

Vicarious reflections

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**African explorations in empirically-
grounded intercultural
philosophy**

by Wim van Binsbergen



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cover illustrations: The main cover illustration shows the side of a slit drum of the Bambola people, Congo, held at the Museum voor Muziekinstrumenten, Brussels, Belgium (2012) – photograph © 2015 Wim van Binsbergen. On the back cover, the inset with the Hergé *Kuifje* cover derives, with thanks, from: <http://assets.catawiki.nl/assets/2012/5/10/5/d/e/5de7e920-7d18-012f-5350-005056945a4e.jpg> . On the spine, the photograph of the author is © 2015 Dennis W.J. van Binsbergen, and shows Wim van Binsbergen (right) and driver during field-work on the Bamileke Plateau, Cameroon, 2015 (note the vicarious reflections on his shoulder-bag); *all other illustrations in this book:* © 2015 Wim van Binsbergen, unless otherwise stated



*'I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff - and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.
And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate
Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:
Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass
Hang all the furniture above the grass,
And how delightful when a fall of snow
Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so
As to make chair and bed exactly stand
Upon that snow, out in that crystal land!'*

Vladimir V. Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, New York: Putnam, 1962.

To the shades of my parents,
Mia T. Treuen (1918-1984) and
Willem A. van Binsbergen (1917-1991)

Chapter 0

Introduction, acknowledgments, summary, provenances

0.1. Introduction

0.1.1. Vicarious reflections

VICARIOUS REFLECTIONS – representations that cannot stand on their own but that are in themselves the secondary representations of the primary referent; or the thoughts that are not thought on one's own account, but on behalf of somebody else, or at the latter's instigation. This book, with that tautological and Nabokov-, Magritte- or Escher-like circular title, is about the tangle of reference and appropriation linking African knowledges, the representation of such knowledges by non-Africans, the adoption of North Atlantic knowledges by Africans, and the ways in which all such representations can be more or less faithful to the original, can claim greater or lesser integrity, authenticity, and truth, and can become dominated by, or liberated from, the power games that have informed global North-South interactions for the past half millennium. It is a book no anthropologist and no philosopher would ever conceive on the strength of their respective professional disciplinary competences. It could only have emerged from the no-man's-land, the uninhabitable 'inter', which is where interculturality now roams instead of the buffalo, and where an anthropologist turned would-be philosopher finds himself to be exiled to, especially if at heart he has remained a poet and mystic at least as much as he has become a scientist.

Where so much of North Atlantic knowledge construction on other continents

has been deliberately and unashamedly *vicarious* in the sense of condescending appropriation ('why don't you step aside so that I can explain your culture to you'), I have sought to engage – not always successfully, of course – in a radically different form of vicariousness: learning to let African worlds to be thought in me, so that I can attempt to articulate and represent them *vis-à-vis* both non-Africans and Africans – *and thus to self-critically identify, as in the present book, both the pitfalls and the potential of interculturality. One such pitfall is the vicarious slavish adoption of politically-correct African positions, and this, clearly, I have also sought to avoid.*

0.1.2. A transcontinental career

I was trained at Amsterdam University and at the Free University, Amsterdam (Cand. 1968, Drs 1971, Dr 1979, the latter two *cum laude*), as a specialist in the social-scientific and historical study of popular Islam, folk religion in general, and the anthropology of the present-day Mediterranean region. Yet, due to institutional politics which at the very beginning of my career were totally beyond my control, in 1971 my main field of research became sub-Saharan Africa. Through successful field-work in Tunisia, Zambia and Guinea-Bissau, and through a number of prestigious international publications including the innovatively Marxist and theoretical book *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), as well as appointments including one as Simon Professor¹ at Manchester, UK, and others as acting Professor of African Anthropology, Leiden University (1975-1977), and as Head of Political and Historical Studies, African Studies Centre (ASC), Leiden (1980-1990), I had by the mid-1980s firmly established myself in the study of African religious anthropology – which culminated in my serving as President of the Netherlands Association for African Studies (1990-1993), and my membership of the Africa Committee of WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research, a division of the Netherlands Research Foundation NWO). However, beginning with my new field-work (in booming Francistown, Botswana, from 1988 on) into Southern African urban culture as an interface between regional cultural traditions and globalisation, major changes took place in my research and writing. In Botswana, under the spell of mounting existential, epistemological and political doubts (also fed by my identity as a poet, and my breaking, at age 15, with the Christianity of my childhood) about the distancing, reductionist, hegemonic and debunking skeptical attitude which was the main stock-in-trade of religious anthropology at the time, I was brought to join the regional *sangoma*² ecstatic

¹ The Simon Professorship was for decades the main trophy which the Manchester School (*cf.* Werbner 1985; van Binsbergen 2007a) had to bestow, even in its dying days (late 1970s), when I was an incumbent.

² Retaining the proto-Bantu root *-gŌmà* 9/10, 'drum' (Guthrie 1967-1971 and n.d.) / *-goma* L 9 drum, 5.1. (Meeussen 1980 and n.d.), the term *sangoma* designates a Southern African ritual specialist who, in typical shamanic fashion, enters into trance and divination as a result of prolonged and insistent drumming, usually accompanied by singing. Characteristic, however, of the African conceptualisation of this practice, and in contradistinction from many other forms of shamanism through space and time, is that the *sangoma* when in trance is not supposed to make a mystical

cult. Here, without giving up my existential agnosticism, within a few years I emerged as a qualified and practising *sangoma* diviner-healer-priest in my own right.

Having thus largely forfeited – or so it seemed – the methodological basis for conventional empirical research into African religion, I was obliged to put my intellectual production (and my income as a family provider) on a new footing. This I attempted to bring about in two complementary ways.

In the first place, the many intercontinental and long-range historical strands which I encountered once inside the *sangoma* cult, brought me to extend into other continents, and far into the past, my usual Africanist oral-historical and ethnographic research into ecstatic healing cults, divination systems, leopard-skin symbolism, kingship, *etc.* Such extension was initially highly problematic, for the connections in space and time I was bringing to light were totally counter-paradigmatic from the point of view of the presentist and localist social anthropology in which I had been educated and in which I had assumed a measure of leadership. They also required accomplishments in fields of knowledge and skill which I had hardly at my disposal by that time: cosmology, comparative mythology, art history, the ability to read objects of material culture and myths in detail, in depth, and professionally (my anthropological training had been obsessed with social relationships and hardly anything else), archaeology, genetics (although I had done some as an undergraduate), comparative and historical linguistics (my extensive undergraduate and postgraduate linguistic training had only been in General Linguistics, under Reichling and Dik), Egyptology, Assyriology, History of Ideas, Biblical Studies – and some of the specific ancient languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic) informing these fields of study. In the process, I saw myself forced to develop from scratch – since I did not find it readily available in the mainstream scientific comparative literature – a transcontinental perspective on cultural and cosmological continuity through space and time. This line of research is still continuing, and in the most recent years has taken precedence over my work as a philosopher, but for two decades the relationship was to be reversed.

For in the second place, my initially highly emotional and personal grappling with a new, more receptive and dialogic, less hegemonic and less implicitly racist, form of intercultural encounter, in the course of the 1990s gradually developed into more articulated statements on the unacceptably subordinating nature of North-South knowledge formation, and on ways out – such as Afrocentrism, and Martin Gardiner Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis, to whose debates I contributed extensively. This preoccupation led to a number of publications which made it possible for me to trade, in 1998, my Amsterdam (Free University) chair in the social anthropology of ethnicity, for one in the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, within the Philosophical Faculty of Erasmus University Rot-

journey *outside* the here and now, but to be possessed by ancestral, demonic or divine presences that are supposed to *invade* the here and now, and specifically the *sangoma*'s body and mind.

terdam. Still most at home in essentially illiterate rural situations (as an ethnographic and oral-historical field-worker with a handful of African and Mediterranean cultures and languages more or less at his fingertips), I was keen to trace the history and the varieties of human thought beyond the frozen texts out of which most mainstream philosophy is distilled, and into regions and periods where few of my new philosophical colleagues would be able to follow me, where still fewer would be able to survive and function, and where hardly one of them would perceive any philosophy to speak of. Implicitly basing my attempts at intercultural philosophy not only on my descriptive and theoretical experience in anthropology and sociology but also on *the Postulate of the Fundamental Unity of Humankind* (at least, of Anatomically Modern Humans – the subspecies that emerged in East Africa c. 200 ka BP³ and to which all humans now living belong), I misguidedly expected from further, transcontinental empirical research the firm substantiation of that postulate – without realising that on this point (as on many others) philosophers, however naïve in their approach to empirical data, yet in many respects had already thought far ahead of social scientists. Let us stop a while to consider this question in some detail.

0.1.3. The fundamental unity of humankind

A. THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF HUMANKIND. Rather more narrowly than encompassing the full extent of humanity, the fundamental unity of *African* peoples and civilisations has been passionately affirmed,⁴ and denied.⁵ Similar claims of fundamental unity have been made in mainstream anthropology for every major culture province, e.g. the Mediterranean (Gilmore 1987); Indonesia (de Josselin de Jong 1984); the Ancient Near East;⁶ the Slavonic world (Maduniš 2003; Los 1969); the world of Islam;⁷ and Western civilisation (Marvin 1915; Dawson n.d.). On the basis of the kind of considerations that led to the Whorf-Sapir thesis (see below, Chapter 6, footnote 242) concerning the over-determination of thought and life world by language, it has been particularly tempting (but often also unmistakably ideological and political) to claim the unity of large population groups because they turned out to be speaking branches of the same linguistic family, phylum or even macrophylum – a claim particularly made in regard of the Indo-European,⁸ Aus-

³ ka = kiloyear, millennium, 1,000 years; BP = Before Present.

⁴ Diop 1959; Chami 2006; Maquet 1967 / 1975; Rowlands 2003; for the Afrocentrist Clyde Winters – 1980a, 1980b – that unity even extends to include speakers of the Dravidian linguistic phylum, and groups in East and South East Asia.

⁵ Kaphagawani & Malherbe 1998; Appiah 1992; Howe 1999 and Fauvelle 1996 as devastating critics of Afrocentricity – also cf. Chapter 12 of the present book, on Mudimbe.

⁶ Goedicke & Roberts 1975; Frankfort 1948, 1951a, 1951b.

⁷ Geertz 1968; Hodgson 1974; Lewis 1976, 1993.

⁸ It is difficult to be consistent in the rendering of the names of linguistic macrophyla. In general, I have followed the usage of state-of-the-art long-range linguistics as represented in the global Tower of Babel project (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), so while aware of the disparate nature of the underlying constituent languages or regions, I am writing 'Afroasiatic', 'Khoisan', 'Sinocaucasian', etc., instead of Afro-Asiatic, Khoi-San or Sino-Caucasian; but with the excep-

tronesian, and Bantu languages.

Speculations on humankind's original language go back to classical Antiquity,⁹ and suggest an underlying assumption of the *monogenesis* of human speech – in accordance with the Israelite claim made by roughly the same time, in *Genesis* 11:1 – although in *Genesis* 10:5, 20, and 31 a plurality of tongues is acknowledged. In the 19th century CE, when linguistic theory was reaching considerable levels of sophistication and comparison, similar ideas were formulated again, for the whole of humankind, by Johnes (1846; also cf. Bergmann 1869; Stam 1976).

But despite all these claims of the unity of *subsets* of humanity, the *unity of humankind as a whole* has comparatively rarely been subject of empirical scientific debate. Research and theory in the human sciences, including physical and cultural anthropology and the study of ethnicity, have concentrated on *differences*, not convergence or unity. The 19th c. CE was the century that saw the rise of the sciences of Man, but also the rise of quasi-scientific racism (e.g. de Gobineau 1853), and polygeny rather than monogeny fitted that paradigm better. Yet one of the greatest pioneers of the idea of prehistory, de Quatrefages, wrote on *Unité de l'Espèce Humaine / Unity of the Human Species* at an early stage (1861). But by and large, until recently, the very idea of universals of human culture or language has been abhorred. The contemplation of especially the somatic diversity of humans dominates, usually under the heading of 'race'¹⁰ dominated handbooks of physical anthropology, and the question as to what humans have in common seldom came in. An exception were the writings of the Humanistic School of USA anthropology, with such authors as Margaret Mead and especially Clyde Kluckhohn – to the extent to which anthropology holds up a *Mirror for Man* (Kluckhohn 1949), it is here that we find one of the rare titles in the way of *Common Humanity and Diverse Cultures* (Kluckhohn 1959). A handful of other scholarly titles specifically addressing the unity of humankind focus on the much-researched topic of the origin of the populations of the Americas (Fewkes 1912). In the first half of the 20th century CE, leading American anthropologists – predominantly Americanists – tended to be opposed to diffusion for much the same reason why (van Binsbergen 2012e) present-day Africanists dislike the idea that the African cultures they claim to cherish professionally, have always been part of the wider intercontinental world, and therefore, just like European cultures (and despite the historically understandable tendency towards the vicarious and pathetic essentialisation of things African) may be legitimately considered from a point of view of transcontinental continuities. One example from among many of the American stance: Spièr (1929) when positively reviewing Dixon (1928) – and dextrously applying the point of 'psychic unity' as a negative argument for diffusion of geographi-

tion of *Indo-European*, where I have inserted a hyphen and a capital letter, not for Eurocentric hegemonic reasons but in order to keep this composite word transparent and pronounceable.

⁹ Notably the cruel experiment – raising newborn infants in total isolation so as to determine the specific language of the first word they would utter – conducted by the Ancient Egyptian king Psammetihos / Psamtik as reported by Herodotos, *Historiae* II, 2 and 15; the first utterance happened to sound like 'bread' in the Indo-European language Phrygian. By an amusing coincidence of history or of scholarship (if it was just that; Hrozný must have known his Herodotos) it was also a word for 'bread' again, in:

nu [n i n d a	SUMEROGRAM]	an e-iz-za-at-te-ni	'now PANEM you eat'
wa-a-tar-ma	e-ku-ut-te-ni		'water then you drink'

(Gordon 1987 / 1971 / 1982: 93; Ceram 1955: 77) that offered Hrozný the clue to the decipherment of the cuneiform version of the Hittites' language, whose ancient empire extended westward to include Phrygia!

¹⁰ Which was only discarded after the tragedies associated with that concept during World War II; Montagu 1941 / 1974; Lévi-Strauss 1952; Poliakov 1979 / 1971.

cally similar traits, maintained:

'The environmental discussion is but a preface to one of discovery and invention, which turns ultimately on the question of culture parallels. The factors that make novelties possible are opportunity, need, and genius, each a variable, hence in combination kaleidoscopic in results. Yet the more general the opportunity, the more widespread the need, and the lower the genius required, the greater the possibility of approximate duplications hither and yon. What the extreme diffusionists will not see is that the "psychic unity" necessary for culture parallels is little more than the most generalized forms of these three factors.'

Reconsidering the same question four decades later, Ford (1969) broadens it from a continental to a world-wide focus, and does so from the perspective of the well-known controversy between (a) cultural diffusion of region-specific culture traits, *versus* (b) the thesis that explains the similarities between geographically remote culture traits on the basis of *the fundamental unity of the human mind* (a point also made in more recent decades by Habermas – 1988), conceivably resulting in independent yet converging parallel inventions at different parts of the globe.

The topic of the fundamental unity of humanity has invited not only wild speculation along *e.g.* theosophical and *New-Age* lines; but also more scientifically informed extrapolation. Among the early, proclaimedly scientific, explorations of the unity of humankind we may mention Bachman 1850. Another early example is the consideration of the possibility of extraterrestrial life by Darwin's counterpart in the discovery of evolution, Alfred Russel Wallace (1904) – but the unity of humankind implied by the latter is merely one by negation: non-extraterrestrial. Similar boundary explorations are offered in the growing literature on interspecies relationships and animal rights, but again they tend to offer an image of unity by negation, not by substance (*e.g.* Turner n.d., with extensive references). The palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, too, started out from personal natural-science competence but worked towards a cosmic vision of the unity and uniqueness of humankind, as forming a *noösphere on the way to convergence with the divine* – almost a poor man's and hear-say version of Hegel's (1807 / 1977) view of history.¹¹ In palaeoanthropology, the monogenetic versus polygenetic origin of humans (and of language; Trombetti 1907) has constituted the subject for passionate debate at least ever since Darwin (1871). While this debate still goes on in regard of the earliest genesis of Man, some three or four million years BP, present-day physical anthropology has largely accepted the fundamental unity of the much more recent Anatomically Modern Humans (emerging in East Africa only c. 200 ka BP) on overwhelming anatomical and genetic grounds – to which work on human universals (Wiredu 1990, 1996; Brown 1991), linguistics (Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), comparative mythology,¹² and comparative religion notably in regard of shamanism (Eliade 1968; Lommel 1967), has added impressive socio-cultural arguments. Even a century ago the comparative study of humankind's major symbols (Goldsmith 1924; *cf.* Lauf 1976) and religious forms (Williamson 1899; von Bunsen 1870)

¹¹ *Cf.* Hegel 1977; Teilhard de Chardin 1955, 1965 / 1956. That his scientific competence was acquired relatively late in life (after the typical Jesuit model) is clear from his blundering (if not more guilty role) in the Piltdown forgery case. But despite his unitary vision of the origins of humanity, yet his palaeoanthropological work led him to suggest 'la probabilité d' une bifurcation précoce' in the earliest phase of humankind, close to its place of origin – allegedly separating once for all the putative African and Asian branches; Teilhard de Chardin 1956: 257-261.

¹² Witzel 2012; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010; *cf.* the extensive discussion, below, of the theonym Nyambi as an example of transcontinental comparative mythology going at least some way towards suggesting the *fundamental unity of humankind*.

had led to similar suggestions, but on empirically, methodologically and theoretically far less convincing grounds. Yet as a potentially central concern in the social sciences, and one of the greatest possible political relevance in a time of globalisation and intercontinental conflict, one can only be surprised by the paucity of attention it has received in recent decades.¹³

At this point, let us make a transition from empirical-scientific to philosophical (and theological) approaches to the problem of the fundamental unity of humankind. Baldry (1965) brings together what the Ancient Greeks thought on this point. These did not explicitly have the notion of an all-encompassing humanity (othering in terms of *βάρβαροι Barbarians* was their dominant discourse); yet their common discourse on the distinctions between humans, gods and animals implied an underlying awareness of human unity; and so did, for instance, the fact that in order to explain the antecedents of a regional and, at the time, recent phenomenon, the Persian Wars, Herodotus saw himself compelled to spin a broad tale encompassing the entire known world, one chapter for every major region – Egypt, Persia, Scythia, etc. Yet instead of such universalism, particularism won the day: the Greeks' victory in the Persian Wars – although for the Persians almost a backwater skirmish – came to be celebrated as constitutive of the unique identity and quality of the (Eurasian) West, the myopic exaltation of the Greek genius against which the *Ex Oriente Lux* movement and the *Black Athena* debate have battled right into our time and age. The notion of the unity of humanity we only see emerge with the Romans, notably Cicero (Redaktion 2001) – under the proto-globalisation conditions of the growing Roman Empire. However, in this connection we need to keep in mind that, even when an explicit application to humanity could not be readily attested, a struggle with the more general problem of *unity in diversity* has been a constant in Ancient thought, both among the Greeks¹⁴ and among the Ancient Egyptians.¹⁵

Through the centuries, Jewish and Christian theologians and Biblical scholars have often been inspired by the suggestion of fundamental unity of all of humankind as emerging from the Biblical account(s) of the Flood concerning the one surviving family.¹⁶ This implication almost extends to a global scale, since flood myths are among the few mythical near-universals of Anatomically Modern Humans.¹⁷

In philosophy the idea of humanity and the theoretical and conceptual elaboration of its unity has received extensive attention (Redaktion 2001; and Bödeker 2001, to whom the following paragraph is much indebted). With St Paul, and again prompted by the mounting

¹³ A notable exception has been the pioneer collection by Morin & Piatelli-Palmarini 1974, to which some of the greatest minds in that generation of anthropologists have contributed (e.g. Sperber – cf. 1968, 1974, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1996; or de Heusch – cf. 1958, 1971, 1972); yet its impact has remained limited.

¹⁴ Heintel 1972; Stokes 1971; Adkins 1970; also Empedocles' four-element system, the much more general cyclical cosmology of element transformation may be regarded as solutions to this problem – van Binsbergen 2012d; and so may be regarded the ideas underlying alchemy – Jung 1956.

¹⁵ Hornung 1971 / 1983; with an interesting parallel among the Zulu of Southern Africa: Jaftha 1992, perhaps consciously intended / imposed by the latter author: in recent decades, an Afrocentrist-inspired Egyptocentrism has become, once more, a dominant interpretative model among African intellectual and religious elites. Once more, for at least, Bernal 1987 claims that such an Ancient Model was also standard in the West from Antiquity to the 17th c. CE.

¹⁶ *Genesis* 7-10; Anderson 1977; Habel 1988; Ross 1981; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 6.

