing certain values on the one hand and a dogmatic unilinear conception of human history on the other. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the human being into a pastiche of rights may be interesting from the Western philosophical point of view. However, the concept of a human being based upon this fragmentation is philosophically tenuous. It arbitrarily detracts from the fact that at any given moment in time, the human being is a wholeness and not fragments to be pieced together into a theory of rights as and when the free enterprise economic system dictates.

The quartet of human rights forms the basis of the ontological structure of being a living human-being. Seen from this ontological standpoint, these rights complement one another and they are contemporaneous in any concept of the right to subsistence. The state cannot and does not create this quartet of rights in particular. The state was not present at the coming-into-being of this quartet of rights: it did not create or invent them. '...man is older than the State, and he holds the right of providing for the life of his body prior to the formation of any state.'<sup>69</sup> On this basis, the right to life is non-derogable. Therefore, even within the context of the state, this right may not be infringed. The state then assumes the role of recognizing this quartet of rights. Recognition of these rights is the only political option that the state has. Indeed, a state could either be dissolved or disrupted as a result of failure to be the true defender and facilitator of this fundamental quartet of rights.

Since the domestic household is anterior both in idea and in fact to the gathering of men into a commonwealth, the former must necessarily have rights and duties which are prior to those of the latter, and which rest more immediately on nature. If the citizens of a State—that is to say, families—on entering into association and fellowship, experienced at the hands of the State hindrance instead of help, and found their rights attacked instead of being protected, such associations were rather to be repudiated than sought after.<sup>70</sup>

### **THE MARKET AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE**

It must be clear right at the outset that this section in particular is not a treatise on economics. It is primarily a philosophical reflection on the economic reality of our time.

The market and, by extension money in the context of the free enterprise system, in plain language capitalism, shall be our point of focus. In considering the theme of the market and the inalienable human right to subsistence, we shall substantiate the thesis that the free enterprise system with the market as its indispensable correlate insofar as it is inextricably bound to profit-making, has already undermined its own foundation. This is because the reason for its existence no longer lies in the inviolability of the inalienable human right to subsistence, but in the ascent of money to absolute sovereignty.<sup>71</sup> Having a considerable lot of money has become the new foundation of the state. Popular sovereignty in the form of parliamentary or constitutional supremacy has in practice become replaced by economic sovereignty. According to this logic which continues to operate in many parts of the global village:

Responsibility for social well-being was individualized, privatized, neutralized. The wealthy were relieved of the burden of social responsibility and ethical human behaviour by imposing greater hardships on those who already had less... There was no room for putting altruism ahead of self-interest, compassion ahead of efficiency, or mutual obligations and collective identity ahead of individual benefit. Nor was there any doubt about the intrinsic superiority of the market-place.<sup>72</sup>

It must be understood though that profit-making is neither good nor bad in itself. It is the manner, extent and purpose for which it is pursued and realized which become subject to the moral judgement of good or bad. Profit-making becomes particularly immoral if and when it is deliberately designed to protect and sustain structural inequality through the dehumanization of the human being. In this case, the deliberate construction and sustenance of dehumanizing inequality is its basis and principle of operation.<sup>73</sup> A subtle transmutation occurs here. According to this transmutation, the individual right to subsistence is neither foundational nor primary in the constitution of the state. The status of this right has been transferred to money. This latter has assumed the character of a substance. Value is attached to it. It must be seen as the substance of the highest value among all other substances if it must be used as the yardstick with which to determine and measure the value of all the other substances. Thus, even the value of the human being is to be determined by money. At the same time it fulfills the function of being the measure of the value of goods or services on the one hand and of being the means of exchange on the other.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, money is contemporaneously substance and function.<sup>75</sup> It is precisely on the basis of its dual nature, as it were, that money is the measure of all things: of life that already lives that it may die and of life that is yet to be that it must never be born. The market is the specific locus within which this principle of mensuration operates:

Markets in the most literal and immediate sense are places in which things are bought and sold. In the modern industrial system, however, the market is not a place; it has expanded to include the whole geographical area in which sellers compete with each other for customers... In general, the function of a market is to collect products from scattered sources and channel them to scattered outlets... There are two main types of markets in which the forces of supply and



demand operate quite differently, with some overlapping and borderline cases. In the first, the producer offers his goods and takes whatever price they will command; in the second, the producer sets his price and sells as much as the market will take... The concept of market as defined above has to do primarily with more or less standardized commodities such as wool or wheat or shoes or automobiles. The word is also used to deal with, for example, the market for real estate or for old masters; and there is the labour market', although a contract to work for a certain wage is not quite the same thing as the sale of a packet of goods. There is a connecting idea in all of these various usages, namely, the interplay of supply and demand.<sup>76</sup>

The market, according to this citation, can still be defined in the locative sense, that is, a place or geographical area in which economic activity takes place. In addition, the market may no longer be understood in the locative sense only. It must be understood as a resource in the dual sense of natural (goods) and 'human resources'. Both participate, albeit with a difference pertaining to the dignity and respect accorded to each, in the economic activity of selling and buying according to the rules of supply and demand. Such participation presupposes the principle of exchange which in our time is based upon and facilitated by money. In the context of the free enterprise system aligned to profit-making, money as a substance of the highest value in economic terms is located between the preservation and the destruction of human life, and indeed, the life of other living organisms as well. The rule of money extends to every corner of human life. The sovereignty of money is the reality of the dominant economy of our time.

Employment and unemployment are critical analytical concepts for understanding the working of the free enterprise system. The contemporary service economy is dominated by finance capital.<sup>77</sup>

The value of the human being is based primarily on his characteristics as a *producer* both for himself and for more general economic and social purposes.<sup>78</sup>

As a 'producer', the human being has the potential to render a particular service. This potential becomes actual and concrete if and when the labour market buys the service. Buying the service means fixing a specific price on it which is then accepted by the seller. The effect of this exchange between buyer and seller is that the human being as a 'producer' has now become employed. The labour market buys human 'producers' only when and as it needs them. On this basis, human beings may be regarded as a 'resource' for the labour market because the labour market can turn to them for help or support (service) in order to achieve its purpose.<sup>79</sup> The labour market cannot, and does not in practice absorb all the employable labour that is available at any one time. Therefore, unemployment, despite continued efforts to reduce it to 'acceptable' levels,<sup>80</sup> is a structural necessity for the survival of the market in the free enterprise system. In order to contain and control the potentially disruptive consequences of unemployment in the social sphere, 'a universally accepted thesis maintains that economic and social policy must go hand in hand'.<sup>81</sup> The validity of this thesis rests upon what it impliedly accepts, namely, each individual's equal right of access to natural resources essential for survival. The labour market either protects or infringes upon this right through the use of the concepts

of employment and unemployment. This happens on the basis of a subtle philosophical distinction between labour and employment. Philosophically, labour as a teleological positing,<sup>82</sup> may be recognized as the basis of the right to property.<sup>83</sup> The exercise of the right to labour is logically anterior and hierarchically prior to being employed. It is also indifferent to participation in any kind of economic system. It is anterior to the possession or the availability of money. It is also independent of inheritance or donation of money from any source whatever:

To labour is to exert one's self for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the purposes of life, and most of all for self-preservation... Therefore, a man's labour has two notes or characters. First of all, it is personal; for the exertion of individual power belongs to the individual who puts it forth, employing this power for that personal profit which it was given. Secondly, a man's labour is necessary, for without the results of labour a man cannot live; and self-conservation is a law of nature, which it is wrong to disobey.<sup>84</sup>

However, the logic of employment in the free enterprise system reverses this ontological order by subordinating labour to the privilege of being employed.<sup>85</sup> This reversal of the ontological order means that the right to subsistence is now placed second to the privilege of being employed. The basic thesis of the logic of employment is that privilege precedes right. Accordingly, only those who are employed, provided they exercise frugality in using their earning, have a relatively greater assurance of survival. The rest of humankind, except the few who are protected by the now fragile<sup>86</sup> social security systems guaranteeing a minimum subsistence allowance, being unemployed, are formally precluded from exercising their right to subsistence. The deadly logic of the sovereignty of money finds this subtle derogation of the inalienable right to subsistence both affordable and acceptable. On this basis, it is relatively easy for the defenders of economic sovereignty to conceal or ignore the transmutation of a right into a privilege. Second, it is similarly easy for them to label the privilege a 'right' which is unenforceable by law. In reality what is unenforceable is the privilege since the right to labour has already been derecognized by law. Employment as a privilege and not a right is indeed what is on offer. But labour as a teleological positing is a right to be asserted regardless of the availability of an offer of employment. If a right is in any sense a trump then it is an entitlement which the law must recognize, respect, and protect. But a privilege under the guise of a right is something the law may withdraw at any time. The adherents to the view that the 'right' to work or employment is unenforceable at law are actually denying the assertability of the inalienable right to labour. Globalization is now doing this on a grand scale.

### **GLOBALIZATION: A QUESTION OF GOVERNANCE OR JUSTICE?**

The foregoing has shown that globalization as a form of bounded reasoning ultimately raises questions concerning the recognition, respect, and protection of human rights. The questions demand a response to the exigencies of fundamental justice. Many responses have been offered on both counts. One is that the European Union as a compact trading bloc could use its currency, the Euro, to challenge the overwhelming power of the United

States Dollar. The problem with this argument is that it leaves the logic as well as the metaphysics and, therefore, the consequences of globalization intact. This means that the success of the Euro will be more in the replacement of the Dollar as the globalizing power. Changing the players within the same game is not quite the same thing as having another game with its own rules. This then is the basis rather than an extended argument of our criticism of the following thesis:

The issue is not whether the world's economy is governable toward ambitious goals like promoting social justice, equality between countries and greater democratic control for the bulk of the world's people, but whether it is governable *at all*.<sup>87</sup>

First, it is hard to find an example of governance devoid of an empirical (social) basis and totally without any aim. To hold otherwise would be to contradict the author's own definition of governance, namely, 'Governance—that is, the control of an activity by some means such that a range of desired outcomes is attained—...'.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the authors acknowledge in the same paragraph of the same page that governance is both socially based and aim oriented, 'institutional arrangements and strategies' to ensure some 'minimal level of international economic governance, at least to the benefit of the major advanced industrial nations'. So, the issue is not governability 'at all' but governance for the benefit of the already rich. This surely is a question of fundamental justice despite the wish of the authors to the contrary. Second, the authors undermine and even contradict their own thesis with the pertinent observation that:

The ideology of socialist revolution may have few takers but one should not imagine that the world's poor will remain cowed or passively accept their poverty... A world of wealth and poverty, with appalling and widening differences in living standards between the richest and the poorest nations, is unlikely to be secure or stable.

We suggest that the authors do not will this injustice in the name of governability 'at all'. If they insist and persist on the validity of their thesis, then we propose to introduce them to *ubuntu* human rights philosophy which is fundamentally at odds with their thesis and its implications for social justice.

