QUEST

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Résumé

La méthode utilisée parles auteurs pour rechercher l'explication du concept de la "personne" formulée par un médecin (onísègùn) Yoruba est impruntée à la tradition analytique en philosophie. Le concept Yoruba de "inú" est supposé être l'équivalent du "self" en Anglais. Il est identifi comme la source de l'intellect (opolo), de la sagesse (ogbón) - ici interprété comme incluant la tradition orale - de la moralité personelle (ìwà), et de la patience (sùúrù).

Des analyses supplémentaires ablissent des rapports entre "èmí" (le moi métaphysique), "okòn" (l'esprit), "ojú inú" (l'imanigation) et l'inu. Finalement, "iyè inú" est interprété comme l'équivalent de la conscience du moi.

Les auteurs analysent aussi la possibilité de corrélations physiques, organiques, avec les aptitudes psychologiques. La théorie du moi, comme il est expliquée par l'onísègùn, semble être plus compatible avec la théorie "double-aspect" qu'avec le "dualism". Le concept de la personne deviendrait plus fondamental, capable d'avoir des attributs soit mentaux, soit physiques.

THE HOUSE OF THE "INU"
Keys to the Structure
of a Yoruba Theory of the Self[1]

Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo

They have separate keys which open them when you need them. If you want to make use of wisdom (*ogbón*), you take it out of this *inú*. If you want to have patience (*sùúrù*), you take it from the *inú*. Everyone of them has got its own place [room], which *Olórun*[2] creates for them to live [in]. All the keys that work in the body (*ara*) are inside the *inú*.

This paper arises out of discussion peripheral to the collection of information for a research project concerned with Yoruba Thought that was based at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) during 1976-1988 and which originated at the University of Lagos, Nigeria in 1974. A number of papers and, most recently, a book have been published on the methodology and some materials of philosophical and psychological interest that have been formulated and collected in the course of this project (Hallen 1975; 1977; 1981; Sodipo 1973; 1975; 1983; 1984; Hallen and Sodipo 1986; Abimbola and Hallen 1993). A number of critiques or reviews of these have also been published (Bodunrin 1981; Oruka 1983; Byrne 1987; Cordwell 1987; Jorion 1987; Mudimbe 1987; Appiah 1992; Sogolo 1993; Masolo 1994).

One specific objection that has been raised in these critiques, of both methodology and material, is that we tend to ignore, override or delete the potentially **unique** insights or viewpoints of the individual thinkers with whom we have been dealing (Oruka 1990; Oseghare 1992). Since the methodology we are using is a variety of conceptual analysis, of identifying the shared meanings of select concepts in the Yoruba language, this has been and is to some extent true.

However, in the course of this generalised conceptual research, we have occasionally encountered an obviously deliberate attempt by

one of the *onísègùn*[3] to formulate an original mode of explanation that
would make the meanings and structural relationships between certain
components of the conceptual system more clear. Such an occasion
occurred in 1979 when one of the *onísègùn* sought to explain a Yorùbá
concept of something akin to the English-language psychological "self"
with its various psychological capacities (imagination, intelligence,
etc.). He did so in response to a previous discussion in which we had
expressed some confusion about the functions of and relations between
the apparent multiplicity of faculties and/or powers the Yorùbá
attribute to the individual person. Prior to the next visit our *onísègùn*
obviously gave some thought to the problem and formulated an orig-
inal analogy that he hoped would clarify our understanding of these
things. He also tries, in the context of the analogy, to give more pre-
cise or careful definitions of some of the basic terms that he had used
in previous discussions with us.

In this analogy the 'self' is compared to a kind of house, and the
various capacities of the self as occupants lodged in different locked
rooms within it. The relationships between the 'self' and its various
abilities, between the abilities themselves, and the manner in which the
'key' to the door of a particular room is located and used, as expressed
in material-object terms (the analogy cum metaphor), presents a fasci-
nating account that we believe provides a theoretical basis for the
exposition and analysis of a Yorùbá-language concept of the psycho-
logical 'self'.

1. "Inú" as the Self

We are suggesting that an appropriate translation of "*inú*" or the "*inú*"
as used in the analogy is the English-language "self". The adoption of
this translation on a hypothetical basis, however, does not imply that
we are adopting any specific English-language (or Western) psycho-
logical theory of the self (Freudian, behaviourist, etc.) and attributing
that to the Yorùbá as well. Cross-cultural translation on the abstract

level is always a delicate operation and one must constantly be sensitive to the slightest nuance that may indicate an alternative meaning.

Nevertheless for us to choose "self" as the most representative translation of this term, there must be at least some meaning shared in common between the two, or there would be insufficient reason for us to suggest this as a translation. We shall therefore begin by proposing a simple, working definition of the "self" in English, and then use this as a starting point for interpolating the explanation of our *onísègùn*. In English, "self" is used to refer to the individual person, and may include both the body and the mind. In our analysis we concentrate upon what may be more precisely defined as the **psychological** self. By this we mean that inner, private, 'mental', enduring conscious element or dimension of the person that is rejected by, for example, behaviourism. For we believe it is along the lines of this kind of conception of the 'self' that our *onísègùn* is thinking when he proposes his explanations of "*inú*". Consider the following quotations:

(1) Everything we do begins from the *inú*. The hands (*owó*), the legs (*esè*), and the head (*orí*) cannot think of anything [that is, do not have the innate ability to think of anything]. It originates in the *inú* and then goes to the head, the hands, the legs, etc.

(2) There is nothing which the legs, the hands, or the head can do without the *inú*. All of one's character and actions are gathered inside the *inú*.

(3) The eyes, the mouth (*enu*) -- even though we speak through the mouth it all comes from the *inú*. Before we can use this hand to hold something, the *inú* as well has done its part. The hand cannot think of or hold anything on its own. Whatever we see with our eyes, before we can speak about it with our mouth it has first been done inside (*inú*).

The area of the body that is roughly identified as the locus of the *inú* is the stomach or belly. But this should not be taken to mean that the *onísègùn* would assert a relationship of identity between the *inú* and either of these bodily parts.

> (4) We eat inside the stomach (*ikùn*). The house of wisdom (*ogbón*), the house of patience (*saura*), the house of character (*ìwa*), and of good character (*adin*) are different from the stomach. They each have their own different dwelling place.

"*Inú*" literally means "inside", but the meaning attributed to it by the *onísègùn* is closer to a psychological 'inside' of the individual person. That this is the case is indicated by the faculties, capacities, or abilities associated with the *inú*.

2. A Sampling[4] of the Occupants 'Housed' in the *inú*

> (5) All the powers [of the person] are inside the *inú*.

> (6) If you are thinking that someone owes you a sum of money, and that you want to go and collect this money, you think of this from the *inú* ... The *inú* is the house of wisdom (*ogbón*) and the house of intellect (*opolo*) ...

To go back to the quotation with which this paper began, the 'occupants' of the *inú* specifically mentioned by the *onísègùn* in the course of his explanation were as follows:

a. *Opolo*:

> (7) It [the *inú*] is the place where intellect (*opolo*) lives. The intellect is not inside the head. The intellect is inside the *inú*.

(8) The intellect (*opolo*) is living inside the *inú* before it moves to the head.

"*Opolo*" is used by the Yorùbá to refer to the physical organ, the brain. But it also has a more abstract meaning that may be translated as "intellect". Perhaps the most common usage of this term, almost verging on the idiomatic, is to refer to someone who can remember or recall information:

(9) And there are some people who will remember [something] for five to six years. We say that these people have 'got' *opolo*. Such a person will not forget anything (+).[5]

(10) If they say about ten sentences in your presence today, and you are able to say exactly the same words tomorrow, and in three days you can repeat the same without taking away any one [word] out of it, and you can say it again even when it is five months' time when you have not written it down, this is what is called someone who has 'got' *opolo* (+).

Understandably, in a society centred upon oral rather than written words, the ability to recall information accurately is of crucial importance. But it would reinforce the stereotype of the so-called 'traditional' mentality and misrepresent the meaning of "*opolo*" if it were restricted only to this. For in addition:

(11) For example, if a person is saying that this town should have water [pipe borne] or a bank, or that our hospital should be changed to a general [one], the way in which this could happen is that both men and women would contribute money. People may [at some point] ask, who made the [original] suggestion? They would say that he has got *opolo*. This is the way that we use that word.

This additional dimension to the meaning of the term does seem to bring it more in line with that of the English-language "intellect". For as well as the ability to learn/remember, "intellect" denotes a capacity to invent and to deal with new situations.

b. Ogbón:

Ogbón is usually translated into English as "wisdom" (Abraham:507)[6], and does seem to refer in a more specific manner to the knowledge of one's oral traditions:

> (12) When you have a child you begin to teach him wisdom (ogbón). When the father becomes old, then he will begin to say [to his offspring] 'this and this' are the things which they told us. Whatever he has seen or heard, he will be saying the same things [in turn] to his son. But the son has not seen all of this. Whatever we have not seen but which we are told of are what we call 'this and this' are the things they told us.

In a previous publication we have examined the distinction the Yorùbá make between information, including oral tradition, which is classified as *ìmò* (previously regarded as equivalent to the English-language "knowledge") and *ìgbàgbó* (previously regarded as equivalent to the English-language "belief") (Hallen and Sodipo, 1986: Chapter 2) . We there challenged both translations as inadequate and misleading. With reference to the present context the point worth relating is that oral tradition (what one is told but has not seen, either happen or tested) is consistently assigned only a hypothetical status. As the *onísègùn* have said repeatedly, what one is told (second-hand information) may not be true. It is not 'true' until one has seen it for oneself.

This is important in the present context because it serves to correct a misrepresentation that is often made about the psychological attitudes maintained by (virtually all) members of 'traditional' cultures

towards their oral traditions -- that they are received and preserved in an unquestioning manner as true. With the Yorùbá, at least, this simply is not the case.

c. *Iwà*:

> (13) If a person has been doing something bad and wants to change so as to do good things, he will start to think of this from the *inú*. If a person has been doing good things and wants to change to bad, it starts from the *inú*. There is not a single thought that comes out of any other place. All live inside the *inú*.

Behaviour follows upon thought, and thought originates in the *inú*. "*Iwà*" is usually translated into English as "character", with the emphasis in shared meaning placed upon the ethical or moral sense of the latter. A person with a good character (*adin* or *iwà rere*) is someone who does, and thinks, good things. A person with a bad character (*iwà burúkú*) does and thinks the opposite. What in more precise terms the Yorùbá regard as good and bad behaviour is not part of the subject-matter of this paper. What is perhaps worth remarking upon is that our *onísègùn* assigns only one 'room' in the *inú* to *iwà*. In other words, *iwà* is *iwà*, and as such has its own place in the psychological self. Whether the *iwà* 'living' in the room is to be classified as good or bad is a further consideration.

d. *sùúrù*:

This attribute of the self, because of the high value it is assigned as an inner and behavioral element, has some connection with *iwà* (as indicated by quotation 18 below). However because our *onísègùn* named it in his analogy as a distinctive occupant of the *inú*, we are in part also treating it as such here.

(14) If the *inú* does not annoy or irritate a person, he will not become angry.

(15) You know, there are some people who are hot tempered (*oninúngbono*; lit. with 'hot insides'). If you play [joke] with them, they will become quarrelsome. There are some people you can play [joke] with who will not become annoyed. People will say that the *inú* of such a person is good (+).

Sùúrù is usually translated into English as "patience". That it is assigned a special 'room' in the *inú* attests to the importance the Yorùbá attach to it as a positive 'inner' element of consciousness. But as it has several definitions in English, and multiple connotations, we shall try to be more precise about what is meant by it here.

(16) If there is 'mixed-up-ness' in his *inú* (*inú daru*) . . . he cannot know anything. No peaceful word can sit down in his *inú*. He is like something which is foaming.

(17) There are some people who will stay among others and will not talk [but they do listen]. And there are some people who will continue to stand and talk for three to four times [i.e. talk a great deal but not listen]. Some people have the *èmí* of *sùúrù* and some have got none.

From the above it is apparent that *sùúrù* encourages a consciousness that maintains composure and self-control, especially in difficult or problematic situations. For it is when the self is not under control that it is not in an optimal state to deal with difficulties that may arise.

(18) *Iwà sùúrù* -- this is the head [the best] of all the good *iwà*.

Opolo, *ogbón*, *ìwà* and *sùúrù* are the occupants of the *inú* to which our *oní̀sègùn* makes specific reference. But it is clear from the context of his remarks (see quotation 5 above) that he does not intend his account to be exhaustive, to be a complete list of all the 'occupants' or psychological capacities of the individual. In his explanations he does in fact make reference to two other elements of the person as somehow related to the *inú*, but the basis of the relationships are less clear and require a greater element of speculation on our part.

a. *Emí*:

Throughout the research project it has been difficult for all of the *oní̀sègùn* to make an explicit distinction between the *inú* and the *èmí* in our discussions. In previous publications we have remarked upon this, that they sometimes use the two terms interchangeably (Hallen and Sodipo, 1986: 64, fn. 10 and 114-15). Does this then mean that they are meaning equivalents?

A straightforward answer to this question is complicated by the fact that *èmí* is usually defined in metaphysical terms, while *inú* is here defined psychologically or epistemologically. *Emí* is said to be roughly equivalent to the 'spirit' or 'vital element' of the person (Abraham: 187) that survives death and is reincarnated an indefinite number of times. While *inú*, as we have seen above, is explained in terms which render it much closer to a psychological self that is not directly assigned any obvious, comparatively metaphysical status.

Our *oní̀sègùn* alluded to the *èmí* on two occasions in his analogy, and we again find that the best way to make sense of these statements is to treat the "*èmí*" as an alternative name for the *inú*. The two references are as follows:

> (19) The true [referring to the correct meaning of the term] *inú*.... when a word enters into it, the word sits down there. A person does not pass the word out with their faeces. This is the *èmí* which 'turns' [controls] words.

And to continue the quotation that began as (6) above:

> (20) The *inú* is the house of wisdom (*ogbón*) and the house
> of intellect (*opolo*). It is also the house of food (*onje*). But
> the *èmí* is kept in its own place.

That *èmí* is being used in this question as a meaning alternative to *inú*
is bolstered by the following supplementary statement, also made by
our *onísègùn*:

> (21) If these [the various psychological 'occupants'] were in
> the same place where the food lives, you could easily have
> passed them out [with faeces, again].

Although food (*onje*) too is taken 'inside' when one is eating, it is an
inside that is distinct from that of the psychological *inú* (see also quo-
tation 4 above) that may, on occasion, also be referred to as *èmí*.

Whether the **psychological** meaning of *inú* and the **metaphysical**
meaning of *èmí* may ultimately be reconciled on some higher theoreti-
cal level remains as an open question that must still be looked into. In
his own explanation the *onísègùn* did not introduce any explicit meta-
physical dimension into the latter term. It is apparently only used in
the context of his analogy as a comparatively common, alternative
name for the *inú*, for the 'self'.

b. *Okòn*:

"*Okòn*" is usually translated into English as "heart" or as "mind"
(Abraham: 512), and it may seem odd to scholars of Yorùbá culture
and thought that it does not appear in an explicit manner in our oní-
sègùn's explanation of an *inú* that appears to house and to perform the
functions of the mind (given quotations 1, 3, and 6 above).

He did in fact make reference to the relationship between the *okòn* and the *inú* in a manner similar to that in which he expresses the relationship between *inú* and *opolo* (brain; intellect):

> (22) If you have peace of mind (literally, 'if your *okòn* touches the ground'), it comes from *inú* and people will say that you put your *okòn* into things. People can also say that you put your *inú* into it. It is the *inú* which they will refer to, whereas it is the *okòn* which is there [inside the *inú*]. It's as if you put something into a basket [the 'something' being the *okòn*; the basket being the *inú*].

We have some suggestions to make about the relationships between psychological capacities and physical organs (heart-mind; brain-intelligence) in the Yoruba conceptual system in the concluding section of this paper.

3. The Owner of the House and Holder of the Keys:
Inner Consciousness, Self-Understanding. and Self-Consciousness

Consciousness (as an awareness 'of' things external to it) and its various faculties is one thing. Self-consciousness is another. For "self-consciousness" is used to describe that reflexive dimension of the psychological self that refers to the consciousness of consciousness - for the awareness that the self has of itself. The model of the *inú* so far introduced by the *onísègùn* has claimed that it is the source of all thought and action, and that it has various specialized faculties, capacities, or abilities (*ogbón, opolo*, etc.) at its disposal. But no explicit reference has yet been made to an element of the *inú* that is primarily concerned with the awareness of the *inú*. There does seem to such an element -- in fact, two -- the *ojú inú* ('inside' eye) and, more importantly, the *iyè inú* (the 'inside' understanding; the understanding of the *inú*).

a. Ojú Inú:

We have some reservations about putting the *ojú inú* under the sub--
heading of self-awareness or self-understanding because it does not
appear to involve an explicitly reflexive element in the explanations of
the *onísègùn*.

For this reason some may feel that it would have been more
representative to include it as one of the more specialized psychologi-
cal abilities discussed in the preceding section. We finally decided to
introduce it at this point because, with the *ojú inú*, it appears that one
is getting closer to the private, inner consciousness or awareness that
is at the core of the *inú*.

In some situations *ojú inú* is used in a rather literal sense, as the
ability to 'picture' rather than to perceive (sharing some meaning in
common with the English-language "imagination") something internal
to one's own, private consciousness:

> (23) You know (*mò*) where this *oyìnbó* (expatriate) lives.
> You can be looking at the place now [when you are not
> there], picturing the door and how you enter the place.

But to leave it at this would not be to do the *ojú* inú justice. For it is
also used to refer to private ('inner') mental processes of intellectual
comprehension and judgement, with antecedent or consequent sensory
perception (as an instrumental component of that specific intellectual
process):

> (24) Another way you can know (mò) something is, you can
> be watching someone who is walking in the street. If his
> 'heart is not touching the ground' (if he is not enjoying
> peace of mind), you can easily know if he is not well (+).

> (25) We can look at a person. You can even look at a crop
> [on a farm]. If it is not good, you will say [perhaps only to

yourself] that the soil of the place is bad. If you see a child
working sluggishly, you will say that he is a sick person. If
the child is restless [not serious about what he/she is doing],
you will say this is a bad child. We are looking at these
things with the *ojú inú*.

b. *Iyè Inú*:

This was the final psychological element of the self with which our
onísègùn concluded his analogy:

> (26) This is where the keys live. *Iyè inú* [the 'inside' under-
> standing; the understanding of the *inú*] is the thing which
> directs or advises (*juwe*) a person about what to do. If you
> want to do something, the *iyè* (understanding) of your *inú*
> will show you how to do it.

Is it representative to argue that in the above explanation "the under-
standing of the *inú*" may be interpreted as an equivalent of self-under-
standing? Let us look more carefully at the implications of three key
phrases:

I. "This is where the keys live"

To go back, once more, to the quotation with which this paper begins,
the various occupants of the *inú* 'live' in rooms with locked doors.
When you, as *iyè inú*, decide (once more, refer to the opening quota-
tion) to make use of a certain one, you, as *iyè inú*, must use the par-
ticular key that will enable you to have access to it. The place where
the keys 'live', therefore, suggests a decisive mental centre or core
where the individual, after assessing a situation (perhaps using the *ojú
inú*), decides what kind of thought, what psychological capacities or
faculties, it would be most appropriate to bring into play.

(27) Sometimes people say that the *inú* of someone is broken (fo). This means that the person does not know what he is doing. But people don't usually say that a person's head is broken. Sometimes people are referred to as having an *inú* of ashes (*èèrú*). This means that their *inú* cannot make the right decision.

2. "...the thing which directs or advises a person about what to do"

We recognize the possibility of interpreting the role of the *iyè inú* in a more mechanical fashion, as simply one more cognitive faculty that responds to problems external to it by implementing a certain line of thought that may or may not lead to a certain line of action. Such an interpretation could possibly totally eliminate (or minimize) self-consciousness as a psychological propensity and reduce the 'mental' self (the entire *inú*) to a cognitive conglomerate of the stimulus-response variety .

However, if one considers the analogy as a whole, and more particularly our *onísègùn*'s detailed examples of how the individual person approaches and manages his various psychological capacities, we do not feel it supports this kind of stimulus-response mechanization. Let us go on to the third phrase in order to conclude this point.

3. "If you want to do something, the *iyè* (understanding) of your *inú* will show you how to do it"

Even when describing the individual's relation(s) to his various psychological faculties, our *onísègùn*'s exposition clearly implies an important element of self-consciousness. Consider, as one example, quotation 13 above. This quotation, describing the individual who has been doing bad things and wants to begin to do good (or the reverse), does not suit a mechanical model, e.g. the modification of behaviour subsequent purely to external social censure.

It is the **individual**, most importantly, who "will start to think of this from the *inú*." In other words, a process of 'deep' thought (ronu) is indicated, in the course of which the individual is **reflecting** on his past life, both **thoughts** and actions. That he is able to do so **inside** (in his private, inner, 'mental' self) presupposes that there be a **self** that is reflexively conscious of itself as a thinker and actor in the past, that is able to assess that past, and to direct and monitor future thoughts and actions once judgement has been passed upon it. This seems to us, therefore, to amount to a satisfactory equivalent to the English-- language "self-consciousness" .

Iyè inú, then, is the psychological element responsible for both self-understanding and self-consciousness. It is the conjunct of consciousness and the self. It is the component of the *inú* that in a conscious and deliberate manner monitors and directs the individual, as an individual, throughout his lifetime. It is the 'owner' of the 'house'. It is the one that chooses to exercise patience (*sùúrù*) and therefore 'opens' that 'door', or to exercise wisdom (*ogbón*), or to undertake the intellectual analysis (*opolo*) of a particular situation or problem.

4. Supplementary and Concluding Remarks

There are indications of a kind of psycho-physical dualism in some of the explanations of the relations between the *inú* and the body (*ara*), which it may be of interest to develop in the future. Preliminary to this one would first have to try and understand the basis for the identification of certain bodily organs and/or substances with specific 'psychological' abilities. Are these apparent physical correlates literally identical with a psychological ability, are they primarily symbolic, or is there some other basis upon which to explain the relationship or association? In the account of our *onísègùn* four such 'identifications' are at one time or another suggested: (1) the *inú* with the *ikùn* (stomach; but somewhat countermanded by quotation 4 above); (2) the *opolo* (as intellect) with the brain; (3) the *èmí* with the blood (as *èje*); and (4) the *okòn* (as mind) with the heart.

One way to avoid the issue of physical-psychological correlates would be to say that meanings are contextual -- that *"opolo"*, for example, is in some contexts used to refer to the brain and in others to refer to intelligence. To try and find some point of identification between the two is therefore in fact to confuse these contextual meanings. The way to instill clarity and prevent confusion is to keep the two (or more) meanings distinct.

In an attempt to shed some light on this issue of possibly physical correlates, we would now like to discuss the identity and meaning of the *okòn* (heart/mind) previously referred to above.[7] Is the identification of "heart" with "mind" literal, symbolic, something else, or are the two meanings different and distinct and not to be confused? Consider the following statement made by our *onísègùn* in the course of his analogy with reference to the relationship between *èmí* and *okòn*:

(28) Blood (*èje*) is the *èmí*. Blood and *èmí* are in the same place. When we kill an animal, we notice how the blood flows through the heart (*okòn*). We know this is the case with animals, and we think it would be the same in the person. *èmí* is the blood which drops into the heart (*okòn*).

One obvious way of analyzing this statement would be to side with the contextual meaning(s) position and to say, simply, that in the above passage our *onísègùn* is speaking of *èmí* and *okòn* as purely physical components of the body, and nothing more. Although such a contextual interpretation seems sensible and straightforward, we are reluctant to take it. For the distinction between the physical and 'psychological' in previous explanations of the *onísègùn* has not appeared so absolute:

(29) It [knowledge] goes from the *inú* to the *opolo*. It is the blood (*èje*) which does the work. If the *èje* should dry up in the *opolo*, it would not work. *Eje* is the *èmí*, and also the *opolo*. Without it neither of them can stand (+).