¹⁷ Isaak 2006, who offers a nicely referenced overview of many hundreds of flood myths, half of which happen to be from North America; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; Witzel 2010; and extensive sources cited there.

proto-globalisation in the Roman Empire in the 1st c. CE, Christianity took a radical distance from the parochialism of Judaism where the unique Supreme God had been largely particular to the Israelites; instead, St Paul formulated and propagated the idea that all of humankind is in principle sharing in the same salvation history. In the world of Islam the emerging idea of one humanity was to some extent mirrored, like so much else in Judaism and Christianity, by the concept of *الدين* *ad-dīn*, 'the community of all believers'; however, *not* thus transmitted into Islam was St Paul's most seminal idea: that this community also comprised the non-believers, effectively the whole of humankind, and not just once for all by a logical operation, *but more dynamically through a shared history of salvation*. Hence Islam tends to lack both a sense of a collective, secular history of accumulative, qualitative change (Islam's sense of history seems to be limited to eschatology, which today the terrorist movement of Islamic State is enacting with human decapitation, mass slaughter, destruction of ancient monuments, and sacred battle-fields named in the *الحدِيث* *hadith*), and also lacks a sense of the *non-theocratic* dimension of human society.¹⁸

¹⁸ Although the ex-Marxist Huntington's (1996) pessimistic, Spenglerian idea of the *Clash of Civilizations* is to be faulted on many counts, what it does convey is the awareness that the present-day violent and massive conflicts between militant Islamists and the North Atlantic region are not so much about scarce resources including power, mineral oil, and hegemony, but about *models of thought that constitute reality in such fundamental, and such fundamentally different, ways that, to the actors involved, they appear to justify killing, and dying for*. When I started out as an intercultural philosopher, in the mid-1990s, I was convinced that intercultural philosophy could make a positive contribution to solving this kind of problems of identity and communication in the modern, globalising world. In this spirit I wrote, shortly after '9/11', Chapter 5 of the present book. Meanwhile however, the aftermath of '9/11', both in the Middle East and in the North Atlantic region, has totally robbed me of such confidence and left me disgusted, which has been a factor in my retreat from intercultural philosophy as my major field of intellectual endeavour. While the final editing of the present book was done the IS carnage at Paris, France, 13 November 2015, took place; and it brought home once more the futility of intercultural philosophy in the face of terrorism. The violence-drunken actions of IS reflect no more a nation's *culture* than that a Mafia clan's subcultural reliance on violence to regulate economic and political transactions reflects 'the culture of Southern Italy'. In the hands of IS as an eschatological millenarian movement, the appeal to Islam seems in the first place a pretext to perform the logical operation (Girard-fashion) of separating in-group from out-group, constituting the in-group through act of violence, and through that violence committing the out-group to a horrendous fate. To understand the broad mechanisms of the current situation, an appreciation of the technological and logistic vulnerability of modern, urban industrial society is helpful, but between Weber's theory of the state's monopoly of violence, and Girard's insistence on the constituent nature of violence, our toolkit is fairly adequate, without reserving an unduly large role for intercultural philosophy as a relative newcomer on the intellectual scene. Beyond elucidating how IS's mode of thought puts it outside the human order, outside the latter's self-evident appeal to fellow-humanity, I cannot perceive any more how intercultural-philosophical debate is to have any impact on this state of affairs; in the best Diltheyan / Weberian tradition intercultural analysis is predicated on the operation of *Verstehen*, but how futile is the determination to understand, and to communicate with, a section of humanity that has deliberately and radically defined itself as outside the common human order, and that totally rejects the empathy that a sense fellow-humanity is supposed to produce? Alternatively, military action might have such an impact – analogous to the morally neutral action of leucocytes eliminating viruses from the living organism. But perhaps I am simply being too pessimistic. For after all, it was *in the first place* philosophers (Giordano Bruno, Erasmus, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Gandhi), rather than natural scientists, technicians or soldiers, who created the framework for modernity and indirectly inspired the mass

The Paulinian idea did inspire Western philosophy with the idea of the fundamental unity of humankind, which after a chequered trajectory in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Early Modern times, was elaborated especially from Herder on (Herder 1877-1913), with emphasis on Man as a historic subject. Kant¹⁹ largely situates that unity in the shared *Vernunft* / Reason and in the human community that the aesthetic judgment creates by implication (Kimmerle & Oosterling 2000),²⁰ although it also plays a pivotal role in Kant's pre-critical pioneering, pre-critical cultural and physical anthropology (Sussman 2001). Also in general, in Western philosophy during the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the emphasis was more on the rational and aesthetic potential of the human condition than on the awareness of its cultural and somatic diversity – even though the populations of the South still remained largely outside the scope of Western philosophy during that period. In Hegel, the unity of humankind is gradually born out by the universal *Geist* / Spirit, with emphasis on historical rather than spatial unity, and ominously leaving room for the possibility that certain sections of humankind, e.g. Africans, do not participate in that unity. Foreshadowing Durkheim's (1912 / 1960) theory of religion as society's veneration of itself, Comte's positivist project (Comte 1830-1842) proposed a 'religion de l'humanité' implying the latter's fundamental unity. A philosophical view on world complexity in unity is found in the thought of Marx and Engels (1975b-1983b), with the implication that not the myriad dimensions of somatic or cultural difference but only the handful of different class positions have mattered in history, and with ultimately the utopian possibility of a future dissolution of all divisive class differences and contradictions. This continually inspiring view of human unity was almost diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's (1973a / 1885) subordinating and implacable emphasis on the internal segmentation of humanity in an elect minority of *Supermen* versus a despicable majority. From the mid-19th century CE on, the unity of humankind is perceived, by Neo-Kantianism, in a religious or ethical sense (Cohen 1904). In Scheler (1933) it takes a planetary dimension. The perception of a common humanity²¹ is

movements that, within scarcely two centuries, totally changed the face of the earth. (As a central feature of its orientation, militant Islam has missed (not to say: rejected) this modernist framework – yet it is available in today's Islam, e.g. in the works of the Iranian philosopher Soroush –, and instead draws its obsolete inspiration from medieval Muslim theologians.) But today's Islamic thought may be a case apart. For the rest, and whether philosophers like it or not, they may yet have a vital prophetic role to place, even in our time and age. Here I take *prophetic* in the original, Greek sense of 'speaking on behalf of...' (in other word, 'vicariously'!) – on behalf of God, perhaps, in the Israelite and Christian conception, but especially on behalf of contemporary society, whose contradictions the prophet feels like anyone else, and manages to express as guidance towards change (cf. van Binsbergen 1981b). And although I am aware of the futility of the contribution I could make in this respect, *yet it is in this sense that I have worked on the present book*, passionately, and diligently, as if desperately clinging on to seemingly arbitrary precepts of scholarship in the face of apparent barbarism.

¹⁹ Kant 1983a / 1781 / 1787, 1983b; cf. Korsgaard 1996.

²⁰ For, in Kant's view (1983b), when I call a thing beautiful, I imply that it should be beautiful *to all people*. For a critical African application of this idea, see my own contribution to Kimmerle & Oosterling 2000, barely tolerated, and graded down by the editors to 'a social-science comment'.

²¹ In this connection, I might have pointed to African philosophies of 'humanity' (under such headings as *muntu* and *ubuntu* (Tempels 1955; Jahn 1967 / 1958; Eboussi Boulaga 1977; Ramose 1999), but usually their referent can be demonstrated to be not so much *universal humanity through space and time*, but *Black people in Africa under circumstances of colonial oppression* – in other words, a usage predicated on Whites' misuse of the word *Bantu* as directly or indirectly tributary to, or secondarily assimilated to, colonial practice, and therefore no longer sharing in the universalism which 'humanity' as a philosophical term implies. This is also how the term *botho* / *ubuntu* was spontaneously understood by our informants during exploratory interviews which Mogobe Ramose, Vernie February and I myself conducted in South Africa in early 1999. Cf. van Binsbergen 2001b, reprinted in

often argued to be at the heart of empathy, altruism, reconciliation, and interculturality (Monroe 1996). The question of the fundamental unity of humankind continues to inspire philosophical investigation.²² It is however ignored in Spengler's (1918-1922 / 1993) tragic vision of world history. Later conceptual developments in the course of the twentieth century CE kept pace with the growth of globalisation, of international social, economic and political organisation, and of inter-statal conflict. Here the Indian / German intercultural philosopher Ram Adhar Mall stands out as a particularly sensitive and broadly orientated guide;²³ while the Nigerian philosopher Eze (a stern critic of Kant's and Hegel's racism – Eze 1997a, 1997b) has explored how the very concept of a common humanity allows us to overcome the subordinating particularism of racism (Eze 2001).

0.1.4. Intercultural philosophy: 'There and Back Again'²⁴

From the mid-1990s on, and only selectively inspired by this rich history of ideas on the fundamental unity of humankind, my publications have sought to develop a social-scientifically enlightened – in other words, empirically-grounded – philosophy of interculturality. Many of these products were collected in my book *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons Towards a Philoso-*

2003b. An interesting argument was developed in the work of an African cleric whom below we shall encounter as one of the heroes of what Valentin Mudimbe has called 'clerical intellectualism', and which the latter sees (see Chapter 12, below) as one of the most important spiritual mutations taking place on the African continent in the course of the 20th c. CE: I am referring to Vincent Mulago, whose 1962 dissertation (published in 1965 by *Présence Africaine*) contrasts two forms of 'vital unity' – that of 'Bantu culture' and that of the Roman Catholic Church --- but again one suspects that Mulago's referent is primarily the *muntu*, not of several millennia of Bantu-speaking culture, but of colonial condescension and oppression. (The struggle to have the word *muntu* ('fellow-human', an *a fortiori* 'fellow-Black') unreservedly applied to myself, and to be allowed to share in the common social practices of respect implied in that term (*e.g.* not being seated on a chair in the presence of a king, not dining with one, but on the affirmative side being recognised to have a clan / totem, and being allowed to share in the ribald joking between specific clans) has constituted one of the main strands in my participant observation among the Nkoya people over the decades.) In other words, in the course of the 20-th c. CE the use of the Bantu root **-ntu*, 'human', was contaminated to the point of perversion by its appropriation by racist and colonial political systems of oppression. This root was perhaps originally borrowed from the linguistic phylum called Austronesian (today only found in South East Asia, Oceania and Madagascar), yet as we shall see below (text block BB, p. 25) it belongs to the world-wide 'Earth / bottom / human' complex). Within a long-range regional, African horizon, this root can be considered to define the category of all humans as distinguished from the rest of the visible world – as in the standard Nkoya expression *Nyambi balengile bitondo na bantu*, 'Nyambi [the High God, on whom much more on the next few pages, in text block B] created the trees [by implication: all non-human things] and humans' – *cf.* *Genesis 1:1f.* where the creation consists in the first place, not just of Trees and Man (although those too, emphatically), but of Heaven and Earth. In the Nkoya world-view, Nyambi appears especially as an awesome mythical presence in the deep forest. where only specialist hunters penetrate. Also among the Lele of Kasai, Nyambi has this close association with the forest (Douglas 1963; Cotterell 1989: 228). On the extensive modern influence of the Bible on Nkoya conceptualisations, see van Binsbergen 1992b: ch. 3.

²² *E.g.* Williams 1995; Badiou 1982, 2003, cf. Ashton *et al.* 2006.

²³ Mall 1984, 1985 – with specific application to hermeneutics and the unity of humankind – 1994; Mall & Lohmar 1993; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2003b: ch. 12, pp. 375-395.

²⁴ *Cf.* the title of Chapter 2, below.

phy of Interculturality (2003b). But however voluminous that book was, it could only accommodate part of my enthusiastic philosophical output; nor did that output in the least stop in 2003. *The present volume* therefore brings together a new harvest mainly from the last two decades, when my attention was increasingly drawn to the epistemological challenges of interculturality:

- not only the pitfalls of *North Atlantic*, potentially hegemonic (and occasionally racist) knowledge formation about past and present African social and cultural realities, but also
- the deeply emotional and political question as to the validity, global relevance and global applicability of *African knowledge systems*
- and finally the contemplation of the possibility, *beyond* specific Northern or Southern regional concerns, of arriving at forms of knowledge (they appear in the present book as *wisdom, myth and therapy*, perhaps also *divination*) where local cultural boundaries may be crossed or transcended, and a promise of shared, common humanity may come within our reach.

As a *sangoma* who for the past quarter century has extended an African idiom of spiritual diagnosis, signification, and therapy to clients both in Africa and worldwide; but also as an adoptive member of the Nkoya people of Western Zambia since the 1970s, when I started my oral-historical and ethnographic research in their midst; as a teacher, supervisor and patron in numerous African (as well as European) contexts; as the Editor-in-Chief of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* ever since 2002; and particularly as someone who, in his personal and family life, is living and divulging the inspiration of African life-worlds and who seeks to counter the violent marginalisations to which Africa and Africans have been subjected during the last few centuries – with all these commitments, my interest in these issues could not remain merely academic. Let it disqualify me, or make me look like a clown, in North Atlantic academic eyes, yet it is simply true that *I have come to perceive my academic work in the first place as South-empowering activism (call it v i c a r i o u s , perhaps) in the minefield of the global politics of knowledge*. And this is also how many of my African friends, colleagues, students and kin have understood and appreciated my work.

Others, with opposite political, institutional and scholarly objectives, seem to have shared my perception of the knowledge-political implications of what I have been trying to do over the last few decades, and they may have feared it might succeed. For (much to my surprise, and against the promises made at my accession), while the expansion and training of my exquisite, intercontinental stable of PhD students were in full swing, in combination with my extensive website on African religion and philosophy demonstrably attracting thousands of visitors from all over the world, my editorship of *Quest* and my numerous publications and prestigious international invitations in the field of Intercultural Philosophy, my appointment in the Rotterdam chair was suddenly discon-

tinued after the first two four-year terms, without even the slightest suggestion of a formal valedictory function, as if under a cloud. (*Or had the quality or quantity of my philosophical work really sunk below intersubjectively acceptable professional standards? I could discern little to substantiate that academician's worst fear – the present book will be the final answer to this question*). It was the time when the Dutch political adventurer Pim Fortuyn, a part-time professor at Rotterdam like myself, was about to win a land-slide electory victory in Dutch national politics, if he had not been assassinated instead, in 2002; he was supposed to have abused the prerogatives of his chair, and the Rotterdam University authorities referred to his case as justification not to renew any temporary appointments for longer than eight years, although puzzlingly some of my colleagues in the same position as I were yet allowed to serve for longer spells. At the Free University, Amsterdam, my appointment had been permanent.

Most unfortunately, the period of my institutional isolation and decline in Rotterdam coincided with a similar change of heart on the part of the then management of the ASC, in the 31st year of my appointment there, – leading to what was effectively a *Berufsverbot* imposed on me for 2007-2010. During that period, I was no longer allowed to deliver the postgraduate course scheduled for me (I was alleged to corrupt the students' minds – and it is true that, taking them as seriously as I did the science we were all supposed to serve, I tended to react very critically to what I thought were theoretical and methodological shortcomings in their work), and all my institutional colleagues were formally forbidden from collaborating with me any further. Having given my best intellectual, didactic and managerial powers to that institution for most of my adult life, and having made a considerable and generally recognised difference in the process, I was now subjected to the most petty and painful humiliation. It comforted me that I thus appeared to be prematurely sharing the fate of major philosophers such as Bertrand Russell (victim of institutional harassment despite a most splendid career and socio-political track record), Boëthius (writing his masterpiece *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in death row in Late Antiquity), and even Socrates (who, on the accusation of spoiling the Athenian youth in the late fourth century BCE – and a similar accusation was brought against me in regard of the PhD candidates at the Leiden ASC –, was forced, or rather, had provoked his judges to force him, to drink lethal poison at the age of seventy; but without leaving even a shred of written text). By the end of those miserable three years, I received full institutional rehabilitation at the initiative of the new director Ton Dietz, and a splendid and costly valedictory conference organised (by Marieke van Winden and myself, with Gitty Petit, at Dietz' instigation) on the occasion of my formal retirement in 2012. These gestures went some way to compensate me emotionally. Further comfort I derived from the fact that during those three years of ostracism, even though I was barred even from research and travelling funds, my ongoing writing projects were to make enormous progress due to the absence of institutional commitments and distractions.

Yet, stripped of my Rotterdam PhD conferment rights (which had legally ex-

tended for no more than five years after termination of my incumbency), I have had the greatest difficulty seeing my last few African and Asian PhD candidates through their final examinations. Although my formal philosophical adventure was thus to end prematurely and disappointingly as far as the institutional framework was concerned, I '[l]ived on, flew on, in the reflected sky' (Nabokov 1962), editing *Quest*, supervising PhD students, fulfilling guest lectures, presenting papers, and working on texts with an exclusively or partly philosophical relevance.²⁵

0.1.5. Comparative mythology as a way out

These 3 years in the desert marked, and in hindsight were (on the surface) caused, by a change in my disciplinary allegiance; by the delay before such a change, after an incubation period, could lead to impressive new publications; and by (undeserved) institutional impatience in regard of such delay. *Behind this, however, was profound and increasing disagreement about the theoretical and methodological requirements a scientific institute should insist upon in its knowledge production, despite postmodernism.*

²⁵ For my last PhDs, my colleague W. van Beek (ASC / Tilburg) has been most supportive – as have my other long-standing friends and colleagues (including e.g. K.vo enda Beckmann) serving on the necessary PhD examination committees. Over the years, I have owed a great debt to my other ASC colleagues including (beside those mentioned above or below) R. Buijtenhuijs, P. Konings, Mieke Zwart, H. Meilink, J. Nijssen, E. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, J. Hoorweg and G. Grootenhuis. Moreover, he unintended but decisive facilitating action by L. de Haan, D. Foeken and M. de Bruyn enabled me to produce the following output for 2007-2010: a book with the Belgian Royal Academy of Sciences, on *Expressions of Traditional Wisdom from Africa and Beyond* (van Binsbergen 2009; reprinted in the present volume); another one on *Spiritualiteit, Heelmaking en Transcendentie* (in Dutch – 2012f: 'Spirituality, Healing and Transcendence', largely on the prominent Dutch philosopher Otto Duintjer but with a large section on transcendence in the context of Nkoya society of South Central Africa – my lasting home in Africa); a 400-pages study *Before the Presocratics* (van Binsbergen 2012d), where – true to my African and Afrocentrist *Wahlverwandschaften* (elective affinities; von Goethe 1879 / 1809), I trace the ramifications of a cosmological system (that of the cyclical transformation of elements), crucial to the emergence of ancient divination systems and of modern science and technology, across both the Old and the New World, and all the way back to the Upper Palaeolithic – almost reducing the Presocratic Greek philosophers (to whom the Western History of Ideas attributes the invention of philosophy and science) to the status of overrated thinkers from a backwater of the then civilised world; an edited collection on *Black Athena Comes of Age* (201e), in which I present my final, highly critical assessment of the *Black Athena* Thesis; a comprehensive and innovative edited collection, with Eric Venbrux, entitled *New Perspectives on Myth* (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010), and the 2008 international conference, with massive external funding of which this book is the result; a massive co-authored book *Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation* (in press), with my old friend Martin Doornbos, finally gone to the press in 2010; and, in the most stimulating collaboration with my sometime PhD student Fred Woudhuizen, a massive co-authored volume on *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (British Archaeology Reports International Series, 2011), in which major trends in cosmology, comparative mythology, iconography, linguistics, and the reconstructed evolution of systems of thought since the Upper Palaeolithic, are explored in a bid to make sense of the minute and fragmentary data on the puzzling Sea Peoples who marked the end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean region; as well as two special issues of *Quest: Lines and Rhizomes – The Transcontinental Element in African Philosophies* (2007) / *African philosophy and the negotiation of practical dilemmas of individual and collective life* (2008); and finally a short book *Shimmerings of the Rainbow Serpent*, on the interpretation of Palaeolithic iconography in the light of Nkoya puberty rites (201g).

The present book testifies to the theoretical inspiration which intercultural philosophy had brought me – but intellectually and institutionally I had soon reached the limits of what that investment could yield, my empirical orientation remained more and more frustrated in the philosophical environment, and the challenges of the fundamental unity of humankind remained without substantial progress. So from 2004 on, I allowed myself to be more and more drawn into the folds of the renewed, Harvard-centred long-range comparative mythology, increasingly at the expense of my ongoing work in intercultural philosophy.

Although I had always engaged in the study of myth, this new perspective, and the new worldwide circle of colleagues by which it was being proffered, had an enchanting effect on me – as if *everything I had always wanted to know about humankind's early history but had been afraid to ask*, was finally made available to me. If it was empirical investigation of the fundamental unity of humankind that I was after, how could comparative mythology make a contribution on this point? To answer that question, let me take the reader (whom the philosophical signature of this book has but little prepared for an exercise in comparative mythology) on a brief exploration of the spatially and temporally long-range comparative mythology of the god's name Nyambi, which is the common designation of the High God among the Nkoya and throughout Western Zambia. This will also highlight some of the linguistic and documentary resources and methods employed in this disciplinary connection.

B. THE THEONYM NYAMBI. The theonym Nyambi / Nyambē²⁶ is found, with regional variations (Zambi, Nzambi, Ngame, Nyame) all over Atlantic Africa, with eastward extensions towards the spine of the continent. In South Central Africa, the water name Zambezi derives from the original Lyambayi, which may well be a reflex of 'Nyambi'.²⁷

The etymology of the name Nyambi is puzzling. The Jesuit theologian Williams (1930), exploring possible traces of Ancient Judaism (the much-discussed problem of the lost tribes of Israel) in West Africa,²⁸ considers the name Nyame, among the Akan / Ashante (a major ethnico-political cluster in Ghana) an adulteration of the Israelite name for the Supreme God, יהוה Yahweh – which he alleges to be transmitted to West Africa via a Persian source that had *Yami* for Yahweh. For the next few decades, scholars (including myself) would have been inclined to dismiss this type of claim as myopic, Eurocentric fantasy, but the more recent, excellent research by Dierk Lange (e.g. 2004, 2011) has established beyond doubt that close links existed between West Africa and Ancient Mesopotamia – especially in Assyrian times, 7th c. BCE, when mass deportation – in this case, via Egypt, which in the Late period was first under Assyrian, then under Persian rule! –

²⁶ Cf. Hirschberg 1963; Schebesta 1964; van Binsbergen 2012d: 39; 2010a: 180 f., with references.

²⁷ Mythological sources on Nyambi include Jacottet 1899; Jalla 1903: 319 f.; the secondary account by Feldman 1963: 36 f. is unreliable because she situates in Mozambique what clearly is a myth from Western Zambia.

²⁸ A similar concern has inspired the work of von Sicard (1952), and in recent decades Parfitt (professor of Semitic languages at University College London, UK – 1993 / 1992; Parfitt & Semi 2005; Bruder & Parfitt 2012) on the Ark of the Covenant in Ethiopia, Southern Africa and even (perhaps somewhat over-zealous, chimerical?) New Guinea.

was a major political instrument.²⁹ The Mesopotamian influx turned out not to be the first major inroad into sub-Saharan Africa from the Ancient Near East. For our work on the Sea Peoples in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean³⁰ brought out that some of the Sea Peoples, after their defeat in the Egyptian Delta, migrated westward along the North African coast and then traversed the Sahara into West Africa. My analyses of the spiked-wheel trap, of the *Borean³¹ (including Austric – so by implication peripherally Eurasian) component of the Bantu linguistic family, and of the Eurasian parallels in Nkoya mythology³² also suggests major continuities between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa going back to at least proto-historical times.³³ This is not yet a window on the fundamental unity of humankind, but at least puts paid to the habitual essentialisation and alleged isolation of Africa – on the contrary, that continent, its inhabitants and their cultures have always been part of the wider intercontinental world – even besides the now generally affirmed probability that the human species emerged there c. 3 to 4 million years BP, and Anatomically Modern Humans c. 200 ka BP.

If we consider the possibility that the name Nyambi belongs not to the Afroasiatic linguistic domain (including Hebrew and Egyptian) but to Niger-Congo / Bantu, it could convincingly be associated with proto-Bantu **gamb*,³⁴ 'speak', which would give as meaning 'the speaker', perhaps: 'the one who creates with the word', as throughout the Ancient Near East.³⁵ In Nkoya (and in the cognate Luyana language, which is the Lozi

²⁹ Apparently, even the Ancient Greeks, and their unmistakable affinity with the cultural orientations and gene pools of sub-Saharan Africa, also owed their coming into being as a people partly to such mass deportation: Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2001; however, the latter study must be treated with considerable reservations (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 54, 400 n. 1295) in view of its lack of linguistic sophistication. On Ancient Greek-African continuities, also cf. Bernal 1987-2006; Mudimbe 2008; Mveng 1972; van Binsbergen 2010e, and extensive references there.

³⁰ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, with extensive references ranging from Herodotus to Lhote 1959. The major North-South routes through the Sahara are lined with rock art depicting chariots, which reached the Eastern Mediterranean in the middle of the 2nd mill. BCE (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Fig. 28.17, pp. 382 f., with sources).

³¹ *Borean is the reconstruction of a language form hypothetically spoken in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic, and considered (and that is the basis for its reconstruction) to have left traces in the lexicon of all linguistic macrophyla now spoken; cf. Fleming 1991, 2002; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008. In the context of such long-range historical linguistics, *Austric* (cf. Blust 1993; Higham 1996) is the name given to a proposed linguistic macrophyllum combining the phyla of Austronesian and Austroasiatic, spoken today over much of South East Asia and Oceania.

³² van Binsbergen 2010a, 2010b, and in press (d); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 81 f. One of the relevant findings of my explorations in the Mediterranean Bronze Age has been the linguistic discovery of uninvited guests on the Mediterranean shores, such as the place names *Jabbok* and *Canaan*, which are unmistakably (proto-)Bantu, meaning respectively 'fordable stream' and 'place of denial'. Whatever the (widely contested) historical status of the *Exodus* tradition of a massive influx of Israelites from Egypt in the Later Bronze Age, (*Proto-*)*Bantu-speakers seem to have been among the prior inhabitants of Palestine.*

³³ Protohistory is the term to designate an era when strictly local written sources are still absent, but indirect historical data may be gathered from written sources from adjacent regions.

³⁴ Meeussen n.d.: 4.2, L; Guthrie n.d.: item 770.

