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## Editorial

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This issue of the *CODESRIA Bulletin* revisits a postcolonial turn in anthropology and Africa. Anthropology is a dynamic and plural discipline, in constant dialogue with itself, related disciplines, and the continuity and innovation, vitality and negotiation of evolving local and imported forms of social and cultural reality in Africa. It is in recognition of this that CODESRIA invited ten scholars of Africa – in the majority *from* Africa – to comment on the position of the postcolonial anthropologist. These scholars in the main take as a point of departure the work of Professor René Devisch. A European anthropologist who applied his understanding of local Congolese lifeworlds to investigate much-overlooked aspects of his native Belgium and the *habitus* of North Atlantic social scientists, Devisch has displayed an impressive ability to look at local practices through a bifocal lens. This in turn has led to a re-evaluation in academia of local knowledge practices and systems, and their complementarity with regard to universal sciences.

On the occasion of the award of an honorary doctorate granted him by the University of Kinshasa in April 2007 (only the tenth such award in the history of that university), Professor Devisch reflected in his academic address on the very topic ‘What is an anthropologist?’ He looked back at his studies of philosophy and anthropology in Kinshasa – deeply marked by the sociopolitical and intercivlisational contestations of Négritude and African philosophy that were prevalent at the time. From these he drew inspiration for his anthropological endeavours after the 1970s, with the aim of contributing to the decolonisation of anthropology and the anthropologist in order to understand the particular sociocultural contexts from within the rationale and dynamics of the communities involved. Over the years, his primary research interests focused on the Yaka in rural southwestern Democratic Republic of Congo and suburban Kinshasa. Additionally, he benefited from the hospitality of diverse subaltern communities, both rural and suburban, for research stays in his home country Belgium, in southern Ethiopia and Tunisia, and from supervision of African and European doctoral students during their anthropological fieldwork in eight African countries. More recently, Devisch and his colleague Filip De Boeck acted as promoters of the honorary doctorates that their alma mater, the Catholic University of Leuven, granted two African scholars, Jean-Marc Ela in 1999 and Valentin Mudimbe in 2006.

One can gauge some of the significance of the recognition by the University of Kinshasa from the remarks of the Dutch anthropologist, Wim van Binsbergen:

When, nearly half a century after the end of colonial rule, an African university grants an honorary degree to a prominent researcher from the former colonising country, this is a significant step in the global liberation of African difference (to paraphrase Mudimbe’s 1997 expression). The African specialist knowledge institution declares itself to be no longer on the receiving and subaltern side, but takes the initiative

to assert its independent scholarly authority, and thus redefines the flow of North–South intellectual dependence into one of intercontinental equality.

In his reply to the critical reflections expressed in the commentaries on his academic lecture, Devisch situates his anthropological endeavour in the ‘shared borderspace’ that may develop between a transcontinental plurality of lifeworlds, traditions of thought and scientific disciplines. Very much aware of the trauma of the colonial presence and intrusion also in its present disguises, and the gnawing sense of moral debt contracted by his generation of social scientists who came to Africa in the early days of independence, he is yet able to feel revalidated by the reciprocal interpersonal loyalty that his many African hosts, co-students or colleagues have extended to him over the years. He invites us to reflect on contemporary anthropology’s intercultural commitment to a bifocal gaze and to multisided intercultural discourse, to the cross-pollination in African academia between universal sciences and local knowledge systems (as was suggested in the Special Issue on ‘All knowledge is first of all local knowledge’, *Africa Development/Afrique et développement* 30.3, 2005, ed. Theophilus Okere, Chukwudi Anthony Njoku and René Devisch), and finally to the blind spots in Western-derived social science.

### The Bifocality and Intercultural Dialogue at the Core of the Anthropological Endeavour

A profound respect for diverse ways of life, for plural gender-specific procedures of signification, as well as a capacity for empathy and unprejudiced dialogue, together constitute, we believe, the golden thread in extended fieldwork along which the anthropologist can investigate groups or networks and the lifeworld from within. Such genuine intersubjectivity involves seeing local realities primarily from the perspective and in terms of the communities concerned. And yet there remains a paradox, since researchers subsequently represent their insights largely in the academic traditions of persuasion derived from Eurocentric modernity. As the late Archie Mafeje observed, a core question for the anthropologist is how much does his or her report remain a form of bordercrossing. There is the constant risk of exoticising, if not othering, the locals – a risk derived at least in part from the Western scholarly tradition of the book and of epistemological distancing that, as Mafeje suggests, exclude a multi-value logic in favour of subject–object dualities.

One mainstream discourse in social science continues blithely to privilege Enlightenment rationality, the autonomous self and Human Rights – this last understood in the individualistic terms of contemporary Western ideology – promoting itself as the universal project and the bearer of progress to all nations. It is also this perspective that, in the transatlantic mass media and much of Western-derived academic discourse, deploys in ethnocentric fashion its projected phantasms with regard to the populations south of the Sahara, or to non-literates and impoverished rural and displaced people. This is the case even

when the latter processes are engineered in full or in part by the destructive agency of the very Enlightenment rationality that is celebrated. However, the open-ended, many-tongued networking and digital narrativity in today's media world stimulate us more than ever to seek new modes of border transcendence. Moreover, the variety of modernities and the many transnational, diasporic crossings increasingly bear witness to the transcontinental multi-centredness of cultural history. Ever sensitive to what is obfuscated in the encounters of civilisations, many an anthropologist has wondered if the North is not seeking, in some insidious way, to invent a shadowy zone or an 'un-thought', which it contrasts with its technocratic, rationalist and secularised societies, in response to its individual and collective *angst* in the face of death, finitude, the unforeseen and the hybrid.

Living in the shattered worlds of shanty towns may force anthropologists to expose themselves to a ruthless interrogation of their partly defensive intercultural constructs. There is, for instance, as Devisch points out, the anthropologist's exposure to the local epistemologies that characterise rule-governed commonsensical thinking, or the more intuitive practical thinking, as well as the reflexive and rule-governed systematic, but culture-specific, understandings of things and the human condition. The anthropologist thereby must open up to lifeworlds that unfold themselves through the interplay of everyday practices and the manifold interventions, motions and messages of humans, ancestors and non-human agents, visible and invisible worlds. All this may unfold in interactive and culture-specific – very likely not Enlightenment and Christian – sites of emerging meaning production and innovative world-making, among others, through such forms as parody and mimicry.

The anthropologist will feel interrogated by the clash between the postcolonial state institutions on the basis of intrusive civilisational models conveyed by transcontinental media or school syllabi, of public display, religiosity, consumerism and sexuality on the one hand, and the subaltern people's clinging to home-born beliefs, modes of living, habitual techniques and skills, on the other. Hence, the anthropologist, to Devisch, is witness, in the youth cultures and new religions, to so many subaltern urbanites' transcultural bricolage of both a forceful identity display and its constant refashioning or reframing in the multiple selves of the members of the community studied.

These experiences may force many a social scientist beyond the neutral stance of science. He or she may become more and more reluctant to leave out of the picture both the shocking effects of estrangement, uncertainty and disarray and the countertransfereential dimension in the experience of them. Here, some social scientists find a way out, either in emancipatory involvement with their host group (see Jacques Depelchin below), or in subversive artistic productions or aestheticising writing on their own society. By doing so, they may be able to show how much the latter has imbibed or overcome the imaginary colonial and postcolonial identity or knowledge constructs – a reality unmasked in diverse manners in their commentaries by Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Lansana Keita, André Yoka Lye, and in the thoroughgoing scholarly analysis by Valentin Mudimbe, in *The Invention of Africa*, 1988. As Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, Déogratias Mbonyinkebe Sebahire, Noël Obotela Rashidi and Wim van Binsbergen also argue in their commentaries, depicting

or differentiating so-called 'traditional' and 'modern' people or societies as incarnations of 'local' versus 'globalising' lifestyles is largely a fiction of the media and social sciences. But it is a myth that in many ways shapes perception and action in a world where reality is often hostage to ideology.

This reinforces the need to take a new and bifocal look from 'there' to 'here' – as if it were 'there'. Applying the anthropological insights gained in the corporeal symbolism in Yaka socioculture to his research in Belgium with family physicians and psychiatrists, Devisch was led to trace in a phenomenologically inspired perspective the impact that the culture-specific moulding of the body and senses has had on many a patient, both autochthonous and allochthonous.

### **Cross-Pollination in African Academe Between Universal Sciences and Local Knowledge Practices and Systems**

Academe in contemporary Africa can promote its social and cultural relevance by selectively integrating with its epistemology of scientific rationality and objectivity the innovating force of African traditions of knowledge systems and practices. Devisch believes that in their quest to neutralise as much as possible ethnocentric bias, the anthropologists' first attempt (see also Lapika Dimomfu below) is to understand subaltern individuals and groups and the rich potential of their knowledge and spirituality endogenously, that is, in their own terms. The use of the term 'endogenous' or local here, with regard to the particular society or network, professional or interregional, that is the focus of the anthropological study, is, he points out, certainly not intended to suggest a unity, homogeneity or clearly distinguished culture or bounded group. Rather, he has in mind a capacity of interrelated subjects and of cultural matrices to exercise self-orientation and critical insight from an earlier or more primary and endogenous wellspring of inspiration or reference, largely carried by the mother-tongue and home culture. By local knowledge or mode of knowing, Devisch refers to any given professional network's or groups unique genius and distinctive creativity, which put a characteristic stamp on what its members develop as local and possibly long-range patterns of knowledge and epistemology, metaphysics, worldview and local technologies.

A popular etymological interpretation of the French notion of *connaissance*, understood as *co-naissance* (literally co-birth; but colloquially referring to experiential knowing and insight), Devisch argues, offers an insightful linguistic rendition of the sensuous intercorporeal and dialogical encounter in which the anthropologist is engaged. By virtue of the emotional, hence intercorporeal, co-implication of the subjects in a communal action – such as an apprenticeship, a palaver, a marriage or a therapy – the sharing of knowledge becomes *co-naissance* or an intersubjective knowing and knowledge sharing.

### **Blind Spots in Western-derived Social Science**

Anthropological fieldwork and the subsequent scholarly reports may for the author and reader entail major dislocations from the interactional, the verbal or the observable to the spheres of the transactional, multisensory co-implication, the auspicious event and the invisible realm. An ethically committed anthropologist, however, cannot go on excluding from the intercultural encounter

whatever appears to be at odds with the Eurocentric academic's secularised worldview, or with a hegemonic mode of sensory and objectivist data acquisition canonised by Enlightenment rationality.

Arising from these arguments, Devisch identifies the issue of whether the empathetic anthropologist can or should espouse, in terms of their own canons, the distress or the beauty of the encounter, hence the dignity and numinous inspiration, the sanctification of sorrow and spiritualisation of suffering in line with the cultural milieu of the host group. How is this problem to be expressed or theorised? Interaction in the unstable border zone between the here and the there, the living and the deceased, the visible and the invisible, the auspicious and the uncanny – whether in dream-sharing, ritual, sacrifice, divination, witchcraft, healing, pilgrimage, poetry, dance or song, Islamic or Christian liturgy – makes the anthropologist also attentive to what is not rule-governed, representable, sayable or verbal.

This, Devisch maintains, makes the engaged and liberated anthropologist – very much like the artist – listen to all sorts of language play and surprising narrative themes, and open up to the non-habitual or co-attracting modes of becoming. Such receptivity may be demanded in the dramatic arts, including the resonance between musical tone, transactional mood and ritual existential motivation; a transindividual sensitivity and synaesthetic playing on suggestibility in entrancement; or dreaming and possession induced by guiding ancestors; and masquerade and the plastic arts. The anthropologist is moreover led to concentrate on particular tracks of world-making and thinking through things, whether in aesthetics or initiatory knowledge productions and artefacts, or in legal claim-making, resistance, emancipation, community building. He or she is enticed to look in particular at processes of world-making by local networks from the focus of vulnerability and pain, healing and the sublime, and their ferment in the interstitial. Such culture-specific hermeneutic and identity dynamics question much of the Eurocentric, gender- or race-biased master narratives of nature, fact, property, mastery, regulation, individual choice and scientific rationality.

A second concern highlighted by Devisch can be formulated in line with what was suggested earlier about the anthropologist's tuning in with the given sociocultural orientation and the local forms of 'co-naissance' or co-implicating knowing. Anthropology is summoned to seek critical insight into the dynamics of multiple and shifting identities, and into the genuine and paradoxical ways in which particular lifeworlds disenfranchise the subaltern, or veil and unveil the unsayable. Participant observation leads the anthropologist to scrutinise the culture-specific ways of feeling, seeing and trans-subjective, hence intercorporeal, modes of figuration, interlocution, recollection, empowerment and comprehension. He or she is thereby led to focus on the knowledge, values or imaginaries that are endogenous to particular cultural sites, as well as on their explanatory tropes, their interpretation and generalisations. This focus may inspire some unprecedented transcultural approach that can trace possible homologues between age-old crafts or rituals, contemporary aesthetics or techno-scientific developments, and futurist techno-human virtual reality. Is it not the role of anthropology or intercultural philosophy to also unravel the unthought – both the most original or the deeply

suppressed – in the host society, just as in mainstream Western consciousness? What readily comes to mind here are the genuine, original modes of knowing and their authoritative use in society, of the arts of language play, of dealing with the human body in resonance with the social and cosmological body, or of palaver and reconciliation, in many African societies.

A third concern of the anthropological endeavour radically opposes some of the deconstructionist stances taken in postmodern thinking. The fundamental authority for the anthropologist is precisely the culture-sensitive and culturally embedded (thus unavoidably culture-bound) intellectual and existential interdependence of field and text, of life-bearing thinking and speaking through the voice of things and artefacts, intersubjective engagement and self-critical reflection. Such an approach to the culture-sensitive, specialist and intersubjective encounter from within a shared basis of valuation bears witness to the ever-emerging possibilities of a mutually enriching human co-implication. It would involve the artfulness, the dignity and the domestication or, literally, the home-coming of more and more lucidly interweaving 'glocal' worlds – worlds that mark our challenging era with hope.

Professor Valentin Mudimbe offers an apt concluding assessment. Drawing on an exceptionally wide-ranging intercivlisational expertise and an expert scholarly scrutiny of the great philosophical studies in relation to self and other, and knowledge acquisition, Mudimbe's magnanimous letter to Devisch invites the latter to enter the intercultural hospitality of a meditative walk along the Benedictine tradition. He invites Devisch in particular to critically reflect on the philosophical underpinnings and major phenomenological understandings of the most fundamental and therefore interculturally comparative process of cultural shaping: how to make the body a site of *the Rule*. Translated into the thematic of the Kinshasa Academic Lecture: how to subdue the culture-specific biasing blind spots, passions and errors characterising ethnocentric misunderstanding and misrepresentation, to an empirically sound and transculturally valid scientific anthropological practice.

Having, two decades ago, forcefully resisted the missionary and evolutionist *Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe now scrutinises, with incisive awareness, the phenomenological and discourse-based modes of keeping intact the intersubjectively most engaging intercultural knowing and insight or 'co-naissance'. If it is not the salvationist mission or the humanitarian impulse in the name of something bigger than us that validly urges a genuine intercultural *epoche*, nor the embarrassment or the moral guilt for respectively his or her ancestors' or predecessors' so-called pre-modern ways of life or colonial intrusion, is it then perhaps the Other's precariousness and ethical appeal, or rather mere fascination, that urges the anthropologist's commitment? Drawing on his background in philology and in line with the Foucaultian approach of structured discourses, as well as cutting across major philosophical and empirical anthropology, Mudimbe examines the gravitational field in which the intercultural anthropologist is moving. He defends the classical plea for keeping the ethical commitment distinct from the proper neutral scientific endeavour and agenda in line with its rules for empirical and historical-contextual enquiry that aims at interculturally valid scientific knowledge.

It is in the light of these epistemological and ethical concerns that CODESRIA welcomes the opportunity offered by René Devisch's address at the award of an honorary doctorate to him by the University of Kinshasa, followed by the commentaries and a letter by most distinguished African and/or Africanist scholars. Such recognition of a Western anthropologist by the intellectual community of a country whose populations have been victim of some of the worst excesses in African encounters with Western scholarship and traditions meant an opportunity for CODESRIA to revisit the debate on anthropology, the anthropological approach and their relevance in Africa.

Exactly a decade ago, the late Professor Archie Mafeje in a 43-page monograph strongly critiqued African anthropology as a handmaiden of colonialism, and called for social history to replace it as a discipline. His critique of anthropology was published in the *African Sociological Review* (2.1, 1998), along with responses by Rosabelle Laville, Sally Falk Moore, Paul Nchoji Nkwi, John Sharp and Herbert Vilakazi. On the rejection of anthropology at independence by African politicians and intellectuals, Archie Mafeje wrote:

After independence they did not want to hear of it. The newly independent African governments put a permanent ban on it [anthropology] in favour of sociology and African studies. In the new African universities anthropologists got ostracised as unworthy relics from the past. From the point of view of the African nationalists, Anthropology was designed to perpetuate that which

they sought to transcend as nation-builders. From the point of view of development theorists and practitioners Anthropology was not a modernising science and, therefore, was a poor investment. The few African anthropologists on the ground felt defenceless and 'went underground' for more than two decades, as some of them confessed in a special meeting organised by CODESRIA in 1991. The attack on Anthropology was heart-felt and justified in the immediate anti-colonial revulsion. But it was ultimately subjective because the so-called modernising social sciences were not any less imperialistic and actually became rationalisations for neo-colonialism in Africa, as we now know. However, the important lesson to be drawn from the experience of the African anthropologists is that Anthropology is premised on an immediate subject/object relation. If for social and political reasons this relation gets transformed, anthropologists might not be able to realise themselves, without redefining themselves and their discipline (Mafeje 1998: 20).

This observation by Archie Mafeje was pertinent, and at a minimum, served as a wake-up call to those wishing to practise anthropological research in Africa not to take for granted the parameters set by colonial anthropology and, instead, to redefine themselves and their trade precisely along the lines he suggested. Most recently, a CODESRIA volume – *African Anthropologies: History, Critique and Practices* – documents in a critical manner how far anthropology has come on the continent and how it strives

to be relevant despite initial hurdles and current critique. Deconstruction and reconstruction are a fact of life in the discipline. Common though the tendency is for anthropologists to be compromised, co-opted and neutralised by dominant discourses and dominant forces, it is refreshing that a growing number of critical voices are beginning to be heard more loudly. Anthropologists have contributed and could contribute even more to positive forms of transformative thought and practice, both by working to facilitate social and cultural change and also by providing critical accounts of it. African anthropology has established a major milestone in terms of self-criticism and reflexivity in the manner suggested by Mafeje.

CODESRIA believes in debates that recognise and provide a level playing field for African contributions and perspectives. This is the way forward in the collective quest to minimise the catalogue of misrepresentations of which Africa and African scholarship are often victim. Such dialogue, mutual recognition and respect should help to convince African and non-African social scientists alike about their integrity and science vis-à-vis Africa and its predicaments. Indeed, CODESRIA believes the twenty-first century marked by globalisation and the contestation and renegotiation of disciplinary boundaries and social identities to be particularly opportune for paying greater attention to changing what is produced as knowledge on Africa. Even more importantly, it is time to interrogate the institutional cultures within which that knowledge is produced, with a view to encouraging greater and more genuine collaboration that draws from different disciplinary boundaries.

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**Lecture**

# What is an Anthropologist?

*Academic Lecture on the Occasion of the Honorary Doctorate  
in Anthropology at the University of Kinshasa on 4 April, 2007<sup>1</sup>*

Mr Rector Lututala Mumpasi

Mr Dean Shomba Kinyamba

Your Excellency, Ambassador of  
Belgium, Johan Swinnen

Your Excellency, Monsignor Nzala  
Kianza, Bishop of Kwango Diocese

Dear Professor Lapika Dimomfu, my  
Promoter

Dear Professor Mwene Batende, my Co-  
promoter

Dear Colleagues

Dear Students

Distinguished Guests

Throughout this address, I would like to invite you to follow us, namely my wife who is here with us today and myself, into four journeys or comings and goings; firstly, between Flanders and Congo; secondly, between our University of Leuven and the University of Kinshasa (Unikin); thirdly, between the clash of civilisations and the role of the anthropologist of tomorrow; and finally, between lifting my mourning period for two fellow anthropologists and my auspicious good wishes.

## **Journey 1: What Did I Come to do in the Congo, Between 1965 and 1974?**

One does not become an anthropologist by birth, but nevertheless ... In other words, the anthropologist is rooted in a family novel and its places of memory.

From my mother and my father I cherish the memory of their giving a diligent and very warm welcome to numerous assistants and dealers who stepped over our parental farm. The farm was situated on the border with France and just a dozen kilometres away from the North Sea. During the night we could see the lighthouse in the port of Dunkirk. The farm stood on a piece of land bordering that part of France where persons of my parents' generation spoke Flemish, whereas my cousins and nieces indulged in the French language adopted by the French state and thus spoken in schools. During my childhood, the on-foot smuggling of farm produce, tobacco and strong alcohol was

**René Devisch**  
Catholic University of Leuven  
Belgium

rampant. It turned this *borderzone* into a hunting ground: residents such as my father would help small smugglers who walked by to avoid being detected by the somewhat rapacious glimpse of Belgian or French customs officers.

In my childhood fantasies and memories, the borderzone thus constitutes a driving force of my 'family novel' and people's ingenuity and boldness. Besides, the borderzone casts my mind back to family traumas caused by the two World Wars into which my father, mother and uncles perished had been sucked, and grand-uncles perished. In the family novel, the borderspace also marks the tension my parents experienced in their own childhood between the Flemish language spoken at home and the colonising French language spoken at school and in well-off circles in Flanders. It is this tension that they have passed on to us, their children.

## **The Intercultural Borderspace and the Intersubjective Borderlinking Constitute the Anthropologist's Biotope**

I first set off for Kinshasa in 1965, finding myself in the centre of a frantic and newly independent Africa. The West was basing its optimism on its trust in exact sciences, industry, nation-state, and on intellectuals' commitment to people's emancipating conscientisation worldwide. As a young man, I was fascinated by the cultural differences and the encounter with the *other* in his or her individual and socio-cultural originality. I felt particularly attracted by the way Charles de Foucauld, a former officer in the French armed forces, became a hermit and self-taught anthropologist while living among the Touareg in Tamanrasset, on the south border of Morocco. His life has never ceased to instil in me an ideal of respectful encounter with the *other's* genius.

During my philosophical studies until 1968 at the Canisius Institute of

Philosophy in Kimwenza, it was especially Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (focusing on the person-to-person relationship, the lived body and sensoriality) that served as our gateway through the then emerging Bantu philosophy pioneered by Hountondji, Kagame and Tempels. I have just revisited my lecture notes taken some 40 years ago during Father Johan Allary's classes on militant Négritude. It derived its inspiration from Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre. It was embodied in the writings of Senghor, Césaire (notably his 1950's *Discourse on Colonialism*), Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Sembene Ousmane, and their successors. In 1967 Johan Allary and I bravely undertook to set up a small Africanist library at Canisius, quite ostentatiously close to the Rector's room.

In my third year of philosophy, Lévi-Strauss's writings came to be an exemplary source. I was especially moved by the widely appealing and radically non-ethnocentric humanism, and thus by Lévi-Strauss's structuralism to which I dedicated my Master's dissertation. Opening a school of thought for Western postmodern intellectuals who no longer positioned themselves as universalist role-models, Lévi-Strauss radically invalidated the scandalous norm of the racist hierarchy between cultures. It is still worth saying that such a hierarchy was introduced by evolutionist anthropology and applied by colonial ethnography. I distinctly remember how I learned the basics of the Koongo language during my regular visits with Professor Dirven to Kimwenza village, and how we led efforts at Canisius to have some communal life among fellow students coming from three continents and having very different sensibilities and civilisational aspirations. Both experiences taught me how much, among ourselves, we valued very differently the connection between facts and words, feelings and thoughts, sign and reason – which moreover we defined differently.

While in Kimwenza, and then here at the University of Kinshasa Campus, I got infused by the aspiration for 'mental decolonisation' – as the expression was

coined by Mabika Kalanda. As a young Belgian after Congo's independence, I felt torn between a depressing consciousness of shame towards those Africans, recently colonised, with whom I rubbed shoulders, and a moral debt and desire for reparation. At the same time, I was concerned by a persistent attraction to what I fathom was some sort of 'hide-and-seek' game that the Congolese people had invented in face of their 'alterisation': how did they manage to resist or parody what was then described as 'the civilising mission', which demanded that they should be converted, educated and develop in the white man's image?

And, I must say, the calls to regain social and cultural legacy expressed themselves only much later in such terms as Zairian authenticity, enculturation, endogenisation or Afro-modernity.

#### The Decolonisation of Lovanium University and its Emancipation as UNaZA (Université nationale du Zaïre) Heralded for Me a Trans-subjective Repositioning as an Aspiring but Allochthonous Anthropologist

Upon completion of my philosophical training, I originally wanted to study agronomy as a step towards sustainable development. Nevertheless, I was incited to undertaking a training course in anthropology. After my one year of undergraduate studies at the University of Louvain, I came back to the Congo in 1969 to live with a small community in Livulu and later in the then student residential accommodation known as Home,<sup>7</sup> with the aim of studying anthropology here at the University Campus. I gained exposure to the radical aspiration for mental decolonisation expressed by those students associated under the name of 'Présence universitaire'. The dissertations I submitted to the department of sociology and anthropology, by way of examination for various lectures, focused on the following questions: how can we understand, in their own terms, the daily practices of Bandundu villagers who were very much devoid of trade goods as well as their modes of production and exchange, their palavers and their rites? The Dakar School for African Psychopathology, to which the course on psychopathology introduced us, inspired my enduring interest in medical anthropology and intercultural psychoanalysis.

During the 1970–71 academic year, as students we felt mobilised by President Mobutu's powerful call to decolonise the Zairian sovereign identity. At the same time, the popular imagination bestowed upon the white man the title of 'uncle' – a role that was defined in terms of duties rather than rights towards nationals. I left the campus of Kinshasa in July 1971. At this time my Zairian fellow students who were still in full education got forcibly recruited into the army at the Tshatshi military barracks on 4 June, following a spate of arrests for their so-called civic insubordination and high treason against the Head of State. As far as my personal story is concerned, this raid of the army into University life enforced the choice I had just made, which was not to seek permanent residence in the Congo. In fact, I had chosen to reverse my itinerary: to learn in depth about life here in the Congo and make it truthfully known in Europe. It was in keeping with such a choice that I had left the Kimwenza community one month earlier, a community that had so generously offered and allowed me access to the very rich Congolese experience and for which I remain evermore grateful. I gained and took the freedom to devote body, mind and soul to an audacious, though temporary, adoption within a village community in Bandundu. (I must point out by way of gratitude that I began my first anthropological research in association with the Congo's Institute for National Museums, IRSAC or Institute for Scientific Research in Central Africa, and the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research.)

This region of Bandundu is located away from the major public scene, which increasingly became the battleground for two competing ideologies: the party-state's ideology for the recourse to authenticity versus the so-called Eurocentric civilising mission of the churches and the non-governmental organisations for development. In Kwango, I had only just become a witness to major stakes in economic zairianisation undertaken by the Mobutist nation-state. And paradoxically, within the host Kwango community, the cultural shock brought about through the zairianisation movement prompted my search for a deep layer of cultural and identity authenticity, both from below the prejudiced gaze that the colonial mission projected on to the 'native' Kwango people (namely of Yaka,

Koongo and Luunda ancestry) and from below those models and prejudices devised by colonial masters and partly internalised by the people.

#### During the Research, it is the Access to the Intersubjective and Collective Memory or Intermemory that Constitutes the Main Crucible for a Professional Anthropologist

Here, I would readily compare my anthropological experience through participant observation to that of some twenty African and European anthropology PhD students whom I was able to accompany as promoter during their fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s. Anthropological research is carried out in proximity, and sometimes face-to-face, with host communities. Anthropologists heed the plurality of words and listen to both common and dissident views. They listen to collective hopes or traumatic memories blocked in the patients' body. Whoever works among individuals and groups becomes intoxicated by their practices, in a fever that gives one a taste for their audacity, but also summons one to share the wounds inflicted by life. Anthropologists thereby go so far as to turn their attention to gestural expressions and body language: they seek to grasp the hopes and fears in groups and persons. You may consent that after such an interpersonal adventure, it is no easy task to disentangle, in the anthropological writings, 'who really speaks' and 'who acts' in the transmission of messages and signs between the living and deceased, between the visible and the invisible universe as one find them in divinatory oracles, dreamwork or sacrifices.

In such a deeply moving trans-subjective experience – and regardless of whether he is male or female, novice or fully fledged, autochthonous or allochthonous – the anthropologist can be captivated by fascination, enthusiasm or even awe. The anthropologist is often likened to a romantic or rebel in pursuit of a more authentic human inasmuch as he does not feel good about himself or his belief. This experience applies to an African anthropologist who, in common parlance, 'comes to live amongst his own people in the village or the city'. Yet, the same is true of a European anthropologist seeking an adoption in a different society. Anthropologists are, thus, torn between fascination for the unknown and a desire to learn from subordinate people who are

jettisoned in their *otherness* by Eurocentric ideological constructs lurking behind salvific progress and sovereign Reason. As far as my own experience is concerned, in 1972 I arrived among a grouping of villages known as Yitaanda in North Kwango. (Let me note in passing that Yitaanda represents a thinly populated settlement of thirteen villages standing within a one-day walking distance from the Angolan frontier, on the one hand, and bordering the Wamba river on the other – that is, some 60 km in the north of Imbela Catholic Parish and about 450 km in the southeast of the capital city, Kinshasa.) My arrival in this settlement revived my childhood memories at the banks of the North Sea.<sup>2</sup> As a child I experienced, in the face of its powerful tides, a fear of being engulfed by an indefinable and massive otherness. I experienced some similar feeling upon my arrival in Yitaanda. At the same time, however, I felt some sort of fascination that makes you desperate for an encounter with such a high tide that gently submerges you only if you give yourself over to it while sitting by the beach.

Of course, without being invited, still muttering the local language and unaware of people's genuine sensibilities and interests, an anthropologist arriving in a local community or a given network has no option but to give himself or herself up to the most hospitable family within the group, in a collusive and mutual exchange for good wishes and attractive promises. Your hosts make you feel completely harmless through welcoming you and, for instance, granting you a status akin to an ancestral figure – which makes you into a classifiable and partially controllable member. The fate of my little story suggests that upon my arrival in Yitaanda I found the head of the grouping in death agony. He was an ailing octogenarian known as Taanda Kapata. A delegate of the regional chief of Luunda descent arrived in Yitaanda some weeks later in order to start the holding of palavers for succession. He called me Taanda N-leengi – a name that somehow raised me to the status of a 'reborn' figure. In particular, such a name entrusted me with the authority to undo the fate of Chief Taanda N-leengi. As a matter of fact, N-leengi was Kapata's predecessor in title and was exiled in 1939 by the colonial power to Oschwe in the Region of Lakes in the northeast of Bandundu. His alleged crime was to have participated in the

anticolonial prophetic movement known as *Bamvungi*. And in this mythical construction engineered by the envoy of the Luunda chief, I came down as the reborn Taanda N-leengi reappearing in the white colour of death after Kapata's rule, which began in 1939. (Needless to say, the fact that my name René literally means 'the reborn' was completely unknown to my hosts.)

For the inhabitants of Yitaanda, I flatly contradicted the stereotypical image of the white through my quite modest, unimposing and lasting presence in the same village. Such modesty was evidenced through my submission to the elders' authority, through the help I offered in the building of my own hut, or again, through my occasional participation in hunting expeditions, long walks to visit neighbouring village communities, celebrations and dancing. I deliberately tried to acquire the status of a friendly and caring Yaka elder, who would listen to others and provide a sympathetic gaze. In other words, I achieved the status of someone to whom people could entrust the treasure of their language, or even the heart of their culture.

For any anthropologist who loyally partakes in a host or adoption community, there is an ensuing feeling of mutual adoption. This borderspace between the host community and an anthropologist doing fieldwork and writing his or her dissertation, articles or books, is also moved by the unspoken and a face of shadow. On the one hand, the host community projects on an anthropologist, whether autochthonous or allochthonous, the imaginary of Eurocentric emancipation triggered by his or her appearance, his or her questions and his or her financial means, however limited. An anthropologist, then, realises the extent to which his or her gaze and listening are on his or her side distorted by the available methods, theories, instruments for analysing kinship, domestic economy, residential patterns, rites of passage, art of speaking and figurative art, etc. On the other hand, given that, as anthropologists, we strive for an intersubjective encounter within an intercultural borderspace, a shadow zone unwittingly springs from inside ourselves: it is a zone inhabited by our preferences, desires, refusals, denials and hardly conscious traumas. Further, it is a zone encompassing intergenerational hopes, fates and debts that deeply inform or

afflict us. This shadow zone, within ourselves and tying in with our Eurocentric education, steers our listening, receptiveness and our writings in our encountering with the host group.

Because my promoter, Professor Lapika, has already expertly painted the research undertaken in the Kwango, let me then move one step further. Let me clarify that the Yitaanda society bestowed upon me the status of *mbuta* or elder. Henceforth it was a status inviting me to no more speak out my innermost, but to learn to know things and commit them to memory through amiable listening and clear-sightedness of heart. My wife, Maria, joined me during the last three months in Yitaanda. The day before we were bound to leave, Chief Taanda came to offer us some palm wine and asked then for our glasses saying: 'When Maama Maria gives birth, the first-born will be named after me; and in these glasses we shall continue to drink to that child's health.' That explains no doubt why our elder son, Oswald-Taanda, became an architect specialising in redevelopment of a city's or region's borderspaces or thresholds, which, for residents, mark both a fold and a place to outreach. And as Maama Maria can confirm, the two and a half years' intense learning at Yitaanda took me twenty-five years for its unpacking and decoding.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as already stated, there is another story following my first anthropological experience. And so I invite you to:

## **Journey 2: How to Contribute Towards Decolonising the Gaze of Alterisation in my Home Country and at the University of Leuven – Developing a Yaka Gaze Within my Flemish Original Culture**

Whenever I return from the Congo to resettle in Flanders, I admittedly feel terribly upset at finding myself wrestling with an all-too-technocratic and modern male public discourse. Such a discourse continually and self-confidently gives priority to an ideological phrasing under the banner of the Enlightenment rationality and exact sciences – and to such ideas as the autonomous self and the individual human rights of modern Western society. It goes without saying that such ideas are no more than ethnocentric catchphrases being heralded as a universal project likely to lead towards the progress of all nations. In this

perspective, Western media and public forums as well as various academic debates continue to direct in an ethnocentric fashion those projective fantasies on to people living in Africa south of the Sahara.

Aware of what remains concealed in the intercivlisational borderspace, I cannot help wondering whether the North is not trying, without admitting it, to metabolise the shadow zone or the unthinkable of our technocratic, rationalistic and secularised civilisation – viz. the individual and collective *angst* for death, finitude, the unpredictable and the hybrid. It is likely that such fear of death or, more vaguely, this disturbing strangeness in the North Atlantic consciousness, finds its early sublimation in a double self-satisfaction. As a matter of fact, the media constantly remind us about the level of satisfaction that our technocratic environment is supposed to generate along with the influx of beautiful products, the transfer of our perfect technocracy and nice goods to the disadvantaged regions in the South. I wonder whether, at the same time and paradoxically, in its discourses and programmes for public healthcare, birth control and development intended for the South, the North – without having a lucid consciousness of its own motives – is not determined to try and spread more than ever its own death phantasms. In other words, are the media not contributing to repressing these phantasms by shifting them to an adversary Otherness, which Europe relentlessly merges with its phantasms of the ‘Black Continent’ and now the so-called ‘document-less immigrants’?

Besides, through my anthropological research among the people of Kwango and Kinshasa, I became acutely aware of my own Flemish cultural identity. When collaborating in some research programmes between 1980 and 1986 with a number of general practitioners and psychiatrists in Brussels and Antwerp, my attention was directed towards cultural mechanisms that shape and bring about certain symptoms. The implication of such collaboration is that the following were the key questions awaiting answers from an anthropologist evaluating his Yaka experience in his own Flemish soil: On the basis of which specific experience or culturally determined body image predisposition did Belgo-Sicilian male patients – aged between 35 and 45 – complain to their family doctors, five times more than their autochthonous peers,

about an epigastric condition? Was a Moroccan patient with a rather frequently mentioned right knee complaint not conveying an unspeakable problem of standing upright, virility or paternalistic authority?

In essence, the issues boiled down to stating how the Yaka seek, on behalf of their own subjects, to valorise attention for a meaningful consonance in beauty, or cosmetics, between the body, the group and the lifeworld. Hence, by developing this Yaka gaze within my original culture, I reversed or helped decolonise ‘Orientalism’ (as unmasked by Edward Said) – namely, the exoticisation or alteration of the African or the Asiatic created by the colonising European gaze.

This kind of mutual anthropology is something that can only be achieved through gaze ‘from there’ to ‘here’ and vice versa. I developed this approach in a course entitled ‘Anthropology of the Body’ – which I taught for 30 years at the Anthropology Department of the University of Leuven. Adopting a bifocal perspective, the course explored from the Yaka standpoint the culturally repressed encrusted in people’s living, display and depicting of the body, its borders and sensoriality within some Flemish environment. The course also dealt with the subjects’ weaving into the family novel and network as well as into the lifeworld. In the main, it tackled that interweaving in Flanders pertaining to expressive arts, the surgery and the witch craze in transition towards the Renaissance, as well as in arts and the media since 1970. This no doubt explains why the majority of doctoral theses written under my aegis have arisen from insights generated by this course on Anthropology of the Body.

For my part, the desire to understand the comings and goings between cultures, as well as their clash and flights, has never stopped. For instance, the French language that you and I adopt to state the distance between this language and our originary cultures and mother-tongues, is also the language which both ‘here’ and ‘over there’ has amalgamated our parents at school to learn about ‘*our ancestors, the Gauls*’. It is also the same language that is daily creolised, ‘cadaverised’ – according to the expression of a well-known Kinnois singer – and thus domesticated in the streets of Kinshasa. The iconoclastic laughter by the ‘cadavéristes’ is doubtless a wholesome vaccine that needs to be

exported to the West where life has, for the vast majority, become too dull as a result of intense mechanisation and computerisation.

### **Journey 3: The Anthropologist as Witness to the Clash of Civilisations**

If the clash of civilisations is as hard as stones colliding in the tornado of capitalist globalisation, the more we welcome networks for intercultural encounter or interuniversity cooperation, the more we allow the borderspace to reveal itself in its fragile reality – a reality that appears as rich and flexible as the human heart is.

In 1986, I resumed ties with Africa in view of annual research stays. These stays lasted between three to six weeks among the residents of Kinshasa’s slums, and/or were intended for, or complemented by, the on-site supervision of a number of doctoral students. During the 1990s I was thus privileged to visit every single PhD student for some weeks within their chosen urban or rural community of origin or adoption. I found myself in ten African countries, including northern Ghana, southwestern Nigeria, southern Ethiopia, the bordering region of Lake Victoria in eastern Kenya, northeastern Tanzania, KwaZulu-Natal and northeastern Namibia as well as the cities of Tunis and Cairo. These fieldwork trips have increasingly provided strong evidence that from the 1990s onwards Africa is more than ever caught up in the clash of a very diversified and paradoxical set of civilisation scenarios. This period is marked by huge debates triggered in countries emerging from apartheid, dictatorship or totalitarianism. There were mobilisations for the recognition of crimes against humanity, such as genocide and slavery. Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies, Afro-American feminism and certain eco-feminist movements dewesternised social sciences and deconstructed their *phallo-logic-centric* biasing. In the same period, a big part of Africa became fatigued and strained under the terror of so-called warlords and HIV pandemics. The same Africa got together to fight for its own survival thanks to neighbourhood associations and tontines. It created its networks around burials or therapeutic collection, family, religious and metaphysical concerns and traditions. It is Jean-Marc Ela, the honorary doctor I promoted at our Leuven University

in 1999, who is the long-term champion of these 'people from below'.

The supervision of the doctoral theses that I was able to provide in various aforementioned countries pointed me towards a multiple dynamics underlying the reconstruction of a promising future, and from which I would like here to raise two points. Let me mention, at first, the parody and more or less ritualised or ensorcelling aggressiveness and/or mimicry through which countless communities turn intrusive violence or terror against itself in such a self-destructive way. On the other hand, it is through its spirit of humour, practical joke and creolisation that plural Africa confronts the life hazards in the city or in the desert or mining regions. It is the Africa of kinship and disenchanted young people and where (charismatic) communes of faith or local networks mushroom alongside associations for mutual support. However, Africa also challenges its life hazards through its ecological inventiveness in the breeding and farming, or the repairing broken-down cars, alike through the huge and prosperous interregional markets (such as at Kumasi or Onitsha). Hence not only has this plural Africa managed to domesticate its international, intraregional languages and universalist religions, but it has also locally adapted a number of globalisation trends of knowledge, information technology and consumer goods.

In an endogenous way or from inside, these local networks – creators of professional or ethnocultural identification – relentlessly mobilise, transform and reinvent their knowledge forms, their social and cultural, ethical and metaphysical values, in part dating back to immemorial times. These multiple basic networks require that per region or professional association, they should be entitled to their proper history and development, and this all the more inasmuch as such networks may also rest on contributions made by more fortunate nationals in the diaspora. Is true development in the North and South not concerned over and above all with a shared quest for a better living together, according to various modalities of exchange and mutual aid springing not only from the technological or economic order, but also from cultural and spiritual input?

It was thanks to the endless support from home by Maama Maria, my wife, and those who generously welcomed me during my stays, that I was able to experience such transhumance between Leuven, Kinshasa and other African networks. In this respect, I would like to mention first of all CERDAS (the Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in South-Saharan Africa), which is based here at Unikin. I would particularly thank you, dear Professor Lapika, the director of this Centre. You and your colleagues have continued, since the late 1980s, to offer me within the centre a platform for warm and fruitful exchanges. I thank you very much indeed. My thanks also go to Servico in Gombe for allowing me to benefit from their logistics. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Rectors of Scopenko at Mont Amba – Father Ngoma Bodi and his predecessors – for their hospitality since we had to abandon our anthropologists' house in Kingabwa during the September 1991 looting.

I am very indebted to the very many warm receptions I have continually enjoyed in the Congo. Such receptions, along with the sense of dignity as their hallmark, did not shirk the task of restraining my discreet and reserved writing so as to avoid some exoticisation – a writing that undoubtedly appears, at times, as too aestheticising. While some of my writings discuss the so-called 'Africa that has gone off to a bad start' – either on the level of antecedents in the colonial era or through the way in which various young Kinshasa residents metabolise the shock and hybridisation between civilisation horizons through parody or roving – I have never been blind towards the injustice, exploitation and violence inflicted and acted in the public space of Kinshasa and elsewhere in the country.

Nevertheless, the more the affinity and the feelings of affectionate complicity grow between an anthropologist and his or her networks or hosts, the more the anthropological encounter becomes transferential. And such transference is better understood in terms of the literal meaning of *diaphorein* – which means to transport, carry through, move beyond and to be open to one another. Besides, the meanings and strengths so generated continue to regenerate in a face-to-face encounter between subjects. It is an encounter that underpins human subjects and which words cannot articulate or

translate. This encounter, both interpersonal and intercultural, can become an authentic human undertaking involving several and mutually enriching voices.

In fact, for about three weeks each year since 1986 and until 2000, I worked among the Yaka and Koongo population in the suburbs of Kindele, Selembao, Yolo, Luka-Ngaliema, Masina, Ndjili III and Kimbanseke. As fate would have it, these regular visits allowed me to witness people's uprisings, which one could only describe as *Jacqueries*, in September 1991 and January–February 1993. I was, I must admit, as badly shaken by the devastating side of these uprisings as I was when experiencing the endless deterioration of suburban infrastructure and most appalling living conditions in Kinshasa. Is this environmental deterioration a result of externalisation of violence inflicted on things rather than on fellow citizens? Is this the sort of violence that one experiences within oneself as a result of the clash of civilisations? The more the impoverished urban areas reflect the shattered memories of the so-called Eurocentric civilising mission, the more such enduring poverty and disillusionment – especially among immigrants from the hinterland – discloses what appears to me to be the paradoxical impossibility for reconciling solidarity and disparity in survival income.

In partial collaboration with CERDAS, including our late colleague Matula Atul, my work in Kinshasa also dealt with the healing churches of *mpeve ya nlongo* or with the consultations that patients seek from healers in addition to using medical services. I have recorded living narratives coming from the word of mouth of some twenty university undergraduates originating from the Kwango as well as numerous other narratives relating, among others, to night-dreams and to the exegesis sought from a wise person in the vicinity.

