

Africa  
intercultural

## BOOKS / INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS BY WIM VAN BINSBERGEN

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WIM VAN BINSBERGEN (\*1947) was trained in sociology, anthropology, and general linguistics, at Amsterdam University (Municipal). He held professorships in the social sciences at Leiden, Manchester, Durban, Berlin, and Amsterdam (Free University). At the latter institution he took his *cum laude* doctorate (1979) and was the incumbent of the chair of ethnic studies (1990-1998), prior to acceding to the chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Simultaneously, he held senior appointments at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. Over the decades, he has established himself internationally as a specialist on African ethnicity, African religion, ethnohistory, globalisation, intercultural philosophy, divination, comparative mythology, the Mediterranean Bronze Age, and transcontinental continuities between Africa and Asia in pre- and proto-history. He was President of the Netherlands Association of African Studies, 1990-1993, President of the Netherlands / Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy (1998-2022), and one of the Founding Members / Directors of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, 2006-2020. From 2002 he has been the Editor of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*. His many books include *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), *Tears of Rain* (1992), *Intercultural Encounters* (2003), *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (with Fred Woudhuizen, 2011); *Black Athena Comes of Age* (1997 / 2011); *Before the Presocratics* (2012); *Vicarious Reflections* (2015); *Religion as a Social Construct* (2017); *Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation* (with Martin Doornbos, 2017); *Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated* (2018); *Rethinking Africa's Transcontinental Continuities in Pre- and Proto-history* (2019, ed.); *Sunda: Pre- and Proto-historical Continuities between Asia and Africa* (2020); *Sangoma Science: From ethnography to intercultural ontology: A poetics of African spiritualities* (2021); *Joseph Karst: As a pioneer of long-range approaches to Mediterranean Bronze-Age ethnicity: A study in the History of Ideas* (2021); *Van vorstenhof tot internet: Fragmenten van een culturele antropologie van Afrika* (2021; in Dutch); *Pandora's Box Prised Open: Studies in Comparative Mythology* (2022); and *Religion and social organisation in north-western Tunisia, Volume I: Kinship, spatiality, and segmentation* (2022). His published work is also available from <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda>. Wim van Binsbergen is married with the classical (European and Indian) singer and breathing therapist Patricia Saegerman, and has five adult children. Besides his scholarly work, he is a published poet, the adopted son of a Zambian king, and a certified and practising African diviner-healer in the Southern African *Sangoma* tradition.




# **AFRICA INTER- CULTURAL**

**Theory, methodology, description**

**by Wim M.J. van Binsbergen**



PIP-TraCS: Papers in Intercultural Philosophy / Trans-  
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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS: *front and back*: see caption to Fig. 4.7.4, below; for aesthetic reasons the photograph has been mirrored; it appears correctly in Fig. 4.7.4; *back cover*: Wim van Binsbergen (front, right) officially presents a major fruit of his Nkoya research, the 500 pp. book *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and History in Central Western Zambia*, to the Prime Minister of one of the royal chiefs of the Nkoya people; Shikombwe royal capital, Kaoma District, Zambia, 1992

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Ἐάν ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, γέγονα χαλκὸς ἤχων ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (1 Corinthians, 13:1)*

no better school for interculturality, and for love,  
than 39 years of Flemish-Dutch-African marriage, and therefore:

*to Trexy (Patricia), the love of my life,  
whose book this is just as much as it is mine*

# ***PART 0. PRELIMINARIES***





## **PREFACE**

When I was invited, in the mid-1990s, to succeed the distinguished Hegel scholar Heinz Kimmerle and accede to his Rotterdam Chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, this meant both the fulfilment of an adolescent dream, and the promise of a radical career change enabling me, at long last, to concentrate on the epistemological and global-political aspects of the production of transcontinental socio-cultural knowledge in which I had been engaged, as an empirical social scientist, ever since my early twenties, but on whose shaky foundations I had so far not been able to concentrate.

Had I only been (like the parents of Nabokov's fictitious poet John Shade)

*.....an infant when my parents died  
they both were ornithologists...* (Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 1962);

but no, my parents lived till I was 37 (my mother) or 45 (my father), the former a trained dress-maker, the latter a trained fitter. To my two parents I have owed, on my father's side, an indestructible constitution (fruit of several generations of proud slum dwelling in the notorious or famous Amsterdam Jordaan quarter); and on my mother's side (who vicariously admired the Amsterdam Jewish population without belonging to them) I have owed a sense of tragic humour, a blind (and in her case demonstrably unwarranted) faith in the invincibility of love, and a relentless, utterly logocentric, faith in words. These were conditions that were constantly tested to breaking point in the *Purgatorio* (Dante Alighieri) of secrecy and violence that my parents had managed to erect around the four children in their care. That I survived my childhood more or less sane (*Sangoma Science*, my crazy 2021 book, may force us to qualify this statement) was largely due to my dear elder half-siblings (a brother and two sisters), and it is to them that much of the credit of my written work should go. My parents's principal achievement in the context of the present book has been that they caused me to

lack nearly all chauvinistic identification with my own cultural and residential background – thus most effectively preparing me for *A Transcontinental Career* (the title of Mosima 2018, a Festschrift in my honour).

Whereas from age 15, *belles lettres* had brought me violent shocks of identification and thus intensification of my malaise, philosophy, from the Presocratics to Aristotle and St Augustine to Bergson and Sartre (with a long fixation on Teilhard de Chardin's home-spun cosmology), had been the consolation of my adolescent days. At the time I believed (the counter-evidence has remained spotty) that I lacked true powers of thought, I was moreover convinced that the discursive philosophical word would be impotent in the face of the protracted psychological crisis I went through, and therefore I had refused to embark on a study of philosophy – instead defining myself as a poet and literary essayist. I chose to read anthropology because I was under the impression (utterly mistaken, to my great good fortune) that a career as an anthropologist would give me ample opportunities to be a literary writer without affecting me existentially. The very opposite happened: although I remained active as a literary writer throughout my life, clearly my true passion soon came to reside with anthropology, fieldwork has often inspired my literary work, but I am glad that my youngest daughter, Hannah, so far has insisted on being a poet and nothing else, and at an age when I had not even published a single book of poems, has already gained national fame.

My political awareness awakened relatively late. I grew up in a popular urban neighbourhood, in a painfully mixed working-class / small-scale-entrepreneurial family. People in that neighbourhood by and large had no affinity with formal politics. Their potentially fascist tendencies in the Interbellum I have recently had to face in my autobiographical poetry (2020e), yet my father had been a passionate Socialist in his youth (much to everybody's surprise he had *The Internationale* played at his funeral), and his brother was a Communist resistance war hero and martyr (but even though I bore that brother's given name, it characteristically was to take over half a century before I learned – only from my brother, Peter, with whom a share a mother but not a father – about my uncle's tragic but inspiring fate, that might have reconciled me with at least part of my roots). Peter himself was idealistically involved with the artificial language *Esperanto*, and this brought the Maoist propaganda periodical *El Popola Ĉinio* ('From People's China') to our doorstep on a monthly basis – but although Peter taught me to read Dr Zamenhof's linguistic concoction (today surprisingly the backbone of successful computer translation!), the starry-eyed, apple-cheeked, pigtailed Chinese little girls in the pictures failed to inspire any global solidarity in me. During my early student days, the brilliant Marxist (in the end Maoist) Jewish jurist Wim Wertheim, a vocal critic of Dutch colonial politics in its violent death pangs, and our professor of South

East Asian history and sociology at Amsterdam University, was the first to introduce me to the rich tradition of critical revolutionary thought. My first wife, Henny E. van Rijn, a physicist half a generation older than I (and not by mere accident a namesake of the Netherlands's most famous painter – her father's family, like Rembrandt's, hailed from Leiden which is traversed by the ancient river Rhine), likewise introduced left-wing thought and periodicals into our life, on the basis of her own student days.



source: <https://digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/islandora/object/islandora%3A5362>

Fig. 0.1. Freedom fighters Ray Alexander and Jack Simons (centre) are welcomed by a crown upon their return from a quarter century of exile, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1990

However, only when I had finished my studies (including fieldwork on popular Islam in North Africa) and taken up a teaching job in the Department of Sociology, University of Zambia (UNZA), Lusaka, Zambia (South Central Africa), did I become exposed to responsible and effective socio-political activism, by the glorious examples, first of the anti-colonial ex-Dutch Jaap van Velsen, and particularly of the South African freedom fighters Jack Simons (1907-1995; my UNZA head of department, a Communist whom I always considered an Afrikaander) and his inspiring wife the Jewish Baltic Communist activist Ray Alex-

ander (1913-2004; in a long private conversation with my wife and me in 1973 she related how she founded SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement). It was in their house (the principal ANC – African National Congress – strong-house outside South Africa during apartheid) that I was privileged to meet several of the top-ranking leaders of the South African liberation movement ushering in the new South Africa.<sup>1</sup> This radicalising influence came at the right place and time to catch on, and soon after my return to the Netherlands after three years in Zambia, I was among the founding members of the Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology. We scrutinised the texts of the neo-Marxist revival in France (Godelier, Meillassoux, Terray, Althusser, Rey, *etc.*) in order to find an analytical framework allowing us to interpret our personal, local African fieldwork data (from Senegal, Cameroon, Zambia, Congo, Kenya, Tunisia) in global terms of imperialist and capitalist exploitation, contestation, liberation – in which the then very popular paradigm of the articulation of modes of production became our principal tool. In addition to one non-Africanist (Johan van de Walle, a specialist on Dutch materialist history), our group comprised the demographer / anthropologist Klaas de Jonge (leader of Dutch team research on migration in Senegal – *cf.* de Jonge & van der Klei 1978 – and soon famous as a freedom fighter in South Africa, who after arrest by the apartheid regime managed to escape to the Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria, where he remained confined for two years); Peter Geschiere (ethnographer of Cameroonian state penetration, 1978 / 1982, and soon renowned as an analyst of African modern politics); Simon Simonse (author of the path-breaking study of Nilotic African kingship *Kings of Disaster*, 1990); the late lamented Jos van der Klei, perceptive analyst of West African labour migration (1989), and for many years leader of anthropological fieldwork training projects in Tunisia and Senegal; and the late lamented Reini Raatgever, Marxist theoretician of

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Simons spent a fruitful time at Manchester, where he wrote *African women: Their legal status in South Africa* (1968). With Ray Alexander he also wrote a revealing radical statement on South African society and history: *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* (1969). It was in Manchester that the politically radical Jewish South African anthropologist Max Gluckman had founded the world's most innovative anthropological movement of the mid-20th c. CE, the *Manchester School*, whose regional focus was South Central and Southern Africa, besides Israel and India (Werbner 1984; van Binsbergen 2007a). The brilliant Jaap van Velsen, although an *enfant terrible*, was one of the purest exponents of the Manchester approach. Also Terry Ranger taught here in mid-career. Against this background it was predictable that (initially at Richard Werbner's initiative, and to my great good fortune) I was to be co-opted into the Manchester circle, profoundly underwent its theoretical and political influence, and soon temporarily occupied the Simon Chair, like Victor Turner before me.

kinship, 1988). Partly in the inspiring context of this Working Group, I wrote the last few chapters of my first major scholarly book *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981c / 1979), a reconstruction of half a millennium of religious change informed by an elaborate Marxist theory which I had designed. In addition to inspiring our members's ongoing scientific work, our Working Group produced two collections on neo-Marxist anthropology (van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1982, 1985; also cf. Gerold-Scheepers & van Binsbergen 1978; van Binsbergen & Meilink 1978), but died peacefully long before the second, in English, was even out (1985).



From left to right: J. van de Walle, W. van Binsbergen, S. Simonse, K. de Jonge, the late lamented J. van der Klei (on his lap his daughter Geertje), the late lamented H. Meilink (a member of the ASC Senegal research team, 1971-1974, but not a member of the group), and P. Geschiere; the late lamented R. Raatgever took the photograph and therefore is not on it.

Fig. o.2. The Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology, 1977

I initially came to work in Leiden when I was invited to act in the one remaining Leiden chair of African anthropology,<sup>2</sup> and soon I was appointed at the

<sup>2</sup> In the first decades after World War II, these Leiden chairs had a checkered history:

“Musical chairs” would aptly describe the vicissitudes of Africanist anthropology at the University of Leiden. In 1960 there was added, to Hofstra’s chair [ an extraordinary chair in African ethnography ], an extra-ordinary chair in the sociology and culture of Africa. The first incumbent was Busia (...). This chair was converted into an ordinary chair when

African Studies Centre, where in 1980 I became one of the two research directors, founding and (until 1990) leading the Department of Political and Historical Studies (and from 1996 to 2002 again the Theme Group on Globalisation). In this capacity I was in the first place occupied with administration and research supervision, although I could still do some fieldwork and writing. I was increasingly worried about the lack of political responsibility and of both methodological and epistemological sophistication among my Africanist colleagues, and I initiated a monthly Africa Seminar at Leiden with me as convenor and chairperson, but rather than addressing these defects head-on in my own writings, I became disillusioned and cynical about the relevance of Africanist research in general – and with this disillusioned attitude I started in the Chair of Ethnic Studies which the ASC had created for me at the Amsterdam Free University. My highly descriptive and theoretically flimsy 1992a inaugural was devoted to the Kazanga ethnic association of the Nkoya people in Zambia, on whom I had focussed my research ever since 1972.

As soon as this became politically and morally possible (there was an international boycott affecting academic, artistic, and sportive contacts with South Africa from the 1970s till Mr Mandela's release from prison in 1990) I repeatedly visited South Africa; for although I had become a recognised specialist on the Southern African region, I had always refused to visit South Africa as long as apartheid was in place. However, for practical family reasons (and also in the light of a number of deeds of extreme violence which happened right under my nose during a visiting professorship in Durban) I did not heed Jack Simons's call (I visited him and Ray in Cape Town in 1990, a few months after their repatriation from Zambia) to come and help build the new South Africa. Meanwhile I had embarked on extensive new fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana. Several regional and national politicians there sought my advice and support, but rather than actively joining in that promising country's political

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Busia was succeeded by Holleman in 1963. Hofstra's chair went out of existence when he retired in 1968. After Holleman left the Africanist chair in 1969 for the chair of legal anthropology, the former was occupied (1972-75) by Beattie from Oxford (...); after a brief period when Van Binsbergen (...) acted in the chair, it has been occupied, since 1977 [ and until 1982; this was written in 1980 ], by Kuper...' (van Binsbergen 1981b: 51 f.)

Holleman was also for many years the Director of the African Studies Centre, Leiden. Kuper was on the Centre's Board, until his relentless, devastating criticism of the Centre before assembled representatives of our funding agencies threw the institution in near fatal crisis – the occasion for the psychologist Jan Hoorweg and myself, in 1980, to be made joint scientific directors commissioned to ensure the centre's survival. This we accomplished, in close collaboration with the centre's administrative director the former New-Guinea civil servant Gerrit Grootenhuis. Kuper was succeeded by Geschiere, Geschiere by Pels, etc.

transformation, I continued the line of research on ecstatic religion, in which I had engaged in North Africa (from 1968) and Zambia (from 1972). The radical steps I took in Botswana were existential and intellectually counter-paradigmatic rather than liberating in the standard revolutionary and political sense: in a town saturated with racist history, and deeply perverted by White monopoly capitalism and the nearness of apartheid South Africa, I chose to publicly brave the group expectations of my fellow-Whites, and to join the sinister and dreaded, all-Black, *Sangoma* cult, which (even though essentially an African healing movement) at the time was perceived by Whites as satanical and murderous. I have repeatedly and at length written on the implications of this demarche in terms of the regional and global politics of knowledge, and the disciplinary canon of professional anthropology, and need not repeat the argument here.

The 1990s were for me a period of stock-taking, reflection, incubation, and, finally, transformation. I had the opportunity to put my historical research into the transcontinental antecedents of the divination system of the Francistown *Sangomas* on a much broader and professional footing when I was invited – as the only anthropologist of religion among Assyriologists and Bible Scholars – to join the Work Group on Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Magic, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1994-1995. This opened my eyes to a level of scholarship, and of time-honoured scholarly resources (recently greatly enhanced by ICT), for which my training at secondary school and university had adequately prepared me but which the pedestrian, essentially anti-scholarly orientation of the relatively young social sciences (still with an inferiority complex towards such older fields of humanities as philosophy, history, literary science, and philology) had always discouraged. I plunged into this new world of unbounded access and passionate debate with an enthusiasm that completely cured me of my cynicism, but that also forced me to sustained introspection as to the limitations of my anthropological habitus, its hegemonic implications, and the epistemological and cosmological challenges implied in my ‘Becoming a *Sangoma*’ (cf. my 1991 piece of that title).

But the academic mill at Leiden needed to be kept going. With my long-standing friend, fellow-student (of fieldwork training in Tunisia), and co-editor Peter Geschiere, I had meanwhile taken the initiative for a massive and well-funded national Dutch programme (with very extensive and high-powered intercontinental participation) on ‘Globalisation and the Construction of Communal Identities’. The focus on globalisation further brought me to look with a different eye at my decades of Africanist anthropological research, but despite serious attempts (Meyer & Geschiere 1999; van Binsbergen 1997a; van

Binsbergen & Geschiere 2005) did not yet bring the epistemological depth I was craving for. Would I ever be able to transcend the scientific sophisms of Popper and de Groot, and Kuhn's facile, unprincipled view of the circulation of essentially equivalent paradigms – and hit on a philosophy that could throw light upon the murky labyrinth of interculturality in fieldwork?

In his attempts, at Rotterdam, to focus his recent explorations in intercultural philosophy upon Africa, Heinz Kimmerle made contact with me in Leiden, I made a few appearances in his circle (e.g. my paper van Binsbergen 1996b), and soon found myself as the main candidate for his succession – to which I brought admittedly only a very spotty training and publication record in philosophy, but without doubt an all-round specialist knowledge on African cultural life. More than a year before my Rotterdam appointment came into effect, I was invited by the prominent African political scientist Ali Mazrui, then heading an institute at Binghamton University, upstate New York, USA, where I was privileged to rub shoulders<sup>3</sup> with brilliant and inspiring Islamic and Asian philosophers, and encountered modes of philosophy that were scarcely tributary to modern, implicitly hegemonic, North Atlantic philosophies. In our private conversations Mazrui made me more fully aware of what he called my 'new responsibilities'. Significantly, I took the opportunity of my trip to Binghamton to have yet another meeting with Martin Bernal (who held an appointment at nearby Ithaca; like once my once favourite literary writer Vladimir Nabokov). Earlier that year Bernal had been my guest of honour at a conference I had organised in Leiden, on his *Black Athena* project. Europe's, and the world's, indebtedness to Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, Afrocentricity, the recognition of Africa's and Africans's place in the world past and present, – these increasingly became the themes around which I found a new inspiration and elan for my ongoing scientific research and its philosophical underpinning.

But however great my initial enthusiasm for the Rotterdam intercultural challenge, soon my attempts stagnated,

- not only because of the philosophical aporias arising (for which I was insufficiently philosophically equipped, and which I believe I am only beginning to resolve with the present booklet's argument),
- but also because of devastating developments at the global level (the in-

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<sup>3</sup> In this environment, with its non-hegemonic focus on West Asia in the History of Ideas, I presented my complex technical argument (van Binsbergen 1996a) on the astrological origin of the geomancies found in the western Old World, including Ancient and Byzantine Greece, the Islamic world, Early Modern Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa



creasing violence between the North Atlantic and various Islamic contexts culminating in the year 2001 in '9/11' and the subsequent 'War on Terror' (cf. van Binsbergen 2005c), the global crisis of transcontinental migration for which no adequate, *i.e.* humanly acceptable solution, could be worked out; the COVID-19 pandemic; the war in Ukraine, the manifest impotence of global institutions of peace-keeping, the ensuing collapse of markets worldwide; the callous continued use of internal combustion engines and fossil fuels despite the collapse of the natural environment especially on the poles and in the rain forests; the irreversible climate changes leading to greatly increased hurricanes, flooding, hunger and extinction...

In this way I found my initially optimistic engagement with intercultural philosophy increasingly a form of irrelevant token intellectualism, even impotent escapism, that I could no longer take seriously – *even less so, because soon I believed I had sufficiently proved, at the theoretical level, the impossibility of interculturality* (never mind the interculturality that I was increasingly parading in my own published work).

My work in Rotterdam proceeded far from smoothly. Kimmerle had been a celebrated student of the Continental Western philosophical tradition, but had been devoid of any profound knowledge of Africa, lacked a prolonged fieldwork experience, did not know a single African language, and entertained the kind of condescending, blindly dotting, effectively dehumanising token optimism towards post-Independent Africa and Africans which I have found only too often among development workers and social researchers from North Western Europe. He could not have been more different from me, and his inheritance was obviously not in good hands with me. Contrary to many Dutchmen my age (I was born immediately after World War II, during which Germans had destroyed our country, terrorised our population, and abducted over 100,000 of them to be murdered in concentration camps) I had no problem with Kimmerle *as a German* – my maternal grandfather had been German, and I was fluent in that language which, deservedly, had been the principal philosophical language of the West until recently. Be that as it may, within a week after my Rotterdam inaugural address (1999a, which bore the provocative title *Culturen Bestaan Niet* ('Cultures Do Not Exist'), my emeritus predecessor had written long denunciatory letters to the Rotterdam philosophical faculty and to all active and potential intercultural philosophers in the country, to warn them against me and to effectively destroy the human and institutional resources I absolutely needed for my work at Rotterdam. The faculty that had solicited and appointed me could not bring themselves to publicly defend me against their respected former colleague (still the patron, role model, and academic supervisor of several of them). In my book *Vicarious Reflections* (2015a) I

have presented a *post-mortem* of my Rotterdam adventure, and it needs not be repeated here.

But what is also clear from that book, as well as from its philosophical predecessor *Intercultural Encounters* (2003c), and from a great many shorter publications by my hand throughout the 2000s and 2010s, is that despite all tribulations and personal frictions, I did find, in philosopher's land, what I had been looking for: *the intellectual, conceptual, and methodological means to confront the epistemological naiveties of the anthropology I had been educated in, and to begin to think more deeply about what it is to share, or not to share, culture with other people at the other end of the globe, and to report on such intercultural experience in discursive language (after I had tried, for decades, to capture such experience in the literary format of poetry and a novel, as well as in thousands of field photographs)*. So I would not have missed the Rotterdam experience for the world.

Having decided, early on in my Rotterdam adventure, that 'cultures do not exist' so that intercultural philosophy could not simply be the 'philosophising about the interaction between cultures', I soon redefined my mission as the incumbent of the chair of Foundation of Intercultural Philosophy, as: 'investigating the possibility and impossibility of interculturality'. This stance alienated me both from my Rotterdam philosophical colleagues (also cf. van Binsbergen 2005b) and from my Leiden Africanist ones, for I seemed to be sawing through the very legs of the chairs on which we were all sitting, as Northerners intellectually officiating on the South. If distinct African cultures do not exist, how then can we (in Leiden) carve out a distinct field of research for ourselves in Africa? What would African Studies be if African cultures do not exist? And (on the Rotterdam side) how can we, as highly trained and accomplished philosophers who read and reread, and understood, Kant while van Binsbergen was still struggling with second-rate *Ersatz* philosophers such as Marcuse, Mannheim, Althusser, Teilhard de Chardin, and Susanne Langer, take seriously van Binsbergen's amateurish concoction of Continental and Analytical philosophy in his anti-Gettier argument on truth provinces as called into being by the inevitably *cultural* rather than *a-priori, formal*, nature of knowledge as 'justified true belief'?

Given the severe limitations of my own philosophical knowledge and the estrangement that more and more came to characterise my relations with my Rotterdam colleagues, I must confess that for a long time my progress into defining the possibilities and impossibilities of interculturality stagnated in the cultural aporias of 'justified true belief'. I had written at length on my personal explorations into ecstatic religion, sorcery, African traditional healing, divina-

tion (e.g. 1991, 2002, 2021b), yet (surrounded by my Rotterdam colleagues' overkill of alienated and alienating philosophical, logocentric text production, and in myself more and more weaned away from the self-evident self-reflectiveness that is the poet's main capital) I could not bring myself to *the simple realisation that, if I boasted to engage in North African popular Islam, and to be a Zambian king's adopted son, as well as a Botswana Sangoma demonstrably capable of veridical divination and of effective healing, that could only mean one thing: cultures may not exist, but interculturality certainly does exist, and I am its very (although not its only, and certainly not its principal) incarnation.*

From my many publications of the last decade and a half, two things at least may become clear (1) the aporia in which my thought on interculturality stagnated in the early 2000s, and (2) how I gradually began to work myself out of this *cul-de-sac* mainly in my writings on wisdom, on reconciliation, on ancient modes of thought especially myth and cosmology, on the move away from logocentricity towards less verbose modes of thought and of interaction. The present, relatively short argument sums up that trajectory, and opens a further way out.

This booklet originated in my collaboration in Michael Steppat's initiative for a collective work on intercultural philosophy centered on Bayreuth, Germany. Against all my massive tomes of the last two decades, usually exceeding 500 pages each, the elegant short format of this booklet may be attractive to those who have been deterred so far, lacking either the stamina or the elbow grease for the heavier volumes. I have tried to further add to this booklet's attractiveness by a generous selection of personal photographs, whose extensive captions are supposed to bring out what even my main text cannot convey in terms of *couleur locale* and empathic closeness to the African people on which the argument focuses. However, the attentive reader will notice that (true to the nature of captions as a text genre) these captions tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, and often fail to apply the full extent of the technical conceptual apparatus that is deployed in the course of this booklet.

