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# **African Philosophy and the Future of Africa**

Edited by  
*Gerard Walmsley*

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## INTRODUCTION

# AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

GERARD WALMSLEY

The papers in this volume were all presented at a conference on *African Philosophy and the Future of Africa* (St Augustine College of South Africa, October 2007). The call for papers prior to the conference asked for presenters that were (a) passionate about philosophy and (b) passionate about Africa. In issuing such an invitation the organizers were at one with Joseph Margolis who says:

I would mistrust a career in philosophy that didn't address - philosophically as well as personally- the natural bearing of all the philosophical specialties one might pursue [on] personal and political conduct and responsibility (2002: 192)

Margolis criticizes those who too confidently and neatly separate the best professional work in philosophy from personal commitment and social and cultural contexts. There is a suggestion also that this is inexcusable in a world of crimes against humanity and genocide. For Margolis there is a "conceptual continuity between the analysis of knowledge and the direction of human life" (2002: 193). This resonates with the thought of Voegelin:

Philosophy has its origin not just simply in a desire to understand more clearly or deeply or systematically, but also in the philosophers felt awareness of and resistance to the disorder in his surrounding culture or society -an awareness that threatens the philosophers own soul.<sup>2</sup>

To my mind this brings out something of the character of African philosophy. Here passionate thinking is united to deep concern for concrete issues. Hence we have titles such as *Philosophy Born of Struggle*

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<sup>1</sup> The papers in this volume are dedicated to the memory of Emmanuel Eze, a major proponent and supporter of African philosophy. His death, shortly after the conference at which he was a keynote speaker, was a loss to many.

<sup>2</sup> I base this on Glenn Hughes' characterization of Voeglin's thought in 'Insight and the Foundations of Human Dignity'. He makes reference to *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 16, Order and History, Volume III: Plato and Aristotle* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 124.

(Edited by Leonard Harris, 1983, 2000) or *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonialization* (Kebede, 2004). And as Charles W. Mills remarks, black philosophers often choose to specialize in ethics or social-political philosophy, or in philosophy of culture, because their lived contexts directs them to these areas of philosophy (2002: 158). I am also reminded of Steve Biko's well known remark: "It is better to die for an idea that will live than live for an idea that will die."

The theme of the conference of which the presentations were first given was rather wide ranging. This was intentional. The aim was to invite reflections that would both demonstrate the relevance of philosophy for life in the African context and also the importance of philosophy from Africa for the wider world context. I hope that the following papers fulfill these aims. Let me now give an outline of their content.

The first keynote speaker gave a particularly challenging address 'Reason and Culture: Understanding the African Experience.' Emmanuel Eze begins by discussing the problem of "reason in culture." He goes on to use the African experience as a "test case for any kind of research program interested in making explicit the conceptual diversity implicit in what we generally call cultural experience." Initially the key question is formulated as "How can we find the best model of a philosophical method to conceptualize the diversity of reason in experience?" Eze attempts to move beyond the treatment of diversity in the practical realm of multiculturalism and debates about gender, race and class -- debates that are often elusive and controversial -- to consider diversity in the act of thought itself. This withdrawal to a consideration of the conditions for thinking diversity as found in the nature of thought itself, is understood as allowing a more fruitful return to the practical realm, for it leads to an understanding of how thought is embedded in what Eze calls "ordinary experience."

The paper may be seen as an anticipation of Eze's fuller reflection *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (2008). This is concerned with questions such as the following: Does everyone possess rationality in the same way to the same degree? Do different forms of reason exist in diverse cultures? How do those who possess rationality express this in the activity of reasoning? What activity of reason manifests the possession of rationality? What should we take as evidence for the possession of rationality?

Questions such as these are particularly relevant to African Philosophy and questions of African Identity. However, the question of whether or not the processes of reason are the same in all cultures, or whether they are shaped by the particular conditions of particular cultures and places and times is relevant to anyone interested in the nature of human thought and rationality. The question challenges those who too quickly conclude they have discerned a universal "Enlightenment" account of "Reason" that can be imposed unproblematically on any non-western context.

In both this paper and in the fuller book length treatment Eze tries to discern the roots of diversity in the very nature of the mind itself. His key question may be reformulated as “How do you articulate diverse forms of rationality?” His response is to introduce the notion of ordinary experience and explain how this, of its nature, leads to diverse forms of reason and diverse manifestations of rationality.

For Eze a fundamental feature of the human condition is the gap between ordinary experience (or thought) and its expression. This gap allows room for the freedom of thought. It allows thought to express itself in diverse ways according to the resourcefulness of intelligence. Thought is found to be a need for tongue, a desire for expression. Hence we cannot expect there to be only one way of expressing thoughts, of reasoning, of manifesting rationality: “There are many universal languages of reason.”

In this way a reflection from the point of view of “an Afromodern postcolonial sensibility” brings “ordinary experience” to the foreground in a way that illuminates conceptual diversity in cultural experience and in human experience generally. We discover how from ordinary experience emerge many forms of reason within various contexts. This may be seen as the resourcefulness of intelligence. So to discern reason and rationality we need to consider both performance and context. Only then can we decide what counts as reason and rationality. A better grasp of reason itself, rather than the assumption of a fixed “universal” model that often imports the particularities of a dominant culture, leaves us open to recognizing reason in various cultural contexts. Eze makes an important contribution to the re-thinking of reason and rationality.

In ‘Truth, Power, Intellectuals and Universities’ Bert Olivier offers a stimulating reflection on the future of Africa in relation to the future of higher education in Africa. The linking concern is the formation of reflective citizens and critical and responsible leaders. This far reaching paper opens with a reflection on the barriers to the proper functioning of the university as a cultivator of mature citizens as opposed to simply being the producer of laborers. Olivier is concerned that Universities be centers of opposition to the paralyzing power of much of popular entertainment and of bureaucracy.

A key role is assigned to the intellectual who has to consider his work in terms of both “truth” and “power.” For whilst truth may be elaborated within a discipline, it has extra-disciplinary power. Hence academics and the university as a whole find themselves as “privileged points of intersection” between key dimensions of human life.

There is a crisis in the university, a crisis magnified and manifested in the contemporary corporatization and bureaucratization of the university. Olivier discusses these issues in detail. He shows how the master discourse of economics affects the university as a space of learning. He wonders whether or not the self-critical nature of the university is compromised as the university is coerced into the service of the economy. There are questions as to whether or not the university is being standardized without appropriate standards to guide the process.

Such corporatization leads to the problem of bureaucratization which is seen as the joint effect of both business and government. Academics are pressurized into accepting standard roles, pedagogy, terms, and marking schemes.

The question follows: What to do to respond? Olivier suggests the intellectual finds ways to engage in “local resistance” and to reveal what is hidden in prevailing practices. He draws on Foucault, Lacan, and Heidegger to gather resources that will help academics resist being incorporated into dominant discourses and practices. His hopeful conclusion is that all academics can act to preserve the being-human of human beings by joining critical practices and critical thinking.

Gabriel Massi argues for a special role for the public intellectual in Africa in his ‘The Role of the Public Intellectual in an African Context: Naming the Present.’ Along with the rest of the world Africa is experiencing major challenges in the social, economic and technological spheres. However, contexts differ and there is a special need, given the history of Africa, for public intellectuals to “name the present” and identify the forces that are shaping the future. Massi offers his account of the particular forces that African intellectuals have to focus on, and identifies what is perhaps the most central issue. He argues that many theorists have given accounts of the African situation with little positive results. In effect “African Studies” are in disarray. He suggests we focus on the process of change -- how to cope with change and development. This is a simple suggestion, but possibly having profound implications. Massi considers change in two ways and asks how Africans can avoid being the passive victim of change. He points out the complicity of African intellectuals in their negative reaction to change seen in the mass emigration. Then, by contrast, he points to the positive ways in which change may be responded to and challenges intellectuals to make their contribution. Their role should be to use intellectual reflection to change the present *Krisis* into a *Kairos*.

There follows three papers on *Ubuntu*. Jason van Niekerk reflects in ‘On the Tensions between *Ubuntu* and *Simunye*’ on certain difficulties in present accounts of “*ubuntu*” moral theory. He responds to tendencies of some writers to conflate “*ubuntu*”, which has to do with the individuals disposition to be responsible to others, with ‘*simunye*’, which is more focused on solidarity or consensus with ones community. According to Van Niekerk these two notions are in tension with *each other*. *He argues that priority should be given to ubuntu. Though “ubuntu”, he argues, is more a description of “folk-psychology” than a complete normative theory, it is open to being developed into a complete normative account. By contrast “simunye” theory tends towards relativism. Moreover it is not as distinctively African as ubuntu theory.*

Bernard Matolino writes on ‘*Abantu* and their ethic in the face of AIDS.’ The havoc that HIV/AIDS wreaks in Africa motivates the writer to reflect on the ethical outlooks of Africans and their possible ethical response to the disease. Matolino takes the basic African ethics to be



“*ubuntu* ethics.” He interprets *ubuntu* as a call to act responsibly in relation to the community well being. To live by this ethical theory is demanding given the extent of the AIDS epidemic.

Matolino brings out the complexities of living by such an ethical position. For *ubuntu* seems to imply that one acts responsibly only towards those who live according to community norms. But those who are affected by AIDS/HIV may be seen as acting against community norms and are often seen as no longer part of the community. As a community based ethics “*ubuntu* ethics” has difficulties coping with “outsiders.” The question arises: Is an ethic of *ubuntu* able to adequately respond to the spread of AIDS? The paper argues that such an ethic has limitations when applied to the more private area of sexual morality. This brings a strong challenge to standard accounts of *ubuntu* ethics.

In an extremely clearly argued paper Thaddeus Metz discusses ‘African Values and Capital Punishment’ His aim is to construct the strongest argument possible against capital punishment that can be grounded in african values. His approach is to develop an african account of dignity in which dignity is taken to reside in the appeal to communal relations. The paper ends by suggesting that this new approach to dignity should be compared to more familiar Western accounts –particularly the Kantian account.

Charles Villet examines the thinking of Hegel and Fanon on “recognition.” His ‘Fanon and Recognition in the Colonial Context’ examines how the treatment and understanding of “recognition” changes as we shift from the context of Hegel to the colonial context of Fanon. The main concern of the paper is to demonstrate how the master-slave dialectic, and thus recognition, deviates in the colonial context from the original Hegelian dialectic. The opposition implied between master and slave in a colonial structure and in the struggle for liberation problematizes humanity and mutual recognition. This problem remained a concern within Fanon’s work because of his analysis of violence and its role in decolonization.

Paulin Manwelo reflects on ‘The Politics of Identity in Africa: Diversity and Inclusion.’ His main aim is to clarify the notion of African identity in order to critique diverse schools of thought that arrive at what he considers inadequate treatments of this identity. He finds that prevailing modes of identity fail to provide or promote a sound account of African identity that is dynamic and vibrant. Such models tend to be one-dimensional and exclude various aspects of African life that are needed for an integral account of contemporary African identity. His aim is to point the way forward to a more adequate and inclusive account. This account is meant to recognize the increasingly multi-cultural dimension of most if not all nations in Africa.

Louise du Toit raises a distinct problem in African Philosophy -the absence of women's voices. She argues that this may be due more to the choice by African women in the media as more suited to their message, rather than to exclusion. This is because African media create

room for the concrete and the particular which tends to be excluded by western and masculine philosophers. In addition she holds that professional philosophy in an African context should come to terms with this different dimension of genuinely philosophical thought.

Maria Frahm-Arp's contribution in 'Identity Issues amongst South African Pentecostal Charismatic Christians: Between Oreos and Romany Creams' brings in a woman's contrast on identity. The paper is interdisciplinary in that it involves both sociological and philosophical reflection. It deals with the question of identity in a very concrete context. The central question dealt with was "What does it mean to be African in a post-apartheid context and in a situation of upward mobility?" Frahm-Arp examines how Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity as found in different modern, global, technologically advanced churches, now located in South Africa, ask and answer the question of African identity in a global world.

Questions about 'Black Economic Empowerment' are raised by Gampil Matheba. He explains the ethical basis of BEE and relates it to the wider notion of affirmative action. A partial concern is to show the continuing need for BEE and affirmative action, given the long period of racism -- and disempowerment -- in the apartheid period.

A particularly interesting paper took up the growing theme of indigenous knowledge. Mogomma A. Masoga's and Hassan Kaya's contribution, 'Building on the Indigenous: An Appropriate Paradigm for Sustainable Development in Africa', insists that development in Africa must take African society and culture seriously. They argue that sustainable development must build upon the indigenous. They make an important distinction between "indigenous" and "traditional." The "indigenous" is not only the traditional. It is whatever local communities consider important in their worldview and practice. They also suggest that working paradigms of knowledge often marginalize indigenous models of knowledge and traditional practices. This, they say, has repercussions at the social and political levels. They make a strong case for building on the indigenous, showing how the indigenous is open to organic growth and how it is relevant to questions of effective social upliftment. They also offer ethical guidelines for research into local communities. Implications for educational theory and practice are also brought out.

The final paper was given by the second keynote speaker, Bruce Janz. He offered a wide ranging reflection on 'The Concept as Object, Mode, and Catalyst in African Philosophy.' He offers a deconstruction/reconstruction of the theme of the conference -- on the question of whether and how philosophy can contribute to "development" in Africa. He takes up Derrida's thought on the "debts and duties" of philosophy. This opens up to a reflection on "philosophy from a place." African philosophy is well characterized as being philosophy from a place. It arises out a certain culture and also out of the need to respond to the colonial imposition. Here the question is "How can African Philosophy face its "Other" and how can it be productive and creative?" An important aim of the paper was to explain how African Philosophy can

advance beyond an obsession with the question “Is there an African Philosophy?” The question should rather be “What is it to do philosophy in this place -- in Africa and in Africa in a global context?” Janz examines tensions between cosmopolitan thought and thought from a place. The result of this is a creative re-expression of what it is to do African philosophy. Janz’s important conclusion is that there will come a day, as with feminism, when “African philosophy has created concepts so useful and so important that no credible overview of philosophy can afford to ignore them.”

A final task in this introduction is to thank all the contributors to this collection and all the participants of the conference that gave rise to the papers. Included in this thank-you are those who helped to organize the event: Charles Villet, John Enslin, Nontando Hadebe. Special thanks to Charles Villet for help with the preliminary editing of the papers.

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**PART I**

**AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY:  
CULTURE AND TRUTH**



**CHAPTER I**

**REASON AND CULTURE: UNDERSTANDING  
THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>**

*EMMANUEL CHUKWUDI EZE*

**I.**

This paper is about evenly divided between the two halves of the title. In the first half (I and II), I discuss the problem of reason in culture – any culture – as a problem about the rationality of experience. In the second part (III and IV), by narrowing my focus to the particulars of experience which we historically refer to as “African,” I have chosen to use this reference as a test case for any kind of research program interested in making explicit the conceptual diversity implicit in what we generally call cultural experience. And because my training is in philosophy, I formulate my guiding question in this way: How can we find the best model of a philosophical method to conceptualize the diversity of reason in experience? This is a unique problem because diversity as such can be thought about only through the idea of identity [1]. Similarly, we can understand identity but only in the thought of what it is not: the thought of diversity. It is therefore all the more difficult to think diversity when the diversity in question is diversity in reason itself.

We can attempt to bypass this difficulty by projecting the idea of diversity into surrogate practical concepts, such as multiplicity, pluralism, or multiculturalism. But all of these concepts are elusive. Let us take, for example, the most current of them, multiculturalism. It is believed, on the one hand, that multiculturalism is about heterogeneity and therefore about the problem of multiple identities [2]. From the point of view of the currently, fashionable, uses of the concept, Adorno was one of the first to theorize this idea of identity as a form of multiplicity. In his Hegelian book on aesthetics, Adorno argued that “matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with the tradition, expressed his disinterest”: namely, “nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity -- things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant” [3]. In our time, the exemplar of the contested insignificant has been dubbed the trinity of contemporary criticism: gender/race/class, a trinity whose inner forms and affinities, in my view, are far from conceptually articulate [4]. It is probably because of

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was published in *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008 (Copyright 2008). The version was entitled ‘Introduction: Diversity and the Social Question of Reason’.

the difficulties involved in coherently thinking this trinity that has led some critics to believe, in the extreme, that diversity is no more than an ideology: an *idée fixe* that has been used by intellectuals and in the general culture to license the degradation of common values. Some advocates of this second perspective on the identity of diversity rarely hide their distaste not only for academic discourses of multiculturalism but also for any kind of practices of multicultural politics [5].

But there is another meaning to diversity – a meaning somewhat removed from the present cultural and political contestations over the term. Through this other meaning of diversity, we can understand what we mean by identity. Diversity, from this other point of departure, takes as its focus the act of thought. In this thoughtful act the diversity in reason poses a particular problem for any identity that legitimately wishes to constitute itself as a historical singularity. In reflecting on such act of thought, as I propose to do here, one will not be concerned with the specific social and political interests that drive some of the intellectual arguments: monoculturalism versus multiculturalism, racialism versus nonracialism, genderism versus gender-blindness, social democratic ideals versus raw capitalist class values, and so on. We would, rather, pursue an understanding of the conditions that generate these and other positions in the conflicted civil and political societies. The overall goal will be to shed light on the general but implicit grounds on the bases of which overtly antagonistic social and political contests about the idea of diversity are currently negotiated. I ask you to bear in mind, then, that what follows is a series of interrogations on the logical conditions that allow one to hold the thought of a social concept -- in this case, the concept of identity or diversity.

I defend a two-part thesis. First, the modern mind cannot but think diversely. Second, diversity is not as local or practical a matter as one would like to think. My current interest, accordingly, is to investigate the nature of the thought of diversity in the cultural and postcolonial histories of modernity and postmodernity, with special reference to the African experience. From this investigation I draw what some might consider a startling conclusion: diversity constitutes a necessary condition of thinking in general. If so, without diversity there is no thought. And without thought there is no mind. Of course, one can imagine having sensation without thought, a brain but no mind, body but no spirit, nature without culture, etc. But one actually makes an identity only in relations of diversity, in dialogic and agonistic interaction with objects, peoples, or cultures considered, therefore, as the non-identical.

It is to focus on this thesis that I said I will not be concerned with accounting for the practical and especially the social and political contestations that currently frame both reflective and unreflective understandings of ideologies and counter-ideologies of diversity-as-multiculturalism, or even their military equivalents in the clash of civilizations doctrines. So, I think I should be explicit in explaining why I suggest we bracket the politics. I do so not because the concept of cultural



diversity that animates multiculturalism is in opposition to a theory of experience of diversity, as practice may be said to be in opposition to theory. Rather, I think I can leave politics out of immediate considerations because analysis of the meanings of concepts may be all – it is not much, to be sure, but may be all – one can expect of philosophy as philosophy. What sorts of political activism one may choose to engage in with the help of an analytical concept is, of course, supremely important. But, out of respect for the work of thought itself, it is only fair to recognize that, at least on some occasions, thinking can be work enough.

## II.

So far, you may be tempted to accuse me of what some consider an old vice: a deep yearning to transcend partisanship or, at least, to live between camps but intellectually remain above the factions. This vice, you say, is a desire as old as philosophy itself. From Plato through Soyinka to Rawls, this tendency is usually, and correctly, associated with philosophical idealism. In the American tradition and before Rawls (I'll return to Plato and Soyinka at another point, as time permits), Emerson speaks from the perennial intention of romantic philosophical idealism when he boasted: "some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depends on this particular up or down." But, he added, "The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy." To the scholar in such a situation of controversies, in danger of losing precious time in contemplating the universal, Emerson advised: "Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honourable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom." [6]

Prior to the transcendentalist American tradition represented by Emerson and others, and in fact from the earliest days of Platonism in Western philosophy to our contemporaries in the postcolonial traditions, the problem of the relation between the universal perspective of the scholar and the immediate necessities of particular social, political, and historical debates is a constant theme. If we considered the issues from, as suggested, the point of view of thought as such, the problem of the universal and the particular stems from conflicts arising between two, antagonistically related, tendencies in reason. The antagonism is at the root of thought itself. Moreover, it is the sort of antagonism that enables thought. Because this antagonism is rooted in thought and is productive of thought, therefore, it is appropriate to characterize the problem of the universal and the particular – from the point of view of the scholar who takes thinking seriously – as a problem of mind and world. Or better: a problem of mind-in-world.

Because of its rootedness in the nature of mind, and because of its dialectical productivity, the problem of diversity makes it, unsurprisingly, impossible for thought to conceptualize in a transparent way its own

constitutive relations, namely, the relations between thought and mind, concept and object, or word and thing. At the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes the intellectual problems to which may lead questions about these relations. As if to point out that the relationship between mind and world is fundamentally, metaphysically speaking, corrupt, Kant argued that reason has a peculiar trajectory in at least “one kind of its cognitions.” I will shortly enumerate, in the specifics, the elements of these kinds of cognition. In general, they are the ones in which, as in the concept of diversity, thought is troubled by questions which it cannot dismiss, because they are posed to it by the nature of reason itself; but which it also cannot, all around, satisfactorily answer. [7]

One would think that, under such circumstances, thought would desist from trying to build a secure, foundational, and comprehensive metaphysical picture of that aspect of the world. But it doesn't. Before Kant, Francis Bacon had clearly pointed out this tragic fact. “The human understanding,” Bacon writes in the *Organon*, “is unquiet.” He then gave a list of themes on which thinking “cannot stop or rest, and still presses onward, but in vain.” The following are some of the prominent examples: “We cannot conceive of any end or limit to the world, but always as of necessity it occurs to us that there is something beyond. Neither, again, can it be conceived how eternity has flowed down to the present day, for that distinction which is commonly perceived of infinity in time past and in time to come can by no means hold,” for otherwise, “it would ... follow that one infinity is greater than another, and that infinity is wasting away and tending to become finite.” Furthermore, similar ‘subtlety arises touching the infinite divisibility of lines, from the same inability of thought to stop.” [8]

Another key area of epistemic problems within any dream for thought of ultimate rationality, an area which Bacon also considered troublesome, though more mischievous, is the idea of ultimate causality. “In the discovery of causes,” he notes, “although the most general principles in nature ought to be held merely positive, as they are discovered, and cannot with truth be referred to a cause, nevertheless the human understanding, being unable to rest, still seeks something prior in the order of nature.” To Bacon's already long list, I like to add: thought would most certainly like to have, for example, the concept of a complete picture of our own mental capacities; an indubitable grasp of the transcendental conditions of the thing – the object – we claim to be the target when we say we know something; and a complete metatheory of the relations between our known subjective mental landscape and the basis of the objective landscape of the external world. But the uncertainties and the errors – the potentially serious damage to knowledge – to which some of these different movements of thought could lead are equally patently obvious. For example, as Bacon was quite aware, “in struggling toward that which is further off” thought “falls back upon that which is nearer at hand ... which [has] relation clearly to the nature of man rather than to the

nature of the universe, and from this source ... philosophy has been strangely defiled.” [9]

This defilement, as I noted in relation to Kant, is the outcome of widely held epistemic desires and their metaphysical aporias. In this light, the problems of thought appear as a perversion of reason in relation to numerous philosophical questions. David Hume, famously, nearly dismissed most metaphysical questions and more in just such terms. The questions, he suggested, are ‘strained’ and ‘ridiculous.’ [10] At the end of the part of the *Treatise on Human Nature* called ‘Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy’ (Section vii, “Conclusion of This Book”), Hume complains: “The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.” Normal questions thus take on skeptically frightening proportions: “Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.” [11] Hume’s final solution to his strained and ridiculous musings is to take flight into an idea of nature. “Most fortunately,” he declared, “it happens that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras.” [12] In other words, to relieve the mind of its thoughtful burdens, nature itself, as it were, gently distracts thought from some of its extraordinary epistemic responsibilities. “I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.” [13] Following Hume let us, colloquially, characterize this solution as the triumph of the heart over the head.

In technical terms, however, this Humean naturalistic solution can hardly be characterized as conceptually adequate. Kant certainly – and rightly – found it so inadequate. In more recent works, such as John McDowell’s *Mind and World*, we can see fairly clearly why empirical naturalism, combined with philosophical skepticism, has provided a persistently inadequate response to what Hume colorfully diagnosed as clouds and darkness in human reason. [14] The contradictions and imperfections of reason exist because in knowing a thing the mind starts, as Kant writes, “from principles that it cannot avoid using in the course of experience and that this experience at the same time sufficiently justifies it in using.” [15] But they are these same principles that, curiously, misguide

reasoning to go ever deeper, in pursuit of never-ending questions. Because such transcendental questions lack closure, the questions leave the deeper interests of thought open-ended, and throw into permanent doubt the hope that the dream of complete rationality could ever be realized.

### III.

The picture, as it emerges from this specific part of the history of modern philosophy in the west, as represented in the works of Hume and Kant, is that thought, blinded by its hopes and the dreams, surreptitiously as it were, serves itself with empirical principles in ways these principles are not entitled to be used, something we can see in plainer light. The questionable use of empirical principles occurs because reasoning finds itself, it seems, compelled to resort to principles that go beyond all possible use in experience. Yet because of “cloud” and “darkness,” this unwarranted use of principles of experience seems beyond suspicion – so much so that even common sense appears to agree with it. By succumbing to this double blindness, human reason, as Kant puts it, plunges itself into contradictions. Curiously, Kant also suggests that reason, by itself, can gather from this last development that its pseudo-epistemic procedures are the product of errors, the errors “hidden somewhere,” even though reason may also be incapable of discovering the errors. [16] If – in addition to those of Bacon, Hume, and Kant – our own cultural and historical observations about Africa are accurate, we ought to ask: What could be the truest meanings of these necessary “errors” in thought? Where is the “somewhere” in which the causes of the errors might be hidden? Why, and how, in specifics, do the epistemic blindnesses and errors in thought necessarily plunge the mind into clouds, darkness, and contradictions? Moreover, how well does the mind appreciate its dilemma: its own, so to speak, self-deconstruction?

Although Kant claims that one could gather from the consequences that something must be wrong with the infrastructures of a metaphysically oriented reason, it is to me far from clear how deep is the mind's proper recollection of these errors. Beyond Plato's mythological programs, we are not even clear about the mind's very capacity for recollection. [17] (For example, do not acts of remembering frequently confuse memory with history?) Working from these hesitations, I would like to guide us to see how modern philosophers underestimated the extent of the problematic conditions alone under which thought may risk its claims of autonomy beyond the empirical, beyond memory, and beyond history.

### IV.

For example, the mind's problems in some aspects of cognition extend right into Kant's own choice characterizations of these problems.

What if the so-called error, darkness, and contradiction into which reason plunges itself constituted the indices of what I referred to earlier as the radical and productive antagonism in thought? What if the supposed cloud and the darkness, noted by Hume, are the negative root of thought as such? What if contradiction is the intellectually generative power of this negativity? Whereas Hume saw clouds and contradictions as imperfections, and whereas Kant pointed to unknown errors of the mind responsible for the darkness and contradictions in thought, I suggest that we re-describe these putative clouds, errors, and darkness as themselves constitutive of a necessary historical – rather than skeptical or transcendental – fate: the epistemic and moral fates of reason in history.

This suggestion is fundamental to the defence of the thesis I stated at the beginning. And the suggestion is not as radical as it may sound. Some philosophers, borrowing religious metaphors, believe that humans are subject to an original Fall: a mythical fall into, and then re-emergence of consciousness from, a primordial state of Paradise into states of reason. Or, these philosophers, they speak about humankind's emergence from the innocence of unknowing to the morality, even mortality, of knowing. One could recall in this regard Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, particularly the third volume of that work, called *The Consummate Religion*. [18] Some Continental philosophers regularly translate these same mythological schemas – and the questions the schemas bring into view about the nature of mind, self, and world – into yet more esoteric languages of Identity-in-Difference. For an example of this, consider Léopold Sedar Senghor's *Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine* or Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. [19] But outside these mythically-proportioned metaphors and concepts, the idea of ordinary, vernacular, historical fates of reason can stand out – and should be able to stand out – on its own terms.

It is in the hope of the recovery of the ordinary, therefore, that I have preferred to talk about the problems of thought as the problem of diversity in thought, and of the problems of diversity in the world as also a problem in the thought of diversity. To talk this way is already to speak in the languages of history and of the everyday. Unlike in the idealist or in the excessively romantic approaches, where the everyday is derogated, respectively, to either the realm of mass ignorance, or to the realm of the primly bourgeois, I suggest a different approach to what should be seen as the ordinary problem of reason, namely, how do you articulate diverse historical forms of rationality?

Specifically, the vernacular language of the ordinary in experience reveals the roots of the complexities in thought that some modern, and sometimes postmodern, philosophers prefer to attribute to real and invented metaphysical worlds. For me, by contrast, analyses of language – any language, in any culture – in relation to ordinary experience indicate what you could call a gap in thought, a breach in tongue. This breach indicates not some inherent ignorance of ordinary

minds compared to the metaphysical insights of professional philosophers. Rather, it points to a general distance between thought and mind, discourse and reason, concept and object, the universal and the particular, or the typical and the unique. A breach in tongue is therefore an indication of moments of an epistemic gap in everyday linguistic perception. But this is a productive gap. It is a generative absence absolutely necessary for the autonomous (that is, non-causally determined) emergence of thought. This emergence can be called freedom of thought, or the freedom of mind. To speak of a breach in tongue, therefore, is to think of this breach only as the space of a generative absence from which the mind constitutes its own figures as acts of thought, as acts of speech. Obviously, an absence is not a thing: it is a gap. Thought is that which composes itself – because, therefore, of nothing and so to speak out of nothing – as a need: the need of tongue; the need for speech; the need for voice. Thought is the need for language. We can therefore establish an intimate and absolute conceptual relation not simply between thought, word, and world but also between language and freedom of thought. The breach in tongue is therefore the origin of freedom, whereas freedom is the work of – the working-out of – the need for tongue, the need for speech, and the coming to voice. For all this, the best definition of thought is: That which spontaneously composes itself as, in itself, an object of work: the work of freedom of “mind,” namely, the freedom of a voice, the freedom of self, the freedoms of cultures, and the freedom of the world. As we called the spontaneity of this work freedom, then, we can say that it is only in the history of the work that thought becomes manifest as universal language – the languages of freedom as expression of mind. It is because language is thus thoroughly historical that thinking, too, is historically fated. And inasmuch as thinking is both worldly and historically fated, there cannot be just one way or one kind of expression of thought. There are many forms of expressions of thought. There are many universal languages of reason.

The vernacular language which I deploy to describe both the breach in tongue and its various forms of gap in the rationality of experience suggests how one might go about thinking the ethics of freedom and the morality of experience in general, but also the ethics and morality of variously rooted social and cultural experiences of freedoms of thought. Ethics and morality are only the necessary consequences of freedom; they flow from the breach in tongue without which freedom neither exists nor makes any epistemological sense. It is therefore in the relations within thought in experience that we make plausible not just the rationality of the negative in thought but also the positive reality of rationality and its freedoms: they are bound as well as bounded to history in the ethics of care for self and the moral concern for the other. On the one hand, you could consider this an application of the epistemological principle derived from our original thesis to the domain of social problems. This option would be available in the language of applied science: the philosophy of morals; ethics of identity; or social and cultural

ethics. On the other hand, instead of the language of application of a science to a separate domain of experience, one could consider morality and ethics not as separate domains in society to which one applies a theory of an ordinary rationality. In fact, in my particular choice of the concept of the ordinary to qualify the theory of rationality that I have proposed, it was my intention to attenuate the problems associated with traditional philosophy, where it is presupposed that rationality is something you could abstractly derive from outside of social or everyday experience, and then apply the abstractions to that experience. In contrast to the traditional language of a high science of thought applied to, as it were, a low domain of experience of life, I have shown that, in the origins of thought, there is to be found, both coincidentally and noncoincidentally, the experiences of concepts of the morally high and concepts of the morally low, the ethically sublime and the ethically ridiculous, just as we found the absence of, or a breach in tongue coincidentally with the need for speech, and in the same ways one would think about necessity and freedom. I hope to also show that the deeper epistemic and moral significance of these various distinctions, themselves, are best grasped by inquiries into the spontaneous and reflective origins of thought in ordinary experience.

I conclude now, therefore, that the obviousness of the relations between rationality and freedom, and ethics and morality, is already there when, for example, we try to explain the relations between mind and thought, concept and object, and language and things. Because of the non-coincidence between the two poles, one intuitively apprehends in the idea of freedom all the potential of a world composed of not just the existential realities of the self and its other but also the moral necessity of mutual respect and justice toward the identities of self and other. It is as if, in the very desire to explain how we come to knowledge of objects, we can also already perceive, in embryonic forms, all the range of paradoxes – epistemological as well as moral – that are implicated in, and across, human subjectivities.

This tri-aspected (epistemic, ethical, and moral) reality of what we call reason in experience, or vernacular rationality, can be fairly encountered by directly addressing questions such as: Why do all cultures experience the self as transcendent, on the one hand, and recognize the desire of the self for material and social rootedness, on the other? In general, questions like this evoke the issues we already suspected as potential occasions for error. But we have also re-described the questions. In the redescriptions, we should ask: How do we, today, best confess freedom as a historical task? How do we confess – and convert – the epistemic limits in experience into morally significant insights? Here, I can only offer some brief suggestions. We can approach the tasks by tracking the historical vicissitudes of ordinary reason across a range of ideas and concepts currently deployed in debates not only about identity and difference but also about culture, tradition, and history; philosophy and science; literature and the arts; and politics, war, morality and the law.

Yet, I cannot in this short space expect myself to pursue a comprehensive philosophical worldview. Rather, we should consider this suggestion, more modestly, as one mans effort to practice philosophy as a critique of concepts.

My methodological circumspection derives from an Afromodern postcolonial sensibility. The sensibility is rooted in a vernacular tradition of thought where philosophy is best understood as an evolving critique of abstractions common in ones society. Prior works on the critical legitimation of consciousness, and of the ethical and moral concerns, as I have just sketched them, are best referred to as vernacular theories of rationality. In my own discipline, philosophy, this designation is helpful if we keep in mind the fact that it is Kant's legacy that dominates the landscape of twentieth-century philosophy, at least in what may be called the Western experience. From Kant, academic philosophy inherited the quandary of explaining how it is that the mind can spontaneously authorize its self-constitution and self-governance; how it can, when necessary, correct the errors in its own cognition of objects; and how it can restrain itself from the extravagance – the overreach beyond the boundary of all experience – to which the force of reasons own spontaneity drives it. If the minds exuberance is cause for the metaphysician and the dogmatic transcendentalist to celebrate, for the vernacular or critical philosopher of concepts it is a moment of hope in the triumphant emergence of the subjects consciousness in the midst of nature, and a source of efforts to explain the work of cognition in general, the critical sciences in particular, and the idea of history in experience. If there is no science of things without the touchstone reference to nature in the order of experience, then, Kant is right: one must put dogmatic metaphysical idealism on the critical chopping block. But the transcendental problematic of rationality looks different when we disclose the original terms of the underlying assumptions about reason. This disclosure must also constitute the grounds of a normative dislocation: What if the metaphysical error in reason is also the root condition of the problem of diversity in being? What if diversity in experience makes epistemic sense in relation not just to reason but also to an ethics of memory and of history?

Taking these questions seriously requires, at a minimum, that difference or diversity in a post-Kantian and postcolonial sense should be seen as resulting from the perceived gap in the dynamic relation between objective conditions of truth (things, values, interests, or means-and-ends relations) and subjective cognitive predispositions (concept, idea, formal procedures of explanation and justification) found in an equally post-Kantian and postcolonizing world. If experience is always mediately situated within these objectivities and subjectivities, then the clouds, darkness, and contradictions between the two poles account in part for the perceptual gap – the breach in tongue – we think must exist, or have difficulty explaining why it shouldn't exist, within the thought of post-Kantian and postcolonial experience and history.



Experience – and by this I mean not the relation of a transcendental apperception with itself but ordinary, vernacular, everyday experience – is the epistemic locus and the moral index of both the fateful mark of freedom of thought and of diversity of identities. There is historical grandeur, a grandeur both tragic and heroic, in thinking that even the Kantian tribunal of the so-called Transcendental Reason must submit to this sort of fate in experience and culture. They are experiences of race, class, and gender, and the cultural and political liberations from the conquests of colonialist reason which enable these ruptures. The ruptures are absolute because they are irreversible. That is why the task I assigned myself, here, is to show how, in fact, it is reason as such – not its transcendental glorifications – which must re-invest history with meaning and with continuity in everyday life.

When I use the word experience, then, I have in mind merely the meaningful fates of reason in the ordinary historical encounters of diversity in thought, culture, and society. Experience in this regard is the reflective composition of the memories of the ruins of Reason; it is a series of histories of hopes and accumulated wisdom in the actions of worldly subjects of reason. But experience is also worldly reason in search of greater freedom and liberty, in each culture and in all cultures, for all humankind. Experience is the openness of the particular to the diversely universal.

## NOTES

1. For a good grasp of the many dimensions of the general dilemma, as a substantive issue rather than as a narrowly methodological concern which I make of it here, see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

2. See for example James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Tully and Daniel M. Winstock, eds., *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

3. Theodore W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 8.

4. See, for example, Robert John Ackerman, *Heterogeneities: Race, Gender, Class, Nation, and State* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

5. See, for example, Peter Wood, *Diversity: The Invention of a Concept*, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 64.

7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Preface to the First Edition", Trans. Newton Smith, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1965), p. 7.

8. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon: Or True Directions Concerning The Interpretation Of Nature*, London: 1620, XLVIII.

9. Ibid.

10. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, London: John Noon, [1739]. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), P. H. Nidditch (Second edition) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 269.

11. Hume, *Treatise*, p. 269.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 7.

16. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 6.

17. Plato, *Meno*, Trans. W. K. C. Guthrie, in *The Collected Works of Plato*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 353-420.

18. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. III, The Consummate Religion*. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

19. Léopold Sedar Senghor's *Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1962). Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Continuum, 2005).

## CHAPTER II

# TRUTH, POWER, INTELLECTUALS AND UNIVERSITIES

BERT OLIVIER

They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom...for trying to change the system from within... Leonard Cohen.

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punishment*, pp. 227-228).

The epigraphs, above, sound ominously like an adumbration of the fate that may befall those academics and intellectuals – the two words are not synonymous – who are at present being subjected to, and in some instances resisting the wholesale bureaucratization of universities in South Africa. Among other, related, things, it is the sentence of boredom, of the grey, dull desert of ennui that those who resist it wish to avoid, not only for themselves, but also for their students. As Kierkegaard (1971: 281-296) showed, boredom is intimately related to the need to combat it by means of the “rotation method” – an inventive way of imparting never-ending aesthetic novelty to one’s life, but one the function of which has been taken over by the entertainment industry today. It is probably the case that few people ever go beyond the switching of television channels, or texting one another by (aptly named) cell phone to combat boredom, and besides, the more people are bored, the more capitalism flourishes by providing instant “interest”, from “reality shows” and professional sport to pornography; at a price, of course. And the provision of “entertainments” – in what Kristeva (McAfee 2004: 107-108), following Debord, calls the “society of the spectacle” – is related to the theme of this paper, namely the exercise of power. Those academics and intellectuals who work at universities – especially in the “critical” humanities and the social sciences – and conceive of these institutions, not merely as training grounds for the future “labourers” in a country’s economy, but also, importantly, as spaces for the cultivation of “citizens” (a distinction made by the American political philosopher, Farhang Erfani, in a lecture) who are able to live critically and responsibly in a democracy, have an interest

in countering such paralyzing entertainment-power, but also the equally paralyzing, (boring) power of bureaucracy, with power of a different kind. In an interview titled 'Truth and Power' (1980: 127), Foucault makes the following observation, which is pertinent for the present era regarding universities as politically sensitive institutions, regardless of the fact that the reasons for the crisis he refers to are different today (given the current colonization of universities by the imperatives of capitalism) from those in the 1970s, in the wake of the student protests of 1968:

And what is called the crisis of the universities should not be interpreted as a loss of power, but on the contrary as a multiplication and re-inforcement of their power-effects as centres in a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals who virtually all pass through and relate themselves to the academic system.

His remark is situated in the context of a discussion of different kinds of intellectuals, which is, in turn, situated at the end of a long interview on 'Truth and Power' (1980). His elaboration on different kinds of intellectuals [1] – the "universal" and "specific" intellectual, respectively (1980: 126-132) – is itself a circling back to the subject addressed at the outset in the interview, namely the political status of science and its potential ideological functions. The questions raised by this are summed up by Foucault (1980: 109) in "two words: power and knowledge." He goes on to say that his first major text, *Madness and Civilization* (published 1961), was written within the "horizon" of the questions condensed in these two words, and that it was a matter, for him, of pointing out that the relations of a science such as psychiatry with social, political and economic structures ("...the interweaving of effects of power and knowledge;" p. 109) should be more clearly comprehensible than those of sciences like theoretical physics and chemistry – something also posed later, this time regarding medicine, in *The Birth of the Clinic*. For various reasons his work failed to attract the interest of Marxist intellectuals in France, who were preoccupied with "more scientific" problems, and with gaining institutional recognition, as well as being caught in the straitjacket of an orthodox vocabulary not receptive to questions concerning the "power-effects" of psychiatry and medicine (1980: 110).

He remarks that it was only with the advent of (the student and other, related, protests of) 1968 (1980: 111) – arguably the political manifestation of the transition to a new global dispensation, broadly known as postmodernity – that the questions he raised assumed "their political significance" graphically, thus giving him the courage to pursue them further, this time in the direction of practices of imprisonment. In the exchanges that follow the interviewers press him on several related issues, such as the "theory of (historical) discontinuity" (wrongly, according to Foucault) attributed to him (1980: 111-112). This elicits from him the

claim that, against the assumption of “smooth, continuist schemas of development”, the evidence suggests that, for reasons which he set out to investigate, there have been sudden transformations in the accepted forms of knowledge and “régimes” of discourse within which certain statements are accepted as being scientific, and others not [2] – something that drew his attention to the “...problem of the régime, the politics of the scientific statement” (1980: 112). Already, in this formulation, one can see a development – in terms of the notions of a “discursive régime, of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements” (p. 113) – of what was initially stated in terms of the relation between science and ideology (conceived of, in Marxist terms, as “false consciousness”) – adumbrating his concluding elaboration on the relation between different kinds of intellectuals (including those in universities) and power.

Crucially, Foucault is at pains here to advance the insight – not a relativistic one, as his rationalist detractors, committed to a notion of contextless truth, are all too eager to assert – that it is legitimate to talk of knowledge and truth, but that such talk has to take careful note that both “knowledge” and “truth” are identified as such, or attributed, as epistemological values, to statements located within a system of propositions. This alludes to what Foucault famously calls an “*episteme*” – a concept sometimes seen as being synonymous with what Kuhn calls a “paradigm” [3]. Foucault himself uses the term “paradigm” by way of contrast where he clarifies what he means by “discursive régime” and “régime of power”, when he points to rapid changes in scientific practices, which are (1980: 112-113):

...only the sign of something else: a modification in the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true. Thus it is not a change of content (refutation of old errors, recovery of old truths), nor is it a change of theoretical form (renewal of a paradigm, modification of systematic ensembles). It is a question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. In short, there is a problem of the régime, the politics of the scientific statement. At this level its not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal régime of power, and how and why at certain moments that régime undergoes a global modification.

It was these different régimes that I tried to identify and describe in *The Order of Things*, all the while making it clear that I wasn’t trying for the moment to explain them...But what was lacking here was this

problem of the “discursive régime”, of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements. I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm.