### THE METAPHYSICS OF COMPETITION

'Competition', 'competitiveness' is the dogma of economic globalization. According to this dogma even the human right to life—human dignity—must be subordinated and reduced to the totalizing drive to make profit without limits. Profit-making then becomes irrational and unethical precisely because it loses its character as a means to rational and ethical ends. This logic and dynamism of contemporary economic globalization is in fact contrary to the original meaning of competition. Etymologically, competition means the common pursuit of a common goal:<sup>89</sup> it means,—*cum petere*—'to seek together the best solution to the right problem, in the right place and at the right time. It also means that the selection of the best is not reduced to the unique.'<sup>90</sup> Seen from the perspective of the

original meaning of competition, the dogma of contemporary economic globalization is oriented towards the exclusion of the 'other' in this case especially the other human being. This orientation towards the exclusion of the other is fundamentally and practically a negation of exteriority. To negate the exteriority of the other is ontologically tantamount to denying their existence: it is equal to killing them. On this reasoning, the logic of the contemporary dogma of competition proceeds from the metaphysical premise that thou shalt kill another human being in order to survive. The problem with this metaphysical premise is that it accepts a restricted understanding of survival. The restriction lies in the fact that it upholds the thesis that individual survival comes first. Everything, including killing another human being, is permitted provided it is done in the name of individual survival. The problem here is the following.

The imperative of individual survival is meaningless unless it accepts a prior premise, namely, that whatever seeks its own survival must exist first. Acceptance of this premise is incomplete without the acknowledgement that whatever exists is there without the possibility and the right to grant prior consent to its existence. In other words, existence is contingent. Strictly construed, the contingency of existence imposes upon the human being—and all that there is—the duty to refrain from killing anyone since no one has the prior, superior, nor exclusive right to exist. No one has the prior, exclusive, and superior title deed to life. Thus from a metaphysical point of view, the duty to refrain from killing the 'other' results in the condition of an existential stalemate: it is the condition in which relations cannot become dynamic since they must remain only stagnant. In the sphere of human relations, the transition from stagnation to dynamism imposes the duty to justify the killing of another human being. At the same time, it permits the killing of non-human entities in pursuit of either individual or collective survival. But this permission is conditional upon respect and protection of these entities first for their own sake and in order to preserve them for use by posterity. This latter means that survival, properly construed, means in the first place the survival of life as a wholeness. Individual survival is ultimately in function of the survival of life as a wholeness. If this were not so, then patriotism, being a soldier and martyrdom would be irrational and meaningless. These latter examples are rational and meaningful precisely because they are predicated on the premise that if and when it becomes necessary one must give up one's own life in order to give life. The restrictive interpretation of survival contradicts this premise. It is precisely this contradiction that underpins the dogma of competition.

Contemporary economic globalization translates the questionable metaphysics of the dogma of thou shalt kill in pursuit of individual survival into practice. It is a metaphysics which changes the condition of stagnation without relationship to that of dynamic relations built upon a weak ethical foundation. In other words, it allows for intersubjective relations on the understanding that individual survival shall be decisive even if this means dispensing with the need to justify the killing of another human being. It contradicts the ethical thesis that: 'There is, or there ought to be if the very notion of a relationship is to be upheld, a unicinity in every person which cannot be erased by any systematic or totalizing mode of thought.'<sup>91</sup> By upholding such a contradiction the dogma of competition ends up being an act of killing in practice. The killing is both literal and metaphorical.

In a metaphorical sense, firms can 'kill' one another on a market; customers can 'kill' a firm by arbitraging away from it in favor of another firm; and people can 'kill' one another in competing for jobs or positions. In a much more literal sense, a firm can kill people if it decides to relocate and to move from one country to another almost overnight, leaving all its former employees with the choice between being jobless and uprooting their current way of life by moving.<sup>92</sup>

As a metaphysics of killing, the dogma of competition is socially and morally problematical.

Despite its popularity, competitiveness is far from being an effective answer to the present problems and opportunities of the new global world and society. Excess competition is even a source of adverse effects. The most striking result of the competition ideology is that it generates a structural distortion in the functioning of the economy itself, not to mention its devastating social effects. Increasing the number of jobless is not the way for a country to grow richer. Nor is impoverishing those with jobs by cutting wages and benefits a socially acceptable form of productivity increase.<sup>93</sup>

The metaphysics of *ubuntu* philosophy is fundamentally at odds with the contemporary dogma of competition. This is so because in the sphere of economic relations it is based on the ethical thesis that *feta kgomo o tshware motho*. It is to this that we now turn.

### **UBUNTU HUMAN RIGHTS PHILOSOPHY**

*Botho, hunhu, ubuntu* is the central concept of social and political organization in African philosophy, particularly among the Bantu-speaking peoples. It consists of the principles of sharing and caring for one another. It is essential to understand that *ubuntu* in most African languages is a gerundive, a verbal noun denoting a particular state of being and becoming at the same time. It thus denotes a particular action already performed, an enduring action or state of be-ing and the openness to yet another action or state of be-ing. Even without the repetition of a specific action in the future, the basic insight denoted by *ubuntu* is that of the suspense of being having the possibility of assuming a specific and concrete character at a given point in time. Because of the suspension of be-ing, no single specificity is guaranteed permanence. For this reason, we suggest that it is inadequate and somewhat misleading to translate *botho* into *hunhuism*<sup>94</sup> or *ubuntuism*. The -ism suffix gives the erroneous impression that we are dealing with fixations to ideas and practices which are absolute and unchangeable. This opens the way to dogmatism. This kind of understanding of *ubuntu* is contrary to the central idea that because motion is the principle of be-ing, the forces of life are there to be exchanged among and between human beings. The process of perpetual exchange, the unceasing movement of invisible currents,<sup>95</sup> makes sense only if we recognize that the forces of life do not belong to anyone. Secondly, we should also recognize that the forces of life manifest themselves in an infinite variety of content and form. On this reasoning, we suggest that it is more correct to talk in terms of African *human-ness* rather than African humanism.

Two theses to be found in almost all indigenous African languages will be discussed here. The first is *Motho ke motho ka batho* and the second, *Feta kgomo o tshware motho*. A literal translation of these two African philosophical aphorisms from the Sepedi (Northern Sotho) language is not called for here since it can hardly suffice to convey adequately the exact meaning in the original language. We shall therefore convey the core meaning only. The first aphorism means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane respectful relations with them. Accordingly, it is *ubuntu* which constitutes the core meaning of the aphorism: *Motho ke motho ka batho*.<sup>96</sup> This aphorism rests upon two conceptually interrelated philosophical principles. One is that the individual human being is the subject—and not an object of intrinsic value in its own right. If this were not so, it would be senseless to base the affirmation of one's humanness on the recognition of the same in the other. It is meaningful to state that to denigrate and disrespect the other human being is in the first place to denigrate and disrespect oneself only if it is accepted that oneself is the subject worthy of dignity and respect. Precisely the claim that one makes about oneself is exactly that which one concedes to the other. Thus, the concept of human dignity is far from alien in traditional African philosophy. And so nothing could serve better as the basis for an indigenous human rights philosophy. Another principle closely interrelated to the first is that *motho* is only and truly human in the context of actual relations with other human beings. This is not to be construed to mean that relations with so-called physical nature or the overall environment are unimportant. Nor does this mean that the group is primary to and therefore supersedes the individual. The crucial point here is that *motho* is never a finished entity in the sense that the relational context reveals and conceals the potentialities of the individual. The concealed potentialities become revealed whenever they are actualized in the practical sphere of human relations. Outside of this sphere *motho* remains a frozen fossil. On this reasoning, indigenous African human rights philosophy proceeds from the dignity (*seriti*, in Sepedi) of the human being and the negation of absolutism or dogmatism.

The second aphorism (*Feta kgomo o tshware motho*) means that if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life. On this point the Gikuyu proverbs concur: '*Kiunuhu gitruagwo* (meanness is not eaten) and, *Utaana muingi uninagira murokeruo ng'ombe* (too much generosity depletes the cows of the one visited in the morning).'<sup>97</sup> This means that mutual care and sharing with one another precedes concern for the accumulation and safeguarding of wealth. According to this philosophy, the individual human being is to be regarded not only as the giver of values, but as the basic and primary value of all values. Social and political organization based upon principles contrary to this basic principle already contains within itself the source for instability, strife, and war. The will and orientation to possess and consume more at the expense of the others invites resistance which can ultimately lead to war. In societies where the veneration of the dollar commands the worship of the high and the lowly alike and, in the age of economic fundamentalism where the sovereignty of money<sup>98</sup> has replaced the human being as the primary value, the imperative to preserve life has fallen into clear and immediate danger. This is the path of contemporary globalization sweeping the multitude of humanity into its structural poverty trap.<sup>99</sup> The principle of solidarity,

like the principles of sharing and mutual care, have all been undermined by globalization. In these circumstances, human rights discourse, especially the right to life, can hardly be credible or gain greater legitimacy. Western human rights philosophy also departs from the point that the individual human being is a touchstone of value. The difference lies in the conceptual emphasis. The Western human rights philosophy emphasizes the idea of the human being as a fragmented entity upon whom rights may be pasted on the basis of contingency, whereas the African conception underlines the idea of a human being as a wholeness acquiring rights as such. The practical implications of these points of emphasis are evident in globalization whose negative effects contravene the maxim, *Feta kgomo o tshware motho*. It follows then that far from being nostalgia for an obsolete tradition, the invocation of the *ubuntu* human rights philosophy is a credible challenge to the deadly logic of the pursuit of profit at the expense of preserving human life.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Passmore, J. *A hundred years of philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968:368. Ayer, A.J. *Language, truth and logic*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974:12.  
For a criticism of the verification principle, see, for example, Ryle, G. *Collected papers*, 2, London: Hutchinson and Co., 1971:127.  
For an exposition of the falsification principle partly aimed at refuting the verification principle, see, for example, Flew, A. and MacIntyre, A. (eds.), *New essays in philosophical theology*, London: S.C.M., 1963:98–99 and 106.
- 2 On the critique of ‘truth’ based on the correspondence theory, see Bohm who argues that truth is a complex construction which is not given in advance. Bohm, D. *The undivided universe: An ontological interpretation of quantum theory*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993:16–17.
- 3 Zaner, R.M. ‘The problem of embodiment’, in *Phaenomenologica*, 17, 1971:vii.
- 4 On the ontology and epistemology of be-ing as a whole-ness and a one-ness, see the whole of chapter one of Bohm, D. *Wholeness and the implicate order*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- 5 Ramose, M.B. ‘Relations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam’ (forthcoming).
- 6 In ancient Western philosophy, Heraclitus may be identified as one of the major exponents of the view that motion and not rest, is the principle of be-ing. The debate between the adherents and the opponents to this view has hardly been definitely concluded. Both Peirce and Bohm are the modern/contemporary adherents to the view—which we endorse—that motion is the principle of be-ing. According to Peirce, ‘I start from and in and with and as Motion. For me, in the “spiritual” as well as the physical world, there is of course no Rest as the ultimate goal or as the antithesis of Motion. The changeless is less than the dead, it is the non-existent...I often say that I am determined to be free to be determined. Why? Because of the unnamed Third yet lying in the womb of Motion, to which both the determinate and the indeterminate have reference... To me the idea of the new, the young, the fresh, the possible, are deeper than any time-import, and are indeterminate only in a