This booklet signals that, now that I am approaching old age, my time of incubation is over. I have woken up, have shed my cynicism and my inertia, and although I can see that the world is in the greatest danger, *interculturality, and an ever heightened general awareness of the inevitability and the necessity of interculturality, is an indispensable requirement for the restoration and realisation of our common future as an increasingly interdependent, and accommodating, fundamentally one, humanity.*

At the end of this Preface, let me express my thanks to the people who have greatly contributed to my struggle for insight into interculturality throughout my career, and especially in the last two decades. I have already declared what I have owed, in this respect, to my parents and siblings. Let me continue by mentioning my exemplary teachers, who in secondary school equipped me with enough basic linguistic, historical and mathematical skills to prepare me for my later work; and who in university have managed to imprint on me the notion that intercultural knowledge production is among the highest (most difficult, yet attainable, and most rewarding) modalities of being human – and who taught me one, painful and limited yet effective, way as to how to go about creating such intercultural knowledge: *through fieldwork*. However, their teaching would have been futile if my childhood had made me more complacently chauvinistic about my own socio-cultural background (instead, my childhood's terror – despite the great lifelong consolation that my brother and two sisters have been – propelled me out of any sense of Europe as my comfortable home); and if it had not been complemented by the African people who, over the decades, have welcomed me as a researcher into their lives, and who have insisted (and have made possible!) that I soon exchange that alienating role for something better and closer to them. Here I should particularly mention the few people who, as research assistants, mentors even, have taken me by the hand and conducted me further and further into the labyrinth of interculturality without ever letting go of Ariadne's red thread of shared humanity: Hesnawi bin Ṭahar in Tunisia, Dennis Shiyowe in Zambia (my adoptive elder brother, and my youngest son's godfather), Ennie Mapagwane, Edward Mpoloka and Joshua Ndhlovu in Botswana, Jacqueline Touoyem in Cameroon. Around these guides a broad halo of dear field contacts begin to light up, with faces too numerous to mention by name, but anyway including the ʿAissa brothers, Neshi bin ʿAmer, Dhiab bin Hassuna, Najma bint Hassuna, Umborka bint Ḥamad, Ḥera bint Yussuf, Rabah bin ʿAli, in Tunisia; Hamba Mwene, Masuku Malapa, Davison Kawanga, Mary Nalishuwa, Catherine Shimunika, Stanford Mayowe, Edward Kahare, John Kawayile, Jonathan Kapangila, in Zambia; Antonio Ampa, Ndisia Ampa, Joop de Jong, Dyuki Suarez, Arghetta Bafata, in Guinea Bissau; Shukē Amos, Smarts Gumede, Ellen Krijnen, Isaac Mazonde, Mrs L. Molamu, and Moseki Maje, in Francistown, Botswana; and so many others. In the specific context of the present booklet my next indebtedness is to Michael Steppat of Bayreuth University, Germany, who insistently but with patience and understanding brought me to revisit my work on interculturality, even though outside Africa it had brought me precisely little recognition; the clarion blast calling forth the present booklet was when Michael after a first reading of the article on interculturality which he had commissioned and which became the basis of this book, called it 'a stun-

ning achievement'. Further thanks should go to my dear colleague, friend, and fellow-editor of *Quest* Sanya Osha, who from the early 2000s has been an inspiring interpreter and critic of my work; to my dear former student Pius Mosima, who has developed a most illuminating exegesis of my work; to such friends and colleagues as Richard Werbner, Terry Ranger, Matthew Schoffeleers, Michael Witzel, Vaclav Blažek, Richard Fardon, Valentin Mudimbe, René Devisch, Alain Anselin, Claude-Hélène Perrot, Emily Lyle, Kazuo Matsumura, Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Oum Ndigi, Robert Buijtenhuijs, Martin Doornbos, Martin Bernal, Gerti Hesseling (effectively my first PhD student, who more than paid back her debt to me by initiating me into constitutional law), Sjaak van der Geest, Frans Wiggermann, Fred Woudhuizen, and my fellow-members of the Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology including Peter Geschiere with whom I extensively collaborated in publications and research. It is a great pleasure to list so many brilliant colleagues who while admiring my work critically helped to bring it to further fruition. Among all these stimulating voices around me, I should especially mention my second wife Patricia van Binsbergen-Saegerman, who (herself born in Congo, Africa, and a Licenciate alumna of the study of African Languages and History at Ghent University, Belgium) has shared my research, and the struggles and triumphs of my writing over the past 39 years, and who has been my sparring partner in many specific conversations preparatory to the present argument. It is fitting that I should also thank my first wife, the late lamented Henny van Rijn, who greatly contributed to our first spell of Nkoya fieldwork (1972-1974) and to my scientific thinking in the first phase of my career; and our daughter Nezmia, who, daily playing on the knees of my future adoptive father Mwene Kahare, at the time (at age 2-3) was our chief public relations officer during my initial Nkoya fieldwork. Nezmia has simply been the first of my beloved five children who, each in their own way, have through the decades confirmed the truth of the motto I have adopted for this booklet:

*'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' (1 Corinthians 13:1)*

– even though in the present context *charity*, beyond 'love they neighbour', has taken on a technical meaning of intercultural acceptance of cognitive difference. Finally, from 2005 I have frequented the African country of Cameroon, and there (in addition to the Western Grassfields and the wider Buea region) especially the Université Yaounde I, in the capital city of that name. In 2006, at the invitation and under the chairmanship of my friend and colleague Dr Godfrey Tangwa, I gave a seminar at the Department of Philosophy, on the epistemology of intercultural philosophy, in which essentially the same reasoning on the basis of the standard definition of knowledge formed the core of an argument as to the im-

possibility of interculturality. I am grateful to Dr Tangwa for gently pointing out the inadequacy of that argument already at such an early stage.

I regret that it is only as an afterthought that I include the Leiden African Studies Centre (ASC) in this list of indebtednesses. When I joined that institute early 1977, my main Nkoya fieldwork had already taken place, financed from personal funds, I had taught at the University of Zambia, had acted in the Leiden African chair, and had been found eligible for the Manchester Simon Chair in anthropology which I actually occupied in 1979-1980. In subsequent years, the ASC admittedly enabled me to keep up close contact with the Nkoya and to physically return to them numerous times. On my side of the bargain, I diligently served, much against my natural inclination, as institutional administrator, at the same time attaining such international recognition and realising such a level and volume of publication output as was seldom rivalled by any of my institutional colleagues. But whatever my endeavours, achievements, and merits in the ASC context may have been, this did not prevent that in 2007, under a new, ignorant and power-hungry director, I fell victim to the centre's total ostracism; and even after I had been rehabilitated in 2010, and had been rewarded with a splendid expensive intercontinental valedictory conference in 2012 on the occasion of my attaining pensionable age, the same institution refused to publish the *commissioned* proceedings of the conference they had initiated and paid for; these later appeared, under my editorship, as a special issue of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* (2019). Little wonder that I saw no remaining option but to radically sever all connections with that institution. Still, in my struggle for interculturality it has played a most significant role. Also in another way: the strands of recognisable Dutchness in these tribulations since 2007 (the virtual absence of objective and effective standards of fairness, generosity, empathy, morality, decency, responsibility, and shame) have reminded me, not for the first time (*cf.* my desperate childhood, characterised by traumatic intra-family experiences, and by the absence of such protection as my wider kindred should have extended), not to cling too closely to the national cultural orientation into which I happened to be born.

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***PART I. INTRODUCTION: WHY  
INTERCULTURALITY IS  
PROBLEMATIC***



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *interculturality* presents itself to the world today as a programme of *clarity* and *hope*. It suggests that the constituent parts into which humankind seems to be divided, are on the one hand unmistakably defined, internally integrated in themselves, and unequivocally marked within their own neat boundaries – but on the other hand, that (according to the optimistic dreams of a ‘multicultural’ society) between these parts constructive interaction and mutual understanding are possible, even on what suggests to be a basis of equality – so that we may at long last be on our way *Zum ewigen Frieden* – ‘to peace eternal’ (Kant 1959 / 1795). In the light of the promises of interculturality *as a present-day collective representation*, many of the ills of humanity – our divisiveness, group hatred, mutual exclusion, exploitation, mutual violence, historic inequality like in slavery and class formation, anomia (given the recent destruction – under the onslaught of globalisation and of the technological innovations that made globalisation possible – of long-established religious beliefs and cultural values), may appear to be merely ephemeral and epiphenomenal. Against the background of this lofty (even though unrealistic) prospect, little wonder that the concept of interculturality has conquered not only the media but also the world of scholarship over the last quarter of a century

This booklet’s argument consists in several parts.

After the preliminaries and the introductory Part I, in Part II I shall theoretically explore the concept of interculturality, trace some of its disciplinary antecedents, and point out some of the limitations that have sprung from that particular origin. Here a major contradiction becomes apparent, whose negotiation has cost me the greatest effort when writing this booklet. As an anthropologist I have been steeped in a dominant paradigm that, ever since the

1960s, has sought to deconstruct the self-evidence with which the actors themselves (especially in Africa) perceive their social world as composed of tribes, nations, cultures, ethnic groups. But if such collectivities, in the hands of social scientists, may simply be reduced to nostalgic and ideological figments of the imagination without any real, tangible existence, does not that mean that also *interculturality, as presumably, the interaction and compromise between cultures, can only exist as a form of ideological wishful thinking?* I shall try to free ourselves from the deceptive ideological elements that have cluttered around interculturality, yet retain the concept in order to put it to some better use. Within the limited allotted space I shall cursorily take a sobering look at culture, identity, ethnicity, national and international political space, inequality, and seek to peer through the ideological smoke-screen that interculturality oftentimes entails as an intellectual and political perspective.

Yet we cannot give up the concept of interculturality, not only because humanity's future seems to largely depend on it, but also because practically and personally our experience with possible and even realised interculturality has been extensive – in fact, for me personally such experience has formed the backbone of my adult life as a person (offering some of the most valuable and instructive episodes of my life) and as an intellectual (pressing me to develop my thinking beyond the complacency of Eurocentric hegemony). In this highly selective exploration (and our present scope does not allow for more) we shall be frustrated by limitations of printing space and by the personal constraints (disciplinary, theoretical, regional, paradigmatic, bibliographic, linguistic) inevitably informing a single author's intellectual product. Our greatest handicap however may be the fact that, if such is to be the thrust of my argument, I seem to reject essential dogmas of modern societal ideology, and to battle against what for many fellow scholars looks as a meaningful perspective towards a better world.<sup>4</sup> Deconstructing ideas that for the people who

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<sup>4</sup> This applies *a fortiori* in the African context. Already in 1983 the leading Afrocentrist writer Asante wrote on 'The Ideological Significance of Afrocentricity in Intercultural Communication'. Having repeatedly and vocally identified as a (moderate) Afrocentrist myself (2005, 2000a, 2000b, 2005a, 2011b, 2011c) how can I possibly doubt the possibility, yea, the existence, and the liberating force of interculturality? I cannot, and shall not – even though I reject the idea of humankind being composed of numerous identifiable, named, bounded, and internally integrated *cultures*, plural; all I can see is myriad interlocking, superimposed, *cultural orientations* governing *partial* aspect of the lives of individuals and of groups – *but in such a way that from the cradle to the grave, or even from the morning to the evening, one will always take recourse to various different cultural orientations*, – some of which one may share will most modern people (use of the cell phone, motor car, plastic or even virtual money, bras and underpants) or all fellow-citizens of one's nation-state (an official national language, the

hold them are a source of hope and an inspiration for political action, if ill-understood may well invite anger, rejection, ridicule, even aggression. In such an endeavour, one may seem to deny – for the sake of some abstract, theoretical, uninspiring, lifeless truth – to specific newly emancipating sections of humanity (nations that in the recent past still sighed under colonial rule; women; sexual minorities; people of colour; recent intercontinental migrants) the very dignity, self-esteem and pride they are currently struggling for or may have only recently won, usually at the cost of long and painful battles. Is philosophical and social-scientific analysis inevitably the enemy of freedom? Or can we still take seriously the promise – a basic tenet of critical intellectual life throughout the centuries and the continents – that grounded insight gained as the result of painstaking, courageous critical reflection and the broadest empirical inspection, not only feeds intellectual life but also leads to a lasting liberating insight changing the future for the better of humankind as a whole?

In Part III we shall turn to Africa proper, and have a cursory glance at the landscape of interculturality there. One of the greatest pitfalls in the contemplation of Africa is the lure of *essentialisation*. From the time of the Enlightenment, Europe and the North Atlantic region at large have sought to define themselves by a negative contrast with Africa – with on the European side such imagined traits as rational, mature, humanitarian, truthful and trustworthy (features of which European expansion in the Ages of Mercantilism and Colonialism usually made a mockery). Ever since, the essentialisation of Africa as being either exceptionally endowed (*e.g.* in the domains of music, dance, customary law, social organisation, conflict settlement) or exceptionally wanting (*e.g.* in health conditions, inventivity, proto-science, rejection of superstition) has greatly influenced the image of Africa among development workers, journalists and politicians – including African ones. Yet our focus on Africa will prove to be both timely and felicitous, for in the modern world this continent has functioned, not only as (a) the labour reserve from which people have left for an (often deplorable) transcontinental future as slaves and migrants, but also, (b) locally and regionally, as a laboratory for the dynamics of identity, democracy, dictatorship, genocide, majority rule, ethnicity (and especially in the post-Independence African context, ‘intercultural’ is often an ill-analysed synonym for merely ‘interethnic’; *cf.* Kom 1995), inequality, the national and international political spaces in which these dynamics situate themselves, and

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national anthem, allegiance to the flag and the national sport teams), but many of which are peculiar to much smaller and far more situational contexts, such as a profession, a creed, a hobby, an urban ward, an extended family with its own little customs and scraps of private language.

the local and global economic, ideological and religious processes informing the entire setup.

I am no newcomer to Africa. In that continent were the scenes of several prolonged spells (and many shorter ones) of my fieldwork, in more than a handful of African countries between 1968 and 2011; here also is the continent of my social-scientific and intercultural-philosophical competence as brought out in numerous publications, extensive teaching, and decades of supervision of the research of numerous others. I have spoken six African languages, am conversant with a similar number of local African socio-cultural settings, am truly at home in at least two African villages whose inhabitants are my close kin, I have been an ethnic activist for the Nkoya people of Zambia, have attained recognition not only as an African philosopher (cf. van Binsbergen 2008b / also in Procesi & Kasereka 2012) but also as the adopted son of an African king, and as a diviner-healer in the Southern African *Sangoma* context. In transcontinental academic contacts, but also in my private personal life (when it comes to world-view, the continuity of generations, the place of humans in nature, the scope and limits of our ability to know and to act) I often identify as an African – in line with the definition which the South African freedom fighter Robert Sobukwe gave of that identity: ‘any person who considers Africa, home’. This in itself (given my origin in a North-west European popular urban neighbourhood) should already be enough to believe in the possibility and actual existence of interculturality in the African context, but my parallel identities as a North Atlantic anthropologist and philosopher have rendered me self-conscious and inhibited, and for a long time lured me into a convoluted, verbose, implicitly perverse argument.

Perhaps most important of the third, African part of my argument is *my claim that while interethnic relations admittedly largely make up the socio-political space in present-day Africa, this in itself does not mean interculturality, simply because African cultural orientations especially in Niger-Congo (> Bantu) speaking Africa, tend to apply to huge geographic extensions, very far from being neatly confined within the commonly recognised, and named, boundaries of ethnic groups such as exist in the locals’s consciousness.*<sup>5</sup> On the con-

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<sup>5</sup> Here I turn against a popular conception of Africa as a patchwork-quilt of cultures (as distinct from ethnic groups), which today holds captive, not only common Africans, politicians, missionaries and ethnic brokers, and journalists and development workers world-wide, but also the widely acclaimed North Atlantic philosopher of part-African descent, Kwame Anthony Appiah, who in his best known book, *In My Father’s House*, already in the title cleverly affirms both his own Africanness and his automatic assumption of Africa’s cultural diversity (cf. *New Testament, John 14:2*, ‘In my Father’s House there are many mansions’),



trary, *interculturality in present-day Africa in the first place involves evidence of (including – but not to be limited to – actors’s conscious making reference to) transcontinental exchanges*, and these I shall illustrate (no more than that) in a number of descriptive vignettes borrowed from my published work. I have already prepared the reader for the photo essay that is to add concrete visual images to these verbal descriptions.

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and who asserts (without the slightest claim to authoritative privileged knowledge concerning the African precolonial past and its identities):

“if we could have travelled through Africa’s many cultures in [ precolonial times ] from the small groups of Bushman hunter-gatherers, with their stone-age materials, to the Hausa kingdoms, rich in worked metal - we should have felt in every place profoundly different impulses, ideas, and forms of life. To speak of an African identity in the nineteenth century - if an identity is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology - would have been “to give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name” ’ (Appiah 1992: 174).

The unidentified reference is to: Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act V, Scene 1 – as we all know, the British bard (Early Modern propagator of convenient stereotypes such as Othello the jealous Moor / Black Man, Shylock the stingy Jew, Caliban the freakish monster, Appiah the African Harvard professor), while admittedly unrivalled in the poetical force of his language, is also our best guide when it comes to steering clear of wishful thinking concerning the reconstruction of Africa’s past.



## ***PART II. THEORY***



## CHAPTER 2. CULTURE AND INTERCULTURALITY

### 2.1. A few African approaches to interculturality<sup>6</sup>

To get started on our arduous journey in the present argument, let us listen to one of the most authoritative voices to speak of intercultural philosophy<sup>7</sup> from Africa, that of the celebrated Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu:

“The crucial point, however, is that philosophical insight is not exclusive to any one race, culture, or creed. A corollary of this is that such insights can be shared across cultures. Of course, the same applies to philosophical errors. Given these, it almost goes without saying that what is wrong with parochialistic universalism is not the universalism but the parochialism. Thus, the antidote to parochialistic universalism is not any sort of anti-universalism but rather judicious universalism. Philosophical universalism means at least three things. First, philosophical theses are, as a matter of semantic fact, of a universal significance. Second, irrespective of their place of enunciation, they can, in principle, be understood and assessed by people in any part of the world provided, that they have the interest and the requisite abstract abilities. Third, philosophical dialogue is possible among the inhabitants of all cultures, and

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<sup>6</sup> There is one typically African approach to interculturality which I will not address here, but which I have commented upon in my review (1992c) of the first book of the leading Belgian anthropologist Filip de Boeck (1991). In many African *cults of affliction* (as defined elsewhere in this booklet) the cultural other is represented and appropriated by minutely imitating, during a trance dance, that other’s striking motor patterns, sounds, and habits, *e.g.* the White District Commissioner’s wife drinking tea; the approach may be extended to the other’s characteristic objects, *e.g.* the Whites’s guitar, train, automobile.

<sup>7</sup> *Intercultural philosophy* is a relatively late scion on the tree of intercultural reflection. Somewhat older is comparative philosophy, which is a much more straightforward and unproblematic – but admittedly also less forward-looking – undertaking, in that it takes for granted the accepted corpora of regional philosophy (Indian, Chinese, Islamic, Western, African *etc.*) without seeking to transcend their difference or to amalgamate them. *Cf.* Kwee Swan Liat 1953; Raju 1962; Bahm 1977; Larson & Deutsch 1989; Masson-Oursel, 1923; Radhakrishnan & Raju 1960; Wiredu 1984; Dussel 2009.

can be fruitful both intellectually and practically. (Wiredu 1998: 154.f.)

Wiredu's immensely optimistic claim here is rather contentious. Philosophy is defined by him as necessarily universal, hence philosophy's universal significance, communicability and capability of being dialogued world-wide follows not as a claim to be ascertained (and possibly found to be spurious), but per definition, hence *ipse facto* true. The refuge to universalism without stopping to consider the foundations for such universalism, is common among philosophers, and for instance is also very manifest (and amply chided by me) in the work of the Congolese / American philosopher and novelist Valentin Mudimbe (cf. van Binsbergen 2005a). Moreover, given that (a) Wiredu himself uses the English language as a principal medium of expression although he is not a native speaker, while (b) also his native Ghana (despite the dominance of the Twi language) like most other African countries has a considerable plurality of languages within its borders, Wiredu in his claim irresponsibly glosses over the implied, but patently wrong, assumption of self-evident mutual intelligibility at the linguistic level.

Wiredu continues: 'I am not, however, predisposed to any wishful thinking regarding the prospects of interculturalism in philosophy. Although there are heart-warming signs of mounting interest in intercultural discourse in philosophy today (...) the enormity of the factors that hinder genuine intercultural dialogue is impossible to ignore or diminish. Even if we set aside moralistic considerations, such as the apparent tardiness of the West to accord dialogic charity and respect to Africa, there are conceptual confusions deriving from the imposition of Western categories of thought on African thought materials that will take a long time to sort out. That would be but one step towards securing a level playing field for dialogue. There is furthermore the huge imbalance in the resources for education, research, and publication, which itself is the epiphenomenon of comparably egregious economic and political disparities, with Africa as the invariable underdog. This, to say the least, does not promote equality of opportunity in dialogue. Still, much is going to depend on how persuasive we, African philosophers, are going to be in presenting the African philosophic case for the edification of our own people as well as others. Such an enterprise cannot consist of just disseminating narratives of how various African peoples think but also developing arguments for the soundness or profundity of appropriate elements of the thought of our ancestors. That is the first part of the African philosophic task. The second part must consist of a synthesis of insights from all accessible cultural sources. That is an eminently intercultural project. (Wiredu 1998: 164.f.)

I think that such 'a synthesis of insights from all accessible cultural sources' is an unrealistic pipe-dream – without adducing any explicit grounds it assumes (*pace, e.g.,* Quine 1970) uniformity and (again) the possibility of mutual translatability between the formats and categories of human thought of all times and places (even if we confine 'human' to 'Anatomically Modern Humans' – the variety that appeared on earth

only 200,000 years ago and to which all humans living today belong).<sup>8</sup> Wiredu's point concerning 'conceptual confusions deriving from the imposition of Western categories of thought on African thought materials' is certainly well taken (*cf.* Okot p'Bitek 1971), but it is practically endemic among intercultural philosophers, from Placide Tempels trying<sup>9</sup> to capture the Luba (Congo and Zambia, South Central Africa) worldview through global philosophic discourse, to the more recent *Ubuntu* philosophers<sup>10</sup> of Southern Africa, who, themselves highly trained in the North Atlantic academic philosophical tradition and themselves no longer in any practical, day-to-day way involved in a traditional African life-world, under the pretension of committing to writing a time-honoured all-encompassing oral philosophy of African village life, in fact nostalgically present a constructive social and ethical philosophy of their own invention (van Binsbergen 2001a / 2003c).

## 2.2. The recent routinisation of the concept of culture

*How could I possibly resist and defy the common present-day belief that cultures exist to such an extent that interculturality is a matter of course?* I have begun to

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<sup>8</sup> In recent decades, I have given much attention to the reconstruction of Anatomically Modern Humans's ancient modes of thought, initially through my webpage of more or less that name ([https://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient\\_models/index.htm](https://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/index.htm)), later also in a number of book publications: van Binsbergen 2012a, 2018, 2021b, 2022a; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. I have found these modes to comprise, among others, 'range semantics', recursion, triadic thought, and cyclical element transformation. The central puzzle for these modes of thought resides in the difficulty (also very manifest in the Greek Presocratic philosophers of ca. 500 BCE, for whom we have extensive textual documentation, *e.g.* Diels 1964; de Raedemaeker 1953) of thinking unity and difference, or immutability and change, at the same time. One of the great achievements of Aristotle was that he addressed this difficulty at the root level (Aristotle, *Physica*, VII.3; Maso *et al.* 2014).

<sup>9</sup> With considerable success, I would say – not only because of the persuasive internal consistency of *Bantoe Philosophie* (1955) but also because I am intimately familiar with an African worldview – that of the Nkoya of Zambia – that is very closely akin (both in contents and in linguistic expression) to that of the Luba who were Tempels's interlocutors. Adjacent to the Nkoya region, an offshoot of the Luba inhabit a part of Ilaland (*cf.* Smith & Dale 1920; Fig. 4.3.1, below). The Nkoya have a tradition (van Binsbergen 1992) of hailing from the Zambezi / Congo watershed, where Luba is spoken today. My wife Patricia studied the Luba language at Ghent University, Belgium, and this enabled her to begin to speak simple Nkoya within two weeks after her arrival in Nkoyaland. The success I attribute to Tempels testifies to his intercultural knowledge and talent, especially if one considers that he was far from a trained philosopher, and merely derived a superficial impression of just Thomist philosophy from his education as a Roman Catholic priest.

<sup>10</sup> *E.g.* Ramose 1999; Bewaji & Ramose 2003; Boele van Hensbroek 2001; Murithi 2006; Bhengu 1996; Samkange & Samkange 1980.

suspect that, with the adoption into general common language use world-wide,<sup>11</sup> ‘culture’ has become a global *collective representation* (Durkheim 1912; in other words: a shared *belief*), supported by a widespread communicative network of ideological connections which have allowed the concept of culture to function as an ideological state apparatus (Gramsci 1950 / 1985; Althusser 1976; Geschiere 1986) facilitating citizen’s acquiescence *vis-à-vis* the state and its power elite; this is, of course, in line with Marx’s (1818-1883) juvenile adage:<sup>12</sup>

‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.’

Denying the reality of cultures (not: of *culture*, singular, in the sense of cultural programming of individuals through a process of social communication) is a form of *hybris*, of iconoclasm, rejecting the central collective representation of our Age of Multiculturalism),<sup>13</sup> therefore inviting strong negative sanctions. In principle this needs not deter us in the least: similarly sacrosanct was once

- The belief in god,
- The belief in the immutability and absolute nature of sexual difference,
- The belief in women’s subservience and primarily reproductive tasks,
- The belief in Black people’s inability to invent on their own impetus, or to fully participate in White culture,
- The belief in Black people’s inability at self-government, *etc.*

All these collective representations, once at the heart of a substantial body of then respectable writing, have now largely been rejected. In some cases (*e.g.* the belief in god) at considerable costs for societal normative integrating and for individual mental health (again: Durkheim 1912), perhaps even doing violence to the truth (god may yet exist, after all), but at least upholding the relentless rationality that has formed the backbone of North Atlantic thought ever since the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Little c.s. 1978 situate the rise of the concept of *culture* (*q.v.*) in a sense close to Tylor’s (1871) to Early Modern, especially Enlightenment times, but the adoption into everyday language world-wide must be a mass-media phenomenon of the second half of the 20th c. CE

<sup>12</sup> Marx 1971, originally written as ‘Zur Kritik der hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie’, 1843.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Longman 2004, who makes the interesting point that, since *race* was no longer acceptable as a right-wing rallying cry in the post-World War II period, *culture* came to take its place. The USA so-called ‘culture wars’ since the 1970s (*e.g.* Gitlin 1995; Goodheart 1997; Berlinerblau 1999) are a case in point – they are clearly precipitated by issues of ‘race’, especially, Black African Americans asserting their constitutional rights in the face of dogged White opposition.

<sup>14</sup> In my recent book *Sangoma Science* (2021) I remind the reader that such rationality is eminently predicated on the Aristotelian doctrine of the excluded third (‘where P, there not-not-P’), which is merely one of the many different types of logic possible. If one adopts an



Although today raised to the status of a self-evident, universal human given, yet the concept of culture in the sense of ‘everything one learns as a member of one’s society’ (Tylor 1871) is a relatively recent<sup>15</sup> product of North Atlantic elite academic contexts, and as such is likely to have built-in limitations, *e.g.* hegemonic implications, reflecting the Ages of Imperialism and Colonialism during which anthropology (after humble beginnings, with Kant) found its place among academic disciplines.

Classic, structural-functionally inclined anthropology of the Interbellum (*cf.* Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952) produced a concept of culture (as bounded, integrated, consciously held, coinciding with a population group and a language, reflecting a shared history and a sense of common destiny, *etc.*) that has since been generally received, first in North Atlantic educated society, then worldwide, and today is part of the standard conceptual toolkit of ordinary social participants anywhere. This has enormous consequences for the continued viability of the terms culture and intercultural as theoretical academic concepts. The concept of interculturality is usually implicitly predicated on such a naïve concept of culture, as if to simply denote the encounter or combination of more than one ‘culture’.

Much of the anthropology of social organisation in the 1960s-1980s has been preoccupied with the deconstruction of identity and ethnicity, ‘tribe’, and ‘nation’ (*cf.* Helm 1968; Gutkind 1970; Gluckman 1971; Vail 1989; Ranger 1982; and extensive references cited there) – my own scepticism vis-à-vis the concept of interculturality has also been largely informed by that anthropological position. I have personally made contributions to that endeavour (van Binsbergen 1981a, 1985, 1997b, 2008), and that background has greatly informed my reluctance to see interculturality as the interactions between *cultures*, plural. For anthropologists (and for some historians studying African ethnicity), African ‘tribes’, although emphatically dominating the societal thought of African actors to-

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alternative position, notably one to the effect that all Being constantly oscillates between existence and non-existence (like a proverbial crew member beamed up successfully and integrally, or not, into a space craft – as in the TV series and motion picture *StarTrek* initiated by Gene Roddenberry), then the denial that God exists becomes just as meaningless as the affirmation of her existence. It may be possible, on such a basis, to design a *wisdom philosophy* (for first sketches, *cf.* van Binsbergen 2020a, 2009b) which may also serve to accommodate and transcend the formal incompatibilities between rival cultural orientations. This train of thought is highly relevant in the present context of exploring African interculturality, since it was prompted (as was my entire 2021b book) by my own situation of finding myself caught between incompatibilities, as both a North Atlantic scientist and a Southern African diviner-healer.

<sup>15</sup> For a very condensed overview of the history of the concept of culture, *cf.* Perpeet 1974; van Binsbergen 2003: 472 *f.*, and references cited there.

day, are merely recently *invented traditions* (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) serving present-day processes of ethnic rallying; or impositions by bureaucrats, White entrepreneurs, missionaries and European researchers; or reified forms of *false consciousness*<sup>16</sup> meant to create imaginary token identities that should divide Africans and keep them from developing a unifying class consciousness (the standard example would be South Africa under apartheid, when the White-dominated, racist state did everything, including the creation of pseudo-states in the form of Bantustans, in order to reinforce the divisive tribal illusion – which is still the scourge of majority-ruled South Africa, more than thirty years later).

