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Résumé

La polygamie est-elle moralement condamnable? J'envisage ce problème en examinant les différents contextes dans lesquels la polygamie se manifeste de nos jours: 1) parmi ceux qui ne subirent jamais l'influence des missionnaires ou des colonisateurs (le contexte traditionnel ou indigène) et 2) parmi les nouvelles élites influencées par le mode de vie des pays occidentaux (le contexte moderne). Ensuite je montre les situations différentes dans lesquelles les versions modernes de ces pratiques ont normalement lieu. J'analyse les considérations pour ou contre ce système dans ces contextes et situations différentes.

Ma position est que, s'il ne peut être question d'une condamnation en bloc de la pratique en général, elle ne peut pas non plus être justifiée en termes généraux fondés sur la culture et les traditions, et que, en considérant les situations spécifiques, on peut obtenir une base permettant une évaluation adéquate du point de vue moral. Des considérations appropriées à l'évaluation du contexte moderne dans lequel un couple se marie sans qu'il soit question d'autres partenaires dans leur union, seront différentes de ce qui peut être le cas dans le contexte traditionnel, dans lequel on assume qu'il y aura d'autres partenaires.

Je conclus que, vue les considérations partagées par les hommes aussi bien que les femmes dans les sociétés africaines traditionnelles, et mise à part la conception inadéquate de la place des femmes dans ces sociétés par rapport aux hommes, la polygamie n'est peut-être pas profondément immorale peut être considérée comme parfaitement morale.

THE ETHICS OF POLYGYNY

Segun Gbadegesin

Polygyny is a form of polygamous marriage in which two or more women are married to one man at the same time, and all the women may or may not be living under the same roof with the man. The practice is hardly challenged among indigenous Africans. With the coming of Christianity, however, eyebrows were raised against it, especially by the missionaries and their colonial administrative colleagues. With time, the legal systems of the western colonial powers were imposed on the colonies, with provisions for legal marriage. As was to be expected, the new converts to the christian faith as well the new westernized elites accepted the newly imposed ethic of marriage.

In spite of this acceptance of monogamy by a cross-section of the new elites however, the practice of polygyny is still fairly widespread. While some do not hide it, others keep it a secret, especially to avoid the legal penalty for those who contracted the first marriage under the municipal marriage acts. As Ali Mazrui has aptly observed, "Many Africans end up having one Christian wife and more than one wife under a different traditional arrangement." [Mazrui (1980, p.55)] This new dimension, brought into the traditional institution of marriage, has often been a source of controversy among Africans and non-Africans alike. There are those who oppose the foreign imposition of marriage and family systems on Africans on several grounds, including that of pure cultural nationalism. On the other hand, there are those who oppose polygyny on several grounds, such as the claim that it is inherently exploitative of women.

In this essay, I will discuss the following question. Is there anything inherently morally wrong or repugnant about polygyny? I will approach this question by examining two different contexts in which polygyny is now manifested: (1) among those who were never influenced by the missionaries and colonizers (the traditional or indigenous context); and (2) among the new westernized elites who chose or were forced to choose municipal marriage (the modern context). In the second case, I will look at the different situations in which the modern

versions of this practice normally occur. I will examine the considerations for and against the system in these different contexts and situations. I will argue that while there can be no blanket moral condemnation of the practice in general, it can also not be justified in blanket terms by appeal to culture and tradition, and that considerations of the specific situations may provide the basis for an adequate moral evaluation of the practice of polygyny. Thus considerations that would be appropriate for an evaluation in the modern context, in which a couple go into marriage without any presumption of other partners in the affair, would be different from these which may be required in a traditional context, in which such a presumption is taken for granted. I will conclude this essay with the assertion that the morality or immorality of the practice of polygyny depends on the values shared by the men and women involved and the conception of the place of women in relation to the man.

1 Religion, culture and value relativism

First, there is the reaction of Christian missionary against the practice of polygyny; Islam and Traditional religion have nothing against the practice as long as the man has the material means to take proper care of his wives and is able to deal adequately with domestic problems. Despite many Old Testament accounts of polygyny, involving for instance, favourites of God such as Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon, the practice of polygyny is frowned against in the New Testament, which can be considered as the real foundation of the Christian church. A bishop, according St. Paul's instruction in one of his letters to Timothy, is expected to be husband of one wife. Many educated Africans accepted this injunction, either freely or because they had little choice, especially in the case of those who worked with Christian missionaries as teachers, clerks or clergy.

Most African countries now have dual legal systems in which issues emanating from traditional customs are settled under Customary Laws system while those emanating from English Legal system are

treated under the provision of that system. Thus, for instance, in present day Nigeria, it is still possible to enact marriages under either of the systems, with the provision that while Customary Laws allow for polygyny, the adopted English Legal system does not, and anyone who contravenes the latter is liable to punishment on conviction. There is a third system - the Islamic Sharia system which is, in this respect, similar to Native Law and Custom in allowing for the practice of polygyny. We therefore have a situation in which a religious system and the inherited legal system condemn polygyny while another religious system as well as the traditional system accept it as a normal practice. What can we say about polygyny from the perspective of humanistic ethics?

By humanistic ethics, I understand a system in which the validity or soundness of ethical propositions is not determined by the truth of any religious, cultural or legal propositions, but derived from the rational consideration of human interests and needs. The presupposition of this is simply that a religious injunction is not necessarily sacrosanct: it may be morally unjustifiable, reasonably unconvincing and humanly intolerable. In the same way, a legal rule or traditional code may be both morally and reasonably unjustifiable. It follows, therefore, that a religious, cultural or traditional practice may be called in to question from the point of view of human interests; and a moral code which gives rise to a particular social practice cannot be exempted from the kinds of questions that may be raised from this point of view. It is, of course, true that one cannot raise questions about a practice without getting outside the practice; and a person who raises such questions should have been exposed to opposing points of view. The fact remains, though, that questions of justification of particular practices from the moral point of view are legitimate questions and no moral or traditional code is immune from them.

This brief remark becomes necessary in the light of a position maintained by Stephen Toulmin in Reason in Ethics [Toulmin (1970)]. In this work, Toulmin compares two questions:

(i) "Is it really right to debar women from smoking in public?" and

(ii) "Is it really right to have more than one wife?"

Toulmin thinks that question (i) above is an intelligible question which implies a proposal for a change from the practice of regarding it as offensive for women to smoke in public to a more liberal attitude. But he thinks that question (ii) is a great deal less intelligible because (a) it seems to imply a suggestion that some present practice be abandoned in favour of an alternative one; but since the exact nature of the change proposed is not clear, it is difficult to estimate its probable consequences; and (b) it is questionable whether the practices compared (i.e. Christian and Muslim marriages) can be regarded as 'alternatives' at all - since the ramification of the institution of marriages, both in Christian and Muslim societies, are so complex that it is not simple to replace one institution by another [Toulmin (1970, p.152)]. Toulmin then concludes "[t]he question which of these institutions is "right"? is therefore an unreal one, and there is no conceivable way of answering it as it stands" [Toulmin (1970, p.153)]. He suggests that to understand this question, it has to be regarded as an instance of an even more general question, in a disguised form. Thus the question: "is it right for me to marry one wife or four?" has to be transformed, first into "Is Christian marriage or Muslim marriage the better practice?", and then again into "Is the Christian or the Muslim way of life the better?" [Toulmin (1970, p.153)]

I do not see why it is necessary to put the matter in this way. The question, "what if anything is wrong with "polygyny" makes sense and appears intelligible in any context in which there is not one but a mixture of practices with regard to the institution of marriage. And this seems to me to be the current situation in many African communities. Although the indigenous system conforms to the traditional codes, the point remains that this system and its code have been challenged and an alternative system proposed. In this case, since there is a challenge, there is need for justification. It is not just a question of substituting one practice or moral code for another. The morality of the substituted code must also be raised. Why is it presented as a morally superior system?

Toulmin's remarks assume that the change from one form of life to another is inconceivable within a given culture-group. In the context of the institution of marriage then, the question is whether it is conceivable to change from one kind to another. But Toulmin has tied up the institutions of religion and marriage in such a way that they add up to a cultural milieu in which the former determines the latter with no possibility of change. It seems to me that this is a static conception of culture. Even if it is true that religion determines marriage and family institution, the question still needs to be raised whether there is any religious institution which mandates the marrying of more than one wife. If there is none, then the question that Toulmin considers unintelligible may turn out to be as intelligible as the other one. Furthermore, we should take recent accounts by Islamic scholars who have denied the connection of Islam with mandatory polygyny seriously. Tahir Mahmood, i.e., has argued that "it is entirely baseless to presume that the Qur'an conferred on men a fundamental right to have more than one wife. Islam had neither introduced nor legalized polygamy. On the contrary, it had reformed the pre-islamic law of polygamy in various ways" [Mahmood (1972)]. Part of the reform is the existence of anti-bigamy stipulation in marriage contracts: "Muslim women in several countries now have a right to stipulate at the time of marriage, against the second marriage of the husband during the lifetime of the first wife" [Mahmood (1972)]. Examples include the Ottoman Law of Family Rights (1917) and the Jordanian Law of Family Rights (1951). In the case of the Moroccan Code of Personal Status, 1958, even in the absence of an original stipulation in the marriage contract, the court may inquire whether the second marriage has caused any injury to the first wife [Mahmood (1972)]. In the same way, Aisha Lemu has argued that although the Holy Qur'an permitted the marrying of up to four wives, it was a restriction and not a liberalization of what went before. Furthermore, "The Qur'anic verse brought in not only a limit but also a new condition: ... but if you fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [marry only] one ..." Lemu then argues that since it is hardly possible

to satisfy this condition, the meaning of the verse "clearly indicate that monogamy is the norm." [Aisha Lemu (n.d., pp.15-17)]

From this it would seem that the judgement whether to enter into polygynous marriage or not rests with individuals and this is what makes it, at least, *prima facie* appropriate to see it as a normative issue: there is a choice. Even when a religion does not see anything wrong with the practice from the perspective of a person's relationship with God, the issue is not settled. For there may be something wrong from the point of view of their relationship with fellow human beings. Of course, where people have been socialized into a society in which polygyny is widely practised, they are not likely to see anything wrong with it and therefore the question whether or not it is morally wrong may not arise for them. The only question raised will be a pragmatic one: can I as a man, afford more than one wife? Or, as a woman, what prospects are there for me in this kind of relationship? For both man and women, an important consideration is whether or not they can manage the domestic conflicts that are, rightly or wrongly, usually seen as a regular feature of polygynous homes. Incidentally, Islam insists on the man addressing himself to the question whether he can love the women equally without having a favourite and thus creating tension in the home. And in Yoruba oral tradition, there are several references to the problems of polygyny. In Ifa literary corpus, Orunmila the wisdom deity counselled his devotees on the problems of jealousy, accusations of witchcraft, and expensiveness that are associated with polygyny.

To attempt an adequate resolution of the issue then, we may profit by looking at the two broad categories of the practice:

- (i) polygyny in a traditional setting with no serious moral alternative (monogamy is practised, but it is not conceived as a moral alternative, only as a pragmatically determined choice).
- (ii) polygynous marriage in a modern setting with a rival alternative presented as morally superior (by missionaries) and accepted by the modernized elites (who nevertheless do not thereby totally do away with polygyny).

While the second category seems to me to lend itself easily to a critique from the perspective of humanistic ethics; the first is a more complex moral phenomenon. I will deal with the second category first.

2 Polygynous marriage in a modern setting

The crucial issue here is that both man and woman (i.e. first wife) enter into marriage relationship after a period of courtship, expression of love, and an understanding that the "two shall become one". The parents and extended family members are not brought into the show right from the beginning. They are later informed for their blessing, as a formality. Many a couple have gone ahead without such parental blessing. So in this modernized setting, we cannot invoke tradition to justify any choice of marriage form, and when a marriage partner decides to modify the relationship, s/he cannot appeal to tradition. What then can we appeal to, in order to evaluate such an attempt or practice of modifying a relationship such as is involved in the transition from a monogamous to a polygynous relationship?

To resolve the question, I think we need to identify (a) relevant moral principles against which the practice is to be evaluated and (b) the different situations possible with regard to the practice. There doesn't need to be any problem with these identified requirements. Any practice can be morally justified or condemned by appeal to some moral standards derived from some adequate moral principles. For our purpose here, I will identify three moral principles noted for their acceptability to mainstream western moral philosophy. Then I will try to determine the extent to which they may be said to be applicable in the context of traditional African moral values concerning marriage. I will then look at distinctive African moral values and determine their relevance to the question of the ethics of polygyny.

The second item that needs to be taken into consideration is the different situations with regard to the practice. As it is, the question whether polygyny is morally repugnant is put in a too general form. It seems to embrace all cases (actual or imagined) of polygynous mar-

riages. But since we are concerned with the moral evaluation of a practice, and since there are bound to be different forms and shades of the practice, we cannot have a blanket condemnation or justification of the practice. We therefore have to take account of the different situations with respect to the practice. This is important in the light of the fact that there are people who will spontaneously jump in condemnation of the very idea of a practice (abortion seems to be the worst victim of this attitude) without bothering to look at particular cases, in order to locate special problems. It seems to be forgotten that, however repugnant an idea may be to our moral outlook, there may be cases in which it cannot be morally condemned without our involving ourselves in contradictory moral beliefs.

Actual situations vary from practice to practice with respect to the morally significant facts. Thus, the morally significant facts with respect to abortion may not be important when we are faced with the morality of polygyny. For instance, in the case of abortion, we are faced with the question whether it is justified to terminate fetal life. The significant issues that need to be determined here include, among others, the extent to which fetal life is real life, and, assuming that that is resolved, the extent to which it should be accorded rights over and above that of its carrier. On the other hand, in the case of polygyny, the major question of interest is the legitimacy of having more than one wife at a time or of being a partner in a polygynous relationship. Among the relevant facts to be addressed here are the interests of all the participants: husband, wives and children and how far these are taken into consideration. Looking at the matter from this perspective, three possible situations may be identified with regard to the practice of polygyny:

- (a) Husband and wife agree at the initial stage of courtship that the husband may have more than one wife;
- (b) Husband successfully persuades his first wife, after their marriage, to agree to his marrying more wives;
- (c) Husband decides on his own, after marriage, to marry more wives without consulting the first wife.

It seems obvious that these three situations are not identical; and the question whether polygyny is/is not morally repugnant has to take the differences in the situations into account. Meanwhile, however, we need to make some remarks concerning the principles of interest, fairness and respect as acceptable standards of evaluation

2.1 Western moral principles versus African social practice

According to the *principle of interest*, actions, policies or practices are to be justified according to their consequences for the interests of those affected. The point is that only human interests matter, and any other basis for moral evaluation of conduct has to be subjected to the principle of human interest. Thus a practice cannot be justified on the ground of its conformity with the will of a supernatural being unless it can at the same time be shown that it has further positive consequences for the interests of human beings. The point is that any human social practice or conduct is to be justified by appeal to its consequences for the interests of those it affects. Whether we define interests as (a) objects, actions or policy which satisfy human wants or as (b) those objects, actions or policies which promote pleasures or as (c) those objects, policies or actions which increase our opportunities to get what we want [Brian (1965, pp.174-176)], does not have any serious consequences for the position that interest is a basic standard for the evaluation of human conduct and practices. In any case, in spite of these fine distinctions, one may agree with Benditt that "the concept of interest concerns one's position in life with respect to being happy" [Benditt (1975, p.331)]. Benditt goes on to observe that "being concerned with happiness, the concept of interest involves a person's position with respect to the fulfilment of his expectations, and also with respect to his physical and mental well-being" [Benditt (1975, p.331)]. The notion of interest is therefore tied up with the idea of well-being.

Seen in this light, the principle of interest appears to have a close relationship with other standards of evaluation such as utility and

rights. Indeed, these other standards may be seen as varying applications of the principle of interest. For instance, the principle of utility judges practices according to their consequences for the maximization of interests: actions are right to the extent that they lead to a greater balance of satisfaction of interests. On the other hand, the principle of rights judges practices according to their consequences for the protection of individual interests: actions are right to the extent that they protect individual interests, if need be, against the maximization of social interests. The main difference, as Rawls points out, is that while "the principle of right and so of justice, puts limits on which satisfactions have value, they impose restrictions on what are reasonable conceptions of one's good". In the principle of utility, "we are to arrange institutions so as to obtain the greatest sum of satisfactions (interest), we ask no questions about their source or quality but only how their satisfaction would affect the total of well-being" [Rawls (1972, pp.30-31)]. The principle of right insists that "the interests requiring the violation of justice have no value" [Rawls (1972, p.31)].

Fairness is the next central principle in the western moral universe. As defined by Rawls, "this principle holds that a person is under an obligation to do his part as specified by the rules of an institution whenever he has voluntarily accepted the benefits or the scheme or has taken advantage of the opportunities it offers to advance his interests, provided that this institution is just or fair. We are not to gain from the cooperative efforts of others without doing our fair share." [Rawls (172, pp.342-343)] The main idea here is that in the case of a voluntary involvement in a mutually advantageous practice, each of the partners has an obligation to sustain the practice by doing their parts, especially when they have benefitted from the endeavour. A person's conduct may therefore be evaluated on the basis of this principle. It may be argued then, using this principle, that since the marriage institution falls into the category of mutually advantageous practice, the conduct of partners may be so evaluated on the basis of the principle of fairness.

Finally, there is the *principle of respect*. The idea here is that human beings as persons are appropriate objects of respect as such. Though, there are several possible bases of respecting persons -e.g. respect for competence, for excellence in character, the moral idea of respect is that personhood is an appropriate object of respect. To respect persons is to take them seriously, to pay attention to them, and to stand back or give room to them [Gbadegesin (1984, pp.65-79)].

The real opposite of respect is contempt, the reactive attitude which looks down on its object as something inferior and not to be reckoned with. It is manifested as ridicule or disgust at the sight of its object. Human beings are persons in the sense that they have capacity for feelings and emotions: the capacity to feel mental and physical pain, love and sympathy and the vital human needs and interests deriving from these. It is also in respect of these features that they are appropriate objects of respect: these are features which ought to be taken seriously in our dealings with persons.

The principle of respect is usually interpreted as having a common presupposition with the Kantian principle of humanity. The intuitive idea here is that human beings as persons are ends-in-themselves and are to be treated as such and not merely as means. One is treated merely as means when one's own interests are not considered in any deliberations with regard to what one is to do, say or receive. For Kant, humanity connotes autonomy, a priceless possession of human beings which cannot be exchanged. It is in respect of this feature that Kant recognizes each person as an object of respect, including the evil doers! [Kant (1964, p.128)]

At this point I should like to deal with the issue of the relevance of these principles to the evaluation of polygyny. Clearly, these principles rely on a western framework and the question is whether such a framework is in fact adequate for evaluating the institutions and practices of other cultures. African institutions, for instance, it may be argued, ought to be evaluated by African moral standards. In this case, it is important that the moral reasoning or rational agency of the participants in the social practice be used. I sympathize with this point

of view. For one thing, African cultures have been subjected to all kinds of abuse in the hands of early missionaries and some first generation western social anthropologists (who were their academic colleagues) imposing western ideas and standards as the yardstick for judging African practices. As I recalled above, the first set of missionaries considered it their duty to eradicate all those practices they considered to be against Christian principles whether they were conducive to the well-being of the people or not. It was a real case of contempt and disrespect for the humanity of Africans. However, it is very easy to carry the objection too far in this area. It is possible to assume, for instance, that the principles we have discussed thus far do not feature at all in traditional African moral discourse. But this would be exaggerating cultural differences. Traditional Africans - men and women - had their misunderstandings. The communal structure of society does not guarantee a completely harmonious relationship. People, as human beings, occasionally fight. Elders are called upon to resolve disputes, either between husband and wife, or between co-wives or between brothers. On such occasions, the elders listen carefully to all sides of the dispute and then, thoughtfully, they point out the faults on the part of each of the parties of the dispute by appealing to the appropriate moral standards. They say, for instance "my son, what you have done is wrong because you treat your wife badly. Don't you realize that she has feelings? What do you think her family will think of us?" In other words, the elders appeal to considerations that give meaning to the principles of interest, fairness and respect. It would therefore be wrong to suggest that these principles are exclusively western. True, they are formulated by western philosophers in their philosophical discourse, but they are also universally recognized principles applicable to interpersonal relationships.

The difference between traditional African societies and western societies is that, though these principles are recognized in traditional societies, they are not applied to every member of society, especially in situations in which there has been a stable pattern of relationship which has worked well for the society. Thus, for instance, it is

generally agreed that a man can do anything he wants with his money. If he decides to marry more wives, as long as he takes proper care of them all, nobody's interest is harmed. And since women also understand this, no one feels that she has been unfairly dealt with if a husband should announce his intention to have an additional wife. However, when there is a dispute between the co-wives, or between the husband and one of the co-wives, it is usually settled by making an appeal to the notions of interest, fairness and respect.