Given that the introductory "it" really does refer to "knowledge" (the context does make this explicit), this statement blends the physical and 'psychological' together in such a way as to suggest that the two are not so distinct as a contextualist interpretation would want to argue. It is as if one may look at (refer to) the same phenomenon from/with two different windows/vocabularies. One window emphasizes the physical dimension (perhaps with important ramifications for or as consequences of herbal medicine), while the other emphasizes the 'psychological' (talking about the same experience in non-physical, both functional and 'inner', 'mental' terms). But both windows/vocabularies are in the same 'room'/language, even if on different walls, and are therefore both legitimate perspectives and therefore interrelated in the discussions of the onísègùn as well. This would indicate that they should not be kept rigidly distinct. The position we would then end up with is closer to a variant of double aspect theory than of dualism, but with equally generous aspects in terms of conceptual richness, detail of description, and power(s) of explanation.

"*Enìyàn*", the Yorùbá concept of "person", then becomes primitive (in the sense of being the fundamental concept), capable of having both psychological/mental/spiritual and physical properties ascribable to it. Such a (double aspect) theory has perhaps most recently and successfully been presented in P.F. Strawson's Individuals (London, 1959). Whether this would mean that we are as well advocating an approach along the lines of Strawson's descriptive (rather than 're-visionary') metaphysics is a question about which we have not finally made up our minds, in principle or in practice. Certainly conceptual analysis (Hallen and Sodipo 1986: 122-23) also involves some description of meanings. But our own efforts have yet to deliberately undertake the identification of those most fundamental features of the Yorùbá conceptual system along the lines apparently envisioned by Strawson. Following this interpretation, however, the *okòn*, as heart, is undeniably physically separate from the *inú*, as conscious self. But as thought or mind it has its origins in the *inú* (as with the *opolo* in quotation 8 above).

Finally, to come to the controversial issue of interpretation, let us consider the analogy of our *onísègùn* as a whole. Interpretation becomes important in two different respects: (1) Is our interpretation of his analogy correct?; (2) Is his interpretation of something akin to a Yorùbá psychology, as represented in the analogy, correct (in the sense of at least being a cogent representation of the language's relevant concepts)? As far as the first question is concerned, we have endeavoured to quote here virtually the whole text of the analogy, so we will leave it to readers to pass judgement on whether we have interpreted it fairly. As for the second question, it does not arise if one prefers to emphasize the uniqueness and individuality of a person's explanations (Oruka 1990; Oseghare 1992). For one is then not required to ask whether that individual's explanation of what the Yorùbá 'think' is correct in more generally representative terms. One then judges each individual explanation or theory on the basis of its own merits as a consistent, possibly original, theoretical explanation.

This, perhaps, is where an emphasis on uniqueness and upon a more generalized form of conceptual analysis come together. Our *onísègùn* began, as we did, on the level of shared meanings (as in Quotation 11 above: "This is the way that we use that word."). But when he recognized a degree of vagueness and consequent confusion even on this advanced level, he had deliberate recourse to a novel form of explanation (the analogy) and more precise (and therefore original?) definitions (selectively) than is apparently normally the case.

Notes

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2. The supreme deity of the Yorùbá.

3. The professional group in Yorùbá society with whose members we have been working. Literally the term may be translated as "masters of medicine," but in the relevant literature it has been variously translated as "herbalists", "traditional healers", and "native doctors", i.e. practitioners of non-Western medicine.

4. We use this term because it is clear that our *onísègùn* did not mean the capacities or faculties to which he makes specific reference to constitute an exhaustive list.

5. This quotation, and those henceforth followed by the (+) sign, are extracted from discussions with *onísègùn* other than the one who formulated the analogy. We introduce them because they serve to amplify or simply to confirm, rather than to amend, the meanings suggested by the original analogy.

6. Such notations (Abraham: 507) are used in this paper to indicate page references in the most standard Yoruba-English dictionary (Abraham, 1958).

7. See p. 11 above.

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Résumé

L'auteur défend la thèse suivante: le mouvement pan-africain que Dubois a fondé ne doit pas être traité comme contaminé par le racisme du 19ᵉ siècle ainsi qu' Appiah l'affirme dans son intrigante argumentation dans "la maison de mon père". Ce mouvement peut être reconstruit à partir d'une idée de la négritude adaptée à la pratique. La négritude dont il est question dans cet article est fondée sur la réalité des souffrances que les africains continuent à supporter. Le besoin d'affirmer son identité à travers la couleur de sa peau est né de la nécessité de combattre les souffrances politiques et existentielles. La négritude ou l'africanité n'a pas besoin d'être fondée sur une essence dubieuse, dérivée du langage métaphysique. La négritude peut, en fait, être définie à partir d'un point de vue africaniste, un comportement moral et intellectuel formé culturellement envers l'expérience africaine, comportement qui cherche à surmonter les effets d'une socialisation impliquant une manière raciste de voir les choses.

A PRACTICAL IDEA OF BLACKNESS[1]

Teodros Kiros

W. E. B. Du Bois, as Anthony Appiah says, is the one who " laid both the intellectual and the practical foundations of the Pan-African movement." [Appiah 1992, p.28] I agree with Appiah's judgement, but not with his reading of Du Bois's conception of Blackness as racist. To argue thus I will (1) provide my own readings of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, and (2) develop a pragmatic or existential notion of Africanity, guided by a practical idea of Blackness, in contrast to various metaphysical formulations of African identity.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois writes:

Once I should have answered the question simply: I should have said "fatherland " or perhaps better "motherland" because I was born in the century when the walls of race were clear and straight; when the world consisted of mutually exclusive races; and even though the edges might be blurred, there was no question of exact definition and understanding of the meaning of the of word ...

Since (the writing of "The Conservation of Races") the concept of race has so changed and presented so much of contradiction that as I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain? Africa is of course my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father's father ever saw Africa or knew its meaning or cared overmuch for it. My mother's folk were closer and yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still my tie to Africa is strong. On this vast continent were born and live a large portion of my direct ancestors going back a thousand years or more. The mark of their heritage is upon me in colour and hair. These are obvious things, but of little meaning in themselves; only important as they stand for real and more subtle differences from other

men. Whether they do or not, I do not know nor does science
know today.

But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fif-
teenth century these ancestors of mine and their descendants
have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster
and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage
between the individuals of this group vary with the ancestors
that they have in common with many others: European and
Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But
the physical bond is least and the badge of colour relatively
unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kingship
is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult;
and this heritage binds together not simply the children of
Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South
Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.[2]

Appiah correctly argues that Du Bois uncritically takes over one of the
great beliefs of the expressivist tradition, like Herder, who stated that a
race asserts its particularity through its feelings, and that feeling, as
opposed to reason, is the vehicle of ethnicity, or raciality. However,
what Du Bois inherited rather hastily requires a reconstruction which I
will attempt below.

For me, to be Black -- that is to disclose one's Africanity -- is to experi-
ence oneself as a problem, a non-being, in the eyes of the non-black
(read white person). Blackness then, unlike whiteness, is not merely a
particular form of being human, but sadly a way of being an inferior; a
being whose being is itself ontologically incomplete.

From all the other "races" of humanity (the Egyptians, Indians, Greeks,
Romans, Teutons) the Negro writes Du Bois, " is a sort of seventh son,
born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a
world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see
himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensa-
tion, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself
through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a

world that looks on in amused contempt and pity...." [Du Bois 1970, p.3]

This passage could be interpreted to mean that to the extent that the African found herself on the American soil, she does not have control over her existence. The African did not choose to come to an alien soil, and once she arrived here, she involuntarily submits body and soul to the judgement of the other's gaze[3], the other's standards of beauty, competence, and norms of being. Ultimately the African lost her own self-constructed [Kiros 1994] and self-determined[4] standards of beauty, competence, and norms of being.

The African who is now an American, or rather who is striving to be accepted as an American, reexperiences her self, not as a whole, but as divided between a sense of an Africanity (meaning, born into the geographical space of the globe called Africa) of which the African-American retains a fading memory, and a tiresome longing to acquire a new sense of self, an Americanity, and increasingly discovering that the striving is a sad long dream, a struggle without a hopeful end. Their raciality stands in the way, stubbornly rooting them into non-being. The African-American self remains divided, and suspended in mid-air. Relentless striving consumes the African-American however. In the course of the existential struggle to acquire an identity which simultaneously fulfils the retention of an image of a temporarily lost sense of Africanity and the possible acquisition of a new conception of self, the African-American locates herself amidst a non-welcoming, indifferent, and hateful world, where the African-American's intellectual and emotional prowesses are dispersed and squandered.[5] Du Bois himself put it thus,

These powers of body and mind has in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed or forgotten. The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx...Here in America... the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And

yet it is not-weakness-- it is the contradiction of double aims. [Du Bois 1970, p.4]

This state of wondering, or quest for identity, is not one of self-assured intellectual fermentation but rather of resentment, an unrealistic idealization of Africanity and its ever changing images. This phase of consciousness often invites all kinds of charlatans to burden civil society with fantastical images of Africa, an embarrassing view which strikes indigenous Africans of the continent as something that has nothing to do with Africanity as they live it, as they seek to participate in it as a perpetual project, an illusive task for the future. The present preoccupation with certain forms of Afrocentricity needs to be understood as a fragile but necessary way by which African-Americans in particular are aggressively creating spaces for themselves with the type of transhistorical Africanity abundantly available in scholarly works of Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentrism. Only after the perennial needs for material necessities and identities are provided to all blacks by the holders of power, pseudo expressions of Africanity are going to haunt our very presences. The young are increasingly becoming restless for responsible guidance. They are asking for authoritative leadership, and what they are asking for is not despicable. Indeed their demands are a crucial phase of moral growth and critical self-consciousness. Before new forms of life are created and the old forms of life are withering, something like Afrocentricity becomes a readily available source of fantastical identity.

The indifferent and often openly hostile reaction of the white person however, need not dissuade the Africans of their innate right to assert their selfhood through a constructive retrieval of the past, however bleak their historical knowledge is. The African historical past is in fact a past of a great people with a unique" love of harmony and beauty," [Du Bois 1970,p.4] nurtured by the vast waters of culture and effective historical consciousness. When the racial master seeks to reduce Negroes, as Du Bois put it, to " mere hewers of wood and drawers of water", [Ibid, p.4] the Africans look deeply and defiantly into the dead historical past and begin to affirm their supposed " innate love of harmony and beauty." Despite Emancipation, African-Americans remain dependent, ignored

and disappointed. To counter these series of miseries and destruction of
the African soul, Du Bois instructs the Negro people,

> the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the
> unifying ideal of race; the ideal of fostering and
> developing the traits and talents of the negro, not in
> opposition or contempt of other races, but rather in
> conformity to the greater ideals of the American
> Republic, in order that some day on American soil
> two world-races may give each to each those
> characteristics they both so sadly lack. There is no
> true American music but the sweet melodies of the
> Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folklore are
> Indian and African... [Du Bois 1970, p.4]

In this passage, the father of Pan-Africanism is not singing the divisive
and denigrating counter-racism and song of pseudo-Afrocentricity, but
profoundly and cautiously constructing time and space for the flowering
of the long neglected African presence in the American soil. He is argu-
ing for Africanity and not Afrocentricity; he always knew that the de-
scendants of Africa did not lack a centre, but only a space and time to
locate their centre, their historicity, and being, since the racial Other has
sought - but failed- to remove them from history. The lack of a centre
was only a fact in the selective imagination of the racial other and not in
the heart and soul of Du Bois, and all those children of Africa who are
inspired by his thoughts.

African Identities, and Appiah's conception of Pan-Africanism

For Appiah, identity is not a source of one's self-conception that can be
metaphysically discovered. Therefore, African identities, which are
simply particular forms of identity, are also not metaphysically grounded
in biology. Strictly speaking, identities are products of history. Appiah
contends that Du Bois's and Crummell's conceptions of race as a com-
mon historical experience, is a falsehood. Furthermore, identities as
historical products are constructed by individuals as specific responses to

their place in history. We are not born with fixed self-conceptions. Rather, we invent our self-conceptions. Myth, religion, heresy, science and magic are simply falsehoods which buttress the highly ambiguous notion of identity that both Eurocentrists, as well as certain Afrocentrists use to justify falsehoods by presenting them as truths.

Pan-Africanism, Appiah argues persuasively, requires a much firmer grounding than the mythical and pseudo-scientific superstructure that it has inherited, a view with which I fully concur. Indeed, Pan-Africanism, very much like feminism, deserves a better grounding than the ideas of race and womanhood. Surely, Pan-Africanism can reasonably be grounded, in what I prefer to call, **a practical idea of Blackness**, thereby rendering Pan-Africanism itself a politically motivated practical idea. This practical idea does not need a biologically motivated and racially expressed understanding of Blackness as a peculiar property that only dark skinned people share. A racially motivated and metaphysically buttressed idea of Pan-Africanism is politically disempowering. First, because it burdens black people with responsibilities that they cannot carry as human beings and second, because this notion imposes on its bearers gods who love conditionally, listening only to blacks, confining Africans to worn out traditions which perpetuate massive hunger, as I have argued in my book *Moral Philosophy and Development: The Human Condition In Africa*, instead of selectively appropriating some of the economic qualities of the modern imagination. These sacrosanct ideas are insulting to African passions and intelligences. Finally, a practical idea of blackness ought to jettison the dangerous ideas of putting Africans under the dehumanizing categories of intuition, warmth, softness, sun people, etc. This peculiar notion of Africanity is an imaginary concept that is not intelligently imaginative and Pan-Africanists will be served better if they reject it.

An empowering idea of African identity, hence a solid expression of a Pan-African ideal, argues Appiah, ought to comfortably assume that " **We are Africans already.**" That is to say we need not waste our imagination inventing an Africanity that we already imbibe in our moral fibres and which we cannot remove short of killing ourselves. On the

other hand, to say that " We are Africans already " should not mean that our African identities are completely formed as members of a race, sharers of a peculiar experience, and bearers of overtaxing metaphysical endowments. No, every identity is continually invented, renewed, negotiated, transformed or abandoned. Identity is an experience of perpetual reshaping in the endless quest for historically contingent meaning. It is a project guided by a historicized gaze.

Like Achebe, Appiah argues that an African identity is never completely formed. Rather, with every expansion of a person's horizon one discovers new facets of one's personality. She brings into focus something that was not there before or one simply explicitates what was merely implicit, to form the construct of an African identity. For example, the Igbos did not initially perceive of themselves through this ethnic prism. It was only after they transcended their sense of themselves as villagers, and were seen by others as Igbos, that they actually discovered themselves as Igbos. It was the experience of war for example that pushed both the Igbos of Nigeria and the Eritreans of Ethiopia, [Kiros 1991] to assert their Igbo and Eritrean identities. In this sense Appiah is right, when he argues that identity is a construct which originates and is continually shaped by one's historical situation. Their identities become real not only because they were grounded in geography or biology but because the Igbos and the Eritreans - given their bitter experience of war- came to believe them tenaciously. The racial and colonial other, the white other, continually pushes Africans to look at themselves as peculiar, as racially different.

A Pan-African identity, therefore, is not needed because there is an all encompassing "project of a racialized Negro nationalism" [Appiah 1992, p.180], but because we Africans "share a continent and its ecological problems...the problem of racism, dependency to the world economy (as Negroes and Maghribis) ..., the possibilities of the development of regional markets." [Ibid] To this list I must add that we Africans also share the collectively experienced pangs of hunger, poverty and fatal diseases. These conditions compel us to be drawn to something like Pan-Africanism, which promises us political redemption. Pan-Africanism in

this instance is not a completely packaged ideology to which one is born, but rather a practical necessity that is created by despair, anguish, and political suffering in the hands of racists and exploiters of all types.

What is Africanity?

Several times I have used both the idea of race and Africanity rather loosely. I now wish to tighten up the meanings of the two ideas. First, if I am right that Du Bois has a radically different thesis in *The Souls of Black Folk*, a product of his youth, then I can draw the following conclusion.

His notion of Africanity is directly conditioned, as Appiah has argued, by the discourses on racism which began in the 18th century, and consecrated themselves in the 19th century. However, unlike the ontologizing of whiteness in the racist discourse of the 19th century, Du Bois's notion of Blackness is not ontological, but rather a deliberate strategy aiming at the political empowerment of the victims of ontological and epistemological notions of raciality. It is couched in the historical and contingent language of existential despair, a cry of freedom, a dream of the self-construction of an African identity. It is now appropriate to develop a sketch of what I call political Africanity, or a practical idea of Blackness.

One way of entering the labyrinth of Pan-Africanism, of which Africanity is a dominant concept, is through the work of Aimé Césaire, who through his conception of Negritude, along with Du Bois, dominated the contemporary Pan-African movement. In a self-effacing language, Césaire prophetically warned,

> It is an obvious fact: negritude has brought dangers.
> It has tended to become a school, to become a
> church, to become a theory, an ideology. I am in
> favor of negritude as a literary phenomenon, and as a
> personal ethic, but I am against building an ideology
> on negritude...if negritude means a kind of prophecy,
> well then no, because I strongly believe there is a

> class struggle, for example, and there are other
> elements, philosophical elements, that certainly deter-
> mine us. I absolutely refuse any sort of confused,
> idyllic pan-Africanism... As a result, although I don't
> reject negritude, I look on it with an extremely criti-
> cal eye. Critical, that is basically what I mean: lucid-
> ity and discernment, not confusedly mixing every-
> thing. In addition, my conception of negritude is not
> biological, it is cultural and historical. I think there is
> always a certain danger in basing something on the
> black blood in our veins and three drops of black
> blood.[6]

The poet-thinker sings emphatically, as if protesting against any sign of
biological essentialism when he wrote,

> My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled
> against the clamor of the day
> My negritude is not a leucoma of dead liquid over the
> earth's dead eye
> my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
> it takes root in the red flesh of the soil
> it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky
> it breaks through the opaque prostration with its upright
> patience [Clifford 1988, p.178]

For Césaire, as well as for me, Africanity does not require -- as I have
argued repeatedly -- any dubious and dangerous return to a mythical past
that idealizes in a racist vein the privileges of merely possessing " black
blood in our veins " that automatically disposes the African body to feel
without thinking, to sing without critical remembrance of the imperfect
legacies of African leaders and their autocracies and callousness. Second-
ly, strictly speaking, Africanity cannot be captured by biological determi-
nations. It is rather a contingent, ever changing, historical project that
grows out of cultural and historical inventions which became traditions,
and just as strongly, could germinate novel styles of existence which
grow new roots in the " red flesh of the soil. " Note that Césaire does not

talk about centres, be they European or African, but rather a search for a living identity in the form of a personal ethics that could provide Africans with a foundation upon which they can build their "upright patience," which could never be destroyed by the force of hate.

Furthermore, for me, Blackness or Africanity is a way of being, a mode of comportment in a world ruptured by alienation, hate, indifference and confusion. There may be a human essence, in which Africans partake in the same way as others, via the affirmation of their particular, regional beingness. Africanity is not a replacement of one centre, say the European centre, by an African one. This quest is a travesty on the political meaning of Africanity, which is the search for an identity with no tinge of racism and the right to protect the victims of oppression from the arrogant gaze of the powerful and rich. Africanity is a body of practices that seek to inscribe the collective sufferings of human beings of African descent on the living flesh of human memory through the media of blues, myths, poems, essays, and most recently, the African novel's stubborn refusal to be disengaged from history into the transcendental realm of nonbeing, nothingness. Abiola Irele has persuasively argued in favour of this thesis in a Harvard address.[7]

When a people's identity is systematically uprooted from history and people of African descent in particular are left dangling in the dark universe of self-doubt and self-hate, as Professor Cornel West brilliantly pointed out recently, then a strong stress of the political virtue of Africanity with a practical intent may eventually help these victims of history to retrieve their molested, distorted and mutilated dignity, pride, and sense of historicity and identity. When the meaning of blackness is thus carefully placed in history, it does not need genetic arguments about the uniqueness of Blacks as certain Afrocentric representation of Blacks as Sun People. In fact, contrary to the Afrocentric program as articulated by Asante, a project bordering on religion, this peculiarity burdens blacks by racial encumbrance of the type that white supremacists indulge in.

The anatomy of black rage does not need to be motivated by hate. What it needs most desperately is the virtue of Africanity that empowers

people of African descent without unnecessarily leading them to onto-logize their otherwise effective historical representation of themselves not as superhumans, but human beings, the equals of all human beings like themselves.

If we take the Western conception of the African as an expression of a specific raciality with peculiar characteristics that are irreconcilably different from the Westerner, then, as Professor Henry Louis Gates put it in *Race, Difference and Writing*,

Africans would be described through "... a predetermined set of causes or effects thought to be shared by all members of a physically defined group who are also assumed to share certain "metaphysical" characteristic: 'Skip, sing me one of those old Negro spirituals that you people love so dear,' or 'you people sure can dance,' or even 'Black people play basketball so remarkably well because of their peculiar muscular systems coupled with a well-defined sense of rhythm.' [Gates 1986, p.404]

I agree with Gates that these pseudo articulations of differences that seek to metaphysically frame the human qualities of Africans, are indeed racist statements. Let me engage these racist statements a bit further. Consider that these statements are sometimes used by Africans them-selves while describing some of the things they apparently do so well. Are we then to conclude that these Africans' self-descriptions are full of self-hating and self-denigrating conceptions of their Black selves, and that they are ultimately false expressions of selfhood marred by false consciousness? Indeed there is a sense in which that may be true. Equally though, there are instances in which they may also mean some-thing rather different.

The reason some of our African athletes, dancers, writers and thinkers are so good in what they do should not be sought in a particular type of muscular build, but rather dates back to the historical time in which Africans were only allowed to excel in certain areas that were systemati-cally reserved for them while being judged as unfit for the white race. The fact that Africans did indeed excel in these areas is something Afri-cans are understandably proud of. When these African athletes are

pushed to explain themselves and do so objectively, I doubt that they would seriously credit their peculiar muscles, but rather their will, stamina, and determination to excel, to dazzle their spectators, precisely in only those areas that have been allotted them in the past. Of course there is a danger of false self-representation here, particularly the Afrocentric tendencies here to reduce Africans and people of African descent, to those bones, muscles, and rhythms that both Appiah and Gates correctly protested against in their essays in *Race, Difference and Writing*.

It is one thing to say yes, " this is what we have done with our bodies. There are numerous other things we would like to do (think, write, argue and debate). Since we have been kept from the professions, academia etc, some of us (less than 1% of the population) have excelled in sports. We are quite proud of what we have achieved against all odds. It is quite another to imitate the unworthy strategies of the racists by stressing one's particular endowments as some thoughtless blacks do.

To assert the centrality of the dance, the song and the sport in African civil life, does not require an affirmation of a peculiar African centre solely composed of a body without a frame or an African genetic endowment unpropelled by the forces of intelligence and imagination. Rather, the celebration of the products of toil found on the tombs of slavery and colonialism, should encourage all reflective beings to silently praise the achievements of a stigmatized species of humanity graced by a dark skin colour. Precisely on that account, Crummel's hate is brilliantly captured by Du Bois's remarkable psychological surgery of his tortured mind. Du Bois writes:

> This is the story of a human heart - the tale of a black boy who many years ago began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself. Three temptations he met on those dark dunes that lay grey and dismal before the wonder-eyes of the child: the temptation of Hate...the temptation of despair...the temptation of doubt. [Du Bois 1970, p.176]

This passage speaks to millions of Africans languishing on the lonely streets of shanty towns inside and outside of the continent of Africa, to

those millions who feel the immense power of hate, doubt, and despair, in their predictably hopeless and dreary everyday lives.

It is a passage that brings to life the mind and soul of the wretched of the earth. Du Bois had a vision of unifying an otherwise deeply divided continent, not racially or genetically, but through the singularly cohesive experience of collective suffering. This totalistic crystallization of the Crummells of the world, is infested with hate, ready to explode anytime when its African victims cannot bear the undeserved unemployments, famines, dead end jobs (when employed) and the systematic denials of entry into the clubs of civil society, where they are willing but unable to spend their hard earned salaries. The Blackness that I speak of is grounded precisely on the similarities of suffering that African continue to share. It is born out of the necessity of struggle to overcome political suffering. It is not grounded in dubious essences that is the language of metaphysics.

Du Bois indirectly speaks to the need of organizing these impulses of hate, despair and doubt in the form of a superstructure, that I wish to call a pragmatically[8] motivated Africanistic gaze. By a gaze I mean a racially socialized visuality manifested in moral and intellectual comportment toward the world; and by Africanistic gaze I understand a culturally induced visual, moral and intellectual comportment toward the African experience which seeks to overcome the effects of the racist socialization of visuality.