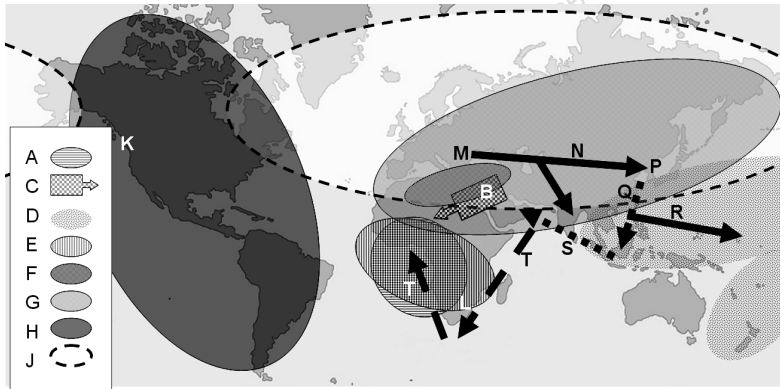
³⁵ Like in the Ancient Near East the sun god Marduk (in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish* – King 1999 / 1902); and the Biblical 'judge' דבורה Devorah ('bee', but really 'speaker', because of the noise a bee-hive makes – *Judges* 4:4 f.; cf. the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Budge 1969 / 1904: I, 238, my italics):

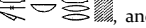
court idiom), 'speaker' is *ngambela* – more specifically the term for Prime Minister, *i.e.* the highest court officer, who communicates the king's pronouncements to the outside world, for the king, being sacred, can have no direct dealings with the world. An alternative, but probably spurious interpretation is 'the one who does *not* speak' (Anonymous, n.d. 'In the beginning...').


In this connection it is relevant that, in the South Central African worldview, as in Atlantic Africa, Nyambi is primarily considered as a creator, and is generally taken to be a *deus otiosus* (cf. Shelton 1964; Nwanunobi 1984), who has no day-to-day dealings with the natural and human world any more, and who is hardly the subject of a cult.³⁶

The leading Africanist Baumann (1936) tried to identify the origin of the name Nyambi, but failed. On the basis of knowledge of the Kongo (Brazzaville) language, however, Dennett, a well-informed trader and amateur ethnographer, offers plenty of detail on Nyambi including (1906: 166 f.) a very specific morphological analysis of the name:

'The name for God is NZAMBI and its literal meaning is the personal essence (IMBI) of the fours (ZIA or ZA = four). What then are the fours? They are the groups each of four powers called BAKICI BACI...'



'The door of the first Circle, Sesheta, is called Υ es-neb- τ er $\cdot \cdot \cdot$  and shuts in the images of Tem [the creator god Atum], Khepera [sunrise god of beginnings] and Shu [the god of air who lifts Heaven from Earth]; when Rā [the Sun God] speaks to them they answer in a voice which resembles the *humming of bees*'.

As testified by the Telipinu epic of the Hittites (Pritchard 1954) and the Ancient Egyptian royal title  *nswt-bt · t*, 'She of the Reed and the Bee' (the two *-ts* leave no doubt as to gender), the bee was a solar cosmogonic symbol throughout the Ancient Near East (also cf. Draffkorn Kilmer 1987). Also cf. אלהים *Elohim* ('the gods'? or merely a *pluralis majestatis*?) creating through the word, in *Genesis* 1:3 f. Also cf. Chapter 9 below, note 357 on immanentalism.

³⁶ Although this deity may still be invoked in oaths and in the dedication (expressly: to the rising sun) of a new-born infant; there are indications (Mutumba Mainga 1972) that prayer to the morning sun as an epiphany of Nyambi was a regular institution in Western Zambia. The spread of the world religions Islam and Christianity has, however, made it difficult to confidently identify historic, local High-God cults in Africa.

- A. attestations of the theonym Nyambi and cognates (Nyame, Nzambi, Ngame etc.)
- B. locus of the Biblical theonym YHWH – C. extent of Assyrian Empire, c. 7th c. BCE
- D. Austric (= Austronesian + Austroasiatic) spoken today – E. Niger-Congo (> Bantu) spoken today
- F. Mediterranean and W. Asian virgin goddesses named *-n[]t- associated with weaving and warfare
- G. weaving goddesses as extension of F. – H. Amerind spoken in proto-historic times
- J. Central *Borean cluster: Eurasiatic, Sinocaucasian, Afroasiatic
- K. North-West Coast Raven trickster
- L. Zulu Princess of Heaven Inkosazana – M. Scythians (Iron Age)
- N. eastbound transmission across Eurasian Steppe as from Bronze Age
- P. Scythian / W. Eurasian traits in Korea, Japan and Taiwan
- Q. southbound Western Eurasian influence
- R. eastbound W.-Eurasian influence
- S. postulated westbound Sunda influence from Early Holocene on
- T. postulated extended Sunda influence into Africa

Fig. 0.1. Global distribution aspects of the theonym Nyambi.



Dennett thus implies that the four-element cosmology, best known from the Greek Presocratic philosopher Empedocles, and attested throughout the Old World and even North America since the Upper Palaeolithic, is also found in Central Africa – a finding whose considerable comparative and historical significance I have discussed in my book *Before the Presocratics* (van Binsbergen 2012d: 125 f., 157 f., and *passim*). Also among the Nkoya, in traditions supposed to refer to their oldest history, reference is made to ‘The Four’ (*Likota Iya Bankoya*, 38:6; van Binsbergen 1992: 447 and *passim*), which appears to relate to the four major royal dynasties to survive into colonial times, but may ultimately also link up with the element cosmology (although in historic times the Nkoya turn out to have a transformative cycle of six, rather than four, elements). Throughout the region of its distribution, the theonym Nyambi has solar (sometimes lunar) and spider-like connotations, as has the West-African divine trickster Anansi, whose name and character are likely to be cognate to Nyambi’s.

In my work on comparative mythology I have repeatedly suggested (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 112 f.) that Nyambi is in fact continuous with a cluster of Bronze Age goddesses distributed from the North African Sahara to West Asia, and associated with *weaving, spider-like features, a female and even virgin nature, and* (remarkable, in women – but continuous with the institution of women warriors in Ancient Dahomey, Ancient Libya etc.) *military prowess*. In the course of the Bronze Age, these goddesses were relegated (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4) to positions of domestic subordination under male celestial gods, but more originally they appear to have been supreme Mother Goddesses and Creator Goddesses; cf. Table 0.1, below, p. 31 f. On both phonological and semantic grounds, it is tempting to consider the Mediterranean members of this cluster of goddesses (e.g. Athena, Neith, Anat, Anahita, Tanit, Antinea, perhaps, although already masculinised, the Berber god Ānti / Antaios³⁷ as one coherent series of cognates. Semantically,

³⁷ Another long-range association presents itself in this context, although it is a very far shot, and most probably a red herring: given the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read Thesis (note 47, below), and the several empirical indications of possible Austric presence in the Bronze Age Mediterranean (Pedersen n.d.; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.4, pp. 370 f.), the North African god Ānti (his tomb was supposed to be in Tingis, Mauretania), and the various Ancient Egyptian gods called Antī (Brunner 1975-1986; Brunner 1975-1986; Bonnet 1971 / 1952: 38f.; Sethe

and perhaps also phonologically,³⁸ Nyambi may be considered merely an outlying member of this series.




Eliade (1965 / 1953) stresses the binding / weaving aspect of the *moon*³⁹ and discusses Athena in a lunar (whose sea / watery nature I have argued elsewhere; 2011f) rather than solar connection. Also Graves – notoriously disreputable as a scholar, but often with a poet’s stunningly convincing insights – sees (1965: 22 f.) West African Nyame in a lunar perspective. Yet in comparative religion it is rather the (often female!) sun which has spider-like connotations (van Binsbergen, in press (g), (b)), and it is illuminating to consider Nyambi in the light of the global distribution of spider motifs (van Binsbergen 2010: Fig. 9.7, p. 185, reproduced here as Fig. 0.2).

I have given an extensive but far from conclusive discussion of the possible etymology of the name *nt* / Neith in *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 88 f.). There, after exploring the possibilities of an Afroasiatic and Indo-European background, arguments are adduced, in regard of Ancient Egypt, for a possible North-Eastern, Uralic background with shamanic connotations (in accordance with the Bronze-Age spread of horse and chariot technology from proto-Uralic Central Asia), while, through the semantics of ‘wetness’, confirming Neith in her hypothetical primary identity as ‘Mother of the Waters’. (Proto-)Uralic thus appears as another uninvited guest on the Mediterranean linguistic scene of the Bronze Age. Beyond this Uralic connotation however, a proto-Austrian connotation (suggestive of South East Asian or Oceanian provenance – in line with the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read or Sunda Hypothesis) may be adduced (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 370 f., Table 28.4), not only for the name *nt* / Neith but also for such other important Mediterranean Bronze-Age names as Osiris, Ra^c, Men(es), Daidalos / Talos, Dilmun, and Atlantia. The semantic and phonological resemblance of the name and symbolic connotations of Neith with proto-Austrian **nah* ‘bow’ (with the final *-t* interpreted as the

1930: §51 f.; Otto 1975–1986), there might be a connection here with the Oceanian Gilbert Islands, where gods are called *anti* and divine ancestors *anti-ma aomata*, ‘living gods’; cf. Cotterell 1989: 50 f.; Starostin & Starostin 1998–2008, ‘long range etymologies’: proto-Austrian **TVŋ*, ‘hear’, proto-Austronesian **a’ntin*, ‘hear at a distance’ < *Borean **TVNV*, ‘know, hear’ (here and elsewhere, *V* = unspecified vowel). For such an interpretation, it would have helped if there are any attributes or connotations of these Mediterranean gods that could be argued to have Sunda implications. This however seems scarcely the case – although, as we have just seen, the possibly Austrian element in the Mediterranean Bronze Age is not limited to this one case. One Egyptian *Anti* is known as ‘Lord of the East’ – but this can hardly be taken to refer to South East Asia rather than to Eastern Egypt. Another is associated with the expression ‘two claws’ – again scarcely specifically Sunda. Greek accounts of *Antaios* depict him as a collector of human skulls for the roofing of a temple of his father *Poseidon* (Fontenrose 1980: 33), killed by *Herakles* ‘in Libya’ – which in Antiquity was a geographically very wide concept, also cf. Fig. 8.1, below – by lifting him off the ground – *Antaios* was invincible as long as in contact with his mother, Earth / *Gaia* (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.15). Apart from the apparent Sunda / Austrian etymology of Greek *aēr* (cf. Austronesian *air*, ‘water’) and *haima* (‘blood’, with the tell-tale, probably Austrian *-m-*), the only likely Sunda element here would be *headhunting*, but although this is a widespread institution in South East Asia and Oceania, its Eurasian and African attestations are sufficiently numerous not to rush to Sunda conclusions on this point (van Binsbergen 2014). The somewhat hybrid conception of *Antaios*’ descent selectively combining elements from both the cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (lifting is deadly for him) and that of the Separation of Water (*Poseidon*) and Land (*Gaia*), suggest, rather than long-range connotations of South East Asia / Oceania, that he belongs to the class of very old mythemes of which particularly North Africa appears to have retained a fair helping.

³⁸ Neith’s *nVt* (*V* = undetermined vowel; the *i* and *th* are artifacts of Greek transliteration) > ? Nyambi’s *n*[/z-...

³⁹ Also manifest in discussions of witchcraft both in Ancient Greece, and in modern North America; Adler 1990 / 1979.

common feminine ending in Old Egyptian (Δ / $-t$), is remarkable (Neith is semantically and iconographically associated with the bow and arrows, e.g. ,  or  – the right-hand signs in the latter two utterances represent a bundle of two bows packed together; in the well-known 1st-dynasty stela of Queen Merit-Neith two arrows cross the familiar heraldic inflated bag on a pole). Yet the similarity between the Austric and the Ancient Egyptian word is probably largely coincidental, all the more so, because it is only the oldest reconstructed Austric proto-form that resembles the name of Neith, whereas the late forms in Austronesian and Austroasiatic are widely divergent from the Egyptian name. So we must look further for etymologies of our chain of female theonyms. In doing so, as non-specialists, we will lean very heavily on the authoritative etymological database of the *Tower of Babel* (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008).



If we assume that the common lexical element in the series of Mediterranean Bronze-Age female theonyms Neith / Athena / Anahita / Anat / Tanit etc. is $*-nt-$, then for the identification of its etymology we might in the first instance go back (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'long-range etymology') to a *Borean* root $*(NVTV)_n$ (V is again an undetermined vowel), of which so far three variants have been reconstructed:

1. $*(NVTV)_n$, 'to move quickly'; with reflexes in Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic (Illich-Svitych, 1967: 338 f., 1976: II, 90 f.; Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1608; all changing *Borean* $*-T-$ into $*-d-$, hence phonologically unsuitable for our present purpose, while also without semantic relevance;
2. $*(NVTV)_2$, 'female relative', with reflexes in Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic (Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1570), the latter in proto-Afroasiatic: $*nVH\dot{t}$, making both semantically (these are goddesses!) and phonologically an attractive case, cf. 'Anahita'; and
3. $*(NVTV)_3$, 'snake', with reflexes in Indo-European and Amerind, which however are not adequately documented in the *Tower of Babel* database. To some extent Neith, as goddess of the waters, is a cognate character to such Ancient Near East serpentine chaos figures such as Tiamat and Leviathan; therefore this possibility should not be discarded off-hand.

Nor does this exhaust the etymological possibilities of our chain of female theonyms, especially since West Asian traits abound (Hoffman 1979 / 1991; Kammerzell 1994) in the Ancient Egyptian Delta, where Neith's town Saïs is situated.

4. Proto-Afroasiatic $*\lambda am-$, 'woman', > proto-Semitic $*\lambda ant- at-$ / $*\lambda am-$, 'woman' (3100) and Old Egyptian $im\dot{z}t$. It is possible that our chain of female theonyms derives from proto-Semitic and merely denotes the gender of the deities involved, as (demoted) Great Mothers. In the course of the Bronze Age such female deities were, as we have seen, eclipsed by male gods, often with celestial connotations, and relegated to inferiority associated with such female tasks as spinning and weaving, despised from a male dominant perspective. However, in an earlier dispensation they would probably not be defined by juxtaposition to males but have stood on their own, and then designation by their gender identification seems implausible.
5. *Borean* $*HVNTV$, 'front', has reflexes (Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1875) in Eurasiatic (= Nostratic), Afroasiatic and Sinocaucasian; in the latter two macrophyla the *Borean* $*H-$ tends to be retained in modified form (although proto-North Caucasian $*?end\dot{u}$, 'forehead', as it is in proto-Eurasiatic, $*Han \cdot V$, 'front', which is unsuitable for our purpose; however, the *Borean* $*H-$ is dropped in most reflexes in Eurasiatic including most Indo-European ones (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 65 f.), although do note Hittite / Hatti $hant-$, 'forehead', $hanta$ 'opposite', Luwian 'first'. Along this line of approach we may yet come to our female theonyms, highlighting their bearers' super rank.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Perhaps this is also the place to point at proto-Indo-European $*k(')enta$, for an adverb or

6. In principle fitting for a chain of female theonyms is also the following etymological connection: proto-Semitic **ʾanta*, 'thou' (3084), which however has no reflex in Old Egyptian.
7. Reminiscent of the watery aspect of this chain of goddess as hypothetical transformations of the 'Mother of the Waters', is the proto-Indo-European root **-unt-* or **-und-*, 'wave', which however does not readily drop its *-u-*, and only has reflexes in Germanic and Latin (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 252*f.*), and therefore is unlikely to have relevance for our chain of theonyms spread as it is over a vast region where various macrophyta have been attested in (proto-)historic times; but *cf.* the semantically interesting proto- Altaic **untu* (*-o*), 'whirlpool, tide', Ozawa 1968: 59*f.*
8. Similarly reminiscent of the watery aspect of our chain of goddesses as hypothetical transformations of the 'Mother of the Waters, and therefore semantically stimulating, is the North Caucasian protoform **-ontV-* (*/-intV-*), 'soft; liquid; wet; to warm up (a liquid)', with reflexes in various North Caucasian languages, *cf.* proto-North Caucasian **ʔəntü* (*~ -n-*), 'soft, liquid, wet'; Caucasian connections may be detected in older layers of Biblical myth, *e.g.* the Noahite narrative in *Genesis* 5 to 10, while the bee complex of Ancient Egypt (especially manifest in the bee connotations of Saitic Neith since the earliest dynastic times, and in the Ancient Egyptian royal title,  *nswt-bit* 'She of the Reed and the Bee', which evokes the two aspects of later cosmogony, Heaven and Earth) has Anatolian and Caucasian continuities, especially in the Telipinu epic. But again it is hard to explain how the vowels *-o-* / *-i-* could have been dropped.
9. From a perspective of comparative mythology, where storm' and 'sea' may be associated with the same divine figure (*e.g.* Japanese *スサノオ* Susanoo, Ancient Egyptian  Seth, Ancient Greek Poseidon), a moderately interesting angle of approach is *proto-Indo-European **[h](a)wē-* / **(a)want*, 'to blow (of wind); wind', < Nostratic **Hewa*, 'to blow, to winnow' (with further reflexes in Altaic and Dravidian) < *Borean **HVVV*, 'to blow, to winnow'. It is only in Hittite, Tokharian, Germanic, Cymric / Welsh, and Latin that *-nt-* is seen as a later development, which, if at all applicable to our series of female theonyms (which is unlikely), suggests, again, a West Asian provenance for them.
10. Considering the connotations of military prowess which the goddesses in our widespread chain have, another promising proto-Indo-European root is **nent-*, 'to dare', with reflexes in Tokharian, Germanic and Celtic⁴¹ 'struggle' (Pokorny 1959-1969: II, 317). However, this relatively recent root does not seem to be a reflex of proto-Eurasian let alone *Borean, and its exclusively Indo-European background would seem to be too narrow for our widespread chain, despite the considerable West Asian impact on Egypt, especially on the Delta. Remotely connected may seem Proto-Indo-European **(o)neid-*, 'to insult', with reflexes in Old Indian, Avestan, Armenian, Old Greek, Baltic and Germanic (Pokorny 1959-1969: II, 322).
11. proto-Afroasiatic **ʔnt-* 'louse'. This is again an unlikely connection since it has no reflex in Old Egyptian. Neith however is reported to be associated with beetles and other bugs, and the Mother Goddess which appears to be a Neolithic transitory stage between the Upper Palaeolithic 'Mother of the Waters' and our Bronze Age god-

preposition meaning 'under, lower, deep, along, against', with reflexes in Hittite, Tokharian, Old Greek, Latin / Italic, and Celtic (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 459*f.*; Tischler n.d.: item 539*f.*) This root is largely irrelevant in our present context, since in none of its reflexes it sheds its initial *k-*. Yet it ties in with the more general 'earth / bottom / human' complex to be discussed shortly.

⁴¹ *E.g.* Old-Irish *nēit*, - there also exists a Celtic war god Neit or Neito, epigraphically attested in the Iberian Peninsula - which ties in with the Mediterranean associations of our chain of theonyms, and with the war-like connotations of Egyptian Neith; Simón 2005.

deesses, is associated with bees as signs of death and rebirth (Gimbutas 1982, 1991).

12. Another possible etymology of Neith is Indo-European: **nedh-* 'net' < Eurasianic **nVdV*, 'to tie', with further reflexes in Uralic and Dravidian, but also an extension in Chadic (Illich-Svitych 1967: 364 and Illich-Svitych 1976: II, 324; Dolgopolsky n.d.: item 1533). This 'ties' in with some of these goddesses' specialisations, spinning and weaving, but leaves unaccounted the military and watery dimension, and does not consider the relatively late, Bronze-Age connotations of these goddesses' demotion and relegation to the women's quarter.⁴²

Overlooking the wealth of lexical / etymological material that has been presented here, we can hardly claim to have offered a compelling etymology of the chain of female theonyms that stretches from West and North Africa to West Asia. Yet two options emerge as rather convincing: the serpentine / cosmogonic option (3), and the 'exalted' option (5) – with possibly the 'tying, weaving' dimension as a more recent, Bronze-Age addition (12).

Our discussion of the etymology of our chain of female theonyms would remain one-sided and even more inconclusive than it already is, if we would not take this opportunity of drawing on a much more comprehensive, in fact global, context, where the most likely solution for our etymology seems to lie. An important step in the recent rise of long-range linguistics has been the formulation, by John Bengtson and Marvin Ruhlen (1994), of so-called 'global etymologies': words that are found in most macrophyla spoken today, and that have retained the recognisable marks of both phonological and semantic cognation. I found (van Binsbergen 2010c; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 76 f.) that another such global etymology could be given for the immensely important conceptual complex designating 'earth / bottom / human' – a complex moreover that convincingly highlights the extent to which sub-Saharan Africa is in continuity with the cultural history of Eurasia (*pace* Cavalli-Sforza – 1991; Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994 and many other writers, who have erroneously relegated African languages to the extreme peripheral recesses of human cultural history). I am giving the original analysis in full (van Binsbergen 2010a: 155 f.), because beyond highlighting the etymology of our female goddess names and beyond the rehabilitation of the Bantu philum, it also contains important lessons towards another one of this book's major themes, *the fundamental unity of humankind*.

BB. A GLOBAL ETYMOLOGY: THE COMPLEX 'EARTH / BOTTOM / HUMAN'. The following example, although excessively long, may serve to indicate the relevance and the power of the **Borean* hypothesis as a long-range approach. Remarkably, the root *-ntu*, 'human, person', although only one of many of hundreds of reconstructed proto-Bantu roots (*cf.* Guthrie 1948, 1967-1971, and n.d.: **nto*, Guthrie no. 1789; Meeussen 1980 and n.d.: **-ntu*), found in many or all languages of the large Bantu family (a division of the Niger-Congo or Niger-Kordofan phylum), was so conspicuous in the eyes of Bleek (1851 – the first European linguist to subject these languages to thorough comparative study), that he named them 'Bantu languages' after that root (*ba-* being a common

⁴² And even this lavish listing does not exhaust the rival possibilities. Thus, in addition, we have: proto-Semitic **ytn* ~ **ntn*, 'give' (3143; no reflex in Old Egyptian), unfortunately without consistent treatment in the *Tower of Babel* database; Old Egyptian: *nty.w* 'people, men' (Old Kingdom) [original note: '-y may be a suffix or a reflex of a front vowel'], again without consistent treatment in the *Tower of Babel* database; Old Egyptian: *ntnt* (Middle Egyptian) 'skin' / ('loin cloth leather') < **IVtIVt?* < proto-Afroasiatic **lat-* (?), 'skin' (but the analysts themselves complain of 'scarce data!'); and Old Egyptian: *nt3* (Pyramid texts), 'run' < proto-Afroasiatic **nVta2-*, 'go, run', also with reflexes in Semitic and Western Chadic, but without obvious semantic applicability in the present context. None of these options seem remotely convincing as etymology for our chain of female theonyms.

form of the plural personal nominal prefix). However, *-ntu* is not exclusive to the Bantu family. This is already clear from proto-Austronesian **tau*, 'human, raw' (Adelaar 1995). Looking for an etymology of the puzzling Greek word *ánthrōpos* 'human', the Dutch linguist Ode (1927) had the felicitous inspiration to see this word as a reflex of what he claims to be proto-Indo-European **nt*, 'under' (cf. the more consensually established proto-Indo-European **ndho* 'under', Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 323) – thus proposing a semantics of 'human' as 'ground or underworld dweller'. Thus, incidentally, Ode also offered an interesting etymology of the long contested Ancient Greek theonym Athena as an underworld goddess.⁴³ Along this line, many more possible (pseudo-?)cognates from many language phyla come into view. The background assumption in this kind of historical linguistic reconstruction is that standard methods of historical and comparative linguistics allow us, with intersubjective scientific plausibility, to reconstruct progressively older levels of parent forms, right up to the oldest possible reconstruction, **Borean*; nearly all linguistic macrophyla spoken today contain, among an admixture of forms of unidentified provenance, also reflexes from **Borean*. Against this background, (pseudo-?)cognates of Bantu *-ntu* seem to be proto-Afroasiatic **tV?* 'a kind of soil' (cf. Old Egyptian *t* / *t3*, 'earth', with cognates in Central and East Chadic and in Low East Cushitic), from **Borean* **TVHV*, 'earth'; a reflex of this root is also found in Sinocaucasian⁴⁴ notably as 土 *tǔ* (modern Beijing Chinese), *thā* (Classic Old Chinese), 'land, soil', Karlgren code: 0062 a-c, suggested to be of Austric origin: notably proto-Austronesian **buRtaq* 'earth, soil', proto-Austroasiatic **tej* 'earth', Proto-Miao-Yao **Ctau* (cf. Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994: 60, *tak*, however the latter two authors – according to Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 'Long-range etymologies' s.v. **TVHV*, 'earth' – seem to confuse the reflexes of **Borean* **TVHV* with those of **TVKV*). Considering the remarkable similarities⁴⁵ between Southern and Eastern African Khoisan on the one hand, and North Caucasian on the other hand, one should not be surprised that also some Khoisan language families seem to attach to the very old and very widespread 'earth / bottom / human' complex which we are identifying here: South Khoisan (Taa): **tāʼ*, **tuʼ*, 'person'; North Khoisan (proto-Zhu) **ž u*, 'person' – Central Khoisan has **khoe*, etc. 'person', which might well be a transformation of **ž u*. (Note that here, too, like in Bantu, it is the word for 'human' that produces the ethnonyms Taa, Zhu and Khoe / Khoi, or Khoekhoe / Khoikhoi!) Further

⁴³ For alternative etymologies, of the name *Athena*, cf. Hrozný 1951: 228; Fauth 1979a. Regrettably, Martin Bernal took his (*demonstrably wrong*) etymology of Greek *Athēnē* < Egyptian *nt* / Neith as the heraldic emblem of his (yet greatly inspiring) *Black Athena* Thesis, which generated considerable debate: Bernal 1987 vol. I; Jasanoff & Nussbaum 1996; Egberts 1997 / 2011; van Binsbergen 1997b / 2011; Blažek 2007.