For analysts bringing to their work a different regional perspective than that of the North Atlantic region, such distancing deconstruction of accepted African identities is sometimes impossible, or unaffordable. Thus, among my African PhD students, Dr Julie Ndaya-Duran, a Congolese student of the Congolese women's Christian prayer group 'Le Combat Spiritual', despite my insistence could not bring herself to totally distance herself from the *emic*<sup>17</sup> position even though both her research and her personal family experience amply brought out the occasionally violent, manipulative, exploitative and ideological aspects of that group (Ndaya 2008). By the same token, Dr Pascal Touoyem, a Cameroonian studying ethnicity in Africa and himself strongly identifying with the Bamileke ethnic group, could not be persuaded to adopt the academically dominant deconstructive model lock, stock and barrel for his approach to African ethnicity, and as a result created considerable difficulties for himself in the supervision and defence of his PhD thesis (2014). For these African colleagues, *yielding* (in what was effectively – given the hierarchical organisation of academic life – a situation of *unequal interculturality*) to the North Atlantic scholarly pressure towards deconstruction of collective representations that they perceived as eminently African and with which they identified, *would have amounted to open and public betrayal of their own conscious identity*, and that price they understandably found too high to pay. Nor was it necessary to pay that price, for (as we shall see in the course of my argument) the *etic* (implicitly *othering*) analytical perspective in transcontinental knowledge formation is only one side of the medal: it must be complemented by the *emic* perspective which (because of the fundamental underlying unity of humankind) implicitly contains

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<sup>16</sup> Engels, Friedrich, 'Letter to F. Mehring', Marx & Engels: 1949: 451.

<sup>17</sup> We shall come to discuss that key term shortly. Interestingly, the distinction between *emic* and *etic* is analogous to that which I have advocated for the study of myth (van Binsbergen 2009a): as I maintain there, the project of comparative mythology should encompass, on the part of the researcher, both (a) *rupture*' (distancing, scholarly objectivity, even objectivation) and (b) *fusion* (subjective identification with the myth and with its original owners, in such a way that the myth is appropriated – albeit only situationally and temporarily – into the researcher's life).

the promise of mutual understanding and accommodation, even without going to the extreme of self-sacrifice through existential betrayal.

It is remarkable that many aspects of interculturality are not consciously perceived by the actors involved. This is a large difference with ethnicity, which exists on the basis of these actors's *emic* conscious distinctions, 'naming and framing', within the publicly defined national socio-political space.

*Streamlining* in nostalgic representation is also part of the artificial creation of culture. Performativity and virtuality are closely related (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1997a, 1998a, 2015a: ch. 1, 2001b). As already referred to above, a red thread connects the early attempts at systematisation and codification of African thought by Tempels (1955) and by the Rwandan philosopher, Kagame (1955), via codifications of African Socialism by the African state Presidents Kaunda (1971) and Nyerere (1962), to *Ubuntu* philosophy. The process is as inspiring as it is alienating from whatever authentic tradition and practice as has ever existed on African soil.

If we wish to create clarity about the concept of interculturality, we have no option but to offer a formal definition of culture; also on that basis can we attempt to delineate the difference between culture and ethnicity. In that connection, think of:

- a cultural orientation
- acquired by a social communicative process (in other words, it is not innate, not genetically determined)<sup>18</sup>
- so deeply programmed into the human person as is almost impossible to shed or to negotiate, and resulting in such perceptions of

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<sup>18</sup> Some cultural contents (*e.g.* lithic techniques in the Palaeolithic; basic Narrative Complexes as reconstructed by comparative mythology) have been found to display great *inertia*, in other words, stay more or less unaltered, recognisable, across millennia, even tens of millennia. This is most surprising, for normally they would have been victims of cultural drift and free variation, changing them beyond recognition within a few centuries. The Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung claims that such inertia has a hereditary basis in the so-called *collective unconscious*, but this explanation is highly contentious, especially in anthropology which is predicated on the tenet of the *learned* (instead of innate) nature of all cultural orientations. *Cf.* van Binsbergen 2022, #11.3. Meanwhile recent neurobiological approaches (*cf.* Farmer 2010) do suggest, again, the possibility of hereditary, genetically anchored dimensions to certain religious beliefs, symbols, *etc.* These would then apply to all Anatomically Modern Humans – contrary to Jung's hypothesis of distinct collective unconsciousnesses for virtually any subset of present-day humanity, even down to the level of nations, creeds, ethnic groups, families.

the world (or rather, such world-creating perceptions) as, *to the actor involved, are self-evidently true*

- yet of limited scope, and situational, therefore an individual may combine several such orientation throughout life, and often even in the course of one day
- that situationality means that culture (in the more limited sense of *cultural orientation*) is only partial; as a result, culture is not closed into itself, not clearly bounded, not fully integrated, not easy to determine, nor does it coincide with the conscious distinctions which the actor herself makes about her life world and its central concepts.

In other words: *cultural orientations* may exist, may be piled one on top of the other, may interact; but (as a refrain to which we shall gradually develop a counterpoint as my argument proceeds) *cultures do not exist*.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.3. The anthropological approach**

A number of features characterise modern anthropology as a mode of knowledge formation:

1. an accepted tradition of coherent theory, which is so deeply ingrained into the beginning student that it is hard to shed later in one's career<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This was the state of my thinking, and the title of my Rotterdam inaugural address, in 1999, when (having so far mainly identified as a social scientist – with a sprinkling of linguistics, religious studies, history, and archaeology, and a fair helping of poetry) I had just exchanged my Amsterdam Free-University chair in the Anthropology of Ethnicity for the Rotterdam chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy. I will substantially qualify my adage 'cultures do not exist' in the course of my present argument. Also, in the current state of my thinking, such a flat denial of existence is no longer in place: if (as I propose in my 2021b book *Sangoma Science*, and in my various shorter texts on wisdom (2009b, 2020a), everything constantly oscillates between Being and Non-Being, then even cultures may yet exist, after all, despite their theoretical undesirability, and so might tribes, nations, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the 2015 *post-mortem* of my philosophical adventure in Rotterdam (1998-2006 / 2011), which illuminatingly puts the finger on my apparent incapability of shedding the obvious shortcomings of an anthropological perspective (surprisingly it was to take me yet almost a decade longer to overcome my anthropological fixation on the deconstruction of African actors's *emic* group classifications):

'Half a century ago I received a very long and intensive training as an empirical social scientist (...). The self-evidences (*i.e.* the blinkered sociologicistic presuppositions, if you

2. fieldwork as the principal method of intercultural knowledge construction
3. the distinction between *emic* and *etic* (with as underlying implication the absolute difference between the researcher and the researched)

It is to points 2 and 3 that I shall now devote a separate discussion.

### 2.3.1. Fieldwork as a form of intercultural knowledge construction

Much has been written on fieldwork as the privileged anthropological mode of intercultural knowledge construction.<sup>21</sup> What is often overlooked is that fieldwork, beyond the one-way observation, interviews and eaves-dropping in which the researcher's senses form is the active instrument, fieldwork also encompasses a unique two-way validation, in which the researcher humbly submits to the host community:

'Anthropological participation in the context of fieldwork has a unique function of *validation*. Let us take as an example the learning of a foreign language through total immersion. Someone involved in such a process will produce speech acts, will submit these to native speakers for criticism and correction, and will thus gauge and improve his own skill in the local language. In the same (and overlapping) ways participant observation furnishes a practical feedback to the implicit and explicit insights that a

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want) of the social sciences were inescapably ingrained in me during that period, and I admit I cannot and will not get rid of them at this late hour [ I was 68 when I wrote this – 2022 ]. In the last analysis, this means that I have learned to doggedly take the hard-earned, yet fragmentary and often mal-observed and mis-understood data from the field as the ultimate criteria against which my scientific pronouncements are to be tested in order to make sense to me as an anthropologist – call it a naïve empiricist point of departure that ties the anthropologist's hand to the point of making her or him the local actors's slave, almost unfit for free discursive thought [ or call it charity – 2022 ] . It is not [ I hope – 2022 ] lack of thinking power that brings me to adopt this awkward position. It is awareness that in the last analysis the conceptual and interpretative initiative lies, not with the anthropologist, but with the competent local socio-cultural actor whose life and thought ethnography and ethnohistory are to represent... *vicariously* [ cf. the title of my 2015a book – 2022 ] . Thus reduced to a humble secondary position, to dependence and subservience, the anthropologist tends to reduce, in the light of the primary field data, all philosophical reflection to a subordinate level – to an embellishment, a footnote, a literary trope (meant to grant a semblance of bibliographical and socio-political topicality, conceptual sophistication and erudition to one's ethnographic texts).' (van Binsbergen 2015a: 38)

<sup>21</sup> A blatantly arbitrary selection might include *e.g.* Jongmans & Gutkind 1967; Epstein 1965; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b; van Binsbergen 2003; Kamler & Threadgold 2003; de Lame 1997; Devisch 2006.

fieldworker may have gathered earlier in the same research through observations and conversations. Participation is, in the first instance, not an expression of exotism, not a form of *going native* or of risky loss of self, but simply an inductive and hence evidently incomplete form of empirical experimentation, which has a practical, interactive and reflective nature. If the fieldworker has actually arrived at some genuine knowledge and understanding of local cultural forms, then she is rewarded by the participants's affirmative attitude and an increased flow of subsequent information; and in the opposite case she is punished by the participants's rejection and a decrease in the subsequent flow of information. The more the fieldworker is defenceless, the more devoid of personal and state-supported North Atlantic hegemonic<sup>22</sup> protection, the more cut off from her home background, the stronger the social control that the participants can exert on her, and the more massive the flow of information and the greater, ultimately (provided the fieldworker can retain or regain her professional distance), the knowledge and insight gathered during fieldwork. The time-consuming and humble learning of a cultural orientation, including at least one of the local languages (local settings nearly always involve more than one language simultaneously), characterises anthropology as *a form of intercultural knowledge on feedback basis*. Moreover, knowledge production in participatory fieldwork takes place on both verbal and non-verbal levels, leading to the ethnographer's textual renderings of the participants's own texts, as well as to her own textual renderings of observations of non-verbal behaviour. Because of this much wider, non-verbal basis, firmly rooted in participation, the knowledge acquired in fieldwork derives from experience (often (...) a profound and distressing experience) in ways that have scarcely parallels in the procedures of intercultural knowledge production so far pioneered by intercultural philosophers - unless the latter do fieldwork among 'sages' (cf. Oruka 1990; Mosima 2016), but then their techniques of elicitation and recording are often hopelessly defective.

Therefore, whatever may be theoretically wrong with fieldwork as a method for the production of intercultural knowledge, it appears to be *in principle* far superior to the forms of intercultural knowledge of philosophers, who tend to rely on existing texts,<sup>23</sup> and usually on translated texts from foreign languages at that: I say "in principle", because we have to admit that this empirical advantage of fieldworkers may easily be forfeited by the epistemological naïvety of anthropologists as compared to professional philosophers.

The role of researcher forces the anthropologist to adopt distance and instrumentality *vis-à-vis* the participants and their cultural orientations, but at the same time the internalisation of local cultural orientations works in exactly the opposite direction. Ethnographic fieldwork is a play of seducing and being seduced. It constantly suggests the possibility of such boundary-crossing as the fieldworker desires, and in this suggestion the boundary between researcher and the researched, is not so much de-

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<sup>22</sup> We shall come back to this pivotal term below.

<sup>23</sup> Here already I am implicitly applying the criterium of 'the work of interculturality', to be developed below: *without specific, extensive, manifest effort, the claim of interculturality remains an empty shell.*

nied or perceived, but in the first place *constructed and deconstructed*, at the same time. The researcher seeks to be seduced towards participation and knowledge; but the hosts also, in their turn, seduce through word and gesture in order to constantly shift and reduce the boundaries of access, knowledge, approval, trust and intimacy (... within which all anthropological fieldwork is situated).'<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3.2. Emic and etic

...*Emic and etic* express the distinction between an internal structuring of a cultural orientation such as is found in the consciousness of its bearers, on the one hand, and, on the other, a structuring that is imposed from the outside. *Etic* has nothing to do with ethics in the sense of the philosophy of the judgement of human action in terms of good and evil. Pike's terminology (cf. Headland *et al.* 1990) is based on a linguistic analogy. In linguistics one approaches the description of speech sounds from two complementary perspectives: that of phonetics (hence *-etic*), which furnishes a purely external description informed by anatomical and physical parameters revolving on the air vibrations of which the speech sounds consist; and the perspective of phonology, whose basic unit of study is the phoneme (adjective: 'phonemic', hence *-emics*): the smallest unit of speech sound that is effectively distinguished by language users competent in a particular language, basing themselves on the distinctive features of that speech sound. (...) Pike thus codified the two-stage analytical stance (both *etic* and *emic*) of the classic anthropology that had emerged in the second quarter of the twentieth century with such proponents as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Griaule and Leiris.' (van Binsbergen 2003c: 22 f.)<sup>25</sup>

For the analyst notably the intercultural philosopher, one of the crucial issues is: *to what extent can we adopt the emic perspective of modern world citizens and consider cultures and their boundaries as real and given – and to what extent must we adopt a distancing, etic view, which deconstructs culture and interculturality, and seeks to expose it as a nostalgic construct essentially serving the status quo?* In the last few decades, most approaches (attracted by the lure of a promise of harmony, non-violence, non-exclusion, equality – all implied in the popular but often deceptive political ideology of multiculturalism) have proceeded to discuss interculturality without stopping to consider this important question.

Classic anthropology, in its genesis in a context of the North Atlantic Ages of Discovery, Mercantilism, Imperialism, and Colonialism, and in its preference (during most of its existence prior to the last half century) for remote abodes of (conceptual, cultural, identity, linguistic, religious, gender) 'otherness', – for the *Heart of Darkness*<sup>26</sup> – *has been predicated on the more or less absolute*

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<sup>24</sup> van Binsbergen 2003h: 496 f.; slightly edited.

<sup>25</sup> From: van Binsbergen 2022c, special topic #2.5.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Conrad's novel of that name (1899), depicting a boat journey up the Congo River around the turn of the

*distinction between the researcher and the researched.* This distinction is also reflected in the distinction between *emic* and *etic*. Here a total epistemological aporia arises which standard social-science methodologies and binary logic cannot solve – hence interculturality appears theoretically impossible. Let us take a closer look at this aporia.

### 2.3.3. An epistemological approach to interculturality

Underlying the question as to the possibility or impossibility of interculturality is a fundamental consideration of epistemology, to which we shall now briefly turn.

As we have seen, culture may be defined as a person's sense of (largely conscious) conceptual, linguistic and motoric orientation, which (through interpersonal processes of communicative learning especially prior to adolescence) has been programmed so deeply and so effectively, that it is usually very hard for that person to ignore or relinquish such an orientation. On the other hand, the general rhetoric according to which 'a' culture contains 'a total way of life' enabling one to live one's entire lifespan within such a 'culture' from the cradle to the grave, tends to be grossly exaggerating, even essentially wrong; cultural patterning typically addresses specific facets and spheres of a person's total life, each of these orientations may have a different history and provenance, a person is usually at home in far more than a handful of such orientations, and these are usually not internally fully integrated nor mutually finely attuned.

For instance, the cultural orientation towards tenderness, informal health care, altruism, generalised reciprocal exchange and non-violence, that in many societies is to attend the domain of close kin relations, may be very well combined with violence, cruelty and insensitivity in dealings with non-kin, within a formal organisation or in a cash economy, *etc.* and yet exist side-by-side in the same person of a political leader, a soldier, a cattle-raider, a *mafioso*. Joseph Stalin, politically an unrivalled mass murderer, was reputedly a tender father; Adolph Hitler, forensically scarcely second to Stalin, was famously courteous to German women classified as Aryan, but sent 3 million women classified as Jewish to their (usually unmarked and collective) premature graves. And even Barack Obama, in most respects the opposite of Stalin and Hitler, and himself the deserving role model of billions of Black and post-colonial people, and in general of well-intending world citizens *tout court*, despite being a champion of the democratic rule of law, *yet allowed* the militant Islamist Osama bin Laden to

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20th c. CE, where the distant shores of that great river appear as scenes of extreme barbarism and otherness. This theme was adapted (and turned upside down – the barbarism becoming mainly North Atlantic) to Vietnam, the Mekong River, and the USA War (1955-1975) in that region, in Francis Ford Coppola's motion picture *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In 1978 the anthropologist Alverson critically used Conrad's expression in the title of an insightful study of values and self-identity among the Southern African Tswana people – thus taking his distance from the *Heart-of-Darkness* stereotype.



be summarily executed on the spot without the slightest form of trial.

Nor is this type of contradiction peculiar, either, to statal politics in the modern world. It has, for instance, a counterpart among the Nkoya and other African contexts. Among the Nkoya, the ideal of intimate, caring, generous relationships between close kinsmen at the village level, absolutely prohibits all overt expressions of violence (usually people take the way out of resorting to invisible, immaterial violence – to magic); with the many occasions for rivalry and friction, with diminishing resources from the soil and the forest yet sky-rocketing prices for commodities, school fees, transport and other present-day requirements, the village headman's main task of peace-keeping is rendered even more difficult because he lacks all formal sanctions. In compensation, Nkoya life traditionally comprised several domains in which violence could be manifested: not only the covert forms of magical violence, but also intergroup violence between clans and especially between kingdoms; detection and lynching of witches as intra-group enemies; and, focusing on royal capitals, the institution of slavery, originally of a somewhat mild nature (as pawnship after manslaughter; yet at the annual royal harvest festivals slaves would be immolated), but from the 18<sup>th</sup> c. CE (penetration of mercantilist long-distance trade including slave trade) trade would so much erode Nkoya notions of kinship that royals would often sell their very own sister's sons into slavery.<sup>27</sup>

Another example: *modern urban society*, in Africa and elsewhere, contains people from numerous different ethnic backgrounds, who may each believe to represent a different ethnic culture; but that is only a very partial culture, attending to family life, life crisis ceremonies, evaluations in the personal sphere, and to selected token ethnic markers such as circumcision, facial tattoos, etc.; outside the sphere of the family, urbanites, regardless of their ethnic cultural background, share a common cultural urban orientation, and this allows them to cross the street safely (cf. Fig. 4.4.3, below), take a bus, use money and credit cards, shop in a supermarket, operate a bureaucracy, operate the Internet, a cell phone, a TV set, a motor car – and by and large, despite the predictable emphasis on their being different, yet to the extent to which they are urban, they are monocultural instead of multicultural or intercultural.

What a cultural orientation does is create a *sense of self-evident reality* (we might as well say: *create a self-evident reality, tout court*), in which a person's perceptions, evaluations and actions no longer have to be shaped by her or him from scratch and in full deliberative, rational consciousness, but may comfortably become ready-made, automated, and beyond moral censure.

Thus a person is, among other things, a rough bundle of scarcely integrated nor mutually attuned cultural orientations; and so are her friends and neighbours, in such a way that the greater the social, genetic, and geographic distance between two persons, the greater the likelihood that their respective bundle of cultural orientations has a strikingly different composition, and is

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<sup>27</sup> In this connection, the fundamental opposition between (pacifist, productive) village and (violent, parasitical) royal court is a pivotal element in Nkoya culture and society, and I have analysed it in detail (1992b, 2003e, 2012b).

also perceived as different. By a rather confusing usage, which is responsible for a proliferation of unjustified claims in terms of interculturality, modern discourse speaks of 'a culture' (e.g. North Atlantic urban culture; Yanamamo culture; Nkoya culture; as distinct from 'culture' in the sense of cultural orientation) in reference to a social domain in which (1) a significant portion of (2) 'most' individual persons's respective cultural orientations (3) tend to somewhat converge. Since such 'a culture' has largely a statistical and ephemeral, situational existence, to conceptualise their interaction as 'interculturality' would be rather unconvincing.

As professor of intercultural philosophy (Rotterdam, 1998-2006 (2011 as far as PhDs were concerned), I interpreted my task primarily as *investigation of the possibility of interculturality*. This proved a major challenge in its own right, and my answer was largely negative. Interculturality, examined merely at the abstract theoretical level, I found to be a nostalgic, hegemonic, politically suspect illusion, mainly serving to prop up the illusions of the postmodern, multicultural polity. The epistemological reasoning that led me to this position I have summarised in terms of the definition of 'knowledge' as '*justified true belief*'.<sup>28</sup> If we think that this definition offers us a criterium to distinguish between valid knowledge and its deceptively spurious rivals, we are mistaken. For all three criteria in the above 'knowledge' definition, 'justified', 'true' and 'belief', are merely *cultural* criteria, whose applicability in concrete cases cannot be determined from first principles alone (i.e., not from some universal logical or mathematical rule) but must be carefully evaluated by the specific application of the specific cultural orientation the person in question happens to be following at a given point in time, as a result of the socio-cultural communicative processes to which she has been subjected throughout her lifetime.

EINSTEIN IN NKOYALAND. For instance, if we try to use the Nkoya language in order to insert the knowledge contained in Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905 / 1917 / 1960) into the Nkoya worldview, we find that in no way Einstein's knowledge can be made into a locally justified, locally true, local belief. This is not because of any inherent incapacity of logical thought, on the part of the Nkoya or their language. The problem is not formal but cultural: the mathematical formulae conveying the theory are meaningless in Nkoyaland, and the crucial relativist space-time compression as a function of speed of locomotion is a nonsensical dream, not even remotely reminiscent of the *malele* magic (bilocality, extremely rapid displacement, *Tamkappe*-like disappearances) attributed to Nkoya royals (in a way that betrays (like the food taboos surrounding them: unable to receive food from anyone, but supposed to distribute food to all) their partly South Asian background – to a considerable extent they are displaced Chola princes, but even beyond that, transformed

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<sup>28</sup> Gettier 1963; Lehrer 1979; Lowy 1978; Duran 1982: 202; Moser 1993; Austin 1988; Andrews 2013; Müller 1889.

Brahmins, Hindu sages, transferred to a different continent where their South Asian heritage was amalgamated with African traits so as to grow into a different cultural setting.

DARWIN IN NKOYALAND. Another example: in the Fall of 1973 I attended the funeral of Mwene Mulimba, the principal headman and Owner of the Land in the Kazo valley, 5 kms north of the royal court of Mwene Kahare. By Nkoya custom, dozens of people had flocked to the place of bereavement in order to sleep out in the open for over a week – death upsets the normal distinction between the sheltered village of culture and the open forest of nature. Many headmen and chiefs were among the mourners, including Mwene Shipungu, a close kinsmen of the Mulimba and Shumbanyama family (into which I was being adopted), and among the original owners of the Kahare royal title. The standard career path for headmen and chiefs was (and is) that they have a spell as labour migrants (sometimes on farms, more usually in towns) for up to two decades, prior to retiring to the village and succeeding to a major title. Mwene Shipungu had seen something of the world of South Central and Southern Africa, and had been touched by modern formal education, including a basic awareness of evolution theory and its application to human origins. So the funerary gathering was his opportunity to voice his long-cherished question, asking me (grinning, for the thought was almost too funny for words): ‘Is it true that you, Whites, believe that we humans descend from monkeys?’ (The question itself is already difficult to translate and to interpret: the concept of ‘Whites’ (*Bakuwa*) is straightforward in Nkoya (notably: somatically lowly pigmented humans but excluding albinos of African descent), but<sup>29</sup> ‘humans’ (*Bantu* – part of a widely ramified, global etymology which surfaces for instance in \*Proto-Austronesian *taw*; as set out at length in van Binsbergen 2018: 538 f.) is a category applicable to Black people only – I have spent my first few years among the Nkoya to work towards a point where I was no longer a *mukuwa* (a White, forced to sit on a chair in the chief’s hall, like the chief himself – even if involuntary yet an unthinkable act of disrespect) but a *mntu*, ‘a human being’, allowed to sit on the ground with my legs folded

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<sup>29</sup> In ways that have been adopted into the British colonial *colour bar* and South African *apartheid*, administratively coded use of ‘Bantu’ as an ethnic term designating ‘Black Africans’. The racist narrowing down of Bantu to ‘Black African’ rather than ‘human’ *tout court* has even been appropriated in Africans’s own societal consciousness, and has surprisingly coloured the meaning of a related term *ubuntu* (by its grammatical form this term simply signifies: ‘being human’) which meanwhile has become the showpiece of *Ubuntu* philosophy. In 1999 a ‘rainbow’ team of Netherlands-based researchers, funded by the African Studies Centre Leiden and composed of the literary scientist Vernie February (South-African born, and part-time professor of literature at the University of the Western Cape), the philosopher Mogobe Ramose (likewise South-African born, and soon to take up a professorship in philosophy in South Africa), and the Netherlands-born anthropologist / philosopher / *Sangoma* Wim van Binsbergen, travelled to South Africa in order to initiate a conference on *ubuntu* there. Having a rented car at our disposal, we took the opportunity of visiting Ramose’s rural area of origin, in a Tswana-speaking region far north of Pretoria, in order to interview a leading villager on what he considered *ubuntu* to mean. His answer was as revealing as it was disappointing. For him, the concept of *ubuntu* triggered none of the lofty, time-honoured values and ideals expounded in the academic books on *ubuntu*, of which Ramose had published one particularly popular one. ‘*Ubuntu, that is like here in South Africa, there are Whites and Blacks, ubuntu means simply: being Black under apartheid*’... This depressing statement has importantly informed my own dismissal of *Ubuntu* philosophy (van Binsbergen 2001a).

under me, and clapping hands in respectful salute). I confirmed Mwene Shipungu's assumption, and added that the principal proof for such descent was the extreme similarity between Primate bones and human bones. Monkeys are rare but not absent in Nkoyaland,<sup>30</sup> Mwene Shipungu (like all his peers) was an accomplished hunter in possession of several excellent rifles, and I appealed to what I thought would be any hunter's experience: you can tell the identity of a butchered animal by the specific features of its bones. But that proved a totally unfounded assumption: Mwene Shipungu sneered that no hunter was ever interested in or knowledgeable about the bones of his quarry, it is only the meat (*nyama* – also the word for 'game, game animals') that counts. Clearly, in the Nkoya context, the palaeontological argument for Man's simian descent is simply not justified, and cannot turn Darwin's (1871) splendid if disquieting idea into 'justified true belief'.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, what a cultural orientation does is to create specific *truth provinces*, each peculiar to a particular cultural orientation; within this truth province, a particular propositional claim may be justifiably found to be true, but between two such truth provinces, each constructed by a different cultural orientation, no communality of truth may be established nor expected. Strictly speaking, interculturality is, from this perspective, a mere illusion, an impossibility.

If each cultural orientation then appears to create its own universe constituting its own truth province – outside of which truth cannot exist and cannot be transmitted nor appreciated – , *culture would seem to be fundamentally incommunicable*.

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<sup>30</sup> However, among the Nkoya it is a terrible insult to equate someone with a monkey. A standard insult monkey metaphor insinuating slave descent (and this insult is sometimes conducive to the addressee's suicide), is: 'Climb up a tree and you may see where you have come from' – for slaves have come from far away, as war captives or pawned debtors after manslaughter, and the essence of their status is that they have no right to return home.

<sup>31</sup> In the light of these two examples, one is puzzled at the daring (for charity-focused) naivety of another Africanist anthropologist / agriculturalist (Seur 1992), a fairly brilliant student of Manchester-orientated Norman Long. At one point during his fieldwork Seur began to read sociological classics (e.g. Weber) with his Central Zambian peasant informants, in a bid to make them aware of the covert structural implications of their situation. Seur's underlying assumption must have been that whatever was true in Germany in the early 20th c. CE, or in any North Atlantic sociological department after World War II, must likewise constitute justified true belief in Central Zambia three quarters of a century later. As Long already described at length (1968), that region was full of peasant farmers having converted (like so many people in South Central Africa since the 1920s) to the Watchtower / *Kitawala* sect (cf. Hooker 1965; Greschat 1967; Cross 1978; van Binsbergen 1981; Fields 1985). Never mind the material motivation which Long read into their conversion (notably: 'by opting for a new, fictitious, self-chosen family of brothers and sisters in Christ, one could begin to deny one's born kin, and thus escape the latter's claims on one's accumulated wealth as a successful farmer'). The point is that, as Christians, they once more affirmed the possibility of truth (Gospel truth, to be precise) to be transmitted intact across cultural, temporal and geographic boundaries and considerable distances.

