



QUEST

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# QUEST

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**Mailing address:** Quest, PO Box 9114, 9703 LC Groningen, The Netherlands.

**Editors:** Roni M. Khul Bwalya , Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Issiaka-Prosper Lalèyê, J.A.I. Bewaji. Regional editor East Africa: Prof. E. Wamba-dia-Wamba (Dar-es-Salam)

**Production:** Willem Storm, Sarah Lewis

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**QUEST: Philosophical Discussions** is an African Journal of Philosophy. It intends to act as a channel of expression for thinkers in Africa, and to stimulate philosophical discussion on problems that arise out of the radical transformations Africa and Africans are undergoing.

**QUEST** includes materials on both current subjects related to Africa, and subjects of general philosophical interest, serving an international public of professional philosophers and intellectuals in other disciplines with philosophical interests. Original articles written in either English or French will be published, each with a summary in the other language. **QUEST** appears twice per year in June and December.

**Contributions:** Articles should normally not exceed 6,000 words in length and should be accompanied by an abstract.

**Subscriptions:** see details on the last page of this issue.

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## EDITORIAL

*Roni Khul Bwalya, the initiator, editor, designer and inspirator of QUEST, died unexpectedly last December. A great loss to QUEST and to the future of African philosophy.*

*We commemorate this inspiring figure, whom many colleagues have never met personally, in this issue. We are also preparing a special publication with his collected work.*

*QUEST proceeds with a renewed editorial team. Prof. Issiaka-Prosper Lalèyê from St. Louis, Senegal and Dr. Ayotunde Bewaji from Nigeria have expressed full commitment to the QUEST-venture. We hope to extend the editorial team with one or two colleagues from other parts of Africa (or from Lusophone Africa) soon.*

*In this issue Prof. I.P. Lalèyê introduces himself with an original and interesting article on the theory of culture. Further we have contributions from Wamba-dia-Wamba, Procee, Scholze and Kimmerle among others.*

*Wamba-dia-Wamba elaborates on a new concept of politics and the development of political alternatives in the African context. Procee continues the debate on cultural universals between Wiredu and Odera Oruka (QUEST Vol.IV, No.2) with an original contribution, and the universality of Human Rights is discussed in a contribution from Prof. Scholze. Furthermore, Prof. Kimmerle gives his response to criticisms of his book on African philosophy, and there are a number of book reviews.*

## Gift-subscriptions

Several African Departments of Philosophy are facing serious financial problems and have not been able to subscribe to QUEST. We would like, therefore, to invite readers to pay gift-subscriptions to African departments and friends (US\$ 15.- each).

## EDITORIAL

*Roni Bwalya, le fondateur, rédacteur, créateur et instigateur de QUEST est soudainement décédé. Une perte immense pour QUEST et pour l'avenir de la philosophie africaine.*

*Nous rendons hommage dans ce numéro à ce personnage hors du commun, que beaucoup de collègues n'ont hélas jamais rencontré. Nous préparons également la publication de ses oeuvres complètes.*

*QUEST continue avec une nouvelle équipe rédactionnelle. Prof. Issiaka-Prosper Laleye du Sénégal et Dr. Ayotunde Bewaji du Nigéria sont prêts à coopérer à QUEST. Nous espérons pouvoir agrandir la rédaction avec un ou deux autres collègues venant d'autres régions ou d'autre zones linguistiques.*

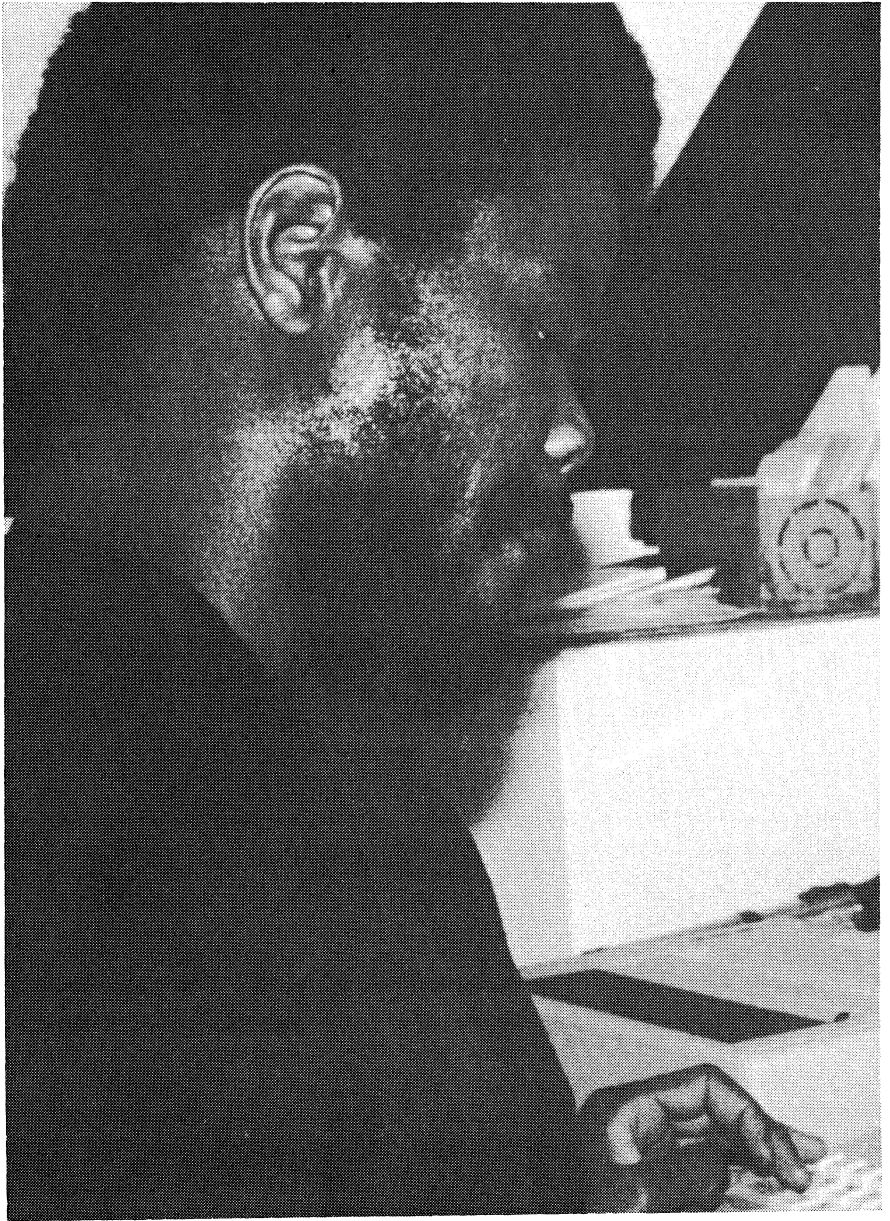
*QUEST a déjà publié des articles du Dr. Bewaji et Prof. Laleye présente un article intéressant dans ce numéro. Un article profond de Wamba-dia-Wamba contribue à l'élaboration d'un nouveau concept de politique et d'alternatives politiques pour l'Afrique.*

*Le débat concernant les universaux culturels qui opposait Wiredu et Odera Orika dans QUEST (Vol.IV, no.2) s'enrichit d'une contribution originale de Dr. Procee, et la question de l'universalité des droits de l'homme est abordée dans un article du Prof. Scholze.*

*D'autres discussions à propos d'un livre allemand du Prof. Kimmerle traitant de philosophie africaine et des comptes-rendus littéraires.*

## Les abonnements-cadeaux

En raisons de sérieux problèmes financiers, plusieurs facultés de philosophie ne sont pas en mesure de souscrire à QUEST. C'est pourquoi nous aimerions inviter nos lecteurs à financer des abonnements-cadeaux destinés aux faculté africaines. Aux prix de US\$ 15.- par année vous pourriez faire en sorte que vos collègues africains puissent participer aux discussions soulevées à QUEST.



*Ronado Musonda Khul Bwalya*

## IN MEMORIAM RONI KHUL BWALYA

The co-founder, editor and inspirator of QUEST, Roni Khul Bwalya, died last December of a sudden attack of asthmatic bronchitis. He was a very special person, who really should have introduced himself to all of you through his philosophical works, his poems and drawings. But he died too soon, at the age of 34, in the last year of his PhD research in Leeds, England.

To those who knew him personally, he left the impression of his intriguing personality, often eccentric behaviour, but even more so of his thoughtfulness and depth of reflection. Roni Bwalya was not interested in superficial intellectual theses and common well-cemented positions. He could neither fit the established model of a *critical intellectual* with a set of standard commitments, nor could he fit any model of an *establishment intellectual*. He was extraordinary.

As if to underline that point, he disregarded all the usual outward signs of intellectual dignity and standing, such as beautiful suits, cars, and academic titles. The only possessions he cared for were his abundance of books and music cassettes, and a motorbike. As a teacher at the University of Zambia he drew the attention of a large group of students, who wanted 'to be there' when he performed. Often, he would then find himself having difficulties with administrative officials, who did not believe that this fellow in T-shirt was actually a lecturer and not a student!

This distance from the more common social values was not a sign of recalcitrance, or an ideological position against the existing elite society for Roni Bwalya. Born in a Lusaka slum area he was certainly a gap between him and the elite and he continued to feel like a 'Mutendere boy' to some degree. For Roni, philosophy was a way of life. Life therefore, could not be guided by conventions, but only by a quest for quality, insight and a multitude of life experiences. Colleagues could sometimes be enraged by his disrespect for their titles and often considered him arrogant. That, however, was definitely a misinterpretation: he simply did not care for many things they valued highly but valued other things.

For as far as I know him, Roni Bwalya's philosophical existence was moved originally by what he used to call 'substantial philosophical

questions', questions concerning (our conception of) reality, knowledge, morality and history. He thereby tended to identify more with 'idealist' positions than with realist or materialist ones. He preferred the more obscure and all-encompassing thinkers. In the many courses which we taught together the division of labour was always simple: he would, for instance, discuss Plato, Hegel and the Négritude and I would discuss Aristotle, Kant and Nyerere.

It is, however, remarkable, that in his own philosophical writing and social engagement, Roni Bwalya moved away from his original inclination towards the purely intellectual questions. He did not consider it proper timing to engage in pure philosophical reflection when the current problems were so pressing and demanding of informed, but uncowardly criticism. While the official Zambian ideology of Humanism was being hotly debated, while the African intellectual development was searching for new ways ahead, he considered it his primary task to be involved.

He had worked out a very interesting interpretation of Plato's 'State', as containing two intertwined endeavours (roughly a 'moral' and a 'political'), which he could unveil in a paragraph-by-paragraph dissection of Plato's book. However, I could not persuade him to work it out and prepare it for publication. There were more pressing things to do, he said, and started working on a thorough critique of Zambian Humanism, which was at that time the most debated issue in Zambia. His renaming of the official state ideology of 'Zambian Humanism' as 'Kaundaism' and his subsequent devastating criticism of a book by the Guru of the president of the Republic of Zambia were daring indeed. But he was not afraid: "I have some schoolmates in the CID (secret police) and I suppose that they will warn me if anything goes wrong".

His favourite philosopher in the Western tradition was Nietzsche. He admired Nietzsche most of all, I think, for his penetrating and colourful style of writing and argumentation. Roni Bwalya, like Nietzsche, loved the art of carefully selecting exactly the right words and metaphors to describe, uncover and criticise, coining new words and expressions when necessary. Roni loved language, which he



considered as being a way to uncover a deeper meaning and order of things, rather than simply as a means of description. Not only the informative content of an expression, but also its connotations and aesthetic quality are important in determining its true meaning.

Roni Bwalya also shared Nietzsche's deep concern with his culture and aversion of hypocrisy and servility. Nietzsche hated the German culture of his time, Roni did not hate Zambia, but he considered a relentless self-criticism of African culture and society a prerequisite for finding new ways to move ahead. For example, he considered the frequent and often hypocritical practice of blaming all problems in Africa on colonialism one of the prime mental and intellectual weaknesses, which can be excused only when used as a counter-attack against outsiders. But defensive tactics do not inspire progressive movements. These views definitely do not mean that his commitment to independence and autonomy can be doubted in any way, but merely reflect his concern for the actual realisation of these ideals.

In this light, it is interesting to read his criticisms of Zambian Humanism and its uncritical spokesmen. He refrains from practically all standard criticisms, such as the impracticality of Zambian Humanism, its religious foundations, and its elitist practices. His criticism boils down to the thesis that, as a state ideology, Zambian Humanism is unfaithful to the deeper aims of the independence struggle.

Roni Bwalya had a 'post-modern' attitude towards religion, which often shocked and excited his students, who were either true believers themselves, or explicitly anti-religious because of their Marxist-Leninist conviction as student-activists. One of the climaxes of his courses was his discussion of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. Bwalya took this critique as a beautiful example of unconventional, relentless and eloquent criticism, and made his audience shiver by the reflection they were led through, which they had never dared before. Two catholic nuns in class consulted our Head of Department, a jesuit priest, to ask permission to change courses after they had to endure the

Nietzsche lecture. What astonishment for them to find Bwalya visiting their church that same Sunday to experience their performance!

Bwalya belongs to the post-independence generation. He was raised by his grandmother, who is said to have been a person with strong and well-known supernatural powers. She took great interest in her grandson and had a room cleared out especially for him, so that he could concentrate on his schoolwork. This was an extreme measure for the overcrowded three-room house.

Roni Bwalya could, under the post-independence free-education system, visit 'Munali', one of the best Lusaka secondary schools. He endured the terrible experience of the National Service (the massive, mandatory mobilisation of youth in rural production units, which turned out to be a disaster) and entered the university to major in Political Science. His teachers were quite impressed with him, and he was chosen by the new Philosophy Department to complete his studies in the USA. In his student years, he was famous among students, not only because of his success with girls, but also because of his illustrated magazine AURORA which he wrote and published himself. Before he initiated QUEST, he produced several other incidental publications, in the hope of earning some money with them.

He preserved some curiosities from his student time, for example his name. In attempting to avoid the readily made tribal identification and stigmatisation he took on a new name, and chose for 'Khul', probably because of its association with the american 'cool'. In modern bureaucratic society it is difficult to consistently avoid using your official name, so Khul became an extra name, although he continued to use it, by itself, or sometimes in the combination 'Khul Bwalya', or as initials RKB.

It would be presumptuous to attempt to give a complete reconstruction of his intellectual heritage, but something should be said. Let me begin with some observations.

Bwalya can be considered an exponent of a new generation of academic African philosophers, he did not experience the attainment of

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national independence, was trained at a secular African institution of higher learning and came from an urban, non-elite family background. In line with this background he also had a different view of Africa than the older generation. His primary mental association with 'Africa' was not as something threatened (tradition, 'African culture') that should be regained, retained, or explained. Nor did he perceive Africa in the first place as something opposed to imperialism and the West. For him there was simply the reality of post-independence African society with its plurality and specificity, groping for new paths and new identities.

He strongly believed in the idea of the 'melting-pot' as the cultural future of this world, which does not imply that all cultural differences will disappear, but that isolationism is impossible and identities are constantly (re-)created. Therefore, 'the question of African philosophy' was not of interest to him. He had an inclination towards a universalist conception of philosophy. In his view, African philosophy should not be some special type of philosophy, based on specifically African cultural roots. People must simply make culture and engage in philosophical reflection. Perhaps his views on this matter were equally influenced by his intuitive or aesthetic dislike of the somewhat apologetic, defensive, conservative tone which accompanies many publications with ethnophilosophical orientation. Roni Bwalya felt that the philosopher should not take on the role of 'cultural preserver', let alone myth-maker, but should be a creator or demystifier. His reservations about some of the present-day publications in African philosophy were therefore not in the first place ideologically inspired. Such philosophy simply do not express his type of commitment to the African situation. Furthermore, he distrusted the cultural and political role of philosophy with an ethnophilosophical orientation.

We will remember Roni Bwalya as a thoughtful and inspiring person. His work will remain an inspiration for QUEST. We extend our sincere condolences to his wife Terry and his family.