When Foucault returns to the question of the political significance of science – which topic marks the beginning of the interview, as mentioned earlier – it has to be seen against the backdrop of what he says, above, about propositions being “governed” by a “discursive régime.” Without this, one could not construe his distinction between the “universal intellectual” and the “specific intellectual” (1980: 126-132) in such a way that it is possible to understand each as being situated within a different “régime of discourse”, with the concomitant implication, that the “régime” relevant to the universal intellectual has made way for a different discursive “régime”, within the ambit of which such intellectuals no longer have a place. Why should this be the case?

The “universal intellectual” – of whom the “writer”, who represents the moral and epistemic interests of humankind, is the exemplary figure (1980: 126) – corresponds, according to Foucault, to the Marxist figure of the proletariat as the collective historical subject or “bearer of the universal.” Through the moral, political and theoretical choices made by the writer, the proletariat as inchoate, immediate embodiment of the universal (dialectical *telos*), is individualized and made conscious. That this is the actual state of affairs can no longer be justified, he argues. Instead, the “specific intellectual” may be regarded as having taken the place of its “universal” counterpart, and such a development may itself be understood in terms of Foucault’s claims concerning the relation between statements and discursive régimes: in light of his elaboration on the changed historical situation, which is inseparable from the kind of scientific, technological and cultural changes which comprise a distinctive system of mutually cohering and corroborating concepts and propositions, the context within which the universal intellectual functioned, no longer exists. The reasons for this are themselves a series of contingent historical events, in the course of which the “specific intellectual” was shaped as a recognizable figure. Moreover, here the sciences appear once again as one of the crucial contexts (perhaps the decisive one) where such intellectuals play an important role, but with a difference – it is no longer the kind of (Althusserian) structuralist Marxist science which supposedly rescues the workers from “false consciousness” accompanying ideology – for Foucault (1980: 118; 1980a: 58), this conception is still caught in the obsolete philosophical model of the “subject of consciousness”, which has been decisively surpassed by the so-called “linguistic turn”, his own position being a complex appropriation of this advent of what may, in his archaeological terms, be called the linguistic episteme. While he recognizes the role of language as “discourse” (which already indicates the convergence of power and meaning), for him there is something more decisive than the “great model

of *langue*", or the linguistic system of signs and relations of meaning, and to understand the changed role of the intellectual today, one has to grasp what this is, and what its consequences are (1980: 114):

Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning", though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail – but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. Dialectic" is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue.

Small wonder that Foucault (1980: 123) has inverted Clausewitz's formula concerning the relation between politics and war to read: "Politics is the continuation of war by other means!"

What does this mean as far as intellectuals are concerned, today? He gives one important clue where he says (1980: 132) that one should not think of the "political problems of intellectuals" in terms of 'science' and "ideology", but in terms of "truth" and "power." This means, among other things, that he conceives of 'specific' intellectuals as working within circumscribed domains – such as pharmacology, computer science, nuclear physics, immunology, social or political theory, psychoanalytic theory, zoology or political geography – where "truth" has a clearly specifiable meaning. However, in the elaboration of truth within the confines of each domain, or even interdisciplinarily (where a pharmacologist and a political geographer collaborate on a study concerning ways of combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in densely populated areas, for example), the political or cratological (power-) effects of this specific truth may surpass the domain of its own provenance and make themselves felt at a level of general significance. Foucault's own work (which is simultaneously philosophical, historical, theoretical, discursive and political), exemplifies the way in which the work of a specific intellectual may have an impact on a wide intellectual, scientific, social and political terrain [4], although his own reference to the role that the American physicist Robert Oppenheimer played in the development of

the first nuclear bomb may serve as a telling example of this (1980: 127-128).

It is not difficult to understand why this should be the case. Where Oppenheimer's specialized, specific research was concerned, its decisive role in the construction of the atom bomb gave it immediate, almost tangible military and political significance. In fact, standing as it did at the juncture that separated the Second World War and the Cold War, the development of the nuclear bomb is a paradigmatic instance of Foucault's claim, that politics (here, the Cold War), is war by other means. One need not turn to such obvious instances of research on the part of certain specific intellectuals, located in fields of conspicuous military importance, to understand what is at stake in the role of such intellectuals as characterized by Foucault, however. In South Africa, no less than in other countries, it frequently happens that the "truth" of a specific intellectual's work within his or her domain surpasses its disciplinary confines and asserts its wider political significance. When, near a coastal city in South Africa, zoologists are commissioned, for instance, to investigate the impact of the construction of a deep water harbour on the marine ecology in its immediate vicinity, and they report on the probable negative, if not devastating consequences of the shipping routes into and out of the harbour, on the daily migratory trajectories of foraging seals and penguins whose habitat happens to be near the proposed harbour on several islands, such a zoological report instantiates specific intellectuals' work with far-reaching cratological or social-political significance of an ecological nature. How can one tell that this is the case? By the rejection, on the part of the development company, of these findings in the report, evinced by the fact that they simply ignored it. The need for such a harbour is justified by interest groups in ostensibly unassailable, discursively self-evident economic terms (framed to display the supposed benefit to the region as far as employment opportunities for workers are concerned, but in fact far more beneficial to investors and shareholders in the companies concerned), while the ecological argument or discourse against it seems far from self-evident. And yet, given the increasingly apparent, complex interconnectedness of ecosystems on planet earth [5], the long-term folly of willfully inflicting damage on any of them – in the process injuring the entire, planetary ecosystem – may be seen as gaining social, economic and political significance proportional to the degree that the general awareness of the eco-political relevance of limited resources is becoming increasingly evident.

This illustration of the purchase that specific intellectuals' discipline has on what one may call "universal" political (that is, power) relations, also explains what Foucault means when he says that such intellectuals have moved closer to the proletariat and the "masses", even if the specific, "non-universal" problems they grapple with are often far removed from those of the masses. He gives two reasons for this (1980: 126): that the struggles in which specific intellectuals are engaged, are of a "real, material, everyday" nature, and that such intellectuals frequently



have to confront the same adversary as the proletariat, namely “the multinational corporations, the judicial and police apparatuses, the property speculators, etc.” Clearly, the example, above, of zoologists submitting a report which goes against the grain of the dominant discourse of “regional economic development”, is a case in point: their work is in the long-term interest of the working classes, even if it seems to undermine their short-term employment interests.

Zoologists such as these, as well as many other academics who are in the position to act as specific intellectuals, usually work at universities, of course; which brings me to a related issue. According to Foucault, since the demise of the universal intellectual in the guise of the writer, concomitant with ‘specific activity’ becoming the ground for politicization, specific intellectuals have been able to establish “lateral connections across different forms of knowledge” (1980: 127) – without relinquishing working within their own fields, they have been able to participate in a process of politicization of intellectuals at a global level by means of mutual exchange and assistance or support. In their powerful sequel to *Empire* (2001), namely, *Multitude* (2005: 236-237; 268-288), Hardt and Negri (who owe a lot to Foucault, intellectually speaking), too, note the way in which what they call the “multitude” – those people worldwide who are irreducibly different, and yet have something decisive in common, to wit, their opposition to the forces of Empire (the new, global sovereign power that rules the world at multiple levels, including the juridical, the economic, the political, social and cultural) – can and do form alliances, communication and support networks across the globe [6]. Foucault believes that it is this process which – no doubt partly because of the immense advances in global electronic communications technology – allows the academic (as specific intellectual) and the university to appear as “privileged points of intersection.” At the same time it provides the reason for what was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, namely the so-called “crisis of the university” – “...universities and education have become politically ultrasensitive areas” (1980: 127) – a development that constitutes a discursive barometer for what Foucault here calls the “multiplication and re-inforcement of their power-effects as centres in a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals.”

Perhaps one should add that, elsewhere (1980a and 1990), Foucault nuances his conception of the specific intellectual somewhat. In ‘Body/Power’ (1980a: 62), for instance, he denies the (no doubt specific) intellectual the role of “advisor”, attributing to him or her (specifically the “historian”) the function, instead, of providing the “instruments of analysis” for “a ramified, penetrative perception of the present, one that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organisation dating back over 150 years.” And, quite consonant with what he says in ‘Truth and Power’ (1980: 114) about the necessity of analyzing history in terms of the model of “war”, he adds, here, that the intellectual’s role is therefore a “topological and geological survey of the

battlefield...” In ‘Power and Sex’ (1990: 124) he amplifies this by remarking that he “dreams” of the intellectual who “doesn’t know exactly where he is heading nor what he will think tomorrow for he is too attentive to the present” – a description that seems to me to apply very well to Foucault himself (see Gutting 2005: 10-13). Clearly, in his attempt to get away from the all-too-familiar tendency, in western thought, to generalize, Foucault attributes to the (specific) intellectual the task of having to be attentive to the contingencies of the present – keeping in mind that, as “historian of the present”, it was always his self-imposed objective to unmask the claims to legitimacy of present practices as lacking legitimacy precisely in light of the contingency of the circumstances of their provenance (Gutting 2005: 10).

In ‘Power and Sex’ Foucault makes a number of observations that – keeping his characterization of the relation between the specific intellectual, truth and power in mind – are pertinent for the understanding of the power-effects that the valorization, in and through discourse, of a certain conception of truth can have. This, in turn, will put one in the position to ask similar questions concerning the power-effects of other kinds of truth, circulating in discourses other than those of sex, madness and imprisonment (explored by Foucault) – discourses, moreover, which have the function, in South Africa today, of exercising tremendous power in certain institutional contexts. Broadly, in this interview (focusing on the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*) Foucault attempts to explain that, far from wanting to write an encompassing history of ‘sexual behaviour’ through the ages, his own interest is rather in trying to understand the connection that has existed for centuries in western society between sex, the desire for truth, and the effects of power. In brief (Foucault 1990: 111):

“How has sexuality come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest “truth” is read and expressed? Since Christianity, the Western world has never ceased saying: “To know who you are, know what your sexuality is.” Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our “truth” as human subjects are decided.

He proceeds to draw a line between the Christian practice of confession – which was never simply a means of prohibition, but a way to link questions of salvation with the discursive production of a certain kind of power over human bodies – and distinctly modern discourses on children’s sexuality (starting at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), on homosexuality, women’s sexuality and on sexual liberation. Regarding the latter, he points to the paradox that, while ostensibly promoting the overcoming of repression and constraints on people’s sexual practices, that is, truly liberating individuals, the opposite is the case (parallel to the other discourses on sexuality referred to) (1990: 114):

This type of discourse is, indeed, a formidable tool of control and power. As always, it uses what people say, feel, and hope for. It exploits their temptation to believe that to be happy, it is enough to cross the threshold of discourse and to remove a few prohibitions. But in fact it ends up repressing and dispersing movements of revolt and liberation...

Here is the rub: whether a discourse ostensibly aims at protecting the human race from the putatively debilitating effects of children's masturbation, or against the 'sickness of the sexual instinct' as manifested in homosexuality, or against the illness-inducing presence of women's sexuality, or – by contrast – appears to promote the liberatory overcoming of hypocrisy and prohibition, it has productive effects of power; not merely of control, but also in the form of producing certain (sometimes new) modes of behaviour. And the important thing is further: it is "truth" of a certain kind, peculiar to a specific discourse, which induces these effects.

Given what Foucault says about the role of the specific intellectual today, and given the "politically sensitive" status of universities as "knowledge institutions" (South African universities being no exception), what does this mean for such intellectuals at South African universities? This question is all the more important, I believe, in light of two factors impinging on universities' autonomy – worldwide, but especially here, because of the compromising implications of the university funding formula in South Africa – the corporatization of universities, and, hand in hand with this, their bureaucratization. Keep in mind, against the backdrop of Foucault's work on discourse, truth and power, that the process of corporatization as well as of bureaucratization is articulated in powerful, state-sponsored or (at least) state-supported and approved discourses.

The corporatization of universities – here and elsewhere in the world – should be understood against the backdrop of the fact that, as Johann Rossouw (2006) has argued, in the present era the dominant societal sphere is the economic, with spheres like the religious and the political (each dominant in the western middle ages and the modern epoch, respectively) hierarchically subject to its priority status. What this means for universities is that, as spaces of learning, they, too, are subordinated to the current "master discourse" (explained below) of economics, and hence it should surprise no one that the vaunted autonomy of universities has made way for their economically-determined heteronomy. This development is signaled in the discourse of management, where vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, school directors and heads of academic departments are now referred to as CEOs, administrative and academic managers, or "line-managers." This reduces academics and students to mere resources, in order to maintain and strengthen the hegemonic economic system. Ultimately this process of

overhauling universities in the image of capital makes even the clutch of “managers” (school directors, deans, and so on) into mere functionaries of the new discursive régime. The important question, however – which is seldom asked with critical intent by disillusioned academics or by members of the public who may feel a justifiable sense of being somehow cheated – is whether a university as a place where the highest levels of teaching, learning and research are supposedly self-critically maintained, is capable of being such an institution if it is compromised by the economic imperatives which drive the transformation of universities today. The putatively free and open academic space of universities, where emancipatory epistemic and scientific practices would flourish, is effectively obliterated by coercing universities into the service of the economy. In South Africa universities are doubly compromised by the blatant reduction of its academic-intellectual function to economic criteria and by the always imminent government- “audit” (which is conducted by bureaucratic means and justified by an appeal to standardization masquerading as ‘standards’).

The bureaucratization of universities happens in tandem with their corporatization, and is symptomatic of the pact between the political sphere (governments) and the economic sphere, where the latter calls the shots in the present era (which does not have to be the case, as Joel Bakan points out; Bakan 2004: 161-167). One only has to read the specifications regarding, for example, ‘standards generation in higher education’ in the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework of South Africa* (HEQF 2007: 7), to gauge the extent of the “panoptic functioning” of this document for the generation of the kind of knowledge that the South African economy “needs” at this point in its development – and I put “needs” in brackets, because these are determined by the narrow technological developmental focus of the present government, and are designed to promote these at a discursive level. This is apparent from the “technical” description of the “generic competencies” required at the various levels of “cognitive complexity” as conceived of in the approach that governs the HEQF. What is not prioritized, namely the critical thinking capacity cultivated and promoted by the humanities (which cannot, by its very nature, be couched in such a “generic” discourse) is, in the long run, more conducive to an encompassing kind of development predicated on the consideration of the humanity of people, instead of their potential as mere resources for technological development. The way the process of promoting a certain kind of education via the discourses of corporatization and bureaucratization occurs, seems innocent, almost imperceptible – which is unsurprising, because since the advent of modernity, power has operated most effectively where it is virtually invisible (Foucault 1990: 118):

...power in the West is what displays itself the most, and thus what hides itself the best: what we have called “political life” since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the manner in

which power presents its image (a little like the court in the monarchic era). Power is neither there, nor is that how it functions. The relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body.

This is in accordance with the logic, delineated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, that prisons exist to hide the fact that we live in a carceral society. Referring to the “delinquent”, he says (1995: 301; 305-306- and note the pertinence of his characterization for what I have referred to as the bureaucratization of South African universities):

The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside [7] ... The prison is merely the natural consequence, no more than a higher degree, of that hierarchy laid down step by step.... We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the ‘social worker’-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power...

The carceral texture of society assures both the real capture of the body and its perpetual observation; it is, by its very nature, the apparatus of punishment that conforms most completely to the new economy of power and the instrument for the formation of knowledge that this very economy needs. Its panoptic functioning enables it to play this double role. By virtue of its methods of fixing, dividing, and recording, it has been one of the simplest, crudest, and also most concrete, but perhaps most indispensable conditions for the development of this immense activity of examination that has objectified human behaviour.

This state of affairs – no less so today, in postmodernity, than at the zenith of modernity – of which the increasingly “docile bodies” of academics under conditions of bureaucratization, and of consumers under advanced, differentiated capitalism are symptomatic, is reminiscent of the bodies of prisoners in the modern, panoptical prison described by Bentham in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and used as a model for subject-constitutive modes of surveillance in the modern epoch by Foucault (1995: 195-228; especially 200-207, and 226-228) in that exemplary genealogical study [8]. Hence the idea that our society is characterized by its “panopticism” –

the fact that the subjectivities of citizens in modern, and no less so in postmodern, societies are decisively shaped by a system of surveillance ranging from outright surveillance (such as closed circuit television security cameras in shopping malls and in ‘security complexes’, as well as Gatsometer, camera and radar devices to regulate traffic movement) to administrative, discourse-governed and -governing systems that continually tend towards full-blown bureaucracy, and which comprise no less of a “panoptical” system of control than the paradigmatic Panopticon conceived of by Bentham – with those who are subject to it, whether in managerial or in worker-capacity, subjectivizing themselves by monitoring their own behaviour docilely in accordance with the behaviour-structuring, discursive operation of administrative systems.

The cratological-panoptical workings of those administrative-governmental, as well as university-managerial discourses ostensibly aimed at “generating” and maintaining scientific and “intellectual” standards at South African universities function no differently from what has been outlined and discussed with reference to Foucault’s examination of the links between discourse, truth and power, on the one hand, and that between panoptical-discursive surveillance techniques and the tendency to regulate bodily behaviour in such a way that bodies, whether those of soldiers or of academics, display a certain “docility” (see Foucault 1995: 135-169; especially *The control of activity* – pp. 149-156) – a “tendency”, because, as Foucault as well as other poststructuralists such as Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Derrida have convincingly argued, every subject has the ability to adopt a counter-discursive position vis-à-vis the tendency to be “spoken by” a dominant discourse (Foucault 1990: 115; Olivier 2003). Mary Schmelzer (1993) has demonstrated admirably how such a counter-discursive practice can be developed in the interstices of the panoptical pedagogic spaces of an American university, and there is no reason why it cannot be done at South African universities as well. Schmelzer describes the functioning of the panoptical-discursive apparatus subtly and accurately, in so far as it resonates with anyone who has experience of American universities, but also with South African academics in so far as it holds a mirror up to what the latter are experiencing today. From her evocation (1993: 128-132) of the insidious manner in which the apparently innocuous (and well-intentioned) fulfillment of her duties by the administrative assistant (in the department where Schmelzer teaches) activates, extends and reinforces the panoptical discursive régime in terms of which the institution functions, to the enumeration of the multiple levels and ways in which the disciplining of (especially academic) staff members and students operates, her account is a familiar and chilling reminder that no one working in an university system today can escape the discursive-panoptical gaze that exacts its price in numerous ways. This includes the determination of pedagogic norms through, for example, the uniform length of semesters and lectures (which, as Schmelzer points out, presupposes that intellectual work is performed at the same rate in every discipline by all students; 1993: 129). The individual academic staff

member is constituted in the convergence of superficially different, but metonymically connected and mutually reinforcing discourses. This happens through the filling-in of forms (pertaining to the use of photostat-copying machines, or to the recording of students's marks and attendance, among many such functions), reports and evaluations on academics from students, from colleagues, from departmental heads, school directors, and from deans (Schmelzer 1993: 131-132).

What is the academic, who is also a specific intellectual, to do then? Is she or he doomed to be no more than the normalized power-effect of panoptical discourses within the institutions where they teach and do research? It is significant that Schmelzer cites Foucault saying (quoted in 1993: 134) – in a conversation with Gilles Deleuze – to the effect that the specific intellectual can “sap power in an activity conducted along side [sic] those who struggle for power”, and then explains that:

This strategy allows the intellectual to engage in a struggle to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices while seeming to use those practices. What he encourages is local resistance to an essentialist agenda, accomplished by continuous critique, showing that things must be reconfigured in uncentered, unclosed, uncomfortable discourses that [quoting Foucault again:] “show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that that which is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.”

To give a more concrete embodiment to Foucault's strategic remarks, she proceeds to describe her own strategy of practising as a specific intellectual within the institution where she works. She starts by asking how she can “resist and survive” (1993: 134), and suggests that the development of “strategies” that can “be read in multiple ways from multiple surveillance positions might be a beginning.” From the examples she gives it appears that the kind of recording (of grades or marks) prioritized by the system hides several practices on her part which are not promoted by it, for instance that the exercises performed by the students were done so collaboratively, instead of individually (which the system supposes). Nor do the administrative records required by the university show the kind of questions she asks the students, which “call into question” their “expectations”, in this way causing a certain (no doubt wholesome) discomfort on their part. “Beating the system at its own game changes the game”, and students who “...take these critical questions seriously...begin to reshape their world and their panoptic position”, she points out (Schmelzer 1993: 134, 135). Her aim is to practice a kind of pedagogy that will enable students to see things from a different perspective than that dictated by the educational system, finally being able

to identify the system itself and, in the process, “disrupt the circulation of power” (1993: 135). Schmelzer sees herself and other would-be intellectuals as having to “...continue resistance at productive margins” in teaching as well as research, because (1993: 136):

...if resistant critique is to effect changes in the power operations of the network we inhabit, each of us must find ways to continue to work despite the monitoring, measuring, and the subtle power relations that constrain serious rethinking of what it means to teach or to learn.

Having reconstructed Foucault’s argument concerning the strategic role of the intellectual in the face of hegemonic panoptic-discursive power relations in some detail, fleshed out by Schmelzer’s example of such a resistant strategy, I would like to give a brief overview of the Lacanian counterpart of discourse in its multiple etiological effects and relations, because of the typological nuances that Lacan brings to an understanding of the manner in which discourse functions.

Lacan talks about the “production of the four discourses” – those of the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst. These may be conceived of as four different kinds of discursive operation of language, each of which constitutes and structures both the subject and social reality differently in etiological terms – that is, structurally as far as identity and interpersonal or social power relations are concerned. In Seminar 17 – The other side of psychoanalysis; 1969-1970 (Lacan 2007: 13), discourse is presented as something by means of which several ‘stable relations’ are established, and within which “conduct” or “acts” can be “inscribed” as within a kind of “framework” of “primordial statements.” He refers to psychoanalytic experience, where one encounters such ‘stable relations’ in the form of the superego, for instance. The superego, in so far as it is recognizable as a psychic structure of authority and subjugation by which the subject’s actions are constrained may be regarded as an exemplary instantiation of the operation of discourse in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms.

How do the four discourses differ (see Fink 1997: 129-136; Bracher 1994: 115-126)? The discourse of the master – to which Lacan gives priority – implies that the subject is first constituted by its (nonsensical) subjection to language or the master signifier, which alienates it irreversibly from the “real” (the register or sphere that surpasses language) by introducing a split into it, in this way constituting the lacking subject, divided between consciousness and unconsciousness. However, the master’s discourse systematically hides or represses the unconscious “knowledge” of its incompleteness – it shows no interest in knowledge as such; as long as things “work.” The discourse of the master is the discourse of power (that of neo-liberal capitalism, in the present era), which, unlike its servant discourse, the discourse of the university, is



not concerned with knowledge, but simply with whether the system of dominant power relations works.

The university discourse represents the slave (whose knowledge serves the master), and is predicated on the attainment of knowledge, but knowledge putatively of a specific kind, namely systematic, factual or encyclopaedic knowledge regarded as being, in principle, certain, and “completeable.” As such, it operates to undergird the discourse of the master in so far as the latter claims unquestionable power – one finds here an acknowledgement, on Lacan’s part, consonant with Foucault’s insights, that the university as an institution more often than not serves the dominant powers of the age.

The discourse of the hysteric instantiates that epistemic position from which the master’s discourse (and by implication that of the university) is relentlessly questioned concerning the justifiability of its claims. Interestingly, Lacan associates this – the hysteric’s discourse, and not, as one may expect, that of the university – with authentic science, because the questioning of the master’s discourse by the hysteric’s represents the structural “uncertainty” or indeterminacy at the heart of science, as exemplified by Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle in quantum mechanics (Fink 1997: 133-134). Needless to say, this insight dispels the illusory claims and aspirations of the master’s as well as the university’s discourse, by uncovering a logic which limits, and therefore subverts all claims to the justifiability of unconditional power, and to the presumed wholeness of “knowledge” from within. This explains why Lacan increasingly identified the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of science (Fink 1997: 133).

The discourse of the analyst indicates that discursive position from which the subject’s certainties (its master signifiers) are symptomatically decoded as being indicative of its desire – in other words, the analyst’s discourse, representing the “real” (the traumatic impact of which requires the reconfiguration of one’s symbolic horizon), mediates between the subject’s explicit claims (whether these belong to the university’s discourse or to the hysteric’s) and its repressed or hidden desire, in the process uncovering the master signifiers driving the subject, and submitting them to a relativizing dialectic by implying that the subject is never “master” of her or his discourse. Bracher (1994: 123-124) reminds one, however, that for Lacan the analyst’s discourse does not enable one to break with the master’s discourse once and for all, the decisive difference being that, instead of being subordinated to master signifiers imposed from the outside, the subject learns to “produce” them her- or himself. The analyst’s discourse therefore functions paradoxically to rid the subject of the implicit claims to authoritativeness and completeness of the discourses of the master and the university, while acknowledging the inescapable need, on the subject’s part, to be temporarily empowered in order to act. The analyst’s discourse therefore enables the subject to resist the illusion of conclusive empowerment by master signifiers and final enlightenment by their servant, the university

discourse, in the place of which he or she is encouraged to settle for knowledge that is open-ended and revisable.

It should not be difficult to understand the discourses (bureaucracy and corporatism) which are shaping university administration, and through the latter, teaching as well as research, as representatives of the “discourse of the master”, in Lacanian terms. And in so far as those disciplines or sciences taught at university are predicated on “systematic unity” and “certainty”, and are conceived of as serving the interests of the community and of society, they represent the “discourse of the university” (which upholds the hegemonic powers). The specific intellectual, in so far as he or she questions and subverts the hegemonic discourses from within the system, corresponds to the “discourse of the hysteric”, but – if Lacan is correct – this activity requires the mediation of the “discourse of the analyst”, which provides an interpretive indication of what desire it is that drives the hysteric’s (the intellectual’s) questioning, in the process also reminding her or him that the temporary or intermittent appropriation of master signifiers is unavoidable if the cratological terrain is to be shifted, however gradually, from the margins in a temporarily desirable, but revisable direction.

Given the preceding analysis, mainly by means of powerfully explanatory insights on Foucault’s part (because, apart from understanding, a certain causality is involved here), and partly via the modulation of these cratological insights in Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, is there any reason for those academics who practice as specific intellectuals to hope that their ‘strategic’ activity (in the Foucaultian, not the Habermasian sense) will eventually lead to a situation where their intellectual-academic work will be liberated to the extent that intellectual work would be “directly” translatable into emancipatory action, not just on the part of individuals working within academia, but on the part of people – the masses, the proletariat, the “multitude” (as Hardt and Negri describes it)? I’m afraid not. Not because freedom is something which is never experienced; it is, even if only momentarily, in what Lacan calls “the revolutionary’s choice: freedom or death” (Copjec 2002 ); rather, it is because, if Foucault and other poststructuralist thinkers are right (and I believe they are), one is never outside of countervailing power relations in society, which means that, ineluctably, one is always enmeshed in multi-layered, overlapping grids of discourses that function in an ambivalent manner to enable and, simultaneously control, direct, disseminate and domesticate human action and behaviour. Nowhere has Foucault mapped this multiple function(s) of discourse in a more condensed, suggestive, and programmatic fashion than in his inaugural lecture (at the College de France), titled *The Order of Discourse* (translated as *The Discourse on Language*; 1972). What Foucault shows here, is that – in accordance with what I tried to unpack concerning his conception of the relations between truth (or knowledge), discourse and power – at best one’s striving for freedom (which always presupposes the quasi-transcendental human condition of being free and not-free, spoken

by discourse and able to challenge this very discourse) is articulated within a network of strategic relations and tactical moves, themselves made possible in accordance with the mechanisms regulated by a number of distinct, but overlapping principles with a double function, namely to allow discourses to operate in a productive manner, but simultaneously to control them – in a manner analogous to Lacan's distinction between the *moi* and the *je*, or the ego and the "I", where the former functions as a locus of limitation and stability for the 'spoken' subject, while the latter marks the un-objectifiable position from where the subject speaks.

A skeletal reconstruction of "The Order of Discourse" (Foucault 1972) would look as follows (and enable one to locate the discourses of corporatization and bureaucratization on the grid thus outlined, just as they were located at the levels of the master's and the university's discourses in the framework provided by Lacan's four discourses): Foucault intimates that there are several principles that serve to control what would otherwise be a fearsome proliferation, in the guise of "ponderous materiality", of discourses in society. These principles are classified under three main headings, which are themselves further subdivided into several groups (three under the first and second heading, and four under the last). The three main headings, and their subdivisions are: Principles or rules of exclusion (including prohibition, the division between reason and unreason or madness, and the opposition between truth and falsity); internal rules of control, or principles for classification, ordering and distribution (including commentary, the author and disciplines); and lastly, rules for the conditions of employment or application of discourse (including ritual, fellowships of discourse, doctrine and social appropriations of discourse, for example education). What makes Foucault's programmatic explication of these principles – which operate in every society in a very complex manner – so compelling, is his paradigmatically poststructuralist articulation of discursive-linguistic structures which, because they are invariably productive of power-relations, impart a stable, if dizzyingly complex web or grid for understanding social and political relations, and at the same time intimate that these structures are, at a diachronic level, changing all the time in their specificity. In this way he accommodates both stability and change, being and becoming. (This, by the way, gives the lie to those commentators who have insisted that poststructuralist thinkers like Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Kristeva and Deleuze are beyond the pale as far as rationality is concerned, decrying their work as being simply "irrational." In fact their work is a multifaceted and complex interweaving or analysis, exploration and elaboration of those aspects of human life and subjectivity that strike one as being paradoxical or aporetic, and hence is predicated on a differentiated conception of rationality.)

Hence, for instance, "prohibition" (1972: 216) has always operated in every society, but in a manner that displays an evolution and cultural specificity all its own. Similarly – and here the paradoxical nature of the way these principles function is clearly apparent – "commentary"

(1972: 220-221) functions in relation to what is regarded in every culture or different cultural domains (such as literature, science, philosophy and religion) as “fundamental texts”, but in such a way that it is premised on the assumption that no commentary (for example the Talmud) on such a text (here, the Torah) can say anything that is, strictly speaking, new in the sense of not being contained in the fundamental text already. But if this were the case, no commentary would be necessary, and yet, such commentaries flourish in relation to fundamental texts. Moreover, although this distinction between commentaries and fundamental texts remains intact in every era, from time to time what was regarded as a commentary before, shifts into the position of a fundamental text which, in its turn elicits commentaries; Derrida’s “commentary” on Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry* (Derrida 1978), which is an early articulation of deconstruction, would be a representative example.

For present purposes the most conspicuously relevant part of Foucault’s “The Order of Discourse” is one of the principles specified under rules for the conditions of employment of discourse, namely ‘social appropriations of discourse’, of which Foucault (1972: 227) specifically names education. It is significant that he elaborates on it as follows (1972: 227):

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it.

Hence, one could say that in the present era, bureaucracy, through its systematic, encompassing implementation, provides or imposes the “rules for the conditions of employment” and application of all those discourses that comprise university education. Moreover, corporatist discourse, although not essential to bureaucracy (which could operate just as well under fascist, or under socialist conditions), contingently, in the present era, fulfills a legitimating function regarding the former.

Is it at all still possible, in the light of these compelling thoughts on the part of one of the most innovative thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to doubt whether universities, as educational institutions, play a crucial role in the “maintenance” or “modification” of the manner in which different discourses are “appropriated” – through increasing bureaucratization, which happens to be tacitly complicit with the principles of corporatization – with undeniable cratological or political consequences? Apart from the possibility that always remains for the specific intellectual, namely to use the resources of the system to destabilize it through

questioning, undermining assumptions of self-evidence, and so on (as Schmelzer, using Foucault's work, has shown), could one, through the employment of a certain kind of discourse, mitigate what might otherwise be the irresistible disciplining cratological effects of all these discursive networks within which one is inescapably enmeshed? I believe that one could, and there is more than one such discourse or discursive ensemble available to one – one of which has already been discussed, namely Lacan's theory of the four discourses, where the relation between the hysteric's discourse, the analyst's discourse, and those of the university and the master provide one with an opportunity to negotiate the terrain of subjection to power in an innovative way (Schmelzer's critical practice being a case in point). The other discourse I would like to consider briefly here, is that of Heidegger's "fourfold", given its potentially mitigating power-effects as a touchstone or set of criteria of sorts, for ascertaining whether an institution, a discursive régime, a specific political organization of society, a distinctive social or cultural way of life, an architectural or art-work, can be regarded as being able to accommodate, or allow room for, what may be called a truly human existence – one where the being-human of human beings is not obliterated by dehumanizing discourses such as those of bureaucracy and of the corporation (see Bakan 2004).

Heidegger's concept of the "fourfold" (1975:149-151) [9] comprises the interrelated concepts: "earth", "sky", "mortals" and "divinities" which, together, according to Heidegger, comprise the indispensable means of orientation in the world for human beings. This means that, if one or more of these are absent as "markers" to determine one's "place" in the world, one would not be able to claim that one is living a truly "human" life, which is why he remarks that the four together comprise "a simple oneness." "Earth" denotes just that, but in the most archetypal sense conceivable: the earth as condition of the possibility of life, including human life, but also as that which resolutely resists humans' penetrating, objectifying (and ultimately violating) scrutiny. It is the 'serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal" (1975: 149). The 'sky' is the "vault" that is the matrix of seasonal blessings as well as inclemency, but it simultaneously marks the limit that reminds humans of their finitude. "Mortals" are humans whose nature is to be "capable of death" (1975: 151), and "divinities" are the "messengers of the godhead" (1975: 150), who are awaited in hope by mortals, whether they reveal or conceal themselves.

The American Heidegger scholar, Karsten Harries (1997:159-162), provides a lucid, insightful interpretation of this concept, and not only reminds one that the "earth" as the "given", or as "material transcendence", is a "gift" uncreated by human understanding, and which, as such, limits the "world" or sphere of intelligibility, but he further points out that what "opens" humans to "earth" in this sense, is the body, and urges one to remember that (1975: 159):

...the embodied self is a caring, desiring self. To be in the presence of the earth is inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Earth thus...refers to the elusive affective ground without which all talk of essences, meaning, values, or divinities is ultimately groundless, merely idle talk.

In other words, that which limits “world” - the cultural, linguistic space of a tradition - is the earth or “ground” which moves humans as affective, caring, desiring beings in the first place to articulate their desires, fears and projects, and these articulations belong to the open cultural space of what Heidegger earlier (see note 8) referred to as “world.” The “earth” is therefore that which affects the human, embodied self. Seen in this way, “earth” is, despite its inscrutability, ultimately inscribed as such in language (in an encompassing sense, which includes “discourse”) as that which enables humans to traverse the realm of openness or “world.”

Harries’s (1997:160) elaboration on “sky” reminds one that, in addition to what Heidegger says about it, it is metaphorically linked to the awareness that humans are able to surpass the “here and now”, that they are always “ahead of” or “beyond” themselves. This, says Harries, is partly what the spiritual dimension of being human entails. This is a reminder of Heidegger’s contention, in *Being and Time* (1978: 458), that humans are not merely characterized by “thrownness”, but also by “projection”, even if they further tend to be subject to “falling.” “Projection” here means the ineradicable capacity of individuals to appropriate a given situation and transform or elaborate on it creatively, even if the tendency to fall back into the comfort zone of tradition and custom – or, one may add, of valorized discourses such as those of bureaucracy and capitalism – always exercises its gravitational pull on them. Hence, “sky” suggests the creative ability to renew or transform cultural traditions or the “normalizing” discourses surrounding one in the face of their inherent tendency to regulate one’s life in a carceral manner.

Harries (1997:160) rightly connects “mortals” with Heidegger’s earlier analysis, in *Being and Time*, of Dasein’s resolute acceptance of its death as a prerequisite for an “authentic” existence. As long as one does not make peace with ageing and everything that accompanies it, one is also never free to live a culturally or intellectually creative life. Succinctly put: accepting one’s mortality liberates one for “adding one’s verse” to the ongoing drama of the tradition, as the fictional Mr Keating in Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society* would say (see Olivier 2002).

Heidegger’s “divinities” – as Harries (p.160-161) observes, the most problematical of the “fourfold”, given the secularism of the present age – nevertheless points, for Heidegger, to the deepest source of meaning for humans. Not, to be sure, the god or “God” of any specific tradition, but precisely the divine as unknown, because naming it violates, for Heidegger, what is essential about “...the many-voiced ground of all

meaning and value” (Harries 1997:161). If this is what the term “divinities” ultimately denotes, it is the deepest source of all cultural activities and practices on the part of humans, including the cultural practice of teaching and conducting research at universities.

What is the relevance of Heidegger’s discourse on the “fourfold” for this inquiry into the relation between truth, power, intellectuals and universities? Just this: if the present growth in panoptical-discursive regulation, via bureaucratization and corporatization of universities in South Africa and elsewhere, were not to be evaluated in terms of a discourse such as Foucault’s on power, truth and discourse, or Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, or Heidegger’s on the “fourfold”, the majority of academics are likely to be fully assimilated by these dominant discourses, with no means to conduct, as specific intellectuals, the ambivalent kind of subversion of the system (from within) for its own sake, and for the sake of the academics and students whose intellectual lives are immeasurably impoverished by the hegemony in question. All academics are, in principle, capable of acting as specific intellectuals by introducing, not merely critical thinking, but critical practice, into the academic spaces that they traverse, for the sake of preserving the being-human of human beings. All we have to fear, is fear itself, as Franklin Delano Roosevelt once remarked.

## NOTES

1. The notion of an “intellectual” has a history in the thinking of various philosophers, some of whom are and were intellectuals themselves – including Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky (probably the best known “public intellectual” today, given his widely publicised criticism of American foreign policy), and, to my mind an exemplary, uncompromising public intellectual, the African-American philosopher-theologian and activist, Cornel West (see Said 1994; Yancy 2001; Chomsky 2007). Here I shall be concentrating on Foucault’s conception of different kinds of intellectuals. In South Africa today one notices with concern the growth of a public “atmosphere” increasingly hostile to the free democratic activity of criticism exercised by intellectuals in the sense that I will be using the term in this paper – something that manifests itself in institutions like some universities adopting a “media policy” which severely restricts academics as far as public statements (in the media) are concerned. It is not difficult for intellectuals to circumvent this, of course, in a country that (still) has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, by couching their criticism, as it should be done, in terms of disciplined (and discipline-oriented) academic freedom and against the backdrop of the freedom of expression protected by the constitution. As the South African intellectual, Siphosiso Seepe, recently (on 17 October 2007) said at a seminar presented at the Central University of Technology of the Free State, SA, it astonishes him that people congratulate him on being “courageous” in his published criticism of the ANC government, because

it should not require courage to criticize freely and responsibly in a democracy. I have experienced the same thing on occasion, when I criticized merger procedures at the university where I teach because of demonstrably “dehumanizing” practices (Olivier 2006).

2. See in this regard Foucault’s inaugural lecture, published as ‘The Discourse on Language’, where he points to the example of Mendel in Biology (1972: 224), whose work was initially ignored (despite being accepted at a later stage, within a scientific context that had changed sufficiently to “register” his work) because it was not “within the true” – that is, within the discursive régime that could accommodate its truth-claims.

3. Although the two concepts have something in common, in so far as both represent a fundamental, tacit conception of what is to count as knowledge, underpinning the work of a number of scientists, they differ in some respects. See Gutting (2005: 7-9) for an illuminating discussion of the differences between Foucault, his mentor Canguilhem and the “standard Anglo-American view” (including Kuhn’s) on the relations between concepts (and their history), theories and systems of concepts (*epistemes*). See also Olivier (1984) for a thoroughgoing examination of the logical structure of a Kuhnian paradigm.

4. One way in which this becomes apparent is in the many interviews that were conducted with Foucault during his lifetime – where the interviewers’ questions elicit responses from Foucault that cover precisely such a variegated terrain. Another is via the biographies written on him – see Macey (1994) and Miller (1994).

5. See Kovel (2002: 91-92) on this virtually unrepresentable complexity of the global ecosystem.

6. See Olivier (2007) for a discussion of this aspect of Hardt and Negri’s work.

7. Strikingly, Brett Easton Ellis, in his novel, *American Psycho* (1991), describes a yuppie consumerist society where sheer ennui in the face of the monodimensional materialistic desert of designer clothes, designer cosmetics, designer drugs and – unavoidably, it seems, because they are merely the logical consequence of consumerist behaviour which reduces everything, including humans, to mere commodities – designer murders comprises a similar carceral domain from which there is no escape. Significantly, Ellis ends the novel with the words, which are both intra-diegetically and extra-textually valid: “This is not an exit.”

8. For an investigation of a paradigmatic fictional account of ubiquitous postmodern, electronically mediated modes of surveillance, supplemented by a discourse-analytical reading of the panoptic-discursive effects on subjects of sex-advice columns in contemporary glossy magazines, see Olivier (1997).

9. On previous occasions (see Olivier 1998 and 2003a) I elaborated on the “fourfold” in the context of the pertinence of Heidegger’s thought for architecture, and for a specific instance of installation art, respectively. In the former (1998) I look at an earlier work



as well, namely “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in which Heidegger first introduces the concept of “earth” in the sense that it bears here, as well as its counterpart, namely “world.”

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**CHAPTER III**

**THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL  
IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT:  
NAMING THE PRESENT**

*GABRIEL MASSI*

**PREFACE**

The introductory remarks in this year's BBC's Reith lectures [1] are instrumental in the shape that this paper has taken. At the first lecture, the chair, Ms. Sue Lawley, welcomes her audience to the Royal Society in London, a place that was founded in 1660, and where "great minds have gathered to discuss important scientific issues of the day..." It is here, she continues, that this year's lecturer, "a man who believes that we need a new enlightenment [2] to solve many of the world's problems" [...] and who "is not afraid to put his theories to the test ... will be explaining how he believes that with global cooperation our resources can be harnessed to create a more equal and harmonious world. If we cannot achieve this, he says, we will face catastrophe; we'll simply be overwhelmed by disease, hunger, pollution, and the clash of civilizations" [3].

The choice of this introduction to preface this paper is deliberate, since I believe the role of a public intellectual in any context to be that of naming the present and that which this present entails, [4] the task effectively carried out by Jeffrey Sachs in the lectures referred to above [5]. As a public intellectual, he addresses himself to the need for change that beckons our world for its very survival on the threshold of this third millennium: change in the way the world's resources are shared, change in the running of our institutions, change of how we relate to one another, and most importantly, on how, together, we manage our crowded planet. In short, change is at the heart of any major choices that our planet embarks upon in order to move it to its next phase. In other words, change is the grid permitting the deciphering of the world, to quote Jean-Marc Ela, a well-known African theologian and sociologist [6].

History is instructive on the issue of change as it sheds light on how previous generations have managed to preserve our planet in its current form, even without the technological advantages now at our disposal. We will do well to learn from history if we are to conscientiously manage change constructively at the dawn of this new century.

**INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, therefore, I will begin by briefly naming the general

contemporary challenges characteristic of the twenty-first century that Africa faces, and then zeroing in on a particular issue and assess it more closely in its appropriate framework. At this point I would maintain that the choice of, and clarity in, methods adopted by a public intellectual in elucidating any given situation are largely decisive on its subsequent success or failure. Facts testify to the substantial attention Africa has received, and continues to receive, by experts from both within and without, but with a limited amount of success [7]. Why? It is the question that comes to mind immediately and repeatedly. Although theories compete on this front, it is crucial to point out and prioritize relevant themes that are vital in devising a clear way of dealing with issues adequately, and perhaps search for what might be the missing element in the methodologies used thus far.