### 2.3.4. The myth (going back to Aristotle,<sup>32</sup> as far as the Western tradition is concerned) of the Excluded Third and of Logical Consistency.

In many ways Aristotelian rationality allows us to respond adequately and pragmatically in our interaction with the non-human world (which therefore can be argued to display, most of the time, and at the meso<sup>33</sup>-level of our conscious human interaction with it, a structure similar to that of our binary logic). Yet we cannot close our eyes to the fact that, in the interaction between human individuals and between human groups, the same logic incessantly creates intransigent positions of recognised and emphasised *difference* which cannot come to an agreement since both sides, by their own logic, are justified to consider themselves right, yet their respective truths are mutually incompatible and in conflict. The main conflicts in our globalising world of today (*e.g.* those between North Atlantic military capitalism on the one hand, and militant Islam on the other hand, as rival paths through (post-)modernity; those between economic short-term maximising globalism and a future-orientated ecological responsibility; those between consumption on the one hand, and integrity and global solidarity on the other hand; between state-protected socio-political order (where the state effectively exercises a monopoly on violence; Weber 1986 / 1919) , and organised crime) remind us of the potentially paralysing and destructive implication of such consistency. In Western thought it is only recently that such post-structuralist concepts as *différance* and *differend*,<sup>34</sup> and the elaboration of ternary and multi-value logics, have created a context where we can [ begin to – 2022 ] think *beyond* binary logic, can affirm interpersonal encounter despite blatantly different cultural orientations on either side, in other words, can bring about *interculturality*<sup>35</sup>

Thus we meet an aporia which we cannot overcome in the context of anthropology alone: if cultures do not exist, and if the differences between rival, confronting cultural orientations have to be approached with an intransigent Aristotelian logic of non-compromise, there is no conceptual space left within which interculturality might be confidently situated. Yet my entire adult life has been replete with instances of interculturality – as we shall see below; what is more, many millions of people in the world today believe in interculturality and literally expect the world from it – fortunately, for without an understanding between warring constituent groups at the local, regional, and global level, humanity is rapidly

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysica* IV.4, 1006<sup>b</sup> and following; IV 7, 1011<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> This is simply the *anthropic principle*, one of the central concepts of recent natural-science cosmology (Barrow c.s. 1986). I take the *meso-level* of phenomena to be that of our normal Galilei-Newton world, at the order of magnitude of the human body, *i.e.* 100° (= 1) metres. At very much higher and very much lower orders of magnitude (galaxies, elementary particles), the self-evidences of our Galilei-Newton world dissolve, and the paradoxes and wonders of the theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics replace the (appearance of the) transparent logical structure and the object-subject distinction of the meso-level world, bringing out the restrictive boundary conditions of the latter.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Derrida 1967a, 1972; Lyotard 1983.

<sup>35</sup> van Binsbergen 2015a: 536, slightly edited.

heading for extinction. Obviously the way out lies in *wisdom*, in taking a relative view of the Aristotelian and anthropological heritage, even if we are not prepared to give up that discipline's accomplishments so easily.

### **2.3.5. How to overcome the aporia that has arisen?**

Explicitly, deliberately and exclusively adopting the *etic* perspective may be considered a form of *analytical violence*. The very act of fieldwork consists, even for a die-hard anthropologist, on blending both *emic* and *etic* perspectives, and this is likely to engender insurmountable aporias. For the *historian*, on the other hand, the situation looks less bleak, and for her the task at hand appears to be manageable, capable of being accomplished.

The interlocking, often heterogeneous and usually scarcely integrated, strands of cultural orientations that make up a person's (or a group's) life world, need not be articulated by the actors in terms of distinct, consciously constructed and consciously maintained boundaries. Usually these strands are not named and their boundaries are fluid and fluffy. Nonetheless, the socio-political space in which people live their life world, tends to be consciously perceived by the actors as an internally structured space – structured in terms of explicitly named and demarcated constituent parts (even though such demarcation is not always totally consensual, among the people involved, nor totally consistent, nor free of invented tradition). It is illuminating to call the constituent parts 'ethnic groups', and the process of their explicit definition and structural accommodation in space and time, 'ethnicisation'. In this perspective, ethnicity is simply the (emic) structuring of the largest socio-political space (the international order, sometimes just the nation-state) in terms of explicitly named and more or less consensually distinguished constituent parts. In post-colonial Africa, ethnicisation has been the dominant form which the articulation of higher-level structural units, and hence the major form the expression of identity, has taken. *Framing* and *naming* are to be recognised as among the principal mechanisms of ethnicisation. Articulating the higher-order political space, situating individuals and groups there, naming and framing them, and justifying such distinctions often by reference to history or to some invented tradition, has been the major form of political process in modern Africa, where distinctions in terms of *class* have remained weakly developed. Religious affiliation tends to be linked to regional origin (since missionary bodies, in Christianity especially, have tended to concentrate on particular geographic spots in the wider socio-political space, expressing such articulation through the use of a particular local / regional language for intra-group communication and for the translation of sacred texts).

With the rise to global prominence of the (or rather, 'a' — notably, a highly manipulable, strategic, and exploitable) concept of 'culture' — not only in the world of social science but even in the local and regional emic discourse (as part of the world-wide response to major processes taking place during the last few decades: globalisation and massive transcontinental migration, and the installation of a multiculturalist ideology in the North Atlantic region), one has tended to conflate 'ethnic group' and 'culture'. This process was aided, in modern Africa, by the fact that the same type of conflation was at work in post-Enlightenment Europe of the 18th and 19th c. CE, when a particular mystique of 'the people' (*das Volk / le peuple, die Nation / la nation*) was claiming the 'natural' coincidence between territory, language, identity, the sense of a shared collective past and of a specific historical destiny, and... *culture* (supposed to converge for all adults living in the extended socio-political space in question). In this perspective one can understand how *intercultural* became increasingly an ideological, mobilising, and nostalgic blanket term for the accommodation of cultural aspects of more than one nation.

Let us resign ourselves to the thought that our aporia cannot be overcome in an anthropological perspective alone, as long as this presupposes the extreme othering of the other about whom we seek intercultural knowledge. But there are other possibilities.

Whilst widely adopted among anthropologists, surprisingly the distinction between *emic* and *etic* (and much of the theoretical framework that has informed it) is habitually shunned by modern historians,<sup>36</sup> precisely in order to avoid the

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<sup>36</sup> My 1981c book, based on the thesis that won me my 1979 *cum-laude* doctorate, was examined by a doctoral committee headed by the late lamented Matthew Schoffeleers, with the late lamented Terence Ranger as external examiner — which reflected the close and eminently productive collaboration between these two senior scholars and myself since the Lusaka International Conference on the History of Central African Religious Systems (1972). Ranger (*cf.* 1978) was immensely impressed by my attempt at writing long-range, largely precolonial hence largely undocumented, history on the basis of a combination of explicit theoretical models (mainly Marxist-inspired, then *en vogue* but still of eminent value), scraps of fragmentary documentary evidence as well as oral traditions, and ethnographic distributions. Yet he could not help remarking on several later occasions, and with great justification, that he would have wished for my work to be 'more properly historical' — less clinging to imposed theoretical *etic* concepts at the expense of a sense of historicity, — even the historicity, the quality of being protean and constantly subject to change, of customs and concepts of the people applying them, and of the modes of their application. In those years Ranger himself could not always withstand the lure of theoretical models such as 'mode of production' (I can still hear him pronounce *Goadállleeyay* — the name of his favourite French neo-Marxist Godelier, *cf.* 1973) and 'ecosystem' — but their application did not produce his best work, which consisted (*e.g.* in his study of the Zambian witchfinder / mass murderer

*othering* that lies at the root of the emic / etic distinction, and to create some kind of fusion between researcher and the researched.<sup>37</sup> Whereas anthropology is predicated on an implied absolute distinction between the researcher and the researched, each with their own conceptions and implied worldview, the hallmark of the historian, on the other hand, is to try and operate (also textually) at the interface between the here and now (when and where the historiography takes place), and the researched context of historical action and belief. In the hands of the historian, concepts that are being used by the historical actors (such as 'state', 'witchcraft', 'god', 'justice') are not translated into some purportedly cultureless abstract *etic* term, but are considered to be volatile, protean, and are taken on organically, in the endeavour to produce a historiographic text that blends *etic* and *emic*. For sub-Saharan Africa, I can think of no better example than the work of the late lamented Terry Ranger, whose impressive powers of imagination, evocation, and political identification with the African people as well as his inimitable writing style, allowed him to write great African historiography (Ranger 1967, 1970, 1972, 1975a, 1975b, 1985) even if he did not command a single African language (nor any other, for that matter, beyond his own native English), and was incomparably more at home in university departments and at Christian mission stations than in African villages.

The anthropologist turning to the analysis of interculturality, emphatically considers it a handicap when she finds out that 'cultural' and 'intercultural' have become (as is usually the case in the present-day world) emic concepts consciously and explicitly used by the actors themselves. However, for the historian, such a finding would only be a blessing, a confirmation that the historical research is on the right track. How to wisely reconcile these extremes? Through *wisdom*, presumably.

What then is the experience of fieldwork? After often cumbersome even desperate, beginnings, most fieldwork projects, if persevered, ultimately seem to yield valuable knowledge across the boundaries of the research host's and the researcher's respective cultural orientations. A number of significant insights come to the fore here:

- unity and continuity, even if impossible to achieve with verbal means because of the acquired academic inclination to apply a binary Aristotelian logic, may yet be found at the level of *action*, when unity of pur-

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Tomo Nyirenda / Mwana Lesa, the self-styled 'Son of God') in the imaginative and empathic, politically engaged pasting together of scraps of archival data into a credible, illuminating, captivatingly written drama supplely blending emic and etic perspectives.

<sup>37</sup> A similar fusion I have advocated for the study of myth, 2008a, 2022: ch. 3.



pose may overrule discord of theoretical position

- it is possible to live an alien truth even if (at the conscious level) the person involved may be emphatically conscious that subjectively, and against that person's original cultural orientation, that alien truth is very likely just an untruth<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This has often been my experience as a religious anthropologist, ever since my first fieldwork (on popular Islam in North-western Tunisia; whose experiential aspects I have described at considerable length, van Binsbergen 2003: ch. 1, now reprinted as 2022b: ch 2; and in my novel of 1988b), right through to my work on urban Christian churches especially in Lusaka (1972-1973) and Francistown (1988-1992; although brought up in Roman Catholicism as a child, I ceased to identify as a Christian in 1962), Zambia; on the *Bituma* cult of the Zambian Nkoya people (1972-present); on oracular shrines and local ethnopsychiatry among the Manjacos of Guinea-Bissau, West Africa (1981-1983); and on the *Sangoma* cult in Francistown, Botswana (1988-present). In the field, the flow of information and insight is largely dependent on the research hosts's perception of the fieldworker's wholehearted engagement, so as a rule I did as I had been told by my teachers of anthropological fieldwork, and did dance, sing, pray, sacrifice, kill and butcher animals, received and ultimately gave oracles, displayed at least the outside signs of trance (but soon, beyond performance, I also had the subjective experience of trance – in short, going through the motions with increasing expertise, so that finally at the level of publicly perceptible behaviour I could no longer be distinguished any more from the locals. Initially I was very much aware that I was merely pretending to be a believer in the local collective representations, and I hated myself for my professional lack of integrity. Over the decades, however, this antagonistic 'othering' attitude on my part gave way to a more accommodating stance, when I realised

- that human encounter has an existential value which is not entirely dependent upon whether both sides of the encounter consciously think about it
- that various forms and levels of scepticism may also have been the covert conviction of some of the local actors themselves (as these did occasionally intimate to me);
- that the level of unanimity and agreement among these actors (as enforced by social control) only extends to whatever beliefs they would articulate *publicly*, while behind that public façade enormous variations in conceptions, images and even in acceptance or rejection of the beliefs involved were to be suspected (and sometimes even manifested themselves, in private interviews);
- that even in my conscious mind I would not remain so deeply convinced of the non-existence of the invisible beings locally venerated as collective representations – speaking and thinking gradually about them became an idiom, a short-hand mediating my implicit intercultural adaptation – to such an extent that after half a century I am still observing the cult of one Tunisian saint, and still sacrificing on my personal *Sangoma* altar on my home premises in the Netherlands; and even decades after my Manjacos research – even though this was shorter and made much less profound impact on my existence – I paid someone to visit, on my behalf, the shrine of Mama Jombo in Northern Guinea-Bissau in order to buy, transport, and sacrifice at the shrine, the two pigs and 5 litres of

- the ethics of integrity do not preclude (often even positively stipulate) the practice of cautious manoeuvring and accommodation for the sake of sociability and peace
- again, for the approach to interculturality we need a special, non-binary logic, otherwise we cannot even temporarily reconcile contrasting truth provinces

*Under what specific conditions might yet different truth provinces be accommodated, and tolerate each other to exist side by side, even to interpenetrate?* Let us suggest a few of such conditions:

- when verbalisation (which is highly culture-specific and group-specific, hence utterly divisive) is kept at a minimum, e.g. in music, silence, prayer
- when there is a strong positive sanction favouring cultivated tolerance, and discouraging the articulation of difference.

In my recent, passionately personal, and almost unscientific, study of ecstatic religion (van Binsbergen 2021b, *Sangoma Science*) I have explored some of the conditions under which conceptions of reality and truth as totally different from Western academic thought could be entertained, especially rejection of Aristotle's logic of the excluded third (= 'where P there not not-P'). Already in 2003 I stressed the need and the possibility of 'epistemological charity' (with Lepore 1993; Malpas 1988; McGinn 1977), which is the attitude based on the self-critical realisation to the effect '*who am I to reject this belief which to many others is not only plausible, but unconditionally true?*' It is time that I once for all incorporate this more lenient and less antagonistic perspective in my own conception of interculturality. The possibility and desirability of interculturality is widely posited, and moreover, my own lifelong experience as a fieldworker is that, at the subjective personal level, intercultural knowledge formation is possible without a doubt. Let me elaborate.

### **2.3.6. My personal path through interculturality: From stammering learner fieldworker via practising diviner-healer and African prince, to intercultural philosopher**

To my embarrassment I must admit that, whatever my theoretical distrust of the concept of interculturality, I personally seem to be the very embodiment of the possibility of at least some forms of interculturality


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rum there which I had promised in exchange for fulfilment of a major desire I had in 1983: *a son* (who was born, as promised by the oracle, in 1985).

'Born in the Netherlands (1947), I was trained at the Municipal University of my home town as an anthropologist specialising in religion. From my first field-work (1968), when I investigated saint worship and the ecstatic cult in rural North Africa, I have struggled with the problem of *the truth of the others' belief*– which I am inclined to consider as the central problem of interculturality. With gusto I sacrificed to the dead saints in their graves, danced along with the ecstatic dancers, experienced the beginning of mystical ecstasy in myself, built a network of fictive kinsmen around me. Yet in my ethnography I reduced the very same people to numerical values in a quantitative analysis [(cf. van Binsbergen 2015a: 176, special topic 'Love they informants'; and 2022b) – 2022 ], and initially I knew of no better way to describe their religious representations than as the denial of North Atlantic or cosmopolitan natural science (van Binsbergen 1971). It was only twenty years later when, in the form of a novel (*Een Buik Openen* – '*Opening up a Belly*' – 1988) I found the words to testify of my love for and indulgence in the North African life forms which, while still in the field, I had believed I needed to keep at a distance as an ethnographer; and my two-volume, English-language book manuscript on this research has still been lying idly on a shelf. [ <sup>39</sup> – 2022 ] In the course of many years and across more than a handful of African field-work locations, always operating in the religious and the therapeutic domain, I gradually began to realise that I loathed the cynical professional attitude of anthropology, and that I had increasing difficulty sustaining that attitude. Again, who was I that I could afford to make believe, to pretend, wherever (at least, to judge by their publicly displayed behaviour and speech acts...) the undivided serious commitment of my research participants seemed to be involved? Several among them have played a decisive role in my life, as role models, teachers, spiritual masters, lovers. In Guinea-Bissau, in 1983, I did not remain the mere observer of the oracular priests but I became their patient – as nearly all the born members of the local society were. In the town of Francistown, Botswana, from 1988, under circumstances which I have discussed at length elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1991, 1998b, [ 2021b ] ) – the usual professional routine for fieldwork became so insufferable to me that I had to throw overboard all methodological considerations. I became not only the patient of local diviner-priests (*Sangomas*), but at the end of a long, *local* therapy course I ended up as one of them, and thus as, official and publicly at least, a believer in the local collective representations. At the time (1990, the very year when the South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela was released after decades of incarceration) I primarily justified my '*Becoming a Sangoma*' (van Binsbergen 1991) as a political deed, for me as a White man in a social context (the originally White mining town of Francistown, Botswana) which had been disrupted by monopoly capitalism and by nearby South African *apartheid*. Now more than then I realise that it was also and primarily an *epistemological* position-taking – a revolt against the professional hypocrisy in which the hegemonic perspective of anthropology reveals itself. It was a position-taking which in fact expelled me from cultural anthropology (although I did go by my own choice)<sup>40</sup> and which created the conditions

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<sup>39</sup> Until very recently. Volume I was basically published August 2022, Volume II is to follow within a few months.

<sup>40</sup>  *Zvibili / Sethlako sakayeta keetetswe*, '*Shoe for going and returning*' is one of the sixteen stereotyped outcomes in the Francistown tablet oracle. I may have needed to explicitly transcend the bigotted, othering anthropological perspective in which I

for the step which I finally made when occupying my chair in intercultural philosophy.’<sup>41</sup>

Beyond the subjective and necessarily limited lessons of such a strictly personal and, admittedly, exceptional account, we may appeal to a number of more systematic reasons to regain our trust in the possibility and factuality of interculturality.

In the first place, the intransigence of the Aristotelian rule of the excluded third *does not constitute the only logic that is possible*. Ternary, multiple, fuzzy, wisdom, logics have been proposed and may give us the tools to strike a viable, sociable, peaceful compromise between the (non-)truth of the other and the (non-)truth of ourselves. At the back of the problematic of interculturality stands not only the concept of culture but also the notion of ‘inter’; this has been subjected to several discussions in recent postmodern writing, *e.g.* in the work of the Dutch intercultural and aesthetic philosopher / ‘ecosophist’ my friend and colleague Henk Oosterling (2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005).

In the second place we may mention *the claim of the fundamental unity of humankind*, which I have elaborated in other contexts (van Binsbergen 2015a: 8 *f.*, 2020c). The logical irreconcilability of specific rival cultural orientations, hence the enormous difficulty of transmitting truths across cultural boundaries, may be abstractly argued, yet we may be confident that deep down we all share, as humans, or at least as Anatomically Modern Humans, a communality that ultimately makes it possible to recognise each other as fellow human beings with similar emotions, thoughts, vulnerabilities and strengths. The fact that we all have fundamentally the same body (perhaps to be usefully distinguished in male and female, but only for a minority of situations and contexts) means that we can recognise and feel empathy with suffering, physical effort, illness, physical strength, endurance, concupiscence, and take a sometimes profound interest in each other.

Then again, in the third place, we may find inspiration in the *critique of logocentricity*, which has been a particularly valuable contribution from post-modern philosophy (Derrida 1967a, 1967b). Although words are the scholar’s main tools, and more in general the writer’s, the poet’s, the myth-maker’s, the diviner-healer’s, the prophet’s – yet words, like alcoholic drink, have the tendency to destroy more than they can heal or conceal. *In significant ways, explicit articulate language is the enemy of interculturality*. Why should it be that

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had been educated, but once having reached that point of liberation, nothing prevented me from continuing to publish recognisable anthropological texts – on the basis of fieldwork conducted several decades earlier, or new fieldwork in new African sites (*e.g.* Cameroon) or outside Africa (*e.g.* Sri Lanka, Thailand, or Indonesia).

<sup>41</sup> van Binsbergen 2015: 428 *f.*, slightly edited.

in prayer, music<sup>42</sup>, the visual arts, architecture, the apparent cultural boundaries seem to fade more easily than in verbal communication, and – in such non-verbal situations – true interculturality seems to lie around the corner? An illuminating consideration could be that there is not a single human product that is so utterly patterned, structured and sanctioned (at the price of unintelligibility, or at least evident marking as incompetent outsider, in other words at the price of ridicule and exclusion) as language is, hence non-verbality has a great advantage when it comes to crossing cultural boundaries.

As a fourth consideration, which is very dear to me as an inveterate, multiple and practically world-wide, practitioner of fieldwork (fieldwork which I have often dreaded as the most oppressive, most difficult thing in my life's experience, yet in which I have always engaged with gusto and a sense of fulfilment – *as if the Promethean attempt to cross boundaries in the pursuit of intercultural knowledge allows me to fulfil the destiny of being human*)<sup>43</sup> let me mention, once again, *the effort criterium* as a touchstone of interculturality.

The concept of interculturality is far more complex and problematic than is commonly assumed. Not the practice (not even my own, extensive one) but the sheer

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<sup>42</sup> Hebert 2001; van Binsbergen 2020 espec. Prologue: 'Music from the East', and 2015b, 2000d. In my piece on 'Islam as a constitutive factor in so-called African traditional religion and culture' (originally 1999c) I reverse the perspective, and present Islam as a vehicle for the articulation, transmission, and even for the creation, of African traditions *e.g.* in the musical domain.

<sup>43</sup> My late lamented friend, the psychoanalysing anthropologist Renaat Devisch has touched on this point in a moving article on the psychoanalysis of the intercultural encounter in fieldwork. Here is his own summary:

'Since the early 1970s, the author has been working among the poverty-stricken Yaka people in rural southwestern Congo and suburban Kinshasa. A descendant of a colonizing society, the author sought immersion in a particular Congolese community and later in suburban Kinshasa, as well as insights from within the host group's own rationale and perceptions. Through reciprocal fascination and compassionate encounter, hosts and anthropologists transfer onto each other images, longings, and thoughts that in many ways are unconsciously biased. The self-reflective experience of integration in other life-worlds has helped the author to self-critically scrutinize his own native Belgian socio-cultural matrix.' The article advocates a type of post-colonial and psychoanalytically inspired anthropology that urges self-critical understanding of definitions of self-creation in relation to alterity constructs. Any further development of psychoanalytically informed anthropology, or of culture-sensitive psychoanalysis, should draw on this understanding of co-implication and intercultural polylogue, thereby allowing these disciplines to transcend their Eurocentric antecedents.' (Devisch 2006)

However, the psychoanalytic dimension in anthropological fieldwork has yet another side. As I have pointed out in reflections on my own fieldwork in Botswana (van Binsbergen 2003, 2021b), the researcher, however determined to be objective and scientific, is likely to occasionally succumb to personal unconscious projections in which the unresolved conflicts in her own psyche (usually springing from childhood trauma) attach themselves to the field experiences at hand, and influence his reading of the phenomena in the field.

theoretical possibility of intercultural philosophy has been at the heart of my work at Rotterdam. I have outlined some of the challenges involved in my 2003c book. The common assumption to the effect that it is *cultures* that interact, implies a deceptive reification and personification – for in fact it is only *people* that interact, most people pay allegiance to a number of cultural orientations at the same time, yet are socio-politically enticed to identify eclectically and performatively as representing only one specific ‘culture’. However, ‘Cultures Do Not Exist’ (van Binsbergen 1999a, 2003c: ch. 15). Much work proclaimed to be in intercultural philosophy amounts to self-deceptive North Atlantic navel-gazing, *e.g.* when a European philosopher ignorant of the practice and texts of Buddhism in Japanese, Chinese, Pali, Lankan, Thai, contexts *etc.*, and ignorant of the attending languages, yet pretends to engage in intercultural philosophy when commenting, in English or Dutch, on the English-language paraphrases of Zen Buddhism as available in the American writings of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1914, 1927-1934, 1947) meant for an American audience – I can hardly consider this intercultural philosophy since the whole exercise is taking place within the context of North Atlantic cultural orientations, towards which the Japanese and Buddhist elements have already been accommodated and filtered out before even coming to the philosopher’s notice. (...) Confronting such appropriative, Eurocentric, conceptions of intercultural philosophy – of unmistakable complacency, ignorance and laziness – and at the same time not allowing myself to realise that, given my very own life-long personal engagement with interculturality<sup>44</sup> [ I had no option but to affirm the possibility of interculturality – 2022 ]

All this made my work at Rotterdam an exhausting, up-hill battle. One I could never win – until I was away from Rotterdam, away from the institutional production of Africanist knowledge in Leiden, and free to reflect, as deeply as needed (or at least as deeply as I could), on the implications of my own experiences as an Africanist researcher over the decades. I was forced to leave the Rotterdam scene after eight years, six years before reaching pensionable age, greatly edified by the new intellectual perspectives that had opened up to me there, but without the slightest valedictory function being thrown for me – ‘good riddance’, was apparently the overwhelming thought I inspired in my Rotterdam colleagues.

In other words, my earlier conclusion that interculturality is impossible because it rests on the popularisation of an ill-taken concept of culture, was in itself premature, myopic, hegemonic, desperate, and (if it would ever run any chance of being taken seriously) potentially destructive of humanity’s future.

We have only implicitly considered what would have been a fifth consideration: *the anti-hegemonic orientation of true interculturality*. The East Asian writer Jung (not to be confused with the Swiss psychiatrist) has sought to capture this element by his term *transversality*:

‘Transversality is the keyword that permeates the spirit of these thirteen essays spanning almost half a century, from 1965 to 2009. The essays are exploratory and ex-

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<sup>44</sup> van Binsbergen 2015a: 45n *f.*, greatly edited.

perimental in nature and are meant to be a transversal linkage between phenomenology and East Asian philosophy. Transversality is the concept that dispels all ethnocentrism, including Eurocentrism. In the globalizing world of multiculturalism, Eurocentric universalism falls far short of being universal but simply parochial at the expense of the non-Western world ... (Jung 2011)

The social science of Africa, given its 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE origin, had hegemonic even implicitly racist roots, and we must be very careful, and think very hard, lest it will revert to that condition. Let us loosely define *hegemony as: the frame of mind, and the resulting practices and institutions, that take for granted, and seek to perpetuate and to reinforce, the existing geopolitical inequalities in the world at large*. Profoundly aware of the hegemonic and globalising tendencies in the Early Modern and more recent history of his motherland, Ainsa (from the University of Zaragoza, Northern Spain) offers an inspiring approach to hegemony and globalisation:

'In the face of the alienating effects of the current globalization it is appropriate to assess the brutal historical experience of Spain's conquest and colonization of America. From that confrontation were born innovative mixtures, unanticipated metamorphoses and the polymorphous reality to be seen in today's Latin-American cultures. Utopia, in the context of the globalization we are now experiencing, is composed of interculturalism, the very many opportunities for exchange and cross-fertilization. Traditional utopian discourse must henceforth reconcile the universal values of reason with passions, differences, fragmentation and the diversity of cultures.' (Ainsa 2006)

It is a perspective rather in line with the approach in my present argument: interculturality lies not only in the actual interaction between people and groups in the present-day world, but it also points to a particularly fertile context of continuity, hybridisation, innovation and transformation which typically arises as a result of globalisation, and in which not purity, but hybridity, and not firm boundaries, but porous ones, as well as continuities and boundary crossing, take precedence.