### *Summary*

*By investigating the relationship between consciousness and culture, the author exposes the limits of the world-wide culturalist movement. This movement, which has particularly been developed within the UN by UNESCO, aims at eliminating the relations of domination and aggression in the world.*

*Consciousness has its roots in culture. Because of this, both are alike in nature, which allows the influence of consciousness on culture. In order to be able to have influence, consciousness must develop itself. This development is made possible by means of intersubjectivity and temporality, which increases consciousness' field of vision and its potential of participation within culture.*

*In this way, the consciousness improves both of its functions, namely, the function of contemplation and the function of active transformation of the world. But consciousness can never encompass more than a part of culture; its vision is always partial and its possibilities for action remains limited. Furthermore, consciousness alone is not capable of transforming the world.*

*In order to accomplish the goals that have been laid down by UNESCO, it is not enough to merely have faith in the development of the consciousness and its capabilities. A consciousness that pursues the fulfillment of its being will find values within the culture from which it can chose in order to engage the will in concrete projects of development and the realization of Human Rights. Only concrete action, rather than verbal proclamations, will lead us to the realization of the goals of the world-wide cultural movement.*

# CONSCIENCE ET CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

I.P. Lalèyè

Aujourd'hui, sur le plan international comme au niveau de chaque pays, tout concourt à placer et à maintenir la culture en tête de nos préoccupations. Nous assistons à un vaste mouvement désireux d'inscrire la culture au fronton de la conscience individuelle et collective. Il importe, je crois, de ne pas seulement se laisser entraîner par ce mouvement, en supposant que ses initiateurs et ses acteurs proches et lointains sont bien inspirés et bien intentionnés et qu'ils ne désirent que notre bien à tous. Il faut puiser dans les ressources de la conscience tant individuelle que collective pour soumettre ce mouvement culturaliste qui nous entraîne et nous englobe de plus en plus à une analyse un tant soit peu objective, dans le but de motiver le plus rationnellement possible notre adhésion partielle ou totale et, s'il le faut, notre résistance ou même notre refus plus ou moins radical.

Dès qu'une pensée s'arrête pour considérer la culture et quels que soient les motifs qui l'ont conduite à cette décision, la première chose qu'il lui faut savoir est l'impossibilité quasi insurmontable, pour un sujet humain, de se placer en dehors et comme au-dessus de la culture. C'est donc toujours grâce et à travers une certaine culture que toute autre culture est visée; et dans le cas où un sujet réfléchit, ou bien médite, sur sa propre culture, sa réflexion ou sa méditation est par avance déterminée par cette culture encore; de telle sorte qu'il devient nécessaire de découvrir des procédés capables d'éviter un enfermement, ou un encerclement qui pourrait demeurer longtemps dans l'ignorance de ses propres limites.

La deuxième chose à savoir est que, bien qu'il soit impossible de faire abstraction du sujet individuel dans ce que je nommerais le "fonctionnement de la culture"<sup>2</sup>, il est cependant indiscutable qu'une action individuelle ne parvient à déterminer le devenir de la culture que si elle est expressément démultipliée par de nombreuses autres actions individuelles qui, à travers le temps et l'espace, transforment en un acte collectif ce qui a commencé par n'être qu'une intuition et une initiative personnelles. C'est parce que leurs actes possèdent, au

plus haut point, cette vertu de contagion et de démultiplication, que les saints et les héros déterminent le devenir de leur culture et infléchissent si souvent l'orientation de la morale et de la foi de leur peuple, voire de l'humanité.

Mais, l'impossibilité de se mettre définitivement en dehors et au-dessus de la culture, et l'impossibilité de prétendre - à moins d'être un saint ou un héros - insuffler à une culture une énergie nouvelle et un sens nouveau, ne doivent pas servir d'excuse pour ne pas réfléchir sur la culture ou pour ne pas agir seul et en groupe sur le devenir culturel. Ces deux impossibilités fixent plutôt un cadre et elles le délimitent de concert avec d'autres difficultés, certes, mais amalgamées à des "facilités" qu'il appartient à la réflexion et l'action de découvrir si l'une et l'autre désirent être efficaces.

Je me propose de contribuer à une analyse du mouvement ou de la tendance culturaliste mondial(e) actuel(le) en examinant, dans une première partie de mon exposé, les trois actes les plus récents par lesquels le monde actuel a entrepris de hisser la culture au premier plan de nos préoccupations. La proximité de ces actes dans le temps, par rapport à nous, nous oblige à faire de l'histoire immédiate<sup>3</sup>; c'est-à-dire une histoire si intimement encore mêlée de sociologie que ses conclusions ne sauraient être manipulées que de façon fort prudente. C'est pourquoi, dans cette analyse nécessairement brève de ces trois faits, je m'efforcerai plutôt de dégager le nouveau contenu dont la notion de culture s'est trouvée progressivement dotée.

Dans la deuxième partie, j'entreprendrai de situer la conscience dans la culture, en répondant notamment à cette question qui peut paraître banale et que je formule ainsi: Que peut la conscience pour la culture?

Dans la troisième et dernière partie, je dirai ce que je pense de l'engouement dont la culture est aujourd'hui l'objet et des risques auxquels cet engouement nous expose, en particulier si nous renonçons individuellement ou collectivement à notre droit de pensée et d'action.

Les trois faits récents qu'il est possible, selon moi, d'inscrire parmi ceux qui ont marqué l'intérêt renouvelé du monde actuel pour la culture sont: la création de l'UNESCO à Londres, le 16 novembre 1945<sup>4</sup>; la tenue à Mexico, du 26 juillet au 6 août 1982, de la Conférence mondiale sur les politiques culturelles (Mondiacult); et enfin, la résolution des Nations Unies proclament, le 29 janvier 1987, une *Décennie mondiale du développement culturel*; cette décennie a été, comme l'on sait, lancée le 21 janvier 1988, par le Directeur général de l'UNESCO.

On l'aura remarqué, ces trois faits récents dans lesquels, pour ma part, je vois de véritables actes, tournent autour de l'UNESCO qui en est ainsi le centre, dans un sens plus dynamique que spatial du terme. La référence à l'UNESCO ne renvoie pas seulement au système des Nations Unies. Par-delà ce système, cette référence est propre à rappeler la deuxième guerre mondiale et la volonté unanime de paix pour le développement qui a animé tous ceux qui ont vécu cette guerre et en ont connu les horreurs. Ainsi n'est-il pas étonnant que la tâche assignée à l'UNESCO soit de "... contribuer au maintien de la paix et de la sécurité en resserrant, par l'éducation, la science et la culture, la collaboration entre nations afin d'assurer le respect des principes de la Charte des Nations Unies"<sup>5</sup>.

Ce n'est pas seulement dans la tâche assignée à l'UNESCO que sont mentionnées l'éducation, la science et la culture. C'est aussi dans l'appellation-même de cet organisme des Nations Unies, puisque le sigle UNESCO est l'abréviation, en anglais d'un nom qui en français n'est autre que "Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Education, la Science et la Culture".

Le moins que l'on puisse dire de la notion de la culture qui a présidé, en 1945, à la confection du nom et de l'objectif de l'UNESCO est que cette culture se concevait séparément de l'éducation et de la science. C'était comme si ces trois réalités humaines constituaient autant d'entités distinctes les unes par rapport aux autres, et qu'elles étaient appelées, grâce à un usage approprié, à concourir au maintien de la paix et de la sécurité mondiales. De là à

dire que la conception de la culture qui prévalait alors était encore élitiste, de telle sorte que l'on pouvait être éduqué et initié à la science sans pour autant être *cultivé*, il n'y a qu'un pas que l'on se gardera bien de franchir. Car, d'une part la notion de culture demeure, aujourd'hui encore, entachée d'une certaine connotation élitiste, et, d'autre part, - plus fondamentalement - il demeure loisible pour la pensée, de penser séparément la culture par rapport à tous ses contenus que sont l'art, la science, l'éducation, la morale, la politique, etc., au moment-même où l'on considérerait la notion de culture de la façon la plus englobante possible.

On peut considérer la publication, en 1871, par Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), de son Primitive culture, comme l'un des actes majeurs de la culturologie alors naissante, c'est-à-dire de l'étude scientifique de la culture. Et il va sans dire que c'est cet intérêt scientifique pour la culture qui en a progressivement amoindri la connotation élitiste, orientant de plus en plus l'attention vers les composantes objectives de la culture en même temps que sur l'universalité du phénomène culturel en tant que tel. Mais cet intérêt de la science pour la culture a néanmoins abouti à un résultat des plus désarmants, puisqu'au moment où Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876-1960) et Clyde Kluckhohn (né en 1905), tous deux des anthropologues américains, publièrent en 1952, leur article sur la culture [Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952)], ils n'en dénombèrent pas moins de cent soixante définitions.

Une telle abondance de définitions est, de toute évidence, plus un mal qu'un bien. Elle révèle la richesse d'un domaine en même temps que l'incapacité de le maîtriser. Elle laisse par conséquent le champ libre à l'enquête, sinon à la recherche, et elle oblige chaque usager du mot *culture* à préciser le sens qu'il lui donne ou celle de ses acceptions sur laquelle il choisit de mettre l'accent. L'UNESCO ayant été conçue et fondée pour faire contribuer la culture au maintien de la paix, il n'est que normal que ses responsables et ses experts aient orienté leurs efforts vers la contribution à l'élucidation du concept de culture et à une plus adéquate expression de son contenu. Mondiacult, à Mexico,



offrit à l'UNESCO l'occasion de faire le point de ce long travail d'élucidation de ce concept.

Sans vouloir passer ici en revue le détail de l'apport de Mondiacult à la notion de culture, à sa portée ainsi qu'aux notions d'identité culturelle, de patrimoine culturel, de politique culturelle ou aux rapports de la culture à la démocratie, à l'éducation, à la communication, à la science, à la technologie et même à la culture, il me paraît suffisant de citer l'expression élémentaire à partir de laquelle la conférence de Mexico a réalisé sa réflexion sur les politiques culturelles à l'échelle de la planète. Dans la Déclaration dite de Mexico, il est en effet écrit: "La Conférence convient que, dans son sens le plus large, la culture peut aujourd'hui être considérée comme l'ensemble des traits distinctifs, spirituels et matériels, intellectuels et affectifs, qui caractérisent une société ou un groupe social. Elle englobe, outre les arts et les lettres, les modes de vie, les valeurs, les traditions et les croyances. Elle (la Conférence) convient aussi que la culture donne à l'homme la capacité de réflexion sur lui-même. C'est elle qui fait de nous des êtres spécifiquement humains, rationnels, critiques et éthiquement engagés. C'est par elle que nous discernons des valeurs et effectuons des choix. C'est par elle que l'homme s'exprime, prend conscience de lui-même, se reconnaît comme un projet inachevé, remet en question ses propres réalisations, recherche inlassablement de nouvelles significations et crée des valeurs qui le transcendent."<sup>6</sup>

Cette définition de la culture ne se contente pas d'indiquer ce qu'est la culture dans son être, et d'aucuns diraient dans son *essence*. Elle en indique le sujet producteur; elle en énumère les principales composantes, et cela, en une énumération qui montre bien qu'il s'agit d'un ensemble ouvert. Surtout, en énumérant les principales fonctions de la culture, la Conférence de Mexico, d'une part manifeste l'orientation pratique de ses participants et, d'autre part, dégage devant quiconque désirerait se servir de cette définition, l'espace spécifique qui s'offre à sa pensée comme à son action.

Fidèle à son Acte constitutif (4 novembre 1946), l'UNESCO, à Mexico, continue d'assigner comme objectif à l'interaction de la culture, de la science et de l'éducation, la consolidation de la paix et le respect des droits de l'homme. Pour Mondiacult, cette interaction doit "... contribuer à l'élimination du colonialisme, du néo-colonialisme, du racisme, de l'apartheid et de toute forme d'agression, de domination ou d'intervention"<sup>7</sup>. La communauté universelle réunie à Mexico ce mois d'août 1982, fit sienne la devise de Bénito Juárez et proclama: "Entre les individus comme entre les nations, le respect du droit de l'autre est la paix"<sup>8</sup>.

Cette orientation vers l'action à partir de la culture se retrouve dans le fait de proclamer une *Décennie mondiale du développement culturel*. Pour s'en convaincre, il suffirait de jeter un coup d'oeil aux quatre objectifs majeurs assignés à cette décennie.

En effet, le premier de ces objectifs est la prise en considération de la dimension culturelle du développement; le second, l'affirmation et l'enrichissement des identités culturelles; le troisième, l'accroissement de la participation à la vie culturelle, et le quatrième, la promotion de la coopération culturelle internationale.

J'ai signalé au début de mon exposé que l'une des choses que devrait savoir quiconque se propose de réfléchir sur la culture, est l'impossibilité, pour un sujet humain, de se placer en dehors et comme au-dessus de la culture en tant que telle. La définition de Mexico affirme, quant à elle, que c'est par la culture que l'homme prend conscience de lui-même. Le rapport de la conscience à la culture est donc toujours médiatisé par la culture encore. C'est pour cette raison qu'un retour s'impose aux rapports de la conscience à la culture, pour tâcher de répondre, comme je l'ai annoncé, à la question de savoir ce que peut la conscience. Car les tâches envisagées dans chacun des quatre objectifs assignés à la Décennie sont sans doute belles et exaltantes; on peut cependant se demander qui devrait les réaliser, avec quels moyens, comment et avec quelle(s) chance(s) de succès?

Observée à partir de l'individu, la conscience, en un sens, paraît irrémédiablement en retard par rapport à la culture. La culture est toujours déjà là lorsque la conscience individuelle s'éveille et décide, plus ou moins tardivement, de s'exercer à la saisie de la culture. Il semble également que, quelque parfaite qu'elle puisse être, la saisie de la culture par la conscience demeure irrémédiablement partielle. Elle est partielle dans le temps, puisque le propre de chaque conscience individuelle est de ne durer que quelque temps. Mais elle est également partielle dans l'espace, car il n'y a pas de culture aux contenus si peu nombreux qu'une conscience individuelle puisse se vanter de totalement les contenir. On peut donc dire qu'en restreignant la conscience à sa dimension perceptive et contemplative, l'impuissance de l'individu paraît sinon totale, mais considérable.

Cependant, la conscience ne saurait être réduite à sa dimension contemplative. Même et surtout dans l'individu, la conscience est fréquemment pratique. Comme telle, elle assiste à l'émergence de l'idée de l'action; c'est à elle qu'il revient de la mûrir, comme idée, et donc de permettre à la réflexion d'y accomplir son oeuvre d'analyse, de critique, de construction et de reconstruction. En particulier, une fois l'idée de l'action prête comme idée, c'est encore à la conscience individuelle qu'il appartient - soutenue par la volonté - d'assister à sa réalisation, à son inscription dans le réel; ce réel pouvant être celui de la matière ou celui de l'esprit, celui de l'intellect, du moral ou du politique, ou même celui de l'imaginaire<sup>9</sup>.

Si la puissance de la conscience individuelle, dans sa dimension contemplative, nour paraît aussi réelle que limitée, qu'en est-il de sa puissance dans la dimension pratique? Si nul ne peut nier qu'elle soit, à son tour, réelle, chacun admettra facilement cependant, que, même consciente, l'action individuelle n'acquiert une portée culturelle qu'en s'articulant à d'autres actions également individuelles, devenant ainsi et de proche en proche, une action collective. Ce qu'il convient de signaler est que, justement, c'est dans le passage de la conscience individuelle aux autres consciences individuelles appelées à s'associer plus ou moins étroitement, afin de pouvoir réaliser l'action collective,

que s'insèrent - génétiquement parlant - tous les médias ou, si l'on veut, les intermédiaires dont l'agencement *sui generis* constitue la culture elle-même en tant que telle. Ces intermédiaires comprennent les signes et les symboles les plus élémentaires connus de l'homme, mais aussi ces signes, ces images et ces symboles, portés chacun à son plus haut degré d'abstraction, le système qu'ils forment étant lui-même soumis à une complexification qui donna naissance, dans les temps immémoriaux, au langage, aux langues, aux écritures, à la science comme mode d'appropriation et de maîtrise du monde, et aux métalangages subséquentement produits par la science elle-même engagée dans son propre devenir<sup>10</sup>.

En fait, ce n'est que dans une première approche que la culture apparaît comme le *médium* qui s'interpose entre la conscience individuelle et la conscience collective. Car, vue de plus près, la conscience individuelle paraît devoir son existence (et même sa substance) au lien indescriptible qui la relie aux autres consciences. En d'autres termes, toute conscience est avant tout non pas le propre d'un sujet isolé, mais la marque spécifique d'un ensemble de sujets en interrelation et qui se soutiennent mutuellement dans leur éveil à la conscience, ou dans l'éveil de la conscience en eux. Bref, la conscience ainsi perçue est nécessairement intersubjective. Le moment où la culture est perçue comme le *médium* conduisant de la conscience individuelle à la conscience collective est, par conséquent, un moment tardif et, de ce fait, quelque peu trompeur. Car c'est au surgissement de chaque conscience que se trouvent les autres consciences, et donc déjà la culture.

Mais une chose est de rencontrer ou de découvrir la culture au moment où l'on s'efforce de voir le lien menant de la conscience individuelle à la conscience collective, et une autre chose est de se prononcer sur le ou les pouvoir(s) de la conscience individuelle, lorsqu'elle aspire à conférer une portée culturelle à son action. Car la présence de la culture au surgissement de la conscience ne saurait, comme telle, limiter l'action de la conscience sur la culture. C'est le contraire que l'on devrait pouvoir affirmer, et dire que, du fait que la

conscience s'origine dans la culture, l'identité de nature ainsi offerte fonde, du même coup, l'efficacité de l'action de l'une sur l'autre et vice versa.