What, therefore, are likely to be the conditions for the methods adopted to successfully begin to address the fundamentals of a given problem? The understanding of the audience at various levels of appreciation and penetration of realities will certainly play a significant role in solving this puzzle. This element, it seems to me, may be the turning point regarding all, if not most African situations, for, unless one feels they are part, and tangibly contribute, to the solution of a problem they may never own it. In my opinion, public intellectuals will make a significant contribution to the African situations if they are able to provide the practitioners in the field with a clear guideline [8].

I should hasten to mention here already that contextual and global are two juxtaposed qualifiers of a growing currency that inevitably hover over appraisal of any extant realities. Both are crucial and integral to analyses required in most of our contemporary situations. One can cogently argue as it is increasingly the case that the interconnectedness of our world is an actuality that any of us in this generation can only deny at our own peril [9]. In a similar vein, it is in our interest—all of us inhabiting this global village—to look out for one another, for failure in that will certainly guarantee a communal path to destruction. Thus, for this reason leaving any tenuous link on this planet untended should never be a warranted option. It is therefore encouraging to note that presently we already are, or are gradually becoming increasingly, aware of this reality. But if that is so, there is also overwhelmingly contradicting evidence on what is actually happening on the ground: the expended effort on many fronts is hardly matched with concrete gains on their opposite ends. Let me now turn to the contemporary challenges to Africa.

### **SOME OF THE MAJOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN AFRICA**

Although it is evident that Africa has her share of the world's challenges, the growing global nature of our realities is such that these problems not only threaten to engulf Africa, but indeed our entire planet [10]. As it has been argued persuasively elsewhere it is neither Fascism,

Cold War, nuclear demons, nor even War on Terror that threaten to wipe out our generation from the planet, but rather a failure to learn to live peacefully and sustainably in an extraordinarily crowded world [11]. For as it is further held, this planet is bursting at the seams in human terms, in economic terms, and ecological terms [12]. The survival of its inhabitants will depend on how best they are able to live side by side as they face a common ecological challenge. If this wish brings home a serious invitation to re-think our relations to one another and towards the earth, the reality on the ground, however, is starkly different as parts of our world still wallow in an untold poverty, and the effects of global warming threateningly stare us in the eye.

Poverty, however, is hardly a new subject in Africa, although it has soared in the recent past when viewed against the background of the current situation in the world [13]. Arguably, poverty is not a property of Africa alone, but one will be well advised to note that poverty is more rampant and extreme in Africa than elsewhere. Africa has the following four problems: low food production, disease ecology, deficient infrastructure, and burgeoning populations [14]. But the current arguments that poverty can be eradicated by 2025 [15] leave me rather pessimistic. Is it not an open secret, for example, that Julius Nyerere, a public intellectual of a renowned caliber, devised and enacted his *Ujamaa* policy in 1967 to rid the Tanzanians of this evil, together with its siblings, ignorance and disease? And yet forty years on, Tanzania has little to show in this respect, [16] although she has succeeded elsewhere [17]. It is here, I believe, that one needs to summon a radical transformation in people's mentality if a dent is to be made on this challenge.

Aquiline Tarimo and Paulin Manwelo flesh out this problem in concrete terms as it is applicable to the African contexts, thus complementing and enriching its preceding counterparts. In their analysis, poverty is directly juxtaposed to the disorders and conflicts that Africa has endured, and in which it continues to swim. They single out the following causes: disintegration of value systems, deterioration of political institutions, and the scramble for inadequate resources as decisive in understanding the current African situation, which is generally described as economically poor [18]. To this view, I will add that poverty, conflicts, development, and peace are intricately linked to one another, and that a close study of these elements may help clarify some of the challenges that Africa faces. In this case, it is helpful to engage what was commonly at the center of traditional methods, and placing them side by side with their contemporary counterparts, attempt a line of thought that may offer a viable solution.

In brief, one can convincingly argue that efforts to improve African situations by way of research and practical implementation are not lacking. But if so, why does the picture still remain somber for the most part? It seems to me that we need to look elsewhere if we are to address these situations in their present standings in order to put this continent on track to a new future. I believe that that task lies in one element – change.

**CHANGE**

The immediate paragraphs have raised serious challenges on a wide range of issues on the African landscape which, I believe, leave us with something to reflect on. These concerns should put the intellectuals with mettle in search of better, effective and lasting solutions to these matters, for simply naming them – as important as this is – is not enough; as this has already been done from almost every possible, conceivable angle [19]. It seems to me that a simple reality, so simple that most of you are likely to dismiss it at first hearing as naïve and unrealistic, may hold the key to most of our contexts. I wish to argue in the rest of this paper that, in addition to naming the present, a public intellectual should show how change is a necessary response to realities bedeviling this continent. In my view, if we do not wish to find ourselves in our present situation or worse eight or eighteen years down the road, that is, 2015 and 2025 (the two United Nations landmarks set at 2000 as the targets for attaining the eight millennium development goals and eradicating poverty respectively) then we need to engage the issue of change seriously.

I will here single out two approaches to change: that which affects persons whether taken individually or collectively and that which affects our resources.

By way of entering into this problematic, let me return to the mythical parents of humanity as rendered by Arnold Toynbee in his classic, *A Study of History* [20]. The fall of Adam and Eve from grace, he argues, led to their expulsion from what seemed to be an integral reality. Ipso facto, they are faced with a serious new reality. The choice they make will certainly determine whether they perish or survive. Their choice to work for their continued existence, as well as procreate, led to two geneses of civilizations: Abel the keeper of sheep and Cain the tiller of the ground. We will never know what the fate of humanity would have been had either flinched on this test of facing a new reality. Rendering the same story even more dramatically, a student of the physical environment of human life compares it to a band of naked, houseless, fireless savages who start from their warm home in torrid zones and push steadily northward from the beginning of the cold season to the end of warm season. The discovery of new realities (e.g. extraordinarily cold seasons) along this way surprises them. As it grows worse with time, their immediate reaction is a raw escape: some going southward, but only a handful returning to their former home, there resuming their old life, without much of a change. The rest, who wander in different directions, all perish except one small band. Faced with this reality of destruction, they are led to invention through various ways: finding shelter underground, improvisation of bedding, and housing through tree branches and leaves, while others wrap themselves in the skins of the beasts that they have just slain. As a result, the following realities are sprung into existence: the naked are clothed; the homeless are sheltered, fire as a means for keeping warmth is discovered, etc. They therefore

subsist where at first they thought they were doomed [21]. From then on humans have been catapulted into constant changes, and they have had to improvise often in order to survive, but improvisation should open the way to a more concerted effort.

Interestingly, we find in our historical [22], as well as contemporary literature, immense treasures which may shed light on how some intellectuals have described the turn of events in various contexts. A limited selection is in order here: *Black Skin, White Masks* is deemed instructive on this aspect; so are various novels on the African writer's series, for example, *No Longer at Ease*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, or *Mine Boy* [23]. The heroes of these novels seem to be caught unaware by the unprecedented changes unleashed on their lives, leaving them at the mercy of their situations. In the case of Obi Okonkwo, for instance, he succumbs to corruption, not because as Mr. Green in the novel concludes that the "African is corrupt through and through" [24], but rather because he fails to process change, thus landing himself and his future plans into a ditch. Samba Diallo is adeptly portrayed, struggling with the issue of identity when he is faced with a new influence brought on him by western education, but he emerges somehow successful, but not before immense struggles on his part.

Other responses to change have been described in various ways. Some critics focus on blaming Africa's current problems on such human tragedies as slave-trade, colonialism, destruction of traditional values by external forces that the African was subjected to, apartheid, and neo-colonialism. As a victim, therefore, Africa is to be remunerated financially in terms of debt cancellations [25] and the like if it is to take off the ground.

Thinkers such as Axelle Kabou, George Ayittey and others have been highly critical of such tactics as feigning powerlessness, coupled with mediocrity, or returning to ideological trends as ways of managing change in some African milieus [26].

Another response to change is seen in the contemporary phenomenon of the exodus en masse of the African intellectuals to the West. Poor governance, mismanaged common good, abuse of human rights, poor educational facilities, etc., are listed as the major causes for this reaction.

Still one can observe another important way of managing change. Corruption and its subsequent flight of capital to foreign accounts is seen as a way of "allaying fears" and "securing a future" by a good number of those who are well placed in the managing of the common good. Closely linked to this development is the allure to politics of the class of experts, such as university professors, medical doctors, and from other specialized fields. For an uninterested observer, this should pass for a laudable move. But a closer look would seem to reveal a new trend that is largely driven by greed. Unfortunately, what could have otherwise been exploited to cure many ills of the African societies, such as the skills of doctors or other

experts, is, instead, being used to perpetuate the plunder of the limited resources, thus plunging most of our people to a pathetic existence [27].

One can also mention here the tendencies to revert to traditional values and applying them wholesale to the realities of the twenty-first century, as a way of responding to contemporary challenges. With the coming of globalization, this trend seemed to have switched course, first to denial and then to destructive reactions. Also, we have seen in the recent past the rehashed and precipitated attempts to create half-baked mechanisms, such as attempts to create a United States of Africa, modeled on the United States of America, as a way out of complex social and economic woes increasingly decimating this continent [28].

I am aware though that this reaction to change, the reversion to traditional values, is not simply a case of greed, although the latter plays an important role in it. Rather, my intention has been to show by this and other examples how change has been handled in the negative. Perhaps another trend with a more positive touch will offer a different picture on how change has been managed constructively.

One such assessment of change was brilliantly spearheaded by the first Tanzanian president, the late Julius Nyerere. Faced with the challenges of independence, growing poverty, and the world order at the time, he sought to invest in people through education, and used the Swahili language as a unifying tool, thus molding the Tanzanians into a strong entity. Even if only his efforts reached only partial success, there is no gainsaying that his firm purpose remains one of the lasting legacies to change that Africa is proud of today [29]. It is a foundation which can gainfully offer a springboard to solid institutions that are so necessary for a stable and prosperous road to progress.

Also, the propulsion of Nelson Mandela to *Madiba* is reflected in his versatility to favorably devise ways to change from the struggle of independence to which he staked his own life, to a wholesome response to the post-apartheid era that enabled him “to reconcile a nation so bitterly divided by the perversions of apartheid; to bring stability where the scale of the injustice, and the potential for bloodshed, was biblical” [30]. In a similar way, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the able leadership of the Nobel Peace Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, powerfully showed that forgiveness was possible, and it was the only credible way to forge a new reality out of an otherwise terribly wounded people that even the most highly optimistic would have not granted [31].

Now these last three ways of managing change mirrors something that is reflected, and expanded, in a chapter in a memoir by Professor Wangari Mutha Maathai, “Foresters without diplomas” [32]. The chapter recounts a tale of change in a growing unemployment situation, compounded with a large scale of poverty in Kenya, and a rather naïve work-by-the-poor-for-the rich homes through humbling seedlings project to a full bloomed Green Belt Movement. A number of stories and factors are skillfully woven together, but all geared, as a Conference [33] by the



author would later reveal, to peace. Felling of trees to make way for commercial crops, regardless of its adverse effects on people and the environment alike is the case in point. Malnourishment and encroaching desertification are no longer a distant reality, but are sorely felt by the despondent mothers as well as worried farmers and pastoralists. The scarcity of pastures which has already fomented numerous conflicts pitting agriculturalists against pastoralists has led to a huge loss of life [34], and marks indelible scars among the people, who once enjoyed a good neighborhood.

As a reaction to this volatile and risky situation, trees have become a way for the recovery of this lost innocence. Not only do they provide employment to the poor women who are increasingly nursing a generation of malnourished babies, and thus alleviating poverty – if only in a small way – but are also likely to reverse climate change, and eventually bring about peace among the warring factions over the scarce resources.

In the process of tree planting, a poor village woman, who is also likely to be an illiterate, is empowered, and is proud of her contribution towards reversing this catastrophic trend that she is likely to experience firsthand in her courtyard, on one level, but also its adverse effects on humanity thrown back on to her in the increasingly global village, on the other.

It is apparent, therefore, that this anecdote harmoniously brings together a cross section of the community, in which each member responds to, and is affected accordingly, with the sole purpose of stewarding creation that they are entrusted with. Such a reaction to change is likely to produce a multiplying effect, when one considers such efforts as those of the Bangladeshi Banker, Professor Muhammad Yunus [35] and the Grameen Bank, and the like. These efforts involve every fabric of the society, making them responsible for and proud of their contribution in shaping their future.

In other words, change is first and foremost a personal choice before it is shared out with others. Its effects are likely to have a lasting influence on people and all around it when it is consciously appropriated and reproduced on whatever level by its beneficiary.

I began this paper by referring to a world renowned economist (Jeffrey Sachs), but who has also worked closely in villages of Africa as a representative of Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations. His work and numerous visits to various places in Africa brought him firsthand experience of various types of people, and in glaring contexts whose challenges are multifaceted. His experience is, therefore, both personal and public: personal because he is shaped by the realities that he lives on the ground, but it is also public by the very fact of the audience targeted in the process.

Then, I turned my attention to the realities that the continent faces and which are inextricably connected – not in isolation but together with the rest of the world – and argued further that to address them fruitfully

one would need to summon various elements in whichever method is eventually opted for, but focusing particularly on what is seen as the missing link.

By use of examples of how change is managed, I tried to tease out how public intellectuals paradoxically contribute to various contexts by their very way of being, and how also by adapting the language and the nature of contexts they help bring a solution to them while at the same time empowering those directly involved in them.

My arguments, therefore, have sought to focus on the phenomenon of change and what it entails, how public intellectuals must allow themselves to be shaped by it and in the process shape it in their interpretation of realities that are stifling the continent of Africa.

Let me re-emphasize that the change that is being evoked here must have an impact on how people manage change in language, mentalities, and in their appreciation of realities. It is a success when realities become transformative and influential in helping to create one's own destiny through an engaging dialogue with them and not by holding a withdrawn stance. Change, as argues *Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator*, is that which transforms *krisis* into *kairos*. [36] And, that is what a public intellectual must aim at in African contexts.

By way of conclusion, I would like to adapt a conversation by two characters Xuma from the North and Paddy in *Mine Boy*, a book set in Johannesburg by Peter Abrahams sixty-one years ago, to realities that clamor for change across this continent presently [37]:

You say you understand, Lello said, but how can you? You belong to a privileged class. You do not live here. You do not know what it means to survive in these despicable, sprawling slums of our towns. You do not have to survive this horrendous stench. You live in the other side of the town. You do not know how it feels when rains flood my shack away. Did your children leave you for the sex industry? Did you know my beautiful wife? Did you care about her? Do you know how it feels to lose her at childbirth? Lello's voice rose. You say you understand. Did you feel these things like I do? How can you understand, you the privileged! You understand with your head. I understand with pain. With the pain of my heart. That is understanding. The understanding of the heart and the pain of understanding, not just the head and lips. I feel things. You want me to be your friend. How can I be your friend when you and your kind do this to me and those of my type?

Then I must think as a lower caste of the society.

No. You must think as a human person first. You must be a human person first and then a deprived. And if it is so you will understand

as a deprived and also as an advantaged. That is the right way, Lello. When you understand that you will be a human person with freedom inside your breast. It is only those who are free inside who can help free those who are around them.

## NOTES

1. "A Reith lecture is a lecture in a series of annual radio lectures given by leading figures of the day, commissioned by the BBC and broadcasted on Radio 4. They began in 1948, in honour of the first Director-General of the BBC, John Reith." Cited: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reith\\_Lectures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reith_Lectures) (accessed on June 8, 2007).

2. "Kant reasoned that although a man must obey in his (sic) civil duties, he (sic) must make public his use of reason. Cited: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment\\_concept#Kant.27s\\_definition\\_of\\_.22enlightenment.22](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment_concept#Kant.27s_definition_of_.22enlightenment.22) (accessed on June 8, 2007).

3. Jeffrey Sachs, 'Bursting at the Seams,' Reith Lectures, 2007. Cited: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2007/lecture1.html> (accessed on June 18, 2007).

4. See a work by David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, and London: SCM Press, 1994). This work revolves around the idea that if theology has been, over its historical trajectory, named variously – the contemporary period is yet to find its rightful name. It is a challenge he invites his colleagues to take up seriously.

5. Jeffrey Sachs, *ibid*.

6. Jean-Marc Ela, 'An African Reading of Exodus,' in *African Cry*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986, pp. 28-38.

7. This element is exemplified in the projects that have been undertaken on the continent, including the famously hailed, Lagos Plan of Action in the 1980s (officially the 'Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000'), which was an Organization of African Unity-backed plan to increase Africa's self-sufficiency. It was drafted in Lagos, Nigeria in April 1980, during the conference which included a variety of African leaders, (cited at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagos\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagos_Plan_of_Action) accessed on September 3, 2007); earlier on various 'Five-Year Development Plans' had been devised by most African countries following their political independence achievements, for example, Tanganyika, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1964 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1969 and 1<sup>st</sup> July 1969 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1974, but in the recent past we have witnessed 'The New Partnership for Africa's Development' (NEPAD), largely spearheaded by Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. Alongside these are such painfully sarcastic projects currently undertaken by President Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia, (see <http://www.battlingaids.com/entry/presidents-aids-remedy-is-nothing-but-a-sham/>; accessed on September 11, 2007). One can also mention here

such projects as the “villegelisation project” in the 1960s of the late Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Among the international initiatives, one names, among others, the infamous “Structural Adjustment Programs” of the 1980s. Interestingly, even in religious circles, Africa has received similar attention. The Jesuits (Society of Jesus) are a case in point here. In their last world gathering (General Congregation 34) Africa was named as one of the priorities, that is, the Society of Jesus in Africa.

8. Methodological initiatives such as those promoted by public intellectuals somewhere else, for example, Amartya Sen, who has, among others, gauged freedom to development. Others include the recent Nobel Peace Prize winners, Professor Wangari Maathai, 2004, and Muhammad Yunus, 2006. Also of note here is Professor George Ayittey’s book, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), which together with his previous work, *Africa Betrayed* from the same publisher in 1992 boast a rich bibliography of various solutions that have been proposed by experts both local and expatriates.

9. Jeffrey Sachs, *ibid.*

10. Jeffrey Sachs, ‘Economic Solidarity in a Crowded Planet,’ *ibid.*, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2007/lecture4.html>, pp. 1 (accessed on June 18, 2007).

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 2

13. How can one justify this, as Serge Latouche points out that the Gross National Product (GNP) of the Sub-Saharan Africa taken together to be less than that of Belgium or Holland? See his *L’autre Afrique . Entre don et marché* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 13-14.

14. Sachs, ‘Economic Solidarity in a Crowded Planet,’ *ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Several African leaders at independence set their gaze on “institutional” means to address some of the chronic issues that faced their country. To this, one can add Professor Anyang Nyong’o’s analysis on this issue, ‘From Lagos Plan of Action to Nepad: The dilemmas of progress in independent Africa’ (African Academy of Science, Nairobi, Kenya). Cited: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/umrabulo15/plan.html> (accessed on September 3, 2007).

17. Julius Nyerere made big gains in creating a cohesive nation by discouraging tribalism and encouraging a uniting language – Swahili.

18. Aquiline Tarimo, S.J., and Paulin Manwelo, S.J., *African Peacemaking and Governance* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2007), pp. 10-28.

19. Literature on this abound, ranging from political through socio-economic and religious to ethnic. The following thinkers, to mention but a few, come to mind: René Dumont, *False Start in Africa* (London: Deutsch Limited, 1966), Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar-Es-Salaam: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, London and Tanzanian Publishing House, 1973), Frantz Fanon, *The*

*Wretched of the Earth* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), *Black Skin White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*, Charles Lam Markmann, ed. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967); the most recent ones include: George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), Aquiline Tarimo and Paulin Manwelo, *African Peacemaking and Governance* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Press, 2007). The Berg Report set up by the World Bank to assess the possibilities of jump starting African economies in view of overcoming underdevelopment was yet another (Professor Berg's report is allegedly seen as a body formed to counteract the 'Lagos Plan of Action' that the Bank judged wanting.) Religion has not been spared as Jean-Marc Ela and a host of others have cogently demonstrated. See, for example, Jean-Marc Ela, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

20. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 66.

21. Ibid.

22. I make a conscious choice to limit the historical field of my concern, for the goal here is not to paint an elaborate historical effort but a focus on the reaction to change.

23. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, *ibid.*; Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1996); Cheikh Amidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, Katherine Woods, trans. (London: Heinemann, 1963), Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

24. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, *ibid.*, p. 3.

25. Aquiline Tarimo offers an insightful analysis on the issue of debt cancellation. See his *Applied Ethics and Africa's Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2005), pp. 128-143.

26. Axelle Kabou, *Et Si L'Afrique Refusait le Développement ?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), pp. 17-28; George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 29-83 at 31-32, also his other book, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992)

27. See, for example, the Kenyan members of parliament's demands for a "golden handshake" at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament (cf. Bernard Namunane, 'MPs Plotting Hefty Send-off Pay Deal,' *Daily Nation*, 27 July 2007, pp. 1 and 4); Cf. also a similar accusation of the Tanzanian Parliament, Emmanuel Lengwa, 'Wapinzani Waibua mpya,' Alasiri. Cited: <http://www.ippmedia.com/ipp/old/2007/10/17.html> (accessed on 17 October 20, 2007).

28. Cf. recent unsuccessful attempts to create a "United States of Africa" modeled on the United States of America (Cf. 'Union Government,' at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African\\_Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Union) (accessed on 20 October 2007).

29. Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Development: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1968-1973* (Dar-Es-Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 14-39.

30. John Carlin, New York Times Book Review, in Anthony Simpson, *The Authorised Biography* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 1.

31. Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999).

32. Wangari Mutha Maathai, *Unbowed: A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 2006), pp. 119-138.

33. Professor Wangari Mutha Maathai, 'Religion and Environmental Conservation in Africa: Allies or Adversaries?' a Conference paper delivered at Hekima College on 22 November 2006.

34. Ibid.

35. Professor Muhammad Yunus and the Bank he founded for Micro-credit to the poor women won him the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2006.

36. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005). Issues that summon Church should not only be seen as problems to be avoided, but rather contexts which should adhere to moments of discernment, decision, judgment and participation. And, in his own words, "they create a platform on which the Church deploys its evangelizing and salvific mission in society ...." p. 253.

37. Abrahams, *ibid.*, pp. 172-73.

## **PART II**

### **UBUNTU INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY**





CHAPTER IV

**ON THE TENSION BETWEEN *UBUNTU*  
AND *SIMUNYE***

JASON VAN NIEKERK

**A NECESSARY PREAMBLE**

In this paper, I examine some constraints on the shape of a moral theory aiming to capture and articulate those intuitions ascribed to *ubuntu* [1]. Having done so, I find one potential account of *ubuntu* less theoretically attractive than others, and reject it. That outline is close to a description of the philosophical project simpliciter, and thus necessary for my examination to be a properly philosophical one. But, dealing with African philosophy, this outline also captures two potentially problematic moves that must be noted, and justified, before I go on. First, in critically examining *ubuntu* this way, I am treating it as a set of folk-psychological beliefs, rather than a theory already fully formed. This is potentially problematic in light of what Mogobe Ramose has called “philosophical colonization” [2], wherein it is assumed that African traditional conceptions are not philosophy, but raw materials to be subsumed into existing (“coincidentally” Western) philosophical systems. A second worry is that the set of folk-psychological beliefs and intuitions I examine arise from a *weltanschauung* which is not my own. As such, my authority to criticise or reject candidate conceptions seems questionable.

As regards the first worry, it is not my project in this paper (or, I hope, more generally) to subsume *ubuntu* into an extant moral theory [3], but it is true that I take the term “*ubuntu*” to describe a set of folk-psychological beliefs rather than a complete normative theory. I do so, not from the assumption that African conceptions are distinct by definition from philosophy, but because, while a number of distinct attempts have been made to formalize a theory of *ubuntu*, none is taken as canonical. That is, when “*ubuntu*” is discussed it is not used as a synonym for one of the theories proposed by (for example) Mogobe Ramose [4], Thad Metz [5], or Augustine Shutte [6]. Rather, these theories themselves are, in principle, open to some criticism based on their degree of congruence with a body of intuitions and folk-psychological beliefs, and new work could meaningfully be said to be talking about *ubuntu* without reference to any of these theories. For this reason I take it that the question of how best to construct a moral theory incorporating these intuitions is still unresolved.

As to the second worry, I don’t seek to speak authoritatively about the existing *weltanschauung* – rather, I discuss those intuitions or claims ascribed to *ubuntu* by those who do have a claim on this authority. I do criticize and reject candidate formalisations of these intuitions qua

normative moral theory, testing them against requirements I think fair to expect of any such theory. I try to be explicit about my reasons for applying these requirements, and if not all of my philosophical intuitions are shared, I hope that my reasons for proposing them are at least clear.

Having thus qualified my position, I turn to my argument.

### **“UBUNTU IS NOT SIMUNYE”**

Michael Eze has argued that some accounts of *ubuntu* “conflate *ubuntu* with *simunye* [oneness]” [7]. In the context he was addressing, Eze referred to the distinction between a claim of metaphysical oneness with others and a normative ethical system promoting harmony (the latter typically being picked out to be the word “*ubuntu*”). I do not want to engage with the metaphysical debate – I find dependence on extensive sets of metaphysical claims to be a weakness in a moral theory [8], and want to examine *ubuntu* as a normative claim, grounded in the phenomenal [9]. That said, Eze’s slogan “*ubuntu* is not *simunye*” seems applicable in purely normative terms. In this context, if we take *simunye* to mean acting out of solidarity with and for the sake of one’s particular community [10], then “*ubuntu* is not *simunye*” amounts to “*ubuntu* is not simply *simunye*.” While *simunye* seems a necessary component of *ubuntu*, it is not sufficient. One reason to say so is that the patriot – even the jingoistic patriot – seems to meet the requirements of solidarity with and action for the sake of his community, but jingoistic patriotism is not what is normally meant by *ubuntu*. To see why, we should note that many who write on *ubuntu* require oneness with our community, as well as a more general orientation. So Ramose says that “to be a human be-ing is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them” [11], Mokgoro describes “a basically humanistic orientation towards fellow beings” [12], and Tutu describes the person with *ubuntu* as “generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate” [13] without qualifying these qualities as necessarily directed toward members of our own community.

It seems then that two broad sorts of action are endorsed by – or rather, exemplary of – *ubuntu*: responsiveness to others generally, and solidarity with our particular community.

The first sort of action, which I will call Responsiveness, is exemplified by dispositions toward openness to others generally [14], being accommodating toward strangers to our community [15], and the claim that an obligation to respect some general humanness extends to forgiving avowed and self-identifying enemies of one’s self and community [16]. I find this last instance particularly interesting, since forgiveness and reconciliation could, especially in a post-apartheid context, be explained in terms of concern for the cohesion of communities, rather than concern for individuals, but this is not the rationale given. Here Antjie Krog [17] cites TRC participant Cynthia Ngewu’s concern for her son’s murderer becoming “human again,” [18]

and Rev. Frank Chikane's concern for what would "liberate the perpetrator" [19] of his attempted assassination.

The second exemplar of *ubuntu* is the sort of action I'm characterizing as *Simunye* – acting out of solidarity with and on behalf of our community, assisting other members of our community through practices such as the "loan cow" [20] and *ledima* [21], and the promotion of tradition and a shared sense of identity [22]. Here two points are particularly interesting. The first is that the community is exemplified not simply as a group with which we identify, but as a rich set of relationships of mutual support [23]. The second point is that these communities are mapped to a significant extent by their supportive proximity relative to the agent, so that there is a particular emphasis on kinship as the vector for relating to the community, as K.A. Busia notes, stating that

there is, everywhere, the heavy accent on family – the blood relatives, the group of kinsfolk held together by a common origin and common obligation to its members... The ideal [...] is that of mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the group of kinsfolk. [24]

So it seems that the actions I've glossed with the terms Responsiveness to the other and *Simunye* are both advocated by *ubuntu*. It also seems to me that they are distinct – we can imagine instantiating either in isolation, and instances of one are not necessarily instances of the other. That is, we can act for the sake of our community without concern for others generally (as the dogmatic patriot does), and be concerned for others generally without engaging at the level of our particular community (as a convert to Internationalist Socialism might). But, while we can instantiate these separately, it seems that both are necessary for *ubuntu*. So "*ubuntu* is not *simunye*" without the addition of a generalised responsiveness to others.

## THE TENSION BETWEEN RESPONSIVENESS AND SIMUNYE

But there is a tension between these two components of *ubuntu*. Not only are they distinct, they can pull in opposite directions. It seems that we can imagine cases in which these pulls conflict, and here are three examples: a xenophobic community; an activist who prioritizes distant others over his own community; and nepotism.

In the case of the xenophobic community, we can imagine belonging to a community whose rituals, initiations, and solidarity-building practices rely on alienating non-members of the community. Doing so really does build feelings of communal solidarity and cement bonds of friendship with those closest to us, and is a long-held tradition. But it precludes extending our generosity, accommodation, and general responsiveness to strangers. Note that we still embody the responsiveness and concern required by *ubuntu* – but we limit its proper scope to our own

community, those with whom we have or could reasonably come to have, communal relationships.

In the case of the far-sighted activist, good is done for distant others, and he himself responds to these others with compassion, care, generosity and a heartfelt concern for bringing these others to properly realise their humanity. Note that the activist also seems to engage in a kind of *simunye*: he identifies with the distant group whose cause he has taken up – and they with him, their distant advocate – he interacts with others committed to their cause, builds reciprocal relationships with fellow demonstrators, and learns their traditional protest songs. But he does so to the neglect of relationships with his community, both in his everyday interpersonal interactions and in that he comes not merely to question the attitudes of his community [25], but to feel a growing and unlamented distance from their concerns.

And in the nepotism case, let us imagine that we are all members of a large family. This clan is influential in our community, and has a family tradition of using what leverage it has to the benefit of its members. This tradition bonds us to one another through supportive relationships, and cements our solidarity with and commitment to the interests of our clan, but leads to disharmony in the greater community, where others correctly doubt their access to a fair share of the resources and opportunities for advancement we control, and resent the negative impact of our family bias on their lives. Note that here the actions of our clan are deficient in both Responsiveness and *Simunye* toward our greater community. But both are excellently displayed within the family, where our closest, richest, and most fundamental relationships are concentrated.

It seems to me that how a theory of *ubuntu* responds to these conflict cases points to how it grounds the normative value of *ubuntu* – which is what I'm interested in. Three possible ways of grounding this value spring to mind here [26]: The first is a reductive *Simunye*, which takes *simunye* to be basically valuable, endorsing Responsiveness instrumentally as and only to the extent that it realizes *Simunye*. This model finds the activist's case to be a far more serious wrong than the xenophobic community's, which would seem at least permissible, and may allow the nepotism case to be permissible, if closer relationships are weighted more strongly.

The second option is a reductive Responsiveness account, which takes Responsiveness to be basically valuable, endorsing *Simunye* as and only to the extent that it realizes responsiveness to others. This model finds the xenophobic community's case to be a far more serious wrong than the activist's, which may be at least be permissible, and disallows the nepotism case, as it circumscribes our Responsiveness.

The third model is non-reductive, finding both *Simunye* and Responsiveness valuable *sui generis*, enjoining us to realise both values to whatever extent possible, and where they conflict, to favour whichever is maximally realizable. This model allows that either value could be favored in conflict cases, dependent upon the specific instance.

Evaluating the relative merits of each strategy is a larger project than I can do justice to here, so I'll limit the rest of this paper to discussing the first strategy, Reductive *Simunye*. Specifically, I want to argue that Reductive *Simunye* is either endorsed, or allowed for, by some of the literature, and that it is unattractive *qua normative* moral theory, and ought to be avoided.

## REDUCTIVE SIMUNYE

Busia seems to outline Reductive *Simunye*'s direction of fit when he says "Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are virtues enjoined as essential; without them, the kin group cannot long endure. Its survival depends on its solidarity" [27]. And Kwame Gyekye describes the agent as

naturally oriented towards other persons with whom she must live. Living in relation to others directly involves an individual in social and moral roles, obligations, commitments, and responsibilities, which the individual must fulfill. [28]

Here "with whom she must live" seems to allow that our moral roles, obligations, commitments and responsibilities need not extend to those with whom we must not live [29]. And Ramose suggests a priority which may allow for the nepotism example's strong partiality when he says "According to this understanding of the family, it is unethical to withhold or to deny *botho/ubuntu* towards a member of the family, in the first place, and the community at large" [30].

Here it is important to note that Reductive *Simunye* is not a strictly eliminative reduction – it does not deny the value of cultivating a general disposition of responsiveness to others. Rather, it justifies that disposition instrumentally, and thus limits the extent to which it is reasonable to pursue it. The history of Consequentialism tells us not to discount the scope of instrumentalist approaches, but nonetheless I have doubts that this model can account for our intuitions about what a normative moral theory should do.

The first of these concerns tribalism and insularity. Commenting on what he referred to as the "Problem of Tribalism," Kwasi Wiredu has noted that African Communitarian philosophy needs a normative mechanism that "goes beyond kinship limits" [31], and it seems reasonably clear to me that he has something like the Reductive *Simunye* approach in mind here. If advocates of Reductive *Simunye* allow sufficient partiality to endorse the clan-partiality of the nepotism case, then it seems clear that this model would not attach very much disvalue to insular or tribalist approaches. It could, of course, note that certain instances of insularity are detrimental to the community, and should thus be avoided, but I don't think this instrumental reason is sufficient. For one thing

insularity, tribalism, and even *xenophobia* are frequently to the benefit of the community, whereas Wiredu's worry seems to point to these things as persistent disvalues. For another, we may wonder whether explaining tribalism as bad for "the tribe" [32] properly expresses the depth of what we find worrying about such insular concern - here I am thinking of Desmond Tutu's concern over the callousness of (apartheid Minister of Police) Jimmy Kruger's "coldness" to the death of Steve Biko [33]. Here the advocate of Reductive *Simunye* may bite the bullet claiming that the disvalue of tribalism is exaggerated, but it seems to me that this move costs intuitive plausibility.

Another concern is that Reductive *Simunye* shares a structural drawback with Moral Relativism. It is not identical to Relativism, since it proposes a normative standard applicable "always and everywhere," and does not arbitrarily endorse whatever practices a given community advocates. However, like Relativism, Reductive *Simunye* seems to fall short of our intuitions about non-members. Perhaps the most extreme illustration of this is slavery – if concern for others is valuable only to the extent that it realises harmonious relationships within the community, then slavery, human trafficking, and international exploitation generally fall outside of the scope of moral comment. Note that Reductive *Simunye* can provide us with an instrumental argument against living in a slave-owning or apartheid society, if regular participation in our society is a reasonable basis to consider people *de facto* members of our community. But, in cases such as facilitating human trafficking between other communities, Reductive *Simunye* does not seem even to allow scope for the issue, much less advocate the censure that seems intuitively to be the right response – with reference both to our intuitions about moral theories generally, and what the other two accounts of *ubuntu* would seem to advocate.

Not only does the theory seem to give us the wrong answers in this case – it seems unable to provide answers in another relevant sense: if our community is the victim of such international exploitation, Reductive *Simunye* is capable of pointing out the harm done to our community, but not the wrongness in the actions of those who do this harm to it [34]. This seems like an unacceptable lacuna in a normative ethical theory. So, Reductive *Simunye* does not seem capable of providing an attractive theory.

Here it is worth noting that it seems we can account for an advocate of Reductive *Simunye*'s intuitive worries about the activist case without reducing to *simunye*. It seems that any account of *ubuntu* would find some moral harm in the activist's estrangement from concern for and identification with his community. But even a Reductive Responsiveness account would allow for this – even if relations to our community are just one instance of the responsiveness owed to others, they are a necessarily proximal, enduring instance of it. As such, even though family, clan, or community relations do not have automatic trumping power on this account, they are nonetheless the persistent vectors through which the majority of our responsive relationships are realized, and thus crucially

important and not easily overridden. But it is not impossible, in principle, for the activist's actions to be at least permissible, if his actions do in fact constitute a full realization of a disposition toward responsiveness, and the substitute *simunye* he engages in is sufficiently valuable. This does not allow them to be overridden in the case of the *xenophobic* community or slavery examples however, since what is basically valuable is our disposition to be responsive to the situation of others, and such practices limit our whole community's capacity to realize this disposition.

While I do not have the time or space to properly examine this model here, I want to note that I find this Reductive Responsiveness attractive *prima facie* – perhaps more so than the non-reductive model, which seems liable to problems of incommensurability, and may fall to Occam's Razor if Reductive Responsiveness can provide a sufficient account. But these are questions for the future. What I hope to have done in this paper is to have provided reasonably compelling reasons to think that "*ubuntu* is not *simunye*," and does not reduce to it either.

## NOTES

1. For the purposes of this paper I assume that the reader is familiar, at least in outline, with the set of [roughly] harmony-oriented normative claims and praxes commonly picked out by the term "*ubuntu*." In addition, while I deal primarily with South African literature addressing "*Ubuntu*" or "*Botho*," there is some overlap with cognate terms from other traditions, and I will be treating these as sufficiently similar to be relevant to the discussion.

2. 'I doubt, therefore African Philosophy exists,' *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 22 (2), 2003, pp. 113-127 at p. 119.

3. Ramose's criticism was directed toward Augustine Shutte's attempt to accommodate *ubuntu* within a basically Thomist framework.

4. Mogobe Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999).

5. Thad Metz, 'Toward and African Moral Theory' *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15 (3): pp. 321-341.

6. Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa* (Cape Town, Cluster Publications, 2001).

7. Michael Eze, 'Ubuntu as a Communitarian Critique of Liberal Individualism,' a paper delivered at the 2007 International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) conference held at Rhodes University.

8. I say this both because metaphysical claims are significantly difficult to justify, especially in competition with other such claims, and because invoking the metaphysical to explain the normative seems to multiply explanatory entities unnecessarily.

9. While many working in African ethics do argue from rich metaphysical premises of the sort Eze opposes, eschewing this approach as I do is not uncommon either. Kwasi Wiredu notes in the introduction to

his anthology *A Companion to African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 18, that he and several other African philosophers, including Gbadegesin, Gyekye, and Bewaji have argued for an essentially non-religious basis to African ethics.

10. I think this is roughly the sense in which Dirk Louw uses the term, which translates literally as “we are one,” in his *Ubuntu: An African Assessment of the Religious Other* (a paper delivered at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, held in Boston in 1998), p. 2.

11. Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, p. 52.

12. Yvonne Mokgoro, ‘Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa,’ *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 1, (1998): pp. 1-11, at p. 2.

13. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 30.

14. As noted by Ramose, Mokgoro, and Tutu above.

15. Noted in Peter Mtuze’s discussion of *ubuntu* in his *Introduction to Xhosa Culture* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 2004), pp. 103-106.

16. See Tutu’s claim that “In the process of dehumanising another... the perpetrator was inexorably being dehumanised as well.” in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 31.

17. Antjie Krog, ‘If it means he gets his Humanity back: Reconciliation and forgiveness as part of wholeness in the Truth and Reconciliation process’ (Keynote address at the 2007 International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) conference held at Rhodes University). Krog argues convincingly that the motivation for such forgiveness is not Christian. I think that her examples also demonstrate that the motivation is not a concern for the wellbeing of our community, but for individual others with regard to their ability to experience community simpliciter.

18. Quoted in Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998), p. 109.

19. ‘If it means he gets his Humanity back’ (Krog cites “Brand,” though her bibliography does not list this author).

20. See Mtuze, *Introduction to Xhosa Culture*, pp. 103-106.

21. This practice, in which neighbours assist a farmer with his harvest, and are then feasted with beer and slaughtered cows, is described in Johann Broodryk’s *Ubuntu management and motivation* (Johannesburg: Gauteng Department of Welfare/Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy, 1997), p. 14.

22. See N.K. Dzobo’s ‘Values in a changing society: man, ancestors, and God,’ *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*. Edited by Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 223-240, at p. 226.

23. This is not an uncommon claim in the literature. One clear example is Segun Gbadegesin’s claim that, on the Yoruba conception “the community is founded on notions of an intrinsic and enduring relationship among its members,” in his ‘Yoruba Philosophy: Individuality,



Community, and the Moral Order,' *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 130-142, at p. 133.

24. K.A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 33.

25. Which may well be a healthy attitude, properly encouraged by a community.

26. I cannot claim with certainty that these options are exhaustive, but they seem reasonably likely to be, at least at this stage of the investigation. For the purposes of this paper however, all I require is that they are plausible as candidates for grounding *ubuntu*.

27. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa*, p. 34. My italics.

28. Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 67. My italics.

29. It is possible that Gyekye's discussion here is merely hermeneutic, describing how we come to respond to others, rather than what justifies our doing so. But it is also possible that Gyekye is aiming to outline the justificatory grounds for moral concern – and this ambiguity is present, I think, in the text, not merely the citation.

30. Mogobe Ramose, 'The Ethics of Ubuntu', *Philosophy from Africa* (2nd ed.). Edited by P.H. Coetzee & A.J.P. Roux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 324-330, at p. 329. My italics.

31. 'Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries' (Keynote address at the 2007 International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) conference held at Rhodes University).

32. Wiredu noted that "tribalism" is a significant worry even if (and perhaps because) the concept of "tribe" is to a significant extent an anthropological imposition. For my current purposes I use "tribe" as a synonym for community.

33. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 31.

34. This would not be true of an agent-neutral Reductive *Simunye* account, which would require us to promote the *simunye* of whatever communities we happen to interact with, rather than simply our own. This seems plausible, *prima facie*, but it also seems like a specific kind of Consequentialism. For the purposes of this paper, all I can say to this possibility is that such an agent-neutral approach seems distinct from the motivations for *simunye* as I have been discussing it (and, I think, as it is discussed in the literature).



## CHAPTER V

# **ABANTU AND THEIR ETHIC IN THE FACE OF AIDS**

BERNARD MATOLINO

HIV/AIDS has wrecked havoc on the African continent. Its presence does not restrict itself to matters that pertain to health and disease but extends to touch other areas of life. Its touch invariably leaves terror and destruction on all aspects of human life. Its prevalence is so widespread such that there is none among us on this continent who can ever dare say he/she does not know anyone who has ever died of AIDS. As a disease it has spread itself to cover all age groups and everyone who is alive is at a real risk of either contracting the virus or being affected by it.

In his foreword to the book entitled *Ethics and AIDS in Africa: A Challenge to our Thinking* the South African Supreme Court of Appeal Judge Edwin Cameron aptly captures the impact that the epidemic has had on the Africans. "We have struggled to grasp the virology of AIDS, its demography, its impact on human physiology, its social and economic consequences, its responsiveness to medical treatment, but most of all we have struggled with the moral and ethical implications of so much suffering and death, first in North America and Western Europe, and now in Africa, where the epidemic's fiercest toll is being exacted" (2005: iii).

Thus three things are clear at the outset: Firstly, that AIDS is a medical disease that requires medical treatment. Disease is an interruption of health and it causes weakness and sickness in the body which eventually leads to the total disintegration of bodily function and death. Diseases by their nature do not normally get rid of themselves. They require medical interventions to eliminate their presence. In the case of AIDS such a treatment is unknown or at least has not been discovered. Secondly, AIDS touches negatively on all aspects of social life like the family, the economy and ethics. Thirdly, although AIDS is a global disease it has had a very devastating effect on the African continent.