Even if we accept the possibility that fieldwork might be a valid and reliable mode of intercultural knowledge production, the above consideration (especially the *effort principle*, but also the pitfall of hegemonic Eurocentrism) make it necessary to try and identify the specific conditions under which fieldwork might succeed in yielding valid intercultural knowledge. But even if an entire discipline pretending to cater for intercultural knowledge is build on such a methodology, we must still ask (a) whether its claim of constituting a form of interculturality is well founded, and (b) if so, under which conditions such interculturality in fieldwork may be achieved. These conditions are not exactly secret:

- a broad and profound general and practical knowledge of the socio-cultural situation at hand, built up over many months of personal exposure;

- considerable mastery of the local language(s)
- probably most important: *extensive and sufficiently empowered feed-back mechanisms in the contact between the researcher and representative members of the community at hand*, so that the local (*ipse facto* competent) cultural owners can exercise a fair measure of control over the representations that are committed to writing by the ethnographer, and the latter (also while still in the field) cultivates a receptive humility.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I have explained above how anthropological fieldwork is predicated on the principle of daily, extensive feedback from the host community, but that in itself is not sufficient to satisfy the requirement of *informant empowerment*. Informant empowerment was not among the formal formal (perhaps implicitly hegemonic) fieldwork lessons I received at Amsterdam University in the 1960s, and did not play a role in my writings on North Africa. Such empowerment can hardly arise in the common situation (*'There And Back Again'* – the title which Tolkien invented for Bilbo Balins's book on his travels in fictitious Middle Earth, and which was put to good use in my 1979 polemics on fieldwork with Sjaak van der Geest a.k.a. Wolf Bleek in the pages of the journal *Human Organization*) when the fieldworker returns for good to her distant home after one major spell of fieldwork, writes her ethnographic publications, and is never seen in the host society ever after. Cultivating an enduring, increasingly close, relationship with the Nkoya people across half a century, has enabled me to organise the informant feedback and empowerment condition in a rather fortuitous manner: in the years when I was writing *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and History in Western Central Zambia* (published 1992), I was in constant epistolary contact (e-mail was not yet an option) with an active group of educated Nkoya who checked the details of my texts (including English translations of oral traditions) and nudged them in the right direction. Of course, such involvement came at a price: the members of my local reading committee all had their own personal interests in regional ethnic dynamics and the latter's textual representation, but that was inevitable – the juggling between conflicting local partisanship is an ubiquitous and important aspect of fieldwork anyway.

Incidentally, *Tears of Rain* has been crucial in developing my intercultural approach also in a very different way. When I and my family took up residence in Francistown, in the Fall of 1988, the book MS of *Tears of Rain* had been almost completed, during several months of hectic editing and rewriting during the Summer of 1988. Much of this editing was done directly onto the pages of the MS's printout, and (given the hurdles of preparing our young family for a year abroad) time had lacked to insert these numerous, extensive, and crucial alterations into the book's master digital document. In the late 1980s, digital book production directly by the author was still in its infancy (at least in Northwestern Europe), and although for some of my 1980s literary books as well as for the semi-literary van Binsbergen & Doornbos 1987 I had prepared text documents myself for printing, my previous scholarly books (including three published by Kegan Paul, London) had relied on extensive secretarial help at the ASC, Leiden. *Tears of Rain* fell into the gap between two successive routines of book publishing. I took with me to Francistown the hand-edited printout – the unique copy with all editing; naïvely, I never thought of photocopying it – as well as a much older digital version, trusting that there would be some lull in the fieldwork al-



The overwhelming characteristic of successful attempts at intercultural knowledge construction through fieldwork is that *they require a very great and prolonged personal, existential effort on the part of the fieldworker.*<sup>46</sup> Valid intercultural knowledge cannot be had cheaply nor superficially. The trouble with many purportedly intercultural claims today, worldwide, is that they are made too facilely, shunning *the hard work of interculturality*, or letting some-

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lowing me to insert the alterations and send the final document to the publisher's. This opportunity came only in the Summer of 1989. However, the place on the shelf in my in-house office where I had deposited the MS, proved empty. I nearly had a heart attack – the unique MS represented several years of irreplaceable work. When I questioned our trusted domestic help Mrs Chizani Moroka (a close neighbour in the popular ward where we lived), she mistook this to imply an accusation, and offered to bring in a diviner-healer (*Sangoma*) in order to prove her innocence. Rather to my surprise, not she, but I, was to be the central subject of the *Sangoma's* enquiry. The imposing gentleman brought in from the informal residential area of Masemenyenga under the smoke of Francistown Airport, Zimbabwe-born Mr Albert Sithole, cast his bones, intimated extensively (and with what then seemed to be stunning detail) on my family past and personal future, and persuaded me to kill a goat in sacrifice. The MS was never found again (in the site-and-service area where we lived, every plot had been standardly furnished with an outside toilet; but there was a constant shortage of toilet paper...), and I virtually had to rewrite the book from scratch – probably for the better. Until this episode the *Sangomas* of Francistown, and the entire domain of tradition religion in that town, had remained inaccessible to me, but now, as a humble client, I suddenly had access, with far-reaching consequences for my research, my writing, my career, my life. Mr Joshua Ndhlovu, a highly qualified secondary school teacher who at age 50 had dropped out as such for mental reasons and was now launching himself on a *Sangoma* career, had accompanied Sithole for the sacrifice and introduced us to his lodge leader MmaNdhlovu (no relation; this is simply the Elephant totem); at her lodge in the township of Riverside we witnessed our first *Sangoma* sessions; and during one of these, a medium in trance declared my (Congo-born) wife Patricia to be dangerously ill and desperately in need of *Sangoma* treatment. Patricia accepted (the details disclosed by the medium seemed again incredibly pertinent). We remembered that already when on our way to Francistown, a year previously, a diviner in the Harare market, Zimbabwe, had identified her as the incarnation of Mbuya Nehanda the still nationally famous spirit medium who had played a pivotal role in the 1896-1897 African Rhodesian Revolt (cf. Ranger 1967). And within a week Patricia was dancing to *Sangoma* music with MmaNdhlovu's other adepts, in the black uniform of the Mwali cult. It would take another year before I followed in her footsteps.

<sup>46</sup> Remotely, we are reminded here of Freud's (1961, 1968) emphasis on 'dream-work' as the central transformation that produces dream images out of the processing of (especially sub-conscious) experiences and the conflicts they have left. But in intercultural work the vector is different: the intercultural culture worker is working consciously, facing the very contradictions between cultural orientations, and seeking to overcome them selectively in compromise.

one else do that work. Philosophers engaging in the codifying of so-called ‘sage philosophy’ in Africa (e.g. Odera Oruka 1990; for a critical treatment cf. Mosima 2016) often try to do so without stopping to consider the methodological requirements for fieldwork as a reliable strategy of valid intercultural knowledge acquisition. Again, European philosophers approaching African notions of time, Japanese Zen Buddhism, or the West African Dogon world-view, not on the basis of personal extended exposure and participation, but through a mere library study, and who yet make claim to being intercultural philosophers, to my mind engage not in an intercultural, but in a Eurocentric hegemonic exercise, and their claims may severely damage the very cause of interculturality.

In the *work of interculturality*, boundaries are created and affirmed at the same time as they are being dissimulated and transcended. Interculturality is not about the absence of boundaries, but about *the charitable negotiation of boundaries*.

At this point in my argument most of the theoretical baggage which we need on our way through interculturality in Africa may be considered to be in place. It is time we proceed to Part III, *GLIMPSES OF INTERCULTURALITY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT*. Here our approach will be as eclectic and selective as it has been in the Part II. Massive aspects of the relevant descriptive phenomena will remain outside our scope. Partly (and admittedly) by sleight of hand, I simplify the extremely complex situation<sup>47</sup> by assuming that between Africans themselves, especially in the national socio-political space, what we mainly see is *inter-ethnic* exchanges but these are rarely *intercultural* ones because (despite the ostentatious parading of distinctive token ethnic markers to distinguish between ethnic groups) pretty much the same or converging cultural orientations may be assumed to underlie much African social life especially within the socio-political space of present-day nation-states. Likewise, in the consideration of such transcontinental influences as could be said to amount to interculturality in modern Africa, I greatly simplify matters by paying attention only to one-to-one interactions (African-European, African-Indian, African-Mediterranean, etc.), without venturing into a consideration of the obvious extensions of this pattern, where all the various elements interaction criss-cross with one another on African soil today. My perspective on African life is overwhelmingly from the local, African-centred situations which I have gotten

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<sup>47</sup> Complex also because the tangle of theoretical and methodological dimensions, indicated in Part I – and then further complicated by the dangers of Eurocentrism and hegemonism.<sup>48</sup> This contention was already contested, rightly, by Colson in her 1968 argument – in line with several similar arguments at the time.

to know through prolonged personal fieldwork, and while I do not deny the importance of all the other possible considerations and combinations (Indian with European and African, Chinese with European and African, *etc.*), I lack the data to discuss them with any degree of authority and detail.



***PART III. GLIMPSES OF  
INTERCULTURALITY IN THE  
AFRICAN CONTEXT***



## CHAPTER 3. FOCUS ON AFRICA

As said above, African Studies have been preoccupied by the effort, over the past sixty years, to describe, understand, and deconstruct African *emic* conceptions of socio-political space in terms of tribe, ethnic group, culture. Here I still find it important to proceed from an essentialising approach to African ethnicity (in the sense of ‘tribes are the present-day remnants of once viable, pre-conquest major socio-political units’<sup>48</sup>), to a more sociological one: in post-independent African states, the widest socio-political space is *emically* though consensually divided up in a relatively small number of sub-national, named, bounded units, and these are called ‘tribes’ or ‘ethnic groups’ – these may also constitute a context for the continued, but now state-encapsulated, exercise of traditional leadership in the hands of chiefs – once more or less independent kings.<sup>49</sup>

‘While theorists of cultural pluralism have generally supported tribal sovereignty to protect threatened Native cultures, they fail to address adequately cultural conflicts between Native and non-Native communities, especially when tribal sovereignty facilitates illiberal or undemocratic practices. In response, I draw on Jürgen Habermas’ conceptions of discourse and the public sphere to develop a universalist approach to cultural pluralism, called the ‘intercultural public sphere’, which analyzes how cultures can engage in mutual learning and mutual criticism under fair conditions. This framework accommodates cultural diversity within formally universalistic parameters while avoiding four common criticisms of universalist approaches to cultural pluralism. But this framework differs from that of Habermas in two ways. First, it includes ‘subaltern’ publics, open only to members of cul-

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<sup>49</sup> For illuminating perspectives on African traditional rulers as encapsulated by the (post-) colonial state, cf. the work of my colleague Emile van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1987; van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & van Dijk 1999; Ray & van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996. Van Binsbergen 2003f constitutes my own, theoretically more ambitious, attempt at synthesis of this field of study.

tural subgroups, in order to counter relations of 'cultural power'. Second, it admits 'strong' publics, democratic institutions with decision-making powers. Finally, I show how the subaltern, strong institutions of tribal sovereignty contribute to the fair discursive conditions required for mutual learning and mutual critique in an intercultural public sphere.' James 1999a, cf. 1999b).

With our focus on interculturality in present-day Africa we can only make a modest contribution to the study of African post-conquest transformations since the late 19th c. CE – a roller-coaster of social and political change whose study and documentation have filled entire libraries and have been the specialist province of African Studies, with thousands of researchers world-wide, with its own specialised scientific journals, associations, conferences, research institutions, *etc.* Partly because of theoretical and methodological advances booked in adjacent fields of study (*e.g.* the study of urban society, globalisation, migration, ethnicity) we have progressed considerably since the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, when most of Africa was still under European-dominated colonial rule, and the study of '*culture contact in Africa*' was the overarching term in which most of the Africanists of the first hour (including Malinowski *e.g.* 1943, 1939; Mair 1938; and Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard, Forde, *etc.*) made their mark. Given the bureaucratic format of the colonial state, it imparted the basic structural assumptions of its territorial organisation to lower-level institutions in Africa, and these received ample attention from researchers from the beginning.

According to a stereotypical, and inherently hegemonic even racist, view of Africa, that continent finds itself, always and inevitably, at the *receiving* end of cultural history. Numerous reasons may be advanced to the contrary: the Out-of-Africa model of recent molecular genetics, the history of domestication (with *zebu* cattle and sesame as original, African contributions), the undeniable empirical foundations of Afrocentrism (van Binsbergen 2000b, 2005a), the unrivalled role of Ancient Egypt in global cultural history (provided we agree to consider Ancient Egypt, African), the African origin (Arnaiz *et al.* 2001) of the Ancient Greeks who have played such a decisive role in propping up Western superiority feelings, the recent global history of music and dance where African styles have greatly prevailed, the seminal impact of African art on 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE global avant-garde art, *etc.* It would have been nice if my empirical examples, in this chapter, had brought out more fully the same vector of African intercultural contributions to the wider world; now this is only manifest in my treatment of the so-called Melanesian bow. However, these examples were chosen for convenient availability and illustrative power – not in order to launch myself as the Afrocentrist which I undoubtedly am.

As an example of the structuring of socio-political space against the background of local cultural, identity and linguistic inputs, I shall first present a longish case study of a rural area in Western Zambia – the region of the Nkoya people with whom I have been closely associated for the past 50 years. It is to reinforce my



repeated assertion, above, that ethnic and linguistic fragmentation, at least in Zambia (but to my understanding much further afield, throughout South Central Africa and possibly throughout sub-Saharan Africa) does mean emic classification but not interculturality in the strict sense, because the units thus emically distinguished basically all share in the same cultural orientations. After that, over half a dozen case studies will follow to highlight aspects of Africa intercultural.

### **3.1. Linguistic micro-diversity,<sup>50</sup> ethnic fragmentation, and underlying continuity of culture: The example of the Njonjolo valley, Kaoma district, Zambia, Africa (1973-1974)**

The Njonjolo valley in Western Zambia, Africa, has been one of my principal fieldwork sites ever since 1973. The traditional ruler Mwene Kahare is chief of the Eastern, Mashasha, section of the Nkoya people<sup>51</sup> at the same time as a senior member of the traditional administration of the former Barotseland, now Zambia's Western Province, under the Barotse or Lozi Paramount Chief, who resides 200 km west of Njonjolo in the alternate twin capitals of Lealui / Limulunga. For many years, Mwene Kahare was also a member of the House of Chiefs, based at the Zambian capital Lusaka – an institution with mainly symbolic functions and without legislative powers.

Ever since the imposition of British colonial rule (1900 CE), the official language of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) has been English, and with the 1845 CE Kololo invasion from Southern Africa the dominant language of Barotseland soon became Lozi, a Nguni *i.e.* Southern Bantu language (like Swazi, Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele), supplanting the earlier Luyana language that was virtually indistinguishable from present-day Nkoya. Geographic displacement of individuals, of small kin units, and of larger socio-political groups, over dozens, sometimes hundreds of kilometres, has been a major feature of the socio-political organisation of Western Zambia for centuries. This has made for a far-flung pattern of kinship and marital relations extending not only over much of present-day Zambia, but also far into Angola and especially into (the Democratic Republic of) Congo – whence hail major royal dynasties in present-day Nkoyaland – all sharing the Lunda political culture that emerged in the course of the second millennium CE (*cf.* Vansina 1966; van Binsbergen 1992b). As I have argued elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020d), the Lunda complex displays considerable transcontinental influence from South, South East, and East Asia. As the target area of the south-bound vector of the cross-model by which the Pelasgian substrate complex from the Mediterranean was diffused all over the Old World since the Late Bronze Age.

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<sup>50</sup> For a study of the position of the Nkoya language within the national state of Zambia, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1994d, with extensive references.

<sup>51</sup> Here I cannot go into a discussion of the historical dynamics of the ethnonym Nkoya, which in fact only arose as a result of incorporation into the Lozi/Kololo state. I refer the reader to my numerous publications on the Nkoya.

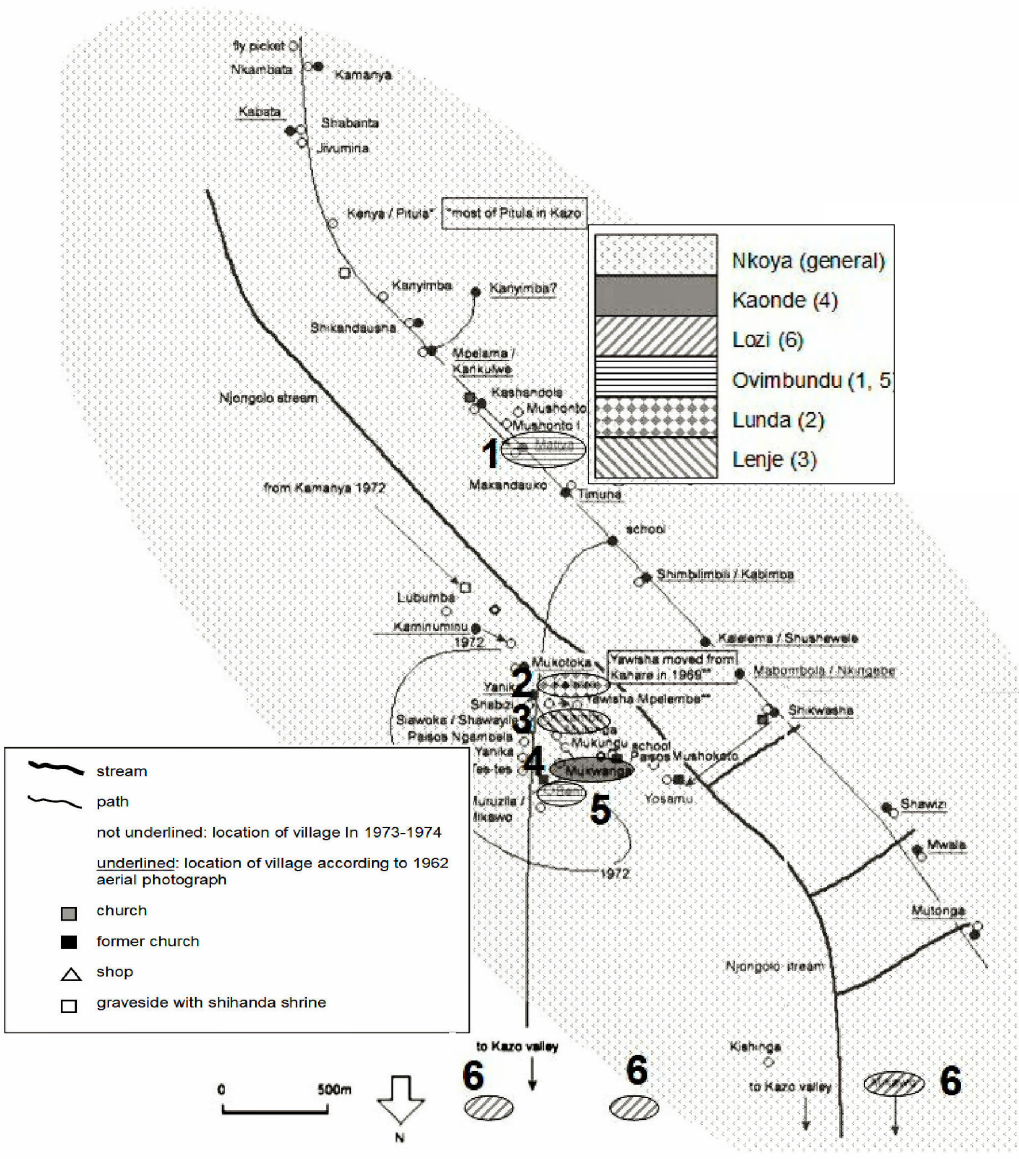


Fig. 3.1. Linguistic-ethnic diversity in the Njonjolo valley, Kaoma District, Zambia, 1973-1974

This part of South Central Africa, like much of sub-Saharan Africa in general, also has considerable socio-cultural continuity with significant other regions (the Mediterra-

nean, West and North Europe, Central and East Asia; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chapter 28.9, pp. 373*f.*; van Binsbergen 201**b**, and in press (a)).

Right up to the first decades of colonial rule, captivity resulting from local small-scale warfare, and indenture as legal punishment for man-slaughter, had created a situation where a sizeable minority of the population of Nkoya villages would consist of so-called slaves (*bandungo*): subservient individuals who had no right to return to their (usually distant) original homes (cf. Douglas 1964; van Binsbergen 2012**b**, in press (b)).

From the 1910s on, the Nkoya region has been superficially Christianised, first by the South African General Mission SAGM (mainly employing Angolan mission workers as local agents in Western Zambia); soon also by the Roman Catholic church, the latter mainly relying on overseas senior staff; and after Independence (1964) also the many other Christian denominations active in Zambia, such as the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Also soon after Independence a major agricultural development scheme, named Nkeyema after a nearby stream, was established by the Zambian state in the eastern part of Mwene Kahare's area (Hailu 1995; Nelson-Richards 1988: 26*f.*), and as a result large numbers of non-Nkoya prospective farmers flocked to the attractively serviced plots, mainly from such ethno-linguistic groups as Tonga, Lozi, Bemba, Kaonde, Mbunda, and Luvale – to such an extent that in the next half century Nkeyema grew to constitute a major rural community with such ethnic and linguistic diversity, and population density, and central service places, as we would normally only find in African towns. And indeed, Nkeyema's very high diversity of population remained a local phenomenon and did scarcely extend to the utterly rural Njonjolo valley, some 25 km south of Nkeyema. But even so the linguistico-ethnic situation in the comparatively small Njonjolo valley (roughly 8 kms long and 2 kms wide) is considerably complex, as Fig. 3.1 indicates. Comprising several dozen small villages, the valley's population has Nkoya as their everyday language, but since many inhabitants hail (largely in line with the time-honoured historical pattern indicated above) from relatively distant places mainly within a 100 km radius, and maintain family ties over such a wide area, most adults are fluent in more than one language, apart even from English and Lozi which function as *linguae francae* and as languages of administration and formal education (no formal education is being offered in the Nkoya language). Focussing on individual villages, we note the following: linguistico-ethnic diversity which the Njonjolo valley showed during fieldwork in 1973-74, from south-east to north-west.

1. The Ovimbundu-speaking village of Matiya, not far from the grave shrine of Mwene Kahare Timuna (died 1955), where Timuna had his capital and where in the 1930s also the SAGM mission worker Matiya was accommodated.
2. Mwene Kahare's capital, which, early in the reign of Timuna's successor Kabambi, was moved to a more accessible spot close to the all-weather road which connects Njonjolo with the Lusaka-Kaoma tar road. In this capital, Nkoya is still the main language spoken both for domestic / family purposes and for use in the royal council and law court,<sup>52</sup> but like other Nkoya royal

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<sup>52</sup> The official Local Court for this area is at Munkuye, some 15 kms north-west of Njonjolo on the old main district road. Here is also a Roman Catholic Mission. Traditionally the administration of justice was one of the Mwene's prerogatives, but it was affected by Lozi overlordship (with Lozi *indunas* seeking to operate as lowest-

families – especially the one clustering on the western, Mutondo royal title), some royals take pride in their historic Lunda affiliation, keep up socio-political ties with other Lunda aristocratic groups, and may occasionally speak Lunda among themselves – a related but distinct tongue.

3. Near the royal capital, Headman Kikambo, the son of a Lenje captive from Central Zambia, heads his own small village, and the Lenje language is occasionally still resorted to here.
4. Like elsewhere in Africa, blacksmiths among the Nkoya tend to be strangers, and the blacksmith village of Mukwanga has retained its Kaonde identity (the ethnic cluster immediately north of the Nkoya, in Kasempa District), with occasionally language use of Kaonde.
5. Also a SAGM mission worker, Ben is the Headman of an Ovimbundu village, which boasts a very small church building of the Evangelical Church of Zambia (a local church organisation spawn by the SAGM), and one of the very rare cows in this valley surviving the constant tsetse threat; this is where we bought fresh milk for our infant daughter Nezmja during fieldwork.
6. Nkoyaland became incorporated in the Barotse traditional state as from the Kolo-lo invasion, an incorporation that was continued and even reinforced despite the fact that the Lozi King Sepopa (who had extensive Nkoya antecedents) restored Luyana rule (but not the Luyana language) in the 1860s. Because of this incorporation it has been difficult for Chief Mwene Kahare to check the encroachment of Lozi immigrants upon Nkoya land. Villages identifying as Lozi in ethnic identity and speech were not yet found in Njonjolo in 1973-74, but they had already started to appear (with positive sanction from the part of Mwene Kahare) in the forested areas north of the Njonjolo stream and of the Kazo stream; in subsequent decades they have become rather numerous.<sup>53</sup>

The situation in the Njonjolo valley seems rather representative for Zambia, South Central Africa as a whole, and in fact for much of sub-Saharan Africa. Linguistic diversity is considerable. Thus Zambia alone, with less than 20 million inhabitants (ca. 2020) to a area 1.2 x that of France, commonly boasts 72 languages and seems to be a jigsaw puzzle of linguistic diversity. Tanzania (1.25 x Zambia) officially even counts double that number of languages. In general it is true to say that many ethnic groups coincide with the language characteristic of them. But this does not mean (although that error is often made especially by politicians, ethnic brokers, and church workers focusing on Bible translation) that for Zambia we must reckon with 72 different *cultures*, and for Tanzania with even double that amount. Throughout these national territories, the great majority of languages belong to the same linguistic stock (the Bantu phylum as the main branch of the Niger-Congo or Niger-Kordofan macrophylum which comprises most of sub-Saharan Africa, extending from the Cape of Good Hope, to Northern Uganda and Senegal). These languages are often not truly mutually under-

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level judges) and colonial state penetration. From the 1980s on an informal 'palaver' (*mabombola*) court was operated not only in most valleys, but particularly at the Kahare royal capital. <sup>53</sup> van Binsbergen 2021 Karst, pp. 209 f.

standable yet their basic syntax and lexicon (including their kinship terms and *e.g.* the 100 words of the basic Swadesh list) are manifestly convergent, and historic socio-cultural and religious life is informed by a common Niger-Congo cosmology centring on horticulture, small-scale animal husbandry, puberty initiation, kingship, ancestor veneration, spirits of the wilds, and belief in, and practices of, sorcery. It would be utterly misleading to equate linguistic or ethnic diversity with cultural diversity. Although specifically selected cultural traits (such as language use, circumcision, specific musical and dancing forms, styles of kingship) may be stressed by the local actors as public markers of their identity (for which they scarcely distinguish, at the explicit conscious level, between linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identity), in fact Zambia, and by extension South Central, Southern, and Central Africa, may be considered one huge cultural area – in which interculturality manifests itself, not so much in the interethnic exchanges between Africans, but in transcontinental cultural orientations as largely brought by Mercantilism, Colonialism, and Globalisation.

### **3.2. European / African Interculturality in the context of a present-day urban cult in Lusaka, Zambia**

Continuing our eclectic exploration of interculturality in modern Africa, we follow the flow of urbanisation as one of the most significant social transformations in Africa over the past century. Here of course the study of *formal organisations* (including churches and ethnic associations as the main forms of African self-organisation), ethnicity, the rise of formal and especially informal commercial enterprise, the growth and contestation of urban norms, of ‘urbanism as a way of life’ (Wirth 1938), and of *virtualisation* of the relations with the rural village home and its productive and reproductive concerns (van Binsbergen 2015a: ch. 1, 1997a, 1998a), have received ample attention from researchers. As a focus of interculturality I concentrate, in the next case study, on a rural cult of affliction,<sup>54</sup> which I have studied (from 1972 onwards) both among the Nkoya urban migrant minority in Lusaka, and in the Nkoya area of origin, 400 kms west of Lusaka.

3.2.1. European / African interculturality in a cultic context: Considerations of modern decency overriding time-honoured local traditions in the contact with the sacred among female adepts in a Zambian urban cult of affliction.