Pour atteindre la culture, la conscience individuelle n'est pas limitée par les autres consciences individuelles. Elles sont plutôt le tremplin auquel il lui faut accéder. Et, comme tout tremplin et nonobstant sa nature immatérielle, la conscience collective, à condition d'être adéquatement sollicitée, démultiplie à l'infini les capacités du sujet individuel et représente ainsi une force aux immenses possibilités et au devenir imprévisible.

Néanmoins, nous devons prendre garde qu'individuel ou collectif, un sujet actif doué de conscience n'est cependant pas investi en permanence du pouvoir spécifique qu'est la conscience; pouvoir de perception ou de contemplation, mais aussi, comme je l'ai dit plus haut, pouvoir d'action et de transformation de la réalité sous plusieurs de ses formes. Autrement dit, l'action accompagnée de conscience paraît indiscutablement investie d'un certain nombre de caractéristiques positives, et de ce fait dignes d'être recherchées. Toutefois, la conscience comme telle ne paraît pas être une condition *sine qua non* ni de l'effectuation de l'action, ni même parfois de son efficacité<sup>11</sup>.

En particulier, lorsqu'on essaie de se représenter l'action collective par rapport à l'action individuelle, le lien de l'action à la conscience semble s'estomper au fur et à mesure que l'on va de l'individu au groupe ou à la société. Autant l'action paraît dépendre d'une conscience - même notoirement affaiblie - au niveau de l'individu, autant il nous semble que l'action collective paraît capable de se passer du lien à la conscience, comme condition de son déploiement ou de son efficacité.

Sans vouloir procéder, ici, à l'élucidation du statut, de la nature et de toutes les fonctions de l'instance *sui generis* dans laquelle se reflètent les actions menées par la société comme collectif de sujets, à l'instar et sur le modèle de la conscience individuelle dans laquelle se reflètent les actions menées par le sujet individuel, il me paraît déjà

possible de voir ce qui échappe à la conscience individuelle d'une part, et à son équivalent social ou collectif, de l'autre.

Ce serait une lapalissade de dire que dans les deux registres connexes de la perception-contemplation et de l'action-transformation, la conscience tant individuelle que collective n'atteint, ne couvre, ne vise et ne supervise que ce qu'elle atteint, couvre, vise et supervise. Par rapport à l'ensemble de ce qu'il y a à voir-contempler et par rapport à l'ensemble de ce sur quoi il faut agir et qu'il faut transformer, il y a toujours une part importante qui n'est pas atteinte par la conscience individuelle, au plan de l'individu et qui n'est pas recouverte par la conscience collective, au niveau du sujet collectif qu'est le groupe ou la société.

Toutefois, il faut veiller à ne pas perdre de vue la donnée de départ que constitue le non-isolement de la conscience individuelle. La conscience est, ai-je dit, fondamentalement *intersubjective*. Il en résulte que ce qui échappe à la vigilance d'une conscience individuelle est, au même moment - mais pas nécessairement sous le même angle - accessible à toute autre conscience également individuelle située dans un même voisinage. L'identité de nature des consciences individuelles envisagées ici fonde leur interchangeabilité. Cela signifie que ce qui échappe à une conscience individuelle  $Ci1$  en un instant  $t1$ , mais demeure accessible à une conscience individuelle  $Ci2$  en ce même instant  $t1$ , peut être atteint et investi par la conscience individuelle  $Ci1$ , mais inévitablement en un instant  $t2$ . L'intervalle qui sépare  $t2$  et  $t1$  acquiert, de la sorte, au regard de la conscience individuelle  $Ci1$ , (et en fait au regard de toute conscience), une véritable vertu constitutive. Le temps offre à la conscience le moyen d'avoir prise sur elle-même et de se viser en visant l'objet ou le monde. C'est pourquoi toute conscience est *temporalité*.

Cependant, si par rapport à ce qu'il y a à voir et ce qu'il y a à transformer, la conscience individuelle possède, grâce au temps, la ressource de se récupérer (et comme rattraper), la béance que la non-exhaustivité ou la non-complétude de la visée consciente installe dans toute conscience individuelle n'est pas, pour autant, supprimée. Elle

n'est même pas supprimable, étant donné que le retour de soi sur soi grâce auquel la conscience tente de combler les lacunes de sa visée s'opère en un temps  $t_3$  qui ne restitue l'intervalle séparant  $t_2$  et  $t_1$  qu'en parcourant l'intervalle allant de  $t_2$  à  $t_3$ . Il faut du temps pour essayer de récupérer un temps précédemment vécu par la conscience.

De même que pour la conscience individuelle, l'intersubjectivité est donnée de départ, de même la représentation collective ne se déploie, ne se diversifie et ne se consolide, comme *représentation*, qu'à condition de se référer à une autre unité également collective, mais pouvant être distinguée, grâce au temps, et/ou grâce à l'espace. J'entends par là que pour le groupe ou le sujet collectif, l'*alter ego* dont la visée permet au groupe de se structurer comme sujet, peut être situé dans le temps ou dans l'espace. S'il est situé dans le temps, il peut n'être que le même sujet collectif s'appréhendant à deux moments différents de sa propre histoire. Mais s'il situe dans l'espace, c'est alors un véritable *alter ego* du sujet collectif, et ce sont les rapport positifs ou négatifs, les intérêts convergents ou divergents, bref, les antagonismes plus ou moins nombreux et plus ou moins violents qui se chargeront d'acheminer chacun des deux sujets collectifs en interrelation vers la découverte des limites de leurs visées respectives, ainsi que des limites de leurs actions aux visées plus ou moins profondément transformatrices.

La fonction du temps dans la constitution et le déploiement de la conscience individuelle paraît être la même dans le déploiement et la constitution de la conscience collective. mais il importe de signaler que le processus selon lequel le temps favorise l'émergence de la conscience n'est pas le même dans l'individu et dans la société. Une des raisons de cette différence de processus est la pluralité des consciences individuelles, lesquelles, bien qu'engagées dans les interrelations constitutives du tout social, n'en vivent pas moins des temporalités entrecroisées, divergentes ou même opposées. Le temps social est loin d'être homogène, et les consciences individuelles engagées dans le tout social se déploient en des temporalités diversement orientées qui confèrent au temps social une structure

propre, impossible à réduire à la structure de la temporalité individuelle.

La béance que le temps introduit dans le devenir de toute conscience individuelle se retrouve donc dans le devenir de toute représentation collective. Mais ces deux béances ne sont pas identiques dans leur structure, et ce n'est donc pas de la même façon que la conscience individuelle et la représentation collective entreprennent de se rattraper et comme récupérer.

L'examen de la fonction du temps dans la structuration de la conscience tant individuelle que collective qui précède contient de quoi répondre à la question "que peut la conscience, par rapport à la culture, c'est-à-dire à partir de la culture et pour la culture?" Et la première réponse qui s'impose ne peut être formulée que sous une forme négative. Elle est qu'individuelle ou collective, la conscience ne peut pas tout. Cependant, même formulée négativement, cette première réponse est un truisme, en apparence tout au moins.

La conscience ne peut pas tout voir et la conscience ne peut pas assister à tout ce qui se fait. Il y a toujours, étant donné un certain espace culturel, quelque chose qui existe et qu'une conscience ne voit pas et quelque chose qu'elle se fait mais qu'une conscience individuelle ou collective ne se représente pas de façon adéquate. Individuelle ou collective, la conscience est ainsi doublement débordée; elle l'est au plan de ce qui est et elle l'est aussi au plan de ce qui se fait. Naturellement, dans le domaine de la vision-contemplation, comme dans celui de l'action-transformation, ce qui n'est pas vu en un temps ou en un lieu donné n'est pas, pour autant, invisible partout et pour toujours. C'est pourquoi la deuxième réponse à notre question est qu'individuelle ou collective, la conscience peut travailler à étendre le domaine de ce à quoi elle assiste dans ce qui se fait.

Dans la perspective ainsi dégagée, ce que nous nommons culture à l'échelle de l'humanité, n'est pas autre chose que l'effort gigantesque déployé par l'homme - au sens générique - pour étendre sans cesse le domaine de ce que la conscience voit dans ce qui est à voir, et le domaine de ce à quoi la conscience participe, dans ce qui est en train



de se faire. Seulement, pour une conscience individuelle, le meilleur atout pour accroître le domaine du visible, c'est une autre conscience individuelle; et pour chaque conscience collective, il n'y a pas de meilleure alliée que chacune des autres consciences collectives et, de proche en proche, l'ensemble qu'elles forment, c'est-à-dire l'humanité.

Il peut paraître paradoxal d'affirmer qu'individuelle ou collective, la conscience ne peut atteindre sa plénitude comme *être*, qu'en promouvant l'élan et les efforts de son *alter ego* à être et à être pleinement. Mais, ce qui rend d'abord une telle idée paradoxale, c'est notre penchant à prendre la conscience pour ce qu'elle n'est pas, et à concevoir son aspiration à la plénitude d'être en des termes et sur le modèle d'un accroissement matériel. Car, il va de soi que si c'est matériellement que chaque conscience devrait rechercher la plénitude d'être, l'accroissement de chacune aurait pour condition l'amenuisement de toutes les autres ou en tout cas du plus grand nombre d'entre elles.

Or, il ne faut point oublier que la conscience n'est pas matérielle. Pour elle, croître, c'est gagner en intensité; atteindre la plénitude d'être, c'est atteindre ou rechercher ce que j'appellerais non point l'éclat, mais la *brillance*. Et pour un tel objectif, la promotion, l'encouragement, le soutien de l'aspiration de l'autre à la plénitude d'être est la condition *sine qua non* de l'aspiration de soi-même à la plénitude d'être comme conscience individuelle ou collective. A partir de cette conception de l'être, du déploiement et de l'aspiration à la plénitude d'être de la conscience tant individuelle que collective, qu'y-a-t-il lieu de penser de l'engouement actuel de notre humanité pour la culture et pour le *développement culturel*? C'est ce que je vais à présent considérer en guise de conclusion de mon exposé.

La conscience ne peut pas tout, mais elle peut travailler sans cesse à accroître l'espace que couvrent ses possibilités. Ainsi peut se résumer la réponse que j'ai donnée à la question "que peut la conscience?" Cette réponse doit encore être complétée en faisant

remarquer ce qui suit: à savoir que par elle-même, limitée à ses ressources propres, la conscience ne peut rien.

Certes, on peut se représenter, ne serait-ce qu'en pensée, l'âge d'or durant lequel les consciences pouvaient (si nous situons cet âge dans le passé) ou pourront (si nous situons cet âge dans l'avenir) accéder les unes aux autres et toutes ensemble à ce qu'elles se représentent, par le simple fait de se le représenter. On imagine aussi aisément qu'au niveau du Créateur, la conscience doit entraîner *ipso facto* la création de ce dont elle est conscience.

Il n'en va pas de même de la conscience humaine. Chez l'individu comme au niveau de la société, le contenu d'une représentation consciente ne peut pas devenir réel si le sujet de cette conscience ne fait pas passer sa représentation par la volonté et ne dispose pas, pour transformer le réel, des ressources propres à produire les transformations désirées, conformément à l'aspect de réalité choisi.

C'est le moment de revenir aux quatre objectifs assignés par les Nations Unies, à la *Décennie mondiale du développement culturel*. À la fin de la première partie de mon exposé, et après avoir énoncé ces objectifs, je m'étais posé la question de savoir qui devait les réaliser, comment, avec quels moyens et avec quelle(s) chance(s) de succès?

Au niveau de l'individu comme au niveau de la société, la formulation verbale peut être considérée comme un des temps forts d'une prise de conscience. Et si, limitée à ses propres ressources, la conscience était dotée de la capacité de créer ce qu'elle se représente, il nous suffirait de parler pour produire et créer ce dont nous parlons. Si tel était le cas, ce n'est pas seulement le développement culturel qui nous serait déjà accordé; ce serait aussi le développement tout court et aussi la juste valorisation de la femme dans la société et dans la culture, ou encore les droits de l'enfant, les droits de l'homme, etc..

Force nous est de reconnaître que même faite solennellement, la proclamation des objectifs les plus lumineux, au service des valeurs les plus indiscutables, ne saurait suffire pour que ces objectifs soient atteints et pour que ces valeurs deviennent des réalités. Ce qui est par

contre fréquent, c'est qu'individuelle ou collective, une proclamation verbale peut occuper indûment plus largement ou plus longtemps qu'il ne faudrait, l'espace de temps ou l'espace tout court qui nous sépare encore des objectifs à réaliser. On appellerait cela une *diversion*.

Point n'est besoin de suspecter ses partenaires individuels ou collectifs d'être de mauvaise foi; car la proclamation des valeurs peut et doit être sincère. Mais ce n'est qu'en sachant que les pouvoirs de la conscience sont limités que l'on pourra contribuer à l'avènement, dans la réalité, de ce à quoi on adhère profondément, mais sincèrement, au plan des idées; en exploitant pour cela, les ressources de la conscience expressément articulées à celles de l'action concrète.

Une des conséquences que l'on peut tirer de l'examen du rapport de la conscience à la culture est que, du fait de l'antériorité de la culture par rapport à la conscience, d'une part, et, d'autre part, par suite du double débordement de toute conscience par la culture, la visée de la culture comme un *tout* ne peut être qu'une illusion. Cela, j'espère que les analyses que j'ai faites dans la deuxième part partie de mon exposé auront contribué à le rendre acceptable. Ce dont la visée tient la conscience en éveil, et l'engage dans les méandres du vouloir individuel ou collectif, pour que les valeurs choisies deviennent des réalités, ce sont les tâches concrètes découlant de ces valeurs, dans le prolongement, le cas échéant, de leur proclamation verbale.

Ces tâches concrètes ont aujourd'hui pour noms *développement* et plus fondamentalement encore, *droits de l'homme*. Et, quoi que l'on puisse penser de l'inadéquation du concept de développement, les buts concrets qui sont à atteindre et que ce concept désigne sont ceux qui conditionnent l'existence humaine au triple plan du physique, de l'intelligible et du spirituel. C'est par rapport à de tels objectifs concrets qu'il appartient à chaque individu et à chaque société d'éviter d'être divertis, sous le fallacieux prétexte que la culture comme telle doit être promue, célébrée et comme vénérée. Car tout ne porte-t-il pas à croire que pour produire la culture, il faut y penser le moins possible et concentrer, par contre, toute sa conscience et toutes ses énergies sur

les tâches dont la réalisation conditionne la vie concrète humaine individuelle et collective.

Cette vigilance en faveur de ce qui permet la vie et la liberté des individus et des sociétés est encore du ressort de la conscience individuelle ou collective. Elle peut l'exercer et elle doit le faire. Qu'elle le fasse donc et la culture lui sera donnée de surcroît.

Parions que nous Africains, nous saurons nous montrer *cultivés* selon le nouveau contenu que la Conférence de Mexico a donné à la *culture*, ce mot qui semble déjà si usé tout simplement parce que nous en mésusons si souvent. C'est ce souhait que je formule.

### Notes

1. Prononcée en avril 1990 à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Conakry (Guinée).
2. Cf. Laleye [1985, pp.183-198].
3. Cf. Verhaegen [1974].
4. La constitution de l'UNESCO date du 4 novembre 1946. Cf. Grand Larousse [1964, p.587].
5. Cf. Grand Larousse [1964, p.587]
6. Cf. UNESCO [pp.4-5].
7. Cf. UNESCO [p.5].
8. Cf. UNESCO [p.6].
9. Comme en témoignent les incessantes créations de l'art, sous toutes ses formes, mais en particulier, du cinéma et, plus proche de nous, de la bande dessinée, l'imaginaire constitue un espace d'une fécondité extraordinaire et pratiquement illimitée, et dans lequel la créativité humaine a tout intérêt à se donner libre cours.
10. L'utilisation des logiciels dont la liste, fort heureusement, est très loin d'être close, montre à quel point l'outil qu'est l'ordinateur et la science qu'est l'informatique exploitent un véritable métalangage, en même temps qu'ils en assurent la gestion et le font sans cesse progresser.

11. On sait comment, par l'apprentissage, l'acte habituel se libère progressivement de la conscience pour accroître son efficacité. Pour ce faire, l'habitude puise dans les automatismes plus ou moins profonds de notre être et exploite ainsi des ressources inconscientes et préconscientes.