In the same way, when the survival of the community is at stake, the interest of the individual may not be pressed. But in these situations the individual already knows the limits of individualism as a result of an effective process of socialization in which individuals are made to see their interests in the light of social interests. So they will refrain from pressing any claims against society. For instance, if an aggressive neighbouring community is disturbing the peace, young men are called upon to take up arms. They will not complain of an erosion of their rights; they are all too willing to sacrifice their interests for the survival of a community which has given them life and has not alienated them from itself. However, this does not seem to apply to the context of modern African societies. Indeed, this is why it makes sense to approach the question of the ethic of polygyny from the perspectives of both modern and traditional contexts.

More relevant in the traditional context of morality are the moral values of good character, honesty and cheerfulness. People are judged as good or bad according to how honest they are, how generous they are and how ready and willing they are to perform such tasks that are essential for communal survival. Women are judged according to how respectful they are to their husbands and parents-in-law, as well as how devoted they are to their family. Each person has a role to play in the life of the family and the community; therefore it cannot be right for anyone to shirk their responsibility by appeal to rights. That is where communal survival lies. As far as marital relations are concerned, people are also judged according to how they perform their marital roles. Thus, the senior wife takes on the role of mother towards the other wives and their children. Her status as a moral person is determined by that role-performance. Therefore she cannot complain about her husband having more wives. In this context, the

appeal is to tradition: the way things have always been. The man has always been the owner of the home as well as the breadwinner; he therefore is in the position to determine what he wants. The wife agrees, if she is consulted, because she accepts the norms of traditional society. Sometimes, if the husband does not feel like having more wives, people may feel that the first wife has given him a "love-portion". So sometimes it is in the interest of the first wife that her husband has more wives. But again, the modern context is different in the sense that it is based on a different ethic.

3 Polygynous marriage in a traditional setting

As I have observed earlier, the crucial issue in the modern context is that both man and woman enter into marriage on the understanding that "two shall become one" following their acceptance of the newly introduced ethic of marriage. We may now turn to the representative kinds of situations in which the issue of morality may arise with respect to polygynous marriage. First we may take up the situation in which a husband decides on his own to take an additional wife without consulting the first wife. Are we in a position to evaluate this conduct on the basis of the principles highlighted above? This is obviously a difficult question. On the one hand, many men (and women too), even after they have accepted (in some cases grudgingly) a foreign practice which appeared to demand the sacrifice of what has been a part of their traditional frame of reference, find it difficult to go all the way with such a practice. A common example is the christian faith which requires a total abandonment of traditional medical practices. On the other hand, however, a modernized women caught in this kind of situation feels that she is unfairly treated, and I think she is right. Lack of consultation in such a situation seems uncalled for and unjustifiable especially if both are still husband and wife. This is because of our assumption that they both accepted the idea of a monogamous relationship at the beginning.

There are certain situations in which this may happen. It is possible that another woman pregnant with the husband's baby, and usually, the parents of the woman will insist on the man marrying their daughter. Otherwise, she may not find a husband. Out of embarrass-

ment, the husband may not be in a position to tell the first wife, until it is too late. In some cases, the wife hears the news from friends or from the parents of the husband who then persuade her to accept her situation and consider herself lucky to have a helper. In this case, while many will understand the predicament of the husband, they will nevertheless blame him for cheating on his wife. The interest of the first wife seems to be involved here. In the modern context, unlike the traditional context, the idea of love plays a prominent role. The husband and the wife are presumed to have many things in common, sometimes including a common purse, and the love between them is construed as unshareable. This kind of situation has caused many women serious mental agony. It would therefore seem that by betraying the expectations of the first wife, the husband has done her some injustice.

Thus far, the position I have maintained on this category seems simple and sound. But there is an important consideration. If it is morally unfair towards the first wife for the husband to take the woman carrying his baby as a second wife on the grounds that I have adduced, what is the position of this woman? What options are available to the man, considering the fact that this other woman's well-being is also at stake? She needs to be dealt with fairly and treated as a person as well. We may complicate the matter a little. Suppose the man did not disclose to this other woman that he was married. They just met and he proposed to her and they became friends with the prospect of getting married. Then, after getting pregnant, she discovered that her man was already married. If we hold the position that marrying her will be morally unfair to the first wife, what about her own well-being? I guess in such a situation we may still want to blame the man, while we understand his resolution of the crisis by taking the additional wife. The other option of taking only the child of the affair while laying off the woman seems doubly unfair.

Our second situation, still in the modern context is one in which the husband successfully persuades the first wife after marriage to accept the idea of his marrying, say, an additional wife. There may be various reasons for this development. For instance, the husband may discover that he needs a larger family and he has the means to provide for such; or it may be that he needs children of a particular sex and

the wife has not been blessed with such; or it may be that the woman has reproductive problems. Whatever the reason, this situation appears to be an improvement over the previous one. This is because the husband takes the first wife into confidence, and seeks her agreement through persuasion. We may say that the husband shows respect for the person of the wife. Even here, however, some people will be unwilling to defend the position of the husband. After all, the question may be raised why the husband should even suggest the idea to the woman in the first place. For the reason I have adduced, however, it appears to me that we can grant that the husband has tried to show respect for the first wife.

If, however, we look at the situation with regard to the principle of interest, it is not obvious that the successful persuasion of the wife detracts from the fact that the woman's interest may suffer as a result of the husband's decision. Her well-being, both physically and mentally, may be adversely affected when she suddenly discovers that there is another woman in her husband's life. This is because, as we have assumed, they entered into the relationship on certain expectations which are now frustrated by the husband's decision. Some reasons usually adduced by a husband may be more prone to this kind of feeling than others. For instance, when the reason is that the husband has become affluent enough to have more wives. This becomes more striking if it is noted that, in the modern context, the affluence of the man is made possible with the devotion and support of the wife.

Of all the reasons that may be adduced by a husband, the most relevant and understandable from his point of view is that which has to do with the absence of children from the marriage. The fact is that most traditional African societies place a very high premium on children. Thus a Yoruba saying puts it:

A baa logun eru	Even if we have twenty slaves
Ki a ni iwefa ogbon	Or thirty servants servants
Ojo ti a ba ku	The day we die
Omo nii dele deni	It is children that count.

It may therefore be understandable for a man to decide to try another woman for the purpose of having children. In most cases, the wife will be persuaded to accept this decision. It may be argued that the wo-

man's interest is not properly considered. To start with, the very fact of her being unable to have children of her own is likely to have an adverse psychological effect on her. In a society in which children are valued more than wealth, a woman in this situation feels that her life is empty. She needs the support of her husband in such a situation to bear the burden of guilt and shame occasioned by society's display of ignorance. As Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie has rightly observed: "A childless woman is considered a monstrosity as is an unmarried woman, spinster, or divorcee. She becomes the butt of jokes, scandal, and the quarry of any passing man, married or unmarried. She is often by males in the society as an unclaimed and degenerating commodity to be freely exploited in all ways - emotionally, sexually and financially, among others." [Ogundipe-Leslie (1985, p.25)]

It must be realized, however, that the husband's situation also calls for understanding, and his own interests also count. For he sometimes finds himself unable to withstand the pressure from his family and friends to try another woman. To the traditional African, it is undesirable that a man should die without a number of survivors. Indeed, the husband may be blackmailed into accepting the idea trying another woman when it is suggested to him that he might be the cause. We know that in many cases too, the idea is suggested to the wife to try another man and some women may succumb to such an idea. The difference is that in the case of the woman, the consequence of her trial is not polygamy, since it is not now the practice that a woman can have two husbands. Rather two options are available traditionally. The woman may obtain a divorce, or she may remain with the husband and try her luck outside the marital home. If she is lucky, she may then get a divorce or still stay with her husband without letting out the secret of her child. This shows neither the husband nor the wife desire a situation in which they do not have children. It would appear then that whatever option is chosen as a way of dealing with the problem should be alright. It is also true that in some cases, a woman may encourage her husband to try another woman. This follows the traditional idea that a child borne by another woman under that situation may be a harbinger of a child for the first wife too. So a first wife, even when considering her own interest, may not be totally against her

husband trying another woman in this situation; though it is not an easy option for many.

3.1 The woman's perspective

Thus far, the main considerations have been those which inform the man in a decision to have a polygynous marriage after a first marriage based on the acceptance of the monogamous concept. But what about the women? We should also consider the various considerations that influence a woman's decision to opt for a polygynous marriage, for this is crucial to understanding the way they take the situation. The first point to note here is that there is no common women's view on the morality of polygyny. While a large majority of modern women and some traditional women see it as unfair and exploitative, others see themselves as only cut out to play a role - female role - as mother and wife, and are therefore expected to have junior wives to perform chores and run errands. This is especially true of the first wives; and it seems to suggest that they are not expected to be jealous when their husbands brings in additional wives. The reactions also differ from class to class. Again, Ogudipe-Leslie's finding on this is instructive: "Women of the urban working class, the urban poor, and the peasantry have definitely different attitudes. They insist more on their right to work as they very often have to live within polygynous systems, Islamic and Traditional. They tend to ignore the biological and emotional oppressions they have to endure, in the view that men are incorrigibly polygynous and that women are socially impotent to correct them." [Ogudipe-Leslie (1985, p.123)]

On the other hand, the second wife, though now exposed to modern ideas of freedom, independence and self-determination, still finds herself in a male-dominated society with norms of behaviour and ideas of success determined by males. In such a society, a woman is not expected to be single and where there are more females than males, the individual woman may have no other choice than to be a second wife. Furthermore, it may be calculated by her that her own security, protection and interests may be better taken care of by a well-to-do person who has been tried and found reliable. Such is the

man who already has one or more wives. After all, if he is not good, he will not have women living with him as wives.

A further support for this point of view - in defence of polygyny - is provided by the main emphasis of African traditional moral values which is good character. On this score, a wife is good if she performs her roles in the house with devotion, takes care of the children and shows respect for her husband and his relations. On his part, the husband is good if he protects and provides for the wives and children. Lack of care is a good ground for divorce. A woman who has been socialized into this way of thinking may not find anything wrong with polygyny. However, though these considerations make sense when they are invoked in the traditional setting, by and large, they sometimes also influence the reactions of the actors in the modern setting, and this is because traditional values still play an important role in the lives of modernized elites.

This is even more glaring in a case where a husband is expected and persuaded by traditional moral considerations, to inherit the widow of a deceased brother or cousin. The reasoning here is basically moral. A woman is married into a family; the death of the husband should therefore not be the end of the mutually benefitting relationship between the families. Even when the woman does not have any children before the death of her husband, it will be expected that another man in the family will inherit her in the hope that she will bear children to the family as a continuation of the link and to the credit of her former husband so that he does not pass into oblivion. Furthermore, the traumatic experience of a woman who loses her husband is taken into consideration by the practice. She may not easily find another husband outside of her deceased husband's family, especially if she has children. Therefore, the family is expected to provide a cushion for the shock. It is not unusual, however, for a woman to reject a man chosen for her by the family, in which case she is permitted to leave. It is also not unusual for a man to refuse to inherit a widow. But if a man agrees to inherit a widow in accordance with traditional moral considerations, he would normally consult with his first wife and she is also expected to understand and agree. After all, she may at some time find herself in the same situation. Perhaps her well-being is still affected, but in terms of fairness and respect, it is

hard to judge that the husband's action is morally repugnant. Here is a case in which traditional thought and practice may be brought to bear on individuals in a modern setting.

We should note, however, that even in the case we are considering, the influence on modern marriage and family system is minimal. For instance, a modernized woman does not consider herself as a property to be inherited by anybody; so even if the death of her husband does not mean the end of her relationship with his family, she does not anticipate her being inherited by another member of his household. Modernized men have similar feelings, and this accounts, in part, for the modern phenomenon of ruptured relationships between the families and wives of deceased man.

Considering the foregoing, it appears to me that it is neither the moral superiority of polygyny nor the power of men that keeps it going among modernized elites. Rather its persistence is best explained by the reluctance of many women to press any claims against their husbands even when they understand that they have a case under the law. I think that this reluctance is also a function of the different moral attitude of African women generally. A woman with children does not consider it a good idea to sue her husband - the father of her children. She cares for him and her children, and she would rather tolerate insult and injury in the hope that her children will eventually vindicate her when they succeed in life. In any case, in spite of her modern ethos, the woman elite still lives in a society that judges her by traditional standards of value and she would rather not be found inadequate.

4 The traditional context

I now want to examine the traditional context of marriage and raise the question whether polygyny is morally repugnant even in that context. Recall that the assumption we operated with in considering the morality of polygyny in the modern context is that both husband and wife enter into marriage relationship with a view that two shall become one. This is not the case with regard to the traditional context; for in that context, it is a general belief that a man may have more than one wife.

Several considerations inform the traditional approval of polygyny. First there is economic consideration. In a situation where the main economic activity is agriculture, and where there is no development of other productive forces beside labour, the more hands there are on the farm, the bigger and better the returns. A hard-working male therefore needs more than one wife to help. The productive value of women is therefore one of the main reasons for the traditional justification of polygyny. It is not unusual that the suggestion to have another wife may also be made by the first wife. This was the case of a young woman interviewed by Awa Thiam:

I was married at 15. I live with my husband and co-wife in this village where my eight children were born. My husband took a second wife 12 years ago. My co-wife and I get on very well. Our relationship is quite good. Besides, I was very keen for my husband to take another wife, as I was worn out with my large number of children and having to look after the house and to work in the fields. My husband is a peasant, but I do most of the agricultural work. As I felt that I needed some help, I had no hesitation in suggesting to my husband that he may marry again. The second wife now helps me So far, I don't regret that I suggest my husband taking another wife. [Thiam (1986, p.45); see also Clignet (1970)]

Ogundipe-Leslie also found out that market women were contemptuous of some of the problems that concerned the urban middle-class women. This is especially true of the "resentment of polygyny by middle class and Westernized women. They (i.e. market women) mainly felt men could not be expected to be loyal to one woman while some outrightly claim they needed helpmates in the form of co-wives to assist with housework. They needed younger wives to share or preferably take over the chores of kitchen and bed, so they, the older wives, can be freed to concentrate on travel for business reasons." [Thiam (1986, p.123)]

This, then, is one kind of rational agency: the need for help on the farm dictated to Awa Thiam's young woman that her husband should have a second wife. The question remains, of course, how she would have acted if her situation had been different. That is, if she had

not been burdened with that responsibility, would that suggestion have been made by her? Suppose, for instance, that the husband had the means of introducing mechanization or hiring labour, would the woman have suggested an additional wife to her husband? But of course, we may also ask whether she could have avoided the responsibility in the traditional context. All these are meant to raise the question of voluntarism with respect to the woman's reasoning. It is also interesting that the young woman was opposed to the husband's marrying a third wife: "Neither my co-wife nor I want him to ... we can manage quite well." [Thiam (1986, p.46)] To Ogundipe-Leslie's market-women, there are more important things in life than competing for the love of an old man who may be better taken care of by younger woman. An interesting question is whether these old women would have had the same attitude when they were younger.

A second consideration in favour of polygynous marriage in the traditional setting is the conception of children as wealth. A man wants as many children as possible because they are his resources. In a context of high infant mortality rate, the more wives he has, the more children he can expect to have. Indeed, as we have seen in our discussion of the modern context, it is not unusual for a woman who discovers that she has reproductive problems to also suggest to her husband to get a young wife for himself.

There is also a third consideration. In the traditional setting, there are no contraceptive devices. A woman nursing a baby is therefore not sexually available until she weans her baby and this takes at least three years. A man cannot be expected to wait that long. Therefore, out of natural urge to satisfy sexual needs the husband is expected to have more than one wife in the hope that they will not all be nursing at the same time.

There is one other consideration. Many traditional African societies experienced inter-ethnic wars in the past. During those times, young men at the prime of their lives had to serve their communities by participating in warfare. Many were killed in the process. This often led to an excess of females over males. In societies in which it is unacceptable for women to remain single for life, one way out is for men, who can afford it, to marry more than one wife.

What should be noticed here is that all these considerations, except the last, seem to be to the advantage of the man. The money that is made on the farms goes to the man, though as I will explain later, this is one area in which the women may exploit the situation to their advantage. In most of these traditional societies, it is also true that the father is thought of as having more claim to children than the mother and therefore it is his position in society that is mostly enhanced by having many. Finally, it is his sexual need that is considered, regarding the last argument above. Women in traditional society take this without much complaint because they have been socialized into the traditional value system.

But there are negative considerations as well. Even the economic consideration does not work one way. It is possible for diminishing returns to set in. For with increasing hands also come increasing mouths to feed. More important, however, are the internal problems that come with polygyny. As mentioned above, conflicts between the wives are almost unavoidable in many cases. This is the basis of Orunmila's counsel against polygyny. Orunmila is believed to advise his devotees to avoid many wives, perhaps following his own experience of domestic unrest that comes with it:

Okansoso l'obinrin dun moo loode oko
Bi won ba di meji, won a di ojowu ...
Bi won ba di meta, won a deta ntule [Abimbola (1975,
p.112)]

It is advisable for a man to have only one wife,
When there are two wives
They become rivals
When they increase to three
They destroy the home

Orunmila is certainly in a position to know better. Of course, one may react here that monogamous marriages also involve a lot of quarrels and conflicts and that it is only a matter of degree. But polygyny has more problems. As Abimbola interprets this poem, "it is not a condemnation of polygamy but rather an analysis of the problems involved in it such as rivalry, fighting, wickedness and witchcraft. Polygamy creates a favourable atmosphere for these marital problems which are

not absent but minimal in a monogamous situation." [Abimbola (1975, p.112)] For instance, there is the problem of conflict between the children, especially after the death of the father. Where a father has a lot of wealth, and he dies intestate as it usually happens in many traditional societies, the problem often arises as to who gets what.

However, all these pros and cons are practical in nature, and the question may still be raised whether there is any independent moral consideration outside these practical matters which can be applied to judge the rightness or wrongness of polygyny on a traditional culture. It seems to me that we cannot judge the morality of the institution outside of those considerations, and that if we confine ourselves to examining these considerations, we may come up with a basis for judgment. For instance, as I have observed, the pro-considerations all seem to favour the man, thus making the woman an instrument for satisfying the man's needs. Second, the negative considerations indicate for us that the arguments against seem to be more cogent than those in the light of the internal problems highlighted.

Does this suggest that monogamy is a better form of marriage? I have not addressed this question. Indeed, in the foregoing, I have not been directly concerned with a comparison of monogamy and polygyny. Rather, I have focused on the ethic of polygyny, examining its presuppositions from a normative perspective. One thing is clear, though. Between monogamy and polygyny, we may not have a clear morally sanctioned choice. For it is possible that what we regard as a feature of polygyny, namely the underlying assumption concerning the status of women and the apparent domination by male which it seems to enjoin, may not be entirely absent from monogamy. Just as male evolved ideology has supported monogamy as a norm in polygynous cultures, it has supported monogamy in monogamous cultures. Ironically, however, it seems that polygynous cultures have a better prospect to supersede this ideology and break the tradition of domination which it sustains. First, in polygynous cultures, there is room for choice; there is none in monogamous cultures. In traditional African societies, a person is allowed to enter into either monogamous or polygynous relationships. There is no legal force. In Western monogamous cultures, on the other hand, there is legal constraint, and polygyny cannot even be voluntarily entered into. This seems to place an un-

necessary limit on individual choice in a matter which should be strictly for individuals to decide.

Second, the reality of domestic power structure in polygynous families does not often reflect the assumption of male domination that polygyny normally suggests. In practice, the women may exert more power than the man. First, they market the produce from the farm and may conspire effectively to deliver anything they like to the man. He is at their mercy in this regard. Second, if they want, and depending on their perception of the husband's treatment of them, they may decide to starve him in any way or pay him back in his coins. If the husband has a quarrel with one of the wives and there is mutual understanding among them, he is not likely to get any of the others on his side. Neither can he expect any of them to serve him in any way. So he will be forced to treat all of them with respect and take them seriously. This is well demonstrated in Ola Rotimi's Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again. In this play, the main character, Major Rahman (a man) found himself in a helpless position, a victim of his own strategies. He had been married to Liza, an educated woman while studying abroad. He returned home, leaving the woman behind to join him later. While back home, he had to inherit Mama Rashida, the wife of his late senior brother. The woman was very respectful, but she was not, in the judgment of Rahman, "presentable". Rahman then got interested in politics and he needed the support of the people that mattered. One such was the president of the National Association of Market Women. To secure her support, Rahman married Sikira, her daughter. Liza, the educated wife returned from abroad to discover that her man had two other wives beside her. She was furious, but decided to stay after he had apologized and explained the situation. It was not easy, of course, as Sikira, the younger woman, the daughter of the female power-broker felt threatened by the arrival of the "academic" woman. As time went on, however, they became friends. Liza, in spite of objections from Rahman taught the other two women useful lessons on self-reliance and independence. Rahman did not like this as his position in the house and outside was threatened. In the end, the lessons worked, and the political ambition of the man was shattered as the women took over.