Alan Whiteside pointed out that Southern Africa has the most reliable data on the spread of the disease, and it paints a grim picture when he reveals that

[i]n South Africa, HIV prevalence rose from 0.5 percent in 1990 to over 27.9 percent in 2002. Botswana and Swaziland both began collection of data in 1992. In Botswana the first survey showed a prevalence rate of about 18 percent; this rose to close to 40 percent in 2000 and has remained at these levels. By contrast in Swaziland, 1994 prevalence was just four percent but by 2002

it had reached 38.6 percent – currently the highest in the world. In Lesotho the 1995 survey was even lower – about three percent but according to the 2003 ANC survey, it is now approaching 23.2 percent” (2005: 7).

Clearly the number of people who are getting infected is very high and it appears as if this will continue to be the case despite widespread information about the disease and the campaign to stem its spread. It is commonly known that the virus that causes AIDS, in sub-Saharan Africa, is mainly transmitted through heterosexual sex. Men and women who engage in unprotected sex are at the risk of contracting this virus.

With all the problems and challenges that this epidemic has presented on the continent it is pertinent to look at it from an ethical point of view. Thus the motivation of this paper is to look at the dominant ethical outlook of sub-Saharan Africans who have borne the greatest brunt of the epidemic and investigate the possible ethical responses that are available to them in dealing with this disease. This people are generally known to be a people who have authentic love and care for each other's well-being. They live by an ethic that is commonly known as *ubuntu* in South Africa. At the heart of this ethic are a call and a duty that is imposed on the individual to have regard for the whole community. She is commanded to act at all times with due regard for her community's well-being.

The concept of *ubuntu* is aptly rendered clear by Mogobe Ramose when he says the following:

*Ubuntu* is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *ntu-*. *Ubu* evokes the idea of being in general. It is enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of existence of a particular entity. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*. At the ontological level there is no strict separation between *ubu-* and *-ntu*. *Ubu-* and *-ntu* are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of being as oneness and indivisible whole-ness. *Ubu-* as the generalized understanding of being may be said to be distinctly ontological; *-ntu* as the nodal point at which being assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be distinctly epistemological. Accordingly, *ubuntu* is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the *Bantu*-speaking people (2000: 324).

Thus *ubuntu* represents the existence of a being that is whole in its formulation and that being at the very least ought to be whole. In

explaining the fundamental and practical aspect of *ubuntu* Augustine Shutte states that “(a)t the centre of *UBUNTU* is the idea that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, persons depend on persons to be persons. This is our hidden secret” (2001:3). It can be deduced that a person attains her wholeness through other people. She finds herself in others and the life she leads is in communication with how other people live. All her experiences should be in good standing with other people’s experiences. She is at one with her community and she is essentially constituted by her community. Her understanding of herself as a being is derived from her standing with her community which should be in good stead.

The individual does not only rely on her standing and relations with her community when faced with questions of her identity. She also relies on her community when faced with problems that may appear insurmountable. When faced with difficulties she can count on her community availing the necessary help. The community readily helps her, even when at times she has not asked for that help or is even unaware that she is in need of that help. Thus John Mbiti noted that “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man” (1970: 141).

This clearly points to the fact that there is an inseparable existence between the individual and her community. They do not exist side by side but together as one and for each other. The individual will not see herself as an entity that stands alone and by some kind of necessity has to either co-operate or live with her fellows in communion but as essentially constituted by her community.

The interests that the individual pursues must be in harmony with the community and they must seek to foster the harmony and cordial existence of all her fellows. She is barred from pursuing interests that may prove to be injurious to the interests of the community. If she does that she is not only threatening the interests of the community but her own interests as well. In an ideal case it should not be possible that an individual may formulate and pursue interests that are at variance with what her fellows hold valuable.

The individual together with her fellow community members are strongly tied together by bonds of togetherness that permeate all the facets of her existence. This bond that ties all these individuals together in such a thoroughgoing and fundamental manner is the ethic of *ubuntu*. Those who abide by this ethic can then be called *abantu*. In ordinary language the use of the term generally refers to people. But in its deep and more meaningful sense it is used to describe not only people but those people who live by the dictates of *ubuntu* and who at all times show responsiveness to this ethic. *Umntu*, then, is an individual who has shown herself to be sufficiently integrated with the other so as to be one with her community.

The concrete expression of the ethic of *ubuntu* lies in the manner in which a person practically lives out her life. It is not sufficient for one to have bonds of oneness with her community. She ought to have a certain moral worth that is recognized by her fellows as befitting her social standing. It is in executing the duties that she ought to that becomes a person. Ifeanyi Menkiti renders this point very clear when he points out that

[t]he various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense - an ethical sense without which personhood is conceived as eluding one (1984: 176).

The adult member of society is expected to discharge certain duties and observe certain moral dictates to be considered a person. Menkiti holds that if one fails at these things then she has failed in being a person. It is not clear, however, what she is/becomes. But what is clear is that on the account of Menkiti if an individual fails to discharge her duties as she ought to, or exhibits conduct that is deemed to be immoral-then she is not a person and indeed not a member of the given community.

A cursory observation of the way in which certain communities, particularly those in traditional settings, react to certain events serves to confirm this point. Death is a very good example and can be used to show how one is regarded in her community. If a person of little worth dies the community normally reacts to that death with little care and attention. In some quarters, if this person of little worth was particularly evil, her death is greeted with glee. On the other hand if a person had the needs of the community at heart and was of a highly regarded reputation and of a quality moral standing, her death will be met with a lot of grief. The actual funeral will be solemn and all those who are afforded an opportunity to speak bidding farewell to the deceased will routinely speak highly of her deeds.

Benezet Bujo is in agreement with Menkiti when he notes that: "There is a large consensus that the strengthening and the growth of life are the fundamental criteria also in the realm of ethics. The members of a clan share the obligations to contribute to the growth of life of the whole community by their moral action. Usually, only that kind of behaviour which leads to the building up of the community is morally good" (Bujo, 1998: 27).

The individual's core responsibility is to conduct herself in ways that are morally worthy and in ways that contribute to the growth of the community. A moral person will never willfully seek to behave in ways that undermine the well-being of her community. She will seek to consolidate whatever advances her community has made and her contribution will always be an attempt to make her community prosper.

In the event of an illness, the community being one with the individual has the responsibility of taking care of the individual and getting rid of that illness. The people who are immediately around the individual have the responsibility of taking care of the illness that befalls the individual. But in this communitarian ethic illness is not just seen as a physical disorder that can be sufficiently dealt with at the physical level. The arrival of an illness is taken to be symptomatic of an aberration at the spiritual level. This disruption of that, which is supposed to be, at the spiritual level is taken as playing the role of communicating something that is proceeding from the spiritual world. Ill-health is supposed to be communicating that there is some kind of unhappiness with what is happening in the physical world. Some kind of process has to be commissioned to introduce the order that has been disrupted in the spiritual realm.

The relatives of the sick individual then proceed to engage a spiritual person to aid them in finding out what the cause of the sickness is and what possible remedies can be employed to alleviate the suffering. The information about the cause and the remedy of the spiritual disruption that has now manifested itself in some sort of physical ailment is openly retained by the family of the sick person. This information sometimes can be shared with the whole community, this is particularly so if there are going to be rituals that require that the whole community be invited or involved. If an individual has been neglecting her duties the ancestors may punish her by blocking her chances in life, bringing bad luck on her or simply cause her health to fail. If a ritual is done to appease the spirits, it is followed by an undertaking that the wrongs of the past will be made right and then festivities follow. All these things are done in the public domain with no secrecy whatsoever attached to any of these processes.

Ramose's account of those affected by mental illness makes this point even more lucid. He notes that all individuals in the community are recognized from a perspective of wholeness which incorporates them in the family and the wider community. The individual experiences herself and is experienced by her community, and only through that process can she come to say she is sharing in the life of the community through compassion and care. In the event that there must be certain rites to be performed on the individual they must be done in accordance with *botho* (i.e. being) so they can retain their meaning.

In the case of mental illness, the individual who was afflicted by such a disease was not sent to some lunatic asylum to be taken care of. Those who are well and close to the individual would report her as a victim to the ancestors with the aim of finding her wrongs so that they can

be made right and restore her to her previous state. Here the intervention is still at the spiritual level and not physical yet. Ramose argues that there is a balance between the living and the dead and the *ngaka* i.e. a diviner) is supposedly there to restore the balance that has been somehow disrupted. It is only after this process that the healing will move on to look at the body.

This is the general approach that is taken in dealing with issues of health in communitarian societies. The sick individual may need to be taken of in the physical sense but the real and deeper need is located in an attempt to restore a balance in the spiritual world.

We have noted that for an individual to be regarded as a person she has to be of a certain moral standing within her community and have an ability to discharge her responsibilities as she ought to. Morality also applies to sexual interaction amongst individuals in the community. An individual is expected to behave in a certain fashion when it comes to issues of having sex. Jomo Kenyatta (1979), discussing the ethics of sex among the *Gikuyu*, limits sexual intercourse to married heterosexuals and even adds that certain positions were not allowed when having sex.

The primary purpose of sex is to procreate so that the family is expanded and the individual has a duty to contribute the growth of the family and the community. Failure to procreate and add to the growth of the community is seen in a very bad light. Sex can never primarily be engaged in for the purpose of giving oneself some or other possible pleasures, but is done for a specific purpose. Among the *Shona* people it was common that if it was discovered that a man was incapable of producing children, his brother or other relative would take his place and help him get his wife pregnant. The whole thing was done in a very surreptitious manner. At night, the man pretending to be going outside the hut to relieve himself, would not return to the hut. Instead a brother or other relative waiting outside would get into the hut and pretend to be the unsuspecting woman's husband.

So the idea of even having sex, which is such an intimate thing, was held to be in the interests of the community. If one was failing to fulfill what the community expected of him, then the community would come to his aid.

Kenyatta chronicles how among the *Gikuyu* sex was seen from an ethical perspective. It was something that was restricted to the confines of a family man and woman. Although teenagers were allowed to play some games that can be seen as romantic/sex games, the actual sex never took place. One waited until she was married. Among the *Shona* a man who married a non-virgin was rightly expected to be outraged. To register his outrage he would send a blanket as a present to the mother of the bride. But this blanket would have a very big hole at the centre. The family of the bride would subsequently be dismayed and respond by making some reparations to their offended son-in-law.

The spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa is through heterosexual sex. The people who so abide with the ethic of *ubuntu* in other areas of



their lives seem to be struck with some sort of inadequacy and lack of proper response when it comes the spread of AIDS. How then can this ethic respond to the pandemic?

Firstly, the ethic of *ubuntu* has been instrumental in two serious fronts that AIDS has presented. The disease particularly kills young adults who have young children who still need many years of care before they can assume responsibility for their own lives. Many communities and families have stepped in to take care of the innocent orphaned children. Sometimes this care is extended to people who are not directly related to the care giver. In extreme cases the whole community takes responsibility for the care of a household of small children who have been prematurely orphaned.

In the true sense of the spirit of *ubuntu* the young children are not really on their own. They are with the community, not only as members of a particular community but as people who share their fate with their respective community. Whatever the consequences of the death of their parents and whatever happens to them the community is there, ready to give them the necessary support that young children should receive.

Secondly, those who are infected with the virus and who are approaching their demise are never excluded from the community. Beginning to get physically wasted and continually depending on the generosity of others for their sustenance, they are sure to count on the ever available presence of the community. They are physically attended to with devotion and care at no expense. As Ramose noted with those who are mentally ill, HIV positive patients and those dying with AIDS are never sent to hospices to face their ultimate death on their own without close and warm affection of their relatives. Instead they are kept within the confines of their homes and at a very great cost to their caregivers they are seen through to their last day.

Even in cases where a person has pursued patently errant ways and has no-one to blame but herself for her status, the community goes a long way in forgiving and embracing the individual to give her the care that is due to her.

These two approaches are indeed commendable and are within the keeping of the ethic of *ubuntu*. However, they are problematic in that they are a reaction to the devastating effects of the pandemic. They are responses that are in place and that would apply to any given situation that obtains the same results. The disasters of orphanage and rapid deterioration in sickness, without the contributions of AIDS, are not that widespread. Indeed there are many disasters that have befallen sub-Saharan Africans but AIDS seems to present a special problem because of the way in which it has created countless orphans and has brutally decimated millions of people, literally leaving them wasted and ghastly to look at.

*Abantu* particularly appear vulnerable because of a number of difficulties that arise out of *ubuntu*. Firstly, within this ethic particularly in

dealing with disease, it appears as if there is no spiritual resort or explanation that can be solicited to account for the prevalence of such an illness, which is very fundamental in the process of healing the sick. This is so particularly at the individual level. If a person is sick, she is normally afflicted by something that is known, something that other people have suffered from before and something that has been successfully taken care of. In the case of mental illness as Ramose has pointed out, those who are well and near the individual consult the *ngaka* to find what wrongs the individual has done to disturb the harmony between the living and the dead. Once the disturbance has been found it is attended to in the spiritual realm and after that attention will be turned to the physical.

In most cases this seems to yield success. A perfectly understandable explanation can be given about what has been disturbed in the spiritual realm and corrective action can be performed. However with AIDS it is never clear as to what has gone wrong in the spiritual realm. The relatives of an individual who is lying in bed dying because of some complication caused by AIDS may go out to consult a *ngaka* to find what the problem could be with their relative. A bogus *ngaka* can attempt to give an explanation. But a genuine *ngaka* may just as well not succeed in giving an explanation. Within the scheme of things it appears as if the individual in this case has not done anything to particularly cause a disturbance that has resulted in the illness.

The spiritual cannot be explained and attended to, or if it is falsely explained and erroneously attended to, the result won't be effective. The sick individual is then left with a physical ailment that has no accompanying spiritual remedy and in the absence of such a remedy the physical interventions will not yield any success. This situation provides a problematic situation for the ethic when it comes to attending the sick. It appears as if there ought always to be an explanation of what has gone wrong in the spiritual realm in order to attend to the physical needs of an individual. But since such an explanation is not discernible the ill person is left with no meaningful intervention to help her get well.

It is commendable to be at one with one's community but in the case of AIDS this presents a very interesting result. We have seen that when an individual is sick those around her take the responsibility for finding what has gone wrong with her and what can be done to make it right. This move while commendable should be treated very cautiously because it appears as if it removes a certain responsibility from the individual for her sickness.

The emphasis here appears to be that the wrong must be found and made right so that the individual can be well again. It does not appear to be that the wrong must be found and the one who has caused the wrong to be there must suffer the consequences of her actions. It is not clear why punishment should not be preferred as opposed to making things right. If sickness is some kind of punishment for the wrong that one has done, why should someone take responsibility for getting the wrong right instead of

the person who has caused such a wrong? In the case of mental illness it is understandable because the mentally ill are not aware that they have lost the plot but with other illnesses brought about as a result of someone's patent notoriety there is no overwhelming reason to compel kin to look for solutions to what an errant person deliberately did.

If the community is insistent on helping those who have been errant and do all within their powers to make what has been wronged right, the community would be acting against its own interests. It would be threatening its own survival by embracing someone who is patently its enemy. If the ethic demands that these individuals be given help, it would be unfairly depriving the other community members who observe moral dictates their right to exclude those who refuse to abide by those dictates. Those in the right are given a raw deal in that they are expected to play a role of making right what they have not wronged.

This leads to an inherent tension between the individual and the community. While it is good for all people to cooperate and live as one in the deepest possible sense and share in each other's fate this ideal has a self-defeating ring when it comes to AIDS. Although sexual intercourse, which is the primary vehicle of infection, is governed by communal norms there is no doubt that it is primarily a matter that is highly individual and extremely private. It does not matter how much the community seeks to have a say in the way and manner in which people have sex, it remains something that an individual has to ultimately take responsibility for.

This is rendered clear by the whole process of testing for HIV. An individual who goes to test for her HIV status does it alone. If she finds that she is HIV positive she celebrates that fact and credits herself for that outcome. She can praise herself for her care in ensuring that she does not contract the virus or in the fact that she has been exercising great restraint in sexual activities and has successfully curbed all her sexual desires, refraining from any sexual intercourse and reducing her chances of infection to zero. She hardly ever thinks about her community, she does not credit it with anything and she does not praise the generality of the masses for being careful in not getting infected thus also not infecting her. She cannot (with Mbiti) say I am negative because we are all negative and since we are all negative I will always be negative.

On the other hand an individual who finds herself HIV positive is immediately confronted with questions like: Where did I get it from? Who gave it to me? How did I get it? Why is this happening to me? She does not find courage in the fact that the statistics show that the infection is on the rise. She does not immediately announce her status and seek to find comfort in those who already are positive and wait for the next person who will announce that she has also just discovered that she is positive. She is besieged by negative thoughts about her own sexual conduct or at least immediately blames her errant partner or curses herself for lapses she can think of in her sexual life and history.

This shows that sexual activity is a highly private matter that is not necessarily shared by the community. It becomes urgent then to question the seriousness of the claim that we are all one.

Further it also shows the tension that is there between the individual and the community in reference to the emphasis put by *ubuntu* on the oneness of the community and the individual. This is a serious case where the individual can stand alone and be a threat to the community.

Menkiti has argued that if an individual fails to discharge her duties in the community and shows herself to be incapable of commanding moral worth that is in tandem with her station in life she would have failed in the project of becoming a person. This failure is directly proportioned with one's moral worth. If an individual who is advanced in age consistently shows a mean streak, is unwilling to engage in activities that promote the well-being of the community and prefers to sabotage communal ideals and goals at every available opportunity, she would be described as a non-person. However Menkiti does not tell us what she becomes. Kwame Gyekye (1997), arguing against Menkiti, states that we know quite a lot of old people who are mean and evil yet we do not stop regarding them as persons.

This is crucial in that although the community may stop regarding an individual as a person, the ethic does not sufficiently provide what should be done to the person. This is rendered very clear with the way in which witches are treated. If an individual is known to be a powerful witch who causes harm and destruction to others through her powerful medicines and sends her *tokoloshes* to beat her enemies at night, nothing concrete is done to stop her and show that she is no longer a person. Instead, attempts are made to make her right and become good again. It appears as if the ethic lacks the practical mechanism of getting rid of those who are no longer persons. It is undesirable to deny someone a qualification into a certain category yet allow her to continue associating or even disrupting those who have membership within that category.

*Ubuntu* appears to be designed to deal with matters that are very public. HIV/AIDS issues are left to the discretion of the infected person. She is not compelled to disclose her status and her status is hidden from her community because they cannot see it. She may even choose to actively spread the virus or not. Her relatives are not able to offer her help or be with her in the experience of having the virus. It is only when she has full blown AIDS and is dying that people around her become aware of her condition. This makes it extremely difficult for the ethic because the virus operates and multiplies in secrecy, only showing itself when it is too late to offer any help to the infected person.

## CONCLUSION

HIV/AIDS is essentially a medical problem that needs to be dealt with medically. As the infection spreads across sub-Saharan Africa it touches on the lives and existence of people in a very serious way. The

ethic of *ubuntu* is disempowered to decisively deal with this medical issue because it is presented in isolation and secrecy and only makes its presence known before it kills its victims. While the efforts of looking after the sick and the orphaned are highly commendable, *ubuntu* requires a thorough rethink to effectively deal with the epidemic.

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**CHAPTER VI**

**AFRICAN VALUES AND  
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

*THADDEUS METZ*

**INTRODUCTION**

What is the strongest argument grounded in African values for abolishing capital punishment? In this chapter, I defend a particular answer to this question, one that invokes an under-theorized conception of human dignity. Roughly, I maintain that the death penalty is nearly always morally unjustified, and should therefore be abolished, because it degrades people's special capacity for communal relationships. To defend this claim, I proceed by: first, clarifying what I aim to achieve in this essay; second, criticizing existing objections to the death penalty that ethicists, jurists and others have proffered on 'African' grounds; third, advancing a new, dignity-based objection with an African pedigree that I take to be the most promising; and, fourth, making some concluding remarks about related work that should be undertaken if my argumentation in this essay is sound.

**CLARIFYING MY AIM**

I have said that I aim to answer the question, 'What is the most promising way to object to the death penalty, when appealing to African values?'. This question is naturally understood to assume, for the sake of argument, *that* the death penalty is immoral, and seeks the best explanation of *why* it is. Many readers, however, might be initially unconvinced that the death penalty is immoral. Indeed, capital punishment is legal in more than two dozen states below the Sahara, and often majorities in sub-Saharan abolitionist states would like to see it legalized.<sup>1</sup> However, such readers will find good reason to change their minds, if, as I expect, they find the argument I make against capital punishment to be independently attractive.

I maintain, in fact, that many African readers will find my argument against capital punishment to be attractive for appealing to certain ideas implicit in views they already hold. I argue that characteristically African values provide good reason to reject the death penalty, regardless of whether that has been appreciated up to now. By 'African values', I mean ideas about good/bad and right/wrong that have been salient among the black peoples in the sub-Saharan region in a way they have tended not to be elsewhere in the world. Such a construal of the word 'African' implies neither that such values are held by *everyone*

*below the Sahara*, nor that *no one beyond the Sahara* does so. Instead, this word is meant to connote properties that have been recurrently exemplified in that region among those not of European, Arab or Asian descent and that have not been instantiated most other places on the globe. My claim is that there are ideas about the dignity of persons, the value of community, and the justifiability of violence that are common in the moral-philosophical worldviews of traditional black sub-Saharan societies and that, upon philosophical clarification and refinement, can be seen to entail that capital punishment should be abolished.

I use the terms ‘death penalty’ and ‘capital punishment’ interchangeably to indicate the state’s intentional killing of a person that expresses disapproval of a crime that has been judged to have been committed. So stated, the death penalty, imposed by the judicial branch of government, must be distinguished from deadly force, employed by the executive branch. To use deadly force (or to do so justifiably) is for the police or army to employ coercion, which has a good chance of killing its target, in order to prevent harm to innocent parties. Deadly force is ‘prospective’, by which I mean that it is by definition deployed before a crime or other aggression has been committed, and is (justifiably) used to stop the harmful act from being done. The death penalty, in contrast, is ‘retrospective’ in that it is a response to harm or a wrong that has already been done (or has been perceived to have been). A second major difference between the two is that the death penalty is meant to censure certain wrongful behaviour, whereas deadly force need not be condemnatory, e.g., it may sometimes (rightfully!) be employed against ‘innocent threats’, i.e., persons who, for no fault of their own, would otherwise harm other persons. Below I argue that one major problem with the existing African arguments against the death penalty is that they counterintuitively entail that deadly force is unjustified in cases where it clearly is not.

In claiming that certain African values entail that the death penalty ‘should be abolished’, I mean to say that it is nearly always an injustice. Of course, ‘nearly always’ is not the same as ‘always’. Below I admit that there are rare cases in which imposing the death penalty would be justified by the sub-Saharan rationale I provide. However, they would be so infrequently encountered, and it would be so difficult to prove that they meet the relevant criteria, that I suspect that the most reasonable course for a state to take would be to abolish the death penalty altogether, rather than to make allowance for the very odd exception.

## CONSEQUENTIALIST ARGUMENTS

I have not encountered anyone appealing to African considerations who systematically argues that abolishing the death penalty would promote the general welfare more than retaining the death penalty. However, I have found those who have contended that retaining the death penalty would not promote the general welfare more than abolishing it.



That is, some African abolitionists have sought to object to a consequentialist argument for the death penalty by contending that the results of abolishing it, with regard to crime rates and the like, would be no worse than those of retaining it. Typically, the debate has focused on deterrence, with abolitionists, such as the important Nigerian philosopher Segun Gbadegesin, pointing out that, for decades, criminologists were unable to find real evidence that the death penalty deters more than, say, life in prison.<sup>2</sup>

The 'African' source of this consequentialist debate is straightforwardly understood to be the fact that sub-Saharanans characteristically prize community, and that punishment is justified insofar as it will prevent either members of the community from being harmed or communal norms from being violated. Some African philosophers have explicitly argued for stringent penalties such as the death penalty based on the idea that the end of protecting the community justifies the means (at least if the party being severely punished is guilty of a serious crime).<sup>3</sup> African abolitionists have replied to this argument by contending that the community would be no less protected if the state no longer used the death penalty.

There is one serious problem with this rationale against the death penalty: there have been studies conducted in the past 10 years that purport to provide new, strong evidence that the death penalty can deter, and has indeed deterred, crime more than its absence.<sup>4</sup> Of course, these studies have been questioned. However, while it was a truism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that there was no good evidence for the deterrent capacity of the death penalty, in the 21<sup>st</sup> it is debatable whether there is. Insofar as the consequences of the retention of the death penalty relative to its abolition are unclear, one is not yet justified in rejecting the death penalty for consequentialist considerations.

## **EXTANT DIGNITY-BASED ARGUMENTS**

The objection that capital punishment is degrading of human dignity neatly side-steps the problem facing a consequentialist criticism of it. A dignity-based objection does not appeal to the results of the death penalty, but rather maintains that there is something about it 'in itself' that is morally wrong. To have a dignity is, roughly, to have a superlative final value, i.e., to be a certain entity that is good for its own sake to a degree higher than anything else in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.<sup>5</sup> I first present and reject two dignity-based objections to the death penalty that have been prominently made from an African perspective, before presenting a new one that I maintain is a clear improvement on them.

First, one encounters the argument that human beings have a dignity of a sort that would be degraded were an innocent person executed, an argument that Moses Òkè has made most thoroughly from an African standpoint.<sup>6</sup> He points out that it has been common among traditional Yorubas, a people in Western Africa, to believe that all or most

human beings have a dignity. I add that the same is true of traditional African societies more generally, with many of them holding that human beings have a dignity in virtue of being a spiritual offshoot of God, the source of all vitality. Supposing that the state must above all not degrade people's dignity, that an innocent person's dignity would be degraded if he were executed, and that the state can never be certain that those it executes are guilty,<sup>7</sup> it follows that the state should abolish the death penalty.

I mention a *prima facie* problem with this rationale, before presenting what I think is a decisive reason to reject it. One might point out that certainty is not expected anywhere else in our moral reasoning, and that a weaker, but still robust, standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt both is more sensible and can sometimes be satisfied. If one has proof beyond a reasonable doubt that someone deserves to die for his misdeeds, then one arguably does not *degrade* him upon putting him to death, or does not do so in a way that warrants blame or guilt, even if he is in fact innocent and does not deserve execution.

While this problem with Òkè's argument is worth considering, I think the most damning consideration against it is that it oddly entails that the use of deadly force is unjustified in cases where it plainly is not. If 'respect for the dignity of all (is) not in sync with either the policy or the practice of judicially killing offenders or alleged offenders in the community, especially when it (is) granted that the judicial system (is) always vulnerable to error',<sup>8</sup> then all intentional killing must be considered impermissibly disrespectful. However, that would mean that it is wrong ever to use deadly force in defence of oneself or of others. Elsewhere, I have maintained that the following case, 'Ethnic Cleansing', shows this implication to be deeply counterintuitive:<sup>9</sup>

You are a peacekeeper who sees two men chasing an innocent, elderly woman with machetes, trying to kill her merely because she has a different ethnicity. You have a machine gun. After firing a warning shot to deter the men (that you see they have recognized as a warning), they are not scared off and continue after the woman. You shoot the two aggressors, reasonably judging it to be necessary and sufficient to protect the one innocent. They die, and she lives.

I claim that the use of deadly force is morally justified in the case of 'Ethnic Cleansing', *despite the lack of certainty* that the men will continue aggressing or will succeed in seriously harming the woman. And most African readers will agree. Pacifism is far from the dominant approach to violence in sub-Saharan moral thinking, and it is instead widely accepted that violence in self- or other-defence can be justified. In sum, if certainty of guilt for serious harm were necessary for intentional killing to be

justified, then deadly force would always be unjustified, but it is not. Hence, Ôkè's objection to the death penalty is fatally (so to speak) flawed.

The same problem applies to a second, somewhat more common African- and dignity-based argument against the death penalty. Members of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of South Africa, among others, have maintained that human life has an inherent dignity that confers an inalienable right to life on all of us. As the death penalty would violate a person's right to life, even if he were guilty, it would be an impermissible degradation. As one justice of the Court has said:

[There is a need to] recognise the right to and protection of human dignity as a right concomitant to life itself and inherent in all human beings, so that South Africans may also appreciate that even the vilest criminal remains a human being (*Furman v Georgia, supra*). In my view, life and dignity are like two sides of the same coin. The concept of *ubuntu* embodies them both.<sup>10</sup>

'*Ubuntu*' is the Nguni term for humanness that is understood by many in southern Africa to encapsulate morality. To have *ubuntu* is to live a genuinely human or ethical way of life, which one does, roughly, by prizing community with other persons.<sup>11</sup> The Court takes others to merit communal relationship by virtue of the dignity they have as human beings, and for such relating to include upholding everyone's right to life, regardless of what they have done.

However, the problem with this rationale against the death penalty is that it counterintuitively also rules out the use of any deadly force. If one's vile actions are not enough to forfeit one's right to life, then even the aggressors in Ethnic Cleansing retain theirs, making it prohibitively degrading for the peacekeeper to shoot them. However, I presume the reader agrees with me that deadly force would be justified in such a case, meaning that the present objection to the death penalty is not the right one to make.<sup>12</sup>

## A NEW DIGNITY-BASED ARGUMENT

I now present a third, dignity-based argument against the death penalty that is grounded in African values, one that avoids both the problematic appeal to the consequences of its imposition and the counterintuitive implication that deadly force is invariably impermissible. Part of this new rationale includes the idea that human beings have a dignity just insofar as they are capable of communal relationships, where these are understood to be relationships in which one both shares a way of life with others and cares about their quality of life.<sup>13</sup> To share a way of life with others and to care about their quality of life is more or less what English-speakers mean by 'friendship' or 'love' in a broad sense. By this account of dignity, then, if one had to choose between killing a cat or a

person, one should spare the latter because it has a capacity to love that makes it intrinsically worth more than the former.

Now, what would it mean to degrade someone who has a dignity in virtue of her capacity for communal or friendly relationships?<sup>14</sup> On the face of it, unfriendly or unloving behaviour is what would treat others as incapable of community or as less than special for being so capable. More specifically, degradation often consists of unfriendly behaviour toward someone that is not meant to counteract her unfriendliness. Respect for the capacity for community or love means treating a person in accordance with the way she has exercised it. Roughly, those who have been friendly do not warrant unfriendly treatment, whereas those who have been unfriendly do warrant unfriendly treatment, if necessary to protect those threatened by their comparable unfriendliness. If one is unfriendly toward another because one must be in order to prevent his proportionate unfriendliness, then one is not disrespecting his capacity for friendliness, which he has misused.

This account of the way to degrade, and conversely to respect, individuals capable of friendship or community grounds a straightforward explanation of why the death penalty would be degrading but deadly force would not. Aggressors in (clearly justified) other-defence cases are, by virtue of being killed, *being forced to correct their own proportionately unfriendly relationships*, whereas killing offenders in the case of capital punishment would not serve this function.

This rationale against the death penalty is not vulnerable to purported counterexamples that one might be tempted to suggest. For instance, although capital punishment might, as above, serve the function of deterrence and hence prevent unfriendliness proportionate to what the offender has done, it would not be necessary to end any proportionate unfriendliness that the *offender* is engaging in or responsible for. The person on death row is no longer torturing, mutilating or killing, and so the death penalty would not help those threatened by *his* comparable unfriendliness. Furthermore, even if execution were to (m)end unfriendly relationships that the offender still has or harm that he has caused, e.g., with regard to the victim's family, this unfriendliness would not be *proportionate* to the grossly unfriendly action of execution.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have critically discussed objections to the death penalty that have been made by appealing to values salient below the Sahara desert. I have argued that the most promising sub-Saharan rationale for abolishing capital punishment invokes the under-analyzed idea that human dignity inheres in our capacity for communal relationships, understood as the combination of sharing a way of life and caring for others' quality of life, or as friendliness. This capacity of an offender would be degraded, I argued, if the state put him to death, insofar as doing so would not be necessary to correct any proportionate misuse of

the capacity for community, viz., unfriendliness, on his part. However, I contended that the capacity of aggressors to enter into community with others would not be degraded if the state used deadly force against them, since doing so would be necessary to counteract a comparable unfriendliness on their part.

In other work, it would be worthwhile considering how this objection to capital punishment compares to other objections to it, ones that are not necessarily grounded in salient African ideas. In particular, if I have indeed identified the best way to criticize the death penalty by appeal to sub-Saharan values, it would be worth considering how this criticism weighs up against, say, one grounded on a more Western, and specifically Kantian, understanding of dignity. According to the Kantian, human beings have a dignity insofar as they are capable of autonomy. Which conception of dignity, one grounded on autonomy or community, is more likely to entail that the death penalty is unjust and to give the best explanation of why it is? And which conception of dignity is more plausible on the whole? Such questions deserve answers in future research.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Dirk van Zyl Smit, 'The Death Penalty in Africa', *African Human Rights Law Journal* (2004) 4: 1-16. Cf. Lilian Chenwi, *Towards the Abolition of the Death Penalty in Africa: A Human Rights Perspective* (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Segun Gbadegesin, 'Can There Be an Adequate Justification for Capital Punishment?', in Jan Broekman *et al.* (eds.) *Social Justice and Individual Responsibility in the Welfare State* (Stuttgart: Frans Steiner Verlag, 1985), pp. 227-233 at 231-233; M. Adekunle Owoade, 'Capital Punishment: Philosophical Issues and Contemporary Problems in Nigeria', *Second Order* (New Series) (1988) 1: 41-61 at 47-57; Constitutional Court of the Republic of South Africa, *The State versus T Makwanyane and M Mchunu*, Case No. CCT/3/94 (1995), <http://www.saflii.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> For two examples, see Egbeke Aja, 'Crime and Punishment: An Indigenous African Experience', *The Journal of Value Inquiry* (1997) 31: 353-368; and Oladele Abiodun Balogun, 'A Philosophical Defence of Punishment in Traditional African Legal Culture: The Yoruba Example', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* (2009) 3: 43-54.

<sup>4</sup> For some of the key papers, see Hashem Dezhbakhsh *et al.*, 'Does Capital Punishment have a Deterrent Effect? New Evidence from Postmoratorium Panel Data', *American Law and Economics Review* (2003) 5: 344-376; H. Naci Mocan and R. Kaj Gittings, 'Getting Off Death Row: Commuted Sentences and the Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment', *Journal of Law and Economics* (2003) 46: 453-478; Joanna Shepherd, 'Murders of Passion, Execution Delays, and the Deterrence of Capital Punishment', *Journal of Legal Studies* (2004) 33: 283-321.

<sup>5</sup> I have spelled out the concept of dignity with much more care in Thaddeus Metz, 'African Conceptions of Human Dignity', *Human Rights Review* (2011) DOI: 10.1007/s12142-011-0200-4.

<sup>6</sup> Moses Òkè, 'An Indigenous Yoruba-African Philosophical Argument against Capital Punishment', *The Journal of Philosophy, Science and Law* (2007) 7, <http://www.miami.edu/ethics/jpsl>.<sup>7</sup> And, furthermore, that the state cannot compensate someone (or at least not adequately!) if he has been wrongfully put to death.

<sup>8</sup> Òkè, (note 6).

<sup>9</sup> See Thaddeus Metz, 'Human Dignity, Capital Punishment, and an African Moral Theory: Toward a New Philosophy of Human Rights', *Journal of Human Rights* (2010) 9: 81-99 at 86.

<sup>10</sup> Constitutional Court of the Republic of South Africa, (note 2), para. 311; see also para. 313, 229, as well as Gbadegesin (note 2), p. 227, and P. M. Maduna, 'The Death Penalty and Human Rights', *South African Journal on Human Rights* (1996) 12: 193-213 at 207-213.

<sup>11</sup> For what I take to be the most philosophically appealing facets of *ubuntu*, see Thaddeus Metz, 'Toward an African Moral Theory', *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2007) 15: 321-341.

<sup>12</sup> I first made this argument in Metz, (note 9), pp. 86, 88-89. There are additional African-based arguments against the death penalty from the Court that are not as prominent, but there I argue that they all fall prey to the same problem of implying that deadly force is impermissible.

<sup>13</sup> I have done the most to spell out this conception of dignity in Metz (notes 5, 9), but one can find related ideas in H. R. Botman, 'The OIKOS in a Global Economic Era', in J. R. Cochrane *et al.* (eds.) *Sameness and Difference* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), [http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-6/chapter\\_x.htm](http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-6/chapter_x.htm); and Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> The next few paragraphs borrow from Metz (note 9), pp. 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> There are some unusual situations in which the death penalty would counteract the offender's proportionate unfriendliness, when, say, he is responsible for organizing terrorist activities and the only way to stop his followers from engaging in them would be to execute him. For more discussion see Metz, (note 9), p. 93.

**PART III**  
**AFRICAN IDENTITY**





**CHAPTER VII**  
**FANON AND RECOGNITION IN**  
**THE COLONIAL CONTEXT**

CHARLES VILLET

**INTRODUCTION**

Hegel's master-slave dialectic serves as one of his most influential ideas and it has left a lasting legacy. Hegel's master-slave dialectic describes a specific form of human relations in which domination has a central role to play. This domination is at the heart of the need for recognition in the midst of a life and death struggle. In short, recognition is the *mutual* recognition of one conscious agent and a second conscious agent. Recognition within Hegel's framework carries a certain amount of ambiguity: His dialectic seemingly sets off in the direction of mutual recognition but this promise is not fulfilled. The dynamic underpinning Hegel's dialectic is taken up by Fanon in his critique of Western colonialism. The master-slave dialectic was implicit in human relations in the colonies with the addition of the crucial and disturbing presence of violence. Fanon's critique is also a blow for the possibility of mutual recognition. Fanon provides a picture of the dialectic in terms of race, and recognition becomes a problematic notion in the light of Western racism. The core of Fanon's analysis (which appears in *Black Skin, White Masks*) is that the dialectic in the colonial context is similar to Hegel's dialectic but it diverges in a number of important ways. The aim of this paper is to throw light on the similarities and differences between the Hegelian dialectic and the Fanonian dialectic of the master and slave.

**HEGEL'S RECOGNITION: LORD AND BONDSMAN**

Hegel provides an analysis of the working of self-consciousness in his work *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), and demonstrates how the self can only become conscious of itself by the presence of, and recognition of itself by, an-other (PhS 113). However, this process of self-consciousness takes place at the expense of the other. The moment in which the self becomes conscious of itself, declaring itself as an "I", the other is negated and destroyed as an-other (PhS 109). This is a perplexing notion. This negation and destruction of the other is the result of it becoming a mirror image of the self (PhS 111). This mirror image is the self's attempt at overcoming the other in order to become certain of itself as the primary and essential being in this world (PhS 111). Both self and other engage in this process of self-consciousness and the result is an always unequal relationship of strict opposition. In short, the process is

thus: declaring oneself as “I” is a reaction to becoming conscious of one’s self through the presence of an-other. Declaring oneself as “I” is important, because it avoids consideration of the self as a *thing* (PhS 115) or object amongst other objects. However, in order to do this one must see the other as a *thing* or object, and in doing so, negate and annihilate the other as a self for-itself.

To demonstrate the working of the process of self-consciousness (German: *Selbstbewusstsein*, which could also mean “being self-assured” (Singer, 2001: 78)), Hegel incorporates the metaphor of the relationship between lord and bondsman. The lord “is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness” (PhS 115). Once this mediation has transpired, the lord becomes a being-for-self. The lord becomes conscious of self only by virtue of the presence of an-other. This other is the bondsman, who “is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another” (PhS 115), i.e. being-for-other. The bondsman is inextricably linked to *thinghood* (PhS 115), and cannot break free from being considered a *thing* by the lord. The lord, on the other hand, ironically, desires the *thing* that is the bondsman. Why this desire? According to Singer (2001: 76), in the Hegelian sense, “[t]o desire something is to wish to possess it and thus not to destroy it altogether – but also to transform it into something that is yours, and thus to strip it of its foreignness.” The lord desires the *thing* that is the bondsman in as much as the *thing* can be possessed, namely by defining what the *thing* is. Defining the *thing* that is the other satisfies the desire of the lord by virtue of representing an act of making the other the same as the self. The other nourishes the desire of the self to make the world its own. The lord seizes power over the *thing* because he is the one who decides what the *thing* is (PhS 115). What is the nature of the *thing*, according to the lord? The answer to this is quite simple: “it is something merely negative” (PhS 115).

The relation between lord and bondsman has an ironic effect: “the lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness” (PhS 116) (the bondsman), and in so doing becomes dependent on the *thing* for his own self-consciousness (PhS 117). The chains of the bondsman become that of the lord as well. As a consequence, there exists no manner of freedom, only mutual enslavement to the *thing*. The bondsman is dependent on his *thinghood* and thus on his definition as *thing* by the lord (PhS 115). This dependence of the bondsman is held in place by servitude, i.e. a fearful consciousness in which one’s whole being is seized with dread (PhS 117): the bondsman fears annihilation (i.e. death) by the lord. The bondsman sets aside his own self-consciousness, in so doing negating himself, by providing servitude to the lord in an attempt to rid himself of this fear (PhS 116, 117). This fear is rid of in servitude by satisfying the desire the lord has for possession of the other. The bondsman, negating himself, does to himself the same thing that the lord does to the bondsman. This negation, at first, draws back into itself and he makes his own “negativity an object and transform[s his] alienation into independent

self-consciousness” (Oliver, 2004: 5). Through his newly acquired independent self-consciousness the bondsman becomes aware of what he really is (PhS 118). His fear, at first mute and also turned inward, is externalized onto the lord (PhS 118-119), and the lord is seen as the object of his (the bondsman’s) fear (PhS 117). The independent consciousness of the bondsman represents a spirit of resistance and rebellion against the lord. Through this rebellion the bondsman comes to see himself as existing on his own accord by negating the object of his fear, namely the lord (PhS 118). As a consequence, the lord becomes other to the bondsman. The bondsman still fears the lord, but overcomes this fear by seeing the lord as an object, i.e. a *thing*. The *thing* has been seized as the possession of the bondsman through his rebellion, and its nature is now his own making. What is the nature of the *thing*, according to the bondsman? The answer to this is quite ironic, for the shape of the *thing* is now a mirror image of the bondsman himself (PhS 118), namely an object that needs to be mastered, negated and annihilated. Liberman (1999: 272) words this moment well when he says, “each subject objectifies the Other, i.e. each subject produces an object.”

#### **FANON’S RECOGNITION: WHITE MASTER AND BLACK SLAVE**

Frantz Fanon provides his analysis of the theme of recognition in the work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) and reinterprets Hegel in the colonial context in terms of race, namely the relationship between the white settler and black man, i.e. master and slave. He picks up where Hegel left off, stating that “man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognised by him” (BW 216). This presents a number of positive and negative things to be said about recognition: positively, it seems that the desire or need for one to be recognised is a simple human attribute, [1] i.e. it is human to want to be recognised. Both positively and negatively, one is only human if recognised as such. Negatively, Fanon seems to suggest that the extent of the imposition of one’s existence on an-other becomes the measure of humanity, i.e. one can only be human if you ensure that you impose yourself on an-other successfully. It must be clear that from the onset the concept of humanity is now problematised, but it is also qualified as the bond between self and other. This is clear when Fanon (BW 217) says, “it is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his [man’s] own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of life is condensed.” Thus, I am only human if an-other recognises me as human. My humanity is inextricably intertwined with the other, even though it seems that (Hegelian) humanity can only come about in the consumption of the other because of the need or desire for recognition (Williams, 1997: 49). This need or desire is expressed in an “open conflict between black and white” (BW 217) within the colonial context. The situation is such that the white settler regards the black man

as a slave (BW 214) because he does not measure up to the standard of whiteness. In so doing the white settler asserts himself as the master. Therefore the black slave mirrors everything that is bad to the white master, i.e. the negative characteristics of humanity. The question now comes to the fore: what are the negative characteristics of humanity, in the eyes of the white man, in the black man? The white man considers black men as “machine-animal-men” (BW 220): they are partly human, partly animal, completely thing and object, and is there solely to perform labour (BW 220).