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### Résumé

*Les systèmes politiques historiques dominants, tels que le système multipartiste et le système autoritaire du parti unique, sont principalement orientés vers le pouvoir étatique. Ils n'ont pas réussi à faire que les populations se sentent elles-mêmes responsables de leur politique, leur émancipation. La nécessité d'un nouveau modèle politique s'impose.*

*Cet article va au-delà des débats habituels concernant les systèmes politiques et la démocratie en Afrique. Il essaie d'élaborer un nouveau concept de politique (et de démocratisation). La politique conçue comme une relation active, prescriptive avec la réalité, relevant des processus d'autodétermination en dehors de l'ingérence (et souvent à l'encontre) de l'Etat et des partis politiques. Lieux, processus et militants sont des mots-clefs pour cette conception décentralisatrice et pluraliste de la démocratie.*

*Cette critique fondamentale des conceptions étatiques de la politique présente dans son développement des suggestions concrètes afin de favoriser les processus politiques de démocratisation en Afrique.*

*A ce sujet, on pourrait faire un rapprochement avec certaines institutions africaines comme le Palaver (Ntungasani) et les réunions communautaires (Mbongi).*

# BEYOND ELITE POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba

It has become fashionable to speak of *democracy*; almost every African country is said to be involved in a process of *democratic transition*. Conferences, seminars, workshops, symposia and debates are being organized more and more often in order to examine the internal and external contexts of accelerating factors of, and obstacles to this transition. The content assigned to the democratic process varies according to the different voices of the various social forces involved.

Supporters of many different forms of capitalism - including forms based on global international corporations and forms based on local nationalism - have reduced the notion of democratic transition to the following: emergence of a market economy, privatization of State enterprises, multi-partyism, "laissez-faire" government and a democratic constitutional order. The structural adjustment programmes, sponsored by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), for example, give no historical references in which the process of transition as viewed above has led to social and political self-emancipation of the People. It is merely assumed that the process will eventually lead to self-emancipation. No satisfactory explanation has been given as to why the African experiences with multi-partyism in the early sixties led to authoritarian regimes, rather than social and political self-emancipation of the people.

The thesis of this paper is that the content of democratization is determined by modes of politics. While democracy may be seen as the normal behaviour in a socially differentiated community, its content is shaped by the dominant mode of politics. The transition must, therefore, be redefined in terms of the change from a mode of politics in crisis towards a new mode of politics.

Despite the critique of statism from social movements, current proposals for political change in Africa remain imprisoned in a state-centred conception of politics. Current social movements have been aiming at a reevaluation of society in which the extreme *statization* of

almost all aspects of social life is criticized. Student movements for example, have been demanding autonomous student organizations against the Party authoritarian youth section. Women's movements have been fighting for autonomous women's organizations against the Party patriarchal women's section. These demands, however, should not be interpreted as demands for the destruction of the state per se, but as the people's reconstruction of political and State formations. Unless society has some autonomy from the State, it cannot control and limit the State powers.

My proposal is to focus on political processes (of the people) rather than on the political system (of the state); on **democratization**, that is, on the people's treatment of differences among themselves in society, rather than on *democracy* as a form of state. It is an attempt to define the main lines of a possible emancipative/progressive mode of politics through which democratization can be given a new meaning. The dominant modes of politics, which are now in crisis, have been centred around the seizure of state power and distribution of State positions and have not been about the transformation of the State in favour of the People's social and political emancipation.

A mode of politics<sup>1</sup> can be defined as the way in which a particular form of politics (a prescriptive relationship with reality) functions as a system of decision-making, practices and thought. Two dominant historical modes of politics have been specified: the *multi-party parliamentary* mode and the *Third International (or Stalinist)* mode (single *vanguard Party*-based politics). These two modes are in crisis because neither of them incorporates a process of human and social emancipation at this time.

The parliamentary mode of politics subordinates parties under the State consensus. These become State organizations competing for the distribution of State positions and not for the people's reconstruction of the State. Parties are regulated by the constitution and operate on the basis of and through the constitutional and State system. Ultimately, politics is reduced to a matter of numbers: the



right for more votes forms the foundation of legality and legitimacy. This mode of politics is not in the first place about institutions (civil liberties) that are seen as mediations of freedom, but is mainly geared towards the occupation of State positions rather than their destruction or transformation. It is a politics of the occupation of the existing machinery of power and not a deployment of a new one. No guarantee is built-in this mode of politics that ensures that the State is held accountable to the large masses of people. The multi-party parliamentary mode of politics is characterized by its State-centredness, oppressiveness and tendency to freeze creativity and imagination.

In the single vanguard Party, or 'Third International', mode of politics, the Party is the exclusive source of politics: the Party stands for 'revolutionary politics' and the only possible revolutionary politics come from the Party. Politics is, in this mode, ultimately reduced to the organization or building of the Party. People outside of the Party **do not exist politically**. Communist Parties outside of the socialist countries embody this mode of politics. In the absence of *socialism in a country*, there must at least be a revolutionary organization, which is the Party. Politics is confined to the Party and the Party as a revolutionary organization is seen as the very content of politics. All political domains (factories, women, students, culture, cooperatives, etc.) must fall under the *scientific guidance* of the Party. The latter is presented as the source of all political truth. This mode is thus authoritarian and state-like oppressive. After the seizure of the State power, the Party becomes an organ of management of the *socialist state*.

To what extent is the *democratic transition* in Africa different from a change from one of these modes of politics to another? What, for example, would make multi-partyism in Senegal<sup>2</sup> and Botswana emancipative?

A progressive politics does not always exist; when it does, it does so under certain conditions. The question is what conditions are necessary for the emergence of a emancipative politics in Africa. A specification of these conditions entails a determination of a certain mode of politics, which is a better approach than merely comparing the merits and demerits of multi-partyism against those of the existing single-Party State absolutism.

In Africa, we must move away from the unpatriotic *territorial nationalism* [Wamba-dia-Wamba (1991)] of comprador modernizers. This is a process of '*nation-building-from-above*', which is rooted in colonial legacy and insists on political unanimity seen as a basis for *national unity*. This process has blocked people's creativity and mass enthusiasm and has made the treatment of differences among the people by the people themselves complicated. For example, citizens of one state may be required to treat their relatives of a neighbouring country as refugees or enemies.

We must move away from developmentalism which is based on a mere transfer of economic, cultural, political and social models arrived at through an outside controlled process of decision-making. In Africa, Westernization and capitalist transformation seem to be the same thing; authoritarian cultural imposition seems to be the guiding principle.

We must de-construct colonial legacy and the rigidity of *traditions* (traditions invented or imagined by colonialists while claimed to be African and adopted as such by Africans); these *traditions* are used to justify and enforce the post-colonial State which we have to de-imperialize. The colonial State was constructed with conquest and the latter's justification. Militarism was the motive force. To the extent that the politics of political independence implied occupation of colonial State positions, it did not destroy militarism as the motive force of the State by making civil institutions its core. Militarism is the favoured imperialist *courroie de transmission* in neo-colonies. We must, therefore, move away from the process of *moving away from traditional society* and *internalizing* the colonial State.

Our economies have continued to be *denationalized*<sup>3</sup> i.e., privatized by international Capital, making control of them by the African people impossible and, with that, the construction of a *democratic State*. On this basis, our people are prevented from consuming the very resources they produce. We must have control over our integration into the world economy through a process of de-nationalization of our economies.

We must democratize the knowledge process which is now completely dominated by the outside. We are increasingly unable to have control over our cultural creations (artistic, musical and technical productions). Without a new historical mode of politics, a new vision of politics, which can de-marginalize the large masses of people (women, youth, workers, poor peasants, people-without-identity, the invisible majority), unblock their creativity and allow them to become the centre of history-making in our countries, we cannot succeed. The state-Parties (multi-partyism), the vanguard Party State and the laissez-faire state have failed to induce the process of self-emancipation of people in the World in general. In Africa they have tended to keep the People in poverty, misery and ignorance.

Political capacity, political consciousness, or the active prescriptive relationship to reality, exists under the condition that people think it must exist.

Marx and Engels assigned to proletarians the modern revolutionary capacity of realizing communism (as a classless, Stateless community, free from exploitation, oppression and domination). This, however, has not yet been fulfilled.

For Lenin, revolutionary capacity and political capacity were one and the same. Proletarians have this capacity if they satisfy certain requirements and conditions. They must assume a political position i.e., take a prescriptive position on the factory as a political site, on the question of the State and power, on the question of war and national liberation - thereby destroying the machinery of power of the

enemy instead of merely occupying it and employing new power relations. That is to say, they must have political consciousness (a consciousness of the antagonism within the existing overall socio-political order). A mere spontaneous class instinct (trade-unionist consciousness) is not enough.

In Africa, Fanon assigned revolutionary capacity to the rebelling peasants; Cabral assigned it to the intellectuals who are able to commit 'class suicide'. Generally though, the tendency in Africa has been to assign revolutionary capacity to the State (including the Party and liberation movements functioning as State structures) *per-se*. Politics has been reduced to a domain of the State. Unfortunately, the State cannot transform or redress itself: it warps a prescriptive relationship to reality by imposing unanimity. Internalization of the State by people and State orientation in handling differences among the people provokes self-censorship in people and blocks political consciousness. The new social mass movements in Africa are demanding a new vision of politics which aims at limiting State power, unlike the elite politics of multi-partyism geared only towards access to existing State power instead of its transformation. It is time for a new begin.

Politics has **militants** and **sites** [Lazarus (1990)]. Sites are a result of the development of political issues by the people. Example of such political issues are the National Question, factory despotism, imperialist domination, imposed poverty or underdevelopment. Some examples of political sites are: the Assembly in the ancient Greek democracy in which differences among Greek citizens (male, slave masters and free men) were dealt with; the Convention in the French Revolution; the Palaver<sup>4</sup> (*ntungasani*) i.e., the collective open mutual self-questioning and self-criticism organized to resolve the crisis causing a near break-down of the community. Every speaking person of the community is called upon to discuss the affairs of the community; The *Mbongi*<sup>5</sup> (originally: male lineage assembly at the fire place) where male members of the lineage shared their daily needs, experiences, desires, worries and meals; The national conference in a

number of African countries (Benin, Congo, Niger, Mali, Gabon, Zaire, etc.) seems to be a site of politics geared towards a re-construction of the authoritarian State.

Without those sites, politics ceases to exist. Both the state-Parties (parliamentarian mode) and the single vanguard Party State systems refuse to see the factory as something more than simply a place for the production of commodities. Both systems think of the People as a simple guarantee or support for the State.

The Party is not necessarily a political site. It is often incorrectly viewed as a timeless instrument or organon of modern politics. In Africa the Party is merely used as a simple tool, formula or technology of political organization; its historicity is never problematized. In its present form, the Party emerged after the failure of the Paris Commune (1871) and the rise of imperialist States<sup>6</sup>. Today every Party has a State-like structure i.e., it incarnates a State project. Parties have slowly ceased to be political organizations - operators of the People rather than the State - in their treatment of political matters. Whether they are in power or in the opposition, they see the State as the exclusive reference for political consciousness. Attempts by the Proletarian Cultural Revolution to re-politicize the Party, by means of *criticism from the masses*, failed. Attempts to build *new types of Parties*<sup>7</sup> by splitting off from the old types, also failed. Parties that are in the opposition, work to ultimately replace the one in power, instead of addressing political matters. The thrust of progressive politics should be against State logic; it should be separated from and qualitatively different than the State logic. It is impossible to achieve a democratic State that is transparent to people's viewpoints, if people think in State Logic, that is, internalize the State and implement self-censorship.

Politics exists through historical modes, for example the revolutionary mode of Saint-Just and Robespierre, the Bolshevik mode of Lenin, the Stalinist mode of Communist Parties and the parliamentarian mode of consensus over the importance of the law of commodity.

In Africa, we must work and fight for a new mode of politics. We must ask ourselves if the activities of the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* constitute or organize a new historical mode of politics.

In Africa emancipative politics will be without Parties and will function by means of *political* organizations. Certain organizations of the so-called civil society - such as *Mbongi Fu Kia Nei* (the assembly of people's genius) in Kinshasa - are political organizations. The difficulty we are facing now is that the categories (such as mass organizations, civil society, movements, etc.) we use are Party-related categories. Our starting point must be: in Africa too, **people think** and this is the sole material basis of thought. Authoritarian politics (including elite politics) assumes the people to be **unthinking**, silences them or forces them to comply. We must take note of what people think under free circumstances and we must investigate the internal content of these thoughts. It is through an analysis of those forms of consciousness that forms of political consciousness, characterizing the antagonism within the existing overall socio-political order will be grasped. Elite politics, more often than not, draws its ideas and *forms of consciousness* it tries to impose on the people from outside (Western or Eastern) elite politics.

Only a political organization - necessitated by the political (based on people) treatment of political matters - understands that there are at least three situations in contemporary societies:

- (1) the factory (including the plantation and home) as a site of politics.
- (2) processes involving all people in their deviation from the State, i.e., processes in which a deviation from the unanimity (entertained by the State and routine) takes place.
- (3) processes of people's deviations from foreign *imperialist* impositions.

This leads to the realization that progressive politics has **several sites** and a **multiplicity of processes**: localized process like the factory and open (to all) processes involving all categories of people without privileging anyone of them. Coordination through forced centralization leads to authoritarian politics. An open process could be viewed or

handled as an extended *mbongi* (a universal one: female/male, old/young, workers/non-workers equally involved), a certain type of assembly in which a *ntungasani* (palaver) - animated by *Nzonzi* (militants) - takes place. The multiplicity of *mbongi* constitutes the *emancipating* political community.

Emancipative politics in Africa will not necessarily be a result of the existence of Parties. Because the single vanguard Party-State has collapsed and is politically and perhaps historically dead - even if it lingers on in some places - the multi Party-State system is knocking at our doors and seen as a viable project of replacement. Multi-partyism, as a replacement of the single-Party State, will not enhance the emergence of political consciousness. Which is why even imperialism is for multi-partyism - as an extra conditional aid. Westernization<sup>8</sup> is no guarantee for political emancipation - even if the West was already politically emancipated. Multi-single vanguard Partyism - proposed by former Party-State countries (Tanzania, Angola?) that deny the existence of politics **outside the Parties**, is only an extended authoritarianism.

All the above is reflected within the African movement for democracy: the national conference is much more a site of politics than the Parties are. But will they jeopardize the success of the conference? It is clear that mass organizations of the so-called civil society are responsible for inducing pro-people politics within Parties and the Conference. The very possibility of democratization of both structures depends on that fact.

A multiplicity of political sites calls for a **pluralist** structure which must contend with the several political processes. The multiple character of political reality must be reflected even in the structure of coordination. We need a workers' committee which may be called a workers' cell or leading core - in the factory/plantation/home(?)<sup>9</sup> and not a trade union (which is linked to a Stalinist Party - the so-called red trade union -, or under the State Parties - often linked to imperialist countries' trade unions) involved in the process leading to the abolition

of the factory as a system of exploitation and despotism. The existence of such a committee would prove that workers as a group are capable of being involved in politics. Also, it would end the division of labour between the Party for politics and trade unions for *economic interests*. Through this kind of division of labour, workers are distracted from participation in the factory's political matters. We need popular committees/assemblies (*Mbongi*) for everybody, without any group being privileged, to participate in other political processes: people's treatment of differences among the people, democracy, people's treatment of the great differences (intellectual/manual labour, gender/sex, city/countryside, industry/agriculture, etc.) people's treatment of the question of national identity (historicity of the national question, multiethnic identity, cultural/linguistic decentralization or equal status, etc.), and people's treatment of the question of imperialist domination. Failure for the people to take up the treatment of these matters independently from the State, consolidates Statism and imperialist domination. Homogeneous *Mbongi*, not reflecting the multiplicity of reality should be avoided.

Together, various militants for this type of politics, form a political organization (reflecting the character of multiplicity of political processes) whose secretariats are in charge of the political intellectuality of the mode of politics - politics as diversity. Let me say, in passing, that a militant is not a representative of any group; that is why the basic method of work of the militant is to make a public statement after investigation for debates in various sites of politics. The militant clarifies rather than confuses issues - *Wata ngana, bangula ngana, Kimbongi kia zingana walembana zo bangula wafwila mu zingana* (proverbs are told to clarify; the one who told proverbs to confuse died through the confusion she/he created).

It is through a scheme like the one briefly introduced above, that people's viewpoints on matters of politics, as opposed to that of the State and State-like Parties, could be maintained alive and the State could be contained, made accountable and democratized. Politics around the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* in Zaire, have given rise



to networks (*réseaux*) linking local discussions to the Conference's debates. These networks are not very far from functioning as *Mbongi*.

Regulations aimed at silencing people's political viewpoints should be the first target for a politics of democracy and social emancipation to develop. If multi-partyism can induce the eradication of those regulations, struggles for multi-partyism may be tactically supported as a means of transition to a new mode of politics.

Theoretically, at least, if people - the political community - organized around *Mbongi*, effectively treat all the matters of politics, then the State despotism (*statism*) required by the State treatment of those matters will be eradicated - and ultimately the dissolution or withering away of the State may be possible. We are not there yet. Only when people are politically (consciously) capable to determine the sphere of operation of their State, that we can speak of a democratic State, a State based, in its functioning, on people's viewpoints on the treatment of matters of politics.