It seems to me, therefore, that one consideration in favour of polygyny, lies in this: an institution, in many cases dictated by assumptions of male superiority in male dominated structures, may, with a better consciousness on the part of women, work for their emancipation. But this is not all. For it is also possible that good humane relationship exists between the man and the wives as well as between the co-wives, and that they are able to pass this on to their offspring. Indeed, it is possible that originally, between a man and two or more women, this humane consideration is the basis of the relationship. If so, then, morally speaking, it should not matter what form of marriage it is. As W.E. Abraham once argued: "If it is, it is clear that it cannot be the partnership aspect of marriage which makes polygamy immoral. Many partners are polypartnership. Even companionship and friendship do not require to be restricted to two persons to be successful. If getting married once is not immoral, getting married twice cannot be immoral." [Abraham (1962, p.190)] The essential thing, then, is the relationship and the image of the participants that lends support to the system. If the image of women as subordinate to men and as objects or properties of men is transcended, and a polygynous relationship is founded on mutual respect, love and understanding among the partners, with a view to enhancing human relationships, then there may be nothing profoundly repugnant about polygyny.*)

*) Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Colgate University, Hamilton; Ohio University, Athens; and the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Canadian Association of African Studies, Toronto, 1991 and at the 11th Annual SSIPS/SAGP Conference on Ethics, Aesthetics and Ontology, Columbia University, October, 1992. I am grateful for the very helpful comments I received from the audiences at these institutions and conferences.

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Summary

The desire for democracy, which is so strongly expressed in Africa today, involves clear dangers if democracy is not understood well as a system of government.

This article aims at expressing the essence of democracy: a strategy to select the best persons, structures, ideas and decisions within a society. Such a system requires the expression of the qualities of individuals. It requires, on the part of the governors as well as on the part of the governed, great moral and intellectual qualities. These qualities should help to overcome the risks inherent in democracy: like the slowness of decisionmaking, bad time-management, a tendency to anarchy and tyranny of the majority.

The article indicates that democracy is the most difficult form of government, but that it is also inevitable, because it is the most desired system and best suited to effect the development of nations.

LA VRAIE FACE DE LA DEMOCRATIE

Définition, Vertus et Limites

P. Ngoma-Binda

Avec les profonds changements idéologiques et politiques qui se sont opérés en Europe de l'Est, l'idée est de plus en plus acquise, à travers le monde entier, que la démocratie libérale constitue la forme de gouvernement la meilleure. Il n'est plus de doute que c'est cette forme de gestion des hommes et des nations qui conduit le plus rapidement à l'épanouissement c'est-à-dire au développement spirituel et matériel des individus et des sociétés. En Afrique, cette conviction est aujourd'hui profonde dans la tête des intellectuels ainsi que dans le coeur des masses longtemps victimes d'une gestion politique dictatoriale et irrationnelle.

C'est principalement en faveur de ces masses que René Dumont s'est récemment appliqué, dans un livre pathétique [Dumont et Paquet (1991)], à montrer pour l'Afrique cette implication nécessaire du développement par la démocratie. Sa thèse majeure est qu'il n'y a "pas de développement sans démocratie". Quiconque s'oppose à la démocratie s'oppose par le fait même à la liberté et au développement. Et c'est également cette position que j'ai soutenue dans une étude antérieure [Ngoma-Binda (1990a et 1990b)] qui fait voir que la démocratie est la stratégie de gestion politique la plus apte à conduire au développement économique. Et il faut ajouter ceci: le fait même que de nombreuses nations africaines s'agitent actuellement, exprimant fortement leur volonté de liberté par la tenue des "Conférences Nationales Souveraines", prouve à suffisance la justesse de la conviction intuitive relative à l'excellence de la démocratie comme "force civilisatrice" de l'individu, des nations et de l'humanité. [Lipton (1972, p.17)]

Mais, plus nous sommes convaincus de la supériorité du gouvernement démocratique, grâce à ses avantages comparativement énormes face à tout autre mode de gestion politique plus, me semble-t-il, notre attention tend à se relâcher vis-à-vis de l'exigence intellectuelle de

devoir saisir correctement la nature comme la portée, les préalables comme les implications majeures de la réalité démocratique. En tout cas, en écoutant les débats et en regardant les faits de la scène politique du Zaïre depuis avril 1990 et de maints autres pays africains dont les peuples clament la volonté de libération, il est incontestable que les notions de base de la démocratie sont encore loin d'être claires dans les esprits. Involontaires ou pas, ces carences, confusions et imprécisions dans la compréhension de la réalité démocratique et dans la saisie des stratégies de sa mise en route sont largement préjudiciables à la réalisation du bien-être des Africains.

C'est pourquoi, je me propose de montrer l'autre face de certaines évidences et compréhensions superficielles de la démocratie, en tâchant de relever quelques facettes généralement oubliées. Plus exactement, je procède à une *redéfinition* de la démocratie en partant de quelques thèses convergeant toutes vers l'idée principale que la démocratie constitue l'outil politico-intellectuel le plus à même de favoriser le développement économique si et seulement si elle est perçue comme une stratégie de germination et de sélection des forces, personnes, idées et décisions les meilleures par la voie électorale consensuelle; stratégie fondée sur les vertus les meilleures, les plus élevés de l'homme, et renforcée par le contrôle permanent ainsi que la sanction sans complaisance, par le peuple, de ces personnes les meilleures qui auront été choisies.

I La démocratie comme stratégie de sélection des meilleurs

C'est à Abraham Lincoln que le monde doit la définition la plus ramassée et la plus célèbre de la démocratie: gouvernement du peuple par le peuple pour le peuple. Il la tirait de l'étymologie de ce mot. L'on sait en effet que du point de vue de l'étymologie, "démocratie" renvoie au pouvoir politique que seul le peuple est censé détenir, gérer, distribuer et contrôler. Appartenant au peuple, le pouvoir dans la société démocratique moderne n'est la propriété de personne, il n'appartient à aucun individu, fût-il le prince comme dans la monar-

chie ancienne. Le pouvoir est, comme dit Claude Lefort [1986, p.27], un pouvoir désincarné, désincorporé c'est-à-dire non confisqué par un individu ou un groupe d'individus qui en disposeraient à leur guise. En démocratie, le lieu du pouvoir est un "lieu vide" au sein duquel le dispositif institutionnel "interdit aux gouvernants de s'approprier, de s'incorporer le pouvoir". Dans la société démocratique seul le peuple, collectivement, est la source du pouvoir de décision, de commandement, d'organisation et de transfert du pouvoir. Autrement dit, pour qu'il soit légitime, le pouvoir a à passer par l'approbation et le consentement du peuple qui entend le mettre au service de tous les citoyens, en toute égalité et en toute justice. Propriétaire du pouvoir, le peuple en garantit la légitimité et en détermine seul les modes d'incarnation dans la société, à travers le droit, pour la réalisation maximale de son propre être comme peuple ou nation.

A propos de cette définition "démocentrique", il y a deux précisions majeures qu'il importe de faire. Ces précisions, liées aux deux termes grecs qui composent le mot démocratie, ont pour objectif de réviser et de réévaluer la définition lincolnienne de la démocratie en soulignant l'exigence de la possession préalable, par le peuple, et principalement par le peuple gouvernant, des qualités morales et intellectuelles les meilleures possibles. Il est donc question de relativiser certaines des évidences reçues à propos de la démocratie.

1.1 A propos de la démocratie comme débat d'idées

Il est utile de faire voir, en tout premier lieu, que définir la démocratie comme, sans plus, un débat d'idées, c'est témoigner d'une certaine pauvreté d'intelligence politique¹. Une telle pauvreté définitionnelle est due au fait qu'on manque de remarquer que le mot grec "cratie" du concept démocratie provient du verbe *kratein* qui signifie "être le plus fort, l'emporter, exercer un pouvoir fondé sur un rapport de forces et non sur un débat: le *kratos* s'oppose au *logos*, il n'a d'autre légitimité que la domination et c'est un pouvoir de fait fondé sur le conflit". [Escaprit (1986, p.337)] Contrairement donc à ce que

l'on a coutume de croire et de prêcher, la démocratie est d'abord un rapport de forces et non un débat d'idées. Je ne veux point faire entendre que le débat d'idées ne soit pas important voire essentiel dans la pratique démocratique. Mais il n'en est que l'un des éléments de stratégie essentiels dans le conflit ou la lutte concurrentielle qui tente de basculer le rapport des forces dans un camp ou dans un autre. Celui qui l'emporte, grâce aux diverses stratégies mises en route - dont le débat d'idées, c'est celui-là qui, désormais, peut *arkhein* c'est-à-dire qui a le pouvoir de commander, de diriger, de prendre la tête (suivant la *hiérarchie* qui s'impose) dans la direction des affaires publiques.

Le débat d'idées n'est ni l'essence de la démocratie ni même la stratégie majeure de l'effectuation démocratique. L'élément majeur c'est la reconnaissance de l'existence de la pluralité et donc du rapport des forces, du *conflit* non seulement d'idées mais aussi de classes, de situations et d'intérêts divers. Et le moyen le plus efficace de résoudre ce conflit passe nécessairement par le *logos partagé*, échangé, c'est-à-dire par le dialogue (peu important, dès l'abord, la nature et la pertinence des différentes idées en compétition dont les unes peuvent d'ailleurs être tout à fait idiotes). Par conséquent, il est plus exact de concevoir la démocratie non comme essentiellement un débat d'idées mais comme un **mode d'arbitrage ou d'harmonisation des conflits** (toujours déjà existants parce que inhérents au désir d'être et de subsister inscrit dans le coeur de chaque individu) au **moyen entre autres du dialogue, de la parole échangée.**

Et l'on doit bien prendre soin de remarquer que cette parole échangée n'est pas n'importe quelle parole. La démocratie véritable c'est-à-dire avancée, située à un haut degré dans la réalisation de l'idéal démocratique, requiert le *logos*, la parole logique c'est-à-dire rationnelle et raisonnable, à la fois. Ceci implique que même dans le cas où la démocratie serait définie comme débat d'idées, on devra toujours ajouter qu'il s'agit d'un "débat logique" c'est-à-dire rationnel et raisonnable. L'importance de souligner cette façon de comprendre la chose démocratique réside en ceci qu'elle nous permet de détruire l'idée spacieuse insinuée dans la démocratie regardée comme débat

d'idées, celle qui tend à accréditer la force de la parole ou le simple *exercice rhétorique* comme étant le tout et l'essence de la démocratie. Si elle était simplement un débat d'idées, la démocratie ne serait rien d'autre que du sophisme, la seule habileté dans le maniement de la langue désignant le chemin à suivre, quel que soit où il mène, vers le bien ou vers son contraire, et désignant le chemin à suivre selon les humeurs propres ainsi que la force de persuasion verbale auprès de la masse de celui qui tient le discours. Ce serait de la logomachie, une arène d'émulation rhétorique vide de contenu. Si on la pense être un débat d'idées, la démocratie serait encore mieux appréhendée si on la définissait comme un débat *sensé* d'idées *sensées* c'est-à-dire un débat investi de rationalité et de moralité.

Egalement, notre conception de la démocratie comme *gestion et arbitrage logique c'est-à-dire rationnelle et pacifique des conflits* détruit cette autre idée insinuée (dans le "débat d'idées") comme possibilité de libre ouverture à la démagogie, comme pavanement oratoire versant dans l'immoralité du mensonge et de la flatterie au moyen de fausses promesses énoncées avec grandiloquence et tintamarre. La démocratie n'est ni démagogie ni joute rhétorique ni même débat d'idées. Elle est une technique politico-morale de gestion des libertés et des conflits d'idées et d'intérêts au moyen de diverses structures, dont la structure dialogale.

1.2 A propos du gouvernement par le peuple: l'exigence d'émulation qualitative

La seconde précision corrective que j'aimerais apporter est relative au concept "demos" c'est-à-dire à la nature de ce *peuple* qui détient le pouvoir de diriger les affaires publiques et qui en garantit la légitimité. Et je soutiens que de ce concept nébuleux et polysémique il convient de choisir le sens le plus raffiné, débarrassé d'impuretés par l'histoire de la pensée politique, et le plus conforme à la réalité de l'exercice moderne du pouvoir politique. A cet effet, il m'apparaît que le concept "peuple" doit se saisir en un sens qui a évolué, selon trois

scansions majeures, au cours des temps et des raffinements philosophiques.

Dans la démocratie athénienne le peuple, *demos*, c'est d'abord l'ensemble des habitants de la nation, quels qu'ils soient, jeunes ou vieux, femmes ou hommes. Tout habitant de la nation fait partie du peuple et, comme tel, bénéficie des droits et est astreint à des obligations précises. Mais on remarquera très vite la nécessité de forger le concept de *citoyen*, comme fils de la nation, à qui seul sera reconnu le droit politique i.e. le droit de participation à la gestion des affaires publiques. Est par conséquent exclu : tout habitant qui ne bénéficie pas du droit de citoyenneté.

Mais cette exclusion ne se limite pas aux seuls étrangers, les métèques, et aux esclaves. Les enfants ainsi que toutes les personnes physiquement faibles, dont les femmes, sont également exclus de la catégorie du peuple apte à gouverner. Les affaires de l'Etat doivent être dirigées, selon le voeu même du peuple, par des personnes dynamiques et courageuses, capables de grand travail et d'énergie morale importante. Car la victoire au sein de la lutte politique exige force et courage. C'est ainsi que, jusqu'à une époque récente, les femmes n'étaient guère comprises, dans les sociétés démocratiques occidentales, parmi ce peuple capable de l'emporter et de diriger, parce que jugées faibles et peu courageuses. Elles étaient bonnes, comme on dit en Allemagne, juste pour les enfants, la cuisine et l'église, et non pour la politique.

Une troisième exclusion c'est celle qui concerne les ignorants, les incompetents et toutes autres personnes intellectuellement et moralement incertaines. L'affirmation la plus importante de cette vision politique est celle de Platon qui entend réserver les tâches de gestion politique aux seuls philosophes c'est-à-dire, dans le contexte moderne, aux personnes de grande compétence et de haute qualification intellectuelle. C'est que le commandement et la direction des affaires publiques est une chose trop importante pour être laissée entre les mains du premier venu. Seuls les hommes formés, intelligents, compétents et intègres sont capables de parole logique, capables de prendre la parole en public pour dire quelque chose de sensé qui puisse emporter

l'adhésion et contraindre l'adversaire à courber l'échine. Et c'est à ce niveau seul qu'il faut accepter la démocratie comme lutte politique, comme combat d'idées, de programmes, mais aussi et surtout comme lutte des qualifications, émulation qualitative des compétences. Mais alors on voit bien que, dans cette lutte serrée, le concept de peuple apte à diriger se réduit inévitablement à l'*élite* parmi l'ensemble d'habitants de la nation. C'est en fait ce petit nombre de personnes qui exerce le pouvoir, qui prend la tête des affaires de l'Etat, parce qu'il l'emporte, qu'il est le plus fort au niveau de la compétition intellectuelle et morale. La compétition politique devient ainsi synonyme de compétition des qualités.

Ainsi, contrairement à ce que l'on fait habituellement entendre, il n'est jamais question, dans la démocratie, d'un quelconque gouvernement *par* le peuple, dans le sens de l'ensemble des citoyens, mais plutôt du gouvernement par une minorité politiquement qualifiée. Et la notion moderne de "démocratie représentative" fait bien voir justement le caractère incontournable de la sélection des meilleurs, de l'extraction de l'*élite* du sein du peuple pour tenir la tête des affaires communes. Et ce qui importe c'est que l'exercice du pouvoir par la minorité dirigeante trouve sa légitimité dans le fait du consentement, par le peuple, à ce qu'elle puisse assumer cet exercice; et plus encore, ce qui importe c'est le fait que la majorité du peuple, persuadée des qualités intellectuelles, morales et dirigeantes de l'*élite* sélectionnée, décide de confier l'exercice du pouvoir à cette dernière. De la sorte, le pouvoir exercé par la minorité lui est délégué par le peuple, mieux, par la branche majoritaire du peuple qui l'aura emporté, et qui lui fait confiance, qui est assurée que la minorité exercera le pouvoir à sa place selon les aspirations et les objectifs de la branche majoritaire.

C'est cette conception de la démocratie comme représentation qui est acceptée et mis en pratique, inévitablement, dans les sociétés modernes aux vastes dimensions. La démocratie directe ou radicale, celle où chacun des citoyens serait effectivement au pouvoir et prendrait part à toutes les décisions politiques, n'est possible qu'à un peuple d'anges ou de dieux, comme disait Rousseau. La démocratie

doit donc se définir comme gouvernement des représentants; et cette représentation signifie recours à l'aspect qualitatif. C'est pourquoi, à notre époque moderne, la définition exacte de la démocratie est celle qui doit la décrire comme le *gouvernement du peuple pour le peuple par les meilleurs élus par le peuple*. De ce fait, la démocratie se donne non comme une essence mais comme une stratégie d'exclusion des faibles et des médiocres de la gestion du pays et des biens publics, pour ne retenir que les plus aptes, les meilleurs. La démocratie est une stratégie, un instrument de sélection des ressources humaines des idées et des décisions les meilleures, c'est-à-dire celles qui sont les plus susceptibles de conduire à une réalisation maximale des objectifs que l'ensemble des membres de la communauté se fixe. Elle correspond à une exigence d'émulation qualitative. Gouvernement des meilleurs parmi le peuple pour le peuple, la démocratie comporte de fortes chances de produire le maximum de bénéfices pour l'ensemble des citoyens.

On voit bien que cette exigence présuppose que l'élite intellectuelle et morale (des personnes à la fois qualifiées sur le plan intellectuel et dotées d'une intégrité morale remarquable) comprenne la nécessité de s'intéresser à la pratique politique et donc d'entrer effectivement dans la compétition politique où le peuple sélectionne et retient les meilleurs. Or bien souvent c'est le contraire qui apparaît, dans une espèce de paradoxe. L'élite intellectuelle et morale révèle cette tendance à vouloir se replier sur son propre travail originel dans le calme, la discrétion et dans une espèce de dédain de ce monde politique turbulent où même les moyens immoraux ne sont guère dédaignés. En général donc la véritable élite (intellectuelle et morale) se réserve. Et en cela même elle laisse malheureusement aux médiocres l'occasion d'occuper et de dénaturer l'espace politique qui, par sa vocation, est censé être celui-là même le plus ordonné, le plus rigoureux et le plus exemplaire sur le plan du respect des principes conduisant à l'excellence dans la vie sociale.

La démocratie ne peut tenir que sur le ciment de la vertu, intellectuelle et morale. Et elle ne peut avancer correctement que si les

personnes les plus aptes, au lieu de regarder avec indifférence la caravane passer, se chargent de la responsabilité de mettre la main à la pâte. Et en tant qu'elles sont qualifiées, ces personnes ont l'obligation civique et morale de rendre le maximum de service à la communauté, de se placer à la direction la plus élevée des affaires publiques. Car, si dans l'arène politique seuls les médiocres (c'est-à-dire la race rapace des menteurs, démagogues, égoïstes et aventuriers en mal de prestige et d'avantages matériels) se présentent, le peuple sera malgré lui contraint de choisir les moins mauvais parmi ces médiocres. Dans pareille situation du pays des aveugles où les borgnes sont rois, on devine aisément l'ampleur de la catastrophe lorsqu'il est requis, comme dans le gouvernement des nations, d'avoir mieux qu'ailleurs toutes ses facultés. Par conséquent la règle de sélection dans toute démocratie qui se veut de qualité est claire: il est question de toujours choisir non pas les moins mauvais parmi les médiocres mais plutôt les moins mauvais parmi les meilleurs, à défaut de choisir les meilleurs parmi les meilleurs.

Mais quelles sont, concrètement, les qualités que ces meilleurs parmi les représentants au gouvernement sont censés posséder et qui permettent de maximiser les chances de succès de toute la communauté?

2 Les qualités ou vertus démocratique des meilleurs

Les qualités démocratiques s'enracinent dans les vertus fondamentales qui constituent la nature de l'homme et qui font sa dignité humaine: la rationalité et la moralité. En effet les chances d'augmenter l'efficacité de la productivité d'une organisation politique, économique, sociale ou culturelle se destinant au développement du peuple, résident essentiellement dans le fait de la mise en oeuvre des techniques précises fondées sur les vertus intellectuelles et morales. Même la démocratie capitaliste moderne ne survit que parce qu'elle se fonde sur ces vertus [Novak (1987) et McClosky et Zaller (1990)]. En effet, la double opération d'exclusion des cancre et de sélection des élites se

réalise sous la forme du conflit. Mais il s'agit d'un conflit, géré pacifiquement, entre des intérêts opposés, des visions du monde divergentes et des points de vue différents quant aux solutions relatives à l'organisation de la société.

C'est ainsi que la démocratie se donne comme une gestion intellectuelle et morale de la société, ou de l'entreprise. En tant que gestion, elle fait nécessairement recours à l'intelligence qualifiée, car là où l'organisation désire se réaliser sans l'intelligence c'est-à-dire sans la rationalité, il ne peut jamais y avoir de gestion mais du tâtonnement, du bricolage, de la gesticulation désordonnée et un enlisement sans fin, sans jamais aboutir à un quelconque résultat positif. Gérer une organisation c'est déployer les principes de la rationalité économique c'est-à-dire de l'ordre et de l'épargne, de la réduction des dépenses et coûts de production, et de l'accroissement des chances d'un rendement toujours plus important.