⁴⁴ Also cf. the North Caucasian language Khinalug: *ant*, 'earth, ground', North Caucasian etymology 2191, < proto-North-Caucasian **?antV* (~ m), 'dirt, earth', clearly part of the same complex analysed here. (*my later addition*.)

⁴⁵ For which the geneticist Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* – 1994 – has given (*pace* Vigilant *et al.* 1989) an adequate explanation: today's Khoisan speakers are a hybrid African-Asian population which had still ancestors in West Asia 10 ka BP – they are another example of the Back-to-Africa movement.

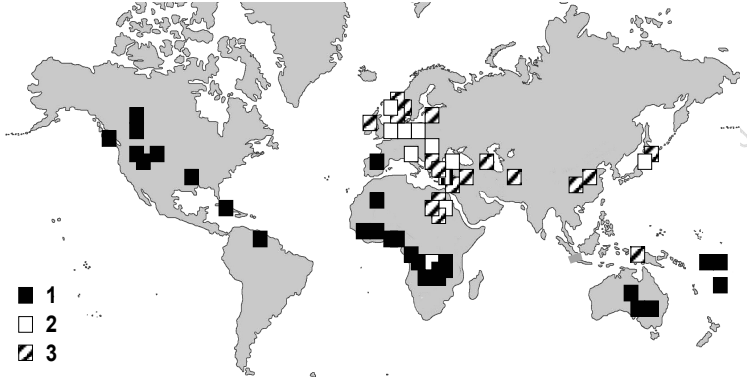
possibilities are contained in the reflexes of another *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', which however is both semantically and phonologically so close to *TVHV 'earth' (however, in *Borean reconstructions, the vowels, indicated by *-V, had to remain unspecified and therefore could differ) that we may well have to do with one and the same word: proto-Sinotibetan *diəH 'bottom' (e.g. Chinese 底 *təjʔ 'bottom' Karlgren code 0590 c; 根 *təjʔ, 'root, base', Karlgren code 0590 d) from proto-Sinocaucasian *dVHV, 'bottom'; from the same *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', also Afroasiatic *duH, 'low' (e.g. Egyptian: dH (z1) 'low', East Chadic: *dwaHdaH- 'down') as well as proto-Auroasiatic *dʔuj (also *tu:ʔ 'tail, vagina'), proto-Miao-Yao *tʃoʃi.B 'tail', Proto-Austronesian: *hudi 'buttocks' (not in Proto-Austronesian B) (also *udehi 'last, behind' – the latter, Austric forms being predicated on a semantics of 'lower part of the rump', cf. English 'bottom') (cf. Peiros 1998: 157, 165; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008).

As we have seen, one of the most inspiring recent long-range theories spanning vast expanses of space and time has been the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read 'Sunda' Thesis (postulating massive South East Asian demographic and cultural impact on South and West Asia, and by extension sub-Saharan Africa, from the Early Holocene onward).⁴⁶ Although my initial enthusiasm for this hypothesis prompted me to regard the conspicuous African distribution of the spider theme in terms of the otherwise well-attested transmission from South East Asia / Oceania in proto-historical times (as appeared to be the case for a variety of musical instruments, certain styles of 'hunched' sculpture, ecstatic cults, the peopling of Madagascar with Austronesian-speakers, etc.), further analysis on a global scale (which especially brings out the prominence of the spider motif in the New World) suggests that with the spider we are dealing with something rather different than a Sunda effect: notably, a very ancient mythological element, which may be dated more precisely if we assume it to reflect a transcontinental distribution interpretable as

⁴⁶ Oppenheimer 1998; Dick-Read 2005; van Binsbergen 2012c; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008. But although an Anti / Antaios / *a'ntiŋ connection may be suggested in the light of the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read Hypothesis for which especially in the African context evidence is now accumulating, it does smack of the absurdities of an antiquarian super-diffusionism. The consonantal combination *VntV is far too common to be pressed into service for such a far-fetched claim linking the Western Mediterranean and Oceania. Besides, plenty of alternative, and probably equally unlikely and spurious, long-range associations could be adduced in this connection:



- Proto-Altaiic *ant'a 'slope', with reflexes in Tungus-Manchu, Korean and Japanese < Nostratic *Hant.V, 'front', < *Borean *HVNTV (see above)
- Eurasianic *anTV, 'to join, together', with reflexes in Altaic ('oath, comrade, match'), Dravidian and Chukchee-Kamchatkan, < *Borean *HVNTV, 'to join, together'
- Japanese *amá-, *anti 'taste, tasty, sweet' < Proto-Eurasianic *xamV < *Borean *HVMV 'to taste, sour'
- Japanese, *anti, 'kind of duck', proto-Altaiic *āŋatV, 'a kind of duck' < proto-Eurasianic *āŋVtV, 'duck'
- Japanese anti, 'plough' < Proto-Altaiic *amča 'plough'
- Eurasianic *aŋTV, 'a kind of plant', with reflexes in Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic and Dravidian
- Uralic *onta < Proto-Eurasianic *yontV, 'heat'
- Uralic *ontV 'root, origin', < Proto-Eurasianic *ŋünŋe

a manifestation of the Upper Palaeolithic communality of African, Amerind and Austric linguistic macrophyla after the disintegration of *Borean and the branching off of a 'Central' cluster (with the macrophyla Sinocaucasian, Eurasian and Afroasiatic) c. 15 ka BP (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77f., with the cluster dendrogram; also cf. van Binsbergen in press (c)).



1. Spider Supreme god; – 2. oblique references to spider in folklore etc., not mythical;
3. spinning / weaving goddesses, with spider connotations; references in: van Binsbergen, in press (g), in press (b).

Fig. o.2. Global distribution of spider mythology (van Binsbergen 2010: Fig. 9.7, p. 185).

Time to return to our analysis of the theonym Nyambi. Typical of Nyambi in the African context is that, as a Supreme God, this deity occurs in isolation rather than paired with a counterpart. This is not the case with some of the other female Old-World deities considered in the present connection as possible cognates of Nyambi. Egyptian gods tend to be organised in pairs or triples reflecting the history and power games of their cultic constituencies *i.e.* local and regional congregations, so we should not be surprised to find Isis and even Neith paired with various major male gods, especially  Osiris and  Seth. Astarte is paired with Ba'al ('Lord'), whose very *name* she is claimed to be. Greek Hera is paired with the Supreme God, Zeus. Athena is usually associated with Poseidon (whom she contests the loyalty of the town of Athens – and with whom she already appears to be connected in a much earlier dispensation, in Central Asia; cf. Karst 1931), – but her adoptive or vicarious child Erichthonios (actually born by Gaia, therefore emphatically 'autochthonous'), the first Athenian king, sprung forth from the semen which Athena's charms brought Hephaistos to spill (Pausanias 1.2.6; Apollodorus 3.14.6); and Hephaistos is in many respects Athena's counterpart as god of artisanal arts and crafts. In the Israelite tradition, substrate gods with female connotations were paired with, identified with, or subdued by, Yahweh – much like their Arabian counterparts in regard of Allah. Something similar applies to the Japanese creator goddess イザナミ Izanami (who was subdued by her brother イザナギ Izanagi), and 天照 Amaterasu (temporarily subdued by her brother スサノオ the sea / storm god Susanoo).⁴⁷ The brother-sister rivalry that comes to light

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the Japanese comparative mythologist Obayashi (1989) interprets the vicissitudes of Amaterasu and Susanoo's relationship in terms of Dumézil's (1958) tripartite ideology of Indo-European societies, which therefore requires a third deity, Ohokuninushi ('Harvest deity'; cf. Mackenzie 1923: 373f.). While this is a moot point (in my opinion Indo-Europeanists,


here, reminds us of a common mythological pattern in the Early State (Africa, Egypt, Aegean, Celts, Nkoya, etc.), where the woman is constitutionally considered the owner of the kingship, but this right is held to be usurped by her brother or husband (van Binsbergen 1992b).

Since world-views tend to constitute – especially (but far from exclusively, as Lévi-Strauss has emphasised in his approach to *La Pensée Sauvage*, 1962) in the literate environments of civilisation, during the last handful of millennia – *correlative cosmologies* (so that, for instance, social relationships are paralleled by those between colours, animal species, celestial bodies, musical notes, deities, seasons, etc.), it is to be expected that such pairing of major deities is associated with natural pairs in the human experience. Besides ‘dark and light’ / ‘night and day’, the most obvious pairs are those of Light and Dark, Sun and Moon, Heaven and Earth (the Separation of Heaven and Earth has been the central theme of mythology world-wide since the Upper Palaeolithic) and Water and Land (whose separation seems to have been a dominant cosmogonic theme prior to the shamanic invention of naked-eye astronomy and rise of the Heaven-Earth separation as main mythological motif).⁴⁸ Inevitably, and as we have already seen, Nyambi

given their fixation on linguistics and their lack of sophistication in socio-political theory, tend to rely too readily and automatically on the Dumézilian schema), it at least helps us to interpret the parallels between Isis and Amaterasu in terms of long-range Eurasian continuity in space and time. The invention of the spoked-wheel chariot in Kazakhstan c. 4 ka BP opened up the Eurasian Steppe for linguistic and cultural continuity all across Eurasia, and probably the Japanese Amaterasu account (only committed to writing, in classic Chinese of all languages, in the early 8th c. CE, more than three millennia after the flourishing of Egypt’s Old Kingdom!) is indebted to some West Asian source (with a likely impact on Ancient Egypt, as so much in West Asia at the beginning of the Bronze Age – cf. Rice 1990) rather than the other way around. Scythian *i.e.* West Asian / Pelasgian influence on Mongolia, Korea and Japan has great plausibility. According to state-of-the-art long-range linguistics, the realm of the Altaic phylum stretches contiguously from modern Turkey to Japan! Sunda influence on West Asia, the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa is still a moot point and at the focus of my current research (van Binsbergen 2012c, 2012e, 2012g, and in press (b); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.3, pp. 361), but it might constitute the return movement by which (as shown in Fig. 0.1, above, stretches N-P-Q-S) the circle is closed, and cultural material may have been pumped around all over the Old World in recent millennia, as depicted in Fig. 0.1, the sequence N-P-Q-S-T.

⁴⁸ Inevitably, we have no direct conventional (*i.e.* written) sources on mythologies in periods preceding the invention of writing, c. 5.1 ka BP – although since Gimbutas (1991: ch. 8) interesting, but much contested, claims have been made concerning rather older language-based sign systems. However, the revival of comparative mythology since 2000 CE (largely at the instigation of the leading Sanskritist Michael Witzel, of Harvard, formerly at Leiden) is predicated on the insight that the accumulated results of long-range linguistics, archaeology, ethnographic distribution patterns, and comparative religion, against the background of advances in molecular genetics, provide a framework within which prehistoric thought patterns may be reconstructed with considerable intersubjectivity and reliability, on the basis of myths and other language forms collected in historic times as well as pre- and protohistoric iconographies, provided one has at one’s disposal an elaborate theoretical model whose extrapolation into pre- and protohistoric periods is rendered plausible since it has already stood the test of application to empirically known later periods; there are indications and claims to the effect that comparative mythology has by now reached this important stage: Witzel 2001, 2012; Harrod 1987, 2010; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010a. If from 2004 I have been drawn into this field it was not only because my Africanist and Mediterraneanist empirical knowledge as well my proto-historic methodologies and theories proved to be very welcome there, nor again because the Harvard connection afforded me much needed comparative opportunities for Asian travel I had never had as an Africanist, but particularly because it is in this booming field of long-range, interdisciplinary research that I could hope to empirically consolidate the thesis of the fundamental unity of humankind,

and more or less cognate deities have also been drawn into such complementary cosmological schemes. Typically, the latter's application is seldom consistent, and may be reversed or muddled especially when mythical material is transmitted across linguistic and ethnic boundaries – as is very often the case. The process of supplanting a cosmology by a later dispensation that is more attuned to new modes of production and to the complexity of new forms of socio-political organisation, is seldom total and completed – remnants of the earlier systems will continue to cling to the later versions, making for alternative non-integrated variations and repertoires. Thus in many respects, even if incorporated in a later, vertical cosmology hinging on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, yet the older cosmology hinging on the horizontal Separation of Water and Land will continue to shimmer through in the mythical and ritual material. Above I have suggested that the complex figure of Antaios is a case in point. This principle may also explain why in South Central Africa, including among the Nkoya (*Likota Iya Bankoya* 4:1), Nyambi may take (Tegnaeus 1950: 193, *carte / map* 5; Wasitau 1997) the form of a *bird* – and not, like the culture heroes of adjacent regions, that of a hunter. For white, aquatic birds have been closely associated with (even identical to) the cosmogonic Mother of the Waters since the Upper Palaeolithic (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: *passim*). In Ancient Egypt, Neith has clearly retained many features of the 'Mother of the Waters', but so has Greek Athena – and this correspondence is a major reason *not* to consider (*pace* Bernal's *Black Athena* Thesis) the latter as a reflex of the former, but to assume an underlying common source, probably in West or Central Asia (van Binsbergen 2011f). De-throned by later, male-centered and vertical, celestial cosmological dispensations, the cosmogonic females may be turned not only into relatively docile (but occasionally rebellious) domestic spinsters and weavers, but also into divine tricksters – I take it that the widespread bird-like divine trickster of North American mythology (*Raven*; Robinson 1981) may be partly⁴⁹ explained in this way – and perhaps also the constructive but humble earth diver, which in Flood stories the world over, but especially in North Asia and North America,⁵⁰ restores Land after the Flood, albeit often not as an independent agent but as a servant of the (already typically male) Flood survivor. The fact that the spider appears as a creator deity in Oceania and North America, but also as a persistent association of Nyambi in the African

whose philosophical underpinning so far did not satisfy me, or eluded me. My claim of the succession of two Separation cosmogonies in the Upper Palaeolithic, one hinging on Water-Land, supplanted by one on Heaven-Earth, is also such an informed conjectural model. I have invoked and elaborated it in various recent writings (van Binsbergen 2010a, 2012d; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) where it turned out to be in accordance with the specific comparative mythological data adduced, but I have so far not come around to spelling out all the evidence and theory systematically. Such evidence, of course, includes various cosmogonies (*e.g.* *Genesis* 1: 1 f; the Ancient Egyptian cosmogonies featuring the Primal Waters  Nun – the hieroglyphic sign depicts water containers over 'sky', since the Primal Waters comprised underworld, sea and sky), the abundance of data on Flood myths world-wide (undoing the order installed by the Separation of Land and Water, the Flood myths describe simply an anti-cosmogony), the very wide-spread mytheme (from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Greece, Africa and Oceania) of raising of Heaven so as to make room for the second generation of gods, and for the world at large, *etc.* However, this is not the place to pursue this point any further.

⁴⁹ I say: *partly*, because, given my cluster analysis of the disintegration of *Borean, any analysis of African / American similarities has to take into account that the most obvious point of cultural and linguistic convergence between Africa and North America is situated in the Upper Palaeolithic. However, indications of trickles of trans-oceanic exchanges between the Old World and the New are now sufficiently numerous, and by now sufficiently mainstream, to allow for exchanges in far more recent millennia in addition to a common Upper Palaeolithic origin; cf. Jett 1999, 2002.

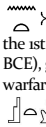
⁵⁰ Villems 2006; Weigle 1987; but also cf. *Genesis* 8:7.

context, suggests that here (in a fragmented distribution massively overgrown with later mythological innovations) even considerably older layers of mythology struggle for survival, going back to the Middle Palaeolithic or even further.

Brown (1991) considers 'intertwining, e.g. weaving' a universal of culture, but although attestations of weaving go back to the Upper Palaeolithic,⁵¹ weaving in the narrower sense is not a universal among Anatomically Modern Humans. Whereas weaving is a central institution in West Africa, yet in most of Africa South of the Congo-Zambezi watershed, and in parts of Oceania and South America, no weaving seems to have been practiced in the last few centuries. However, at least for the African case various authors⁵² have adduced evidence of pre-existing weaving. Probably such local weaving was eclipsed by the import of British textiles after the Industrial Revolution – and a similar argument might be made for imported South Asian textiles. Although the wooden, ivory, bone or leather tablets of the geomantic oracle in Southern Africa (to which we shall often return in the present book) could be argued to derive from distant prototypes in East African and even Chinese divination,⁵³ yet it is tempting to think that their more immediate prototypes derive from weaving utensils (shuttles, spindle whorls) which were in use regionally in proto-historical times, and which make excellent random generators in the sense that they may be thrown and fall in a limited number of differentially interpreted positions.

Von Sicard (1968-1969) in his extensive, well documented overview of the *unilateral mythical character* generally designated *Luwe* in the scholarly literature, suggests that also the Nape divinatory god of the Tswana as identified in some sources (notably Brown 1926) is in fact a form of Nyambi. Jacottet's (1899) account suggests a close association between Nyambi and the unilateral character Mwendanjàngula – which is also the conclusion I drew in a detailed analysis (van Binsbergen 2011a) of a Nkoya composite statuette depicting that major god, among others.

I have found the tabulation of traits and their implications a major aid in the analysis of mythical material, and it is with one such table that I will conclude this account of Nyambi as one particular theme in comparative mythology:

	Region (Bronze Age)	early Mother goddess	Subdued by male god	Reduced to a secondary role as	References and notes (also cf. Hastings 1909-1921)
1	Mesopotamia	Spider goddess Uttu	Raped by Enki 'Lord Water' (who has usurped the sea, as one of the domains of the Mother of the Primal Waters)	Uttu, goddess of weaving and clothing; Ninhursaq, Earth and Underworld goddess	Cotterell 1989: 86
2	Egypt	 Neith in the 1st dynasty (3100 BCE), goddess of warfare and hunting; Isis is also a	Horus, Ra ^c	Neith as Goddess of weaving and funerary goddess in the New Kingdom c. 1300 BCE, but	Carter & Mace 1923-33; Cotterell: 1989: 108; there is a remarkable parallel between Isis and 天照 Amaterasu: both were forced by their tempestuous brother (Seth in Egypt,

⁵¹ Czech Republic, 27,000 BP; cf. Anonymous, 'History of clothing and textiles'.

⁵² Fagan (1969: Plate 10b after p. 66); Ralushai & Gray, 1977: 8; Theal (1898-1903: VI, 261); and Wilson (1969-1970: I, 175 – weaving as a prerogative of the Lemba – with probable Israelite connotations, cf. von Sicard 1952, 1962; Thomas *et al.* 2000, with extensive references).

⁵³ E.g. temple blocks, dice made out of *astragali*, etc.; van Binsbergen 2005d, 2013.

		weaving and spinning goddess – although as a culture hero, the male  Osiris (but note his dependence on the Isis orthography) is credited with introducing weaving		continues to rule the waters and to have a final say in the assembly of gods	スサノオ Susanoo in Japan) to be confined to the weaving room – Willis 1994: 49; Plutarch 1934b-1935b
3	Iran, Armenia	Anahita, Anahit	Aramazd, Vahagn	Anahita largely reduced to domestic and subservient function, but still a weaving virgin and control over waters	Cumont 1911
4	Ancient Syro-Palestine	Astarte-Name-of-Ba'al; Anat; Ašerat (cf. 2 Kings:23)	Ba'al	consort; the goddess slays Ba'al's enemy and revives Ba'al, yet is relegated to the subaltern level	as Name of Ba'al: Glueck 1945; Albright 1936-37
5	Greece	Athena, Hera	Zeus, Poseidon, Hades	Demeter, Persephone / Proserpina, Harmonia, Athena as goddesses of handi-crafts and weaving	Athena and Arañne, Ovid (1812 / 1815) <i>Metamorphoses</i> , 6: 1-148 f.; cf. Glei 1998
6	North Africa and Sahara (Tuareg)	Antinea			Benoit 1920; Lhote 1958 / 1959
7	Rome	Magna Mater	Jupiter	Juno	Grant 1962
8	Judaism	El, Elohim, Yam	 Yahweh	Names of Yahweh; Leviathan	de Vaux 1969
9	Arabia	The pre-Islamic goddesses at Mecca	 Allah	Names of Allah	Wellhausen 1927
10	Early Japanese society	イザナミ Izanami, giving birth to the entire world and to the elements is her epiphany	イザナギ Izanagi, スサノオ Susanoo	Izanami as death goddess; but the celestial realm remains under female rule, notably that of the Sun goddess 天照 Amaterasu, who is mainly a weaver	古事記 <i>Kojiki</i> , cf. Philippi 1977; Chamberlain 1882

11	classical China	Weaving Girl	Cowherd		this could be read as an astronomical myth: the relation between its two characters is analogous to the distant association between the constellations of Gemini and Cygnus in the sky (in Greek mythology, Zeus sired the Heavenly Twins / Dioskouroi on Leda in the shape of a swan, cf. Rappenglück 1999; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen: 363 n. 1215); or between Lyra and Aquila (the Chinese stellar equivalents; Ions 1980: 192 f.; Willis 1994 /1993: 95, who mentions Vega, i.e. α Lyrae – the brightest star of that constellation – instead of the entire constellation)
12	Atlantic and Central Africa, including Akan and Nkoya	Nyambi, Nzambi, the trickster Anansi; spider themes abundant in Western Grassfields iconography, Cameroon			see main text
13	Nordic Europe	Holda, Frigg, and the Daughters of Sun and Moon			Bonser 1928; Cotterell 1989: 89
14	Zulu (South Africa)	Princess of Heaven Inkosazana / Nomkhubulwana, the heavenly princess	has the rainbow as her weapon; mediates between Heaven and Earth (rain, fertility, general well-being); and may be associated with female puberty rites; no details on any weaving activities	subordinated to her Father, the King of Heaven	Berglund 1976, Scorgie 2002

Table 0.1. Old-World goddesses of weaving, virginity, and prowess, often with spider-like connotations (largely based on: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4).