Very briefly, dominant historical modes of politics, now in crisis, cannot resolve the world-wide political crisis we are facing. For a long time in Africa, since perhaps the Atlantic slave trade, African people have hardly been responsible for their own self-emancipation; they, instead, have been subject of *Western Charity* (abolitionists, missionaries, colonialist civilizers, neo-colonialist partners in African *development*, imperialist *democrats*, etc.). Silence has often prevailed in historiography of activities of militants (rebellious slaves, pagans, colonized, neo-colonized, etc.) for African self-emancipation. Short of a new mode of politics, capable of responsabilizing the large masses of people independently of the State (repressive or paternalist/populist) problematic, the silence will persist and we will be headed, as elsewhere, towards a prolonged crisis. This consciousness emerges and develops through the active participation in the development and treatment of processes of matters of politics. When this participation is stopped, the consciousness is replaced by the internalization of the State perspective and the ensuing self-censorship. The Party, in its present form, cannot enhance this development and much less multi-

partyism which reduces politics to a matter of number. In this process of self-responsibilizing of the large masses of people, traditions - attacked, denigrated and destroyed by both colonialist and post-colonialist States - of the Palaver (*Ntungasani*) and the fire place assembly (*Mbongi, Baraza*, etc.) can be reactivated and extended. People's militant voice will again be heard.

These brief reflections constitute part of a much longer essay forthcoming as a chapter of a book [Wamba-dia-Wamba (forthcoming)]. They are intended to provoke extensive debates on conditions of emancipative politics in Africa. No definite answers or directives are intended here. Let us keep talking. *Mfumu na Mfumu! Nganga na Nganga! Bana batedi, bana basekudi!* (literally: the politician measures up with the politician! the scientist measures up with the scientist! some speak, others retort!).

### Notes

1. This concept has been developed by Sylvain Lazarus [1985, 1988 and 1989].
2. For a good discussion of the limitations of Senegalese multi-partyism see Barry [1991, pp.151-168].
3. This concept has been introduced by Jacques Depelchin [1992] in relation to the Zairean economy.
4. For a detailed analysis of this concept see Wamba-dia-Wamba [1985, pp.35-50].
5. A concept developed by Kia Bunseki Fu-kiau [1985].
6. For details on the issue of the historicity of the Party and Party form see Lazarus [1985, 1988, 1989 and 1990].

7. For details on this question see The Proletarian Unity League [1977].
8. I am thinking of Serge Latouche's works, especially Latouche [1989].
9. I am thinking here of a *family assembly* in which all members have equal rights of say rather than a *family meeting*.

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### Résumé

*Au centre des discussions entre universalistes et relativistes, on trouve le problème posé par les conditions épistémologiques et éthiques nécessaires au dialogue interculturel. La thèse défendue dans cet article est que ni l'universalisme, ni le relativisme ne sont en mesure d'en fournir une bonne définition. On a besoin d'un autre courant de pensée philosophique. Ce courant de pensée, le pluralisme philosophique, est basé sur une métaphysique alternative, pour laquelle les processus et les interactions, et pas tant les substances, sont primordiaux.*

*En vertu de ce pluralisme, deux articles précédemment publiés dans QUEST sont commentés: ceux de Kwasi Wiredu et Henry Odera Orika concernant l'essence et le statut des universaux culturels.*

# BEYOND UNIVERSALISM AND RELATIVISM

Henk Procee

Are there Cultural Universals?

This was the main question in Quest Vol.IV, no.2, December 1990, discussed by Kwasi Wiredu and Henry Odera Oruka. In this paper, I will dwell on an underlying problem of this debate: What is the point of the discussions between universalism and relativism? This quarrel can be stated as much in epistemological as in normative-societal terms: the intelligibility and possibility of a cross-cultural dialogue. My thesis is that neither universalism nor relativism can grasp that goal sufficiently and that we, therefore, have to look at other philosophical directions.

## Biology or culture?

Wiredu defends the existence of cultural universals as following: without cultural universals there would be no inter-cultural communication. There is (empirically experienced) inter-cultural communication. Therefore, there are cultural universals. What are the preconditions for this kind of communication? What are the capacities that all human beings have in common? Two basic factors are involved here: conceptualisation and articulation. The power to conceptualise is a development and refinement of the capacity to react to stimuli in a law-like manner, which is present in even elementary forms of life. Our biological-cultural identity as *homines sapientes* makes us organisms that have a drive for equilibrium and self-preservation, not only by instinct but also by means of reflective perception, abstraction, deduction and induction. Because of the biological element of instinct we can be sure of a certain species-distinctive uniformity in human actions. Because of the element of culture, that is, of habit and conscious thought, there is plenty of room for variation. As Wiredu says, the biological substrate accounts for the possibility of objectivity and

universality in the standards of thought and action in our species, culture for various degrees of relativity and subjectivity.

Wiredu opposes, rightly, the relativistic view, in which differences between cultures are so over-accentuated that inter-cultural communication would not be possible at all. I agree with his criticism. Nevertheless, I hesitate to accept his argumentation, which depends heavily on a biological theory. In his view it is the instinct-regulated drive to equilibrium and self-preservation that accounts for standards such as **universality** and **objectivity**. The problem with this, however, is that these standards have more of a cultural character, depending on different epistemological backgrounds, than a biological one. This means that the boundaries between the biological and the cultural cannot be drawn as sharply as Wiredu suggests. Interestingly enough, he points to this problem, when he states that 'a human being is a rule-following animal'. To take that Wittgensteinian point seriously makes it impossible to recur on a static biological nature. What is needed here is not a philosophical anthropology that divides human beings in a (lower?) level of biology and in a (higher?) level of culture and thought. Instead, we need another type of anthropology, in which both are combined. Such an anthropology has, in my opinion, successfully been explored by the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner. I will come back to this theme later.

### Universalistic ethics

An interesting part of Wiredu's universalism is the optimistic flaw in his argumentation. Not only does he accept a cognitive basis for human understanding, he also accepts an ethical one. He declares to have found the archimedean point for human acting and reacting: the principle of sympathetic impartiality. That is the Kantian categorical imperative supplemented by a dose of compassion. He infers this principle (based on the survival of human society) from the bio-social nature of human beings. Different questions can be posed here. First



of all, does Wiredu not make the **is-ought fallacy** by inferring normative statements from empirical ones? Secondly, if this principle is so basic, why is it that so many people do not behave nicely? Thirdly, does this principle explain equilibrium and self-preservation in a society sufficiently? Doesn't the principle of **rational egoism** suffice better for that goal?

Odera Oruka points out these questions in his article. His comments go into two directions. In the first place, he criticises Wiredu for demanding too much in the ethical field. In his view, it is enough for morality to adopt a theory of **rational egoism**. In the second place, he has serious doubts about the idea that universalism automatically leads to mutual understanding. It can also lead to fundamental disagreements. In an almost Foucault-like manner, he points out that Wiredu's four universals - science, language, logic, and morality - have been the factors that the West has employed to justify its colonization and domination of the world. Universalism has been intermixed with power and interest; it would be over-optimistic and naive to underestimate that fact.

Here is the central tenet of the quarrel between Wiredu and Oruka: the possibility of real understanding and of fruitful dialogue. Wiredu suggests that universalism can fulfil that role, Oruka sees serious problems in this because he thinks that power and interest are inherently a part of every dialogue. Wiredu and Oruka represent two types of universalism - an optimistic and a pessimistic one.

I consider relativism as an intellectual attempt to diminish the negative aspects of universalism, as seen by Oruka. Relativism implies that every historical epoch and every culture has the equal right to present its perspective on the world. In principle they all have the same value. There are no standards independent of culture that prove that some perspectives are better than others. Because of this, we can only be tolerant of all different perspectives. In this way relativists try to develop a new universalistic ethics of inter-cultural tolerance.

### Universalism and relativism

As we all know, cultures vary in customs, habits, morals and ways of thinking. This variation makes the interpretation of cultures very complicated. The understanding, comparison and evaluation of cultural systems (and the interactions between them) cannot be a neutral, culture-independent affair. All efforts to say something about a culture or to do something with a certain culture take place against a background of mainly implicit pre-suppositions about the (ideal) construction of the world. This complex web of presuppositions I call a **system of ideas**. The two most influential system of ideas are universalism and relativism. As I said before, neither of them are sufficient. Therefore, I will explore a third system of ideas: pluralism.

The contours of philosophical pluralism can be described against the background of universalism and relativism. Universalism has unity at its centre: there is one reality, one method to acquire knowledge of this reality, and one sound system of moral judgment. In all the apparent variety it tries to find a basis which can function as a guideline for human existence and judgment. (It is interesting to see how Wiredu defends this position.) In contrast, relativism puts variety in the centre. Within this system of ideas, there are many realities, many ways to gain insight into these realities and there are diverse moral systems. Moreover, it is very critical towards universalistic pretensions; which are seen as attempts to suppress specific forms of life. (Here we can place some of the criticisms of Oruka.)

In the course of history, the universalistic attempts have been linked to several sources: Religion, -God created the world according to his plan, and real unity is found by joining that plan; Nature, -reality has its own fundamental order in which unity exists by compliance to this call; Reason, -unity is guaranteed when everybody submits to its rules, and History, -historical development follows certain lines towards a final goal, the empire of freedom. Unity can only be obtained by participating in this course of development.

Nowadays, especially in pluralist societies, there is little support for these attempts. There is no divine order. There is nothing magical about the world any more. The idea of an absolute state of being no longer has any force. Reason seems to have been dissolved in a multitude of argumentative styles. With the loss of socialist states, the unflinching steps of history have ceased to exist.

In this situation of eroding unity, every age, culture, state of being and religion seems to be of equal value or equally worthless. Where does one find the external measures which can supply an independent judgment? In this divided universe we have to accept the radical heterogeneity of cultures. Two possible courses have now been explored. Each course presents its own difficulties. One is relativistically oriented: people are being imprisoned in the culture, the morality, the intellectual systems they accidentally find themselves in. Empirically this stance is unconvincing, morally it is unacceptable. The second course, which has more of a universalistic character, achieves a higher moral step by refraining from postulating all sorts of do's and don'ts. Instead it gives each culture, each historical age the right to speak. Such a meta-morality refuses to pay the price of the original universal **unity**: the exclusion of groups of people, denouncing other forms of life as inferior, the uniformization of cultural diversity. Instead of that it pleads for an unconditional tolerance between cultures. Such an unlimited tolerance immediately raises the question if it is possible at all to have fruitful interactions and to undertake common activities. It also raises a more logical question: can this stance be inferred from the relativistic premises? In my opinion, it cannot. To put it shortly: if one culture finds itself superior to all others, then inter-cultural tolerance can only exist by means of absolute domination of that specific culture in the end.

### Pluralism

Against this background, I will discuss the idea of philosophical pluralism. In spite of their differences, universalism and relativism have something in common. They share the same metaphysics. That is, they have the same preoccupation with stable fundamentals for interpreting the world. They have at their centres the quest for stable entities, which can function as the last resort for knowledge and morality. In the case of universalism, such entities are supposed to be world-wide, and in the case of relativism these are taken to be internal to specific cultures. Both universalism and relativism I consider as forms of philosophical fundamentalism. Instead of that, I suggest an alternative metaphysics, in which the central place is given to interactions and processes. The so called **fundamentals** can now be interpreted as historically and culturally contingent outcomes of processes of interactions. This means, for example, that neither cultural identity nor moral standards nor criteria for real knowledge can be established once and for all. This is the critical part of the pluralistic **system of ideas**. However, it does not stop at such a negative orientation. There is also a derived positive meaning, summarised in the expression **interactive diversity**. In pluralism, differences between (groups of) people are not seen as a final goal but as a starting point from which new insights and ideas can be gained. This is a process without end. The notion of interactive diversity is both descriptive and normative. It is descriptive because it interprets social structures and relations as an ongoing process of dissimilar interactions between groups, ideas and 'reality'. It considers the world not in static but in dynamic terms in which the factors **time** and **power** (according to Oruka) are unmistakable. It is normative because it indicates where the quality of the interactions and its products lies: in the possibility for ongoing interaction.

Many questions about pluralism can be raised now; in particular, what are the preconditions and what the outcomes? Elsewhere, I wrote extensively about these issues [Procee (1991)]. In this paper I will restrict myself to some essential points.

The question to be answered first is: How is interactive diversity possible? In order to answer this question, I will return to the discussion about the relation between nature and culture of human beings.

### Nature and culture

Plessner was a biologist and a philosopher. He tried to find a common characteristic of human beings, accepting the overwhelming variety of visions of man. By only looking at human life from the biological point of view, human life appears limited, because it neglects history, culture and thought. Looking only at cultural aspects is a limitation, even reduction, in an analogous way. In his approach, he combines both elements of man as in the notion **animal rationale**. In accordance with the interactive metaphysics he takes as a starting point for his analysis the relations between organisms and their environments. Every organism has its own category-specific environment. Plants have a directly dynamical relation with their environment. Animals do to, but in a more indirect, mediated way. The process from stimulus to response goes through the animal, through the **subject**, even if the subject doesn't notice it. The animal has a centric structure. If it could only step outside its centricity, it could experience that it is the subject itself, which makes the connections. Such a position of **eccentricity**, is specifically human, although man also retains the characteristic of centricity. Human beings have a certain structure: they exist and are aware of the fact that they exist; they are, in other words, actors and spectators at the same time. A person can be differentiated into three dimensions: he/she is body and has a body, is master and plaything of his/her psyche, is the product and producer of his/her culture. In short, human existence carries a fundamental ambivalence, which prevents humans to ever completely coincide with themselves - their psychological situation, their bodily position, their cultural environment. The **eccentricity** of human beings gives, as result of their radical **doubleness**, rise to an enormous variety of human individuals (as the factual embodiments of their common

structure), to the large diversity of cultural patterns, and to ongoing changes. Pluralism accentuates that changes are what the human world is based on, but does not predict certain outcomes or specific directions of the processes at hand.

Plessner's contribution to philosophical anthropology stresses a fundamental unity combined with radical differences, and does that from an interactive perspective. There is one cultural universal: the human **eccentricity**. What does that mean for a fruitful intercultural dialogue? Plessner writes in Die Frage nach der Conditio Humana:

Understanding does not imply an identification with the other, in which the distance to that other disappears, but implies communication within a distance, whereby the other appears as other and as alien at the same time. [Plessner (1976)]

It is the recognition of that specific human structure that makes dialogue possible. Understanding, then, starts on a level of contact that goes beyond personal concepts, even if they are supposed to be universalistic. Such concepts are the products of long cultural and intellectual histories and they can be inadequate or even counterproductive. Oruka has given a convincing illustration of this problem in his critical comments on Wiredu's universals. But Wiredu too stresses this insight in a nice way, by explaining that intelligibility is not the same as translatability.

Of course, I do not like disqualifying Wiredu's plea for universals. I agree with his purposes, but find a more subtle and critical analysis necessary. His ideas about reflective perception, abstraction, deduction and induction, however, can play an important methodological role. They can serve as a first approximation when trying to understand members of other cultures. Only, they cannot have an ultimate status, for two reasons. First of all, because they belong to the culture-impregnated level of embodiment of the basic anthropological structure and not to the level of the structure itself. Secondly, because we need some stance from which we can criticise all our (even self-evident) concepts.

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### Pluralistic ethics

**Eccentricity** as a common human peculiarity means that interactions are important for human beings; this, however, does not pass judgment on the moral quality of these interactions.

Therefore, we have to face an important moral question: how can a transcultural ethics be developed? Wiredu optimistically sketched the contours for such an ethics, which he calls sympathetic impartiality. This is a position that can be the outcome of human **eccentricity**. However, the same basic structure can also lead to contrary outcomes. So, we cannot rely automatically on his ethics. Moreover, even if he is right, people can restrict the principle of sympathetic impartiality only to their own in-group, leading to anything but a transcultural ethics. Notwithstanding my anthropological and cultural doubts, I share Wiredu's position, not as an empirical statement, but as a normative challenge. How can we relate such a challenge to philosophical pluralism?

Pluralism accepts that there are many moral possibilities, many ways of distinguishing good and bad, right and wrong. How is it possible to judge them? What are the standards for evaluating them? For a qualitative assessment two (meta)criteria can be developed: the doctrine of non-exclusion and the principle of the promotion of interactions.

The first criterion arises from the idea of **human dignity** which is located on the abstract level of eccentricity where all people are essentially equal. Here we use (procedural) universalistic insights. These imply that people have a right to a minimum existence and to equal rights for the benefit of their interactions. So they lead to a moral demand for more equality in the social-economic field, as John Rawls argues in his book A Theory of Justice. They also lead to consequences in the political domain: when procedural agreements are made (who can decide what and when) essentially everybody must have the possibility to put in a word. A ban on this based on race, culture, sex, social position is impermissible. In this context I mention **The Univer-**

sal **Declaration of Human Rights**, which, in spite of its relative powerlessness and inconsistencies, gives expression to this moral point of view.