Mais la démocratie n'est pas une gestion simplement intellectuelle des affaires publiques ou privées. La compétence intellectuelle n'est réellement efficiente que si elle s'accompagne de la compétence morale. C'est ainsi que toute démocratie véritable se veut une *gestion morale*, et cela à un double titre. D'abord par ses propres contraintes internes, elle obéit à des règles qui la censurent. Elle s'autocensure, pour ne point devoir se déployer de n'importe quelle manière, au nom précisément de l'efficacité à sauvegarder et du rendement à maximiser [voir Novak (1987)]. La gestion démocratique obéit donc à des normes qui sont propres à toute bonne gestion. Elle est normée, et répond à une certaine moralité. Mais, à un titre plus évident, la gestion démocratique est morale en tant qu'elle ne peut se réaliser qu'en faisant appel aux vertus morales externes, qui sont intrinsèquement des normes d'exclusion et de sélection démocratiques.

De toutes les vertus morales qui fondent la démocratie, il me semble découler trois qualités principales, sur le plan pratique, qui englobent toutes les autres. Il s'agit de la transparence, de la disponibilité à l'écoute, et de la possibilité d'exercice de la liberté souveraine de l'individu.

2.1 La transparence démocratique

La *transparence* est l'une des vertus cardinales de la démocratie. Elle signifie sincérité dans les rapports interindividuels et clarté dans la gestion des affaires. Elle implique la mise à la disposition du peuple concerné de toutes les informations nécessaires, principalement les informations névralgiques c'est-à-dire celles qui concernent la gestion des ressources humaines et financières. Toute gestion qui manque de transparence émousse la confiance du partenaire ou de l'ouvrier. Par contre, la confiance augmente avec l'augmentation de la transparence dans les rapports et dans la gestion. La transparence fait régner la confiance, génère l'entrain et la disponibilité au dévouement et à la générosité en faveur de l'affaire dont l'individu se sent désormais co-responsable, dans la réussite comme dans l'échec.

La transparence suppose la sincérité, la loyauté, la discipline et la fidélité vis-à-vis des règles du jeu définies, démocratiquement, au sein de l'organisation ou de la communauté. En conséquence, elle exclut le mensonge, la fourberie ainsi que toute tendance à confisquer pour soi-même les données et les informations intéressantes. Dans toute entreprise commune, toute personne qui met en avant la vertu de la transparence dans la gestion sème la confiance, accroît le rendement, renforce la dignité et le bonheur de la communauté.

Mais également, la transparence permet de diminuer les coûts et les efforts intellectuels et physiques à investir dans la recherche des moyens d'éviter le vol et la fraude au sein de l'entreprise ou de la société nationale. Dans la mesure où la transparence constitue une vertu morale génératrice de confiance, elle est par le fait même un instrument de réduction des frais moraux et financiers à consentir à travers les punitions à infliger et la surveillance excessive à assurer dans le but d'éviter la fraude [voir Homann (1988) et Koslowski (1988)]. S'il est vrai qu'aucune organisation ne peut durablement fonctionner avec le maximum d'efficacité sans un important capital de confiance de ses membres les uns à l'égard des autres, il faut alors se convaincre que la transparence constitue une vertu fondamentale dans

la marche des affaires, privées ou publiques, économiques ou politiques. Elle diminue les suspicions et les revendications inconsidérées.

2.2 Savoir écouter l'autre: la vertu d'humilité

La deuxième vertu fondamentale de la démocratie comme gestion morale c'est la **disponibilité à l'écoute de l'autre**. L'autre est différent de soi et, généralement, conçoit autrement les problèmes. La démocratie se réalise au sein donc de la confrontation des conceptions et des différences. En fait, il ne peut y avoir de confrontation que si de part et d'autre existe un minimum de disposition au respect des idées qui contredisent les siennes propres. Cette disponibilité est un signe d'humilité et de tolérance c'est-à-dire d'esprit de justice, d'acceptation de la négociation dialogale et de prise en compte de l'autre comme interlocuteur égal et face à qui l'on a des obligations.

Si ces vertus sont absentes, il ne peut pas y avoir un quelconque espace de confrontation conceptuelle; il y a alors écrasement par l'un de la conception et du libre choix de l'autre. Ainsi, la disponibilité à l'écoute écarte la dictature et la violence, permet d'atteindre un degré de vérité susceptible d'accorder les conceptions et les intérêts divergents. De la sorte, la démocratie est, sous l'aspect de la disponibilité à l'écoute, une **technique de la recherche du consensus** dans la vision des choses et la prise des décisions. Elle est une technique, d'ordre moral, visant à prendre collégialement les décisions au moyen de la négociation. Cette technique présuppose que la confrontation négociatrice des idées et des intérêts constitue la seule voie, moralement saine et intellectuellement la plus adéquate, pour faire naître la vérité qui accorde toutes les parties en présence. Or il est de l'essence même de la négociation de nécessiter que chacune des parties prenantes consente à renoncer à l'exclusivisme, à abandonner le noyau dogmatique de ses prétentions. Etre démocrate, c'est savoir écouter l'autre. Et c'est, par conséquent, faire acte d'humilité, de justice et de sagesse.

2.3 La garantie d'une égale liberté pour tous

Et la troisième vertu qui achève de donner un caractère démocratique à un esprit ou à une organisation socio-économique c'est la **garantie, à chaque membre de la société, de l'exercice de la liberté et de ses droits.** La liberté est considérée ici non pas sous l'angle du fondement mais plutôt sous celui de la *pratique* de la liberté. Gérer démocratiquement c'est permettre aux autres, ses associés dans la nation ou dans l'entreprise, d'exprimer librement leurs choix et préférences. On ne peut jamais parler de démocratie dans une organisation sociale où la libre expression des idées fait défaut. Celle-ci permet à un plus grand nombre de citoyens de prendre part à la politique, d'avoir à exprimer leurs points de vue eu égard à la marche des affaires publiques. Pour cela, la société qui se veut démocratique met en place des structures de garantie des chances égales pour tous, pour emprunter le langage de Rawls, de pouvoir évoluer librement au sein de la société.

Cette liberté d'expression des idées donne l'avantage à la société de disposer d'un vaste éventail d'outils intellectuels au sein desquels il est possible d'extraire les meilleurs. La pluralité d'idées diminue la fréquence des erreurs et des décisions idiotes. Car là où une seule voix s'exprime, réduisant au silence toutes les autres (comme dans le cas des partis uniques qui ont confisqué et détruit l'Afrique), il y a généralement accumulation des erreurs et des idioties. La privation de la liberté d'expression tue lentement la nation ou l'entreprise, d'une double manière: par l'accroissement de sa propre cécité vis-à-vis de ses erreurs, et par le désengagement progressif des membres frustrés.

La liberté d'expression des idées, la disponibilité à l'écoute ainsi que la transparence dans la gestion des ressources, des personnes et des affaires forment, ensemble, un état d'esprit spécifique: **l'esprit démocratique.** La démocratie est un état d'esprit fait de la volonté permanente de vivre les vertus morales de la transparence, de l'ouverture généreuse et attentive à l'autre, et de l'épanouissement pour tous de la liberté. Mais cet effort d'incarnation des exigences de gestion

rationnelle et morale ne va pas sans difficultés. Il est nécessaire donc d'indiquer à la volonté africaine de démocratie quelques-uns des paradoxes et limites ou défaillances de la réalité démocratique.

3 Les limites de la démocratie

S'il n'est pas facile pour une personne humaine de mener une vie constamment morale, il l'est encore moins pour un groupement humain composé d'humeurs, de conduites et de caractères divers. Il n'est donc pas aisé de faire preuve, à tout instant et en toute chose, d'un esprit démocratique dans son comportement public. En effet, si la démocratie est la forme de gestion la meilleure au monde, elle est aussi la plus difficile à réaliser. En évoquant les difficultés de la démocratie, qui se donnent comme des limites malheureuses, je pense pouvoir compléter et réviser le tableau des évidences généralement énoncées à propos de la démocratie. A côté donc des difficultés de compréhension de la théorie démocratique en terme de "débat d'idées" et de "gouvernement *par* le peuple", il y en a d'autres, relatives à la pratique, dont la gestion du temps, la règle de la majorité et la tentation anarchiste.

3.1 Une gestion laborieuse du temps

L'une des limites ou difficultés à reconnaître à la pratique de la démocratie concerne la gestion du temps. La démocratie exige en effet un grand effort moral et un long processus de *négociation laborieuse* allant parfois jusqu'à perdre du temps avant d'obtenir le consensus, contrairement à la dictature qui impose impérieusement ses orientations, sans rencontrer le moindre obstacle. Dans ce processus de négociation, chacun a le droit de prendre la parole et d'exprimer sa vision des choses. Même les idiots et les tapageurs ont ce droit, et l'on est obligé de les écouter, parfois longuement. La démocratie exige certes de la patience. Mais, assez souvent, elle dérape et sombre dans des joutes oratoires interminables. Et, en plus de la fatigue physique, la perte de temps en est l'une des conséquences graves.

C'est ce défaut qui est généralement dénoncé dans la démocratie traditionnelle africaine qui ne semble point connaître de limite de temps dans ses longues "palabres". Mais, en fait, ce n'est pas le propre de la démocratie africaine de tirer les débats en longueur. Même dans les sociétés modernes, africaines et occidentales, toute discussion démocratique d'une question importante prend du temps. On en a la preuve dans les débats des parlements, des cours et tribunaux, des tables rondes, conférence nationales et autres rassemblements, qui peuvent prendre des mois entiers [La Conférence Nationale Souveraine, au Zaïre, a duré seize mois, du 7 août 1991 au 6 décembre 1992, et a dû être stoppée d'autorité par le Président de la République].

Toute démocratie exige de la patience et du temps; mais une démocratie mal gérée fait perdre beaucoup de temps. Et chacun sait que qui perd du temps, perd de l'argent, et perd la possibilité de progrès rapide. La lenteur du processus décisionnel dans la démocratie peut ralentir le progrès. En ce siècle de la vitesse supersonique, la vie et le succès appartiennent à celui qui sait gérer le temps et qui sait être le plus rapide. C'est que pour compter parmi les meilleurs au sein du peuple, l'on doit savoir gérer non seulement les hommes, les ressources matérielles et les idées, mais aussi le temps. Dans la théorie économique le temps est un facteur d'importance capitale. Quiconque est bon gestionnaire du temps est potentiellement bon gestionnaire des affaires. La gestion des débats et du temps requiert donc de grandes qualités d'habileté, de fermeté, de saisie rapide, de discernement et de synthèse de l'essentiel des choses.

3.2 Démocratie: victoire de la majorité?

La deuxième difficulté ou limite de la démocratie, et sans doute la plus fâcheuse, est l'absurdité ou la déraison tyrannique qu'entraîne parfois la règle de la majorité. L'on sait que la pratique démocratique se fonde, en ce qui concerne le processus décisionnel, sur l'importance numérique des membres participants. La décision est en faveur de la position exprimée par le plus grand nombre de personnes. Et cette

décision se prend, habituellement, sous forme de vote. L'emportant, "la majorité" est autorisée à faire passer son programme politique, et la minorité est obligée de se soumettre et d'obéir aux règles qu'elle met en place. De cette manière, la démocratie se présente, quoique imperceptiblement, comme une tyrannie de la majorité, et que Alexis de Tocqueville disait effrayante [voir aussi Hirschmann (1984, p.93)].

Mais elle est plus effrayante encore si cette majorité est incompétente, non instruite, non informée, et poussée par des considérations plutôt sentimentales que rationnelles et objectives. L'élection ou le vote dans une formation politique ou sociale peut constituer une auto-destruction lorsque la population est mal informée et qu'elle appréhende et analyse incorrectement les situations. L'on peut facilement imaginer l'étendue du désastre auquel conduirait la victoire de la majorité de neuf idiots sur dix votants dans des décisions d'importance vitale. Si la logique démocratique veut que c'est la majorité qui a raison, la réalité est que, malheureusement, la raison et la vérité peuvent bien se trouver du côté de la minorité. Cela fait voir aussi que ce principe de la majorité est en fait l'équivalent moderne du *tirage au sort* de la démocratie athénienne (que Socrate dénonçait en recherchant le règne de la raison), principalement là où les citoyens sont sous-informés sur les questions débattues et sur les termes de référence du choix à opérer, et là où les citoyens sont conduits par les sentiments (égoïstes et tribalocentriques notamment) plutôt que par la raison analytique.

La démocratie comme victoire de la majorité n'est justifiée en tant que principe politique que si cette majorité est éclairée, si elle est capable d'indépendance d'esprit et d'objectivité, c'est-à-dire si la majorité est reconnue apte à opérer des choix rationnels et raisonnables. Bref, la démocratie ne signifie pas seulement *nombre* mais aussi et surtout *qualité*: qualités intellectuelles et morales. Et nous revenons là à notre notion de "meilleur", d'excellence non seulement des représentants du peuple, mais aussi des *électeurs* de ces représentants, et qui doivent opérer le choix. Tout choix non fondé sur des analyses

et des arguments rationnels n'est rien d'autre qu'un tirage au sort minable.

L'une des manières les plus efficaces d'empêcher la majorité de s'exprimer en faveur d'une option dangereuse c'est de renforcer les possibilités de transparence et de clarté dans les affaires, et aussi de multiplier des occasions et structures de formation et information intellectuelle et politique susceptibles de permettre un degré suffisant de discernement et de choix rationnel. C'est dire que toute démocratie est sous-développée voire dangereuse si la majorité de la population est intellectuellement sous-développée et ignorante des réalités objectives de la société [voir Ngoma-Binda (1990a)]².

Mais un autre remède proposé contre la tyrannie de la majorité c'est le respect des minorités. Malheureusement, ainsi que je l'ai évoqué plus haut, l'expérience montre que cela n'est souvent qu'une belle proclamation d'intention. Le parti gagnant (la majorité) exerce sa loi c'est-à-dire applique son programme politique, contre vents et marées soulevés par l'Opposition jusqu'à ce que, peut-être aux élections suivantes, le pouvoir change de camp. Sauf scandale particulièrement grave, la majorité au pouvoir demeurera à la direction du gouvernement et mettra en oeuvre son projet de société, surtout s'il bénéficie également de la majorité au parlement. Dans cette logique, le respect des minorités (autres partis, ethnies, etc) doit exister certes, mais simplement en tant qu'application d'un droit reconnu naturel et universel: le respect des droits de l'*individu* en tant que personne physique ou morale. A y réfléchir en profondeur, on doit affirmer qu'il n'y a rien de spécifique dans la proclamation du respect des minorités. Elle signifie simplement la nécessité de devoir respecter les droits de l'homme (droit à la vie, à la liberté d'association, etc). La seule "minorité" qui vaille, si l'on veut bien penser radicalement les choses, c'est l'*individu*. Si ses droits sont respectés, les droits des groupements (toujours déjà constitués d'individus) devront également l'être par voie de conséquence. Et à la limite, toute notion de minorité devrait disparaître dans un régime véritablement démocratique.

3.3 La démocratie : case voisine de l'anarchie

En système démocratique, l'accentuation des droits de l'individu fait généralement oublier et les limites de la liberté, et les devoirs de l'individu vis-à-vis de l'Etat. Et c'est ici que nous rencontrons la troisième limite de la démocratie, à savoir la *tendance à l'anarchie* c'est-à-dire à des comportements excentriques voire extravagants au nom de la liberté individuelle. Dans les sociétés occidentales, particulièrement scrupuleuses sur le point du respect des droits de l'homme, il semble que l'on se retrouve face à des démocraties quasi ingouvernables. Face au déferlement sans précédent de toutes sortes de maladies sociales (terrorisme, revendications sexuelles, pornographie, drogue, etc) consécutives pour la plupart à des cris de plus en plus lancés en faveur de la liberté de l'individu cependant même que la société globale, en général conservatrice, exprime de plus en plus vivement la nostalgie de la morale classique, bien des gouvernements demeurent perplexes. Toutes ces pressions contradictoires réclament tirer leur légitimité des valeurs mêmes de la démocratie. Cela rend la décision délicate et difficile à prendre [Koslowski (éd.) (1987) et Löw, Koslowski et Spaemann (éds.) (1990)], surtout pour une démocratie qui refuse d'être ni molle ni trop forte. Une démocratie molle peut déboucher à l'anarchie; tandis qu'une démocratie forte peut encourir le reproche tant redouté de mouvoir aux voisinages de la dictature. Or, sous la pression internationale, la tendance des nations modernes est de laisser faire et de laisser passer. En tout cas il en a été et il en est encore ainsi, en bien des points de vue, dans l'Afrique moderne. On n'ose pas punir comme cela se doit, de peur de susciter la désapprobation des organisations et ligues des droits de l'homme. Et l'anarchie tend à se glisser dans les fibres de la société démocratique.

Si au Zaïre et dans les autres pays africains aujourd'hui en ébullition démocratique on ne fait pas attention au choix du juste milieu dans la gestion de la démocratie, on risque de se placer devant ce douloureux dilemme qui met face à face la dictature et l'anarchie. Au regard des premiers balbutiements de la démocratie actuellement en

construction dans nos pays, la possibilité de tomber dans l'un ou l'autre extrême est très grande. Pour contrer ce danger, le dirigeant n'a pas d'autre alternative que de se situer dans la position délicate et inconfortable de la gestion habile associant la bonté à la fermeté, la justice à la rigueur de la discipline, conformément à la loi, en un dosage qui doit prétendre à la justesse.

Ceci revient à dire que la démocratie est une *gestion de la liberté*. Gérer la liberté c'est la contrôler, en lui fixant des limites fermes, pour l'empêcher de s'abîmer dans des débordements. C'est se situer, comme le dit si bien James Buchanan [1975], entre l'anarchie et le Leviathan. En conséquence, cela doit acculer à tempérer l'optimisme habituellement affiché face à la démocratie perçue comme règne de la liberté. La démocratie bien comprise doit se définir non comme règne mais comme gestion de la liberté, une gestion laborieuse, rationnelle et habile qui fait précisément que la démocratie constitue la forme de gouvernement la plus difficile à mettre en oeuvre. La vraie démocratie est un espace du règne des devoirs, de la responsabilité de l'individu; responsabilité vis-à-vis de ce qui est permis et vis-à-vis de ce qui lui est interdit d'entreprendre.

Cette même conception de la démocratie comme règne de la liberté a produit de graves aberrations politiques dans les institutions de certains pays du monde libéral. L'une d'elles concerne cette liberté laissée aux individus (au nom du principe démocratique!) de participer ou non aux élections nationales.

Ce principe de la libre participation aux élections (obligation morale de la part du citoyen mais pas un devoir impératif) peut avoir des conséquences fâcheuses dans des situations où (et elles ne sont point rares) la participation aux élections est faible. Une telle situation peut donner l'impression que c'est l'expression de la volonté de la majorité qui apparaît même quand la participation est très faible, comme cela a été le cas, récemment, au Burkina Faso où le Président de la République, M. Blaise Compaoré, s'est fait élire *démocratiquement* par une très faible portion de la population au sein de laquelle s'est dégagée la majorité en sa faveur! On aura compris ici ma thèse:

dans une société démocratique le vote doit être obligatoire, en particulier lorsqu'il est question des matières d'importance capitale pour la nation (les élections législatives et présidentielles ainsi que le référendum constitutionnel, notamment).

Du reste il en est ainsi dans certains pays de l'Occident, comme la Belgique. Si la participation obligatoire au vote est prise comme une limitation douloureuse imposée à la liberté individuelle, sa pertinence s'impose au nom de l'intérêt supérieur de tous mais aussi par le fait que le vote constitue la plus grande chance offerte à tous les citoyens adultes de pouvoir participer directement aux affaires politiques de leur pays. Dans ce sens, elle doit être considérée plus comme un droit civique de l'individu que comme un devoir. Et c'est aussi le lieu de redire que la liberté signifie le droit de tout faire dans le cadre de tout ce qui est prescrit par la loi. Et ce cadre a ses limites, malheureusement ou heureusement pour l'individu.

Bref, toutes ces limites (que sont la possibilité de rhétorique démagogique, le danger d'extravagance des libertés, la tyrannie éventuelle de la règle de majorité, le risque de perte de temps et d'énergie, la difficulté de saisie correcte de la réalité démocratique) font que la démocratie est un outil de développement particulièrement délicat et difficile à utiliser. Mais, malheureusement, quelles que soient les failles qu'elle présente, la démocratie demeure le meilleur instrument politique pour atteindre le développement économique. Elle est incontournable pour toute organisation ou toute société qui cherche à progresser.

Ainsi l'Afrique actuelle, celle des masses, a-t-elle raison de revendiquer l'instauration de la démocratie sur son sol, contre les détenteurs du pouvoir qui sont persuadés d'avoir dirigé correctement jusqu'ici et qui estiment que la démocratie occidentale n'a pas à se présenter comme une marchandise impérialiste à exporter et à imposer à tout prix à la population africaine.

Conclusion

Transcendant les avantages matériels de leur position de pouvoir, les dirigeants africains ont l'obligation de comprendre que la démocratie constitue l'outil politique le plus efficace dans la recherche du progrès économique et du bonheur des peuples. Car la démocratie se définit comme une lutte concurrentielle réglementée, ordonnée et subordonnée à des procédures pacifiques, ayant pour visée de faciliter la sélection, par le peuple et parmi le peuple, des idées et ressources humaines les meilleures c'est-à-dire **les meilleurs gestionnaires du temps, de la parole, de la liberté, du pouvoir, et susceptibles de conduire au développement économique avec le plus de rapidité et aux coûts les plus faibles possibles**. La force principale de la démocratie réside en ceci qu'elle permet, grâce à la participation politique du plus grand nombre de citoyens, de sélectionner les gestionnaires les meilleurs et d'exclure les moins aptes au commandement et à la haute administration des affaires publiques.