In a Harvard address, Cornel West, spoke about the potentially explosive situations of individuals whose lives are deeply marred by doubt, despair and the temptation to hate. What West did not directly confront is what I wish to call the anatomy of hate, the type of hate that characterizes much of the white racist's universe of fear, insecurity and a self - imposed sense of superiority. Doubt, despair and the temptation to hate are reactions to the fear, insecurity and sense of superiority that people of African descent encounter in their every day lives. A historically sensitive Africanistic gaze can effectively and astutely frame the anatomy of hate by the "positivity" of the practical idea of blackness as was out-

lined above. Let me illustrate the problem with an image and a personal experience.

Imagine a group of young black boys who on a hot summer day are riding in a train heading toward the city. They are brightly dressed, speak loudly and cheerfully, dance to the vibrant tunes of black music. Some of the white passengers are uncomfortable with the scene. To begin with, the heat inside is intensive. And that loud radio music is intruding their thoughts. To make matters worse, they are faced by a group of young black boys happily singing away. Suddenly a big white man yells at the black boys, calls them "Niggers" and tells them to shut up. Luckily, the man walks out at the next stop, before anything happens.

Now, let us attempt to put ourselves inside the mental frame of the black boys first. We certainly cannot simply say that the young boys did not do anything to deserve the name-calling as well as the physical threat. Of course they have upset the other passengers. Perhaps they did it purposefully. One can rightly condemn their way of selfishly appropriating the public space. And the disconcerting blend of summer heat, radio, and the uninhibited self-expressions might infuriate almost anyone. One does not have to possess a particular colour to react to the scene. What the angry white is perhaps knowingly ignoring is the fact that this is the way the resentful, the dislocated and the angry speak to their oppressors. Fanon described this many years ago in *The Wretched of The Earth*.

It is of course impossible to establish with certainty whether it is self-doubt, entrenched hate, or simply thoughtlessness which determine the teenagers' treatment of the angry white passenger. Perhaps it is a combination of all three. Or perhaps high spirits. In this single instance one can see a complex scramble of the effects of historical injustices going back to slavery, as well as the effects of material deprivation, envy, and a sense of 'thrownness' in a complex world. One could convincingly explain the behavioral propensities of these boys within the parameters of the historical project of an Africanistic gaze, particularly the ever present problematic of identity formation. Indeed these young boys are

testing the limits of experience in their irritating ways, helplessly displaying the flaws of character, which are a function of inattentiveness at home where their parents - if they are fortunate to have any - are either working at odd hours or are collecting welfare checks and letting time go by. For these young black boys, the loud talk, the radio, and the dance have become habitual self- expressions of impulsively and resentfully constructed ways of deliberately forcing out attention from an otherwise self-absorbed society. In this society lower class distress only surfaces when it emerges in crises, such as the riots of Los Angeles or the shootings in the streets. The young boys are also asserting to the white passengers that they exist, that they are not going to succumb to any form of invisibility. They assert their blackness so that they can prevent invisibility.

It is perhaps unfortunate but inevitable that in my example, it is a white man who cursed and lashed out at them, although there might have been a black person in the crowd who might have felt like doing exactly the same. The unfortunate fact is that we live in a world in which behaviour is judged not simply as a manifestation of human character, but rather as a racially peculiar trait of people of African descent. Both the black teenagers and their abuser are desperately in need of transformation; both have been moulded by the ferocious force of raw hate uncleansed by self-generated principles of moral-rational thought. Clearly, the black boys are crying out for direction and the passenger needs the best tools of *self-control with which to silence the transgressive needs of racial hate. He should, with education, transcend his irritation to the extent where he can ask the teenagers to please quiet down, instead of shouting "Nigger' at them.*

A personal encounter can serve as another example. I was happily walking on Mass. Ave. heading toward Somerville one Sunday afternoon. It was a very hot summer day. Sweaty, hurried and pressured by the heat, I began walking impatiently. In spite of this discomfort though, I had the interest and the time to stop at the corner by a nice brown house on the corner of Elm and Beach street to take delight in some withering and exhausted red roses that were being attended to by an

older person who looked very unhappy. The heat, the withering red
roses, the unhappy worker and I, the solitary walker, accidently blended
to produce an eventful summer day. I made an effort to be attentive not
only to the roses but also to him. I smiled at him and said, "What a day,
it is really hot, isn't it?

No answer. Not even a word. Only a hateful look. The look was
enough to make me intensely dislike the natural art of casual conver-
sation. I did not give up though. I made a second effort and remarked:

" Oh, look at these roses, aren't they lovely ? Again no answer. He
mumbled words that I could not hear, and also bent and picked up a
spray. With the spray in his hands, he began nervously walking back and
forth occasionally stealing a glance at me. I was intrigued by him. I
sensed hate condensed in his shaky hands holding on to a spray. Pointing
at me and aggressively coming close to my eyes, he sprayed a red rose
with a thick, oily black paint and said,

"Here! Here ! take a black rose." He laughed furtively, cut the rose,
wet with black paint, and said again,

"Here, take it, take the black rose."

By this time, he had managed to anger me. I came very close to want-
ing to kill him. I was ready for anything. I firmly stood where I was,
without moving. Directly looking at his eyes, I ordered him to give me
his 'black rose.' He stared back, obviously shocked by the order, not
knowing what to do. Finally, he reluctantly extended his arms with the
black rose. I snatched it forcefully from him and flung it back to his
face. By this time, I had lost my cool, and the heat did not exactly coop-
erate with me either. He must have somehow sensed my fury. For he did
not respond. After he removed the black rose, he walked away from me
silently and quietly.

I don't know what to do with all these facts now. Every now and then,
the event haunts me. I remember, not very proudly, my own anger; I
also remember, equally poignantly, the depth of hate, his unproductive
hate, the hate that demolished the natural beauty of an innocent flower.

One of the practical tasks of the Africanistic gaze is to boldly seek out
the young and angry, the young and violent, the young and confused, the

young and hurt, even the young and irresponsible and engage them in serious self-searching, while the young are struggling with forming identities. Once these identities are successfully formed they can then be reintroduced to a reluctant world which needs the diverse values, norms and interests which can be respectfully shared as African experiences. Indeed, Pan-Africanism as a project can participate both as an articulator of different African voices as well as the founder of new ones. If it is properly developed, it can contribute to a humanizing of the world.

Conclusion

Pan-Africanism does not require essences as much as carefully thought out *strategies which specifically address the needs and interests of Africans and people of African descent.* There is no need for dubious mythical gods who will redeem Africans from the chronic pangs of hunger; nor is it necessary to stress racial specificity in the dangerous manner of racial supremacists. It is certainly unwise and strategically ineffective to invoke genetically predetermined ontologizing of mental and bodily endowments. All that **the practical idea of blackness** or Africanity needs is the simple idea that the humanity embodied in the passionate and compassionate language of identities and dignities of a historically afflicted people known as Blacks or Africans (particularly those Blacks or Africans who continue to be shamed by racism, poverty and indifference) be recognized and respected, and that the inalienable rights of food, shelter and clothing become readily available to the victims of historical selection.

An " authentic " (in the Sartrean sense, in which it means lucid to consciousness) Pan-Africanism must dissuade itself from advocating that there is a singularly and racially specific African philosophy that could collectively mobilize Africans for a cause. Again, only certain African experiences can be critically assessed by Pan-Africanism as political rather than to a metaphysical project.

Nobody can match Du Bois' empowering categories of the temptation of hate, doubt and despair as they movingly and truthfully inspire the

shattered victims of racism and poverty directly to principled and organized political action, the single most important virtue of vigilant citizens of the modern *polis*. Du Bois is indeed a powerful myth maker, a convincing storyteller. One of his best myths is his imaginative reconstruction of African history. For those who continue to believe that they have no history, Du Bois is the ultimate teacher. He teaches through myths; and his myths are nothing less than political therapies.

At a crucial time, in which drug addicts, children in single parent homes, children on the streets, as well as the alienated but well to do black professionals, are all restlessly seeking identities, Du Bois' political/ existential categories deepened by the Africanistic gaze, in concert with Appiah's deracialized Africanity, can provide the desperately needed sense of belonging and fulfilling sense of self, to all those people of African descent. It is for them that the themes of *The Souls of Black Folk* makes a powerful appeal, and it is for them and the morally intelligent white Americans that Du Bois' timely meditations were written.

Notes

1.   This paper was originally presented at the weekly seminar of the Du Bois Institute at Harvard University in 1993. I would like to thank Henry Louis Gates, the director of the Institute, and Anthony Appiah for their incisive remarks. My special gratitude goes to May Farhat of Harvard University who had read and edited this article.

2.   Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, pp. 116-17.

3.   "The viewing subject does not stand at the centre of a perceptual horizon, and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain. Vision unfolds to the side of, in tangent to, the field of the other. And to that form of seeing Lacan gives a name: seeing on the field of the other, seeing under the Gaze." Bryson 1988, p. 94.

4.   The notion of self-determination within a global philosophical context by drawing examples from the African political scene is developed in [Kiros 1991].

5.   I have developed this theme in a paper " The Moral Evil of Slavery" which I gave at the Du Bois Institute in 1991, and which is now forthcoming in *Phylon* (Fall 1994).

6.   In René Depestre, *Bonjour et Adieu à la négritude* (Paris, 1980), pp. 144-145. Quoted in [Clifford 1988], p. 178.

7.   Irele Abiola "The African Imagination" Harvard lecture, October 21, - 1992.

8.   I use the word pragmatic in the Kantian sense where Kant says, " A history is pragmatically composed when it teaches prudence, i.e. instructs the world how it could provide for its interest better than, or at least as well as, has been done in the past. " From E. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1975), p. 34.

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Summary

The colonial state is the transposition of the European state on African soil. Its function was at the same time to undermine and to enhance intertribal antagonism. The colonial state denaturalized the tribe, adapting it to the new conditions of the state. But a solid foundation for the state in Africa can only be achieved by building it upon African tradition.

LA TRIBU CONTRE L'ETAT EN AFRIQUE

Charles Robert Dimi

La tribu est un groupe d'hommes ayant une langue, des coutumes et une organisation sociale communes et admettant une même origine, un ancêtre commun réel ou mythique. Les rapports entre les individus membres d'une tribu donnée sont de l'ordre de l'affinité linguistique et socio-culturelle. A la limite ce sont des rapports de consanguinité. La tribu se présente comme un groupe homogène, jouissant d'une autonomie "politique" et sociale et occupant un territoire propre et généralement composé de groupes plus petits, tels que les clans.

L'Etat, par contre, est une société organisée, c'est-à-dire une société qui possède des organismes politiques, administratifs et juridiques autonomes. Il est une personne morale, une autorité souveraine exerçant le gouvernement des choses et des personnes sur un territoire national. Il exprime, autant que faire se peut l'intérêt général et fonde son pouvoir, en principe, sur l'adhésion de la majorité du peuple qui s'exprime, si possible, par le suffrage universel, notamment dans les pays de tradition démocratique.

La différence entre la tribu et l'Etat n'est pas une différence de nature, mais de degré. Cependant, les rapports sociaux à l'intérieur de l'Etat ne sont pas des rapports d'homme à homme, mais des rapports impersonnels: l'Etat sollicite les individualités constituées en citoyens.

En Afrique, l'Etat, sous sa forme moderne, est une transposition du système politique européen sur le sol africain; la transposition coïncide avec le début de la colonisation dont le principe actif est de diviser pour mieux régner. L'application dudit principe, en Afrique, se traduit par la création, par les puissances coloniales européennes, des ensembles territoriaux "nationaux" qui regroupent (jusqu'aujourd'hui), chacun, une mosaïque de tribus. Le trait distinctif de l'Etat colonial voire post-colonial africain est sa disharmonie, corollaire de son extériorité.

Plus de cent ans après la Conférence de Berlin qui scelle la balkanisation de l'Afrique, les tribus africaines aspirent encore à une

manifestation de soi totale en fournissant à chacun de ses membres le principe qui règle toutes les relations sociales ou la plupart d'entre elles. Tout se passe comme s'il y avait "autonomie dans l'autonomie".

Il y a lieu de se demander si l'autonomie des tribus n'est pas diminution de l'expression de l'Etat africain, comme puissance souveraine. La présence persistante et obsédante des tribus sur la scène politico-administrative n'a-t-elle pas pour corollaire politique la tribalisation de l'Etat africain?

Au moyen d'une dialectique à la fois négative et positive, nous étudierons, d'abord, l'extériorisation destructrice de la tribu par l'Etat colonial africain. Nous cernerons ensuite le déploiement de la tribu dans le sens de sa propre conservation grâce à la cristallisation du moi groupal de chacun de ses membres. Nous montrerons, enfin, que la volonté de chaque tribu de persévérer dans son être peut, dans bien des cas, aboutir à l'encerclement de l'Etat par la tribu. Il s'agira alors de raviver le vieux fond moral de la tribu pour édifier un Etat africain véritable.

L'Etat à l'assaut de la tribu

Toute domination d'un peuple par un autre suppose, de la part du peuple dominant, une praxis aliénante. Celle-ci consiste à ce que le peuple dominant se projette sur le peuple dominé (il veut le façonner à son image).

La projection, au plan politique, n'est autre chose que la restructuration de la société conquise. Les colonisateurs réorganisent et remodèlent les indigènes dans le but de les amener à accepter la colonisation comme une nécessité naturelle. Ainsi ils pourront renoncer à la liberté sans laquelle aucun individu ou aucun peuple ne peut s'émanciper. Par exemple, chaque métropole coloniale s'érige en mère-patrie pour chacune de ses colonies dont les habitants sont tenus de chanter l'hymne national. Il en résulte une sortie de soi -étrangeté - du peuple conquis. Le peuple dominant adopte, au plan politico-administratif, des dispositions susceptibles d'affecter son vis-à-vis dans

l'intimité de son être. C'est à cela que répond la création des régions, des subdivisions et des communes. La méthode toute indiquée en pareilles circonstances est l'infériorisation du peuple à dominer ou même déjà dominé qu'il importe d'élever jusqu'au niveau du Peuple-Référence avec ses valeurs. En ville, par exemple, le quartier administratif est en même temps le quartier résidentiel des colons tandis que les indigènes sont confinés dans les bidonvilles - espaces raciaux. Il y aura, dans le même ordre d'idées, des écoles pour les enfants des colons et d'autres pour ceux des indigènes.

La création des Etats en Afrique, sans effacer les préjugés raciaux, est quand même réduction (abolition) de la distance qui sépare le peuple dominé du peuple dominant par la prise en compte de sa particularité qui peut s'intégrer dans la mouvance universalisante de l'Etat pris comme REFERENTIEL. L'idéologie de l'unilinéarité et de l'unidimensionalité, en effet, sous-tend la praxis coloniale européenne; elle a pour fonction de faire allusion aux indigènes tout en évitant soigneusement de se faire illusion. Mauvaise foi ou inintelligence? Dans l'un et l'autre cas, il y a une constante: la colonisation est mise entre parenthèses de l'autre aussi bien dans son individualité que dans sa personnalité - la vérité de son être est niée. Ce qui permet de justifier sa domestication par la médiation, entre autres, de l'Etat comme force organisée et concentrée.

L'Etat en Afrique est une institution réalisée par les colons; il est, selon l'expression africaine consacrée, "la chose des Blancs". Cette expression a l'avantage de mettre en exergue son extériorité - il est une excroissance historico-politique - d'autant plus que les colons sont seuls à en connaître la quintessence.

Le rapport de la tribu à L'Etat mérite d'être considéré comme un rapport d'exclusion; il prend l'allure d'une lutte à mort pour la domination. La tribu ou l'Etat. Mais cette lutte à mort est celle de deux forces inégales; elle est consécutive à la traite des Noirs - le commerce triangulaire - et à la défaite des peuples africains face à la puissance de feu étonnante des Européens - les guerres de conquête coloniales. L'Etat colonial africain est transfiguration de la façon

d'être et de vivre des Africains, transfiguration qui se matérialise à
travers l'obligation des indigènes de survivre dans des conditions
nouvelles extrêmement tendues, c'est-à-dire "dans la perpétuelle
menace d'un collapsus qui [les] condamnerait à l'anomie" ([Ribeiro
1971, p.60].

De par leur excentration (ils ont pour centres directeurs les
différentes métropoles coloniales), les Etats africains sont des Etats-
images: les métropoles coloniales projettent leurs structures économi-
que et politique sur les territoires placés sous leur domination; elles les
structurent non pas pour eux-mêmes, mais parce qu'elles en tirent
profit. En ce sens, l'Etat colonial est la prolongation (continuation) de
l'Etat métropolitain qui crée des structures qui lui sont favorables.
Double phénomène d'extension et d'intégration, d'une part, et re-
production de la dépendance, d'autre part. Les territoires coloniaux
sont parties intégrantes des territoires anglais, belge, espagnol, fran-
çais, italien et portugais. Les dépositaires de l'autorité en Europe sont
en même temps les gouvernants suprêmes des colonies; leur pouvoir,
par conséquent, est médiatisé.

L'Etat africain se greffe sur la structure tribale et, paradoxale-
ment, il s'implante en marge d'elle. La greffe consiste, par exemple, à
inféoder les chefferies indigènes: les chefs indigènes sont érigés au
rang de collaborateurs, de représentants locaux de l'administrateur
colonial. Leur rôle consiste précisément à prélever l'impôt forfaitaire,
moyennant des gratifications en nature (fusils de chasse, tôles...) et en
espèces. Véritable stratégie de décapitation des tribus au moyen de
l'arbitraire répressif.

Mais quelle est l'efficacité d'une telle stratégie?

L'Etat colonial africain est l'expression par excellence de la
violence dans sa nudité et sa monstruosité; il impose aux tribus et à
leurs membres par la force qui se matérialise à travers les armées
coloniales en tant qu'elles sont chargées de mettre les tribus et leurs
membres au pas. Il "s'impose à eux par la force redoublée d'une
adaptation écologique, grâce à une formidable capacité à enrôler et à
mettre à son service tous les indigènes qu' [il] parvient à capturer et

surtout, à intégrer dans la nouvelle ethnie naissante" [Ribeido 1971, p.61].

La transposition de l'Etat sur le sol africain suppose une redéfinition des rapports sociaux qui, jusque là, étaient fondés sur le double principe de l'horizontalité (égalité des membres d'une même classe d'âge) et de la verticalité (soumission des classes d'âge inférieures à celles supérieures, des cadets aux aînés). Face à une telle structure, l'Etat a tout l'air d'un acide dissolvant; il substitue les groupes socio-professionnels à ceux tribaux, les classes sociales aux classes d'âge, par la médiation des cultures de traite (cacao, café, banane...), adaptées à l'économie marchande.

Le processus de détribalisation des indigènes peut-il vraiment aboutir en se fondant sur le plan physique (la répression) et économique (l'introduction de l'économie marchande)?

Son issue reste problématique tant que l'âme tribale reste plus ou moins intacte. C'est pourquoi il est impérieux de s'attaquer à cette âme. L'évangélisation des indigènes répond, en partie, à pareille nécessité, mais elle se fait en marge de la sphère étatique. L'Etat colonial se doit d'assumer lui-même la charge de mission de conquête des âmes pour une détribalisation à outrance des indigènes. Telle est l'une des fonctions de l'école coloniale (former, dans la langue du colonisateur, des semi-lettrés indigènes). Ceux-ci sont voués à l'abâtardissement au double plan linguistique et culturel. Chaque tribu, en effet, existe dans et par sa langue si bien que parler une langue étrangère, pour chacun de ses membres, revient à se nier soi-même et par conséquent à vouer sa tribu à la perte totale. Dans ce sens, il y a désintégration et déstabilisation de la tribu de l'intérieur par la médiation de l'école.

L'Etat n'existe pas sans un corps de fonctionnaires ou d'agents publics. Ceux-ci ont la vocation de servir partout où besoin est, à l'intérieur du territoire "national". Par l'école, des jeunes tribaux sont arrachés à leur clan et incorporés à l'Etat. L'obligation scolaire universelle, pour reprendre ce que disait R. NEMITZ, "s'accompagne nécessairement de la répression des forces locales" [Nemitz 1987,

p.77]. Mais l'école coloniale est moins une affaire de pédagogie que de politique indigène. Par sa médiation, l'Etat envahit de plus en plus la tribu; il l'enserre comme un boa constrictor au point de l'asphyxier en effaçant la vision du monde, des choses et des personnes de ses membres. Par exemple, les jeunes tribaux se persuadent de l'absurdité de la famille élargie; ils iront jusqu'à entretenir des rapports incestueux avec "leurs soeurs" (qui sont, en réalité, leurs cousines au nième degré).

L'école coloniale distribue la science avec parcimonie; elle maintient les jeunes tribaux qui la fréquentent dans un état de semi-ignorance.

Un tel état de choses n'est-il pas préjudiciable à l'Etat africain?

Le sursaut de la tribu et ses mécanismes de défense contre l'Etat

Les liens de sang ont toujours une importance non négligeable dans l'Afrique actuelle; ils occupent une place prépondérante dans les rapports entre les individus et aussi les rapports entre ceux-ci et l'Etat. Car chaque Africain continue d'appartenir à une famille élargie. La structure de cette dernière est telle que l'individu reste dépendant d'un grand nombre de personnes et rend même cette dépendance vitale voire nécessaire.

L'essentiel pour l'Africain, c'est de sauver son moi groupal du chaos dans lequel il veut paradoxalement précipiter sons vis-à-vis tribal. Ce genre de sauvetage, évidemment, est dirigé contre l'unité nationale que suppose tout Etat véritable.

L'intersubjectivité de l'Africain est, par conséquent, lacunaire, chaque tribu s'enferment de plus en plus sur elle-même. Toute alliance intertribale doit concourir au renforcement de l'autosuffisance de chacune des tribus en lice. Il n'y a donc pas implication de l'Africain dans le contexte d'interaction en tant que processus de formation de l'Etat-nation. Par exemple lorsqu'un Africain se présente à un autre, il doit lui dire qu'il est de telle ou telle tribu. Ce qui peut faciliter ou non leur commerce.

L'Africain, aujourd'hui, se sert de l'Etat comme un infirme, pour se déplacer, se servirait d'une béquille. L'Etat, pour lui, a valeur de prothèse, nécessaire pour soutenir son identité tribale pour qu'elle ne s'effondre pas dans un contexte qui est formellement hostile à la tribalité et qui sollicite l'autonomie réelle, comme le prouve G. DEVREUX: "Une telle tendance à accentuer avec insistance et même de façon obsessionnelle, sa propre identité ethnique (...) et de s'y accrocher (...) vise simplement à empêcher l'effondrement d'un soi fêlé, et d'une prise de conscience incertaine de sa propre identité en tant que personne" [Erny 1972]. Les communautés tribales isolées se présentent alors comme autant d'atomes déconnectés - exclusion constitutionnelle des tribus. Tout accord entre les volontés tribales éparses et autonomes devient problématique.

L'Africain est, à bien des égards, hostile à l'Etat, comme à la modernité authentique. L'hostilité consiste en ce qu'il rejette tout repère identificatoire qui pourrait le définir comme citoyen, c'est-à-dire comme individu qui a des droits et des devoirs définis par un ensemble de lois ayant une valeur objective universelle. Il considère le pouvoir d'Etat comme dépersonnalisant, alors que la tribu lui assure la sécurité, puisqu'elle lui interdit de définir l'autre dans un rapport de réciprocité. C'est que la tribu, selon P. CASTORIADIS-AULAGNIER, "demeure la structure d'accueil de la personnalité authentique" [Castoriadis-Aulagnier cité par Lipanski 1978, p.78] que l'Etat, par contre, recherche à transcender. Une telle transcendance n'est-elle pas un voeu pieux?

L'encerclement de l'Etat par la tribu

L'autorité politique en Afrique n'est pas immanente à la nation tout entière; les volontés particulières, ici, sont incapables de se constituer en volonté générale. Car l'omniprésence de la tribu dans la vie individuelle et sociale est telle qu'elle est devenue incontournable dans la gestion publique des personnes et des choses. Raison pour laquelle les dirigeants africains, pour se maintenir au pouvoir, se proclament eux-

mêmes "Père de la nation". Par là, ils s'attribuent une origine mythi-
que. La vérité est que les Etats africains sont loin d'être des Etats
dignes de ce nom. Les habitants d'un pays ne constituent pas un
peuple en tant que tel. Celui-ci, selon HOBBES, "est un certain corps,
et certaine personne, à laquelle on peut attribuer une seule volonté, et
une action propre" [Hobbes 1982, p.22]. En Afrique, aux lieu et place
du peuple, on a à faire à une multitude. Chacun est "un particulier
groupal" qui s'érige, quand les circonstances l'exigent, anarchiquement
au rang de sujet. Résultat: absence d'un esprit public véritable et de
société civile puisque les lois qui régissent ceux-ci tombent toutes en
désuétude, à peine promulguées. Nous expliquons cela, pour notre
part, par le fait que la communauté tribale dans laquelle chaque
Africain est ancré, est loin d'être une société en tant que telle. Celle-
ci, de l'avis de J. LEIF, "réunit un certain nombre d'individus, qui,
comme dans la communauté, vivent les uns à côté des autres, mais
n'ayant entre eux aucun lien réel. Ici, chacun existe pour soi, dans un
état de tension vis-à-vis des autres, car chacun essaie d'interdire à ses
semblables les sphères d'action qu'il considère comme siennes.
L'homme y est étranger à l'homme, se dirige d'après sa volonté
réfléchie et par calcul et spéculation ne cède quelque chose que contre
réception d'une chose au moins équivalente.