The second criterion has some roots in a (although reconstructed) relativistic background. It is linked with the actual differences between people on the empirical level (rich-poor, healthy-ill, man-woman, different cultural backgrounds, and so on). For understanding each other on that level a lot of compassion as well as impartiality is necessary. This is rather evident, but there is also a more general ethical issue at hand: a criterion for the fruitfulness of interactions. The better the interaction, the more the partners will learn from each other. So we can add to the principle of non-exclusion the principle of improving interactions. It classifies inter-human relations, policy measures, social processes, cultural beliefs, and so on, on the basis of whether they do or do not positively contribute to the interactive possibilities of groups and individuals. Logically spoken, this criterion can be reinterpreted as a consistent formula of the relativistic ethos. When somebody claims that **cultures are of equal value** he implies two other claims: first of all, that his own culture is not superior to others; secondly, that it makes sense to learn from other cultures. By this move, he has to admit that cultures can be measured according to the standard of openness and willingness to learn. Consequently, his original slogan gets a totally different meaning: cultures are not of equal value.

On the basis of the two criteria (non-exclusion and improving interactions) the much praised value **tolerance** for inter-human and intercultural association must be removed from its pedestal. It may become evident that the moral justification of tolerance is limited. It is the ethics of the powerful who are not interested in the peculiarities of the less powerful. It is also the ethics of intercultural indifference. (In certain circumstances tolerance can be a useful and morally defensible strategy, but only as a derivative of the two meta-criteria). Within pluralistic thought relativism has a very restricted moral worth.



But the opposite of tolerance is also not without problems, as Oruka already mentioned. Unequal power balances and ideas like **the West is best** have made discrimination and repression possible. Pluralism can also be helpful for analyzing and criticising these situations by providing the two meta-criteria.

These are not only critical standards for the quality of interactions, but also can function as guidelines for political, economical and cultural reform. It is evident that if one wants to implement an ethics of intercultural dialogue a lot has to be done in the fields of politics, economics and culture, theoretically as well as practically.

Can we be confident that pluralistic views on epistemology and ethics will result in fruitful intercultural dialogues? Can we be sure that we will reach a situation of paradisiac relations? I am less optimistic than Wiredu. Human **eccentricity** is that which remains, the ultimate cultural universal. In its embodiments, however, it will deliver many pleasant and unpleasant surprises. Pluralism does not guarantee **the best of all worlds**. Nevertheless, it provides us with a normative challenge: to make **interactive diversity** more and more possible.

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### Résumé

*Dans quelle mesure peut-on s'attendre à ce que les droits de l'homme, en tant que droits de tous les hommes dans un même monde, soient acceptés? Dans ce contexte, l'auteur commente l'**Charte Africain**, et aborde également la question de savoir si l'Afrique traditionnelle connaissait déjà les droits de l'homme.*

*L'auteur défend une conception historique des droits de l'homme, pour laquelle ces droits subissent des changements dans leur formulation et leur fond au cours du processus d'émancipation. Il ne s'agit point d'une conception formelle des droits de l'homme, et l'accent est mis sur les conditions économiques et politiques nécessaires à la réalisation des droits de l'homme.*

*La conception historique des droits de l'homme exige que - étant donné le rapport individu / état dans les sociétés modernes - les droits individuels occupent une place prédominante. Comme l'exemple de l'Union soviétique nous l'a appris, on ne peut pas impunément sacrifier les droits de l'homme à des objectifs de développement ou nationalistes.*

# **HUMAN RIGHTS BETWEEN UNIVERSALISM AND RELATIVISM**

**Wolfgang Scholze**

## The Question of Human rights in Africa

The question of the universality or relativity of human rights is relevant today in various respects.

The development of modern nation states in Africa has fundamental consequences for the relation between individual and political power, between the individual and community. African political thought is confronted with questions about dictatorship, democracy and traditional values. At the same time, humanity as a whole, and in particular in Europe, has to face the consequences of a world-wide economic system which produces increasingly deteriorating chances of survival in the 'Third World'. This situation produces new imaginary enemies and hostilities, for example against refugees seeking asylum. In many parts of the world people look for fundamentalist solutions. With this global situation in mind, we must reckon with the loss of appeal of human rights as a basic consensus of society.

It should also be considered that the idea of the universality of human rights is rooted in the European tradition. Therefore, we must face the objection that the idea of the universality of human rights is logically a Western idea, which is being imposed upon other countries. The reluctance of many African countries to accept European human rights standards is quite logical, in view of the fact that the former colonial powers have always refrained from applying human rights standards which were part of their own constitutions to African people. In that way, the European powers way denied the universality of human rights that they now so fervently proclaim.

Therefore, there are several reasons why it is not at all certain that the claim to the universality of human rights, which is connected to the idea of innate or undeniable rights of human beings in 'One World', can be maintained in the face of cultural relativism and pluralism in this world [Ermacora (1983, p.34)].

In any case, a dialogue between various ideas on human rights must take place which should not avoid confronting the European conceptions of human rights with social realities in the 'Third World'. It should be added that we are dealing with this problem at a point in history, where the developments in Eastern Europe in 1989 led to a reordering of the 'international system' with great consequences for the rest of the world [Menzel (1991, p.4)]. In this connection, it should be considered what effects the failure of the 'existing socialism' has had on the interpretation of human rights by African politicians and theoreticians.

In this contribution, I will discuss some questions concerning the universality of human rights, focusing on the historical justification of human rights and the position of individual rights in the African discussion.

### Universality of human rights and the African tradition

The actual human rights situation in Africa is such that it is unclear what the affects are of the *African Charter of Human Rights and Peoples Rights*. This Charter went into effect in 1986 and has meanwhile been ratified by 40 African states. As a consequence of the Charter, the African commission of human rights was established in 1987, and their activities give an impression of the problems which are being faced and of actual human rights issues which arise [African Charter (1990, p342f)].

The existence of 'regional interpretations' of human rights in different parts of the globe, is often rejected, as such diversity opens up the danger of undermining universal standards<sup>1</sup>. It would be realistic, however, not to ignore attempts at formulating regional human rights declarations. At this moment in time it is not yet clear if the African Charter will function as a means of establishing internationally recognised human rights in Africa. The emphasis in the Charter on the universality of human rights is a hopeful sign here.

There are two tendencies that effect the chances of human rights to have success in Africa, which are quite contradictory. On the one hand, most African states and peoples remain aloof regarding the human rights principles in the African charter. This reserve can be explained by certain ideological presuppositions, social structure, historical factors and specific views of Man as will be discussed below. On the other hand, we see important political changes taking place in Africa. Previously accustomed political means, like high-handedness or restrictions on democratic procedures in the name of socialism, have been discredited now. Apart from the resistance of the population and pressure from the new elites, dictatorial regimes are forced to come to terms with crumbling external guarantees for stabilising their political systems. These factors necessitate the creation of a new political legitimacy. In this political context, and with widespread verbal support for democracy, human rights will have a better chance.

Actual democratisation, however, is significantly dependent on economical and social development in African countries. Defending and guaranteeing human rights presupposes the creation of basic political, economical and social conditions. One of the key-conditions for a sustainable democracy with human rights in Africa is the creation of new just and equal international relations. We can only expect the attempts to create human rights awareness and human rights educational programmes, for example, to succeed if these take place within the right framework of conditions [Seck (1990, p.311f)].

Beyond these considerations one needs to look at the human rights tradition in order to understand the present human rights situation in Africa. Isaac Nguéma, member of the *African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights*, assumes that there were no human rights in traditional african societies [Nguéma (1990, p.302)]. This position is not supported by all Africans. In fact, the existence of human rights in pre-colonial Africa is frequently defended. This

disagreement at least indicates that the particularities of African history in this respect have to be taken into account.

The praxis of colonial powers has contributed to the impression that human rights are an externally enforced import product. Other factors that inhibit the acceptance of human rights are economical underdevelopment and perhaps the symptoms of a 'colonial mentality': a weak sense of will-power and few courageous initiatives by individuals, as Nguéma states [Nguéma (1990, p.302)]. Also, certain specific structures in traditional societies can form important difficulties for the development of a politics of human rights.

Most important, however, is the idea that a human being can only attain his or her value within the ethnic group, that exists in many traditional societies. The group members consider themselves as the only people who have the full value of human beings. They are the only ones who have full corporate capacity, whereas members of other ethnic groups do not. In this view of society, a person has neither a general, nor an eternal value. These views are still of influence today. They are contrary to the philosophical foundations of human rights within the western tradition, in which the foundations of law are laid in the human being *as such*, presupposing a universal idea of the human being.

These contrary views on human beings show the difficulties which must be faced in order to bring Western and traditional African views closer to each other. Can one expect to come to an agreement on conceptions of human rights, under such circumstances? If we do not want one system to force its will upon another, the only method is to bring the two systems closer together ('Annäherung'). This shows that the recognition and realisation of the universality of human rights implies an intercultural learning-process. It is necessary to see human rights as the heritage of humanity as a whole. Attempts to claim the exclusive 'source-rights' of human rights do not contribute to this aim. The controversies about the foundations of human rights show how difficult it is to realise this aim.

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The problem of the historical foundations of human rights

The preamble of the African Charter enlists the support of the African tradition to underline the importance of human rights and freedom in traditional Africa. This move is, without doubt, directed against the common view in the West, that democracy can not be reconciled with the history of African peoples. It appears that one can not avoid the question of whether Africa has produced human rights in its history. We should, however, proceed even further with our questioning, and ask whether the interpretation of human rights as the outcome of the European Enlightenment, is in itself not based on a racist prejudice towards Africa. Is it not possible that our view of the origin of human rights belongs to a tradition of prejudices within European philosophy (e.g. Hegel) towards Africa [Neugebauer (1987, p.91f)]?

Some African authors find a human rights conceptions in pre-colonial Africa<sup>2</sup>. M'Baye tries to show that specific human rights were recognised in pre-colonial Africa. He points at the right to life, freedom of religious worship and the right to work. He also raises the point that human and civil rights in Africa were destroyed by colonial occupation in the 19th century [Baye (1982, p.588)]. From the European side this view is often strongly objected to. In confronting such views, Kühnhart talks about "apologetic attempts to pull human rights into traditional African thought" [Kühnhardt (1987, p.212)]. He supports his opinion by showing that the principles of human rights which M'Baye postulates, differ from the idea of individual human rights and deviate fundamentally from the human rights ideal.

In our opinion neither reproaches, nor fixed standards of what real human rights-conceptions are or should be like, are very helpful. It should be stressed that human rights are products of historical processes and their fixation can not be for eternity. If the human rights-idea is interpreted as that conception which takes these rights to be based in the human essence, then one could say that this conception of human rights has a number of sources which can be traced back to

antiquity. This conception only penetrated western culture in modern times. The fact that human rights were formulated in Europe some two hundred years ago, should definitely be related to the stage of development in that society. The resulting conception of human rights, however, was abstract and individualistic. We must therefore avoid accepting any particular formulation of the conception of human rights as a standard, thereby interpreting all present-day human rights-problems as merely a problem of implementation of this standard.

Such a position would ignore the dynamic character of human rights. Indeed, a number of rights have been added to the classical human rights. At this time, we speak about human rights of the second and third generation. The various generations of human rights should not be opposed to each other, but be understood as an integral vision of the phenomenon of human rights and human emancipation. The 'Third World' nations were the first to stress that human rights should not be reduced to individual rights, but should bring the whole range of preconditions for a humane existence into view. In the preamble and article 22 of the Charter, therefore, the right to economic, social and cultural development is stressed [African Charter (1990, p.348f)]. In contrast to the tendency of many European thinkers to see human rights rather narrowly as individual rights, it is stressed here that the right to development can not be separated from civil and political rights.

If one accepts a conception of human rights as *codifications of the foundations for a humane existence*, then a large number of interconnections between European and African traditions of thought can be identified. Human rights, according to this view, are not the sole possession of Europe, in the name of which the 'rest of the world' should be civilised. At the same time, however, this view excludes certain 'regional' conceptions of human rights which aim at justifying dictatorship and power-politics with reference to the assumed special characteristics of community life in pre-colonial Africa. This line of argumentation, which we find in the human rights conceptions in



'African Socialism' and in state-nationalisms, ignores the fundamental value of individuality in the idea of human rights, in the name of elite power-politics. The value of human life in present-day Africa can not be based only, or mainly, on looking backwards and revitalising the traditional village community and its framework of values. Human rights should, while rejecting interpretations that are too narrow, always be primarily rights of individuals. The universal recognition of this premise is not yet guaranteed in this world.

On the position of individual rights in the African human rights discourse

The modern world, which is including Africa more and more, requires timely answers to the question of the defense of individual freedom, and of the relation between individual and political community. This observation should not allow one to ignore the real situation, where economic, social and cultural rights and the rights of states in relation to other states, is given priority over rights of individuals [Menschenrechte (1980, p.11f)]. It is often stated that fundamental requirements for survival should be guaranteed first, before individual and political rights can be guaranteed. This strong adherence to economic and social aims as requirements for a successful struggle against poverty and underdevelopment is understandable. Where mere survival is threatened, we can not ignore the question of securing the continuity of human existence. From the European side, this reality is often veiled by abstract conceptions of human rights.

That is why a present-day idea of human rights can not be limited to individual rights. At the same time the discussion about the universality of social and economical rights is still open. The objection that these rights are useless if they can not be enforced due to insufficient resources should be taken seriously.

The contrary view, however, that ignores personal and political rights because of the stress on economic and social development, is equally unacceptable. It is an unfounded assumption that economic and social development itself will lead to the recognition of human rights. The experiences of the human rights discussion and practices in the soviet-type socialist countries expose this fact. These experiences are relevant for Africa: they lead to the conclusion that a humane society in the present world is impossible without recognition of the rights of individuals. The ambition to produce a special 'socialist conception of human rights', has contributed to neglecting the rights of individuals, and the idea of human autonomy. Already in Marx' work there is the failure to recognise the significance of rights for a future socialist society. Marx rejected, definitely not without good reasons, a Natural Rights foundation for the idea of human rights<sup>3</sup>. But the reduction of human rights to class-interests and thus to class-rights, could then play a dominant role in existing socialist societies. According to the socialist conception of rights, it was the state which was to protect, develop and limit human rights. The first marxist thinker who wanted to incorporate Natural Right conceptions into marxism, was Ernst Bloch. The idea of the social character of human rights, which has been important in the marxist tradition in particular, should nevertheless not be lost.

Pointing out the absolute necessity of a social basis of human rights, however, does not prove the correctness of the view that group-rights and rights to participate in the economic process, are primary in human rights. The same holds for the attempt to construct a continuity between traditional group-structures and modern state-structures. The decisive argument against such views is that the rise of the modern national state implies a radical change in the relation between individual and political power. The social role and identity of the individual is necessarily determined in a new way. Under current conditions, the sphere of freedom of the individual can not be guaranteed by merely verbal references to the values of traditional society.

Many states in Africa are facing the task to develop political institutions which receive cultural recognition by the people and at the same time facilitate the mobilisation of the people, which is an ultimate prerequisite for social and economic development. Too often, however, initiatives of self-help are equated with political opposition and are suppressed. Human-rights violations are thus daily practice. This basic necessity of human rights contradicts the idea that human rights are not relevant for developing countries, as these rights would contradict their anthropological experience and developmental requirements.

At the same time, it should be accepted that there are different conceptions of human rights, because these are in the first place historically determined and dependent upon social development. The West should therefore not make the mistake to demand the protection of individual human rights in Africa without looking at the social context and the prerequisites for their protection. In this context, it is understandable that the African Charter demands citizens to respect the values which belong to African traditional civilisations.

An historical interpretation of human rights can help to avoid two often made mistakes, namely the reduction of human rights to European Enlightenment ideas, and the reduction to specifically African rights. In the discussion within International Law the view is expressed that *human beings* should be subjects of rights, not *the state* [Kimminich (1988, p.418)]. This is derived from the idea that human rights are essential to control state power and its coercive force, and to protect people against bureaucracy and technocracy. In the African human rights discussion we do not only find the ideas that are rejected in this paper, but also the ones proposed. We often see the demands for democratisation of African societies and radical changes in the awareness of people as a prerequisite for the realisation of human rights. Such deliberations find expression in demands for a 'New Ethics' in individual and social life as well as in international relations [Furrer (1990, p.338)].

### Some Conclusions

1. The central tenet of human rights must be the priority-status of the individual person. In this sense, the concept of human rights is a challenge to political thought and practice all over the world, that disregards the freedom of the individual.
2. Nevertheless, demands for human rights have to be combined with political and economical demands. The formulation of freedom-rights of citizens in the form of fundamental human rights will always be culture-specific. Human rights have to take into consideration the individual and social aspects of human existence. At the same time, we have to guard against expecting human rights to solve all our problems.
3. A 'culture of human rights' desperately needs to be established, in order to facilitate the realisation of human rights. Given the fact that the East - West conflict has dissolved, there is a chance to terminate the ideological and instrumental use of human rights for accusing opponents and dividing the body of human rights merely to serve political interests. The idea of human rights would lose its sense if it were only a means of self-legitimization.
4. It remains to be seen to what degree western societies will be willing to accept disadvantages and limitations of their powers, for a full recognition of human rights and their unlimited application.