Ainsi, la vie démocratique requiert de fins et parfaits gestionnaires de la liberté et de la justice c'est-à-dire de la démocratie parce que, plus que toute autre forme de gestion politique, la démocratie est la plus difficile à rendre effective. En effet, parce qu'elle exalte la liberté et le libéralisme, la démocratie est généralement encline à laisser les portes ouvertes à l'indiscipline et à l'anarchie. Et aussi, parce qu'elle valorise la justice et l'égalité, elle réclame de léser le moins possible les intérêts de chacun des membres impliqués dans l'organisation sociale ou économique concernée.

Seules les vertus morales peuvent contribuer à faire de l'homme compétent et formé un bon gestionnaire de la société et du pouvoir. Mais pour être un bon gestionnaire de la démocratie, on doit commencer par savoir se gérer soi-même, c'est-à-dire savoir gérer ses propres passions, sa conduite, ses humeurs, son temps, ses relations avec les autres, son organisation du travail, etc. La démocratie commence dans le coeur de l'homme. Car elle est, avant tout, un état d'esprit: esprit

d'ouverture, d'humilité, de sensibilité à la justice, à l'égalité et au respect du droit et de la liberté.

Quiconque ne vit pas la démocratie dans sa propre vie intérieure et dans son propre milieu de vie ne saura jamais ni gérer la démocratie ni la faire rayonner autour de lui. Et comme la démocratie est, avec la rationalité et la moralité qui lui sont inhérentes, l'outil le plus efficace pour conduire au progrès, quiconque ne vit pas intérieurement les vertus démocratiques ne saura jamais contribuer, efficacement, au développement économique de son entreprise, de son organisation sociale ou de sa société nationale. Et dans ce cas, on aura beau concevoir de magnifiques projets d'organisations gouvernementales ou non-gouvernementales, l'échec est fatalement le résultat le plus probable, à court ou à long termes, si l'on manque de vivre la démocratie dans son for intérieur. La démocratie n'existe ni dans le mot ni dans le nombre (nombre de partis, de citoyens de la majorité, etc) ni même dans la matière c'est-à-dire dans les institutions mises en place. Elle est dans l'esprit: l'esprit démocratique. Difficile à acquérir, il est pourtant le seul qui permet aux choses de s'épanouir, et aux hommes comme à la société de devenir meilleurs.

Bref, la société démocratique est une société au sein de laquelle tous les regards sont tournés vers l'*excellence*. C'est une société constamment soucieuse d'incarner et de matérialiser au mieux l'idéal d'excellence inscrit dans le coeur de l'homme. Sans cesse attentive à ses propres insuffisances et aux possibilités de sa perfectibilité, la démocratie est, de nos jours et de tous les systèmes politiques existants, le système de gouvernement par excellence. Même si, en pratique elle n'est pas toujours et nécessairement ce gouvernement à la tête duquel se tiennent les meilleurs, elle est néanmoins, comme dit Lipson, le plus sage et le meilleur. En effet, ainsi que le notait Alexis de Tocqueville, il est le plus propre à faire prospérer une société. Et c'est cette leçon que Michael Novak [1991]³ a récemment rappelée en montrant que la démocratie est le système le plus à même de favoriser le bien commun c'est-à-dire de garantir les bienfaits de la coopération

volontaire, élément de base du développement et de la richesse des nations.

Notes

1. On réagit là contre une manière impropre de concevoir la démocratie, conception principalement diffusée, au Zaïre, par le jeune politicien Nyamuisi Muvingi (qui vient hélas d'être assassiné, en 1992).
2. J'y soutiens la thèse selon laquelle tout comme une économie ou un pays, une démocratie peut être sous-développée si des conditions préalables ne sont pas remplies.
3. Pour une vive discussion de la théorie démocratique et de ses limites à l'époque actuelle, voir Bowles et Gintis [1988] et Erhard, Brüss et Hagemeyer (éds.) [1973].

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The Committee For Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA) is concerned with the increasing violations of academic freedom that are taking place in African universities and supports the struggles African colleagues are engaged in to assert and preserve their rights.

The formation of CAFA is inspired by the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility of 1990 and by the World University Service Lima Declaration of 1988.

Some objectives of CAFA are:

- informing colleagues about the current situation on African campuses
- setting up an urgency network to respond promptly to emergency situations
- mobilizing unions and other academic organizations so that we can put pressure on African academic authorities and governments
- organizing delegations that will make direct contact with teachers and students and their organizations in Africa

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Résumé

Les violations actuelles des droits académiques ont leur racine principale dans les programmes d'ajustement structurel imposés par le Fonds Monétaire International et la Banque Mondiale aux pays débiteurs de l'Afrique. En limitant l'accès des étudiants africains aux études supérieures ces programmes non seulement engendrent une situation conflictuelle dans les universités africaines, mais en plus ils représentent une violation du droit académique, c'est-à-dire de la liberté d'association et d'expression ainsi que du droit d'étude.

Faire la critique des programmes d'ajustement structurel, tels qu'ils sont appliqués au système scolaire en Afrique, est donc une priorité pour les académiciens qui désirent se mobiliser pour la défense des droits académiques. En même temps il faut que, au niveau international, les académiciens s'organisent pour défendre tous leurs collègues et les étudiants africains persécutés par les autorités. De surcroît des critères doivent être formulés afin de réglementer les conditions sous lesquelles les académiciens étrangers travaillent dans les universités africaines, de façon à éviter que leurs activités puissent contribuer à légitimer la répression des droits académiques.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN AFRICA

Silvia Federici

Since the days of colonial rule, African students and teachers have been outspoken critics of governmental policies and have frequently suffered severe consequences of their protest. Thus, repression of academic freedom is not a new phenomenon in Africa. Nevertheless, through the 1980s, a systematic pattern of abuse against academics and students has emerged that has no precedent in post-colonial Africa. According to the Africa Watch Report of 1991, the abuse of academic rights is now the order of the day in many countries:

They include: summary executions of academics and students; torture; arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention without trial; imprisonment under conditions that are cruel and degrading; restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, association and movement; dismissal of faculty staff; expulsion of students; university closures, banning of student organizations and staff unions; the prohibition of 'political activity' on campus; discrimination against students on the basis of race, ethnic or regional origin; censorship of teaching and reading materials and manipulation of curricula ... restrictions on travel abroad ... refusal to grant scholarships" [Africa Watch (1991)]

Although the suppression of academic freedom in Africa is well documented, there is unfortunately still a lack of understanding among non-African academics (Africanists included) with regard to the causes of this repression. As the Africa Watch Report has pointed out:

Compared to other professional groups, particularly doctors, scientists, journalists, writers, lawyers, academics throughout the world have been slow to campaign against human rights abuses. [Africa Watch (1991, p.7)]

What are the roots of this attack on academic freedom in Africa? This question is by no means intended to suggest that the abuses that are currently perpetrated can be reduced to one single common

denominator. The compulsory islamisation of the educational system in the Sudan, apartheid in South Africa, ethnic discrimination in Malawi are a few examples of the diversity of motives behind the repression of students and academic staff.

However, despite the variety of situations, we can identify structural factors that are playing a role in the escalating attack on academic freedom. In the process, we can also dispel some misconceptions on this matter which represent an obstacle in the ways of an effective mobilization. We must question the current tendency to picture the repression of academic freedom in Africa as structurally rooted in the controlling role of the state with respect to the educational system.

We must also question the tendency to account for its escalation in the 1980s and 1990s purely on the basis of the challenge posed to the state by pro-democracy movements, which find fertile grounds for their mobilization in the campuses¹. While applicable in a number of cases, this theory is misleading and we may add, demobilizing, since it encourages a hands-off position among foreign academics, who fear their initiatives may be misconstrued as undue interference in African affairs. This theory ignores that a growing number of abuses of academic rights are being perpetrated by African governments not to preclude a "transition to democracy", but in order to implement the economic and educational policies recommended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which have generated widespread protest throughout the campuses.

More specifically, singling out the autocratic character of the African state, its control of the educational system, as the prime cause for the deterioration of academic freedom ignores that the state is no longer the major player in the African academic scene. Undoubtedly it is the state that administers the work of repression, but it increasingly does so on lines set out by the World Bank and the IMF, that are reshaping the African educational system, through their Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in ways that are being denounced by academics and students throughout Africa as a threat not only to

academic freedom, but to Africa's economic future and right to self-determination. As is well known, SAP demands that the state stops subsidising higher education and restructures it on a "cost-sharing" basis. This is admittedly part of a strategy aimed at reversing the expansionist policy many governments put in place at independence, when widening people's access to higher education appeared as a major condition for social and political progress. In defense of this policy the World Bank has repeatedly claimed that the higher education system in most African countries has been overextended, fails to provide quality education and is at odds with the economic realities of the continent. [World Bank (1989, pp.82-83)] The goal of the World Bank, as concretised in its Capacity Building Initiative, is to reduce the number of higher education institutions and replace them with regional centres, funded by donors, specialised in building Africa's "growth capacity" and analytic skills. [World Bank (1991, pp.1-9)]. It is not a coincidence, then, or the result of a miscalculation if, in the countries where SAP'S have been adopted, the higher education system has notoriously collapsed, and clashes between students, teachers and governmental authorities has become endemic. So severe have been the cuts that even some of the most prestigious universities - Ibadan, Makerere, Dar - have become disaster areas. Buildings are falling apart, no educational material is available, teachers are leaving in droves, students sleep on the floors of overcrowded hostelrooms and in the prevailing climate of uncompromising austerity, at least for public education, even minor concessions generate prolonged confrontations. The recent banning of ASUU, the union of Nigerian university teachers, following its decision to strike for needed higher wages, the closure of the university of Harare this summer, due to the students' demand for an allowance increase, the crisis following the introduction of "cost-sharing" at Dar in 1991, are exemplary of the state of African campuses in the post-SAP era.

To point out the role of the World Bank and SAP in the present deterioration of academic freedom does not imply that there are no other factors responsible for the present pattern of abuse of academic

rights. Neither does it imply that the African states have no responsibility for this situation. It should however serve to identify the long term cause of the present abuses of academic rights, and to structure our priorities. We believe, that while we should also defend all African colleagues and students who are being persecuted, we should give special attention to the World Bank's plans for African education. These plans themselves jeopardize academic freedom. We, as non-African educators, have an obligation not only to defend our colleagues, but to ensure that all Africans are guaranteed their right to education, particularly when this right is denied by organisations financed in part by our own governments. Indeed we should redefine the notion of "academic freedom" to include the right to academic study. Africanist scholars must take on the task of defending academic freedom in Africa. If they do not, no one else will.

Human rights organisations, even when acting in support of academic freedom, abstain from judging the views, or the causes, embraced by those who are objected to the government repression. Thus they cannot be expected to evaluate the implications of the plans for education that are being applied or promoted. As for the "democratisation" of African institutions (academic ones included), there are already powerful forces working towards this objective. Multipartism and the abdication of the state from its role of as central manager now have the full backing of all international powers. By contrast, no world power or agency has so far objected to the dismantling of African education, or chastised the measure that African governments have taken to stem the protest against it. This means, however, that even if every autocratic regime were replaced by a multiparty system, and academic institutions were to gain more authority from the state, no significant improvement would occur in the academic rights situation.

We can be sure that as long as the recommendations involved in the SAP shape the future of African education the repression will continue. For the introduction of SAP goes against the core of the social contract that emerged from the anti-colonial struggle, which

identified access to education as the key to socio-economic and political betterment. It also goes against the core of Africa's right to self-determination. The SAP and the strategy it entails present generations of Africans from having their voice heard on the international scene by condemning them to what an African colleague has defined as a new "dark age".

If the present course prevails, the only "higher education" allowed to thrive will be one congenial to the needs foreign agencies and investors, that is one exclusively concerned with developing skills tailored to their economic objectives (such e.g. as the skill for debt management that looms high in the World Bank's priority for its "Capacity Building Initiative"). Already, in an academic panorama characterised by lack of funds foreign donors decide (through research grants and the financing of specialised institutes) what and how Africans can study. This trend will escalate if few universities remain, and foreign donors have the upper hand in deciding what constitutes Africa's "capacity".

It is important here to remember that the much decried expansion of the Africa's higher education system in the post-colonial period was a necessity rather than a luxury and that despite a fivefold increase in the number of students attending universities and other higher institutions in the period between 1970-71 and 1986-87 (from 401,000 to 2,063,000), by 1986-87 Africans still constituted only 3,5% of the world higher education enrolment. This means that the number of Africans who have access to higher education remains excessively low. There is, moreover, no evidence that cutting the funding of higher education benefits primary school enrolment [According to World Bank's statistics, this has fallen from 77% in 1983 (the pre-SAP era) to 68% in 1986²]. Nor is there evidence that higher education can thrive if placed on a "cost-sharing" basis. Without subsidies, the majority of the students will be excluded from higher education and it will become the privilege of the few ones again, as in the colonial period. Finally, if the African education system needs to be restructured (as the World Bank argues), who then has the right to decide

what its new course should be? Is the demand for more democracy, so insistent today in Africa, compatible with the exclusion of the new generations of Africans from any role in the redefinition of their educational future?

Policy advocacy

1. In view of these considerations Africanists the world over should analyse the objectives, the argumentation, and the consequences of the World Bank's plans for education in Africa, with a view both on academic freedom in Africa and on Africa's economic and political future. On this basis the World Bank should be urged to revise its conditionalities and plans for African education. Africanists should also provide information to the broader public and appeal to our academic unions and organisation to ask their members not to cooperate in any way with the "rationalisation" process now underway in Africa's higher education systems.

2. At the same time, we need to build mechanisms to defend African colleagues and students whose rights have been violated. These should include:

- setting up an 'urgent action' task force, to respond to emergency situations (organise letter writing, send delegations to embassies)
- provide material support: contact with the families of those who are in jail, money for their legal defence and their medical needs, scholarships for those who may need to leave their countries or are fired from their jobs
- publish materials that can broaden both the scholars' and the general public's knowledge of the situation prevailing on African campuses (articles, pamphlets, fact sheets)

We should also not underestimate our clout. It are academics, many from North America, who write the educational reports of international agencies, redesign the curricula and tests in many African academic institutions, host African academics and even governmental

authorities in conferences and symposia. Therefore, no African state or international agency can afford to dismiss the positions we take if we speak in a unified voice. As Africa Watch states:

Long overdue, public expression of concern by academics, can do much to embarrass or to promote a constructive response by a government which has killed a student, detained a colleague or closed a university for political reasons. [Africa Watch (1991, p.7)]

3. The crucial roles that many western scholars play as experts for international agencies, producers of policy reports on education in Africa, or as teachers in African universities (etc.) require that we establish professional/ethical guidelines regulating this activity. We should for instance ask our academic unions and organisations to convince their members:

(a) not to take positions in academic institutions where our colleagues are on strike, or where the faculty has been retrenched in compliance with the "rationalisation" process demanded by the World Bank and the IMF;

(b) not to cooperate with any institution that finances or assists governments guilty of violating academic freedom and/or promote objectives that instigate the repression of academic rights. We also need to establish guidelines for research funding and the distribution of research findings.

4. In order to ensure that these initiatives are effective and to avoid taking steps that in some cases may be counterproductive, close ties between academic and student organisations in and outside Africa are needed. In this way information and coordinate our efforts can be optimal.

5. Finally we need to reach out to potential constituencies (student organisations, (Afro-american) labour unions, churches and mosques) which can join us in putting pressure on African governments, as well

as international agencies. It is especially important that to reach Afrocentrist scholars and activists, who are concerned with the production, diffusion of African knowledge and the integration of an African perspective in world culture - all objectives which are presently being jeopardized by the educational course being advocated by the World Bank and the IMF for Africa.

The key condition, however, for the success of these initiatives is that we overcome the apathy that surrounds work on Africa in academic circles, even among Africanists. Africanists cannot afford being silent. Not only because they are compelled to know by virtue of their profession, but also because every abuse of academic rights directly affects their work. This means that we should decide whether or not to bring students to, or carry on research in an academic institution where for example the academic unions have been banned, the police is stationed on campus, or where colleagues and students may disappear overnight. Even the most narrow interpretation of what constitutes academic interest and what constitutes academic freedom suggests that the defence of both should be a matter of utmost concern for all of us.

The activities of the Committee For Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA) are directed to these aims. Several human rights organisations, e.g. Africa Watch, Human Rights Watch, have now set up task forces specifically working around the issue of academic freedom.

Notes

1. See Africa Report, Sept-Oct.1991; see also The (London) Time Higher Education Supplement of September 11, 1992. that speaks of "the incestuous link between academia and the state in Africa as a major cause of repression of academic freedom."
2. See Africa Update 1990/1991

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Résumé

Dans cet article sera posée la question de savoir si la traduction anglaise du livre de Placide Tempels, la Philosophie Bantou, rend l'original flamand de manière adéquate. Il n'en est pas ainsi. A plusieurs endroits la traduction diffère grandement de l'original, de nombreuses notes et chapitres sont absents et quelques fois un nouveau texte apparait à leur place.

L'original de Tempels est ainsi systématiquement faussé: la traduction donne une image plus négative de l'Afrique. De plus elle viole l'intention liée à la méthode de Tempels, qui consiste à prendre comme base de ses recherches le point de vue bantou. Une nouvelle traduction correcte du livre de Tempels en anglais est donc extrêmement souhaitable.

BANTOE-FILOSOFIE vs. BANTU PHILOSOPHY

Willem Storm

Nearly fifty years have passed since Placide Tempels' book Bantoe-Filosofie was first published, in the Dutch (Flemish) language. All these years the book remained a cornerstone in the discussion about African Philosophy. Catholic missionaries of the older generation often still remember the excitement of reading the small book for the first time. It has continued to excite the discussion ever since, gaining some more respectability, it seems, in the years after the incisive criticism which it had received in the seventies and eighties.

It is remarkable that such an influential text has been used in translations which themselves never seem to be checked and questioned. Bantoe-Filosofie was translated into French by Dr. A. Rubbens in 1945 (Lovania, Elizabethville; a revised version, also made by Rubbens, was published later on by Présence Africaine, Paris) and the French version again was translated into English by Colin King and appeared in 1959 (Présence Africaine, Paris). It is this indirect translation via French into English which is the text the English speaking world uses.

Questioning the translation might seem unnecessary as King mentions in his Foreword (Preface) that he has shown the text to Tempels. But how good was Tempels' mastery of the English language? After all, the English version does not mention that it is an "authorised" translation. As Prof. Fabian contends in his "Bantu Philosophy - Placide Tempels and his work in an historical perspective":

Bantu Philosophy was originally conceived in Dutch and (...) Tempels often appealed to the original text when caught in contradictions or arguments (...)¹

One does not have to know both Dutch and English to see at a first glance that the two versions differ. The original Foreword disappeared and was replaced by three new ones, there are slight differences in the chapter titles, and the amount of footnotes was greatly reduced. The laborious, but adventurous, work of comparing

the editions became all the more rewarding as differences continued to pile up and there appeared to be a pattern in the differences: the translators seemed to hold different views on Africa and Africans than Tempels and used the translation to 'correct' Tempels. That, at least, became my suspicion. The following exposition should supply some evidence.

Criticising the translation of Tempels seems to be a timely task, as the book is still often referred to. Okafor's discussion of Tempels in his "Bantu Philosophy: Placide Tempels Revisited" in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. XIII, nr. 2, 1982, criticizes Tempels concept of Vital Force. He thereby, however, uses remarks on the concept of life in a footnote of the English edition which does not appear in Tempels' original text, but was added by the translators!

In my comparison I used the following two versions of Tempels' text:

1945 Bantoe-Filosofie, De Sikkel, Antwerpen.

1959 Bantu philosophy, Présence Africaine, Paris.

Several types of differences come to the fore:

- 1) a large number of deviations from the meaning of the Dutch text;
- 2) in many cases the translator does not follow Tempels' paragraph-ordering;
- 3) some paragraphs are omitted, most footnotes are omitted;
- 4) the translator adds his own text and notes;
- 5) the original Foreword is not translated;
- 6) words like Baluba, Bantu, Zwarten are not translated strictly. Where the original gives "Baluba", the translation is often "Africans";
- 7) the Dutch word "algemeen" means "general", but is often translated as "universal". As far as I could find out Tempels does not use the word "universeel", which is a term with stronger implications than "algemeen". Tempels is more reluctant to generalise

and often uses the phrase "and this probably also counts for other Blacks and Primitives".