Overwhelmed, as also the uninitiated reader is supposed to be at this point, by the unlimited vistas of space and time which comparative mythology was opening up for my research, and by the promises this particularly held for the vindication of Africa's place in global cultural history, while eager to acquire the new fields of knowledge and skill which this next step entailed, I was tempted to think that in this field, rather than in intercultural philosophy, my main research of the next decade was to be situated. And indeed, that inspiration has by now fed several more book-length studies on Africa's transcontinental connections in pre- and protohistory, now nearing completion.

0.1.6. A philosophical adventure

But although I clearly did not come to identify exclusively as an Intercultural Philosopher, nor was given the option to do so, the most ambitious book project I am now working on is largely philosophical, and has for provisional title *Sangoma Science*, and – like some of the Chapters in the present book – seeks to explore the epistemological and natural-science foundations of the knowledges contained, and transmitted to me, in the context of the Southern African *sangoma* cult. Of such knowledges, apparently effective spiritual healing and apparently veridical divination are the hallmarks, at least in the eyes of the practitioners and their clients. That book will also be the context to take up, once again (after extensive earlier discussions of the problem notably in *Intercultural Encounters*, and also in the present volume), the question as to how a present-day writer who lays claim to moral and intellectual integrity (like I implicitly do, to the limited extent of the humanly possible),⁵⁴ can yet combine a North Atlantic / global academic philosophical and anthropological practice, with the publicly affirmed practice as a *sangoma* – in other and more pejorative words, *as an African witchdoctor*. Is my stance on this point merely ostentatiously strategic – hence performative – in the global politics of knowledge? Or (and this is a claim which my African audiences have often enthusiastically appreciated) is there (in spite of all condescending rejection and *Besserwissen*⁵⁵ on the part of North Atlantic scholars and lay people) simply a measure of *truth* in African knowledge systems – a truth, even, that could be interculturally argued and and globally mediated?

My philosophical adventure has spanned nearly two decades so far, but – as the present book testifies – we may not be quite at the end yet. Over half a century ago, when I had to decide on my field of university study as a freshman, I pre-

⁵⁴ It is not lack of integrity, I hope, but certainly, and admittedly, lack of philosophical consistency, that makes for one of the central contradictions in my work of the last two decades, including the present book. On the one hand I insist, also in the remainder of this Introduction, on the corpus of social-science methods, theory (and empirical findings) as a privileged body of knowledge which no one making pronouncements on society and history can afford to ignore *since (contrary to what journalists, literature scholars, preachers and other amateurs suggest) it is our own only basis for convincing truth claims about social life*; on the other hand, I lend an ear to the post-modern insistence on the impossibility of *any* privileged position, which would seem to include my own social-scientific claim as in the preceding lines. For good reasons, this dilemma has negatively informed my relations with my philosophical colleagues at Rotterdam. The dilemma has not made me give up for good my empirical work along time-honoured methodological lines. At best, it has opened my eyes to the reality of equally justified, yet incompatible, intellectual positions – and to the potential of *wisdom* approaches (Chapter 16 of the present book) as offering a way out beyond the rigour of logical argument. This still sounds as a lame excuse. Yet a (Derridean?) world-view hinging on the oscillating of (complementary) opposites will be at the heart of *Sangoma Science*.

⁵⁵ 'Knowing better' (but not really) – a cherished term of Martin Bernal to designate the paradigmatic condescension with which mainstream scholars tend to treat the paradigms of an earlier vintage – even if these (as Bernal argued for the work of E. Meyer, Childe, Montelius, and other writers including Afrocentrists) still contain considerable truth and unanswered questions. Ironically, much as I myself was inspired by Bernal's work, in the end I too had to retreat into what he might have called *Besserwissen*, in my final, fundamental critique of his *Black Athena* Thesis in favour of a view recognising the strong West Asian element (in addition to merely the sub-Saharan African element) in the genesis of Ancient Egypt.

tended in social and amorous conversation that it was going to be *philosophy* – a pretence I could easily keep up (in the way of those little books on *Bluff Your Way Through Modern Art*; *Bluff Your Way With Expert Conversation From The Flight Deck*, etc.) given my budding personal philosophical library and my superficial familiarity, at the time, with the works of the Presocratics, Marcus Aurelius, Teilhard de Chardin, Sartre, and Wittgenstein. Yet, as an adolescent I never seriously contemplated such a career, because my self-identity (only formed one or two years earlier...) was in the first place that of a poet, and I had a one-sided perception of what I took to be the ‘logocentricity’⁵⁶ (*avant la lettre*) and bloodless rationality of established Western philosophy – a context in which I would not confidently introduce my poetry nor my obsessive personal sensitivities. Cultural anthropology seemed less threatening to those concerns. So anthropology it was to be. Only decades later, after a long detour through the social sciences,⁵⁷ and prolonged total immersion, serially, in several African life-worlds and their cosmologies and symbolic systems was I, finally, to be co-opted into the field of philosophy in a formal capacity. And even though my adolescent stereotypes of philosophy, decades later, were to give way to an appreciation of the irreplaceable profundity, relevance and liberating power of

⁵⁶ On this term, cf. Rorty 1989a. Post-structuralist philosophers like Derrida (1967a, 1967b; see Chapter 6 of the present book) and Lyotard (1979, 1983) have reproached earlier forms of philosophy for being ‘logocentric’ – although the rich semantic field of the original Greek *λόγος* / *logos* (which includes not only ‘word’, but also ‘argument, fact’, etc.), and the point that also their own philosophising happens to be, almost inevitably, in discursive language, makes this a moot point. *Is there an alternative?* Scarcely in philosophy, to the extent to which that activity is explicitly defined as language-centred. However, to the extent to which, in every society, much (probably: *most*) interaction, communication, symbolism and meaning is realised by non-verbal, non-language means, the alternatives must be numerous. I submit that one such alternative is implied in the anthropological standard technique of transcultural knowledge acquisition through participant observation: months, years, even decades before the ethnographer reports on the field-work by writing a discursive and specialised scientific text, the day-to-day intensive participation in local social life means that the researcher, by chatting along, singing along, dancing along, praying along, etc. with the field-work hosts, already offers an implicit, non-logocentric ethnographic account of what she or he has in practice learned as essential about the local society – and publicly puts that actual account to the critical scrutiny of the local experts. In a Dutch-language reflection on the excellent PhD ethnographic work of the Belgian anthropologist Philip de Boeck (1991; van Binsbergen 1992c), I took this point to its extreme consequences, suggesting that similar transcultural ‘vicarious reflection’ is at stake in the kind of theatrical cults of affliction in which, especially in South Central Africa from 1900 CE onwards, local people have produced trance dances mimicking European colonial officers, their wives sipping at tea, the generic principle of Whiteness (*the Bindèle cult*) but also guitars (*the Kitā / Guitar cult*), steam locomotives (*the Setima / Steamer cult*), airplanes (*the Ndéke / Airplane Cult*), etc. (Colson 1969; van Binsbergen 1981b) – while I suggested the possibility of an ethnography that would gesture, dance, sing, pray rather than textualise what the field-worker had learned in the field.

⁵⁷ A detour however which happened to include symbolic logic and *Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead & Russell 1910) as applied to general linguistics (van Binsbergen 1970), the philosophy of the social sciences (including the ethics of field-work – van Binsbergen 1979b, 1987b), and an increasingly central grappling with myth (van Binsbergen 1980B, 2009a, 2010a; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010).

philosophical thought, I did not stay on in philosophy, in the sense that I did not make intercultural philosophy the sole or even dominant intellectual concern of the final decades of my life and career.

The stock-taking of intellectual growth and publications over the decades, which the compilation of the present volume has inevitably entailed, makes me realise that another price was paid by my temporarily crossing over to philosophy, and that here it was not just me who paid it – but also anthropology, African Studies, and the institution that, across the decades, has (except for one period of three years) supported me, by and large, so loyally and unconditionally – I mean the ASC, Leiden. In the mid-1990s, a quarter century after I first went to teach and do field-work in sub-Saharan Africa, I was in many respects at the height of my accomplishments as an anthropologist. Although still engaging in religious anthropological research *e.g.* in the fields of *sangoma* divination and healing, and already trying to retrieve my former language skills in Greek, Latin and Arabic so as to have greater access⁵⁸ to a wide variety of sources illuminating the ancient, elusive, largely obscure early history of divination in the Ancient World, my work on globalisation and my renewed urban research had greatly opened up the context and scope of my religious studies, and promised massive and innovative textual results. But however much the then director of the African Studies Centre, the late lamented Gerti Hesselting (who served from 1996 to 2004), endorsed and facilitated my part-time chair in a different university (Rotterdam) and in a different field (Intercultural Philosophy), these promises, however, were not to materialise for another decade or two if at all, because I had largely left the critical and collegial context in which I had thrived, and had been seduced to permit myself the status of newcomer and learner, even gate-crasher, in a totally new context, where the struggle to survive intellectually and institutionally cost me more energy than I had ever needed in academia. Overlooking the Chapters of the present volume, I am not convinced that it is my *philosophical* arguments (however much applauded by some of my African colleagues and students) that will prove to be of more than ephemeral value. My own favourite is the Mudimbe piece (Chapter 12), contesting that great African intellectual's identity as a *philosopher* – but hear who is speaking – yet making him shinningly visible as a uniquely courageous and recognisably modern human being in the face of death and homelessness. My argument in the Mudimbe Chapter can hardly be considered main-stream philosophy – it is a passionate and in part literary exercise in the History of Ideas, which is also Mudimbe's own *forte*. But next comes, in my personal preference (in addition to my defiantly counter-hegemonic piece on 'Aristotle in Africa',⁵⁹ about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Com-

⁵⁸ Beyond the rich and inspiring harvest of texts, bibliography and insights I had already gained – to my lasting gratitude – at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, at Wassenaar, as a member of the small and tightly-knit Working Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, 1994-1995.

⁵⁹ I am not sure an international, English-orientated readership will (or should) pick up the

mission – Chapter 9), my long piece on *virtuality* (Chapter 1), which despite publication in 1997 as a working paper and subsequent circulation on the Internet yet did not quite get the attention I think it deserved, and perhaps still deserves.

0.1.7. Why I cannot give up my reticently empiricist position: An attempt to define the social-science perspective

This brings us to the vital theme of my persistent fidelity to, and reliance on, the social-science canon. While the first decades of my Africanist career were largely devoted to my struggle with analytical issues of power and production (hence my extensive work on the state, ethnicity, and modes of production), in the 1980s (and partly as a result of the inspiration from two very dear Flemings that crossed my path and remained close to me: my wife Patricia, and René Devisch) a marked shift occurred in my work, towards symbol, meaning, divination, myth and identity. But it was a change for *another type* of anthropology – not (like when acceding to the Rotterdam chair) to a different discipline altogether to replace anthropology. Although I never denounced my identity as an Africanist anthropologist (and historian), for over a decade philosophy had that identity relegated to the background. When last year I took the time to finalise, after over twenty years, a short study (van Binsbergen 2014) on *Nkoya residence, kinship, and marriage* – the apparently obsolete concerns in which I had been centrally trained nearly half a century before – I was overwhelmed, not by boredom with a paradigm I no longer supported, but, on the contrary, by the joy of trying my hand expertly and confidently on what I knew I had mastered (instead of the defiant uncertainty that has marked my career over the last few decades, jumping from one discipline not mine by training, to another such discipline, like Eliza on her flight across the broken ice in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – Beecher-Stowe 1900 / 1852).

It is at this juncture that I may try to identify the central point of thwarted communication between my philosophical colleagues and me, – and explain

local, Dutch irony implied in such headings transporting to Africa more or less prominent philosophers (Aristotle in the present Chapter, elsewhere Kant – van Binsbergen 2003b: ch. 9, 2000d –, Lévi-Strauss (cf. Kuper 1970), Kimmerle (cf. below, Chapter 14), van Binsbergen himself (see the cover of the present book), etc.; and although the expression 'Guattari in Africa' is not explicitly used, that could have been the title of Chapter 10, below, too. In connection with the linguistic diversity in the Bronze Age Mediterranean I have occasionally spoken of 'uninvited guests' – surprising presences, such as proto-Bantu and proto-Uralic, even proto-Austrian, in the Levant, that would seem to run counter to distributional expectations. But the *locus classicus* to which reference is being made, is the following. The entertaining and immensely popular, though crypto-fascist, Belgian cartoonist Hergé was the author of an album – today controversial – entitled *Tintin au Congo / Kuifje in Afrika* (1931 / 1954), where the protagonist, a resourceful but (as child of his time and age, and of his author) inevitably racist juvenile European star reporter, finds occasion to see most of the colonial and racist, hegemonic stereotypes about the African continent and its inhabitants illustrated and confirmed.

what, in this book's sub-title, is the meaning of 'empirically-grounded'.⁶⁰ Half a century ago I received a very long and intensive training as an empirical social scientist – seven years full-time before even the Drs examination, with a similar duration then standard, at least in the Netherlands, for the attainment of the doctorate. The self-evidences (*i.e.* the blinkered sociological presuppositions, if you 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. In the last analysis, this means that I have learned to doggedly take the hard-earned, yet fragmentary and partly 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 almost unfit for free discursive thought*. It is not 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*. Thus reduced to a humble secondary position, to dependence, 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). As I have argued elsewhere (2003b: 498 *f.*), the anthropologist is used to 'rough it' – and rather than departing from an explicit theory and seeking the data to substantiate or explode it, usually prefers to let herself or himself to be guided by the flow of personal inspiration produced at the local actors' initiative by field data at hand, spending only so much time and effort on conceptualisation and theory as seems needed to make the resulting ethnographic argument more or less presentable as a scientific text.

C. MAKING ETHNOGRAPHIC CLAIMS THE EASY WAY – BUT SPURIOUSLY. This humble, secondary, dependent and empiricist orientation was ingrained in me from my earliest years reading anthropology. My principal teacher then, André Köbben, had gained his PhD with field-work among the Agni and Bete of Ivory Coast (1955), and during his lectures on field-work method in the mid-1960s he would fulminate about a team of 'Culture and Personality' researchers, who had come to ascertain, during a prohibitively short stay at Köbben's West African field site, the prevalence of Freud's Oedipus complex there, without bothering to construct ethnographic authority for themselves by making such considerable professional investments in residence, language acquisition, and cul-

⁶⁰ It is the inspiration of my participation in the Symposium 'Chaos in the Contact Zone', University of Rostock, Germany, August-September 2015 (although most participants were not philosophers but historians and literature scholars) that drove home to me the backgrounds and implications of the loss of authority characteristic of the social sciences in post-modern academic constellations. I wish to express my gratitude to the convener Prof. Stephanie Wodjanka, and to the organiser Dr Andrea Zittlau, for inviting and accommodating me, and for patiently contributing to my self-reflection.

tural learning through participant observation as Köbben had himself made and as he was to require his students to make. The easy approach he was chiding was not uncommon among anthropologising psychoanalysts. A few decades earlier (1925), the iconic Carl Gustav Jung (Burlinson 2005, 2008; Collins n.d.), then already 50 years old, had made an ethnographic sally to the Elgoni people of Mt Elgon, one of the highest mountains of Africa, at the Ugandan-Kenyan border, and was inevitably but unreliably confirmed in his Lévybruhlian and essentialising ideas (Wilmsen 1993 / 1995). Jung had had no ethnographic method or procedure to speak of, nor any local cultural and linguistic competence – and by his own admittance got practically no information out of the Elgoni. The unmethodic eagerness with which armchair anthropologists (and, in this case, historians of religions) would jump to conclusions as to the proposed universality of the Freud Oedipus Complex is also emphatically clear throughout a minor classic as Fokke Sierksma's *Religie, Sexualiteit & Agressie* ('Religion, Sexuality and Aggression' – 1979 / 1962). Another psychologising ethnographer of the first half of the 20th c. CE, Margaret Mead, fared only slightly better than Jung – after worldwide success with her studies of South childhoods, also her field-work methods were found to be defective (Mead 1928, 1930, 1935; cf. Freeman 1983). Testing theories in the field has been almost anathema among professional anthropologists; instead, they have tended to rely on crude, naïve induction: *let the empirical facts speak for themselves, or at least* (since even anthropologists now realise that apparent facts are preconditioned by the researcher's mind set and paradigms) *let them have the first and the last word*.

Much as, in later days, I have had to realise the considerable limitations of my brilliant teacher's anthropology (a fixation on social relations, lack of statistical sophistication, no room for art or material culture, little room for material and economic relations, for myth, for meaning, for continuities in space and time, for history, for library research, and finally a naïvely social-democratic political outlook), there was yet great value in what I was given to learn. I have never been able to shed Köbben's lessons as to the necessary underpinning of anthropological thought by prolonged field-work experience, and as to the secondary nature of theory (easy to formulate, to play with, to impose, to criticise, to replace) as compared to what a local society had to offer through direct and time-consuming participant observation *from the typically humble, locally powerless and reticent stance of the ethnographic field-worker*, where not the researcher but the local actors call the tune and determine what is interesting though harmless enough (!) to share with the inquisitive outsider. Köbben's period as a leading anthropologist was mainly the 1960s, and preceded the counter-hegemonic discourse of the late 20th c. by decades. But the title of one of his books, *Van Primitieven tot Medeburgers* ('From Primitives to Fellow-Citizens' – 1964), brings out very clearly the *counter-hegemonic stance* that was, *avant la lettre*, the essence of his anthropology.

Building an anthropology that is vicarious in the sense that it ignores the perceptions and conceptualisations of the people we write about, is Faustian (cf. von Goethe 1981 / c. 1800 CE), and objectifying in the Sartrean sense of *dehumanising* (Sartre 1943). I have often both admired and chided the unlimited freedom my philosophical colleagues allowed themselves to 'think through' or, preferably still, 'think *beyond*', not only aspects of the present-day social experience in the North-Atlantic region, but also extending their appropriative gaze to the West African Dogon, to African proverbs, shamanism, the African atti-

tude to death, etc. – as if all theoretical frameworks which one could impose on reality, are interchangeable and equally applicable and valid, merely depending on an author’s rhetorical skill and dexterity in reproducing the fashionable discourse of the day – and *scarcely if at all* depending on that author’s determination to counter-hegemonically give voice to the local actors’ own perceptions and conceptualisations (which also requires our author *to know* – in other words, to have invested heavily in local linguistic and cultural competence, and in observational and interview method). Σώζειν τὰ φαινόμενα *Sōizein ta phainomena*, ‘to do justice to the empirical evidence’, is an adage ascribed by Simplicios, a millennium later, to Plato in connection with the central problem of planetary mechanics which the epicycle theory had sought to remedy: the appearance of erratic yet periodical movement (Rehbock 2001); but most philosophers I know seem to be more interested in Plato than in empirical evidence (so cherished by him) in the first place.

So the local actors’ input is indispensable, even primary, for any conceptualisation about a given socio-cultural complex, least such conceptualisation falls victim to the researcher’s unintentional Eurocentric and hegemonic tendencies. But there is also another and opposite constraint here. Local actors are not in the first place detached, self-reflective observers, and their views cannot in their crude unprocessed form count as valid ethnography, either. In the middle third of the 20th century CE, social science was predicated on the principle that valid knowledge about social phenomena *could not coincide* with the collective representations shared by the members of a society – for such representations are blinkered, informed as they are by these local actors’ own interests as members of a gender, class, profession, religious denomination, and other specific social roles, and by these actors’ lack of an explicit, complex, and consistent toolbox for the description and analysis of social phenomena – so rather than offering valid knowledge in themselves, such local collective representations are to be objects of sociological research in their own right. Extensive intersubjective qualitative and quantitative methods have been designed and critically improved so as to allow the social scientist to reliably and validly proceed from raw social data to sociological text, under the scrutiny of her or his peer forum, and with the application of the social-science theories and concepts intersubjectively accumulated for over a century within that discipline.

The social sciences have achieved these precious accomplishments almost at the cost of ostracism. For although splendid intellectual genealogies could be drawn up that extend the history of the social sciences to Ancient Greece (Herakleitos, Herodotos, Thucydides), Late Antiquity (the St Augustine of *De Civitate Dei*) and medieval Islam (ابن خلدون Ibn Ḥaldūn), yet the social sciences are essentially a child of the North Atlantic region in the 18th c., only coming to fruition from the middle of the 19th c. onwards. It was only in initial border fights with the established humanities, philosophy, history, law, medicine and

theology (the very fields from which most early social scientists were recruited) that the social sciences managed to secure a place in academia, – a modest place, under-endowed, and relatively despised as it has continued to be. The social sciences did so, when the dominant image of humankind among European scholars had been, for over two millennia, exceedingly *individual-centred*, and had lacked a specialist discourse in which to designate, and study in detail, enduring social relationships, groups, institutionalisation, and the invisible yet decisive structural influence which classes and their struggles, identities, ideologies, religions, are having on the course of human history. Gradually, the ideas of Vico, Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Pareto gained some circulation in North Atlantic intellectual and academic life – while they were tested out and theoretically improved by their application to myriad concrete social settings past and present, by highly trained researchers, whose specifically institutionalised social-science discipline had emerged to liberate them from the individual-centred constraints of pre-existing and still dominant academic disciplines and discourses.

Thus a number of key ideas, perspectives and concepts were developed which, to this day, may meaningfully and productively inform any attempt to make valid and reliable statements about social phenomena – statements whose meaning and truth would very considerably exceed that of other pronouncements about society (such as common journalism, or conversation over beers):

- the idea that *the social* constitutes an ontological domain in its own right
- the idea that enduring social relationships weave a complex structured network around individuals and their perceptions, and must be studied painstakingly, with the detailed technical vocabulary developed for that purpose in the course of over a century, and taking into account all primary and secondary data including all published texts relating to the subject – but with primary attention to the pronouncements of the social actors in question themselves, in their own language, their own modes of expression, and with broad cultural understanding of their overt and covert implications
- the idea that much of the structure of society, as invested in institutionalised, enduring complex relationships is yet not directly observable, so that the social actors themselves – even when articulating it in terms of their conscious collective representations – remain partly unconscious of that structure, yet cannot help that their perceptions, actions and statements are largely governed by it
- this insight in the indirectness of our knowledge of social structure is predicated on explicit, intersubjective and accumulative social-scientific theory, and can only be empirically investigated and substantiated in the light of such theory; pronouncements about social relations and their history are meaningless as long as they are not theoretically grounded

- for the same indirectness of our insight into social structure, we need specific intersubjective methods, which bring us as closely as possible (*e.g.* through participant observation in field-work, and in-depth interviews in the social actors' own language and modes of expression) to the people whose social life we are studying, and on which we should report so humbly, so explicitly and in so much detail that our scientific reports become amenable to critiquing both from (a) the social actors themselves, and from (b) our professional peers
- the idea that power, usually with a strong element of inequality, is an aspect of all social relationships, and (often in the form of class conflict) determines both the social processes that constitute society, and the research which social scientists conduct on society; it is precisely in order to contain and control the effects of such power relations, that the products of social research are in need of at least the two forms of critical scrutiny mentioned above; this is all the more pressing when the researcher and the researched belong to different broad, global complexes whose recent historic relations have been characterised by subordination, hegemony and resistance (as between various classes, or continents)
- the idea that conflict and contradiction constitute inherent aspects of any social order, and rather than threatening the persistence of society, make up its very essence, while providing the motor for change
- the idea that society is not a matter of a script of norms and values being slavishly acted out by docile individuals, but the other way around – that only in the moderately structured action of people, specific norms and values are being produced, expressed, reinforced, and changed; idealised, generalised descriptions therefore are invariably one-sided and eclectic, and they need to be brought to life by detailed, methodologically sophisticated case-centred accounts of concrete social behaviour in specific situations
- the idea that social researchers, being themselves involved in social life with their own perceptions and interests, and conducting social research as an aspect of their own social life, cannot be trusted to automatically arrive at valid and reliable statements about social life, and, on the contrary, need to be guided by specific intersubjective methodological procedures, in addition to the forms of critique outlined above
- the distinction, finally, between (a) how social researchers may conceptualise their object of study in analytical terms of their own definition (*etic*), and (b) how the social actors themselves conceptualise their social situation (*emic*);⁶¹ to sum up all of the above, adequate

⁶¹ On these concepts, *cf.* Headland *et al.* 1990. In the latter book especially the contribution by Quine, 1990b; also van Binsbergen 2003b: 22 *f.*

social research critically and creatively combines both perspectives as complementary.