My interest, throughout, has been to understand exogenous and endogenous cultural matrices and horizons: what domain of imagination – whether persecuting or salvific – was at stake? What values or modernisation ideologies were being conveyed either through the media or street-based churches? I wanted to grasp the underlying reasons behind the desire for Kinshasa's residents to opt for healthcare or therapeutic consultation with a healer or medical practitioner – whenever they are felt haunted, frightened, made to feel guilty, ensorcelled, saddened or seduced by ostentatious consumption.

The CERDAS team welcomed many of my Leuven colleagues. I would mention a few: my colleague Filip De Boeck undertook his most important research during the 1980s among the Luunda inhabiting southern Bandundu. Besides, thanks to the support of Professor Kahang'a, De Boeck extended his investigations to the *baana luunda* phenomenon in Kikwit of entrepreneurial youngsters in the 'diamond hunt' from Angola. More recently, he has carried out further research into street children and the sociocultural imaginary in Kinshasa. Dr Peter Persyn, Mrs Pascaline Creten and Dr Jaak Le Roy joined Dr N-situ for research work with CERDAS regarding the quest for health parallel to medical treatment of Kwango population in health centres, healing churches or with folk healers. Later in this address, I will mention the research stay that Stefan Bekaert made among Sakata people, thanks also to Monsignor Nzala and Barrister Mr Mbu.

Peter Crossman's 1997 surveys, under my supervision, in six different African universities (from Tamale, Dakar, Addis Ababa, Kampala and Harare to Western Cape) squarely walked in the footsteps of intellectuals and so-called postcolonial scholars from Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa (I would mention, among others, Appiah, Ela, Ki-Zerbo, Kwasi Wiredu, Mazrui, Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Okot p'Bitek). These surveys echo UNESCO's appeal to 'durably reconstruct scientific capabilities' from diverse parts of the world. These capabilities constitute a vital humanity legacy in the same way as does biodiversity or ecological diversity. A commonsense proverb in Igboland of southern Nigeria goes that any practical or scientific knowledge is, at first or in its germ, a local knowledge mainly invented and practised in a regional language and in a local or professional setting. Thus, such a proverb consolidates the call different corners of Africa have heeded about reanchoring or endogenising university education on African soil. In other words, it is a call about valuing – within the lyceum and the university curriculum and research programmes – more of those African local or endogenous knowledges that colonisation and its legacy had obliterated. Let me mention, among others, the pioneering scholarly work by Paulus Gerdes and Wim van Binsbergen on mathematics or geometry that was practised a long time ago – naturally without being formally theorised

– in the basketwork or in the *mancala* probability games. We should not forget that the by-products of such probability games were applied in the millenary geomancy throughout South Asia and Africa. They are still present in certain sacred sculptures, dance steps or certain design patterns that elders draw on the ground when illustrating a story. In addition, there exists a wealth of mathematical knowledge that is practised in the infinitely complex and varied art of rhythms and melodies. The same applies to the notions of time and calendars, ecological knowledges, craft, ancient and new farming and pastoral techniques. Let us also think about local taxonomic knowledges in fauna and flora, pharmacopoeias and medical aetiologies, or diverse types of healthcare. Let us also mention the local arts of story-telling, legal or therapeutic palavers as well as contemporary letters, drama and plastic arts.

Having had the privilege, as anthropologist, of being shaped by this Africa consisting of multiple networks of endogenous knowledges and by postcolonial university exchanges, I can only tell you, if you allow it, my intercultural concern and interuniversity commitment. I express this commitment, in cooperation with Dean Shomba, Professor Mwene-Batende, the CERDAS members and in echo of African thinkers I have just mentioned, but also in echo of a recent book on *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa* edited by the Nigerian Professor Afolayan.

The first question to be asked is this: In order that the academic encounter of sharing and receiving 'glocal' (global and local) forms of knowledge become fully established, is it not the case that everyone, both in the North and in Africa, should more than ever devote themselves to reassuming more clearly the presuppositions, perceptions, forms of communication and ethical foundations of the double universe of knowledges at stake? There exist, on one side, specialised knowledges transmitted uniformly and hegemonically worldwide through 'uni-versity' education programmes, and on the other side, the 'diversity' of knowledges and endogenous cultural productions that are anchored in non-Western thought traditions.

The second question I wish to raise is this: is it not the role of the University to also promote itself, at certain levels and in a well-balanced mode, into 'multi-versity'? In so doing, it could carry out its

mission by producing interassociations and debating on creative platforms between colleagues, researchers, experts and artists from the surrounding communities and through a plural partnership involving North–South and South–South networking. Let us imagine interassociations trying to integrate into curricula the local systems of know-how. Indeed, as Franz Fanon remarked in his own time, we do not expect a Freudian-trained psychotherapist to successfully and straightforwardly apply some standard methods to a Bamileke or Sukuma hysteric. Nor can we see a British judge settling a divorce case in the city of Mbandaka. The complexity of human sciences demands that we learn more from, and listen to, the plurality of the current multi-world – a world where the human being, under its various versions and layers offers to us an unsuspected wealth that awaits deciphering through epistemological and metaphysical horizons.

Ladies and Gentlemen: at this juncture, I cannot help taking you into my brief journey no. 4, in order to address the question of:

### How do I See Tomorrow's Anthropologist?

Is an anthropologist not someone who – on the level of academic, educational, professional or social co-implication with social networks, or in collaboration with public institutions and services – critically and effectively articulates multiple voices of the memory? Is it not his or her task to recall, in the professional context, the wounds and aspiration of 'people from below' in the city or the village? It is anthropology that, for 25 years now, has been fighting to decolonise human sciences inasmuch as it opposed cities against villages, modernity against tradition. Anthropology is a science standing close to the living experience of subjects in context. It is incumbent upon an anthropologist to undertake an inventory of local, plural and complex, ancient and modern forms of knowledge and arts, such as for appeasing and healing, production and sharing, as well as for contributing to the improvement in material, social, legal and hygienic conditions of existence for networks and society as a whole. Do these arts and local forms of knowledge make theoretical and practical suggestions that would allow us to provide some answers to the basic concerns of the majority of the population

on the planet? Among such concerns, which are also the anthropologists' concerns, we can mention hunger, exploitation and social exclusions, wars, pollution, deforestation, the plundering of resources, epidemics and the danger that many local languages in urban areas simply vanish. In the near future, anthropologists could offer themselves as an intercultural borderspace as well as an intramemory space between past and present societies, between North and South or even between South and South. Accordingly, such anthropologists may become not only interculturalists but also intergenerational diplomats. As such they ought to challenge the excessive Eurocentric modes of their discipline as well as their adopted perspective. Regardless of whether they are acting professionally or in their group of origin or their adoptive environment – and whether collaborating with social networks or public institutions – anthropologists should particularly prove amenable to the social and cultural genius. Can they also direct their minds away from what the scientific credo tends to obliterate? I particularly have in mind here what – in those areas relating to life, the sacred and people's core aspirations and commitments – stands apart from either a secularised modern and postmodern worldview or typically Eurocentric, logocentric and patriarchal modes of transmission and production canonised by academic knowledge. I also refer to what stands out from European vision of health development, education, public administration and so on.

The aspect of 'dewesternised' and postcolonial anthropological attitude I advocate is radically at variance with some deconstructivist positions in postmodern thought, more particularly in its extreme defeatist relativism of some Anglo-American kind. Quite paradoxically, these positions describe everything in terms of processes of hybridisation, creolisation, collage or plural cultural interbreeding under the aegis of globalisation brought about by businesses, politics and the media, more particularly video productions and musical bands. Such extreme relativism runs the danger of restoring a form of universalism that makes us inept to think about the *Other* in his or her originality, manifold layers as they appear in encounters. It is a discounting universalism claiming that globalisation and interbreeding processes will eventually erase the original syntax of local languages and cultures as well as the

endogenous reinvention or emancipation of some epistemological, ethical, architectural, therapeutic local traditions.

Returning to the more modest and concrete level of 'people from below' – to whom countless anthropologists ally themselves – I would contend that borderspace stands as a form of complicity constituted by humour and cheerfulness (which is so widespread in Kinshasa), or by mutual aid through networking and genuine hospitality, healing and mourning sessions and by the encounter between an anthropologist and his or her host community or between anthropologists of the North and the South. Such complicity can even become an intersubjective framework leading one another to unearth the ultimate issues unfolding in life. And in such a mutually enriching encounter of human dignity and hope an anthropologist and his or her host-community become established in each other in a form of intersubjectivity that is increasingly co-constitutive of interlaced worlds.

Stating, without grandiloquence, that my academic work was enriched by a prodigious variety of local forms of knowledge from different parts of Africa and by the wounds and wisdom of my host communities amounts to saying how I am blessed with the plenitude summoning me to pondering. I wish to mark this gratitude by making a donation to the Faculty of my publications and additional specialist books.

Mr Rector and you, Ladies and Gentlemen, please allow me to close this short speech with a *double wish*.

At this juncture, allow me to recall to memory two doctors in anthropology, namely the late Matula Atul who we keep all in our hearts, and the late Stefan Bekaert. Stefan died tragically in a cable lift crushed in the Alps by an American military plane flying back from a raid into Bosnia on 3 February 1998: thus 8 years and 2 months ago. Having lived intensely as a generous and subtle anthropologist for two years among the Sakata of Ntolo along Lake Ntumba – where I visited him in 1994 – Stefan defended his most mature PhD thesis in late 1997. A few months later we agreed that, upon his return from the Alps, he would come to the University of Kinshasa in March 1998 to take over my research networking here. Now let the prodigious number of eight years, according to the Sakata philosophy, urge us to mark a closure of such a mourning

period and replenish this past, which nevertheless does not pass by. Let this honorary doctorate degree allow us to lift the period for our mourning of both Stefan but also late Professor Matula Atul. Let us launch an appeal to young successors, who are as talented as our departed colleagues, to carry out our mission so that soon Congolese anthropology can ultimately have its real academic centre here: that is my first wish.

Thanks to you, the honorary doctorate confirms, quite conveniently, our complex interlacing, co-constitutive of what we are. On behalf of my wife, Maria, our family and on behalf of my colleagues of the Africa Research Centre in Leuven, as well as my fellow-feeling colleagues at the Belgian Royal Academy of Belgium and also at the Owerri Whelan Research Academy in southeastern Nigeria, and on my own behalf, I would like to express my very sincere thanks to you, Rector, Mr Dean, Professor Lapika (my promoter), Professor Mwene Batende, dear Colleagues, and to all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, who have attended this celebration. In particular, I would like to register my thanks to the Honourable Deputies and Senators who turned up today as well as to Your Excellencies the Ambassador of Belgium and Monsignor Nzala. Thanking you all for listening, I would like to finish with my last good wish: 'this is and brings felicity': *kyeesi*.

## Notes

1. Translated from French by Paul Komba.
2. My research among the Yaka in Kwango (1971–74) and in Kinshasa (about three weeks annually from 1986 till 2001) was conducted in association with the Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa – IARA – at the KU Leuven. I acknowledge with thanks the financial support from NFWO (the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research), FWO (Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders), the European Commission General Directorate XII, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation in New York. The research was also carried out in conjunction with the IMNC (the Institute of National Museums of Congo) and the CERDAS (Centre for the Coordination of Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in South-Saharan Africa) based at the University of Kinshasa. The bibliography of publications for my research is hosted at [http://perswww.kuleuven.be/renaat\\_devisch](http://perswww.kuleuven.be/renaat_devisch). See also <http://www.africaresearch.be>

**Reactions to René Devisch****1. Towards an Ethic of the Intercultural Polyogue****The Path of an Anthropologist**

*Opening up to another person is always something of a mystery. An exploration, regardless of its orientation, is a generous source of findings and questions.*

Nocky Djedanoum 2000 *Nyamirambo! Poésies*, Bamako, Editions Le Figuier/Fest' Africa, p. 11.

**W**hat is an anthropologist? This somewhat banal question is the subject of deep reflection and meditation by René Devisch, Emeritus Professor at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and recipient of an honorary doctorate from the University of Kinshasa, at the end of a mutual adoption and *sui generis* investiture.

The happy award winner from our alma mater seized the golden opportunity to deliver a brilliant and pithy speech that revealed to us the intricate pathways of his 'cultural experience' (as defined by James Spradley and David McCurdy).<sup>1</sup> In other words, he gives us some lessons on his anthropological quest as an encounter with otherness in fields that have become familiar, thanks to frequent visits and keen observation underpinned by relevant methodology.

The researcher thus creates opportunities whose outcome is no longer fortuitous, but is the result of an attitude learnt and mastered by patient listening, clinical observation, a keen sense in terms of intuition, perceptiveness and anticipation, in the manner of the seer. This ultimately enables him to establish effective and efficient communication with the host environment, even if it means inventing appropriate categories of thought for translating this rich experience that sometimes borders on the unspeakable. The shrewd researcher taps into registers of internal conceptualisation in the sociocultural environment he is researching. In this regard, we recall the crucial remark by Claude Lévi-Strauss that 'The ethnological problem is, ... in the final analysis, a communication problem'.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of this rather complex process, the anthropologist arrives at a more authoritative definition of his own boundaries, including his credo or that of

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the group to which he belongs – in brief, his own individual and social identity.

Let us now retrace the path taken by René Devisch (RD). He starts by establishing the link between his vocation as an anthropologist and his family life story marked, *inter alia*, by a benevolent atmosphere that apparently brought good luck. There is undoubtedly a place in our lives where we bloom and blossom, and catalytic events that shape our destiny. Such events are sometimes inspired or borne by a name, such as that of René, which we see later being reborn among the *Yaka* of Kwango, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A relationship is thus established between the realm of childhood and the journey of the adult. Autobiographical accounts tend to substantiate this relationship in an after-the-fact interpretation of the events. The family environment is set against a background of cross-border transactions (a recurrent theme) where at least childhood fantasies, dreams and souvenirs, and illicit activities likened to hunting are played out. Such transactions remind us of the black market economy in our sprawling urban areas in which people, in particular women from destitute backgrounds, struggle to survive on a daily basis by inventing strategies full not only of cunning, ingenuity and cultural creativity, but also of mistrust of the law in the postcolony. That is precisely where a window opens and allows the anthropologist to look at the other, where and how the other is different – a look that could eventually become cynical,

condescending or empathic, as the case may be.

The social reality, as it is viewed and understood, has all the connotations of ambivalence cross-bred during the childhood period from a culture imposed through language and ways of life. RD opted very early for empathy, a choice that was partly inspired by his teachers and favourite thinkers, including philosophers, writers, sociologists and anthropologists. He is resolutely in favour of immersion in the problems of the Congolese elite of his student generation. Here, immersion is neither fusion nor confusion, as these blur the vision. The generation referred to is driven by a manifest determination – for which they must pay a high price – to liberate and build a less inegalitarian and less dependent society. Such a society, with a few exceptions, will ultimately be swallowed up. We can imagine the student RD leaving, in spite of himself, the turbulent Congolese scene only to return later with a burning desire to better understand from the standpoint of a few privileged observation posts, in particular the *kwangolese* homeland and the maddening capital, Kinshasa.

Should we join him, in the 1970s decade, in talking about the clash of cultures that may have been speeded up by the economic 'zairianisation'? It is said that the intention of the then Zairian government, pressured by the unfavourable economic situation, may have been inspired by its 'American master'. The idea was to stimulate and to politically monitor the growth of a middle class capable of learning the rudiments of business and pulling itself up by its own bootstraps in order to bridge the growing and threatening gap between a minority of wealthy people and the destitute masses. However, the results

have been more disappointing than ever – a total disaster in which the general public is the greatest loser, not to talk of the ruin of a whole segment of this artificial bourgeoisie created from scratch and sustained by clientelist gestures. Alas, the same is true of the authenticity ideology, which was nevertheless so promising, on account of its excessive political exploitation.<sup>3</sup> Each person can form their opinion of that turbulent period in the economic and political history of the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

RD has the feeling that, beyond all the excesses and contradictions, there is a key factor that seems to have marked his approach as author: the imperative to urgently explore what he calls ‘a deeply rooted layer of cultural and identity authenticity’.<sup>4</sup> He points out that ‘beyond the colonialist writer’s prejudiced view of the *Kwangoles* people [...], are models and prejudices of the colonial master which the people have introjected’. We are aware of the havoc wrought by others, particularly in neighbouring Burundi and Rwanda, which sent shock waves into the DRC. These prejudices, stereotypes, myths and stigmas have led to the unspeakable, opening up wounds that will take ages to heal. This is the side of anthropology that can produce unexpected and undesirable effects, in terms of fabrication of memories and identities, a risk that calls for ethical vigilance.

How do anthropologists go about their work, in concrete terms? He asserts:

Anthropologists lend an ear to the plurality of voices and common or dissident perspectives. They listen to collective memories, memories that are wounded or heavy-laden, etched on the bodies of patients.

As you can guess, here we are in the realm of medical and/or psychoanalytic anthropology. Let us stop at the concept of ‘plurality of voices and common or dissident perspectives’, which appears to have a broad application. I cannot help referring here to the words of a young Italian anthropologist, Francesca Polidori, who came to Rwanda in 2003–2004, to do fieldwork as part of research for a doctoral thesis in anthropology on Rwandan refugees of the 1959–1963 period. She seized the opportunity to study the *Gacaca* courts<sup>5</sup> instituted to clear the backlog of genocide cases and to foster the so-called process of unity and national

reconciliation. Francesca Polidori, invited to express her views as a field practitioner in my social and cultural anthropology class at the National University of Rwanda, made this pertinent remark:

I find that the greatest potential of the *Gacaca* lies in its ability to spur on people to confront the different truths about the genocide. It is not simply a legal tool, but a form of public reflection and commemoration of genocide.

The lesson to retain in the context of this article is the attention that should be paid to the plurality of statements on the social reality made by various social speakers or actors in an approach that is somewhat multi-vocal, taking into consideration RD’s famous ‘common or dissident perspectives’.

What about collateral effects themselves? RD takes a startling shortcut about these and talks about other anthropologists navigating in the same waters. He says that anthropologists are torn between fascination and anxiety, particularly, I would add, when one visits the mediators of the invisible. And RD gives a poetic description, again inspired by his childhood memories:

Before this huge mass of water and powerful high tide, I experienced, as a child, the fear of annihilation almost similar to the fear of being engulfed by an indefinable and massive otherness upon my arrival in Yitaanda. However, you are ardently lured to the encounter by some fascination, such as the high tide that will gradually engulf you if you yield to it by sitting on the seashore.

Another beautiful description worth retaining is that of the anthropologist assigned a status that he/she has to accept and the feeling of mutual adoption as well as the launching of projective mechanisms. RD devotes significant and interesting sequences that cannot be summed up without reference to the ‘grey area in us’ illuminated by flashes of theories that ultimately calibrate possibilities of listening, receptiveness and writing potentials.

How then can we assess the fallout from such an encounter that apparently has a bit to do with magic and metamorphosis? To revisit his metaphors: ‘looking from out “there” towards “here” and vice versa’, through the lessons learnt from

reading in the margins, between the lines, the transitional spaces, in particular, on the potentialities of the individual body as well as the social body. The anthropologist thus becomes, in the present and the future, ‘an inter-cultural and inter-generational diplomat’, to echo RD’s words. Or, again, ‘At work in his group of origin or in the environment of adoption, where the anthropologist, while collaborating with social networks or with public institutions, ought to be especially sensitive to the social and cultural spirit.’

In a perspective of applied anthropology, in our contexts of national and regional reconstruction after the immense damage caused by bloody conflicts, the anthropologist becomes some kind of cultural broker,<sup>6</sup> who builds a bridge between voluntarist public policies and the problems and aspirations of the rich base of his/her cultural heritage that has long been lost and which is found in times of emergency, but also thanks to a clear vision of culture as an inexhaustible source of wealth (culture as wealth). Such wealth needs to be pondered, rejuvenated and readjusted (especially innovations in various forms of transitional justice, networks of associations, creative crafts, etc.).

RD rightly recalls that there are some persistent taboo areas proscribed by established intellectual traditions, in particular with regard to forays into life, the sacred, the present absence, what is innate (is this privacy?) in relation to secular Eurocentric trends in several domains. Unfortunately, this is a persistent situation – a situation whereby the North (Europe and North America) is placing the South under its material, intellectual and even spiritual dominion. In the best of scenarios, we find ourselves in contexts of subcontracting or co-opting, and in the worst-case scenario, one is confronted with extraversion and marginalisation, as the Benin philosopher, Paulin Hountondji,<sup>7</sup> the US-based French historian, Florence Bernault,<sup>8</sup> both lucidly point out. Regarding the second warning or appeal for epistemological vigilance in the face of the excesses of a certain breed of sceptical and relativist postmodernism, we should seriously ask ourselves where contemporary Africa stands in its historicity to speak in an informed manner.

In such an Africa, have we, indeed, sufficiently assimilated the lessons, constraints and opportunities of

'imposed' and somewhat 'booby-trapped' modernity, its so-called package of democratisation of institutions, individual growth and prosperity, secular thought and practices and entrepreneurial efficiency? Can we do without it, or have we already formulated our own interpretations? What kind of modernity do we need, taking into account our heritages, questions and profound needs today at both individual and collective levels? How are we currently fighting to achieve by sheer force a modicum of autonomy and initiative in a context that is persistently changing its name and language?

Can we count on some collaboration from our big partners from the North or elsewhere? These are some of the key questions that need to be highlighted.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of his stimulating reflections and proposals and before making acknowledgements and closing his long period of mourning, RD outlines for anthropologists areas of trans-subjective cooperation and sharing, with a view to building interdependent worlds, to use less poetic and 'structured' words than his. Being grateful to those who have 'built' it, in every sense of the word, is a

beautiful homage to the Africa whose radiant face he visited and loved, and which gives him the sense of fulfilment that sums up and paradoxically reassumes the 'silence', a silence replete with unspeakable words.

### Notes

1. James Spradley and David McCurdy, 1972, *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*, Prospect Heights, Waveland Press.
2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1950, 'Introduction à l'Œuvre de Marcel Mauss', in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
3. See Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, 1985, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, chap. 11. Quant à lui, l'art congolais rend aussi compte et à sa façon de cette période critique; see Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 2003, *Mami Wata: La peinture urbaine au Congo*, Paris, Gallimard.
4. See in particular René Devisch, 1993, *Weaving the Threads of Life: The Khita Gyneco-logical Healing Cult among the Yaka*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press. We have tried to explore his complex and innovative approach presented in Mbonyinkebe Sebahire, 1995, 'Rite et efficacité symbolique: questions de méthode', *Revue philosophique de Kinshasa / Kinshasa Philosophical Review* 8.14: 113–51. See also René Devisch and Claude Brodeur, 1996, *Forces et signes: Regards croisés d'un anthropologue et d'un psychanalyste sur les Yaka*, Paris, Editions des Archives contemporaines.
5. Francesca Polidori, 2004, 'Rwanda 10 anni dopo: I tribunali Gacaca e le sfide della riconciliazione' [Rwanda 10 ans après: Les juridictions Gacaca et les défis de la réconciliation] *Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale* 73.
6. See Michael Angrosino, 1994, 'The Culture Concept and Applied Anthropology', *American Anthropologist* 96: 824–32.
7. Paulin Hountondji, 2007, 'Au delà de l'ethnoscience: Pour une réappropriation critique des savoirs endogènes', [www.google.fr](http://www.google.fr) [accessed on 1.11.2007].
8. Florence Bernault, 2001, 'L'Afrique et la modernité des sciences sociales', *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 70: 127–38.
9. See Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, 2006, *Culture Troubles: Politics and Interpretation of Meaning*, London, Hurst, chap. 6.

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## A Word About René Devisch

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I wish to start by congratulating Professor René Devisch for earning this honorary doctorate and for his contributions to knowledge as well as the numerous cross-cultural bonds of friendship that he has knit into such a beautiful iridescent and multi-coloured tapestry.

1. The reaction to his address is precisely what one would expect upon hearing a true life story. It is a fitting testimony to the consideration and respect he deserves. There is no point in approving or disapproving of a person's manner of breathing, walking and living.

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2. One can be struck by ethnology's about-turn, which compels anthropologists to observe themselves, and then proceed to self-analysis before observing their subjects from a distance with the methodic and persevering eye of a detached observer. At last, we have met the challenge of liberating anthropologists from the old straitjacket, wherein they prided themselves on being members of the only

field of knowledge that subjects everybody, including the anthropologists themselves, all at once, to scrutiny, and who enjoy the privilege of reflexivity.

3. I admit that anthropologists should not be viewed as miracle workers either. We must not expect them to be crusaders. I would even argue that the avoidance of politics may not signal lack of interest in the world. Anthropologists can assist in reframing politics by taking its practices or gesticulations from the clouds and repatriating them to their place of birth: the transformation of the person into a human being, into living flesh.

# Existential Dilemmas of a North Atlantic Anthropologist in the Production of Relevant Africanist Knowledge<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

When, nearly half a century after the end of colonial rule, an African university grants an honorary degree to a prominent researcher from the former colonising country, this is a significant step in the global liberation of African difference (to paraphrase Mudimbe's expression). The African specialist knowledge institution declares itself to be no longer on the receiving and subaltern side, but takes the initiative to assert its independent scholarly authority, and thus redefines the flow of North–South intellectual dependence into one of intercontinental equality. Even more is at stake in the present case. Having studied and researched at the predecessor of the University of Kinshasa in the beginning of his academic career, and having returned there numerous times for research and teaching, the honorary doctor could be classified among the conferring institution's own students and research associates, and his work has ranked prominently in Congo studies during the last several decades. At the same time the conferment honours a discipline that ever since the decolonisation of Africa has (because of allegations of its colonial connotation) formed contested ground in that continent: *anthropology*; and in this case even an anthropology away from the popular topics of power, social organisation and globalising development – but rather, one of symbols, corporality, and insistence on the continuity, vitality and viability of historic, local cultural forms. Aware of the peculiarities of his case, René Devisch has devoted his extensive and celebrative word of thanks to the topic 'What is an anthropologist', and it is the highly original and widely ranging nature of this text that has prompted CODESRIA to invite a number of African and Africanist scholars to comment on it.

This puts me in an awkward position. Ever since 1979 my intellectual and institutional collaboration with René Devisch has been so intensive, and so saturated with admiration and friendship, that I find it

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difficult to summon the distancing, objectifying tone, or the concise formulations habitually associated with such comments. The honour done to him by the principal university in the country to which he has pledged his work and his heart (and which is also the birth country of my wife, the country of origin of my adoptive royal ancestors, and the focus of some of my recent research), is in the first place a source of great joy to me, and scarcely invites the critical cleverness expected from me here. However, the personal dilemma thus posed is typically Devischian in that it is analogous to the central dilemma dominating his ethnographic writing and teaching as founder and driving force of the Louvain School of Anthropology: *how to create a position from where to speak, and a mode of speaking (and of silence), that does not betray the existential closeness and continuity between speaker and those about whom is spoken*. In other words, how to avoid the modernist pitfall of assuming a privileged point of view as speaker; how to adopt a stance that does not impose firm boundaries and alien categories but seeks to understand and employ the categories that have informed the earlier closeness; how to turn text into a dialogic encounter between equals, instead of an appropriative and subordinating monologue? This is to be the spirit of the following remarks, even though my piece is still too short, and my personal tendency to hypercriticism too strong, to entirely live up to this ideal. As has always been my strategy of personal mental survival, I will bluntly articulate – from my own perspective, which is inevitably one-sided and prejudiced – what I consider to be home-truths, but none other (I hope) than those that RD and I have already considered, and sought to thrash out, in a productive, outspoken and trustful friendship that has spanned half our lives.

## A vision of Anthropology as Intercultural Representational Loyalty

For reasons that will gradually become clear in the course of my argument, I prefer to go over the four parts of Devisch's piece in the reverse order, from end to beginning. In his final, most inspiring and least controversial, section he sketches a vision of 'Tomorrow's anthropologist' as one who renders audible the many different voices of remembrance, particularly on behalf of the least privileged classes and groups in the world system today.

Yet such a position, however gratifying to the Africanist anthropologist, and however much in line with the positions of other anthropologists, historians and philosophers, brings up questions that, of course, RD could not discuss in his short and festive presentation, but which need to be answered before his vision can be more than a source of self-congratulation for anthropologists and for Africans.

The first question is that of *method*. By what specific methods is the future anthropologist going to realise this vision? Reiterating a basic tenet of the Louvain School – that it is the anthropologist's task, and prerogative, to speak as a local – RD implies that here the local meanings and modes of enunciation should take precedence over whatever established models and concepts of the global anthropological discipline; and his argument soon develops into a diatribe on universalism, postmodern relativism and globalisation. However, the matter is more complicated than such a binary opposition suggests. The scientific representation of the cultural other remains highly problematic even if the problem of access has been solved. All science is predicated on the possibility of generalisation – of raising the local to a level of narration, conceptualisation, abstraction – in short *representation* – where it turns out to reveal themes that, while continuing to be local, are also – by virtue of an intersubjective methodology managed by the global disciplinary

community of anthropologists – indicative, in space and time, of more universal conditions. Such management need not be an entrenched clinging to obsolescent paradigms; on the contrary, it may be dynamic, transitory and innovative, as RD's argument and his entire oeuvre clearly show. Yet necessarily, every anthropologist will find herself in a field of tension between local inspirations and commitments, on the one hand, and globalising expectations of method and professional discipline, on the other. The methodological hence universalising implications of science are among the uninvited guests of RD's inspiring and festive banquet (we will meet a few others below), and one wonders what would happen to his vision if they were yet given pride of place. I fear that, if they continue to be kept out of doors, they will turn (like high-ranking uninvited guests in myths and fairy tales) into vindictive forces spoiling the party and bringing its protagonists to misfortune.

The next question concerns the qualified mix of universalism and localism that we find in today's context of globalisation, also in Africa. Here again, recognition of an *inevitable and highly productive, situationally shifting field of tension* (instead of the hope of opting, once for all, for either pole of the opposition informing such tension) would have quickened RD's now rather too dismissive pronouncements on 'postmodernist deconstructivist relativism' (essentially addressed against the *métissage* of cultural and social forms that many students of African cultural, identity and social forms have stressed in the context of globalisation). My point is not so much that, like RD himself, globalisation studies have almost invariably criticised the *McDonald's-and-Coca Cola* model of African globalisation as too facile and too superficial. RD points at a genuine danger when he warns against a

relativisme extrême [qui] risque de ré-instaurer un universalisme impuissant à penser l'Autre dans ses couches plurielles et son originalité telles qu'elles surgissent dans la rencontre...

All the same we should not overlook the fact that these multiple layers and this originality are far from constant. Globalising Africa displays the creative proliferation of new practices and new identities, and the resourceful adaptation

of new objects and new technologies to time-honoured practices, which then inevitably change in the process – rather than the unadulterated preservation of historic practices as such. So on the African scene of today and tomorrow, we may expect much that is old, but even more that is excitingly new and full of bricolage, in the very contexts (humour, merry-making, mutual aid, hospitality, healing and mourning) that RD rightly identifies as growth-points for anthropological encounter and understanding. To which we can add: *much that will disappear forever, to be supplanted by commoditised global trash*, also in Africa, given the unexpected ways in which the – apparently so much less defenceless – North Atlantic region has, within two or three decades, been overtaken by ever increasing commoditisation, electronic media, the aggressive market model and a reduction of much of popular culture to commoditised emulations of routinised clichés.

The question is perhaps at which level, and with what degree of specificity, we are looking for universals in the anthropological encounter. For that they are there also transpires in Devisch's own insistence on 'une complicité transsubjective entraînant l'un et l'autre à creuser ensemble des interrogations ultimes dans les replis de l'existence'.

### Witnessing 'the Clash of Civilisations'?

We proceed to our author's third section, where in beautiful passages the juxtaposition between globalism and localism, exogenous and endogenous cultural forces, is articulated in a way that avoids the above pitfalls, explicitly admitting that both are working simultaneously, even though RD's preference is on the side of what has been anciently local – something we can understand and must respect.

Having identified with Congolese, more specifically Kinshasa, society for decades, RD is not a distant observer when the clash becomes, from psychological and symbolic, dramatically *physical*, notably in the destructive events of September 1991 and January–February 1993, about which he has written incisively. And, identifying as more or less a local, he realises that, even regardless of the constraints of his professional disciplinary forum, his hands are tied by

local commitments – he cannot just write as he pleases. Nonetheless,

je n'ignore pourtant pas la violence à la fois subie et agie dans l'espace public kinois et surtout ailleurs dans le pays. (...) Toutefois, plus l'affinité et les sentiments de complicité affectueuse grandissent entre l'anthropologue et les réseaux-hôtes, *plus la rencontre anthropologique est transférentielle.* (italics added)

An anthropologist like Devisch, whose theoretical baggage and reference have been psychoanalytical as much as social-organisational, can hardly be expected to use the word *transfereential* without acknowledging its usual specialist implications. The obvious reading of the italicised phrase would be that the anthropologist's text gets charged with subconscious conflict from the personal (especially early) life history of the anthropologist himself, and by the end of my argument we will come back to this. Surprisingly, however, RD takes *transfereential* in the literal sense of *transfer*, notably the transfer of cultural content from the ethnographic hosts to the ethnographer – admitting that (like in any interpersonal encounter)

la signifiante et les forces qui sont nées et continuent à naître dans la rencontre de sujet à sujet dépassent ce que l'on peut dire ou maîtriser; elle excèdent la verbalisation ou la traduction.

As my book *Intercultural Encounters* (2003) brings out, I am rather in agreement with RD's observation on this point, but the devastating implication is once again methodological. If in an interpersonal encounter the ethnographer opens up to host's cultural experience, absorbing and emulating the latter, then ethnography may become a form of *deferred introspection* on the part of the ethnographer. However, if in the process the ethnographer's own personal transference towards the reception, appreciation and explanation of that cultural experience remains out of sight; and if part of what the ethnographer has learned admittedly cannot (as being 'beyond words') be communicated to, especially, a scientific forum; then the process of ethnography becomes largely uncontrollable and risks being relegated to a genre not of scientific writing but of *belles lettres*. Claims to this effect were already made, but on different grounds,

by Clifford and Marcus in their influential postmodern statement *Writing Culture*. It is as if anthropology, despite being paraded in RD's text as the key to intercultural loyal representation, is facing a devastating dilemma: the choice between *irrelevant but methodologically grounded superficiality, and profoundly existential but unmethodological relevance*. It is this sort of dilemma that, a decade ago, made me give up ethnography and instead concentrate on theorising about the philosophical bases for interculturality. But probably one need not go so far. For whatever our methodological *desiderata*, RD's qualitative insight in Congolese and especially Kinshasa cultural dynamics retains compelling qualities – apparently, our hearts, and our minds, even as scientists, are moved by other forces than method alone.

But there is something else that makes me uneasy. I cannot dissociate the phrase 'clash of civilisations' from Huntington's unfortunately influential analysis of today's world conflicts in terms of religion-driven essentialisation, which seeks to derive total explanation from a reified domain of ideology while ignoring the political economy of globalisation, North Atlantic and specifically USA global hegemony, and the aftermath of the colonial experience. RD is only too well aware of the need for decolonisation, but his self-admitted, mild tendency to aestheticising and idealising cultural processes, in combination with an awareness that for reasons of sociability his hands are tied, make him, I fear, stress symbolism over political economy, and underplay the complexity of the Congolese postcolony in the early 1990s. Were the *Jacqueries* primarily a response, as he suggests, to the failure in the *oeuvre civilisatrice eurocentrée* ('the Eurocentric civilising mission') in the eyes of the urban proletariat, a radical casting off of an alien cultural model that could only seduce but not deliver, and that specifically did not provide wholesale, new existential *meaning* in a situation where old meanings had been reduced to *anomie* and ineffectiveness? There is much in the religious and ideological history of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the course of the twentieth century (also, for instance, in the healing churches of which RD made a special study) to suggest that – before, during and after Mobutu's *authenticité*

movement – European cultural contents were eagerly and massively adopted to the extent, and in those social classes, that the political economy allowed at least minimum chances of survival, dignity and participation. It has proved to be a widely applicable empirical generalisation that people resort to collective violence and mass protest, not so much when they totally reject the apparent focus of their aggression, but when they are subject to *relative deprivation* – when, Tantalus-fashion, the desired prize, ever so near, yet remains out of reach. Why not read these *Jacqueries* as barely disguised class conflict, as uprisings not against European culture as such, but against a thoroughly corrupt state and its elite, that have reduced the citizens of one of the richest countries in Africa to inconceivable poverty and powerlessness, in the very face of great (largely European-shaped) riches and uncontrolled power?

To this rhetorical question, RD may answer 'because the people of the Kinshasa suburbs where I did my fieldwork then, did not consciously conceptualise their violent actions in terms of such class conflict'. Which only reminds us that, however close the ethnographer chooses to remain to the participants' worldview, there must remain room for explanations in more abstract, theoretical, structural terms. Such terms necessarily elude the participants' consciousness because the primary function of local collective representations is to make people unaware and uncritical of the violence, exploitation and powerlessness to which they are subjected in their society. Before a festive audience of university prominents whose middle-class commitment to the postcolony is no secret, in other words with tied hands, how does the anthropologist begin to reveal home-truths that reach beyond the local society's *aestheticising apparatus of acquiescence*? Or is the problem merely that of applying village research strategies in an urban mass society?

One major condition to allow the anthropologist to adopt greater freedom in the face of the mystifying local collective representations is the following: the *utopian* illusion inherent in RD's text must be critically recognised. Globalisation has created a context in which *locality* could acquire a different meaning (from a self-evident *sui generis*

dimension of social phenomena, imposed by ancient technologies of locomotion, to active *construction* of locality as something that can no longer be taken for granted in a globalised world where previous boundaries have faded with the reduction of the costs of movement through geographical space). Here the emergence of interstitial spaces that are at the same time nowhere and everywhere (e.g. the Internet, English as global *lingua franca*, the world of global electronic media) is lending a new meaning to the word *utopia* ('the land of nowhere'). For, with their promise of boundary-effacing interculturality these spaces take on connotations of an ideal future society – somewhat as in More's famous book *Utopia*, and contrary to a critical orientation of modern thought that sees utopia primarily as an ideological perversion of reality. RD's vision of future anthropology inspires because it promises to create, to constitute in itself even, such a utopian space.

Yet such a vision is predicated on the tacit assumption that the anthropologist is fully available for the unadulterated absorption and subsequent representation of local cultural content, because she has no compelling cultural belonging of her own to begin with – she is nowhere, not in the sense of being homeless by an excessive dedication to the meta-local universalism of global scholarship (as I argued elsewhere to be the case for Mudimbe), but because she pretends to *fully* adopt a new home in fieldwork. This is not just RD's personal delusion but the collective (though far from universal) delusion of our generation of anthropologists – whose fieldwork rhetoric (including my very own) is replete with *adoption*. Yet the *raison d'être* of fieldwork, and of the subsequent professional textual representation of other people's social and cultural life, can only be the emphatic admission of two *prior* cultural homes: (1) in all cases that of the anthropological discipline, to which continued and all-overriding allegiance is pledged and renewed with every interview and every publication; and (2) in most cases also the anthropologist's society of origin, if different from the host society of fieldwork. The point boils down to a simple home-truth, which anthropologists of our generation have been slow to learn: in order to have a genuine encounter, it is imperative that both parties insist on who they are and tolerate the other without

giving up their own identity – in a way that RD with his recent writing on *border-linking* understands, at the theoretical level, much better than I do myself. But despite pioneering this theoretical solution, the utopia of RD's future anthropology, while playing with the promise of postmodern utopias' boundary-effacing, yet resides in self-inflicted violence: in the dissimulation, perhaps even the flagrant denial, of the fact that the anthropologist is inextricably localised *outside* the host society, because that anthropologist cultivates an ulterior home in global universalising science (and also has been indelibly programmed to continued allegiance to her society of birth). We are back at the tragedy of fieldwork: that in the field the ethnographer lives a committed *communitas* that she is subsequently compelled to instrumentally take distance from, in her professional and social life outside the field.

### The Thrice-born Anthropologist

Following the lead of anthropologists such as Lloyd Warner, Margaret Mead and Vic Turner, RD has sought to apply whatever he has learned in the field in Congo among the rural Yaka people and in the slums of Kinshasa, to his native Flemish society – thus becoming a *thrice-born anthropologist*, in Turner's apt phrase inspired by the South Asian belief in reincarnation. The idea that the North Atlantic region can fundamentally and radically learn from other cultures has been at the very heart of anthropology since its inception, and has always sought to counterbalance such instrumental, colonial and hegemonic overtones as anthropology has also inevitably had as an exponent of its times and region of origin. The project of the anthropologist who, by virtue of an African apprenticeship, sees his society of origin with new eyes, is sympathetic and, from an African perspective, inspiring and gratifying. Yet again a number of questions remain.

To begin with, the apparently place-less anthropologist of the fieldwork encounter in Africa turns out to have a native culture after all – so why could this native culture not have been considered as the inevitable and filtering, even distorting, backdrop to whatever meaning, whatever *rapport*, the anthropologists could have achieved in the field in the first place?

Secondly, the fusion between subjects, one of them being the anthropologist, which dominates RD's image of the African fieldwork encounter, gives way to alienating alterisation when it comes to Western Europe, as if the anthropologist, back from the field, finds himself ('benevolent Yaka notable' that he aspired to be, in his own words) reborn as a lower life-form in a murky North Atlantic underworld that can no longer be home and apparently never was.

It is a familiar experience among fieldworkers from the North Atlantic region: having adopted an African culture, we feel we are no longer at home in our own culture of origin – our *sense of the self-evident* (whose production is the principal function of culture) is destroyed as a result of what could be considered a professional hazard. On closer scrutiny, not all of what RD tries to let pass for Flemish culture fits the bill: that complex social composition includes 'Belgo-Sicilians', as well as Turkish immigrants; but that is not the point. The point is that RD once more falls into the trap of thinking in absolute, non-overlapping binary oppositions (where he seeks to side with the preferred pole), rather than in broadly positioned, and situationally and perspectively shifting, fields of tension of situationally varying intensity (where meaning, relevance and life are generated not despite, but by virtue of, that tension; and where only the introduction of a scientific stance, and scientific textuality, make the tension rise sky-high, and the poles worlds apart).

Of course, North Atlantic cultural forms of today seek to come to terms with individual and collective fears of death, of finitude, of the unforeseen and of the confusion of categories – with all these perennial but inevitable nightmares of the human condition. It is true that in this endeavour 'the West' has often conjured up phantasms of alterity, filling its nightmarish imaginary space (for instance, in the construction of a commoditised popular media culture) with somatic and cultural features referring to other continents, especially Africa. But, as an inspection of the work of principal Western thinkers on these existential threats in the last two centuries could bring out (Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Heidegger, Sartre, Plessner, Horkheimer and Adorno, Buber, Levinas, to mention but a few), the recourse to exotic images was never the *main* vehicle for such

existential reflection in North Atlantic thought. Nor would existential familiarity with African life (such as anthropological fieldwork has certainly afforded RD), or a mere look at clinical figures concerning individual and collective violence, murder and mental illness in Africa, suggest that south of the Sahara people and cultures have been, in every respect, so very much more successful in allaying these nightmares. They are nightmares, indeed, not so much of the modern or postmodern North Atlantic, but of the human condition *tout court* – they are the price to be paid for the language-based self-reflexivity that makes us all, humans living today, into Anatomically Modern Humans. Like myself, RD has in the context of his fieldwork been peripherally enmeshed in the web of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations (he has written some of the most incisive treatises on witchcraft ever); has seen how the absence of a culturally supported notion of natural death plunges entire African families and communities into paroxysms of witchcraft suspicion that totally destroy the ever-so-thin fabric of solidarity; has seen how in recent decades the AIDS pandemic in Africa has reduced people's sensitivity for suffering others to levels previously only recorded for aberrant ethnographic cases like the Ik people under exceptional ecological pressure; and his decades of frequenting Congo at the heights of corruption, terror and civil war cannot have left him with too many illusions as to any narrower range or shallower depth of the human predicament in that part of the world, as compared to Western Europe.

Without a doubt, African societies have made great and lasting contributions to the range of human strategies of coping with the tragic human condition. It is the anthropologist's privilege to describe these strategies in a globally accessible format, and thus to facilitate their wider global circulation (even though all such representation is inevitably distortive to a greater or lesser degree). But the discharge of this privilege need not be at the expense of cultural *Selbsthass* – 'self hatred'. Especially not since state-of-the-art comparative genetic, linguistic, mythological and ethnographic research has brought out the fact of very considerable cultural continuity between sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia, which in part goes back to the common African cultural background of all Anatomically

Modern Humans (originating in sub-Saharan Africa 200,000 years Before Present, and trickling out to other continents from 80,000 BP), but mainly is due to the much more recent 'Back-into-Africa' migration, which started from Central Asia c. 15,000 BP and in the process also had a considerable impact upon Europe. Although geopolitical factors of the last few centuries have led to extreme ideological alteration, in fact North Atlantic and sub-Saharan cultures are to a very considerable extent continuous, which makes for considerable implicit understanding in the field despite the mask of alteration.