There are a lot of small deviations in the text which are probably inherent in any translation. The title of chapter 6 literally means "Do a.o. the Bantu have a philosophy?", the translation is "Can we give Bantu thought a 'philosophical system'?" The title of chapter three literally means "Wisdom and epistemology of the Bantu" and is translated as "Bantu wisdom or criteriology". Similarly T70.1a (K116.2p) (means Dutch edition page 70, paragraph 1 (English edition page 116, paragraph 2)). "the very opposite of our moral judgements" is translated as "cutting morality to ribbons", and e.g. T88.1a (K144.1p) contains a sentence which is completely mistranslated. Each of these smaller deviations is not very harmful, but it might not be mere chance that in none of these cases the Bantu benefit from the translator's deviations.

More clearly biased are the following types of mistranslations:

T14.2a (K36.1p) "Niet de Zwarten, maar wij moeten filosofischer leeren denken" ("Not the Blacks, but we must learn to think more philosophically") is translated as "Before we set about teaching these Africans our philosophical system, let us try to master theirs".

T14.3a (K36.2p) literally reads "It is not at all certain that the Bantu themselves will supply us with a complete philosophical terminology" and is translated as "We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary".

T28.3a (K55.1p) Tempels says that he received his information first-hand. The translators say that he received it through a colleague.

Tempels refers to "a university-educated Black", the translators to a "Bantu".

T36.1a (K66.1p) Tempels says, literally translated, "It did not take long for them to acknowledge the technical skills of the whites", the

english edition "The technological skill of the white impressed the Bantu".

T44.4a (K79.1p) Tempels: "seen from their point of view", translation: "the subjective point of view of the Bantu".

T45.7a (K80.1p) Tempels: "an animal", translation: "a wild beast".

T55.3a (K96.0p) Tempels refers to "languages", the translation to "dialects".

T98.1a (K159.0p) Tempels translates 'Kalunga ka masika' as "the place of evil, from which nobody returns or from which nobody can exert influence". The English version gives "the accursed region, hell, whence nobody has ..." The addition of hell (which refers to Christianity) is an example of distorting the emic-approach of Tempels.

These shifts in the meaning of Tempels' text through the translations probably indicate best the particular bias which is introduced. We will discuss this later. There is, however, another category of differences between the Dutch and the English text. This is the category of simple omissions and additions.

T3 (K19) Tempels includes a footnote on the rationality intrinsic in each system, the translation omits this note.

T8 (K27.1p) adds a rather nasty remark, which can not be found in Tempels original: "Need we, then, be surprised that beneath the veneer of 'civilisation' the 'Negro' remains always ready to break through?"

T9 (K29.1p) Tempels reference to the Bantu leaders as possible agents for civilising the Bantu is missing in the English version.

T15.1a (K37.1p) The sentence "Analysis and induction have brought us to ontology" is missing in the English text.

T23 - T29 (K49 - K55) In this part Tempels used three footnotes; footnotes which are omitted in the English version. They are replaced by four other footnotes. In one of them (K53) is written "... writes to me ..." Who is me in this case? The footnote on T24 which states "I compare only two thought-systems which during centuries have inspired two different cultures" is, in the English version, interwoven

notes (e.g. T3 and T104), in which Tempels elaborates on this subject. Other aspects of Tempels text remain unclarified of these omissions, e.g. Tempels' warning against the appearance of consumerism of European science, technology and philosophy by Africans.

For academic purposes it would be necessary to replicate this exercise to determine whether is it especially the French or the English translator who is to be blamed for the distortion. Most urgent, however, would be a re-translation of Tempels influential book directly from Dutch (Flemish) into English.

Notes

1. I refer here to the English version of Fabian's article "Philosophie bantoue - Placide Tempels et son oeuvre vus dans une perspective historique", which was published in Bulletin CRSIP (Brussel, 1970).

Résumé

Dans cet article l'auteur analyse quelques arguments courants concernant le monisme et le pluralisme politique. Il offre une évaluation critique de quatre arguments en faveur du monisme politique, à savoir 'l'argument de tradition' (c'est le monisme qui s'accorde le mieux aux traditions politiques africaines), 'l'argument éthnocentrique' (la diversité ethnique appelle un monisme politique), 'l'argument de fait' (l'expérience postcoloniale a conduit au monisme politique) et 'l'argument du développement' (le monisme est nécessaire pour un développement rapide).

L'auteur portera ensuite le débat sur deux arguments en faveur du pluralisme politique, 'l'argument de tolérance' et 'l'argument de responsabilité'. En conclusion nous serons convoqué à un échange d'idées ouvert sur l'avenir politique pour lequel la philosophie herméneutique de Gadamer pourra être source d'inspiration.

DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE IN AFRICA: SOME ARGUMENTS

Didier N. Kaphagawani

On the presumption that almost all of Africa has been or currently is, *de facto* or *de jure*, politically monistic, this paper attempts to analyze some common arguments for and against political monism on the one hand, and political pluralism on the other. The main purport of the paper is to show that although democratic practice is theoretically just as possible in the context of political monism as it is in the context of political pluralism, the question whether Africa ought to be politically monistic or pluralistic defies any universal solution insofar that it demands nothing less than a universally prescriptive solution¹.

Political Monism in Africa

Arguments for political monism have been proffered and defended in many academic and non-academic quarters and fora, but this paper considers four, namely, the traditional, the ethnocentric, the *de facto* and the development argument.

The Traditional Argument

What I have termed 'the traditional argument' has been propounded in varying ways and forms by, for instance, Julius Nyerere, Paulin Hountondji, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Gyekye. This argument takes as one of its premises the claim that pre-colonial (traditional) Africa was politically monistic in the sense that each tribe had one paramount chief or king. Yet, it is argued, such a system was democratic in that these kings or chiefs very much depended on the views of their advisers in any decision taken. Thus, it can be concluded that, because there was political monism in traditional Africa, there is no reason for modern Africa to be different.

In Essays on Socialism Nyerere points out that despite "all the variations and exceptions where the institutions of domestic slavery existed, African family life was everywhere based on certain practices

and attitudes which together mean basic equality, freedom and unity." [Nyerere (1969, p.10)] Similarly, making reference to the Gikuyu of Kenya, Kenyatta also remarks that "before the coming of the Europeans, the Gikuyu had a democratic regime" [Kenyatta (1968, p.131)] because the elders and advisers, the custodians of political authority and power, "talk(ed) till they agree(d)." [Kenyatta (1968, p.104)] Professor Kwame Gyekye has made similar observations about the Akan of Ghana. [Gyekye (1992, pp.13-19)] He points out that, despite its shortcomings, traditional Africa thrived on attitudes and practices which should be of a boon to modern Africa; namely, "the pursuit of consensus" - taking into account individual persons' views and opinions before all important decisions are made; the esteem and promotion of "mutual tolerance" and patience; and "an attitude of compromise", all of which are quite essential to democratic practice. [Gyekye (1992, p.18)]

Gyekye discusses these qualities and practices with direct reference to the Akan political system with which he is acquainted; but these also hold for quite a good number of traditional political systems in Africa. For instance, the Chewa of Central Africa also valued consensus as is testified by the proverb *Mutu umodzi susenza denga*, meaning literally 'one head never ever carries/lifts a roof'. The message implicit in this proverb is that due to the finitude and fallibility of the human mind, in any decision or action of public concern, consultation and consensus are necessary. Interestingly, this proverb resembles a number of proverbs in other African cultures; for instance, the Akan proverbs: *Ti koro nko agyina* (One head does not go into council) and *Nyansa nni onipa baako ti mu* (Wisdom is not in the head of one person); and the Lugbara (Ugandan) proverbs: *Abi ndu'buwa (kaniku aju) ako ni yo* (There is no wall without supporting poles) and *Abindu ni duu 'basi* (The verandah floor is clean because of people) [Gyekye (1992, p.20) and Dalfovo (1990, p.31)]. Other proverbs exist in many African cultures which confirm both the cherishing of mutual tolerance and patience, and the value accredited to the attitude of compromise².

However, granted the merits of traditional Africa, the traditional argument fails to come out of the wood on a number of considerations, the most significant of which, for the purpose of this discussion are two. First, contemporary Africa should not only learn from traditional Africa, but also from both colonial and post-colonial experiences in order to find the best possible means and alternatives for constructing a 'future' Africa. It is in this vein that in Another Last Word, Taban Lo Liyong writes on one of the empires in West Africa:

We know of Songhai. We know of Ghana ... these were the extensions of Middle East into Africa. We are proud of the results. But the results were fusions of foreign and indigenous. If we want to build super-Songhai, we have to embark upon a deliberate policy of fusion.

And let us crossbreed our cultures with very sturdy strains of economic mentality ... If we succeed, our grand-children will point to our era the way we are doing to Songhai and Ghana. [Taban Lo Liyong (1990, p.112); my emphasis]³

Secondly, traditional Africa cannot be said to have been a one-party system. Wiredu points out that

In some one-party apologetics the suggestion is made not only that the system is hospitable to all the desirable human rights but also that traditional African systems of government were of the one-party variety, in a full-bloom or in an embryonic form. As far as at least the Akan tradition is concerned ... both claims are contrary to fact. Although the Akan system was not of a multiparty type, it was not a one-party either. [Wiredu (1990, p.259)]⁴

The basis for this denial is, for Wiredu, that no political monism "can survive the right of the populace, organized under their own spokesman, to question the decisions of the ruling body or to demand the dismissal of its leader" [Wiredu (1990, pp.259-260)], a practice and attitude esteemed in the Akan political system in particular, and, I

dare say, in almost all traditional African political systems in general. "Since the traditional system featured this right", Wiredu rightly argues, "it was neither a one-party system nor even a simulacrum of it." [Wiredu (1990, p.260)] Contemporary political Africa is replete with instantiations of Wiredu's observation about the virtual impossibility of destooling the leadership within political monism. On this count, the traditional argument for political monism seems to be less watertight as it initially appears.

The Ethnocentric Argument

The 'ethnocentric argument' is nothing more than an indirect proof aimed at establishing the advantages of political monism by underscoring the problems of tribalism in politically pluralistic systems. Such arguments often masquerade as arguments for unity, championing political monism as the most appropriate system for resolving intratribal conflicts and differences. For instance, the political arena in Africa is not unacquainted with remarks such as: "The multi-partism that the West is preaching about is ruining nations in Africa and beyond. People are taking sides in the name of multi-party and the result is tribalism, killings and displacement of people, refugees" [Kainja (1992, p.729)] and "... multi-party system or partisan politics may appear to be democratic in theory but in practice nothing could be further from truth. What actually happens in a partisan election is nothing more than political mud-slinging by one party to discredit the other. The people do not hear the truth ... because partisan debates are more often preoccupied with achieving the political discredit of the rival party rather than the advancement of national political development. The much needed national unity is totally irrelevant, in fact it is incompatible with multi-party politics. [Ntaba (1992, p.733)]

A comment or two is quite in keeping at this juncture.

First, to claim that in political pluralism the main concern of each party is to discredit the other parties is surely to mistake the periphery

of the political arena for its centre. For one to be afraid of being discredited suggests an awareness of disreputable activities one would otherwise not wish to see washed in public, not necessarily for the public's sake nor for the sake of truth, as the claim above would have us believe, but rather for one's primarily selfish reasons. Thus instead of the people knowing the truth, non-truths are told without let or hindrance. In any case, it is imprudent, to say the least, to assume that the proclamation of the truth is the property of one-party systems in Africa.

Second, to portray political pluralism as essentially muck and mud-slinging because of tribal differences is to ignore the virtue of difference as rightly pointed out by the oracle:

Tribes are there to stay, long live the tribes;

...

Those who talk about equality know you not that you are chopping heads in order to level the common height?

...

For you cry out against tribalism, but have you examined what can be achieved through positive exploitation of tribal qualities?

I am a tribalist, hence I am propagating positive tribalism.

{Taban Lo Liyong (1990, pp.115-117)}

The advantages of unity in difference is no doubt being extolled by this oracle; for the promotion of the well-being of an African nation not only depends on the qualities of individual citizens but also the cultural skills of the different ethnic groups constituting the nation. The differences in talents is not a disadvantage; it is an asset to the nation. And the tapping of both individual and ethnic characteristics for the promotion of the well-being of the African nation is what Taban refers to as 'positive tribalism'. Such skills are abound in Africa, but lamentably only recognised at the superficial level of, for instance, merely promoting and appreciating different cultural dances at a distance. Taban is quite right in retorting this attitude by asking:

"when the elders dance tribal dances, are you sure you can stop them dancing other tribal dances?" [Taban Lo Liyong (1990, p.117)].

The De Facto Argument

Political monism in Africa has also been justified by pointing out the initial presence of a number of political parties at independence and the gradual marginalisation of some of the parties and the domination of one political party. It is thus argued that political monism presides in almost all of Africa due to the natural death, through persistent loss of seats in parliament, of opposing parties⁶.

In those countries where political monism prevails *de facto* (quite unlike in those countries where political monism obtains *de jure*!) it might seem that "people are free to form opposition if they so wish." [Wanyande (1987, p.71)] The thinking is that just as other political parties suffered a natural and untimely death, so can they also be naturally resurrected.

In practice, however, the introduction of political pluralism in Africa is virtually impossible, even in countries where political monism has prevailed *de facto*. There are various reasons for this. The demise of other parties is, among other things, due to the dominant party assuming centre-stage and marginalising the rest. This explanation, however, does not apply to, say, Botswana where one party has assumed the centre-stage almost since independence and yet the minor parties have not suffered a natural death. It is one thing to have a landslide victory in parliamentary or even presidential elections, but one ought to bear in mind that permanent landslide victories cannot be guaranteed in political pluralism.

The Development Argument

The prevalence of political monism in Africa has also been justified by arguing that economic development is incompatible with political pluralism; that instead of attending to peripheral matters

raised by opposing parties in a country with political pluralism, a country with political monism exerts all her efforts in the promotion of the well-being of its citizenry.

This argument seems quite persuasive particularly to newly independent countries, which many African countries were roughly three decades or so ago. For indeed it behoved these young nations to look into ways and means of providing basic necessities of human life. And quite a number of African nations have commendably made some headway in this regard. As Odinga notes:

The post-colonial non-democratic government argued that democracy could be sacrificed in favour of development; that development would lead the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. Foreign governments ..., looking for client states in Africa, seem to have fallen for this kind of logic. Strong men were supported for their political terror over their own people in the belief that, through despotic rule, they could extract sufficient resources from society to use for development. [Odera Oruka (1992, p.138)]

But, Odinga laments quite rightly,

Thirty years of despotism has left a balance sheet of political decadence and little substantial development. Even in place where some economic growth and infrastructural development took place ... lack of political development has left society vulnerable to rebellion against illegitimate authority. And since for a long time, society has been denied the art of political organisation due to repression, such rebellion can easily degenerate into civil disorder, much to the detriment of the modicum of development achieved over the years. [Odera Oruka (1992, p.138)]

Even if political monism would have been excused in Africa, for reasons stated above, for a decade or two, one doubts its prolongation since after twenty years or so of independence one would not be imprudent to expect Africa to have come of age politically.

To those who argue for the incompatibility of development and democracy (in political pluralism), Jonah has this to say:

The mere existence of one or more political parties is hardly sufficient to sustain a democratic system of government. Neither is there an optimal number of political parties. What is important is that political parties be true reflections of the interests and aspirations of society. ... A true democracy needs a free and responsible press and leaders that are willing to tolerate one. ... Democracy must be supported by a civic culture of openness and toleration. An informed and educated populace is most likely to be capable of maintaining and respecting democratic reforms. ... (and) there is need to expand education so as to foster enlightened public opinion. [Jonah (1992, p.17)]

Thus the mistaken thinking that political pluralism goes against the grain of development arises out of a narrow-minded conception of development; for if social and cultural developments were recognised as being of significant importance, political pluralism would have been regarded as essential for both democracy and developmental progress. The myopic view of development entertained by some politicians in Africa seems indeed, in part, responsible for regarding political pluralism as very much prejudicial on development. And yet, as Jonah rightly insists, the promotion of social and economic development in Africa is the consolidation of democratic practice. The absence of social and economic development is the annihilation of democratic practice in Africa. "Democracy and development", writes Jonah, "are indivisible. It cannot realistically be expected that democracies can flourish in the face of economic and social deprivation ... (I)t is not enough to insist that societies become democracies. Attention must also be given to the creation of conditions, such as sustained economic development, which will support democratic institutions, norms and values." [Jonah (1992, p.17)] And in this almost all of Africa has been beset with a host of apparently insuperable problems. In spite of the

initial progress in economic development during and immediately after independence, many African countries have failed in sustaining the momentum of development for a number of reasons, both natural, and human. But in any case, development seems compatible with political pluralism as it is with political monism. Now I will turn to the argument in favour of pluralism.

Pluralism in Africa

After almost three decades of independence from the colonialist, Africa is seen to be in need of a transformation through what many scholars call a "second independence"⁷, by means of the institution and practice of political pluralism. This discussion considers two types of arguments for political pluralism in Africa: the toleration and accountability arguments.

The Toleration Argument

For democratic practice to have a firm grip in Africa, toleration of dissenting views and respect for difference of opinion must be instituted. For, as Spinoza once wrote, "the object of (any) government is not to change men from rational beings into beasts and puppets (as many African countries have rather unfortunately done in the last thirty years (Kaphagawani)) but to enable them develop their minds and bodies in security, and to employ their reason unshackled; neither showing hatred, anger nor deceit, nor watched with the eyes of jealousy and injustice. In fact", Spinoza continues, "the true aim of government is liberty." [Scruton (1986, p.96)] Thus to argue for political pluralism in Africa is to make a case for not only toleration but also the pursuit of consensus and the promotion of an attitude of compromise.

Now the question arises what toleration is. Fetscher maintains that toleration is "the attitude of people, including government politicians, in strong powerful positions towards people in less powerful

situations (as well as) the attitude of the dominant majority towards a minority." [Fetscher (1992, p.4)] The concept of toleration presumes some form of indifference in the sense that it is not only the "attitude of mere tolerance of the character of other people different from one's own, but also the respect and appreciation of their very different qualities, of their 'otherness'." [Fetscher (1992, p.4)] And as indicated in the traditional argument above, such attitudes and practices existed in traditional Africa; and one sees no reason for their non-existence in contemporary Africa⁸.

The issue of tolerance has been discussed extensively by John Rawls in A Theory of Justice where, among other things, he argues that the principle of tolerance as well as the principle of freedom of conscience, follows from the principle of justice insofar as justice has, as its foundation, equal liberties and fairness. Freedom of conscience, Rawls insists, is

based solely on a conception of justice. Toleration is not derived from practical necessities or reasons of state Those who would deny liberty of conscience cannot justify their action by condemning philosophical scepticism ... nor by appealing to social interests and affairs of state. The limitation of liberty is justified only when it is necessary for liberty itself, to prevent an invasion of freedom that would still be worse. [Rawls (1978, pp.214-215)]

Now since liberty of conscience presumes toleration, and toleration presupposes justice by which is meant equal liberties and opportunities, then the question arises whether it is right and proper for natural justice to demand tolerance of the intolerant. This question is particularly pertinent to Africa where tolerance has been in abeyance since independence. The African predicament raises a number of questions the most significant of which are:

- (i) whether such intolerant persons/parties/institutions have any right to complain if and when they are not tolerated

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- (ii) what circumstances would justify a tolerant person/-party/institution not to tolerate an intolerant counterpart
 - (iii) under what conditions may a tolerant person/-party/institution tolerate the intolerant ones and for what goals

One possible answer to the first question would be to say, rather hurriedly and without much thought, that surely the intolerant persons in Africa have no reason to complain when they are not tolerated by the tolerant. On the assumption that one has no right to complain about the conduct of another person which is in unison with principles one would employ in similar situations to justify one's behaviour towards the other person, one's "right to complain is limited to violations of principles (one) acknowledges." [Rawls (1978, p.217)]

But to claim that an intolerant person has no right to complain about any form of intolerance experienced is definitely not to say that the tolerant person has the right to suppress and persecute the intolerant person. For in so doing the tolerant person is merely excluding intolerant behaviour, hence violating the very principle the tolerant person should uphold. However, Rawls argues, circumstances arise when the intolerant person should not be tolerated; namely, "when the tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their own security and of the institution of liberty are in danger." [Rawls (1978, p.220); my emphasis] The conditions of sincerity and considered and informed opinion are necessary and important particularly in Africa where many have been victims of intolerance just because they have been regarded as dangers to public security when in fact they were not! Thus the abdication of toleration is the annihilation of democratic practice.

The Accountability Argument

The prevalence of political monism in Africa, it is argued, has had dire consequences ranging from stagnation in economic development to the inability to resolve both social and political problems throughout the continent. Lack of accountability and answerability are

seen to be one of the reasons for this African plight. Indeed, as Oginga Odinga points out, precisely because governments in political monism are not in practice answerable to any body, the question of checks and balances does not arise; leaders decide to enslave their own fellow Africans; "service to the people (is) replaced by service from the people"; "popular participation in politics (is) suppressed in favour of the politics of state control"; the state "synonymous with the supreme leader, father of the nation, kings of kings, and the only bull in the kraal, (becomes) the only sovereign entity not to be challenged even when it (is) engaged in the mass murder of its own citizens"; and parliamentary sessions being more, or entirely, eulogy sessions than fora for constructive and intensive debates, a practice guaranteed, in theory, in political pluralism⁹. The absence of checks and balances in Africa seems to be disadvantage of political monism¹⁰.