The role of the distinction between subject and object is an important one to take into account here because it points to a major difference between Hegel’s bondsman and Fanon’s black slave. Before the discussion can continue, the Hegelian distinction between subject and object as such requires clarification. In this respect, following Lonergan (1992: 446), one can distinguish two elements in the Hegelian dialectic that is crucial for this distinction: namely the primacy of concepts and the integral role of sublation. Firstly, in short, concepts are primary because of its provision of meaning to objects, which results in the grasp of objects. In this respect the grasp of an object facilitates the move into being a subject. Secondly, this movement into subjecthood means that the object becomes sublated, i.e. it is consumed by the subject. In so doing, the object becomes dependent on the subject for its own nourishment, i.e. its meaning hinges on that of the subject. The term object, then, refers to a self-consciousness that is not able to affix its own meaning and in so doing bring itself to realization. The object’s meaning is determined and constructed by an-other, and therefore it is a being-for-other. Therefore, a subject, in contrast, refers to a self-consciousness that is able to affix its own meaning, bringing about a realization of self, i.e. being-for-self. The subject’s realization comes at the cost of the object, which becomes sublated in the process, i.e. its meaning is derivative of the subject and must also be acceptable to the subject. Hegel’s treatment of recognition above ends with the bondsman turning the tables on the lord by way of considering the lord as an object, but this only happens after the bondsman regards himself as an object that needs to be transformed into a subject.

According to Fanon this is not the case within the colonial context. Where there is, at least, some form of reciprocity in Hegel, Fanon points to a major departure from this route in the relation between the white master and black slave (BW 220-21). The white master finds the black slave laughable and is not seeking recognition from the slave. Rather, the white master simply wants the black slave to perform labour for him. However, the black slave finds no liberation in his work (as the Hegelian bondsman does), and does not get embroiled in objectifying the master. He does not come to regard the white master as an object because he never turns his own negativity (a result of his negation and objectification by the master) into an object in the first place (Oliver, 2004: 5). This is a necessary step on the way to subjectivity, and the black

slave never makes this move. Instead, he wants to be *like* the white master, i.e. he is fixated with becoming a subject. This situation makes him less independent than the Hegelian bondsman because he always considers the subjectivity of the master, and never his own. The result of this is a paradox in which the black slave finds himself: he wants to be recognised as something (namely a subject), but the master will not do so. The white master will not recognise the black slave as a subject because in his consideration the slave is not human but part of nature, i.e. an animal. Serequeberhan (1994: 46) points out that in the Hegelian sense, nature is equated with objecthood. Therefore, the white colonial master's attitude rests exactly on a Hegelian presupposition concerning humanity. Human (or spiritual) existence is equated with self-conscious freedom (*Ibid.*: 139), i.e. subjecthood, which is on a higher level than that of the unfree and naturally determined, namely the nonhuman. The lord initially found himself on this level, but elevated himself to become human when he became conscious of himself, therefore forsaking his natural existence. This, according to Serequeberhan (*Ibid.*), is the most significant moment of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and it is a moment that the Hegelian slave can also partake in. This moment transpires when the Hegelian bondsman becomes a subject in his own consideration when he regards the lord as an object.

Fanon's black slave never reaches this moment, but remains stuck within a fixation with the identity of the white master. The Hegelian bondsman turns away from the master and turns towards the object (BW 220), i.e. he considers the lord as an object and in so doing asserts his own subjectivity. The black slave, on the other hand, turns towards the master and abandons the object (BW 220), i.e. he considers the lord's subjectivity as something he wants himself. There is a good dose of irony here, for the Hegelian bondsman attains subjectivity although he did not pursue it. The black slave pursues subjectivity, but finds it unattainable. In the final analysis, the Hegelian bondsman both disallows definition of itself by the object (i.e. the lord) and being considered as an object as such and in so doing takes hold of its own meaning. The Hegelian slave knows how to form an independent self-consciousness and his situation even becomes so radical that the master becomes dependent on the slave to uphold his own self-consciousness.

Fanon's black slave is not so fortunate and remains in an unfavourable situation. He does not create himself (BW 220) and is dependent on the master for his own self-consciousness. Within this situation, at bottom, as Fanon puts it so succinctly, "[i]t is always a question of the subject; one never even thinks of the object" (BW 212). The black slave wants to be recognised as a subject, and never wants to be regarded as an object. The black slave wants to be the "centre of attention", wants to be *the* subject. However, in the gaze of the white master the black slave always fulfills the role of an object in four ways (BW 212): firstly, the slave is an instrument against which the master measures his own superiority. Secondly, the slave enables the master to

realize his subjective security. In the third place, the slave helps the master in defining himself and the world. Fourthly and crucially, the slave is denied his individuality and liberty. The master regards himself as a fulfilled self-consciousness, meaning that he has asserted himself “as a primal value without reference to life” (BW 217).

### FREEDOM THROUGH CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

The situation between the white master and black slave becomes even more radical and bleak. The black slave’s desire for subjectivity is by no means exhausted, despite the odds stacked up against him. He is “a man crucified. The environment has shaped him, has horribly drawn and quartered him ... [he has] an indisputable complex of dependence on the [white master]” (BW 216). The black slave cannot simply remain in the place that has been assigned to him, for he seeks to make an end to this (BW 216). For Fanon this can only happen through violence and not labour, as is the case for the Hegelian slave. According to Fanon “human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies” (BW 218). Conflict, it seems, is a central feature in human reality if one is to be transformed from being an object to being a subject, thus facilitating the entry into self-consciousness. Fanon continues by saying, ‘self-consciousness accepts the risk of its life, and consequently it threatens the other in his physical being’ (BW 218), implying, it seems to me, that the pursuit of subjectivity by the black slave threatens the master’s life. The desire for subjectivity, for the black slave, represents three things: firstly, he wants to make himself recognized (BW 217) by virtue of his own agency, i.e. he wants to assign meaning to himself as he pleases. Secondly, he wants to be considered as one that can desire, and is not devoid of the ability to transform himself. Thirdly, he does not want to be considered a mere thing. Fanon looks to Hegel (PhM 233) for a clear articulation of the black slave’s desire for subjectivity: “It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus it is tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not *bare existence*, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.”

For Hegel freedom exists only because one is prepared to take the ultimate risk to obtain it. Freedom is therefore essentially negative because it is not something that it is my *right* to have. Freedom is gained only beyond struggle, thus it something to be *earned*. This freedom is characterized by the ability to assign meaning to oneself. The reason for this is that self-consciousness is not bare existence (i.e. being-in-itself) but rather “pure self-existence, being-for-self” (PhM 233). To recapitulate, in my view, being-for-self refers to the individual that has agency in terms of assigning meaning to him- or herself. The freedom and agency that is involved in being-for-self is not granted to the black slave, or rather, *he does not grant himself this freedom and agency*. According to Fanon this

is the case because recognition without struggle does take place as the white master, one day, without conflict, “said to the Negro, ‘From now on you are free’” (BW 219). Here the white master’s words seem contradictory as its tone seems normative in a sense, commanding the black slave to accept that he is now free because he has the same rights as the master. However, this is an empty recognition as “the former slave wants to make himself recognized” (BW 217) and be in control of how this transpires. Thus, he wants to be in control of the “what” in himself that is recognized, i.e. the image and identity conveyed to the master of old and also to himself. And yet, the desire to be like the white master persists.

The situation of the Fanonian slave-object is described well by Hegel (PhM 233): “The individual who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of his recognition as an independent self consciousness.” This is indeed an interesting point in my view, and it throws some light on the idea of personhood, at least in the Hegelian sense. Personhood can be gained without struggle, but this does not necessarily imply that one has gained freedom or agency in being able to provide oneself with meaning. It seems then that personhood does not imply mutual agency and freedom. It is rather a question of what kind of personhood one gains: is it a personhood of equality following on the master’s decision to forsake his hold on the slave, i.e. he simply does not oppress the slave anymore and the slave has the *same* rights as the master; or is it a personhood of superiority that was preceded by a violent struggle after which the slave has rights that are *superior* to that of the master. This problematises personhood, for equal rights seem to be a fair trade but also seem to be no more than a simple truce with violence simmering just under the surface. In Fanon’s view, the black slave will only be satisfied if the dialectic is inverted, and the means to do this is violence. The values of the white master is simply inherited and exercised by the slave and not transformed, transcended or overcome in order to reach values that are authentically the slave’s own. This leaves one at a rather bleak juncture because it seems to imply that the master-slave relation simply perpetuates itself by way of a relational inversion, i.e. there will always be a master and a slave. This means that if the (Fanonian) slave attains freedom through violence and overthrows the power of the old master, he simply becomes the new master. However, the equality of persons in society does not come about.

## CONCLUSION

Fanon provides a sober and unnerving reading of Hegel’s master and slave as it manifests in the colonial context. His work was written in a context both similar and different to our own. We have seen an end to colonialism, but its effects are still manifest, as is the unequal relationship between the West and its former colonies. His work conveys a strong and direct message in terms of the violence that transpired in the colonial

context. Violence still plagues great parts of Africa, be it in the guise of war, terrorism or crime. In terms of our context Fanon's words, especially on decolonisation (in *The Wretched of the Earth*), speak to us most urgently and there is no denying its truth in reality. The aftermath of colonisation is a messy and uncompromising process in which human lives are lost or seriously damaged. Fanon demonstrates the relevance of Hegel's dialectic for the colonial context but also the ways in which the colonial dialectic diverges from Hegel's model. The insight in this respect is that Fanon's reading of Hegel is still relevant to our own context because of the persistence of violence and racism. Further studies could investigate how we can assess our own context in light of Fanon's reading of the dialectic, but also for ways that can help to deal with the dialectic. One such avenue could be to examine the notion of a postcolonial humanism that Fanon sought and much can be gained in mining this moment of hope that lurks in his otherwise bleak analysis of colonialism and decolonization.

## NOTES

1. I will, at certain points in the discussion, make use of the term "human" as I regard *sole* reference to the term "man" as sexist. However, I will make some use of the term "man" for reasons of clarity of style, i.e. to remain connected to Fanon's vocabulary and avert a confusion of terms. The same applies to the pronoun "he", which I will use throughout.

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## **CHAPTER VIII**

# **THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN AFRICA: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

*PAULIN MANWELO*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this essay, I would like to achieve three objectives. Firstly, I will highlight the problem at stake: what does it mean to speak of African identity? Indeed, it is not obvious that we all have the same understanding when we use concepts to express reality. There are concepts which are not easily dealt with. For instance, the case of the concept of globalization that is so much used today, in different and conflicting ways, is eloquent. It is the same with the concept of identity. So, what do we mean by identity? More precisely, what do we mean by African identity? To clarify concepts that we use is an important step in order to avoid any semantic confusion.

Secondly, clarification of terminologies will pave the way to explore and critique what I would call schools of thought on the issue of African identity. There is an extensive African literature on this topic. This goes from negritude literature and all the literature before and after independence to the present day. I wish to distinguish four schools of thought that represent four models through which African identity has been or is often thought of. My contention here is that these four models have failed to define as well as to promote a sound, dynamic and vibrant African identity. They all fall into the trap of one dimensionality or exclusionism. The approach of presenting an African identity at the expense of other dimensions needs to be reconsidered. The end result of the four models reveals an inadequacy in their dealing with the question of African identity.

The third objective is an attempt to go beyond the existing models of African identity by reconstructing a new model that can help us to build an African identity that is positive, dynamic, and appropriate to today's context.

## **THE SOCRATIC PREDICAMENT**

What is the problem we are dealing with? How can we frame it? Put otherwise, what is the question of African identity all about? Those who are familiar with Socrates will recognize what I would call the Socratic predicament; that is, the necessity of determining the nature of the question one is dealing with before any attempt at giving a solution to the problem raised. The Socratic predicament is, as a matter of fact, the prerequisite condition for adequately tackling a given problem. Otherwise,

a good solution can become a wrong one, because it has been applied to a problem that has been wrongly defined [1]. So, what do we mean by “African Identity?”

### A NON-ONTOLOGICAL QUESTION

Let us first put it in a negative way: the question at stake when one speaks of African identity is not whether an African is a human being or not. This is not the question we are dealing with. This question was, in fact, raised in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by anthropologists, ethnologists, and philosophers. The names of anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl, Marcel Griaule, and philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Voltaire, Hume, Kant, Montesquieu, and Hegel are well known in this debate [2]. The question of African identity, conceived in terms of ontology, or what the Kenyan philosopher D.A. Masolo has termed as the debate between Logocentrism and Emotivism, is divided between African philosophers and Western philosophers.

But, if it is true that this debate was necessary as a response to all the attacks on the humanness of Africa and all justifications for imperialism and colonialism in Africa, it behoves to recognize that this debate is over.

### A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL QUESTION

Indeed, the question of African identity reveals a new dimension *today*, which is not an ontological one, but rather a sociological, political, religious, and economic one. The African identity question, *today*, is no longer whether Africans are human beings or not, but rather, the question should be framed as follows: *how can an African live his or her life in a meaningful and successful way today?* The question of African identity becomes here not a question of being an African for the sake of being an African, but rather, the question of being an African in a meaningful and successful way. In the final analysis, what is at stake in the question of African identity is the question of values and the ability to give sense to African life today.

In the question framed above, the word, “*today*”, represents a very important paradigm in order to clarify further the question, hence, its italicization in this text. Indeed, the problem of African identity has to be considered in *today’s* context, which is characterized by rapid and profound social changes such as the fact that *today* we no longer live in tribal and ancestral societies, but rather in pluralistic and diverse societies. The question of African identity must thus be raised within this new paradigm, this new context. Hence, in respect to today’s pluralistic context, we can, once again, frame the question as follows: *how can an African live his or her life in a meaningful and successful way in a pluralistic society?*

Herein lies the crux of the matter when we speak of African identity *today*.

### **FALSE MODELS OF AFRICAN IDENTITY**

Before I try to give an answer to this question, I would like to point out four traditional attempts at dealing with the question. As I indicated earlier, these four models of African identity fail to adequately address the question of African identity in that they cannot be considered as ways through which Africans can live their lives in a meaningful and fruitful way *today*.

#### *Exceptionalism*

The first model is that of exceptionalism. The proponents of this model hold that African identity must be built upon African values, and more precisely, upon African traditional values. The return to African traditional values is thus seen as the only way to foster African identity. In this school, Africa is considered an exceptional world which needs an exceptional way of living. This perspective praises the *uniqueness* of the African culture and personality. There is a strong tendency toward pride and self-congratulating. One would then do everything to praise African traditional values such as kindness, solidarity, creativity, spontaneity, and so forth.

This model is not only a romanticization of the African past, but also, it is prone to exclusionism. It tends to promote the exclusion of others from the African world. Others become not only foreigners, but also threats, enemies to African's world and way of living. And it is interesting to notice that the same logic of exclusion vis-à-vis other cultures and people of the world will also be at play within African countries themselves, in that each ethnic group, for instance, will tend to consider itself as being "unique", "special" and then will tend to exclude other ethnic groups from its way of living or seeing things. For once one starts such a politics of exclusion, one will be at pains to stop it from spreading and invading other spheres of life.

This model was dominant during the age of negritude, at least some conceptions of negritude – the radical wing of it. And, today the main proponents of this model are the so-called ethnophilosophers [3].

#### *Assimilationism*

The second model of African identity is the assimilationist model. The project of this school is to build up African identity through an uncompromising and complete integration of European values into African life. Such integration will run from eating to dressing, speaking, and mainly to the appropriation of European technology and sciences.

Assimilation is thus considered as the only route to progress and prosperity for Africans. “The only hope for [African] enhancement is increased interaction with whites, because only assimilation can civilize, refine, and modernize [Africans]” [4].

The assimilationist model appears attractive, especially when one considers the scientific and technological achievements of the West leading to the improvement of the material conditions in Europe or in America. But needless to say it relies on a pathological vision of Africa. For, the latter is viewed as a world of superstition, ignorance, and fear. And this eventually leads to the inferiority complex: Africans tend to consider African values as being inferior to European values.

Assimilationism is not only a depreciation of African culture, it is yet another form of exclusion in that it only considers one culture (Western culture) at the expense of others (e.g. African culture). Assimilationism is the negation and the rejection of the other. In the last resort, it is a lack of respect for the other. Therefore, it cannot be a sound basis for building up a society of persons characterised by differences.

### *Marginalism*

The third model is the marginalist model. This model is different from the exceptionalist model because it is characterized by the exclusion of both the present African culture and the European culture. Even though the marginalist shows an inclination towards traditional values, he or she considers the present African values as being totally corrupt and therefore no longer relevant. The marginalist lives in confinement and revolt. The marginalist is often scandalized and depressed by the shortcomings of our world, including the African world. The struggle here, which is a moral one, is to create a new world for Africa.

The marginalist model is not different from the previous models, in that it is characterized by a profound scepticism, which is a disguised form of exclusion of other cultures. In the final analysis, this model is unrealistic in the sense that it is an idle imagination of a perfect world on earth.

### *Humanism*

The fourth model is the humanist model. This model advocates a homogeneous civilization for all human beings. Since human beings share a common humanity, this model calls for a way of living where differences and particularities do not have room to thrive. The struggle for identity here is the struggle for a common identity shared by all. Karl Marx can be considered as one of the proponents of this model. The dream of the communist ideology was precisely to contain any distance among human beings, be it in terms of material possessions or in terms of values.

The humanist model was very much applied to Africa at the peak of Marxism. But we know that this project led to dictatorship and other forms of totalitarianism that reduced to silence any form of freedom of expression.

The bottom line is that this model is based on an unrealistic assumption in the sense that it does not take human differences seriously. It also falls into the trap of the assimilationist model; but here it is based on an illusion of creating a single culture and civilization for all human beings. Such a project is a dangerous ideology because it leads to dictatorship and other forms of suppressing particularities and differences.

Looking at the situation of Africa since the time of African independence, my contention here is this: if we consider a few cases such as Ghana with Kwame Nkrumah (who was a strong voice of the exceptionalist school), the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the former Zaïre) with Mobutu (a strong advocate of the humanist school with his philosophy of authenticity), or the case of Malawi with Kamuzu Banda and Zambia with Kenneth Kaunda (both strong proponents of the humanist school), it becomes obvious that the politics or the challenge of building up a sound, dynamic and prosperous African identity has failed mainly because of their inadequate and one-dimensional approach.

After more than forty years of independence in many African countries, we are still at great pains at finding a sound model for our African identity. *Today*, many African countries are still caught up in the dilemma of the models or schools that we have described above: exceptionalism, assimilationism, marginalism, and humanism. This explains why ethnic conflicts, tribalism, strong nationalism, racism, in short, all forms of exclusion are rampant and represent one of the vicious viruses destroying our societies.

## **MULTICULTURALISM AND PLURALISM: A NEW MODEL OF IDENTITY**

In order to overcome the tendency towards exclusionism, one of the sources of conflict and war in Africa, I would like to reconstruct a new model that can be of a great assistance in the effort to build up an appropriate model of African identity. This model is characterized by multiculturalism and pluralism.

The reconstruction effort of the new model of African identity is a fact that cannot be denied. Indeed, *today*, be it in Africa or in another part of the world, we live in post-ancestral, post-tribal societies. A tribal society, by definition, is a closed society; a society where one's identity is determined only by a specific social group, mainly the clan, tribe or ethnic group. Today, on the contrary, thanks to social mutations, caused by geographical, marital, political and economical interactions, we no longer live in closed societies. Instead, we live in open societies or de-centered societies. In short, we live in pluralistic or multicultural societies.

I tend to consider globalization as the advent or the “epiphany of pluralism” [5]. Globalization is thought to be a process of homogenization of cultures. Yet globalization is precisely the opposite. Globalization is the time of differences and even the time of *differance* (a term coined by Derrida), in that we are compelled to respect and celebrate our differences as God’s gift to our humanity. Our times *today* can, indeed, be described as the time where we are aware that our world is composed of many tribes, many ethnic groups, many races, many cultures, and many civilizations; and at the same time, we are also aware that we are condemned to live together with our differences, which often are opposite and irreconcilable. John Rawls captures well the fundamental question underlying this new context as follows: “how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” [6] Given such a context of pluralism, it becomes obvious that any attempt to promote exceptionalism, assimilationism, marginalism, false humanism, or any other form of exclusionism, be it at the national or international level, is doomed to lead to social unrest and disorder.

This is where the challenge of building up an African identity *today* stands. The politics of African identity must take seriously the fact of pluralism or multiculturalism. Unless we become aware that our societies are pluralistic, that is, that our societies are made up of many and different people; unless we realise that we are called to live together despite our differences, we will be at pains to make progress as peoples or nations, and as a continent, and, indeed, as the world at large.

The multiculturalist model of identity is thus the best way through which we can, as Africans, build up sound, just and stable societies *today*.

What does all of this imply in a more concrete way? In other words, how should we promote our African identity today according to the model required by the fact of pluralism?

### THREE MAIN TASKS AHEAD

There are three main tasks to be considered in order to promote the ethics of multiculturalism in our African societies.

First, there is a need to change our mentalities by embracing a new understanding of today’s world. To change our mentalities is to acknowledge the paradigm shift in Africa today that is the transition from ancestral, tribal, ethnic societies to modern and multicultural societies. It is impossible to live in today’s Africa with backward ideologies only related to our ancestral, ethnic and tribal ties.

Second, if the above assumption is true, then some categories that we still use *today* in order to identify ourselves become obsolete, even dangerous in terms of understanding who we are and what we ought to be *today*. More precisely, I would like to argue here that the concept of

identity based on notions such as ethnicity, tribe, race and the like must be “sublated” [7] in order to promote a concept of identity rather based on the notion of *citizenship*. If, indeed, we live in a new world, there is a need for new categories that can help us to grasp and live the essence of this new world. The concept of citizenship has, precisely, the merit of defining our identities today, both in terms of our particularities, and also in terms of our common bonds in society. More precisely, the concept of citizenship implies the following social values: *social justice* (fairness vis-à-vis others); *recognition* of our differences; *self-determination* (the ability to exercise some degree of control over one’s life); and *solidarity* (the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them for the common good for a better society).

In this context, it becomes obsolete to define oneself in terms of one’s tribe, ethnic group, race or religion. Actually, these categories are, *ab initio*, prone to division and conflict. However, the category of citizenship is, *ab initio*, inclusive and thereby less prone to division and conflict. It makes a great deal of difference when someone identifies himself or herself as a Luo or Kikuyu rather as simply a Kenyan citizen. Stressing our ethnicity, race, or religious affiliation is likely to lead to conflict and division, instead of focusing on the national component of our identity. The recent move by the Rwandese government to forbid its citizens recourse to any form of identification based on one’s ethnic group, Hutu or Tutsi, can rightly be considered as an attempt to go beyond the politics of identity based on ethnicity, the source of division and conflict.

Third, the task of reconstructing our African identities today concerns the institutionalization of new laws. The process of changing our mentalities cannot be limited to the matter of good will, nice discourses or pious exhortations. There is a need for laws that will materialize the good will by promoting both the common good and our differences. We need laws that will protect the minorities and ensure that nobody will be excluded because of his or her ethnic group, race, religion, political affiliation, etc. In our post-tribal societies, that is, our de-centered societies, only sound and valid laws can achieve the task of fostering a way of living that will respect our diversity, promote the common good and thus prevent us from any form of exclusionism. The ongoing debate in the Kenyan Parliament on the legislation of the question of ethnicity can also be considered as a right move towards a reconstruction of identities in today’s African society. Such legislative efforts have been made, with some degree of success, in multicultural societies such as Canada and the United States of America. Indeed, African states must understand that the fact of multiculturalism is not an option. It is the only way that will determine the existence or the collapse of our nations.

#### **THABO MBEKI ON AFRICAN IDENTITY TODAY**

The following poem by Thabo Mbeki captures what should be the

African identity today:

« I am an African.

I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land...

I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape, they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land have ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and independence and they who, as a people, perished in the result...I am formed of the migrant who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their own action, they remain still, part of me...I come of those who were transported from India and China whose being resided in the fact, solely, that they were able to provide physical labour, who taught me that we could both be at home and be foreign, who taught me that human existence itself demanded that freedom was a necessary condition for that human existence.

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African!..[8]

## NOTES

1. One can recall here Plato's *Dialogues* where Socrates always starts by asking his interlocutor to define the key terms he uses in order to avoid any misconception of issues. Several times, Socrates' interlocutor will be at pains in giving a clear definition of terms. The point of the Socratic predicament is that one cannot pretend to act appropriately when one does not have a clear understanding of the issue at hand.

2. See, for instance, Montesquieu's satirical remarks in *The Spirit of the Laws* about black people: "It is impossible for us to suppose that these beings should be men, because if we suppose them to be men, one would begin to believe we ourselves were not Christians" (Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 61).

Voltaire of the French Enlightenment said in his essay, 'The People of America': "The Negro race is a species of men as different from ours as the breed of spaniels is from that of greyhounds. The mucous membrane, or network, which nature has spread between the muscles and the skin is white in us and black or copper-colored in them ... If their understanding is not of a different nature from ours, it is at least greatly inferior. They are not capable of any great applications or association of ideas and seemed formed neither for the advantages nor the abuses of philosophy" (*Ibid.*, p.62)

Hume similarly declared: "I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized



nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences ... In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but "tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly" (*Ibid.*, p. 62).

Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, relying on Hume's assertion, said: "Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color" (*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63). Kant added another remark as a response to the news that a black person held a philosophical debate with Father Labat: "And it might be that there was something in this which perhaps deserved to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (*Ibid.*, p. 63).

Hegel represents perhaps the one who made the most racist pronouncements about blacks. In his famous *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, he said this about Africa: "Generally speaking, Africa is a continent enclosed within itself, and this enclosedness has remained its chief characteristic ... The characteristic feature of the Negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity – for example, of god or the law – in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being. The African, in his undifferentiated and concentrated unity, has not yet succeeded in making this distinction between himself as an individual and his essential universality, so that he knows nothing of an absolute being which is other and higher than his own self. Thus, man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage. All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism, and he remains in this state to the present day. The Negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes" (Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment. A Reader*, (Cambridge, Mass, Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 122; 127-128).

3. One can find the expression of this model in *Titres de Gloire des Noirs sur les Blancs (Arabes)*, *Epître de Jahiz*, VIIIème siècle (translated

by Haddad Adnan and published by Centre de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée, UNAZA, Campus de Lubumbashi,, 1970), pp. 5 & 7.

4. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 79.

5. Paulin Manwelo, ‘ Globalization as the Epiphany of Pluralism’ , *Afrika Yetu* (December, 2005).

6. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 4.

7. By sublation, I understand not the *de facto* suppression of the idiosyncratic attributes of the individual, but the capacity to elevate them to a higher level of value in society.

8. Mutuma Mathiu, ‘Thabo Mbeki’s Poem’, *Sunday Nation* (September 3, 2006), p. 8.

## CHAPTER IX

# OLD WIVES' TALES AND PHILOSOPHICAL DELUSIONS: ON "THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY"<sup>1</sup>

LOUISE DU TOIT

## INTRODUCTION

African philosophy as a loose set of canonical texts and authors is currently clearly and overwhelmingly dominated by men. One demonstration of the relative absence of strong female voices within the discipline is found in the 1998 publication edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *African Philosophy: an Anthology*, in which, apart from two articles out of a total of fifty-one, women authored only those five essays specifically raising the question about "Philosophy and Gender" (Eze, 1998: v-viii). This is not to accuse Eze of anything, but to provide evidence of the fact that there is virtually no feminist writing in the African philosophy traditions. Bell Hooks authored two chapters and co-authored one, which means that in total, only five women authors were involved, as opposed to about 43 men authors (some of whom also wrote more than one chapter). Furthermore, on his web-page<sup>2</sup> renowned African philosopher Bruce Janz lists as one of the central issues in African Philosophy, "African philosophy and women / feminism: What can each learn from the other? Why are there so few women in African philosophy? Where are the points of tension?" While it is possible to frame this issue about women and African philosophy in many different ways, my article raises the question in the following way: Why do African women intellectuals seem to reject (African) philosophy as a genre of writing? If this is indeed the case, what may feminist and other philosophers learn from this act of rejection? The following, also interesting ways of putting the same issue fall outside of the scope of this article: What may feminist philosophers learn from African philosophy? What are the points of tension and overlap between these two traditions of thought? What does it add to our understanding of oppression if we compare sexism / patriarchy with racism?

In response to my formulation of the question about women and African philosophy, I will argue as follows in this article: (1) In section 2 I will put forward some arguments to show that it is at least plausible to assume that African women are not simply passively excluded from the

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this article was first published in the *South African Journal of Philosophy*. 2008, 27 (4) 413-428.

<sup>2</sup> <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/afphil/docs/centiss.htm>.

echelons of philosophy, but that they seem to have actively chosen other avenues for intellectual expression, notably literature or fiction writing. (2) Irrespective of whether this can indeed be empirically proven to have been the case, in the third section I will argue that there may exist good reasons for such a preference for literature over philosophy, for the concrete and the particular over the abstract and general. These reasons will be linked specifically to a strategy of resistance to abstract and oppressive universalising discourses; as such, this choice is not unique to African women, and can be contextualised within broader postcolonial and feminist frameworks, as I will show. (3) In the fourth section I draw on the work of Adriana Cavarero, Hannah Arendt and others to argue that, since its inception, western philosophy was permeated with a desire for timelessness, universality and immortality, which was moreover masculine in character. Within this masculine symbolic order of the same, women were rendered either functional / instrumental and for-men, or invisible and inaudible. These aspects of philosophy must be overcome if (African and other) women want to participate in philosophical discourse. Part of the strategy needed is to restore voice to the singular, the particular and the unique. (4) In conclusion, I will argue that the literary form of intellectual self-expression and epistemological resistance found in African women's literature not only currently poses a deep challenge to mainstream (African) philosophy, and to its self-conceptions, but that it should also be historically contextualised as part of the legacy of anti-colonialism which sits at the heart of western philosophy's self-doubt and the advent of "postmodernism" during the late twentieth century. As Bhabha (1994: 48) puts this point, "...the political and theoretical genealogy of modernity lies not only in the origins of the idea of civility, but in this history of the colonial moment. [Modernity's genealogy] is to be found in the resistance of the colonized populations to the Word of God and Man..." We are far too inclined to write the history of the West as self-contained and internally driven. I finally call for more sustained philosophical attention to African women's literature as a form of intellectual expression and as posing a challenge to philosophy to define itself more flexibly and broadly (at the same time returning to its roots) as the Platonic "love of wisdom."

These concluding thoughts would imply that I do not regard "postcolonial" African women's fictional writing as currently a part of philosophy, as this discipline is now organised and delimited, and I do not find it desirable either that philosophy should simply appropriate that wisdom tradition with its very different historical origins and aims. What I would however encourage is a philosophical engagement with this tradition in order to make philosophically relevant and fruitful the insights emerging from it, in order that the silence and absence of African women in and from philosophy may be addressed. In this regard I believe that African women's writing should ultimately be part of the tradition of "love of wisdom" or philosophy broadly conceived, as I think that its

contribution is an important part of the postcolonial and feminist projects of emancipation.

### **ARE AFRICAN WOMEN REJECTING PHILOSOPHY AS AN INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLINE?**

In the first paragraph of the article I gave some evidence for the claim that African women's voices are largely absent from African philosophy. The briefest of excursions into the field will yield very similar results – there are virtually no women working within the field, and of those theorists who do write about African women, very few actually are women from Africa. Sometimes the "woman question" in African philosophy is raised by male philosophers such as Sefo Kwame (1990, 1991), Bruce Janz and others, but this (the question of women's absence) and what could be called "women's issues" or questions around sexual difference, have seldom been positioned as key issues within the field. When this issue does get raised, there is often a strong assumption that African women have once again been victimized, that they have been structurally excluded from the discipline of (African) philosophy, or that not enough had been done to bring them into the discipline. This assumption is rooted in what I would call a "developmental" understanding which views African women as that group within African societies which has traditionally (in terms of colonial logic, that is) been as it were "furthest removed" from the western institutions of literacy, academia and philosophy, and whose members have thus "missed out" on "inclusion" into the philosophical discipline, which is often regarded as the pinnacle of western civilization. While it is definitely true that colonial systems have positioned African women on the outskirts or borders of "civilization", and African cultural systems too have often acted to justify women's exclusion from formal education (through the instrumentalisation of women's lives via their reduction to instruments of labour and procreation, through cultural institutions such as lobola), such a one-sidedly developmental view simply reiterates and reinforces the familiar assumption of African women as passive victims of larger circumstances. In the process, it loses from view the logical possibility that the first few generations of African women intellectuals generally might have chosen not to express themselves within the philosophical genre.

Although more empirical research will have to be done to sufficiently justify this suggestion, there is at least one phenomenon that lends support to this possibility. If one compares the emergence of African philosophy with that of African novel writing, there is to my mind a clear difference between the two historical trajectories. In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994), Florence Stratton shows that the early tradition of African novel writing was dominated by men, although there were women writing at the same time. The main problem for the women writers was the reception of their work by the

publishers and critics. In 1966 the first two novels by African women appeared in the same year: Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Literary critics were nearly unanimous in condemning these novels for their focus on women's world, regarding it as particular, trivial, parochial, as 'small talk', old wives' tales, as gossip, and thus as insignificant in the wider scheme of things, not "universal" enough (Stratton, 1994: 81; 83). In spite of this unpromising start, women kept on writing and publishing fiction, and over the course of 50 years established a strong African women's (if not feminist) voice within the genre of the novel. Apart from Nwapa and Ogot, these would include Zaynab Alkali with *Stillborn* (1984), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1979), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Kehinde* (1994) (cf. Wehrs, 2001: x), some works by Bessie Head, and numerous others.

Stratton (1994: 87) moreover shows *Efuru* to be a clear woman's response to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and may thus be viewed as a feminist / womanist novel: Nwapa's story inverts the stereotypical view of women as passive and a-historical bystanders to African history, when she portrays the female gin distillers as actively resisting the British ban on local gin production. Moreover, the men are portrayed as self-serving collaborators of the colonial regime. These positionings firstly disrupt the simplistic binary opposition between (masculine) settler and (masculine) native, and the accompanying masculine history of struggle and liberation. Instead, they present the colonial and postcolonial history in ways that center women's agency and perspective. Secondly and perhaps even more radically, Nwapa challenges one-sidedly patriarchal versions of African indigenous cultures. Compare Stratton (1994: 90): "Nwapa's narration of the myth [of Uhamiri, the goddess of an ancient matriarchal religion], places Achebe's characterization of Igbo society as strictly patriarchal and excessively masculinist under revision. For the myth of Uhamiri embraces both matriarchal and patriarchal principles. Upholding the principle of gender equality, it gives cultural legitimacy to female power." My point is simply that in this earliest of women's novels a strong voice from women's side of reality already emerges, based on the revisiting of indigenous interpretative traditions, and forces correctives on the one-sided masculine voice which dominated earlier fiction writing coming out of Africa. Looking at the institutionalised scene of African philosophical writing, nothing comparable is to be seen.

It should also be made clear that I do not simply reject what I called above the developmental explanation for the absence of African women from philosophy; that explanation is very likely an important part of the full picture, and I believe that ultimately only time will tell whether these women's absence from philosophy is chosen or not, when more of them get the opportunity to enter the discipline. But of course, even if more African women enter the discipline at a later stage, it leaves open the

possibility that the first generations consciously or sub-consciously resisted entering it, found it unhelpful or unsatisfactory, possibly even oppressive. Without being able to go into too much detail here, I must mention one further distinction, namely between the philosophical ideal of open, flexible and equal exchanges of ideas and the closed, inflexible and highly unequal ways in which the discipline is very often institutionalized. Flawed institutionalization might in other words be to blame more than "the discipline as such", but then again it might be precisely what makes philosophy philosophical that has been seen as unpalatable or an obstacle. I will pursue this line of thought below. For the sake of my argument, I ask the reader to entertain with me the possibility that African women thinkers currently not only reject Philosophy as a discipline, but that they prefer literary writing as a form of intellectual self-expression.

#### **AT THE BOUNDARY 'SOMETHING BEGINS ITS PRESENCING'**

In this section I want to show that the elements in African women writers' novels that were regarded as particularly undermining of their quality, namely their focus on women's world, their "parochialism" and particularity, their being "old wives" tales" and local, are precisely the reasons why African women would prefer literature over traditional or mainstream ways of practicing philosophy. For the further discussion, I take a poem as my point of departure.

##### **In Answer to Some Questions**

In answer to some questions that miss the point  
or  
yes but where are you from?

What I don't have  
is a land  
is a lover  
is a language  
to say, is mine  
What I don't have  
are ropes  
of romance  
of nationalism  
of words to tie me down / in smug belonging  
to stop me knowing  
what more there is

What I don't have  
is pencil lines  
drawn around my/self  
by pale people

who know nothing/of my terrain

What I don't have  
are someone else's borderlines

I rub them out with my desire with action  
and a need to know

I am never satisfied

I flood their borders  
with the sea of my sisters names  
and my brothers  
whose lives keep their blood  
red like mine.

(Joyoti Grech, in *Feminist Art News*, 3/10/1992, back cover,  
quoted in Davies, 1994: 58)

There is no clear indication that the narrator / speaker in this poem is female, although the author clearly is. Yet, as I will continue to show, there is a sense in which the speaker is paradigmatically female or feminine. One could say that this poem is an example of a postcolonial text (not necessarily African) which is written in response to a question about the speaker's identity: "where are you from?" It should be noted at the outset that the question does not stand on its own, but is preceded by a telling "yes but", which indicates that the speaker has already introduced herself in some way or another to the interlocutor, most probably by giving her name. The "yes but" indicates that the interlocutor is not satisfied with that form of individualized, particularized identification, and wants to more securely place the speaker's identity. The interlocutor wants to know about her land, lover (husband?), language, wants to be able to pinpoint her origins, wants to give her a racial or ethnic tag or label, and wants to be able to fit her into his / her frame of reference.

These types of questions, the speaker indicates to us, "miss the point", as seen from her own perspective. What the speaker then goes on to deny ("What I don't have...") is the possession of precisely those elements that would help the interlocutor "place" her, label her and ultimately "understand" her. Drawing on the work of postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha (1994: 46), this type of interlocutor, asking these types of questions, moreover, can be understood as a liberal embracer of "cultural diversity" who looks upon the Other as an object of epistemology, of knowledge, control and containment. In this kind of situation, says Bhabha, "[t]he Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" (p.46). The speaker thus distances herself from those possessions, "ropes", "pencil lines" and "borderlines" that would simultaneously give her a clear identity in the eyes of the interlocutor and



make her into an object of his / her knowledge, in Bhabha's words, "the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference" (p.46). That which would bestow upon her a 'smug belonging' would within the very same gesture "tie [her] down", reduce her to an object and destroy her active desire, enunciation and narratable history.

These borderlines are rubbed out and later on "flooded" by the speaker using her desire and action, her capacity for speaking herself, for being an autonomous agent and a subject forging and interpreting her own history. By disclaiming her belonging to or owning of "a land, a lover, a language...to say, is mine", the speaker clearly inhabits the space of Bhabha's "hybrid" (1994: 19), who knows that, who embodies that, there are no "pure" identities or origins. Again using Bhabha's (1994: 1-6) scheme of analysis, one could say that these borderlines and pencil lines refer to the sense of transgressing or crossing a border or limit, residing in the prefix "post" as in postmodernism and postcolonialism. Quoting Martin Heidegger, Bhabha says that "[a] boundary is not that at which something stops but...that from which something begins its presencing", and therefore the latter sees the importance of the postmodern condition to lie in "the awareness that the epistemological "limits" of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups..." (Bhabha, 1994: 6). For Bhabha then, the borders of Eurocentric worldviews and knowledge-systems are the interesting places, because that is where dissonant and dissident histories and voices start to become audible. I want to argue along the same lines, that the borders or limits of (African) philosophy are its interesting places – without being recognized as philosophy, African women's literary expression emerges at philosophy's borderline and speaks of a dissident and dissonant history which, as an alternatively positioned wisdom tradition in its own right, profoundly challenges the self-conception and self-delineation of (African) philosophy.

As long as the border is simply affirmed as an abstract signifier of difference per se, the Other remains the "good object of knowledge", but when the voice of the particular Other starts to be heard, when she starts to name her world and her desire, the possibility of and need for actual cultural difference and differentiation opens up (as opposed to "cultural diversity" which treats other cultures as docile and knowable bodies / objects of difference, in Bhabha's analysis, pp. 48-9). This reading of the poem renders its climax particularly pertinent, since the speaker proposes to "flood" these borders of identification "with the sea of [her] sisters" names / and [her] brothers." In spite of her not owning a land, lover, language, or nation that she can call her own, the speaker is self-assuredly present in her poem and seems to have another secure source of identification – she speaks of her "terrain" (implying an abstract rather than a physical space) and then in the climax, of her sisters and brothers "whose lives keep their blood red like [hers]." Artificial borders and lines are incapable of resisting the force of the sea, but it is significant that the

sea consists of names – those highly particularizing labels that embody respect for the particular, the local, and the singular. Who these millions of brothers and sisters are (their names making up a mighty sea) is not made clear, but we know that they are not a clearly demarcated nation or language group. They might conceivably be the millions of other “hybrids” on earth, including migrants, refugees, colonized groups, minorities, displaced peoples and indigenous marginalised groups like the American Indians or Australian Aboriginals or South African Khoi and San groups.

In this reading of the poem in light of Bhabha’s understanding of marginality, it seems to me that African women must be one of those groups (definitely not to be understood as a homogenous or pure group in any way) who have a keen existential interest in enunciating themselves and their worlds in a particularized way. This is the case, because, as has often been noted, African women are “doubly oppressed.” African women typically have to negotiate their claims to difference, to particularized existence and to their own, authentic voice and history, within and between two systems of pernicious and homogenizing generalization which both render them invisible, voiceless and outside of history. These are, on the one hand (i) colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and on the other (ii) indigenous patriarchal excesses. As Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga’s classic novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1984), so clearly illustrates, these two systems sometimes overlap and reinforce each other, sometimes collide or undermine each other, and there is no simple way for African women to negotiate their own lives within and between them. On the one hand the protagonist Tambudzai has great admiration for (and later empathy with) her uncle who is both the greatest benefactor within the whole clan, and a victim of the colonial system; on the other hand, she learns from some of the women in her family how to resist an indigenous patriarchal system which tries to instrumentalise her. Tambu’s older brother Nhamo humiliates and taunts her because she lacks his male-privileged access to colonial education – in this sense, he embodies the coalition between indigenous patriarchal oppression and colonial oppression. Every aspect of Tambu’s life seems fraught with ambiguity. Her cousin Nyasha, who takes these contradictions very seriously, is by the end of the novel nearly physically destroyed by the social tensions which she translates into an incapacity to swallow or digest anything – she suffers from anorexia or bulimia. By contrast, Tambu finds some sort of escape and redemption in the world of the intellect, and particularly in literature. This discovery empowers her to write her story later on, a story which is integral to her maturation, and to finding her voice and position, to decide upon her stance (moral as well as intellectual) within a doubly disabling context.