The acceptance of the idea of the universality of human rights as part of the history of ideas and their political realisation, forms a great task ('Herausforderung') for the late 20th century. It appears that it is not so much a problem of relativism, but a problem of actually realising the universality of human rights, which is at stake.

(\* translated from German by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek)

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Notes

1. See for example Kühnhardt [1987, p.101].
2. See for example Mojekwu [1980, p.86].
3. For the problem of the foundation of the human rights see Oelmüller [1991, p.31f].

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# NON-AFRICANS ON AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

## Steps to a difficult dialogue

Heinz Kimmerle

After having travelled in East- and West-Africa, and after having visited the Departments of Philosophy at universities in Kenya, Tanzania (where still does not exist an own Department of Philosophy), Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria I have written a book on the situation of philosophy in (sub-saharan) Africa<sup>1</sup>. There is no doubt about the fact that this has lead to difficult generalizations. The empirical base was rather small in order to speak about such a huge continent. Another difficulty was that countries in which English is not the lingua franca were represented too little. Further difficulties existed and exist in the field of methodology. How can one as a non-African speak about African philosophy? Is it possible to set aside one's own presuppositions far enough in order to see and to communicate which the important questions are for Africans? And finally one could raise the question, whether it would not be better to let the Africans speak for themselves, because African philosophy can be explained in a proper way only by Africans.

All these difficulties clearly stood before my mind's eye, when I started the whole enterprise. So I took some decisions which might help to overcome them.

Firstly, I resolved to keep listening for a long time before I should say to have understood something or be able to tell others about it.

Secondly, I choose for the method of dialogue in a certain sense of this word. I did not try to put aside the questions which arose within myself when I began to study African philosophy. On the contrary, I tried to formulate as clearly as possible what these questions were:

Do the African philosophers not adapt themselves too much to Western standards?

Is their valuation of analytic and systematic thought not one-sided and orientated upon certain main streams in Western philosophy?

How can the specific conditions of an oral tradition of wisdom be used in modern African philosophy?

Is it not necessary to determine more precisely and in a more differentiated manner what ethnophilosophy can do and what it cannot do? And so on!

Thirdly, I decided not to develop a continuous discourse on my subject, but to use different styles. By that I intended to practise openness and to express at the same time something of the climate of philosophizing and of the environment wherein it takes place. The dialogue (as introduced in the second place) was and is not directed at the aim to come to an understanding as universal as possible. The basic assumption is that philosophy need not be the same everywhere in the world. Different cultures produce different kinds of philosophy. The aim, therefore, only can be to find out what African and Western philosophies have in common and where they differ and remain different. The universal traits originate from the fact that both are philosophies, being results of a more or less pure thinking, and from the actual growth of relatively universal conditions of life in all cultures. That means that intercultural philosophy, as I want to shape it, stands beyond the opposition of relativism and universalism. On the one hand philosophy is relative to the culture where it belongs to, and on the other hand it is "philosophy" everywhere and it participates in the actual growth of universal conditions of life all over the world, how severe the differences still may be.

In his review of my book Christian Neugebauer did not understand these starting points or preconditions of my research on African philosophy<sup>2</sup>. He wants to give a "controversial and differentiating judgement". The controversial points which he makes, however, show an embarrassing lack of understanding. This begins at a very elementary stage. In my book there are used four different kinds of texts: philosophical problems, (purely informative) remarks, diary notes, and poetry. Neugebauer counts three, taking together the second and the third one. The different contributions from poetry are



summarized by him as "disappointed romanticism". This again shows on a very simple level that he wants to differentiate, but that he is not able to notice differentiations. Can one subsume Leopold Senghor's poetry under the label of romanticism or condemn it in general as expression of Negritude? Among the examples of poetry Neugebauer is missing "angry" young or old authors. Is there a more striking example of an angry author than Wole Soyinka? And what about Kundi Faraja with his biting satirical poems?

There is one item which is common to both of us, except that we are non-Africans writing on African philosophy. We want to support the tendencies of intellectual decolonization. With a critical remark already in the Foreword of my book that this strategy is the only one in Neugebauer's writings and that there are other aspects of a dialogue with African philosophy. I wanted to say that my book as a whole has to prove such a broader and more differentiated approach. This is implied by the fact that it is said in the Foreword. Therefore, a special arguing was not necessary; it would not have been apt, as it seems to me.

If it is true that we are allies in the fight against neo-colonialism, we should ask indeed: what can philosophy do in this field? What we should avoid under allies, is to insult the other and to use expressions which clearly form hits below the belt. It is a great pity that Neugebauer does not avoid that. I only mention the use of the expression "toothless lightweight". Under normal circumstances every discussion would be broken off by such a behaviour. However, the number of scholars dealing with African philosophy and fighting intellectually against neocolonialism is too small. That is why the alliance should be maintained and the discussion continued.

What philosophers can do in a field where politicians and businessmen govern the scene cannot be said easily nor directly. Using a radical vocabulary or pretending to know how to act better than the politicians and businessmen - like Neugebauer does - will not improve the situation at all. The philosophers does his own job by critically analyzing the way of thinking of his time as it is also presupposed in

politics and in economy and by suggesting alternatives in this field. It depends very much on the situation to what extent this will be effective or not. I do not think that Marx is right saying that philosophy is part of the superstructure and therefore not politically effective, and I do not agree with neo-marxist ideas that philosophy can find out a blueprint for what politicians and businessmen have to do. In the present situation in which not only politically and economically, but also in science and technology everywhere the conditions of an optimal development are in discussion it might have a special effect to make clear that in philosophy (like in art) there is no development and that, therefore, philosophers of the Western world and of Africa can work together under the presupposition of complete equality.

It would be possible to refute the other critical points which Neugebauer has made one after the other by showing that this quotations lack the necessary connection or that he does not know how to read. Let me only give two examples for that. The analysis of the relation between "developed" and "developing" countries is not at all summarized in a sentence quoted by Neugebauer, that they both try to reduce the difference between themselves. If one looks at the context the analysis clearly leads to the statement that the "developed" countries strive to continue and to strengthen the relation of dependence, which is described as the core of neocolonialism [Kimmerle (1991, pp.184-185)].

About the sense of community and solidarity in African tribes and other forms of social life (unions of villages, kingdoms, etc.) - this differentiation is necessary, I admit - I do not assert anything. I confront with each other two different African views (Of J. Nyasani and of K. Gyekye) and come to the result that thereby a simple opposition between African and Western forms of social life gets undermined. Africa cannot be fixed on the concept of "WE" or collectivism just as little as the Western world on the concept of "I" or individualism [Kimmerle (1991, pp.126-132)]. Neugebauer's reading of this line of thought comes out at the statement that I would assert "a

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dichotomy of Europe and Africa, the first individual, the second communal"<sup>3</sup>. The contrary is true.

Besides Neugebauer's there are other reviews of and reactions on my book "Philosophie in Afrika - afrikanische Philosophie" which show that it is not easy to understand each other's argumentations and to practice an intended alliance among Non-Africans writing on African philosophy. A mainly positive reaction came out shortly after the publication of the book<sup>4</sup>. A remark of the author of this review is very much to the point. Habermeyer interprets the impact of the book as an effort not to do more than "to open the way to and the view upon" African philosophy. Although it can be said that the subject-matter of this philosophy is different from other philosophies, most certainly from Western philosophy, it is not yet possible - at least not for a Non-African - to grasp it in its specificity. The fact that African philosophy is defended and challenged to discussion from Western presuppositions is regarded by Habermeyer as a paternalistic point of view. With regard to both aspects in a note on the book G. Groot chooses an opposite position as Habermeyer has done. While for him the provisional state of affairs rather is the cause for a sceptical attitude towards the relevance of African philosophy, this author shows that the argument of paternalism finally hits its original user<sup>5</sup>. It would be more paternalistic to give African philosophers a position outside the critical debate, or not to treat them as any other philosophical author.

The line of Neugebauer's critique can be found also in Hoffmann's review, although it is written in a clear and unbiased style<sup>6</sup>. One would expect that a somewhat careful reading is enough to see that the diary notes and the choice of the poetry in my book have nothing to do with a search for "genuine Africinity" or exotic attraction which stands for a position that by far has been outdated in these parts of the text. I tried to give a differentiated picture. But everybody reads what he/she can read according to his/her basic assumptions. Hoffmann shares with Neugebauer a way of thinking

which acknowledges only two opposite positions. This way of thinking is connected with a conception of the relation between theory and practice that philosophy, if it is formulated strictly and radically in terms of social, political and economic problems, it will have big results in practice. This seems rather idealistic to me. But, on the contrary, a sober philosophical discourse, confining itself to the work of the philosopher which has its own political and social impact, especially when presuppositions of political and social thought are analyzed, and deliberately doing without any high-spirited expectations about its practical consequences is regarded as idealistic by these authors. Thus Non-Africans discussing African philosophy with the same intention to treat this philosophy seriously on the base of complete equality disagree on points which have to do with their roots in Western philosophical traditions.

My intention with this short article is not only to give a countercritique of different reviews of my book. I want to provoke reactions on the kind of dialogue which I try to call forth. As an example for my way of dealing with African philosophy I will report what I have done with the discussion of the question of truth between K. Wiredu and H. Odera Oruka<sup>7</sup>. In the first instance a pragmatist's and a universalist's conception are confronted with each other. That seems to be the core of the discussion, if one skips some misunderstandings and some unfortunate formulations as e.g. Wiredu's "truth is opinion". However, an African scholar, D.A. Masolo, has pointed out that both positions express at the same time the attitude of the authors towards the question whether traditional African thought is considered relevant for solving actual philosophical problems<sup>8</sup>. He outlines a broader context of the pragmatist's view by embedding it in the connection of a sociology of knowledge, as it has been developed by Mannheim and Scheler.

My own intervention provides a context which is again broader than Masolo's suggestion. The concept of truth in Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophies is connected with the notions of history and

time in a manner which opens completely new ways of thinking. That every period in history has its own truth, because it disposes of a special perspective which makes it possible that one sees certain things or aspects of things and others are hidden, has far reaching consequences also for an intercultural dialogue in philosophy. Nobody can claim any longer to possess the truth or even strive after its possession. The search for absolute truth in Western philosophy, which is called metaphysics, is thus abandoned. What the metaphysical philosophers from Plato to Hegel were searching for, turns out to be a specific shape of truth or - formulated more precisely - a specific relation between giving to see things or aspects of things and hiding others. A new kind of thought is necessary when absolute truth is abandoned. This can only be found by critically asking what is done and what is failed to do in the many projects of search for truth in the history of metaphysics. A new openness for other ways of thought and other kinds of philosophy is created.

From African philosophy I have learned before all that metaphysics does not or needs not disappear when it is critically analyzed. The critique of metaphysics can also lead to a critical metaphysics. Nevertheless, the new way of thought which is explored by Nietzsche, Heidegger and others needs another constitutive element besides critique of metaphysics or critical metaphysics. If truth is bound to history and time, metaphysical entities are also related to the perspective of the period of history in which they are conceptualized. How metaphysical concepts are to be thought if we depart from this notion of truth, cannot easily be said. Nietzsche works on that problem by going back to ancient Greek tragedies and mythologies, and Heidegger starts to read presocratic Greek philosophers in a new way and he expects help from the poetic language of Hölderlin.

If it is allowed to broaden the concept of opinion in Wiredu's statement: "truth is opinion", not only by interpreting opinion as the common opinion of a society, as Masolo suggests, but by relating it to the perspective of a period of history of a concrete community (East Asia, Europe, sub-saharan Africa, etc.), the conjunction between this

statement and the negative attitude towards traditional African thought can be broken through. The expectation may not be ungrounded that traditional African thought can help to find a way how we can rethink metaphysical concepts on the base of the notion of truth which is bound to history and time. The critical transformation of metaphysical thought thus could become a joint venture of African and Western philosophers. The outlook on such a project means for me that there is every reason for continuation of the dialogue.

### Notes

1. H. Kimmerle, Philosophie in Afrika - afrikanische Philosophie. Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff, Frankfurt am Main, Qumran im Campus Verlag, 1991.
2. Zeitschrift für Afrikastudien, nr.11/12, Wien 1991, pp. 111-114.
3. Zeitschrift für Afrikastudien, nr.11/12, Wien 1991, p.113.
4. W. Habermeyer in Widerspruch. Münchner Zeitschrift für Philosophie, Vol.11 (1991), nr.21, pp.89-92.
5. G. Groot in Streven, february 1992, p.25.
6. G.-R. Hoffmann in Neues Deutschland, february 21st 1992, p.10.
7. The discussion originally took place in Universitas. An Inter-Faculty Journal of the University of Ghana from 1973 until 1976. It is partly documented in Wiredu [1980], and it is continued in Quest, Vol.2. (1988), nr.2, pp.3-21. Wiredu's conception gave rise to other discussions which I leave aside here. [Kimmerle (1991, pp.70-78)].

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8. D.A. Masolo and K. Wiredu, "Truth and the Question of African Philosophy", unpublished paper, 1989. A further version of this paper is in print now; See Nagl-Docekal and Wimmer [1992].

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## REVIEW

Philosophie in Afrika - afrikanische Philosophie. Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff by Heinz Kimmerle, Edition Qumran im Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1991.

Reviewed by Gerd-Rüdiger Hoffmann

Heinz Kimmerle's book is another German work which aims at introducing African Philosophy and 'Intercultural Philosophy' in the European universities<sup>1</sup>. This remains an arduous undertaking. Racist prejudice in the history of European philosophy, one may think of Hegel's lectures on worldhistory, or Kant's contributions to geography and anthropology, continue to inhibit a correct treatment of philosophical accomplishments on the African continent, or about Africa. Moreover, it seems to me to be in the interest of Europe itself to finally take account of African philosophy. Philosophies until now, especially the Hegelian, have contributed to the creation of favourable conditions for totalitarianism and to the worldwide dissemination of a system of eurocentric rationality, by their strivings for the Universal and its promotion to the only thing which can claim validity. This system, and the political and economic mechanisms of its reproduction, are largely to blame for the real present danger of the destruction of this world.

Kimmerle recognises the problem that western civilisation continues to be totally growth-oriented and can only function because it exploits the south. Such a civilisation "makes it questionable, if her continuation can be guaranteed for a long period of time" (*"lässt es als fraglich erscheinen, dass sie ihren Fortbestand für lange Zeit sichern kann"* p.236f). **Deconstruction** is therefore required, in order to reach another way of thinking, a thinking which leaves place for other Modes of Thought, which have been neglected up to now because they were considered unimportant for 'the' *progress*.

But which role can African philosophies play today in order to reach a better understanding of the current situation of the world? Can



we expect that African philosophies have a meaning beyond the African continent, when it concerns the realisation of the aims of Modernity - "to liberate man from ignorance, subjection and suffering"?

All this will be part of the basic motives of Heinz Kimmerle, professor at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, to be involved with African philosophy.

A important thesis of the book is that *intercultural philosophy* is a must today. Intercultural philosophy should have the form of a 'dialogue'. African philosophy can not be ignored anymore in this context (pp.189/190). The dialogue can, however, only make sense if intercultural philosophy relinquishes the hegemonical pretensions of western civilisation, which are based upon superiority in economics, technology and sophistication. "It is necessary for this exercise that western philosophy considers itself as both *giving* and *receiving*. This last attitude is correlative to the fact the western civilisation is endangered, which by herself, she seems incapable of overcoming, or keeping within reasonable limits." (p.238) I can fully support this point of view. I believe, however, that the importance of philosophy is overestimated when Heinz Kimmerle states that intercultural philosophy "could create a counterforce to neo-colonialism" (p.238).

Another central thesis of the book was already formulated by Kimmerle at the "First Joint Symposium of Philosophers from Africa and from the Netherlands" in Rotterdam on March 10, 1989. After subscribing to the necessity of development in the economic and political field, he said: "If we come back to culture in a more distinctive sense, we can state the difference between economic development, a corresponding political system, and the supplementary function of sciences and education on the one hand and the absence of progress and development for the properly so-called cultural expressions on the other. In the field of arts and philosophy, therefore, no dependence is apt. African and European partners can meet on the

foot of complete equality" [Kimmerle (1989, pp.105-106)]. This idea is very interesting, because it opens up the possibility, also methodologically, to discuss as equals. This would make it also impossible to categorise philosophy in developed and underdeveloped philosophies. Nevertheless, I see several problems:

1. Praxis shows that philosophy does not only exist as a purely spiritual thing. It is always also institution, tied to philosophers that live in a concrete society, dependent in its effects on the level of development of education, mass-communication and the other sciences (including the so-called exact sciences). And all this has a lot to do with the economic possibilities and the political circumstances. In Kimmerle's book itself these connections are indicated. Would it not be better to develop other *criteria for development* instead of *negating development*? In any case the issue shows us that the generally recognised (western) concept of development has become obsolete.