Given the empirical underpinning of the present book, from chapter to chapter we shall have occasion to add further elements to these general social-science principles, even though it is intercultural philosophy, rather than social science, that constitutes the book's main concern. We shall dwell on the themes of *virtuality*, *globalisation*, *commodification*, especially as conceptual tools for a specific approach to present-day major processes of social change; on *boundaries*, *identity and ethnicity*, attending the internal segmentation of most social systems. We shall pay ample attention to *religious phenomena* and to the conceptual and theoretical problems they pose, especially in our present time with its devastating intercontinental conflicts apparently hinging on religion, notably Islam. In addition, we shall have a long and close look at *knowledge systems* (especially those of Africa) and their global circulation – and end up with *wisdom* as a perspective stressing the merely relative value of all these prescriptions, straddling, and practically negotiating, the contradictions between them.

This is only to give an impression of the scope of social-science insights that *might have been* incorporated in the general cultural outlook of our time and age, included in the secondary school curricula and in the toolkit of journalists and media personalities, *but were not*. Despite the installation, in the course of the 20th c. CE, of a relatively new subject 'social studies' which however has often amounted to mere patriotic training for citizenship, the social sciences proper did not manage to massively penetrate secondary education. As a result, the discovery of *the social* as a (semi-)autonomous dimension of human life to be studied in its own right (the point especially of Durkheim – 1897) had to be replicated again and again by every first-year student (from the North Atlantic region and its dependencies) turning to the social sciences after having been brainwashed in the dominant individual-centred image of humankind during more than a decade of primary and secondary education. Despite the large number of social-science graduates in the course of the 20th c. CE, the social base of the social sciences in the North Atlantic region has remained narrow and vulnerable. And in the late 20th century CE that social base even practically collapsed, for a number of reasons:

1. neo-Marxism was largely the (essentially fruitful) form social-science inspiration had popularly taken in the middle of the 20th c. CE, and might have served to mediate many of the above elements of the social sciences' basic outlook, yet it became socially and intellectually unpopular not to say impossible with the demise of international communism and the Fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s
2. academia (at least in Western Europe) was removed from the centre of state power, and relegated to a powerless and slightly discreditable periphery of society
3. post-modernism in art, *belles lettres* and the humanities, including philosophy, became the new *shibboleth* in the final quarter of the 20th

- c. CE, and denigrated all paradigmatic disciplinary approaches to academic knowledge as fantasy, 'Grand Narratives', 'just another opinion', and nothing more
4. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has resulted in a mutation of social life in the sense that (first in the North Atlantic region and its extensions such as Japan and Australia, but increasingly on a global scale including sub-Saharan Africa) human-human interaction more and more came to be replaced by the *vicarious* and *virtualised* interaction between a human individual and a material object (cell phone, computer, vehicle); as a result, the individual-centred image of humans was granted a new lease of life.⁶²

0.1.8. From social science to philosophy – '*There and Back Again*'⁶³

So the edifice of theory and method built by the social sciences, has been discredited as another 'Grand Narrative' in the name of post-modernism, but scarcely did one realise that the same applied to the implicit and untutored return to individualism – and to post-modern theory itself. Given their vulnerable socio-political base, the social sciences proved incapable of safe-guarding their theories and methods under the assault of post-modernism. Today, 15 years into the new millennium, students taking degrees in anthropology may not learn kinship theory, legal anthropology, ethnographic classics, interviewing, participant observation, statistical methods and remote languages any more, but are supposed to intuitively and unmethodically scan the social data that come their way (not typically through prolonged participant observation in remote languages any more, but through brief raids for data – using a *lingua franca*, mostly English – , often even just via the Internet) within the set framework of whatever the New Scholastics of Foucault, Lyotard, Guattari and Deleuze, and their anthropological and philosophical secondary commentators and imitators, have offered them. Needless to say that I find this a most deplorable state of affairs, and have distanced myself forcibly, almost violently from it.

And while thus the basic idea of a social science has been dramatically eroded within the social-science faculty itself, present-day philosophers (despite the exis-

⁶² Technological innovations tend to be neutral, complex and contradictory in their socio-cultural effects. Thus while the advent of the Digital Age had had an erosive negative effect on human relations, and their understanding, as evoked in this point, there has also been an unpredictable boon greatly facilitating person-to-person digital contacts, and bringing the god-like qualities of omniscience and omnipresence almost within reach of every competent user of the computer and the Internet – albeit at considerable environmental costs for the cooling of ever larger and more powerful digital servers. Comparative scholarship in the humanities, social sciences and mythology has been facilitated and accelerated by the digital revolution (through the digitalisation and global availability of innumerable books and data bases) as never before, and in my own research and publishing I have greatly benefited from these developments.

⁶³ Cf. the title of Chapter 2, below, and its explanation.

tence of such texts as Peter Winch's Wittgensteinian *The Idea of a Social Science* – 1958 / 1970!) are free, once more, to make pronouncements about social phenomena largely on the spur of their own personal experiences and introspection, without even paying lip service to the existence of a paradigmatic methodological and theoretical alternative in the form of the social sciences. The post-modern heroes of yesterday could be said to have derived much of their attraction from the fact that they set out to do what too few of their readers have reproached them for doing: *reinventing a poor man's, intuitive, unmethodological form of social science, unhindered by specialist knowledge or cumbersome and difficult methods, and without acknowledgment of the work accumulated by tens of thousands of social scientists in the course of over a century.* In my Rotterdam inaugural (1999, greatly revised reprint 2003b) I ironically called such philosophical infringement of the time-honoured conventions of scholarship 'canonical botanising' – and that, I should have realised, was not a way to make, and keep, philosophical friends.

I have now made clear what I mean by 'empirically grounded' of this book's subtitle: *a dogged and – in a present-day philosophical environment – unwelcome defiance of post-modern eclecticism, studied amateurism and disdain of empirical knowledge and accumulated library resources, by insisting on the obligation, on the part of any intercultural philosophy, to take into account the existence of a massive body of theory and method, managed (until recently...) by the social sciences, and imposing drastic constraints upon any attempt to make pronouncements about social phenomena by the sole recourse to intuition, first principles, or introspection alone.* The social sciences cannot prescribe to philosophers what the latter should say about social phenomena (including situations commonly designated 'intercultural');⁶⁴ but they do constitute a serious, intersub-

⁶⁴ The concept of *interculturality* is far more complex and problematic than is commonly assumed. Not the practice but the sheer possibility of intercultural philosophy has been at the heart of my work at Rotterdam. I have outlined some of the challenges involved in my 2003b book. The assumption that it is *cultures* that can interact, implies a deceptive reification and personification – 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'*. 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 etc., 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 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 culture, towards which the Japanese and Buddhist elements have been accommodated and even filtered out before even coming to the philosopher's notice. A similar situation of non-intercultural philosophy obtains when that philosopher's fellow-countryman and colleague (who happens to have lived and studied in Japan, but lacks all first-hand knowledge of Africa, its languages and cultural orientations) raids the literature on the West African Dogon for usable stepping-stones towards his own 'intercultural' insights... Confronting such appropriative and Eurocentric conceptions of intercultural philosophy made my work at Rotterdam an exhausting, up-hill battle.

jective claim as to what sort of pronouncements on social phenomena, arrived at by what sort of methods, in the light of what kinds of data, and in the context of what sort of theories, may make a plausible claim to validity and truth.

My interaction with my Rotterdam philosophical colleagues frequently revolved on precisely these issues:

- they pointing out (not without justification!) the philosophically poor, flimsy nature of my statements, and dismissing them as 'mere social-science talk',
- against me insisting (again not without justification!) that the statements they felt compelled, and justified, to make about especially present-day North Atlantic society (with few exceptions, their spatial, temporal and even linguistic horizon was Continental in more than one sense – forgivably narrow) could scarcely pass the social-science methodological and theoretical scrutiny that it was in my competence, and mandate, to exercise.

My criticism has been existential rather than epistemological or procedural, and in the last analysis has amounted to the following:

- *while I have never concealed the incomparable existential benefits and pleasures of field-work in remote places,*
- *and while my life has been enriched by learning from my field-work hosts,*
- *yet I can never forget that I have paid very dearly for what little intercultural knowledge I ended up with*
 - (by investing 7 years of my youth in mastering anthropological theory, method and literature;
 - by living for years under logistically arduous and medically dangerous circumstances – exposing myself and my loved ones to such conditions;
 - by more or less learning (at the cost of great and prolonged personal efforts, humility and local ridicule), a number of African languages and cultures
 - through the total immersion of often immensely stressful and demanding participant observation;
 - and by sharing, for years, the company of strangers a few of whom I have known to be deliberate sorcerers, even murderers
 - applying, under these demanding conditions, the methods and theories that, I had learned, would produce valid intercultural knowledge)
- *therefore I will not condone others, simply because they identify as philosophers, postmodernists or journalists rather than as classic social scientists, to claim intercultural knowledge without having earned their right to it in ways recognisably similar to mine, and by methods that I can accept to yield valid knowledge whose truth claims I can endorse.*⁶⁵

⁶⁵ This echoes a similar reproach to me by a distinguished African colleague, Harriet Sibisi,

With such a structural solid basis for miscommunication and distrust, I think we have here a convincing explanation of the abortive outcome of my transdisciplinary Rotterdam adventure, however well intended and initiated, from both sides.

The virtuality discussion in Chapter 1, below, sums up the challenges in the forefront of Africanist anthropology at the time it was written, but rather than bringing those challenges further to fruition from there, I allowed myself a huge detour as if I possessed life eternal. Today, twenty years later, I am not ashamed of what was achieved in the course, and as a result, of my Rotterdam philosophical adventure, but I realise that now I still have largely the same shipload of intellectual and writing commitments and obligations to meet as in the mid-1990s, but that my time resources have meanwhile dwindled dramatically. Anyway, my books on divination, on Africa's transcontinental continuities, on North African popular Islam, on global flood myths and on comparative mythology are now nearing completion, my big book on Nkoya history, culture and society is in the press, much of my literary work (in Dutch) has finally been published, new research in Cameroon in 2015 has proved that I can still endure the stress and hardships of field-work and report on it at short notice, so there is still hope that I can make up for lost time.

then Professor of Anthropology at Cape Town. In 1990, while waiting for a dramatic breakthrough in my Francistown field-work that had been promised to me (my formal initiation to the status of apprentice *sangoma* / *thwaza*), I travelled to South Africa, for the first time in my life (political motives had always kept me from breaking that country's global academic boycott, then finally lifted), in order to visit my aging friends the freedom fighters Jack Simons and Ray Alexander – who had just returned to their home country after many years of exile in Zambia; in the process I was asked to deliver a paper at the University of Cape Town (van Binsbergen 1990). Harriet Ngubane / Sibisi, one of the main authorities (Ngubane 1977; Sibisi 1975) on Zulu healing with which the South African *sangoma* complex largely overlaps, responded with exasperation upon my disclosure that I was about to enter *thwazahood*: *How could I, a European with only a superficial experience in the Southern African life world, make such a claim and attain such a status, whereas she, who was born and bred in that cultural context, spoke Zulu as her mother tongue, and had spend many years of field-work precisely on this topic, had always been denied the privilege of initiation?* So shortly after the release of the freedom fighter, and future State President, Nelson Mandela from life imprisonment, her question could not have been asked at a better time – and I could not answer it, except by appealing to an idiom which at least has currency in the traditional Zulu and *sangoma* circles both she and I had frequented: *such election is not by personal human choice but by the will of the ancestors*. But while traditionally convincing, this answer does not solve the very real knowledge-political dilemma arising here – 'the will of the ancestors' is not a permissible ground in academic debate. A year later, the same dilemma and a similar exasperation (in response to the first presentation of my paper 'Becoming a sangoma', 1991a, at the Satterthwaite Colloquium on African Religion and Ritual, UK) cost me the close, long-standing and dear friendship of another Southern African anthropologist, Richard Werbner. Apparently I was, out of sheer habit, blundering in where angels fear to tread.

0.2. Acknowledgments

Yet I would not have missed my philosophical adventure for the world. To have philosophical colleagues and students, and to engage in philosophical debate, for nearly a decade, has considerably helped me (or so I think – but the reader will be the ultimate judge of that) to proceed beyond what has been circulating in anthropological circles for decades in an attenuated, second-hand, unreferenced form (e.g. under the denominator of ‘post-modernism’, the fashionable, vicarious, Neo-Scholastic resort to post-structuralist philosophers – read in American translations if at all); and to try and articulate, discursively and with greater precision, my criticism of certain forms of current Africanist empirical research. It has also enabled me to appreciate the intercultural promises contained in the kind of transcontinental knowledge construction that is now gradually (in the form of wisdom, mainly) coming within reach, not in the last place through the increasing articulation and maturation of Afrocentrism and the *Black Athena* debate, and of the intellectual production of new generations of African scholars, with whom my work for *Quest* has brought me in close, incessant and inspiring contact. It was, meanwhile, a disadvantage that the Rotterdam Department of the Philosophy of Man and Culture, to which I was co-opted, had an exclusively Continental signature, where Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger and Derrida (an *African* philosopher!) were household words, and Merleau-Ponty (locally represented by the true intercultural philosopher Douwe Tiemersma) was already the odd person out – and against a background of total avoidance,⁶⁶ within the entire Philosophical Faculty, between Continental and Analytical philosophers – the latter (according to whom the meaning of a statement is nothing but the procedure by which it may be substantiated or falsified) has in principle much closer affinity with my empirical social-science background and continued approach, but (having only one day a week allotted to my Rotterdam activities, and Rotterdam being far from Leiden and from my home) I lacked the time resources and the encouragement to explore that possibility.

Before 1998, my philosophical training had been fragmentary and eclectic, and my attempts at philosophy idiosyncratic and defective. So justifiably, my Rotterdam colleagues occasionally had no choice but to give me a hard time. But that forced me to come to terms with existing and emergent philosophical discourse as, by and large, more sophisticated and conceptually better equipped than much current and past cultural anthropology – even though philosophers’ introspection-based, unsystematic sociography of the modern and post-modern condition proved often amateurish. I take this opportunity to salute my former Rotterdam colleagues (foremost the generous, inspiring and loyal Henk Oosterling, followed by Douwe Tiemersma, Jos de Mul, Awee Prins, my predecessor

⁶⁶ I am using the term in its specialist anthropological sense: the cultural rules that prohibit or at least greatly ritualise, against strong sanctions, the social interaction between specific categories of people in society, e.g. between parent-in-law and child-in-law.

Heinz Kimmerle, and Wiep van Bunge as Dean of Philosophy), and to thank them for their challenges, tolerance, patience, and intellectual generosity. To these I should add particularly accommodating and stimulating Dutch philosophical colleagues working outside Rotterdam: Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Henk Visser, Otto Duintjer, Gerrit Steunebrink, and Raymond Corbey.

However (and that throws a different light on the preceding pages), the Rotterdam appointment was unremunerated, and if it had not been for the continued (apart from those unbelievable three years...), generous and trusting support from the African Studies Centre, Leiden, where I have held an appointment since 1977 (and even since my retirement in 2012: as an Honorary Fellow), I could never have achieved the continued data collection in Zambia, Botswana, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Cameroon, and occasionally in Asia, and beyond, since 1977; nor the growth of insight and knowledge-political awareness to which my work has at least aspired, perhaps in vain, over the past two decades.

Meanwhile my great debts must also be acknowledged to three other sets of persons:

- In the first place my wife and children, whose commitment to Africa, and to me, decisively enabled me to continue my journey along the meandering, thorny and occasionally treacherous path of counter-hegemonic, transcontinental knowledge production, and thought. If Chapter 12 of this book is explicitly dedicated to my wife Patricia, it is because that Chapter celebrates her country of birth, the Democratic Republic of Congo; but if I had not had a more compelling and urgent reason to finally dedicate a book to my parents, this entire book – like several others, before – should have been dedicated to her. Patricia's Flemish background – deceptively close to my Dutch cultural and linguistic origins yet often confusingly different – has also turned the decades of our blessed marriage into a continuing learning process of practical interculturality, *where not the blunt and undistinguished sameness of the other, but the revelatory and redeeming mystery of otherness was allowed to come out as humankind's greatest gift in life*. It is also in this intimate context, where concepts and theories are put to the test ten times a day, that I have had to qualify the sonorous adage of my Rotterdam inaugural address: *Cultures Do Not Exist*. It remains true that there is no such thing as 'a' culture, capable of being bounded and isolated, counted, and of being lived a total life within. But, as I have always admitted in passing anyway, there is surely the partly subconscious, deep-seated cultural orientation on selected, disconnected points of the childhood programming that takes place through the communicative processes of the family and the community in which one grows up and lives one's life, and these virtually immutable points unmistakably inform our experience of our-

selves and others to a decisive degree.

- Next, I must thank my field-work hosts over the decades, initially only in Africa, but gradually diversified to include short exploratory visits in South, South East and East Asia, Oceania and North America. Without the hospitality, trust, communicative efforts, and sustained affirmation of a recognised shared humanity on the part of these many hundreds of people; and especially without the unbelievable achievements of intercultural communication, as well as patience and tolerance, which my various research assistants over the decades (حسنأوي بن طاهر) Ḥasnāwi bin Ṭāhar, Dennis Shiyowe, Pat (now Dr) Mutesi, Edward Mpoloka, Annie Mapangwane, Jacqueline Touoyem-Nkouëtso, and more incidental assistants like Dikeledi Moyo, Rebecca Sisca, Joshua Ndhlovu, Davison Kawanga, M. Malapa, Faustino Ampa) have extended to me, I would have missed many of the most formative experiences in my life and work. Now, however, when I close my eyes in day-dreaming there is a parade of immensely varied yet familiar and dear faces on an inner screen – faces of kinsmen, and above all teachers, – teachers of forms of knowledge which these initial strangers have sought to extend to me.
- And thirdly my *African colleagues*, especially in the field of philosophy, who with typical African generosity accepted me (prematurely) in their midst as a matter of course, and included me in their collective projects (e.g. the Eboussi Boulaga *Festschrift* (Procesi & Kasereka Kawwahirehi 2012). They already admitted to deriving some inspiration from my affirmation of African knowledge systems, at a time when my Rotterdam colleagues still felt obliged to dismiss my papers on Kant, Aristotle, Guattari and Derrida⁶⁷ as the clumsy homework of someone who was and would always remain, irreparably, a 'mere social scientist'. Among numerous African colleagues I should single out a few: Sanya Osha, who as loyal and generous member of the *Quest* editorial board, as co-editor,⁶⁸ and as critic has done more than any other person to make me feel at home and confident when thinking in the African context; Valentin Mudimbe, who from

⁶⁷ The former papers in my *Intercultural Encounters*, the other three included in the present volume. One of the disappointments of my Rotterdam adventure has been that I may perhaps have managed to learn some philosophy from my colleagues, but they proved absolutely imperious for the social science I had to impart to them, even though it might have helped them to understand today's North Atlantic, urban social experiences (on which all their philosophising was explicitly predicated) far better and on methodologically far better grounds than merely through introspection, i.e. the habitual, casual, self-centred musing from personal experience, on which philosophers tend to rely too often; and it might have offered them a sociology of knowledge in the light of which to critique their own, and other philosophers', epistemological standpoint and would-be intercultural philosophy. But *lesen Sie mein Buch*.

⁶⁸ Salazar, Osha & van Binsbergen 2002; Osha c.s. 2008.

an intellectual opponent became a dear friend; Paulin Hountondji, who showed himself a loyal and powerful patron of *Quest*, an excellent host in Benin, and a perceptive and inspiring critic of Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge; Godfrey Tangwa, who repeatedly was my host at the Department of Philosophy, University of Yaounde I, Cameroon; Théophile Obenga, who defended my integrity when North Atlantic peer-group pressure had tricked me into contributing to what turned out to be an anti-Afrocentrist publication (Obenga 2001; Fauvelle-Aymar *et al.* 2000); Mogobe Ramose and Tunde Bewaji, who managed to overcome their initial scandalisation at my deconstruction of *ubuntu* (the Southern Bantu word for 'humanity') as a mere academic construct of a traditional Southern African mode of thought (van Binsbergen 2001b), and who engaged in critical, passionate debate with me – after Ramose and I had first shared intellectual explorations in Rotterdam, and in Northern South Africa, with Vernie February, during short field-work on *ubuntu*); Dimas Masolo and Thaddeus Metz, who together made our joint work at the Masolo special issue of *Quest* both a human and an intellectual peak experience (Metz with van Binsbergen 2015); and my last two Cameroonian PhD students, Pius (soon Dr) Mosima, and Dr Pascal Touyem, who in appreciation of my teaching brought me a new extended family, a new place to feel at home, and even new field-work sites.

There have been less recent but equally crucial inspirations, from my brother Peter Broers (my first scholarly role model, setting me on the track of the Presocratics at age ten, and designing my index software); my sisters Else and Nettie, without whose love and guidance I could scarcely have survived my childhood, and who taught me the value of unconditional kinship, divination, and therapy long before Africa added its own overtones to these themes in my life; my first wife Henny van Rijn, who loyally saw through with me the first, immensely trying years of Zambian teaching and field-work (on which all my later anthropological and philosophical work is largely based), and who taught me, by example, natural sciences, scientific method and statistics, besides being my first English editor, and above all the mother of my first, immensely dear child; to André Köbben, who incidentally has had a life-long interest in philosophy and *belles lettres* – with my apparently 'diffusionist' pursuit of transcontinental continuities I may have largely disowned and alienated him and many of my other anthropological colleagues, yet my passionate insistence, throughout the present book, on the value of humble, reticent and time-consuming social-science methods and theories directly springs from him as my first anthropological role model – not to speak of his crucial initiative in finding a year's WOTRO writing-up fellowship for me when I returned from Zambia in 1974 – a boon for which I am still thankful both to him and to that funding agency); to Douwe Jongmans and Klaas van der Veen (the incomparably inspiring supervisors of my first field-work), Willem Wertheim (who introduced me to Marx, Weber, to a politically-aware Asian history, and to a responsible political outlook as an intellectual), Matthijs Schoffeleers (who was an inspiring fellow-

researcher on the history of African religious systems, my final, generous PhD supervisor, my co-editor of a major book, and the inspiring officiant at my second wedding), Bonno Thoden van Velzen (who proved a most constant and generous patron over the decades), and Jeremy Boissevain (who could not live up to the Mediterraneanist expectations he kindled early in my career, and who died when this book was in the press) as my main other teachers of anthropology; to Jack Simons, Ray Alexander, Jaap van Velsen and Max Gluckman, as shining examples in the politics of knowledge in the Southern African and anthropological context. Further thanks are due to the Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology (comprising Peter Geschiere, Simon Simonse, the late lamented Reini Raatgever, Johan van de Walle, Jos van der Klei and Klaas de Jonge, beside myself), which during the years of its existence, from 1976 to 1982, managed to leave a lasting impact on my own anthropological and philosophical work – and that of the Netherlands at large. Peter Geschiere was not only my co-editor of the well-received book *Old Modes of Production and Capitalist Encroachment* that, with an earlier Dutch version, came out of the Amsterdam Working Group (van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985 / 1981), but together we also initiated (at Peter's instigation), in the early 1990s, the national Netherlands Research Programme on Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities, funded and co-ordinated by the Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research (WOTRO) / Netherlands Research Foundation (NWO), creating and partly funding an active network of dozens of researchers in the Netherlands and worldwide – my last station in anthropology before intercultural philosophy, and hence of marked influence on the present volume. The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, Wassenaar, offered me a most inspiring year as member of the Study Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East (1994-1995), and thus opened up my incipient research into the meta-African spatial and temporal ramifications of geomantic divination⁶⁹ (including that version which I learned as a *sangoma* in Botswana) to an immense international realm of comparative scholarship fathoming five millennia. Sjaak van der Geest (who also features in this volume under his old *nom de plume*, Wolf Bleek) was my contemporary in André Köbben's PhD class in the mid-1970s, conducted a polemic exchange with me on the ethics of anthropological field-work in the then prominent scholarly journal *Human Organization* (1979), and, with my field-work teacher Klaas van der Veen, drew me into the field of medical anthropology where *vis-à-vis* my irremediable tendency to long-windedness both showed themselves most accommodating and generous editors (van Binsbergen 1979c); in the latter capacity he was again to have – unexpectedly, considering how our paths had diverged in the meantime – great impact on my work and career when he asked me, in 1990, to give a first, preliminary account of my research into Southern African divination (published as van Binsbergen 1994a) – thus (after the more substantial examples in the study of divination by

⁶⁹ Cf. Hébert 1961; Jaulin 1966, 1991; Kassibo 1992; Maupoil 1943; Skinner 1980; Trautmann 1939-1940; and numerous texts by my hand, listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

René Devisch⁷⁰ and Richard Werbner in preceding years) effectively launching me on the track to decades of divination research and ultimately to intercultural philosophy. Richard Fardon's work was a constant source of inspiration, and he particularly ingratiated himself with me when, in 1998, he did most of the editing of our book *Modernity On A Shoestring* (Fardon et al. 1999), granting me precious time to work on my second inaugural, that for the Rotterdam chair (van Binsbergen 1999). Rijk van Dijk was our fellow-editor for that book, and for the subsequent book *Situating Globality* (van Binsbergen & van Dijk 2004), which goes to show the constructive role he has often (up to 2007) played in my work on globalisation, notably when I was founder and co-ordinator of the African Studies Centre's theme group of that name, and member of that institution's Management Team, from 1995 until in 2002 I took the initiative to step down as an administrator in order to concentrate on my book projects – for the first time in my career leaving my back uncovered.