A la séparation des individus correspond donc aussi la séparation
des biens [...]. L'échange est garanti par la volonté sociale" [Leif,
introd. à Tonies 1977, p. 27].

Dans l'Etat africain, il règne la confusion dans les relations
interindividuelles. La notion de contrat, ici, est frappée de vacuité,
puisqu'il n'est pas encore possible d'exprimer un accord momentané
des volontés au moyen d'une convention. Ce qui atteste, comme
l'établit J. LEIF, que "les relations sociales sont d'une toute autre
nature que les relations communautaires. Alors que celles-ci sont
vivantes et chaudes, celles-là n'affectent nullement l'intimité de l'être;
elles sont purement extérieures, froides et conventionnelles, et peuvent
être représentées de la manière la plus adéquate par le commerce"
[Ibid]. Le besoin de vie et de chaleur dans les relations intratribales

pousse chaque Africain à s'enraciner davantage dans sa tribu qui peut alors entreprendre d'encercler l'Etat en éliminant ses vis-à-vis.

Dans cette lutte à la mort que se livre les tribus pour le contrôle et la maîtrise de l'Etat et de ses appareils, il se crée des pôles de domination politique et administrative. Certaines tribus, en effet, s'avèrent plus puissantes que d'autres. Le procès de leur domination coïncide avec le processus qui aboutit à la formation de l'Etat africain; les colons, pour asseoir leur domination, comme nous l'avons déjà dit, ont accordé des privilèges à quelques tribus qu'ils ont arbitrairement érigées au rang de tribus supérieures. Catégorisation et classification des tribus d'après ce qu'elles "valent". Au Cameroun, par exemple, les Beti, les Bassa et les Douala ont été préférés aux Bamileké, Makia, etc. Ce qui est une amorce de la tribalisation de l'Etat et de ses catégories socio-professionnelles.

L'intérêt de chaque groupe tribal semble contradictoire de celui de l'intérêt général qui suppose, pour sa défense, un levier puissant, capable de ruiner les tribus - l'Etat. Celui-ci pour les Africains, parce qu'ils appartiennent chacun encore à une communauté tribale, est essentiellement contraignant et coercitif. Ce qui se traduit par un système de lois, c'est-à-dire de règles objectives et universelles.

L'Africain aidé par sa tribu en lutte contre les autres, s'emploie à s'y soustraire - refus de payer l'impôt forfaitaire, par exemple, préférant fonder ses relations avec les autres sur le système de parenté à l'intérieur d'une société qui a pour visée essentielle l'abolition des démarcations tribales. Dans cet ordre d'idées, les fonctionnaires et les agents de l'Etat, pour rendre service aux usagers de l'administration, utilisent leur langue en tant qu'elle est porteuse de signification. Au cas où les usagers ne répondent pas dans la même langue, ils adoptent une attitude d'inertie, attitude dont ils se départissent si et seulement si les usagers adoptent à leur tour une attitude de corruption. Tout cela concourt aux lenteurs administratives. Ainsi le système de parenté s'étend à l'Etat. Ce qui a fait dire à C. LEVI-STRAUSS qu'"un système de parenté ne consiste pas dans les liens objectifs de filiation ou de consanguinité donnés entre les individus; il n'existe que dans la

conscience des hommes, il est un système arbitraire de représentations, non le développement d'une situation de fait" [Erny 1972, p.44].

Le système de parenté qu'adoptent bon nombre d'Africains est incompatible avec l'ipséité du sujet; il exclut toute expérience égotiste, puisque, selon P. ERNY, "socialisation et personnification sont synonymes" (9). La tribu aspire à l'autosuffisance et à l'autosubsistance; ce qui fait qu'elle est animée par le désir d'éternité. L'essentialisme, parce qu'il favorise des comportements stéréotypés, oriente la pratique des individus membres d'une tribu donnée. Face à l'Etat, chaque tribu pourra cesser d'être une puissance supérieure étrangère. Il devient "une mère nourricière" ou plus précisément "une communauté alimentaire" - la commensalité avec ses consanguins. IL y a donc personnalisation des rapports impersonnels. Et, du coup, l'Etat devient faible et vulnérable. En transformant l'Etat en pourvoyeur de nourriture, la tribu et ses membres se doivent d'occuper les postes-clés de l'Etat et de l'administration.

Le népotisme, le clientélisme et l'affairisme, érigés en méthode de gouvernement, l'administration se trouve, du coup, plus ou moins privatisée. Le revers de la médaille, c'est le triomphe de l'individualisme et de l'égoïsme dans les rapports intratribaux. Individualisme et égoïsme sont les corrélatifs de la production marchande qui restent cependant limitée à des oasis, comme le montrent P. JACQUEMOT et M. RAFFIOT. "Au premier stade de l'accumulation reste le désir de son groupe d'origine de supplanter les groupes voisins en prestige, donc en pouvoir - du moins au niveau de la lutte ostentatoire et symbolique que se livrent les représentants des lignages (...). Les rapports marchands ont désormais investi les rapports sociaux traditionnels. L'individualisme et l'accroissement des besoins monétaires, amplifiés par la lutte pour le pouvoir" [Jaquemot 1985, p.129-131].

Les fléaux consécutifs à la tribalisation de l'Etat et de l'administration sont tels que l'usager de l'administration finit par se faire à l'idée qu'il doit "suivre son dossier", sans quoi il ne pourra jamais aboutir. La faveur se substitue alors au droit. La découverte de l'autre par le moi est médiatisée par la figure tribale et ses substituts. Car la

tribu est pour chacun une présence, une proximité rassurante et apaisante: l'intimité de la relation avec autrui ignore les distances dans l'espace et le temps.

Ne faudrait-il pas alors chercher dans la tribu le ressort intime de la promotion d'un Etat africain véritable?

Les colonisateurs européens ont entouré le concept de tribu d'une gangue idéologique; il importe maintenant de l'en dépouiller pour ne pas verser dans l'afro-pessimisme.

L'encerclement de l'Etat par la tribu atteste plutôt que les Africains ont, avec la complicité des Européens, mal négocié le virage historique que constitue la colonisation. L'Etat africain en tant qu'excroissance historique n'a pas été pensé à partir des exigences de la structure politique des sociétés africaines. Celle-ci ne saurait donc servir de fondement au pouvoir politique détaché des hommes qui l'exercent et incarné dans une institution dont il est la matérialité. L'Etat africain est abstrait; la tribu, par contre, est concrète, réelle. Ses mythes, ses tabous et ses interdits sont, dans son rapport à l'Etat, des mécanismes de contrôle assez astreignants. La coercition est relative au fait social; elle a une vertu intégrative puisqu'elle rappelle l'Etat à l'ordre: plonger ses racines plutôt dans le passé historique de l'Afrique qui a été occulté (l'anhistoricité des peuples africains). La tribu rassure l'individu dépersonnalisé sans quoi il ne pourra jamais espérer être un citoyen véritable; elle inculque pour ainsi dire à chacun de ses membres la conscience d'être et est refus de la bureaucratie et des privilèges matériels qui en découlent.

L'encerclement de l'Etat par la tribu vise, à regarder les choses de près, au rétablissement de l'égalité et de la justice sociales par une redistribution des biens, certes à une échelle réduite. La structure tribale est un contre-pouvoir, en dépit des déchirements que cela peut susciter et suscite même. L'acuité du problème tribal est plutôt révélatrice de l'inadéquation de l'Etat et de la structure sociale. Hormis peut-être ceux qui en tirent profit, de par la position qu'ils y occupent, les individus ne se reconnaissent pas dans l'Etat. Celui-ci demeure une nécessité extérieure: les constitutions africaines ni sont

pas en rapport avec les réalités sociales; elles sont comme des déter-
minations artificielles, arbitraires ou a priori. Les tribus ne sont pas
impliquées dans la détermination de la loi fondamentale. Donc, c'est
l'Etat lui-même qui secrète et entretient d'ailleurs depuis ses origines,
les antagonismes intertribaux.

La tribu ne devrait-elle pas devenir l'âme vivante de l'Etat
africain et ce d'autant plus qu'elle en est la mauvaise conscience?

Ce problème se pose en termes de détermination de l'essentialité
de l'apport de la tradition à l'édification d'un Etat véritable en Afri-
que. Toute tradition est un commerce entre les hommes qui reconnais-
sent l'existence d'une autorité morale incarnée par un chef. Celui-ci est
pour l'ensemble de la tribu un modèle; il suscite imitation et reproduc-
tion de ses actions. Mais pour que l'imitation servile et la reproduction
mécanique ou irréfléchie ne triomphent pas, les Africains doivent
s'employer à ne pas congédier la raison raisonnante. Il est question
d'imprimer une dynamique nouvelle à la tradition pour prendre en
compte les nouvelles conditions de vie.

Les traditions ancestrales étaient d'ordre communautaire et moral,
en dépit de l'étroitesse tribale. Le chef traditionnel authentique, en
effet, était attaché de façon indéfectible à sa communauté; il organisait
la production des moyens d'existence matériels en institutionnalisant la
coopération (le travail en équipes) - la paresse était inexistante et les
profiteurs-exploiteurs n'avaient pas droit de cité. Pour ce qui est de la
distribution, le chef assurait une répartition équitable du produit du
travail. Et la consommation, sous son égide, se faisait de façon
communautaire.

La tribu peut et doit devenir une médiation pour l'accomplisse-
ment de l'Etat en Afrique. En ravivant son vieux fond social et moral
pétrifié, grâce au logos organisateur, les Africains pourront en faire la
substance d'une éducation civique et morale apte à promouvoir le
développement harmonieux des institutions politiques. Il s'agit
d'enrichir la tribalité africaine au lieu de la détruire. Ce qui permettra
de sauver les Africains de la mort par asphyxie politique: actualiser la
tribalité peut les tirer du bourbier politique.

Conclusion

La déstructuration de la tribu par l'Etat colonial s'est avérée comme un acide dissolvant de la personnalité et de l'individualité de l'Africain. Pour ne pas dépérir et compte tenu de l'excentration de l'Etat colonial, la tribu secrète des mécanismes de défense - encerclement de l'Etat. Celui-ci ne peut plus tenir par soi-même; il est condamné à mener une vie languissante et morne, à cause des antagonismes intertribaux qu'il a créés. Les tribus semblent alors former une foule, une cohue qui ne connaît ni règle constituée, ni organe régulateur d'aucune sorte.

L'attache tribale devient le tremplin le plus sûr pour une ascension sociale fulgurante; La revendication ethnique est une arme efficace. Mais, comme le montre VAN DEN BERGHE, "lorsque le conflit ethnique devient une pratique admise, on se trouve dans un cercle vicieux. Chacun s'attend à trouve en face de soi un tribaliste, et justifie son propre particularisme ethnique comme un procédé défensif et préventif ou comme un moyen de rétablir l'équilibre détruit par le tribalisme de l'autre. Le favoritisme devient endémique, omniprésent, pratiquement inévitable" [Van Den Berghe 1972, p.548].

En réalité, les colonisateurs européens et leurs successeurs africains dénaturent la tribalité pour perpétuer leur domination; la positivité de la tribalité n'est pas illusoire; il suffit de s'appuyer sur la tradition africaine pour donner à l'Etat un fondement solide, mais à condition que cette tradition soit elle-même actualisée. La tradition, une fois enrichie, permettra aux Africains de se découvrir soumis à l'obligation de la réciprocité de leurs relations avec les autres.

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Résumé

A partir d'une définition générale de la démocratie comme "gouverne-ment pour et par le peuple" l'article offre une analyse de trois dimen-sions des processus de démocratisation. Chacunes de ces dimensions peut être abordées à patir de questions concrètes; les expériences africaines concernant ces questions sont ici analysées. En conclusion il sera débattu de toute une séries de problèmes liés aux processus de démocratisation.

CONCEPTUALIZING DEMOCRACY
IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Bas de Gaay Fortman

> "In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is
> there no agreed definition but the attempt to make one
> is resisted from all sides...The defenders of any kind
> of regime claim that it is a democracy..."
>
> George Orwell

In Africa the idea of "democracy" became popular primarily in the re-
placement of one set of rulers by another. Using Abraham Lincoln's
definition , "government of the people, by the people, and for the
people", the nationalists' struggle specifically embraced only the first
part. Colonial rule was inherently authoritarian in all its manifestations
and was to be replaced by *government of the people*, in the sense that
those who rule the country should be natives of that country. Indeed,
there can be no democracy without independence.[1] In the case of settler
rule or white minority rule, the fight was for *majority rule*. With the
installation of the Mandela government in South Africa this struggle has
come to an end.

Colonialism, however, was neither characterised by government by
the people, nor by government for the people. Where democratic forms
of local government existed under colonialism, these were not invested
with any meaningful power, or, through the mechanisms of *indirect rule*,
they were transformed into authoritarian systems. Today, these institu-
tions that have been destroyed or at least marginalised cannot be
restored. Indeed, attempts to use traditional forms as the basis for mod-
ern government - "Négritude", "Ujamaa", "African Socialism", "Zam-
bian Humanism" - have chiefly served to disguise some real deficiencies
in African democracy. Colonialism brought Africa a process of state
formation upon which post-independence rulers have further built. Such
modern government needs modern types of legitimisation; one cannot
have it both ways. In trying to explain what this means, we will take
Lincoln's definition as a starting point. Government of the people does

not only mean self-determination but *representation*, government <u>for</u> the people may be seen as *accountability* while government <u>by</u> the people signifies *participation*. The three concepts are interrelated, as we shall see, and all necessary aspects of the democratic use of power. Thus, democracy means that power is representative, controllable and should also be participatory.

Realising that democracy is a process much more than an idea, I shall try to relate the three types of people's rule - <u>of</u>, <u>for</u> and <u>by</u> - with institutional arrangements allied with democratic processes. Finally, I shall briefly discuss some prerequisites for a sustainable democracy.

Representation

"Government of the people" means representative democracy. Those who rule should not just come from the people, but there should actually be mechanisms to ensure that they represent the people in processes of decision-making.

An essential feature of representation is the *substitutability of those in power*. If the ruled are dissatisfied with their rulers, they should have the opportunity to replace them. This is usually done through elections. If regimes do not provide such mechanisms, the only way to replace those in power is to change the regime.

In Africa, various types of parliamentary democracy and party organisation were inherited from colonial powers at independence that had done nothing to enhance the acculturation of modern democratic institutions. At a time when the one-party state is in total disrepute it would be salutary to remember that the multiparty system has generally not been a success in Africa. Within the countries that exported their parliamentary democratic models a multiparty system had developed on the basis of a "crystallisation of society into nonregional and nonterritorial social classes, together with the structures of interclass compromise promoted by the passage of time and the hegemonic influence of capitalism" (Davidson 1992: 207). In Africa, however, where this crystallisation had not been given any chance to develop, the party

system was either based on multiple organisations of an ethnic nature, or on one dominant African party fighting for independence that could totally defeat the European settler party as soon as there were free and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

In the latter case the *Independence Party* usually acquired a monopolist position initially based on popular support. Where there was a real electoral struggle, the division between the parties tended to be founded on ethnic differences rather than on distinct political programmes. Although the transition to the single-party state was not supported by everyone in the countries that fit in this category - such as Kenya and Zambia - it still attained a certain degree of legitimacy through means such as public referenda.

Generally, the multiparty model was interpreted as "the majority rules" rather than "the majority decides, while the minority is respected". There was contempt rather than respect for political adversaries, which resulted in political violence, particularly during election time.

Hence, policies of transition to a single-party state were often based on a good deal of public support. Where the major party had already attained its dominant position during a period of multiparty elections, more or less stable one-party regimes were formed which in quite a number of cases retained a competitive element in elections.

In other instances, the one-party state was created as the result of a military coup d'état. But since the military was still a rather young and, in terms of the power struggle, non-homogeneous institution, the ensuing regimes tended to be subject to new take-over attempts. Thus, during the seventies the average life span of a regime in the world dropped to nine years (with the United States, for example, counting as one regime since 1776). Benin was an extreme case experiencing six coups d'état over a period of nine years.

Where the one-party state had a basis of at least formal democratic legitimacy, the elections that followed often offered the masses more opportunity to unseat nominated incumbents than had been the case during the period of a multiparty electoral system. In Zambia, for example, multiparty elections in Bembaland meant that the candidates for

the United National Independence Party would always be elected (often unopposed) while the same used to be true for the African National Congress candidates in Tongaland. The elections that followed the introduction of the single-party state, however, offered a real choice, were more competitive and hence led to a higher voter turnout.

Thus, the failures of the one-party state should not be explained primarily from a *representation* perspective. On the contrary, it was the multiparty state in the immediate post-independence period that failed in terms of establishing proper mechanisms for representation. Hence, now that the search is for *democracy and good governance*, there is little reason to regard the re-introduction of multiparty systems as a panacea.

The peacefully established single-party state did fail, however, in terms of the substitutability of those in political power at the top. To oppose the incumbent president/party leader was regarded as utterly disrespectful. But this was not really different from the multi-party period, since incumbent leaders were never unseated under that system either. Post-independence multiparty systems still meant one-(dominant)-party-government. Thus, an entrenched concentration and personalisation of political power at the top developed, which brings us to the second interpretation of democracy.

Accountability

The concept "Government for the people" means that those in power should be accountable. Hence, they should not only be substitutable but their actions should be subject to control. Those who rule on behalf of the citizens should be accountable to the citizens. In terms of institutional arrangements, this means more than just a parliamentary system in which ministers can be called to account for their policies and decisions. Where power is totally concentrated, control becomes highly problematic. A crucial factor is the division and separation of powers or, in other words, the existence of institutional *checks and balances*. While representative democracy is historically connected with the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the notion of accountability derives from the work of

another political philosopher: de Montesquieu. Historically the creation of democracies is connected with the rule of law which implies primarily *government by law* rather than through purely arbitrary execution of power. In this regard, the function of law is to limit rather than to extend state power. Thus, politics, too, is restricted by law. Indeed the State itself should be subjected to established legal processes while the term "law" does not mean just any Act of Parliament but includes provisions for the implementation of human rights. This is the requirement of the *Rechtsstaat* (Rule of Law) which should not be regarded as a status that can be acquired or not but rather as a continued process of subjecting power to law in a normative sense. It implies a judiciary separated from the executive. Indeed, an *independent and accessible judiciary* may be seen as one of the essential institutions of a modern democracy.

Another such institution is a *free press*. Accountability is meaningless where political actions and operations cannot freely come out into the open and where public criticism is suppressed. Generally, it is the separation of institutions that may provide the necessary checks and balances. A further example is the relationship between the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance. Without making the responsibility for the value of the currency independent of the financial management by the government, there is no protection against populist inflationary policies.

Thus, accountable democracy means much more than parliamentary control of political power. Yet, in this narrow sense too, the single-party state suffers from a serious democratic flaw. The single party became intimately associated with the state itself. But who controls that party? Who controlled UNIP in Zambia and KANU in Kenya? Who controlled Chama cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania? Who calls the single party itself to account for its policies and its political decisions? The Leninist answer is: "The party is the avant-garde of the masses that controls itself!" But since the collapse of the Berlin wall and the opening of the archives of the "people's democracies" revealing the structural nature of public mismanagement, corruption and other forms of abuse of power in these countries, nobody can still seriously believe in democratic centralism any

longer. Using the term "democratic" in this case has been exposed as a
fallacy.

At this point we may conclude that although the single-party state
was not a complete failure - certainly not in comparison with multiparty
rule - from a Rousseauian perspective, the tendency of the single-party
system to concentrate, monopolise and homogenise power is seen as
undemocratic from a Montesquieuian point of view.

Especially the one-party rulers have responded to calls for
democratisation by simply narrowing down the issue to the question of
multi-partyism. An example is President Hastings Kamuzu Banda's reac-
tion to the general call for democracy in Malawi, which was to announce
a referendum on the question of whether or not multiple parties should
be admitted. Since he made no inclination whatsoever to give up his full
control of police, judiciary and media, this might be seen as a shrewd
way of avoiding some of the most pressing issues in democratisation.
Not surprisingly, the opposition's immediate response was to call for
press freedom and revocation of arbitrary police powers for arrest and
detention. Without institutional mechanisms for political accountability
including basic democratic freedoms, the multiparty system does not
constitute a real improvement. Donor pressure reinforced such demands
for a multi-party system, which resulted in Banda losing his referendum
despite attempts to play upon public fear of tribal domination and chaos.

Compared to the Malawian experience President Arap Moi's reac-
tion to the movement for democratisation in Kenya might be seen as
more cunning. Trusting that power-hungry politicians would immediately
abuse the freedom of association in order to restore tribal and personal-
ity-based political divisions, he passed over the referendum stage and
called for a general multiparty election. Also because of haste on the part
of the donors there was insufficient time to concentrate on measures for
the establishment of Montesquieuian democracy first. Thus, Moi suc-
ceeded in his attempt to retain power through his control of the media,
widespread intimidation, insufficient checking of the electoral process by
the observers sent by the donor countries that had insisted upon free and

fair multiparty elections, and the "winner takes all system" which Kenya had inherited from the British. With a minority of the popular vote Moi could continue his one party government. "The minority rules, the majority is not respected" is the unfortunate result of this "democratisation" process.

Generally, accountability becomes rather problematic in situations of one-party government. In the African context it is not just a multiparty system that is required but *multiparty government*. In Zambia, for example, the defects of multipartyism in connection with one-party government are already manifesting themselves again, as they did in the period immediately following independence. It is particularly the Westminster model that produces single-party government as a result of multiparty elections. The re-introduction of multiparty systems might be an appropriate occasion for establishing electoral systems that are more conducive to political cooperation, consensus seeking and coalition politics. South Africa provides an encouraging example here. It is noteworthy that even in Britain itself, the home of the Westminster model, there is increasing doubt as to the merits of an electoral system that tends to produce single-party government on the basis of less than half of the popular vote. The realisation by a significant part of the electorate that within the political power relations of their constituency, their vote would have no significance anyway, is not very conducive to electoral participation. This brings us to the third aspect of the concept of "democracy".

Participation

"Government by the people" means participatory democracy. Those in political power should not only be substitutable and controlled but the people should also participate in political processes. The term *basic democratic rights* refers to the conditions for popular participation: freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of opinion and expression, the right of all to take part in the government of their country, and of equal access to

public service. In this category of rights we find guarantees against any tyranny of the majority (or of the minority for that matter if a minority happens to be in power). In terms of collective rights, the so-called *minority rights* are included here, such as the right of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to practise their own culture.

Participation as an essential element of democracy is based on the old Roman rule *Quod omnes tangit debet ab omnibus approbari* (What touches all has to be approved by all). It requires maintenance of the fundamental freedoms which were already mentioned in relation to the *Rechtsstaat*. As the Aragon nobility said to King Philip II of Spain: " We, whose value as human beings is the same as yours, make you our King and Lord provided that you protect our freedoms; if not, you are no longer our King." In Africa there used to be similar relationships between chief and elders within the framework of mechanisms for *direct democracy*. Through processes of double alienation (Franz Fanon) - taking people's customs away from them first, reformulating these for the purpose of colonial rule and then returning them to the people as if they were still their own - "traditional" rule became autocratic (De Gaay Fortman and Mihyo 1991: 143). After independence the number of laws, orders and decrees increased tremendously, but the involvement in policy-making and implementation by those directly affected was reduced even further.