But even if such continuity were not the case, the stark contrast RD makes between African cultures on the one hand, and on the other Enlightenment rationality, the exact sciences, the autonomous Ego and (between parentheses, as if we should know better?) human rights, is amazing. Less than three centuries old, these achievements of modernity have admittedly constituted a North Atlantic departure from the historical cultural continuity that in many other respects unites the North Atlantic region with the rest of the world. Yet it is a departure that is not in the least *owned* by the inhabitants of the North Atlantic region but, on the contrary, like all cultural achievements of humankind (and I am not suggesting that modernity should rank among the *greatest* achievements) it constitutes *an inalienable part of the inheritance of all of humankind*; it has rapidly though patchily been appropriated, in creative and innovative ways, as well as contested, all over the globe. Africans or Indonesians or Native Americans applying these achievements are, in doing so, operating in a culturally alien space, but not any more so than are inhabitants of the North Atlantic – they all may effectively learn these themes of modernity as an innovative, globalising departure from the culture of their childhood, they all will experience strong tensions between these cultural modes in their adult lives, and they all will also discover the severe limitations of modernity in the process. Yet it is these pillars of modernity that have allowed RD to become an anthropologist and to take a critical view of his own native society. It is here that the truly amazing practice is situated of seeking to understand the other through the medium of written

specialist text, in such a way that the well-formedness, consistency and persuasiveness of that text (as a result of the writer's solitary and monologic struggle through the distancing and virtualising medium of the written word, and these days usually through a high-tech artefact, the computer) has become the principal indication of the degree of intercultural understanding and truth that has been attained in the process. However sympathetic, convincing and striving towards integrity RD's mode of being an anthropologist is (and there is no doubt about that), it is in all respects a product, not of any historic African inspiration (where such a reliance on monologue, text and machine would be unthinkable), but of globalised modernity and (in RD's attempt at placelessness) its postmodern aftermath. Not as an intellectual producer, nor as a citizen, would RD (despite all his well-taken criticism of modernity) be prepared to give up these achievements – in fact, he tells us that Mobutu's forcefully incorporating RD's fellow students into the army made him decide that he would not stay in Congo for the rest of his life. So much for '[so-called] human rights' – one must not make light of significant human achievements in the very place where they have been so much trampled upon.

It should be possible to champion the global circulation of the many genuine contributions Africa has made to the global heritage of humankind (ranging from mathematical games and divination systems to therapy, music, dance and conflict regulation – all to be found in RD's text) without at the same time cutting one's own flesh, in what seems almost a compulsive sacrifice to undomesticated and destructive alteration.

### **The Anthropologist as Hero**

One of the popularised and obsolescent notions of psychoanalysis is that of the *Primal Scene*: a key childhood episode (e.g. the infant's witnessing the parents' sexual intercourse) creates a subconscious conflict that destructively breaks through in adult life in various symbolic disguises. In the global mythico-symbolic repertoire, the hero figure looms large, not only because it provides a plausible idiom to recast the relation between the infant son and his mother, but also because it is an apt expression of the process of individual maturation and fulfilment every human being is likely to go through. Bruce Kapferer once coined

the phrase 'the anthropologist as hero' to focus on the transformation of the image of the anthropologist under postmodernism. As a psychoanalysing anthropologist, RD is far more familiar with these themes than I am, and I therefore take it that the mythologising format of the first section of his piece is deliberate.

The mythologising element is unmistakable, and profoundly puzzling. Instead of presenting himself as just a particular kind of anthropologist situated in a collective professional genealogy and a collective mode of intellectual production, RD reverses the burden of proof and under the overall heading 'What is an anthropologist?' presents the narrative of his own professional life; and under the subheading 'What did I come to do in Congo between 1965 and 1974' presents a personal myth. Like all heroes, his birth is miraculous: he is congenitally 'a person of the boundary', born on a farm between France and Flanders and close to where the land gives way to the sea, hence apparently destined to placelessness and to dexterity in the handling of boundaries. One is reminded of the fairy-tale 'The clever farmer's daughter' (underneath which lurks a trickster figure also known from many South Asian sacred narratives) who – superhumanly skilful in the handling of irreconcilable opposites – is told to come to the king's court 'not on the road and not beside the road, not mounted and not afoot, not dressed and not naked'. The myth continues when our young Fleming is reported to go to Africa, of all places (the year is 1965), for what is suggested to be primarily an academic study of philosophy, and there, from what yet, but only vaguely, materialises as the context of clerical life as a young member of the Jesuit congregation studying from the priesthood, with all its subtle implications of obedience and harmless rebellion, we see the miraculous birth of an anthropologist, fully equipped (not unlike the Greek goddess Athena springing forth from her father's head) with today's discourse of interculturality, alterity and professional anthropology – but without any professional teachers, supervisors or teaching institutions being named (again, Devisch's locatedness in North Atlantic institutional and professional frames is dissimulated); and without any manifest institutional or existential struggle concerning his celibate clerical vocation – only to be miraculously provided with a

spouse at the end of his first fieldwork, when their marriage is blessed by the local chief, whose mystical predecessor by spiritual adoption our fieldworker has turned out to be. Is it just that RD is speaking for people who have known him all his adult life, so that he can afford, tongue in cheek, to let an edifying personal myth adorn the facts already known to the audience? One simply cannot understand why a juvenile clerical calling, in time traded for a brilliantly productive and innovating secular career as one of Europe's most prominent and most profound anthropologists who has moreover excelled in loyally facilitating Africanist knowledge production by Africans, should be so utterly embarrassing as to be turned into an unspeakable Primal Scene – especially at the moment when that career receives the highest official recognition from the African side. Other anthropologists of recent generations, like Schoffeleers, Fabian and van der

Geest, went very much the same road (but without the accolade in the end), as did Congo's highest ranking intellectual son, Mudimbe, and numerous others. The anthropologist is his own greatest enigma; but he should not be, for the very reasons of self-reflexivity I have stressed in the present argument.

But do not forget who is talking here: the adoptive Nkoya prince Tatashikanda Kahare, the illegitimate child from an Amsterdam slum turned into the Botswana spirit-medium Johannes Sibanda, Bu Lahiya who since his first fieldwork in Tunisia forty years ago has kept up the home cult of the local saint Sidi Mhammad and has never renounced his steps in the Qadiri ecstatic cult, but now officiating as if for him the self-renewing adoption of African cultures has been smooth and sunny sailing throughout.

Or as if he had been able to articulate any of the home-truths contained in the

present argument, but for the life-long example, the constant and profound intellectual feedback, and the unconditional friendship of Taanda N-leengi / René Devisch, intercultural hero who has managed to go where angels fear to tread. The Primal Scene masked in René's festive and deliberately vulnerable self-account is the pain of self-annihilation without which, however, no intercultural rebirth could ever be achieved. His honorary doctorate marks, and rightly celebrates, his spiritual arrival in the land of the ancestors – many years, hopefully, before his body is taken there, too.

#### Note

1. Considerations of space have forced us to suppress most of the extensive references and bibliography to this contribution, as well as extensive quotes from Professor Devisch's original allocution; the full version preserving these details may be consulted at: <http://www.shikanda.net/devisch.htm>

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## A Tribute to René Devisch

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It was by pure curiosity that I accepted CODESRIA's request for comments on the address by Professor René Devisch on the occasion of his acceptance of an honorary doctorate from the University of Kinshasa. As a Congolese intellectual, I am ashamed to admit that I did not know who RD was until I read this speech, which greatly impressed me by its brilliance and the lessons that this Belgian scholar of Flemish extraction has learned from his anthropological practice among the Yaka of the DRC.

My ignorance of the work of RD is symptomatic of my general ignorance of the work of anthropologists, even though some of the people whose work I have greatly admired happen to be anthropologists or have engaged in anthropological research. In addition to having read Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Balandier and Melville Herskovits, I was a student of Jan Vansina at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a close friend of the late Elliott Skinner, the Franz Boas Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. Skinner's immersion in Mossi culture and values is quite similar to the

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admiration and sense of kinship that RD displays with respect to the Yaka.

With Devisch, as with much of anthropological production in the era of post-imperial and postcolonial studies, anthropology has been transformed from its origin as the colonial science *par excellence* into an extremely innovative and illuminating body of knowledge on the struggles of the multitude to make sense of the contemporary world and to find security and make ends meet in the face of the challenges of globalisation. It is therefore not surprising that in the last three years, during which I served as a member of the Herskovits Award Committee of the African Studies Association (ASA) of the United States, the most interesting books among the 150 or so books submitted for the best book award have come from anthropologists and historians.

The educational itinerary of RD in the Congo was enriched first by the mental decolonisation promoted by progressive intellectuals like Auguste Mabika Kalanda, but also and more importantly by his full immersion into the life and culture of a local village community. Going to the school of the people, as Frantz Fanon advised revolutionary intellectuals to do in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, allows one to see the world from a totally new perspective, and one that differs radically with the dominant Eurocentric vision of reality.

A very interesting example in this regard is Devisch's characterisation of the popular participation in the military-initiated violence of September 1991 and January–February 1993 in Kinshasa as 'Jacqueries' or popular uprisings. From the standpoint of the authorities and the press, these events are simply described as '*pillages*' or acts of looting. So what started as officially engineered acts of indiscipline by the military in a strategy of what Amnesty International then called 'violence against democracy' was taken over by ordinary people as political protest against an unjust and repressive social order.

In this regard, the anthropologist has a comparative advantage over other social scientists by the very proximity of his/her practice to the lives, discourse and even bodily gestures of ordinary people as historical actors. Anthropological witness thus provides an objective and credible interpretation of reality by describing it from the standpoint of ordinary people, who like to *tell it as it is*, rather than from that of the dominant classes, who have a vested interest in justifying the status quo. This is the most important methodological lesson that Barrington Moore teaches on objectivity in the social sciences in his monumental work *The Social Origins of Dictatorship*

*and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. As victims of the historical process, ordinary people have nothing to lose from an objective analysis of the realities. For Moore, as for RD, objective scholarship is attempting to tell it like it is, that is, as close as possible to the way history is understood not by the elites, but by ordinary people.

At the same time, nothing should be done to romanticise all the positions taken by ordinary people. Take, for example, the proliferation of faith-healing churches in the DRC, through which numerous people hope to find their salvation from growing poverty and its consequences

for health and life in general. With scoundrels of all kinds purporting to perform miracles and solve difficult problems quickly for those who can afford to pay, anthropologists like RD, who have an intimate knowledge of these establishments, should once again put their science and knowledge at the service of the people, so as to protect them from these false prophets.

In closing my remarks, I would like to thank CODESRIA for inviting comments on this brilliant address by RD. It bears witness to an outstanding tradition of anthropological practice that CODESRIA ought to continue promoting in Africa.

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## The Anthropologist in Four Phases

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On 4 April, an honorary doctorate was awarded to René Devisch, Professor at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. In his inaugural lecture given in gratitude for the award, René Devisch focuses on the question: What is an anthropologist? Instead of merely acknowledging the award in the usual way, he draws his message from his four-leg 'journey', his life and visits as an anthropologist or social player. He, therefore, glances at a number of places he visited and which are like stopovers on his four-leg journey.

In the 'immersion' phase, the wealth of alterity leaves its mark on him and he draws from it, in particular, the characteristics of the practice of anthropology, namely, proximity, close contact, particular attention to gestures, language, the diversity of utterances and listening to collective memories. In spite of the fascination he feels and the mutual adoption, RD is preoccupied with his 'acrobatic' position, his being torn between two worlds, two cultures...

The next leg of the journey is the return to the native land. How can he erase the look or the weight of alterity in his own society? Is universal culture not put in jeopardy by ignorance of the other? Long accustomed to the North-South transfer, RD attempts the opposite. The fruits of his research in Congo are the vector of conscientisation, inculturation and

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'decolonisation'. He has sought to meet this challenge in his teachings.

In the last-but-one leg of the journey, he becomes the 'witness of the clash of cultures'. Transformed into a globetrotter, RD visits nine other African countries, apart from Congo (Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, Tunisia and Egypt). He believes that the dynamics of local networks are crucial to the success of anthropological research. He asks: 'does the genuine development of both the North and the South not entail, above all, mutual research on the "collective wellbeing", in accordance with the various modalities of exchange and mutual assistance, not solely in the technical or economic spheres, but also in the cultural and even spiritual realms?'

Acknowledging that 'he has been shaped by the rich diversity of Africa's networks, its endogenous knowledge forms and the post-colonial course plied by African universities', RD talks about his 'intercultural concerns and inter-university commitment' in two propositions. The first consists in rethinking, on new foundations, 'the academic encounter to share knowledge

... both global and local', by taking into account 'more lucidly, the presuppositions, frameworks of perception, forms of communication and the ethical foundations of the two-fold universe of the knowledge involved'. He makes the distinction between knowledge conveyed by 'uni-versity' academic programmes, 'the multi-versity of knowledge, different forms of knowledge and endogenous cultural programmes rooted in non-Western schools of thought'.

The second proposition is based on the promotion of 'multi-versity', a function that could be fulfilled by the university. Such a function could lead to 'inter-associations and platforms of poly-logue and creativity among colleagues, researchers, experts or artists from the North and the South', offered to the ambient society and the rich and diverse North-South and South-South partnership.

RD's fourth journey is a kind of soft landing that consists in presenting the profile of 'the future anthropologist'. He views the future anthropologist as the one who draws up an inventory of 'local, diverse and complex, ancient and contemporary arts and knowledge; he/she is an inter-cultural and inter-generational diplomat'. According to RD, 'anthropology is the science that is in close contact with the real-life experience of human beings'.

Let us consider the vision of others: RD's testimony is a good illustration of problems encountered in carrying out research on a 'mined' field and on subjects or issues that need to be thoroughly grasped. Théodore Trefon and Pierre Petit have experimented on this in their 2006 work, 'Expériences de recherche en République démocratique du Congo: Méthodes et contextes' [Research Experiments in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Methods and Context] (in *Civilisations* 54.1-2, 274pp.) in which twenty studies are devoted to research on mined fields in various regions of Congo. Petit and Trefon, co-directors of these studies, point out that as 'a true paradigm of an Africa confronted by the horrors of war, state disintegration and informalization of the economy, Congo appears to shoulder all the obstacles to field research that is in conformity with the methodological canons of the various disciplines' (2006: 9). This reflects the concerns voiced by RD above.

Conducting research in a postcolonial society presents another obstacle to the European. Petit and Trefon seem to assert this fact. They argue that 'White researchers cannot dilute their colour and become invisible in a society where the very colour of the skin makes them relatives of the former colonialists. This position of alterity lends them a very

variable status, depending on the context' (2006: 12-13). The situation is very different in the case of RD. Instead of 'sticking out like a sore thumb', he has, quite on the contrary, won the confidence of the people through close contact and prolonged immersion. The result is a certain trivialisation of alterity.

A quick glance at recent publications on Congo by the Anthropology Centre at the Université Libre de Bruxelles reveals an ever-growing interest in urban studies. The Observatoire du changement urbain [Urban development observatory] established in 2000 in Lubumbashi has recorded results of research on that town. Several years earlier, Luc Heusch had initiated studies on the traditional societies of Central Africa (see Petit and Trefon 2006).

The field is an unavoidable area in any anthropological research. However, what differs is the manner in which research is conducted. Marc Eric Gruenais (2005) proposes 'upgrading of fieldwork' ('Le renouvellement du terrain: Quelques considérations sur l'évolution des méthodes ethnographiques' [Upgrading of fieldwork: Some considerations on the evolution of ethnographic methods], *The African Anthropologist / L'Anthropologue Africain*, 12.2: 172-80). The outline presented, though very brief, is worthy of consideration.

Now, a word on the workshop conducted in Kinshasa, from 17 to 21 September 2007, on the urban history of Central Africa. At that workshop, historians, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, geographers, demographers, architects and town planners reflected on upgrading of theories and methodologies, and on the establishment of new reference frameworks. The 'frameworks' on which research sites are based call for a series of 'perspectives'. At that workshop, Professor Elikia M'Bokolo presented 'new perspectives' in the study of urban history. The complexity of the urban phenomenon, the difficulty in measuring particularly growth, the importance of the long duration of the study, the town viewed as a laboratory, etc., were raised. In towns as in the rural areas, the field is vast, but approaches vary widely.

RD explained the manner in which the anthropologist's role should be construed. He experienced it through his research and concerns as a European torn between two worlds. Such a vision should be placed in context. Some people have reproached him for neglecting the quantitative aspect of research, in favour of the qualitative dimension. Others have opted for a compromise between the two approaches. In any case, the debate remains open.

## THE AFRICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

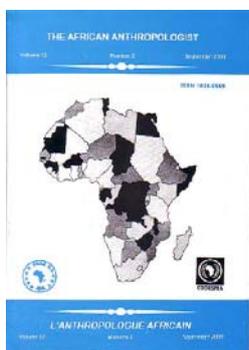
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## 2. Towards a Reappropriation of Local Knowledge and Practices

# Anthropology Without Borders

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### On Anthropology

How can one dialogue, without sweating, with an anthropologist, one who, in principle, is destined to ... reconstitute human beings, to retrace their sinuous physical and metaphysical pathways? How do we meet the one who is explorer, nomad for all seasons, diviner, reader of dementia, the man with four eyes, as we say in my country?

These are the naïve questions I started by asking, as a man of letters, an idealist of the imaginary world, a hunter of others' dreams, since he has none of his own ... the list of questions continues: how can one do an in-depth assessment of human beings while tracking them down, as anthropologists do, in their final place of refuge, in both the visible and invisible realms, without implicating oneself in a lasting manner, without soiling one's hands and soul?

Moreover, I initially bungled all those seers together – ethnologists, anthropologists and sociologists alike. And the dominant thought appeared to share out the work, spaces and privileges, assigning all 'civilisations' to anthropologists, 'advanced societies' to sociologists, and 'early settlements' to ethnologists, unless of course you were 'primitive'...

But the times have changed, smoothing over the rough edges of prejudices and customs. We, the Young Turks, disbanded our forces and hung up our weapons, and dialogued with one another.

The first professional anthropologists I met, who were real explorers of the future, in particular those who were foreign, included René Devisch and Filip de Boeck. The interpersonal contact, friendship and erudition helped to screen and dispel a good number of prejudices and to make us understand that all would ultimately be anthropology, in the sense that it is the inevitable path to the rediscovery of the human being in society. And journeying from interpersonal inter-comprehension, I naturally got to inter-comprehension of cultures and customs.

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### Education at a Time of Crisis

It appears that one of the crucial factors in understanding the human being in society is the mode of transmission of knowledge, including indigenous knowledge. Knowledge, know-how, skills, transmission of skills – this is the challenge for our generations. And here culture is one of the keys, as a method, genius, a permanent and identity value in such transmission of knowledge and skills.

At this juncture, it is perhaps appropriate to raise the question of the backwardness of our Sub-Saharan African countries and the challenges of modernising them. A tentative answer to this question is that modes of transmission have been entropic insofar as the clash of civilisations has not been on a level playing field. Moreover, political authorities have continued to control genius and to try to muzzle subversive and creative expression and thought, to impose imposture, to hollow out and disfigure the dream, imagination and utopia.

In Africa, it has always been more than a clash; it is a real *tsunami*, be it in the colonial or neocolonial period. Only the law of totalitarianism, profiteering and the wild instinct of survival and conservation takes precedence, particularly after the independence years and the single-party political era. The consequences of the law of the jungle are superstitious, fetishistic and cannibalistic 'demon-crazy', the leader's personality cult, the culture of gatherers and endless demagoguery.

Throughout our colonial and neocolonial history, three concepts – knowing, being able, having – have been at war and their opportunistic collusion has always been fatal.

### Knowing, Being Able and Having

In a paradoxical global village in which everything tends to be standardised, while being geared towards monopolies, towards a uniform mindset, knowing – in terms of the power and efficiency of knowledge – becomes a costly product.

Knowledge and the technocratic system that is its tentacular offshoot henceforth manifests itself as a determination to possess uncontrollable power. In the global village, knowing, being able and having ultimately become selective – an infernal trinity.

### The Buffalo and the Antelope

What is the place and role of the social sciences and, in particular, anthropology when confronted by visible and invisible forces, in this infernal mechanism, in this terrible machination of globalisation? This place or role cannot but be subversive. Here, the social sciences are the magic candle that lights up dark tunnels of material and moral misery, and that chart all courses against so many odds. It is somewhat akin to the subversive place and role of our folktales used whenever it was necessary to teach shortcuts that are lessons in audacity and malicious genius. This is a bit like the fables of the buffalo and the antelope. Honestly, is it possible for carnivores and herbivores to have a candid and face-to-face dialogue, at times of tension, without the weakest resorting to cunning and guerilla warfare?

The social sciences, unfortunately, attained a middle-class status precisely on account of contact with globalisation and the transverse nature of knowledge. They have remained accumulations of knowledge, as opposed to functional knowledge. For knowledge to be functional, the social sciences in Africa would have had to humble themselves in order to be truly interactive channels of mobilisation and, in the final analysis, 'initiators' (in the first redemptive sense) and transforming initiatives.

I talk of the social sciences humbling themselves in the literal sense of *humilis* (from *humus*, nourishing soil). The term *humilis* connotes not only that which takes root, which dies and grows in the humus, but also a person who has not stopped learning, who is still learning, and is always learning, though in the heat of initiation; who reinvents his/her permanent and adapted critical discourse and self-critique through fieldwork, close contact with subjects, subversion, revolt and guerilla warfare.

### Epilogue

I have heard – I do not remember where – that growing old is swapping one's dreams for regrets. I have just read, in an excerpt, the following Yoruba proverb in Wole Soyinka's autobiography, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2007) (published by Actes

Sud): 'as one approaches an elder's status, one ceases to indulge in battles'.

Strangely, there is a corollary to this proverb in the culture of my ancestors of the Bandundu savannah, and it is quite amusing that the ambiguity in French stems from the play on the homophonic words, *statut* [status] and *statue* [statue]. Here is the proverb: 'When you start resembling the ancestors' statue, your wisdom grows like them.'

I feel like telling René that, on the contrary, his battles have started; that, at last, he is 'reborn': has his pilgrim and initiatory speech testified to this fact? As in every magical act of initiation, he was already 'dead' in Africa and by Africa. Now he is reborn of her because the anthropologist has at last met the man, like Diogenes looking for dawn and the sun in himself,

at the depths of his being, where life dwells, where life moves.

The thoroughbred *Kinois* that I am, riddled with paradoxes, gnawed by centrifugal temptations, and who dies daily in the fire of sacrifices and propitiatory violence, knows what it means 'to move life'. Does the Congolese musician Koffi Olomide not exclaim in one of his big hits: *Ve dir, tozali na sistem ya lifelo, kasi motu akozika te* (We are all in hellfire but nobody will be scathed)? After all, it is thanks to art that I have learnt to die and be born again every day like ritual bread: power of knowing, power of being able, power of having by 'Article 15', by the struggle of Sisyphus (*kobeta libanga*, 'to cut stone'). In other words, not to exist but to resist!

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## An Africanist in Search of a New Epistemological Framework

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**R**ené Devisch, in his academic address given during his honorary doctorate award ceremony at the University of Kinshasa, ardently advocates a new foundation for anthropology whose complexity deserves an exceptionally firm commitment.

An anthropologist's vision of the cause of a new anthropology is naturally a very sensitive professional exercise. My spontaneous contribution to RD's enriching reflection is therefore both a question and an answer.

The problem he seeks to elucidate calls for more than a one-off reflection. He rather addresses it in an epistemological advocacy, to the extent that in spite of the statement of the problem, he sets out to produce a new anthropological discourse, which is a challenge in itself. Taking pains to internalise the problem cherished by the negro-African intelligentsia or rather because he has done it sufficiently, he resolves to take anthropology out of what he calls with his distinctive frankness, the decolonisation of anthropology or the alterity perspective. RD is of the view that it is by going back to the very origins of anthropology that African anthropologists will safeguard their precious contribution to the building

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of a new scientific approach based on endogenisation. From this standpoint, the anthropologist is perhaps the scientist who has the necessary tools for easily perceiving how the outlines of cultural and spiritual expression can be treated in the greatest interest of humanity as a whole.

From the research-action point of view, on which he strives to focus, RD advocates the promotion of an everyday culture through an instinct for appropriation and creation. In this drive for innovation, RD seeks to go back to his roots in Africa if only to make himself the successor of those whose authentic African tradition, rooted in endogenous knowledge and know-how, he dreams of handing down to posterity. Through this approach, RD unveils the anthropologist's role, which is similar to that of an artist striving to depict the complexity of a boundless landscape on a single plan. The model thus obtained cannot be reduced to a simplification of reality to the extent of

emptying it of its contents, but rather to the transition from one complex reality to a more obvious one.

In RD's view, one does not engage in anthropology for amateurish reasons, but to meet a social need. In fact, anthropology is, first and foremost, the expression of a need for exchange or dialogue with others. To exchange with others, we need to understand what our interlocutor is saying or wants to say. We, therefore, need to understand the interlocutor's codes or rules, in short, his/her language. To understand, you need to learn the language and codes. That is why the anthropologist is obliged to create a training field by being immersed in people's daily life. Unlike sociologists, anthropologists must be immersed in the community so as to look with a view to better observing the real life of the community. They have to listen in order to apprehend the implicit and feel emotions. It is through such participation in the day-to-day life of the community composed not only of dances and songs but also of tears, illness and witchcraft that the anthropologist is able to chart the course leading to the improvement of the wellbeing of the people.

That is the real challenge of the scientific approach in the social and human sciences, particularly in anthropology. As a discipline that is still in its infancy, anthropology has so far accumulated resources that constitute a rich nursery into which future generations will dip without depleting their main scientific preoccupations. Unfortunately, present-day anthropology is still heir to a tradition consisting mainly of field research, some perfect and some imperfect, and which confines the researcher in a prism of evolutionary, diffusion, functionalist and structuralist theories that blow out of proportion cultural differences between civilisations by bi-polarising humanity, with one half being civilised while the other is primitive. Hence the urgent need to decolonise anthropology.

As a scientific endeavour that is essentially colonial, anthropology will not survive the decolonisation movement unless its subject is completely restructured and its interpretation frameworks are liberated. This will give the historian a free hand to explore the past, thereby allowing future anthropologists to revisit the goal assigned to them by Claude Lévi-Strauss: 'holistic knowledge of the human being, embracing its subject in all its historic and geographical breadth from the vast modern city to the smallest Melanesian tribe and leading to conclusions that are positive or negative, but which are applicable to the whole human race', so that such knowledge may be rooted in a day-to-day anthropology.

Furthermore, RD recalls that since its origins anthropology remain the basis of any study of the human being and society. In the address, RD justifies the purpose of anthropological studies by pointing out that they help us understand the meaning of human activities at the various levels where they can be interpreted by the social actors themselves, on the one hand, and by the researchers who study them, on the other.

The proposed epistemological orientation is phenomenological and praxeological. And the methodology, as we have seen, is geared towards analyses of the meaning that emerges.

Indeed, on the African continent, anthropology is being phased out in research programmes and the few resistant strains are downsized and confined to ephemeral consultancies, and

the generous grants and scholarships disbursed in the past are today devoted to research for other ends, including environmental purposes.

The search for pluralist perspectives in the social and human sciences is one of RD's major research preoccupations. He was the first to draw up a table of all health systems in the former Zaire, in his 1988 publication titled *Health-care systems in Zaire*.

His research approach is in four stages. First, he revisits the goal of anthropology and explains the profound nature of his subject of study. Secondly, he re-examines the anthropological science itself with the avowed intention of identifying the real epistemological framework while ascertaining and assessing how the latter has been irrigated by different research streams throughout the history of anthropology. Thirdly, he carries out a critical analysis of colonial anthropology with a view to identifying and consolidating the achievements. Fourthly and lastly, in the firm hope of further fertilising the field of anthropology, he endeavours to propose a new analytical framework based on data culled from research works he has conducted over the past thirty years among the Yaka and in African universities.

RD's experience among the Yaka innovatively leads him back to his native Flemish cultural heritage and, in particular, opens his eyes to cultural symbolism. It is from this view point that he analyses the manner in which the human body obeys the laws of an anatomy that is somewhat fantasised or symbolised by domestic habitation, cosmic groups and concepts, rather than the laws of the anatomy described in medical textbooks (Lapika, Eulogy at the honorary doctorate award ceremony).

As Professor Shomba Kinyamba recalls in his speech at the honorary doctorate award ceremony, RD made the ritual one of the fundamentals of anthropology. In his view, the ritual explores and reaffirms the fundamentals of life, such as sharing, the hierarchical order and the ethical order. He unveils and establishes a relationship between practices and representations. Ritual creativity, RD points out, is inherent in everyday gestures, in the conviviality around a glass of palm wine or a bottle of beer, in the divinatory oracle, just as in therapies.

As regards teaching, RD has always taken a keen interest in the endogenisation of knowledge in African universities. As Professor Gaston Mwene Batende says in his eulogy to the recipient of the honorary doctorate, RD has relentlessly called on African universities to 'design and apply models of endogenous development in the educational system'. RD is of the view that endogenisation of scientific knowledge will enable Africa to firmly assert its influence and identity, by making its invaluable contribution to such an endeavour. RD believes the time has come to rate African universities by their level of involvement in the endogenisation of knowledge and their active participation in the reconstruction of the African cultural identity and holistic promotion of the human being in the global and pluralist village. However, most African universities continue to cling to the structural models and curricula of Western universities on which they were founded during the colonial era, whereas they operate in new sociohistorical, sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts.

RD's research reveals, furthermore, that some of the human sciences minimise endogenous knowledge. For instance, conventional law has put customary law on the back-burner since only a few hours of lectures are devoted to it. The highlight and emphasis are on European laws copied from the Western cultural model, under the pretext that customary law is obsolete. Holders of endogenous knowledge can be co-opted into teaching and research projects. They will make their contribution, for instance, to oral African literature studies, medical anthropology, physiotherapy, African psychotherapy, African sociology, customary law, rural and agricultural economics, etc. (see Mwene Batende, speech at the honorary doctorate award ceremony).

Would exotic anthropology or alterisation of the African therefore be dead where there are no anthropologists to teach long courses? The vacancy is stealthily filled by modernist contemporary sociology, which supplants cultural and social anthropology that should normally boost endogenisation of knowledge. Some African anthropologists, bending under the yoke of deculturalising modernity, prefer to be called sociologists instead of fighting tooth and nail to develop and promote an anthropology that, coupled with sociology, contributes positively to sociology, equipping the general theory

of sociology (Mwene Batende, speech at the honorary doctorate inaugural ceremony).

To side-step this trap, RD finds in the new anthropology a field for analysing and validating the dual problem of individual experience of socialisation and the relationship with the growth of society through the individual. Relying on his experience of clinical anthropology in Antwerp, Brussels and Tunis, and on a limited psychoanalytic practice, RD decides to organise the funeral of rural culture that is relatively well adapted in order to start replicating his perspectives on urban areas. At this stage, RD clarifies his objective: this is not an attempt to develop a new general theory of anthropology; based on existing theoretical and methodological instruments, it is important to organise an updated approach that allows us to deal with facts that give access to what he himself calls intersubjectivity and the collective memory or intermemory that constitutes the melting pot of professional anthropology.

In light of this new approach, we dare to think that the path leading to a true anthropology premised on completely new foundations is built step by step, in particular with a review of the dimensions of the human being who has to be observed by the anthropologist, no longer as a mere physiological substrate but rather as a complex entity that moves and changes in an unpredictable social environment governed by very specific rules of communication. In other words, it is in the epistemological constructivist basin that a research project in the restructured anthropology will bathe; such a project is both a quest for meaning and an investigation of the actors involved in this search, that is, the human beings situated in both the integrated interactive order and the societal order (Jean-Christien Ekambo 2006 *Pour une nouvelle anthropologie de la communication*, Kinshasa, Éditions IFASIC).

In practical terms, the researcher who plunges into the anthropology of communication first has to take into

account the language of the practitioners themselves with a view to choosing the activity that will be the subject of study.

Hence, for any blueprint of the new anthropology to be scientifically recognised, it must be based on a new vision of anthropology and a methodological approach that is adapted to the epistemological status of the subject of study.

This eminent anthropologist's contribution to theory revolves around his semantic and praxeological approach to concepts of matrilineal village formation, endogenisation of knowledge and management as well as the domestication of the crisis facing social institutions (Shomba, speech at the honorary doctorate award ceremony).

We conclude this brief commentary on RD's address by inviting readers who so wish to engage in a genuine and constructive debate with RD on this vast and enriching research field of endogenisation of knowledge in African universities.

### Africa Development/Afrique et développement



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Africa Development is the quarterly bilingual journal of CODESRIA published since 1976. It is a social science journal whose major focus is on issues which are central to the development of society. Its principal objective is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among African scholars from a variety of intellectual persuasions and various disciplines. The journal also encourages other contributors working on Africa or those undertaking comparative analysis of developing world issues.

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### 3. Towards an Intercultural Emancipation

## What Does it Mean to be Human in an Increasingly Dehumanised World?

### Intentions, Text, Context and History

Given the current global situation, the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a disaster-ravaged country, where the political leadership at least ought to declare a state of emergency, Professor René Devisch's question – 'What is an anthropologist?' – somehow reminds one of the captain of a sinking ship, who is more concerned about the state of the ship than the situation of the passengers. In reading his address, several questions come to mind: What is a human being? What is a Congolese? What is solidarity? The narration also makes us think of the possible outcome of a text titled: How Congo became a disaster-stricken country. And the list goes on. Perhaps – and this is even more serious for an anthropologist – one could ask how and why he ignores Sylvain Lazarus' 1996 work: *L'anthropologie du nom* (Paris, Seuil), since such a work, even if it were at odds with his own writings, would certainly have compelled him to think more in terms of a genuine reality and not a mystifying reality. Beyond the above questions, this chapter seeks to understand why he has not seized the opportunity to speak as loudly as possible for those who do not have a voice.

RD advocates a 'de-westernized post-colonial anthropology', which sides with 'the ordinary human being' and seeks to develop 'the ethical underpinnings of the two-fold universe of the knowledge related to either dimension'. He dwells at length on an anthropology overflowing with good will and good intentions towards those who suffered the consequences of a science which, as we are fully aware, was contrary to RD's therapeutic dream. He wishes to turn the page as quickly as possible. However, he does so by invoking, lightly, allies such as Césaire and, in particular, Fanon categorised as militants of Négritude. Both Césaire and Fanon had distanced themselves from Négritude, Fanon going

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as far as castigating the 'yes men of Négritude'.

Unfortunately, confronted by such statements, RD relates the recent history of Congo, which is at odds with his own intentions. We will revisit this below. The ethical underpinnings he proposes are not really taken seriously by the author himself, for if they had been, we would have expected him to make the proposition at the very beginning of the address in order to guide research on what could be called an ethics of truth in the wake of the epoch-making event of 30 June 1960.<sup>1</sup> That event (Patrice Lumumba's speech) gave birth to an idea in the consciousness of many Congolese. The ethics of truth would therefore consist in examining how and why fidelity to the truth has not been pursued, in certain cases, and why efforts to achieve such fidelity have been isolated or practically individualised.

What, then, would happen if we adhered to principles of truth and rewrote the history of Congo through intellectual biographies of people of all origins, but which, nevertheless, meet the standards of world history – to borrow Ernest Wamba dia Wamba's cherished expression? To be more precise, what if, instead of viewing the Congolese out of the kindness of our hearts, as a people who need to be assisted through secular, religious or scholarly humanitarianism, we viewed them as the survivors of a long, unending catastrophe? An unending catastrophe that has engendered and nurtured the habit of viewing the Congolese as a people who have acquired the right to exist only thanks to 'sacrifices' made by Léopold II, or thanks to the good works of the civilising Europe or North America that has proclaimed itself the defender of the good and bulwark against evil.

### Century of Light or Century of Misery?

There is, however, another long tragedy, so to speak, consisting of a long and ever-growing list of Congolese people – recognised, unrecognised, disregarded, unknown – who, from the Slave Trade till now, have viewed themselves as human beings and not as slaves, colonised people, or people obliged to yield to that which, in retrospect, looks like a process of programmed liquidation. Some of these people who have resisted the imposed tendency to see themselves as slaves or colonised people had rejected Mobutu's dictatorship as far back as 24 November 1965, contrary to a thoughtless and insulting assertion made once by Laurent-Désiré Kabila to the effect that 'everyone had joined in the dance'.<sup>2</sup>

These voices from Kimpa Vita to Cyanguvu, from Kimbangu to Mulele, from Lumumba to Mitudidi still echo in the memories of people everywhere. Furthermore, we still hear in our human consciousness the loud echo of unknown voices of people howling in despair and anger before being shoved down into the hold of ships, colonial jails, or of people banished during the colonial era or postcolonial dictatorship.

As the living, familiar with the terror inflicted on Congolese, is it not high time we confessed what our conscience is persistently telling us: to reject the habit of denying our own humanity by accepting to inculcate the habit of accepting the unacceptable? 'Living beings' or, better still, 'survivors' of a holocaust that has never been recognised because – whether wittingly or not – the suffering of white people continues to matter more than the suffering of the poor illiterate or animist; the suffering of men matters more than that of women, children or the handicapped. The hierarchy of the suffering of human beings, as Fanon had already observed in *White Skin, Black Masks*, appears to be complicated, but remains simple: as people approach the

nerve centre of power (or whatever that is understood to mean), submission is automatic as well as the discriminatory form of the economic, political and social pyramid. Power spreads and radiates like the sun: all turn toward it and depend on it. In case of a ceremony, such as that of the crowning of Professor Devisch, the institutionalisation of discriminatory relationships will be strengthened.

Should the commemorations, enthronements or, as in the case of Professor Devisch, the honorary academic crowning of an individual, not serve as one of those moments when it is allowed – no, where it is the duty of whoever is being awarded the honorary doctorate – to try to recall Kimpa Vita's lesson and some of the above-mentioned persons: that of remembering that the privilege to speak loud and clear should be exercised mainly to protect the weak, the poorest of the poor, survivors of an annihilation that is still being denied and whose explanation or justification is still being updated? Such mutilation of a part of the human race (no matter how small) always ultimately leaves scars in the collective conscience of the survivors and orchestrators of the liquidation of respect for the principle of life. Paradoxically, a mentality that denies the principle of life, purportedly in defence of a sacrosanct 'freedom', has emerged. It is obvious that, in the final analysis, anything goes. And when institutionalised force or power enshrines this privilege, would it not incite those who side with the marginalised to fight to put an end to the practice of favouring only certain voices?

Such a mindset – denying, renouncing or refusing all responsibility for a crime whose magnitude has not yet been fathomed – gradually set in, uninterrupted, from the Slave Trade to Hiroshima/Nagasaki,<sup>3</sup> including the genocides, unrecognised and recognised, but which are fuelled, *inter alia*, by what was known as the Black Code.<sup>4</sup> This brings forcefully to mind Einstein's comment upon hearing about the bombing of Hiroshima: 'The release of atomic power has changed everything except our way of thinking.' The process leading to the fission of the atom started in earnest with the systematic fission of humanity between those who matter and those who do not, between the discoverers and the discovered, between the occupants of the land and the occupied, between the able-bodied and the handicapped, etc. In brief,

between those who matter and those who do not matter: how can we tell their own story and give an account of their own existence while denying their existence?<sup>5</sup> So, gradually and with increasing conviction, some people, particularly scholars, got into the comfortable habit of siding with the powerful who determine, explicitly or implicitly, who matters and who does not matter. For some, the habit is conscious and for others, it is unconscious.

In his address accepting the honorary doctorate, RD narrates, between the lines, the history of Congo from 1965 till now. For someone who is explicitly inspired by Franz Fanon and who is an expert in research on individual and social healers, this narrative is surprising because of the open praises heaped on the principal co-perpetrator of the destruction of the DRC. Could this be because RD sees in Mobutu a reflection of Léopold II? Did he see himself as a Belgian diplomat compelled by his position (as Kasa-Vubu in the independence ceremonies) not to say anything that could be viewed as high treason against the Congolese state?

### Fidelity to What Truth?

The tone of the narrative, if not the narrative itself, sometimes borders on apology. A case in point is his mention of 'President Mobutu's powerful call for the propagation of a sovereign Zairian identity'... Of course, he talks about those who, on 14 June 1971, were 'forcibly enlisted in the army... for civil insubordination and the crime of high treason against the Head of State' – the same crime with which Lumumba was charged on 30 June 1960. This passage is perhaps the most important in RD's entire speech for therein RD is stating in black and white the reasons why he became an anthropologist. This (sovereign? – a reference to Mobutu) dictatorial manifestation brings to an abrupt end the idea of settling permanently in Congo. 'I chose', he writes, 'to acquire in-depth knowledge of life here in Congo and truly relay it to people in Europe.'

However, given the way the conscious, the subconscious or unconscious link hands to mould human consciousness, we can rest assured that RD had not forgotten other events that heralded (for those who wanted to see and think) the intentions of Mobutu and the international clique in power in Congo: on 4 June 1969 students were massacred.

On 2 June 1966, on Pentecost Sunday, Jérôme Anany, Emmanuel Bamba, Evariste Kimba and Alexandre Mahamba were hanged. Pierre Mulele was also eliminated after the authorities had promised to grant him an amnesty in 1967. Would it be the memory of Mulele that prompted RD to decide, in the wake of 4 June 1971, to 'plunge, body and soul, into a daring adoption, [RD's emphasis] albeit temporarily, in a Bandundu village community'. (We cannot afford to ever stop remembering this date set aside for the commemoration of the martyrs of 4 June 1969.<sup>6</sup>) Only the author can relate this experience to us, but we can assume it must, at least, have dawned on him that it would take a great deal of courage to go and practise anthropology in a community that was suspected of being geographically situated in a region on the same wavelength with Pierre Mulele's native Kwilu.

In the history of Congo, as narrated by Professor Devisch, there is a rejection or betrayal of the objective that emerged from Lumumba's 'multi-splendoured' speech of 30 June 1960. Any averagely informed analyst of that event would have expected him to be faithful to that truth. Did Césaire himself, overwhelmed by that truth, not write *Une Saison au Congo*, thereby strongly saying yes, in the manner of a master of theatre arts, to a speech by Lumumba that is more unifying than the travesty of authentic nationalism committed by his executioner some years later? Mobutu exceeded all possible limits of betrayal. He out-heroded Herod in turning values upside down, thereby automatically consolidating the stranglehold of the West, the self-proclaimed custodian of universal values. In other words, he left no stone unturned to make sure the Congolese would no longer think in terms of truths that would spur on human beings to transcend themselves by building an immortal (see Badiou 1993).

### Should One be an Anthropologist, Psychiatrist, Historian, Philosopher or Simply a Human Being?

Congo's aimless wandering life can be traced as far back as the Slave Trade and double genocide (African peoples and Amerindians from the Caribbeans and from North America), but which is still systematically denied as if the system could not have gone wrong. The split in

humanity has also led to the fission of the organisation of human knowledge and self-knowledge. Science, human conscience, generally referred to nowadays as the human sciences, have split into disciplines that are unwittingly becoming cannibalistic. This fission *ad infinitum* of human knowledge was and remains one of the pillars of tolerance of the intolerable, acceptance of the idea that the suffering of certain parts of humanity is more acceptable than that of those who believe they ought to suffer less than the others.

Anthropology is not like art, science, love or politics. In the art of relating and practising human relations, poetry, for example, has existed for as long as human speech – long before the invention or discovery of anthropology. The latter disappeared, but poetry continues to flourish. Have we not arrived at a stage in the history of the human race where we should ask ourselves how we can put an end to this mentality that led to the fission of the human sciences? In spite of the efforts of those who have sought to decolonise anthropology, such an undertaking was, by definition, impossible. The split in knowledge production has not improved the knowledge of the human being. In place of what could have happened, we have witnessed a sharp increase in the human

sciences which, at the end of the day, are only an ersatz whose propagation enables a party of producers and reproducers to save face. What can one expect from anthropology other than that it should conserve what cannot but confine it to practices that make it tolerate the refusal to think?