Nor does the long list of my indebtedness end here. It is a cliché for elderly teachers to thank their students for their inspiration and feedback, but in my case the thanks are genuine and many-sided; among many dozens of dear PhD and MA students that have made me proud over the decades, I should like to single out the late lamented Gerti Hesseling, Julie Duran-Ndaya and Stephanus Djunatan, representing (with echoes of USA President Barack Obama's 2009 accession speech...) three continents in a rewarding and unforgettable way. Among my students, Kirsten Seifkar became my student assistant in 2001, and in subsequent years greatly assisted me as an editor, especially for *Intercultural Encounters* (2003) and *New Perspectives on Myth* (2010); from 2004 to 2012 she also served on the Editorial Board of *Quest*, whose finances she then managed in an excellent way, in addition to her free occasional services as an English editor. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was my adolescence hero who (despite his own manifest transcultural insensitivity,⁷¹ which was merely characteristic of his times, of his stilted hieratic stance and of his geological / paleontological profession) taught me to think in vast expanses of space and time; during my first visit to China, 1992 (when 海芳劉 Haifang Liu, Cuiping Wei, and 李安山 Li Anshan became my lasting friends and resourceful colleagues) I predictably had to visit 周口店 Zhou-Kou-Dian, where Teilhard had helped excavate and publish the *Sinanthropus* around 1930. Still in the Chinese context, although over the decades I have greatly admired and

⁷⁰ Specific intellectual encounters between Devisch and myself in the field of divination include Devisch 1985, 2008.

⁷¹ Chided, for instance, in Toulmin 1982, because after twenty years working in China Teilhard still proved completely ignorant of that region's cultures and languages. To this may be added Teilhard's (1955) *sociological* insensitivity, which was at the root of his use of the geologicistic or biologicistic concept of the *noosphere* as a layer of human consciousness statically enveloping the earth regardless of human societies' internal social organisation, self-reflexive consciousness both individual and collective, and historic dynamics. On the semantic implications of the suffix *-istic*, see Chapter 10, below, footnote 387.

sought to emulate (in arbitrary order) Köbben, Jongmans, Sandra Harding, Fromm, Erikson, Wertheim, Gluckman, Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Gellner, Ranger, Pingree, Mary Douglas, Martin Bernal (incidentally, a Sinologist by training), Carcopino, Peter Gay, Lucebert, Hoyle, Poortman, Achterberg, Willem Frederik Hermans, Hugo Claus, Jaap van Velsen, Herman Gorter, Nabokov, Derrida, Witzel, and Kant, I believe no anthropological, historical, philosophical or literary writer has made a greater impact upon me as a role model than, of all people, the British embryologist Joseph Needham, who in mid-career became the competent,⁷² prolific and (at a time when this was far less obvious than today) *anti-hegemonic* historian and mediator of ancient Chinese science, enshrined in the monumental, multi-volume *Science and Civilization in China*. In Japan (2005 and 2009), 渡辺和子 Kazuo Matsumura, 弘文堂 Kikuko Hirafuji and 編者 Shigeru Araki went out of their way to offer me the best possible short introduction to Japanese modern and traditional life. During my principal Zambian field-work, 1972-1974, Robert J. Papstein was a dear and inspiring friend sharing with me the problems of Zambian proto-history; he was also the first to introduce me to a non-African field-work setting: the Navaho Nation, New Mexico and Arizona, 1979 – decades before I sampled Native American life on the USA eastcoast, and in British Columbia (Canada). Vladimir Nabokov was another of my adolescence heroes, and although too little of my literary work transpires in the present volume (yet I grappled with interculturality in my poetry decades before that topic came to dominate my scientific prose!), Nabokov's divinely superficial obsession with reflections and secondary reflections is reflected... in the title of this book, and in the opening quotation on p. 4. Terence Ranger was the inspiration, role model, and PhD external examiner behind my work on the history of African religion in the 1970s, when I pioneered the proto-historical methods that were to inform much of my work in subsequent decades; later he was a resourceful advisor and patron when I was Head of Political and Historical Studies at the Leiden ASC. Richard Werbner was among the mainstays of my anthropological career in its first two decades, and introduced me to Manchester, to the study of divination and to Botswana, before our friendship was to be sacrificed on the altar of field-work transference – an affliction endemic among anthropologists. My friend René Devisch has been not only Belgium's leading African anthropologist for decades, but he has also been well read philosophically, and his example and advice, from the mid-1980s on, have greatly inspired me towards the counter-hegemonic and symbolism-sensitive position (hopefully) manifest throughout the present book. Martin Doornbos was my senior colleague and advisor in the study of the African state in the

⁷² While my admiration for Needham is limitless, we should not overlook – especially not in the present book, whose main themes are vicariousness and hegemony – the fact that Needham's achievement would have been totally impossible – just like the transcultural anthropological field-worker's ! – without the great, loyal and inconspicuous assistance from local, in his case Chinese, counterparts, among whom foremost Dr Wang; cf. Anonymous, 'Wang Ling'.

decades when my research concentrated on that topic, and my co-editor in two book projects: *Afrika in Spiegelbeeld* ('Africa in the Mirror', 1987, in Dutch, an edited collection of secondary reflections... on Africanist research); and *Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation*, a massive book whose co-authoring took us two decades so that we should hardly be surprised that it has now been in the press with the Uni[versity of]S[outh]A[frica] Press, South Africa, for more than five years... Finally, Martin Gardiner Bernal and Michael Witzel were my inspiring intellectual role models (a status yet inevitably qualified by profound criticism on my part) during the last few decades, when I have sought to contribute to the development of long-range approaches to Bronze-Age Mediterranean proto-history (in which connection I am also greatly indebted to Fred Woudhuizen), and to comparative mythology.

I hope this book does some justice to the intellectual treasures all these dear people have bestowed on me, and to the tolerant kindnesses they have shown me. Meanwhile this late book is dedicated – as if it were a first book, or a PhD thesis – to the memory of my parents: not only the shining shade of my mother, but also the excessively ambivalent shade of my father, who justifiably had most to fear from my writing and was most pained by it, yet who, like any ancestor, deserves his place in the family portrait gallery of my many book dedications, now that I am myself nearing the age at which he died.

0.3. Summary: The structure of the present book

Kaleidoscopically reflecting my work of over two decades, this book is loosely structured, and such unity as it may yet possess derives from the person, the concerns and the style of its author more than from deliberate and clever compositional architecture. In order to make a tangible reality of the 'empirically grounded' in the sub-title of this book, numerous textblocks present vignettes of description and analysis on very specific topics that have occupied my research over the decades. While this does not make for compositional unity, it does convey the sense of my research: exploration and grappling with data of overwhelming complexity and heterogeneity, where the Faustian temptation of turning the whole project into a strictly personal quest is always mitigated by the sense of vicariousness, of being subservient to the knowledge, life-world, and mode of expression, of the original owners, my research hosts and informants.

I start out, in Part I (*Cultural anthropology as a form of intercultural knowledge construction – its potential and shortcomings*), with a set of texts that are still deeply rooted in my work as an anthropologist. The first Chapter brings, after an introductory Section on African urban studies, some of my theoretical insights in modern globalisation (preparing my work on the distribution of ancient geomantic divination as a manifestation of proto-globalisation), and explores the heuristic value, in this respect, of the concept of *virtuality* – applying it to a handful of different African situations, from village to town, and from

female puberty rites to witchcraft, healing, and ethnic festivals. The essentially dialogic nature of my theorising manifests itself in that I enter into critical debate with some of my closest friends and colleagues: Geschiere, Devisch, Schoffeleers; it is much to their credit that they have by and large taken such criticism, not as disloyalty, but as the sign of respect and of joint working towards a shared truth, as was my intention. Taking the forms and conceptions of ethnographic field-work of the mid-20th century CE for granted (prolonged personal immersion in a community through participant observation, within a narrow spatial and temporal horizon), Chapter 2 discusses ethical aspects of field-work, as a stepping-stone towards more profound, self-critical and anti-hegemonic approaches to anthropological knowledge construction in several other Chapters of this book – which also in this respect is very much a sequel to my *Intercultural Encounters* (2003). In a similar way, Chapter 3 illustratively presents a few of my field-work experiences with divination and ecstatic religion that have all but expelled me from anthropology and into the arms of intercultural philosophers – but without going into the detail and depth that discussions of these topics in subsequent Chapters of this book, and in the 2003 book, aspire to in their trajectory towards intercultural philosophy.

Part II (*Religious hegemony and some of its remedies*) brings Chapters that, each from a different angle, explore the extent to which an intercultural-philosophical perspective may add to existing social-science approaches to religion, particularly as a way out from *the (usually implicit) hegemonism that assumes that one's own perspective is, self-evidently, the most central, obvious, and truth-producing one*. We explore: the transcultural study of evil (Chapter 4); the interpretation of violent ideologies in the context of today's militant Islam and the commensurately violent reactions it has met from the West (Chapter 5); the promise of a viable intercultural theoretical approach to religion to be derived from the work of the greatest French post-structuralist philosopher, the late lamented Jacques Derrida (Chapter 6); a discussion, in Chapter 7, of the mainstream canon of religious anthropology, mainly as an expression of my initial bewilderment at the now so popular term *spirituality*; and, loosely applying a Derridean approach, a passionate statement (Chapter 8) on African spirituality, not as an evocation of cozy cultic togetherness around the drums and the fire, but as an affirmation of the politics of sociability that I see as the heart of African spirituality today.

Having thus effectively entered the field of intercultural philosophy with Part II, Part III seeks to offer some answers to the question *'How not to crush Africa under North Atlantic thought?'* The phrase *'names-dropping'* in that Part's title has to do, yes, I admit it, with my survival strategies as a gate-crashing anthropologist in philosophers' land, but more importantly, with the fact that the three Chapters of which this Part consists, each centre on one particular philosopher threatening to crush Africa and African thought. In Chapter 9 this is *Aristotle* (in the 'rhetorical' approach to South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, through which Post-apartheid South Africa sought to come to terms with its conflictuous

recent history); in Chapter 10 it is *Félix Guattari*, on the North Atlantic side, and (as a beautiful example, however, of the non-crushing variety) in Chapter 11: *Hebga* (and his critic *Amougou*), on the African side. Both Aristotle (through his modern disciples advocating his *Rhetorica / The Art of Rhetorics* as the indispensable art of how to make the truth seem true), and Guattari, seem to provide incisive heuristic models rendering familiar African situations (and, as far as Guattari is concerned, *occult* African situations, to boot) somewhat easier to understand – until we become conscious of the condescension and arrogance implied in the very act of setting loose these alien (and as far as Guattari is concerned, often demonstrably ignorant and obsolete), subordinating perspectives, projecting them onto Africa as if there are in that continent no local, African traditions of worldview and philosophy available to make sense of African situations in the first place. Against this background we appreciate all the more the remarkable achievement of Hebga as an African philosopher who knows the North Atlantic, supposedly transcontinental (for in the last analysis too often merely intransigent, myopic, and Eurocentric) tradition well enough to let it work for him without being cornered by it – as we should appreciate Amougou's demonstrating these qualities in Hebga. But let us not throw away the baby with the bath water: applied with reticence and self-reflection, such transcontinental perspectives may yet have considerable illuminating power – as was my point also when, a few years ago, I produced the edited collection *Lines and Rhizomes - The Transcontinental Element in African Philosophies* (van Binsbergen 2008).

With the preceding Parts we have been building up towards one of the *pièces de résistance* of this collection: sixty pages of discussion of the work of the great African classicist, Romance languages specialist and philosopher Valentin Mudimbe, in Chapter 12. There the issues of hegemony and the liberation of African difference, the 'Colonial Library' (Mudimbe's aggregate term for the accumulated textual records of 'North' colonial knowledges – inevitably warped – concerning 'the South'), and the rejection of African religion and of Afrocentricity as potential sources of empowerment and pride, have been vocally articulated in the self-construction of, on a global scale, one of the most remarkable intellectuals of our time. Here no naïve oversights, or unintended condescension, nor racism – almost the opposite of the pejoratively vicarious and distorting reflections we have considered, and critiqued, in the earlier Parts. On the contrary: as the title of Part IV indicates, 'Beyond Africa: The price of universalism' – the path of Mudimbe has been that he has exiled himself away from Africa, not only physically (which was beyond his control, after he had courageously incurred the wrath of the late President of Zaïre – now the Democratic Republic Congo – Mobutu Sese Seko), but especially existentially. Mudimbe has tended to radically reject the specificities of the African historical, political, cultural and spiritual heritage, in favour of a placeless, homeless universalism that cherishes its (largely North Atlantic and Ancient, and only sporadically African) classics and their epiphanies in the form of texts; – but *the only meaning of*

such universalism can be cultural and spiritual self-denial, not as a time-honoured spiritual virtue, but as a form of self-destruction; and this, I argue, is the path Mudimbe has taken. But then, in the face of the certainty of individual death and of the reasonable doubt cast on the independent ontological existence, life, of gods, ancestors and other spirits, do we have a choice? Do we have a choice as Africans? (And who am I to include myself among their number...?)

I suggest (here, and throughout my work) that we have, and that choice is called *the collective construction of enduring, self-reflexive culture*. The main reason why Mudimbe cannot affirm his Africanness seems to be that his education within the folds of imported mission Christianity and scholarship has programmed him *to deny the intrinsic value, except as metaphors and poetry, of African knowledge systems*. The cornerstone of any intercultural-philosophical affirmation of Africa, in my opinion (and I flatter myself to interpret in these terms the admiration of some of my African colleagues for my work), is *the rehabilitation of African knowledge systems*, not as the untutored and incoherent stammerings of 'savages' waiting to be finally rescued, *i.e.* enlightened by initiatives coming from other continents lying to the North or the East of Africa, but *as regional provinces of meaning and truth that have never been totally isolated from the flows of knowledge and truth in other continents, but that yet, more importantly, constitute their own indispensable contributions to the sum total of human knowledge –, irreplaceable, immensely valuable, and in principle capable of global circulation and global relevance* (van Binsbergen 2003b: ch. 7). My lasting interest in African divination and healing is not because these knowledge systems offer a *New-Age* type of trance-inducing escape into obscurantism and into wild, voodooish dreams of occult power, not because they offer to 'the Whiteman' forbidden fruits of African occult, exotic secrets,⁷³ but because they may well contain unique valid knowledge that deserved global circulation because it is not, in quite that form, available from other continents with their own local knowledge systems; and often that African knowledge has not yet been totally warped by the onslaught of globalisation and its foolish tendency to North Atlantic hegemony.

In Part V (under the somewhat triumphant title '*Inside African knowledge systems*'), the rest of this book, I try to initiate and develop an argument to this effect, but since we are already nearing the end of this book the remaining scope is too limited than that I could conclude such an argument. However, I have chosen myself excellent company. The path-breaking feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding sets the pace, in Chapter 13, for an exploration of what it is that underpins scientific knowledge systems, including the North

⁷³ Although I must admit (as I did in my autobiographical accounts on 'becoming a sangoma' – van Binsbergen 1991a, 2003a: ch. 5 and 6) that initially I felt that exoticising lure, too; it is only gradually that I became truly conscious of the strategic implications of these African knowledge systems, and of my adoption of them, in terms of the global politics of knowledge.

Atlantic one which over the past half millennium has been so successful and dominant as to literally and massively change the world (climate, species composition, annihilation of glaciers and parts of the atmosphere, urbanisation, weapon technology, transport technology, etc.). Is it epistemological superiority (as North Atlantic chauvinists would like to flatter themselves) or is it sheer hegemonic power, privileging one set of knowledges over another set that may not be intrinsically inferior but that happens to lack the former's material advantage in the form of military overkill? The answer turns out to be less relativist, and less radical, than we might expect. Is it hegemonic power that keeps the airplane in the air above the North Atlantic region, but makes it crash when it begins to fly over lands where the West holds no effective sway? Today's drone military technology offers a grim answer to this rhetorical question: *it cannot just be hegemonic power and nothing more, for the plane does not crash at all, but simply flies on beyond the geographical frontier of its ideological and military support*. Within this epistemological context, Chapter 14 looks at divination and board-games as formal systems reflecting on space and time. This Chapter uses a long-range historical perspective, rather than a recognisable intercultural-philosophical one that, at the time when that piece was written (1995) was not yet my concern. In Chapter 15 I return to divination (after having used that topic as an example in many of the other Chapters already), asking whether there is any truth in African divination, in other words: 'Does African divination "work", and if so, how it is this possible?' I take a slight advance on my book in preparation *Sangoma Science*, and seek to go beyond the usual reductionist anthropological interpretations, according to which apparently veridical divination is merely a combination of well-informed gossip and performative sleight-of-hands.⁷⁴ Finally, in Chapter 16, we hit on the concept that perhaps is most

⁷⁴ The whims and scruples of scholars are often bewildering; I am not the only example. The Assyriologist Temple, who assisted in the abridgment of Joseph Needham's (with Wang Ling and others) multi-volume *magnum opus Science and Civilization in China*, in the 1970s threw away his academic reputation – in exchange for a best-selling *New-Age* book title – by suggesting (Temple 1976) a particularly radical solution for the inexplicable astronomical knowledge the Dogon of West Africa *appeared* to possess. A literalist reading of their cosmogony (published by Griaule & Dieterlen 1965), as if it belonged to the genre of the discursive, modern scientific text and nothing more, might suggest that the Dogon knew about Sirius (*α Canis Majoris*, the brightest star as seen from Earth, with the exception of the Sun) being a double or even triple star system. The weaker companion however is absolutely invisible from earth with the naked eye, was only indirectly attested (on the basis of calculated orbital irregularities) in the 19th century CE by one of the greatest mathematicians of that time, Wilhelm Bessel, and was only decades later actually spotted with the strongest professional telescopes of that period. How then could the Dogon know? Temple skipped the most obvious possibilities:

1. to misread the Dogon cosmogony as a scientific statement amounts to an inadmissible 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead 1997 / 1925: 52, 58) – whereas in fact the Dogon account meant something different, less exact and more cosmological and mythical;
2. Griaule & Dieterlen's' own modern astronomical knowledge, although that of lay

needed in the discussion of interculturality and of African knowledge systems: *wisdom*, not as a static receptacle of seemingly lasting and stable unequivocal (but also predictably obsolete and irrelevant) truths of the elderly, but as a *dynamic method to articulate, reconcile, negotiate and salvage contradictory truths such as are at the heart of any society, and such as, a fortiori, inevitably arise in any intercultural encounter.*

'My truth is a jealous truth' (cf. *Exodus 20:5*),

in other words, *my truth can only exist within the life-world that I and the fellow-members of my community have collectively constructed by means of the world-creating cultural (especially ritual and symbolic) practices of our community, and therefore my truth can, subjectively, not be true beyond that community. A*

people, had inadvertently seeped into their account;

3. the visits of European astronomers to West Africa in the late 19th c. in order to observe rare planetary transitions, had inadvertently contaminated the Dogon account of their worldview; hence, also, the Dogon as reported by Griaule & Dieterlen appear to distinguish the same number of satellites of Saturn as professional North Atlantic astronomy did around 1900 CE and up to the 1960s (Reece Phillips & Morgan 1961, who still list only 9 satellites for that planet), whereas due to the improved observation opportunities afforded by unmanned space travel, today's actual number has risen to over 60! (Soderblom & Johnson 1982; Thomas *et al.* 1983).

Instead of contemplating such likely common-sense interpretations, Temple fantasised that the knowledge of the true, composite nature of Sirius could only have been divulged by *extraterrestrials* – probably the aquatic culture heroes such as were depicted, especially under the name of Oannes, in a Hellenistic myth (Cory 1832; Burstein 1978) concerning the origin (three millennia before Hellenism!) of the Early Bronze Age civilisation of the Persian Gulf (to which Assyriologists were to give the name 'Sumer', 'Sumerian' in the 19th c. CE). Temple sketches the hypothetical route of this allegedly extraterrestrial knowledge through West Asia and (once it had been entrusted to the Garamantes people) across the Sahara so as to end up with the Dogon of the Mali Plateau. In *New-Age* and Afrocentric circles the futile discussion of the 'inexplicable superior astronomical knowledge of the Dogon' has still not subsided. Even Mudimbe (2004) has been partial to it, despite all his abhorrence from Afrocentrism. This long-winded introduction was needed to finally make my point: *Temple shows himself imaginative and courageous to the point of recklessness with his extraterrestrial theory, but when it comes to discussing the links between the oracles of Dōdōnē (Epirus, Greece) and Siwa (Western Egyptian desert) in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, an elaborate discussion of postal pigeons brings out that, when it comes to divination, Temple cannot think up a better alternative than to resort to the common, crude and mechanistic reductionism of the diviner as manipulating secrets that, although in principle public, have more or less restrictive circulation.* 'Of course', he seems to be saying, 'the possibility of authentic veridical divination (contrary to the possibility of extraterrestrials?) cannot be contemplated for a minute by any serious intellectual (including Temple, although his appeal to extraterrestrials means that he has opted out of that category), but fortunately the diviners on either side of the Mediterranean were in constant touch with each other through postal pigeons, and this allowed them to dispense the secret information that was to impress the clients who came to their oracles...' Faced with such pitfalls, one would be well advised to give such controversial topics a wide berth. However, that option is hardly open to me any more, since the possibility of veridical divination has emerged, not as a theoretical possibility – as it does in modern quantum mechanics! see Chapter 15, below, with references – but as an experiential fact throughout the quarter century of my activities as an African diviner, and has therefore decisively informed my views of African knowledge systems.