Today it is seen as necessary to supplement the term *development* with the adjective *participatory*. Too many policies and plans have been imposed upon people from above. Thus, the connotation of the word development *per se* is no longer purely positive. Some speak of "victims of development". The fact that people become victims of development policies is the result of lack of consultation and participation. This particularly applies to women as is being increasingly realised now. In this regard it is noteworthy that the United Nations Assembly resolution on *The Right to Development* contains only one new element in comparison with existing treaties, covenants and resolutions: the right of people to participate in development. Democracy in the sense of rule by the people

means development by the people, or, as it is usually called, "participatory development".

Normative interconnections

Thus, democracy appears to be a concept with various levels of interpretation allied to different types of institutional arrangements. Taking the democratic principle "The majority decides, the minority is respected" as an example here, this requires : (1) proper mechanisms for representation so that majorities can be constituted; (2) basic democratic rights including minority rights so that everyone can participate in political processes and (3) a public political system of checks and balances including an independent judiciary to which those belonging to minorities have no less access than those in power. But above all the term *respect* indicates a democratic *culture*. Cultures, as we know, are not static. Thus, rather than just as an idea or set of ideas, democracy should be seen as a *process*. Every society has to *receive* democracy in its own way. As the Norwegian Minister for Development Cooperation accurately put it in a speech to the Advisory Committee of the Global Coalition for Africa:

> We must not forget that democracy must grow from local roots, it cannot be imported, sold or paid for. It cannot be imposed from outside. The people of each nation must take their fate into their own hands and shape the form of government most suited for their national aspirations. Consequently, we must avoid any attempt to impose predefined models of democracy on African countries... (Grete Faremo, as quoted in Human Rights Handbook 1992, part II, p. XIII).

By taking a closer look at the *process* of democratisation in Africa we wish to point to certain connections between democracy and other normative concepts.

1. Socio-economic perspective. Democratisation in Africa means a process of transition. The current situation in Eastern Europe provides an illustration of the difficulties of transition under poor economic conditions. Naturally, absolute poverty is not conducive to political participation. Starvation and poverty may bring people "to the nervous instability of hysteria and to a mad despair" as Keynes pointed out in his *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (Keynes 1920: 213). Those who fear starvation may decide to fight. On the positive side, Adam Smith already explained how:

> ...commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbours, and of servile dependency upon their superiors (Smith 1776: 313).

Africa still suffers from the adverse consequences of a global economic system that favours the already industrialised countries. Indeed, one can follow the OAU Secretary-General when he describes as misleading

> the emerging notion that multipartism, in a magical way, can bring about development. For no matter how many political parties an African State may have, that will not alter her economic fortunes. It will not change the price of coffee, cocoa, cotton, sisal or copper...Democracy must apply to the international system. This system is created by the major economic nations, evidently to suit their priorities and interests (Ahmed Salim Saleh, as quoted in Human Rights Handbook 1992, part II, p XIII).

The present G7 approach to internal economic governance can hardly be called democratic. The Human Development Report 1992 notes a striking lack of *good governance* at the international level. In this regard, the relationship between the political conditionalities currently set by bilateral donors and their consortia and the economic conditionalities of the

international financial agencies may also be questioned. "Human rights concerns continue to be conspicuously underestimated in the adjustment process", the UN special rapporteur on the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights concluded (Türk 1991: 57).

Democratisation, we may conclude, requires continuous pressure for inclusion of the International Economic Order on the global agenda.

2. *Peace and stability.* Democracy provides peaceful means for channelling grievances and settling conflict. In Chad, for example, the introduction of the one-party state in 1962 may well have fostered the civil war that followed, since it deprived the Northerners of political ways of fighting for their interests (Buijtenhuis 1992: 92). Once such a violent confrontation has started ,it becomes extremely difficult to reintroduce democratic processes. Generally, current African history illustrates the necessity of launching processes of *reconciliation* before embarking upon formal democratisation. Reconciliation means making a new start together after a period in which things had gone totally wrong between the parties concerned. Thus, in Angola, after all those years of civil war it was necessary to first reconcile UNITA and MPLA in a multiparty government before introducing multiparty elections. While the Cold War was clearly responsible for the escalation of the conflict between the two major Angolan parties, regrettably the end of the Cold War was not used for immediate attempts at reconciliation coupled with foreign assistance for reconstruction. As it happened, the elections were fought in a sphere of total hostility and mistrust which, if anything, worked against reconciliation.

3. *Responsive governance.* Here we prefer the American term "governance" to the English "government" because rather than just some institutional arrangements, this again concerns a process. Governance that does not respond to the needs of the citizens lacks legitimacy and is likely to enhance the call for a change of regime. In the case of a civilian government, it has often led to a military take-over. Military regimes, however, generally have not resulted in better government while negatively affecting democracy and economic effectiveness. Hence, responsive governance also means *demilitarisation*. Zaire provides the most striking example of a process of slipping from military overgovernment to *'ungovernment'* (The Economist, February 13th 1993, p. 15).

Today "good governance" belongs to the political conditionalities of the donor countries although it is not always clear how far this is more than a matter of words and how far development programmes are tuned into the needs of responsive governance. One important characteristic of responsive governance is a reasonably functioning legal system. The juridical quality of a society should not be seen as much less important than the economic conditions under which people live. This observation is not to be interpreted, however, as a call for new law-making. In Africa, after a period of non-functioning overgovernment legal reform primarily means *un*making law, rather than making it. But, in order to reach their objectives, processes of deregulation and privatisation should be accompanied by efforts to improve the quality of government.

The Human Development Report 1992 calls for a new international non-governmental organisation next to Amnesty International called *Honesty International*. Just as Amnesty aims at the mobilisation of public shame in regard to violations of human rights, Honesty might do the same with respect to corruption and other forms of *pocketalism*. Without waiting for an international NGO to be created, local non-governmental organisations might regard *honesty* already as a major challenge.

4. Pluralism. As was already stressed above, democracy is a *culture*, perhaps more than anything else. A culture of tolerance, of human equality, of restricted politics, and of respect for different or even opposing views. Democracy goes against that historical human tendency to be connected with some absolute focus of identity, an ultimate warrant of truth. As opposed to, for example, the nationalist identity, the democratic identity is not based on natural unanimity or at least consensus but rather on relative truth and a continuous need to search for consensus.

People will opt for democracy once they realise that although in terms of political decision-making it is a bad system, it is still the only system that is "thinkable" (Churchill). After two years of parliamentary democracy in Russia, opinion polls indicate that popular support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian rule has been reduced to a minority. Understandable as that may be in view of the daily experience of chaotic politics and economic mismanagement, it still means that democracy has not as yet gained a place in the hearts of Russian citizens. Democracy as a culture of course is not based on a belief in its political and economic effectiveness.

The cultural institutional basis for democracy lies in *civil society*. This term refers to "that segment of society that interacts with the state, influences the state, and yet is distinct from the state" (Chazan 1990: 281). It implies organisations that take an interest in the affairs of governance beyond their own group interests. There is an obvious interaction between civil society and good governance as mentioned above. As Judd has put it:

> Civil society needs government to be open, responsive, and accountable. And an active civil society, acting not only as a check and balance on government but also informing political debate is essential and indispensable to politically sustainable development (Judd, 1992: 7).

In Africa there has always been "an institutional landscape between the family and the state" (Chazan) although colonialism has negatively affected traditional structures for political participation. In recent years we have been able to witness a remarkable growth of voluntary associations in Africa. Conducive to this development were the relaxation of official controls over associational life (the tendency to connect every initiative with the ruling party) and the expansion of communication networks. It is particularly the churches that have significantly expanded their activities into the realm of civil society. Thus, in Zambia, Kenya and Malawi they were at the roots of a democratisation process.

Finally, the basis of a civil society that functions well is education. In this respect, the situation in Africa today is extremely worrying. Deteriorating economic conditions have particularly affected the quality of education. Staff/student ratios of 1:300 are no longer an exception, even at university level. It would be useless to include major *conscientization* efforts in processes of democratisation in Africa unless the structures of formal education are considerably improved first.

Note

1.   Remarkably, in Chichewa (or Chinyanja), the term for independence and for democracy is the same: *ufuru wa kudzilamulira*: the freedom to make one's own laws.

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Truth and Ethics in African Thought: A reply to Emmanuel Eze[1]

Tunde Bewaji

1. *Ethics, Àse, Logos and Orí*

In an attempt to provide an analysis of "truth" and "ethics" in "African thought", Professor Emmanuel Eze gave certain novel interpretations of the Yoruba *Ifa* literary corpus and divination system which are, to my mind, very curious as well as interesting. It is my belief that some of these interpretations might be appropriate to *Ifa* or *Afa* belief and practice among other peoples, but this does not seem to be the case of the Yoruba belief and practice of *Ifa*. This point can become very clear only after an understanding of what Professor Eze says. But before then, our consideration will be well served if we introduce the discussion with the note of caution given by the foremost *Ifa* scholar, Professor Wande Abimbola (1976), in introducing the classic <u>Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus</u>, thus:

> In this work, the connotation of the term '*Ifa*' is deliberately restricted to the *Ifa* divination system and its literary corpus as it exists among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is important to establish this from the outset because similar systems of divination exist among the Igbo, the Nupe, the Gwari and the Jukun of Nigeria as well as among the Yoruba people of Togo, Dahomey (now Republic of Benin), Cuba and Brazil (p. 3).

The reason for this is that while a large chunk of what Eze says may be true of Igbo *Afa* system, they are not supported by either oral or written evidence among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

While matters of where *Ifa* originated may be merely of academic interest, the preponderance of opinion is to regard *Ifa* divination and the literary corpus accompanying it as indigenous to the Yoruba people and hence, *Ifa* is believed to have spread from there far and wide. It is only a matter of conjecture that it is possible that in the process of diffusion changes took place within the corpus that transformed it to suit the new environment and society in which the system finds itself.

Eze's consideration of *Ifa* in the neologisms of phenomenological hermeneutics only obscures our further understanding of the relationship between *Ifa*, truth and ethics in Yoruba thought. Let us start with what he says about *thought*:

> ... Within the Yoruba tradition, thought has its origin in ashé Ashé often translated as 'power', is a concept that designates the dynamism of being and the very vitality of life. Ashé is the creating source of all that is; it is the power-to-be, the principle in things that enables them to be (p. 5).

To settle the factual issue, Eze's interpretation of "thought" in Yoruba writings as Ashé is inaccurate. With the tone mark provided by Eze it is not what is intended that the word he has written means. The tone marks here used are ashé which means "sieve". For Àshe (or àṣẹ which is the correct way of writing Yoruba language) on the other hand, the tone marks are different and this makes the pronunciation and meaning different (Yoruba is a tonal language).

Apart from that factual or mechanical fault, the author seems unaware that the Yoruba have a word, totally different and never confused with any other, for thought, namely èrò. Erò is "thought"; it is the content of the mind or that which one has in mind at any moment of consciousness - èrò ọkòn (though ọkòn could be given a literal translation to mean heart, giving a confusing twist of meaning to the unwary), or èrò Inú or ìrònú as the "thought or stirring of one's stomach". Èrò is what one uses one's head to rò (think) or one's stomach\belly to rò; and also it is that which one fi Orí rò - thinks with one's head. In other words, the Yoruba will say that your thoughts - èrò - come from your head or your heart or your stomach\belly; never do they say it comes or originates from your ashé (sieve) or àṣẹ (power instrument).[2] Thus, those who are thoughtful have ìrònú, those who are thoughtless, either because of forgetfulness or stupidity lack ìrònú and are called *a láì nf 'rònú* by contrast with *olópolo pípé* - one whose head is "correct" or onî 'rònú ìjìnlè - one with deep thought.

Concerning the issuance of thought from àshe (power) in the above, it could only be cosmic thought (if there is such a Hegelian thing) that

would issue from such power. But Yoruba creationism lacks that type of account found in either Genesis, by which means God, by fiat, created the universe by uttering the words to their effect; or that in the Gospel of St. John where the word, the Logos, is imbued with what amounts to creative, generative, regenerative (and possibly degenerative) powers. Thus, the equation of àshe with the primal "stuff" of being, probably the Greek Urstuff or nous, is a strange assimilation of Yoruba ideas to Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian ideas.[3]

There are enough materials on the use and misuse of àṣẹ in Yoruba belief and philosophical system. Aṣẹ is understood to mean various things, depending on the issue, thing or problematic. i) In prayer - ìwúre: at the end of the prayer or chant, there is always a chorus àṣẹ or ááṣẹ. This means "it will come to pass as said\desired\expected". ii) On the other hand, when a deliberation has reached a conclusive point at the court of the elders, family, or king, the one with authority is expected to put her\his stamp - ase - on it, making it law. iii) Each animal, plant, object, thing and human has a certain power or authority inherent, innate, natural to them. Thus, *àṣẹ iná ni iná fi ń jó, àṣẹ oòrùn ni oòrùn fi n ràn, àṣẹ bòlòbòlò ni n bẹ lẹ́nu ìgbín, kó sẹ kó sẹ ni tì ìlákọ̀ṣẹ*, meaning that "it is by the nature of fire that it burns\consumes the bush, that of the sun by which it shines\provides light, that of the snail that makes its saliva slimy and that of ilako (small tiny snails) that makes it survive dangers". The nature of pepper makes it hot, that of sugar makes it sweet and honey, sweet. If this means their creative logos, then so be it! It only reduces àṣẹ for Eze to a spiritual\animistic entity. It is not clear if this is what he has in mind, but in Yoruba thought this does not seem to be the case.

At another remove are the magico-metaphysical understandings of ase. Professor M. Akin Makinde (1988) identified many such uses of àṣẹ.[4] In all these instances identified by him, there is always a material component for, or accompaniment to the àṣẹ to be effective. These could be gourds, horns, shells, alligator pepper, red palm oil, etc. In many cases the physical objects with their contents are called the àṣẹ; in others, it is the spoken word that accompanies the use of the physical

objects or things that are called àṣẹ. What must be understood is that àṣẹ, when understood as a word, is only a prayer or curse and, in this regard, there is a polarity of prayer and curse, in that in most prayers, by wishing oneself\others some good, one wishes others some evil as good cannot go round; and vice versa.[5]

In this regard, it would be inauspicious to single out àṣẹ from the family of àásán, ògèdè, Ọfọ̀, àyájọ́, gbólóhùn, ọ̀rọ̀ and say that one is power and the others are not. The complexity of the situation would forbid such a fiat. None of the scholars on *Ifa* and traditional medicine that I am aware of have presupposed any link between àṣẹ as

> the dynamism of being and the very vitality of life. Ashe is
> the creative source of all that is; it is the power-tobe, the
> principle in things that <u>enables</u> them to be (p. 5).

So when the author understands Gates' words that

> the <u>ase</u> used to create the universe I translate as "logos" as the
> word as understanding, the word as audible, and later the
> visible, sign of reason (p. 6)

to mean the principle of intelligibility or rationality, this only fastens on one aspect of àṣẹ intentionality. The point of uttering àṣẹ is to command and in such instances the command constitutes the *raison d'etre* of existence, action, inaction, situation, etc. of the commanded. This is not "rationality itself", but reason of, for and in: nothing intrinsic here!

No doubt God\Olodumare is the source of all authority and power in Yoruba belief system. But are we to equate Olodumare with àṣẹ? No evidence at all supports this. And it seems that this is the only way Eze's contention in the following passage can be coherently interpreted of Yoruba ideas about àṣẹ:

> Ashé, then, can be understood as the principle of intelligibility
> in the universe and in humans, or as rationality itself. It is
> creative power, the word, the reason, the logos which underlie
> reality. More specifically, ashe is that principle which
> accounts <u>for</u> the uniqueness of humans; it is a rational and
> spiritual principle which confers upon humans their identity

and destiny. It endows individuals with <u>Orí</u> - which is the
Yoruba word for destiny (p. 6).

This can only be correct if àṣẹ is the sanction, power, authority or stamp
used by God\Olodumare to seal, affix or grant destiny. But then, what is
used cannot be what uses; God cannot be the same as the instrument
used by God!

What the above considerations show is that Professor Eze's under-
standing of àṣẹ does not correspond in all aspects (both general and
particular) with the complicated way in which the Yoruba understand,
conceptualize and use àṣẹ. This deficiency leads to a very superficial
understanding of àṣẹ in Yoruba moral philosophy and epistemology on
the part of Professor Eze with a consequence that faulty conclusions are
drawn regarding the place of *Ifa* as source of truth and guaranteer of
morality.

II   Babalawo as Father of Secrets, His Secrets: theory and practice.

Professor Eze says,

> For example, among the Yoruba, the guardians of the *Ifa* text
> were priests called Babalawo, a word which literally means
> "Father of Secretes" (p. 7).

Usually in Yoruba societies, it is possible to have a situation that meets
Eze's description of *Babalawo*. But as Idowu (1962), Abimbola (1968,
1969, 1976, 1977), Makinde (1988), Dopamu (1986), Lijadu (1898),
Aromolaran (1976) and many others have documented, there is often a
division of labor in Yoruba society, even in matters of religion. Thus
one could go to consult a diviner - o /, alawo or Babalawo - whose sole
duty and competence is to help peer into the future.[6] In most cases, these
specialists have no other duty; they are not affiliated to any other divin-
ities except Orunmila, the divinity of their profession or trade. They do
not officiate at private or public religious functions, they only find out
for people what may happen and what should be done in various circum-
stances to progress. They are professionals in the strict sense of the
word. Their skills are acquired in a period of training spanning at least

10 solid years (in the case of very bright students) of tutelage under renowned babalawos, **never for three years** as Professor Eze stated (p.7).

However, the babalawo may combine other skills such as herbalism and be an Onisegun native or herbal doctor - or priesthood and be a Baba\Yeye Lorisa or Abore - chief priest of a particular divinity or village, who are partly ritual priests and partly diviners and herbalists. All of them, in virtue of their positions in society are fathers of secrets, because members of society consult them in confidence and expect the strictest confidentiality of transactions. They are no different from hospital doctors, bankers, teachers, etc. in contemporary society who are compelled by virtue of their relationship of trust with their clients to exercise discretion in the use or abuse of public and private knowledge. The babalawo need not be a member of any secret cult, and members of the profession of babalawos are known to members of the communities in a way cult members are not known; otherwise, there would be no way they could be consulted for divination, just as public awareness of membership of secret cults removes the secretness of the cults.

On the nature of *Ifa* corpus, I have written:

> Whichever way one looks at it, *Ifa* corpus is an exceptionally remarkable text which embodies the reflections of Orunmila and his disciples on a limitless configuration of issues ranging from the origin of the universe, (wo)man, and other things in it to the nature of all beings natural and supernatural, the relationship between them, the various climatic and ecological features of nature, the order of society, the destiny and ultimate end of all sentient beings and countless other things (Bewaji 1992 p. 144).

But the conclusion arrived at there is that *Ifa* is not self-consciously philosophical or epistemological, as Eze has put it (on p. 7). And Eze has not advanced any new arguments, apart from the fact acknowledged by me, that *Ifa* is capable of epistemological and philosophical analysis - such as Eze attempted, and which I had also attempted.

That *Ifa* is a process of divination permitting hermeneutical novelty of astute diviners does not entail self-critical work. What the babalawo does is to use the verses of *Ifa* to guide the search to a path coterminous with the seeker's problem. He does not go beyond this, either to question his trade, his source of knowledge, the limitations of that knowledge, the basis of truth - òótọ́ and falsity - irọ́ - in his trade and whether alternative means of truth are available or not. Also, there is a limitation to the exegesis permitted: the babalawo cannot read the text in such a way that it contradict *Ifa* corpus or interpolate unrelated verses, bearing in mind the freedom Eze alludes to here. If he is well versed in *Ifa* system, it is not the number of verses that matter so much but the facts of how the permutations occur - which he has no control over. Whether 16 palm nuts - èkùrọ́, ọpẹ̀lẹ̀, - or 16 kola nuts - obì - are used, the end result is the same.[7]

The characteristics of Esu as the way and barrier to àshe mixes up many issues: If Odù is àshe, and Odù is revealed, yet hidden and Eṣù is concealment or absence of truth, what is the relationship between Eṣù, Odù, àṣe, Olodumare, truth, logos, etc? Are they aspects of just one omnibus entity? That is, are they the same? From the analysis provided by Eze, this would appear to be the case! But such an interpretation, based or linguistic juggling, would represent a total misunderstanding of these beings and the ideas connected with them. If Olodumare consults Orunmila, that means they are not the same, because, Orunmila will have to go into his Odu to provide the clue to enlighten Olodumare! Esu's role is to ensure that a text reader cannot attain truth if there is dishonesty in his mind, all the meaning that he should grasp will be warded off from his view. Esu does not favour or disfavour any person, except on account of past action or inaction.[8] For Eze to then suppose that Esu enables babalawo to attain knowledge in the sense of providing knowledge (p. 9) is totally out of place. When Esu is not being credited with impartiality, he is credited with being cunning, never as being a wise sage or philosopher. It is strange that Eze should suggest that Esu is the patron god of philosophy and philosophers: how can one be under the inspiration of Esu! (p. 10).

On the way the babalawo attains the accurate prognosis or divina-
tion, the key factor is how the materials of divination turns out when
cast. It is not possible for a honest babalawo to do otherwise. Eze says:

> The babalawo recites the verses of the figures <u>at random</u> while
> the inquirer listens for the words or verses that relate to his
> quandary. When the inquirer hears words or parables that
> resonates with him, he stops the babalawo and requests inter-
> pretation of the particular aphorism or verse (p. 10).

The impression created here is that the babalawo only indulges in guess
work. This is very far from the truth. There is an order of importance or
hierarchy of the Odu themes and verses that are members of the Odu.
The babalawo cannot start randomly from the middle or from the least
important. In matters of life and death and grave importance, randomiz-
ing the search reduces the gravity of the situation. Only charlatans and
incompetent diviners will try such ploys, and at great dangers to them-
selves, because Esu is always present and watching proceedings very
closely, ready to visit any default with grave consequences.

III. Reflections

Eze is correct in stating that *Ifa* practice "is aimed at understanding".
The rider "moral understanding" has to be shown. But let us briefly
consider the "specific interpretative structures" to see what they presup-
pose:

a)   The way of truth is the way of interpretation:

Now, contrary to Eze, speaking of interpretation is not the best way to
represent what transpires. But since he has latched onto it, he has a
wrong use of interpretation to offer. For the babalawo's process of inter-
pretation is not to bring out what is not already there, but to help the
inquirers to understand their situation through a joint consultation of *Ifa*.
How an *Ifa* verse can be interpreted is not as nebulous and varied: each
verse has a history, one that provides the basis and information to illumi-
nate the point of a consultation. Each verse recounts a first recitation of
the verse to someone, the nature of the problem on which the first con-

sultation took place and the information sought, the prescriptions given, action taken, and consequences of obedience or disobedience.

If the babalawo has the freedom to interpret the verses according to his\her whims and caprices, where would the "objective - inter-subjective process of inquiry" come from? The knowledge incorporated in *Ifa* is not static in the sense that each babalawo, through researches, adds to the body of knowledge interpretations that follow from the text. This is the only meaningful and the only legitimate non-static sense of increasing\- improving the corpus. This growth is gradual expansion, not anything else.

c)   Truth is not abstract generalization:

In Professor Eze's essay, one finds apparent quotations without reference documentation. He says, for example, that,

> Reasoning in *Ifa* is based not on "the knowledge of a set of generalizations or maxims which may provide our practical inferences with major inferences", but on a "capacity of judgement". What is pursued in *Ifa* is not the *abstract rational generalizations but concrete universality* (sic!) (p. 12). {Underlining emphasis mine}

If the words in quotation marks are from certain sources, where is the documentation for them? And what is the point of contrast between "abstract rational generalizations" and "concrete universality"? This leaves an apparent inconsistency in one's mind!

What seems to ring loud, clear and true about the Yoruba *Ifa* divi- nation system and literary corpus is that it is a process of infusing order into apparent disorder, making manageable the precarious errancy of daily experiences. This is done through the use of past experiences and how they were coped with to deal with the here and now and the intrac- table volatility of the future.[9] The determination of "truth" and "right" will not be possible in a situation of uncertainty and orderless variety: that is, if no standards of truth and morality were established and dis- cernible to the society, and no generalizations governed the use of pre- cedence. What is right is perceived to be intrinsically right as is equally

applicable to truth from within the system, and these standards are unvariably enshrined in the *Ifa* corpus.

d) Human knowledge is finite:

Eze is right here. What one needs to add is that it is not only human knowledge that is finite and limited but that of the divinities and Deity as well. For this is the reason why the divinities and Deity consults Orunmila and *Ifa* for information and guidance.