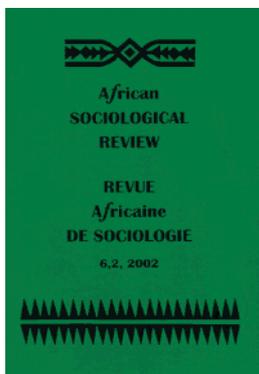
RD's exercise is a near-perfect illustration of how a ceremonial and quasi-state preoccupation prevented him from pursuing what he is most proud of: becoming a Congolese by marriage. In spite of his desire to be bold, he was apparently afraid of resolutely siding with those whose audacity had cost them their lives (see the names mentioned above). His boldness could have been of the kind that seeks to attain what is possible albeit unimaginable and unexpected.

#### Notes

1. See Alain Badiou, 1993, *L'Éthique, essai sur la conscience du mal*, Paris, Hatier.
2. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who, at the time, was returning to wield absolute power, had recruited and defended Skombi Inongo (one of the high priests of Mobutu's *authenticité*), which was a joke and insult to those who had paid with their lives for refusing to obey the orders of the dictator.
3. We are aware of the contribution of the Union minière du Haut-Katanga [Upper Katanga

Miners' Union] in supplying the uranium used to make the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Belgium, in turn, made great strides in the nuclear industry. The University of Kinshasa received a small nuclear reactor. However, to my knowledge, neither Congo nor Belgium, which boast of having a very active anti-nuclear movement, have ever bothered to ask what became of the Shinkolobwe miners of Katanga province and their families. Does this not call for a major healing process, to set the record straight in world history?

4. See Louis Sala-Molins, 1992, *Les misères des Lumières: sous la raison, l'outrage*, Paris, Robert Laffont.
5. In rereading this phrase, I realise that it echoes what Lewis Ricardo Gordon said at one of the meetings commemorating the tenth anniversary of the *Fabrica de Ideias* International Seminar of CEAO/Universidad Federal de Bahia, from 15 to 17 August 2007: he called it the Black's schizophrenia.
6. Among the known names of those who were eliminated are all those who are no more, as Zamenga Batukezanga writes in one of his poems: 'If the River Congo could speak', referring to the bodies of the people who were thrown, alive or dead, into the River Congo from helicopters. One day, we will have to record all the people they tried to dissolve in the sulphuric acid of Congolese memory.



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## African Sociological Review

*African Sociological Review* is a bi-annual publication of CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal. It welcomes articles and other academic communications from scholars in Africa and elsewhere regarding issues of African and general social analysis. The **Review** exists in the first instance to promote the extension of sociological and anthropological thought among scholars working in African. Relevant work from elsewhere will however also be considered. Contributions may be in English or French.

## What is an Anthropologist?

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The question of 'What is an anthropologist?' discussed by René Devisch in his address of the same name is an interesting one given that anthropology is the only fully comprehensive science of humankind. All the different disciplines are related to anthropology either directly or indirectly.

But in answer to Devisch's question the answer is that there are many kinds of anthropologists who study human cultures from diverse vantage points. What RD offers, however, is a specific description of the career of a postcolonial European cultural anthropologist who, in order to maintain the tradition of the colonial anthropologist in Africa, sees himself constrained to modify the traditional colonial paradigm vis-à-vis Africa. RD must first claim that his approach to his African research subjects belies 'the stereotypical image of the European by his daily and ordinary existence in the same village and his acceptance of the authority of persons of importance by his involvement in the building of his own «hut» and participation in hunts' etc.

RD also presents his liberal postcolonial credentials by arguing on behalf of the subjectivity of the ordinary villager (*gens d'en bas*) and his recommendation that Africans should now seek to place value in 'local and endogenous knowledge, those that were destroyed by colonialism and its aftermath'. He offers the examples of non-theoretical mathematics and geometry together with sacred sculptures, dance steps or drawings that village notables use for illustrative purposes. He also extends his recommendation to the mathematics embedded in the rhythms embedded in songs, etc. What we have here, it would seem, is but a slight modification of Lévi-Strauss's thesis.

This is all well and good but the problem with this postcolonial approach is that it suffers from the same criticisms that one could bring against the cultural ontology of the Western colonial enterprise with regard to African peoples, in that there is something essentialist about their beings and cultures. This would mean implicitly that technological development ought not

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to progress in the same way that it did and does in other cultures.

Technological progress and development in other cultures such as those of Western Europe, China and Japan especially took place under conditions where they were rapid moves to assimilate forms of knowledge, both technological and otherwise, the lack of which placed them at a disadvantage in the perpetual conflict between the world's peoples in terms of technologies and other aspects of culture.

Technological development in China, for example, did not take place in the context of a dogmatic reverence for indigenous modes of knowledge – of which China carries a strong and influential tradition – but by seeking to absorb in modified fashion more developed technologies and programmes of social organisation under the sociological rubric of Marxism. The cultural template for this modernisation drive was indigenised under a version of Marxism-Leninism that became known as Maoism. This was a purely indigenous experiment employing a modified version of a modern developmental programme. This experiment was carried out under conditions of autarky and quasi-isolation from the rest of the world.

But after the first experiment was tried and its results evaluated, China set out on a novel path of development with the principles of modern technology firmly in place. The result is that China, all things being equal, is seen as a serious rival by the West in all dimensions of modern technology and economic production.

This modernising approach is not what RD appears to be recommending. What seems evident is that Devisch's paradigm is quite traditionally Western with regard to Africa in that his implicit assumption is that there has been very little of technological worth that has been produced by Africa's peoples since the dawn of humanity.

It is an admirable recommendation that the study of anthropology should set out on an intercultural path in the context of the multi-versity. There is the recommendation here for an equalitarian rather than a hierarchical cultural relativism. But the relativism espoused by RD is one in which Europe is viewed as the fount of logocentrism while Africa is required to bask in its vaunted humour and innocent gaiety.

Perhaps most telling is Devisch's referencing to the postcolonial research he and others carried out in the Congo during the postcolonial years. In this context he sees fit to mention the research of a Peter Crossman that he refereed in a number of African universities – research that fell into the same sociology of knowledge of African intellectuals such as Mudimbe, Ela, Mazrui and others. Yet, on this list there is no mention of the two African intellectuals whose works are foundational for contemporary African anthropology: Cheikh Anta Diop and Paulin Hountondji.

The Western anthropological stance towards Africa has evolved into a postcolonial anthropology that first posits an African essence that is anchored to its cultural products implicitly understood as preferably unchanged. It is the colonialist thesis of a dynamic Western logocentrism and a static, even primordial Africa.

But this approach is easily shown to be historically inadequate. Any accurate historical and anthropological study of Africa constitutes what could serve as a normative template for the African anthropologist. The key points in a proper historical anthropological study of Africa would yield the following: (1) for whatever contingent reasons humanity in the guise of *Homo sapiens* first appeared in the environment of Africa; (2) human technology, necessarily dynamic, first developed in the Palaeolithic up to the Holocene and beyond. This technological dynamism eventually produced the world's first truly technological societies in places such as Ancient Egypt, Kush and other parts of Africa. Writing, mathematics and the scientific arts have

been bequeathed to the rest of the world on account of Africa's cultural dynamic. We note too in this regard Africa's copper, bronze and iron ages as proof of an ongoing technological dynamism.

The formulation of an adequate anthropology of Africa would seem to require a paradigm that models itself after the comprehensive approach already established by Cheikh Anta Diop (see his *Civilization or Barbarism; L'Afrique noire précoloniale*; and *L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire*). The traditional Western paradigm of selecting a little group here and there, then deciding to go and live among its members to better study them, ought not to be the preferred *métier* of the African anthropologist. It is the study of the interconnectedness of Africa's populations and their historically

dynamic cultures that should be answer to the question 'What is an anthropologist?'

Also lacking in Devisch's analysis is any recognition of Paulin Hountondji's thesis in *African Philosophy: Myth or Reality* that the anthropology of Africa should not be interpreted as reflective of some kind of unchanging African essence. A discussion of such would have put in focus the kind of anthropology proposed by Diop and Hountondji.

The contemporary African anthropologist therefore has before him a task qualitatively different from that of the Western anthropologist only because of the different historical experiences of both. On the one hand, the Western anthropologist historically has been the subject while the African has been the research object. What is required now are

African anthropological studies of the diverse cultures of the West. There is also the important task of transforming anthropology into a genuinely scientific study of human culture by raising questions about the conceptual apparatus and terminology of a still extant traditional Western physical anthropology. This branch of anthropology is still beholden to its patently normative language, which includes terms such as 'Caucasoid', 'Negroid', 'sub-Saharan' and so on. These same normative principles have been transferred to modern genomic anthropology with language such as 'sub-Saharan genes', 'Caucasoid genes', etc. What is evident is that Devisch's question of 'What is an anthropologist?' is an important one but one that must be carefully parsed before answering.

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## Letter to René Devisch

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### *Kata Nomon*<sup>1</sup>

- *voμος*, place of pasturage, herbage, habitation.
- *voμος*, what is a habitual practice, custom, of the laws of Gods, law.
- *κατα νομον*, according to custom, or law.

What a paradox is this discourse of the honorary degree that you received from the University of Kinshasa! It identifies with, and comments on an interrogation about the future of a discipline from its external conditions. These, while contributing to a definition of anthropology, mark also the relevance of a space that allows a healthy exercise that the discourse seems to disqualify. Supported by an orthodox academic career and a commanding authority in social sciences, in annexing the plausibility of a plea between North-South radical politics of solidarity and the demands of a scientific practice, does not the discourse confuse domains? At the least, these problems should be distinguished. In any case, it muddles competing duties and privileges of dissimilar fellowships. But, should we suppose and admit the pertinence of an ethical generosity, and possibly its efficient administration, does it matter whether the discourse is validated by the

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degree of credibility of the scholar, of the humanitarian, or both? Let me continue with the supposition. If we accept this as perhaps a legitimate way of engaging the apparently divergent responsibilities of the same person, can the valuation of interacting credibilities ignore the pillars that support them? These are two almost incomparable powers: on one side, the authority of a scientific practice issued forth from the empirical verifiability of its explanation; and, on the other side, the authority of a moral commitment that is warranted by a spirit of finality.

In its own right, you say, the discourse manifests a language you inhabit. Translating its disconnecting past, it would signify its own purpose for tomorrow's anthropology. Awareness and act of speaking, it anticipates something in your claim for instituting a beyond of histories and geographies, cultures and their idioms. On that account, depending on viewpoints, its expression would be, through and through, a metaphor and a

metonymy. Within such an order, you are right, fascination may well be the other name of anthropology, for instance; and, a matter of vision, nothing, absolutely nothing, would prevent anyone who masters its etiquette, from interchanging the designation of "Kwango Yitaanda villages" with your concept of an "*espace-de-bord intercivilisationnel*." From an ordinary understanding of figures, this system will be allowing a word to be used for something it does not denote. In the same manner, the signifier of one word could apply, without consequence, to another thing in virtue of their association. How could such a language correspond to the task of being an "inter-memory space" between "yesterday and tomorrow's societies" without being constraining as are those it would bypass?

In all, and for sure, a well-defended argument can, in principle, provide for the best of outcomes; but, it cannot ever guarantee its truth, since each one of its premises might be problematic.

Let us "walk" together while reflecting on the common idioms we use in order to clarify both what brings us together, and what may explain divergences on ways of interpreting crucial issues in ethics for

intercultural cooperation. Here is a metaphor. A postulant to the Benedictine life begins the formation period by relearning how to walk; and, progressively, how to make the body a site of *The Rule*. The requisite of such a conversion does not erase dissimilarities of individual steps. Yet, and assuredly, the poetics of an individual's effort, in according one's singularity to the horizon of an ideal, testifies to diverse procedures, somehow conflictual. As in the case of any discipleship, the effort means a double inscription for any difference in kind: vertically, to become a process of engraving oneself in the spirit aimed at by the letter; horizontally, to identify with the process through which one can invent a self from a common vernacular issued forth by this very letter. In this ascetic train, the basic idea of diversity coincides with the notion of a limit to be surpassed. An elsewhere of harmonization echoes this perpetually recommenced inscription in negotiations about the truth of an imperative letter and its symbolic figurations in time, and in the patience of the indefinite exegesis it weaves.

Inspired by his Catholic background, Louis Althusser adapted this very course into a Marxist grid in order to get the drift of the overtaking tension between the requisition of a language, the petitioning of an ideology, and the construction of a history; in sum, the transformation of social totalities. Attentive students of Jacques Lacan would agree that it is in, and from a deviation that, after de Saussure's lesson, one qualifies procedures of a *parole* actuating a *langue*; precisely, the *parole* as the concrete actualization of the abstraction that is the *langue*. By the same mode, one describes the structuring of a subject in the intersubjective space of a language; in fact, in an ever-changing abstract, a conventional social institution.

Now, René, allow me to read your "walk," your Kinshasa discourse, from the particularity of my own steps, but within the cultural language we are supposed to share. My steps are my own steps, as yours are yours, but within a conventional system we are supposed to share. It is ours without being totally ours. They are possibly still marked by demands of a cloister, whatever it may be, and the genealogy of its requirements about how, in the diversity of our personal

differences, to disentangle the inside and the outside of anthropology, the word and the concept.

#### *Legère*

- *Practice: to read.*
  - (a) to bring together, observe, survey, catch up.
  - (b) to pick out, extract, elect, select, to find.
  - (c) recite.
- *Signs: the letter.*
- *Activity: to perceive (lectio)*
- *Function: reading and understanding the given.*

I am biased in favor of the fundamental spirit of your discourse. Its testimony sustains its drive from a personal whole unfolding a personal sense of duty to human solidarity, while maintaining faith in the primacy of a scientific inquiry. But, I am equally partial in my surmise of the superiority of scientific explanation over unscientific constructions, especially those decided in politics of desire.

For more than three months, your affirmations have accompanied me over three continents. Counter-text and pretext, at the same time, they served as an argument, I mean a series of reasons for an attentive skepticism in a number of public stations that I was transforming into obligations for meditation.

Three entries, three lines of questions. Your address implicates them. Seeing them from other angles, they clearly represent the ambiguity of interculturality by the way they have been, for me, competing meanings of the lowest, and of the highest degree in "believing."

1. a. How to face questions on thinking globally from cultural hypotheses that intend to revisit foundational concepts in today's practice of social sciences?
  - b. Early October 2007 – "Re-contextualizing Self/Other Issues. Toward a 'Humanics' in Africa," a Joint Symposium: Makerere University (Uganda), Kyoto University, and Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.
2. a. How to test, evaluate and apply explanations (scientific and

unscientific) in conjunction with sociopolitical arguments of "desire."

b. Early December 2007 – Bogota (Colombia), an academic conversation for "Una ropuesta de Maestria en Interculturalidad." Conceived by a group of professors, the colloquium's objective was to debate on interculturality in the education of teachers; in sum, to define pedagogy.

3. How to appraise intercultural agendas from a good usage of ethical and scientific agreements and disagreements:

a. Mid-December 2007, Durban (South Africa), CODESRIA Annual Social Sciences Campus, on Contemporary African Cultural Productions. Confirming individual research to CODESRIA's principles, the seminar's aim was to authenticate perspectives within scientifically valid boundaries.

b. Early February 2008, Vancouver (Canada), Africa Awareness Conference on Hope, Innovation, Vision: The Past, Present and Future of Agency in Africa.

Here, one faces a classical attitude in politics against prejudiced representations of Africa, a student's organization opposes a one-week celebration.

Consequently, three posts, three different engagements, three types of directions. They are exemplary by their explicit purpose. They are significant by the way they make interculturality one with extended academic or scientific institutions, objects of desire and intended possession. In such a command, as you seem to suggest in your intervention, does interculturality correspond to an extrinsic call in cultural differentiation, and could it be said to relate primarily to an intrinsic structure of its reality?

Arole (expert, convener, keynote speaker) has determined a function that is a question: how to walk with "seers," to be a companion of the road, and remain a voice which, within the liberty of a critical indifference, can rate the improbability, or the perils of what may not have a precedent in the politics of knowledge, vis-à-vis the respectability of the politics of cultural rights; and, at the same time, inhabit the very quest as it formulates a desire for a more ethical order?

Within specific frameworks profiling rules that would promote "interculturality," I came to focus on propositions, and a few precautions in handling them. Between empirical and allegorical lines, in order to reconceive the "interculturality" concept, it was easy to suggest in, and against plays of perspectives, questions on how to grasp your word, formulate its volume, and its connections to other standpoints in theories of difference. A first precaution was, point of personal integrity, the usefulness of a detachment from Aquinas' principle according to which "the primary object of faith is not a proposition but the reality it designates." A reflection testing itself from a culturally religious background can accommodate several sorts of interacting lines. In my disposition, there is no disapproval and no rejection of the definition of faith as a belief in doctrines of religion and observance of obligations it entails. On the other hand, faith has been assented for what conveys trust, in confidence and reliance. In this sense, faith analogizes Herbert Feigl's what is not always perceptible, what can be valued from a *justificatio cognitionis*, the coherence of propositions; or, easier to handle, from the *justificatio actionis*, through commonsense criteria of efficiency and morality. The cause of a scientist would belong to the same order of faith as a sound discourse of political allegiance within a democratic tradition.

A second methodological precaution concerned a deliberate prudence, about the very process of conceiving an intercultural discourse as a matter of faith. In a first approximation, I have been acknowledging it from an equation that integrates a subject and a statement about transactions marked by the value of two prefixes *inter-* and *trans-*. The first actualizes two types of ideas, that of incorporation, or integration (*inter-* as "amid," "between" or "among"); and that of mutuality, or reciprocity (*inter-* as "correlation" or "cooperation"). This prefix, of a Latin origin, fully specifies its value when situated vis-à-vis proximates such as *trans-*, whose semantic field is dominated by the idea of motion, from one place to another. Its denotation, from Latin to today's usages, include significations of "over," "across," "through and through," "beyond."

Finally, here I am now reading a silence as something, and this would indicate

meanings such as "between," "betwixt," and, indeed, "over." From this angle, one can guess some of the reasons of excitement in "inventing," with the support of J. Allary, your Africanist library within the Kimwenza Scholasticate. In fact, you would like a challenge to the normative Colonial Library. For the Canisius linguistic minority you were, to access the African experience through empirical studies of ethnographers, Lilyan Kesteloot's thematization of the Négritude literature, and appraise the 1960s' speculative debate on African philosophy, meant, also and possibly to front a startling "ethnic vindication": "*Flandria nostra*," strange, is it not? I am borrowing the expression, and its value in cultural shock from Jan Vansina's *Living with Africa* (University of Wisconsin Press 1994). Vansina uses it in introducing his return to Leuven, precisely to your Faculty. And, here, I am diverting the design, and imagining the moment you discovered the overwhelming Flemish contribution to the Central African knowledge. Since the mid-1960s, the successive bibliographies of "African" philosophy by the indefatigable Alfons J. Smet have made this fact even more visible.

In 1982, with the accent of bad faith that always masks all good intentions, I decided to correct a bit the excessive Flemish-Germanic presence and counterbalance its scale by publishing in Paris (France) a *Répertoire chronologique des oeuvres de langue française (Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture 9/56: 68-73)*. Twenty years later, reflecting on the question of periodizing themes in philosophy, I felt the need for a concept that could signify the configuration within which to think and rethink new conditions of possibility for an African practice of philosophy. The effect of such a viewpoint may or may not correspond to what could be expected in teaching the history of ideas, but would surely make a difference in the perspective that my friend Lucien Braun, the Strasbourg philosopher, had opened during this period with his massive treatise on a history of histories of philosophy. Thus, a question of genealogy, and a question about the idea of a German crisis of African philosophy, that came out in a personal testimony. My confession was released simultaneously by *Quest* (XIX, 1-2) in Leiden, Holland; and *Africa e Mediterraneo* (2005) in Rome, Italy.

The expression was inspired by a book of Claude Digeon on "*La Crise allemande de la pensée française*" that analyzed a fin-de-siècle cultural phenomenon in Franco-German relations.

"A German crisis of African philosophy," why German? Back to your initiative. Solid and omnipresent, the Flemish and Germanic presence was there in your library. You had the references to Frobenius, the successful *Muntu* of Janheinz Jahn. The original German was issued in 1958; the English version translated in 1960 had ten reprintings, that same year. Its sources and scope test a refusal of the anthropological task for exoticism.

There is, also in the picture, Senghor's curious intervention on "Négritude and Germanity." In time, you came to understand, I guess, that the history of Central African anthropology is not detachable from a Herderian conception of philosophy. First, ethnographic programs for explanation through questionnaires (art, custom, language, law, religion etc.) have been transcribing faithfully a Herderian grid. Secondly, despite a Freemason intervention in the Congo at the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial cultural "impression" is constructed by two extreme, but complementary axes: to accommodate assimilation (the French), or to adjust separation (the British) and, in between, the Belgians. Missionizing and ethnographic mapping articulate the same basic principles in social engineering determined by a convergence idea. Thirdly, by the 1920s, diffusionist hypotheses from the Vienna school of W. Schmidt, with *Anthropos* for scholarly debates, inform ethnographic research everywhere in the world. A man of the cloth, Schmidt, moreover, is directing one of the most ambitious projects to date on "*Ursprung der Gottesidee*."

In brief, and in clear, your interrogations are of a perspective. Is it excessive to frame them within the configuration that devises both your cultural identity, your vocation, and the duty you are conceiving for yourself?

- Between British and French imperial theories, the Germanic-style practicality in Flemish publications of the "colonial sciences," from what became the Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen.

- Within and over trendy schools, historicist versus functionalist, you can observe the leadership in social sciences and in comparative linguistics, and notice the Tervuren team's role in the reconstruction of the proto-Bantu.
- Finally, you cannot miss the unmistakable charisma of some individuals in the field of your new cultural "devotion": a Hulstaert, a Tempels, a Van Bulck, and a Van Wing, for instance.

Anyway the Congolese popular imagination has turned the term "Flemish" into an onomastic generality: Flemish incorporates Belgian.

Complexity of a silence. Recognition of your ethnicity; and, at the same time, extreme prudence in avoiding the unscientific notion of "race" so well-manipulated by cultural militants and theorists of essentialist doctrines.

To the essentially integrative consideration of *inter-*, the amid and the betwixt, *trans-* adds or opposes, depending on one's reading, the idea of a going beyond, what expresses a transcendence. At this level, again from the original Latin meaning, the English prefixes, prepositions in Latin, initiate a dynamic that translates and reflects the challenging, and basically perverse ideal of our concrete relations with other people. In the practice of our ordinary language, the *inter-* and the *trans-* plus *culturality* echo each other. Fundamentally, that is the theme of the Kinshasa address. To any intercultural argument (convenience and correlation between words, or between statements) corresponds another one, always latent and always problematic, that of a position for going beyond, affirming the motion, or negating it, a trans-cultural argument. Referring to Jean Wahl, Jean-Paul Sartre could, in *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press 1956), in order to designate the original sin (– what is signified in our always antagonistic human relations – any *ego* facing its *alter* as a subject, or that other perceived object, faces her or him in a perpetually reversible tension –), elicit its character by cracking the very concept of transcendence.

... we are – in relation to the Other – sometimes in a state of *trans-descendence* (when we apprehend him as an object and integrate him

with the world), and sometimes in a state of *trans-ascendence* (when we experience him as a transcendence which transcends us). But neither of these two states is sufficient in itself, and we shall never place ourselves concretely on a plane of equality; that is on the plane where the recognition of the Other's freedom would involve the Other's recognition of our freedom (Sartre 1956: 529).

Now, let me add a third precaution, a reference to my agreement with points from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. To the acknowledgement of an inapprehensibility of the *alter*, there is, at least, one necessity, contraposing the instability of any ego-identity as what induces its transcendence through the forces of permanence and change. One of the forces is a major "extasis": any consciousness, in affirming itself, cannot negate the evidence of its being-for-others. In this manner, we agree to conceive the intersubjective space of correlations between *ego* and *alter* as a locus in which *inter-* and *trans-*culturality structure their quivering *being-with* within a paradoxical context: the we subject or object of any discourse of cooperation, or of antagonism, being, fundamentally, a sociologization of an ego's awareness. In other words, we must give thought to notions of "doing" and "having," that means to desire, since as Sartre puts it well: "desire is the being of human reality." This is a question of method and a question of ethics: how does one face this issue without "racializing" the interrogation? Operating by implication, do we promote a parenthesis prone to fallacies within the discourse on the intersubjective space? Two perspectives to consider from choices I would make – circumventing, or opening clear the parenthesis: on the one hand, to consider an argument on whose "desire" is being alienated or recognized, and according to which principles; on the other, implication being by definition a weak procedure, to estimate if we mind the content of the parenthesis in the manner we handle the functions of language in relation to laws of evidence?

Concurring, one can contemplate the claim about an "*espace-bordure partageable*" from the prudence of the three noted precautions. Is not this learned expression, the equivalent of Husserl's *Lebenswelt*? In any case, a fabulous concept in what it allows, a

fantastic concept by what it displays. In *The Prose of the World* (Northwestern University Press 1973), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the reflectors you invoke, has the following declaration in a chapter on the principle of a "dialogue and the perception of the Other." The reference has served my reading, in both an overestimation and underestimation, of your "*espace-bordure*."

Right, at the beginning, the fact of a meeting, and a concern, Merleau-Ponty writes. First step, the discovery of:

A singular existence, *between* I who think and that body, or rather near me, by my side. The other's body is a kind of replica of myself, a wandering double which haunts my surroundings more than it appears in them. The other's body is the unexpected response I get from elsewhere, as if by a miracle things began to tell my thoughts, or as though they would be thinking and speaking always for me, since they are things and I am myself (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 134).

After this quotation, a number of things could be used to sanction my use of the adjectives "fabulous" and "fantastic." They signify a bending into legends. One imagines an extension of the usual into the unbelievable, in lexical terms. But it is the basic ordinary that stands there, visible, qualifiable by what it reveals. Three remarks: there is, first, the evidence of a body in its unexpectedness, the senses; second, there is the fact of an elsewhere, that is a locus of one's revelation, that of being in a context; finally, there is the oddity of a process affirming shifts and reversals that leads to a metaphor about the thinking activity: *one invents what invents her, him*. And, a second step, the text continues:

The other, in my eyes, is thus always on the margin of what I see and hear, he is this side of me, he is beside or behind me, but he is not in that place which my look flattens and empties of any "interior." Every other is a self like myself. He is like that double which the sick man feels always at his side, who resembles him like a brother, upon whom he could never fix without making him disappear, and who is visibly only the outside prolongation of himself, since a little attention suffices to extinguish him. (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 134).

Three other remarks, essential for what interculturality represents. First, the power of the thinking subject, a thinking machine, identified in the singularity of a perception. Thus, comes to mind, from Jean-Paul Sartre's diaries: "I think with my eyes." Indeed, an excellent rendering of Descartes' *videre videor* in *Meditations Two*. The *Cogito* is a machine, quasi literally, that is very Cartesian. Secondly, marginality is issued from the limits of one's self-apprehension; and, thematized, it would state the visibility of the other's otherness. Thirdly, perception as an acting *Verstehen* (to know, and understand) actualizes the Husserlian *Lebenswelt*, by what it brings about, the gift of life. This third step synthesizes wonderfully a quasi mystical spirit. One thinks of David Hume's declaration that the pretense of any essentially permanent self-identity are a fiction; and one accesses this fiction with a definite, sweeping belief about how real such a reason is, in derivation.

Myself and the other are like two nearly concentric circles which can be distinguished only by a slight and mysterious slippage. This alliance is perhaps what will enable us to understand the relation to the other that is inconceivable if I try to approach him directly, like a sheer cliff.

Nevertheless, the other is not I and on that account differences must arise. I make the other in my own image, but how *can there be for me an image of myself?* (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 134).

Is this the emigration of the *Cogito* into the other's otherness? In an exalting procedure, the madness of solipsism has been erased. As a matter of fact, a number of things are declared by this implicated motion. And your Kinshasa discourse assumes them: the negation of the verifiability criterion, the work on the self-affirmation of *Verstehen*, as in Heidegger's perspective, should now proceed from an interaction of ontology and hermeneutics. In addition, your Kinshasa discourse assumes an epistemology activating its process in the Acteon complex (alimentary, or military metaphors and metonymies of wars and conquests, violation and destruction), against this poetics of force, and after Gaston Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty advances figures which, in Romance languages, are charged by verbs (e.g. Italian, *cognoscere*; French, *connaître*; Spanish,

*conocer*, etc.) expressing the knowing process as a coming together to life. You substantiate this line in the chapter on the Khita fertility cult of your *Weaving the Threads of Life* (University of Chicago Press 1993). Your sentiments echo those of Merleau-Ponty, such as this one.

... Am I not, by myself, coextensive with everything I can see, hear, understand, or feign? How could there be an outside view upon this totality which I am? From where could it be had? Yet that is just what happens when the other appears to me. To the infinity that was me something else still adds itself; a sprout shoots forth, I grow; I give birth, this other is made from my flesh, and blood and yet is no longer me. How is that possible? How can the *cogito* emigrate beyond me, since it is me? (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 134).

The time of this brief passage in the life of Merleau-Ponty – the late 1940s and early 1950s, Claude Lefort tells us in his preface to *The Prose of the World* – corresponds to that of a step in your intelligence of the world around you. In the mid-1960s, in Kinshasa, at Canisius Institute, you can ascribe principles to a real confusion, your galaxy and its prose. Did you really distinguish that clearly what, now, you can name so distinctly?

- a. the world of a political generation, was exploring the idea of sovereignty, in theory and in practice, with a Mabika Kalanda's "mental decolonization," Fanon's politics, Camara Laye and Sembene Ousmane, the "Black Orpheus" effect;
- b. the world of concepts, with its buzzing interrogations, was opening quarrels with the idea of regional ontology (Bachelard), Bantu ontology (Tempels, Kagame, etc.), conversing in rapports with militant symbols of theories of alterity (Négritude, Black personality etc.);
- c. the world of systems, around an emblem (– Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*, dedicated to Maurice Merleau-Ponty –), in an exponential dialogue between phenomenology and structuralism, was raising, and explaining new challenges about the credibility of Natural Law, the meaning of history, the validity of a dialectical reason.

For sure, you knew about the explosion of the notion of literature. Like most of us, you could not measure the full impact of its happening. The epoch was also being marked by an apparently minor exercise in words. The sacred proclamation, *In principio erat verbum*, had been expanded in new demands. Did the analogous expression, *in the beginning was incorporation*, desacralize an approach to the problem signified by the correlation between three symbolic notions (– ἀρχή, *principium*, "genesis"; λογος *verbum*, "the word"; θεος *Deus*, "God" –), and the Absolute they represent?

Disciplines were to focus on the issue. Psychoanalytical practice, in time (– as a matter of fact, your time, today), has proved, pragmatically, the precise signification of the "incorporation" phrase. In any context, interpersonal, intercultural, even when an alienation is highly visible, convincing work has been demonstrating that, incorporation, more prevalent than separation, is a marker in the process that comprises identification, integration, occasional falling outs.

In actuality, the passage from Merleau-Ponty qualifies the question, and significantly. It may explain also the way I am trying to treat your text. We are speaking about an ordinary way of relating to anyone, and anything, in their capacity of having an infinite number of appearances. In the abstract, three positions, three propositions from what you were reading in the early 1960s. (a) We do not reduce being to phenomenon, (b) we believe that the being of consciousness is not identical with the object it perceives, (c) from the preceding, we affirm also that the being of the perceived is not identical with its appearances.

Back to your speech and its echoes. A focus, you insist upon: interpersonal relation, sensoriality, a living body. Thus, on 4 April 2007, addressing your Kinshasa audience, the relation of your incorporation into a discipline was an account of constructed physical maps. Each, a narrative in its own right, was reflecting or deflecting other diagrams that you could date, their lines transcribing your stories. Kimwenza, not far away from the place where you are making your speech, did let you, you say, invent new outlines. More than simple added dots, in 1968, creating a library of Africanist

literature in a Scholasticate was an event. Possibly, more so for you than for anyone else. Basking in it while learning Kikongo, studying Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon, was to magnify its signification, and could not but transform it into the experience of a consciousness vis-à-vis the massivity of the Colonial Library.

And now, back to Merleau-Ponty's passage on interconnection.

This is a puzzlingly complex passage in three tempos. The first, an expressive interrogation, recites in the positive an ancient line that situates the subject in a sphere of belonging, depicted from the negative exteriority of the plurality of other people. The succession of verbs repeats the intellectual sequence of Psalm 113: (...) *oculos habent et non vident; aures habent, et non audiunt*, etc. The second movement, against the reef of solipsism, posits the subject's reality in the world as being with another person, with other persons. Finally, the concluding two questions are there to ground the subject, its fragmented self in its relation to others, to the world. To give birth, a gift of life, and a gift of knowing.

This quotation asserts the priority of life over the *ego* of the *Cogito*, pointing to what is the condition or, more exactly that "gesture which makes the universal out of singulars and meaning out of our life." In fact, a unique genesis germinates when anyone who is "the world to himself," and "the world to the social," that you refer to by the concept of a "universal human," this is an uncertain one for a dynamics. The measure you brought to your listener, and then to your reader, magnified throughout the confession of symbols and of a fidelity assuming ruptures, illumines the complexity of a love story through a definition of interest. In the "*Espace-bordure*," you write: "we are here to bring about a new social reality." The history of a life can be thematized from discontinuities that stipulate a continuous search in meaning, you show: emotional co-implication, mutual education, marriage or therapy.

The explicit dwells also on the unsaid. Stations of silence, and indirect hints, serve well your way of appreciation in the *Yaka land a nation*, real and imaginary. You have become a master translator and etymologist. "*Thunaha muyidika maambu*" equals the French "*connaissance*," you note. And you insist that

*popular etymology* means "to be born together." It is Gaston Bachelard's favorite, and acquiescingly your Latin *cum-nasci*.

Indeed, *popular* is to be understood as *unscientific*. Yet, we can state that the conceptual value is a highly sensible derivation from the homonymy of the roots of the two verbs. Etymologists of Indo-European languages posit the reconstructed *g'enY* as the origin of both (1) *nôscô* (ancient *gnôscô*) "I begin to learn," and (2) *nâscor* (ancient *gnâscor*) "I am born." This is to say that the value we are contemplating witnesses to a very consequential and skilled extrapolation. It calls to mind – shall we suggest? – a definition of the semantic inference.

From dictionaries:

**extrapolate** (ĭk-străp'ə-lăt') v. –**lated**, –**(lat'ing, -lates**. ĭk-străp'Y-lăt') v. –**I**

–**tr.** 1. To infer or estimate by extending or projecting known information. 2. *Mathematics*. To estimate (a value of a variable outside a known range) from values within a known range by assuming that the estimated value follows logically from the known values. –**intr.** To engage in the process of extrapolating.

You are right. "*Popular*" is the technical term for the type of etymology you are referring to. It is *unscientific*, they say. *Nascientia*, from the homonymia means "what comes to life, and is known as such."

What you say, and often imply, are neutral and softening events and reinstitutes the past in a moderate context. Indeed, the idea of a missionary vocation does not necessarily belong to colonial motivations; the anthropologist's manner of identifying with a culture might likewise be a manner of atoning for the unspeakable mistakes of his predecessors; and, equally, the planetary vision in solidarity must also have its conditions of probability elsewhere than in the generosity of a farmer's well-educated boy. The stories presume successive challenges in the measure of a man. They construct hypotheses for interpreting passages. Thus, from a Franco-Belgian frontier to the Canisius Institute of Kimwenza in the Congo; from an initiation into anthropology to its practice in Yitaanda, Kwango; and, then a career at the University of Leuven, now accompanied by a psychoanalytical

practice. A self affects discontinuities, legitimates ways of becoming, of reflecting maneuvers relating to others, and so on. Exemplarity of R.D. Laing's concept of a divided-self that you frame rigorously: a self in, and out of, his own processes for temporalizing itself; in, and out, of its modalities of reflecting on its reflected being and apprehending its existence as what its own stories reveal, a being for other people. Each one of these marks a rite, instituting itself in its own procedures, thus instructing them. As a matter of fact, they are statements of an ontological insecurity, as well as an appropriation of something, a way of investing spaces in the time of the world you project from a conceptuality. Possibly, interculturality. The obvious seems that they are given to us in a path of voices erupting from a series of genitives, in attachment, or in deviation. *Ainsi, amor patris, amor patriae*. And, then, you say: "one is not born an anthropologist, but..." A conjunction problematizes the entry to an existentialist tenet entailing a possible doubt on its completion: "... one becomes one."

In the process, I may annotate the fringy of the manner you fuse the logic of scientific practice with that of the political, that of a belief; and in the way of doing so, interrogate the moral signification of the vocation you are invoking by erasing the Pascalian distinction between the *esprit de géométrie* and the *esprit de finesse*. But do you really efface it?

Reading your "Qu'est-ce qu'un anthropologue?" has been like reading a lesson from a witness.

Three tasks imposed themselves upon me, three ways for accessing your testimony. First, to consider the "making of an anthropologist," to refer to Claude Lévi-Strauss's canonical chapter of *Tristes Tropiques*: that is a narrative disclosing step-by-step the practice of a discipline, its origin and its meaning. In the ordinariness of the Greek etymology, *άνθρωπου* (*anthropou*, human being), and *λογος* (*logos*), thus a genitive. what is given tests itself against what it formalizes. Secondly, to design what is in presence: two values are intimately linked. Subjective, the discourse of a subject qualifying himself and justifying the qualification throughout an acting out represented in a statement about a commitment. There is also an objective value, a *logos*, word and meaning, that

expresses an abstraction, the discourse that contains the speaker. The awkwardness of any approximation of the genitive is there, in the form, sign and proof of the genitive as its grounds. Does its rendering qualify an agreement with a classical model that it calls to mind, the  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$   $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ , the *amor Dei* paradigm in Latin, with all its possible variations? Thirdly, to observe the celebration of the Yaka poetics of life asserting its will to an essence, which strikes me as the ability "to admit others into (a) deepest singularity," to use Merleau-Ponty. One sees a horizon, he insists, the horizon of humanity, a style of being human that makes *Einfühlung* possible; and, indeed, this horizon, he adds, is humanity, *Mitmenscheit*, as an extensional concept and as a historic reality.

#### *Meditari*

- *Practice: to ruminate.*
  - (a) to act, reflect upon, muse, consider, meditate upon
  - (b) to design, intend, purpose
  - (c) transf.: to meditate, study, exercise
- *Sign: the source.*
- *Activity: to remember.*
- *Function: approaching and framing orders of significations.*

*Reprendre* your discourse as if it were someone else, situate myself in its own movement in order to approximate a possible meaning of what could be the visage of tomorrow's anthropologist. It is a meditation on your meditation, your covenant with a mandate.

Reflecting on a vocation, Devisch summons up the conditions of its possibility. To locate traces and paths in the very act of remembering what could bring to light, and contextualize both their origin and explanation. Does not the process reactualize another one, foundational, Descartes "*at certe videre videor*," of the *Second Meditation* in which the passive charges its own active form, and brings to light the best signs of a reflection meditating on itself: and it seems that I perceive, I see that I perceive, I see that I am seeing. The habitual translation "I think that I see" justifies Jean-Paul Sartre's often quoted "I think

with my eyes." Sartre's formula somehow ruins Descartes' expression in which *videor* exposes the *cogito*, and *videre* stands for the Husserlian *cogitatum*. In the economy of arranging a reconvened space, Devisch's perception of himself brings together what, on 4 April 2007, in an explanatory way, he intended to suggest to the audience. What conflux to expect from exerting silent arguments about cultural paradoxes in the postcolonial history of a Belgian Congo? The demarcation that would singularize a this against a that, serves the efficiency of disjunctions and conjunctions in real life. They should be apprehended in the polysemic value of their function. An overemphasis of a disjunction often serves the cause of the discourse, as an invitation to a transcendence of opposites. As in the most accented binarisms, in the opposition Africa or the West, the disjunction can be, as an intellectual exercise, turned into a hypothetical conjunction that tests also implications for a logical task. Did Devisch mean such a freewheeling game à propos of his discourse? In the second part of his intervention, and quite convincingly in its conclusive remarks, he emphatically charges the two logical operations with the meaning of his own life and its cultural symbols. As markers, they cannot be detached from the puff of gratuitous, and not so gratuitous intellectual games. The meditation signifies an order that emerges out of the ordinary intersection it represents: speech within its own language, speech on its own form and meaning, it is a *parole* commenting on its own performance within a discipline. To use an expression from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Devisch's meditation stylizes a perception of his own act.

Let me use the Latin *meditari*, and designate an activity that witnesses to a distance between this reflection and underlayers of Devisch's meditation. The etymological organization of *meditari* would clarify the "question," the idea of Devisch's intervention. A question, in its own vicissitude – it sets out "a request" addressed to someone, to oneself, an interrogation pressing out an exigency; "a recognition of a lack," the fact of "a partial knowledge" seeking "a resolution" – and enduring its own indecisiveness. *Meditari*, a deponent, has a passive form with an active meaning. It expresses a

relation between a me and a me in a context, acting and acted upon subject; a Devisch structuring himself as "the question" of the meditation I am recomposing from its plural backgrounds.

Taken for granted, the complexity of the conceptual field of *meditari* and its semantic transferences in translation rely on subtle irregularities of Latin deponents. The economy of forms does not exist really any longer in our language, that of meanings still does; and, basically, accorded to the etymological value of the word.

From a Latin Grammar, the rules of exception are:

- (a) deponents have a present participle (*meditans*), which actualizes an active value in *form* and *meaning*;
- (b) deponents have a perfect *active* participle (*meditatus*), whereas other verbs have only a perfect *passive* participle;
- (c) deponents have *both*, a future *active* and a future *passive* participle, in *form* and in *meaning* (*meditaturus*).

Let us focus on the verb, then assent its function, and contextualize what it allows in Devisch's meditation.

One, *meditor*, formally an iterative of another verb, *medeor*, which translates the idea of "exercising," and "healing"; and from the stem *med-*, there is the derived *medicus*, "doctor"; and also related: *medicari*, *medicamentum*. The series "exercise" signifies an acting on one's mind and body. It affirms also in its own signified an effect, "to heal." Thus, to meditate as a healing procedure.

Dynamics of two values since the classical period, in Cicero's language, for instance: (a) *meditari*, used in the physical sense, is the synonym of *exercere*, "to exercise physically"; it indicates a correlation between medical practice and gymnastics; (b) *meditari*, used in the domain of spiritual and intellectual activities, attestations in Cicero's texts, is the synonym of *cogitare*, "to think."

Two, Emile Benveniste insists, in *Indo-European Language and Society* (University of Miami Press 1973), on translating the Greek equivalent, μέδομαι by "to take care of," noting that "the present active is hardly attested."

This angle of the conceptual field summarizes the essence of a *lectio divina* in which the subject submits to an inspiration and the inspiration to the subject. It signals also the main articulation of *The Spiritual Exercises* of Iñigo of Loyola, including the points of meditation structuring the manual. A glaring example of its visibility in Devisch's argumentation could be the coherence of the seminar on the body he has been directing at Leuven Universiteit.

Three, *Meditor*, "to consider and to think," "to reflect and design," attests to transferred values that essentially engage one's mind. The spiritual activity does not detach itself from the senses, thus an exercise in contemplation, even in these days of ours, suggests the two ancient lines: in the active, "to have an intention, a purpose, an object of study"; in the passive, "to access a spiritual axis of communion."

In reflecting on Devisch's intervention, and meditating on his mode of reflecting on his object, one may choose to valorize competing keys to master the conflicts of interpretation: the fluidity of cultural borders, or the rigor of logical analysis. Emphasizing the first in the name of surpassing confrontations, and opposing it in supposing the latter as strictly proper to a scientific practice, any option seems to weaken what Devisch advances à propos interconnections between three areas: first, anthropology and interculturality; second, regional practices; and, third, the intercultural "poly-logos." An overestimation of logical operations may confuse demands and criteria for evaluating explanations. À propos social sciences, the main entries to the issue constitute a basic code for any inquiry: first, a question of a critical attitude, an estimation scientific or unscientific? Second, a question about an explanation: relevant or prejudice? Third, a fact: the scientific is social. And this means something simple: a critical attitude is not the preserve of the scientist since, in theory, anyone can observe phenomena, construct a reasonable explanation from the observation; that is, in principle, infer a hypothesis which is relevant, testable and exploitable. It is also a fact, and Devisch's critique of privileges of rationality correctly notes that a relevant hypothesis may not be testable, and another hypothesis could lack a capacity for applicability. At any rate, who could assure that, despite their relevance, most

arguments on interculturality are not *ad hoc* hypotheses?

Would a focus on the genitive that signifies anthropology be an underestimation of the word anthropology as a statement and a paradigm? Let me sum up the case, rephrase my bias about Devisch's vision, and substantiate a perception.