Yet accountability to the people was characteristic of traditional Africa. About the Luo of Kenya, Odinga writes:

Whenever there was an issue, a crisis or a celebration, people gathered together and carried out a debate. Everyone was free to participate and speak. In the end, there was usually some brilliant person who would rise up and summarise the deliberations. Then they would come to a decision. [Odera Oruka (1992, p.96)]

This also obtained in many African communities, certainly among the Chewa of Central Africa; and this should be possible in contemporary Africa, differences in complexity between traditional and modern Africa notwithstanding¹¹.

Concluding remarks

From the foregoing discussion, analysts of traditional Africa seem to be proposing a hermeneutic approach to current political problems. For, as Gadamer points out, "hermeneutic philosophy understands itself not as an absolute position, but as a way of experience. It insists

that there is no higher principle than holding oneself open in a conversation. But this means: Always recognise in advance the possible correctness, even the superiority of the conversation partner's position." [Gadamer (1985, p.189)]¹² Indeed the caveat hermeneutics, and traditional Africa for that matter, is issuing to those heavily engaged in the introduction of political pluralism in Africa is that their positions are not immune from flaws; and that Gadamer's observation ought to be heeded, namely, that a genuine conversation on any issue, or that of political pluralism in Africa in particular, "the weight of the other's opinion" [Gadamer (1975, p.330)] must be considered seriously.

Such genuine conversations have borne fruit in some parts of Africa, have a precarious existence in other parts, and are non-existent in still other quarters of Africa¹³. But due to disparities in cultures and colonial experiences, the issue of democratic reforms and political pluralism in Africa will, one hopes, not only be laid to rest responsibly, but also its solution is inclined to vary from one African country to another.

Notes

1. Use is made of such terms as 'political monism' and 'political pluralism' to mean 'monopartyism' and 'multipartyism' respectively.
2. For example, *Nzeru Nkupangwa* (Wisdom is not inborn; it is learnt), *Undisokosera nkulinga utamva* (To shout: Nonsense! is to initially lend an ear), *Dziko ndi mafuwa achita uchirikiza* (The world hangs in the balance like a pot on three fire stones) and *Nzeru zayekha adaviika nsima m'madzi* (The know-it-all always immenses food in water). For a detailed analysis of Lugbara proverbs similar to these in message, see Dalfovo [1990].
3. That any culture at any particular epoch is a fusion of foreign influences with indigene practices is a point quite ably underscored by Busia [1962, p.55ff and p.56].
4. The point is quite in commonance with Busia's views [1967, p.27, 109, 143]
5. On the positive exploitation of different tribal skills Taban is reechoing Busia [1962, pp.71ff] and Busia [1967, p.119 and p.121].
6. See for instance Malawi Daily Times of 5/10/92 and 6/11/92.
7. See particularly chapter 9 of Odera Oruka [1992].

8. Busia [1967, pp.108ff] on toleration as quintessential for democracy.
9. See Odera Orika [1992, p.136] and Busia [1967, p.140]. In his Another Last Word Taban Lo Liyong makes similar observations:
 "Governments think they are right. So no alternative courses are to be entertained, political elections are to be staged-managed, opponents are to be killed, referenda are to confirm the obvious; those who do not see things through our eyes can't teach us, but certainly haven't learnt from us, so in the spirit of intolerance better send them to sleep for ever and ever. Amen!" [Taban Lo Liyong (1990, p.108)]
10. This is a point also made by Oginga Odinga in Odera Orika [(1992, p.97)].
11. This was indeed the case of the Ashanti. See Busia [1967, p.142].
12. And in promoting such an attitude Gadamer has a notable predecessor in the name of Leibniz. In a letter of 1696 to Gabriel Wagner, Leibniz writes: "As for me, I lay little importance in refutation, but much in exposition. When a new book reaches me, I search for what I can learn, not for what I can criticise in it." [Loemker (1976, p.470)]
13. The smooth transition to political pluralism in Zambia; the prospects of backsliding into another civil war in Angola; and the unpredictability of the political situations in e.g. Moçambique, Cameroon, Zaire and South Africa.

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Résumé

Dans cet article la problématique de la philosophie africaine contemporaine est envisagée compte tenu de l'horizon historique et politique de l'Afrique néo-coloniale. La première partie sera consacrée à une esquisse de la situation de l'Afrique contemporaine caractérisée par la rupture de son historicité. L'imposition de l'historicité coloniale européenne et la nécessité de récupérer l'expérience de l'être africain font du développement africain une aventure ambiguë.

La seconde partie désigne les tâches de la philosophie africaine en fonction de l'héritage rompu et de l'actuelle situation de misère. La philosophie doit faire plus que de retrouver les croyances et mythes africains: elle doit démasquer systématiquement au niveau théorique le projet néo-colonial. Elle doit être enracinée dans la vraie vie de l'Afrique. Ici aussi l'adage socratique "connais toi toi-même" garde toute sa valeur.

Dans la dernière partie de l'article la vocation de la philosophie africaine sera définie de manière plus élaborée. Il faut qu'elle soit déconstructive dans le démasquement de l'eurocentrisme en Afrique contemporaine, et reconstructive dans sa réflexion sur la situation africaine à partir de ses conditions pratiques et interprétatives. La philosophie africaine sera ainsi un projet théorique et thérapeutique radical visant la récupération et la re-fondation de l'historicité de l'existence.

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: AN EXPOSITION

Tsenay Serequeberhan

In what follows I will present an exposition of Contemporary African Philosophy in view of the historico-political horizon out of which this discourse is presently being produced. The discourse of Contemporary African Philosophy will be explored in terms of its originative horizon. Our exposition will thus be focused on the organic relation of horizon to discourse¹.

For us, present-day Africans, the enigmatic neo-colonial situation that has resulted from the demise of direct colonial rule is the necessary point of departure for any worthwhile or meaningful philosophic engagement. As we shall see, Contemporary African Philosophy originates precisely at this point, i.e., the interface of lived-life and reflective thought.

The terms "horizon" and "discourse" are used here in a rather specialized sense. "Horizon" designates the overall historico-political milieu within and from which specific discourses - philosophic or otherwise - are framed and constitutes the relevant space from which they are articulated. "Discourse", on the other hand, refers to the thematized concerns interior to a specific horizon².

My exposition consists of three sections presented in the following order:

- I. The contemporary African situation and the after-effects of colonialism, i.e., its estranged and estranging legacy.
- II. Contemporary African Philosophy as a reflective introspection within the horizon of present-day Africa.
- III. The vocation of Contemporary African Philosophy as a theoretic reflection on the post-colonial effort to "return to the source" [Cabral (1973, p.63)] and inaugurate the possibility of an autonomous and self-standing freedom.

I

Three decades after 1960 - the year of Africa - the Continent was still suffering from the effects of colonialism and from the neo-colonial prolongation of the European intrusion into African historical existence. Colonialism created and established the material/physical and cultural conditions in which the self-aggrandizing metaphysical delusions of Europe - its "civilizing mission" to the world - could be institutionally embodied and incarnated in the consciousness and the physical actuality of the subjugated world³. The very fact of colonial conquest was taken as metaphysical confirmation of the un-historicity of the colonized. The result of this was the distorted replication and superimposition of Europe on Africa which - after the fact - established the subordination and subservience of the colonized. Ironically this very subservience was taken as the indication of the non-humanity of the colonized and as the justifying ground of colonialism⁴.

Colonial society mirrored Europe and in so doing dis-located the lived historicity of indigenous existence. But this effort to echo Europe in the colonies was itself a rather contradictory undertaking. This mimicry of Europe in Africa was the culmination, simultaneously, of European imperial ambitions, and a fundamental negation of the European democratic heritage. The historical eventuation of this process exposed the internal and inherent contradictions of European Modernity while replicating and superimposing on and against the native - in the colonies - these same contradictions, in an accentuated manner.

On the side of the colonized, subjugation required the cultural negation of Westernized Africans whose very formation as a section of the dominated society was predicated on the rupture of African historicity in the face of European violence. Non-Europeanized Africans, on the other hand, were forced to submit to a lived petrification of their cultural and historical existence. Consequently, the diverse peoples of the continent were reduced to an un-historical

existence as subordinate elements in the concrete expansionist eventuality of European historicity.

Thus, the post-colonial situation of Africa manifests itself as the schizoid existence of two contradictory and yet complementary modes of African being-in-the-world, i.e., the Westernized dominating and the Indigenous dominated native. Encased between these two - complementary and contradictory forms of estranged existence - one finds "independent" and/or post-colonial Africa. These two paradoxical types replicate - by inertia - the colonizing historicity of Europe and the non-historicity of Africa and in so doing constitute the actuality of neo-colonial existence.

As graphically depicted by Ousmane Sembene in his 1968 film *Mandabi*, it is the estranging dialectic of these two broad segments of society which constitutes the contemporary crisis of Africa⁵. In a paradoxical and distorted manner, these two segments of society parrot the estranged and estranging violent dialectic of the colonizer and the colonized described so well by Albert Memmi. But in this case the roles of colonizer and colonized are played by the native, cast on both sides if this antagonistic and complementary divide by reference to the culture of the former colonial power. This tragi-comic and obscene duplication of Europe is the actual and concrete duplicity which negatively constitutes the non-historicity of neo-colonialism, i.e., its historico-political inertness.

In this context the culture of the former colonial power is the ground and the accepted source of hegemonic cultural and political dominance. This then is the internalized historical and cultural estrangement that Frantz Fanon systematically inspected, as early as 1952, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is the estranged and estranging tragic legacy of the self-righteous and self-proclaimed European "civilization mission" to the world.

As Basil Davidson points out, the African anti-colonial struggle did not only expel the physical presence of direct colonialism, it also put in "question the smoothly borrowed assumptions of the social hybrids (i.e., Europeanized Africans) about the opposition of 'Euro-

pean civilization' to 'African barbarism'. [Davidson (1985, p.44)] Indeed, beyond the physical combat expel direct colonialism, contemporary Africa finds itself confronted and hindered - at every turn - by what which this combat has put in question without fundamentally eradicating.

Thus, present-day African realities are constituted partly by the ossified remnants of the colonial past - as embodied at every level in the neo-colonial institutional forms of contemporary Africa and in the pathologically negative self-awareness of Europeanized Africans - and by the varied forms of struggle aimed at actualizing the possibility of an autonomous and free Africa in the context of the contemporary world. This then is, broadly speaking, the enigmatic and paradoxical inheritance of African independence, i.e., the situation of the present. It is the "ambiguous adventure" of Africa with European Modernity which Cheikh Hamidou Kane [1962] articulates so well in his seminal novel by the same title.

The inseminal tilling of Africa's "ambiguous adventure" with the Occident is thus the central concern of Contemporary African Philosophy. It is only by systematically cultivating/subverting and radically seminating the theoretic space of the post-colonial African situation - with the historicity of our own most distinctive existential actuality - that African philosophic reflection can be part of the politico-practical and theoretico-philosophical effort aimed at reclaiming the freedom and actuality of the Continent.

In the words of Antonio Gramsci:

The beginning of a critical elaboration is the awareness of that which really is, that is to say a 'knowing of one's self' as a product of the process of history that has unfolded thus far and which has left in you an infinity of traces collected without the benefit of an inventory. It is necessary initially to undertake such an inventory.

Note II. One cannot separate philosophy from the history of philosophy and culture from the history of culture. In a

more direct and fitting or proper sense, it is not possible to be philosophers, that is, to have a critically coherent conception of the world, without a consciousness of its historicity, of the phase of development represented by it and of the fact that it is in contradiction with other conceptions or with elements of other conceptions. [Gramsci (1975, pp. 1376-1377; my own translation)]

In this regard, Contemporary African Philosophy, as "a critical elaboration is the awareness of" and can be true to its own historicity - the historicity of contemporary Africa from which it is being secreted and spun - by concretely grasping and confronting the "infinity of traces" left by colonialism. It is in this manner a "knowing of one's self" and an explorative "inventory" aimed at appropriating that which is possible in the post-colonial situation. In this sense it is a reflective, explorative appropriation of our cultural, political, and historical inheritance. A meditative "inventory" of our contemporary historicity.

Contemporary African Philosophy is thus a radically original Socratic exploration of the present fecund actuality of Africa. It is ardent effort to reclaim the African experience of Being within the world-historical context of the implosion of European Modernity. Its self-implicative questioning is aimed at what is possible in the barren actuality of the present.

African philosophic reflection is thus an attempt to explore and appropriate what European Modernity closed-off at the dawn of its own historicity and in the violent process of its self-institution. It is, in this regard, a thinking of new beginnings born out of our political emancipation and the historico-political crisis of Modernity, i.e., the long awaited demise of our subjugators.

II

In and out of this overall historico-political horizon the discourse of African philosophy carves out and articulates itself as a viable and pertinent theoretical undertaking. As Theophilus Okere puts it

Whether it is a Plato from Greek antiquity, a Hegel from modern philosophy, or a contemporary philosopher like Heidegger ... their thought is inscribed and their problematic dictated by the non-philosophy which is their own cultural background, especially by their religious beliefs and myths. [Okere (1983, p.xiv)]

The basic and most fundamental fact in Africa today is the misery the Continent is immersed in and the varied struggles - in different areas - to overcome this wretched condition. It is out of this sombre "non-philosophy", this horizon, that African philosophy spins-out its own theoretical concerns. To be sure, African thinkers can also reflect on their own traditional "religious beliefs and myths". But if African thinkers are *really* to engage actual problems, then it is clear that - at some level or other - they have to interface with the concrete problems and concerns facing the Continent and its diverse peoples. For it is not the "beliefs and myths" of the peoples of Africa - in their intricate magnificence - which are mind boggling, but the concrete misery and political insanity of the post-colonial situation. This is what calls forth thinking!

At this point it is necessary to note that "Contemporary African Philosophy" from its very inception has been a discourse directly implicated in the political struggles of the African Continent. Father Placide Tempels' Bantu Philosophy, originally published in 1945 - which provoked and served both as the positive (Ethnophilosophy) and negative (Professional Philosophy) point of departure for the polemical exchanges which presently constitute the discourse of Contemporary African Philosophy - was not a book innocent of politics. In fact, as Wamba-dia-Wamba has emphasized, Tempels was an ideologue of the European "civilization mission". The basic intent of Tempels' work

was to explore and appropriate by subversion the lived world-outlook of the Bantu/Africa. [Wamba-dia-Wamba (1991, pp.211-244 passim)]

This text articulates the need to explore and appropriate the intellectual productions of the Bantu/Africa in order to better anchor the European colonialist project in the consciousness of the colonized. For Tempels, one had to know and recognize the "limited" humanity of the colonized in order to better colonize and Christianize them. But is not colonialism itself predicated on the "complete" absence of humanity in the "savage" who thus needs to be colonized in order to be humanized?

The fruitful ambivalence of Tempels' project - from the perspective of the colonized - is rather obvious: inadvertently and in the service of colonialism Tempels was forced to admit - against the grain of the then established "knowledge" - that the Bantu/African is not mere a beast devoid of consciousness, but a human-being whose conscious awareness of existence is grounded on an elaborate and speculative world-view. This is what Tempels refers to as the Bantu ontology of Being as Force.

Thus, the affirmative response to Tempels' work is an attempt to capitalize on the positive results of this ambivalence, i.e., the inadvertent recognition of the humanity of the human in the colonized. The negative response, on the other hand, is a scientific attempt to expose and guard against the colonialist equivocations utilized to placate, minimize and bypass the obdurate resistance of the colonized⁶. In either case, these responses are inherently political, precisely because they were provoked by the politics of colonialism in the guise of philosophy. It is out of this theoretical impasse that the discourse of Contemporary African Philosophy claims and articulates its questions and concerns.

Viewed in this light, the political imperative of Contemporary African Philosophy is rather clear: As Wamba-dia-Wamba puts it, "(i)n today's Africa, to think is increasingly to think *for* or *against* imperialism." [Wamba-dia-Wamba (1991, p.244); emphasis in the original] One has to recognize that theoretical work cannot be neutral in the context of foundational historical and political struggles. In this context African philosophy has to be the systematic un-masking of the neo-colonialist project on the level theory. The other side of this

posture is to side with neocolonialism by default. It is to be derelict - knowingly or unknowingly - of one's own most historicity. As Okere correctly observes, the discourse of African Philosophy is located within the "movement in both artistic and intellectual life to establish a certain (African) identity". [Okere (1983, p.vii)] It is an effort, on the plane of theoretic struggle, to reflectively explore and theoretically supplement the concrete emancipatory efforts - at various levels and in different arenas - now underway on the Continent. This, furthermore, is not a question of choosing or preferring one set of questions as opposed to another. It is rather a question of being open to that which needs and calls forth thought in the contemporary African situation. As Okonda Okolo puts it, this is the situation of the "formerly colonized, the oppressed, that of the underdeveloped, struggling for more justice and equality." [Okolo (1991, p.208)] For philosophers, as Marcien Towa has observed, are

beings of flesh and bones who belong to a continent, to a particular culture and to a specific period. And for a philosopher, to really philosophize is necessarily to examine in a critical and methodic manner the essential problems of his milieu and of his period. [Towa (1991, pp.194-195)]

In the differing formulations of African philosophers there is controversy as to what "the essential" might be. This dispute, however, is grounded in a shared understanding that it is the present day African situation as it arises out of the ambiguous and broken legacy of the African past which calls for thinking. This then is the relation of horizon to discourse exemplified in Contemporary African Philosophy.

Philosophic discourse does not just happen. Rather, it is the language of articulation of meditative concerns interior to and arising out of the horizon of a specific and concrete cultural and historical totality within and out of which it is located and framed⁷. In each case, and for philosophic reflection as such, it is the lived-life concerns of a culture, a history, a tradition, which serve as the bedrock on which philosophy is grounded. Philosophic discourse is thus the rhetorically eloquent and historically effective enunciation - the bringing to utterance of the historicity of existence within the confines of a specific historicity. For as Okolo emphatically puts it, ultimately philosophy

"exists *only* in particular traditions." [Okolo (1991, p.204; emphasis added)]

III

Given what has been said thus far, what then of Contemporary African Philosophy? In the history of philosophy and presently, ethnic and/or religious, national, epochal, and continental qualifiers have been and are still operative in regards to designating specific philosophic discourses. German, Greek, Oriental, Jewish, Arabic/Islamic, Medieval/Christian, Ancient, Modern European, American, are all philosophic designations interior to the tradition of Western philosophy. These qualifiers designate the specificity of a philosophic discourse in terms of a horizon within which and out of which the particular philosophic discourse is articulated. The latest addition to this list of qualifiers is "Contemporary French Philosophy", which Vincent Descombes describes as "coincident with the sum of the discourses elaborated in France and considered by the public of today as philosophical." [Descombes (1980, p.1)]

In short, what has to be noted is the fact that the designation African Philosophy has behind it a long list of precedents and thus needs no justification. This designation, just as the ones mentioned above, specifies a philosophic discourse in terms of the specific horizon out of which it is articulated. As indicated in section one of this paper, Contemporary African Philosophy is directly linked to and arise out of the present horizon of a post-colonial world.

Indeed, as Okere convincingly argues, Contemporary African Philosophy is an actualization from within the African world of the "historicity and relativity of truth ... one of the main insights of the hermeneutical revolution in philosophy" [Okere (1983, p.124)], which substantiates and in turn is substantiated by the efforts embodied in this discourse. In this regard, Contemporary African Philosophy, originating as it does, out of the "heart of darkness", is an added critical/questioning voice among the varied current discourses of philosophy. It is the questioning mediative voice of those the modern European world compelled into voicelessness in the prices of its own self-righteous and violent historic self-institution. In fact, as Lucius

Outlaw pointedly observes, in "light of the European incursion into Africa, the emergence of 'African philosophy' poses deconstructive (and reconstructive) challenges" to the world-wide imperious and ferocious dominance of Eurocentrism. [Outlaw (1987, p.11)]

The "deconstructive challenge" of African philosophy is directed at the Eurocentric residues inherited from colonialism. Educational, political, juridical, cultural, etc., institutions have been taken over by the independent states of Africa. But the basic parameters within which they function, the Eurocentric principles and attitudes which inform these institutions, remain un-thought and un-changed. The "deconstructive" aspect of African philosophy is thus aimed at the un-masking of these Eurocentric residues in contemporary Africa. Conversely, and in conjunction with the above, the "reconstructive challenge" of African philosophy is aimed at supplying a reflective-theoretic supplement to the concrete efforts underway on the Continent. In the words of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, this is the effort to "decolonize the mind" or, with Cabral one can describe it as, an effort to "return to the source". [Ngugi (1987, *passim*) and Cabral (1973, *passim*)]

The discourse of African philosophy is thus directly and historically linked to the demise of European hegemony and is aimed at theoretically fulfilling this demise. It is a reflective and critical effort to re-think the African situation beyond the confines of Eurocentric concepts and categories. The concrete resurrection of Africa, beyond tutelage of Europe, requires (in all spheres of life) a re-thinking of the contemporary state of affairs in terms which are conducive and congenial to Africa and its diverse peoples. This then is the task of the African philosopher. In the inspired and inspiring words of Fanon:

culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought (philosophy!) to describe, justify and praise the actions through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. [Fanon (1963, p.233)]

Africa has been, for some time now, in the process of recovering and establishing its own politico-historical existence after almost a century of colonial rule. This restorative recovery in order to properly fulfil itself needs a re-thinking of much that we have inherited - consciously and subliminally - from the colonial past. It is thus that the

discourse of Contemporary African Philosophy has a politico-historical and existential import and function in the contemporary horizon of the Continent. In this respect it is critical philosophic appropriation and continuation of the politico-historical and psycho-existential therapeutic discourse that Fanon inaugurated in Black Skin, White Masks in 1952 and consolidated in his in 1963 published seminal work The Wretched of the Earth. To explore, appropriate, cultivate, and sow deeply the *seme* of this original and originative effort is the basic task of philosophic reflection in Africa. Thus Contemporary African Philosophy is the indispensable theoretic supplement to the historic process of "re-Africanisation" [Cabral (1969, p.76)] without which, as Cabral notes, nothing can be achieved. It is the reflective exploration of the possible out of the barren actuality of the present: a theoretic and therapeutic radical project aimed at reclaiming and re-instating the historicity of existence - i.e., freedom - against the asphyxiating inertness of neo-colonialism.