IV. Truth and Ethics

Regarding Eze's remarks on truth and understanding, it is not true that the inquirer has much freedom to accept the babalawo's prescription or not. The fact that "There is no predetermined interpretation of "truth" that ought to be imposed upon the inquirer" is only a consequence of the differences in the circumstances of the inquirers. The most appropriate analogy is the practice of arguing cases in the law courts. What we take to be precedents is a very crucial part of case determination: without it judges would be faced with serious difficulties, but with it, the judges' problems are simplified. Though no two cases are identical in all material aspects, the precedents serve as guides to the settlement of cases. To say that they are as valid guides is only to imply that they should be followed. Similarly, when the babalawo goes into the history of an Odu which surfaces for an inquirer, the prescriptions are valid today as they were for the initial inquirer. The degree of variation only concerns substitution, not total disregard of what must\ought to be done.

One may ask Eze how "each inquirer appropriates the word" when he is not versed in the "secret" - awo? Recognition of relevance of divination is only a consequence of the expertise of the diviner, not that of the inquirer. Consulting a babalawo presupposes the negation of the individual freedom - for that matter, the issue of individual freedom precludes consultation as you are bound to follow directives or prescriptions once given by the diviner. If you believe in the system, you acknowledge your incompetence, inadequacy and accept tutelage. You may "choose" to carry out a prescription at your convenience if your problem

can accommodate deferring action, but ignoring a prescription is something one can do only at great peril. If you do not believe in the system you would not need any consultation, then you may freely deliberate as a free person and determine truth, righteousness and knowledge by yourself.

Regarding the foundation of truth, the believer sees truth as contained in Odu and unravelled by the babalawo through consultation with *Ifa*; for the non-believer, truth does not reside within anybody or system; each one of us is an inquirer into truth. As in life, what we call truth, fact, objectivity, knowledge, certainty, etc. are things conjointly determined by members in a community of inquiry. No single individual can claim absolute objectivity or truth - unless eccentricity. But objectivity is actually inter-subjective agreement from a point of view and perspective; in this case, the *Ifa* point of view as practised by two sets of individuals - the babalawo and the inquirer.

V. *Concluding Remarks*

What constitutes morality and moral knowledge in *Ifa*? It seems this is a point to which Eze aspired but missed. Fastening on the epistemic concept of truth and emphasizing the nature of the search is useful enough if that is a terminus of study. But as the essay aimed higher at the concept of ethics in Yoruba thought, it is to be expected that some of the moral basis of *Ifa* be understood - which was conspicuously absent in the essay. I will briefly bring together some of the issues raised earlier that has ethical connotations to underscore this point.

First, *Ifa* as a system of divination and cultural history has very rigorous moral and epistemic standards. The experts live under very high moral codes and the clients obey those that relate to them religiously. Dishonesty, failure to honour obligations, crimes against fellows and society are highly reprehensible. On the epistemic side, the training over many years inculcate in the expert a sense of responsibility in pursuit of knowledge and respect for truth.

Secondly, *Ifa* knowledge is to be used dispassionately, without fear or favour, and without intent to enrich self or pauperize clients. Here it should be noted that the experts were rarely rich persons in their societies, as they lived exemplary lives of service to man, the divinities and Deity.

Thirdly, the precedents in *Ifa* corpus are sign posts and guides to action. Advises based on *Ifa* divination helps individuals to strengthen, correct, and enlighten them in their daily life.

Finally (but this does not suggest that all issues have been exhausted), the *Ifa* priest - experts - are special people in society. The rulers, chiefs, family heads, members of community, etc. look to them as leaders and wise persons. They are consulted on all important matters. They serve as balances to mellow conflict in society. But they are not infallible!

It is my belief that what Eze has to say in the essay is most probably accurate with respect to Igbo *Afa* belief and practice as *uche omimi*. This may not, however, carry the same ethico-religious implications with it that it has for practitioners and believers in Yoruba society. In other words, the Igbo practice enriches the *Ifa* literature and culture by availing other possibilities complementary to the Yoruba system. One would not be surprised at similar variations among the Yoruba of Brazil, Cuba, Togo or the Republic of Benin, and, of course, those found among other ethnic groups in Nigeria; which variations informed Abimbola's restriction of his point of reference to the Yoruba of Nigeria only.

Notes

1. E. Eze (1993): "Truth and Ethics in African Thought" in *Ouest: Philosophical Discussions.* Vol VII No. 1, pp. 4-18.
2. See here M. Akin Makinde [1988] p. 42; and S. Gbadegesin [1991] pp. 29-33.
3. See Okot P'Bitek [1970] chapters 10 and 11 for the dangers of intellectual smuggling of ideas from one area of thought to another.
4. M. Akin Makinde [1988] chapter 5.

5.   M. B. Bewaji (1983): Ofo and Ogede. Essay submitted in partial fulfilment
      of the requirements for the award of National Certificate in Education, Oyo
      State College of Education, Ilesa, in Yoruba Language and History.
6.   See W. Abimbola [1978] chapter 1.
7.   J. A. I. Bewaji [1992] pp. 144-148.
8.   E. B. Idowu [1962] pp. 80-85.
9.   Wande Abimbola [1976] pp. 32-34.

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TRUTH, ETHICS AND DIVINATION
IN IGBO AND YORUBA TRADITIONS
(A Reply to Emmanuel Eze)

Frank U. Uyanne

According to Eze, "Whether it is the Divine Command theory, the Natural Law theory, the Utilitarian theory or Kant's Categorical Imperative, the quest among philosophers has been to find objective criteria with which actions or conduct can be established as right or wrong" (p.5). He sets out to offer an alternative to the above theories with reference to *Ifa*, a way or a system, among the Yoruba, and among "many other African peoples", for example the Igbo (p.6). In what follows, an effort will be made to critically assess Eze's project by subsequently discussing the relationship between ontology, epistemology and ethics; the universe and practice of *Ifa* or *Afa* divination; and the place of the diviner's client as a moral agent within that universe of divination.

There is evidently an intimate relationship between ontology, epistemology and ethics. What is claimed to be, or to be known, truly or otherwise, can engender certain kinds of conduct. Whereas what is, or what ought to be done remains ontologically unchanged. Human ontological, epistemological and ethical claims are subject to change, at least to the extent they are erroneous or merely incomplete. One should strive not only to know what things or situations are but also to act strictly on the basis of this knowledge. He is not to act merely on the basis of his belief, which can be mistaken.

In medicine, for example, an ailment and its cure remain ontologically what they are, whereas a physician's diagnosis may be correct and his prescription wrong, or vice versa. Both can be correct or mistaken. Faulty diagnosis is epistemological, and distorts or is mistaken about the facts of ontology. It fails to grasp the 'whatness' or being of a thing or a situation. The medical implication of this can be fatal. A prescription which is correctly based on a wrong diagnosis can instantly terminate the life of a patient who abides by it.

In Eze's paper on *Ifa* the relation between the *babalawo* and his client in *Ifa* is depicted is the relation between a psychotherapist and his

patient (p.14), in the sense that the patient is partly accountable for the outcome of the encounter. This is one of the implications of Eze's treating the diviner and his client as inseparable elements in the act of divination. I will argue, however, that a client depends on a *babalawo* (Yoruba) or *dibia* (Igbo) even more than a patient depends on the physician. The relationship is more like that between a christian and a priest. In this context the *babalawo* or *dibia* is seen not as a herbalist: *dibia-ogwu* (native physician), but strictly as a diviner: *dibia-afa*. He is the professional who speaks with authority. The client is the less or uninformed, and must accept the professional advice. For the patient, client or believer, the methods of inquiry of the professional are unknown. Many years of training as a process of initiation are mandatory in order possibly bridge the gap between both parties.

The Universe and Practice of Divination

What is the universe of divination? Perhaps this varies from place to place, or from one diviner to the other. However in Igbo tradition the universe of divination can be defined in terms of the limit of access which a diviner can enjoy through his expert mastery of the meaning behind 256 permutations of *Ugili* beads. These permutations amount to 512 beads of ugili. A diviner is expected to interpret the permutations which continue to vary within the limits of the 512 beads as four beads (with 16 shells) are repeatedly thrown. It is important that the Yoruba have also exactly 256 permutations (Eze, 1993:10). The *babalawo* also uses exactly 16 palmnuts in his practice. I refer to a *babalawo* only in terms of his use of palmnuts. Similarly, the present analysis is limited to the above two forms of divination.

The Yoruba *babalawo* requires the *Odu*, that is, *Ifa* text (Eze,p.8). The Igbo *dibia* has no written but oral text to refer to, whereas the *babalawo* needs the cooperation of *Esu*.(Ibid). A *dibia* needs that of *Agwu* (the spirit which is associated with divination). The Igbo believe that a diviner is under the inspiration of *Agwu*. In fact, *Agwu* is said to be responsible for a person's choice of a profession as a *dibia*: a herbalist

or a diviner. A *dibia* is believed to be a failure only if he does not enjoy such supernatural influences. *Esu* or *Agwu* represents the divine dimension of the universe of divination. The Igbo *Afa* or the Yoruba *Ifa* serves as a link between what the Igbo will refer to as *Ani Muo* (spirit world) and *Ani-Mmadu* (human world). Such is the universe of divination in both traditions, or at least among the Igbo.

According to Eze the *babalawo* requires at least eight steps to arrive at two columns of eight marks (p.10). A *dibia* arrives at that by pulling two beads which he then throws at the same time. With a second set the *dibia* will have sixteen slices of *ugili* either on their belly or back. A *babalawo* needs another eight steps to get so far. The *babalawo's* attempt to collect the palmnuts in order to make a mark is easy to manipulate. Since a *babalawo* can collect all the palmnuts at the same time (Ibid), he can leave one or two palmnuts in order to arrive at a certain permutation, or leave more than two nuts or none to create certain impressions. The *dibia's* use of the beads rules out this temptation. In fact, what the Igbo can doubt is the interpretation by the *dibia*. In some cases another *dibia* will be invited to interpret the same set of permutations. Such situations are a test of which of the diviners is indeed a *dibia*. It is also a proof that divination is a dis-interested quest for truth.

What Eze referred to as interpretative structures will not receive a separate treatment in this paper. Our focus is mainly on how he has portrayed the roles of the diviner and his client. Who attains knowledge or truth through divination? Who answers "the questions such as: What is being? What is goal of life? What is destiny? What does reason demand that we do in this particular circumstance? and so on" (Eze,p.7). In order to eliminate the confusion arising from Eze's use of the word "inquirer" we must use the term "client" to refer to the person who consults a diviner.

Eze wrote that the *babalawo* recites the verses "randomly" while the client listens. "When the inquirer hears words or parables that resonate with him, he stops the babalawo and requests interpretation of the particular aphorism or verse.... After listening to the babalawo's interpretation of usually highly metaphorical verses, the inquirer walks away

to reflect on their possible meaning in the light of his personal questions" (p.10, emphasis mine). If this is true of the Yoruba *Ifa*, it is not at all true of the Igbo *Afa*. It is the client's personal questions that a diviner has to contend with. He also claims to be in the best position to do so. In a Eze adds that a client may be incapable of playing the above part. Such a client "fails to appropriate to his situation the metaphorical language of the poem", since "not everyone is sensitive or 'ripe' all the time for the deep wisdom of *Ifa*" (p.17). But he did not show what must happen in such a situation. For instance, does the act of divination *ipso facto* stop? Does the *babalawo* mindlessly go on with the random recitation?

Remarkably, among the Igbo a native priest very often has to consult a diviner. One of my uncles, Nwoyeoka Nonyelu Uyanne, is at present a diviner attached to one of the famous deities - *Ofufe* - in my community. The priest to this deity consults my uncle. This shows what kind of status a diviner has in Igbo tradition. The client, who is not himself a diviner, lacks the capacity to get into the universe of divination from which the *babalawo* or *dibia* gets any unique insight. In some cases a diviner might need to offer sacrifices to the gods before he can succeed. Without the least fear of contradiction he authoritatively makes his pronouncements. The client is expected to accept them for his own good or reject them to his own ruin.

A diviner is famous to the extent that his verdicts have or seem to have the above consequences. If a client is in any doubt he can only consult another diviner. This can also constitute another problem to the client. He cannot do the act of divination himself. The Igbo refer to a *dibia-afa* as *Oje na muo,* that is, he who goes into the land of the spirits. What is his client to challenge his verdict? It must be asserted that reference to written or oral records, reflection and interpretation are part and parcel of divination. Though the client is rational, by consulting a diviner he thereby submits himself to an objective inquiry through *Ifa* or *Afa*. He must thus wait for the *babalawo* or the *dibia* to discover the answer to his question or solution his problems.

The type of freedom which Eze attributes to the client who he called the "inquirer" is questionable. He wrote: "Each inquirer appropriates the word for interpretation according to his/her needs and the prevailing situation .... Thus, *Ifa*, in its structure, guarantees the moral freedom of the inquirer as a rational deliberator"(p. 13). Eze thus put the *babalawo* virtually out of the picture except as a reader of Odu verses. Such an impression is a distortion of the relationship between a *dibia* and his client. I doubt that it is even true of Yoruba *Ifa*. Otherwise a client will read the *Ifa* text by himself. The palmnuts and permutations might also be unnecessary if it is true that the reading is random.

The overall picture of the "inquirer" as a principal actor in *Ifa* fades away in respect of the next three claims by Eze. The client is now "a co-subject, dependent upon (a) the text and (b) the tradition: i.e., how other people of the tradition had interpreted the text" (pp.13/14 ; emphasis mine). He went ahead to stress what he called "a vertical and a horizontal co-determinative process of interpretation" (p.14). But what he termed a "trialogue" is not necessary in *Ifa* or *Afa*. The idea of a "trialogue" arose mainly due to his effort to treat the client as the "inquirer", or "a co-subject" in the process of divination. Truth in *Ifa* or *Afa* emerges as a dialogue between the *babalawo* and reality within his tradition. In fact, there must not be any client for whom a diviner searches for truth. The text and the tradition within which it is found are hardly separable. For instance, *Odu* is what, in the context of Yoruba tradition, even according to Eze, requires the influence of the *Esu* on the *babalawo* and not on his client.

Eze's next assertion that, "*Ifa* contains an intersubjective notion of truth" (p.14) arose from the same attempt to treat the client as the "inquirer" or a co-diviner. Search for truth in *Ifa* does not require the contribution of the client. The claim by a *babalawo* or a *dibia* can be true or false about the client's or other problems even if any person accepts, rejects or doubts it. However, if a client accepts those claims he ought to act accordingly. As Eze wrote, a client's "quest for understanding through the *Ifa* presupposes openness not only to possible speculative insight, but also to the possibility of a new self-understanding" (p.15).

But this comes through the diviner who is the master of the universe of divination. Truth in *Ifa* is not a matter of intersubjectivity. A diviner goes about his business in his own unique universe though it benefits his client.

Eze's Main Contention

Eze fails to offer any alternative moral theory with reference to *Ifa*. His effort to make the client a co-diviner is unfounded. It is a misinterpretation of divination. Giving ethics or morality an ontological base is typically African. Africans make great attempts to discover the basic laws which are the root of order in the universe. They believe that those laws regulate the interaction between every kind of being. The African universe covers both the land of spirits called *Ani-muo* and the physical world referred to as *Ani-mmadu*. The African ideas of ethics is based on theories of Natural Law and Divine Command. Both are seen to be in accord with each other. They are part of the essential features of *Ifa* or *Afa* in which respect there is, at least, the *Esu* or *Agwu*.

Take, for example, the claim that twins must never be accepted as members of the family. Diviners who claimed to have access to the gods and the ancestors used to maintain that this was in accord with both the natural and supernatural laws. Surprisingly, the practice of rejecting twins became dominant, at least among the Igbo. The point is that within *Ifa* or *Afa* the client simply has to accept the verdict of the diviner. The authority behind the *babalawo* or the *dibia* is beyond what a client can confront. This applies both to a person as well as a group. The change of attitude towards twins arose out of influences from other traditions, for example, from the Western tradition, particularly christianity.

What ought to concern us is the extent to which truth is attainable through divination. If the *babalawo* or *dibia* enjoys an authentic contact with reality, he must be recognized as an authority in his own right. The freedom of a client lies in his choice to consult a diviner. This might be like the freedom of a christian who must accept the authority of Christ, for instance through a priest. However, it is the truth of a diviner's claim

that constitutes the validity of divination, and his honesty in the act of divination constitutes the foundation of objectivity. Other ethical theories have similar problems. They are still under test. The man who consults a diviner has taken a short cut, by relying on the authority of the *baba-lawo* or *dibia* who tells him what he must do. The client may be an intelligent advice-seeker, but this will not change his relationship with the diviner.

Conclusion

The analysis I have given has left certain questions unanswered. For example: Is divination an authentic method contacting reality? Does a diviner have any unique insight? What indeed is the nature of the universe of divination? Questions such as these indicate the degree of doubt regarding the reliability of the methods of divination as a source of knowledge. They also show the gap between the client and a diviner.

Among the Igbo, for example, it is startling that the diviners were almost unanimous in "prescribing" that twins be rejected, or be allowed to die. It is equally startling that the Igbo believed such practices to be in accord with natural law, the will of the ancestors, the gods and the Supreme Being - *Chukwu*. Today, no doubts exist about the incorrectness of such claims from whichever source. Unfortunately, numerous twins lost their lives before the error was detected. Is such a case fatal to the idea of divination? Even if it is not it is certainly a source of scepticism towards divination.

However, it is very remarkable that despite the advancement in science and technology the influence of diviners has hardly waned. Top public or civil servants, very highly literate and wealthy people, as well as the poor masses still retain the services of diviners. Why? There might be something about divination which clients find to be very irresistible. Even so, it could be questioned if a diviner gets into any particular universe of knowledge at all.

"LA VRAIE FACE DE LA DEMOCRATIE"

A Note

L. Keita

P. Ngoma-Binda's essay "La Vraie Face de Démocratie. Definition, Vertus et Limites"[1] offers a good example of the attractiveness of the idea of democracy for Africa's intellectuals and general publics. For intellectuals the attractiveness of democracy is reinforced, as the author puts it, by the profound ideological and political changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe" (NB, p. 31). It is a fact that until the rapid qualitative transformation of the political and economic structures of the erstwhile Soviet Union, the idea of socialism as the optimal path to economic development was embraced, in general, by many intellectuals of non-Western nations.

But Ngoma-Binda's essay does not clarify matters or deal with the problematic of implementing the idea of "democracy" in real social conditions. In brief, Ngoma-Binda's essay is a useful theoretical and idealist definition of what the modern West refers to as democracy. The author begins with the well-known definition of democracy as "government of the people by the people for the people," which he then modifies to read that for the purposes of economic development democracy should be perceived as a strategy whereby the best persons, ideas and decisions are to be chosen by elective consensus (Ibid., p. 32). But note the qualification on the conceived strategy: it is to be founded on the highest and best virtues of humankind (Ibid.).

I argue that Ngoma-Binda's definition of democracy is idealist because his theory of democracy is based on the idea of the populace as collectivity entrusting a chosen group of morally perfect individuals with a mandate to make decisions on its behalf. This, obviously, is not the face of democracy in the world — even in the heartlands of the so-called

1   P. Ngoma-Binda, "La Vraie Face de la Démocratie. Definition, Vertus et Limites," *Quest*, Vol. VII, No.2, 1993. Note the abbreviation "NB" (author) for reference purposes.

Western liberal democracies. In recent times there have been frequent reports of corruption and general immorality of elected politicians in countries such as Japan, Italy, Britain and the United States.

It is the unqualified idealist oversight on the part of Ngoma-Binda that could allow one-time elected representatives of any people to transform themselves into statist cliques who would then abrogate onto themselves the right to implement any set of arbitrary policies on behalf of the populace. Opposition to this kind of arbitrary decision making is often answered with the force of the state usually in the forms of censure, arrest and possible imprisonment. Yet sometimes decisions made in the name of statist power succeeds. Consider the examples of the market-oriented statist governments of South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. The successful economic performances of those nations are viewed by orthodox Western political theorists as proof of the virtues of capitalism. The implicit (though unacknowledged) idea here is that sometimes the authoritarian state must be tolerated and even nurtured to allow the growth and development of the market-oriented enterprise economy. Similarly, other non-market statist societies such as North Korea, Cuba and China often claim to be democratic on just that principle: the governance of the people by the "best" people, i.e., the people who know best what the populace needs in economic, political and cultural matters.

I argue now that Ngoma-Binda's definition of democracy is incomplete given that there is no recognition of the historical linkage of "democracy" in practice with the development of capitalism in Europe and its overseas territories (U.S.A., New Zealand, Canada, and Australia). Surely, the proportional representative governments of France and Italy, and the two party structures of Britain and the United States are to be understood in the context of historical developments maximally influenced by considerations of political economy.

The key elements here would be the historic compromise struck between the feudal classes and the economically advancing commercial and town-dwelling European bourgeoisies. This dualism between the political parties of commoners and feudal elements once established in Europe was multiplied in a pro-forma way in the overseas territories of

Anglo-Saxon settlement (Australia, United States and New Zealand). France (on account of the destruction of its feudal classes) replicated itself somewhat differently overseas.

In his discussion Ngoma-Binda fails to acknowledge the great importance of what is generally regarded as the fourth estate, i.e., the press and other media of information, for the purpose of bringing to the attention of the public the practices of elected officials in terms of accountability. On this basis, it is much more prudent to assume that elected officials are mere mortals trained for various bureaucratic tasks than to assume that such individuals should be "better" in terms of virtues. In fact Ngoma-Binda does not even establish a set of mechanisms whereby the "best" individuals could be first chosen before presenting themselves for electoral consideration. For example, should potential politicians be required to undergo training that involves emphasis on ethics or otherwise? And again how would Ngoma-Binda appraise the suitability of individuals who demonstrate great leadership qualities, are enterprising, but have acquired great wealth through unethical practices. In fact most of the professional politicians in the modern Western democracies are wealthy individuals who acquired their wealth by means of what one might refer to as "capitalist opportunism" - which often entails ethically questionable if not illegal behaviour. Would Ngoma-Binda's model reject such individuals as possible electoral candidates? But given the close relationship between modern democracy and the capitalist market system would Ngoma-Binda's model be practically unviable?

A more sober and less idealized approach on the other hand would view government as a mere public instrument for the purpose of eventual expenditures on social goods: 1) education, i.e., necessary investment in human capital, 2) infrastructure, 3) housing, and 4) general health needs. The basis for governmental practices is to be determined by a non-negotiable bill of rights which would serve as the core of a constitution. It is at this pre-governmental level that theoretical questions concerning the structure of government should be discussed. The purpose of elected government should merely be to spend collected taxes efficiently and to discuss issues brought up contingently by the populace.

It is for this reason that genuine democracy must first be founded on the a priori notion of a theory of political and economic rights for the individual. The generic pre-colonial African society was in general founded on family economic rights in terms of group ownership of agricultural land, and political rights in terms of penalties meted out for infractions of local law. The election of public officials by means of mere voting does not automatically lead to true democracy as self-government. Witness the high unemployment rates and accompanying alienation in the liberal democracies — often leading to disaffection with the political process as in the United States.

The severely constricting effect of economic disparities between social groups and the political limitations of the two party structures quite obviously make a sham of democracy in the Anglo-Saxon nations especially. What does this kind of democracy do for the homeless and chronically unemployed in Europe or the United States? It is clear that democracy as practised can degenerate into a charade of "now your turn, next my turn" among the capital-owning classes in the so-called market economies.

In fact, under such circumstances democracy can indeed be dangerous in the sense of its capacity to defuse public hostilities and disenchantment by means of the purely symbolic ritual of voting. Yes, democracy is the path to effective and meaningful government, but genuine democracy entails much more than the election of individuals to positions of governmental authority on the basis of mere voting. In fact I want to go one step further to argue that genuine and effective democracy is best implemented when there are structures in place which place the onus on individuals to determine for themselves whether any specific goal should be sought after on an individual or group basis. The role of public officials in this instance would be merely to ensure that the above-stated optimal conditions are maintained. Under such conditions political power would rest with the individual and groups consisting of individuals, and not with elected officials. Such individuals would serve merely as instruments of popular power.

In more concrete terms relevant to African milieus let us say that democracy as a necessary condition for economic development is meaningless unless buttressed by economic rights (positive rights to employment and the ownership of productive capital) and political rights (rights to political and cultural expression). More specifically, economic development, in its most meaningful sense, would take place only when individuals own or have full control over their nation's resources (through resource leasing or purchase) and production implements (capital).