- special sense... The best I can do is to say, "I wish of the Future, we could begin to talk of the Unreached as the Yet distant!" in Kvelson, R., *Law as a system of signs*, New York: Plenum Press, 1988:v.
- That this in many ways is an echo of Hobbes' position in *De Motu* needs no special pleading.
- 7 Needham, J. *Science and civilization in China*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975:170–190.
- 8 Dussel, H. 'Globalization and the victims of exclusion: From a liberation ethics perspective', in *The modern schoolman*, January 1998:123–129.
- Dussel, H. 'Arquitectonica de la Etica de la Liberacion Laval Theologique et Philosophique', 54(3), Octobre 1998:455–471.
- 9 Mudimbe, V.I. *The invention of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- 10 Eze, E.C. 'Out of Africa: Communication theory and cultural hegemony', *Telos* (111), Spring 1998:139–161.
- 11 Hanke, L. *Aristotle and the American Indians*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959.
- Hanke, L. 'Pope Paul III and the American Indians', *Harvard Theological Review*, xxx, 1937:71–72.
- Williams, R.A. *The American Indian in Western legal thought: The discourses of conquest*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Parkinson, F. *The philosophy of international relations*, London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1977:24–25.
- 12 Dussel, H. 'Globalization and the victims of exclusion: From a liberation ethics perspective', in *The modern schoolman*, January 1998:143–147.
- Dussel, H. 'Arquitectonica de la Etica de la Liberacion', *Laval Theologique et Philosophique*, 54(3), Octobre 1998:457–461.
- 13 There is, of course, the metaphorical meaning of globalization. This departs from the point that our planet is like a globe receiving light from one main source, the sun. Yet, it receives the light of the sun differently and alternately. So humans experience the sun differently and its brightness exerts dissimilar influences upon them. This surely leads not only to different but at times even contending conceptions of the sun. A paradox inherent to this condition may be expressed thus: the light of the sun continues to enjoy unparalleled dominance over our planet. Yet, humans appear intent to resist this dominance by expounding contending theories on the nature and, therefore, the light of the sun. If there is any lesson to be drawn from this—notwithstanding the deadly brightness of an all-out nuclear war (Jungk, R. *Brighter than a thousand suns*, Tr. J. Cleugh, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1956)—it is that light emanating from only one main source might be enjoyable but is no less resistible. Accordingly, globalization is unlikely to succeed for as long as it extinguishes other lights elsewhere on the plea that there is only one source of light suited to illuminate all areas of economic life for the whole of humanity.
- 14 De Benoist, A. 'Confronting globalization', *Telos* (108), Summer 1996:121.
- 15 Korman, Sharon. 'The right of conquest, the acquisition of territory by force', in



*International law and practice*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996:18–40.

16 ‘Discovery’ was a legal device to claim title to foreign territory by the discovering West European power. It is worth noting here that the latter undertook the voyages for the purpose of ‘discovery and all its attendant legal consequences. It seems odd that the voyagers, and those on whose behalf the voyages were undertaken, appear not to have considered the possibility that they too would be discovered through the very act of discover. They were thus poised to universalize their religion and culture through assimilation and integration at best and also by means of outright murder, plunder, disseizin and destruction at worst. For a discussion of how his universalization gradually led to a ‘monocivilizational (though polycultural) world’ and how ‘reconciliation’ is applied to understand the contrasts and contraries, see Wilkinson, D. ‘1492 in comparativecivilizational perspective’, *Dialogue and Humanism*, (1), 1992:7–8.

Zea, L. ‘The discovery of America: From conquest to reconciliation’, *Dialogue and Humanism*, (1), 1992:11–22.

17 De Benoist, A. ‘Confronting globalization’, in *Telos*, 1996:128–129.

18 Houtum van, H. *The development of cross-border economic relations*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1998:45–83.

19 De Benoist, A. ‘Confronting globalization’, *Telos*, 1996:120.

In the name of globalization, contemporary financial emperors have assumed the role of Mephistopheles and forced humanity into the position of Dr Faustus. By the time the hour of reckoning is about to strike, Dr Faustus not only utters in desperation, ‘O! lente! lente! currite noctis aequi’, but also acknowledges with resignation that money is the root of all evil (*pecunia est radix malorum*). The Persian proverb complements this insight thus: women, gold and land (*Zan, azr, zamin*) are the root of all evil.

20 Lancon, P. ‘L’conomie, comme Theologie de la Contrition’, *Liberation*, June 3, 1996:5.

21 Kelsey, J. *Economic fundamentalism*, London: Pluto Press, 1995.

22 *Black’s law dictionary*, 5th edn. St Paul Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1979:543.

*Rechtswortebuch*, C.H.Beck’sche, Munchen: Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1994:409–410.

23 *Black’s law dictionary*, 6th edn. St. Paul Minn.;; West Publishing Co., 1990.

24 *Longman concise English dictionary*, UK: Longman, 1985:997.

We read the following: ‘Greek marriage was monogamous; indeed, monogamy was believed to be a distinguishing feature of Greek as opposed to barbarian usage... Roman marriage was strictly monogamous.’ *The Oxford classical dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953:539.

However, this did not preclude the fact that concubinage was ‘a basic institution alongside marriage’ in ancient Rome. See Brundage, J.A. *Law, sexy and Christian society In Medieval Europe*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987:23.

25 Singer, I. *The nature of love*, vol. 1, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Duby, G. *Love and marriage in the Middle Ages*, Tr. Jane Dunnett, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

- Brundage, J.A. *Law, sex, and Christian society in Medieval Europe*, 1987:13 and 27.
- 26 *The Vocabulaire Juridique*, Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1996:518.
- The Oxford companion to law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980:809 and the sixth edition of Black's already cited law dictionary, (972), provide the definition of marriage which clearly inclines to monogamy. In his definition of 'plural marriage', Black states expressly with regard to bigamy and polygamy that 'such marriages are prohibited' (973). Our objections to this will be kept to the minimum. The view that a heterosexual relationship is the 'natural' and thus the only basis for founding the family is questionable. Although sexuality generally orients one sex towards its opposite, it does not follow that heterosexual relations are the only natural ones. In view of the fact that ancient Greece was frankly homosexual (Singer, I. *The nature of love*, 1984:49), the claim that only heterosexual relations are natural can hardly be sustainable (Kosnik, A. *Human sexuality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1977:70-74). Homosexual and lesbian relations are not by definition asexual, loveless, and unnatural. On the other hand, monogamous marriage is philosophically objectionable as well. It proceeds from the metaphysical proposition that the married couple constitute one body. This is by every test an abstract body. Infinite declarations that the married couple forms one body cannot obliterate the reality that each one of the couple remains a separate ontological-biological organism. The 'sting' of desire or the biological law of coitus does not by itself impose the duty to turn to one and the same mate consistently and persistently for the purpose of sexual intercourse. The wisdom of the demiurgic principle which has engraved the 'sting' of desire in human beings as well has neither decreed nor programmed the urge for sexual intercourse to be necessarily adhesive, one-directional and eternally fixated onto only one mate. Rather, it is the normativization of the 'sting' of desire which imposes by law the duty to be monogamous.
- 27 Westermack, E. *The history of human marriage*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1891.
- 28 Viladrich, P.J. *The agony of legal marriage*, Tr. A. D'entremont, A. Pamploma: Servicio Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, S.A., 1990:69-79.
- 29 Ramose, M.B. 'Human freedom and the law of marriage', in *Current legal theory*, xvi(1), 1998:23-33.
- 30 'Mater et Magistra' par. 193: 'Pacem in Terris' par. 16, D.J.O'Brien and T.A.Shannon, *Catholic social thought*, 1995:115 and 133. Dowell, Susan. 'Challenging monogamy', *Theology and Sexuality*, 2, March 1995:86.
- 31 Tawney, R.H. *Religion and the rise of capitalism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977.
- 32 Ray, P.O. 'The world-wide suffrage movement', in *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 1(1), 1919:220-238.
- 33 Lange, Lynda. 'Woman is not a rational animal: On Aristotle's biology of reproduction', in Sandra Harding and Merrill B.Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering reality*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983:1-15.
- Spelman, Elizabeth. 'Aristotle and the politicization of the soul', in Sandra Harding and Merrill B.Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering reality*. 1983:17-30.
- Dickanson, Anne. 'Anatomy and destiny: The role of biology in Plato's views of women', in Carol C.Gould and M.W.Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and philosophy*. New

- York: G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1976:45–53.
- Whitbeck, Caroline. 'Theories of sex difference', in Carol C.Gould and M.W.Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and philosophy*. 1976:54–80.
- 34 McMillan, Carol. *Women, reason and nature*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1982:1–15.
- 35 Irigaray, Luce. *I love to you*, Tr. Alison Martin, London: Roudedge and Kegan Paul, 1996:23.
- 36 Eisenstein, Z.R. *The radical future of liberal feminism*, New York: Longman, 1981:220–244.
- 37 Markovic, Mihailo. 'Women's liberation and human emancipation', in C.Carol Gould and M. W.Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and philosophy*. 1976:152.
- 38 The bond between family and citizenship is common cause. What appears to be uncommon is the problematization of citizenship in relation to the question of the free movement of both goods and money (capital) in order to determine whether or not the relations between the family, citizenship, and nationality are exploitative. While we agree with the problematization, we do not necessarily agree with some of the conclusions reached by Phillippe van Parijs, 'Commentary: Citizenship exploitation, Unequal exchange and the breakdown of popular sovereignty', in B. Barry and R.E.Goodin (eds.), *Free movement, ethical issues in the transnational migration of people and of money*, London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992:157–162.
- 39 Eisenstein, Z.R. (ed.) *Capitalist patriarchy and the case for socialist feminism*. New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1979.
- 40 Olsen, Frances. 'Legal responses to gender dis-crimination in Europe and the USA', in F. Emmert (ed.), *Collected courses of the Academy of European Law*, vol. II Book 2. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1991:199–268.
- 41 Kelsey, Jane. *Economic fundamentalism*, 1995:292.
- 42 Foucault, M. The care of the self, vol. 3. *The history of sexuality*, Tr. R.Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986:106 (emphasis in the text).
- 43 According to *The new encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 17 Chicago: Macroipaedia Encyclopaedia Britannica. Inc., 1987:534. Pythagoras is usually credited 'for the idea that the Earth is spherical'.
- 44 Extending its range of application to the moon, for example, would necessitate a term like lunarization.
- 45 Camilleri, J.A. and Falk, J. *The end of sovereignty?* Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1992:44–45.
- 46 Thompson, Janna. 'Land rights and aboriginal sovereignty'. *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 68(3) September 1990:317.
- 47 Makonnen, Y. *International law and the new states of Africa*. UNESCO. Addis Ababa: Regional Participation Programme for Africa, 1983.
- 48 For an insightful and extended discussion of the 'rationality of the irrationality argument with particular reference to nuclear weapons, see the whole article referred to here, and in particular the pages indicated: Maxwell, S. *Rationality and deterrence*, Adelphi Papers, Number fifty. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1968:3–4.
- 49 Camilleri J.A. and Falk, J. *The end of sovereignty?*, 1992:35.