‘A general, time-honoured rule in historic religion throughout South Central Africa has been

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<sup>54</sup> A cult of affliction (Turner 1968; Carter 1972; van Binsbergen 1981c, and extensive references there) is a ritual and doctrinal complex, in which new adepts are recruited through diagnosis and healing, gradually proceeding from ailing novice adept to healed member and so on to leadership. Coming from the Indian Ocean region, ultimately at home perhaps in South East Asia, such cults have rapidly spread all over South Central Africa from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE onward. In ways beyond our present scope, in the Nkoya versions of these cults all sorts of transcontinental resonances are manifest, *e.g.* of Buddhism, and Sunda expansion. My other work offers fuller descriptions and analyses on these points.

that women are to approach the sacred with bare breasts. No explicit emic explanation of this custom was ever offered to me, but I understand that worshipping women, by showing their breasts, as absolutely vital organs of nurturation hence of reproduction (in a society largely lacking safe bottled formula feeding for babies), proclaim their closeness to the very source of life and death which is being venerated in their ancestral rituals and their cults of affliction. In the early 1970s, my initial encounter with Zambian cults of affliction was in the capital city of Lusaka, and only after a year did I extend the research to a rural area, notably the Nkoya region of Barotseland (then Western Province) in Western Zambia. In the rural areas, cults of affliction abounded, and women participating in them still observed the above rule concerning baring their breasts – even though in daily life in the villages it had become fairly rare for women to go about their non-ritual tasks with their upper body exposed; the heavy sweat-producing work of pounding grain was an exception even though it caused the unharnessed breasts (often long enough to be led over the shoulder and nurse the baby while on the mother's back) to be tossed up and down unceremoniously. (Needless to add that the extreme sexualisation of adult women's breasts as in North Atlantic post-Victorian popular culture had not yet effectively penetrated to the African population of Zambia by 1970, although Christian / Victorian / middle-class prudery had, for close to a century, especially through formal / missionary education). In town, African women engaging in ecstatic cults were very conscious of being under the scrutiny of neighbours and passers-by not belonging to their own ethnic group, region, and cult. Repeatedly one could hear them call out, in the town's *lingua franca*, Nyanja

*'Zikomo, Bambo, khalani chete:  
tikupemphera pano'*

*'Please, Sir, be quiet: we are praying  
here*

In principle the Nkoya women in town tried to live up to the codes of decency initially imposed by Western education, missionary Christianity, and the lower-middle-class norms of (post-)Victorian England – even though these Nkoya women tended to have very little formal education, were far from middle class but in great majority belonged to the extensive class of insecure urban migrants struggling to survive in town, and (by the early 1970s at least) tended to be scarcely touched by Christianity. The decency code had simply grown (like several other norms, e.g. concerning respect for a dwelling's private space, use of collective toilets etc.) into a basic rule of Zambian specifically urban life – not only in formal, municipal housing estates such as Matero and Chelston, but even in informal squatterments. So when ecstatic cults would be staged on the open spots between dwellings in town (by no means a rare event), most participating women would not expose their breasts, but would wear conspicuous, large white bras – often second-hand ones. However, near the paroxysms of trance the cultically required movements (accompanied by a small male ensemble playing on cylinder drums, while some of the audience would sound rattles made of food tins or woody fruits – *rusaka*, hence the capital's name Lusaka – containing small pips) would tend to become so frenetic that the shoulder straps of these bras would continuously sag down to the adept's elbows, threatening to expose the breasts and shaking them wildly. In these, very common, situations the adepts would pull up their shoulder straps every few seconds and tuck their wandering breasts back into their bras, even when in every other respect they appeared to go through the motions and facial expressions locally associated with deep trance. By the same token, the frenetic trance movements would threaten to expose the adepts' thighs and crotch, and again care would be taken during trance to avoid this from happening by continuously tucking back the adept's cloth wrapper between her thighs – although

such care was usually in the hands of fellow-women in the audience rather than of the adepts themselves'. (van Binsbergen 2021b: 202, slightly edited)

### **3.3. The African tradition goes underground in a modern Botswana city**

When, in the early 1970s, I first drafted my ethnographic account of the Bituma cult in Lusaka,<sup>55</sup> it was partly in response to a statement by Elisabeth Colson (for decades the grand old lady of Zambian anthropology, succeeding Audrey Richards in that capacity; I gratefully borrowed for months her project Landrover four-wheel-drive automobile in 1977) who had remarked, in passing (1969), that, given their rural original locus, cults of affliction were not being performed in the Zambian cities. However, when one and a half decades later I had shifted my research site to the booming city of Francistown, Botswana, I did encounter a situation as claimed by Colson: a modern city full of Africans many of whom had been born in neighbouring villages, but who apparently had not bothered to bring their rural religious practices (and beliefs) with them into town. Although I was an experienced anthropologist of religion, and lived, with my family, in the midst of a popular all-African compound, all I could see was Black urbanites meekly going to their work, shopping malls, churches – but apparently not engaging in any time-honoured local religious tradition. Not even patience, nor the trust of some of our research hosts,<sup>56</sup> but merely our good fortune (the loss of an irreplaceable book manuscript, which qualified us as suffering clients) enabled us to cross the firm boundaries surrounding the domain of local traditional cults in town. I have inter-

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<sup>55</sup> Soon to be published as van Binsbergen 1977a, 1982.

<sup>56</sup> When in the mid-1980s, as head of political science and history at the Leiden African Studies Centre, I had launched a departmental research programme with focus on Southern Africa (rendered topical by the transition to majority rule), it had been obvious for me to accept the invitation of my close friend and colleague Richard Werbner, Manchester, and shift my personal fieldwork site from Zambia to Francistown, Botswana. Richard had done extensive rural fieldwork among the Kalanga people of Zimbabwe and Botswana, had become an authority not only on local divination but also on the region's dominant cult of the High God Mwali, and we had collaborated on the wider study of regional cults (Werbner 1977; van Binsbergen 1977a). His former research assistant, Timon Mongwa, had made the grade as entrepreneur and as major of Francistown, and greatly facilitated our family's stay and my research. But nothing of this, and not even Werbner's personal (but strikingly non-committal) visit to Francistown in the Spring of 1989, did help to break through the veil of dissimulation surrounding rural religious traditions in town (the *Sangoma* cult, which my wife joined some eight months after our arrival, only to be followed by me within a year, formed a slightly different case for this was locally perceived as an alien, recent introduction mainly from Nguni-speaking regions, not really continuous with current village cults in the immediate surroundings of Francistown: the cult of Mwali, that of royal ancestors, and the Shumba / Lion demonic cult.

puted such cults's initial total invisibility in town as an inhibition interculturally imposed by the dominance of nearby White, still apartheid-based, South African society – of which the Francistown White community was a satellite, and where the majority of local adult African males had worked as labour migrants.

### 3.3.1. Interculturality in Botswana: The boom town of Francistown, Botswana (c. 1990 CE) as a culturally and religiously contested space

Founded by Europeans as a mining town in 1897, the city of Francistown (initially a.k.a. Tati) grew into Botswana's second largest city, with a population (1989) of well over 60,000 Botswana nationals of Black African background, and a few thousand Whites. There is (van Binsbergen 1990a) a large number of different African Christian churches at work on this urban scene, and although the liturgical and therapeutic style of most of them is remarkably similar, differences should not be ignored. My participant observation inevitably had to be limited to just a handful of such churches. Here ancestral spirits could only be mediated to the globally informed, Christian church environment in the most muted form possible: contrary to the traditional rural divination and exercism practices, the church-goer (or in view of the fact that therapy is a prime motivation for church-going, the 'patient') would merely collapse, moan and scream inarticulately, no attempt would be undertaken in church to name the individual troubling spirit and identify it in the patient's genealogy – its suppression and dispelling (emulating a *New-Testament* pattern, e.g. Matthew 8:28 f.) was the church leadership's principal recognised task. An exploration of the wider social framework shows that the particular mix of global and local elements to be 'allowed in' is far from entirely decided at the level of these formal organisations alone. In Francistown, the church routine is only one out of many examples (van Binsbergen 1990a, 1990b, 1993a, 1993c) to demonstrate that (as a result of the converging effects of state monitoring, on the one hand, and the population's self-censorship and informal social control, on the other hand) the public production of any time-honoured African local and regional cultural tradition is anathema within the urban environment of Francistown – unless under conditions of state orchestration, such as urban customary courts, or Independence-Day celebrations. For most purposes, traditional culture had gone *underground* in this town. This also makes it understandable why rival therapeutic institutions available at the local urban scene: herbalists (*dingaka ya setswana*) and Nguni-style spirit mediums (*Basangoma*) offering more secluded and more detailed, verbally far more articulate sessions for private conversation and therapeutic action, have continued to attract a larger number of clients than the population's truly massive involvement in healing churches would suggest. Ethnicity does play a role here, since Francistown is in the heart of Kalanga country, and the Kalanga constitute the most educated, vocal, and privileged ethnic and linguistic minority to challenge Tswana majority hegemony in Botswana. Yet this cannot be the entire explanation: Kalanga is not the *lingua franca* in Francistown (that privilege has been accorded to Tswana, which is also the mother tongue not only of the country's Tswana majority living to the West and the South of Francistown, but also of some communities very near Francistown), and from the 1960s on the town has attracted such large numbers of Tswana urban migrants that Tswana are now in the majority – but also even *Tswana* expressions of traditional culture are barred from the public urban scene. Significantly, *churches constitute about the least ethnically divided*



*domain* in Francistown society: many churches here are emphatically bilingual or trilingual (notably Tswana, Kalanga, and Ndebele) in their verbal ritual practice, and whereas it is sometimes possible to detect ethnic overtones in the conflicts which bring churches to split, in general adherents seem to live up to their stated conviction that ethnic bickering is not becoming in a context meant to express common humanity before the face of God.' (van Binsbergen 2015a: 101, slightly edited. )

### **3.4. The implicitly low-verbal, musical sphere as an obvious context for interculturality**

In the theoretical discussion of Part II, I have briefly indicated how non-verbality *e.g.* in the musical sphere, may be capable of braving cultural boundaries which at the verbal level can hardly be surmounted. The musical sphere is the domain of widely recognised excellence of the Nkoya people. Interculturally here works in two ways: it breaches the, otherwise rather unforbiddable, ethnic and linguistic opposition between the Nkoya and the Lozi people during the past hundred years, but it also testifies to the unexpectedly rich and diverse transcontinental past of Nkoya music, – a past that seems to be the principal key to understanding the continued dominance of Nkoya music in the region.

#### **3.4.1. Interethnic relations, interculturality, and transcontinental continuity in Western Zambia: Why should Nkoya musical expressions have become dominant in western Zambia?**

For the larger part of the past 150 years the Nkoya have been in a subaltern, subservient position *vis-à-vis* the dominant Lozi (a.k.a. Barotse and Luyi) – the ethnic group concentrating on the Zambezi Flood Plain and in control of the Barotseland traditional administration under the *Litunga* *i.e.* the Lozi Paramount Chief (formerly King). Also in the modern Zambian towns the Nkoya were considered a despised minority up to the 1980s.<sup>57</sup> Yet even 'Lozi' court music, its song lyrics, its very performers, are of Nkoya origin; and a prominent tradition<sup>58</sup> has it that an early 19-c. CE Luyi king, Mulambwa, humbly requested 'Nkoya' music, as well as 'Nkoya' king-making and king-protecting medicine, so as to secure his own position among the Luyi.<sup>59</sup> I do not think that the complex musical situation can be fully explained

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<sup>57</sup> In several papers I have described the process by which the Nkoya after initial rejection or aloofness have gradually responded favourably to state penetration and opted to participate in the state's and the ruling party's representative and legislative institutions, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1986; Doombos & van Binsbergen 2017.

<sup>58</sup> *Likota lya Bankoya*, 24 and 56, in: van Binsbergen 1992: 79 and *passim*. Also: Anonymous [ J.M. Shimunika ], n.d., 'Muhumpu...'

<sup>59</sup> I put *Nkoya* between quotation marks here, because even that name seems an anachronism for early 19<sup>th</sup>-c. CE situations – as an ethnonym, the name Nkoya, deriving from a wooded area on the Zambezi-Kabompo confluence, gained ascendance in the context of Kololo / Lozi / Luyi political incorporation of most of Western Zambia, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> c CE on.

from regional historical dynamics within South Central Africa alone.<sup>60</sup> My research during the past two decades, into sub-Saharan Africa's transcontinental continuities (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020d), as well as my own amateur steps in Indian ancient court music (*Dhrupad*) as a student of *pakhavaj* percussion, is now offering an answer.<sup>61</sup>

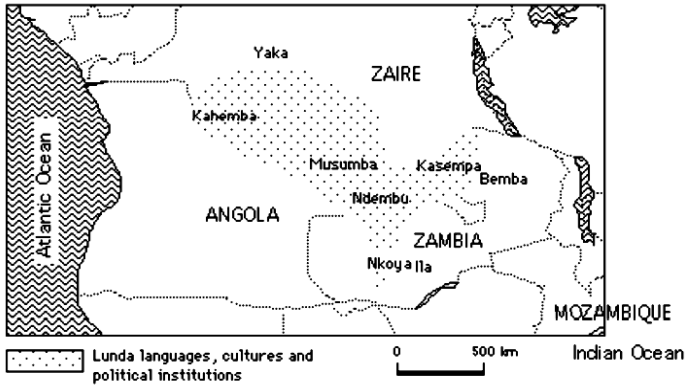


Fig. 2. Proposed extent of the Lunda region in South Central Africa (16th-19th c. CE) (source: van Binsbergen 2020d: 170, Fig. 5.14)

The Nkoya states, those of the Lozi, and in general those of the Lunda cluster to which both groups peripherally belong, are commonly held to have emerged in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE (Fig. 2), and may be considered remnants of a [ hypothetical! – 2022 ] South Asian-derived, largely Buddhist- and Hindu-informed state system more or less controlling South Central Africa in the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE – featuring, among others, such activities as music-making and metallurgy, both of them traits traditionally associated with the earliest Nkoya kings. Such activities highlight these Nkoya kings' affinities with 'Gypsy' emigrants from South Asia who spread all over the globe, including sub-Saharan Africa (Streck 1991, 1995) – taking refuge from Islamic Moghul rule in India, and its insistence on circumcision. The Kahare kingship, one of the two principal royal ones among the Nkoya, likewise has a mythical tradition of rejecting circumcision (van Binsbergen 1992b, 1993a) and even has 'Kale' as nickname – a widespread Gypsy name meaning 'Black One', notably in South Asian languages such as Sinhalese. Another influence on this South Central African state complex seems to have been Shivaite Hindu Chola princes taking refuge when their South Asian empire collapsed by the 14<sup>th</sup> c. CE; and also the Chola had elaborate royal orchestras [ (Hickley 1988 / 1873; Kannan & Thambiah 2012; Lippe 1971); I extensively travelled and filmed in Tamil Nadu, In-

<sup>60</sup> I thus implicitly reject the 'Africa for the Africans' doctrine, see below.




<sup>61</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen in press (a), in press (b), 2012g – the latter including a compelling Buddhist / Hindu interpretation of Great Zimbabwe. The regional, African origin of Great Zimbabwe became an article of faith among African historians in the Interbellum (notably Caton-Thompson 1931). The massive presence, at that site, of transcontinentally imported ceramics was then plausibly interpreted as local princes enjoying overseas trade items of conspicuous consumption, but the unmistakable *lingam* / *yonis* genital iconography of cultic spots at Great Zimbabwe (already extensively documented in Bent 1892 / 1969) leaves no doubt as to the transcontinental religious orientation.

dia, in 2014 and somewhat familiarised myself with Chola antiquities there, van Binsbergen 2014). ] I take it that this musical tradition has continued to lend legitimacy to this state system's South Central African successors, even if these have now very largely shed all conscious recollections of South Asia and Buddhism / Hinduism. Yet South Asian continuities abound in the Nkoya context (van Binsbergen 2020d): *cf.* such Nkoya names as Shikanda;<sup>62</sup> Mangala (< South Asian मङ्गल Mangala, the planet god Mars); the standard Nkoya lover's term of endearment *mbayi*; the Nkoya word *mukupele* 'hourglass drum' (< *mahabera*, 'big drum', in Singhalese?); the Nkoya's legendary origin from 'a distant northern land' (*cf.* Zembra, in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*) named Kola, *cf.* the *Mahabharata* (this epic's protagonists are the Pandava, which in Dravidian means 'Offspring of the Pig') Kuru people, South and South East Asian Kola as ethnic and language name, *etc.* – in Sanskrit, कौल *kola* means 'pig, hog'; Monier-Williams 1899: 256), the pig is considered an avatar of the primal god Viṣṇu, and it may thus not be by accident that the earliest Nkoya kings are supposed to have left the Musumba capital of Mwata Yamvo – 'Lord Death' – where they were housed at or near the pig sties (*cf.* the humiliated Pandava?); the mythical Nkoya king Kapeshe, associated with the solar or lunar *Conus* shell disc and with the mythical Tower into Heaven, *cf.* King Kashyapa (Sanskrit: *kaśyapa* कश्यप 'with black teeth', Monier-Williams 1899: 215) from the Buddhist *Jataka* stories and the Lankan Sigiriya tradition (van Binsbergen, 2020d). Many other details only noticeable from a South Asian perspective, substantiate my claim of a Nkoya / South Asian link – the central theme in van Binsbergen 2020d.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.5. *Ethnicisation, streamlining, virtualisation in modern Africa does not necessarily preclude existential cultural identity*

What took relatively long to register with European researchers, and to be

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<sup>62</sup> Shikanda, from: Skanda / Kartikeya / Murugan / Subrahmanya, the South Asian war god whose name is often associated with that of the Macedonian (Ancient Greek) king Alexander the Great / Iskander, who – in the legendary footsteps of the Greek god Dionysus and pharaoh Sesostris / Senwosret I / III – reached India in the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 5.11–2.2), and who lives on in an epic cycle distributed from the Mediterranean to South and South East Asia – Gopala Pillai n.d.; Harrigan n.d. Like (a) the Ancient Egyptian gods  Horus,  Tefnut, and  Shu – and (b) like humanity as a whole in the Zulu cosmogony; Colenso 1855: 239 *f.* – Skanda was reputedly born in a thicket of reeds (hence the epithet *Saravanabhava*); his name has the same meaning in Sanskrit, 'soaring high', as that of the legendary Nkoya prince Luhamba in Nkoya. My own Nkoya name is Tatashikanda *i.e.* *Shikanda's* (my middle daughter's) *Father*. However, the name Shikanda can also be given a local, Nkoya, etymology, notably: 'pertaining to the *Mukanda* male puberty / circumcision rite' – *cf.* Turner 1967c; Crowley 1982; van Binsbergen 1993b. Here again, the Islamic Moghul connection opens up interesting perspectives for further research, although (given the wide distribution and general cultural embeddedness of male genital mutilation in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa) it is out of the question that South Central African male genital mutilation could have such a specific and recent (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE) South Asian origin. Instead, I propose an Early Holocene Sunda origin for the institution (extensive discussion in van Binsbergen 2020d: ch. 13.4, pp. 424 *f.*)

<sup>63</sup> van Binsbergen 2015: 159 *f.*, slightly edited .

problematised as a major form of innovation on African soil, was *the increasing dominance of the formal organisation also outside the governmental sphere in the narrower sense*. The ubiquity of the formal organisation<sup>64</sup> in present-day Africa (like in the North Atlantic region from the beginning of the Common Era and especially from Early Modern times) in such major spheres as the state, the economy, education, religion, medical care, and recreation) in fact means an incessant element of interculturality between Africa, on the one hand, and the North Atlantic region since Early Modern times, on the other hand. In this connection we should also pay attention to the many forms of *hybridisation*<sup>65</sup> which are characteristic on this point, and which in the last few decades have often been discussed under the heading of *globalisation*. As part of my sustained study of the Nkoya people and their ethnicisation, I have repeatedly (1992a, 1997b, 1999d, 2003c, 2011a, 2015a: ch. 1) looked at the process of transformation brought about by the framing of Nkoya cultural orientations in the context of the Kazanga Cultural Association. That organisation was founded by an Nkoya elite of relatively affluent prominents in Lusaka and elsewhere in Zambia's central urbanised region called the Line of Rail), in order to preserve or propagate what they nostalgically cherished (but largely without their personal participation and continued belief any more) as 'our traditional culture'. Clearly the format, inspiration, goals, priorities, forms of leadership were all products of interculturality, and implied a radical format change underneath of which the origin cultural orientations could scarcely be recognised – yet the villagers eagerly and massively participating in the annual Kazanga Cultural Ceremony at the heart of Nkoyaland, did not mind the transformation (if they at all noticed it consciously), and celebrated the diluted, greatly transformed results as if they were the real thing.

### 3.5.1. The Nkoya Kazanga festival: Cultural display implies virtualisation but that does not preclude authenticity and continuity with the local cultural tradition.

'In the incorporative context of the Kazanga Cultural Ceremony – the regional ethnic festival of the Nkoya people, explicitly addressing the entire post-colonial national socio-political space, one does not only display references to the modern commoditised<sup>66</sup> cul-

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1985d, 1993b.

<sup>65</sup> So-called *corruption*, i.e. the instrumental use of roles and prerogatives within a modern formal organisation, for personal or parochial group purposes that have certainly not been stipulated by that formal organisation (but that often have been inspired by more local and time-honoured values, goals and roles, such as kin obligations), forms an interesting and relatively well-studied aspect of such hybridisation.

<sup>66</sup> In the sense of *the turning into commodities for sale and purchase in exchange for money in a market context, of objects of so-called material culture, but also symbolic goods, knowledges, and interpersonal services as stipulated in local cultural orientations*; cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere 2005.

tural orientations (hence the visual emphasis on such commodities as cameras, microphones, tape recorders, public address systems, sun glasses, modern dress, expensive modern coiffures, *etc.*); one also borrows from a repertoire which has certainly not been commoditified even if it is performative. Thus (see Fig. 4,7,3, below), dressed in leopard skins, around the temples a royal ornament featuring a *Conus* shell from the Indian Ocean, and brandishing an antique executioner's axe,<sup>67</sup> an aged royal chief, with *virtuoso* accompaniment from a hereditary honorary drummer of the same age (...), performs the ancient Royal Dance which since the end of the 19th c. CE was hardly seen any more in this region; at the climax the king (for that is what, despite state demotion to mere chief, he shows himself to be) kneels down and drinks directly from a hole in the ground where home-brewn beer has been poured out for his royal ancestors – the patrons of at least his part of the Nkoya nation, implied to share in the deeply emotional cheers from the audience. And young women who have long been through girls' puberty initiation, perform that ritual's final dance (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1987 / 2003c: ch 3), without any signs of the appropriate stage fright and modesty, and with their already too mature breasts not nudely in full view (as is the requirement during the girl's coming-out dance at her puberty ceremony – and in any other traditional encounters with the sacred), but against all tradition tucked into conspicuous white bras; yet despite this performative artificiality their sublime and agile bodily movements, which in this case are far from censored by any Christian / Victorian canon of prudery, approach the village-based original sufficiently closely to bring the spectators, men as well as women, to ecstatic tearful expressions of a recognised and shared identity'.<sup>68</sup>

### **3.6. Format change towards interculturality: The globalising virtualisation of Nkoya spirituality among the Zambian Nkoya**

Above I have spoken of cults of affliction being staged in the 1970 urban environment of Zambia, where their performance is considerably informed by ultimately European norms of decency as mediated interculturally. When we shift the focus to rural Nkoyaland, and inspect the entire time-honoured local religious sphere there, the accommodation to transcontinental intercultural conditions becomes even more manifest.

A number of spiritual complexes, including

- one revolving on the veneration of deceased kings,
- another on girl's initiation and the spirit of menstruation and maturation named Kanga,
- another on commoner villagers's ancestral spirits,
- yet another on spirits of the wild as venerated in cults of affliction and in the guilds of hunters and healers,

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<sup>67</sup> All these attributes – regalia, in fact – have now become non-commodities, pertaining to a royal circuit that in the present time is no longer mercantile, although it was more so during the nineteenth century CE.

<sup>68</sup> van Binsbergen 2015: 165 *f.*, slightly edited.

together make up the spiritual life world of the present-day Nkoya people.<sup>69</sup> This statement needs to be qualified in view of the fact that many who today identify as Nkoya, including the group's dominant ethnic brokers and elite, have undergone considerable Christian influence and would primarily identify as Christians of various denominations notably the Evangelical Church of Zambia, the Roman Catholic Church, and recent varieties of Pentecostalism. Moreover, in the 19th and 19th c. CE, Islamic Swahili long-distance traders penetrated into the land of Nkoya and left some slight cultural traces there.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> van Binsbergen 1981b, 1992b, 2011a, 2015d, and in press (b); van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b, with a section specifically on religion.

<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of these traces, see van Binsbergen 2015a: 277n f. (= 2015d). They are mainly to be found in the so-called 'material culture' – use of cast-iron cauldrons, muzzle-loading guns, calico textiles – the latter especially as offerings at ancestral graves. I detected, over the decades, no overt traces of Islamic influence. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE part of the Nkoya did practice male genital mutilation ('circumcision'; van Binsbergen 1992b, 1993a, 2020d: ch. 13.4, pp. 424f, and already dealt with in a preceding footnote).

One might perhaps wish to link male genital mutilation and its likely Sunda dimension to evidence that, like many other Bantu-speaking groups, some Nkoya individuals show an aversion to eating pork. Working among the Nkoya ever since 1972, I have not found any domestic pigs there, but the latter feature in oral traditions, and in general the *wild of bush pig*, Nkoya: *nguluwē*, *Potamochoerus larvatus* is a favourite quarry in the region. However (given the relatively late rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE), male genital mutilation is suggestive of a much older Jewish / Semitic / general Pelasgian rather than specifically Islamic influence on sub-Saharan Africa, and is most probably not due to any recent influence mediated through Swahili traders venturing into the interior in Early Modern times. Considering the overall impact of Sunda influence on the western Old World (van Binsbergen 2020d), and the ubiquity of domestic pigs as items of food, exchange, and affection throughout the Austronesian-speaking and Oceanian world (Rappaport 1967; Vayda *et al.* 1961; Lemonnier 1993; Harris 1974) one might even think of ultimately a mid-Holocene Sunda effect on porcine food taboos in sub-Saharan Africa; but such is scarcely likely given the relatively late spread of domestic pigs to insular South East Asia and the Pacific (Dobney *et al.* 2008; Clark *et al.* 2013; Anonymous, Durham University 2007) from, probably, not Taiwan but Vietnam. The archaeology and molecular genetics of domestic *Suidae* in sub-Saharan Africa are rather compatible (Anonymous, *Sus* (genus), and *Pig*) with the consensus of the Ancient Near East and China as epicentres of domestication of this genus. Also a major authority in this field, the linguist / historian Blench (2000) sketches a largely intra-Africa domestic-pig history with south-bound diffusion from the Mediterranean as the main vector. This seems to put paid to a Sunda / African pig taboo connection even though I have demonstrated considerable Sunda impact, not only on sub-Saharan Africa (van Binsbergen 2020d), but also upon the Mediterranean region (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.4, pp. 370f).

Meanwhile, from 1900 CE on the trait of male genital mutilation has become a distinctive ethnic marker by which the non-circumcising (in fact, *no-longer-circumcising*) Nkoya distinguish themselves from the circumcising but culturally and linguistically rather closely related neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Luvale, Mbunda, Lunda, and Chokwe (van Binsbergen 1992b, 1993a). Even though I have claimed a global prehistoric substrate for geomantic divination (van Binsbergen 2012a), yet it has been the specific form of geomantic divination which emerged in Islamic West Asia under the name of *'ilm al-raml*, 'Sand Science', which, on the wings of Islam (as brought by traders and as literate, and distinctively dressed presences at courts) spread over Southern and South Central Africa; such *'ilm*-derived divination also penetrated to Western Zambia (van Binsbergen 2012a: 269), but (except in my

All these complexes define insiders and outsiders in their own right, to such an extent that most Nkoya people today could be said to be outsiders to most of what in some collective dream of Nkoyanness would be summed up as the basic constituent features of the Nkoya spiritual world. All Nkoya men are in principle<sup>71</sup> excluded from participation in, and knowledge of, the world of female initiation; women and all male non-initiates are excluded from the hunters' guild's cults except from the most public performances of its dances and songs, and so on.