In a *CODESRIA Bulletin* article of 2003, Abibatou Touré, Mamadou Cellou, and Barry and Pounthioun Diallo from the University of Montreal discern two “faces” of African feminism – the academic face and the popular one (Touré et.al., 2003: 2 - 3). These authors accuse

African intellectual feminism (not limited to philosophy, but emanating from African intellectual centers) of being "an intellectual profit-seeking feminism, which is not really concerned about the improvement of women's condition in general." Moreover, intellectual feminism is largely sponsored by the west, and thus suspected by ordinary Africans of being channels through which the west tries to preach to them. Their agendas are also seen as sensationalist and reductionist, and as not allowing "for a serious reflection on African women's condition, and on the appropriate solutions to the related problems" (Touré et.al., 2003: 2). Popular African feminism on the other hand entails for these authors those "many women in the economic sphere who are generally illiterate but still hold considerable shares in sectors such as fishing, marketing, gardening, trade, etc." This popular feminism, isolated from intellectual feminism, "is based on the vestiges of the matriarchy practiced in most of the ancient African societies where women enjoyed privileged status" and on the other hand, it is "enshrined in the progressive values introduced by the nationalist struggles for independence" (Touré et.al., 2003: 2).

From this description, it is clear that intellectual African feminism is deeply indebted to western philosophical frames of reference, and often shares in their sensationalist, alienating and external condemnation of African cultures and world-views, whereas popular African feminism is rooted in African traditions, world-views and political history. The authors' criticism against the latter entails that it has a tendency to be complacent or timid with regard to "certain decadent cultural and political practices" and that it "cannot guarantee the emergence of feminine role models in Africa." In other words, popular African feminism does not take a strong enough stance on indigenous patriarchal excesses and is too ambivalent about strong female leadership being asserted. Their anti-colonial solidarity with Africa seems to make it difficult for them to obtain a critical distance on those gender injustices that are justified in terms of anti-colonial or traditionalist discourses.

I have discussed this distinction between intellectual and popular African feminisms to try and indicate to what extent African women's fiction may be viewed as an appropriate type of African feminism, avoiding the pitfalls of both these mentioned types of feminism. African feminist work must thus of necessity be unambiguously marked by a double resistance to oppression: it must do justice to the anti-colonial as well as to the female struggles against indigenous patriarchies, and very often these are framed by the cultural elite as logical opposites, and feminism characterized as alien to Africa. In response, an author like Marie Pauline Eboh chooses to resist Eurocentric feminist theories and embrace what she calls "womanism", and which she describes as follows: "For the African womanist, the double allegiance to woman's emancipation and African liberation are inseparable" (1998: 335), but what she fails to stress sufficiently here is the fact that these two allegiances often clash or stand in deep tension with one another, and it is not always clear what line of action needs to be taken. Nevertheless, if the

logical possibilities of feminism are not artificially limited to those western versions that have so far become globally dominant, then it must be clear that feminist (in the broadest sense of the term) traditions have existed in Africa as far back as we can go. This is the case, because systematic oppression and injustice calls forth resistance. Examples of such “indigenous”, “cultural” or “traditional” practices of women’s resistance to patriarchy can also be found in the African women’s fiction. In Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, for example, the girl Tambudzai learns from the older women in her family such as her aunt, Lucia, and her grandmother, both illiterate women, how to resist patriarchal excess through the ironic relativisation of their attempts at domination and exploitation, through disarming and subversive joking and laughter, and through story-telling which keeps alternative traditions and repressed interpretations alive. For details on these themes, see Charles Seugnet’s discussion (in *Nnaemeka*, 1997: 40ff).

The virtual erasure of feminism or women’s struggle for power on the African continent was the historical result of the cooperation of colonial governments with patriarchal tendencies and agents within African indigenous cultures, as described in the fiction of Grace Ogot, Flora Nwapa, Tsitsi Dangarembga and others (cf. Stratton, 1994: 63, 87). Western feminists can also easily overlook indigenous African women’s strategies of resistance to patriarchy because they are culturally unfamiliar. African feminism or womanism must of necessity be rooted in indigenous cultural traditions. In this regard, I find the various traditions of African goddess cultures and worship particularly promising. Apart from the example discussed in more detail below, there is the example of the water goddess Uhamiri who appears in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (discussed in Stratton, 1994: 90-99), and critic Ousseynou B. Troaré convincingly shows that in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the Earth goddess, Ana, acts as an important corrective on the patriarchal interpretation of tradition (in *Nnaemeka*, 1997: 67).

In the chapter, “Troubled Legacies”, from her book, *At the Heart of Freedom*, Drucilla Cornell (1998: 160ff) alerts western feminists to non-western types of feminist or womanist resistance in her discussion of the Suriname women’s activist group called Mofina Brasa. According to Cornell, Renate Druiventak, one of the leading activists, motivates her actions on behalf of women in her community through aspects of the Afro-Surinamese Winti religion. She advocates for equality for women “in all aspects of life, from land distribution to education”, inspired by a dream she had in which Mama Aisa (Mother Goddess of the Earth) had visited her and told her “to do something for women to help them cope in these difficult times.” Furthermore, this religion views the self as consisting of a kaleidoscope of spirits, both feminine and masculine, which means that it, in Cornell’s words, “undermines any cultural practices that attempt to purify masculinity by cleaning out its feminine other” (p.161). In *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a new South Africa* (2001: 22), Augustine Shutte similarly explains that the ethic of *ubuntu* rests on a

worldview according to which the cosmos is a universal field of interacting forces, so that rocks, plants, animals and humans, both feminine and masculine, and including both the physical and the spiritual or mental dimensions, are all expressions of interacting life forces. The 'self' is thus also here, like in Cornell's example, conceived as strictly speaking existing outside of the individual human (gendered) body, and as furthermore entailing the result and expression of all the different life forces acting upon the single human being. The web of relationships in which a human being is thus caught up is constitutive of who that person is and can be, in contrast with Cartesian and Lockean western models of the self that view the self as primarily self-contained and isolated, entering into contract-type relations with others only secondarily. In *ubuntu* terms, the normative dimension of the human life consists of the successful integration and unification of these different selves. Social and personal integration are moreover mutually interdependent, and selfhood or personhood is a life-long enterprise, but simultaneously also a gift that one cannot give oneself (Shutte, 2001: 22- 25).

Cornell makes clear in her discussion of the Surinamese women's resistance, that "a militant demand that women be treated as equals need not bolster itself by an appeal to Western concepts of the subject or the person." In this example, "the cosmology of the Winti religion provides a "tradition" from within which the demand for equivalent evaluation and the recognition of women as free and equal to men sexually, politically, and ethically, can be rooted" (p.163). Too often, Western feminists fail to appreciate the cultural particularity of the discourses and frameworks which they use to "measure" African women's resistance to patriarchy. The particularities and locality of women's resistance to patriarchal and (neo-)colonial oppression need to be appreciated and their rootedness within African rather than western worldviews must be respected. I suggest that it is from these local and indigenous resistances that the western and African philosophical (including feminist) traditions should learn, and that these resistances are often best portrayed within African women's fiction writing.

## REJECTING WHAT MAKES PHILOSOPHY PHILOSOPHICAL

Everything said so far under this heading supports the notion that African women's intellectual work must be particular and localized, but I still need to show in what sense they reject "what makes philosophy philosophical." For this I will use the work of Italian feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, who has given a particularly perceptive interpretation of western philosophy's erasure of the different, the particular and the unique in the name of its own universality, in her book, *Relating Narratives* (2000). Against this highly idiosyncratic strategy of western philosophy to universalize and de-temporalise itself, "non-western" cultures have to assert difference, change and particularity, in order to escape being measured by western standards and having their difference

interpreted as “feminine lack.” Western “Man’s” (with a capital letter) refusal to face his own particularity and historicity, and his desire to partake of necessity and immortality by being subsumed under the One and the Same, must amongst others be countered by African women’s stories, because stories, in contrast with western philosophical tendencies, proclaim because they perform, the dynamic, contingent and interactive nature of identity-formation.

Plato had already contrasted masculine philosophical activity with “old wives” tales” – here the “old wives” confront philosophy once again with their radically different narrative structure, which nevertheless has all along contained wisdom and love of wisdom of a quite different nature. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt argues that, in western philosophy, “the moment we want to say who somebody is, our vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of the qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a “character” in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us” (1958: 193). Also, Jean-Luc Nancy says that the possibility of a thought of the one, of the someone, of the singular existent, is indeed “that which the subject [of philosophy] announces, promises, and at the same time conceals” (1991: 4; 7).

Western Man’s vocabulary about human identity has historically developed in this way, concealing and erasing the singular existent, because of his need to exorcise his fear of death by subsuming himself or at least his rationality under something of which he can say that it at least is absolute, eternal and necessary. This interpretation by Cavarero is backed up by the psychoanalytic school in French feminism, which tries to make sense of the pervasiveness of patriarchal oppression, psychoanalytically, and which reads this oppression as born out of the masculine fear of mortality. According to Luce Irigaray, for instance, the Platonic cave myth can be read as a therapeutic exercise offering men, but not women, a solution to the problems of loss, mortality and death, since men can subsume themselves under the Idea of the Good, but women form part of the material dimension which must be overcome by the philosopher (cf. Whitford, 1991: 105). The philosophical “Man” of western philosophy is doubly monstrous, says Cavarero: as the abstract, universal name for human existence / existents he simultaneously “engulfs the uniqueness of each human being”, and furthermore claims to include women, naming them in the masculine (2000: 49). According to her, “[Monstrous] Man is at once the entire human species, and one of its two genders. Man is neuter and masculine. Man is both, neither of the two, and one of the two” (Cavarero, 2000: 49).

This is also why, for Cavarero (2000: 52), “the tragedy of the originary scission between the universal Man and the uniqueness of the self ... between the discursive order of philosophy and that of narration – is an entirely masculine tragedy” (emphasis added). Seldom is any woman tempted to sublimate and erase her particular existence in that of

universal, abstract Man. And this is also why it is not entirely untrue that women often represent an aptitude and a care for the particular, the finite, the concrete and the unique, and thus for the narratable, as opposed to the philosophical preoccupation with "rescuing" the particular from its finitude. Hegel proclaimed that "philosophical contemplation has no other intention than to abolish the accidental" – following the logic of saving through suppression (quoted in Cavarero, 2000: 53). In contrast, care for the accidental and unique finds its best expression in the narration of the story left behind by that particular existence. And it is their aptitude for the particular which makes women into the narrators of each other's, and their children's life stories, and the act of spinning them, into a truly feminine art.

Resisting western philosophy's tendency to subsume African women under the notion of "Man", African women tell stories about their situatedness in the world. The narratives within this tradition do not only simply or merely "reflect" an African women's world, but is to a large extent the founding political gesture with which African women deconstruct masculine and imperialist points of view on the world which claim to be neutral, but which in reality conform largely to masculine and colonial or neo-colonial desires and needs. They are thus the kind of borderline stories Bhabha has in mind when he speaks of the dissonant and dissident enunciations in the "beyond." These stories challenge and undermine the impulse of masculine "colonisation" of the feminine, whereby masculinity (like the west, and sometimes in collaboration with it) tries to break free from its need to hear its story as told by the women. Within this genre, then, women authors "learn to narrate themselves as women for themselves and for each other, in the sense of legitimating for themselves a definition which is outside the gaze of the other's / Man's / [western feminist] discourse." (Fraire, quoted in Cavarero 2000: 60). In this symbolic sense then, African women's fiction is thus an important political phenomenon and can be compared with Cavarero's discussion of European feminist consciousness-raising groups during the 1970s, where women responded to their lack of political visibility and of capacity for heroic action in the public sphere, with interactive story-telling. Narrative constructions of female selves for Cavarero here turn into acts of political self-expression and action themselves (Cavarero, 2000: 59). But this understanding rests on a prior theory she develops about the generally human "desire for one's story."

Cavarero postulates the idea that the unity and uniqueness of a life, the answer to the questions "who am I", "who are you", can finally only be given in the form of a narrative, a figural design, a life story, as seen by an "outside", second person, or public perspective. The unifying meaning of a life can thus only be posed by the one who lives it, in the form of a question, or rather, in the form of a desire (2000: 2). In the children's story *Winnie the Pooh*, Christopher Robin tells his father that his teddy bear, Winnie the Pooh, wants to hear a story about himself, "because he is that kind of bear", and then of course Christopher strains

his ears to hear whether he himself appears in the story alongside Winnie. For Cavarero, we are all “that kind of bear.” We all strain our ears to hear snippets about our life story from others, the story in which we are the heroines, the heroes, and the protagonists. Living a life and telling its story are very different activities, and for Cavarero, living a life makes it impossible also to tell the tale. So we cannot do it for ourselves, and every autobiography is notoriously unreliable (Cavarero, 2000: 14). And yet the desire for one’s story remains.

Moreover, we are not the authors or inventors of our own life-stories, we typically do not strive to create our lives as stories. Cavarero illustrates this idea with a memorable story told by Karen Blixen about a man who lived by a pond. This man woke one night to a terrible noise outside. “He went out into the night and headed for the pond, but in the darkness, running up and down, back and forth, guided only by the noise, he stumbled and fell repeatedly. At last, he found a leak in the dike, from which water and fish were escaping. He set to work plugging the leak and only when he had finished [a whole night’s work] he went back to bed. The next morning, looking out of the window, he saw with surprise that his footprints had traced the figure of a stork on the ground” (2000: 1). The point Cavarero takes from this story is that the design of a life, like the figure of the stork traced by the man’s footprints, is something external, accidental, to the intentions and engagements of the life as lived by the protagonist. The vantage point from where the design and unity of a life can be seen, is in an important sense beyond that life and its projects and occupations, such as plugging leaks in dikes. While living and acting, we are “immersed in the contextuality of the events”, “captured in the present of the action that cuts off the temporal series of before and after” (Cavarero, 2000: 18). The man can only see the design, traced accidentally, after the night and the urgency have passed, and only from afar. Cavarero links our inherent inability to live our lives as well as tell our life stories in response to our desire for our story, our desire to know who we are, to the story which only others can ultimately give us.

For Cavarero, the discursive register of philosophy “has the form of a definitory knowledge that regards the universality of Man”, the what; whereas that of narration “has the form of a biographical knowledge that regards the unrepeatable identity of someone” (2002: 13), the who. This is why only a narrative as told by another is capable of satisfying our desire for our story and our need for a unified and unique identity (cf. Cavarero, 2000: 38). And the only reliable way to gain access to who I myself am, is through experiencing the meaning of my narrated life as presented, given by another. It is precisely this inter-relational fragility and dependence of the self or singular existent upon another which the philosophical metaphysics of the subject, and the colonial history of the One, tried to deny and overcome. The traditional subject of western philosophy thus “lets itself be seduced by a universality that makes it into an abstract substance”, whereas the singular existent presents herself as unique and unified without ever being (becoming) a substance (Cavarero, 2000: 38).



For Cavarero our necessary dependence on a detour through another towards self-knowledge and identity does not imply that there is no private person; what she rather says is that personal identity is ultimately what shows, how we appear in our relationships with others, how we become known in various contexts. And this is precisely the story we desire – to know ourselves not in some private, interior way, which is the way we are in a sense overly-familiar with ourselves, but to know ourselves as second person others know us through our physical exposure to them within the world of appearances. Appearance is always appearance to someone, which makes the expositive and relational aspects of personal identity two sides of the same coin. As Cavarero puts it: "existing consists in disclosing oneself within a scene of plurality where everyone, by appearing to one another, is shown to be unique ... first of all in their corporeal materiality" (2000: 20). What is crucial here, is the materiality of personal identity as a physical appearance within a certain time and place, the appearance of a face and of a voice: a claim to relationship. Stories retain this element of identity: they let people appear to one another in concrete situations of necessary relationship, instead of generalising about "humans in general." Narrative is also inseparable from the simultaneity of physical appearance and an ethical claim being made through that physical appearance.

It is important to note that what others possess and I desire is the interrelated unity and uniqueness of my life which I desire to be given as a gift by others. As Cavarero puts it (2000: 37): "[o]bviously, [the] tale is desired – but, above all, the unity, in the form of a story, which the tale confers to identity. A stork is what is desired." Why do I desire the unity, pattern, figure or coherence of my life story from others? Living my life, it is difficult to experience myself as a unity, an existent enduring over time, because my senses let the world stream into my consciousness and let me lose sight of myself; I simply do not have very good access to myself as a well delineated corporeal, animated materiality. The key problem is that, in autobiography, the 'self is the protagonist of a game that celebrates the self as other, precisely because the self here presupposes the absence of another who truly is an other' (2000: 40). In other words, the same impulse reigns in autobiography and in philosophy: in both, by attempting to erase the necessary dependence on the other, the self conquers for itself an absolute unity and self-sufficiency, but remains finally unsatisfied, "because she has the sense ... that she is being deluded" (2000: 40). As Arendt (1958: 179-180) puts it: "it is quite likely that the "who" which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others remains hidden to the person himself; like the daimon in Greek religion, which accompanies each man throughout his life, looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters." To be able to see myself realistically, as I am in my uniqueness and unity, a human being among other human beings and other appearances, I need the gaze, the narrative gaze of the other, if you like, to make sense of my life, and to satisfy my desire for my story.

If Cavarero and Arendt are right, and western philosophy's historical impulse has been to erase narrative and to overcome the desire for one's own story as necessarily a gift from another or others, then mainstream western philosophy's theoretical tools for constructing ethical relations between self and other, between the sexes, and between people who manifest other physical differences with the self (such as maybe racial differences) must be highly suspect and inadequate. And if narratives implicitly acknowledge that identities are fragile, contingent, interpersonal, material, sexed, and so forth, then it makes sense that African women's political, symbolic and intellectual resistance to western philosophy's imperialistic impulses takes the form of story-telling, because narrative restores singularity in that it respects the name, the naming, and the story-making relationships at the heart of personal identity.

### THE CHALLENGE TO (AFRICAN) PHILOSOPHY

It should now be clear that African women's fiction presents a profound challenge to philosophy and to philosophy's self-conception, but this insight is not new: Plato, as we know, was already aware that feminised poetry was threatening his masculine rational heaven. What Cavarero has helped me to show (and which is a much newer idea) was the extent to which Plato was in an ironic sense right when he feminised poetry – he was being honest about the masculine nature of his philosophical enterprise, and contradicting his own universalising aspirations. Masculine fears and interests can only pose as universal for so long as the feminine is framed as an inferior, deviant or lacking version of the masculine-universal. In other words, Cavarero has shown how feminine and feminist writing indeed has an interest in story-telling or narrative in that it (1) helps to restore attention to the singular, the particular and the unique which gets lost in the traditional philosophical aim at universality, and it helps to restore sexual difference; and (2) is for her, as for Bhabha, a primordial or primary political action of finding one's own voice, and narrating one's own life, even with due recognition to the fact that finally my story can only be a gift and that I must negotiate my (hi)story within a web of relationships.

But African women's fiction writing does not only pose a challenge to the self-conception of mainstream western philosophy in the senses described above, in which all feminist literature poses a challenge to it; it poses a different or added kind of challenge to African philosophy. I have already started to describe the ways in which African women's fiction challenged one-sidedly masculine accounts of the colonial period and the liberation struggle when I briefly discussed *Efuru* and *Nervous Conditions* in section three. I have also indicated that some of the philosophically most interesting and significant work emerges when African authors draw on indigenous cultural resources such as goddess myths to mobilise women's imaginations around their empowerment and

the restoration of their inherent worth and dignity. What African women writers are showing in particular, localised settings and in terms of literary strategies rather than in general, theoretical terms, is that culture is never one thing, culture is never interpreted once and for all, and that identities are shaped in action, in enunciation, within dynamic relationships.

In post-colonial contexts, these authors insist that there is no simplistic identity ready-at-hand for the "new nation" to simply adopt or return to. With Bhabha (1994: 55) and Fanon (referred to by Bhabha) they show that, once the boundary of liberation is crossed into the reality of the post-colony, deep confusion and disorientation follow, and within this disorientation it is people's choices that finally shape what the "new" is going to be. As Bhabha (1994: 55) puts it, following Fanon: "In the moment of liberatory struggle, the ... people destroy the continuities and constancies of the nationalist tradition which provided a safeguard against colonial cultural imposition. They are now free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference". As a group, then, African women novelists are insisting on the need for a renegotiation of identities, even of the nature and meaning of the political as such, within the post-colony. They expose the multiple ways in which African men cooperated with colonial powers to reify an inherently fluid indigenous cultural tradition and history to create a colonial patriarchy and a clamp-down on female power across the continent in unprecedented ways. And their work provides an implicit condemnation of any attempt to restrict what women may become within the post-colony, using the notion of a timeless African (patriarchal) culture to do so. With their evocation of local female deities and their activation of indigenous modes of feminist or womanist resistance, they expose the falsehood of an assumed timeless African patriarchal homogeneity. This is the challenge and the potential wealth that African female novelists with their old wives' tales bring to the African philosophical tradition. By characterising women as active and dynamic and as the interpreters and creators of their own worlds, many novels by African female authors "[stand] in opposition with to the entire African male literary tradition [and mainstream, traditional western philosophy] – a tradition to which the very notion of female development is alien..." Women are, in other words, conceptualized not as the Other but as self-defining. Furthermore, their status as historical subjects is given due recognition (Stratton, 1994: 107). We need African philosophers (whether female or male) to acknowledge this contribution and to make it philosophically fruitful, which is what I have tried to contribute to here in a very modest and tentative way.

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**CHAPTER X**

**IDENTITY ISSUES AMONGST  
SOUTH AFRICAN PENTECOSTAL  
CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANS:  
BETWEEN OREOS AND ROMANY CREAMS**

*MARIA FRAHM-ARP*

**INTRODUCTION**

Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has been regarded as a vehicle bringing about a cultural revolution and/or upward mobility in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa rapid social transformation has been taking place as the political and economic reality of previously disadvantaged people has changed, particularly in some urban areas. But these cultural shifts are not uniform and one of the challenges facing the New South Africa is trying to understand the multiple social mutations taking place.

This paper focuses on two Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian churches in the Gauteng area and engages with Weber (1965) and Bourdieu (1986, 1989, 1990) to analyse how these churches are both shaping social transformation and being shaped by the moves in society at large. It will be argued that these churches are creating a particular form of homogeneous, sanitized African inter-tribal/language culture that engages with modern technology, neo-liberalism and the nuclear family while at the same time drawing on African religious and cultural practices. In so doing these churches offer an alternative to the contemporary hedonistic township and Y cultures which have become increasingly popular in the early twenty-first century.

From 2000 until 2004 I have been engaged in fieldwork exploring Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in the Gauteng area. Of the eight different churches that I have worked with, two stand out as being important sites of social transformation and identity formation. These two churches are Grace Bible Church in Soweto and His People church in Johannesburg. My analysis of these 2 churches is based on 2 years of longitudinal participant observation and multiple in-depth interviews with 60 members.

Grace Bible church had a membership of over 8,000 people at the beginning of 2004 and had 12 affiliated satellite churches. This church was started in 1983 by Pastor Moso Sono and is a black lead church where all the members are black. In 2001 the church bought its first piece of real estate and built a church large enough to seat 4,500 people at one time. The church is currently expanding in order to seat a maximum of 9,000

people at once. They also have plans to build an entertainment centre, with cafes, a gym and shops on the property.

The second church, His People, was started in 1983 in Cape Town and is a multiracial church with a predominantly white leadership and majority black congregation. This church has expanded to over 26 different churches in 9 nations throughout the world and has a ministry primarily aimed at evangelising young students on university campuses. His People church in Johannesburg bought their current site in 2001 and built a church with a capacity to seat 1,000 people. The church had a membership of 2,000 people at the beginning of 2004 and was keenly active on the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and University of Johannesburg (UJ) campuses.

### **A HOMOGENOUS, SANITISED, RATIONAL, “AFRICAN” CULTURE**

Bourdieu (1986, 1989) spoke of cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital as being at the heart of understanding the power dynamics of society. Bourdieu's theory is based on the fieldwork he did in France and French dominated Algiers (1990), both of which were homogenous societies at the time of his research, in which one form of cultural capital was dominant. Living in Gauteng I have a heightened sensitivity to the multiple cultures in this geographical area. Bourdieu's ideas of there being one dominant form of cultural capital needs to be extended in the South African context where we have multiple forms of cultures which are vying for dominance in various domains. It is this cultural diversity, which is being addressed in different ways by the two churches in my study.

The Grace Bible and His People churches were developing a homogenous culture by taking aspects of African cultures, American cultural influences, township and an Anglophone corporate culture and establishing a harmonized synthesis of these multiple influences. This was played out in various ways. All the preaching was done in English with *isiZulu* or *isiSotho* asides at Grace Bible church, which had a more “African” feel. In both churches the songs were in English, *isiZulu* and *isiSotho*. The music groups wore specific coordinated clothes that were either the harmonised African-Western fusion of Stoned Cherrie or more corporate style suits. In a melting pot of African traditions and cultures like Soweto, where so many people had parents and grandparents from various tribal groups and languages this new harmonised African culture was a way to negotiate the complexity of multiple language groups, customs and beliefs. Universal “African” concepts like *Ubuntu* and respect for elders were promoted at both churches. But there was quite a difference in how the churches viewed *lobola*, attendance at funerals and family traditional ceremonies. At Grace *lobola*, support for the extended family and attendance at family events was encouraged, while at His People the congregation were told to make the church their new family,

not to pay lobola and not become involved in family ceremonies that were not strictly Christian. At Grace Bible church the homogenous aspect emphasised the collectiveness between different “African” tribal groups in Africa and at His People they tried to create a unity between the various cultural groups found in South Africa where they be black, white, Asian or coloured.

This sense of a homogenous “African culture” was important in both churches because 73% of the previously disadvantaged informants I interviewed had little or no knowledge of their fathers. This meant that they were unaware of the ancestors of their fathers and unable to perform the rituals and offerings required to placate them. Both churches offered a sanitised form of “African culture” that regarded ancestors and any form of ancestor veneration or worship as evil. Herbal *mutis* and *sangomas* were all strictly off limits and regarded as unclean, irrational and of the devil. This meant that any ancestral angst which people felt because they did not know who their ancestors were and were not performing the right rituals was immediately alleviated because the Holy Spirit was regarded as more powerful than any ancestor and would protect believers from the ill effects of these unknown beings.

A sanitised form of African culture was also important because the people in my study were professional men and women who spent their days working in a corporate environment that was ruled by capitalistic principles of rational bureaucratic order. If one of the key roles of religion is to help people make order and meaning in their lives as Wuthnow (1987), McGuire (2002) and Berger (1969) have argued, then as Weber (1965) showed people are drawn to religious systems that support the tenor of their daily experiences, which for these people was corporate South Africa. A religious system that excluded the illogical, irrational and disorderly resonated with the new working experiences of these young professionals. This was a form of Christianity that offered them a way to remain “African” but relieved them of what they perceived as the angst and disorderliness of an African traditional religious worldview, which they were unable to maintain or find helpful in explaining or shaping meaning in their lives.

Mbembe (2001), Mazuri (1984) and Mbiti (1980, 1990) all question the idea of “Africa” or “African” and I have been using both ideas in quotation marks, aware that there is no clear universal idea of what is “African.” In this first section I have been showing how both His People and Grace Bible church have been engaged in creating a homogenous and sanitised African culture. The leadership of these two churches has a clear idea of what they mean by African and this is part of their appeal and their very real influence in the social development of this country. For them “African” is any racial group and person who is a citizen in one of the countries of Africa, takes on the “universal” and positive aspects of African culture like *ubuntu* and strives towards the improvement of Africa’s people. Many of their followers find this concept problematic as it does not engage with suffering which they felt was

central to the experience of African people both in colonial and post-colonial African states. What is being shaped here is therefore a new and contemporary form of “African culture” that draws on aspects of various traditional African religious and cultural practices and unifies them into a homogenous collective in which what they perceive as the irrational is edited out. This makes it easy for this form of “African culture” to be fused with elements of American hip hop and corporate rational individualism.

### **KEY SIGNS OF SUCCESS – MODERN TECHNOLOGY, NEO-LIBERALISM AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Pentecostal-Charismatic movements and churches in Latin America and Africa have been regarded by Martin (2002), Freston (2001) and others as vehicles of cultural change which some have seen as helping people to become more upwardly mobile. I would like to argue that cultural change is already underway in South Africa and that these churches are facilitating one type of cultural change in the particular form of social organisation they are promoting. Picking up on Bourdieu again I would suggest that the symbolic power of these two churches lies in the clearly coded symbols of success which they portray. I am going to pick up on three of these potent codes, namely modern technology, neo-liberal politics and the nuclear family – each of which is understood as symbolising success as a community, a nation and an individual or family respectively.

Both churches used state of the art technology in their sound systems and communication. At His People notices were often given in the form of short video clips. This technology is used to communicate in a medium that is coded in society as being a sign of success, prosperity and up-to-date; therefore relevant. The packaging of the message in modern media, coded the message as immediately accessible and acceptable to the contemporary youth. The PowerPoint presentation of the key points of the sermons made them akin to corporate presentations and therefore resonated with the daily experiences of the professional members in the congregation. This modern technology was supported by the motivational business style language which the pastors all preached in.

The focus of these churches was helping members find their life purpose and the potential they were gifted with in order that they would recognise what work was their calling and become successful in that area. Empowering members with economic success was one of the immediate concerns of these churches. During the sermons a Weberian dialectic between the world of work and faith was engaged in and a significant portion of time was given over to motivating people to achieve financially while very little time was spent in political debates or discussion. This was in stark contrast to the mainline churches under apartheid or many Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa where politics remains a key issue. The apparent lack of political



debate masks the fact that these churches strongly support the neo-liberal democratic agenda of the present government and its focus on small business enterprise and black bourgeoisie empowerment. Both churches had various forms of business networks aimed at helping people establish their own business and/or become more successful in the corporate arena. Individual capitalism, on which neo-liberalism is dependent, was regarded as a key symbol of success in both churches and so members were encouraged to reshape their social structures away from an extended family towards a nuclear family. People were also told that their money should be invested and that they were not required to give all their income to the extended family. The change in economic structure was therefore in a dialectical relationship with the social transformation of the family unit.

With the very particular influence of North American culture generally and Pentecostal-Charismatic teaching on the thinking of pastors at both churches the ideal of the nuclear family was strongly supported by both churches. In my research I found that due to the history of South Africa and the strong influence of American culture, particularly through TV, the ideal of the nuclear family was a potent symbol of success in both churches. Much time was spent preaching on family responsibility and the roles of the parents in the nuclear family and there were several conferences and courses offered teaching people parenting skills. Under apartheid one of the most significant social forms of destruction was the systematic breakdown of previous family structures amongst the peoples of South Africa. One of the most shocking findings of my research was the high number of people who came from broken homes. About three quarters of the people in my study had not experienced life in a nuclear family – but they all held this as the ideal and found the churches’ teaching on family life very important. This was a clear way in which the churches were reshaping society in a way that offered an alternative to the popular Y and township cultures of individuals, which often celebrated minimal responsibility. In so doing apartheid legacies of objectification of the black person as valueless and lacking in potential or ability was being redressed. Men and women were told in multiple ways that they were the subjects of their lives – important people with talent, potential and purpose.

### **ROMANY CREAMS AND OREOS – ALTERNATIVE CULTURES**

This discourse of the object and the subject was made famous in the colonial African setting by Franz Fanon. In my reading of Fanon’s argument I do not think he was suggesting that black people wanted to become white in order to realise their subjective self but in the lived experience of black people I interviewed in South Africa there emerged a definite feeling that some black people tried to become white as a way to engage fully with their subjecthood. These people were regarded as Oreos or Coconuts. In talking about culture and what it meant to be African the people in my study began to explain to me that in their view there were

two types of modern Africans – Oreos and Romany Creams. Oreos were the classical coconut – black on the outside and white on the inside, people who had sold out to white American culture and had no time for their African roots. They were focused on themselves and trying to become financially successful. Romany Creams were understood as being black on the outside and black on the inside. In other words they were people who had not lost touch with their roots, the township and African culture. They still went back to their communities to help people, and they were not just striving to become financially successful but were also working to give something back to the community. They tried to actualize themselves by finding a way and language for the black person to become the subject within a broad cultural-power discourse.

What began to emerge for me was a continuum within modern African culture from Oreos to Romany Creams. As a young black woman who was either secular or Christian one could be either an Oreo or a Romany Cream. The world of the Christian Oreo was very influenced by the secular hedonistic Y culture particularly prevalent in the Zone in Rosebank. Posel (2005) and Nuttal (2004) have done fascinating work on this sub-culture showing how in post-apartheid South Africa the sexual revolution that has taken place has been the most dramatic and unexpected social shift of the last 15 years. These Christian Oreos were very much like their secular counterparts, they listened to all the music, wore all the clothes and enjoyed most aspects of Y culture. The only marker that separated Christian Oreos from their secular friends were the strong boundaries around their sexuality which they tried hard to maintain. The women I met all aimed to remain virgins until they married.

The world of the Romany Creams seems to be more influenced by Christian principles of care, and African ideals of community. This was a celebration of all that was regarded as good within Africa culture. As was explained to me both Oreos and Romany Creams looked the same, they drove the same cars, worked in professional jobs and strove to be successful but the Romany Creams tried to give back to the community and celebrated their African heritage. An example of this is played out in hair fashion. The Romany Cream will wear her hair naturally while the Oreo will have extensions. What distinguished Romany Cream Christian women from their secular counterparts was the boundary they created around African ancestral ritual sacrifices. These women cared for and supported their communities, they felt that their identity was derived from their membership within a community, but they did not agree with or participate in African practices that involved ancestor veneration. At Grace Bible church the Romany Cream version was more acceptable while at His People there were many young women who aspired to be Oreo style Christians.

## CONCLUSION

At both churches the members were engaging with the popular

cultures of Oreos and Romany Creams and they worked with the current symbols of success - all of which were being re-coded in such a way that Christianity was seen as offering a contemporary and relevant alternative to the hedonistic Y and township cultures of the day. In this the churches and their members were engaged in a dialectical relationship with the social transformation currently underway in South Africa. They were being shaped by the changes but were also trying to influence ideas of what it means to be African, modern and successful. These churches are not the only vehicles for social change in South Africa but they did offer a specific form of identity and social transformation – one that engaged with the popular and the modern, which edited out the more “dirty” and bloody aspects of African culture and which places the individual at the centre rather than the community. At both churches there was a clear attempt to create a unified and homogeneous understanding of what it meant to be African such that tensions and divisions between ethnic or “tribal” groups lost their potency. This was a message that told previously disadvantaged people to embrace the potential they had within themselves and to make their mark on the global corporate world, to engage with technology and modernity and to become successful.

Through ongoing longitudinal research it will be interesting to chart the impact of the message offered by these churches in the lives of their members. Do people find this message sustainable or do a high proportion of people leave these churches, and if so why? It will also be important to establish if there is a gendered slant to the message of these churches and how this affects people who attend regularly. Finally in the broader scope of South African society comparative research with mainline churches would be illuminating in teasing out what impact churches generally are having in post-apartheid South Africa.

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## **PART IV**

### **DEVELOPMENT AND AFRICAN CULTURE**



## CHAPTER XI

# BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

GAMPI MATHEBA

### INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about black economic empowerment (BEE) in South Africa. Perhaps due to this deluge, the media hype and strong emotions it evokes, the rationale for BEE and its commanding moral appeal has been lost. Other than Southall (2006), large number of articles, papers and lectures dedicated to systematic criticism of BEE and Affirmative Action (AA) have come out fast and furious from well-known liberal and ultra conservative figures alike. Leon Louw of the Free Market Foundation, [1] Dr Yolanda Kemp Spies of the Center for International Political Studies based at the University of Pretoria, Patrick Laurence, editor of the Helen Suzman Foundation journal, Richard Stacey of the University of Witwatersrand and Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, [2] former leader of an apartheid-era opposition party, are some names that come readily to mind. To this group we should add the arch conservative group, the white-only Solidarity trade union.

As Louw argued, BEE is not just irrelevant and racist but incapable of growing the economy. In fact he asserted that the SA economy has actually contracted (present GDP = the 1970 figure) and stagnated over the past decade, and is the slowest growing on the continent. For Laurence BEE is nothing but a “transfer by the established white elite of a share of their wealth to the emerging black elite under the twin threats of punitive legislative action and targeted exclusion from government contracts if they refuse to do so” (in *The Star*, 18 July 2006). No wonder then that BEE is not an efficient vehicle for poverty alleviation. It is accentuating class divisions amongst Africans as well.

For Kemp-Spies (2006) AA is not just another manifestation of “institutionalized” racism. She contends that AA should be abandoned for failing to achieve what it was meant to – increasing minority representation in areas of employment, education and business.

These rather amazing assertions have compelled me to situate the theme of my paper on the moral moorings of BEE. In this regard I urge you to cast your minds back to the anti-apartheid struggle, especially the lofty ethical ideals that underpinned that struggle. As we do that it becomes crystal clear that BEE is a practical manifestation of Affirmative Action.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION (AA)**

Perhaps you are wondering why I bother with a subject which has been with us for such a long time. At this point in our history most of us are sufficiently familiar with the broad philosophy of AA, if not necessarily with its origins. Yet a paper by Roger Southall, 'The ANC, Black Empowerment and the Parastatals' (2006) does not seem to be cognizant of this. Two interrelated concerns arose upon reading that paper. To start with, it was researched under the aegis of a South African government think-tank, namely the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Secondly it was sponsored by the European Union (EU). While the prestige arising from that relationship is self-evident, Southall's paper is guaranteed readership and wider circulation in North America and Europe as well.

In my appraisal of the paper I made the following assertions:

- that Southall did not pay adequate attention to SA government policy and other guidelines on BEE and AA
- that BEE is more than just servicing the minerals energy complex
- that BEE is about empowering women and physically challenged persons,
- unlike Louw, I believe that the SA economy has grown admirably after the demise of apartheid.

Having made these rather broad observations I concluded that in spite of the prestige and resources it generated, the paper, including the policies it threw up, is, to say the least, disingenuous. If BEE is odious, irrelevant, racist and outdated, as Southall and company allege, then AA is by association odious, irrelevant, racist and outdated. However is it true that this is the case? Before elucidating let us apprise ourselves briefly of the history of AA.

According to Vuyani Ngalwana (2006) the phrase AA was first used in the *Executive Order 11246* issued by President Lyndon Johnson of the United States of America (USA) in 1965 as a consequence of the highly charged civil rights campaign. That campaign was led by African-American luminaries Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X. However the philosophy behind the concept could be traced to President Franklin Roosevelt when he signed *Executive Order 8802* in 1941. By that order the US President outlawed discriminatory employment practices of defense-related industries that were holding Federal government contracts.

The purpose of AA has however not changed much since then. In essence the main objective is to (1) root out racial discrimination in the workplace and in every sphere of life and society, (2) to correct the injustices of the past and (3) to affirm the rights of the hitherto disadvantaged.



For the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in SA, AA means “taking special measures to ensure that black people, women and other groups who have been unfairly discriminated against in the past, have ‘real chances in life’” [3].

In South Africa the AA imperative of correcting past discriminatory practices was inevitable. Even the most *verkrampte* [4] elements of our society admit that apartheid was morally reprehensible. It is for this reason that they battled and continue to extirpate it from every nook and cranny of the SA body politic. At national and other levels of government their representatives participate in formal legislative processes to bring that wish into practical reality. Unlike in the past, these legislative formalities are open, transparent and totally non-discriminatory. In this regard Stacey opined that the SA Constitution “guarantees that all citizens are equal before the law” and that they “enjoy equally and to the same extent the rights and freedoms that the Constitution enshrines” (2003: 133) [5]. To claim that BEE and AA are targeting only the black people or “ANC constituency”, as Southall (2006) alleges, is totally wrong and disingenuous.

In a recent study Motumi (2006) pointed to the indirect and direct requirements for the successful implementation of AA. Similarly in New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) the African Union (AU) speaks of ideal “conditions for sustainable development.”

These indirect “conditions” broadly translate into:

- political stability and good governance, and
- sound economic management (NEPAD, 2002: 30).

In functional terms it is imperative that good governance should assure both the citizen and state of peace and security. Without the latter development and general economic growth cannot be realized.

Direct requirements refer to such factors as a committed leadership, training and development of targeted groups, setting quotas and time-scales and formulating clear monitoring mechanisms (Motumi 2006: 21-25).

In a similar vein the SA Dept of Public Service and Administration issued a set of mandatory requirements on AA. Generally the primary objective of the Public Service AA policy is to

- enhance the capacities of the historically disadvantaged
- inculcate a culture which values diversity and supports the affirmation of the previously disadvantaged, and
- speed up the achievement and progressive improvement of the numeric targets.

While every department is required to have an Affirmative Action Plan, this should contain the following mandatory (direct) requirements: [6]

- numeric targets
- employee profile
- Affirmative Action survey
- management practices review
- Performance management, to mention but a few.

A word or two about each of these mandatory requirements will suffice.

Numeric targets - means that the broad numeric targets set out in the White Paper must be translated into strategically prioritized, time-bound targets for each department's occupational groups and must be further broken down by race into African, Colored, Indian and White. Incremental targets must also be included for people with disabilities.

Employee profile – means each and every department must maintain accurate and comprehensive statistics on all employees broken down by gender, race and disability. This information must be updated annually.

AA survey – means that the programme must include an in-depth survey, repeated at annual intervals, to assess the needs, priorities and perceptions of all staff, both within and outside the three target groups.

Management practices review – means a review of all management practices to determine whether these constitute barriers to the recruitment, retention and advancement of members of the three target groups and identify what changes are needed to remedy the defects so that an organizational culture that respects and appreciates diversity can be developed.

Performance management – refers to implementation of and demonstrable support for the organization's AA policies. These must be included in each employee's performance assessment criteria.

What the study by Motumi (2006) revealed is that it is not sufficient to focus only on the narrow policy precepts. For AA to bring the desired results it has to be complemented by good governance and sound economic management policies. In the post- Cold War context this invariably suggests the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the Washington consensus. Post-apartheid SA has to a large extent aligned itself with that ideology.

Taking stock of our own political situation, the truth of what former State President FW de Klerk said rings louder than before. Similar sentiments were echoed by Bishop Tutu (2004) when he said that SA of today is better than of old. In particular Tutu exhorted us to take pride in how we broke with apartheid. Instead of bloody conflagration and disaster, he averred, the world "marveled" and was "awed" by the peaceful transition from repression to democracy (2004: 3-4).

The claim that AA is inhibiting economic growth is, to say the least, preposterous. Louw's contention in this regard is fallacious and goes against conventional logic. It also flies in the face of many contemporary research findings [7]. Let me also point out that historically it is not as if

AA is unknown in this country. In fact it has been the policy of every government since the Union of South Africa in 1910. After the triumph of the National Party (NP) in 1948, generation after generation of Afrikaners became “affirmed” in a variety of ways. Through that policy the NP put the final nail in the coffin of the “poor white problem”, so much so that by the 1970s their living standards had improved dramatically. Given this inherent one-sided nature these AA interventions privileged the Afrikaners in particular and whites in general. This led and gave rise to the glaring income gaps that we see today. In fact SA became a nation of two economies, “one affluent and largely white and the other poor and mainly black” (Ogola 2006: 10).