Thus, the genitive:

- In words (substantives and adjectives) that express attitudes (physical or spiritual, sentiment and engagement), one faces generally a verbal ideation. The substantive which is the object of this ideation, is known as an *objective genitive*. E.g. René Devisch's love of *Belgium*, compared to his celebration of the *Yaka culture*, is X.

Belgium and the Yaka culture are the objects of the verbal ideation present in love, objective genitive.

- The substantive which is the subject of the ideation, is known as a *subjective genitive*. E.g., according to Devisch, the interest of the *Catholic Church* in the case of the anti-colonial prophetic movement of Bamwungi seems Y.

The Catholic Church is the subject of the ideation present in the interest, subjective genitive.

- Two, a noun is called a *predicate genitive*, when it is in the genitive with or without an adjective, and denotes a socially commonsensical attribute. E.g. an *Anthropologist's fieldwork* of several weeks every year for a decade sounds like Z.

Biased, and not prejudiced, I would tend to favor, beside the functional efficacy of the genitive in cooling clashes, well-defined and highly limited privileges as instrumental tools in conversations on interculturality. There is, first of all, the necessity of meta-codes from which lines of agreements and disagreements can be engaged. Two major meta-codes, propaedeutic to preliminaries, are (a) an ethical position, that would accord itself to a common grid of principles, the table of commandments in Abrahamic traditions as an *exemplum*; and, another, though controversial, (b) an epistemological position, the practicality of the ancient Greek's conceptual grids being another one, although often controverted; which,

discussed or rejected in its own terms, paradoxically, ends up substantiating its usefulness this way.

The genitive to be encouraged in propositions is not a panacea. Of a highly limited efficiency, it may prove to be an effective instrument in conflictual exchanges. A well-perceived difference between a subjective and an objective genitive can clarify a situation, and contribute to the conversation. The genitive is among the less known of technical facilitations that can be of good use in coordinating group discussions.

Ethical pronouncements in intercultural contexts are ambiguous in essence and almost always potentially divisive. They can be restrained in the name of the very reason that justifies them. They could also be constrained by instrumentalizing simple distinctions between subjective and objective statements.

More concretely, my bias is an effect of the already mentioned three precautions. In the dialogic rapport between the ethics of the Kinshasa discourse and the "principles" of my own ongoing engagements in interculturality, I came to recognize three basic references from the preceding lines, and the genitive in anthropo-logy, a good case in point. My three references are delineated in Devisch's meditation.

- A *verb* coincides with an *attitude*, it signifies a meaning, and determines the logic of the discourse: to be fond, to prize something.
- An *adjective*, a moral one, it contributes to a substantiation of the attitude, which is a *burden*; and this adjective belongs in ethics, especially the grid-field of what is "just" and "virtuous."
- A *substantive* designates what is the concern of the activity, and one possible way of expressing it; by thinking about a *relation*, thus the idea of what is familiar, a fellowship; and then, comprehension, knowledge.

These keys – a verb (defines), an adjective (qualifies), a substantive (grounds) – are conceptualities in Greek philosophy. They perfectly correspond to the following terms. For the verb: ἀγαπάω (agapaō) and φιλέω (phileō) "to show affection, prefer, love"; for the adjective, δίκαιος (dikaios) "observant of the rule, observant of duty, righteous, just"; for the substantive, δόξα

(doksá) "opinion, judgment," and ἐπιστήμη (epistēmē) "acquaintance, understanding, knowledge."

Central in the Abrahamic traditions, these keys – an attitude of closeness and love, the burden of duty, and a knowing process – are at the heart of their κοινωνία (koinonía), or fellowship; with ἀγάπη (agapē) "love" being the all-encompassing virtue transcending all precepts. Exegesis says, in θεοῦ ἀγάπη (Theou agapē) – its Latin equivalent is the genitive *amor Dei* –, and in this genitive, a judicial statement manifests its full declarative power. By the declaration, a redemption would reflect divine righteousness meeting human un-righteousness.

Anthropology and ethics are mobilized in the transitivity of δικαιοῦ (dikaiou) "to hold guiltless." The genealogy of this justification is a story in ethics. Its interference with ancient Greek assumptions on justice and (in-) equality is another fact whose history haunts any discourse on human rights. Our contemporary debates on intercultural effects, in the patience of an infinite exegesis on the semantics of few Greek classes of concepts that, almost by necessity, include *agape* and *dikaïos*, *doxa* and *epistēmē*. That is the real thing in the Kinshasa discourse. *L'espace-bordure partageable* clarifies its aspects. The postcolonial anthropologist is a person who assumes a transcultural identity, symbolic or real, it does not really matter. He is Flemish, Belgian and something else. He comments on manners of identifying with a Congolese culture. The *lectio magistralis* unsettles the irreality of an identity; in sum, the idea of an essentialist identity. Of the order of symbols, Devisch's conversions reflect possible forms by combining adjectives and substantives as to signify what is being sought. There is, on the one hand, a diagram: the subjective is to the relative what the objective is to an absolute. On the other hand, an intellectual exercise in mental agility can multiply avenues for interpreting equations that can be constructed from the following statements.

- a. The Flemish-Belgian is to the Yaka-Congolese...
- b. The Congolese-Yaka is to the Belgian-Flemish...
- c. The Yaka-Congolese is to the Flemish-Belgian...

d. The Belgian-Flemish is to the Congolese-Yaka...

These four lines create situations, and can speak to any imagination. They can also serve for a rational game on the identity of Devisch, and introduce fallacies. Simply, (a) arrange an argument using one term as essential, and make it appear at least twice; (b) qualify the term with an everyday adjective that would fit the situation – e.g. "eccentric," "good," "normal" etc. – and (c) and we shall be on our way to promoting fallacies on Devisch's identity from the instructions of the *lectio*.

Indeed, the challenge of the *lectio* was to witness to a dynamic manner of presenting oneself in accordance with truthful statements about the complexity of one's commitment. Did the *lectio* support really such a reason?

Devisch is a modern whose practice is motivated by a Greek notion: *diaphorein*, he remarks (– I shall come back to this Greek intervention, à propos its conceptual ambivalence), that he dubs a transferential sign. Figure may be a better designation for what he considers the norm of an overreaching, and overrunning animation. In sum, in clearer words, it would represent the perfect, interpersonal, and intercultural mediation that can exceed verbalization and overdo translation, being in any one-to-one encounter, what is beyond what can be said and what can be conquered. These are, just about all of them, Devisch's words. The redisposition, my responsibility, underlines the obvious: in the acclaimed, a Greek verb construes an intense mystical accord within the framework of an intercultural representation.

Now, in my imagination, indistinct forms are lining up as if they could symbolize an active role, contributing to an understanding of what all this is about. Two old ghosts, someone called the Giver, and its double are steering at each other. On the straight line, in my imagery, a moment in time, one of the two is facing the *ad vallem*; and the other, the *ad montem*. The problem is that, in the space they occupy, there is not a point from which to decide where the valley, or the mountain, might be; and thus, the arbitrariness of linking a cardinal or temporal point to the two characters. The Giver may well be an ancestor, or a descendant of the other. A "thinking eye,"

I can envision the area to be a moving sphere and, in this sense, gain a sense of reality by observing any tension that would rely on firm opposites. However, in this illusory construct, variations might well be just extrapolations of my perception. I do not doubt the shifting elements that constitute the Giver and his friend. They are of my mind. Above all, they are feeding real spectacles; running the show by arranging sceneries, regulating a formless order, correcting its excesses. In brief, they are recording and setting up a climate, sometimes disfiguring the ghosts but, let us hope, they will never erase them. These are, in effect, the question and an explanation of both the struggle of lines and the truth of my perception.

One of the ghosts is in fact an image from a book, *The Giver* (Houghton Mifflin 1993), a children's story by Lois Lowry. The Giver is part of a course in predictability, which has come to an end in the life of a young boy, Jonas. A rupture made up another universe, another time. Selected and elected, Jonas has been inhabiting new memories, and he has just discovered a reality he is trying to comprehend: what "elsewhere" is called a family, the puzzling existence of old people, etc. He asks the Giver: what is an old person? Call them grandparents, says the Giver.

"Grand parents?"

"Grandparents. It meant parents-of-the-parents, long ago."

"Back and back and back?" Jonas began to laugh. "So actually, there could be parents-of-the-parents-of-the-parents-of-the-parents?"

The Giver laughed, too. "That's right. It's a little like looking at yourself in a mirror looking at yourself looking in a mirror" (Lowry 1993: 124).

This is an exemplary experience of a cultural border-limit that is pregnant with the three disciplinary varieties that, in *Aporias* (Stanford University Press 1993), Jacques Derrida separates à propos Heidegger's approach to death, the crossing of borders: one, languages, object of politico-anthropological disciplines; two, discourse and knowledge, which are the object of research-disciplines, or discourses on discourses; and, three, the zone of demarcation between one and two. These

types, disciplinary systems, define themselves within two symbolic extreme limits, a beginning or birth and an end or death, their own and those of the objects. They are symbolic in the sense that, being passages, they state the continuity of what they represent: in the positive, through birth; and, in the negative, through death. Both, in actuality, affirm the unique anticipation of life. Here comes in now the generality of the Giver and Jonas. A currency, the Giver can decode passages, thematize them from a mirror-image, instruct an innocent; and by teaching, the Giver can initiate a new way in a will to truth. A master, he introduces Jonas into a different culture in which to exist is to make oneself both finite and mortal; finite, as a singularity and a project of existing; mortal, as a being now knowledgeable in the genealogy of beings of death. Jonas's education by the Giver is a gift of life and a gift of fear. On the one hand, Jonas has been exposed to the object of politico-anthropological disciplinary passages, all of them symbols of mortality. On the other hand, doubling the first line of initiation, the lesson on mirrors has exposed to the boy another object, that of disciplines on and about discourses, and its relation to his finiteness. As looking at himself in a mirror, his consciousness will be, from now on, aware of its own wrenching away from itself, the intrinsic division of its reflection; and, that it has a self-for-other-people, the dead and the living.

And "the Giver is laughing..." A conversion happened, body and mind have been marked, an "exoticization or alterization," actualized by what Devisch calls an "inversion" in his *anthropologie réciproque*. Here are two designations, *conversion* and *inversion*. At the root, the Latin *cum plus uerto* (-is, -ti, -sum, -ere) for conversion; *in plus uerto*, for inversion. From A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la langue latine* (Klincksieck 1932), their conceptual field is a picture dominated by two ideas: creation and re-constitution, on the one hand; composition, moderation, and legislation, on the other hand. In both, the proper and figurative significations, stands the idea of shaping the physical and the moral. In the practice of everyday language, one observes a conceptual tension within the signifieds. *Convertire*, "to turn around, in any direction"; and when transferred: "to alter, to modify." *Invertire*, "to turn about, over";

transferred: "to alter, to pervert, to transpose."

From what the conceptual field delivers, one can imagine what Jonas's transcultural conversion would represent in a conversation. Interculturally, the capacity for a correct reasoning (method and principles), along with an investment in multiplying the usage of genitives in fundamental functions of inter-communication (expressive, informative, directive), generally, prove efficient in constraining excessive subjective statements. On the other hand, from the conceptual atmosphere of a *con-* or *in-*version, reformulating Maurice Merleau-Ponty's lesson in a reading of Husserl's *Stiftung*, one conceives the richness of every moment, any individuality, all communities in the call for the possibility of recommencements. Why not admit what we have learned from Husserl, the necessity for all of us, individually and collectively, to accept "*the power to forget origins* and to give to the past not a survival (*une survie*), which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory."

There is more. The whole process of Devisch's meditation testifies to something else that may problematize these preceding lines. In effect, from the swaggering symbolic background unclasped by a Greek verb, a vague figure slowly rises, every now and then, from Devisch's circumlocutions. It could resemble Devisch himself, his twin perhaps. After all, he is well the first person pronoun of the texts. The Westerner's blurred features in the visage of Taanda N-leengi's ghost may be, simply, reconfiguring the reflection of one of its transcultural conditions of possibility, a Greek phantom for example. Transcending time and geographies, intransitivity and transitivity, a Tiresias would be a sound exponent. Blind, he could see; man, he has been a woman; human, he is consulted by Gods; including the highest ones, Zeus and Hera, and even on a most intimate question that puzzles the divine couple. A prophet, and a visionary of all-seasons in the Theban charter (compared to Alcmene and Amphitryon, Oedipus and Jocasta etc.), this personage is also an ill-known, shadowy man.

One easily imagines an African Tiresias and a Greek Taanda-N-leengi. From James George Frazer to Claude Lévi-Strauss in

the field of comparative mythology, as well as in the African ethnology of Marcel Griaule and Luc de Heusch, prophets and seers parallel sorcerers and wizards. They are of all times and cultures. Of the day and of the night, by the negative and the positive, in the ambiguity of their very nature (-not being only this or that, but instead "and this and that" -), and the ambivalence of proprieties that bring them together and, at the same time, distinguish them, according to the privilege they stress and account for, they are, all of them, of the same transcultural "race."

One may introduce here the reality of a terror, a classificatory attitude inherited from the Greeks, and that we still conceptualize in Aristotelian categories, the obliteration of difference: *aphanisis* – one must be this or that, one or the other, Lacan says. It is the supreme male terror -, and it would represent the erasure of "an identity." Cultures are individualities. And anthropology, scientific anthropology, and a fortiori African Studies have been the sciences par excellence of classification. The approach to human and cultural varieties reflect structurations organized from the operativity of the *vel*, from symbolic logic, that is a systematic usage of alternations reproducing a disjunctive rapport between a *same* and its *others*.

Devisch's Kinshasa discourse and its sequel on "*l'espace-bordure partageable*" seem to project a Tiresias in the figuration of tomorrow's anthropologist. A symbol, it signifies a need represented by other levels of both the reality of everyday life and the fables about genesis. Eccentric, Tiresias is the very meaning of a burden, that of compensating for limits, their constraints within the tradition, and the laws they have been erecting. Master of connotations and denotations, Tiresias incarnates a quest that relies on symbols, a divine capacity for perceiving, and designing the world as another world.

Does Tiresias need an ethics? Actuating breaks, he represents a perpetual and self-contradictory impulse within shifting instants and equivocations. Speaking of the anthropologist's image in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss underlines this ambiguity. Specifying a moral unsteadiness, he remarks that, by vocation, the anthropologist is a trouble-maker at home, and a conservative in the culture and time of an elsewhere. In the

transcultural economy that this "manner of being" circumnavigates, this student and scholar in human variations lives a science by the anguish that comes forth, from contrasts substantiated in two verbs: the Greek *emein* (to vomit) and *antropophagein* (to eat human flesh, physically or spiritually). That is an importunate terror. How can a science modify what its practice allegorizes? One, to reject, or the duty to alterization; two, to incorporate, or the duty to assimilation? The anguish consecrates a fear about one's normative ethics, and the grid to invoke in order to respond to a "what is good and bad." Implied demands of the question transform it into an exacting interrogation on the meaning of the words "good and bad," what they carry, what they relate to. And, indeed, the issue emerges of the relation between moral judgment and action, and the "is there a universal moral value of acts?" Burden and duty, the questions transform the anthropologist into a philosopher. In effect, the ethics of any anthropological practice cannot but refer to the meta-ethical. The guidelines for inquiry in textbooks tend to ignore that they belong to a conceptual field, and no longer to a scientific domain. Moreover, a new space of desire has been projected from the intersection of the anthropologist's "elsewhereness" and a real "elsewhere."

By a sheer accident of thematic ordering, *The Giver* of Lois Lowry stands on a shelf in my study next to René Devisch and Claude Brodeur's *The Law of the Lifegivers. The Domestication of Desire* (Harwood 1999). Quasi identical title and very similar interrogation, they call for a need to understand the intelligence of "desire" in the articulation of interculturality, and through its symbolic trust.

Devisch's texts index a personal itinerary to the conditions of their definition. This is the position I am looking at, and which claims to reveal a law signified in the canon of the Giver, symbolized by Tiresias, the seer and the knower. Why and how to read Devisch's questions within the mythical universe of a youth estranged from the memory of a past? On what kind of scale does one evaluate the hypothesis of a science, and appraise its effectiveness in a culture by what is being willed in naming a feature like – what is a grandparent? A discourse able to do the job correctly must be of the order of

explanation. Notwithstanding the precariousness of such an outlook, Devisch faces his personal commentary and its precepts, and consciously names conversions, how they have been and are still leading him. He collects scientific feats and feeds the flux of his statements of solidarity, in their materiality. Describing himself in the image of a master of explanation, he would combine the virtues of the Giver with those of the good old Tiresias.

Indicative and implicative, Devisch's proficient code constructs a universe by deconstructing two worlds in a prophetic vision. Looking at ruptures that explicate conversions, can one gauge this intellectual maneuver by simply marking off its most visible sign, the inclination to overvalue weak systems and undervalue stronger ones? The preference induces a judgment that sets an impression, and surely an ethical activity. They can be appraised. Independently from a valuation of criteria for a valid comparability of systems, the reason moves the very notion of explanation, scientific and unscientific, to another, a too often ignored problem: to be scientific, an explanation must not be a function of a scientific discipline in the restricted sense of usual definitions. Devisch makes a good point in invoking the dynamics of a Greek verb that he singles out, and attaches to it a practice and its reconditioning. The inspiration, he thinks, could accommodate features of tomorrow's anthropologists; in sum, the mythical body of the Giver, or a lifegiver, who, incorporating his Greek double, would transcend the conflicting versions of Tiresias' story.

A last sign of terror comes in. An explanation, Tiresias corresponds to accounts, from which what should be explicated could be inferred rationally and that is not to say logically. After all, prophets may have, as it is often the case, a terrifying spirit of consequences. Generally, however, most of them, as if it were a necessity, would rather problematize any correct reasoning. Any possible inference from the symbolics of the Giver, in Lois Lowry's novel, may be very closely related to the explanation of the book, in the sense that, contingent upon the information procured, the conclusion estimated in a subjective reading, can improve itself in terms of probability, instead of deductively. This

is to say, bracketing its impeccable ethics in politics of solidarity, from propositions of Devisch's Kinshasa meditation and its extension, "*l'espace bordure partageable*," in the clarity of their affirmation about the future of a practice – an attitude in relation to an explanation, and the grounds for agreeing with it – one reads the exigency of balancing two full measures against each other: on the one hand, that of the routine criteria for rating hypotheses supporting an explanation (relevance and testability, explanatory capacity and compatibility with other theories); and, on the other hand, that of creative impulses influencing hypotheses, the part of political engagement which, for better and worse, has sometimes conditioned the rules and mechanics of the sciences in general, and the social sciences in particular.

Notwithstanding, perplexed and wondering, one comes to respect a spirit and its ability in articulating axes for action at the intersection of slippery presuppositions surrounding two conceivably conflicting explanations, that of a science to be invested, and that of an ethics. From the stability of such a perspective, one sometimes dreads over how real is the enemy Devisch is combating?

#### *Orare*

- *Practice: To celebrate.*
  - (a) to argue, plead, treat.
  - (b) to beg, beseech, entreat, to request, ask assistance.
  - (c) to supplicate.
- *Sign: an absolute*
- *Activity: to comprehend.*
- *Function: actualizing meaning.*

An *orant*, from the Latin *orare*, by its etymological meaning, is an envoy and a spokesperson engaging another person, a community, a cause. Male or female, he is an advocate, an intercessor pleading for, or on behalf of another. The feminine *oratrix*, accenting the dimension of a respectful petition, that of a humble prayer, has tended to designate specifically a female supplicant. In the unmarked *orator*, as well as in *oratrix*, one finds the values they share with the semantic field of *oro* (*-aui*, *--atum*, *-are*): that is, on the one hand, with strong juridical connotations,

"to appeal, to petition, pledge, urge"; on the other hand, with an essentially religious value, words related to the conceptual field that includes "to ask, implore, request, pray, supplicate." If, already in Latin, the two semantic orientations are equally manifest in words derived from *oro* (e.g. *oratio*, *adoratio*, *exoratio*, *peroratio*, and the verbs actualizing them), the religious one is, according to all lexicographic and etymological sources consulted, the most dominant throughout the Latin history. It is also the one that is still testified to in Romance languages. *Orant*, from Latin *orans* (present active participle of *orare*), is a word attested today almost uniquely in lexicons of religious affairs and their historical dimensions in disciplines.

If I am introducing this part of my meditation in this way, and progressively extending it, from a Latin background to a classical Greek, it is for a number of reasons. There is, first, a set of methodological motives. First of all, the *oratio*, an integral part of the *lectio divina* whose articulation includes four phases – *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio* – constitutes a normal step in a reading inspired by this plan. Secondly, since the constitution of universities in the Middle Ages, the word *oratio*, which has always maintained its two Latin systems of values, juridical and religious, corresponds to "discourse"; and is, in the general intellectual culture, the correct Latin term for your lecture, whose technical designation is *lectio magistralis*, a public lesson by a university professor. The definition is an academic transfer of the monastic *lectio* which historically initiated it. Thirdly, in a classroom or an amphitheater, the *lectio magistralis*, contested during the 1960's student uprisings, but still a prestigious institution, is an opportunity for a scholar to address a special topic in a programmatic manner that may include, as you did, a personal statement with ethical considerations.

There is a second set of reasons, more culturally determined. First, one may consider the titular of a *lectio magistralis*, within the context of a celebratory function, a person transcending the medieval particularization of charismas that differentiates a *lector* from an *auctor*, a distinction that Pierre Bourdieu reactualized in his sociological research of the French intellectual life. Succinctly,

the *lector* analogizes a "priestly" function. A teacher, whose expected role is to transmit a knowledge and a *savoir-faire*, would be its best representation. The *auctor* (and its proximate *auctoritas* that gave our "authority") – and I am referring to Emile Benveniste's *Indo-European Language and Society* – represents a status meant to increase the power of an institution or a rank, to make bigger and more important what existed before. Technically, one has to refer to the ideology of the Latin Church in order to decode the two functions. A *lector* – a step (a minor order) towards the priesthood – is habilitated to read, comment, and interpret in public the Scriptures; and, in so doing, transmit the orthodoxy of a tradition. The *auctor*, on the other hand, has the power and responsibility of managing the tradition, and guiding it into the future.

In contemporary secularized terms, from this ancient specialization, Pierre Bourdieu suggested two functional classes of intellectuals: a first one, of those who, like any regular teacher, through a social habilitation, are expected to serve the culture according to its exclusive directives, in fidelity to truth, a "sacerdotal" function; and a second class, that of those who, well or ill-inspired, take upon themselves the daring task of exploring the margins of a culture and the unimaginable, a "prophetic function." A professional elected to deliver a *lectio magistralis*, in accord with the *in medio virtus* principle, would generally tend to situate the pronouncement between a *lector's* prudently innovative argument and an *auctor's* judiciously deliberate exploration. By the type of interest it has induced internationally, your *oratio* seems to have been an exemplar of such a measure.

One needs the Latin background of an *orant* – a word sometimes seen as a synonym for *orator* – in order to appraise correctly the symbolism of your *lectio magistralis* at the University of Kinshasa. Your *oratio*, dignified, has the double axis of *oro*, semantically and conceptually. On the one hand, the *orant* speaks as an ambassador, juridical axis. He argues and pleads a cause (*si causa oranda esset*; of Livius 39, 40, 12), and speaks to equals, to friends. On the other hand, the *orant* speaks as a client, addressing an authority, asking assistance, beseeching, praying. In the two angles, the Master of the day

speaks with conviction, *kata nomon*, following the custom and the law; and, request or prayer, his address is made according to regulations and expectations; but, also, according to a conventional institution, and its practice. Accordingly, for an *oratio*, the *orant* follows rules and directives from a probable *ars orandi* (art) and *ars scientiae* (science).

At the intersection of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian representations, thematically opposed to the *orant* who makes his *oratio* standing, sitting or on his knees, there is another face, that of the *gisant*.

Thus, a logos, the word of an *orant*, in its double functions and movements, subjective and objective. Singling the caesura in the plurality of possible genitives, qualifying your message (love or desire, action or faith etc.) – can we assess what it ratifies à propos the deflections of meanings it construes and diffuses in the speech? Yours was about a "discipline" and its "politics."

Invisible, the interstice between the subjective and the objective is itself a letter. A break and a quiet internal period within an expression (form, locution, verse), it joins two unequally accented elements that it consummates and might dissociate. To read it, that is to detect the way it relates to the making of an anthropologist, means a task: to reformulate the creative process of an idiosyncratic topography by modulating some of the axes that articulate it. Here are, at least, three possible keys. One, an observation of the activity of the caesura, by surveying and connecting some of the rings it allows; two, a tracking of symbols that it involves by skirting and finding signs that, one and at the same time, it implies and masks, suggests and disguises; three, assessing some of your questions about an anthropologist's vocation, by reinterpreting what the caesura in the word *anthropou-logos* testifies to, in a manner of recovering the path of the *oratio*, in sum the configuration of its meaning.

In praising your attitude and its testimony, one perceives a paradox as well as a psychological dilemma. I read the text as a riddle on justification. The narration of a progressive education in manners on how to relate to other people, the recording of how a vocation came to be inscribed on a body, your statement

supplies additional information, in relation to how its own impetus and momentum, which have been discontinuous, by no means certain, may or may not explicate the style of celebrating the Yaka culture. At any rate, traces are there. In an honest caution, rather than a full disclosure, your critique of the excesses of globalization could not ignore the Yaka desire in modernization. To celebrate the Yaka tradition with or without restrictions, à propos its internal counterpoints, engages your individual credibility and moral standing, as well as those of the scholar who is also a Yaka elder. As to the effects of the discourse, it will certainly have this outcome: with restrictions, any declaration may divide your own class of Yaka elders, and cast doubts about your integration in the culture; without restrictions, any declaration might inconvenience your deontological integrity. Moreover, the "postcolonial" person you are knows pretty well that the anthropology of Yaka-land in the Colonial Library includes an exemplarily immense work by militant missionaries. To question their methods would not necessarily signify charging their good faith, as it would not à propos contending views of fellow anthropologists born Yaka. But is it absolutely unavoidable?

The explicit in the anthropologist's achievement (what has been done and said), states above all what has been lost. Ruptures in human journeys, the reorientations they govern, always comprise a measure of breakaway and renewal. Ephemeral or not, the disaffection or the loss of walls inform, as for instance, from the life on a familial farm to a Jesuit training, from philosophy to anthropology, from Belgium to the Congo. And of course, the constraints of an academic discourse also are to be considered. They comment on slips and lapses in one's intellectual confession. The explicitness of a reason in a disciplinary practice makes the best of itself by necessity; not only from crises and habitual professional trials, but equally from what conscience and memory can choose to weaken, ruin, or simply erase and forget.

Certainly, the declarative memory of a *parole* circumscribes its own density. A case in point could be your rendering of a transformation: one day, Devisch becomes Taanda-N-leengi. Does the symbolic metamorphosis merit a

significant attention in the anthropologist's consciousness? The text circles it in "*le hasard de la petite histoire*." The adjective *petite* mismatches an event. In the name of privileges unknown to the audience, the *orant* has chosen to misplay what founds his *lectio*. In intent, as well as in its reception, it is a sort of stylistic drama.

Unfortunate, this adjective "petite," for what it half-opens and closes instantly. In actuality, it also invests a memory with its secret. Really charming this adjective, by the interrogation it summons forth: "petite?" It can be exhorted in variations that could include implications like these two: one, "Am I not a situation that the character may not grasp?" or, an emulating banality in the act of remembering, "I mean a 'play' for the audience, for I am simply a figure of a new immanence." Here, with you, an adjective; elsewhere, in my recent experiences, a declaration that inevitably shields something like an evidence. Many would agree that anthropologists undergo an initiation that bestows upon them some kind of esoteric knowledge; and, with it, a power linking them to local spiritual masters.

This opinion nurtures a doctrine. Does the anthropologist believe in what often smacks of mystification? If not by conviction, at least as a mode of protecting a good professional standing, the choice of a style of engagement, backed by a solid reasoning can, in principle, safeguard the anthropologist's moral integrity. The entailment thesis would exonerate the necessary ambiguity of a satisfactory reason. After all, consider the frequent issue of paranormal activities. If in a field, for example, people claim that they are certain that such and such is what qualifies an instance, and is the citation; surely, they have a belief, and possibly the conviction, that such and such qualifies an instance, and is the citation. The reasoning is not bulletproof. Yet, nothing prevents the anthropologist from using it, from describing a paranormal construct that may, or may not, incorporate morally controversial statements. From the outset, an anthropologist must have been a believer. I must not. And, one day, with or without an explicit consent your authority could support a controversial puberty ritual as a possible entry to a textbook for a high school intercultural history class.

Concerning *la petite histoire*, if it were essential to address the naming from what is called a reproductive memory, you could have mobilized it differently, *n'est-ce pas*? In fact, remembering one's life, autobiographical memory, defines its own boundaries, since the act sets useful and objective restrictions on it; and subjective too, by and in the manner to interpret. At the same time, such a problem can be managed by its commonsense specification, and should not restrain us from using the concept of memory without concern. It means what any dictionary plainly defines as the mental capacity of recalling or recognizing previous experiences, real or imaginary. Arthur S. Reber and Emily S. Reber in *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (2001) dub it a "virtual blizzard of specialized terms."

The precaution is expedient. In effect, the chasm between your *oratio* assumed as a discourse *pro domo* which exposes urgencies, and the ambient air of the anthropological "nation" reflects other courts. A carefully constructed miniature mirror, the *oratio* and its sequel summon up paths unwinding classes of particulars about the Yaka in relation to your inscriptions in a number of intellectual streams; and this, in relation to the history of a discipline. Indeed, invoking only the "caesuras" in genitives and the contextual signification of their statements (e.g. anthropologists' valuation of strange things, the Africanist's sentiment for moderation, the why of the Yaka's distinction in hunting the best interpreter' friendship etc.), it is easy to characterize how they are engrossed in other conceptual grids. Among a number of references, I think of *The Law of the Lifegivers: The Domestication of Desire* (Harwood 1999), co-authored with Claude Brodeur, to which I referred in the process of collapsing two myths – the Giver and Tiresias – on to a third one, tomorrow's anthropologist.

In your dialogue between anthropology and psychoanalysis, as a matter of fact between two psychoanalysts, the empirical information relied all but uniquely on your research and questions; thus on the Yaka as a foundational argument. This means – to use the mathematical definition of "argument" – that the Yaka culture stands as the parameter on which the value of all universal functions depends. First, reaction: really? Then, an afterthought:

why not? You are there in good company, with a number of distinguished savants, including Victor Turner to whom you have been compared by Jean Comaroff, of the University of Chicago, and Bruce Kapferer of the University College London. At present, I have also in mind something else, a bit strange. In December 1987, Claude Lévi-Strauss, of the Académie Française, speaking about himself to the American journalist James M. Markham, says this: "one does not try to be a giant, one tries to be a good artisan." And, later on in the conversation, he warns: "All over the world, one is seeking more than one is finding." The report of the meeting was published in *The New York Times* of 21 December 1987. Are you concerned with this exercise in modesty? There is a counter-measure to this. Back in time, in 1955, *Tristes Tropiques* is published by Plon. Claude Lévi-Strauss compares the anthropologist to "an astronomer." Only a metaphor? The figure is used again in the Finale of *L'Homme nu*, twenty-six years later. This time it is a comparison: the self, he writes: "is a point in space and a moment in time, relative to each other" (*The Naked Man*, Harper 1981: 625).

In any case, your conversation with Brodeur *begins where it ends*, with a question of mediation. And which one? In which code does one translate "the shock of a profound awareness that a people's culture, including its unconscious dimensions, is what both deeply links and differentiates human beings." And, here, I am connecting pre-meditated lines on the body of the "discourse," and an apperception, constructing another space from a body of "letters," which is this book of yours. As a matter of fact, *à livre ouvert*, Devisch's liturgy at the University of Kinshasa – "What is an anthropologist?" – and its ethical extension stands in an intercommunication effect, intermingling graphic signs and their histories. You are an "astronomer," in your own manner.

The signs of your *oratio* seem to be variations of a thought, always the same, and *à propos* the idea of a body. I should be willing to let two models unmask a hunt and its risks. There is, on the one hand, omnipresent and somehow mute, but overflowing, an obsession with the idea of a *homo faber*. On the other hand, loquacious, the Yaka argument, as it has been constructed by years of

anthropological studies that have deconstructed a reality, a phenomenon in its details. For hours, I looked at the photos reproduced in *The Law of the Lifegivers*. In a first approach, well, one thinks about regrouping presentations of objects, of things in one group, and those of people in another. On one side, worked objects and on the other, reified humans. It should be easy, and it is not. Things? The *Khosi* figurine (plate 1), the *Binwaanunu* (plate 2), or the *Mbwoolu* statuery (plate 9)?

An intention, a practice fuses with its own meaning and becomes an act of faith. In other words, two horizons face each other: one, life remembers, the activity of the letter and the signs of an origin; two, life does work, comments on a will to truth. The horizons can be approached and have been, from a series of concepts issued by disciplines (anthropology, history, religion, etc.), individual voices (native or foreign, colonial or missionary, etc.), the intrinsic or extrinsic operators (e.g. schools, churches, social institutions etc.). Whatever angle one takes, the most influential agents in the history of the Yaka-land are the Christian missionaries who, in tandem with the Belgian colonial administration, have been evangelizing the region since the nineteenth century. Possibly a wave over an order marked since the sixteenth century. Such is the Yaka domain from which one may test your *terra firma* against points of dissent, points of orthodoxy in a normative trans-disciplinary practice.

Did everyone perceive Devisch saying something like "I may know one of my knots, it is a situation vis-à-vis these horizons? How could I say that you must know how I think you see me thinking about the Yaka?" The style, Laing's, is recognizable. And Claude Brodeur upholds Devisch's quest in discipline and faith. But, in which field to perceive the "more" of a guiding practice, the anthropological or the psychoanalytical? Let me insist on two limits. The first, a question in the European practice of philosophy, most clearly since the Renaissance, structures the Brodeur and Devisch dialogue. It concerns the will to truth itself, the conditions of its normative functions, in concordance with thematics that came to oblige hypotheses about a line which, transcending cultural dissimilarities, would validate a convergence theory. In this perspective,

your model, Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, is emblematic. Paul Ricoeur termed it "a Kantism without a transcendental subject" – and, in the overture to *The Raw and the Cooked* (University of Chicago Press 1983; Harper & Row 1969), Lévi-Strauss accepted the label. In this celebration of your outlook, to know whether you would agree with the implications of such a concept, is here of no importance. You still share something like a principle that submits a method to the primacy of human solidarity. It infixes the invisibility of a culture in what is settled as a prerogative from which to apprehend any alterity in its strangeness, that is its visibility. Oddly, opposite to such an awareness, that you tend to express in a Rousseauist vision sometimes, you think your stances in essentially political terms. I read your memoir on Lévi-Strauss at Lovanium, thirty-seven years ago. It was an inscription in a persuasiveness that linked you to what could be termed an ethics of structuralism. Is what you are teaching us today a deepening, or by the force of circumstances, a going beyond, another one of your conversions? In any case, you may be less pessimistic than Lévi-Strauss. He horrified the American James M. Markham. I referred to their conversation. Here is how it ends, Lévi-Strauss saying: "History is whimsical and unpredictable, 'progress' is uneven at best and certainly relative (...) I try to understand, I am not a moralist at all."

The anti-Cartesian *I is an Other*, from Rousseau to Lévi-Strauss, can allegorize – why not? – the marginality of a Rimbaud. Exactly, Rimbaud as a metaphor of marginality, a striking one, allows flawless conceptual equations. Sure enough, existentially, the following platitudes will do: marginality is to the visibility of the *alter* (the exotic, the marked) what normativity is to the invisibility of the *ego* (the referent, the unmarked). No more entries that favor anyone. Everyone being the *alter* of someone else, the problem seems settled. You have magnified the truism in an *oratio* demonstrating that, for sure, the truism works in the abstract, not in the actuality of our shared human condition.

A tradition and a reason still house their own constructs. Is it wrong to hypothesize that their triumph could be indicative of your alertness to casualties, to consequences. The austerity of your

terrifying secret, of Devisch's position on alterity. Its unsaid hunts anthropological systems for approximating an old interrogation on the body: the body, whose body? In the negative or in the positive, the body, any body, as the singularity that can equate the immediacy of a consciousness and the visibility of an object. You refer to two telling stories: at the University of Antwerpen, under "therapeutic cults of Kwango," the sessions directed for physicians on "the body and the world." At Leuven, for decades – correct? – a popular seminar on "anthropology of the body," the "exotic Yaka culture" and its "unusual way of perceiving." Any student of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press 1956), after a careful examination of the section under the heading "being-for-others," could connect the success of the seminars, at least partially, to the phenomenon of fascination. The reality of fascination, Sartre was convinced, is possibly the measure for identifying with a permanently emerging alterity, that body I can relate to, and which is me without being mine. Thus, always in the same movement, fascination, that other name for the corporeal capacity of horror.

The brief reference to your seminars imposed itself upon me, at a moment I was involved in the work of a Chinese scholar on the "doctor's body" in the traditional Chinese healing system. To conceptualize the difference between the Western medical practice that reads the patient's signs from the abstract constituted by a taxonomic table of symptoms and, on the other hand, the Chinese that moves the other way around (– about impulse sensing for instance, the doctor's body, in its contact with the patient's, initiates both reading and analysis –), Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenology of the body granted us a basic code for a dialogic semiology. In three ways, three successive steps, to stamp the body.

First, to apprehend *the body as what we exist in*, through senses; that is, the frame of our individual history. And, reflecting on it, we make it more than the contingent thing it is, we turn it into this psychological machine which is aware of its limits and of its transcendence. Secondly, close to the Chinese pulse reading, we face an apprehension of the body as what it is in any social context, a

body for other people; in clear, the body *as something we assume in the revelation of others' existence*; in fact, the reality of others' bodies. Finally, we come to see and understand our body as a frame, as *a very concrete locus* from which we think, sense and organize all our relations with others; absolutely, all our connections with other people, and with things, our language, as well as our feelings.

The Kinshasa lecture has been an opportunity to revisit your work, and appreciate your phenomenological bent. Despite the technicality of the "relational body," in publications before the mid-1990s, due to your sense of details, what one gets (e.g. on listening, questions of adults to children, speech etc.) does not disconnect the perception from the three ways of conversation in a dialogic semiology. However, the concordance raises at least two issues: the first, on the measure of a cultural loss which is pivotal in intercultural explorations, on the one hand; and, the second, on the mismeasurement of scientific loss in intercultural narratives.

To acknowledge what is presupposed in your *oratio*, about this, there are, one might suggest, two main lines of objections in the Western discourse on the human body. One in English, represented by a classic, Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (University of Pennsylvania Press 1971). Her treatise analyzes the prescientific representations of human families, focusing on the discourse which, through internal transformations, specialized into biological and cultural anthropology. There is another classic, by Anthony Padgen, *The Fall of Natural Man. The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge University Press 1982). Specifically sequencing narratives on Africa, more militant also in its purpose, is the book by Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (Library of Social Sciences 1977). On the other line, two excellent contributions in philosophical anthropology: Bernard Groethuysen, *Anthropologie philosophique* (Gallimard 1950) and Michèle Duchet's deconstruction of the Enlightenment's anthropology in *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières* (Maspero 1971). Paduans' old maxim, *I am human, I am a borderer*, is not detachable from

today's essentialist and anti-essentialist debates on the body in its socio-cultural generations. The simple divergent chronology of "race thinking" and "racism" in Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianisms* (Harcourt 1968) and Michel Foucault's *Il faut défendre la société* (Seuil 1997) addresses what, with circumlocutions, you work painfully: race may not be a scientific problem, it is a cultural one. The problem, if it is one, might even be elsewhere, in the unsuspected question of racism as a philosophical conceptuality entailed in classificatory grids. Such an angle may probably permit a much more healthy reading of Kant's *Anthropology*, for instance.

From the texts of the late 1970s and early 1980s on bodily space-time, death, marginality and liminality to this discourse of your honorary doctorate, one is stricken by a quaint feature. As to offset an annoying poverty of strong reflectors in today's philosophical anthropology, the awareness you promote privileges a hardy critique of taxonomic economies against the background of ambiguous strategies for encounters. Sometimes, with the faith of an interculturalist, you go so far as to identify with processes that would transcend usual distinctions, as in the following passage from your letter of 20 November 1994 to Brodeur.

After so much simplification and ethnocentric disfigurement has already occurred in the discourse developed by the North about the South, and in a context of massive asymmetry in terms of the balance of powers, undoubtedly only friendship and very lucid and self-critical expertise might be able to offer "the foreigner," in the postcolonial world, a legitimate forum for a critical study of cultural and communitarian practices and ideals.

Would you not agree that the formation of a collective unconscious, ever renewing itself at the ancestral foundations, is far more complex than the development of the individual's psychic life? It appears to me that only a profound anthropological knowledge of other cultures, when examined from the inside, that is, from the point of view of the structuring logic, and founding axioms and values which undergird a culture's practices and institutions, might provide an adequate basis for intercultural

dialogues or even for the development of a critical regard towards ourselves. Anthropology is not a neutral form of scientific knowledge: it arises from the situated experience both of cultural creativity and the lucid encounter between cultures. Your continued interest has inspired me to dig even more deeply in the analysis of Yaka culture (...)

My ethnographic passion resonates with the theme of "homecoming" or the "oiko-logical" turn that many minority groups are making back to themselves and their cultures (op. cit.: 232).

This advocacy of *Einfühlung*, more than it, and rather on the side of not only a disposition in solidarity, but also a disciplinary practice, accumulates elements for a programmatic vision. First, a cause: the psychological note in the quotation has been preceded by an invocation of a transcultural psychoanalytic approach. Listening to the other, precisely the "Yaka unconscious," would shun "the negativity of difference and hierarchization." In your parlance, four figures – the sorcerer, the diviner, the chief, and the healer – each one, an ambivalent entity, would be an adequate key to the Yaka unconscious. Secondly, there is the style of your intervention. Borne upon an intercultural motivation, the principle of a North–South solidarity coincides with that of an alliance determined by a situational discipline. Their conjunction, depending on deontological angles, might raise questions of method for any discourse that would submit its precepts unconditionally to psychoanalytical instructions. At any rate, to soften your precisionist grids, Claude Brodeur, in a letter of 12 December 1992, had already insisted on an "indubitable": "As soon as we pose the question of the possibility of this culture (the Yaka) evolving in a new direction, it will be useful to refer to models of different societies in order to understand these historic transformations" (op. cit. 230). And the titanic oeuvre of Claude Lévi-Strauss comes to mind, especially the volumes of "mythologiques." Thirdly, one can remark on the singularity of your voice in the quotation from the letter of 20 November 1994 (op. cit. 231ff.). This voice is articulating itself simultaneously with a "priestly" and "prophetic" accent. Does it not expect its credibility to be validated

within a scientific community and, at the same time, connote an interaction aimed at modifying the very space that made it credible?

The ambition of your commitment seems tempered in the *lectio* which essentially states a matter of faith at heart. The intervention, at the end, of companions of the road, those who departed and those who are still alive, gives to the arbitration a symbolic and existential importance, that of being a *speculum*. This reflector functions in a manner of cohering two aspects of a practical philosophy. On one side, a looking glass (the good old approach of Varro: *quod in eo specimus imaginem*); and, on the other, a banner (again, an ancient approximation: *opus speculum formatum est*). This key, the entries to dictionaries (Freund, Gaffiot, etc.), is not original. Its usage helps to "speculate" on the coherence of your conversions as moments in a dynamics.

From your exchange with Claude Brodeur, three lessons in the capacity of a *speculum*: to look and to behold, to gaze and to test; and about (1) an anthropological position, (2) the oiko-logical milieu, (3) the activity of a Greek verb.

1. The anthropological position, in a reflection submitted to the psychoanalytical, presents a strategy. It sounds militaristic, is scary, and combines in the same will to knowledge and power most of the Sartrean images against representations of an epistemology of force.

Here are three lines you enumerate (I am using phrases from your text), (1) The first strategy: "analyze the relations of force," "demonstrate the process of 'assimilation-accommodation,'" "be like a scientist in chemistry or physics." (2) The second: "participate in a cultural practice"; two tactics: one, "create and define a role in interlocution," espousing "a discursive strategy for those for whom 'to speak is to make the world'"; two, be attending "to the daily practices of the family or household." (3) The third, "be attentive to the manifestations of meaning that emerge from both encounter and confrontation."

One would like to be convinced, on good faith, that this sort of

prescription is well intentioned. To inscribe them in the symbolics of the activity of a *cum plus nasci* might be an illusion. And, good heavens, what is the business of a projected book facing: "(...) All this, as well as the contumacy and violence of Kinosis in the public realm and in the informal economy, aims to set an end to the postcolony, and reverse the 'whitening' of the African" (op. cit.: 255).