Over the past decades, my research on identity, culture and globalisation in Zambia has concentrated on the annual Kazanga festival,<sup>72</sup> since the 1980s the main rural outcome of a process of ethnicisation by elite urban-based Nkoya people. The actors's explicit purpose for the Kazanga festival is *intercultural* (in the emic conception, where intercultural and interethnic are conflated): to present Nkoya identity to the overwhelming non-Nkoya majority of Zambians (and thus to gain political recognition and access – by an eminently (post-)modern strategy of multicultural politics; cf. Taylor 1992). The central feature of this festival is that elements from all spiritual domains (with the exception of Christianity, which however contributes the festival's opening prayer and partly informs the canons of – what would appear to be, considered from a historic Nkoya point of view – prudish decency governing dancers's clothing and bodily movements) are pressed into service in the two-day's repertoire of the festival. The effect is that thus all people attending the festival

(whose globally-derived format, including an explicit, written, formal programme of events, the participation of several royal chiefs seated together (in a terrible infringement of traditional cosmology – the king as centre of the universe has to be ostentatiously unique), the (obviously merely performative) re-enactment of girl's initiation dances by young women who have already been initiated, the use of a public address system, the opening prayer and national anthem, the careful, geometric orchestration of dancing movements by dancers who are uniformly dressed and who receive payment for their activities, etc. etc.) is entirely *non-local and transformative*)

yet are forced into a performative, vicarious insidership, by partaking of a recycled form of spirituality devoid of its localising exclusivity. Here boundaries are crossed and dissolved. The most striking thing is that the Nkoya people involved do not seem to notice the difference between the original spiritual dynamics, and its transformation and routinisation in the Kazanga context. Or rather, if they do notice the difference they appreciate the virtualised form even more than the original village forms (following a modern media template, to which they have been spottily exposed –

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hands) I have never seen it practiced among the Nkoya.

<sup>71</sup> If I, unmistakably perceived by the local population as a male foreign researcher, yet well on my way to becoming an adopted son of Mwene Kahare Kabambi, managed to gain access to some of these female knowledges, this is mainly due to three factors: 1) I was recognised to write a much coveted book on Nkoya culture and history, so received privileged treatment and access; 2. I was a close affine of the leading women managing this knowledge; 3. I was prepared to follow the standard South Central African procedure by which privileged knowledge is legitimately transferred: payment of a substantial sum of money.

<sup>72</sup> van Binsbergen 1992a, 1999d. Further discussions of the Kazanga festival in my argument on *virtuality* (1997a, reprinted in van Binsbergen 2015a: Chapter 1), and in van Binsbergen 2000c.

they may not have TVs and computers – nor even mains and running water – but from the years 2000s have often had cheap cellphones, having found inventive ways of keeping their batteries charged). However, one might also argue that it is only by sleight-of-hand that the illusion of a more extensive insidership is created here whereas in fact the essence of the virtualisation at hand is that *all* people involved, also the original insiders, are turned into *outsiders*, banned from the domain where the original spiritual scenario<sup>73</sup> could be seen to be effective.<sup>74</sup>

### **3.7. A long-range, global perspective as a likely background to interculturality: The case of female puberty rites**

While cults of affliction largely appear to be a recent, 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE phenomenon in Western Zambia (also cf. White 1949; van Binsbergen 1981c), female puberty rites have such wide, near global, distribution that their early forms must go back to remotest times, at least to the Upper Palaeolithic; this would suggest their representation in rock art worldwide, but the evidence is contentious and difficult to interpret. Female puberty rites constitute a case of long-range interculturality which comes close to affirming the fundamental unity of humankind, and which at any rate testifies to all sorts of intercultural continuities and exchanges which, far from affirming Africa's cultural specificity, confirm the continent and its inhabitants as very much part of a wider world, and that already for an immensely long time.

Female puberty rites form a good context to make a point stressing *the paramount importance of long-range perspectives in the analysis of culture and interculturality*. Classic, fieldwork-based anthropology used to be confined within narrow horizons of space and time – essentially, the space which a single researcher (on foot, horseback, donkey, bicycle, motorbike, or automobile) could effectively cover with intensive participant observation, augmented with scraps from regional and historical literature and relevant archives. Here the main theoretical stock-in-trade used to be structural functionalism: good ethnography was to show how the various parts of the one 'culture' under study constituted (inevitably, under the prevailing paradigm) an integrated, mutually reinforcing whole. This brought, for instance, a prominent Americanist such as Morris Opler (1972) to situate the North American Apache's girls' puberty rites, exclusively, within the orbit of Apache agriculture, division of labour, and residence patterns – as if the life crisis rites were primarily the resultant (Opler even uses such deterministic terms as 'cause and effect') of such strictly local and relatively recent socio-organisational dynamics. The international school of cross-cultural comparison *en vogue* in the 1950s-1970s, centring on the Human Relations Area Files and often using the crudest methods of contingency statistics (e.g. Murdock 1965 / 1949; Köbben 1967) produced thousands of such analyses. However, Apache female puberty rites unmistakably belong to a very wide-spread class of life-crisis rituals found

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<sup>73</sup> Such as was fully accessible to me during prolonged field-work in the 1970s, long before the initiation of the Kazanga Cultural Society with the Kazanga Festival as *invented tradition* and the attending virtualisation discussed above, when the Nkoya musical and dancing repertoire was still in place and informed rural rituals and celebrations often on a weekly basis.

<sup>74</sup> van Binsbergen 2015a: 277f.



in many parts of the world, and (as I have pointed out repeatedly, *e.g.* 2003c: ch. 3, 2012a: 260*f.*) they are very similar to those found in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in South Central African cultural orientations such as those of the Nkoya. Such continuity (which is far from limited to life crisis ritual, but extends to divination, gaming, basketry, myth, fishing techniques) begins to make sense once we realise that in the Upper Palaeolithic of Central to East Asia, the peripheral branches of (a) \*Proto-Austric, (b) \*Proto-Amerind and (c) \*Proto-African languages (= \*Proto-Nigercongo, \*Proto-Nilosaharan and \*Proto-Khoisan), into which \*Borean<sup>75</sup> is supposed to have disintegrated, were still geographically adjacent, sharing, to a considerable extent, both a common ancestral language and a common culture of hunting and gathering. Mainstream approaches to cultural history abhor the idea of relatively recent, prehistoric trans-Atlantic cultural transfers (*e.g.* Ortiz de Montellano 2000),<sup>76</sup> which however might have constituted an attractive alternative explanation for these African-North American continuities – the latter are often so uncannily close as seems difficult to reconcile with a long intervening time span of at least 15 ka<sup>77</sup>

### **3.8. Remote forms of interculturality between South and South Central Africa and the Ancient Mediterranean**

Our final descriptive piece suggestive of long-range interculturality focusses again on ritual forms in South Central and Southern Africa, especially in the ecstatic *Sangoma* cult. I was initiated into this cult in 1990 and thus obtained privileged access, as a fieldworker and as a colleague, to otherwise sheltered information and knowledge. Here again we see the most extensive lines of intercultural continuities across, virtually, the entire Old World, since at least the beginning of the Common Era.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE the main academic sources of information on occult phenomena outside the North Atlantic and the current times, were traveller's accounts, and particularly the writings from, and concerning, Graeco-Roman Antiquity. On the latter we are extensively informed (de Jong 1921, 1930; Kiesewetter 1891-1896; Dodds 1951;

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<sup>75</sup> Proposed by such prominent long-range historical linguists as Fleming (1991, 2002) and Starostin (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), \*Borean is a hypothetical construct supposed to be spoken in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic c. 25 ka BP, and to have left (as the basis for reconstruction) detectable systematic traces in most of the (likewise reconstructed!) \*proto-lexicons of languages spoken today.

<sup>76</sup> As extensively chided by me in recent books (2019, 2020d), and as already referred to above, many anthropologists and historians today combine (a) a tendency towards the bizarre 'Africa for the Africans' ideology (*i.e.*: 'out of respect for the experience of oppression to which Africans have been subjected by the rest of the world in recent centuries, things African *must* be explained by exclusive reference to Africa') with (b) a reification of continents as totally self-contained bounded units, and disbelief in humans's general capability at transcontinental seafaring. As the prominent archaeologist Bednarik (1997, 2003, 1999), has repeatedly argued, the feasibility of early navigation is sufficiently proven by the fact that Anatomically Modern Humans in their first Sally out of Africa, c. 70 ka BP, managed to reach New Guinea and Australia across (as geologists have established beyond doubt) as much as 70 kms of open sea.

<sup>77</sup> van Binsbergen 2021: 187n *f.*, slightly edited; ka = kilo annum = millennium.

Bouché-Leclercq 1879, 1899; von Pauly 1894-1963; etc.). Only since the early 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE, contemporary *i.e.* Bronze-Age accounts on Ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian ‘magic’ (*cf.* van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999) came to importantly broaden the scope of our insight in ancient occult beliefs and practices of the western Old World.

The topic is too broad and too rich to do justice to in mere passing, but a few pointers may suffice to indicate its importance. A crucial factor is that in latterday Africa, many magical and occult practices have a more or less acknowledged background (Becker 1913) in Islamic secret sciences (which, flourishing in West and South Asia in the late 1st and early second mill. CE, were in fact highly continuous with Graeco-Roman approaches, and often preserved the latter in Arabic, Syriac, Persian versions (sometimes with the help of Hebrew) when the original Greek texts had gone lost; Meyerhof 1937; Ullmann 1972; Fahd 1966). But there are also indications of even older connections. The pathbreaking work of Dierk Lange (*e.g.* 2012 / 2019, 2001, 2004) has proved beyond doubt the cultural and demographic continuity between Ancient Mesopotamia (especially the outgoing Assyrian empire of the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) and West Africa. Other suggestions of continuity between the Ancient Near East (including Egypt) and sub-Saharan Africa may be found in the aftermath of the Sea People’s episode, which by the end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean (ca. 1300 BCE) brought a wide variety of peoples on the move, some of which passed via Egypt into the Sahara and West Africa – constituting the southbound branch of the ‘cross model’ identified for the ‘Pelasgian’ demographic and cultural diffusion (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, with extensive references; van Binsbergen 2010b, 2010c, 2021a, and in press (a)). Other indications are few and far between yet well worth considering. When describing in unique detail the traditional pantheon of the Tswana people of today’s Botswana and South Africa (local knowledge of which had otherwise been largely eroded and disappeared by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE), the missionary J.T. Brown (1926) sketched an array of deities which displays parallels with Ancient Graeco-Roman religion, Yoruba religion in West Africa (its parallels with Graeco-Roman Antiquity had struck other authors, *e.g.* Graves 1988 / 1948: 489), and perhaps even more strikingly with the religion of the Ancient Near East (*cf.* Frobenius (1931), whose ‘Erythraean complex’ – ranging from particular bellows to kingship and female puberty rites – stressed cultural continuity from Ancient Mesopotamia, the Red [ Erythraean ] Sea / Egypt, and East Africa); the god of divination turns out to be Nape – *cf.* the Ancient Mesopotamian god of wisdom  Nabu, whose name is the etymon of the standard word for ‘prophet’ in Hebrew and Arabic *nabī*, but which also seems to surface in the extreme West of West Africa as the term *napene* for Manjaco oracular priest (van Binsbergen 1988a, 1984b, both reprinted in 2017). Turning now to a setting with which I have considerable direct experience: while the far more extensive South and East Asian continuities in the present-day *Sangoma* cult are more conspicuous (I have discussed them at length: 2003c: chs 5-8, 2019, 2020d, 2021b), yet the *Sangomas* also display two traits by which they are strongly reminiscent of Late Graeco-Roman Antiquity:

- Especially in private conversations among themselves (of which their lay clients are unaware), they consider themselves to be ‘gods’ (Tswana: *badimo*) – a trait detected in ritual leaders of South Asian Hinduism (van der Veer 1988), but also in Hermeticism: ‘don’t you know you are like gods?’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Cf.* Fromm 1967; Waite 1893 / 1973; Quispel 1992; Festugière 1945-1954; Cory 1828; Ferguson

- *Sangomas* (and other magical practitioners in South Central and Southern Africa) seek to entrap spirit familiars – notably by luring and locking them into honey-fragrant containers placed near fresh graves – so as to make them (in ways eminently familiar from the Arabian *jinn*s / demons depicted in *The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night*; tr. Burton 1893) their magical servants in the execution of their occult transgressions. These are greatly feared practices often discussed under the heading of *necromancy*).<sup>79</sup>

The Pelasgian Hypothesis (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011 and in press (a)), with its claim of dispersion of a specific, extensive cultural package, from the Late-Bronze-Age Mediterranean, into all directions including across the Sahara, offers a mechanism by which such transcontinental continuities may be explained, even though they go against the grain of essentialised Africanness, of the transcontinental *othering* characteristic of common geopolitical, and even Africanist, thinking among intellectuals almost worldwide throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE.

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2003; Ruska 1926; the disreputable best-seller Picknett & Prince 1998 yet contains a few useful indications on this point, e.g. p. 174.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. Spargo 1934; de Jong 1921, 1930; Hubert 1904; Alverny 1962; Hopfner 1931, 1965; du Prel 1890; Kiesewetter 1895; van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999 / 2017; other relevant entries in Pauly-Wissowa 1894-1963, Ziegler & Sontheimer 1979, and *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike. Altertum* (1997).



***PART IV. ADDITIONAL  
MATERIALS***



## ***CHAPTER 4. PHOTO ESSAY***

In view of the inevitably extremely cursory treatment of the descriptive aspects of interculturality in the preceding chapter, it is useful to illustrate the discursive text with significant, extensively annotated photographs. The order is loosely structured around the themes highlighted in Chapter 3.

#### 4.1. Female puberty rites among the Nkoya.



Fig. 4.1.1. In Nkoya emic opinion, female puberty rites constitute a major element in their ethnic identity. Far from being highly specific and local, however, such rites are culturally continuous (in terms of format, symbolism, world view) over much of Africa, and are even strongly reminiscent of those in North America and other continents. Thus they amount to an unsuspected yet significant form of transcontinental interculturality – hinting at such communalities in the cultural orientations of Anatomically Modern Humans as may have a common origin in Lower and Middle Palaeolithic times. While kinsmen crowd close in order to press gifts of beads and money on top of her head as token of appreciation, and flanked by a young girl still far from menarche, our niece, a 14-year old Nkoya girl (centre, with head scarf) presents her coming-out dance (Mukunkike, Kaoma district, 1977). Her naked upper body is hung crosswise with strings of beads that leave her budding breasts in full view; her hips are covered in thick layers of textile, perhaps to emulate the *steatopygy* (i.e., oversize development of the human buttocks, a pet topic of racist early physical anthropology) of Khoisan-speaking women; Khoisan speakers (often with such additional features as peppercorn hair growth, click sounds in their language, possession-healing dances, and accomplished animal husbandry (Khoi, Nama) or hunting and gathering techniques (San) appear to have preceded Bantu-speakers as inhabitants of the region, and to have had a considerable influence on the way of life of the Nkoya, who identify as forest hunters rather than as agriculturalists.





Fig. 4.1.2. Not only among the Nkoya people, but throughout South Central Africa and in fact sub-Saharan Africa at large (as well as in North America, and with a spotty distribution almost world-wide), female puberty rites mark and celebrate a girl's physical maturation, the growth of her breasts and ,*menarche* (i.e., the onset of menstruation). Here in a informal residential area near Chelston, some 15 kms east of the centre of Zambia's capital Lusaka, 1977, a shy, tearful 12-year old girl of the Nsenga people (Eastern Zambia), who a few hours earlier was found to have her first menstruation, is seated, in a space marked as a terrestrial symbol by spreading an improvised light-colour rectangular cloth (an old mealimeal bag), in front of the house, with a white headscarf as sign of her sacred condition, flanked by her younger pre-menarche sister, and surrounded by her mother's brother, two elder sisters (one holding her own baby), and (kneeling, and clapping in salute to the ancestors) her mother. The mother's brother presents a miniature hoe, and a pumpkin, as symbols of the productive and reproductive tasks which have now come in reach for the girl. Tragically she did not live to make this promise come true: like so many young people in Zambia at the onset of the AIDS epidemic, she died only a few years after this event.



Fig. 4.1.2. Among the North American Apache people (who speak an Athabaskan < Na-Denē language, commonly regarded as a branch of Sinocaucasian), the female puberty rites are concluded with the spectacular Sunrise Dance. Dressed in traditional Native American festive clothes, the novice girl rests on and under precious skins (again notice the rectangular format evocative of the Earth) and emerges from under them to begin her solo dance in the rays of the rising sun. Her relatives are grouped in a cosmologically-significant rectangle around her and accompany her dancing with songs and music performed on drums and rattles. There are remarkable similarities with the Nkoya dance of the Kank'anga pubescent girl: the rectangular spatial lay out, the emergence from under cover, the orientation to the rising sun, the assembled close kin ensuring that her ritual space remains respected, the reference (especially acoustic – through rattles and tinkling bottle tops or similar small metal objects) to the falling of rain drops as celestial blessing. Combating cultural drift and free variation, and constituting the major factor of cultural inertia, ritual has been recognised as a unique context in which symbols and practices may be preserved virtually unchanged over very long stretches of time and space; such preservation may even constitute the main societal significance of sacred institutions (van Binsbergen 2018; Durkheim 1912). If the communalities between Apache and Nkoya puberty rites have to be interpreted as springing from a common origin, that origin is to be sought as remotely as in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic (25 ka BP – Before Present) – before the disintegration of \*Borean and the massive peopling (mainly via the Bering Strait) of the New World by Anatomically Modern Humans. Another possibility is direct, and far more recent, trans-Atlantic diffusion during much more recent millennia – an idea that is greatly abhorred by mainstream regional studies (e.g. Ortiz de Montellano 2000) but for which comparative mythology and religion, and the global distribution of such food crops as maize and cassave, seem to provide further indications (cf. van Binsbergen 2021b: ch. 3) – against the background of Anatomically Modern Humans's undeniable capability at ocean navigation ever since c. 60 ka BP (a point authoritatively stressed by Bednarik, as cited elsewhere in this booklet).

## 4.2. Objects as sites of transcontinental interculturality



Fig. 4.2.1. This picture, taken in Ilaland due east of the Nkoya in the 1910s CE, shows a relatively early phase of North Atlantic cultural and political penetration among the Ila people (culturally close related to the eastern Nkoya, the Mashasha). In Ilaland, the first colonial administration was established in 1902 in the Nkala District, later to be subsumed under a long sequence of different administrative classifications, including (parts of) latterday Namwala, Itezhi-tezhi, and Mumbwa Districts. The two men in front are still in 100% traditional attire, including for coiffure a long vertical spire of hair and coagulant (reminiscent of Melanesia, Oceania – with which Sunda influence is likely to have constituted a distant link at some time in the last handful of millennia). The Mashasha cherish oral traditions of Kahare Wa Luhuki Lumweya, ‘The Kahere with One Hair’, which I take to be a memory of the same Ila coiffure. These men share the foreground with an enormous hippopotamus skull (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) – a species that abounds in the Kafue river which flows through Ilaland. In the background left a group of Ila (but without the spectacular spires) likewise seated on the ground – which is the time-honoured mode of group assembly in South Central Africa (as it is in Central Asia). In centre ground we see standing two civil servants of European or mixed European-African background, dressed in North Atlantic (apparently military) clothing; an improvised Western tent with natural poles as supports; and an early motorcar. Cf. Smith & Dale 1920; this picture also at: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/mashukulumbwe.html>.



Fig. 4.2.2. A so-called Melanesian Bow from the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa. Greatest dimension 130 cm. Locally made in the first half of the 20th c. CE. Author's collection. This weapon was bequeathed to me upon the death of its original owner, my adoptive father King Mwene Kahare Kabambi of the Mashasha Nkoya, December 1993. The king used the bow mainly for occasionally hunting relatively small game (e.g. *rusha* / duiker antelopes, *Cephalophinae*), but usually preferred to employ one of his several hunting rifles. When used for hunting, the bow (or the rifle, for that matter) functioned in fact as a divinatory instrument: the king would set out for the forest after placing the weapon in his ancestral shrine, praying to his ancestors, and putting to them an urgent question of his life, or current matters of state and of the royal capital – the outcome of the hunt would amount to the ancestors' answer: affirmative in the case of success, negative in the case of failure. Ceremonially such a royal bow is also used when then king affirms his legitimate ownership of the land by shooting an arrow in a sacred tree e.g. the locally common *mutondo* tree, (wild teak, *Pterocarpus angolensis*). Considered a living ancestral being, the bow is to regularly receive small offerings in the form of cooking oil to be applied to the fibre windings at the top and bottom, and small sprinklings of meal.

World-wide, this is one of the most common types of bow, with a distribution that was studied in detail by the German early anthropologist Graebner (1909).

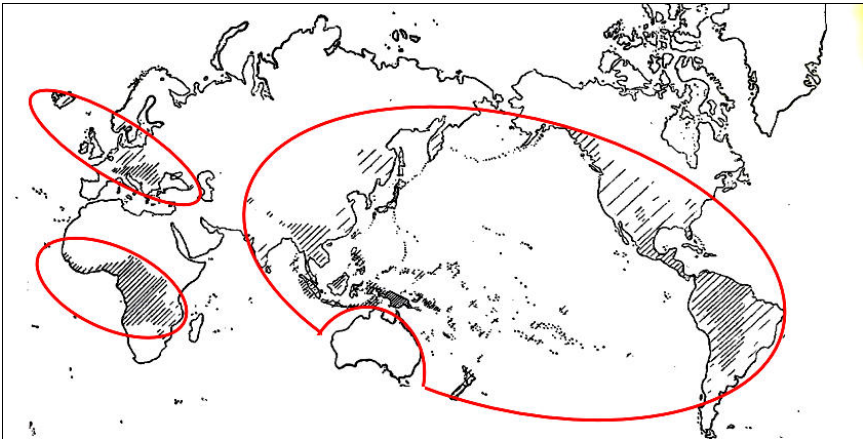


Fig. 4.2.2a. Graebner's map of the global distribution of the Melanesian Bow (red ellipsed added – WvB)

On the basis of this global distribution (showing global highs for Melanesia, New Guinea, and South East Asia) this type is commonly called the Melanesian Bow, and its origin is

postulated to be in Melanesia, Oceania, in the Upper Palaeolithic. However, when all evidence is taken into account, against the background of today's insights (e.g. Forster 2004) from molecular genetics concerning the origin and spread of the principal haplotypes of Anatomically Modern Humans, a very different conclusion is forced upon us (for a detailed and compelling discussion cf. van Binsbergen 2020b): originating in South East Africa in the Lower Palaeolithic (c. 100 ka BP), this type of bow spread to West Asia, Europe, and South East Asia, reaching Oceania including Melanesia (but also East Asia and the New World) only in the Upper Palaeolithic. It is possible that Sunda expansion from South East Asia played a role in its more recent global spread but that factor is immaterial as far as the earlier distribution and the proclaimed African origin are concerned.

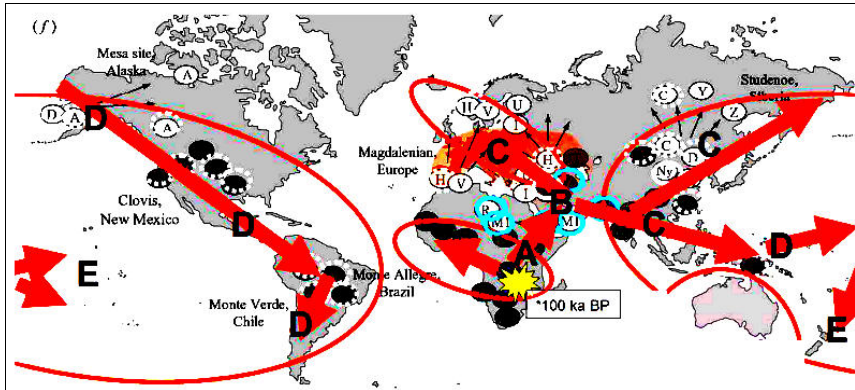


Fig. 4.2.2b. Reconstructed global history of the so-called Melanesian Box – which turns out to be an African one (van Binsbergen 2020b).

### 4.3. Ethnic groups

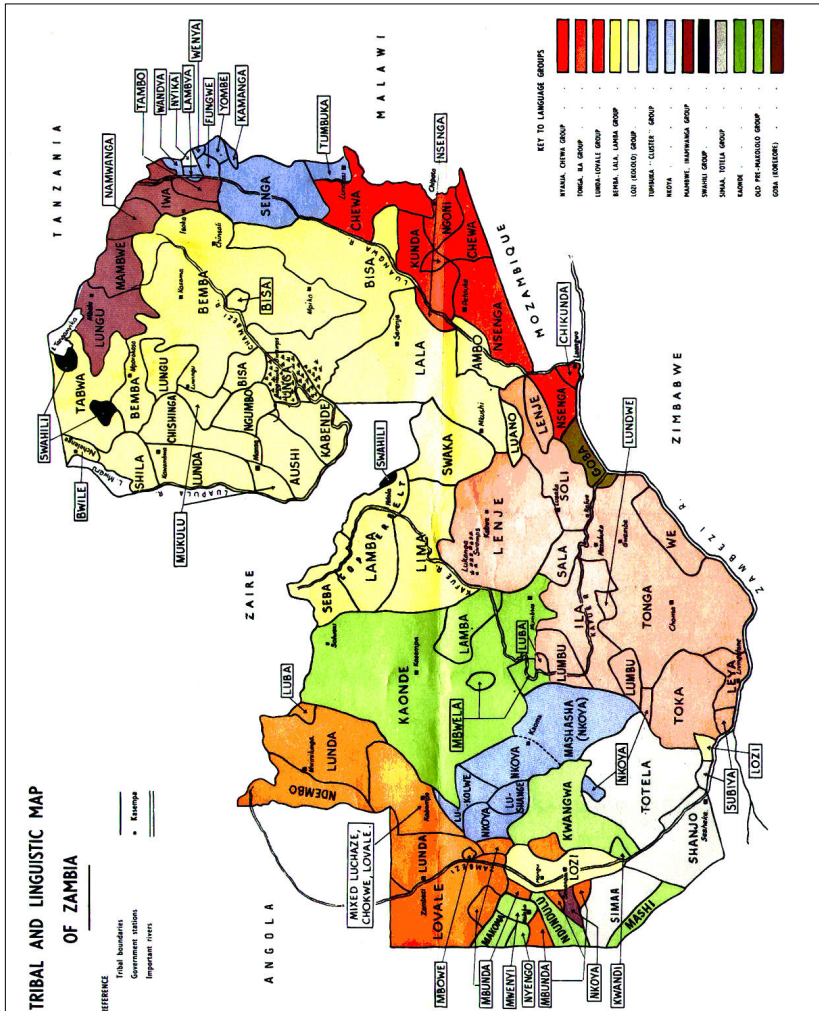


Fig. 4.3.1. Ethnic groups are the emic constituent parts of the national socio-political space, but although they have dominated African political consciousness since at least the 20th c. CE, they are imposed upon a largely continuous regional cultural space, hence do not mark instances of interculturality. Official 'Tribal and Linguistic map of Zambia', as circulated by the Office of the Surveyor General, a Zambian government department, in the 1970s, but going back to an identical 1930s colonial original; it was also reproduced at the end of Richards 1961 / 1939.