But unlike successive governments of the past, in modern SA, AA is not exclusive, racist and gender insensitive, as Hannah Botsis and John Kane-Berman averred (*Star Business Report* 3, October 2007 and *Business Day* 27 September 2007). The phenomenal growth that we are enjoying currently attests to the sound macro-economic management of President Mbeki. Trevor Manuel has likewise become an icon. Since taking over the Finance Ministry some ten years ago the media and almost every South African sings praises about his astute management of the national fiscus.

In the South African context AA should be understood as a strategy at poverty reduction. But after 12 years of freedom unemployment and abject poverty remains the stark reality of many citizens. On the strength of a growing economy comprehensive welfarist policies have however been implemented. It is a truism to say that the beneficiaries are predominantly but not exclusively black. Most poignantly these achievements are within acceptable international budget (deficit) norms. Their sustainability is therefore assured.

In demonstrating its determination and commitment, the ANC government has since 1994 enacted pieces of legislation putting AA into practical effect. For example the *Labor Relations Act* (1995), *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* (1997), *Employment Equity Act* (1998), and the *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act* (2000) [8] etc. Contrary to Stacey’s argument (2003: 133-48), I am of the view that the Constitution (Act no. of 1996) is the most explicit manifestation of AA and as such has laid the groundwork for the enactment of AA related activities and programs by all public institutions in future. Several amendments to labor laws have seen the establishment of several regulatory bodies, the directorate and commission of employment equity, respectively. Among others the former is charged with administering and monitoring the implementation of the Employment Equity Act. It conducts, in conjunction with provincial officials, workplace inspections to ensure compliance with the Act. On the other hand the commission assists with the development of policy. Through an Employment Equity Registry it captures employment equity reports of employers with 50 or more workers and maintains a database of these (*South Africa Yearbook* 2004/5: 187-88).

While AA has become a less contested policy today, the same cannot be said of BEE. Socio-economic factors that spawned AA are no different from those that have persuaded the SA government to insist on the empowerment of the hitherto disadvantaged. Nonetheless BEE “has been a hard sell to the white community and ironically to the black population” (Ogola 2006: 11), though for palpably divergent reasons.

### **BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (BEE)**

Though many liberal tomes warn us of the deleterious effects of BEE/AA on our economy and society, I have observed one common perturbing characteristic about them – complete ignorance of all official (SA government) literature on the subject. That is, while they wax lyrical about how bad BEE/AA really is to our economy etc, they completely ignore the good that could derive from such policies and the abundant SA literature available on the subject [9]. As Bishop Tutu once observed, “we South Africans tend to sell ourselves short. We seem to be embarrassed with our successes. We have taken for granted some quite remarkable achievements and (have) not given ourselves enough credit. The result is that we have tended to be despondent, to seem to say behind every ray of sunshine there must be an invisible cloud – just you wait long enough and it will soon appear” (2004: 2).

BEE is also said to have brought the ideological tension within the Tripartite Alliance [10] to the boil. In this regard reference to the imminent split of the Alliance is bandied about with glee (City Press, 25 June 2006). In 2006 the policy discussion documents issued by other partners, SA Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of SA Trade Unions (COSATU), have helped fuel that speculation. While political commentators have discounted the split and dismissed such eventuality [11] as mere red-herring, mud-slinging continues and rumors abound by the day [12].

A very public spat had preceded this development. Speaking at the second Nelson Mandela lecture in 2004, Bishop Tutu (2004: 12) asked the following pertinent question: “what is black empowerment when it seems to benefit not the vast majority but small elite that tends to be recycled? Are we not building up much resentment that we may rue later?” After this speech Tutu was castigated in no uncertain terms by none other than President Mbeki himself.

Be that as it may the debate that has ensued since then helped draw the battle lines in as far as the merits (or otherwise) of BEE is concerned.

As demonstrated by the liberal elements of white South Africa, BEE is viewed with anxiety and hostility. For them it is primarily reverse discrimination. Just as whites are ignored in as far as public service appointments are concerned, it would not be too far off in the future when the same treatment is meted out in mainstream economy, they argue.

By contrast blacks decry it for totally divergent reasons. Most lament the fact that, it has so far, benefited a tiny elite, mainly those well-connected politically and former ANC exiles (Ogola 2006).

Perhaps stung by Tutu's perceptive criticism and mindful of the potential political fallout, the government has reevaluated the BEE strategy. Since then the objective has been to expand participation by allowing for greater access. It is hoped that the benefits would likewise spread more widely than had been the case so far. Hence the broad based BEE. What is it?

### **BROAD-BASED BEE**

As already indicated after ten (10) years of democracy there arose growing public disquiet about BEE, especially the perception that it was benefiting only a handful of well connected individuals. A comprehensive review of existing laws and other practices was undertaken in earnest. The review led to a set of new guidelines as outlined in a document entitled *SA's Economic Transformation: A Strategy for Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment* issued by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in 2003.

According to this document BEE was hampered by the following factors:

- no common definition and understanding of what was meant by BEE
- low capital endowment
- that blacks were still left out and "removed from the management and operations" of the enterprises they had supposedly bought
- that blacks did not have the requisite skills to run and manage big businesses
- that they did not have adequate exposure and access to markets, and
- there was no 'strong and coherent voice' for BEE (2004: 10-11).

On 9 January 2004 the *Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act* came into effect to legislatively address the issues highlighted.

In a way the Act has captured the essence of BEE as expressed in the DTI Strategy Document. In terms of the Act "black people" is a generic term that refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Broad-based BEE means the economic empowerment of all black people including women, workers, youth, people with disabilities and those living in rural areas. It is then an "integrated and coherent socio-economic process that directly contributes to the economic transformation of South Africa and brings about significant increases in numbers of black people that manage,

own and control the country's economy, as well as significant decreases in income inequalities" (DTI Strategy Document, 2004: 12).

It is envisaged that empowerment will translate in vertical and horizontal human resource development, preferential procurement, investment as well as enterprise development etc.

In order to fight the plague of capital scarcity, several funding institutions were set up. As far back as 1998, the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), essentially a trust fund that held equity stakes in state-owned and other enterprises on behalf of the historically disadvantaged, was created. Additional funding came from Ntsika, Khula and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). In 2004 Ntsika came under the auspices of a new organ, the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA).

Preferential procurement by government is seen as a good strategy at ensuring market access by blacks. In support of increased procurement, the government expanded its supplier development programmes to ensure that more black enterprises are created to enable them to meet the requirements of purchasers in the public sector (*DTI Strategy Document* 2003: 15).

Structured collaboration with the private sector, in the form of public/private partnerships (PPP) is another strategy of ensuring market access by the target groups. Then there is the additional proviso that these partnerships should be accompanied by sector-specific transformation charters, e.g. the mining and banking charters [13]. The latter include specific mechanisms intended to achieve BEE objectives, specify clear targets, time frames and measurement indicators (*DTI Strategy Document* 2003: 16).

The Act also created a 'strong voice' in the form of a Black Economic Empowerment Advisory Council [14].

The State President chairs this fifteen member Council, whose functions include:-

- advising government on BEE
- reviewing progress
- advising on draft codes of good practice, and
- facilitating partnerships between organs of state and the private sector that advance BEE (Act no. 53 of 2003).

The Act provided for the establishment of Codes of good practice. Through them the playing field for all entities operating within the SA economy has been leveled. They also provide clear and comprehensive criteria for the measurement and consistent implementation of broad-based BEE. These are binding measures that must be taken into account when all state organs determine (1) qualification for the granting of licenses and concessions, (2) implement preferential procurement policy, (3) determine qualification criteria for the sale of state-owned enterprises, and (4) develop criteria for entering into partnerships with the private sector.

Two sets of guidelines on interpreting the Codes were released in 2004 (Phase One) and December 2005 (Phase Two), respectively. According to the *DTI Phase One of the Codes of Good Practice* covers such aspects of business as the conceptual framework, measurement of ownership, management control and the interpretation of individual statements. On the other hand Phase Two covers 5 components of the broad-based BEE scorecard. Areas as preferential procurement, employment equity, skills development, enterprise development, residual (industry specific and corporate social investment initiatives) and the Qualifying Small Enterprise sections are under its purview. Phase Two also covers areas as fronting practices, specific verification issues relating to complex structures, multinationals and state-owned enterprises (Star(Business Report) 13 July 2006: 5).

The Codes are not without their critics. Germien du Plessis, writing specifically about Phase Two (*Star Business Report* 14 March 2006) lamented that the Codes may not be “practically workable”, as they place a “huge administrative burden on companies” and generally render South Africa a country in which it is “difficult to do business due to the complex regulatory environment.” On the other hand John-Ernest Fogwell, Chairperson of the Chamber of Small and Medium Business, criticized them for failing to focus on small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs) (*Star Business Report* 2006: 5). In a recent interview the Chairman of the Employment Equity Commission, Jimmy Manyi (President of the Black Management Forum), had called for sector charters for different industries to be scrapped altogether. For him sector charters have set targets too low and are thus shielding business from genuine transformation (*Sunday Times* 14 October 2007: 29) [15].

Writing in the *Sunday Times* (05 March 2006), Mahabane argued that “empowerment, in its current form, is largely disempowering.” He claimed that many mushrooming BEE deals are locking blacks into ownership of minority stakes in big companies and for long periods, up to twenty years. Unable to sell their stock when market conditions are favorable, “illiquidity” occurs. Another problem with current empowerment deals is that big business sells non-strategic stock or “dud assets” instead of valuable equity. Some of the companies in which blacks buy are not as profitable as owners claim.

To overcome these problems, Mahabane proposed that, firstly, BEE deals should allow new owners to sell when markets (prices) are favorable. With capital gained from such transactions blacks would then establish their independent businesses. Secondly, those big companies should sell their “core” assets to blacks. This particular proposal would accelerate wider participation, effective ownership and control. Effective training is a definite need for it would enable the disadvantaged groups to master the intricacies of business, thereby making informed choices when buying into big companies.

In the final section of the Paper we shall address some of the critical concerns cited by the liberals and other opponents of AA and

broad based BEE. At the same time we address the question *quo vadis BEE?*

When reading through their arguments one has picked up a number of concerns associated with the subject at hand. They associate AA and BEE with

- racial discrimination
- cronyism, nepotism and corruption, and
- the brain-drain.

The Paper has touched on these points at various stages and for the fact that they are so crucial, we have to place them in perspective.

Racial Discrimination – this has been the bane of our country throughout history. The struggle against apartheid was really about ridding the country and society of this scourge. Since 1994 no effort has been spared to get rid of it. An elaborate legal framework, as embodied in the Constitution, and other institutionalized mechanisms exist to guard against any discriminatory practice. If “the transformation project and AA represent a violation of the Constitutional right to equality and equal liberty” as Stacey (2003: 146) postulated then recourse to the law is an avenue open to anyone wishing to do so.

Many opponents do not understand that AA is about the empowerment of women and the physically challenged. In other words white women and the physically challenged are being affirmed more systematically than before. In a democratic South Africa this affirmation does not depend on the whims of an individual but is a deliberate government policy.

Empowerment is also about land restoration. In a country where seventy-five percent of the population owned only 13% of the land, restoration is more than a moral imperative.

Cronyism, nepotism and corruption – of all charges against AA and BEE, this is the most serious and challenging especially in the public sector where senior appointments are equated with cronyism and nepotism. Invariably those appointments, it is alleged, have led to poor service delivery. A rather pessimistic perception has subsequently arisen, equating black people and governments with poor management and general incompetence.

It is true that corruption is a serious problem but to associate it only with this government and black people is wrong. There are many local and international examples one could cite to refute that perception. Since 1994 a variety of anti-corruption measures have been enacted. A number of high profile cases involving prominent business people, public servants, politicians etc have become the folklore of contemporary South Africa. In some instances the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and police, have secured the conviction of wrongdoers and criminals. In 2005 the Deputy President of the country was fired for his association with



criminal elements. To me this more than demonstrates the ANC government's anti-corruption credentials.

The brain-drain – the mass exodus of predominantly but not exclusively white professionals since 1994 has been attributed not so much to the “pull” but “push” factors. AA, BEE and a decline in service delivery, living standards etc are often cited as “push” factors. This is especially the case when you consider, as Kemp Spies does (2006), that “AA has become a means in itself” with “no end.” A sunset clause or “expiry date” should then be set (Kemp Spies 2006: 1). In Malaysia twenty years was allegedly given as a ‘sell by date’ for AA (Motumi 2006).

The submission by Kemp Spies reminds us of another but less talked about difficulty that accompanied the South African transition to democracy. During the negotiations white civil servants, through a ‘sunset clause’ mechanism were to keep their jobs until retirement. Though understandable the net cumulative effect of that decision was that the civil service remained largely white, predominated by white male managers. Transformation has therefore not taken place at the speed envisaged and desired [16].

Despite the vision and reality of AA and BEE, the face of corporate South Africa has likewise remained white. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), the 16<sup>th</sup> largest in the world is still dominated by white-owned blue chip companies (Ogola 2006: 10). Where public/private partnerships have occurred, this has been on a limited scale. For that reason the economy still bears the unmistakable hallmarks of the colonial past, when the commanding heights were in white hands.

Unlike the “land grab” policies of Robert Mugabe, a majority of black South Africans are either without or are awaiting land promised to them by the new regime. So far the failure by government to return land to the rightful owners remains the most contentious political issue today. In the urban areas that has manifested in informal settlements and squatting, where sanitation, running water and other social amenities remain elusive to the majority. Coupled with the jobless growth, high unemployment and other social ills, it is not surprising that violent crime has mushroomed.

Given these factors it is unrealistic and unthinkable to end AA and BEE now. Those who demand this refuse, as far as I am concerned, to confront the realities of our malignant society. They are oblivious of the enormous challenges facing our people.

As strategies for growing the economy [17] and closing glaring income gaps etc., AA and BEE should be part of the SA landscape for as long as these remain unachieved. This is a duty the government of SA cannot shy away from or expect market forces to resolve. What Mr. Brian Molefe, the Chief Executive of the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) has achieved over the last few years is illustrative.

He has routinely castigated firms in which the PIC has shares for lack of transformation. PIC manages over R600 billion of civil servants’ pension fund. By virtue of its considerable resources it is the single largest

investor on the JSE and thereby owns significant shares in some of SA's biggest conglomerates. According to the *Sunday Times* (28 January 2007), these include:

- Imperial (20.84%)
- Aveng (20.57%)
- Super Group (18.37%)
- Telkom (17.99%)
- AVI (17.23%)
- Sasol (17.18%)
- Barloworld (16.8%)
- Lewis (16.23%)
- Steinhoff (16%), and
- JD Group (15.63%).

Through this agitation, Molefe's efforts have led, for the first time in their long history, to the appointment of black people in executive positions at Sasol and Barloworld respectively (*The Star*, 23 January 2007) [18].

## CONCLUSION

The Paper has addressed the concerns of liberals in as far as AA and BEE is concerned. Without going into the literature and policy position of government, they rather unfairly came to associate AA and BEE with *inter alia* racism, nepotism and the brain-drain. They are suggesting that South Africa should abandon these policies as they have failed to do what they were meant to. A position taken in this paper is that it is rather too early to follow that course of action. Centuries of racial discrimination and structural socio-economic problems inherited from the past simply militate against that course of action. In fact these malignant problems call for the intensification of AA and BEE programs instead of their abandonment. The government cannot abandon its responsibility of transforming South African society in all respects. As the PIC has demonstrated the private sector cannot, by itself, be trusted to effect economic transformation and empowerment. Without government visionary leadership these multinational corporations could have persisted with their apartheid ways.

## NOTES

1. Lecture delivered at University of Johannesburg (Auckland Park Campus) on 22 June 2006.

2. See comments in *The Citizen* (29 June 2006) made during an address in Centurion near Pretoria. At this forum AA/BEE legislation as Employment Equity etc were slammed as racist.

3. [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/policy/affirm.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/policy/affirm.html)

4. *Verligte* is the opposite. They were less conservative Afrikaners but very much in cahoots with and supportive of apartheid.

5. Having made this observation Stacey could however not stop himself from claiming that the transformation project (entailing AA and BEE) “is constitutionally illegitimate” (2003: 146).

6. Refers to the minimum legal requirements for implementing AA programmes (*White Paper on AA in the Public Service*, March 1998).

7. A 2003 study by Empowerdex for example. According to their report empowered firms listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) were doing better, in terms of increased profitability, than those not empowered (Business Day, 09 November 2006).

8. Among others these Acts prohibit discrimination in the workplace on grounds such as marital status and pregnancy and compel employers to take active steps to promote equal opportunity. EEA forces employers (with 50 or more employees) to submit regular (i.e. annual) employment equity reports.

9. For instance compilations by Nzimande B. and M Sikhosana (eds) 1996. *Affirmative Action and Transformation*. Durban: Indicator Press, Adams, C (ed). 1993. *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta & Co.

10. Comprises of the ruling African National Congress, SA Communist Party (SACP) and the labor federation, Congress of SA Trade Unions (COSATU).

11. Somhlaba, Z.L. ‘When we err in our analyses: the BEE debate and the ANC-led Alliance’, [www.ai.org.za/print\\_monograph.asp](http://www.ai.org.za/print_monograph.asp). See commentary by Matshiqi ‘Alliance split just noise’ in *City Press* (25 June 2006).

12. See ‘Letter from the President’ on 30 June 2006 in *ANC Today* at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za).

13. For discussion of these see Turok, B. ‘BEE and its unintended consequences’. Paper delivered at SA Association of Political Studies Conference (5- 8 September 2006), University of Western Cape.

14. In April 2003 well-known business figures such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Saki Macozoma, Gloria Serobe and Danisa Baloyi were among other prominent South Africans appointed to serve on the BEE Task Team.

15. See a rejoinder by Enoch Godongwana ‘Scrapping Charter could have unintended consequences’ in *Sunday Times* (14 October 2007). Godongwana is the Principal Officer of the Financial Sector Charter Council.

16. Though there has been significant advances in meeting AA targets (i.e. 75%), blacks are still largely confined to low level and low paying jobs in the public service (*The Star* 28 July 2006).

17. A recent study has in fact established that “empowered firms” do better. In 2003 most of them had seen a growth in profit margins of 34% (Business Day, 09 November 2006).

18. See also 'PIC Boss Molefe taking close look at JD Group' in *Business Day* (08 February 2007).

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## **CHAPTER XII**

# **BUILDING ON THE INDIGENOUS: AN APPROPRIATE PARADIGM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

*MOGOMME A. MASOGA and HASSAN KAYA*

### **INTRODUCTION**

We cannot significantly advance the development of Africa unless those involved in the development process of the continent take African societies and cultures seriously, as they are, not as they ought to be or even as they might be; and that sustainable development is never going to occur unless we build on the indigenous, i.e. what the local communities know and can afford. The question is, what is the indigenous and how might we build on it?

Indigenous is not necessarily the traditional. It refers to whatever the African masses in their specific local environments consider important in their lives and whatever they regard as an authentic expression of themselves. Building on the indigenous determines the form and content of the African development strategy, to ensure that developmental change on the continent accommodates itself to the values, interests, aspirations and /or institutions, which are important in the lives of the African people. It is only when developmental change comes to terms with the indigenous that it can become sustainable. For instance, sustainable technology development in Africa will only occur when the innovative technology is totally localized and assimilated into the life of the people. When the people see its relevance, they will accept it and even make it an expression of their creativity by refashioning it according to their changing circumstances.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF BUILDING ON THE INDIGENOUS**

Basing Africa's development on the indigenous leads to a development paradigm that is radically different from the prevailing one. First, it will lead to a democratic and participatory development, which gives primacy to the interests, values and aspirations of the people at large. The prevailing paradigm of development in Africa suffers from relying too much on coercion and authoritarianism, which arises from African leaders who are using force to maintain power in the face of vanishing legitimacy. Also problematic are development agencies who consider their development paradigm as scientific and objective and are therefore insisting on no doubt, no dissent and no negotiated consensus.

Political authoritarianism and coercion has cost Africa dearly, for it has contributed greatly to the failure of various efforts to bring about development in the continent. To be specific, it has led to the dissociation of development from social needs. The social base of power and decision-making has been too narrow and dominated by interests, which are too often in conflict with public good. Authoritarianism has demobilised the African people by making it virtually impossible for their interests to register in public policy. African leaders have failed to mobilize people's energy and support. They have succeeded only in compelling their conformity and in the course of doing this have forced millions of people into a silent strike against government policies. Coercion has brutalized African peoples to an extent that it has become highly detrimental to their sense of efficiency. As African leaders are busy coercing everyone to accede to the numerous demands of their self-serving policies, they have undermined the people's traditional capacity of coping in their difficult local environments.

Second, the notion of building on the indigenous will help Africans to correct a situation in which development becomes a process of traumatization and alienation. This situation arises from the fact that the prevailing development paradigm has pressed the distinction between developed and underdeveloped into a dichotomy between good and bad. The underdeveloped societies of Africa including their people are treated as though they have neither validity nor integrity and may be violated at will. Their validity lies in repudiating what they are in order to be reconstituted into something new and better. The task of development is no longer how the African peoples themselves might move forward on their own terms, but how other people might transform them into an image of what they ought to be. From this perspective development in Africa has become an exercise in self-alienation and humiliation.

The psychological injuries arising from this forced change are not difficult to see. The confidence of the African leaders themselves has been undermined. They no longer act, they merely react, accepting submissively every development fad from the West and abandoning it just as soon as the next fad comes along. African leaders have been criticized for not bringing about development on the continent, but we must now consider whether they had the audacity to seek any genuine development for their poor masses, which could have been a truly heroic undertaking. All we see are signs of diffidence and self-contempt. Easy developmental options are thoughtlessly and cheerfully chosen, with an unshakable belief that other people will bring redemption. There are also the bizarre manifestations of insecurity among African leaders: forbidding the speaking of traditional languages, forbidding the wearing of traditional clothes in Parliament, etc. This is a reflection that there is a problem of confidence. Development calls for consummate confidence and high seriousness, something that the prevailing paradigm does not encourage.

Third, the notion of building on the indigenous will help Africans to avoid the assumption that the indigenous is never conducive to

development and from pressing western capitalist rationality too far in African conditions. The prevailing paradigm is notoriously hostile to everything indigenous. For instance, it spurns the communal tradition of African people presumably because communalism retards the transition to a market society. It is conveniently forgotten that communalism is highly functional as a proxy social security system. In African societies with limited health and medical facilities members of the extended family care for most of the HIV/AIDS patients and orphans.

Primary group loyalty tends to be disliked by the current western development paradigm as it is considered a regressive form of consciousness because it is seen as a hindrance to the development of efficient rational-bureaucratic structures. There is lack of realization that it is the basis of the ethnic associations that have contributed greatly to the development of rural Africa. There is hostility against the household economy because it is oriented towards the law of subsistence rather than the law of value and towards reproduction rather than production, yet it is the quintessential expression of the household economy that development agencies would like the African national economies to become. It provides the very model of self-reliance, internal balance and self-reliant dynamics, which need to be reproduced at the national level.

Fourth, the paradigm of building on the indigenous is the necessary condition for self-reliant development in Africa to which there is now no alternative. These are the development values propagated by the philosophy of the African Renaissance and the NEPAD plan. The over forty years of political independence in Africa have shown that dependent development has failed. Its failure is manifested in the deep and protracted economic and political crisis in the continent including the collapse of the various UN initiated economic recovery programmes for the continent. When the development choice is reduced to self-reliance, the African masses themselves become the end and the means of their development. Their interests, values and aspirations will determine the content, strategies and modalities of development. So much for the general implications of building on the indigenous.

## **OPERATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BUILDING ON THE INDIGENOUS**

It remains for this paper to show the operational significance of building on the indigenous. To begin with, one crucial aspect is that Africans, including the leadership, need to de-emphasize those factors which monopolize their attention today: the debt crisis, commodity prices, the balance of trade, levels of development assistance and foreign investment, structural adjustment, etc. It is important to acknowledge that the unfavourable situation of these factors needs to be checked and reversed. This paper argues that giving them the highest priority is a great mistake for the sustainable development of the continent. This is due to the fact that they are only symptoms of an underlying pathology. Not so

long ago, these factors were not so unfavourable and yet Africa did not flourish. If they are improved today Africa is also unlikely to advance very much.

What needs to be done is to place emphasis where it should have been all along, i.e., on the regeneration of the grassroots where there is still some vitality, before the rot gets too deep. To regenerate the grassroots, Africa's development needs to be localized. Without prejudice to the significance of bigger national projects, the emphasis has to be placed on smaller projects, developed and executed in a participatory manner and relying mainly on local resources. It is only when Africa's development is localized and democratically controlled that it can be consummated by becoming the right of each and the responsibility of all. It is only then that development in Africa will cease to be alienating and humiliating. It will acknowledge Africa's moral autonomy and enrich the African people's humanity.

The above is easier said than done, because there are immense obstacles to the operationalization of the paradigm of building on the indigenous. However, most of these obstacles are not economic but rather political. The major problem is political resistance. This comes from some of the African leaders who are determined to maintain their control; and from some cynical western countries that are attending to their self-aggrandizement under the cover of developing Africa. The overcoming of this resistance will be a decisive break-through and must be regarded as a major item on the development agenda for the continent.

This also has implications for western development agencies. For these agencies, the notion of building on the indigenous entails drastic adjustment. They have to learn to suspend the belief in the superiority of their knowledge and values. They will have to think in terms of much smaller projects developed and implemented democratically. This will be maddeningly messy because they will have to curb their penchant for instant gratification, which lures them to invest in the so-called productive sectors as opposed to the social sectors. They will have to make it clear that they are assisting people, not governments. These adjustments will throw up significant contradictions, which they will hopefully confront without being squeamish, knowing well that they must get immersed in political struggles, which will create problems for them at home and abroad. In getting involved with the development of Africa, they are interfering with vital indigenous social processes in any case. They might as well interfere usefully.

#### **INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A RELEVANT AREA OF RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT**

If one examines much of the literature on developmental issues in Africa, one sees that it has been dominated by the impact of the interaction between our continent and the West, especially Western Europe. While scholars, both from Africa and the West disagree on the



nature of the impact, what is beyond dispute is that the West has dictated the pattern of this interaction since the era of the slave trade, with the result that the benefits have been disproportionate.

One's attention is drawn to the fact that knowledge production and dissemination in Africa have suffered a similar fate like that of African economies, i.e., one of underdevelopment and disarticulation. What does it mean in more specific terms to say that an economy is disarticulated or incoherent? A disarticulated or incoherent economy is one whose sectors are not complementary. There is no reciprocity and linkage among the economic sectors. Production is not meant to satisfy local demand but to satisfy the economic needs of the western countries. The same situation applies to knowledge production, documentation and conservation and dissemination. This is shown by the following aspects:

- The exploitation of local knowledge systems has become a part of the international capitalist exploitation of the resources of developing countries including Africa. Through various mechanisms such as patent rights, western countries have managed to control and exploit the local knowledge systems and products of African communities.

- The intellectual and research activities tend to be designed to support the western exploitation of the indigenous resources.

Research and knowledge production was meant to support and justify the theoretical assumptions of western institutions about the nature and characteristics of Africa. The major educational and research institutions in the world, including resources such as equipment and libraries, are located in the western countries, especially the former colonial powers.

- The few African scholars and researchers produced by western education are also meant to satisfy the research needs of the western countries.

- This perverse situation is compounded by the fact that links between African institutions themselves are largely neglected in favour of partnerships with the metropolitan institutions. Currently, there are more research and academic linkages/collaborations between African and western institutions than among African institutions themselves. Not only did the colonial and apartheid educational systems create a sense of disaffection or desire to dissociate oneself with the native heritage, but also it affected the individual's sense of self-confidence.

- Another fundamental cause of extraversion of African scholarship is the fact that most academic activity is carried out in foreign languages. African scholars are expected to master these languages, thus reducing investment in and removing research and theory out of the indigenous conceptual sphere. This issue of language was the key in the debate by the Kenyan intellectual Ngugi wa Thiongo when he visited South African recently. He concluded that the route towards knowledge is through language.

- In the colonial and apartheid education there was no investment in theory building and interpretation for the colonial subjects, which are the heart of the scientific process.

- Furthermore, African academic and research institutions are not often aimed at addressing local needs and concerns, but remain as “floating islands without roots.”

It is therefore, important that Africa must be truthfully studied on its own terms and to satisfy its people's needs through indigenous approaches. The philosophy and theory of truthful knowledge about Africa challenges all African researchers, academics and practitioners to unmask western ideologies about their continent, expose exploitation, injustices and explore local knowledge systems that promote values which facilitate an agenda of social emancipation and equity among all sections of societies, women, men, children, youth, disabled and HIV/AIDS victims.

The silence imposed on Africa's history need to be shattered. Africans and their heroic struggles, victories, and creative energies need to be rediscovered, promoted and celebrated. Since knowledge is not produced in a vacuum, knowledge production, documentation and dissemination must reflect African realities not constructed through Eurocentric prisms. We should take on the challenges of Cheikh Anta Diop, Claude Ake, Kwame Nkrumah and many African scholars who challenged the western notions of development many years before globalisation.

Globalisation, through its sheer power, reinforces images of global uniformity, imposes its own version of knowledge about Africa to all parts of the world, but at the same time increasingly denies Africa a global space to produce the truthful knowledge of itself. Therefore, for Africa not to be silenced or reduced to a caricature of truth, African researchers, academics and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) practitioners from different parts of our continent must unite to resist the marginality of the continent from global discourse on Africa. They must interrogate existing African studies and their shortcomings. They must bring out to the Africa masses in their respective communities, the ways in which western epistemology including its methods, paradigms, production and dissemination, amounts to “imperialism in the guise of modern scientific knowledge.”

This can be done by identifying and promoting indigenous approaches and methods that bridge existing gaps between Africans and those studying Africa in other parts of the world. In this age of globalisation and globalism, Africa must stand up and insist to be studied on its own indigenous terms, that would reflect its unique historical, social, economic, cultural heritage and circumstances and project the dreams, aspirations and interests and freedom of its peoples. Research and knowledge production can no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views do not count or their lives and personal

experiences are of no significance. Research and knowledge production should not be taken as innocent or distant academic exercises but as activities that occur in a particular set of ideological, political and social framework because much of the existing knowledge production on indigenous peoples is contaminated by Euro-centric prejudices.

It must also be acknowledged that most of the African universities and research institutions have not lived up to their responsibilities as guiding lights to the continent and to the societies within which they are located. However, despite the extraversion and disarticulation of knowledge production in Africa, the catastrophic history of the continent (slavery, colonization – and Apartheid and globalization) has not completely destroyed the African intellectual and spiritual heritage. The wealth of knowledge among the elders in African local communities is an important source of vibrant intellectualism to which African researchers should turn to. When research carries out their task the big question is how you do ensure that the local communities benefit, are recognized, and are capacitated to use their knowledge for alleviating poverty and to regain their dignity.

South African academic and research institutions, including the government, have now taken the challenge to make IKS an important focus area for research, teaching and sustainable development. The South African government through the national IKS Policy (2004) and its National IKS Office (Department of Science and Technology) has also taken the challenge to promote IKS by emphasising the holistic and integrated character of IKS including its interface with other knowledge systems. Mechanisms, including policy initiatives, are also undertaken, nationally, continentally and globally to ensure that the Intellectual property Rights of local communities including their knowledge holders are being protected from abuse and exploitation for profit.

### **THE NEED FOR A CODE OF ETHICS IN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

If one looks at the current global race for knowledge, one sees the increasing use of knowledge and technology to add value to business transactions. This creates what is now known as the global knowledge economy and the so-called global race for knowledge. This global race for knowledge works against developing nations, especially in Africa. It is now seen to be a new kind of poverty, i.e. Information poverty. Research in the western capitalist world focuses on profits rather than solving fundamental problems that affect human beings such as poverty.

The push and pull of globalisation is ruthless and African countries quickly find themselves left out because there is a range of trade practices which exclude them. These include: lack of market information; existence of a dominant western culture which is coming in through advertising, the media, the internet and through the western products; the dominance of English as a language of communication which excludes the

majority of local communities who are illiterate in the language; lack of capacity to access patented innovation; lack of access to internet facilities and electricity, especially in rural areas; and lack of cash and other resources to participate in this global race for knowledge, to educate and train their populations, to put in the infrastructure, etc..

If we look at community research and bio-prospecting in Africa including South Africa, there is definitely a policy vacuum with regard to researchers working with local communities. To gain compliance in research with the communities a code of conduct must be provided to them so that they are guided in the correct behaviour or practices in certain situations. Out of this came the desire to put together a Code of Ethics in order to set-out research guidelines for use in research with communities relating to plant resources in South Africa. There is also an increasing realization on the importance promoting the role of archives and oral history for IKS research and development.

#### **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND INTERACTION BETWEEN RESEARCHER AND COMMUNITY**

The starting point in the whole process of knowledge production, recording, conservation and dissemination should be the researcher and the community involved in this process. They should see each other as equal partners and be equally informed on what is to be done, and how the process is to be done including the outcome and benefits of that outcome. The current process of interaction is not based on equality between the researcher and the community who are the knowledge holders and producers in their daily life activities. The researcher sets the agenda and the community is passive. The community is just there to be studied. Most often, even the language of the research process is foreign to them.

There is also the issue of ownership of control of knowledge generated and documented in a community. There must be mechanisms and structures in place to ensure that the producers of this knowledge have access and control of their own knowledge for their sustainable livelihoods.

Orality is a human-centred way of communication, utilizing words and gestures in a holistic approach. Whereas orality includes informal body language such as gestures, twinkling the eye, or playing the ear or twisting the lips, orature is a more formal version of orality. It involves an organized communal oral presentation of a piece of orality. The holistic nature of these different forms of orality is shown by the fact that they were also channels through which the accumulated knowledge of society could be expressed or transmitted. At the same time when they were articulated by certain key persons in society such as elders, parents, chiefs, community professionals such as hunters, traditional healers, black and gold smiths, midwives, they became sources of accumulated community knowledge and wisdom, especially for the young generations. In this case they became agents of socialization.

In most indigenous African societies orality in different forms had a number of advantages: First, there were no written forms of communication hence community information and other forms of knowledge were communicated through the word of the mouth. Second, orality was a powerful means of conserving consanguine or lineage relationships by merely using adult memory. For instance, it was a societal obligation for every member of the extended family who has reached a certain age to know, remember and recognize all members of his/her extended family. Third, family and community rituals and sacrifices (orature) and other forms of orality were used by the living to communicate with the ancestors (the dead), asking them to protect those who are living and those who are to be born. Fourth, joking relationships, even among former enemies were used to cement good relationships between clans and ethnic group.

Fifth, orality trained community members to master the art of narration and sequencing social events. Sixth, it encouraged community dynamism and creativity in the sense that the relationships and outcomes created by the different forms of orality encouraged or enticed each community member to develop a burning desire to participate in certain community activities. It instilled a sense of belonging or the need to get a place of recognition in society.

Seventh, orality in the form of multilingualism provides a gateway into regimes of truth, knowledge and other cultures, especially when one knows these different languages very well. It gives one access to information that is held by a particular knowledge regime and culture. By entering the knowledge regimes or the knowledge orders one is also able to engage with the producers and holders of that knowledge system. One becomes accepted into that particular cultural group because he/she speaks their language. He/she can share knowledge and information with them in a language they understand.

With regard to the disadvantages of orality: First, it is vulnerable to being de-contextualised and susceptible to manipulation to suit certain power interests. Second, the impact of technology on orality has been to decontextualise it by removing it from its original environment and context. Technologies have also led to dehumanisation of societies and of the importance of orality in communal life. They tend to promote individualism and commodification of orality. Knowledge becomes an exchange value produced, conserved and disseminated for the market and profit. Producers and holders of indigenous knowledge including the community as a whole are increasingly losing control of their knowledge systems. They become alienated from their intellectual properties.

## **THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES AND ORAL HISTORY IN IKS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The interest in oral history among academics as a valuable research tool continues to accelerate. There has been a recognition among

scholars that written sources or records often do not offer a comprehensive picture of the lines and motivation of people and events that have shaped our history and society. Archives and archivists play a significant role in the documentation retrieval and dissemination of oral information about various aspects of society. They raise the public understanding of a country's history and are tools for research. In this regard, archivists play a pivotal role in ensuring access of records to the public.

Oral history cannot and is not intended to replace written records. It is often assumed that written sources are more reliable than oral sources. Written sources require the same scrutiny as oral evidence to establish the circumstance in which they are produced. Numerous documents have been produced which exaggerate facts to create a particular image or impression. Written sources offer immediacy because they are written at a time of an event. Yet, they can be manipulated or written to mislead. Written sources were originally based on oral testimonies. A statement is not necessarily truer because it is written at the time of the event or later.

In this case, oral history provides a new technique for validating and filling in the gaps in written historical records. In most cases, especially in South African context, oral sources become the only record when no written documentation exists. It provides social and cultural information not available elsewhere, presents convincing evidence, and first-hand prose that enlivens historical narratives. Furthermore, oral history can be helpful in filling the gaps that often obscure the motivation behind individual and institutional actions as well as contributing to our understanding of the actions of groups of people who are not presented in archival sources either because of gender, race, class, religion or ethnicity.

The paper argues that oral history is a history built around people. It allows heroes not just from leaders but from the unknown majority of the people. It brings history into and out of communities. It helps the less privileged, the old and the poor to gain dignity and self-confidence. Oral history can take a major role in telling us more about our past and in democratising the study of history. When oral history is community-based it can be liberating and a participatory force.

Furthermore, oral history will connect students to the past by allowing those who have experience or were involved in the events in their communities to narrate their stories in the classrooms or on tape. The classroom will come alive as recorded histories are collected by students and examined against the context of research from a secondary source. Oral history is the best method of teaching as it actively engages students using their natural curiosity about other people. However, the sustainability of IKS as a tool of development and sustainable livelihood will have a meaning if IKS is integrated in the education system.

## **PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF INCORPORATING IKS IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

Although IKS has been identified as an important instrument for sustainable development, this development will only be meaningful and sustainable if it is anchored and allowed to operate in an environment characterized by social cohesion at all levels of society including the family. Incorporating IKS and indigenous life skills in the school curriculum could be an important instrument for inculcating African values into the youths, which will in turn promote social cohesion. Indigenous Knowledge and life skills will enrich the existing western-oriented school curriculum in the following ways:

- Learning attitudes and values for a sustainable future: Indigenous African communities have lived in harmony with the environment and have utilized resources without obstructing nature's capacity to regenerate them. Incorporating African IK and life skills in schools can help to develop sensitive and caring attitudes towards the environment and thereby promote a vision of a sustainable future.

- Learning through culture: IK and life skills are stored in various forms, such as customs, folk stories, folk dramas, legends, myths, proverbs, etc. These are effective tools which can help to Africanize the school system. Teachers could involve learners through activities such as collecting stories, myths and proverbs from their local communities, parents as well as from elders. This could be done by giving assignments or projects to learners so that they can be involved not only in learning about indigenous knowledge but also knowing the sources of IKS.

- Learning across generations to bridge the generational gap: IK and life skills will encourage learners to learn from their parents and elders in the community and to appreciate and respect local knowledge systems. This relationship will help to mitigate the generational gap and promote inter-generational harmony and social cohesion. It will also build trust between the older and younger generations.

- Starting locally from known to the unknown: The blend of learner's higher knowledge and local life skills into the school curriculum fits into the general philosophy that the learner abstracts knowledge from his previous experiences in the family and community. In other words, the learner does not come to the school as an empty vessel. He/she brings the vast knowledge existing in the family and local communities.

- Learning outside the Classroom: Learning outside the classroom is very essential, as classrooms are too small to accommodate all knowledge systems. Learners can learn much from local communities; e.g. to understand the relationship between the soil and plants, learners need to identify the soil types and the plant characteristics in a particular area.

There are many challenges involved in the incorporation of IKS and life skills in the school curriculum. The dominance of western knowledge systems over African indigenous knowledge systems has had devastating effects on the current education system in Africa. There is a need therefore, to develop and promote strategies which will elevate the status of IKS in our educational system as a whole. This is the point where the IKS Centre of Excellence and its activities of research including documentation and community outreach become very important. This is due to the fact that IK is still orally transmitted and is not documented. This poses a challenge to universities and research institutions to document various forms of local knowledge so that they can be used in the school system. Fortunately, the Centre is already responding to this challenge. The sustainable integration of IKS in the school system requires the following actions:

- Documentation, storage, and dissemination of the best IK practices as well as establishing networks that will ensure the dissemination and availability of this knowledge and skills.
- Promoting and supporting learning materials based on the rich African cultural heritage.
- Fostering the interface of the learner's prior experiences and community knowledge, with related disciplines such as biology, mathematics, geography, chemistry, conflict resolution, etc.

There is an optimism that the interest in African Indigenous Knowledge Systems is growing, globally and within Africa itself. For instance in South Africa academic and research institutions, including the government, are making IKS an important focus area for research, teaching and community outreach. This creates an enabling environment in the pursuit of the African Renaissance. This re-awakening and new enthusiasm in IKS is going to help more and more people to come into the fold. It will contribute to the increasing generation and dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The globalisation process has made it imperative that Africa cannot be ignored. Africa is increasingly seen as part of the global village and global economy, including body of knowledge. However, there is need for Africans themselves to create the right environment for more research on IKS.

Furthermore, there is a realization that in order for the world to be a peaceful place and for global economic growth to take place, Africa must be taken out of its marginal position into the global picture. This brings a challenge to African scholars, research institutions and governments as well. They need to take advantage of the forces of globalisation such as the International Communication and Technology (ICT) to promote and market African heritage and associated knowledge systems for poverty alleviation and the sustainable development of the continent. The paper recommends the following:



First, African scholars, research institutions, governments and IKS practitioners, need to develop and promote collaborations and cooperation with their counterparts in other developing countries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of policy strategies, research programs and scholarly discourses. These relationships could strengthen African approaches in the documentation, conserving and utilisation of community knowledge systems for sustainable development. This will be part of promoting south-south relations in these areas. There is a tendency for African scholars to look at themselves from their relationship with America and Europe. They do not look at their historical relationship with the other developing countries which share certain commonalities with them in terms of cultural and colonial experiences.

This perverse situation is compounded by the fact that links between African institutions themselves are largely neglected in favour of partnerships with the metropolitan institutions. Currently, there are more research and academic linkages/collaborations between African and western institutions than among African institutions themselves.

The colonial and apartheid educational systems did not only create a sense of disaffection or desire to dissociate oneself with the local heritage, but also it affected the individual's sense of self-confidence. This implies that African scholars also need to develop and promote more academic, research and community outreach exchange programmes among themselves, to share available resources and local experiences. This will provide an opportunity for demystifying some of Eurocentric perspectives. It will provide both students and educators with exposure to comparative local community experiences and places with regard to their areas of study and research. Most of the educators and students in South Africa have never been outside their home provinces.

Second, research in Indigenous Knowledge should be approached in a participatory way, i.e. emphasising the involvement of the community in the whole research process. Indigenous Knowledge researchers in communities need to be sensitive in the techniques of interaction and data collection processes with local communities.