- 50 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G. *Globalization in question*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996:2–3.
- 51 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G., op. cit.: 182.
- 52 Ullman, W. *The growth of papal government in the Middle Ages*, London: Methuen and Company, 1955.  
Ullman, W. 'Juristic obstacles to the emergence of the concept of state in the Middle Ages', in *Annali di Storia del Diritto*, 13, 1969:43–64.  
Ullman, W. 'The Bible and principles of government in the Middle Ages', in *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo*, 10, 1963:187–227.  
Ullman, W. *Medieval political thought*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Wilks, M. *The problem of sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.
- 53 Parkinson, F. *The philosophy of international relations*, Beverly Hills, London: Sage Publications, 1977:44.
- 54 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G. *Globalization in question*, 1996:181.
- 55 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G., op. cit.: 182.
- 56 The debate between the following authors on the question of the desirability or otherwise of one European state is instructive on this point. Mancini, G.F. 'Europe: The case for statehood', in *European Law Journal*, 4(1) March 1998:29–42.  
Weiler, J.H.H. 'Europe: The case against the case for statehood', in *European Law Journal*, 4(1) March 1998:43–62.
- 57 Green, A. *Education, globalization and the nation state*, London: MacMillan Press, 1997:165.
- 58 For our purposes here, 'the right to life' does not refer to arguments against abortion or capital punishment. Rather, we wish to underline that understanding of this right as an entitlement to which no single human being needs the prior permission of another for its assertion and exercise. For an extended and insightful discussion of our position, see Ramcharan, B.G. 'The right to life', in *Netherlands International Law Review*, xxx, 1983:297–329.
- 59 Macdonald, M. 'Natural rights', in J.Waldron (ed.), *Theories of rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984:34–35.
- 60 Waldron, J., *The right to private property*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983:103.
- 61 Donnelly, J. *The concept of human rights*, London/ Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985:13.
- 62 Rescher, N. *Distributive justice*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966:75.
- 63 Chattopadhyaya, D.P. 'Human rights, justice and social context', in A.S.Rosenbaum (ed.) *The philosophy of human rights*, London: Aldwych Press, 1980:177.
- 64 Lukacs, G. *The ontology of social being*, Tr. D. Fernbach, London: Merlin Press, 1980:22–23.
- 65 Donnelly, J., op. cit.: 3.
- 66 Neumann, F. *The rule of law*, Berg: Leamington Spa, Heidelberg Dover NH, 1986:7–8.
- 67 Waldron, J., op. cit.: 34.
- 68 Jonsson, U. 'The socio-economic causes of hunger', in A.Eide, W.B.Eide,

- S.Goonatilake, J.Gusow, and O.Omawale. (eds.), *Food as a human right*. Tokyo: The United Nations University, 1984:24.
- 69 'Rerum Novarum', par. 6, in D.J.O'Brien and T. A.Shannon (eds.), *Catholic social thought*. Maryknoll: New York Orbis Books, 1995:16.
- 70 'Rerum Novarum', par. 10, in D.J.O'Brien and T. A.Shannon (eds.) *Catholic social thought*, 1995:18. See also par. 35 as well as 'Mater et magistra' par. 43. and pars. 9 and 11 of 'Pacem in Terris' both in D.J.O'Brien and T.A.Shannon (eds.), *Catholic social thoughts*, 1995:90 and 132.
- 71 De Benoist, A. 'Confronting globalization', in *Telos*, (108), Summer 1996:1323–1133.
- 72 Kelsey, Jane. *Economic fundamentalism*, 1995:294 and 335.
- 73 'Rerum Novarum' par. 19 to be read in conjunction with pars. 4 and 137 of 'Quadragesimo Anno', in D.J.O'Brien and T.A.Shannon (eds.), *Catholic social thought*, 1995:22, 43 and 74.
- 74 Wicksell, K. *Lectures on political economy*, vol. 2, *Money*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935:6–8.
- 75 Those interested may consult Simmel in order to determine the similarities and dissimilarities of our understanding of money as substance and function. The present writer does not intend to pursue this line of inquiry. Simmel, G. *The philosophy of money*, D.Frisby (ed.) Tr. T.Bottomore and D.Frisby, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990:131–203.
- 76 *The new Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. II, Chicago: William Benton Publisher, 1974:511.
- 77 De Benoist, A. 'Confronting globalization', in *Telos*, 1996,1996:121.
- 78 Giarini, O. and Stahel, W.R. *The limits of certainty*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993:4 (italics in the original text).
- 79 Kelsey, Jane. *Economic fundamentalism*, 1995:259.
- 80 *Financial Times*, September 24, 1998:5.
- 81 Auleytner, J. 'Social policy in Poland and the European Union', in *Dialogue and Universalism*, vii(5–6), 1998:25.
- 82 Lukacs, G. 'The ontology of social being', 3, *Labour*, Tr. D.Fernbach, London: Merlin Press, 1980:3–4.
- 83 Tully, J. *A discourse on property*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.  
Kramer, M.H. *John Locke and the origins of private property*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.  
Simmons, A.J. *The Lockean theory of rights*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- 84 'Rerum Novarum' par. 34, in D.J.O'Brien and T. A.Shannon (eds.), *Catholic social thought*, 1995:31.
- 85 'Quadragesimo Anno' par. 83, op. cit.:60–61.
- 86 Kelsey, Jane. *Economic fundamentalism*, 1995:212. De Benoist, A. 'Confronting globalization', in *Telos*, 1996:131.
- 87 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G. *Globalization in question*, 1996:189.
- 88 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G., op. cit.: 184.
- 89 Arnspenger, C. *Competition, consumerism and the 'Other': A philosophical*

- investigation into the ethics of economic competition*, Discussion Paper 9614, IRES—Institut de Recherches Economiques, Departement des Sciences Economiques, Universite Catholique de Louvain D/1996/3082/14:12.
- 90 *Limits to competition, the group of Lisbon*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995:90.
- 91 Arnsperger, C. op. cit.: 12.
- 92 Arnsperger, C., op. cit.: 13.
- 93 *Limits to competition*, op. cit.: 97.
- 94 Samkange, S. and Samkange, T.M. *Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Salisbury: Graham Publishing, 1980:34–40.
- 95 Griaule, M. *Conversations with Ogotomeli*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965:137.
- 96 Zvobgo, E.J.M. 'A Third World view', in D.P. Kommers and G.D. Loescher (eds.), *Human rights and American foreign policy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979:93–94.
- 97 Wanjohi, G.J. *The wisdom and philosophy of the Gikuyu proverbs*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997:164–165.
- 98 Vandeveldt, T. 'Appropriation and the sovereignty of money', in F. Flerackers, E. van Leeuwen, and B. van Roermund, (eds.), *Law, life and the images of man*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996:481–483.
- 99 *Kelsey, Jane. Economic fundamentalism*, 1995:279.

## References

- Bidet, J. 1998. 'Metastructure and socialism', in R. Panasiuk & L. Nowak (eds.), *Marx's theories today*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 1998:411–418.
- Casal, P. 1998. 'From unilineal to universal historical materialism', in R. Panasiuk & L. Nowak (eds.), *Marx's theories today*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 1998:131–151.
- Churchich, N. 1994. *Marxism and morality*. Cambridge: James Clarke.
- Dymski, G. & Elliott, J.E. 1997. 'Roemer versus Marx: Alternative perspectives on exploitation', in K. Nielsen & R. Ware (eds.), *Exploitation*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. 1997:197–207.
- Femia, J.V. 1999. *Marxism and democracy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Holmstrom, N. 1997. 'Exploitation', in K. Nielsen & R. Ware (eds.), *Exploitation—Key concepts in critical theory*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. 1997:76–93.
- Hountondji, P.J. 1984. 'Marxism in Africa: Some notes'. *Socialism in the World*, 40:111–119.
- Hountondji, P.J. 1995. 'Producing knowledge in Africa today'. *African Studies Review*, 38:1–10.
- Hountondji, P.J. 1996. *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kamolnick, P. 1998. 'Visions of social justice in Marx: An assessment of recent debates in normative philosophy', in R. Panasiuk & L. Nowak (eds.), *Marx's theories today*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 1998:335–363.
- Mandaza, I. 1999. 'Reconciliation and social justice in Southern Africa: The Zimbabwe experience', in M.W. Makgoba, (ed.), *African renaissance*. Cape Town: Mafube and

Tafelberg. 1999:77–90.

Reiman, J. 1997. 'Exploitation, force, and the moral assessment of capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen', in K.Nielsen & R.Ware (eds.), *Exploitation*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. 1997:154–188.

Resch, R.P. 1992. *Althusser and the renewal of Marxist social theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Samir, A. 1997. 'Exploitation in the periphery', in K. Nielsen & R.Ware (eds.), *Exploitation*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. 1997:305–314.

# INDEX

Please note that an 'n' in page numbers refers to 'reference number'. For example, '360n11' means page 360, reference number 11.

## A

- Abdel-Malek, A. 705
- Abiola, B. 592
- abortion 421
- Action Group of Nigeria 629, 631
- Adagala, K. 436
- Adandé, A. 597
- Adotevi, S. 141, 176, 474
- affirmative action 424n11
- Afghanistan 497
- African-Americans 64n72
  - experience of role in society 657–9–660, 691, 692–3
  - liberal view of alienation 694, 695–7
  - Marxist explanation of alienation 698
  - views on degree of alienation 698–701
- African collectivism 684
- African cosmology 311, 314
- African culture 127
  - see also* culture
  - moral foundations 340–51
- African epistemology *see* epistemology
- African Growth Opportunity Act 679
- African heritage 307–18
- African humanism 175, 185n14
- African literature *see* literature
- African metaphysics
  - and causality 199–200, 232–9
  - concept of ancestors 203–4
  - concept of God 200–1
  - cross-cultural 195–8
  - as holistic closed system 198–9
  - personhood 206–9
  - problem of self 250–7
  - religion 240, 241–9
  - ubuntu* philosophy 280–1
  - witchcraft 204–5
- African National Congress *see* ANC



- African nationalism 51–3, 56, 60, 601, 607, 628
- African philosophy 4  
*see also* Bantu philosophy;  
 ethnophilosophy;  
 Tempels, P.;
- ubuntu*  
 debate re existence 7–10, 104–13, 172–3, 251  
 deconstruction and reconstruction 166–83  
 definitions 144, 180–2  
 four trends 144–64, 175–6, 262  
 Hountondji's definition 150, 181  
 and self 250–7  
 traditional/modernist debate 267–8, 270  
 view of reality 251–4  
 and Western philosophy 7, 8, 10, 118, 144–5, 148, 154, 158, 168–70, 181–2, 316
- African Renaissance 407, 422, 423  
 and Africa's problems 680–3  
 in context of globalization 673–4  
 cultural vindication 683–5  
 ethical prerequisites 685–8  
*hungwe* (Zimbabwe bird) 712  
*Mokoko* 711  
 Nkrumah's new African renaissance 707–11  
 origins and meanings 703–4  
 regeneration of Africa 704–7
- African socialism 138, 175, 185n15, 353, 684
- African studies, and Western hegemony 472–9
- African traditional religion  
 Black Theology 101  
 as centre of African thought 106  
 and decolonization 24–40  
 and politics 563  
 Yoruba 240, 245–9  
 Zimbabwe 588–9n87
- African traditional thought 54, 197, 231, 271–3, 294, 303, 304  
 knowledge versus belief 296–305  
 and Lévy-Bruhl 291  
 and Senghor 292  
 versus science 21–2  
 and Western thought 294
- Afro-pessimist thesis 674, 681, 684
- aid, foreign 680
- Aids 742
- Akan people  
 Akwapim 35–6  
 concept of destiny 229–30  
 concept of God 24–6, 29–30, 31–8, 341  
 concept of truth 272, 283–8