True democracy in this instance again would mean that elected officials would be most accessible at the local level and that local links with the state would be effected by way of another appointed body — somewhat akin to the idea of a senate. But again the emphasis on the local level in terms of accountability and accessibility of elected officials cannot be stressed enough.

It is on account of lack of detail on the possible implementation of democracy especially in African milieus that makes Ngoma-Binda's thesis only a useful starting point for discussion. Given the manner in which the official nations of Africa were created at the European sponsored Berlin conference of 1885, it is not surprising that the problem of democracy in Africa has not yet been resolved. Were the nations of Europe to be forcefully cobbled together by an outside force to form one nation, just imagine the rancour with which elections for the nomination of a head of state would be conducted. Would most Germans ever vote for a Portuguese or Bulgarian head of state? Would most English persons ever think seriously about voting for an Italian to become president of Europe? The likely answer to the above queries would be in the negative.

Finally, one must question Ngoma-Binda's assertion that democracy ought not to be understood as popular self-government, but rather government "par une minorité politiquement qualifié (NB, p. 37). It is this theoretical distinction between governors and the governed that has led to the abuses of power that have plagued the statist governments founded on the principles of Marxian socialism and mixed economy Keynesian-

ism. Genuine democracy requires no such divorcement between elected officials and their employers the populace.

Given the propensity of most human beings to serve self or small group interests rather than those of large collectivities, the success of democracy would seem most guaranteed with strong contractarian rights of both positive and negative tenor. We know already what human beings seek and want out of life. They desire and seek, for the most part, self-actualization through work, freedom of movement and expression, and optimal social conditions for development of inclinations and talents. This is more than just a question of "putting in place structures that guarantee equal chances for everyone to freely develop in society" (NB, p. 4). It is this looseness of definition that produced "democracies" where voting amounts to not much more than festive ritual. The African peoples in their desire for real social transformation do take democracy seriously, but they have been misled into accepting the weak and restrictive models of democracy recommended to them in exhortatory fashion by the class-hierarchized capitalist and market economy societies of the West.

Again, it is this argued for disjunction between the elected governors and the governed that permits minorities of government officials to impose those well-known draconian conditions on Africa's populations without prior consultation. This unfortunate situation would not develop under conditions wherein those elected to government would be totally accountable to their electors.

A Note on Democracy as Practice

Any discussion on democracy applicable to Africa would amount to pure theoretical discourse unless it took into consideration the nature of the neocolonial state. Its structure is almost identical to that of colonial times: a militarily constructed locus where economic resources are exploited for the benefit of the metropolitan power.

In the past the actual and potential violence of the occupying metropolitan power maintained order as long as access to equal power was

denied to the colonized. The departure of the colonials from the centralizing locus of the state has created a situation where there is fierce competition for its meagre and diminishing resources. Under such circumstances might makes right (a pure imitation of the colonials) with the state eventually falling to the neocolonial military — a deliberate creation of the departing colonials.

The evident instability of the state would be resolved only when capital ownership and political power will have been diffused democratically throughout society. This would mean that the efforts of democracy would concentrate not on electing a national head of state, but on devolving maximum political power to regional and local levels. The state stripped of political power would then be reduced to what it should be: a mere civil service responsible only for providing those necessary social goods and services for the populace.

A possible way of neutralizing the power of the state would be to structure government on political constitutions based on maximal proportional representation, and political and economic rights. On the question of political representation let us note that there is no axiomatic political principle which states that executive power at the highest level should be restricted to a single individual. In a truly popular democracy where all political persuasions are expressed the logical solution to the question of executive power would seem to be one in which an executive council rather than a single individual possesses ultimate accountable authority.

The problem with Ngoma Binda's definition of democracy is that his emendation of the orthodox definition of democracy to entrust political authority to a select group of elected officials reflects not only idealism but also elitism. This definition of democracy does not take into consideration the important role that historical and sociological conditions play in the effecting of the relationship between peoples and their governments. In this regard let us note that the existing state structures in Africa spring from the colonial past. But the colonial state was created for the specific purpose of harvesting Africa's economic resources under conditions of military occupation. Any discussion of democracy as it might apply to Africa must take the above facts into consideration.

BOOK REVIEW

Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African
Philosophy by H. Odera Oruka (ed.) (1991). Nairobi: African Center for
Technology Studies. pp 271; ISBN 41-27-9 (paper cover edition).
Review by J.A.I. Bewaji

Sage Philosophy is a refreshingly challenging and effective polemic
against opponents of philosophical sagacity, of the doctrine of philoso-
phical non-reflectivity of traditional African mind, as well as against the
idea of the pre-logicality or irrationality of traditional African peoples.
The book is divided into three parts: i) Oruka's arguments for his project
and his responses to counter arguments; ii) the philosophy of African
sages as documented by Oruka and his research collaborators; iii) the
arguments of western trained contemporary African philosophers for and
against the project of sage philosophy.

Sage Philosophy is about indigenous sages whose lives are
enmeshed in the folklo-cultural milieu of their societies. They are a
minority breed of (wo)men seldomly recognized by society. They have
wisdom and great intellectual acumen for critical deliberations on various
issues of fundamental concern to themselves and to members of their
society.

Commenting on Mbiti's influence on the East African academic
circles, Oruka says Mbiti

> did not distinguish between African philosophy and the popu-
> lar communal - religious outlook of the traditional African
> communities. He (Mbiti) praised Tempel's book as one which
> "opens the way for a sympathetic study of African religions
> and philosophy" (p. 16).

The historical antecedents which Oruka outlines put into clear relief the
diverse directions which were taken from Oruka's early "Mythologies as
African Philosophy". The works of the first African philosophy
professors like Hountondji (1983), Wiredu (1980), Sodipo\Hallen (1986),
Donders (1977) were directed at the repudiation of folkloricism and

ethnocentrism. P'Bitek reprimanded the theological hermeneutics of African theologians for 'robing African Deities in Hellenistic garments, borrowed from Greco-Roman Christendom'. Oruka, here, documents individualized critical thought of Africans, thereby correcting "... the not too uncommon belief that after colonialism traditional Africa no longer was in existence" (p. 18). For, as Oruka states, "... in Kenya at least, most tribal cultures and thought remained intact even after colonialism. There were people whose education and view of life were wholly or mostly rooted in this (p. 18), in contrast to Femi Taiwo's [1985] contention that traditional Africa has been totally destroyed by colonialism.

In the "Introduction", Oruka places the problematic of the ontological issue of African Philosophy in perspective. In the first part of the book, Oruka brings together his seminal essays on the subject of Sage Philosophy. These provide critical comments and reviews of such positions as the "rationalist" theory in African philosophy, which craves for authenticity and uniqueness, the "historical" school's detachment, and the four trends in contemporary African philosophy annotated as "pre-philosophy", "ethno-philosophy", "academic philosophy" and "national ideological philosophy". The overall purpose of this fundamental part, representing the core of the book, is to show that the philosophical sage in traditional Africa is not inferior to his\her counterpart in the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Pacific. Whether (s)he writes, verbalizes or merely reminisces, the type of his\her ideas are not of particular relevance to his\her mental capacity and intellectual disposition.

Thus, rather than proceed to argue in an empirical vacuum, Oruka provides a classic documentation of counter-facts to the so-called primitive, pre-logical and pre-philosophical mentality, as romanticized by Levy-Bruhl, Robin Horton, Dean Farrar and other Eurocentric scholars. In Chapter 5, for example, Oruka not only provides a study of personal involvement in the project of philosophic sagacity, he also uses the opportunity of the formal court-room to thematize sage philosophy. When questioned, he says that sages are

> wise men and women able to explain points beyond the common beliefs in customs. But they differ in degrees in the

> ability to explain such points. Usually, sages are recognized
> by their own immediate community to be wise (p. 69).

Chapters 6 and 7 contain a documentation of interviews and discourses
with twelve sages speaking on issues ranging from wisdom, death, God
and time, culture, body and mind, happiness, freedom and government,
punishment, evil, and equality. The ideas expressed are as diverse in
their content as in their perspective and depth. They reflect a clarity of
thought which is not seen in ethnographic, anthropological or sociologi-
cal studies.

Consider the disagreement between Simiyu Chaungo and Mwitani
Masero on the nature of God. The former accepts and rationalizes the
belief of his community that God is Sun, noting the dependence of life
and growth on the existence of heat and light and warmth. The latter
disagrees, arguing that if God created the Sun, God cannot be the Sun.
Further, that God "cannot have forms", or "be like this or like that" (p.
96). Or, consider the argument about the inconclusiveness of evidence
for after-life or the existence of spirits by Osuru:

> We have no tangible evidence to the claim that people die and go to
> heaven to live another life as is claimed by Christianity. The Teso
> belief that one joins the spirit world after death also cannot be
> verified. the fact that the dead (used to) appear to the living in
> "dream land" is no proof of their real existence. For it is normal
> for people to dream about things they have experienced in the past.
> Dreams about such things can therefore not constitute independent
> existences called spirits. They are in fact mere images of the real
> objects (p. 105).

What Osuru does here is quite remarkable. Even if one disagrees with
Osuru's position, one cannot but be impressed by his philosophical
insight and argumentation. Osuru shows a transcendence of a fixed belief
system as upheld by group commitment, authorities and traditions. How
many (wo)men in so-called "civilized and scientific" societies ever get
beyond "the Bible said x, therefore x is right" or "the founding fathers
of society said x, therefore x is right"? He examines the Christian belief
in life after death and the hope based on immortality of the "spiritual"

aspect of man and finds no conclusive evidence to ground it. Then he turns to the Teso belief in an ancestral world and the assertion that such a world is substantiated by apparitions in dreams; putting down this argument by arguing that dreams are an extension of wakeful life.

Kithanje's discussion of wisdom is the most interesting. The distinction he makes between internal and external hungers helps to uncover factors that may inhibit or enhance the development of mental capacities of humans. No less important is his opinion that a wise person sees the interactions between the past, present, and future, and understands that service to truth transcends demands of personal aggrandizement (pp. 129-131).

Or, consider the discussion of Luo ideas regarding Time gven by Akoko (whose picture graces the cover of the book), in which his ability to express these ideas and the presuppositions underlining them is demonstrated in his philosophical discussion of the nature of God (pp. 135--138). He says,

> Although the Luo recognized one Nyasaye, they were wrong to think that "their" God (Nyasaye) was different from the God of the Europeans. Thus we had, as a result of this incoherent thinking among the Luo, a situation in which other tribes thought that they too had their "own" God. This is totally mistaken. I can demonstrate this quite simply by pointing at the rather pedestrian fact that nature is uniform. The existence of many Gods would have resulted in "pulling" the universe in different directions: this takes care of the possibility of there existing a pantheon of Gods (p. 137).

This argument supports the fact that most African religions were non-proselytizing, non-belligerent, non-antagonistic; recognizing the unity of (wo)man, nature, God and the universe. When disaster strikes, people search to find what members of society have done wrong, and when success smiles on society or members thereof, similar thoughts are entertained. Akoko connects the concept of freedom with responsibility and the social context that man cannot avoid, emphasizing the attainability of happiness rather than total or complete freedom, as this is seen as unat-

tainable. Thus, the tendency to exercise little or no restraint on the juvenile activities of the young, either out of fear of being charged with child abuse or by blaming society for indiscipline, is seen as reinforcing the contradictions within Western societies.

Chaungo Barasa's ideas on God are curious, in that they contrast with the idea that God is a given, a fact apprehended by (wo)man in her\his search for explanations. According to Barasa " ... if man were to pursue and realize the state of intellectual perfection, the mystery of God would be revealed" (p. 156).

The freshness of the ideas of the sages on God and various other issues deserves a more critical exploration and analysis than the one Anthony Osaghare (an academic student of philosophic sagacity) provides at the close of the materials from the sages. Because it is not only their engagement "in deliberate thinking" that is important but also the philosophical and practical relevance of their thought. In the past, it may have sufficed to show that the sages think for themselves (and they would not be sages if they did not think); more important is the fact that the content of their thought is philosophical, providing perspectives capable of leading to solutions of some of many perennial problems of philosophy and humanity.

In Ch. 8, we find the deservedly much publicized and widely discussed seminal article by Professor P. O. Bodunrin entitled "The Question of African Philosophy". Some discussions of the essay do not show a full comprehension of the complexity of the issues raised in the essay (e.g. [Carole Pearce 1992], and some of the ideas raised have not received proper attention. The publication of the essay in *Sage Philosophy* will make it available to an even larger audience and enhance the appreciation of the subtlety of the matters raised by Bodunrin.

D. N. Kaphagawani's "Bantu nomenclature and African Philosophy" (Ch.9) shows some insights but also a few inconsistencies, misinterpretations, and misrepresentations. First, the author speaks of a probable "misconception" by Oruka in annotating four trends in African philosophy as types (p. 181), and later the author endorses this "misconception" as valid, as they "turn out to be bi-valent; they represent types

of African philosophy on the one hand, and methods of philosophizing in Africa on the other" (p. 182). Second, the author misinterprets philosophic sagacity as no more than "tradition-observed" when he accuses Oruka of weaving philosophical themes and techniques around the sages rather than the sages engaging in philosophical reflection by themselves. This allegation forms a misinterpretation of Oruka's account of what the sages actively do.

Also, the author wrongly attempts to link nationalist-ideological philosophy to sage philosophy. Oruka never argued this and to impute such an argument to him is, to my mind, a misrepresentation. When the author says "Pauline Hountondji insists, with a grudge, that African Philosophy is a myth and not a reality" (p. 184), the misrepresentation becomes more blatant. For, to all intents and purposes, Hountondji's grouse was with the parade of ethnophilosophy as African philosophy, not with either nationalist ideological philosophy or with professional African philosophy. Another misrepresentation arises when Kaphagawani conflates two senses of indebtedness. Oruka speaks of indebtedness in terms of provocation of reactions, while Kaphagawani interprets this to mean indebtedness as source of material. Both are valid forms of indebtedness but to say an author meant both when only the first is intended is a misrepresentation (p. 186).

Finally, the title of the essay, apart from bearing on the thoughtfulness of Bantu names, is misplaced, for the author does not link African philosophy with Bantu nomenclature (p. 191196). There are many discussions of African philosophy that are more perceptive than Kaphagawani's discussions of the four or more trends in African philosophy. [Gbadegesin 1991; Makinde 1988; Momoh 1988; Wiredu 1980; Hallen & Sodipo 1986; Gyekye 1987; Bewaji 1983 and 1985]

Lucius Outlaw's essay (Ch. 11) forcefully argues that the debates on African philosophy serve as a timely deconstructive critique of philosophy, marking the death of an aging and decadent mode of thinking in Western intellectual circles (pp. 215-235).

In Ch. 12 Anthony Oseghare puts sage philosophy in its proper perspective for the audience. It is a classic essay written by a student of

sage philosophy. But Oseghare is wrong to say that before *Sage Philosophy* and the project of sage philosophy African philosophy suffered from sterility (p. 238). Perhaps in certain professional circles it was lacking vitality, but it was certainly not sterile.

The last chapter (Ch. 13) by Christian Neugebauer on "The Racism of Hegel and Kant" appeared simultaneously in three places - *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, *Ove: Ogun Journal of Arts*, and here. Although the author undoubtedly has established himself as an Africanist scholar and student of African philosophy, the essay seems unrelated to the project of *Sage Philosophy*. It does, however, serve two useful purposes, in that it i) highlights the historical background to the myth of primitive mentality in Western intellectual circles, and ii) documents the racism of two of the leading Western scholars in history, thereby calling for similar studies of other classics.

The collected "Bibliography" at the end of the book is very useful to students of African philosophy. Though not exhaustive, it provides pathways for those who might want to learn about African philosophy, its history and epochs. The "Index" is very useful, even though there are more names than subjects listed.

The publication of *Sage Philosophy* has been as long overdue as it has been long awaited. It is a very seminal contribution to a growing field of deconstructive research in the history of ideas, cultures and, especially, African philosophy. In a fundamental way, *Sage Philosophy* helps readers to appreciate the level of ignorance that has pervaded the intellectual overconfidence of the numerous "authorities" on the African "mind". In this regard, it must be noted that the book itself cannot be totally absolved of ignorance, as the editor seems to be unaware of the various forms of writing that traditional African societies had before the European encounter.

It is obvious that no library on African philosophy and ideas, private or public, can be complete without Professor H. Odera Oruka's Sage Philosophy, as its degree of appreciation and depth of consideration of the various hiatuses in the discipline of African Philosophy has yet to be equalled or surpassed.

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Visible Injustice looking for Invisible Justice

Justice for an Unjust Society by Hennie.P.P.Lötter. Rodopi: Amster-
dam/Atlanta, 1993. 230pp. ISBN 90-5183-516-7. Hfl.75.-/US$44.-
(Value Inquiry Series 3)
Reviewed by Mogobe B. Ramose

Justice for an unjust society is the title of the book published recently
and written by Professor Hennie Lötter. It is fitting to suggest that the
central focus of the book is *visible* injustice looking for *invisible* justice.
The book is about manifest injustice calling upon its witnesses to seek
ways and means to move away from a "radically unjust society" to a
"nearly just society". The quest for this latter ideal, Lötter argues, does
not mean the setting up of total justice. Instead, so the argument con-
tinues, a residue of injustice must purposely be allowed to remain even
"justice" has been established. Part of the explanation for Lötter's predi-
lection for this position is his more than apparent aversion to "violence"
and revolution. "We should therefore try another option, a peaceful one
that is not politically naive. This is what the proposed view on socio-
political transformation can offer. It can be explained as follows. Implicit
in this view is a rejection of sudden, abrupt, and violent transformations
for which a society is not sufficiently prepared, and which disrupt or
destroy major parts of societal life. Instead, the focus is in the first place
on *establishing* an optimally *just society* so that it functions properly and
not on *destroying* a radically *unjust society* totally." (p. 152) Lötter's
thesis then is that the necessity to establish an "optimally just society"
must be subordinated to the need to preserve some elements of a "rad-
ically unjust society". The aim of such a preservation is to ensure the
proper functioning of the relatively new society. It is this aim then which
precludes recourse to "violence" and justifies the rejection of "total" or
revolutionary change. We shall refer to this basic thesis as Lötter's pre-
scription. All the political, social and philosophical problems arising
from and discussed in Lötter's book revolve around this prescription.

It is also pertinent to describe this as a prescription because the title
of the book is itself prescriptive, *Justice for an unjust society*. The politi-

cal, social and philosophical questions just referred to will be considered under the rubric of the following question. *Considering that justice as a fact or an ideal is problematical, how and by what criterion may one discover and determine visible injustice? What is the justification for the thesis that in establishing a "nearly just society" a residue of injustice should nevertheless be purposely left in place?* Our question might seem to be rhetorical since Lötter suggests explicitly that the purpose of retaining a residue of injustice is to allow for the proper functioning of the to be established "nearly just society" and to avoid the total destruction of the radically unjust society. We hold that this question is far from being rhetorical. In order to substantiate this claim, we propose to turn to some of the political, social and philosophical problems arising from Lötter's discussion. The problems will be addressed seriatim.

According to Lötter, a "radically unjust society" is one "with no legitimately established democratic government of one sort or another. In such a society either the procedures of the adjudication of conflicting claims, the allotment of social goods, the division of benefits and burdens, and the assignment of rights and duties are morally unjustified and illegitimate, or else morally justified and publicly acceptable procedures are thwarted and violated by agents with no right to make use of them." (p. 3-4) The opposite of a radically unjust society, namely, a "nearly just society" will be characterised by the following elements. First, it must have a legitimate democratic government. Second, the constitutional (p. 166) principles of such a society ought to be morally justified in practice. Third, in a legitimate constitutional democracy, the power holders must be those persons entitled to hold power. These persons should be prevented from violating the morally justified constitutional principles. If and when these three characteristics are contemporaneously present in one and the same society then such a society may be defined as a "nearly just society". In other words, for a "nearly just society" to come to be, Lötter prescribes a legitimate constitutional democracy. This prescription comes to light in Lötter's discussion on the option between "gradual social and political change" and "drastic steps" required to remove major injustices. Lötter opts for the first alternative and accordingly lays down

his prescription in these terms: "... the transformationaries ... would concentrate their energy in protesting and transforming the greater forms of injustice first, and in the case of a radically unjust society a change in the form of government is, by definition, the first priority." (p. 153) This is to be achieved without resort to either "violence" or revolution. It is significant that Lötter's focus is on the form. He is evidently dealing with the trans-*form*-ationaries in contrast to the revolutionaries. He is concerned with the *form* of government. A pertinent philosophical question arising from this is the following: *what about focus upon and concern with trans-substantiation*? Does this latter term perhaps plunge us into the turbulent ocean of theological language? Even if that may be so, our question still stands.

Another philosophico-political question arising from the concern with the form is the following: *is there a necessary relationship between the form of government and justice? Does justice comprise of any substance at all? If yes, is the substance knowable to the extent that it can be cast into a specific form of government? Is justice, presumably as a knowable substance, necessarily compatible with a "democratic government of one sort or another"*? A watered down version of this question is apparent in politico-juridical language which upholds a distinction between material and formal justice on the one hand and retributive and distributive justice on the other. The above philosophical question arises from the first two paragraphs of chapter three. Here Lötter refers implicitly to two conceptually interrelated classical problems of philosophy, namely, (i) the problem of universals and particulars, and (ii) the nature and relationship between the *"Ideas"* of Plato and matter (*materia prima*) in the philosophy of Aristotle. In the light of this observation, we pose the following question. Is there any justification for talk about "a universal theory of justice" in contrast to talk about "the universal Idea of justice"? Surely, there are many theories of justice some of which claim to be universal despite their transparent rootedness to a particular time, space and limitations arising from such rootedness. But the same cannot be said about either the existence or the knowability of the "universal Idea of justice". On the face of it, the title of chapter three is

tantalizingly about this problem for it reads, *"Justice: universal or particular?"*

Since the existence of universal justice as an "Idea" has not been established with indubitable certainty and thus its knowability remains elusive, what then is the foundation for the judgement that a given situation *x* is unjust or does not meet the demands of justice? Although we do not claim to have the final answer to this pertinent philosophical question, we nevertheless suggest that it is precisely because of the problematical character of "the universal Idea of justice" that people have to get together to iron out the problems of visible injustice. Since justice as an Idea is invisible, because its existence can neither be established nor be known, we hold, contrary to Lötter, that it is the problematical systematically elusive character of the Idea of universal justice which ineluctably leads people to come together and seek ways of changing visible injustice into justice. Briefly, a "theory of universal justice" can hardly be a substitute for "the Idea of universal justice".

Further on, another basis for the same question is found in the averment that: "Principles, being close to rules, are far more prevalent in human societies; and even in traditional societies which have no *abstract ideal* of *social justice, ...*". (p. 84) It is submitted that Lötter's prescription with regard to South Africa is vitiated and flawed by either his complete neglect - in the case of 'trans-substantiation'- or his inadequate attention to the question whether or not there is a necessary relationship between the "democratic" form of government and justice. Our submission should be understood as a counter to Lötter's thesis that there is an "intrinsic relation between Means and Ends". (p. 132) Surely, there is neither a necessary connection nor is there an intrinsic relation between the quest for democracy as an end and the choice of peaceful means to satisfy this quest. (Nielsen, p.131) Our criticism is, therefore, not upon the "Five Stages of Political Transformation" as such but on the unqualified claim that it is in the nature, in this case, of political ends to determine specific as well as exclusive means towards their realisation. In this regard it is pertinent to observe that Lötter's predilection for non-violent means in the search for democracy in South Africa leads to rather

strange results. First, he selects excerpts from significant actors in South African politics, for example, the writings of the late Steve Biko and the African National Congress. Second, the selected excerpts are interpreted to mean the unconditional rejection of violence - by both the Black Consciousness Movement, as represented by Steve Biko and the African National Congress - as a means to attain democracy. It is submitted that a careful reading of the excerpts (p. 156, 157 and 159) does not warrant the interpretation that both the Black Consciousness Movement and the African National Congress have been or are committed absolute (unconditional) pacifists. Apart from textual analysis in support of our submission, the history of both political organs testifies against Lötter's far fetched interpretation.