Finally, a last interrogation. It might be an important one, but the least appropriate; significant and, at the same time, uncertain. Why would the collaboration between anthropology and psychoanalysis now appear that imperious to you? Is it due to the supposition of "what" exactly is a science? This problem was summed up well by George Johnson, a *New York Times* science journalist, in his intellectual biography of Murray Gell-Mann, Nobel Prize of physics (– *Strange Beauty. Murray Gell-Mann and the Revolution in Twentieth-Century Physics*, Random 1999):

The issue that interested (Gell-Mann) was not how to bring psychoanalysis into the domain of science, but just the opposite: how to explain psychoanalytically why scientists are driven to understand the world through the formulation and testing of hypotheses (op. cit.: 228).

2. And, here, how not to acknowledge your sense of grace and its risks? The *gyn-eco-logical* milieu you reclaim in the quotation just referred to – and which is the object of your acclaimed *Weaving the Threads of Life* (University of Chicago Press 1993) – is not only from Yaka-land, but speaks also to a Greek imaginary. By its etymology, of course it is feminine, and doubly so in the values it states semantically, and denotes conceptually. In effect, *gune* means woman. By definition, the *eco-* from *oikos-* designates that which, opposite to the *politikon* (the *ager publicus* of Romans), indicates a dwelling place and infers ideas of generation, domesticity, and inheritance. You knew what you were unleashing by constructing a hyphenated *gune-oiko-logical*; and, with the composition, advancing a declaration, a logos on domesticity.

It calls up feminine and maternal thematics prompted by other symbolic exercises. Might Tiresias come in? Not good enough, too much on the side of a universe regulated by a grand dichotomy principle. Why, then, not imagine a going beyond, say, of themes opposing "a good mother" to "a bad mother?" The terminology raises difficulties. This is what you say to Brodeur about a model.

(...) breakup or subordination of the universe of the Mother? Instead of situating the investiture of the chief within the order of the Father, as you do, I demonstrate, with considerable ethnographic data in my support, how the (Yaka) chief concurrently emerges in both his (re)generative function (as the supreme provider of life) and in his political function (as sovereign ruler of order) (op. cit.: 242).

The ethnographic data might prove one interpretation correct. In comparative studies, it could correspond to a variation in concordance with others, attested to in neighboring cultures and past the Congolese basin. Certainly, the data permits a debate that transcends cultural areas and disciplines. Does it not presume a tradition marked by lessons from giants – a James George Frazer, a Georges Dumézil, a Claude Lévi-Strauss, a Victor Turner – who explored new ways of reading and interpreting transculturally the very practice of anthropology. Only experimentalism? There is, from 1984, *Se recr  er femme* (Berlin: Reimer); 1993, the just-mentioned *Weaving the Threads of Life*, whose subtitle is *the Khita gyn-eco-logical healing cult* (University of Chicago Press); 1985, in collaboration with A. Gailly, a study on a self-help group of Turkish women; and, released in 1986, a video on a Yaka female diviner you made with D. Dumon.

Your reference to the international feminist inspiration, and its insistence on the contribution of a "Black feminism," grasps a real world. Thus, to your authority, here is a question of principles: it should be possible, using every opportunity, to oblige at least matters of concern related to the *oiko*-interest. Since the *gune-oiko-logical* space is, and principally, about and for women,

why not raise our conscience about urgent issues? Here are recent examples which deserve reflection.

One, according to the World Bank 2006 development indicators, in 2000, the maternal mortality rates per 100,000 live births, was: 10, in Europe; 194, in Latin America; 921, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Two, Mary Kimani, a writer for *African Renewal*, a division of the UN Department of Information, has distressing observations in its recent number (vol. 21/4, 2008). From the chart, she highlights what is at stake. The World Bank's injunctions on cost-sharing in public services, for example, have indefensible effects morally. To get treatment at maternity clinics, women must make a deposit, a symbolic amount, but high for, say, a Kenyan patient living on \$2 a day. No money, no service. Dr Shadrack Ojwang, a gynecologist at Kenya Pumwani Maternity Hospital, in Nairobi, says: "We are asking people to die because they can't (afford to) be treated."

Three, putting priorities (– which ones? and defined by whom?) in perspective, should an anthropologist be concerned by all this? In other words: can the author of publications on the body in African contexts ignore the controverted ethics of the World Bank, and its consequences on human bodies? Does it not make sense to recognize that assessing the perverse by-products of today's intersecting universes should not derail attention from pricing concurrently the highest standards for the gift of life?

3. One recognizes in your texts the clarity of an intention and its politics, but in the complexity of a voice. Its sovereignty claims an ordinary right, its own. Is it not one of the measures in building an intersubjective locality? In any case, it can hardly be detached from the discourse speaking in, and from the experience of an identification. Lines that support such a journey have been assumed in what a Greek genitive expresses, the indefinite work of anthropology, in its etymological exigency. Does it translate what you tell Claude Brodeur to be an "intercultural sensitivity typified in bifocal thinking and reciprocal exchange?"

In the Kinshasa *lectio*, we are invited to understand your activity, from a figure, what a Greek verb allegorizes. I touched on this already, briefly. Let me now clarify the point.

You write *diaphorein*, instead of *diapherein*, as translating literally "to transport," "carry through," "open to one another." Indeed, *diaphorein* is possibly the word one would think of, in any approach to concrete relations. Here is what you say, and entries

(...) plus l'affinit   et les sentiments de complicit   affectueuse grandissent entre l'anthropologue et les r  seaux-h  tes, plus la rencontre anthropologique est transf  rentielle. Et un tel transfert est mieux compris dans le sens litt  ral de *diaphorein*, transporter, porter    travers, au-del  , transmettre, s'ouvrir l'un    l'autre. En outre, la signifiante et les forces qui sont n  es et continuent    na  tre dans la rencontre de sujet    sujet d  passent ce que l'on peut dire ou ma  triser; elles exc  dent la verbalisation ou la traduction. Cette rencontre, interpersonnelle et interculturelle, peut devenir une authentique entreprise humaine de co-implication    plusieurs voix, demeurant mutuellement enrichissante.

*Diaphorein*, effectively, belongs to the lexical field of words that refer to social interchanges such as *diaphoria* and *diaphoron*. They imply the idea of difference. *The Oxford Greek-English Lexicon* (1985), indicates *diaphore  * = *diaphere  * (419a). The entry is distinct (structuration and semantic ordering) from that of *diapherein* (417b), the one you intended. Here is a summary of the two entries

- *Diaphorein* (variant, *diapherein*) has two main semantic lines. The first attests (1) "to disperse," (2) "carry away"; but also (3) "to plunder," (4) "tear in pieces," (5) "break up." The second line: *diapher  *. (1) to carry across from one place to another. There is a third line, with medical applications, of no interest here.
- *Diapherein* is the reference that fits your philosophy. Here are the semantic values you were referring to. A first area, attesting intersecting lines: (1) "to carry over, through"; "to carry from one

to another"; (2) of time; (3) "to move," "to bear to the end"; (4) "to go through with, endure, support." And, indeed, as expected, the passive attests to the idea of separation and distraction: "to be drawn apart, separated, disrupted." In fact, the passive of *diapherein* meaning "to disjoin" and "distract" translates a disjunction. For instance, in Aristotle (e.g. *Politica* 1451a34). This second line includes "to carry different ways." And then the just-mentioned passive.

To repeat myself, *Diaphorein* reads as "to dispense," "carry away," "tear in pieces," "break up" etc., the contrary of your attitude. Basically, its meanings actualize acts of distinction, everything that goes against your principle of "sympathy," *Einführung*. This explicit question of meanings, my interpretative reading, is also an acknowledgement of a remarkable Greek *homonymia*. A similarity of the letter explains the entry *diaphoreō* = *diapherein* in its quasi identical spelling. This equivalence translates a conjunction to which one can relate the ambiguous disjunctive value present in the meanings of the two words. The letter exposes its own alteration.

Amazing that a *lapsus calami* would synthesize so well a question of attitude. The verb *diaphorein* "to separate" instead of *diapherein* "to go through with," the difference between an omicron (-o-) and an epsilon (-e-), might symbolically coalesce so dramatically the dilemmas of tomorrow's anthropologist.

– One, it is possible for an anthropologist speaking in the voice of a Yaka elder to debate his Africa-discipline in Greek terms, in any idiom, and still be relevant in tomorrow's intercultural space.

– Two, one of the challenges may still be in an old question of method: are there, concerning this very practice, ways of thinking of it outside of the negative socio-historical contingencies that have been determining it, and that are symbolized in controversial usages of subjective and objective genitives, the two intrinsic dimensions of the discipline?

– Three, slip of the pen or slip of memory, in the fluctuation of variants, the words

testify to the story of the two vowels, and the impact they might have more on symbolic than real tasks.

An anthropological encounter is transferential, you say. You are right. My emphasis on a possibly punctilious small problem, but in the very activity of verbs, can be superseded in what semantic interferences induce. A zone of partial inclusion of signifieds can be accessed. In effect, *diaphorein* and *diapherein* can be approached as two manifestations of the essential predicament of any discourse on what can be said on being human, that is to say any anthropological project. Occasionally, *diaphorein* means: "to go backwards and forwards," "to distinguish by dislocation," "exhaust oneself by dissipation." And, on the other hand, one can read in texts *diapherein* with close significations: "to bear through, to the end"; "carry different ways," "put in motion." Finally, I should emphasize that in the passive, ideas of "disjoining and drawing apart" are attested frequently, and they animate an axis of synonymous areas (separation, disruption, distinction). They mark zones of conceptual interferences (between the two verbs). The best reference may be Aristotle's usage. In a number of texts, *diapherein*, in the passive (e.g. *Politica*, 1451a34), attests values of what is sectioned. *Diaphorein*, along with its kin (e.g. *diaphoria* "unlike" and *diaphoron* "difference") functions in the semantic proximity of *diaphora*, the technical equivalent of *differentia* for the designation of any alterity in kind, as in *Politica* (e.g. 1285a and 1289a20). That is one of the best entries to the Aristotelian notion of difference in *Metaphysics*.

In sum, we may say that within the genitive *anthropou-logos*, the *diaphora* is in the dislocation between the subject and the object of the logos. It corresponds to Plato's notion of variance and disagreement. And one could bring in the Aristotelian *differentia* of species in logic; recommence the conversation about the Kinshasa discourse, and accent the other dimension of the idea you intended: to face each other, *diapherein*, and affirm our diversity in "to be a different person" (e.g. Plato, *Apologia*: 35b), and "it makes a difference" to me, as in Plato's *Gorgias* (517b).

## Coda

Despite everything, recollecting is a negation of the meaning it claims to contextualize. In the same motion, it sanctions it as a future oriented affirmation. There is no incongruity in the arrogance of the opening statement: "on ne devient pas anthropologue par naissance ... *mais tout de même*." The underlined words canalize everything. Staging the sense of a *how* and a *why*, it holds their impulses. It prefaces an *oratio* that has the form of a dissertation. Should one hypothesize on its undisclosed pillars? They state a humanist manner of elaborating the ambiguous dynamics of a *Mitgefühl*. Is it not an attitude that inspires exhortations, reiterations, repetitions, of what is fundamentally a love story entailing a justification?

Let me celebrate three steps on a scale of metaphors, or of metonyms.

First, a recognition. Conversion accommodates a temperament, and comes to be the sign expressing itself as an activity. To convert is the verb that animates an attitude in its complexity, "to be fond of" and face the price of inflections. Such a verb would invest the mind of the reader who goes along with the legitimacy of its quest for an inter-subjective and intercultural dialogue. The presuppositions do not necessitate demonstration. The Cartesian observation linking reason and human condition extends itself pretty well to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* and Yaka elders: to study oneself is the best bridge with others. One's mental activity can be correlated to others' attitudes and expectations. Reading Devisch, one concurs with a process aimed at a "mieux vivre ensemble." To be fond, in this sense, renews the patience of existentialist phenomenology. We can reread, otherwise, R.D. Laing's anticipation at the beginning of *The Politics of Experience* (Vintage 1967): "my behavior is an experience of the other. The task of social phenomenology is *to relate my experience of the other's behavior to the other's experience of my behavior*. Its study is the relation between experience and experience: its true field is *inter-experience*" (17). That is the attitude of a verb.

Secondly, a reckoning. We have a challenging *lectio magistralis* which unfolds other stories as if they were adjectives. It qualifies beings and

things, attributes virtues and duties. Its structuration shows also an unaccustomed feature as if to demonstrate that what it narrates, the punctual scattering of codings within a construction regulated by internal and external requirements, could be consistent with a highly emotional testimony strictly framed in an austere grid. The techniques analogize clearly the way a beam of particles or a wave can be diffused when interacting with other particles within the same surrounding. An accident? Not sure at all. At any rate, Devisch's narrative can be read, at least, according to three straight lines, each with its own chronological order, having neat tempos, marked by a symbolic light neatly delineated or implied from the fluctuation of a flash in the negative and positive. Here is, a first axis, the most visible one, chronicling the life of Devisch. To what is represented here— a childhood, an education, the maturity age – correspond, almost term by term and step after step, three courses: first, the story of a talented boy on a farm; second, layers are assumed in a number of successive communities (Kimwenza, Lovanium, a return); three, the calling, the invention of a Yaka elder and a Leuven intellectual. Parallel to these sequences, one can bring together two other axes, similar (structurally) and divergent (thematic-ally), and connect them in what cannot be any longer a sheer accident: a personal psychological story followed by the intellectual line that one might, easy temptation, entitle "the making of an anthropologist on his way

to becoming a psycho-analyst." Three headings, three steps, and the maturity: one, the family's novel, and the alliance with war traumas; two, the Jesuit Institute of Kimwenza, the postcolonial imperatives; and, three, the "initiated" as ambassador (fieldwork, marriage, career), researcher and teacher, election and effects, in the Congo and in Belgium.

The description pictures a life. It addresses its own organization a question of method and a question about a vocation. A scholar, Devisch declares using a knowledge borne on a practical knowledge of intercultural frontiers, and motivated by a question about his discipline, today and tomorrow. From interpersonal to intercultural face-to-face, experiential authority may tend to obscure the privilege of its own being as a lack. Devisch shows that the challenge of any commitment states its own activity by subordinating its lack to what it can unveil and affirm about itself.

Finally, a celebration. From what is given in this manner, there is, for sure, a good reason to believe in what it justifies. Throughout Devisch's texts, there seems to be something like a silent rhetoric supporting an enactment. Along with my biases, I came to accept a preconception I had from the beginning. One can always confirm anything expected. In this case, the structuration of axes, from what I can now name, does assert what supports it, a subterranean work. What we are given to meditate on authenticates an ascetic reflection which, in a proven tradition, under the guidance of reason, can deploy itself through exercises on thematics such as the topography of meanings, the

obsession and indeterminacy of ways of desire, our responsibility in this world's affairs; and, in our time, the North–South agendas within a problematic political economy.

The rendition of a wrenching away from, paradoxically, an experiential authority, gives to Devisch's texts a shifty fluctuation of what is remembered in a transitive activity. But, it is to be spoken about in an intransitive recollection. In what the axes stipulate, a silent source doubles all possible interpretations. An avowed rupture in one axis proves to be a foundational rock for highly rational choices, and vice versa. Ambiguity of the memory in what it activates.

Does not the main preoccupation of Devisch, discerning the grounds of principles, pertain to ethics, more exactly to meta-ethics, and not science?

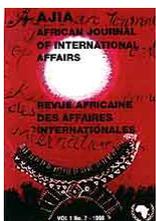
## Notes

1. I must record my gratitude to David Schultz for handling with competence the burden of typing and retyping several versions of this text. His suggestions markedly helped to improve the exposition

Many thanks to Professor Diane Ciekawy for listening to my questions on anthropological issues, and to Erin Post for being my first reader.

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Indeed, I am solely responsible for what is expressed in this open letter to René Devisch.



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## Reply

# 'The Shared Borderspace', a Rejoinder<sup>1</sup>

I feel very grateful that distinguished colleagues have paid me a great tribute by offering a wealth of comments and questions on my stance as a postcolonial anthropologist. In order to clarify such a stance, I may venture to place those comments and, indeed, questions within the context of a borderspace – an expression coined by Bracha L. Ettinger in her book, *The Matrixial Borderspace* 2006 – which develops amid the plurality of worlds, thoughts and disciplines that affect us all. Leaving aside the incidental epic and anecdotal style underlying my festive Academic Lecture, I now want to tightly articulate my response to queries according to three stages. First, I would like to address the question of intercultural polylogue as well as its ethics. Secondly, an attempt will be made to address the issue of local knowledge forms and practices. Thirdly, attention will be given to the contribution that anthropology is expected to make to intercultural emancipation.

My stance remains haunted by the postcolonial unconscious. Arriving in the DR Congo as a young man, in the aftermath of that country's independence, and being welcomed by those who had once been colonised by my fellow countrymen, I was overwhelmed by the trauma caused by the colonial claim and intrusion as well as by the retorts. And the dawn of the African continent appeared to me through a contract of united confidence in social and cultural creativity that entirely rested on everyone's shoulders. I could, thus, not help feeling invited to such a contract as well as to the heavy moral debt to be shouldered.

### Towards an Ethics of Intercultural Polylogue

The main plank of the argument arising from comments by my colleagues Mbonyinkebe, Eboussi Boulaga, van Binsbergen, Mudimbe, Nzongola-Ntalaya and Obotela, goes to the very heart of my anthropological project – a project that gradually led me to formulate the problem as follows: how to launch into a polylogue

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those metaphysical aims and models for making the human, as well as the epistemologies, categories and figures of thought, models of action and production, which originate from diverse, if not incompatible cultures and sources?

Such models for the making of the human have something to do with the origins and ends as well as with the interweaving between the corporeal and cultural as embedded in the human being. They also relate to mother-tongue, paternal function, imaginary and symbolic weaves. Further, they have some bearing on cultures' interpenetration, the subjects' uneasy relation to their shifting identity, but also their concern for the Beautiful, the Good, the Just and Truth. The question is, therefore, how to successfully secure such a polylogue, if any, against the backdrop of civilisations grappling with hegemonic globalisation. In other words, how can such a polylogue be maintained while averting the delusion of a globalised access to alluring consumerism and overbearing technological and scientific constructs?

At the risk of being perceived as someone who is difficult to classify, or even as someone disrupting the liberal ideological horizon peculiar to some schools of thought in the social sciences, I have held myself out as an intermediary indefatigably crossing anthropological and local trains of thoughts that are too often excluded. I do not see myself as a political actor or an agent for economic development. Nor do I present myself as an historian of civilisations or a philosopher who is as much moved by a project of society as by the universal human.

As a subject of the former colonising state, I not only lack the moral authority to speak about Congolese postcolonial politics,

but also feel particularly bruised by the alienating effect that such colonisation has had on both the decolonised and the coloniser. However, I did not for that matter give up inscribing my anthropological project into the colonial or postcolonial and neocolonial clash of civilisations. And my concern has been to understand how the cultural matrices of Congolese communities and networks, with which I am so familiar, sought to overcome colonial and neocolonial hegemonic models.

In other words, to what extent do such matrices adequately respond to the Cartesian or Hegelian dualist thought – which is itself the product of the Enlightenment – or to strategies for the conquest of markets within the neoliberal capitalist economy? How do Congolese university students react to phallogoc models of representation proper to Western academicism, which gives priority to instrumental rationality or objectivist scientific observation and assumes a hierarchical divide between Nature and Spirit, world and self, truth and belief? And what has been the effect, on cultural matrices and identity fantasies of Black Africa today, of the Judaeo-Christian civilising discourse, which, since the end of the nineteenth century, has been preaching the conversion of individuals and nations from their so-called pagan pasts towards a salvific and westernised future?

By launching his radical appeal for 'mental decolonisation' in 1965, Mabika Kalanda, in his short book, addresses himself to various Congolese intellectuals who fought for political independence. He demands that they exercise great lucidity in face of the dramatic conflict experienced between African metaphysical universes (based on relations and autochthony) and Western ones (based on Reason and Christian salvation). In the wake of Simon Kimbangu and Patrice Lumumba, he invites African intellectuals to anchor their belonging to several cultural universes, both local and those inherited from colonial presence, into a project of liberation and reappropriation.

Some intellectuals, like Depelchin, have sought to address this fracture, between the originary horizon and the trajectories geared towards an emancipating progress, via political means or by way of commitment towards liberation – an option that, as Mbonyinkebe points out, is not without risk of bitter disappointment. Other intellectuals make a commitment to rediscovering local modes of knowing and being, if only to subject such modes to the test for a postcolonial (Afro-)modernity. In this confrontation of horizons, the ambiguity of ‘practices and gesticulations’, according to Eboussi Boulaga’s sensible phrase, is so puzzling since the mimetic successor of the Western master is henceforth a brother by blood who is too often deficient when he is pitted against such a liberation and reappropriation project.

Is that, however, one of the reasons why for nearly two decades we observe, especially in Congo, a nationwide massive narcissistic withdrawal of individuals into the so-called Revival (Neo-Pentecostal) Churches, exciting themselves in response to the command from an a-historic Holy Ghost? Prophets and ministers bully their followers into renouncing their culture of origin on the grounds that such a culture somehow stands for satan’s machinations – no doubt echoing the subordinate standing of such a culture on the international stage.

More than any other commentators, Professor van Binsbergen forcefully reminds me of how an anthropologist – who is captivated by local reality understood in its own terms – is likely to obnubilate social and cultural opportunities that co-exist alongside the violence inflicted by new nation-states and the prevalent neoliberal and military world order. This important reminder faces me with an essential ambiguity underlying any cultural study conducted within a subaltern environment. But this is a sort of ambiguity from which I find it difficult to escape: either I should equate the Yaka of rural Kwango, and those living in the shantytowns of Kinshasa, to the colonised and the exploited (I will return to this point, in section 3, when addressing Jacques Depelchin’s comments), or I become gripped with the fragility and misery, benevolence and creativity, even with the gifts, pains and angers of ‘people

of lesser means’ (according to the expression coined by Pierre Sansot) or ‘people from below’ (as Jean-Marc Ela would put it). And here, I am by no means in search for a heroic posturing, but only for an intersubjective location of just knowledge. Indeed, I feel profoundly ashamed at the powerlessness of Eurocentric science in the face of the macroeconomic and its intersubjective dynamics (which are often marked by greed, hatred, perverse contact, voyeurism) and which, at the intercultural and international level, continue to replicate themselves in ever-growing imperialism. It is for this reason that I chose to save my anthropological alliance with the host-society by bestowing upon it its well-deserved and affectionate attention without dispossessing my hosts of their own dynamic qualities. Unlike the condescending connotation that Professor Keita feels in my describing the host society as of being of ‘lesser means’ or ‘from below’, these depictions are by no means indicative of belittlement or inferiority. Rather, they symbolise the very greatness of the Yaka people in their effort to be creative and excel in, and from, the order of scarcity that is theirs. They combine both simplicity and inquisitiveness, vitality and frailty, dignity and distress.

My writings steer clear of drawing a comparative and Eurocentric scale that would take as its ultimate grounding the economic order of the Enlightened Ratio or individual autonomy and Human Rights. As a matter of fact, the Yaka people are not haunted by the Adamic myth of man’s fall – which, through the Book of Genesis, has continued to model Christian and Western civilisation: I refer here to the Hebraic and Christian myth of the original order of plenitude and innocence that Adam and Eve lost in primordial times and which is sanctioned by those who claim to be their descendants. The myth gives proponents a vision on the human condition as stemming from a punishment for a fault humans must have committed in their body now gripped by scopic drive. This, it is argued, led man into his being of lack, shame and finitude. Hence, according to such an Adamic myth, the body–soul divide can only be plugged up by way of suffering, hard labour, feelings of shame and the order of virtue, in a salvific divine alliance towards *Eschaton*. The Yaka culture was never crossed by an Enlightenment that

redefines the Adamic myth in the terms of an Enlightened Reason that leads to Progress.

It seems to me that social sciences – born out of the same cultural matrices, propagated during the European colonial expansion and now economic and information globalisation – barely proffer a comparative gaze that is neither voyeuristic nor ensorcelling. I launch this suspicion by relying, among others, on the criticisms levelled against Enlightenment by postcolonial and subaltern scholars and their way of thinking about their civilisation universe from categories that are meaningful within their intellectual tradition. Among these scholars I would mention, for example, Jacques Depelchin, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Jean-Marc Ela, Valentin Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Aijaz Ahmad, Claude Alvares, Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, Ashis Nandy, Ranajit Guha, Ziauddin Sardar, Edward Saïd and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

By contrast, the intercultural comparison, which North Atlantic social sciences propose to us, is often rather selective. They join forces with those modalities that set up and confirm any increase in production, management, education, gender equity, unanimity, freedom and democratic consensus. However, it is inevitably the case that the same comparative vision leads to an assessment in the face of the big feast of assimilation (of the Beautiful, the Good, the Just, the Order, Reason and Truth) to which Western modernity would have convened humanity as a whole. The more the modernistic comparative vision aims at a classification, the more it is inevitably exposed to multiple senses and forms of otherness. The question confronting any anthropologist operating in this multifaceted world marked by ‘the end of the grand narratives on modernity’ (see François Lyotard’s *La Condition postmoderne* 1979) is this: how can anthropology sharpen its ambition to translate competing analogous and objectifying systems into incomparable heterogeneousness? Is the sort of anthropology emerging after postmodernity, that is, after the collapse of modernistic craze<sup>2</sup> for the universal, not facing the need for an epistemological refoundation of its own conditions of possibility?

My answer to this challenge implies several strands. Firstly: let me repeat the core of my anthropological experience – an experience that has never stopped instilling in me the ideal of intersubjective encounter. ‘The platform’ from which I speak constitutes an experience in ‘the encounter’, that is, a presence in the others and in their world, a way of opening a world by opening myself to it. It is not in the science that I feel implicated. What mobilises me, rather, is an all-inclusive appeal that is included in the *signifiante*, that is, the emerging meaning production, while appearing in the encounter with others. Such *signifiante* elaborates a meaning that exceeds the representation that subjects make of things during the encounter. It opens the anthropological attention beneath and beyond the rigidity of common understanding, from humanistic or learned viewpoints, on the objective evidence on which the factual, as well as conscious rational knowledge and practices are set. Such attention, in its turn, opens to the human disclosing itself, to the intersubjective ceaselessly reinvented and re-endorsed, to choices that my host communities build in order to mould both individually and collectively their affects, passions and deficiencies in view of a better living together. As will be shown in the second section below, speaking is acting in the Yaka culture of orality. At the outset of formal gatherings it is customary for family patriarchs to reassert the art of encounter in such words as *Thunaha muyidika maambu* – which can roughly be translated as ‘We stand here today to produce things or a new social reality with words’. Such words express the full meaning of encounter, which invariably takes the form of palavers or common actions that co-responsible subjects attempt to achieve and whose task consists in fully acceding to the speakers’ inspiration and the emerging signs or *omina* within the lifeworld.

To enter as anthropologist in such a resonance or echo between persons and worlds engages our way of being in the space of presence and encounter. This echo steers the presence towards the other: the space and modalities of the encounter are not confined and spread in advance. The encounter takes place only where the opening to one another engenders an opening towards being and *signifiante*. The French popular etymology of *connaissance* suggests to

be born with (*co-naissance*). The term, which colloquially refers to experiential knowing and shared insight, offers an insightful linguistic rendition of the sensual, intercorporeal and dialogical sharing of knowledge and co-implication of subjects and their lifeworld, as a mode of reception and understanding in which the anthropologist is engaged. By the virtue of the sensory, emotional and thus corporeal or ‘fleshy’ co-implication (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964) of lifeworld and subjects – such as, in an apprenticeship contract, a palaver, marriage or healing – the concerted action and sharing of knowledge becomes a *co-naissance*. In its maximal intensity, such an experiential and shared mode of knowing spells out a matrixial and trans-subjective borderzone emerging from the type of borderlinking, as described by Bracha L. Ettinger, that develops as a gift of life between mother and child at the dawn of intersubjective existence. My initiation into Yaka culture offered me a similarly matrixial experience of porosity and sharing-in-difference, thus constituting a borderlinking (viz. an unstable border between here and over there, the living and the dead, the sayable and unsayable, the visible and invisible, the familiar and the strange, the controllable and uncontrollable, the self and the other). Such intercorporeal and intersubjective experience comes through, moreover, in burials and the work of mourning, rites of passage and therapeutic initiation, the lucid awakening after recovering from trance or dreamwork, the felicity or blissfulness of poetry, art and humour. The formation of such a borderlinking moreover encourages a world-to-world communication peculiar to the mediumistic divinatory oracle and to other initiatory or ritual states of wonderment and sheer virtuality opened to the future. In contrast, sorcery comes to corrupt such a formation by turning it into sheer anxiety and destructive bordercrossing.

Secondly, the sort of anthropology that I aim at is marked by a persistent self-questioning in the mirror of *cultural alterity* or *strangeness*. When endorsing the work of reason that anthropological science represents, the otherness appears where the singular local level asserts itself in the face of our still badly self-critical, hence intrusive mode of enquiry. The otherness questions our research conventions and forms of knowing, information, representation, confirmation,

modelled by our Western modernity. In line with Michel de Certeau and his perspective on an anthropology of daily practices, I strive for an anthropology that unravels the local and site-specific forms of knowledge and practices. My attention privileges the capacities for a form of autonomy that the subjects construct in their own context. I do not allow myself to be caught up by any exoticising fascination for the forms of heteronomy, strangeness or globalisation, which are likely to subvert such autonomy. The task is so vast that, as anthropologist, I run the risk of only being able to characterise such local practices, capabilities and knowledge at the sole infra-historic level – that is, below their potential contradictions or conservative effects – before having understood the local epistemology that sets for a critical and diachronic assessment from within.

Thirdly, the knot of the intercultural understanding lies in the epistemological revisiting of the problem of intersubjectivity. At this end, it is a question of getting fresh ideas and concepts that focus on the joint construction, within a dialogical exchange, of both the encounter and the otherness or cultural originality. This exchange or *co-naissance* is constructed within discursive spaces and within some deeply moving encounters where rhetorical or figurative and illocutionary form unavoidably intermingle with dissimulating silence and seduction, expressions of desire and anxiety, multcentred and polyphonic narratives. I never ceased to address issues relating to the diverse modalities of reciprocity within the intercultural encounter. The more I felt adopted by my African hosts and came to understand, in their own terms, their sociocultural living space, the more I gauged some sensibility regarding the definition of self crafted by those converts to Christianity and those who have settled in cities all the while keeping with a Eurocentric mirror of alienating constructions of adversary otherness. This implication has left me with a bitter sense of guilt because of our colonialist history, its persecuting nature and its paranoid and exoticising imaginary. This part of oneself soiled by a symbolic debt weighs all the heavier since the same estranging strangeness of the autochthonous and the allochthonous is being reproduced till today. In spite of this impasse, I have never relented in

feeling a sense of interpersonal loyalty towards, and on behalf of my Yaka host community. I have deepened my understanding of how the Yaka view themselves in order to address through some tools of self-understanding my own Flemish culture, its lifeforms and its world grammars. And the honorary doctorate has added a sense of consecutive reciprocity, providing my African and European colleagues with an opportunity to assess the sense, scope and validity of anthropological knowledge that aspires to objectivity and, in particular, to self-understanding moved by the fantasy of transparency.

Fourthly, the venue for such an anthropological encounter, in its quest for trust and mutual assistance within the host society, culminates in joint moves, palavers, rites, feasts and the sharing of daily concerns. Once such an encounter bestows upon us, as anthropologists, the meaning of its emerging production, it stands as a *Eu-topia*, that is, a good and augural space for endorsement. In other words, the anthropological encounter does not take place in an indefinite utopian place. Rather it seeks and creates a space of presence where existence shows through. Thus, it is up to the anthropologist to invest this space with those intellectual tools that he or she brings along or owes to his or her hosts, while giving to the hosts and their epistemology ever more presence and prominence.

I am asked by van Binsbergen whether *psychoanalysis* is a key to such an encounter. Let me say, first, that my psychoanalytical practice is recent and as yet confined to patients from my cultural extraction. I approach the matter as follows. Methodologically I use psychoanalytical concepts as heuristic borders in the clinical practice, and these tools are constantly subject to some clearing. The other question I have been asked is this: am I to revisit my anthropological experience, with both the theoretical and clinical eye that my most experienced colleague psychoanalyst, Claude Brodeur, has adopted when sending me letters marking each chapter of our joint 1996 book, *Forces et signes*, translated into *The Law of the Lifegivers* 1999? Unlike van Binsbergen's suggestion, I do not subscribe to a 'psychoanalytical anthropology' – one cannot put a socioculture on the couch.

However, what one can embark upon is a quest for those psychoanalytical concepts that can assist in clarifying some pitfalls of my complex phenomenological intercultural analysis. But the refinement of gaze and listening is certainly not something that is given me by American *ego-psychoanalysis* or by the French structuralist fascination in psychoanalytical circles with the symbolic function that would be at the work within the unconscious process for human becoming, interlocution, the paternal function or the death drive.

As an anthropologist I have recourse to those psychoanalytical concepts (whether they spring from Freud's, Lacan's or matrixial theories), which allow me to refine my listening to the cultural otherness, as well as to contribute to some epistemological refoundation of anthropology. This recourse, therefore, aspires to deepen among colleagues of diverse cultural or methodological horizons an understanding of our mutual involvement in the intercultural polylogue. It is a recourse, aspiring to make an emancipating contribution to both anthropology and psychoanalysis because in the process it allows these disciplines to break ties with Eurocentric precedents.

If I quite understand van Binsbergen's point, he seeks to clarify the risk of alienation affecting the anthropological encounter, from the perspective of the originary fantasies. He points to a pleasure-pain nucleus in the anthropologist's voluntary submissiveness in the anthropological encounter, and which was marked in my case by a debt relating to our Belgian colonial past. I would be tempted to say, as psychoanalyst, that such a hypothesis, though highly likely, can only be materialised within a clinical setting of a long and painful transference relationship that analytically 'works through' the *jouissance* and desire that the anthropologist would have experienced. I would like to say to van Binsbergen that, in effect, I have no other way but the personal myth to evoke the 'internal personal and collective drama' regarding my own name, René/Taanda N-leengi. It is a drama that relates to both my coming to the Congo as well as to my transition from philosophical studies, in the Jesuit intellectual and ascetic environment, to my life-long commitment to social anthropology as well as my

becoming later a psychoanalyst. Indeed, given that all my Congolese/Zairian professors at the University of Kinshasa had opted for sociology, then reputed as the science of modernisation, the anthropology school that shaped my outlook is the one of my juvenile empathy shared generously with my fellow African philosophy and anthropology students. It is above all the empathy in the encounter with my Yaka interlocutors.

I am grateful to Professor Valentin Mudimbe for offering us in *Kata Nomon* the benefit of such a captivating contribution to intercultural dialogue. As his paper reached me only after I had completed my reply to the nine other commentators, at this point I find it difficult to do justice to his extremely rich and complex analysis. However, I would like to briefly outline how the issues he raises go to the very heart of the contribution that the current postmodern anthropology makes to an intercultural dialogue today.

The postcolonial guilt – which struck most of my generation and background who came to Congo in the aftermath of this country's independence – echoed in me the trauma of both world wars that my relatives had subconsciously incorporated in themselves while transfusing it into me so that I would metabolise it. I take the paradox that *Kata Nomon* from the very beginning emphasises to be a particularly distinctive mark of my empathetic anthropological involvement with the particular historical, cultural and interactional texture of the host group. It is such an endeavour that gradually led me to questioning the modern conception of science as dominated respectively by the Hebraic legacy (with its patriarchal and demiurgic concepts of order, lack and restoration), the Hellenic legacy (directed towards separation, taxonomy, reason and Promethean self-emancipation) and by the modern Western ethos (which qualitatively gives priority to culture over nature, science over local forms of knowledge, man over woman, reason over emotion, psychic over somatic, objectivity over subjectivity, and science as separate from ethics).

Besides, my participatory research has also brought me in contact with enigmatic, hence insane experiences of subjects as well as with other experiences that resist adequate categorisation: here, I have in

mind notions such as charisma, anxiety, ambivalence, disaster, the ominous, fascination, parody, or multiple forms of artistic creativity and humour. Such experiences pertain to an order that Jacques Lacan has labelled as the 'Real', inasmuch as they develop beyond the sayable or withdraw from the Symbolic or the Imaginary. Furthermore, the subject – and in our case, the researcher and those who constitute the centre of the research – is indeed a 'split subject'. From this perspective my argument would be as follows: on the one hand, the subject appears to consciously express or execute himself or herself in a very deliberate way; while on the other hand, he or she is expressed or acted by the Other who, in Lacanian prose, 'is supposed to know' – prior to any attempt to explicitly and consciously articulate or enunciate his or her own experience. As postmodern anthropologist, I cannot do without a very contextualised intersubjectivity ethics, since I address both the split subject and the ways of the desire, the economy of *jouissance* and the lack, or the *aporias* in being between subjects (such as those found in feasting or bereavement, divinatory oracle or charismatic communes of the Sacred Spirit, sacrifice or expiation rites, trance-possession or aggression, reliable awakening or anxiety, bliss or morbidity, enthusiasm or guilt).

It is an ethical arrangement that envisages the position of the local culture towards values, and especially how my understanding can become refined in line with Lacanian thought (in its late developments starting with the 1962–63 *Seminar of Jacques Lacan X: Anxiety*). It is also for that reason that I chose to cast an 'ethical' gaze – in the Lacanian sense – on the desire at play in intersubjective fields within which my scientific and anthropological endeavour is entangled and negotiated. It is a perspective that recognises how we cannot develop a gaze or a form of knowledge that is completely neutral. It seeks a truly de-exoticised gaze or even an intersubjectively demystified, disenchanting and sensitive listening, an 'ethically' responsive and shifting decentring of self to a culturally perceptive sensibility. It gives me the opportunity to concentrate myself on the Other's 'ethical' dignity and genuine commitments. Furthermore, without taking advantage of clearly predetermined models of analysis, the type of anthropological effort to which I aspire

seeks to critically and contextually grasp my host-group's attachments – its determinations, intricacies of power and distress – to its endogenous ethics and religious values. As a voice echoing those of the host community, the type of anthropologist I am advocating tries to disseminate all this knowledge acquired and shared in both the thoughtful local yet scholarly and scientifically sound wording of both analysis and concern for the group's future.

The mythological and liminal figure of Tiresias – which Professor Mudimbe ascribes to me as a mirror-image of the articulation of both my identity as an anthropologist operating in Africa and my home country and thus of my bifocal gaze – helps me to forge my way out of the dual position, which continues to exacerbate tensions turning them into adversity or suspicion. It is, now and then, a suspicion of whether my enterprise is a science or an interpretive narrative, or again whether it amounts to a lucid anthropology or an alienating self-perception. I have lived my anthropological field experience as an experience of those who welcomed me, but also as a testimony to my durably welcoming my hosts in my inner scrutiny: that experience soaks in the fantasy-*rêverie*, which, in line with Wilfred Bion, Donald Winnicott and Didier Anzieu, I can describe as a liminal or intermediary space of transitionality. Long after my initial anthropological fieldwork, the analysis pursued into the *mbwoolu* initiatory rite and its mythical material and dreamwork, its space of play and playful touching, and its sensorium and very elaborate intercorporeality, surprisingly provided me with an endogenous Yaka glimpse on the collective unconscious imaginary activity within such a culture (see chapter 3 in Devisch & Brodeur 1999 *The Law of the Lifegivers*). More particularly, it offered me a glance of those pulsional motions, transitional activities and primary identification that the maternal instance arouses both in the newborn child and in the initiated. This gaze on the intercorporeality as well as on a developing intersubjectivity within the initiatory rite has enriched itself when I became acquainted with the matrixial approach that Bracha L. Ettinger discusses in connection with the psychic resonance field and intersubjective and trans-world borderlinking.

Anthropological writing increasingly proves to me to be ill-suited to fully cast light on the organising or original phantasms that contribute towards the shaping of individual and collective imaginary at work in intercultural encounter. In a bid to lay bare the dynamics of regression, domination, transference and counter-transference, an anthropologist – imbued with fascination and seduction or even subjection likely to play itself out in the anthropological encounter – would need to gear his or her experience towards his or her associatively speaking-out and his or her clinically listening ear. This, however, seems to me to be something that is hardly attainable. Let Professors Mudimbe and van Binsbergen not feel bad at the idea that I do not undertake to dissect more of the entangled intersubjective relations that constitute my intimate biographical identity as well as my leaning towards mediation and intercultural understanding of the otherness. Let them also not take offence that I do not unravel further my concern for paying my debt towards subaltern populations with whom I feel durably associated. For want, in this paper, of an appropriate transferential framework likely to assist me in emerging more as subject of my own history, it is impossible for me to put into an objective and transparent narrative everything that led, via my ignatian experience in Kimwenzu-Kinshasa, to my adoption among the Yaka community of Yitaanda and its Kinshasa networks and to the choice that I have made of my research topics.

Indeed, the art or specific charisma of the intersubjective (as, for example, developed variously by the artist, those committed to social or political action, the diviner or healer, the fieldwork anthropologist, psychoanalyst, psychotherapist, or lover) shapes itself according to a play that is a singular gratifying and testing of fantasies and imaginary formations that organise the specific intra- and intersubjective field. Through various encounters – involving modes of adaptation, exchanges and friendship, multiple forms of mutual assistance or malicious delight, mythical narratives and rites, rivalries and fears, seductions and effects of mediation or of disconnection – the anthropologist who participates for a long time in the life of the host-community is made to bear witness to its culture and becomes an accomplice of

tenderness or aggressiveness, games of desire and prohibitions. However, I had also to grapple both with questions that disturb and with answers that reassure. These experiences did not stop pressing on me to understanding cultural otherness. In fact, only through understanding intersubjectivity, which mobilises the affect, imaginary and research tracks, do I become both an anthropologist and psychoanalyst. Yet, in order to channel such an anthropological interrelation, I need to strip off the interbeing's power exerted within an intersubjectivity framework, which at times proves to be too straightforward. Hence, it is necessary to make a continuous attempt to recognise and name the particular, the difference, the violence and the otherness. Such a move is unravelled when placing myself within the complex borderzone. Such a borderzone springs from unconscious or transferential dimensions that come into play in the anthropological borderlinking, more particularly in its very subtle dynamics of transformational borderlinking. It is at that point that *significance* emerges through affects, emotion, imagination and interlocution. These dimensions articulate themselves alongside various modes of adaptation, perspicacity and information transmission. Thus, they convey titles and initiatory knowledge that take place between the anthropologist and the host community. This borderspace concerns the relational mappings from which the anthropologist and his or her inside sources emerge as subjects on a par with other researchers and co-partners. Put differently, they all emerge as subjects who are invested with significance within a presence, matrix or open tension.

### **Towards a Reappropriation of Local Knowledge Forms and Practices**

Throughout all my journeys to the Congo and through my own bifocal mirror gaze between Africa and my native Flemish culture, the 'ethic of contextualising truth', to which I aspire, sets the context for making the ethics of research more specific, especially in and through the quality of the encounter. By and large, such an ethic seeks to secure an understanding of the host society in its internal conceptualisations and their epistemology.

In his warm and fully empathic reflection Professor Yoka reviews the anthropological project that my colleague Filip De Boeck and I have continued to shape under the unstable impulse of the genius of cultural domestication so widespread among Kinshasa's residents. Starting from the terrible clash of civilisations and the passions in Kinshasa and Congo in times of crisis, Yoka would expect more boldness from social sciences. He asks for an even more cunning genius, in particular in the way these sciences tackle endogenous or local forms of knowledge. As a playwright and academic, Yoka stands as one of those who convey and produce local forms of knowledge, alongside Congolese singers whom he praises. As for Professor Lapika, the promoter of my honorary doctorate, he outlines a similar decolonising vision of local forms of knowledge. It is a vision that he describes as being an urgent project for redomestication. As Professor Nzongola-Ntalaja shows, only by opening ourselves to the infinite creativity, originality and 'the implicit' of host communities or networks can we achieve a decolonising understanding that surfaces whenever a true encounter takes place.