- cosmology 25–9, 201
- ethics 344–6
- faith 32
- morality 31, 327–35, 338, 340–51, 359, 370, 372–3
- personhood 329, 346, 351, 357, 358–9, 360, 369–72
- perspective on human rights 369–81
- political system 373–5
- problem of evil 35–8, 359
- punishment 376
- religious freedom 378–9
- women 436
- worship 31
- and Yoruba concept of personhood 220–3
- alienation 137, 474
  - African-American experience 64n58, 658, 659–60, 691, 692–3, 694, 695–7, 698–701
  - liberal response 694–7, 702n1
  - as literary theme of Négritude 41–3
  - Marxist explanation 698
  - new interpretation 691–4
- All-Africa People's Conference (Cairo 1961) 621
- Allen, C. 614
- alternativism 196
- America, and communities 657–8, 659–60
- Amo, William 148
- ANC 405, 407, 601, 659, 710
  - education 424n9
- ancestors 203–4, 253, 281
- ancestral veneration 29, 203
- Anderson, B. 664, 666
- animism 27, 55, 237
- Anscombe, E. 441
- Anselm, Saint 25, 33
- anthropology
  - see also* ethnology
  - cognitive 20
  - functionalist school 15
  - Kant's understanding 505–8
  - Lévy-Bruhl's view of 'the Other' 12, 13–6
  - master-slave culture 74–5
  - and Négritude 54–5
- Anyanwu, K.C. 311
- apartheid 96–8, 405, 600
  - see also* Black Consciousness;
  - South Africa
  - black universities 424n7
  - and communities 658–9
- Appiah, K.A. 90, 124, 198, 200, 272, 478–, 504, 669
- Aquinas, Thomas 549

Aristotle 75, 140, 157, 169, 174, 254  
 civil society 254  
 definition of man 4, 167, 278, 547, 711  
 Egyptian origins of sciences 8  
 formal logic 149n8, 289, 317  
 truth 285

Arnold, M. 439, 448–9, 455, 456, 705

art  
 Akan 344  
 and culture 111–2

Asante, and women 436

Atanganga 176

Atlantic Alliance 635, 639n51

Aubert, J.-M. 391, 395

Augustine, Saint 35, 37

authenticity 176, 185n18, 449, 450–1, 452

authoritarianism 310, 313

autonomy, and reciprocity 333

Ayoade, J. 610

Azande people 199–200, 293, 300–1

Azikiwe, N. 627, 720

## B

Balandier, G. 61, 64n57

BaLuba people 120–1, 125, 126, 129, 131, 134n3, 137

Bantu philosophy 107, 110, 121

*Bantu philosophy* (Tempels' book) 58, 120, 122, 123, 124, 127–9, 137–8, 145  
*see also* Tempels, P.  
 context 126–7  
 as controversial work 172–3  
 critique by Kagamé 154–7  
 response of African philosophers 130–3, 150–3

Banyarwanda people 39

Barrès, M. 138

Bastide, G. 110

Bastide, R. 44

Bayart, J.-F. 613, 614, 615–6

Bazilli, S. 421

being 421, 167, 168, 757n6  
 African view 309  
 and *ubuntu* 273–81, 382–4, 755

Belgian Congo 138  
 and colonialism 120, 122, 124–, 126–7

beliefs 265  
 and knowledge 296–305

Benhabib, S. 438

bereavement 349, 357–8

Bergson, H. 138, 314

Berlin, I. 695  
 Bernier, F. 518  
 Biko, S. 415  
   *see also* Black Consciousness  
 biological determinism, and gender 464–6  
 Black Consciousness  
   and apartheid 96–100, 414, 416  
   as philosophy 100–4  
 black inferiority 41–2, 96, 100, 136, 683  
 Black Muslims 60  
 black nationalism 76  
 Black Renaissance Convention (1974) 710  
 Black Theology 101  
 Blassingame, J. 700  
 Blyden, E. 707, 720  
 Bodunrin, P. 134n1, 250–1  
 body, the 459–72  
 Boesak, A. 710  
 Botha, P.W. 414, 600  
 Bourdieu, P. 666–7, 669  
 bricolage 16  
 Buffon 518  
 Busia, K. 36  
 Buthelezi, M. 660  
 Butler, J. 468

## C

C<sup>4</sup> factor (cross-culturation) 265–6, 267, 273  
 Cabral, A. 273  
 capitalism  
   and black alienation 697–8  
   and exploitation 653  
   and labour 644–7  
   and socialism 684  
 capital punishment 574  
 Caribbean 716–8  
   literature 66, 68, 69, 70  
   United States' incursions 70–718  
 Casal, P. 646  
 Cassirer, E. 519, 522  
 Castoriadis, C. 89, 91  
 causality  
   and African metaphysics 199–200  
   in African thought 231–9  
   and witchcraft 205  
 causation 27, 195, 202  
   law of 28–9  
 Césaire, A. 42, 45, 47, 51, 53, 71, 598, 672

- critique of Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* 131, 152–3
- and Négritude 64n59, 138, 684, 718, 722, 724, 729–31
- Chafe, W. 20
- charity, principle of 306
- Chile 599
- Chodorow, N. 471
- choice
  - and destiny 224–6
  - moral 333
- Chomsky, N. 657
- Christianity 22
  - Black Theology 101
  - colonization 553–4
  - concept of God 24, 25, 26, 32–3
  - faith versus rationality 32
  - marriage 740
  - missionaries 33, 40, 100, 101, 124, 378
  - reaction to paganism 548–9
  - Tempels' views 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 129
- Churchich, N. 651
- civilization
  - and concept of culture 444, 457n16
  - meaning of 80–2, 169, 170, 173
  - Rousseau's views 509, 510
  - savage versus civilized 13
  - versus barbarism 547–8
- civil society
  - and civic society 334–5
  - and post-colonial state of Africa 609–15, 618–20
- class question 601–2, 647, 649, 653
  - and racism 697
- Clinton, Bill 680
- Code, L. 500, 502
- coherence theory of truth 288, 302
- Coka, G. 706–7
- collective representations of primitives 15, 138
- colonialism 15–6, 80–1, 492, 501
  - see also* neo-colonialism
  - in Belgian Congo 120, 121–2, 123–4, 127, 138, 172–3
  - and Black Consciousness 101
  - creation of ethnic divisions 687
  - culture 75
  - French thought 135–7
  - globalization as version of 673
- colonization 4, 5, 387
  - see also* decolonization
  - authority of papacy 553–4
  - cultural context 547–51

- communalism 73, 147, 257, 354  
*see also* communitarianism
- communism 72, 624, 625
- communitarianism 144, 210  
 community and personhood 351–62  
 perspectival model 324–35  
 rights and duties 363–9, 696  
 women 422, 423
- communities  
 African communities 664  
 Bourdieu's socio-cultural world 666–7, 669  
 changing structure in global context 669–72  
 characteristics 657–8  
 in colonial system 658–9  
 Gross's theory of political morality in society 660–4, 667, 670  
 Lockean theory of society 661, 662  
 and race 658–61
- community  
*see also* communitarianism  
 definition 324  
 particularity in morality 324–40  
 personhood 352–3
- compensation 585n62, 655
- competition, and globalization 752–5
- Composta, D. 8
- Connell, R. 464
- conquest  
 as discovery 4, 759n16  
 legality 544, 554–5, 571–2  
 meridian line 550–1, 585n65, 709, 712, 715n18, 715n19  
 post-conquest South Africa and Zimbabwe 578–9  
 principles of war 549–50  
 right of 559, 586n76
- Conrad, Joseph 67, 68, 83
- Consciencism 176, 186n17, 650, 708
- consensus 327, 330, 350
- constitution  
 Akan 374–5  
 new South Africa 407, 574  
 South Africa (1961) 387  
 South Africa (1983) 572, 573
- consumption motive 686
- contradiction, law of 290
- Copleston, F.C. 8
- correspondence theory of truth 283n22, 284–8, 303, 757n2
- Coste, R. 399
- Crahay, F. 111, 164n15, 173, 176
- creation 26–8, 32, 33–6, 38, 39, 40, 202

- crime, and genetic inheritance 462, 463
- critical school 175
- cross-cultural communication 195–8, 306
- cross-cultural rationality 294
- cross-culturation 265–6, 267, 272–3
- cultural consciousness 72, 74
  - black existential culture 76
  - colonial culture 75
  - master-slave culture 74–5
  - Négritude ideological culture 75–6
  - trans-racial ideological culture 76
- cultural essentialism
  - and cultural relativism 499–504
  - and gender essentialism 490–4
  - progressive versions 497–500
  - and Third World countries 494–502
- cultural geneticism 448
- cultural identity 443–9
- cultural imperialism 501
- cultural nationalism 137, 140–1
  - as culturalism 649–50, 653
- cultural relativism 195, 210n1, 444, 499–504
- culture
  - see also* language;
  - literature
  - and art 111–2
  - and Black Consciousness 102
  - C<sup>4</sup> factor (cross-culturation) 265–6, 267, 273
  - and concept of civilization 444, 457n16 21
  - cross-cultural communication 195–8
  - definitions 325, 444
  - epistemology 266–73
    - and ideology 72–6
  - meanings 72–4
  - and morality 333–5
  - Morgan's developmental stages 13
  - and Négritude 42–3, 53–5, 56–9, 75–6
  - Négritude and cultural assimilation 718–25
  - oral versus written 16, 17–20
  - and truth 300–2
- culture philosophy 134, 197

## D

- Dadie, B. 49, 725
- Damas, L. 43, 48, 719, 721–3
- Danquah, J.B. 28, 38–, 222
- Darwin, C. 291, 678
- Davidson, B. 203, 306, 617

- death
  - meaning of 549
  - suicide 376
- De Beauvoir, S. 417
- debt 679
  - cancellation 545
- De Chardin, Teilhard 59
- decolonization 4, 545, 716
  - of African religion 24–40
  - literature 66–71
  - Nkrumah's philosophy 709
  - post-colonial state of Africa 609–20, 644–55
  - of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe 556–7, 558–62
  - of South Africa 571–4
- deconstruction
  - and African philosophy 91n4, 166–82, 673
  - meaning 183n1
- De Gobineau, A. 136
- De Klerk, F.W. 573
- Delafosse, M. 138, 732
- Delavignette, R. 138
- De Mandeville, B. 674
- democracy
  - and socialism 684
  - South Africa 572–4
- deontology and community 327–8, 335
- Depestre, R. 718, 722, 724, 728
- deregulation 739
- Derrida, J. 17, 167
- Descartes, R. 27, 35, 111, 139, 168, 174, 198, 202, 309
  - and personhood 206
  - and self 250
- destiny 209
  - Akan concept 220, 229–30
  - Yoruba concept 217–8, 219, 223–9
- De Tejada, F.E. 273, 278, 279
- determinism, soft 209
- Dewey, J. 242, 252, 254, 255
- diachronic force 644–6, 652, 653
- dialogical relation, and social identity 324, 327
- dialogue 10, 337–8, 451
- Dickson, K. 352
- difference principle 365
- Diop, A. 53, 56, 110
- Diop, B. 52, 725–6
- Diop, C.A. 53–4, 140–1, 597, 725
- Diop, D. 46
- distributive justice 748



divination 234  
 dogmatic absolutism 736  
 Dolphyne, F. 437  
 donor fatigue 711  
 dualism (mind-body) 208, 460  
 dualism (ontological) 252, 254, 312  
 Du Bois, W. E. B. 718  
   alienation 694, 698, 700  
   concept of race 438, 439, 442  
 Dulles, J. F. 625  
 Dumont, R. 393  
 Durkheim, E. 15, 138, 244  
 Duster, T. 462  
 duties 365–9