Although Lötter does not discuss the question of the justification of conquest in an unjust war, he does, however, discuss "the question of when, if ever, violence can be justified." (p. 157) In the same page, Lötter identifies two conditions, one of which must obtain before resort to violence may be justified. Even so, argues Lötter pertinently, violence may not then be used in a "blanket" manner. By this we understand the invocation of the principle of proportionality in the execution of a just war. Historically, it is hard to deny that the basic moral, political and juridical question in South Africa arises from the radical division between the conqueror and the conquered people of South Africa. The former has attained the position that they enjoy at present in South Africa through conquest in an unjust war. Accordingly, even here the basic theme of conquest in an unjust war is prior to the principle of proportionality in the sense that *jus ad bellum* is experientially and logically anterior to *jus in bello*. In view of the initial and central role of the use of arms in an unjust war in the making of the conqueror's South Africa, it is submitted that the question of the justification of violence deserves much more treatment than Lötter gave it. A thorough discussion of this basic issue is in point for several reasons.

First of all, it will assist us in determining the guilty party on moral, political and juridical grounds. Morally, we agree with Lötter that no one may arbitrarily deprive another of their right food. By food here

we comprehend all the basic necessities without which normal and descent human life is impossible. The land question in South Africa is a pertinent example of this. As Fanon put it, land gives bread and dignity to a people. It stands to reason that politically, a people's right to self-determination becomes infringed whenever a ruler imposes rule over them by force. Similarly, it is juridically vacuous and untenable to hold that where a people's right to self-determination is concerned, territoriality is immaterial in determining the meaning of sovereignty. The point is not simply to determine who is the guilty party. On the contrary, the aim is to be able to respond to the exigencies of justice. Thus the point of departure in the search for justice in South Africa is the fundamental question of to whom does the land of South Africa belong. This is still a pertinent question despite the conqueror's one-sided history of South Africa.

Secondly, the determination of the guilty party in the prosecution of an unjust war would assist in clarifying what kind of justice is at issue. With regard to South Africa as a "radically unjust society", it is submitted that two kinds of justice are involved, namely, retributive justice and redistributive justice. Lötter's approach eschews the first kind of justice. But since the link between the two is organic, as far as the history of South Africa is concerned, Lötter's omission of the issue seriously vitiates his discussion of (re)distributive justice. The logic of the former kind of justice implies restoration, restitution and reparation even before there can be any talk about (re)distributive justice. Lötter does not carry the logic of these concepts far enough to identify "the responsible parties" (p.117) and to demand the appropriate from them.

Lötter's prescription also means that in a "nearly just society", democracy must be morally justified with regard to its origin and practice. Accordingly, the inhabitants of the newly established "nearly just society" have the duty to sustain or secure such a society. This is the major theme of chapter six. For Lötter, South Africa is also a radically unjust society. (p. 116) Following Lötter, we shall accept, for purposes of discussion, that South Africa is a "radically unjust society". But we will certainly question and analyze his reasoning with regard to the

characterisation of South Africa as a "radically unjust society" and the prescription he gives for remedying the situation.

In the light of the foregoing, it may well be inferred that according to Lötter, the major problem for South Africa is the absence of legitimate constitutional democracy. With regard to South Africa, Lötter underlines the absence of legitimate constitutional democracy in these terms. "We could say that being excluded from the benefits and burdens of social co-operation, as well as from the assignment of the appropriate rights and duties, starts when people are prohibited from participation in the formation and alteration of social practices and their accompanying theoretical notions. In a radically unjust society such as South Africa, a major part of the population was deliberately and forcibly excluded in this way and thus deprived of access to the formation of social practices". (p. 116) The last sentence of this citation is both pertinent and correct in terms of the history and the politics of South Africa. Yes, the minority which has held power in South Africa for over three hundred years have indeed purposely resorted to the use of armed force in order to exclude the "majority population" from the "benefits and burdens of social co-operation as well as from the assignment of rights and duties". Today, in the name of democracy, the same minority has, through subtle constitutional engineering, ensured that economic power shall remain in their hands when "democracy" is extended to the "majority population". By so doing, this minority has arrogated unto itself the right to decide what, when, where and how much the "majority population" shall have to eat, to protect itself against other external physical dangers, including clothing and housing. Even the sceptic would have to stop and ponder over the meaning of the **baipei/matyotyombe** (poorly translated into, *squatters*) phenomenon heralding the rise of the "new South Africa". In short, the minority continues to abrogate and violate the right to life of the "majority population". It is thus determined to violate, "the first principle of a minimally just society (which) has as its aim to protect the life of every person in a society, as well as the basic means to sustain that life. ... One thing that must be prohibited is *the arbitrary killing or physical injuring of anyone*, as it would take away a person's means for

attaining a reasonably satisfying life. In the same vein, *nobody may be arbitrarily deprived of food used for subsistence*, and in cases of people without any food for subsistence it must be provided to them if possible to do so without depriving others of enough for their subsistence". (p. 80) Lötter underlines the fundamental importance of this first principle by arguing that "If people have to give their attention to problems of struggle for survival, a vigorous democracy cannot be maintained at all". (p. 142, See also p. 145) Thus by abrogating and violating the right to life of the "majority population" and by ensuring that economic power remains in their hands, the minority in South Africa has thereby called into question its own contraption called the extension of democracy to the "majority population". Seen from this perspective, we hold, contrary to Lötter, that the principal question of justice in South Africa does not revolve around the establishment of democracy of "one sort or another". The primary and pertinent moral and political question, the crux of the matter, even if one were to pursue the reasoning of Lötter in its fundamentals and its logic, is: *may conquest in an unjust war ever be justified? Do people conquered in an unjust war have any obligation to obey their conqueror?* On this basis, it is difficult to accept that the mere establishment and institutionalisation of democracy would constitute an adequate answer to the question. In other words, given the history of South Africa, the relevance and application of Lötter's definition of "a radically unjust society" is questionable.

Furthermore, it is common cause, as Lötter evidently concedes at page 115, that successive conqueror governments in South Africa, including President de Klerk's government, have until now built the political landscape of that country upon the rock of conquest in an unjust war. Such conquest occurred under conditions referred to generally as colonisation. No doubt, this process took on different shapes and colours as it evolved. Even the term imperialism is regarded as a step beyond colonisation. However, the systematic change of name has in no way altered the basic fact that even imperialism in South Africa is deeply rooted in the initial act of conquest in an unjust war. On this basis, it is difficult to accept Lötter's disclaimer - in connection with a "foreign

nation" perpetrating "injustice against the members of another political
community" - that "As such situations (for example, colonialism or the
Israelites' house of bondage), are not so prevalent today, and because I
do not have any experience of them, I will not address their problems."
(p. 130) It is submitted that South Africa's root problem starts with
"colonialism". It is simply beyond our comprehension that Lötter claims
to have no "experience" of South Africa as a colonial situation. To avoid
viewing South Africa as a colonial problem, whatever the character of
"colonialism" might be in our time, is to deny oneself an indispensable
historical starting point in addressing the "problems" of the country.

One of the central arguments of Lötter is that private property
rights ought to be respected. (p. 146) The reason for the respect for
private property rights is that it is consistent with the three principles
underlying Lötter's proposed "minimally just society". In order of pre-
cedence, the right to life, or, the right to food, is the most primary. The
primacy of this right is such that he who, without just cause, deprives
another of the food they already have or denies them access to the
material resources necessary for the preservation of life violates two
basic rights of the victim, namely, the right to life and the right to pri-
vate property. We agree with Lötter that this latter right may not be
violated without a just cause. We disagree with Lötter's implicit assump-
tion that the present conqueror in South Africa had a just cause in wag-
ing an unjust war against the indigenous conquered people of South
Africa. The unjust war waged by the conqueror resulted in the violation
of the right to life and the right to private property in respect of the
indigenous conquered people of South Africa. This initial violation con-
tinues to be secured in many ways all of which have the same aim,
namely, to ensure that the fruits and benefits of defeat in an unjust war
shall remain in the hands of the conqueror or, his successors in title.
Again, we submit that it is the violation of these rights which is the
fundamental problem of justice in South Africa. After all, in a democ-
racy, freedom of speech is fundamentally the right to participate in deci-
sion-making concerning the conditions under which we shall have
adequate food, decent clothing and proper housing. Naturally, many

other human pursuits are related to this. Understood in this way, the definition, and not the extension of democracy, by all adult South Africans is likely to bring justice to the country.

In the light of the foregoing, we suggest that Lötter's defence of the existing private property rights and the human relations that pertain thereto in South Africa is a plea to the effect that a victor in an unjust war is entitled to reap the fruits of such a war. If this plea must make sense at all and be sustained then the widespread implementation of affirmative action in South Africa must be stopped totally. The point here is that affirmative action is based upon the concept of group rights. Thus, regardless of their class affiliation within the same group, the conquered people of South Africa are regarded as a group which deserves special and exclusive treatment. But what is the ground for this kind of desert? Put differently, exactly what is it that is being affirmed by affirmative action? "Historical injustice" is widely accepted as the answer. But the term is rather vague and functions as a euphemism for the necessity to make an honest and open admission that conquest in an unjust war is morally unjustified, politically illegitimate and juridically untenable. On these grounds a remedy is called for in respect of the injured group. In our view, affirmative action in South Africa is a half-hearted recognition by the conqueror that the right to life of the conquered people of South Africa has been violated. By admitting this violation the conqueror has decided unilaterally that he will be the sole and ultimate judge to determine exclusively the nature and extent of the remedy that is due to the conquered people of South Africa. Understood in this way, affirmative action is no more than a unilateral prescription issued by the conqueror in defence of his own interests, especially the unjustly acquired private property rights.

Lötter's prescription that private property rights should, in the circumstances, be respected is consistent with the logic of the conqueror. This is apparent in his insistence that the primary task of the transformationary (p. 144) in a radically unjust society like South Africa, is to effect a change in the form of government. This change, so the argument continues, shall in turn help the transformationary to have "an

influence on economic affairs". (p. 146) Seemingly, the trans-
formationary should be satisfied to "influence" but not to determine the
nature of "economic affairs" in South Africa. Lötter's prescription rings
a familiar note to students of African political philosophy. Yes, the note
pertains to the music of one of the greatest sons of Africa, namely,
Kwame Nkrumah. The latter taught that Africa should seek the political
kingdom first and the rest would be added unto it. Decades of experience
in the politics of independent Africa have falsified Nkrumah's prescrip-
tion. To prescribe the same remedy or doctrine, as Lötter does for South
Africa, is to deny the conquered people of South Africa the potential
benefits from the political experience of independent Africa. It is like
prescribing more and condom-free sex for someone already infected with
the HIV virus.

   In the beginning, Lötter's implicit prescription for democracy seems
to be reasonable and neutral because his radically unjust society falls
short of democracy "of one sort or another". (p. 3) But later he intro-
duces the notion of "background theories". This notion is not only
defined but a comparison between "background theories" reads as fol-
lows: "The highly articulated and systematically formulated background
theories of some Western democracies stand in contrast to the back-
ground theories of less developed societies, which are no more than
conceptualizations, proto-theories, or implicitly held views. But they can
easily be developed into fully-fledged theories. ..." (p. 87) In the light of
this definition and comparison, it is easy to observe the transition from
the neutral democracy "of one sort or another" to a specific "democracy"
which Lötter apparently prefers and would like to see established in
South Africa. This preferred prescription is stated in these terms. "The
theory and method of justice as complex consensus would also apply to
societies which meet two requirements. The first requirement is that the
members of such a society must identify themselves with some of the
central political values of Western societies. The second instance is when
those societies experience many of the conditions and circumstances in
which these political values were developed, and members of those
societies themselves find such values helpful in illuminating their situ-

ation and feasible to implement to overcome their problems of justice. If the application of the theory and method of justice as complex consensus is made dependent upon the voluntary acceptance of some of the values upon which it is based, then this theory cannot be accused of any form of cultural chauvinism or imperialism".(p. 127) The line of reasoning we have just identified contains three stages, namely, (i) neutrality, (ii) command prescription, "must", and a (iii) conditional option, "if...- voluntary". In view of the self-evident interconnection between these three stages, it is pertinent to ask if there is no self-contradiction at all on the one hand and to find out if there is any moral basis for the "require- ment" that members of such a society "must" identify themselves with some of the central political values of Western societies. What happens when such members reject some of the "central political values" of West- ern societies? Is the "human rights" discourse as well as "democratisation" not being used by the West to impose its will on the weaker ones? What about the linkage between "human rights" record, "democratisation" and Western aid? Could we not say, in the light of contemporary international relations, that those opposed to some of the central political values of the West are not left to pursue their own choice? Surely, this leaves Lötter's conditional optional in the cold. However, as a normative prescription, it is beyond reproach. Indeed, a careful study of the so called negotiations process in South Africa would also reveal that in the circumstances, the word negotiations remains a misnomer. It is one thing to negotiate but quite another to reluctantly submit to the will of the more powerful.

Furthermore, Lötter's reasoning in connection with "background theories" and "less developed" societies is questionable. It is common cause that the so called less developed societies came to be mainly because of unjust wars waged against these societies in the past. The definition and division between the "background theories" and the "less developed" societies is easily translatable into the comparison between "advanced" and "backward" societies. Having had the rare privilege of personal discussion with Lötter about his book, we venture to suggest that on this point he has inadvertently lowered the threshold of racial

connotations to a dangerously low level. In addition, to argue that "background" theories might be developed into fully-fledged theories is not the same thing as arguing that theory, especially liberative theory, must be the construction of the oppressed themselves. Our thesis here is that he who holds the key to theory construction also holds the key to power. Since the oppressed in South Africa even today can hardly be seen as holding the key to theory construction, it follows that Lötter's prescription of democracy fulfilling his two "requirements" is a reaffirmation of the conqueror's dominant position in South Africa.

The question of group rights is addressed in the light of the alleged inadequacy and the unsuitability of the Westminster system of government to the "new South Africa". In the old South Africa, there was no serious doubt cast upon the alleged deficiencies of the Westminster system. This relatively new awareness of the defects of the Westminster system for the "new South Africa" is decidedly suspect. For example, in the unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom, there is no Bill of Rights in the sense that there is a written Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe. The old South Africa was apparently satisfied without a Bill of Rights even though it had, unlike the United Kingdom, a written constitution. Why is a Bill of Rights a necessity for the "new South Africa"? Similarly, the old South Africa could generally live with some opposition to the reality of the homelands: independent or not. Now, in the name of group rights, the *Afrikanervolksfront* is demanding a separate independent state for the Afrikaner people, a *Boerestaat* in the "new South Africa". Will such a demand secure justice one the "new South Africa" has become a "nearly just society"? According to Lötter, "The idea of group rights lacks a function. The notion of individual rights, on the other hand, provides protection not only to individual members of a society, but to any group in that society whose values or activities do not contravene the basic principles of justice of the society." (p. 171) If the idea of group rights "lacks a function" then affirmative action, as we have already argued, must be justified on other grounds. In other words, why is the concept of group rights both meaningful and functional with regard to the affirmative action programmes

in South Africa but meaningless and without a function with regard to the demand for a *Boerestaat*?

We submit that Lötter's book deserves serious attention, not so much because of the answers it gives but more because of the questions it raises.

Technology education: a Christian perspective. Series F1: IRS study-pamphlets. Study Pamphlet No. 198.
Institute for Reformational Studies. PU for CHO, Potchefstroom 1992.
Reviewed by Willem Storm.

This pamphlet contains two articles, namely
(1) *Teaching the nature of technology* by J. de Vries, Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven The Netherlands and
(2) *Tegnologiese onderwijs in Suid-Afrikaanse Skole* by prof. P. van Schalkwijk, PU for CHE, Potchefstroom South Africa.
Both articles discuss technology education in Christian educational systems. De Vries begins by stating that technology can be taught in two ways, namely:
1) presupposing that technology is neutral, or
2) presupposing that technology is neutral.

According to De Vries, the first approach entails a type of teaching that can taught at any educational institution, regardless of the ideological, theological or philosophical foundations of the institution. The second approach, however, allows different perspectives on technology; not only with regard to the use of technology, but also with regard to the development of technology. For christian education this means that the christian element is brought to bear on the content of the subject, in that the aim of christian education - to enable one to lead a christian life in this secular world - plays a prominent role. De Vries opposes an instrumental view of education in his article.

In order to demonstrate that technology is not neutral, De Vries provides five characteristics of technology, that are clearly not free of ideological, theological or philosophical presumptions. These characteristics are:
1) technology is something that is initiated by people;

2) technology entails working with materials, energy and information that are all part of Gods creation;

3) the designing, making and use of technology is determined by certain human needs;

4) technology is a result of the human desire to understand nature's behaviour;

5) technology creates the possibility to influence technological developments in accordance to christian views.

In his commentary on these five characteristics, De Vries stresses that technology is the work of humans and therefore intimately connected to the cultures of the various communities from which it originates. Therefore, technology education should be given in connection to the cultural background of the students.

Both articles also argue that no subject taught at schools or universities is neutral. This becomes clear if one contemplates the use of materials needed to create a technological artifact. From a christian point of view, the construction of a technological artifact is seen as a combination of, on the one hand, part of the stewardship humans have over God's creation, and, on the other hand, as a way of putting one's creative potential - also God-given - to use. In other words, for christians the choice of a technological artifact will be guided by the belief that "any artifact may in no way harm neighbours, themselves and the environment".

With regard to a christian view of technology, I miss any reference to the christian notion of love. What role does love play in a christian attitude towards technology? One also wonders whether a political-economic system based on a *Agape*-notion does not clash with the capitalist-democratic system being promoted in Africa by the West, in which western technology, with all its drawbacks that are becoming increasingly evident, seems to flourish. Is it possible for a christian to accept such a technology and political-economic system in which the *Mammon* is so blatantly worshipped?

Also a further specification of what a christian world-view entails would have given the reader more insight into the relation between world view and technology.

Despite these points of criticism, both articles are worth reading and will surely inspire reactions from universalists.

Errata

Two articles in 1993 issues of QUEST were edited and shortened by the editors. This concerns a conference report by G-R Hoffmann in Vol. VII no 2, and the discussion "Beyond Elite Politics" by J. Depelchin in Vol.VII no 1. In this last article there is a typing mistake on page 102, line 15. This sentence should read: "To do so earlier, say during colonial rule, would have flown into the face of colonial ideology which portrayed the European mission as an altruistic venture of bringing civilization and democracy to Africa."

Publications of Interest

D.A.Masolo *African Philosophy in Search of Identity.* Indiana University Press, Bloomington ISBN 0-253-30271-4 (cloth); 0-253-20775-4 (pbk). Edinburgh University Press ISBN 07486 0496 0 1994, pp.301. Published in association with the International African Institute, London, in the series *African Systems of Thought.*

H. Kimmerle *Die Dimensionen des Interculturellen. Philosophie in Afrika - Afrikanische Philosophie.* Zweiter Teil: Supplemente und Veralgemeinerungensschritte. Rodopi: Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA 1994. 198 pp. (Studien zur Interkulturellen Philosophie 2). ISBN 90-5183-694-5. Hfl.60.-/US$ 35.-

Ch.Okolo *African Social and Political Philosophy.* Nsukka, University of Nigeria. 1993.US$ 15.- available from the Dept.of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. phone (042) 770506.

Notes on Contributors

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CAFA Newsletter

The publication of the Committe on Academic Freedom in Africa

The Committee on Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA) consists of people teaching and studying in North America who are concerned with the increasing violations of academic freedoms at African universities.

From World Bank and International Monetary Fund austerity measures, to brutal state repression, the last 10 years has witnessed an unprecedented assault on the African university system. The arrest and massacre of students and faculty, the banning of student and academic organizations, the defunding of universities, and the pauperization of academic staff are threatening African universities with extinction.

CAFA believes that it is crucial that we support our African colleagues and students who are courageously struggling to assert and preserve their rights.

- Subscribe to the CAFA Newsletter, $25 per year;
- Become a member or sponsor of CAFA;
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- Help make CAFA visible at academic conferences;
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Contact: Sylvia Federici, New College, 130 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11550, (516) 463-5838

CRITICAL FORUM

Critical Forum is a new journal, interdisciplinary and not tied to any ideological camp. For the maiden issue, planned for April 1995, articles are invited.

Journal of African Religion and Philosophy

P.O. Box 16144, Wandegeya, Kampala, Uganda.　　Promoting religious theological and philosophical discussion

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The society will hold its first conference Spring 1994 in Kingston, Jamaica. We hope that the University of West Indies will host.

Please cut and submit the membership application below. We look forward to having you.

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Please complete and return to <u>Leke Adeofe</u> at the above address; phone #:(305) 348-3492; fax #: (305) 348-3605. Make check payable to International Society for African Philosophy.

Two members of the Steering Committee, Femi Taiwo and Leke Adeofe, will be present at the APA's meeting in Atlanta, December 1993. Please check bulletin board for further information.

AFRICA ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE TWENTY–FIRST CENTURY:
THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE
(A BOOK PROJECT 1994/95)
Coordinator: *Dr Olusegun Oladipo*

Description of Project

As the 20th century winds down to a close and humankind approaches the dawn of the 21st century, it is important that scholars reflect on the prospects of human development in the coming century. This kind of reflection becomes more urgent in the case of Africa where, a few years to the end of the 20th century, it has still not been possible to meet the challenge of human development on the continent. In Africa today, the promise of independence has not been fulfilled; freedom from colonial rule and racism has not guaranteed for Africans, as Nyerere once observed, freedom from external economic domination, freedom from injustice and oppression and mental freedom. Indeed, over three decades after independence, the human condition in Africa is still, generally speaking, miserable.

This condition poses serious challenges to all those, intellectuals and practical men alike, who are concerned to see that Africa once again becomes a part of the world historical process by regaining its capacity for independent socio–economic development. For intellectuals, this challenge could be met only though sustained reflection on the African experience with a view to discovering the missing links in the efforts that have been made so far to come to terms with the challenge of human development on the continent.

It is in the light of this realisation and the thinking that scholars have a crucial role to play in the generation of a revolution in thought which is a necessary condition for human emancipation in Africa, that a book, which would enable African scholars to reflect on the possibilities of human development on the continent in the 21st century, is being planned.

Contributions

Contributors to this book are expected to use whatever skills they have to examine the African condition today in its various dimensions, with a view to offering new ways in which we can come to understand, in the words of Kai Nielsen, "who we are and what we might become". They are expected to address issues as varied, yet interconnected, as the following:

1. The Challenge of Social and economic Development in 21st century Africa.
2. The Philosophical Imperatives of the Struggle to secure Africa's Emergence in the modern world.
3. The Intellectual Foundations of modernity and the possibilities of Human Development in 21st century Africa.
4. The Question of Ideology in African Development.
5. The Challenge to Social and Political Philosophy of the African condition Today.
6. The Ethical conditions of Human Development in 21st century Africa.
7. The possible Roles of Traditional Philosophies in the task of Designing the Future of Africa.
8. The prospects and possibilities of Cultural Renewal in Africa.
9. Writers and the Quest for Freedom and prosperity in Africa.
10. The Question of Alternative Development Paradigms for Africa.
11. The state and the crisis of Legitimacy in Africa.
12. Democracy and Human Rights in the context of 21st century Africa.
13. The National Question and the Challenge of Community Development in Africa.
14. Science and Technology in the Future of Africa.
15. Africa in World Politics: An Agenda for the 21st century.
16. Pan–Africanism and the prospects of African Socio–Economic integration in the 21st century.

The Coordinator of the project welcomes original and analytical essays from African Scholars on any of the above or other related issues.

Submission of Papers

This book, the proposal for which has been accepted by a publishing firm in Nigeria, is slated for publication in September, 1995. It is therefore expected that contributors would make their essays available to the Coordinator not later than December, 1994. Such contributions, which should be in duplicate and between 20 and 25 pages of A4 paper or any further inquiries on this project, should be sent to:

Dr Olusegun Oladipo,
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University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria.

QUEST: Philosophical Discussions est un journal Africain de Philosophie. Il sert de voie d'expression aux penseurs d'Afrique, et il veut stimuler une discussion philosophique sur des problèmes qui surgissent des transformations radicales que l'Afrique et les Africains sont en train de subir.

QUEST contient des points de discussion actuels se rapportant à l'Afrique et des questions d'intérêt philosophique général, et s'adresse à un public international de philosophes professionels et d' intellectuels appartenant à d'autres disciplines ayant des intérêts philosophiques. Des articles originaux écrits en Anglais ou en Français seront publiés, avec un résumé dans l'autre langue.

QUEST paraît deux fois par an.

Contributions: Les articles ne devront pas dépasser normalement 6000 mots et devront être accompagnés d'un résumé d'un maximum de 200 mots. Le résumé devra être en Français de préférence si l'article est en Anglais, et vice-versa.

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