The starting point in the whole research process of recording, conservation and dissemination of IK should be the involvement of the community itself in this process. They should see each other as equal partners and be equally informed on what is to be done, and how the process is to be done including the outcome and benefits of that outcome. The current process of interaction is not based on equality between the researcher and the community who are the knowledge producers and holders. The researcher sets the agenda and the community is passive and is just there to be studied as fields. Therefore, relationship between the researcher and community should be taken seriously. A sense of trust must be developed between the two parties, especially with regard to disclosure of certain information which are confidential to the community and how they are going to transmit that information to the researcher.

In order for researchers and communities to create a spirit of trust and harmony, protocol in the community must be observed. Their leadership must be taken on board and be informed about everything that is going on because traditional leaders are the custodians of local knowledge.

Moreover, the issue of language in this interaction is important in order to avoid to the alienation of the community as knowledge producers and holders. The language used in the interaction should not alienate the knowledge producers and knowledge holders. The current situation is that information is provided by the knowledge holders in one language but documented and reported in a different language from that of IK producers and IK holders in communities.

Most often, even the language of the research process is foreign to the community, i.e. English or English translated into the local language not vice versa. Hence the meaning and content of the original knowledge tends to be lost or distorted. Therefore, the interface between IKS and local languages needs to be taken seriously. The use of indigenous concepts in IKS should be promoted if IKS is to have a meaning to those who produce and use it directly in their daily lives.

Third, the global race for knowledge as a commodity calls for great need to develop codes of conduct with regard to the interaction between researchers, speculators and local communities. This is to ensure that IPR of local communities as producers and holders of IK are not abused and exploited without communities getting any benefit.

This brings the issue of ownership and control of the community knowledge. There must be mechanisms and structures in place to ensure that the producers of this knowledge have access and control of their own knowledge for their sustainable livelihoods. However, there was an acknowledgement that community knowledge should be recorded and stored in the form of new technologies so that it becomes easily accessible to other people including its producers and is preserved for future generations. It should be protected from abuse and exploitations by prospectors.

A greater awareness is needed amongst researchers on ways of dealing with communities ethically. The Batho Pele principle in South Africa, i.e. putting people first, needs to come into activities of researchers and academics. The communities themselves need to be empowered so that they do not risk being exploited. They should know what their rights are and what they can ask for in terms of contracts and agreements related to bio-prospecting for their knowledge and resources. To gain compliance in research with the communities, information and guidelines or something like a code of conduct must be provided to them so that they are guided in the correct behaviour or practices in certain situations.

Fourth, the challenge that the IKS debate raises with respect to "conventional science" is the thematic outlook with which IKS approaches its field, i.e. the discipline-based approach according to which conventional knowledge is ordered is challenged. There is need to view

science and scientific thinking from the point of view of a thematic framework to viewing social reality.

This challenge comes at a time when the concept of 'science' is being re-visited in the context of the humanities, the social and natural sciences, engineering, and technology. IKS brings the social, human and natural sciences together due to its holistic and integrated nature. Therefore, by putting together an interdepartmental committee on IKS, the Department of Science and Technology ensures that all government departments are involved in the IKS promotion process and that all important aspects related to its development, research and utilisation are covered.

Fifth, on the envisaged IKS national policy in South Africa, it was suggested that IKS policy should be formulated in a generic and dynamic way to make its implementation effective. IKS itself is not one homogenous group of entities. It will be useful to improve on the policy right at the stage of formulation by having an objective where IKS itself is segmented in terms of identifying individuals, groups, clusters within all the sectors where IKS might be involved.

For instance, the crucial issues to consider are: Who are the people involved in IKS in a particular area? Where are they located in that area? Which are their field clusters? And what are their capacities? What are their skills? What are the facilities that they use so that they can be linked up with other segments that have been identified? This is quite useful because otherwise one has a broad policy statement, which cannot be implemented at the end of the day.

The dynamics of IKS over time also need to be clearly stated. For instance, at the moment the main problem facing the Southern African Region is that of HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation. However, in year 2050, the region would have other types of problems. Therefore, it will be more meaningful if the IKS policy could be constructed in a much more dynamic and generic way. For instance, it would be good to have an IKS policy strategy which could contribute to the generation of a set of capacities which could bring forth appropriate directions of technical advance dealing with certain problems at a particular periods of time. Moreover, one of the objectives and dynamics of the dimensions of the IKS policy is the fact that it should impact on economic development, i.e. it must make a difference on the livelihoods of the people within South Africa and the continent at large.

The IKS policy should also interrogate the issue of language as an important tool through which local communities can use to make their input on national IKS policies which affect their lives. There was a suggestion that the promotion of IKS should be a constitutional matter so that it becomes an obligation of everybody not only particular individuals or institutions, including government departments. At the moment the South African constitution is not explicit on IKS.

Besides the importance of interfacing IKS with other knowledge systems and practices, there is a need to take the linkage between IKS and

globalisation into account. At this stage and context we are talking about IKS in South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, etc. representing stocks of knowledge, science and technology from outside through the technology transfer process.

However, at some point it would be crucial to see through a process of mutual engagement whereby a third space is created which will have a set of technologies produced by Africans themselves according to their own agenda to solve global problems. IKS policy must address at least tentatively, on what it takes, the kinds of capacities, institutions and skills and competencies that need to be built over time in our countries so that we can engage in what others might call a cheek-to-cheek dance rather than an arms-length dance.

Furthermore, IKS is not static. It changes with time and place. There are new local knowledge systems produced over time and in different places. These interact with local knowledge systems to form new local knowledge systems over time. It is a dynamic process which IKS researchers need to be aware of. The issue of symbolism in IK needs to be taken into account by researchers. Symbolism has a cultural content. One needs to understand the culture and language of a particular culture in order to understand and appreciate the meaning and significance of a particular cultural symbolism. This helps in the interpretation of symbolism and validation of IK. Lack of understanding the culture behind a particular symbolism creates conflict of values among people originating from different cultural backgrounds.

## **CONCLUSION**

Building on the indigenous is a radically different development paradigm for Africa. It puts emphasis on a democratic and participatory development by giving primacy to the interests, values and aspirations of the African people themselves. It provides the very model of self-reliance, internal balance and autonomous dynamics, which need to be reproduced at the national level. The prevailing paradigm of development in Africa suffers from relying too much on coercion and authoritarianism. It is based on the assumption that the indigenous is never conducive to development and presses western capitalist rationality too far in African conditions. It is notoriously hostile to everything indigenous.

What needs to be done is to place emphasis on the regeneration of the grassroots where there is still some vitality by localizing Africa's development. Concentration should be placed on smaller projects, developed and executed in a participatory manner and relying mainly on local resources. It is only when Africa's development is localized and democratically controlled that it will cease to be alienating and humiliating to the African masses.

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### CHAPTER XIII

## THE CONCEPT AS OBJECT, MODE, AND CATALYST IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

*BRUCE B. JANZ*

My point of departure is the same as for this conference itself. We have been focused on “explor[ing] the contribution philosophical reflection might make to development in Africa,” and the organizers have sought to draw together “philosophers who are committed to the future of Africa and who believe that philosophy has a contribution to make.” It is not my intention to deconstruct the call for papers, but I do wish to identify a couple of aporias that will provide an opening. First, the question of whether philosophers should even have a contribution to “development in Africa” is by no means a settled question, although it might be taken for granted by some. There are many who might be inclined to think that such an imperative would shackle philosophy to utilitarian concerns, and open it to being judged by just how much development has occurred under the influence of philosophy. Of course, we would need to figure out what counts as development, and for that matter, what counts as philosophy, and who gets to determine what philosophy’s effect has been, and how long we have to wait before those effects become apparent. Others might dispute over just what counts as the “contribution” of philosophy. A contribution is sometimes understood as “applied” philosophy, or “practical” philosophy. Hountondji tended to be sceptical about whether philosophy should really be held to the imperative of practicality, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o thought that we should abandon practical philosophy in favour of a philosophy of practice, a much more radical program. Odera Oruka, Wiredu, Gyekye, and a host of others fall somewhere between these two extremes. But, perhaps, a contribution is neither about application or practicality at all.

This opening is a small one. Other words might have been used to get at the place of philosophy in the present and future of the cultures of Africa. But my interest here is to think about what Derrida calls philosophy’s “debts and duties”, a phrase I have often invoked in place of terms like “applied” and “practical.” Both these words often suggest that there is a distinction between thought and action, as if we theorize first and then apply our theories. “Debts and duties” suggest that philosophy comes from somewhere, and that it has a responsibility to recognize that. It is “owing”, because its insight never merely comes from the clarification of terms or the abstract analysis of concepts.

So, the issue of philosophy’s contribution to development has a disputed history within African philosophy itself. The other small initial opening comes as the call for papers identifies another desired group:

“inter-disciplinary thinkers based in various disciplines who would like to contribute to this project of thinking about the future of Africa.” It is noteworthy that African philosophy has had one of the most porous disciplinary boundaries of any area or approach within philosophy. It was born, in its modern form, in conversation with anthropology, religion, and art. It is common at African philosophy conferences to meet people who have expertise in politics, literature, languages, religion, art, sociology, economics, and above all, anthropology. The question of disciplinarity is part of the core of African philosophy – the seminal dispute identified by Hountondji over ethnophilosophy is really in part a dispute over disciplinarity, as he tried to delimit and define philosophy in comparison with anthropology, folklore, literature, religion, and so forth.

Both of these openings seem to bring philosophy face to face with something outside of itself, in the first case its interaction with the non-philosophical world, and in the second case, its interaction with other disciplines. It will be my goal here today to think about just how African philosophy can and does in fact face these seeming “others”, and how that might be a productive, even creative moment. Indeed, philosophy’s debts and duties lead not to practical philosophy, or applied philosophy, but to creative philosophy. I want to make this argument particularly in the spirit of the theme of this conference, that of the future of African philosophy. Much of the past 50 years has been spent justifying African philosophy’s right to exist in the face of the dismissiveness of Western philosophy. I want to imagine a mode of African philosophy that is not obsessed with the question “Is there an African philosophy?” I think that, in fact, even though many have recognized the pointlessness of this question, it has nevertheless informed even some investigations which explicitly begin by rejecting the question. In particular, along with producing a kind of defensiveness in African philosophy, it has also encouraged homogeneity, as solidarity has been more important than particularity. The creative philosophy that I imagine, though, must start from a different question, which is, “What is it to do philosophy in this place?” This question, properly asked, can move past applied and practical philosophy toward creative philosophy. To see how this works, I will walk through the small openings to consider a concept that seems to undermine the question of place – that of cosmopolitanism.

## **COSMOPOLITANISM AS AN OBJECT OF THOUGHT**

Cosmopolitanism has come to stand in for a host of political, social, and ethical ideals. These ideals stand either as a *telos* or an *arche*, a goal which organizes and motivates the development of concepts, or a source which accounts for the development of concepts. It is the question of the development of concepts in which I am interested, and that will become apparent through a critique of cosmopolitanism as a philosopher’s ideal. This concept will allow us to think about three different paths that



philosophy might take, and three different forms of owing that result from that.

The roots of cosmopolitanism are usually traced as far back as the Cynics, and up through reactions to the Peace of Westphalia, the Enlightenment (particularly with Kant), and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Philosophers tend not to associate it with African philosophy, although that may be more an oversight than a reality. It comes in many forms – some regard it as an essentially political concept, designating the membership that people have in an order above the level of the nation (and indeed, the concept has become more popular with the rise of hyper-nationalism). It has come to be identified in some places as worldwide democracy, or liberalism, although it is worth noting that the Romans were in some sense cosmopolitan, as conquerors and rulers, and were neither democratic nor liberal. Some regard it as an ethical concept, a kind of prerequisite for civil conversation. For some, it is the Enlightenment hope revived. Some take it to be roughly equivalent of globalization, and others of modernization, or colonization, and still others of a unified economic market. It can refer to the elevation of reason above partial viewpoints. The cosmopolite is variously the genteel traveler, the impartial spectator, the cultural consumer, the rapacious colonizer, or the post-modern ironist. What we have, then, is a cluster of concepts, rather than just one, that exist within a kind of internal ecology.

Several journals in various fields have recently had special issues on cosmopolitanism, including *Public Culture*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, and *Development and Change*, and a number of books and essays, by Martha Nussbaum, Derrida, David Held, and others, have tried to think through it. Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin announced the annual theme for their 2007-08 Ottoman Urban Studies seminar: 'Cosmopolitanism in the Ottoman Empire and Beyond.' And, within African philosophy, we can identify writers of Africa and the diaspora, including WEB Du Bois, Paul Gilroy, and Kwame Anthony Appiah who have been interested in cosmopolitanism, and we might also include postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha in that list. It is, in fact, Appiah's most recent book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, that got me thinking about how cosmopolitanism relates to African philosophy.

Despite the fact that there are African philosophers considering this concept, African philosophy itself might seem like a strange site in which to consider cosmopolitanism. After all, the very name of the field designates a sort of particularity, albeit particularity within a larger field. One gets the sense, though, that African philosophy has its qualifier in the eyes of the world only because the tendency is to assume that the default condition of philosophy is not African. Perhaps we should all just be saying that we do philosophy, without qualifiers or descriptors.

But the idea of the cosmopolitan, the "citizen of the world", whatever world that might be, is a particularly interesting one to consider in an African context. The first impulse that many philosophers might

have is to try to identify a provenance for this concept within an African context. To consider provenance rather than origin means, as with a vintage wine or a painting, to attend to the path a concept has travelled, the “hands” through which it has passed. Is this an African concept, or one imported from elsewhere? We could do a kind of archaeology of thought, looking especially for the political and ethical senses of cosmopolitanism, that is, in cosmopolitanism as an object of thought, as something to be defined, identified, and traced in its heritage. We can consider the question of whether it is a concept at all rooted within African cultures or languages as a precondition of thought.

And we might find some version of the concept, or we might not. But a few things should be noted. First, in starting with a concept like “cosmopolitanism”, one which has at least partial provenance in European thought, it may well seem as if we are asking African philosophy to adhere to the thought patterns of another tradition. There are many who would far rather focus on the cultural forms of thought that find their place in an African tradition, and ignore the implication that a different tradition might set the agenda for those questions. Second, if this is the case, we might be led to think that we should search for “a philosophy” of a particular group. There are countless studies in African philosophy which try to explicate the elements of an indigenous thought, ostensibly starting from local conditions and questions, but in some significant sense using moves or assumptions about how philosophy is conducted which may or may not have originated within the local philosophical context. And third, we might suspect that there is an agenda at work here in the resurgence of the concept, a re-casting of colonial or imperial ambitions in the form of a seemingly reasonable, ethical dialogue.

So, some might think, to start with a concept like “cosmopolitanism” might merely be an attempt to impose another system of thought onto African thought by using a concept with a dubious provenance. And yet, sorting out these systems of thought as if they were countries on a map, with citizens, border guards, customs and languages is a problematic way to understand philosophy. It is what I call ‘spatial philosophy’, that is, philosophy that draws the map of thought, and attempts to defend a space on that map as being owned by a particular group. This question of the ownership of concepts might bring pride, but it also ignores the fact that most concepts emerge from some sort of encounter or challenge. They emerge in tension and they are, if not fluid at least “viscous”, that is, they flow from place to place, but also stick in places. While Wiredu might try to identify truly African concepts by connecting them to their expression in African languages, even those concepts often emerge or come into focus or application through the tensions of disparate systems of thought. So, the goal of philosophy is not just to identify the heritage of those concepts, but to reproduce their modes of production, that is, to reproduce the tensions and questions that made those concepts viable ones.

## **COSMOPOLITANISM AND THOUGHT-LIFE**

If conceptual reflection is the object of philosophy, our response might be to categorize it, to figure out who owns it, and to accept or reject it accordingly. But if the concept is seen as part of our knowledge-production, things turn out quite differently. We may still need the “concept as object” approach, but we also realize that thinking about cosmopolitanism means thinking about what form of knowledge this concept might make sense in. What is the “thought-life” at work? We talk about work-life, personal-life, religious life, and so forth, and we mean to designate a set of practices which have coherence. “Thought-life” suggests that philosophical thought also has a life of its own, and our production of knowledge occurs because concepts, like practices, come to mean something because of the life they are part of. For example, pouring a drink can be a meaningful action within work life, personal life, and religious life, but the meaning is different (if possibly overlapping) in each. If we can recognize that a concept, like an action or practice, is part of different modes of knowledge production, we may be able to reconfigure those concepts in a way that makes new questions available. Thought-life is the life that thought exhibits, the path that philosophers and others take as they make concepts into meaningful entities. Thought-life is not merely an individual’s life of thought, but rather the idea that thought charts a course or delineates a path, through the use of concepts, and we move within those spaces. As important as the question of whether a concept is true is how it is used, and what questions provoked its use and guaranteed its currency. Thought-life may be attached to a person (we can reasonably talk about thinking with someone, that is, approaching new issues in the manner they would), but it need not be attached to a person. It occurs at different levels. To use a biological metaphor, the wolf travels a path and marks it out with urine or other markers. Is the wolf just the animal that has used those specific markers, and is limited to them? No; it could travel a different path. But in fact it does not just go anywhere it wants, and it reads the other paths marked by other wolves, and other animals. Its marking is a constant interplay. Indeed, its own markers could be used by others - whereas the wolf means to mark territory with its urine, another animal might use that marker as a pointer to a possible food cache left by the wolf, or to pups which themselves might be prey to something else. Concepts, like the markers the wolf uses, can then function differently for different animals, even if the wolf was the one to inscribe them on the land in the first place.

So, instead of inquiring about the nature and definition of cosmopolitanism, and asking whether it can be found within an African cultural context, we might engage a thought-life by behaving “cosmopolitanly” as philosophers, that is, by seeing cosmopolitanism as implicated in a mode of thought, and by using that mode to guide and direct the nature of our thought (or more precisely, to follow a path that the cosmopolitan lays out for us). Thinking cosmopolitanly uncovers

some new possibilities of thought. Consider that even as we might wonder whether “cosmopolitan” exists within an African context, we behave cosmopolitanly, that is, we transcend national boundaries and we accept standards of reason and conduct within the philosophical community. These are not universals, but cosmopolitan ideals. Even as we philosophize cosmopolitanly, that is, we make it into an aspect of a thought-life, we also simultaneously consider it as a concept. But this concept means something different depending on the thought-life in which it is found.

“African” after all, does not designate a static entity, but a set of tensions and productions over time, one which reaches back but equally exists in the context of current questions and concerns. “African” is more an assembly than an identity. That assembly has the form of what I call a “topeme”, that is, the question of what it means to be African exists at different levels of inquiry and questioning, and at each level there is a set of questions and practices that define the thought-life. So, we can ask about Luo, Yoruba, or Zulu philosophy, and in doing so we chart a set of questions that make a thought-life possible, or we can ask about African philosophy, a higher topeme, and then the set of guiding questions change. We might see a topeme at a more individual level as well (Orukan or Mbembéan philosophy), or at other levels (African continental vs. Caribbean philosophy), but in each case, there are questions and concepts that make a thought-life available. We might imagine that there are regional questions within Africa (Ghanaian vs. Ugandan philosophy), and that would describe yet another topeme, another set of basic defining moves that make the place of philosophy coherent. The point is that even if we struggle to find cosmopolitanism as a concept in a topeme, we act as if it is a live concept as we conduct thought-life. Even if we decide to reject it, its trace remains, as it serves to clarify some aspect of an African thought-life. This kind of move is possible with other concepts as well, since any concept has meaning only inasmuch as it exists within thought-life. Otherwise, it exists below the level of intelligibility, in the way that phonemes must be assembled into words in order for meaning to occur (and, if one is a structuralist, words themselves are *emes* within sentences).

Some may suspect we are begging the question. How can we behave cosmopolitanly if we don’t yet know the provenance of the concept (and yet, we continue to behave as if it has currency, indicating at least some provenance)? And anyway, shouldn’t we first be identifying the truly African concepts, and going from there (but, of course, by assembling African philosophy from a set of topemes, we enact some form of cosmopolitanism, even as we question it, and anyway, provenance isn’t about purity but path)? Doesn’t starting from this concept of cosmopolitanism just replicate what has always happened in an encounter between Europe and Africa, that the terms are set by Europe, the concepts defined, and then thought begins from there (and yet, the questions which European thought-lives address are not necessarily the same questions as

those which African thought-lives address)? And, hasn't that led to all sorts of problems, as the place from which African thought comes has yet again become alien to it (and yet, even through this little conversation, the concept yields some version of Africa)?

We may, then, be thrown back to considering concepts as only objects of philosophical analysis. We philosophers tend to construct systems of thought as if they are buildings, laying conceptual foundations first, being certain of their strength, and moving from there (this is a thought-life, incidentally, that has far deeper roots in medieval Christian thought than African). In fact, though, that mode of philosophizing itself might be as much an inheritance of a European set of questions as anything. Concepts are often seen as the focal point of philosophy, but I would like to suggest that they are a marker of philosophy. There is no bare concept (that is, no concept abstracted from a thought-life) that is necessarily or intrinsically African, or for that matter, necessarily Western. These concepts serve purposes within a "thought-life." They mark a territory of thought, in the same way as the wolf marks its territory. Together, concepts tell us where thought-life has been, and they suggest what it might be. To focus on a concept as something owned or guarded misses this.

If we think that cosmopolitanism is not an African concept, what makes us say that? We have African and African diaspora writers writing about it. We behave as if it is a live concept. In fact, there is an answer to this – cosmopolitanism has a provenance. It is a concept that has answered questions that have arisen in a thought-life. In the West, its resonance always will include the Cynics, and the responses to the Peace of Westphalia, and Kant's perpetual peace, and a number of other texts and ideas. But why was it useful at that time, in Europe? The thought-life is clear – it was useful to overcome and address some specific philosophical and political issues. It was used to overcome hyper-nationalism (and its resurgence in recent years has some element of that as well). It was used to establish a moral code in the wake of the breakdown of religious morality. It was used by Europeans to facilitate expansion and colonization, and it gave a ready rationale for why some people were superior to others. The provenance of the concept contains its platial history, that is, the history of the questions which made it a viable concept. And that's why care is needed in dealing with these concepts. Are the same questions relevant in specific cultures on this continent? They might be, or they might not, but the specific history of questioning is nevertheless still different.

It might seem, after all, that we are pushed back to what I called "spatial philosophy", or the idea that philosophy is ultimately about the classification and ownership of concepts. But I would like to argue that we need not be thrown back to spatial philosophy. This thought-life can move forward, to what I will call "philosophy-in-place." Instead of seeing this concept of cosmopolitanism as an *object of thought* or as a *mode of thought*, I would like to consider it as a *catalyst of thought*. Once we have

reflected on the provenance of concepts, and have considered the various versions of thought-life that concepts might participate in, we need to consider how concepts might become productive, or put another way, how we can create new concepts. If we think that concepts are objects, we are likely to try to *apply* them. If we think of philosophy as only a mode of thought, we are likely to try to make it *practical*. But if we think of concepts as a catalyst of thought, one that can both establish and transform thought-lives, we *create* new concepts that are productive.

Thinking about cosmopolitanism as a catalyst of thought, or as philosophy-in-place, is itself an attempt to intervene in the flood of work about cosmopolitanism, not to come down on one side or the other of its virtues, nor to try to find traces of the concept in the deep memory of African philosophy. I am not particularly interested in establishing that African philosophy has some historical priority on this or any other concept. Nor am I interested in taking the usual path with regards to cosmopolitanism, which is to use the concept as a foundation and prerequisite for dialogue, and simultaneously as the presumed goal of that dialogue. That thought-life presumes a humanism that tends to obscure particularity. Rather, I want to look forward, to think about what it means for African philosophy to create new concepts. Where do they come from? What does it mean for any philosophy to create new concepts, and what would it mean for African philosophy to create new concepts? What's new about a concept?

## COSMOPOLITANISM AND PHILOSOPHY-IN-PLACE

What is troublesome about the thought-life in which cosmopolitanism usually appears, in its various forms, is that it sets a standard for thought in advance of thought itself. It presumes that there is a playing field that already has rules in place. Those may not be ethical or political rules, but they are meta-rules. Rules are only formed in the context of the virtues of the "citizen of the world." For Martha Nussbaum, those are classical liberal ideals. For others, they are something else, but they are always there.

What if concepts are created differently? Philosophers, while they justifiably wish to engage society, must think about what they bring to society. The new concepts of the philosopher do not come from *telos* or *arche*, from the means of organizing ideas by their goal or source. They come from the opposite of this, from the attempt to bring something new out of contradiction. What I am suggesting moves past the impulse on the part of many African philosophers, which is to identify the essential core of African thought. Concepts arise when they are challenged, when they are put in tension with other concepts. These concepts, these new articulations arising out of tension, are themselves only evidence of a path that we walk, or perhaps better, one that we have walked. There is no particular set of concepts that one has to hold in order to be called an "African Philosopher." It is the very nature of philosophy, at whatever

topemic level, to dispute over any and all concepts. Put another way, no African philosopher must believe in any particular concept in order to be either truly African or truly philosophical, any more than all German philosophers must be idealists or all British philosophers must be empiricists. But it is also the nature of philosophy to reflect a world of meaning, and to simultaneously contribute back to that world of meaning.

Philosophy-in-place deliberately does not ask the metaphysical question, the place that most philosophers start. It does not set up the debate in the standard Socratic manner, in which we compare positions, and the more “rational” one wins, which we all then adopt and move on to the next question, with the goal of enlightenment in mind. Teleological thought is not the point. More important are the modes of thought that have emerged from the encounters between people and groups within Africa, and also outside of Africa. Those modes are where philosophy happens, because those are the occasions when thought has to both reflect its place of origin, and also when a light is shone on its scope and limits.

We see this in the development of feminism within the last hundred years. Feminism is important not just because it enables inclusiveness, but because once it moved past issues of inclusion, it started creating new concepts. Take the ethics of care, for instance. In modern times, since the European enlightenment, we have tended to think that the only modes of ethics are either some form of universalism (deontology, consequentialism), or some form of virtue ethics (and it should be said, that was also a recovery, placed against universalist ethics). What feminist thinkers such as Carol Gilligan said was, look, there are blind spots that arise precisely because philosophers have not attended to the place of ethics, the place where action actually happens. They have not attended to the ethical choices that real people have to make. They have ignored a thought-life. What is necessary about that thought-life? What makes that a more ethical move than something else? There is nothing inherent in that which demands it. And, it was difficult to see that until Gilligan and others came along and presented a new thought-life, one which grew from the place of women’s experience. Now, one has not properly considered modern ethics if one does not take the ethics of care into account. That mode had to answer to that experience, but it also existed within the context of former modes of discourse about ethics. The question of whether she is right is less important than whether she made a thought-life available for experience and for scrutiny. There is, of course, debate about the extent to which the ethics of care are viable. But now that is a path that can be walked, with both new concepts and a new organization of concepts.

### **EXAMPLES OF THOUGHT-LIFE**

One example of someone who, on the surface, seems to be working Socratically, is Henry Odera Oruka. Oruka focuses on what he calls the “Sage” tradition in African Philosophy. He interviews members

of the community or leaders recognized for being wise. If you look at transcripts (or published accounts) of his interviews, you see someone deeply rooted in a mode of conceptual analysis that begins from identifying definitions. He constantly asks his subjects questions like “what is truth?”, “what is justice?”, and so forth. In other words, he works like a classically European trained philosopher, which he was. One can read him as searching for (and at the same time, assuming) a kind of purity of thought. He wants to find “real” African thought, the kind not tainted by European thought, in order to answer Hountondji’s charge against ethnophilosophy, which is that it is socially and anonymously held, uncritical thought, and therefore unworthy of being called philosophy. Odera Oruka’s response is to find individuals who embody social wisdom, but can also stand at a critical distance from it, which usually means a form of divergence to him.

That’s how Odera Oruka looks – he seems to be working within the thought-life of classical Western philosophy. I think, though, there’s something more interesting happening, something more like what I’ve described above. It is difficult to believe that he really thinks he is finding some sort of pure African thought when he is asking questions that might as well come straight from Uppsala and are structured along neo-Kantian lines. All concepts are answers to questions, and Odera Oruka’s questions come from places, like anyone else’s. But if we read past his fairly static interview format that is recorded, we find something more interesting: sometimes these sages push back. If we abandon the *maieutic* metaphor that Odera Oruka clearly consciously works with, and instead see that there is a creation of new concepts at the borders of forms of life, we can see that Odera Oruka and his interlocutors progressively perform a thought-life. He was, after all, as much an African sage as anyone he interviewed, even in the technical sense of ‘sage’ that he used. He did not stand above and apart. And, despite what he might have said at other occasions (see, for instance, his testimony at the trial on Luo marriage and divorce), he is not mining the past for concepts that can be applied to the present. He is using his encounter with the past to enact a new form of thought. He is not merely operating within a thought-life, but creating a new one.

We might suppose that Odera Oruka is merely making traditional thought available, but that would be to regard traditional thought as a body of material. It is, rather, a thought-life, and one of a particular sort. Tradition is what stands in our peripheral vision. It is what is at the edge of the rational gaze. When we focus on tradition qua tradition, we have taken it out of the traditional, that is, it is in our gaze. To suppose that we could mine it for concepts that could then be applied to present problems is to render it null and void. Tradition is a mode of thought, a thought-life, not an object of thought. But our relationship with it becomes available as we see it for what it is, which is a sustained mode of life that has both practice and reflection inherent in it. Tradition always has both practice and reflection. Practice is altered by encounter with other practices, and



reflection comes to self-knowledge by being interrogated by other reflection. Odera Oruka allows tradition to be something more than a mine for concepts – he creatively engages with it to create something new. But reading him superficially leads to a different, much less interesting conclusion.

Another example: In Sam Imbo's *An Introduction to African Philosophy*, he has a section on the relationship between feminism and African philosophy. Notably, his argument centers on the similarities between the two:

Feminists and African philosophers share certain features. Essentialist philosophy characterized women as beings who emphasized love, caring, and compassion over rationality. This was the same essentialist characterization of Africans as primitive, intuitive beings. There is now a shared rejection of the dominant traditions and a striving to bring about new perspectives; both are committed to examining the structures of power and its operations; both are suspicious of the categories in which the dominant traditions deal; and both seek to engage in practices whose intellectual tools do not deny agency arbitrarily to "others." (Imbo, 1998: 136)

Imbo is surely correct about these similarities, but if all this is true, why have these two areas largely ignored each other? There are not appreciably more women in African philosophy than in Western (probably fewer, in fact), nor have African philosophers used the thought-life of feminism in any major way. And while there is certainly a feminism of women of colour, this fact has not translated into feminism taking African philosophy very seriously. One would expect more common cause, if these two are as similar as he says. What's the problem?

Imbo sees an opportunity in similarities, but I think there is greater opportunity in the differences he has inadvertently turned up. Instead of searching for similarities in these two forms of thought-life, finding the disjunctions allows a critical light to shine on both sides. We have long known of the criticisms of some versions of feminism, that they are insufficiently aware of the experience of women of colour; are there similar questions we ought to be raising about African philosophy? Let's sharpen the issue further – we could add other philosophies of resistance to Imbo's comparison. Many of the same things Imbo said about feminism could also be said about African-American philosophy, or queer theory, or other platial philosophies, and yet even with African-American philosophy there has been a surprising lack of intellectual traffic across borders, if we start from similarities. Now, perhaps it is understandable that a thought-life taken up with its own particular forms of marginalization would focus on clarifying its own concepts. But then, why make the comparison at all?

The opportunity here is to not see these thought-lives as similar, but as separate, and to use the concepts of one thought-life to clarify the concepts of the other. The otherness of the other must be maintained in this process. In this way, we discover that there are a myriad of differences between forms of feminism and most forms of African philosophy. They are rooted in different places, in different sets of traditions. They hybridize different traditions to construct their thought-life. They have had to address different questions, so that the provenance of their concepts is different, even when the concepts seem superficially to be similar (e.g., emancipation, freedom, identity). Feminism may present questions to African philosophy, if thought-lives are placed in tension. What, for instance, does African philosophy have to say about the body? Feminism has created the concept of the body in a particular way – does, or can this figure in African philosophy, and if not, why not? There are similarities in discourse about the colonized body – but are these really the same concept, or are they different? And can working this out in African philosophy turn the question back on to feminism? Giving an African philosophical reading of feminism or a feminist reading of African philosophy seems more useful than just finding similarities between them. And, simply digging deeper into any single thought-life, by itself, doesn't make these concepts clear. Tensions are needed.

Does any of this mean that African philosophy should be primarily looking outside of itself, focusing on other traditions rather than exploring and refining the concepts from its own place? Hardly. The work of clarifying concepts happens when difference is respected and made productive, and that difference is not only between large-topeme thought-lives like "Western Philosophy" and "African Philosophy." Recall that, for Odera Oruka, the issue was to get past the illusion of the maieutic method to recognize that concepts were being produced in the act of putting the sages' ideas under stress. In fact, the small topeme levels have the potential to show forth finer-honed concepts.

A third example, of a different sort: in Western philosophy, we have come to think of thinker's thought as being a kind of style. We do not just talk about the ideas of Freud, we talk about "Freudian readings;" we do not just talk about Hegel's philosophy, but about a "Hegelian approach" to issues. These styles are one kind of thought-life, or rather, a thought-life at a particular topemic level. We are asked to walk with Freud or Hegel, into new territory. In comparison, we rarely see anyone speaking of the thought-life of an African thinker. We rarely hear of a "Hountondjian" reading of something, or an "Odera Orukan" approach to an issue. Why is that? Some might say that this points to the differences in the larger thought-life of African philosophy, that it privileges collective thought over individual. So, instead of a Hountondjian approach, we might think of a Kikuyu approach, or an Akan approach as being a more African version of a thought-life. We do occasionally see that. But that position is by no means universally or even widely held. And, when we do see it, it tends to be understood as a set of beliefs or doctrines – the Akan

belief about personhood – rather than a thought-life which has a creative aspect to it. The thought-life is rarely emphasized at any topical level. I, and I suspect many others, would welcome an Hountondjian, Orukan, or Mbembéan reading of issues or texts both within African society and without, by someone other than these thinkers. What does it mean to walk with these thinkers, to work within their thought-life? What concepts might become available?

But the key is not to just find ways of highlighting concepts, but highlighting the questions that make the concepts possible. What is worth taking seriously, as I have said, are the questions we ask. We spend far too little time interrogating them. We rarely ask about the debts of those questions, whose interests they serve, and how our way of asking is really a way of establishing a path of inquiry, a research program. This is the real potential for African philosophy – to ask questions that both analyze forms of life, and create new ones. We look into the cultural past, not to find a magic bullet that will solve contemporary problems, but to interrogate the questions that a culture brings to itself, questions which themselves owe something to both the richness and the fraught nature of that culture. Those questions are never pure, as if they could be – they always arise within the context of interaction with other places, both at the local level and at the global level.

The task of the philosopher, then, is to question our questions. The claims will trail along behind. And, that questioning occurs when we realize that those questions are deeply and inextricably located within a thought-life, and also when we recognize that merely focusing on that thought-life by itself will not enable the process of question questioning. This is why we need speaking and listening between cultures, between people. I hesitate to use the word “dialogue”, fraught as it is, and prone to being used as a prerequisite for any thought.

Questioning questions becomes possible in contrasts and tensions. Indeed, those tensions are the essential driving force of philosophy. The metaphor of architecture, so much part of the system-building thinkers in the West (we lay the foundations of thought by arguing for some first principles, and build our ideas from there), is an inadequate one in this case.

A fourth example: The concept of *Ubuntu* has had currency in South Africa, and elsewhere on the continent. This is a concept with a provenance – it has addressed particular questions, both historically and recently, both political, social, and religious. But until recently, the concept has been seen as largely identical across Africa. It seems clear that at a particular topical level, it would be more creative to explore the differences. A project to study the concept, its variants, its native language expressions, and its various provenances, would be invaluable. This could happen across Africa, and could begin to unseat both the idea that *Ubuntu* is more like a belief system than an ethical system, and also the idea that *Ubuntu* is identical everywhere. We may find ourselves with multiple

ethical systems, not just rooted in traditional practice, but as live thought-lives, capable of creating new concepts.

Finally, a fifth example, which takes us back to the beginning, to the concept of cosmopolitanism. I have already discussed the ways in which cosmopolitanism is rooted in a Western thought-life. The assumption that it merely refers to being a "citizen of the world" obscures the provenance of the concept, as an answer to a host of questions rooted in Western social and political development. Today it often has the ethical implication of being the foundation (*arche*) or goal (*telos*) that makes dialogue possible. As such, it is rooted in liberal ideals, and it usually assumes that an individual chooses or decides whether he/she is a citizen of a world community. For some, it may be the prerequisite to philosophical reflection, the move from the partiality of natural commitments to the universality of the cosmopolitan.

If we regard the attempt to determine whether the concept can be located within an African context as a necessary but limited first step, we are faced with a different question: what is the thought-life in which the concept has made sense, and if we try to include it in an African context (at whatever topemic level), what new possibilities appear? Instead of world citizenry, we need to consider the "cosmos", or world, in which and with which we have "polity", or some form of political/social/cultural organization. This may not be about individual choice, to belong to a world community or not, as if another state is the natural one, and this one requires rational choice, or as if we always were a citizen of this polity of the cosmos and just never realized it. It may not be about individual choice at all. What if cosmopolitanism were a mode of thought, rather than a prerequisite to dialogue? What if we simply place in tension philosophy-in-place with cosmopolitanism, that is, place in tension our commitment to the debts and duties of place with the idea that the cosmos has a polity? Our worlds have forms of organization that press us inexorably toward the larger scale, toward a new level of topeme. The philosopher's world inevitably outstrips itself, and yet, the source of concepts for that world equally inevitably remains rooted in place.

And what about the concept of place that a cosmopolitan thought-life assumes? What, for example, about our sense of home? The cosmopolitan displaces home, moves it away from immediate human experience, away from the metaphor of family, beyond the nation. For the West, this is why it is rooted in liberalism. But what if we start from a different assumption about what home is in the first place, one more rooted in an African thought-life? Is it the nation that an African cosmopolitanism would move beyond, and what would moving beyond mean? And, how could home be maintained, while moving beyond? This has yet to be worked out in African philosophy.

Or, who counts as part of the "cosmos?" Do ancestors? What would that look like? Or, what is the "reasonable" or "moral" basis for the polity? Or, what is cosmopolitanism supposed to overcome? Tradition? The mythic (see Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, on this)? The irrational?

Is Pan-Africanism a form of cosmopolitanism, or its antithesis? If cosmopolitanism is about dialogue, how are the dialogue partners defined (is it the state that is in dialogue with other states, to transcend state-hood? Is it the nation? The ethnic group?), and what would it mean to shift those definitions? How do we imagine ethics as rooted both in African tradition and in the cosmopolitical? Do these fundamentally contradict each other, or do each of them have the potential to overcome this seeming tension? If cosmopolitanism in the West is about transcending the localized interests of the state, what happens when localized interests are of different sorts, and there are more sophisticated (African) political structures based in traditional models of governance? If cosmopolitanism is (mis)understood through the structures of neo-liberal globalization elsewhere, what representations might it have here?

Or, take this another direction – how could the concept of cosmopolitanism serve to disrupt existing orthodoxies within African philosophy? Deleuze (2002: 12) at one point speaks of the “new scholasticism” of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, and also of the way that Sartre was their “Outside”, the breath of fresh air that allowed them to tolerate the “new restoration of order.” What, in the current set of thought-lives, requires disruption in order to be renewed (or, perhaps, tolerated)? Is there a similar “new scholasticism” within African philosophy?

Or, yet another direction: Does the universalized Kantian rationality of cosmopolitanism in some way get disrupted by African philosophy, and if so, precisely how? This has been a theme in the investigation of African rationality since the beginning, but it has always been put in terms of the contradiction between universal rationality and localized or specific forms of thought. But what if African philosophy could serve as a disruption, rather than a failure, of cosmopolitanism in the Western sense? How, for instance, are both traditional and contemporary African spaces produced and sustained, and does this fit into the optimistic homogenizing moral program of cosmopolitan dialogue?

And finally, yet another implication of considering cosmopolitanism – what are the questions for which cosmopolitanism would be an answer in African circles? At different topical levels in African circles? And, importantly, if we were to consider this as an answer to those questions, what other aspects of the thought-life become apparent in that process? Further, what does this say about disciplinary practice – does cosmopolitanism shed different light on African political theory or social theory than it does on African philosophy? Can we distinguish the goals and methods of those different disciplines in their treatments of this concept? They are, after all, other thought-lives.

This now becomes interesting, because we do not simply accept or reject the ideal of cosmopolitanism. It is precisely our partial commitments (family, nation, ethnicity) that engender the polity of the cosmos, and that polity must continually draw on the partial for its vitality. But more importantly, the concept can serve to invigorate other concepts,

disrupt given modes of understanding, and open the door to new ways of thinking. The concept has become creative. Instead of asking whether cosmopolitanism can be found in African culture somewhere (thus thinking of it as property), this makes these concepts alive and new by allowing the philosopher to see the provenance of the concepts, that is, their debts to their own place, and thus see ways in which they could be used anew. The issue is not whether we can find cosmopolitanism in the African past, and use it in the present. The issue is – in what conceptual system does it make sense, and how does inquiring about it make sense out of the conceptual system? And, how can the conceptual system be disrupted, radicalized, and revitalized?

Recognizing the provenance of cosmopolitanism means recognizing that it has seen several moments of prominence within Western thought. The most recent has been in the context of the rise of nationalism, as a response to the fracturing forces therein. Is that place of prominence one that makes sense within the African context? In some sense, it does, but there is a different path of national development within Africa than elsewhere, because of the history of colonialism. The polity of the cosmos, then, must have a different nature if it is to be meaningful in this context. Why might anyone be interested in it? Again, from the provenance of the concept in the West, it re-inscribes liberal values, with some more attention to particularity. But is that the trajectory that it must take within African circles, and if not that, what? As with many concepts, cosmopolitanism arises within the West with a history and as a response to specific conditions. To simply adopt the concept within an African context ignores that history and those conditions. On the other hand, to simply reject it as un-African ignores the potential of coming to self-understanding, as well as the potential of highlighting alternate historical conditions and present imperatives that might be addressed by related concepts, or by an altered version of cosmopolitanism itself.

This is the hard path, not the easy one. It is much easier to believe that philosophy is like a lens that focuses outward, on some object of thought, and those objects remain at arm's length. We can categorize and classify, draw boundaries and defend territory. And, the result is an African philosophy focused on identity, but ultimately with little chance of affecting anything. We could regard African philosophy as a mode of thought, and recognize that concepts are markers that give evidence of a thought-life. This is more productive, but in some sense always remains a phenomenological task. The contribution of this approach of philosophy to the social world is greater than the earlier approach, in that showing forth a thought-life for philosophers is liable to show forth the same strategies of thought throughout a society. We do not think of concepts as something to be applied to current problems, but rather as indicators of patterns of reason, valuation, and so forth.

Finally, we could regard African philosophy as a catalyst. In doing so, we do not just trace out a thought-life, but we also make new concepts available by connecting the first two modes of philosophy in a

critical poetics of thought. The incoherences and disunities of thought-life become an opportunity. At this point, philosophy has something powerful to contribute to society. It reinterprets a society for itself by allowing it to see itself in new forms. There will be a day when, as it was for feminism, African philosophy has created concepts that are so useful and so important that no credible overview of philosophy can afford to ignore them. And this will be good, not only for the articulation of African self-understanding, but for the self-understanding of the world.

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# **THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY**

## **PURPOSE**

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

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