#### 4.4. Towns as context of interculturality between time-honoured African traditions and transcontinental cultural transfers, especially under modern conditions of globalisation



Fig. 4.4.1. In Zambian towns, cults of affliction may be staged on the open spots which have been left unoccupied in between the self-constructed dwellings in informal residential areas. The picture shows the relatively spacious layout of the large informal settlement ('squatter area') of Kalingalinga, just over 5 kms from the city centre, 1977. In this ethnically highly diverse city ward, administered at the time by the local branch of the United National Independence Party (then the country's only political party), a considerable number of Nkoya urban migrants have settled, finding support with one another in their uncertain, often resourceless urban existence – which for many of them, after a few years in town, will end in a return to the village.

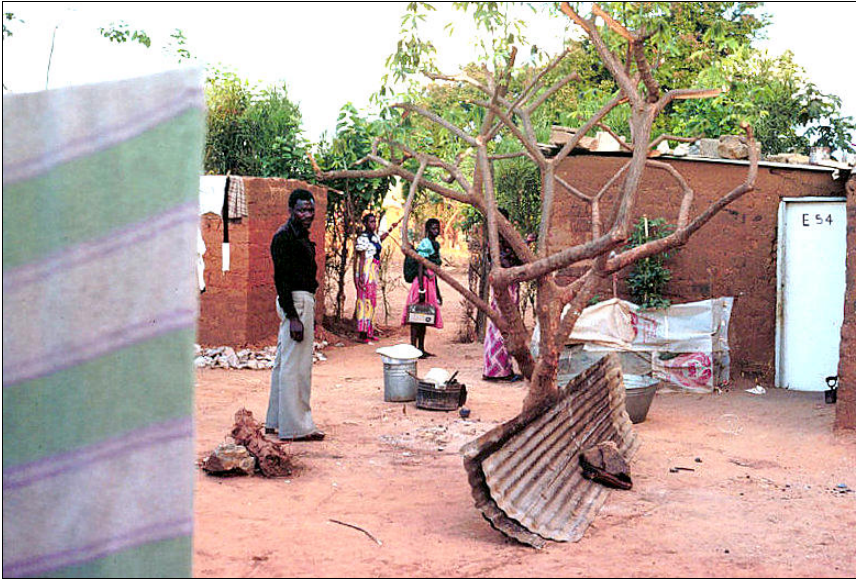


Fig. 4.4.2. A few Nkoya urban migrants in front of their house in the Kalingalinga informal settlement, Lusaka, 1977. Note the modern clothing, the corrugated iron roofing, the metal prefab door styles, the zinc tub and other containers, the radio in the central lady's hand. All these commodities are greatly coveted symbols of social advancement. Yet what brings and keeps these Nkoya urban migrants together seems primarily a sense of a common rural traditional background – an awareness that is revived dozens of times per year in collective ceremonies for healing and bereavement as staged in town, and that helps them greatly in times of need and loss, but that also prevents their individual social mobility, and keeps them tightly inside the circle of those sharing their rural background.





Fig. 4.4.3. Like elsewhere in Africa, towns have formed the interface between globalising modernity and local time-honoured traditions. Here an insecure villager, bewildered by the complexity of the urban scene of Lusaka (1977), tries to find his way in modern traffic.

#### 4.5. The state as an interface of interculturality between Africa and the North Atlantic region






Fig. 4.5.1. The Local Court as an intercultural space (1977): The state-instituted 'Local Court' at the Shikombwe royal capital of Mwene Mutondo, one of the principal royal chiefs among the Nkoya. The seats, gowns, the tie-wearing court clerk (a formally trained regional outsider in control of all procedure and documents), the picture of the then state president Dr Kaunda, the upright stance of the lady giving testimony, – these are all cosmopolitan / trans-continental manifestations. Yet the two assessors (judges) are traditional chief's councillors, who despite some formal additional training under state supervision yet apply a largely local, time-honoured and recognisable form of family law, in this emphatically modern and state-controlled setting. The Local Court has replaced the time-honoured institution of the Chief's Court; in the latter the assessors were the chief's (or king's) councillors, and after their cross-examination and deliberations the chief, not personally present at the proceedings but informed indirectly in his nearby palace by his Prime Minister, would pronounce the final verdict. In the area of the principal other Nkoya royal chief in Kaoma District, Mwene Kahare, the Local Court in postcolonial times has not been situated at the royal capital but at the more accessible village of Munkuye, at some 15 kms distance, where also the Roman Catholic Mission is situated. However, from the 1980s an informal palaver ('mabombola') court was operated at the royal capital after the traditional pattern. On Local Courts in Zambia, also *cf.* Coldham 1990; Hansen 1996; White 1971; Kakula 1982; Canter 1977; van Binsbergen 1977b.



Fig. 4.5.2. A glimpse of the court room of the aged Nkoya royal chief Mwene Mutondo Kalapukila, 1977. The chief is sunken in his throne seat (left), the equally aged *Mwanashihemi* (Prime Minister) Mr Nalishuwa (soon my informal father-in-law) crouches right in front of him on the reed mat, and in the centre, clapping his hands and bending his legs under him in the Nkoya (and South Asian) stance of respect, another court dignitary. Awkwardly sitting in the chair against the wall (embarrassed that as my companion an 'outsider-visitor' model has been imposed upon him, so that he cannot join his seniors and respectfully clap hands for the chief while seated on the ground) is my friend and guide Mr Davison Kawanga, a Nkoya male nurse from Lusaka.



Fig. 4.5.3. An almost impossible intercultural compromise between modern and traditional statehood: Assembled in the royal lodge, the principal Nkoya chiefs (who by the traditional cosmology would each form the centre of the universe, and therefore could never have acted in conjunction and *en groupe*) have stood up from their temporary thrones and (in a stance which conveys respect in the cosmopolitan international tradition, but which in the Nkoya tradition only conveys contempt) listen to the Zambian National Anthem sung (to the tune of the South African freedom fighters's song *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica*, 'May God bless Africa' – but for Zambia recast with English lyrics, now translated into Nkoya for the occasion!) and played on the occasion of the opening of the Kazanga Cultural Ceremony 2011. Note the reed architecture of the temporary royal pavillions erected for the Festival. From Ancient Egypt to Japan, Nkoyaland, and Zululand, and even in North America, reed has the symbolic connotations of the beginning of the world. However, in the specific Kazanga context, the pavillions's format and building material are surprisingly reminiscent, not only of swampy Ancient Mesopotamia, the Persian-Gulf delta, or the Egyptian Delta (mythologically known as *Chemmis*  or  , *3b-bi*, 'the Horizon of the Bee'), but especially (even to the point of the relevant hieroglyphic signs) of those of the Ancient Egyptian 


 *Hb-Sd* Festival with which, from the oldest times, rulers celebrated the completion of significant terms of office (cf. Murnane 1981; Wilkinson 2001).



Fig. 4.5.4. States headed by kings have a rich and near-global, yet temporally relatively shallow history ever since the Neolithic, when the first states arose in the Ancient Near East / Egypt, China, and Meso America. Whatever their own internal, regional dynamics, processes of state formation in South Central Africa, including those among the Nkoya, are connected with these regions, in ways illuminated by the Pelasgian Hypothesis and the Sunda Hypothesis. According to my historical reconstructions (van Binsbergen 1992b, 2012b, in press (b)), from the remotest mythical past till Early Modern times the original Nkoya kings were mainly women. From about the 18th c. CE on, a masculinising transformation took place, in conjunction with long-distance trade, state formation, encroachment of more powerful states (notably Lunda, Kololo / Barotse) than the modest Nkoya kingdoms, White conquest, and incorporation in the colonial state. In the process, the kingship of Shakalongo was the only one where female rulership survived until the late 19th c. CE. Only in the 21st c. CE do we see female chiefs reappear among the Nkoya, as a result of national and regional lobbying by the Kazanga Cultural Association. The picture shows Mwene Kabulwebulwe, seated in state at the 2011 Kazanga Festival, Kaoma, Zambia. A modern armchair serves as throne. Apart from the flyswitch made of the tail of an *hefu* eland antelope (*Taurotragus oryx*, a species reserved to royalty), a sleeveless top of leopard skin, a *Conus*-shell ornament which she wears as a pendant, and a sugar-loaf-shaped headdress whose rim is a band of leopard skin studded with royal *Conus* shells, she is dressed like any ordinary Zambian lady today, in T-shirt and (genuine or imitation) Dutch-wax wrapper. The most telling intercultural compromise in this display of power symbolism is the fact that she is flanked by two state-appointed and state-salaried court policemen (*kapasus*), dressed in a semi-military uniform of North Atlantic origin, and *showing respect by standing in attention*; under traditional Nkoya etiquette, it would be impossible, unthinkable (traditionally: punishable by death) for a court official to stand when the king is seated, and to have one's eyes at a higher horizontal level than the king's.

#### 4.6. Music is capable of crossing regional and continental boundaries hence is conducive to interculturality

As a symbolic system, music seems less complex, less inaccessible than spoken and written language, less surrounded by almost insurmountable boundaries of highly specific native-speaker competence marked in terms of social class, age, gender, and other sociologically relevant characteristics. Music binds the people identifying as Nkoya, but given the presumably transcontinental background of Nkoya music, it also offers them a unique vehicle of distinction and socio-political power – even though they lack all other forms of power.



Fig. 4.5.1. Mr John Kawayile, the blind senior musician in the state-financed court orchestra of Mwene Kahare, plays (on the portable court xylophone) a traditional song to honour the chief (1977), as used to be customary every morning and evening. The setting is the temporary court site at the chief's wet gardens (*mutapa*) on the Kazo stream, 5 kms north of the royal capital. When in the early 1990s the Seventh Day Adventist Church stepped in to help finish the self-help construction of the local clinic which Prince Tatashikanda had initiated in 1977 (!), with Dutch development funding, after a building plan stipulated by the Zambian Ministry of Health, the church's absolute condition was that the royal musical routine (a form of heathen ancestor worship, in the church officials's opinion) should be discontinued. Regrettably but predictably, the church's demands were met.



Fig. 4.5.2. Ever since Zambia's Independence (1964), Nkoya royal chiefs (members of the Barotse-land traditional administration, and as such partaking of the Barotse Agreement between the state and the region's traditional ruler) have received a small state subsidy, which among other purposes has been used to maintain their royal orchestra. Traditional court protocol has been that twice daily at sunrise and sunset (among the Nkoya as elsewhere, the kingship is surrounded by solar symbolism) the orchestra by playing announces that the king is present and in good health. The oldest layer of references to such a royal orchestra is to be found in Nkoya oral traditions (*Likota Iya Bankoya, Muhumpu...*; cf. Anonymous, 'Muhumpu...'; van Binsbergen 1988c, 1992b, Anonymymous [ J.M. Shimunika ], n.d.), which describe how when King Kahare arrived from foreign lands, marching at the head of his followers and immediately followed by his musicians who played while marching, a local female clan chief was immediately enamoured with the wonderful sound of his xylophone; and how the early Luyi king Mulambwa came begging for a royal orchestra, and for the medicine of kingship, from his far more impressive Nkoya counterpart Mwene Kayambila, nicknamed 'the Thatcher' since he boasted to roof his palace with the skulls of his enemies (*Likota Iya Bankoya*: ch. 24; cf. van Binsbergen 1992b). The present picture shows Mwene Kahare's royal orchestra at the royal capital. The instruments belong to the palace, the musicians are recruited from among the chief's traditional clients (former slave families). The lyrics of many traditional songs performed by the orchestra (Brown 1984; Kawanga 1978) stress the musicians's poverty and their utter dependence upon their benefactor, the chief / king. In 1978 the twice-daily musical protocol was still being observed at both principal royal capitals (Mwene Mutondo and Mwene Kahare) of the Nkoya people, but by 1990 the Seventh Day Adventist Church had managed to silence the drums, and I am not aware that the situation has been truly restored ever since – although the royal orchestra has come to play a principal role at the annual Kazanga Festival; there temporary royal courts are erected not only for Mwene Mutondo and Mwene Kahare, but also for Mwene Kabulwebulwe (Mumbwa district) and Mwene Momba (Livingstone district).



Fig. 4.5.3. The two basic instruments of the Nkoya royal orchestra, the hourglass drum (*mukupère*, foreground) and the xylophone (*jirimba*), played by *virtuoso* musicians at the 2011 Kazanga Festival, Kaoma District, Zambia.



4.7. The formal organisation as an interface context of interculturality between Africa and the North Atlantic region, – channelling, in the case of an ethnic association in modern Zambia, a sense of identity and pride and allowing it to be articulated in a format that is acceptable and recognised in the context of globalised modernity



Fig. 4.7.1. The Kazanga Cultural Association was founded in the early 1980s by what could be considered a Nkoya urban elite in Lusaka, 400 km east of Nkoyaland; the word ‘elite’ is relative here and compares them with their rural relatives, not with the national Zambian elite which tends to be incomparably more powerful and wealthy than these are Nkoya who have made the grade in town and managed to build up a secure urban existence as clerks, nurses, policemen, small-scale entrepreneurs. The organisation of the annual display of Nkoya traditional music, dance and kingship has been their Association’s principal achievement. They have also assisted in the rehabilitation of Nkoya chiefs (e.g. they managed to have the kingship of Mwene Shakalongo restored), in political canvassing, in a second Bible translation into Nkoya (the first one, by Rev. Shimunika, was considered to contain too many Lozi-isms and Angola-isms), as well as in critically furthering my own research. In this picture, taken at the Kazanga Festival 2011, Nkoya notables, mostly in their sixties, dressed in modern suits to express their (aspirations to) cosmopolitan success, go through the movements of the *makwasha* dance reserved to elders, on the tones of the royal orchestra (outside the picture’s scope),



Fig. 4-7-2. The executive of the Kazanga Cultural Society, assembled (at my invitation) for a dinner meeting in the Protea Hotel, one of Lusaka's principal hotels (2011).



Fig. 4-7.3. For most of the 20th c. CE, Nkoya kingship has been in constant decline. The causes of this process are obvious: colonial conquest (which put an end to violent conflicts between regional polities); the advent of Christian churches, which undermined the veneration of deceased kings and eroded the awareness that these are responsible for ecological stability and fertility; encroachment of the Lozi traditional administration; the shift from long-distant trade (mainly in slaves and elephant tusks, over which kings have a monopoly, in exchange for calico, muzzle-loading guns, cauldrons, and glass beads) to formal capitalist enterprise and cash-crop production; the emergence of a new world picture proffered by Christianity and formal education. Although nostalgic, condescending *vis-à-vis* villagers, suffering from urban bias, and mercenary to national politics and its rallying for rural votes, yet the Kazanga Cultural Association in many ways has managed to revive Nkoya kingship and put it at the centre of attention at all levels of modern Zambian politics. The picture shows my adoptive father Mwene Kahare Kabambi (born 1921) dancing the Royal Dance at the 1992 Kazanga festival, shortly before his death in late 1993. He wears an apron of leopard skin, and wields an executioner's axe which is a royal heirloom. On his head is a rudimentary wrought-iron crown (*munana*) topped with eagle feathers – a royal totem. During his dance he is accompanied, not by the ordinary musicians of client / slave descent, but by a privileged single drummer, the late lamented Mwene Shimbwende of Shumbanyama village (my other adoptive father) whose hereditary office – lending legitimacy to the incumbent dynasty – marks him as an original (but supplanted) Owner of the Land and of the kingship.



Fig. 4.7.4. The Nkoya people of Zambia have dominated my ethnographic and historiographic research over the past 50 years, and have adopted me in their midst. This illustration (also on the cover of this booklet, in mirrored format), shows an interesting and relevant scene during the Kazanga Cultural Ceremony, 2009. Dressed up in the mask – named *Kayoni ka Mwene*, ‘the King’s Bird’ – of a giant eagle (a cosmogonic representation of the High God Nyambi or of her Child, and also the totem of the royal clan), a civil servant of the Zambian Department of Cultural Services (an apt illustration of virtualisation!), while pointing to heaven (where Nyambi is supposed to dwell), leads a young girls’s dancing troupe, nearly all dressed in identical uniforms (the girl furthest removed from the mask could not afford the expensive new wrapper and brought her own, faded one), and arranged in a strict geometric pattern – *as if to make visible the formal subjugation and domestication of Nkoya cultural tradition under the onslaught of modernising, rationalising, globalising and virtualising interculturality*. The troupe is actually directed, not by the mask figure, but by an adult male (visible behind the mask figure, slightly stooping) also wearing the troupe’s uniform. Behind the non-uniformed girl a boy plays the Nkoya xylophone; the drummers are outside the photograph. Somewhat closer to the mask a peek between the dancing girls affords a view of the temporary ancestral shrine of upright branches, erected for the occasion of the Kazanga Festival. Also note, as a further virtualising element (van Binsbergen 1997a, 2015a: ch. 1) the large cassette recorder by which a festival participant records the music and singing. In the background other festival participants are tickly packed.

#### 4.8. The intersecting spheres of healing and worship have formed context for regional and transcontinental interculturality



Fig. 4.8.1. Constituting (or at least emulating), as formal organisations, a transcontinentally accepted modern phenomenon, the church format may serve as a vehicle for the intercultural preservation of cultural traditions that on their own might not be able to survive. (In Asia, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam have been playing a similar role, *e.g.* in the preservation of such time-honoured institutions as shamanism, male genital mutilation ('circumcision'), and the alienating and oppressive belief that the female body's normal physiology – including menstruation and childbirth – is polluting and must be abhorred.) Flanked by her granddaughter Dani (my sister's daughter, who often rocked on my knees as a two-year old during fieldwork in the early 1970s), the picture shows one of the principal leaders of the Bituma cult of affliction, the late lamented Mrs Mayatilo Shimbwende (my adoptive mother), of Shumbanyama village, Chief Kahare, Kaoma District, Zambia, 1973. Between her and the child, and hung with strings of white beads, we see the charac-

teristic debarked forked pole, which is the cult's main symbol, notably its main sign of office (the latter under the designation of *Kukena*, 'Hill' – the same root is in use for 'royal capital', *lukena*, and refers ultimately – in transcontinental comparative mythology – to the Primal Hill as the first Land (often conceived as a reed clump) emerging from the Primal Waters – the first place for the Primal Bird to alight on; also cf. *Genesis 1:2*). The priestess wears a fully white robe, lifts her flyswitch (in principle a royal prerogative, but often appropriated by cultic leaders in South Central and Southern Africa; it is also common as a divine attribute in Hindu and Buddhist iconography) in a typical dancing movement, and bows her head while pronouncing the cult's main prayer, '*Twakabomba*', 'We are humble' – already attested for the Ila prophet Mupumani's cult in 1915 (van Binsbergen 1981c). The forked pole is a common symbol of the sacred throughout sub-Saharan Africa and North America. The white robe however has especially South Asian associations (as colour of peace and purity) or Islamic ones; in the latter world religion, it is the privileged dress of pilgrims returning from fulfilling one of their principal obligations, the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). The cult's founder, the Angolan Luvale prophet Shimbinga, may be argued to have undergone Buddhist influence; e.g. the water lily is a central object of veneration of the cult, reminiscent of Buddhism's lotus flower (van Binsbergen 2021c). He need not have visited South or East Asia – according to my reconstructions there was considerable Buddhist statal presence in South Central and South Asia in the first and second millennium, and all that is needed is that some of that influence survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, conceivably enshrined in a local cult with which Shimbinga was to come into contact.



Fig. 4.8.2. Over the decades, my principal assistant, guide, and teacher among the Nkoya has been my elder brother Mr Dennis Shiyowe, of our Shumbanyama village – belonging to a kingroup that, until the late 19th c. CE, was in possession of the Kahare royal title. Our mother and other female kin were among the region’s principal leaders of the Bituma cult of affliction. In the course of half a century, the cult’s popularity, both in the village and especially in town, has declined dramatically, and in his old age Mr Shiyowe (himself frequently a sponsor but never an active adept of the cult), like so many traditional religious leaders in modern Africa, embarked on a new career as leader of an African Christian healing church. The picture shows his treatment room which finds itself in the centre of Shumbanyama village (2011); it bears the inscription *CHECHA AFLIKAN DOKOTA* – ‘African doctor’s church’ (in Zambian English, an ‘African doctor’ is a traditional healer, *nganga*).

#### 4.9. The *Sangoma* cult of Southern Africa forms a context of a trans-continental interculturality that usually remains implicit, even unknown, but that facilitates the accommodation of transcontinental newcomers



Fig. 4.9.1. The scene shown at this picture is situated a few dozen kms from Francistown, in the village of Matsilagabedi, 1991, at the shrine (a complex, airy construction of branches with parallels in South Asia, especially in the Buddhist and Hindu Homa cult; cf. van Binsbergen 2022a: ch. 19) dedicated to the cult leader's male ancestors, and hence the ideal place to keep *Sangoma* drums until used. We see several male *Sangomas* (in everyday attire) kill one of the three goats required in sacrifice on the occasion of the final graduation as fully-fledged *Sangoma* of Johannes Sibanda, a.k.a. Wim van Binsbergen, seen here squatting to the left. This Johannes is named after the cult leader's deceased brother or first cousin, whose incarnation he is considered to be. The name opens up another possible connection between the *Sangomas* and the Ancient Mediterranean. For, shared by Jesus's predecessor John the Baptist, and Jesus's chronicler John the Evangelist, this name has had heterodox esoteric connotations in Christianity since earliest times (cf. Picknett & Prince 1998) – even to the point of claiming (as appears to be also suggested by Da Vinci famous 1490 CE mural *The Last Supper*, where a character often identified as John conjuringly lifts his index finger) that John was the original founder of the Christian movement, and Jesus his usurper. Inevitably but unconvincingly, similar allegations (but naming a different usurper) have been made on the basis of the Dead Sea / Qumran scrolls. Ultimately, the Johannes mythology is also informed by the enigmatic Bronze Age West Asian cosmogonic aquatic figure of Oannes (Cory 1828), whose ramifications stretch all over the Old World – but regrettably a fuller treatment falls outside our present scope. The topic is a cherished one for best-seller-type bricolage – e.g., in the hands of the (otherwise serious) Assyriologist Temple (1976), Oannes (a Sumerian culture hero, according to the Hellenistic author Berossus) became an alien non-terrestrial imparting, to the Early Bronze-Age inhabitants of the Persian Gulf, astronomic knowledge (notably: the nature of Sirius as a double star – which is absolutely impossible to observe from Earth by naked-eye astronomy).





Fig. 4.9.2. At the end of my first year of fieldwork in Francistown, October 1989, I made the round of my main contacts in order to take my leave and shoot some final photographs. Contrary to my wife Patricia, I had not yet been recruited to apprenticeship *Sangomahood*, and anyway our extensive *Sangoma* contacts then had been with Mrs Rosie MmaNdhlovu Mabutu, head of the Riverside Lodge. But we had already met her cousin or sister, Mrs Elizabeth MmaShakayile Mabutu, who was heading the Monarch Lodge. This picture is taken at the latter lodge. The senior woman to the left is MmaShakayile, flanked by her two granddaughters who were also accomplished *Sangomas*. The ladies had put on their *Sangoma* finery merely for the sake of my picture. MmaShakayile throws her oracular tablets in what at the time appeared to be mere performative demonstration (but it later transpired that this throw was supposed to have given a first inkling of my imminent career as a *Sangoma* trainee in their midst, from 1990 onward). Their uniforms constitute a non-descript cosmopolitan combination that does not particularly betray them as African. As I have argued elsewhere (2022a ch. 19), the leader's headdress has much in common with the headdress worn by the officiant in the South Asian, Buddhist and Hindu Homa Fire cult, and once we are on that track many other Buddhist, Hindu, and especially Homa elements begin to register. Thus one of the *Sangoma's* favourite hymns turns out to be an almost literal translation of the famous Buddhist *Heart Sutra* (cf. Conze 1958), in which even the original prosody has been retained.



Fig. 4.9.3 Ecstatic cults have a near-global distribution, and their historic ramifications are difficult to trace. Frobenius (1954: 296) interpreted their African distribution as the result of overland diffusion from West and South Asia. Painstaking historical research (e.g. van Binsbergen 1981c, 2012a, 2019, 2021b, and the extensive references cited there) meanwhile suggests that such cults along the entire African ocean coast (and from there deeper into the interior) may owe much to Sunda maritime expansion from South East Asia since the Early Holocene, especially during the last few millennia, and probably mainly in the last few centuries. In 2002, the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji invited me for a conference on 'La rencontre des rationalités', organised by his African Centre for Advanced Studies at Benin, the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH), and the UNESCO, and taking place at Porto Novo, Benin (cf. van Binsbergen 2007b). Keen to meet a fellow diviner-healer of European extraction, the Austrian-born medium and Vodun cult leader Käte Fagbemissi (pictured extreme right; trained in the Caribbean, and attending to a network of adepts mainly in Central Europe and West Africa) came to seek me out at the conference, introduced herself, and took me to the extreme West of Benin, where I was made to consult a diviner (he chided me on behalf of his god Sapata for always losing my temper especially in dealing with my wife – she had just recovered from near-fatal cancer, and upon my return from Benin I did mend my ways); and I actively participated in a nocturnal Vodun session, where this picture was taken. My most intriguing observation there was that the women adepts (the great majority), most of them (although not in this picture) in white top and black skirt, reminded me strongly of Indonesian ritual women congregations..



Fig. 4.9.4. In the residential area of Monarch, a former gold-mine compound and one of the oldest parts of Francistown (Botswana), female *Sangomas* – not yet fully dressed up in their ritual uniforms – have started on a dance to celebrate the imminent initiation as *Thwaza* (apprentice *Sangoma*) of Johannes Sibanda (extreme left, with sun glasses, red shirt as stipulated by ancestral orders, shin rattles and gaudy dancing skirt), 1990. In the background neighbours who despite the fearful connotations which *Sangomahood* has for most urbanites and especially for church-goers, yet are thrilled to witness the spectacle. The initiation of a White person into the cult (although by now no longer a very rare event, and – on the contrary – subject of a growing international literature) at the time was great news and spread throughout the sprawling city of Francistown like bushfire – often in distorted form, stating (not totally without justification) that the *Sangomas* were killing a White man (under the pretense of adopting him into their midst). This picture was made with my own camera by one of the members of the Monarch Lodge.



Fig. 4.9.5. The Southern African *Sangoma* cult is a complex crossroads of intercultural and intercontinental traits. Awed, barefoot, and with awkward movements, but welcomed by the ovations of the senior lodge members, the author on the day of his final graduation as *Sangoma* enters the house (in the remote village of Matsilagabedi, North East District, Botswana, 1991) where the graduation will be concluded, under the direction of the lodge leader Mrs Elizabeth Mmashakayile Mabutu (extreme right, with spectacles and numerous bracelets).

## **CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION**

With these extensive examples of interculturality in the modern African context, we have reached the end of our argument on *Africa Intercultural: Theory, Methodology, Description*. Let us hark back to a principle that implicitly yet crucially informs all interculturality: *the fundamental unity of humankind* (or at least, of the collectivity of all humans now alive, which geneticist and palaeoanthropologists designate as Anatomically Modern Humans and claim to have emerged in East Africa some 200 ka BP (Before Present)). This lifts the argument even above its African relevance, and in fact reinforces the hopes that the concept of interculturality seeks to inspire.



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## 7. GENERAL INDEX

Note. This Index exhaustively lists all proper names in this book, including names of persons, authors, place names, water names, ethnonyms, names of languages, book titles mentioned in full in the text. Maps and other graphic materials have not been thus indexed. Only sporadically is an explanation added. The figures give page numbers of the main text; figures followed by -n refer to footnote text on that page. Italicised items are mostly titles of publications, with the author listed between parentheses. Entries beginning with an author's surname may be fully completed by reference to the end bibliography of this book. Due to last minute editorial changes, actual page numbers may be off by one or two from those listed. The software used for this indexes was conceived by my brother Peter Broers in the late 1980s and subsequently constantly adapted and improved by me. In this connection I am also indebted to my sons Dennis and especially Vincent, who for decades have attended to my ever increasing computer needs, even when this meant trying to keep alive or resuscitate – much against their preference – totally obsolete forms of hardware and software.

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