Nobody more than Lapika has for many decades been my privileged interlocutor. This has been the case throughout my involvement in interuniversity projects and in the vast amount of research I was able to undertake in medical anthropology assessing the biomedical centres of community healthcare and investigating the Kinshasa healers and healing churches. In response to Obetela's wish, I would like to reassure him that my research in the domain has also been quantitative. Lapika and I were torn between opposite loyalties, but we have each on our own side exercised authority over our subject-matter concerning the uneven technological and scientific development or the *significance* of rational and effective management against the *precellence* of passion to live. That is what differentiates the 'North' or the 'centre' and the 'South' or the 'suburb'. (In this Euro-centred prose, 'centre' refers to the multiple centres of world power, be it of political, financial, military and/or media order, whereas 'periphery' refers to the so-called developing countries inasmuch as they badly need technological means.) Accordingly, radical postcolonial anthropology

attempts to deconstruct North/South or centre/periphery divides. In the light of a growing number of peripheries or subalterns, postcolonial anthropology recognises how much the assumption of civilisation dominion from the West or a 'centre' now gives way to an interweaving of horizons, namely plural and partially rhizomatic civilisation trajectories.

On one hand, a number of scholars such as Samir Amin, Jean-Marc Ela, Paulin Hountondji, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ali Mazrui and Kwasi Wiredu immensely contributed to the anchoring of Western intellectual traditions into African languages and cultures. By the same token, these scholars were authoritatively advocating for the dignity and multivalent originality of intellectual and artistic skills of their peoples so open-minded in today's world. On the other hand, the science developed in universities has its strengthened findings reflected in the negative otherness foisted upon popular forms of knowledge. In this way science has never ceased to proclaim that it constitutes the sovereign way allowing the periphery to become a co-author of History and to reach the centre's level of technological development.

In the name of the particularly big influence that this science has exerted on tangible reality, universities entrust to their practitioners – especially those operating in the periphery – the emancipating and necessary mission of unmasking the so-called reactionary cultural claims and forms of local authority, whether customary or state-based, considered as excessive and erroneous. Deeply questioned by these exceedingly antagonistic and recolonising positions, I tried hard to examine some less explored aspects of possible links between Eurocentric sciences and the forms of endogenous knowledge and capabilities in local cultures. These forms of knowledge develop themselves on a daily basis within locally anchored practices, within groups and networks, their vernacular languages and in line with their ontological aims and epistemological traditions. This decolonised and plural position, of which Lapika, Mudimbe, Nzongola-Ntalaja and van Binsbergen stand as advocates, ties in with the awareness of the infinite ways of being and knowing so well-documented in the seven volumes published by Roland Waast 1996 *Les Sciences au Sud: état des*

*lieux*. It is a position that resists the homogenisation of plurality, and appeals to a developing Afro-modernity and true cosmopolitanism in Africa.

As an anthropologist with over thirty years of association with host communities and networks, the most shocking thing about the modernist or postmodern rhetoric on specular cultural interbreeding and 'development' in the wake of *Aufklärung* and Progress ideologies, is that such rhetoric opposes economic and media globalisation against the local, which it regards as adversary otherness. In the name of the ostentatious novelty marketed from day to day through the technocratic globalisation of an increasingly intersecting universe, the same rhetoric runs the risk of overlooking the authentic originality that takes off from far beneath and hardly considered layers of symbolisation and ethics of subjects apprehended from their vital networks and own terms. Besides, such rhetoric directs all its attention towards a technocratic future where the Factual reigns supreme along with its publicised image in the multimedia. While disseminating hedonist advertising images, that rhetoric feeds 'people of lesser means' (especially teenagers among them, as I have witnessed in a most shocking way in South Africa) with a sense of exclusion or even failure. The perverse effect is that such a normalising rhetoric undermines creativity among these people in a strangely worrying fashion. Indeed, the language of mass media tends to underestimate the dense singular word of the subject, network, people or specific symbolic site. By specific symbolic site I mean traces and echoes of people's aspirations, anger and differences, as well as relationships with the unspeakable and the invisible. Indeed, these aspirations, anger and creativity continually weave the intersubjective and intergenerational communities or networks when transmitting life or expressing affliction, in what they have of more vital but certainly also of potentially paralysing or destructive.

The option for an interdisciplinary and intercultural Master's degree in 'Cultures and development studies' I introduced in 1999 in Leuven (see [www.cades.be](http://www.cades.be)), critically and contextually deals with the hitherto unexplored relationship between, on the one hand, sciences developed in

universities born out of the modern Western model as a vehicle for the modernistic credo and telos of Western culture and, on the other, endogenous forms of knowledge that are specific to interregional networks of local cultures – namely, anchored locally within groups, associations or networks, and their vernaculars. This exploration is moreover conducted against the backdrop of people's ontological aims and epistemological traditions.

I am perplexed over the suspicion that Lansana Keita, unlike Yoka, casts upon contemporary anthropology. He basically considers this anthropology to be colonising and reactionary on account of its continued attempt to study very widespread cultures of orality. But does such suspicion not originate from the modernistic option that allies philosophy, as a universally oriented academic discipline, with the culture of literacy? Such a philosophy – while subordinating orality to literacy, *connaissance* to knowledge – is in fact not predisposed to understand cultures of orality from within themselves and without prejudice. Furthermore, Keita appears to make reference only to alphabetical writing, which, in Black Africa's history, is largely a by-product of colonisation and/or Christianity. He does not mention those highly coded systems of signs and graphic patterns that scholars like Clémentine Nzuji Madiya have investigated in the context of Africa's cultures of orality. Nor does Keita refer to the other writing modes, whether Arabic, *N'ko*, Mande or Amharic. Surely each of these forms of writing offers a different way of capturing and storing particular relationships between facts, word, meaning, consciousness and action.

Let us, therefore, revisit the intellectual differences between oral and written cultures. It seems, at first, that in Central Africa's cultures of orality the long-lived interregional or professional networks or communities of mutual assistance in rural and suburban areas exchange their forms of knowledge, in the presence of authorised experts, by means of multisensory, aesthetic and/or practical transactions. Orality develops its own cultural genius – to which van Binsbergen dedicated an original philosophical analysis in his innovative 2003 book entitled *Intercultural Encounters*. Orality brings into play certain bodily

dispositions of participants, which are variously and culturally shaped. While orality does not always escape from the dramatic pathos to which palavers or mythical rite have recourse, it is not primarily geared towards an empirical assessment on the order of the facts, nor is it directed towards a quest for self-critical truth asserting itself in the face of some heterodoxy. Orality articulates an emotional and conceptual sense of meaningful participation arising within the group happening. Such a meaning is captured through the notion of *co-naissance*. It is also a type of dialogical discourse transfusing a rhetorical emotion on issues and responses. The oral styles of communication seek to provoke a density of sensorial and corporeal meanings within the encounter. Such meanings aim to revive, for example, the status of key personalities and the field of their intersubjective and invisible strengths. Orality grounds and revises the memory of rhythms, emotions and forms of ritualisation within bodies, particularly inside people's heart as the seat of secrets and ethical judgement. It is intercorporeality that stocks up collective memory that is the original domesticated memory, that is, the memory regarding the originary household. Intercorporeality drives the existential, contextual and intercultural interpretation that subjects concerned make of significant events. This is also another way of saying that orality facilitates representation and recognition of events and realities in their polysemic dimension, which the group's ethical values inform and dramatise through their metaphorical language and corporeal enactment or performance.

By contrast, the literacy-based culture – at least the alphabetical or linear form of writing – implies a *techné* capable of anchoring knowledge in a meticulous rereading of texts that is endlessly open to the scopic drive, notably to a searching gaze in quest for objective knowledge as perceived in its visible evidence or its historic embodiment. The written word also produces a type of representation of the ideas that maintains them at distance within the framework of a more individual and critical interaction with the text and the authority to which it refers. Let us here think of the paradigmatic example of scrutinising and thus distancing relationship that the heroic subject of Calvinist predestination initiates with regard to the biblical text and the divine

message. In sum, the written word has contributed towards moulding the self-centred and introspective subject in Anglo-Saxon and Calvinistic modernity. In particular it has promoted an essentialist dynamics within which knowledge is tantamount to a mirror reflection or representation of reality. Through the *habitus* of the written word, the anxiety that we feel in our personal experience when brought face to face with the unpredictable – which more poignantly grips those oralcy-based societies depending on a precarious ecosystem – can give way to an approach of reality that unleashes tensions between the established order and the risk of disorder. Besides, by his or her alphabetical transcription of concrete reality or text-based living, an author can experience a paradoxical sense of control that enchants him or her while this written word can also disenchant and instrumentalise that same reality.

Are not linear writing, along with mathematics and exact sciences stemming from literate Arabic civilisation, instruments that the West later developed in its universities in order to foster its modern imperialism? These instruments are joined to the religious worldview of lack – which the Book of Genesis had sanctified in the myth of Adam and Eve. They reinforced the *episteme* of conquering European empires, as has been demonstrated by the philosopher Hans Achterhuis in his 1988 book *Het rijk van de schaarste* – the Rule of Scarcity. These instruments and Christian worldview have doubtless contributed to the transformation of European regional civilisations from being agricultural and crafts-based into industrial mercantilist ones. They have nurtured the imperialist ambition of these empires, as much as their greed and pathos of technocratic development, which now drives the existing economic and information globalisation.

Today, it is worth observing – in the light of Charles Melman's *L'homme sans gravité* 2002 – that for part of this Europe that has been so much in love with ultra-liberalism and techno-scientific ideology, the Discourse of the Father or Master no longer holds sway, and nor does the discourse of Religion or of the State. Rather, people living in that part of Europe appear to be modelled by the 'nice goods' of mass consumption and satisfaction

that a globalising liberal market economy offers. The switch to coded electronic communications, according to customers' needs (e.g. SMS, electronic mail, blogs), may well be globalising. However, they create a *sui generis* culture of a mediatised vernacular (whose rationale has taken over from the user), without singularly metaphorising desires and worries of the subject, even leaving out any reference to a script that is foundational of existence or ethics.

As for the well-read circles of the North and in the South – where subjects and institutions keep organising themselves partly in reference to the text – I would like to make an appeal for a differentiated articulation between the oralcy and literacy in a way similar to the articulation between *co-naissance* and knowledge, participatory co-resonance and objectifying representation. Let the academic not forget that he or she learnt his or her mother-tongue through bathing in the sounds and even living word of the mother, father, brothers and sisters. In a nutshell the academic needs to realise that he or she came to speak the mother-tongue through the intimate and welcoming familiar daily life since the dawn of his or her life. This affectionate mother-tongue is represented through narratives and an indefatigable call for duty. It is being handed down from one generation to another along with pains and joys. It is in this way that a child acquires a lasting sense of self, and belonging to others and to the human and 'extra-human' (in the sense of 'more than human') world. Following my experience in the multicultural circles of the Congo, it appears that the people rely on their mother-tongue to express their ethical commitment and attempt to shake themselves from any form of dominion in a strong intersubjective, intercorporeal and trans-world resonance. (I here have very much in mind people such as healers, elders, matrons, storekeepers, craftsmen, intellectuals, members of the clergy, political and religious leaders.) By contrast, it is the case that languages inherited from the coloniser do not appear to them to be particularly engaging, especially when it comes to addressing collective ethical issues in the public domain.

Eco-feminists, as much as poets do, argue about the importance of reconnecting the Western intellectual to his or her mother-

tongue, to sensorial intercorporeality and to ways of expressing and acting upon daily life as well as to the desire implied or conveyed through such a language. This amounts to saying that the intellectual should be open to the plurality of the culturally specific bodies of knowledge and practices while overcoming his or her technological, bureaucratic and phallogocentric alienation. That is a perspective that critics of decolonising postcolonial reason cherish. These criticisms are formulated departing from African realities (Valentin Mudimbe 1988 *The Invention of Africa*), South American (Walter D. Mignolo 2000 *Local Histories/Global Designs*), and Indian ones (Dipesh Chakrabarty 2000 *Provincializing Europe*; Ashis Nandy 1988 *Science, Hegemony and Violence: a Requiem for Modernity*; Gyan Prakash 1999 *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1987 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*). It is in this vein that I place my effort to highlight the epistemic and gnostic originality of divination and healing cults. It is also in this context that I direct my attention to life transmission in Yaka society, in keeping in with a style of cosmo-vision and millenary medical traditions that are widespread in Bantu Africa.

### Towards an Intercultural Emancipation

On my way of becoming permeated with the social and cultural genius of 'transforming man into a human being' (as Eboussi Boulaga would put it) – a genius that is so pervasive in African societies that would accommodate me – it is in Kinshasa (Kinshasa) that I laboriously undertook to challenge my initial emancipating and liberating ambition along with its Euro-Christian hallmarks. No sooner had I embarked upon this process than I realised that such an ambition was vitiated at its core by relentless reproduction of the trauma that colonisation triggered through its intrusive and paternalistic programmes. Such programmes, while being devised in the North, were tantamount to truth-bearing conversion, took the guise of technical assistance, and ironically contributed to the widening social, economic and technocratic gap between North and South.

Certainly, I have always refused to settle down in the comfort of someone who is

satisfied with mere denunciation of history. Quite the contrary: I have made strenuous efforts to deepen the encounter with others and alterity in its cultural and colonial pulsations. The contact I have made with host communities in ten African countries is no doubt of an uneven intensity. However, it has connected me with the lucid genius of survival in the rural and urban poor but culturally robust circles, and has sharpened my plural and bifocal gaze. Mudimbe has depicted this by reference to Tiresias, whose liberating art of piercing into the unspeakable is characterised by Sophocles, Euripides, Apollodorus of Athens, Ovid. Hence, while remaining moreover lucid as to my own origins, I have in the present reflection perched on the shoulders of a number of scholars such as Eboussi Boulaga, Mbonyinkebe, Nzongola-Ntalaya, van Binsbergen and Mudimbe. The significance of such perching was to reevaluate what I was aiming at by installing within my confronting research in Kinshasa an intermediary space to allow the encounter with cultural otherness and its forms of being and meaning to take place. Mbonyinkebe has variously depicted this disposition as one of 'patient listening, clinical gaze and healers-like sensing out'

The encounter that the anthropologist pursues calls upon the subjects to disclose themselves in their true social and cultural originality or identity as it is embedded in its original legacy and metaphysics. Adopting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, I would argue that the anthropological encounter calls for us to develop intersubjective positions within which each of us can, incidentally, express and deepen our own sense of pride for an infinite variety of stories, intersubjective identities, proper speech places and significance. It is a space whereby the subjects can investigate the possibilities of signifying and expressing what they feel challenged. Since undertaking research in very many different places in Flanders and Africa, I have realised that my quest has proved increasingly and contextually confined, while remaining bifocal or even plurifocal. Such a quest bears witness to the increasing particularisation of intersubjective communication as well as to the culture-specific shaping of intersubjectivity. It is readily asserted by networks and groups in numerous regions

of the world, that is, well beyond a globalising and all-embracing One represented on economic and information levels.

Indeed, as Mbonyinkebe rightly suggests, the aim of postcolonial anthropology – which I fully endorse – is marked by a call and ability for us to open up to *cultural otherness* in the sense of its originality and re-origination. However, this does not imply an unavoidable return to a particular cultural heritage or identity. Rather, it means that the anthropologist needs to experience his or her hosts' ability to entrust upon one another their true sense of the Human, to such a degree that the speakable and the signifier move close to fading into contact with the unknown or the unspeakable – which Jacques Lacan calls 'the signifier of the barred Other'.

And it is precisely this relentlessly adaptive and receptive position of polylogue that renders me unable to join in the very important albeit political and liberating project of Professor Jacques Depelchin. Besides, as an anthropologist who is wedded to committed listening to the non-literate who constitute the vast majority of the suburban population in Kinshasa, I would like to invite Professor Lansana Keita also to include these people in his philosophical cause for development. It appears to me that it is not the fact of orality that leads to economic underdevelopment and social and cultural 'misery'. Rather, it is greediness and other drives unleashed by wars that today side with the sorry state of African states and infrastructure. Furthermore, the 'the misery of the world' – as defined by Pierre Bourdieu – is very much a spell cast on towns and suburbs rather than on illiterate people.

It is, doubtless, Marxism that for the first time sought to chase away the North Atlantic ideological and socioeconomic roots of the One-world hegemony. I do stress the merit that Depelchin deserves for having contributed, in a real countercurrent of lucid thought and commitment in the political arena, to revealing the long-lasting pathology from which Western bourgeois circles suffer, in particular in my country of origin, Belgium. It is about the addiction towards the control, hegemony, greediness and misunderstanding that has still not stopped until today in contaminating these countries in their maritime, colonial, scientific and geopolitical imperialism. The

contemporary rhetoric of globalisation and Human Rights prolongs the inability for a certain West to recognise its extremely violent connections with the fantasised Otherness as adversary. It endlessly rehearses its inability to fathom the repressed in the way it thinks of the Otherness and fails to see the genuine capacities in the cultural Other so as to engage in complementary or even egalitarian relationships. I agree with Depelchin that indeed Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire – in their *négritude* of political and social contest, which radicalised itself into a *négritude* of attestation – were the thinkers to have uncovered the perverse psychological *habitus* internalised on both sides by partners in colonial, neocolonial and racist exploitation.

It is through self-observation, seeking to further clarify my researcher's positioning and approach, that I hope to answer satisfactorily the questions and remarks suggested to me by Depelchin, and, indeed by Keita. For sure, as Eboussi Boulaga has guessed, it was not possible to me to associate myself physically 'as a Crusader for justice' with the important political cause and ethics of sociopolitical liberation of the Congolese people. I do admire the spectacular feat of Professor Depelchin in eastern Congo. I am impressed by the fact that he made himself one of the main architects to have brought Mzee Laurent-Désiré Kabila to power in May 1997. For nearly two decades, Depelchin joined forces with Professor Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, then President of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD Kisangani) and negotiated the end to the civil war. It is, only then, that Wamba was called to prepare the Congo's peace process, lead his people to the 2006 national elections and implement a democratic constitutional regime. However, how can we think, without inner repression, about the muddle for such a cause as tied in with a most murderous violence perpetrated by the armed factions who, for more than a decade, do not stop ravaging eastern Congo?

Unlike Depelchin, it is not in the Africa of the Great Lakes, which is his mother's native soil, but in the borderspace between Flanders and France, bruised by Two World Wars, that I am taken in a debt on the maternal tree of life urging me to pick up fruits hidden amid crushed

branches and leaves. Although I, as an anthropologist, am hardly a social and political revolutionary in the wake of Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, Alain Bidou or Sylvain Lazarus, I aspire to become what Eboussi Boulaga, Lapika, van Binsbergen and Mudimbe have termed an 'intercultural revolutionary' who through a bifocal questioning has adopted a Yaka gaze on my society of origin as well as in the university enterprise that I am part of. But the comings and goings between the confronting Other's gaze and my experience with my own native environment carry cultural alterity forward in the clash of civilisations. That experience has prompted me to challenge the 'alienating' discourse of the master. I have asked myself about how such a discourse was fostered by the coloniser and colonised as well as by their descendants. I was moved by the desire to unearth how such a discourse plays out within the project of 'becoming another' and of 'whitening mind and soul'. The perspective of my discourse, teachings and publications reveals that I unambiguously join in into the anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic criticism, in lines with Depelchin's work and that of my other commentators. In other words, I have proved relentless in distancing myself from the all too Eurocentric gaze born out of liberalism and Enlightenment rationality. I would particularly refer to my papers that excoriate the so-called civilising mission of missionaries and colonisers. I have examined the persecuting nature and paranoid imaginary of such a mission by adopting the gaze of my Yaka hosts. I have here in mind some of my publications dealing with my experience in Kinshasa between 1980 and 1990. These publications, it must be stated, look both at the side of alienation and that of unsuspected creativity. If 30 June 1960 leading to Congo's political Independence left a lasting impression on Depelchin, who was then a young man completing his school curriculum at the Jesuit lyceum of Bukavu (east Congo), I was at that time just beginning my secondary school education in Flanders. There, I only received a paternalistic and widely fantasised image from the Tropics. It was an image centred on the educational and evangelisation mission in Africa. Let us remind ourselves that in this period the television began to enter only little by little into Flemish homes.

I am acutely aware that a Marxist perspective demands in principle that we shelve indefinitely any interest in cultural specificity or dynamics, and that it disregards this for a phenomenological approach and psychoanalytical sensibility. Such an interest is often dismissed out of hand when pitted against the attraction that the militant Marxist develops to bringing out the dialectics of the inescapable by unmasking conflicting forces at play and short-circuiting the nefarious effects of various existing forms of power, exploitation and alienation. However, it is not, it seems to me, the lack of the anthropologist's militant commitment in the political struggle for emancipation that aggravates injustice inflicted in and within the host society. As far as I am concerned, I have trained African and European anthropologists so that they can critically and lucidly reflect on the interaction within contextual networks. I have also instilled in my students a sense of mounting a social critique that favours liberating justice. I have devoted my papers and some of my lectures to unearthing the problem of blind spots and ignorance maintained by partially unconscious passionate strengths at play in the relationship between colonisers and colonised or their descendants. In this perspective, I have never relented in reporting the clash that local socio-cultures undergo as a result of virtually impersonal macroeconomic mechanisms and the devastating effects that often go unchallenged. As learned scientists would put it, these mechanisms and their effects go on reproducing themselves because of the informal dynamics at work, but also because of the ethics of the group, shared beliefs, ignorance, incompetence, monopolies, passions and inertness...

Unlike some of my Mulelist classmates at the University of Kinshasa, the Mulelist and Gizengist offensive in the land of Mbuun-Pende (Kwilu-Kasai) in 1963–64 was not regarded by the Yaka I visited as part of their collective memory. The Yaka territory – which has, by the way, remained without oil refineries and colonial plantations – is within only a week's walking distance from the Mbuun district, yet that district remains largely unknown to the Kwango population. The fact that I have reported the official labelling of the students' protest on 4 June 1971, publicised as an act of high treason

against the President of the Republic, and which led to the students enlisting in the army, by no means conveys my confusion and reservations on the development of Mobutism. During the years 1971–72, and because of the imminent risk that any manifestly critical expatriate ran of getting exiled from the country, the rampant militant zeal that Mobutism mobilised caused my inability to publicly show how heartbroken I was to have experienced with my colleagues such a brutal, excited and repressive experience of zairianisation seeking to wildly replace any (allochthonous and autochthonous) frame of reference.

I would also invite Professor Obotela to think of the same dilemma. Indeed, to what Janus was I subjected? Should I have – because of my origin but unlike my numerous Congolese friends – identified myself with the ones who were singled out as the Congolese people's enemy and seen as exploiters and alienators? Did I not distance myself from the often unacknowledged colonising desires of the many Westerners in the Congo at that point in time, which no doubt repelled me? Did I have the right or ability to take up my share in the work of revealing the true soul of the Yaka people, who were very marginalised on the national stage, on which exogenous attentions and passions had focused? What remains certain, however, is that a number of Congolese and European friends helped me beyond measure to keep the veil lifted on Janus. I do still hear some of these friends say: 'Go to it, put yourself with passion in the school of our people in the village and in the city; contribute forcefully to the Yaka people's regaining of dignity, nationally and internationally.'

And now the anthropologists, of the style I am identifying with find themselves in much less comfortable physical circumstances than those scholars affecting a university and urban infrastructure. They remain in that position because they want to question all their intellectual experience by launching themselves into research at the risk of having to leave their position of subject: by putting themselves in their hosts' school and submitting to their standpoints, they are constantly surprised, without being ever an eye-opener. Because they did not commit themselves into a political or emancipating drama, nor accuse themselves as the ones

by whom the scandal arrives, anthropologists are neither liberators nor missionaries; neither of a depressed nor melancholic conduct. Anthropologists do not settle down in the comfort of those who decipher the enigma, the poverty, or the beauty of the Other. They are called upon to move their locus of investigation, not only starting from their interlocutors' gaze, but especially also by following the working or playing out of displaced or mobilising, passionate or afflicted *significance*, all the while disclosing what invigorates or saddens the subjects. And the more the encounter with prominent subjects of the host-community deepens, the more the encounter confers a disclosing power upon the mutual exchanges.

Although I have exercised caution, I have by no means perceived the award of an honorary doctorate as likely to reiterate or aggravate the discriminatory societal relations cast at the time by the colonial master who established Lovanium within the melting pot of intercontinental hegemonic interests. This honour appeared to me to be a huge wink of eye and lucid loyalty on behalf of Congolese colleagues who have acknowledged so many years of my honest and collegial intellectual quest. As Professor Lututala, Rector of the University of Kinshasa, stressed while awarding the honorary doctorate, it was the mark of the long-lived interuniversity fellowship existing beyond the contradictions affecting, by definition, every single public institution and university relations. It was a symbolic gesture that was made regardless of the depressing and shameful crisis affecting both the University of Kinshasa and North-South interuniversity solidarity. I could say that my contribution tries to dig up systematically local forms of knowledge that sustain a people's existence. Such a contribution joins the reflexive effort of host-members and representatives of institutions managing such forms of knowledge. Among other things, the contribution targets those forms of knowledge promoting togetherness, as much as possible devoid of exploitation or alienation, and capable of encouraging a real platform for intercultural exchanges. Such an interest, therefore, involves an emancipating aim that is also dear to a Marxist ethical vision for a contextualising social economy.

Unlike Depelchin's and Keita's perceptions of my stance, it should be stressed that my intention runs, by any means, counter to depicting the romantic Africa of the village. Rereading Professor Keita's comments leaves me with the feeling that he appears to have only picked and summarised some of my themes into a suspicion of essentialism that would have been seeking to reduce village, orality and local knowledge forms to primitivity. I would join other commentators to say how much, for 40 years, in my writing, lectures and interuniversity cooperation I have fought hard to see the end of such exogenous and exoticising anthropology, which Keita seeks to resist with all good reason, but perhaps not without a pinch of uncontrollable bitterness. And, my writing were, if it needs repeating, recognised at many scientific African stages as offering a fresh potential to rethink specific modes of making a livelihood in a contextualising fashion and in accordance with the subjects' very perspective and cultural genius.

Furthermore, basing myself on a long and wide experience of very diverse African contexts, whether urban or rural – which were tremendously challenging – my plea as anthropologist in DR Congo today concerns the social networks in their capacity to contextually manage their social and cultural economy, while favouring a social criticism of exploitative mechanisms phased in by the state and the globalised fetishism of imported consumerist goods. This social criticism also concerns any of the 'developmentalist' headlong rush in complete disregard for resources as well as impediments that play out in local communities or networks. I here refer, among others, to the resources that local knowledge forms constitute, as examined above. Besides, such a developmentalist view takes its root from ideologies of instrumental rationality and progress. These ideologies are, in turn, fuelled by the *Aufklärung* and Christianity projects. It is of such projects brought together in Africa in their allegedly liberating but imperialist ambitions, that I am witnessing the paranoid impasse experienced by numerous people in Kinshasa. These people have now internalised their parents' humiliation. Having been mobilised for progress in the name of conversion to literacy and the Bible, the heirs of this (post)colonial civilising endeavour now find themselves

in the shanty towns gripped by abject poverty owing to hyper-inflation and bankruptcy of the state and the employment market. In addition, the school and market economy, in particular, call for individual competition. It encourages individuals to sever links with family obligations as well as with moralising appeals launched by churches, exploitative elders and the ruling class.

As an anthropologist, I am wedded to the principle that in order to escape alienation caused by exogenous models, each network or community needs to voice its own emancipation models. And so I would not join Professor Keita when he seeks to legitimise his aim for developing future Africa according to the paradigmatic example of China since Mao. A growing number of recent studies have established how much the erosion of feudal structures by Mao's communist and cultural revolution – violent and hardly mobilising from within socio-cultures – did not radically change, in the majority Han population, the conceptions of world ordering and the very ancient and sexist family *habitus*. The writings by Kuan-Hsing Chen, a social science lecturer at Taiwan National Tsing University and editor of the journal *Inter/Asia Cultural Studies*, show how China today, in parallel with its macroeconomic headlong rush, is integrating some technological know-how and economic management stemming from Western modernity. Professor Chen also points to the fact that China is simultaneously going back to its roots, unearthing some professional cultures and specialised forms of knowledge as transmitted by the *literati* of very ancient tradition in the empire's history. We must not forget that the pre-Mao Chinese civilisation had a science, an army and a state bureaucracy that proved to be more developed than the West stepping over to its industrial revolution in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. My visit to Beijing and Shanghai, and my exchanges with sinologist colleagues and our Chinese students in Leuven, show – next to my limited knowledge of some learned literature on contemporary China – how the intersubjective societal dynamics and China's 'imperial' vision of the world seem to offer little to possibly compare with the great diversity of African realities experienced on the level of communities and networks in the ten African countries I visited.

Besides, while resisting undue attempts to generalise, we must raise questions about some of the so-called ongoing Chinese initiatives for development cooperation at the level of Congo's subsoil. Such initiatives repeat in a more intrusive way the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' economy of counters, thus reissuing a sad precolonial experience, while seeking to connect such economy to the Atlantic sea port through railway and river networks. Ironically, local approval for such an economy of rent implying the extraction of resources, confirms a very ancient arrangement within the local dynastic traditions. But who, among Congolese people, would benefit from such initiatives? Besides, I would also add that Professor Keita is welcome to accompany me in my visits among the Yaka population in Kinshasa, while adopting the gaze of Professor Yoka or a gaze of the informal economy cherished by breeders of poultry, small entrepreneurs and petty traders.

Such a move would assist in understanding the project of Kwame Anthony Appiah, Valentin Mudimbe or Wole Soyinka. It is a project that claims for the right of African people to reanchor themselves in their own metaphysics, to rearticulate their ethical premises to the world today and in this way question the future of African thought both in their soil and the Diaspora. It is thus for this purpose that on completion of my philosophy studies in Kinshasa (1965–68) – where a dialogue dawned between Eurocentric liberating mission and Bantu philosophy – I was desperate to study anthropology in order to learn from the daily and long-term experience of a particular society living in rural and urban areas of the Congo. Along with the sacrifice of my reassuring grounding in my Flemish culture of origin, as well as of

the thought of the unique truth, what attracted my attention to the rich interweaving and encoding *signifiante* of the physical, social and cosmological body was the entry into the corporeal and passionate dimension of the meaning-bearing endeavour. In such an endeavour, word, gestures and actions are carried by people and exchanged by subjects acting from within their context. The endeavour led me up to the 'unsaid and unthought-of discourse' (according to the phrase of the late Gérard Buakasa) that takes us back to the interpretation of *signifiante*. While taking inspiration from Michel Foucault's examination of bio-politics, I have examined his views in detail against the background of life and health management that are variously operated by healers, public health services as well as healing cults and churches. Moreover, through supervision *in situ* of doctoral theses in various African countries, I had the privilege of enquiring closely into the intercivisational branchings (*branchements*, in the 2001 term of Jean-Loup Amselle).

The epistemological mutation I underwent in Africa suggested to me at first the need to question the civilising claim of rationalist modernity and its postmodern narcissistic withdrawal. Further, that mutation implicated me lucidly and contextually in the pathos of the intercivisational project of 'give and take' aiming at tracks of a sustainable and more equitable development. With this experience behind me, I have lived through the honorary doctorate and the present exchange as assuring me of the relevance and need of a piercing and bifocal gaze, and a particularly attentive listening. I will, therefore, not hesitate to refine such borderlinking listening and lucid gaze, as Tiresias would. So, in the shared borderspace between the

recontextualising initiatives developed by Bantu and Euro-American socio-cultures in the management of the living and the confrontation with the unknown and the invisible, I will refine my discernment into a contextual commitment to intersubjective and ethical exchange. Discernment and criticism will still relate to innovative and equitable forms of interacting social networks where the subjects assume their own sociocultural identity without ignoring illusions, alienations and feelings of powerlessness. Such discernment will at the same time focus on points of openness and opportunity – despite hollows of the indefinite, and rejection or estranging strangeness – in the palimpsestuous, intersubjective and 'glocal' quest for health, lucid consciousness and better living-together amid multiple and confronting networks.

Should I dare to believe that such a perspective can reunite us more? Should I hope that it can bind together anthropologists, societies or networks into a ceaseless polylogue, a reciprocity of gazes and an intercultural conversation that is, nevertheless, shaped on the basis of the presupposition of our respective civilisation originality as well as on the basis of the intracultural and intercultural limits of the presentable, sayable and translatable?

## Notes

1. Translated from the French by Paul Komba.
2. Postmodernism has delivered a primarily negative assessment of the Enlightenment 'subject'. Postmodern analyses have regarded the subject as merely an effect of discourse or as a 'position within language'. But I am interested in the notion of embodiment as a means of getting at the realities of 'difference' among a plurality of subjectivities.

## French Policy on Immigration and Co-Development in Light of the Dakar Speech

Should we honestly discuss, solely on the basis of President Sarkozy's speech delivered in Dakar on 26 July 2007, the serious sociopolitical, anthropo-philosophical and historic issues that are obvious in relations between France and contemporary Africa? This paper is an attempt to set aside, or at least to put into perspective the critique of cultural and identity essentialism which, apparently, underpins reactions to the Dakar speech. These reservations can be explained on two grounds. First, Sarkozy spoke in Dakar not as a scholar or even an essayist, which he is not, but as president of a state that built 'France-Afrique', whose operational norms and constraints continue to lie heavy on the imagination, and on French political practices and relations with Africa. Should the real theoretical focus not be on identifying and analysing the implications of the Dakar speech with regard to the policy he seeks to justify: immigration 'chosen and not endured' and the new (?) ideology of 'co-development', that is, mutual development? That is the focus of this paper. The second reason for our reservations regarding the criticism (albeit objective) levelled against the French president is that Nicolas Sarkozy relies rather on African writers, and on disputable ones, for that matter, such as Senghor, to the detriment of European or French researchers. This clearly shows that the time is ripe for a critical analysis of the culturalism of African writers who, while celebrating a weird and delirious *Homo africanus*, prop up day-old theorists like Sarkozy, which is more than he could ever have asked for. But that is another debate. What is the substance of the Dakar speech, and what gaps in his knowledge have African scholars and researchers highlighted so far?

It would be recalled that the French president, true to his offensive and even provocative style, after hurriedly pointing out that colonisation and the slave trade were historic crimes and errors, rejects repentance arguing that 'sons cannot be asked to atone for crimes committed by

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their fathers'. That is nothing new, since this simplistic refrain sung by the whole French political right all the way to the far right, is well known to Sarkozy and his peers, at least since the parliamentary debate on the positive role of French colonisation overseas and the 2005 crisis in the suburbs of Paris. This time, the faith in a Franco-French government ideology, both complex and unscrupulous in regard to French colonial policy, is accompanied by an attempt to theoretically justify African underdevelopment. However, the historical, cultural and ideological resources that the French president contributed towards the construction of his perception of the causes of underdevelopment in Black Africa were fraught with 'substantialism' and a revisiting of the fantasies that marked the dawn of the colonial era. And this leads fatally to the Sarkozian theory of the 'African', whose timeless soul is damned: *'the African tragedy'*, the French president asserts, *'is that the African is not sufficiently integrated in history. The African peasant [...] whose ideal is to live in harmony with nature, only knows the ever revolving wheel of time punctuated by the unending repetition of the same gestures and the same words. In this mindset whereby everything always starts afresh, there is neither room for the human adventure nor for the idea of progress. In such a universe where nature reigns supreme, the African remains immobile amid an unchanging order in which everything seems to be predetermined. Here human beings never take a leap into the future. It never dawns on them that they can get out of the humdrum repetitiveness and forge their destiny.'*

Since the Dakar speech, several scholars, Africans, humanists or Africanologists have reacted, each in their own way, to what can be objectively viewed as the

president's ignorance of the African reality, and worse still, his racial profiling of history and progress. From the scientific standpoint, this position smacks of total ignorance. The only African scholar the president refers to is Senghor, who Africanised and endorsed Eurocentric racism by developing a 'serene' Négritude, which holds that as a result of 'biologisation' and 'negrification' of the emotion, Africans can bring nothing more than the dance to world civilisation, while abstract activities are incumbent upon reason, which is Hellenic. The French president, by disinterring Senghor in Dakar, is relying on an author whose 'serene' Négritude played a 'philosophic' role in the promotion of essentialism in principle, which leads to the legitimisation of the indigene/civilised dichotomy. Apart from this reference to Senghor, whose poetic hotheadedness estranged him from the African reality, the French president displays total ignorance in the Dakar speech. He is totally ignorant of critical and theoretical masterpieces on African civilisation, novel political ideas and *sui generis* sociopolitical transactions published decades ago by both African and French researchers. Moreover, these works show to what extent new African perspectives are undoubtedly moulding and shaping a new sturdy breakaway form of modernity. I recently contributed to this critical interpretation of African civilisation by analysing the socio-genesis of clandestine immigration in Black Africa, a sociological study of which shows that it is not so much the relocation of what the French and Western elite have termed 'the world's misery'; it is one facet (yet to be adequately described) to the numerous counterattacks on the structural crisis affecting the African state whose hegemony is henceforth artificial, since public policy prerogatives have been displaced and entrusted to multilateral players.<sup>1</sup>

Sarkozy's choice of words in the Dakar speech, therefore, shows to what extent the question of drawing up the balance sheet of colonisation has suddenly

become an imperative that is no longer in the interest of the supposed 'victims', but in the interest of the colonial administrators, since it is now pegged to political make-believe that is outdated and, what is more, is not a comprehensive assessment of colonisation. From the theoretical and semantic standpoints, the Dakar speech can be rightly criticised as a step backwards: in his 'frankness' and 'sincerity', Nicolas Sarkozy has let the cat out of the bag in broad daylight, revealing what had hitherto come under the province of classified secrets, that is, that in both form and substance, the intellectual arsenal that underpins France's African policy literally dates back to the end of the nineteenth century. This, therefore, is a policy that, for the sake of coherence, hinges on an obsolete intellectual heritage that is almost a century old, in spite of all the patching up. Nicolas Sarkozy's speech in Dakar shows how the 'new French elite', holed up in a frivolous and exotic vision of the continent, are pretending to shed light on realities that, like a nightmare, have always haunted them – race – the truth of which has always eluded them.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, we must discard such analysis of Sarkozy's mindset and symbolic policy to understand and situate the Dakar speech in the context of French politics. Against this backdrop, the issues raised in the Dakar speech are different: how does this intellectual armature, marked by prejudice, frivolity and ignorance, form part and parcel of what I would call the Sarkozian perspective proper, which has been unfolding since the eve of the French presidential campaign? In other words, how is it that, instead of calling for a new foundation, a new contract of mutual trust with Africans, the Dakar speech attempts to justify current thinking both with regard to immigration policy and co-development? It is important to understand how internal and domestic policy choices and practices, which today are marked by hardly symbolic acts of violence against African immigrants in France, make the Dakar speech a simple pace-setting speech. It should be pointed out that the Dakar speech is more than an episode in a political thriller – it is pragmatic and constitutes a milestone in Sarkozian Machiavellianism. To clearly understand it, we have to situate it in the chain of preceding structural government actions (establishment of a Ministry of Identity and Co-development, selective

immigration) and those that follow (expulsion quotas, DNA tests for foreigners applying to be reunited with their families, etc.). Further, the time lapse between the Dakar speech and the hardening of internal policy poses another problem. What if co-development itself became an instrumental concept, a trap, in such a context characterised by violence, ignorance towards African modernity, the sidelining of the people, clearing France's name and making Africans feel guilty?

### **Genetics and Repression of Illegal Immigrants**

#### **A Symbolic Political Tactic**

In light of this question, the crux of the Dakar speech would be to understand immigration policy and co-development as the refracted prism of an ideology geared towards marginalisation that validates the political concept of an Africa and would make it a 'detached world'<sup>3</sup> par excellence. This concept, which is as old as Western imperialism, is viewed, at least by the 'French elite', as the very essence of one form of the 'concept of the state'.<sup>4</sup> This is how the French state fundamentally views itself, with the other – the Black continent, the foreigner and the strange continent – being relegated to the status of an 'outside world', a far-off land deserted by thought, money and development. The political impact of such a prism is cosmetic: it imposes itself on French citizens and Africans through various cultural channels (schools, the media, etc.) as the gospel truth. However, the first historic consequence of the imposition of this political fantasy is not in the underdevelopment of Africa, which indeed feeds and sustains the Elysian gloss; it is in another form of underdevelopment implied by the force of this fantasy: the narrowness of the horizon on which the Black continent's problems are viewed and objectively explained. The ingurgitation of this narrow prism through which Africa is viewed was and still is the basis for political and cultural representations, one of whose consequences in the metropolis is to have made the colonisation of Africa inevitable, at least from the viewpoint of the political elite. Another consequence is the paternalism and the superiority complex of successive French governments.

The French president's Dakar speech, read between the lines, is an endorsement of the presumption that identity differences are insurmountable and that human relations can only be relations between people viewed primarily as distinct and irreducible. The Dakar speech abandons traditional republican expectations to return, in fact, to this conservative presupposition, which serves as a theoretical and political postulate for the nationalist right. Back in France, at the very heart of national policy, one of the salient aspects of this determinist stand is Sarkozy's adoption of Jean-Marie Le Pen's nationalist right-wing position, which earned him practically all the votes on the far right and consequently led Sarkozy to create the unprecedented and controversial Ministry of National Identity. Abroad, this entails, as it does in the Dakar speech itself, a search, first and foremost, for an ahistorical African essence, even if it means denying the reality of the historicity and modernity of Sub-Saharan social attitudes. According to this essentialist political approach, if *Homo africanus* does not exist, he must be created. Sarkozy resorts to such blatant essentialisation of the Négritude that fetishises attitudes that Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon brilliantly interpreted as a fascicule of complexes linked to violence inflicted during the slave trade and the colonial era.<sup>5</sup> This is a subtle attempt to secure 'African' backing and a parallel to the identity problems and essentialism that tax Sarkozy's own political thought.

#### **Immigration Policy and Denial of Identity**

Contrary to what some commentators and critics have observed, the Dakar speech is not a simple exercise in political fantasy wherein the denial of the African reality plays no political role. Such denial is an episode in the orchestration of a global categorisation. Thus, the serious lapses and bibliographic choices that impact on the French president's conceptualisation of his African policy tie in with his conservatism which, by politicising national identity, shows to what extent he perceives human beings as predetermined invariables. One can even talk of general determinism that also influences some of the major orientations of his internal policy. Geneticist Thomas Heams is right in his searing criticism of the Dakar speech, which he describes as

'the most racist official French government speech in a long time';<sup>6</sup> he draws a parallel between the speech and Sarkozy's determinist ideas on paedophilia voiced during the French presidential campaign. The image of the African stuck in his peasant and ahistoric nature is very similar to that of the paedophile's genetic recidivist predisposition...

All this raises questions as to the ins and outs of French immigration policy. The fourth hardline measure adopted by Sarkozy, with the Minister of National Identity, Brice Hortefeux as band leader, was approved by the French National Assembly in the 24 October 2007 vote. The peculiarity in this hardline measure is the introduction of genetics into French general law, through a provision that has already blocked all possible legal channels for facilitating immigration. On the pretext of controlling the legality of parenthood, the DNA of foreign nationals whose papers are in order, 'integrated', so to speak, can now be obtained and stored in a country that is deeply opposed to the ethnic and racial profiling that facilitated the abhorrent administrative practices during the Second World War. It is worth noting that the initial policy that made DNA testing general and compulsory has been sufficiently disputed and even abandoned, thanks to amendments by a senate that is particularly averse to this legal provision. Thus, the provision adopted by the Assembly is purely symbolic, as DNA testing is now optional and limited to maternal parenthood and some cases of families resident in countries without a reliable civil status administration.

That notwithstanding, DNA testing is not a light matter. In principle, it is proof of discrimination: what can no longer be done to citizens over sixty years ago when Jews and other victims were deported and massacred using similar methods can now be done to foreigners without any scruples, even if it means weakening the contractual and purely cultural foundation of the immigration policy and, generally, French identity. It does not suffice to say that eleven other European countries are doing it: historically, France is the only Western country founded solely on the philosophical values and principles inherited from the Age of Enlightenment. Accordingly, there are no races, no ethnic groups – only human

beings with reasoning faculties. The essence of the much-vaunted French nationality is repugnant to ethnicity and race, which compels the French executive and legislature to steer clear of this pornography that is spreading in the other major European democracies (Germany, United Kingdom, etc.), where governments are peeping into people's privacy and biological nudity. It was introduced in Germany, on the basis of the racist underpinnings of the Bismarckian state, which was first and foremost Germanic, and in the United Kingdom because of its multicultural population, where ethnic origins can be a legitimate referent in general law. The introduction of DNA into the immigration problem is a transgression, a regression that the symbolic and anti-racist legal system of the post-Vichy period strongly reaffirmed.