2. Does "finitude of development" (p.189) mean the end of history? Clearly this was not meant. In that case, however, history has to be thought without development. It has not become clear to me why the European concept of development should continue to be meaningful for economics, technology, politics and the sciences. It is here that it becomes clear that the adherence to developmental thinking itself (developmental in terms of achieving better and more effective forms of dominating nature) endangers humanity. Should that be considered 'development', 'progress'? Towards what does economy, technology, politics and science in fact develop? How are the differences between 'developed countries' and 'developing countries' expressed in the field of 'civilisation'? (p.184). Is the level of democracy meant here? But is it not the case that democracy in western countries is only possible if the rift between north and south continues? The Saxon Prime Minister stated this explicitly a short while ago: "The existence of our society is based on the condition of us remaining privileged, without that our society is unable to function"<sup>2</sup>.

3. A dialogue has certain prerequisites. First of all the goal and content of the dialogue must be determined; secondly, it must be determined who will conduct the dialogue on either side; thirdly, the participants must agree on how the dialogue should be conducted in order to be successful; fourthly, it should become made clear in what way actual equality of the participants can be achieved. This last point also involves financial aspects. As long as the conditions are such that African philosophers are dependent upon the rich partners in the north (the west) for their common projects, then there can only be nominal equality. And as long as African philosophers are referred to as one unit, independent of the school they represent, it will be difficult to achieve real equality. As it is even uncommon to discuss philosophy with reference to its various disciplines, it remains unlikely that geography or race shall become an important category.

4. We should refer, I think, to the idea of Frantz Fanon that a culture of oppressors and a culture of oppressed can only truly come together after complete liberation from colonialism (neocolonialism): "...l'université réside dans cette décision de prise en charge du relativisme réciproque de cultures différentes une fois exclu irréversiblement le statut colonial" [Fanon (1964, p.51)]. It is well known that in the confrontation between Senghor and Fanon, 1956 and 1958, Senghor took liberation from colonialism mainly as a cultural act - back to authentic africanity (Négritude) in order to infuse this subsequently into a universal culture. Contrary to this view, Fanon saw the liberation struggle as the highest form of culture. And Fanon warned against traditionalism: "La caractéristique d'une culture est d'être ouverte ... La mise en place du régime colonial n'entraîne pas pour autant la mort de la culture autochtone. Il ressort au contraire de l'observation historique que le but recherché est davantage une agonie continuée qu'une disparition totale de la culture pré-existante. Cette culture, autrefois vivante et ouverte sur l'avenir, se ferme, figée dans le statut colonial, prise dans le carcan de l'oppression. A la fois présente et momifiée elle atteste contre ses membres. Elle les définit

en effet sans appel" [Fanon (1964, pp.41-42)]. It remains my opinion that it is important to make an accurate study of this struggle and its influence on philosophy.

These remarks are not always criticism of Kimmerle. The book just stimulates me to formulate the above reflections as well as my last remarks below.

Kimmerle's book and his commitment to give an institutional foundation to the dialogue between African and European philosophers, should be considered as pioneering work within the European scientific arena, which is still extremely eurocentric. But, what is African philosophy? Kimmerle presents it in different variants: as consisting of many different discourses, as a subject taught at Departments of Philosophy (Nairobi, Cotonou, Legon-Accra and Ibadan), and as the border-area between Art and Philosophy (in the traditional European sense). African philosophy remains partly understood in his opinion, without being placed in the right context. This context is represented in the book in the form of travelnotes (Diarynotes I up to IV), mainly marked by the idea that "Africa is different". I see this problem differently. For me examples like Fanon, Hountondji and critical writers would have been more in place here than Myths (p.226) and a "Anthology of Westafrican lyric".

Altogether the author gives an interesting view of a still uncovered area in the history of philosophy, and of its current state of affairs. The book is definitely to be recommended to anyone interested in philosophy and/or Africa. The layman will find many new things, the specialist will definitely be critical of specific points, but he will also be forced to give a more coherent formulation of his own position.

\* translated from German by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek

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Notes

1. See for example Moritz [1988], Wimmer [1988 and 1990] and Neugebauer [1989].
2. Kurt Biedenkopf zu Gast bei Christa Wolf: Soziale Marktwirtschaft, Kultur und Utopie. Appeared in Sinn und Form, nr.6 (1990), p.1044 (Berlin).

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## REVIEW

The essential readings of African Philosophy by Tsenay Serequeberhan, Paragon Issues in Philosophy, Paragon House, New York, 1991.

Reviewed by Jups Kluyskens.

Contributions by Tsenay Serequeberhan, Innocent Onyewuenyi, Henry Odera Oruka, Peter O. Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin J. Hountondji, Lansana Keita, Oyenka Owomoyela, Marcien Towa, Okonda Okolo and Ernest Wamba-Dia-Wamba.

In the introduction of the book Dr. Serequeberhan explains that the texts compiled should constitute a representative selection, which can be useful for various field of studies relating to Africa. He also explains why the contributors chosen are African. An exclusionist approach is necessary, according to Serequeberhan, because African philosophers need to (re)formulate their positions in confrontation and dialogue, and on their own, that is without foreign mediators, moderators or meddlers. (page XVIII).

Most of the eleven contributors, such as Paulin Hountondji, Henry Odera Oruka, Kwasi Wiredu and Marcien Towa are well known and have contributed substantially to the debate on African philosophy. The majority of these philosophers were strongly involved in the debate, in the seventies and early eighties, on the nature of an African philosophy. Most of the texts are therefore from this era.

*The Essential Readings of Africa Philosophy* gives an overview of the history of this debate, which is often ordered in the four trends, identified in the now classical text by Bodunrin: *The Question of African Philosophy* (first published in *Philosophy*, vol 56, no 216, 1981). One could say that a specific generation of African philosophers, namely the initiators of, and discussants in this debate, are put in the forefront. It might have been more appropriate to give this book the title 'History of the debate on African Philosophy'.

An important characteristic of this debate is its non-philosophical nature: it is about definitions of philosophy, the development of philosophy in the African context and the role of (African) philosophy vis à vis the West. With reference to the latter the political involvement of philosophy is strongly articulated. Major philosophical traditions in Senegal and Zaire, for example, are neglected. Perhaps because they don't fit the four trends very well, or because they represent a quite different (non-political) discourse.

Serequeberhan takes a rather strong position himself, specifically aimed at the interventions of the West and the imperialistic discourse. This must be the reason why the dialogue should be held among Africans. Even if some of them have been residing abroad for years and only occasionally visit the continent, this does not seem to affect the argument: as long as they are African, they are licensed.

Next to the unphilosophical nature of the debate about African philosophy, there is another general observation to make. Some ten years of debate seems to have been followed by ten years of little development of research agenda's and methodologies concerning the various topics, schools of thought, different intellectuals heritages etc. which had been identified during the debate. What happened after all these intellectual exchanges?

Throughout the texts of *The essential readings*, there are references to the role of African philosophy **should** or **could** play, with regard to 'the existential crisis of the continent' (page 8); 'thinking for or against imperialism' (page 12); 'base a philosophy of their own on the traditional African past' (page 71); 'a dynamic African culture subject to change according to the dictates of changing political and technological realities' (page 136); 'a dynamic philosophy in the vanguard of each of the research disciplines, committed to the formulation of new or modified concepts and modes of knowing appropriate for social and technological development' (page 153); 'African struggles against imperialist domination and its real or

potential local socio-material roots, in all its aspects (including philosophical ones), that Africa can best be grasped' (page 244).

What has happened beyond the mere rhetoric of a potential role which African philosophy can play within the context of modern Africa? The articles by M. Towa (*Conditions for the affirmation of a modern African philosophical thought*) and L. Keita (*Contemporary African philosophy: the search for a method*) address this question, which is of great importance if African philosophy is to further progress and develop. This is not to say that ethno-philosophy, textual analysis, critique of eurocentrism are of no significance, but in times of scarce resources and the dismal state of affairs in many African states and specifically university departments, a more systematic and pragmatic approach to the further development of this discipline is of interest to the philosophers themselves as well as to the potential influence which the discipline can have in the current situation. One can no longer afford to neglect the internationalisation processes, the events in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. It would be naive to think that Africa will not be part of the globalisation process. It will receive further foreign (financial) interventions in various sectors, including higher education.

Apart from the material conditions, the immaterial conditions seem to be of crucial importance, if not the crux, if the debate on African philosophy is to have any effect. This implies that serious reflection is needed, co-operation is urgently needed with social sciences and possibly Africanists, research agendas will have to be set sharp and exclusionist approaches will not prove to be beneficial in the long run. This should lead philosophers to reflect upon methodologies, conceptual changes and priorities for action in their field and last but not least dialogue concerning these problems. Africa and African philosophers would be ignoring the current situation if they would try to further re-institutionalise the gap between the various disciplines and between what develops elsewhere in the world and in Africa.

This book may therefore be seen as a representation of fruitful discussions held in the seventies and eighties to come to terms with a



rich variety of issues and problems concerning African philosophy, but the essential readings of African philosophy for today is urgently awaited.

## REVIEW

*Philosophie, Ideologie und Gesellschaft in Afrika: Wien 1989*

Chr. Neugebauer (Hrsg). Peter Lang Verlag: Frankfurt a/M 1991. 212 p., DM. 52.-

reviewed by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek

"Philosophy, Ideology and Society in Africa", was the title with which a programme for annual conferences started in October 1989 in Vienna. The idea was to bring philosophers and political theorists of African and non-African origin together in order to engage in ongoing discussions on the subject of the conference: crossing conventional academic boundaries, and sustaining a critical and progressive discourse on Africa. Since the first year, however, the programme has not been continued. It turned out to be difficult to find groups outside of Vienna, that were equally active as the organising group of the journal ZAST (Zeitschrift für AfrikaStudien), to organise new editions of the conference. The first conference was, however, a success.

The book *Philosophie, Ideologie und Gesellschaft in Afrika: Wien 1989* contains the papers which were presented during this first conference. The book has a rather unimpressive appearance. It is geared mainly towards the German market, with the introduction and four of the eleven contributions in German (the others are in the English language). The price of the book is more impressive, and I fail to believe that the market for this type of publications is so bad that it is not possible, for such a price, to produce a more elegantly prepared

volume, in proper lettertype, well corrected, with properly hyphenated words.

The content of the book, however, is rewarding. Most contributions prove interesting reading material, and clearly show that discussions on Africa can be intellectually rewarding without playing on sentiments of exoticism to please their readers. But the reader is cashing these intellectual benefits to some degree *despite* the structure of the book. There is for instance no introduction to speak of. The project of the conference is not even mentioned in the book, nor is the reader informed about the discussions between the participants. Several papers are not new, and several of them are not even adjusted to the format of a conference-presentation. Odera Oruka's paper is taken without apparent change from the introduction to his (in 1989 forthcoming) book *Sage Philosophy*, it abounds with references to chapters of 'this book' (which is Oruka's book and not Neugebauer's, which the reader has in his or her hands when reading this). The Hountondji paper appeared in QUEST (no.2 1989) which is not acknowledged; as 'summary' of Hountondji's article the summary of an article by Olusegun Oladipo was copied from QUEST.

The different articles in the book thus remain isolated 'dishes', not composed into an elegant dinner, but they are nevertheless tasty. The papers on *Social Science and Politics in Egypt* (Hans-Georg Heinrich) and the *Nigerian Marxist response to the formation of the Nigerian Labour Party* (Adebayo O. Olukoshi) are interesting case studies. The three papers in German (G-H. Hoffmann, Chr. Neugebauer and F. Wimmer) concern aspects of the relation between European philosophy and philosophers and African philosophy. There is a clear awareness in the papers of the limits and distortions of the European philosophical tradition, especially when this tradition distances itself from non-western traditions. Nevertheless, especially with Neugebauer and Hoffmann, there is a tendency to a universalistic conception of philosophy and a rejection of 'romantic' conceptions of so-called 'otherness'.

In the paper on African literature, by the South African writer Lewis Nkosi (African Literature: *The Seasons of its Anomy*) we find an interesting counterpart to this conception of philosophy. Nkosi discusses and rejects the 'neo-negritudeness' in the person of the Nigerian Chinweizu and defends the critical, modernist and cosmopolitan role of African writership. Nkosi seems to express a common sentiment of conference participants with his sentence "I consider it less than useless to spend all our time bemoaning what history has bequeathed to us. What history takes with one hand history gives back with the other." (p.99)

Although far from new the pieces by Hountondji (*Occidentalism, Elitism: Answer to two Critiques*) and Wiredu (*On defining African Philosophy*) remain first class pieces of philosophical argumentation. Hountondji effectively defends himself against the accusations of expressing 'contempt of African culture' and of defending the class position of elitist intellectuals. He manages even to turn these accusations 180 degrees around, applying the two criticisms exactly to intellectuals parading with 'the African philosophy' and with 'the masses'. Wiredu's paper is, as most of his papers, of unsurpassed clarity: contrasting different conceptions of African Philosophy and at the same time delineating his own position on this question. Odera Oruka's paper (Critique of three negative claims and the issue of sage-philosophy in Africa) is somewhat chaotic, but has a definite virtue in taking the trouble to extensively discuss all the criticisms raised against his concept of 'Sage Philosophy'. The Zairian Mubabinge Bilolo presents a short article on pharaonic philosophy (Die Klassische Ägyptische Philosophie. Ein Überblick), which is interesting but not clearly related to the more current topics of the other papers.

One of the best papers in the book is 'Authoritarian Rule and Democracy in Africa. A Theoretical Discourse', by the Nigerian Yusuf Bangura. With depth of understanding and wide knowledge of the discussions on democracy and civil society he discusses the 'construction of a framework for theorising the problematic of authoritarianism and democracy'. Bangura's theme and approach,

which to a considerable degree goes beyond established liberal and marxist discourses, shows that the rest of the conference contributions are already dated to some extent. The wave of democratic assertion, the fading away of marxist positions and the imposition of new agenda's for Africa's political future, which are matters of concern today, do not yet find clear expression in the other conference papers. It is definitely time to organise a follow-up for the conference "Philosophy, Ideology and Society in Africa" in order to see how the philosophers and political theorists have developed their positions in the meantime.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Pieter Boele van Hensbroek** is working on a dissertation in the field of African political philosophy at the University of Groningen, Groningen The Netherlands. He has been lecturing in philosophy at the University of Zambia.

**Gerd-Rüdiger Hoffmann** is lecturing at the Universität Leipzig, Leipzig Germany. He is co-editor of the book Wie und warum entstand Philosophie in verschiedenen Regionen der Erde?

**Heinz Kimmerle** is professor of intercultural philosophy at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam The Netherlands. He has published extensively, among others Entwurf einer Philosophie des Wir (Bochum, 1983) and I, We, Body (Amsterdam, 1989).

**Justine-Marie Kluyskens** is currently working at the Leiden Institute of Development Studies and Consultancy Services Leiden University, Leiden The Netherlands.

**Issiaka-Prospér Lalèyè** is professor of anthropology and epistemology at the University of Saint-Louis, Senegal. Formerly professor at the UNAZA (Université Nationale du Zaïre) and at the FTCK (Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa). He has published extensively on African Philosophy. His dissertation is titled "Connaissance de la mentalité. Epistémologie génétique et critique de l'anthropologie."

**Henk Procee** is working at the Technical University of Twente, Enschede The Netherlands. In his dissertation Over de grenzen van culturen; voorbij universalisme en relativisme (Meppel/Amsterdam, 1991) he defends philosophical pluralism as a basis for intercultural communication.

**Wolfgang Scholtze** is professor at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität, Neubrandenburg Germany.

**Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba** is professor in the Department of History at the University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam Tanzania. He has published extensively, recently e.g. in the *Journal for Historical Sociology*, vol.IV,3 sept. 1991.

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**General Inquiries:** James T. H. Martin, Philosophy, St. John's University, Jamaica, NY 11439 (718) 990-6378-X5441. **Greek Philosophy:** Anthony Preus, Philosophy, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY 13902-6000 (607) 777-2886. **Christian Philosophy:** Robert Herrera, Philosophy, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079. (201) 761-9480. **Islamic Philosophy:** Parviz Morewedge, Philosophy, Baruch CUNY, 17 Lexington Ave., NYC, NY 10010. (212) 387-1687/685-9300. (607) 722-4908. **Jewish Philosophy:** Arthur Hyman, Yeshiva University, NYC, NY 10033. **African Philosophy:** Abisi Sharakiya, Philosophy, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY 13902-6000. (607) 777-4164.

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