## E

Eboh, M. P. 437  
 Eboussi-Boulaga, F. 142, 158, 176, 163n9  
 economic fundamentalism 736–7, 738, 739, 744, 757  
 economics  
   European Economic Community (EEC) 622, 626–8, 629, 631, 632, 634  
   exploitation in post-colonial Africa 644–55  
   globalization 738  
   market versus right to life 749–52  
   proposed role of African Renaissance 673–4, 680–8  
   theory of self-interest and globalization 677–80  
   and underdevelopment 593, 633  
 economy  
   economic order 390–3  
   and ethics 394–6  
   global 745–6  
   moral obligations 396–400  
 EEC *see* European Economic Community  
 Egypt 8, 180, 425  
 Ekeh, P. 612, 619, 620  
 Elkin, S. 699  
 Ellison, R. 693, 695  
 emanationism 27  
 emic-etic dispute 15  
 emotion 119, 139, 145, 278, 279  
 employment 388, 398, 413, 751  
   *see also* labour  
 empowerment, and particularity 337–8  
 enlightenment, age of 83–8  
 epistemology 168–9, 197  
   African 178, 318n5  
   Africa past and present 307–18  
   Akan concept of truth 283–8

- concepts 264–5
- and cultural context 266–8
- definitions 262–4
- logic and rationality 289–305
- problems 269
- of traditional communities 268–73
- ubuntu* philosophy 273–81, 382–4
- Equity Act (South Africa) 710
- essence 168, 182
- essentialism 451, 523–4
- eternity 34
- ethics
  - Akan 344–6
  - definitions 382, 389n2
  - and economy 390–400
  - of relationships and globalization 674–7
  - ubuntu* 382–8
- Ethiopia, wisdom tradition 425–38
- ethnic identity 446
- ethnicity, and regional integration 687
- ethnic particularism 332
- ethnology 108, 143, 161n4
  - see also* anthropology
- ethnophilosophy 24, 134, 144–7, 174, 262
  - see also* Tempels, P.
  - Cheikh Anta Diop 140–1
  - as concept 118–21, 186n23
  - and critics 150–3
  - as deconstructive and reconstructive challenge 177–8
  - French-speaking school of thought 140
  - and Kagamé 140, 143, 154–7
  - problem of hermeneutics 163n7, 163–5n10
  - response of African philosophers 130–3
  - status 134
- Eurocentrism
  - as African heritage 90–1
  - humanity and Kant 82–8, 94n39
  - superiority of European existence 78–82, 88, 91n3
- Europe, and neo-colonialism 622–36
- European Development Fund (EDF/FED) 393
- European diffusionism 674, 684
- European Economic Community (EEC) 622, 626–8, 629, 631, 632, 634
- European philosophy *see* Western philosophy
- Evans-Pritchard, E. 21, 292, 301
- evil
  - Bantu principles 128–9
  - the problem of 35–8, 359, 512–3
  - and war 549

evolution 291  
 excluded middle, law of 23, 119, 290  
 existence, value of (Kant) 85, 87  
 exploitation 102, 644–6  
     moral implications 650–1  
     moral struggle for recognition and flourishing 651–5  
     primary 646–7  
     secondary 646, 648–50  
 extinctive prescription 562, 575–8

## F

faith, and reason 32, 548–9  
 family  
     and globalization 737, 738–43, 759–60n26, 760n38  
     and *ubuntu* 388  
 Fanon, F. 47, 56, 66, 71, 90, 91, 427  
     critique of *négritude* 141  
 fatalism 209, 228, 675  
 Fatton, R., Jr. 610, 615  
 Feinberg, J. 694  
 female circumcision 437, 496, 504  
 feminism 408–12, 415, 417, 419, 421–3, 425n15  
     *see also* gender;  
     women  
     and the body 463, 484n22, 484n36  
     and cultural essentialism 489–504  
     and marriage 741  
     and social constructionism 463–6  
     Western categories and non-Western cultures 466–72  
     and wisdom traditions 426–38  
 Ferguson, K. 469  
 Field, F. 676  
 force 127–9, 137, 151, 199  
     structural force thesis 644–6  
 Foucault, M. 83, 143, 168, 169, 434, 464, 529n16  
 Foulque, P. 398  
 Frankenberg, R. 447  
 Frankfurt School 144  
 freedom 257, 512, 612, 694–5  
 free will 362, 549  
     free will defence 36  
 French-speaking Africa 716–8  
     Cheikh Anta Diop 140–1  
     French colonial context 135–7  
     Mudimbe's works 142–3  
     and *négritude* 135, 138–40, 141–2  
     Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* 138  
 Friedan, B. 138–410, 413

Funani, L. 406  
 functionalist anthropology 15

## G

G7 countries 678  
 Gaitskell, H. 632  
 Galbraith, J.K. 675  
 Garvey, M. 675, 718  
 Gbadegesin, S. 209  
 Gelb, I.J. 18  
 gender  
   *see also* women  
   and the body 463–4  
   future of women in South Africa 419–23  
   and social constructionism 464–6  
   South African women 405–23, 424n13  
   Western categories and non-Western cultures 466–83  
 gender essentialism, and cultural essentialism 490–4, 502–3  
 genetic inheritance, and crime 462, 463  
 Gentz, F. 528  
 Ghana 626, 632  
 Gilligan, C. 421  
 globalization  
   African Renaissance in context of 673–4, 680–8  
   critique 743–4  
   economic 738  
   effect on sovereignty 744–5  
   ethics of relationships 674–7, 678  
   of Europe 79, 85  
   and the family 737, 738–43  
   and global economy 745–6  
   governance of 753  
   metaphorical meaning 758–9n13  
   metaphysics of competition 753–5  
   as philosophical problem 735–9  
   socio-economic theory of self-interest 677–80  
   and *ubuntu* human rights philosophy 736–7, 755–6  
   and Zimbabwe 605  
 God  
   African concept 38–9, 200–1, 309  
   Akan concept 24–6, 29–33, 32–3  
   Christian concept 24, 25, 26, 33  
   as Force 127, 128  
   Yoruba concept 33  
 Goosen, H. 677–8  
 Gould, S. 463, 464  
 Graham, G. 676  
 Greek culture 8, 494

- invention of alphabet 17, 18
- Griaule, M. 138
- Grontkowski, C. 470
- Gross, M. 661–7, 671
- Grosz, E. 460
- Gurr, A. 70
- Gyekye, K. 36, 207, 252
  - Akan concept of destiny 229–30
  - Akan concept of personhood 220, 221–3, 255
  - critique of Menkiti's theory of personhood 356–8, 359

## H

- Hacking, I. 441
- Hallstein, W. 636
- Harding, S. 437
- Hardy, G. 732
- Harris, L. 437
- Harris, M. 13
- Hausa women 471
- Havelock, E. 17, 18
- Hazoumé, P. 55
- Hegel, G. 137, 256
  - Africans and status of rationality 169–70
  - civil society 611, 613
  - cultural relativism 210n1
  - idea of European superiority 79, 80, 81, 89, 93n39
  - philosophy of history 141
- Herder, J.G. 89, 450
- hermeneutics 176
  - and ethnophilosophy 163n7, 163–4n10
- Herodotus 8
- Hetzler, F. 430
- Heywat, Walda 432
- Hintsa 102
- HIV/Aids 742
- Hollis, M. 294–6, 303
- homogenization, as goal of globalization 743, 744
- hooks, bell 744–410
- Horton, R.
  - theory of causality 232–3, 237
  - traditional and scientific thought 20–2
  - traditional societies as closed 272–3
- Hottentot Venus 488n87
- Hountondji, P. 176, 426, 480
  - critique of ethnophilosophy 141–2, 144, 147, 211n3
  - critique of Kagame 153–7
  - critique of Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* 130–1, 150–2
  - definition of African philosophy 150, 185–6n19

- exploitation in Africa 648–50
  - on witchcraft 211n4
- humanism 152, 685, 709
  - Akan 341–2
  - and feminism 422
  - and *négritude* 59
- humanity
  - of Africans 166, 167, 173, 178
  - critique of Kant's doctrine of human nature 521–3
  - Kant's doctrine of human nature 82–8, 250, 505, 506, 508–13
  - origins 307
  - versus animality 109, 547
- human rights 498, 499
  - abuses 4, 671
  - Akan perspective 369–81
  - family and marriage 739
  - market and right to life 749–52
  - philosophy of 747–9, 761n58
  - and *ubuntu* philosophy 736–7, 755–6
- Hume, D. 13, 15, 32, 90, 256, 313, 508, 521, 679
- hungwe* (Zimbabwe bird) 712
- Husserl, E. 170
- Hyden, G. 617

## I

- identification 439–42
- identity 135, 136
  - see also* cultural identity, racial identity
  - African 8–9
  - law of 290, 294
  - local and global 294–672
- ideologico-philosophical trend 175
- ideology, and culture 72–6
- Idowu, E.B. 34, 107, 245, 474, 481
- Igbo people 251, 252, 256, 474, 484–6n45
- illness, African holistic concept 236–9
- IMF *see* International Monetary Fund
- immortality 203, 204, 227
- imperialism 67, 68, 80, 170, 634
- Indian culture 490, 491, 492, 494, 495, 497
- individualism 231
- individuality 145
- individual survival 754
- intentional action 441
- interconnectedness 310
- internationalization 744
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) 615, 679–80, 682
- interthinking 310, 311

investment 680

Irele, A. 473

Islam

and African philosophy 316–7

and marriage 740

and women 431, 432

## J

Jamaa movement 120, 121, 123, 125, 131

James, G. 180

Jarvie, I.C. 300, 301–2

Jewish thinking 483n20, 583n50, 588n84

Johnson, S. 474

Johnston, H. 624, 625, 683

justice 326, 330, 695

distributive justice and rights 748

meridian line 550–1, 585n65

justification 264–5

## K

Kagamé, A.

categories of African philosophy 161–2n6, 162–4n10, 382

ethnophilosophy 140, 143, 154–7

Kampala conference on reparations (1994) 5

Kane, C.H. 45, 79, 80

Kant, I. 78, 79, 81, 168, 174, 92n7

anthropology and geography 505–8, 529n24, 529n31

concept of race 514–21, 532n81, 534n83, 534n85, 535n88, 535n100, 535n103, 535–7n120

critique of doctrines 521–8

doctrine of human nature 82–8, 95n46, 250, 505, 506, 508–13, 532n59, 532n61, 532n70

and morality 364

Karp, I. 670

Kaunda, K. 683, 684

Keita, L. 135n1 180

Keller, E. 470, 621

Kenya 66, 70, 147, 203, 272–, 626–, 630, 660

Nkrumah's new African renaissance 707–11

Kenyatta, J. 352, 683

Kessler, S. 466, 468

Kettle, A. 70

Khoisan 584n50

Kikuyu 203

King, Martin Luther, Jr. 692

kinship relations (Akan) 328, 329, 330, 332, 333–5, 338, 339, 348, 370, 372–3

Ki-Zerbo, J. 141

knowledge 264

*see also* epistemology

Bantu 128

- effects of oral versus written 17–20
- production in Africa 592–9, 647–8
- versus belief 296–305
- Kosovo 583n50, 588n84
- Kuckertz, H. 207
- Kuhn, T. 657
- Kwame, S. 437
  