However, this transgression has its Sarkozian dimension; it is used to justify a policy that keeps certain categories of humanity at bay – categories that are lagging behind in the modernity race, and who, on account of their pariah status, are forced to act like impostors. The introduction of DNA in the law somehow legitimises the symbolic lynching of people who have been denied the right of access to modernity. Here we are dealing with a policy of otherness which, in the case of Africans, translates into an immigration and co-development policy whose dimensions are taking shape and increasingly conforming to the myth of an Africa which has 'dropped out', as a recluse in its 'detached world'. How can we believe in this 'partnership between nations that are equal in terms of rights and duties', which Sarkozy refers to in the Dakar speech, at a time when this myth is so deeply ingrained in the French government's mindset?

This question arises at a time when Romania's entry into the European Union, whose nationals represent a third of the 25,000 annual expulsions from France, has increasingly led to reductions in the immigration quota, thereby closing the net around illegal African immigrants living in France. In this regard, one wonders whether the insignificant number of illegal immigrants whose immigration status is regularised, the rampant expulsions and numerous forms of violence targeting illegal immigrants are not (before and after the Dakar speech) examples of auto-

legitimation of this form of violence and symbolic exclusion by Sarkozy's choice of words and convictions on African identity. And, what if these illegal immigrants are equated, as we might expect from the concept of modernity, with those who are identified and oppressed because they do not have an identity? What if they assume the appearance of those whom Kevin Bales has described as secondary entities, disposable people doomed to be got rid of or ejected out of the modernity for which they have never been destined? DNA testing to ascertain the paternity of children in the process of family reunion is yet another ploy to further extend this symbolic repression to all foreigners from the South. It is now obvious that in France a genealogy of symbolic violence underpins and sustains the legislative measures aimed at limiting the rights and freedoms of people from regions that are disqualified by the president at a glance. This is a result of the reinvigoration of French internal political interests and representations on African immigration based on identity prejudices.

### **Co-development as an Instrument of Exploitation**

All this ultimately raises another crucial and related question: can we still talk of co-development, which entails respect of common interests and social justice, especially with regard to mobile persons and the different ways in which people join the modernity bandwagon?

### **The Ins and Outs of a Franco-French Concept**

To answer the question whether co-development is not an illusion in a context marked by deep-seated prejudices and powerful French internal political interests, it is important to consider the manner in which this concept has been fleshed out in the relevant government department: the Ministry of National Identity, Immigration, Integration and Co-development (MIINCOD). This ministry was created at the very inception of the Sarkozy/Fillon government. It is self-evident that in this thematic melting pot co-development is the least controversial concept, in light of the view that this ideological ministry is a tool for exploiting immigration. It is, nevertheless, a charged concept that has inherited the ideological representations of the postcolonial order.

Indeed, as regards France's African policy, co-development is a concept that replaces 'cooperation', which was in fashion from the African independence era to the 1990s. Extending the colonial hegemonic system and rekindling the old dream of the French empire, cooperation was used during the period in question to establish and maintain in power African governments that are inefficient in terms of democratisation, political and economic transparency. It also opened the door to the relocation of surplus French 'technical' manpower destined to play the lofty role of 'technical assistant' to remedy the shortage of executive staff in the new-born African states. France, by opting for 'stability' instead of supporting the growth of African societies, has set cooperation on the path of the obsolete Foccart network set up at the outset of the Fifth Republic.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation has been worn out by its failures and irrelevance. In Africa, French cooperation came up against the ideology of 'good governance', which imposed structural adjustment programmes orchestrated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in the 1980s. Thus, 'cooperation' ended up yielding to 'co-development', officially institutionalised when the left regained power in France in 1997. This concept introduced a symbolic innovation: the yearning for respect of African societies whose citizens would eventually offer alternative social technologies to development and express their specific needs in terms of quality and economic prospects. It was therefore important to support Africans instead of imposing on them external visions, as is self-evident in the Dakar speech. Co-development implies, in principle, equality between actors and values that 'co-develop'. Thus, it became a means of breaking the hegemonic predisposition evident in African reports of French technical assistance. France thus wanted to get rid of her cultural and political paternalism.

As recently as 1998, in an authoritative article on the subject, Christophe Daum reviewed that the approach of the French government was not only improper but ineffective.<sup>8</sup> In his view, the relations that inspired that approach tended to protect the interests and supremacy of a patronising vision of the development of the immigrants' countries of origin, in defiance of the entire African socioeconomic reality. To be just, fair and

effective, the approach to the development of the countries of origin should be based on the testimony and priorities of immigrants themselves who know better than anyone else what is good and just, be it in terms of investments or economic policy choices. It would also be proper to analyse current development processes that bind the vision of African societies in ideological shackles that grow in the minds of decision-makers with no room for contributions from African social realities.

From this point of view, it cannot therefore be said that the evolution of the co-development concept has succeeded in suppressing the old state as employer/state as client dichotomy found in the centre/periphery relationship of subordination that France and Europe maintain with the former colonies, and which is epitomised by Sarkozy's so-called 'outspokenness' in Dakar.<sup>9</sup> Co-development is struggling and straining to take stock of the social innovations that have accompanied the birth of an African social field.<sup>10</sup> Although this can be explained by several factors, the gap between what African societies are and what they want, on the one hand, and the French vision, on the other, is attributable to the routine knowledge and bureaucratic reflexes of development assistance, which, by becoming a system in itself, serves the political ends of stabilising African governments rather than the needs of the social field that burst on to the political scene in the 1990s. By confining themselves to presidential palaces and protecting governments from their societies, the French presence and hegemony in Africa has confined co-development to a vision of patronising assistance. However, the critical dimension of this field indicates more clearly the national disenchantment in Black Africa. This shows that, since the dawn of political liberalisation in the 1990s, the logics and federation of the expectations of social actors, at the very least, ended up competing with the hegemonic policies and operations of state authorities that now reign over 'empty societies',<sup>11</sup> as Serge Latouche calls them. The whole problem with co-development apparently lies in its inability to rise above its jaundiced vision of Africa constructed as a stagnant pool by the so-called neo-paternalists whose voices still echo in the Dakar speech. Co-development has been slow in liberating

itself from its 'fetishisation' of bilateral cooperation in order to integrate in its structure, this dimension of sociological transformation of African societies' vision of their governments, themselves and their capacity to accept and interpret their own expectations.

France has abandoned cooperation and embraced co-development, but has probably kept the ideology, while continuing to view African societies as reservoirs of misery, people who elude modernity, and not at all as settings where political creativity and the social demands of the actors are clearly calling into question the absence of political innovation.

### Co-development in Its Ministry

Can one expect any innovations from the MIINCOD in the area of mutual development? Nothing is less certain, particularly after the Dakar speech. And even if nobody can honestly regret the disappearance, under Sarkozy, of the 'Department of African Affairs' at the Elysée, several factors frustrate any dreams of a revolution in co-development or, in other words, in France's African policy. The fact of the matter is that the new French president has accepted this concept which he did not create, and even to take it in the state in which it is currently transformed and manipulated within the European Union. In fact, in France and elsewhere in Western Europe, co-development is only meaningful in a global strategy to combat illegal or underqualified immigration from poor countries. In Brussels, this concept clogs the entire European policy on immigration aimed at curbing the influx of underqualified immigrants (87%) into Europe. By protecting French internal policy interests and riding on this European consensus against the so-called 'misery' immigration, the MIINCOD can only shoulder with great difficulty any autonomous and innovative vision that would lend political weight to co-development. The 'new' vision of France's African policy is therefore not far-reaching enough and badly needs an impetus. Furthermore, it is confined to a real *realpolitik* straitjacket wherein there is no longer any question of helping Africa, out of generosity or repentance, to come out of the doldrums, but all is geared towards safeguarding immediate interests. Against the backdrop of the

Dakar speech, the MIINCOD will be tasked with abandoning the policy of fellow-feeling that runs across Franco-African relations, and instituting a policy that openly prioritises French internal interests. Further, such protection of national interests would corroborate the hexagonal character of the new French presidency observed during the presidential campaign, and which was fleshed out in the televised debate between Sarkozy and Royal. The wide range of issues of internal policy, such as purchasing power, environment, nuclear power, reforms and immigration, revealed a more 'super prime minister' and less international facet to the French head of state. The dimension of the five-year term and the requirement of movement fall in with this profile, and in the context of the oversized internal policy interests, the president loses his influence as a 'great friend and protector' of Africa in the way he reacts in his relations with the continent, depending on the sectors involved. For instance, the prioritisation of expulsion figures and the efficiency of house arrest mechanisms developed or imported into Africa will be the cement of Franco-African cooperation in coming years. France, the great France, seems to have thrown in the towel, in favour of its oversized internal policy.

The disproportionate extension of internal policy is very far-reaching. The relocation of co-development to the MIINCOD marks a turning point: the entry, whether voluntary or involuntary, of France into bilateral relations in its African policy. The unveiling of the era of bilateral relations is a real innovation by Sarkozy since this ministry is new in the Fifth Republic. The attachment of co-development to the MIINCOD indeed marks the end of an era. This is very significant because it appears to withdraw, for the first time, France's African policy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or, in any case, reduces the influence of its Secretary of State for Cooperation. France's African policy therefore appears to be steered as a branch of internal policy, with MIINCOD actually becoming an 'ideological' poll of a split Ministry of Interior. This withdrawal is the direct effect of the rejection of (illegal) African emigration, by former Minister of Interior Sarkozy, now French president, which signals France's abandonment of the hegemonic role it has played in Africa. This African policy shift at the Elysée is a clear reflection of the

reality: Sarkozian co-development marks France's decline in Africa, under pressure from a combination of factors: African people's resentment of a xenophobic policy rid of its hang-ups, the dynamism of the Chinese who are competing with France in key sectors of 'technical cooperation', and, since Dakar, the calling into question of Africans' ability to take up the challenge of modernity. The imperative of meeting the demands of these new developments will entail shifts in the balance of power between the state and social actors. In this new era of strategic and prospective analysis, the Dakar speech comes across as a real tactical delay, as France's rivals have understood the political utility of respecting the demands of African societies.

In short, prior to the French president's speech in Dakar, the entry of co-development in government was not part of a strategy to achieve the objective of 'contacting African societies' and building France's policy with Sub-Saharan Africa on new foundations. It paves the way to providing a skeleton service and condoning routine knowledge and mechanisms for supporting governments, in line with the policy of relocation and European subcontracting of police surveillance of immigration. African governments thus constitute technical staging posts for European domestic policies. We can therefore expect that the French president, within the framework of the Mediterranean Union, will call for stricter routine checks and record-keeping. It is therefore obvious that the fight against migrating Africans will intensify, in spite of the avowed ambitions (research, trade, position of Turkey, which no one wants in the European Union, etc.) and the desire for a common future exhibited in the Dakar speech. To this end, more and more repatriation agreements will be signed to increase efficiency in repatriations, and visa requirements will be tightened coupled with much less diplomatic demands on African leaders who will have to step up surveillance at borders for fear of being sanctioned by cuts in whatever will be left of development assistance. France would thus be in conformity with an approach that has become the inevitable paradigm in EU/African relations.<sup>12</sup> The real challenge in co-development lies in the risk that African states will consider their emigrants as criminals, since the former

will be judged by their ability to keep their nationals confined to their homes. In this regard, only countries with policies that efficiently limit emigration will be labelled as 'friend of France', to the others' great displeasure. With co-development walking hand-in-hand with an immigration and national identity policy, we may well witness a widening of the gap between African societies and governments, and a hardening of dictatorships, amid the indifference of a France that is bent on guaranteeing the efficiency of steps taken by African states to serve its internal policy.

## Notes

1. See 'Sans-papiers, figure du politique. Hégémonie au Cameroun, Etat et cultures nationales en Europe', PhD thesis in political science at Université Paris 8 (531pp.), defended on 22 June 2006, *magna cum laude*, by Ange Bergson Lendja Ngnemzué, under the supervision of Prof. Pierre Cours-Salies. The author studied Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Philosophy at Yaounde University before undertaking further studies at Université de Paris 8 (Sociology and Political Science) and at Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne (PhD thesis in Philosophy in the process of being completed).
2. See *ibid.*
3. For a detailed and well-thought-out introduction on African civilisation that takes into account several sociopolitical life settings, see the following: Georges Balandier (with Jean Coppans) 1985 *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires* (Paris, Presses de FNSP, 2nd edn). See also Jean-François Bayart 1985 *L'Etat au Cameroun* (Paris, FNSP, 2nd edn); Jean-François Bayart 1989, *L'Etat en Afrique, la politique du ventre* (Paris, Fayard); Jean-François Bayart 1996 'L'Historicité de l'Etat importé', *Cahiers du CERI*, 15: 3-49; Jean-François Bayart, Béatrice Hibou and Stephen Ellis 1997 *La criminalisation de l'Etat en Afrique* (Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe); Jean-François Bayart 2004 *Le gouvernement du monde. Une critique politique de la globalisation* (Paris, Fayard). Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz 1999 *Africa Works, Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford, James Currey). Fabien Eboussi Boulaga 1993 *Les conférences nationales en Afrique, affaire à suivre* (Paris, Karthala); Fabien Eboussi Boulaga 1997 *La démocratie de transit au Cameroun* (Paris, L'Harmattan). Jean-Marc Ela 1983 *La ville en Afrique noire*

- (Paris, Karthala); Jean-Marc Ela 1990 *Quand l'Etat pénètre en brousse..., les ri-postes paysannes à la crise* (Paris, Karthala); Jean-Marc Ela 1994 *Afrique, l'irruption des pauvres. Société contre ingérence, pouvoir et argent* (Paris, L'Harmattan). Peter Geschiere 1995 *Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique, la viande des autres* (Paris, Karthala); Peter Geschiere 1999 'Le poids de l'histoire', in Christian Coulon and Denis-Constant Martin (eds), *Les Afriques politiques* (Paris, La découverte/textes à l'appui): 29–43. Serge Latouche 1998 *L'autre Afrique, entre don et marché* (Paris, Albin Michel); Serge Latouche 2003 *Décoloniser l'imaginaire. La Pensée créatrice contre l'économie de l'absurde* (Paris, Éditions Parangon). Charles-Henri Pradelles de Latour 1991 *L'ethno-psychoanalyse en pays bamiléké* (Paris, E.P.E.L). Achille Mbembé 1988 *Afriques indociles. Christianisme, Etat et société en postcolonie* (Paris, Karthala); Achille Mbembé 2000 *De la postcolonie, essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris, Karthala). Célestin Monga 1994 *Anthropologie de la colère. Société civile et démocratie en Afrique Noire* (Paris, L'Harmattan). Luc Sindjoun 2002 *L'Etat ailleurs. Entre noyau dur et case vide* (Paris, Economica). Jean-Pierre Warnier 1993 *L'esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun* (Paris, Karthala).
4. Mbembé, 'Le président français...' in Mbembé 2000.
  5. *bid.*, and especially 'Du hors-monde' ; 217–63.
  6. Abdelmalek Sayad understands 'pensée d'Etat' [concept of the state] as a concept whereby the presence of an immigrant is set up as 'presence in default or by default'. This 'concept of the state', which is a powerful instrument of political control and form of symbolic violence, is disseminated through various channels (schools, artistic expression, etc.), and 'reflects, through its own structures (*conceptual structures*) state structures, as inculcated by each individual, in the literal sense of the word, that is to say, incarnated' (Abdelmalek Sayad, 'L'immigration et la "pensée d'Etat"'. Réflexions sur la double peine', in Commission européenne 1996 *Sciences sociales. Délit d'immigration*. Bilingual French/English publication of the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (Luxembourg); 13–43, at p. 17 for excerpts cited.
  7. See Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs* et *Les damnés de la terre*.
  8. Thomas Heams is a lecturer in Genetics in Paris, and author of the 2007 article 'L'homme africain... Retour sur le discours de Nicolas Sarkozy à Dakar le 26 juillet dernier', in *Libération*, Thursday 2 August, available on <http://www.liberation.fr/rebonds/discoursdesarkozyadakar/270247.FR.php>
  9. François-Xavier Verschave 2005 *De la Françafrique à la Mafrafrique* (Bruxelles, éd. Le Flibuste).
  10. Christophe Daum 1998 'Développement des pays d'origine et flux migratoires', *Hommes et migrations*, no. 1214 (juillet-août): 58–72.
  11. Bertrand Badie and Marie-Claude Smouts 1992 *Le retournement du monde, sociologie de la scène internationale* (Paris, Presses de la fondation nationale de science politique/Daloz).
  12. Using the Cameroonian example, political scientist Luc Sindjoun explains the concept of the 'social field': 'The social field, a concept which wards off the illusion of and independent civil and virgin society, free of all political corruption, pertains to a set of relations between actors influenced by a wide range of logics that transcend the political aspect. From an analytical standpoint, it is distinct from the political field of which it is purportedly a subject, and encompasses religious, economic and cultural dimensions, etc. The Cameroonian social field, understood as a system of concurrent and complementary relations between actors and groups for the promotion of their co-existence and mutual understanding, is analyzed through the dialectic of the conservative order and inventive disorder.' Luc Sindjoun 1996 'Le champ social camerounais: désordre inventif, mythes simplificateurs et stabilité hégémonique de l'Etat', in *Afrique politique*, no. 62 (juin): 57–67; quotation at p. 57.

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# Négritude and Postcolonialism: The Dakar Satire, or the Ideological Revenge of The West

## Introduction

If the cream of Africa's intelligentsia had not pursued the resistance with wailing sirens of postmodernist-cum-postcolonialist 'deconstruction' of the *Third World, of unbalanced development* and of the *theory of dependence*, one would have been greatly tempted to hold the somewhat masochistic view that 'Africa has only got what she deserves!' However, to cloud the issue and exculpate himself of any moral responsibility for what is happening, Mr Sarkozy's main protagonist in this affair, Achille Mbembe, has suggested the fake possibility of heaping responsibility on colonial ethnology and Hegel, in spite of his constant commitment, like the French president himself, to delegitimise the nationalist and Third World struggle. Accordingly, Mbembe has attempted to obfuscate: (1) what constitutes the topicality of the Dakar speech, namely, the ideological revenge of the West regarding the issue of a new world order, and (2) the convergence of the pronouncement with Senghor's most radical views and also with some trends of postcolonial ideology, the link being endorsement of the empire (Eurafrique, globalisation) and dislike for anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist commitment.

## The Topicality of a Speech

In spite of appearance, Mr Sarkozy's pronouncement refers neither to the past nor to the racist prejudices against Africa. Firmly predicated on the topical issues of our world and yet forward-looking, the speech endorses certain disturbing phenomena of our era: the momentous revival of aggressive tendencies of 'liberal imperialism' in the world; attempts to recolonise certain major Third World states (Iraq, Iran, Syria, etc.), the diktat of economic partnership agreements, in the spirit of Eurafrique, etc. Put together, these phenomena are a testimony to the impasse on the essential issue of the *new world order* clamoured for by the Third World. Ideologically, the West responds periodically to this crucial question by

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denying the existence of the Third World and discrediting the theory of unbalanced development and dependence, which justify such requests. Outside this context, the themes of the Dakar speech would be difficult to grasp. Let us recall them: *refusal to repent*, an obsessional reminder of *the Third World's responsibility for its own misfortunes* – a unique phenomenon in the history of the world – assertion of the *benefits of colonisation, emancipation from ghetto life, hybridisation, internationalism, Eurafrique*, etc. The consistency of this theme with delegitimation of the Third World, of nationalism and of unbalanced development appear clearly in *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc: Tiers-monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* by Bruckner 1983,<sup>1</sup> who thus revives a much bigger project for which Aron has a more radical title.<sup>2</sup>

## Exorcising the Decadence of the West

How does one divorce the feeling of guilt and self-hatred, put an end to the attendant idea of decadence and invite Europe to, at last, gain awareness of its superiority? Such is Aron's objective. For him, the danger threatening Europe stems from what constitutes at once its strength and its fragility: (1) the weakness of its power and (2) the inclination to self-criticism, guilt and repentance. Europe can only surmount the moral crisis it is experiencing if it takes its ideological revenge against its rivals: communism and its offshoot, the Third World.

Césaire was able to prove the guilt of a 'morally and spiritually indefensible' Europe, with the indictment 'provided at international level by dozens and dozens of millions of Men who, in the depths of slavery, set themselves up as judges'<sup>3</sup> (1955/2004: 8). For the first time, slaves had an advantage over their masters: they

knew henceforth that the latter were liars; that between colonisation and civilisation there was an infinite gap (1955/2004: 10). Loss of the empire was the culprit's terrible punishment, a moral defeat as devastating as the fall of fascism, a pure offshoot of monopolistic capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

The denazification of Nietzscheism, the barbarism of the Indochinese, Algerian and Vietnamese wars, the inculcation in minds of the fascist myth of a powerful (Gaullist) state, nuclear disarmament of the South and destruction of its economic and industrial potential through structural adjustment programmes, military occupation and recolonisation of hostile major Third World states, etc. – these and many more examples confirm that the ideological, political and military revenge of the West is irreversible. It is henceforth clear that the bourgeoisie is no longer ready to make concessions to the poor, since such concessions are tantamount to loss of power by the beneficiaries of the current world order.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to the extent that the functional concepts of Third World and unbalanced development made it possible to pin-point the structures of domination and oppression of our time and offered a theoretical and political alternative to colonialism and imperialism, they had to be discredited. Indeed, the bourgeoisie was convinced that decisive victory over communism and, by extension, over the Third World, would pave the way for a period of stability, predicted by poststructuralism and the end-of-history thesis. Such doctrines betokened the absolute reign of the universal and homogeneous, Christian and capitalist, liberal and democratic state. French thought in the last decades of the twentieth century perfectly reflects such evolution, as illustrated by Aron and Foucault, the two greatest French thinkers of that era.

## Discrediting the Third World

This is a direct result of the theoretical rejection of communism. Indeed, Aron accuses Leninism of having created the

Third World as a problem by raising the argument of *unbalanced development* as part of criticism of monopolistic and imperialistic capitalism, seen by Lenin as a parasitic regime. Aron's entire task consists in demolishing this argument, which is the basis of all the others. Imperialism presupposed that the West survived on shameless exploitation of other peoples, which meant affirming the illegal origin of its opulence. May we recall that Lenin saw in the colonial market the only place within the capitalist system where it was possible to 'eliminate a rival with monopoly, secure authority, strengthen "necessary relations"', etc.<sup>6</sup> According to Aron, capitalism does not survive on the 'surplus extorted from dependent peoples'. He cites as proof the 'high living standards in metropolitan States that became "victims" of "decolonisation"'.<sup>7</sup> Aron puts into perspective the importance of 'colonial wealth' by arguing that the first Spanish and Portuguese conquerors acquired precious metals as possessions in the distant past, a period of glory and power, but did not acquire any lasting wealth or the capacity to produce wealth (1977: 273). He bases his argument on two interesting examples: Germany's purported industrialisation before its acquisition of colonies, and France's ownership of a dispersed and unprofitable empire, which did not 'contribute substantially to the industrialisation or the wealth of the metropolitan State' (1977: 274).

One may legitimately wonder about the intellectual probity of the author of such lines. How can one hide the massive historical fact that without colonial trade, the major economic changes of the mercantilist era, in particular, would have been difficult, if not impossible? Without such trade, it would have been impossible to restock a whole range of food, mineral and textile raw materials, etc., which were so vital for the expansion of European industry. Indeed, cotton, wood dye and cabinet wood, silk, spices, indigo, coffee, tobacco, precious metals, etc., proved decisive for an industrial revolution whose historical scope transcended the simple boundaries of pioneering nations. Similarly, it is difficult to hide the fact that the slave trade contributed enormously to increase the concentration of capital available to the rich merchants who were to become the first real bankers of the West. The financial and economic importance of such trade can be felt in

Europe's main commercial centres: Lisbon, Seville, Antwerp, Bruges, Nantes, etc. Now, from these cities, the proceeds from triangular trade by land and maritime routes were to benefit even the economies of Germany, Scandinavia, Poland, the Baltic countries, Russia, etc. To prove that there is no direct link between colonial domination and the prosperity of the West, Aron, cites the case of prosperous European states that did not own colonies. Such an argument about prosperous countries within the confines of Europe would have been tenable had Ziegler not aptly raised the question of 'Swiss imperialism'; he accuses Switzerland of playing 'the indispensable role of receiver for the world imperialist system'.<sup>8</sup>

None of these arguments succeeded in pushing back the line of defence of a culprit happy to quibble about the meagreness of colonial benefits, and thus better exalt the infinite superiority of the West's industrial genius. Aron is convinced that with or without colonial exploitation, the West would still have developed. Conversely, he wonders whether without colonisation, Morocco, for instance, would have developed faster.

Aron willingly admits the commission of crimes in the scramble for the control of cheap raw materials. This is immaterial! In spite of such 'crimes', however, Westerners do not owe their current living standards to cheap raw materials (1977: 255). According to him, 'the productivity of labour, which is expressed as GNP per capita, does not resemble the gold or diamond that the invaders exported as a sign and benefit of victory' (1977: 255-6). To better invalidate the theory of unbalanced development, he points out that: 'It is indisputable that there was violence and plunder. However, such violence and plunder are not exclusively responsible for or the major causes of poverty in Africa or South-east Asia' (1977: 275). Here, Aron clearly formulates an idea revisited much later by Bruckner, namely that the violence against other peoples blamed on the West simply coincided with the latter's breach of the poverty pact that bound them to the rest of mankind. This means that the West is 'aggressor' only to the extent that its opulence suddenly unveiled to the peoples 'the contrast between the so-called modern sectors and the others, diseased cities, shantytowns and favellas in the periphery of luxury

neighbourhoods, the comparison offered by television between the misery of some and the ostentatious consumption of others' (1977: 276). Thus, development brings into focus underdevelopment exactly in the same way as health unveils sickness or daylight unveils the night. Aron argues that 'under-development necessarily accompanied development because some States first engaged in economic and industrial development, while other States or peoples lagged behind' (1977: 277). Aron even invites the Third World to pay homage to colonisation presented as an excellent vector of cultural growth. Indeed, each time Westerners 'directly ruled foreign peoples, they brought along certain elements of their own civilisation such as railroads, machines and administration' (1977: 278). Mr Sarkozy extends the list by citing bridges, roads, hospitals, dispensaries, schools and knowledge. Both of them are unaware of or scorn Césaire's arguments:

They tell me of progress, 'achievements', cured diseases, a living standard raised high above the people themselves ... they assail my head with facts, statistics, kilometres of roads, canals and railway lines. And I tell them of thousands of men sacrificed in Congo-Océan. I talk of those who, as I write, are digging with their bare hands at the port of Abidjan...<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein, they are refusing to acknowledge that the achievements brandished were financed with money from the colonies. Former colonial masters even obliged some independent states to pay to them debts incurred on behalf of colonies, not leaving out rents for plots of land seized or colonial buildings constructed.

Let us return to Aron, who invites us to revisit all the principles underpinning the development economy. Cartels are accused, for instance, of imposing 'unfair prices', but no one says what is an 'unfair price' or a 'non-exploitative price' in a trade relationship. Consequently, all calls for a new world economic order are invalidated. In addition, for him, such an order is 'meaningless' (1977: 296). 'The South will have to content itself, for a long time yet, with dependence, which necessarily involves some asymmetry in favour of the powerful and the rich' (ibid.). This must be so, for according to Aron,

'neither the monetary regulations nor the trade rules' (ibid.) of the current world order are negotiable.

In essence, Aron does not understand the absurdity of the belief that the claims of the South are justified in themselves. Indeed, he argues that the Third World is only taking advantage of the tolerance of the West 'supposedly rooted in the principle of equality of individuals and nations – as well as in the unity of the human race' (1977: 279). He accuses the poor of blackmail, since the latter say that the legitimacy of their claims is premised on 'the crimes committed by Westerners in the past' (1977: 280). Accordingly, he concludes that '*the peoples of the West shall not give in, out of a guilty conscience, to the requests of Algerians, Indians, Angolans or Peruvians just to expiate the crimes of their fathers or grand-fathers*' (ibid. italics added).

Mr Sarkozy can pride himself of having such a venerable ancestor! For Aron, only pragmatism and not any form of ideal of justice whatever would attract the benevolence of the North. The only 'argument that may impress leaders of rich States derives from the philosophy, which progressively convinced the privileged classes of capitalist democracies: it is consistent with and not contrary to the interest of the rich to raise the living standards of all peoples and thus promote economic development and prevent social upheavals' (1977: 280). Such benevolence may be manifested through 'reduction of the debts of some poor countries', an increase in the volume of assistance and 'opening of frontiers to manufactured products from the Third World' (1977: 295–6). As we recall, this is the spirit that informed the signing of the Lomé ACP agreements.

Mr Sarkozy's satire thus deliberately fits into a *radical bourgeois vision*, with the message to Africa being that the West has definitively gained more confidence; that they are ready to adopt a hard line in relations with the poor; that they are no longer ready to make concessions to the Third World; that they are determined to combat any attempt to renegotiate or call into question the existing world order, etc. The message thus finally renders intelligible all the manipulations involved in indicting the poor, using blackmail and intimidation to make them accept that they are responsible for their own misfortunes, etc. In short, it is aimed at nipping in the

bud any idea of revolt against the established world order.

There is no gainsaying that the Dakar speech seduced a large segment of the postcolonial African elite, given its advent within an ideological and cultural context profoundly marked by postcolonial deconstruction. This lends coherence to a concept, which still lacked clarity in Aron's writings. What is it?

### **Global Internal Temporality and Specific Historicity of Societies**

Aron has a latent poststructural thesis that is a product of the fragmentation of universal history into separate and autonomous segments. Aron claims that up till the nineteenth century, 'each country, at least for part of the century, was master of its destiny'. Accordingly, 'it responded or resisted Western aggression in its *own way*' (1977: 272). This means that imperialism and unbalanced development alone cannot explain the difficulties of the Third World, and that one needs to turn to the *specific historicity of societies* to find explanations; such historicity alone can explain the advances and lags in history.

We now understand better the pronouncements of Mr Sarkozy on 'tradition', the tragedy of societies that are not firmly rooted in history. Hegel alone is not responsible for those views, which indicate, on the contrary, the advent of a new poststructural era.

Only this era provides the decisive philosophical argument that associates each historical or social production with a *specific global internal temporality*. Such argument makes it possible to put into perspective the impact of imperialist domination in the history of the Third World. Colonialism is indicted for being at the root of Africa's stagnation, dependence and underdevelopment; the West's response is that right from the primitive history of mankind, each country's development trajectory is governed by *specific* development laws and historicity. They need not imply the radical relativism that the existence of specific 'cultural species'<sup>10</sup> presupposes. It suffices that these views mask the polarisation of the world and shield the fact that the phenomena linked to *specific global internal temporality* refer to a *unique albeit polarised world system*.

Contesting the existence of universal rationality criteria and in the wake of the 'ethnoscience', postcolonialists themselves are progressively acquainting us with the idea that each 'ethnoscience' is only intelligible in relation to norms and criteria internal to each culture. We shall now relate these views to the Dakar speech.

The latter contains an apparent contradiction: the withering of identity 'purity' that is accompanied by a solemn appeal to 'reason' and to 'universal consciousness', on the one hand, and a tribute to the African identity based on 'mysticism, religiosity, sensibility and the African mentality', on the other.

This last point sheds light on the first. Reference to the Dionysiac by which Senghor (cited in the speech) defined the fluctuating ethnotype is definite proof that ethnic characterology does not fundamentally contradict the secret intentions of technical globalisation (or even those of (post)modernity/coloniality as demonstrated by Hindutva in India). It is to be recalled that fluctuating ethnotype groups together essentially 'traditional and agrarian peoples operating on the fringes of capitalism: Africans, Latin Americans, Mediterraneans, slaves, etc. A common characteristic of these peoples is that they are coloured peoples subjugated by the West.'

### **An Administered World: Empire and Ethnological Paradigm**

The ethnological paradigm at the heart of the 'empire's' ideological machinery relating to governmentality<sup>11</sup> toned up these crucial issues. As an offshoot of the poststructural era, it provides definitive answers to two burning questions: the question of *time, progress and history*, on the one hand, and the question of the *intelligibility of reality*, on the other. The *norm*, the *rule* and the *system*<sup>12</sup> (which mean that each group, society or culture generates their own consistency and validity) make it possible for ethnology to delegitimise historical thought, invalidate the theory of dependence and of the negative unity of the world, and, as world decentration and acentric theory, to legitimise the 'empire' as a 'decentralised and deterritorialised machinery of government, which progressively mainstreams the entire world within its open and perpetually expanding frontiers'.<sup>13</sup>

From a poststructural point of view, the ethnological paradigm implies, *a priori*, cultural diversity and equality. This does not stand in the way of ethnology as a *science of constraints*, as a theory of 'equilibrium between the various forces at play in the world: economic and political systems, classes, industrialised countries and countries with limited industrialisation'.<sup>14</sup> Ethnology endorses the status quo, which explains why it rejects *function, conflict* and *signification*.

In the *freedom philosophies*, function presupposes the existence of an active subject of history. Spurred by reason and will, such a subject endures the *conflict* and contradictions that are rife in the world. By facing them squarely, the subject demonstrates the full extent of his/her talent and power. Such a struggle cannot be effective, unless the world around the subject is intelligible and meaningful, contrary to the opaque universe of structure and ethnology that typifies the *unconscious* and the *thoughtless*. Free thinking is based on objective knowledge of the laws of history, the economy and society. Its goal is to liberate the oppressed of the System (Eurafrique, globalisation, empire, etc.) in order to integrate them into the community of nations as mature peoples. Constraint theories and (post)structural ethnology seek to maintain them in the System, by assigning them a place akin to the one Senghor reserved for Blacks in the grand 'panhuman convergence' concert where Europe assumed the role of orchestra conductor and Africa was relegated to the rhythm section. Such is the very prototype of a *polarised* and *administered* world.

### Master and Subordinate

Postcolonial deconstruction contributed to delegitimising the Third World by presenting 'cultural studies', 'postcolonial studies' and cross-culturalism (a postmodern version of universal civilisation) as alternatives to economic and social analysis. It, thus, enabled imperialism to gain definitively in confidence and to reverse the trend by engendering among the victims a feeling of guilt and by driving them to self-hatred and culpability.

A coherent postcolonial approach substitutes economic and social formations for the concepts of *cultural* and *significant human expression*

*formations*. Here, the illuminating human and social realities are drowned in a sea of magma where 'doing', 'seeing', 'hearing', 'feeling', 'desiring' and 'touching' play a major role.<sup>15</sup> Diverting the average classes from the fight against class oppression, imperialism, market violence, etc., postcoloniality instead proposes to this hedonist class a form of *light thought* as well as substitutes of 'political' and 'social' struggles that are inoffensive to liberalism: *self-struggles, recognition of the difference in sexual orientation* (homosexuality), *gender, hybridisation, cross-culturalism, tolerance* and *pluralism*, etc.

Neither *light thought* nor these forms of postmodern 'commitment' provide a response to such challenges as poverty, economic and social inequalities, political oppression and imperialist domination. Their obvious goal is even to have us forget that 'imperialism continues to be the only real problem' of our era.<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonialism rejects the theory of dependence under the false pretext that the external colonial constraints no longer exist. It also claims that though powerful, imperialism is not an all-embracing machine capable of crushing all colonial societies, given that Western cultural hegemony is neither absolute nor global and the subjects of captive nations are not passive.<sup>17</sup> The cultural inventiveness of the dominated in the face of capitalist formations justifies an approach based on the *specific historicity of indigenous societies*, their 'own specific legality', their 'own specific rationales' and their 'exclusive relationship with one another'.<sup>18</sup>

Masked by phenomena, Western domination is only integrated in the approach as an ornament, or better still, in a sterile form that impedes any intelligibility of the real relations between the centre and the periphery. The approach especially urges one to admit that the canker eating Africa is from within:

One cannot eternally indict colonialism, imperialism and dependence. The world shall take Negroes seriously when Negroes start being serious themselves. For the time being, they have sunk into anarchy. Paradoxically, their venality makes them euphoric, while drunkenness pushes them to engage in brawls and even massacres. In the face of such

forms of self-intoxication, what can the world do?

Who is speaking, Mr Sarkozy? No! Yet this is the person who most virulently contested his satire.<sup>19</sup>

Slavishly, the subordinate revels in phraseology inherited from the colonial masters that portray the Negro as frivolous and venal in addition to being disorganised and immoral, ethylic and euphoric, aggressive and a butcher. To these traits, another subordinate adds laziness, passiveness and want of zeal.<sup>20</sup> After discrediting African nationalism, Mbembe claims that Africa's quest for self-determination culminated in tragedy, the gruesome 'transformation of human beings into beasts' and darkness synonymous with a 'period of tragedy', 'a period during which power and existence are conceived and exercised with animality'.<sup>21</sup> Does such a historical trajectory not suggest that Africa used to be 'the land of barbarians', pre-colonial (darkness), that 'gradually, Africa emerged from its savagery'<sup>22</sup> because illuminated by 'colonial lights' and that at present Africa is relapsing into the darkness (of independence)?<sup>23</sup>

The image of Africa that postcolonialism seeks to impose is neither that of a proud people freed from the chains of slavery nor that of a heroic continent struggling under unfavourable conditions to gain its freedom and independence, but that of a hideous pigsty, one 'hell of a mess'.<sup>24</sup> An Africa soiled by excrement should thus only be talked about as a 'nightmare' that 'disgusts us so profoundly that we can loathe it as we would a corpse'.<sup>25</sup>

Deep down in them, the postcolonial elite cultivate a complex akin to selflessness and masochism. Fanon had already noted this kind of complex among the blacks of the West Indies. He wrote: 'When, at school, he happens to read stories of savages in white books, he always thinks of Senegalese'.<sup>26</sup>

Why continue the struggle against imperialism when one is convinced that 'if Africa is treated as insignificant', 'it is solely the fault of her children',<sup>27</sup> or when one thinks that 'the overall cause, the unique cause, that cause which is responsible for all distortions, is African culture' itself? (ibid.).

The examples above are testimony thereof: Mr Sarkozy made his pronouncement within a favourable

ideological context. From the condition of victim, Africa, via the voice of her postmodern elite – that keep cursing themselves for being born of such a cruel mother – has decided to confess her sins. Decades of severe structural adjustment encouraged the dissemination of a penitential vision of the world. Popularised by neo-evangelical churches, the latter did not spare the working classes. Voltaire wrote:

We buy only Negroes as domestic slaves. We are blamed for engaging in such trade: a people trafficking in their own children are to be condemned much more than the buyer. Such a trade demonstrates our superiority; he who chooses a master is born to be an underling.<sup>28</sup>

Safe in cosmogonies, the phenomenon of pushing a defeated people to accept that they are responsible for their problems and misfortunes seems to be unique in modern history, since no one hitherto had the nerve to apply the same principle to France, defeated and humiliated: an undignified France inviting the Nazi occupier to establish a European and world leadership; a France that surrendered her own children to the hangman's cremators and to its war factories, etc.<sup>29</sup> Let us disregard the heroic resistance and attempt to apply to this France, on its knees, Voltaire's maxim: 'he who chooses a master is born to be an underling'!

### 'Tradition' or 'Hybridisation'?

Let us revisit the crucial question of the alternative between 'tradition' and 'hybridization'. Within a context of colonial domination, tradition may play either a reactionary role – such is the case when local traditionalist tyrants establish 'a good services and complicity network' with foreign tyrants<sup>30</sup> – or a progressive, revolutionary role. This characteristic emerges each time precapitalist culture is resisting market penetration. That is when it poses a real enigma to capitalism. The solidarity ethic is indicted for promoting 'family parasitism' and inhibiting the entrepreneurial spirit. Indeed, these precapitalist institutions constitute a safe haven for all those who seek to evade the constraints of capitalism: unemployment, low wages, chores, etc.

It is such a protective framework that liberal institutions target when they accuse the precapitalist man of being 'self-

sufficient', 'lacking the passion to reach out and encounter other cultures',<sup>31</sup> 'disengaging with the rest of the world', 'giving in to the temptation of purity', 'remaining immobile', refusing 'human adventure', not 'having a sufficient foothold in history' (Sarkozy), preferring the ghetto to open space, and clinging on to a slothful conception of globalisation (Mbembe). What is the crux of the problem?

Capitalism's obsession is that no one must evade the System. It thus seeks to 'liberate' the individual from a protective framework offered by collective institutions, and in this way make them defencelessly vulnerable to market forces. Moreover, such 'liberation' requires the individual to forsake cardinal collective values – solidarity, nationalism, patriotism, revolutionary militancy, etc. – and to adopt liberal values: individualism, hedonism, the 'entrepreneurial' culture, personal initiative, self-actualisation, cross-culturalism and tolerance. Only such a background accounts for:

- the rejection of 'tradition' (Sarkozy), 'nativism', 'nationalism' and 'afro-radicalism' (Mbembe);
- the invocation of values specific to the (neo)liberal society: 'the appeal to reason and universal consciousness' (here, Sarkozy is closely akin to Hegel), 'emergence from the ghetto' (Mbembe);
- the invitation to 'have a foothold in history', that is, to adhere to Eurafrrique (Senghor/Sarkozy) and globalisation (Mbembe);
- the appeal to hybridise (Senghor/Sarkozy/Mbembe).

It is pointless for us to dwell on these themes. Let us focus on some hybridisation considerations, a bequest by Senghor to postmodernity that epitomises all other themes.

Senghor used to dream of a hybrid Civilisation that was bound to sanction the assimilation–association to France and Europe. He wrote:

The most important concern for the colony is to assimilate the spirit of French civilisation. This refers to active assimilation that fertilises indigenous civilisations and lifts them out of their stagnation or makes them acknowledge their decadence.<sup>32</sup>

Hybridisation is thus constructed here under perfectly inequitable conditions, with

Senghor acknowledging explicitly the subordinate nature of a continent that can choose only between the Empire and stagnation, and worse still, decadence.

Such a humiliating position served the interests of the bourgeoisie, and one can guess that it is with relish that Mr Sarkozy cited the following pitiful lines by Senghor:

The French language has made us a gift of its abstract words – so rare in our mother tongues. Words in our mother tongues are haloed with vigour and blood: French words, for their part, radiate with a thousand fires, like diamonds. Rockets that light up our night.

Let us note the consistency of these lines with postcolonial rantings about the darkness in which the Dark Continent is plunged.

Within the particular context of colonisation, the fantasy of hybridisation actually camouflaged the dream of a vast French empire while supporting an ideal: Eurafrrique. In the name of hybridisation and of the 'common objective to live' within 'the French Empire',<sup>33</sup> in short, in the name of Eurafrrique, Senghor strongly renounced the principle of nationalities and nationalism, describing it as an 'obsolete weapon', 'an old hunting gun'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, he construed independence as 'a myth likely to foster anarchical nationalism'. He also drew the following conclusion: 'to talk of independence is to reason with one's head down and feet in the air, which is not reasoning at all. It is raising a non-issue.'<sup>35</sup>

### Historical Initiative

Césaire tells us that in a colonial situation, the problem of the dominated is not so much cultural hybridisation as the recapture of the *historical initiative*. Theoretically, cultural hybridisation is an absurdity. Historically, it is an impossibility. A borrowing culture does not hybridise, it digests and appropriates. It is to be recalled that colonial domination does not seek to build coherence in the colonised society. By contrast, it seeks to dismantle its fundamental structures, scatter its components to render impossible any life synthesis thereof. The

goal of decolonisation and independence is therefore to promote historical initiative, the ultimate objective being to render the indigenous culture coherent and subsequently able to borrow from other cultures elements suited to its own needs. According to Marcien Towa,

the effort a colonised people have to make in order to wrest from the hands of the coloniser responsibility for their destiny, restructures their cultural outlook and lends even to the former coloniser cultural elements that are necessary and which the colonial regime denied them; such an effort is by no means analogous to hybridization, but could be better described by the term *struggle*.<sup>36</sup>

The *struggle* to establish a more just and a more equitable new world order must be pursued without giving in to the delusion of hybridisation, whose aims are known since Senghor, because it means endorsing the status quo by hallowing 'biology', the inequality in the master/slave relationship in a (post)structural-type world (empire, globalisation), that is polarised, administered and hostile to any historical initiative.

## Notes

- (Paris, Seuil).
- R. Aron 1977, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Paris, R. Laffont): 267–8.
- A. Césaire 1955/2004 *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, Présence Africaine).
- At the exclusive service of imperialist bourgeoisie, the reactionary and aggressive fascist state was supposed to provide 'sufficient protection against socialism' (see G. Lukács 1958 *La destruction de la raison. Les débuts de l'irrationalisme moderne, de Schelling à Nietzsche* (Paris, L'Arche Editeur): 297).
- See R. Tucker 1980 *De l'inégalité des nations* (Paris, Economica): chap. V.
- V. Lenin 1967 *L'Impérialisme, stade suprême du capitalisme* (Paris and Moscou, Editions du Progrès): 108.
- Aron 1977: 267–8.
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