'justified true belief' (a dated but still useful, common philosophical definition of knowledge) can in principle only be 'justified' and 'true' by the internal standards defined within the local and contemporary social horizon. *If North Atlantic knowledge systems find those of Africa fundamentally untrue and incredible, this is not in itself an objective sign of the intrinsic invalidity of African knowledge systems, but merely the result of social truth construction within communal boundaries: only what the West constructs as true, can be true in the West.* Of course, in itself such construction far from constitutes wisdom, on the contrary – wisdom comes in, and is indispensable, when, in the face of such insurmountable yet inevitable oppositions and contradictions as spring from the meeting with other local truths (and such meeting is inevitable under globalisation), two opposite views can make a legitimate claim to truth at the same time, and peaceful, tolerant, loving boundary crossing is to be achieved as the only way out. Which brings us to one of the most surprising, for trivial, almost frivolous, lessons of interculturality: *not in the application of a rigid and strict, procedural logic, but in the looseness of non-logocentricity, of inarticulation, of leisurely and slightly inconsistently singing, dancing, praying, petting, and silencing together, lies ultimately the way out from our present-day intercultural conflicts, even if these are sufficiently serious as to threaten to annihilate the world as we know it.*

Finally a few words on technicalities.

Quotations of words and sentences from other than modern European languages in this book preferably include – if available to, and manageable by, me – the original script and its North Atlantic transliteration. I adopt this practice, not in order to pretend a philological expertise I certainly do not have, but in order to affirm (and that more or less ornamental point is made even when my scriptural renderings contain errors of orthography – as they often may) the right of the original expression, in its own local cultural form, to take precedence over the transformative and potentially hegemonic appropriation in a modern North Atlantic language; and also to drive home the fact (of crucial importance from a point of view of intercultural philosophy and cultural anthropology) that our scholarly encounter with foreign-language expressions is far from transparent and tends to be filtered through multiple layers of translation, interpretation, and error. However, the conventions of modern scholarship are not conducive to consistency where these lofty intentions are concerned – for instance, for the sake of readability I often saw myself compelled to confine myself to conventional and largely absurd English renderings of Ancient Greek, Biblical, and Ancient Egyptian proper names; but as the reader will see, I prefer the more original Achilles to Achilles, *Odyssey* to *Odyssey*, etc. In line with general Classics usage I have preferred to designate Ancient texts under their Latin names, even though written and transmitted in Greek; however, sometimes the English title proved more convenient. In view of their effective adoption into, and constitutive significance for, the culture of the West throughout two millennia, I have used the European / Christian names for the books of the תנ"ך *Tanak/ħ* / *Old Testament* /

Bible, especially the תורה *Torah* – the five books attributed to Moses (the designation ‘*Old Testament*’ is clearly predicated on a Christian, Eurocentric perspective); hence *Genesis*, instead of בְּרֵאשִׁית *Bereshit*, etc.⁷⁵ My intention is to merely *embellish* my text with script fragments from outside the recent North Atlantic tradition in order to stress the arbitrariness and relativity of the North Atlantic, present-day scholarly perspective, and for the same reason I have insisted to add *CE* (Common Era) and *BCE* (Before the Common Era) to most instances of dating in years and centuries, and have I avoided to use the common expression ‘Before Christ’ – since it is only for a minority of the world population that the prophet of Christianity, however admirable and inspiring in many of his recorded utterances, is considered sufficiently central to anchor something as important and sacred as the calendar. No doubt some will consider my conventions on this point, cumbersome, repetitive, futile, signs of affectation, and unnecessarily Politically Correct, but others will appreciate at least the attempt to avoid *the myopic self-evidence of a hegemonic stance*.

An *Index of authors*, and a *General index*, conclude this volume. The purpose, scope and directions for use of these two indexes are given in the short discursive *Envoy*, as well as the technical note, by which they are preceded. Exhaustive as far as authors cited and other proper names are concerned, and offering connections between many key concepts, these indexes should form a considerable aid in opening up this long, complex and in many ways unusual book.

If for a particular author the cumulative bibliography at the end of this book lists more than one publication for a particular year, these are distinguished by a letter behind the year, both in the bibliography and in the main text and footnotes of this book. Co-authored publications are listed under the first author as defined by the publication’s title page or heading; however, when there is an obvious hierarchy between authors (e.g. ‘with’, ‘with the collaboration of’), the publication in question is listed and numbered under the principal author only. Internet sources tend to be ephemeral, and when I cite one, I usually add, in the end bibliography, the most recent date of retrieval. In such cases URLs are specified, but I made them clickable only for my own work or discussions of the latter. For most of my own publications that have appeared in print, are also available at my personal website <http://www.shikanda.net>. In the bibliography at the end of the book, I have often added the URLs to my own work only selectively, more consistently so for work otherwise unpublished, but not, in principle, for work reprinted in revised version in the present book.

Perhaps it testifies to my well-known and regrettable preference for walking the trodden path, but it is amazing how many publications cited in this book have been reprinted at least once, which could lead to anachronistic shortened Harvard references of the sort of ‘Homer 2014’, ‘Kant 1984’. I have sought to remedy this undesirable effect by listing, in the bibliography, and often also in the main text and footnotes, and separated by a slash /, both the (usually more recent)

⁷⁵ I am indebted to the Hebraist Peter Broers for an enlightening discussion on this point.

version that I have used and that I am citing, and the original version that situates a publication in its proper place in the history of ideas. It is not possible to be consistent in such matters, and a book at the interface between the social sciences and philosophy, overlooking and summarising a prolific and versatile scholar's life's work, is in itself difficult enough to write and edit, without being required to include the full bibliographical history of all the two thousand publications I cite.

0.4. Provenances

Nearly all Chapters of this book have appeared in print in earlier form. Each preceded by a short preface, they appear here in what is essentially their original form, but with very considerable editorial alterations and additions, resulting in a book that contains about 45% more text than the original compilation of the constituent Chapters. Specific interpretations have been weighed against my present (2015) views, obvious errors of fact and redaction have largely been corrected, and some efforts have been made (none of them complete or totally consistent – which may be forgiven, considering the size of this book, and the period of two decades it spans in my production) to augment the bibliography and bring it up to date. The extensive editorial process has kept me occupied for most of 2015.

These chapters reflect a sustained effort, over two decades, to deal with long-range empirical research and with its implications for interculturality especially from an African perspective; since few other writers have engaged in precisely that combination, yet 'empirically grounded' means that ideally every single step in the argument is based on empirical substantiation, an excessive degree of self-referentiality has crept in which I have tried to reduce but could not entirely edit away; for this I apologise.

I will now list the provenances chapter by chapter, while taking the opportunity of including further, specific acknowledgments relating to each chapter.

Chapter 1

The first versions of Chapter 1 were presented on the following occasions: as an oral presentation at the Bergen (Netherlands) internal conference of the WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research) Programme on 'Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities', 15-16 February 1996; as a paper at the programme's monthly seminar, Amsterdam, 6 May 1996; at the one-day conference on globalisation, Department of Cultural Anthropology / Sociology of Development, Free University, Amsterdam, 7 June, 1996; and at the graduate seminar, Africa Research Centre, Catholic University of Louvain, 8 November, 1996. The Section on girl's puberty ceremonies is based on a text which I wrote in 1994 as a statement of intent for the *WOTRO Programme on 'Globalization and the construction of communal identities'*, thus opening the way for my student Thera Rasing to submit her own fully-fledged application for PhD research as based on her previous MA work (Rasing 1995). That application was approved, and within a few years she could boast a splendid PhD thesis, and book (Rasing 2001). The Section on witchcraft and healing was an extensive comment at a one-day conference marking Ineke van Wetering's retirement from the Department of Anthropology / Sociology of Development, Free University, 12 April, 1996. For constructive com-

ments and criticism I am indebted to all participants on all occasions, and especially to (alphabetically) Filip de Boeck, René Devisch, Martin Doornbos, André Droogers, Mike Featherstone, Jonathan Friedman, Peter Geschiere, Ulf Hannerz, Peter Kloos, Birgit Meyer, Peter Pels, Rafael Sanchez, Matthew Schoffeleers, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Rijk van Dijk, Wilhelmina van Wetering, and Karin Willemsse. I am also indebted to Peter Geschiere, Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels as editors (the latter in the end only as editorial advisor) of a book in which a much shortened version appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1998, 'Globalization and virtuality: Analytical problems posed by the contemporary transformation of African societies', in: Meyer, B., & Geschiere, Peter L., eds, *Globalization and identity: Dialectics of flows and closures*, special issue, *Development and Change*, 29, 4, October 1998, pp. 873-903; also published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1998, 'Globalization and virtuality: Analytical problems posed by the contemporary transformation of African societies', in: Meyer, B., & Geschiere, P., eds, *Globalization and identity: Dialectics of flow and closure*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 273-303. The full paper was published as a small book as follows: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, *Virtuality as a key concept in the study of globalisation: Aspects of the symbolic transformation of contemporary Africa*, The Hague: WOTRO [Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research, a division of the Netherlands Research Foundation NWO], Working papers on Globalisation and the construction of communal identity, 3; and in a second edition as web book, at: http://www.shikanda.net/general/virtuality_edit%202003.pdf. The latter is the version reprinted in the present volume, but thoroughly edited, and preceded (after some editing) by all but the last few pages of a paper I presented at the WUOO (Netherlands Association of Urban Studies in Developing Countries) Leiden 1985 Conference on African Towns, revised in 1987: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1987, 'African towns: The sociological perspective', a paper written at the request of R. Bergh, for an abortive collective volume on African towns, based on the WUOO (Netherlands Association of Urban Studies in Developing Countries) Conference on African Towns, Leiden, 26-28 February 1985.

Chapter 2

originally appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1979b, 'Anthropological Fieldwork: "There and Back Again"', *Human Organization*, 38, 2: 205-209; it was a critical reaction to Wolf Bleek's [Sjaak van der Geest's] paper challenging the ethical foundations of anthropological field-work, which appeared in the preceding issue of that journal. I am indebted to the original author for his cooperation toward the present critique.

Chapter 3

was first published as follows: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2000, 'Crossing cultural boundaries', *Compass Newsletter: For endogenous development*, no. 3, July 2000, special issue on: *Vitality, health and disease: in soils, crops, animals and people*, guest editor Sarshan Shankar, pp. 12-13. I am indebted to Bertus Haverkort for drawing me into the folds of this interesting intercultural experiment. This Chapter was translated into Dutch by Ilse Bulhof and M. Poorthuis, and, after being amalgamated by them with their Dutch translation of Chapter 7 of the present volume, appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003b, 'Sangoma en filosoof: Eenheid in de praktijk, dilemma in de theorie', in: Bulhof, I.N., Poorthuis, M., & Bhagwandin, V., eds, *Mijn plaats is geen plaats: Ontmoetingen tussen wereldbeschouwingen*, Kampen: Klement-Pelckmans, pp. 219-231. I am indebted to these editors and translators for the encouragement implied in their action.

Chapter 4

This text was originally commissioned in 2012 by the prospective editors, Walter van Beek and William Colson, as a comment on five papers (by René Devisch, Walter van Beek, Diane Ciekawy, Léocadie Ekoué with Judy Rosenthal, and Ulrika Trovalla) to be included in a collective work on the anthropology of evil in Africa. When I submitted this text in 2013, it was first accepted and applauded in writing, then rejected early 2014 on the grounds that the publisher wished no longer to accommodate commentary in addition to the original papers. My text appears here in slightly re-

worked form. I need not comment on the editorial blunders which led to my argument being available for inclusion in the present book.

Chapter 5

This Chapter was published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 'Towards an Intercultural Hermeneutics of Post-'9/11' Reconciliation: Comments on Richard Kearney's 'Thinking After Terror: An Interreligious Challenge', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 2, 1: 58-70 (April 2005, actual date of publication January 2006). Reflecting, more than the other Chapters in this volume, the dramatic topicality of the moment, in a rapidly changing context of international political relations, the piece has lost much of its relevance; I refer the reader to the new autocritical Postscript, now preceding that Chapter below, and to the Introduction's long footnote 18 on militant Islam, p. 12 above. Nonetheless I am indebted to the editor of that issue, and to Richard Kearney, for their inspiration and encouragement.

Chapter 6

The earliest version of my argument on Derrida's approach to religion was presented at the meeting of the Research Group on Spirituality, Nederlands-Vlaamse Vereniging Voor Interculturele Filosofie / Dutch-Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy NNVIF, 28 April 2000, Erasmus University Rotterdam; I am indebted to the participants, especially Henk Oosterling, for their stimulating comments; and to Sanya Osha, for suggesting its publication in *Quest*. The paper was circulated on the Internet, until it was published in 2005 as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, 'Derrida on Religion: Glimpses of interculturality', *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/ Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, XIX, 1-2, 2005: 129-152.

Chapter 7

Also Chapter 7 was first presented as a paper read at the NNVIF's Research Group on Spirituality. It appears here in a slightly edited version. In its original form it circulated on the website of the NNVIF as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1999, 'In search of spirituality: Provisional conceptual and theoretical explorations from the cultural anthropology of religion and the history of ideas', paper, Research Group on Spirituality, Dutch-Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy, Leiden, Friday, 29 October 1999, 16.00 hrs, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Philosophical Faculty; at http://www.shikanda.net/general/gen3/index_page/nvifitems/spirituality_wim.htm. Constituting the transition between my training in religious anthropology and my engagement in intercultural philosophy, the introductory section preceding it in the book's text admits its transitory and provisional nature.

Chapter 8

An earlier version of my argument on African spirituality was also read at the June 2000 meeting of the Research Group on Spirituality, an initiative of the Dutch-Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy NNVIF, held at the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am indebted to the participants for their constructive remarks, and particularly to Henk Oosterling, Cornée Jacobs, and Frank Uyanne. In 2004 this text was co-opted for publication in an international digital journal for intercultural philosophy, as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2004, 'African spirituality: An approach from intercultural philosophy', *Polylog: Journal for Intercultural Philosophy*, 2003, 4, at: <http://them.polylog.org/4/fbw-en.htm>. Simultaneously a Spanish version was published in the same venue: 'Espiritualidad africana: Un enfoque desde la filosofía intercultural'. Manifest in this argument is a sustained attempt to avoid the essentialisation of Africa and *a fortiori* of African religion, and yet celebrating its unique historical inspiration within the global context.

Chapter 9

My argument on Aristotelian rhetoric and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was prompted by my co-responsibility for the special issue of *Quest* in which it appeared – the very

first volume of *Quest* to appear under my editorship: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2004, 'Postscript: Aristotle in Africa – Towards a Comparative Africanist reading of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission', in: Salazar, Philippe-Joseph, Osha, Sanya, & van Binsbergen, Wim, eds, *Truth in Politics, Rhetorical Approaches to Democratic Deliberation in Africa and beyond*, special issue: *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 16, 1-2: 238-272.

Chapter 10

Shortly after I had joined the Rotterdam Philosophical Faculty, my loyal new colleague Henk Oosterling did me the honour of asking me to contribute to a prospective edited collection on Félix Guattari. Thus stimulated to familiarise myself with an author I had not known previously, I prepared a 50-pages draft, in Dutch, which of course was far too long to be accommodated in the proposed book. A small selection was then published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1999, 'De ondergang van het westerse subject: Félix Guattari en de culturele antropologie', in: Oosterling, H.A.F., & Thissen, S., eds, *Chaos ex machina: Het ecosofisch werk van Félix Guattari op de kaart gezet*, Rotterdam: Faculteit Wijsbegeerte, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, pp. 73-86, 149-150. However, considering the great efforts I had invested in the longer draft, and the interest I had taken in Guattari, I translated⁷⁶ the draft into English, and it was ultimately published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2008, 'The eclectic scientism of Félix Guattari: Africanist anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought', in: *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, XXI, No. 1-2, 2007, special issue on: *Lines and rhizomes - The transcontinental element in African philosophies*, pp. 155-228. Much to my delight, a few years later it was reprinted, at the initiative of the editors and at the instigation of Valentin Mudimbe, in the *Festschrift* that African philosophers offered to our great Cameroonian colleague Fabien Eboussi Boulaga: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2012, 'The eclectic scientism of Félix Guattari: Africanist anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought', in: Procesi, Lidia, & Kasereka Kawwahirehi, eds, *Beyond the lines: Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, A philosophical practice / Au-delà des lignes: Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, une pratique philosophique*, Munich: LINCOM, LINCOM Cultural Studies 09, pp. 259-318.

Chapter 11

This text is published here for the first time. The details of its genesis are set out in the introductory text preceding the Chapter, below.

Chapter 12

An earlier version of this paper on Mudimbe was read at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, 1st February, 2001, as the opening lecture in a series of four, entitled 'Reading Mudimbe', organised by Louis Brenner and Kai Kresse. I am grateful to the organisers for creating a stimulating framework in which I could articulate and refine my thoughts about Mudimbe's work;

⁷⁶ Used, for decades, to a situation where social scientists write in English and orally communicate with each other in that language (the modern scholars' Latin) at conferences and in correspondence no matter what underlying mother tongue they may have in common, I was surprised to meet, in Rotterdam, the unquestioned and self-evidence practice of Dutch philosophers writing mainly for each other (and for a substantial national lay readership and constituency) in their mother tongue. Of course, the same practice exists in Germany, France, Spain and Brazil. However, practically never since my student days had I written in Dutch on academic subjects. There is an unmistakable wisdom in that insistence on the mother tongue for philosophical debate – but it also meant that, given my mission in *intercultural* philosophy, and wishing to address my expanding African audiences as well as my anthropological and Africanist colleagues, I still had to spend a lot of extra time translating my philosophical texts 'back' into English. Usually, though, they improved as a result of that extra editorial round.

to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, and to SOAS for financing my trip to London, and to Patricia Saegerman, Louis Brenner, Kai Kresse, Richard Fardon, Graham Furniss, and other participants in the seminar for stimulating comments on an earlier draft; to Michael Mann for indispensable editorial improvements; and to Valentin Mudimbe for rewarding me, as the author of this uncommonly incisive and critical paper, with the great gift of his subsequent friendship. This paper was originally published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, '“An incomprehensible miracle” – Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe's *Tales of Faith*', in: Kresse, Kai, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of *The Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65.

Chapter 13

A first, Dutch version of this Chapter on Sandra Harding was presented as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2001, 'Noordatlantische wetenschap als etno-wetenschap: Een intercultureel-filosofische reflectie op Sandra Harding', paper read at the seminar on 'Kennis en Cultuur' (Knowledge and culture), Annual Meeting, Netherlands Association for the Philosophy of Science, Utrecht, 23 November, 2001. An English version was subsequently presented at the Colloquium 'La rencontre des rationalités', organised by the African Centre for Advanced Studies, the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH) and UNESCO [United Nations Educational and Scientific Commission], Porto Novo, Benin, September 18-21, 2002; and at the Department of the Philosophy of Man and Culture, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 5th July 2004. For their incisive, illuminating and encouraging criticism I wish to express thanks to the participants in these discussions, and especially to Richard Rorty, Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, and for the discussion in Utrecht to Henk Visser, Bert Hamminga, H. Kuiper, and other participants. In the context of the English version I am indebted to Paulin Hountondji for inviting me to participate in the Porto Novo conference, to Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch for chairing the session in question, and to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for financing my trip to Benin; and to the Secretary of the Benin Association of Traditional Authorities, and to the Austrian cult leader Fagbemissi, for introducing me to important aspects of the political and ritual culture of Benin today. The paper was finally published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, 'The underpinning of scientific knowledge systems: Epistemology or hegemonic power? The implications of Sandra Harding's critique of North Atlantic science for the appreciation of African knowledge systems', in: Hountondji, Paulin J., ed., *La rationalité, une ou plurielle*, Dakar: CODESRIA [Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique] / UNESCO, pp. 294-327.

Chapter 14

An earlier draft of this Chapter on philosophical implications of selected African formal cultural systems was read at the 'International conference on time and temporality in intercultural perspective', Rotterdam, 14-15 December, 1995 – a valedictory function on the occasion of Heinz Kimmerle's retirement from the Chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, where I was to succeed him in 1998. I am indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, and the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Free University, Amsterdam, for granting me a year of absence in which I could pursue the topics dealt with in this paper, in the inspiring context of the Working Group on Magic and religion in the Ancient Near East, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NIAS), Wassenaar, the Netherlands, a subsidiary of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW). I wish to thank Richard Werbner, René Devisch and Sjaak van der Geest for stimulating my interest in divination; Alex de Voogt for introducing me to the literature on *mankala*; Frans Wiggermann for feeding me with stimulating Assyriological literature on board-games, and more importantly exploring with me Ancient Mesopotamian magic in a joint publication (1999); and Irving Finkel, Jean Comaroff, Peter van der Veer and his colleagues at the Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (University of Amsterdam), Rijk van Dijk, Douwe Tiemersma, and the participants in the 1995 Rotterdam conference, for constructive criticism of earlier drafts. The paper was soon published in the Kimmerle *Festschrift* as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996, 'Time, space and

history in African divination and board-games', in: Tiemersma, D., & Oosterling, H.A.F., eds, *Time and temporality in intercultural perspective: Studies presented to Heinz Kimmerle*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 105-125.

Chapter 15

When the international conference 'Realities re-viewed / revealed : Divination in sub-Saharan Africa -- Realités revues / révélées: Divination en Afrique sub-saharienne' was organised at the Leiden National Museum for Ethnology, July 4-5, 2005, (conveners: Phillip Peek, Walter van Beek, Jan Jansen, Annette Schmidt) I was invited to deliver one of the two key note addresses 'Divination through space and time' (revised version at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/divination_keynote_leiden2005/web%02pages/keynote_divination_leiden_2005.htm); the other key note was given by the folk mathematician Prof. Gerdes of Mozambique. I wrote up my oral presentation for the conference proceedings. With the exception of the prehistoric section, which the editors could not accommodate but which partly was incorporated in my book *Before the Presocratics* (2012), my main argument appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2013, 'African divination across time and space: Typology and intercultural epistemology', in: van Beek, Walter E.A., & Peek, Phillip M., eds, *Realities re-viewed: Dynamics of African divination*, Zürich / Berlin / Münster: LIT, pp. 339-375. The epistemological section appeared to be able to stand on its own, and is reprinted here as a separate argument.

Chapter 16

is based on my keynote address, International Symposium 'Expressions of tradition wisdom', Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-mer, Koninklijk Museum voor Centraal Afrika / Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale, and Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten en Geschiedenis / Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts et de l'Histoire, Friday 28 September, 2007, Academiepaleis / Palais des Académies, Brussels, Belgium, published as a small book: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2009, *Expressions of traditional wisdom from Africa and beyond: An exploration in intercultural epistemology*, Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen / Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-mer, Classes des Sciences morales et politiques, Mémoire in-8°, Nouvelle Série, Tome 53, fasc. 4. It was also published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2008, 'Traditional wisdom - Its expressions and representations in Africa and beyond: Exploring intercultural epistemology', in: *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, XXII, 1-2 (2007), special issue on: *African philosophy and the negotiation of practical dilemmas of individual and collective life*, pp. 49-120. A shortened excerpt appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, 'Expressions of traditional wisdom: What Africa can teach the world today', in Swinne, J., ed., *Expressions of Traditional Wisdom: Proceedings of a conference held at Brussels, September 2007*, Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-mer; the same shorter version appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2011, 'Expressions of traditional wisdom: What Africa can teach the world today', *Annales: Centre Universitaire de Kasumbalesa, Extension de l'Université de Lubumbashi*, 1, 1: 25-55. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the organising institutions and to J. Swinne for a most inspiring and gratifying experience. I also wish to acknowledge the inspiration from my colleagues in the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam; and the continued support from the African Studies Centre (especially the Library department directed by Jos Damen). Finally, I wish to thank the Brussels participants for their response to this paper, particularly Professors Baetens Beardmore and Weidtmann.