- L**
- labour
  - and exploitation 644–6, 651
  - and Marxist view of alienation 698
  - within free enterprise system 751–2
- Ladrière, J. 395
- Laleau, L. 44
- Lamming, G. 67, 68
- Lancaster House Agreement 554, 557, 560–6, 569, 605, 607–8
- land
  - Akan right to 370, 376–7
  - historic titles in law 554–5, 544, 583n50, 585n64
  - issue of extinctive prescription 575–6
  - land issue in Zimbabwe 560–2, 563–70, 575, 578, 605–6, 607
  - principle of recoverability 559
  - in South Africa 572, 575–8
  - sovereignty over natural resources 557–8
- language
  - in African philosophy 140
  - and Akan concept of truth 283–8
  - and be-ing 274, 275–8, 382–4
  - Chomsky's theory 657
  - of community 327
  - and culture 111, 154, 157
  - oral and written 19–20
  - origins of '*ubuntu*' and 'renaissance' 703
  - and personhood 356–7, 358
  - and society 509–10, 531n39, 531n40, 531n43
  - and truth 302
  - Yoruba 211–6, 480–3, 487–9n99
- Laqueur, T. 465
- law and morality 546
- law, historic titles in 544, 554–5, 583n50
  - see also* South Africa;
  - Zimbabwe
- Laye, C. 50
- Lebensphilosophie* 140
- Leeds University 66, 69
- Lefebvre, H. 142, 144
- Lefevre, P. 250



- Leibniz, G.W. 37
- Lenin 68, 634
- Lero, E. 719, 722
- Le Senne, R. 393, 396
- Lévi-Strauss, C.  
     cultural relativism 210n1  
     perceptual versus conceptual 16–7
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 151, 161n4  
     comparison with Lévi-Strauss 16  
     disparity between Western and non-Western cultures 136–7, 290–2, 598  
     law of participation 57, 139, 290, 291  
     pre-logical versus logical 13–6  
     and Senghor's theory of Négritude 56  
     view of the Other 12, 13–6
- Lewis, H.D. 242
- Linnaeus 518
- literacy  
     *see also* oral traditions  
     and knowledge 315–7
- literature  
     of alienation 150–9  
     colonial novel 136  
     Francophone African philosophy 135–43  
     and Kagamé 157  
     Négritude 41–53, 63n42, 64n48, 719–34  
     struggle towards decolonization 65–71
- lobola* 423
- Locke, J. 174  
     theory of society 661, 662
- logic 118, 145, 147  
     European logic 148, 149n8  
     and rationality 289–305
- logos* 167, 168, 184n3
- Loomba, A. 688
- Lowe, D. 470
- Lugard 623, 624
- Lukes, S. 294, 302–3
- Luo people  
     concept of God 39–40, 200  
     culture 73–4
- Lyotard, J-F. 79, 91, 93n8

## M

- McKenna, W. 466, 468
- McMahon 555
- Makana 102, 104n1
- Makerere University College 67, 68, 69, 316
- Makgoba, M. 711

- Makonnen 710
- Malreaux, A. 111–2
- Mamdani, M. 601
- Mandaza, I. 647
- Mandela, Nelson 660
- Maquet, J.J. 39, 251
- marginalization of knowledge 594, 596
- Mariam, Y.H. 428, 433–4, 438
- market (economy), versus right to life 749–52
- Mars, J. 718
- Marxism 42, 55, 59, 650
  - explanation of African-American condition 697–8
  - morality and exploitation 650–1, 653–4
  - and women 461
- Marx, K. 79, 81, 90, 634, 675
  - alienation 691
  - on exploitation 644, 646
  - humanity and India 94n39
- master-slave culture 74–5
- Mau Mau 203
- Maunick, E. 727–8, 730
- Maurier 209
- Mazrui, A. 602, 617, 681, 709
- Mazumdar, S. 499
- Mbeki, Thabo 407, 422
  - African Renaissance 710
- Mbembe, A. 142
- Mbiti, J. 30, 39, 255, 353
- Mboya, T. 255, 631, 684
- memory 304, 555, 562–3, 583n50, 588n84, 602
- Menkiti, I.A. 206, 353
  - critique by Gyekye 356–60, 362
- meridian line 550–1, 585n65, 709, 712, 715n18, 715n19
- Mernissi, F. 431, 432
- metaphysics 195
  - see also* African metaphysics
  - definitions 188n25, 195, 240–2
- Mètinhoué, G.P. 597
- Mill, J.S. 38
- mind, Yoruba concept 212–4
- Minkus, H. 35–6, 37
- miracles 549
- missionaries 33, 40, 100, 101, 124, 378
- Mkhatshwa, S. 710
- modernity 79
- modus ponens*, law of 15
- Mohanty, C. 491, 493
- Mokoko* 711, 715n25

## morality

- Akan 30, 328–35, 338, 339, 341–51, 358–9, 370, 372–3
- Akan perspective on human rights 369–81
- Bantu 128–9
- in culture 73–4
- ethics and economy 390–400
- and exploitation 650–1
- and particularity 324–39
- person and community 351–69
- perspectival model 324–35
- ubuntu* ethics 382–8
- in war 550

## moral philosophy 508, 515, 519

## moral relativism 198

## More, M.P. 200, 208

## Morgan, L.H. 13

## Moshoeshoe 102

## Mounce, H.O. 305

## Mudimbe, V.Y. 130, 93n19

- authority in African studies 478–9
- critique of Africanist discourses 142–4
- critique of Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* 131, 140
- forms of African philosophy 175–6
- the Other 12, 13

## Mugabe, R. 561, 567, 606, 608, 713

## multiculturalism

- cultural identity 443–9
  - and globalization 677
- music, and being 278–9
- mythical thought 110–1
- versus scientific 16–7

**N**

## natal alienation 700

## nationalistic-ideological philosophy 118, 147, 175, 179, 180

## naturalism 254, 255, 364

## natural resources 558, 680

## nature

- and reality 253
- and supernatural 25, 29, 239

## Négritude 683

- critique 141–2
- cultural assimilation 718–25
- culture 75–6
- as deconstructive and reconstructive challenge 178–9, 180
- and French-speaking Africa 135, 138–40, 141–2, 716–8
- and French-speaking Caribbean 716–8
- identification with Africa 49–53, 118

- ideology 53, 59
- literature 41–53
- origins 185n13
- politics and race 55–6
  - as reaction to white domination 60–1
  - as revolutionary response 59–61
- Senghor's theory 57–9, 60, 138–40, 473
- society, history, and culture 53–6
- neo-colonialism 622–36, 638n26, 638n44, 638n47
  - and exploitation 644–55
- neo-dependency 622
- Neo-Marxism 144
- nepotism 389
- network 739
- Neugebauer, C. 523
- Ngakane, M. 710
- Ngoma 176
- Nietzsche 83
- Nigeria 592, 618, 623, 627, 631, 719
- Nigerian African Women's Diaspora 405, 408, 410, 411
- Nizan 88
- Njoh-Mouelle 176
- Nkombe, O. 175, 176
- Nkrumah, K. 149n6, 427, 629, 633, 725
  - African socialism 353, 684
  - on class struggle 649–50
  - Consciencism 186n17, 650, 708
  - neo-colonialism 604, 623, 625, 627, 634
  - new African renaissance 707–11, 714n16
- non-contradiction, law of 15, 294
- Nordenbo, S. 196
- nothingness, concept of 25–6
- nous* 168, 184n4
- nuclear power 550, 580n20, 744–5
- Nuer people 39, 291, 302
- Nusco, L. 438
- Nussbaum, M. 503–666, 670
- Nyerere, J. 147, 255, 604, 624, 684, 686
- Nze, C. 253, 257
- Nzegwu, N. 475

## O

- Obayemi, A. 482
- Obenga, T. 141
- object *see* subject
- Oduyoye, A. 437
- Ogotemmelis 138
- Ogot, G. 315

- Ogundipe-Leslie 474  
 Ojike, M. 719  
 Okin, S. 500, 503  
 Okoye, F.C. 12n5  
 Olela, H. 180  
 omnipotence 34–6, 37–8  
 Ong, W. 16, 17–20  
 ontology, Bantu 126, 127–9  
   *see also* Tempels, P.  
 Opoku, K.A. 39  
 oppression, of South African women 412–6  
 oral traditions  
   and literacy 315–6  
   versus written 16, 17–20, 480  
 Organization of African Unity (OAU) 708  
 Oruka, O. 272  
   classification of trends 118–20, 134n1 175–, 262  
 Osuagwu, I. 9  
 ‘Other’, the 12–3, 158, 307, 460, 470  
 Oyesakin, A. 436

## P

- Pan-Africanism 41, 56, 185n12  
 papal bull 6–7, 553, 554, 712  
 papal declaration on man 5–7, 552–4, 711, 580n29, 580–2n30, 582n34  
 Park, R.E. 44  
 participation, law of 57, 139  
 particularity  
   and empowerment 337–8  
   perspectival model 324–35  
   versus relativism 332–6  
 Paton, Alan 98  
 patriotism 677  
 Patterson, O. 700  
 Paul, E. 55  
 p’Bitek, O. 40, 76, 316, 436, 671  
 perception 304  
 perceptual versus conceptual views 16–7  
 periodication of African philosophy 180  
 Persia 625  
 personhood 206–9  
   *see also* self  
   African concept and economic progress 681–3  
   Akan concept 328, 346, 351, 369–72  
   and communitarianism 352–62  
   comparison of Yoruba and Akan concepts 220–3  
   Yoruba concept 211–30  
 perspectival model of morality

- definitions 325–6
- particularity of communitarian morality 326–35
- Petersen, K.H. 436
- phenomenology 105
- philosophic sagacity 118, 145–7, 174, 262
- philosophy
  - Crahay's s definition 173
  - and globalization 735–7
- Plato 19, 27, 111, 146, 168, 171, 174, 252, 465
  - civil society 611
  - master-slave culture 75, 77n2
- pluralism 649
  - of cultures and literatures 65–71
- Polin, R. 394
- political system and rights, Akan 372–5
- politics
  - and economy 680–1
  - need for vocational politics in Africa 687–8
  - Négritude and race 55–6
  - and religion 563
- polygamy 423, 437
- Popper, Karl 22
- post-colonial Africa 609–15, 618–20, 644–55
- Post, K. 614
- post-modernism 92n12, 144
- Powell, A.C. 144
- power 151
- predestination 227–9
- pre-logical versus logical views 13–6
- Price, H.H. 298, 304–
- primitive thought 20
- Pritchard, H.A. 297, 298
- privatization of state 673, 681, 685, 686
- professional philosophy 118, 148, 175, 262

## Q

- Quinton 240

## R

- Rabasa, J. 90
- Rabemananjara, J. 55
- Rabiarivello 726
- race 13, 88
  - and biology 459–72
  - and communities 657–8–660
  - critique of Kant's theory 521–8
  - in Kant's anthropology 504–28
  - and South African women 405–23

- trans-racial ideological culture 76
- racial discrimination 61n11, 454, 693
- racial identity 438–43, 61n8
  - attitudes and modes of behaviour 452–3
  - authenticity 449, 450–1, 452
  - and cultural identity 443–9
  - identities and norms 449–50
  - importance of differences 454–6, 459n34, 459n35
- racism 443
  - see also* alienation;
  - apartheid;
  - Black Consciousness
  - and class question 697
  - cultural vindication and African Renaissance 683–5
  - European 170
  - issue of rationality as foundation 5–7
  - and Négritude 42, 56
  - United Nations conference on racism (2001) 5
- Raditlhalo, S.I. 207
- Ramphele, Mamphela 415, 424n10
- Ranger, T. 687
- Rastafarians 60
- rationality 22, 181, 184n5, 196, 264, 265
  - and epistemology 264, 265, 266, 268
  - and faith 32, 548–9
  - and logic 289–305
  - man as rational animal 4, 5–7, 84–5, 86, 87, 167–8, 547
  - meanings 184n3, 184n4
  - papal bull 6–7, 554, 712
  - Western view 167–70
- Rawls, J. 366, 695
- reality
  - African view 251–4
  - conception of 195, 206
  - and language 302
- reason *see* rationality
- reciprocity 333, 334, 335
- reconciliation 599–604, 647
  - Zimbabwe 605–8
- recoverability, principle of 559
- Reiman, J. 645, 646, 653
- reincarnation 254
  - Yoruba concept 226
- Reiser, O. 318
- relativism 262–4, 266, 295, 300–1
  - versus particularity 332–5
  - versus universalism 335
- religion

- see also* African traditional religion;
- Christianity
- Akan right to religious freedom 377–9
- definitions 242–4
- fidels and infidels 548–9
- and logic 292
- and politics 563
- versus science 21–3
- within communities 669
- reparations 5, 570, 578–9, 604, 713
  - Zimbabwe 570–1
- restitution 578–9
- Reston, J. 632
- rheomode language 277–8, 279–80
- Rhodes, Cecil John 557, 607
- rhythm 76, 102, 118, 279
- rights
  - see also* human rights
  - African-American experience 696
  - Akan role-rights 328–9, 330
  - and communitarianism 362–9, 695
  - effect of alienation 694
- rituals 30
- Robertson, C. 472
- Robeson, P. 67, 721
- Rorty, R. 143
- Roumain, J. 718, 722
- Rousseau, J.J. 81, 531n46
  - influence on Kant 508–13, 521–2, 523, 529–31n37
- Rousseau, M. 108
- Russell, B. 288

## S

- sage philosophy *see* philosophic sagacity
- sages 146–7, 271
- Said, E.W. 80, 86
- Samir, A. 647
- Sartre, J-P. 63n32, 139, 441, 452n33
  - on Négritude 63n35
- Sawyer, H. 39
- Scheman, N. 460
- Schiebinger 464
- Schipper, M. 435
- Schmitt, C. 709, 715n18
- Schutte, O. 307, 500
- science
  - in Africa 158, 648, 654
  - and logic 291, 292



- and religion 21–4, 293
- versus mythical thought 16–7
- self 141
  - see also* personhood
  - in African philosophy 250–7, 314
  - alienation 691–2
  - for colonialists 687
  - and morality 328–32, 338
  - obligation to self-development 397–8
  - self-in-community 328–32
- self-consciousness 304
- self-interest 676–7
  - socio-economic theory and globalization 677–80, 687–8
- self-understanding 326, 333
- Seme, Pixley ka Isaka 704–5, 707, 708
- Senghor, L.
  - collectivism 684
  - communitarianism 352, 353
  - logic 145
  - Négritude 56–9, 60, 138–40, 141, 178, 474, 683, 718, 722, 724
  - philosophy of emotive self 118, 309, 318n11
  - poetry 46, 51, 63n45, 732, 733
  - traditional man and reason 291, 314
- Sepedi language 384
- Serequeberhan, T. 135n1, 477, 528
- Shaka 102
- Shona 39, 157, 385, 563, 712
- Shutte, A. 201, 385–8
- Sierra Leone 496
- skin colour 514–5, 516–7, 524, 533n81, 534n83
- Skinner, B.F. 677
- slavery 6, 42, 169, 547, 699, 700
  - master-slave culture 74–5
- Smet, A. 175
- Smith, A. 679
- Smith, D. 464
- Smith, Ian 556, 557, 600, 607
- social constructionism, and gender 464–6
- socialism 73, 684
- social justice 599–608
- social thesis of morality 326–8
- sociology
  - and the body 461
  - of knowledge 472, 486n68
- Socrates 111, 171, 250, 257n1, 463
- Sogolo, G. 200, 205
- Soper, T. 628, 632
- Sotho people 208, 276, 279

- soul 221, 363
- South Africa  
*see also* apartheid;  
*ubuntu*  
 decolonization 545, 571–4, 575–6, 578–9  
 evaluation of tradition 204  
 race and gender 405–23  
 race and structure of communities 658–9  
 reconciliation and social justice 600–1, 604, 661  
 Shutte's exposition of *ubuntu* ethics 385–8  
 South African women 405–16, 423n1  
 witchcraft in Limpopo Province 204, 205
- Southern Africa, political economy 602–4
- sovereignty  
*see also* South Africa;  
 Zimbabwe  
 effect of globalization 744–5  
 extinctive prescription 575–8  
 forgetting the past 562–3  
 and global economy 745–6  
 historically 551–2  
 legality of conquest 554–5  
 and meridian line 550–1, 585n65, 709, 712  
 over natural resources 558  
 principle of recoverability 559  
 quest for justice 555–6  
 reversion to 575, 576–8  
 spiritual sovereignty of Rome 552–4  
 of territory 546, 551
- Sowell, Thomas 454, 455
- Soyinka, Wole 69
- species-essence thesis 644, 651
- Spelman, E. 417, 464
- Spinelli, A. 635
- Starr, F. 625, 637n13
- state, post-colonial in Africa 609–20
- state succession 545, 559, 560, 573, 578, 709
- Steele, S. 701
- Stout, J. 438
- strategic particularism 197, 206
- stress, African concept 237
- structural force thesis 644–6
- structuralism 143  
 in post-colonial state 615–8
- subject, relations with object 12, 313–4
- suicide, right to (Akan) 375–6
- Sumner, C., Ethiopian texts 425–33, 434, 435, 436, 438
- Summers, L. 679

supernatural 25, 29, 199, 236–7  
 synchronic force 644–6, 652, 653  
 synthetic current 175

## T

Tannen, D. 20  
 Tarski, A. 288  
 Taylor, C. 23, 449, 450–1, 453  
 teleology 31, 32, 195  
 Tempels, P. 104  
   *Bantu philosophy* 58, 107, 122, 123, 124, 126–33, 137–8, 145, 172–3, 252  
   critique by Cesaire 131, 152–3  
   critique by Hountondji 150–2  
   ethnophilosophy 120, 124–6, 134  
   issue of civilization 81, 93n23  
   and Kagamé 154–7  
   personal history 120–3  
   response by African philosophers 130–3, 141, 183n9  
   understanding self 254, 255  
 territory *see* land  
 testimony 304  
 Tevoedjre, A. 53  
 Theron, S. 682–3  
 Thévélot, X. 393  
 Third World countries 392, 398, 400, 582n36  
   cultural essentialism 492–504  
 Thomas, L.V. 61, 104, 105, 107, 697  
 Toure, S. 633, 638–9n48, 686  
 Towa, M. 141, 176  
 tradition, definition 326  
 traditional healers 205, 212, 236, 237–8  
 Treaty of Rome 628, 634  
 Treblicot 421  
 trial, right to (Akan) 375–6  
 Troxell 234–5  
 truth 265, 269, 280, 434  
   *see also* knowledge and belief  
   Akan concept 283–8  
   Winch's thesis 300–3  
 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) 545, 574, 579, 600, 662  
 Tshiamalenga 176  
 Turner, B. 462  
 Tutu, Desmond 419  
 Tylor, E.B. 4, 291

## U

ubuntu 419, 422, 423  
 ethics and philosophy 382–8

importance for Africa's advancement 683  
 linguistic origins 703  
 philosophy 273–81  
   as philosophy of human rights 736–7, 755–6  
   in South Africa 573–4  
 unanimism 142, 650  
 underdevelopment 593–7, 615, 633  
 United Nations conference on racism (Durban, 2001) 5  
 universalism 144, 170, 262, 264, 266, 504  
   and morality 324  
 universalization 744

## V

Van Baelen, L. 396  
 Van Hook, J.M. 118  
 victim mentality 701

## W

war, just and unjust 549–50  
 Ward, B. 633  
 Washington, B. 701  
 wealth tax 579  
*Weltanschauung* 104, 139, 151  
 Western culture, and non-Western 490–9  
 Western philosophy 144–5, 148, 166–8  
   and African philosophy 7, 8, 10, 118, 154, 158, 168–70, 181–2, 316  
   hegemony in African studies 472–83  
 Whitehead, A. 679  
 white supremacy 42, 56, 60  
   *see also* apartheid  
   colonial culture 75  
   master-slave culture 74–5  
 widow immolation 495  
 Wilson, W. 701  
 Winch, P. 292, 294, 295, 300–3, 306  
 Wiredu, K. 90, 200, 272, 427, 709  
   and authoritarianism 310  
   dualism 208, 292  
   kinship relations 328  
   particularity 332, 337  
   and personhood 220, 223  
   on concept of supreme being 201  
   and relativism 336  
 wisdom 128  
   Ethiopian wisdom traditions 425–38  
 witchcraft 199, 200, 204–5, 211n4, 237, 245, 293, 301  
 Withaar, H. 199, 209  
 Wittgenstein, L. 292

Wolde-Johannes, S. 426, 433

women

*see also* gender

activists in South Africa 424n8

alienation 694

and Ethiopian wisdom tradition 426–38

and globalization 741–2

race and gender 405–23

Women's National Coalition 407, 408

World Bank 615, 679–80, 681, 709

World Congress of Philosophy (Brighton 1988) 250

worship 31, 100

## X

Xhosa people 101

## Y

Yacob, Z. 426, 432

Yoruba people

and Akan concept of personhood 220–3

attitude towards women 435–6

causality 305

concept of destiny 209, 223–30

concept of God 33, 106

concept of personhood 211–30

and gender 467–8–471, 481–3

holistic concept of health 236, 237

language 480–3, 489n99

religion 240, 244–9, 475, 478

society 474

## Z

Zelleke, K. 430

Zimbabwe

and African traditional religion 563, 589–n87

chimurenga war 559–60

land issue 550, 554, 555, 558, 580n25

land reform 561–2, 563–70, 575, 576–8, 712

reconciliation and social justice 600, 604, 605–8

reparations 570–1

status as conquered people 586–8n83

towards post-conquest Zimbabwe 578–9

transition from Rhodesia 556–7, 559–62, 586n79

and United Kingdom 559, 585–6n74

Zimbabwe bird (*hungwe*) 712