As part of the cultural and intellectual production of a people - a continent - the reflective evocations of the African philosopher are interior to the "efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought" to constitute and "keep itself in existence". The meditations of the African philosopher are themselves internal to the effort to "return to the source" out of the concrete politico-historical concerns of the present. For in the last quarter of the 20th century it is the very existence of life - cultural, historic, political, economic - which is at stake in Africa. It is in this respect that the efforts of philosophic reflection in Africa are directly tied to questions of political freedom, i.e., the possibility of establishing, in Africa, a question of survival!

To evocatively engage this vital concern is the basic calling of Contemporary African Philosophy; it is that out of which it spins the thread of its discourse. But this is also the most fundamental issue within the contemporary horizon of Africa. It is thus that the *discourse* of Contemporary African Philosophy is a meditative exploration of the African *horizon* from within the contradictory situation of a post-colonial *World*.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Nuhad Jamal for her helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. I derive this distinction from an exploration of Heidegger [1966]. In this regard see Serequeberhan [1987].
3. For an exploration of how 19th-century European philosophy contributed to this effort see Serequeberhan [1989 and 1990]. See also Outlaw [1987].
4. In this regard see Frantz Fanon's pioneering discussion of this point [1967, chapter 4].
5. Ousmane Sembene's 1968 cinematographic production is based on his in 1988 published novel The Money Order.
6. For an interesting discussion of these developments see Outlaw [1982]. In this regard see also Mudimbe [1988, pp.136-145].
7. Martin Heidegger [1966, *passim*], and specifically the section titled, "Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking", and by the same author [1968, *passim*]. It is interesting to note that Thomas S. Kuhn makes essentially the same point (from within the problematic of the philosophy of science) when he says that, "extraordinary problems are not to be had for the asking. They emerge only on special occasions prepared by the advance of normal research". [Kuhn (1970, p.34)]

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Résumé

Selon K.A. Appiah l'évidence biologique mine l'illusion largement répandue qu'il existerait des races distinctes, déterminées génétiquement. De plus, il affirme que la croyance populaire d'après laquelle il y aurait des héritages raciaux distincts, définis à travers l'histoire des sociétés est logiquement incohérente. Je répertorie ici les arguments qu'il utilise pour défendre ses thèses, tels qu'il les a présentés dans son livre Dans la maison de mon père, au chapitre II: Illusions concernant les races. Je critique son hypothèse selon laquelle il est possible d'isoler des faits biologiques sur les êtres humains comme s'il sagissait de 'données' et de débattre raisonnablement de ces faits sans aucune référence aux artifices de sociétés que sont les races et les sexes distincts.

REALITIES OF 'SOCIAL CONSTRUCT'
a comment on K.A. Appiah's
"Illusions of Race"

Henle Lauer

The focus of these remarks is restricted to Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah's essay "Illusions of Race", Chapter Two of his book In My Father's House. The claims that Appiah refutes there will be attributed in this essay to a fictional '*DuBois' in order to avoid scholarly exegesis of the actual DuBois corpus. More compelling, at least to a wider audience, are the positive claims that Appiah aims to defend by critiquing DuBois' work [p.45*1].

Appiah argues that it must be false to assert oneself as belonging to a particular race on the grounds that one shares a common heritage and current purpose with all members of that race and with no members of any other race. He explains that fixing one's racial identity is a mistake because it requires that races be defined exclusively by reference to events in social history. He says that defining race in this way is not only empirically misleading, but also logically incoherent. I will further elaborate on this charge of incoherence 1).

Researchers have discovered that genetic similarities within populations do not correlate with familiar racial categories [p.36]. Further, many individuals fail to fall neatly into any specific racial category [pp.37-38]. And the ranges of moral and intellectual capacities fail to correlate with degrees of pigmentation, hair curl and differences in facial structure [pp. 35, 37 ,39]. Let us suppose that Appiah's scientific survey is accurate and exhaustive. Then we may note that evidence accumulated through a century of ground-breaking discoveries supports the following conclusion: Contrasts in skin, hair and face contour provide no basis for postulating the existence of distinct races, regardless of how striking these visible differences may

* Page citations throughout the text refer to Appiah [1992].

seem [pp. 39, 45]. Might there be another basis, then, for positing distinct racial identities?

The alternative *DuBois proposal that Appiah rejects is this:

"Each person belongs to only one race, and each race has its own essence. But this essence is not bio-genetically determined. Instead it is socio-historically determined, such that the essence of a race confers upon each of its members a common historical legacy and a current mandate; these two constitute a person's racial identity [p.30]."

In order to explain why Appiah states that this doctrine is logically incoherent, I will rely on a metaphor. Imagine a huge mansion on a vast estate with parks, malls and farms. A great number of people have assembled and agreed to stay on for an entire year; anyone leaving for any reason will never return. None of the individuals' activities have been prearranged; people are free to go about their varied occupations. On the first night, a record is made of where each person is sleeping; these locations are divided into three lists I, II and III and set aside.

Throughout the whole of the year records are made of everything that happens on the estate; suitable innocuous audio-visual equipment makes this a routine and benign task. The records of all these events are sorted randomly into three lists i, ii and iii. In reviewing what happened, there is a sense in which everything that occurred on the estate is a part of the life history of every individual who lived there, each one having been affected, directly or remotely, by everything that took place.

But the question might arise for a specific individual: which of the events are part of his group's history on the estate? Quite trivially, we would have to know which group he belonged to in order to answer this question [p.32]. The listed events themselves could not reveal which list was a part of his heritage. Allegiances made before he came onto the estate would not indicate which list of the three to count as part of his history. We would have to consult the initial

records of who slept where, and then match his group number with the appropriate list of events. Alternatively, we could have given each group a name instead of a number - perhaps reflecting important names used outside the estate. And the individuals might have been classified according to their height rather than their location on the first night. But this would only give the appearance of being less arbitrary. Suppose that instead of randomly listing the events, all episodes were recorded as involving members of these named groups. Given this way of describing the events that transpired, we could truly claim that groups existed on the estate. But from these records of what happened, we cannot deduce that the groups existed as separate entities, enduring independently of the particular times and places and individuals whose behaviour the group names were invoked to describe. In principle, everything that occurred could have been described without reference to any groups at all; we could have retained a single listing of the year's events, together with a single listing of all the people².

Now if that year's events constitute the entire history of the social world and the estate's inhabitants are all people in the world, then our sketch may illustrate Appiah's two claims: that one's racial identity cannot be defined solely by reference to the history of social events, and that the history of social events cannot by itself entail the existence of races with distinct essences.

In general, positing the existence of essences has fallen out of philosophical fashion, with some influential exceptions³. Professor Saul Kripke has argued that since chemists discovered the empirical fact that water is H₂O, we now know something about the essence of water [Kripke (1972, pp 253-355 and 763-769)]. Essences or not, the explanatory power of molecular theory provides a supporting framework for a posteriori claims about the identity of many substances. On very general grounds, then, one might take issue with Appiah when he says that an "a posteriori claim" cannot be a "criterion of identity" [p.33].

But the reason for rejecting *DuBois' special "impulses and strivings" [pp. 30, 33 and 41] as a criterion of Negro identity is that there is no reliable supporting framework for establishing which individuals are Negro.

To put it simply: In the absence of any reliable way of identifying who is and who is not a member of a certain club, it is idle to say that all and only club members share XYZ sentiments. It is idle because there could be no way to test the claim: whose sentiments do you check if the club's membership is utterly elusive? Perhaps such a membership is self-selecting. If one feels XYZ strongly one may choose to be a member; there is no compulsion. Such a club's identity persists from year to year only as individuals choose to renew their allegiance. The club has no independently sustaining essence of its own; it is a social construction. No less capriciously, claims Appiah, do we choose our racial identities.

Of course there does not 'seem' to be anything capricious about one's roots. The classic means of identifying one's racial heritage is by tracing 'descent' through a 'lineage'. Appiah rejects this method of identifying race because it is a selection artificially imposed on the biological facts; it denies the fuller biological picture of how we each got to be where and who we are⁴. For a taste of that fuller picture, imagine oneself on the first rung of a ladder that widens exponentially at each rung. On the level directly above you stand your two parents; on the rung directly above them stand your parents' parents; four people in total; again on the level above them stand each of your grandparents' parents: eight people. Continuing like this, on the 20th rung above you stand the people of 20 generations ago who are biologically antecedent to your birth: there stand 1,048,576 (2^{20}) people. There is no physical basis for aligning with only a fraction of these; yet that is how lineage is contrived. One's distinct ancestry is a social construct, imposed upon biological given of one's existence. Ancestry is, in Appiah's terms, "an act of choice" [pp. 31-32].

The term 'choice' here is unfortunate. The young man in East Harlem who narrowly escapes the tug of heroin by devoting all his

energies to the Islam Nation has not 'chosen' black brotherhood over assimilation into the white world with his fine future in medicine waiting for him. The young woman who asserts her sense of self worth by dressing to kill and is later gang-raped, has not 'chosen' the risky and degrading conditions of her heterosexuality.

To evoke the metaphor of choice here may be to neglect the effectiveness of 'social constructs' in describing individuals' reasonable decisions and aspirations. A facile polarization of 'biological facts' vs. 'sociohistorical events' threatens to undermine the hopeful excitement triggered by the conclusions drawn in "Illusions of Race".

Nowadays one wearies of talk about interdependence; still it is mistaken to ignore the ways in which social developments (e.g. tool use) have affected biological evolution (e.g. enlarged cranium, bipedalism, opposing thumbs, narrowed birth canal) [Jaggar (1980, p.111)]. In the shorter run, each person is assigned a gender and racial category at birth⁶. Depending upon prevailing economic and cultural arrangements, these social constructs may determine the infant's nutritional and caloric intake, the physical handling and risks, the amount of sleep it receives and the later claims she or he may make as an adult. These physical conditions in turn determine the strength, compliance, intellectual performance and material resources that individual will claim. On a grander scale in the short run, social constructs also have evident effects. The relation captured by the labels 'the West' and 'Africa' are neither illusory nor particularly transient. These social constructs have shaped mute material conditions with relative consistency over a century - although the terms have changed from military occupation to economic intrusion.

Sadly enough, it does not much matter at present if the operative notion of racial identity is logically coherent or not. Beliefs may be quite false, even contradictory, yet still play a causal role in the behaviour that determines human physical welfare.

The social psychology implied here is surely too simplistic to deserve much attention; the sustaining point is that it is unconvincing

to talk of human biological determinism without reference to the social conditions that conceptually prevail.

Appiah's conceptual work is of a different order altogether. He is like the first to build aeroplanes. His arguments suggest that a future framework for explaining human agency is in store; we may dispel 'race' and 'sex' as explanatory categories, as chemists once rejected 'phlogiston'. Human science may one day develop the logics of compassion, currently shrouded in superstitions about motherhood, altruism and gnosticism. The self may one day be licensed by a different model of rationality, to expand through widened spheres of identification. In the broadest dimension of reason, all that has happened socially, has happened to all of us. When we get that far, perhaps we can build anew⁵.

Notes

1. Note that Appiah's argument implies, reasonable enough, that the only viable way to defend the belief that distinct races exist is to appeal to a well-established scientific definition of race. And since the consensus of modern biologists rejects idea of 'race' as it is ordinarily believed [p.35], there is no scientific basis for the conviction that distinct races exist. (Some concepts do not seem to demand precise definition to justify our allegiance to them - c.g. moral integrity, truth - but the concept race requires a different treatment from these)
2. This last point is a paraphrase of one made by Derek Parfit, challenging the existence of a self enduring independently of the stream of experience [Parfit (1984, p.225)].
3. Against affirmative action schemes, Michael Levin has argued that the abilities with which a person competes for social rewards are essential to his personal identity; so it is incoherent to compensate a person for the historical handicaps he may bear, for without them he would have been somebody else [Levin (1980, pp.139-149)].

4. A comparable charge has been raised against the cultural imposition of two discrete sexes upon the biologically given " vast, fluid, ... multisexed ... continuum ... of the human species." [Dworkin (1974, p.175)].
5. I am grateful to Dr. Kofi Owusu for illuminating discussions of In My Father's House, University of Ghana, Legon.

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BOOK REVIEW

In my Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Oxford University Press: New York 1992. pp.225.
Review by Jups Kluyskens.

Perhaps the epilogue of In My Father's House is at the same time an excellent introduction to it. In a most contemplative story Anthony Appiah tells us about the funeral of his father in Kumasi. The moment of reflection about the identity of this man is described as follows: "All the identities my father cared for were embodied about us: lawyer, Asante man, Ghanaian, African, internationalist; statesman and churchman; family man, father, and head of his abusua; friend; husband. Only something so particular as a single life - as my father's life, encapsulated in the complex pattern of social and personal relations around his coffin - could capture the multiplicity of our lives in the postcolonial world" (p.191).

All the previous chapters in this book are carefully and meticulously argued essays expressing the multiplicity of Appiah's own intellectual life and the position of what we could call the multiple existence as a 'comprador intellectual'. This term taken from his essay on the postcolonial and the postmodern reflects the ambivalence of being both a western trained philosopher and Ghanaian. In itself this ambivalence may not be of such significance but it becomes more important with regard to the epistemological question of how knowledge of the other is gained and articulated. The position of the 'comprador intellectual' in his case may be summarized in the question what it means to be African.

In the introduction Appiah formulates the intention of the book as: "exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of an African identity in the late twentieth century". All essays are a mixture of personal and philosophical contemplations examining this identity. Foremost, Appiah wants to transcend competing ideologies within Africa which have existed since independence and which are to a large extent western

inherited ideologies. It seems difficult to define what is shared in this common identity as post universalist, but the attempt opens up a new debate drawing from a large and erudite bibliography.

The basic issue in all these essays has to do with the following problem: if African otherness is mainly a projection and inversion of Western ideologies, what can be said of African identity. Africa in general, Appiah suggests, its situation but also its cultural production, should be understood as resulting from specific circumstances. The issue of race for example has been articulated through specific images produced by western theorists (e.g. biologists) and Africans (e.g. the African-American DuBois) alike and turns out to be a fluctuating political and historical construct. The contemporary African identity which Appiah tries to explore tries to escape these "illusions of race". His arguments should not be understood as mere rhetoric in favour of Africa and Africans, but as an attempt to give sound and solid grounding for his premises and arguments. This becomes particularly visible when he confronts his philosophical investigation with literary theory, African religion, literature and politics. African contemporary cultures are shaped by "two main external determinants of her recent cultural history - European and Afro-New World conceptions of Africa - and her own endogenous cultural traditions" (p.X). Appiah's own intellectual endeavour finds a middle way drawing from his own personal history. Much transcultural but also transdisciplinary effort is made to grasp the question of a late twentieth century African identity. There is a strong tone of humanism in this effort but the technicality of his arguments shows that Appiah is not just concerned with working out an ethical conviction, but with a sophisticated enterprise of deconstruction and construction.

Appiah avoids any essentialism in this book and searches for room beyond universalist theories. This becomes more visible in the explorations in his essay on the postcolonial and the postmodern. The postmodern condition is reigned by a loose principle which he affirms for instance in philosophy, where it "is the rejection of the mainstream

consensus from Descartes through Kant to logical positivism on foundationalism (there is one route to knowledge which is exclusivism in epistemology) and of metaphysical realism (there is one truth which is exclusivism in ontology), each underwritten by a unitary notion of reason" (p.143). For Appiah postmodern culture is "the culture in which all of the postmodernisms operate, sometimes in synergy, sometimes in competition. And because contemporary culture is transnational, postmodern culture is global-though that does not mean that it is the culture of every person in the world" (p.144). The rejection of the claim to exclusivity by postmodernism can be understood as a specific, privileged way of understanding some species of modernism. Is it possible to apply this same idea to premodern culture and to attribute a value to this in a non-competitive way, i.e. beyond the universality of the modernist's claim, and if so, would this put Africa's cultural production in a new perspective? This new perspective is based on the idea that the western view of Africa's culture is distorted by inventing it for a specific public. Therefore the modernist characterization of what modernity entails must be challenged, Appiah argues, the rationalization of the world can no longer be seen as the tendency either of the West or of history (p.144).

The mediating role of African intellectuals in this process is very important for discovering what the idea of postcoloniality means. Mediating as the process of avoiding and overcoming the constant binarism of Self and Other when at the same time being constantly at risk of becoming the Other again. This challenge is taken up by Appiah in all the chapters of the book in a persuasive way and with great vigour and erudition, but leaving open where this will lead to and how the changes of this intellectual position can be further pursued. In presently depressed circumstances, however, the chances may not be great that Africa's cultural production will contribute a great deal to changing perceptions of Africa, despite our wishes to think so. Still, if there is no way out, Appiah's effort to break through the binaries is a splendid antidote to the so often heard pessimism about Africa and its intellectual potentials.

Democracy and Socialism in Africa edited by Cohen, R and Goulborne, H., Westview, Boulder, 272p..

Reviewed by Dipo Irele.

With the demise of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe and a vigorous backlash against the sclerotic orthodoxies sustained by such empty shibboleths as "real existing socialism" it is tempting to consign the entire tradition called "Marxist" to the shredder and the incinerator. [Rorty (1992)] Admittedly, the contradictions in Marx's ideas are much clearer and open now, partly thanks to studies deconstructing its characteristic use of language and its rhetorical tropes. Contradictions at the heart of Marx's ideas, it is asserted, may have contributed to certain atrocities that were witnessed in the former communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Although it is easy to be dismissive of Marxism because of these atrocities it is misleading because Marx's profound insights concerning the social forces that shape society's historical movement are not invalidated by the deficiencies found in the so-called socialist states. With this in mind, one must be careful to avoid the worst possible scenario concerning babies and bath water.

The 13 essays in the book Democracy and Socialism in Africa emanated from a conference at the University of Warwick organised by the Review of Africa Political Economy. The contributors are scholars of African affairs who came together to rub their minds together to explore the relationship between socialism and democracy in the light of recent experience.

The introduction sets the tone for the essays. Democracy, it asserts, is an essentially contested concept. It is contested by the Left and the Right, and within the left radical movement. But so much is clear: without popular or democratic organisations of workers, peasants and other social groups in the civil society, government serves the exploiting classes and abuse of power will continue.

Democracy in Africa has been undermined by nationalist, bourgeois and socialist governments that are not tolerant or permit free elections. There are human right abuses. Legal and political institutions are needed to secure people's rights. Democracy must be taken seriously by socialists and they must ensure that it is renewed within workers organisations and popular organisations and in society at large.

The essays are divided into two parts, one revolves around issues and debates, and the other presents case studies of African socialist states. Peter Lawrence (*Economic Democracy, Socialism and the 'Market'*) starts the first part by examining the issue of economic democracy, socialism and the market and argues that the market is decisive in the allocation of resources and therefore is an important ingredient in the process of democracy and socialism. He points to certain features of African economies which can serve as the basis of collectivist economic and political democracy and suggests that market socialism is possible if the markets are structured democratically by the state in such a way that both the producers and consumers can participate. Peter Lawrence revives here the views of Oskar Lange [1938], which have more recently been discussed by Bardham and Roemer [1992, pp.101-116] and van Parijs [1986] and Nove [1986].

Ken Post's paper (*The State, Civil Society, and Democracy in Africa: Some Theoretical Issues*) discusses the important issue of civil society and shows how it can condition the state and democracy. Post claims that Africa has not experienced liberal democratic regimes, and sketches an innovative basis for socialism, based on a pluralistic national party system with a socialist bureaucracy, though decentralised in terms of policy implementation. He also advocates elected delegates and the formation of a counterbody of elected delegates at every level of bureaucratic agency.

Dauda's paper (*Taking Democracy Seriously: Democracy-Bureaucracy Relations*) urges for consensus among the political elites so that there will be "political stability and peaceful change of govern-

ment" [p.53]. He claims that democracy embodies equality before the law and respect for human rights. These are essential in the search for democracy in Africa. He shows that in the African political landscape, decentralisation has led to fragmentation and instability because ethnic, linguistic political and religious groups have undermined democracy. He advocates proper understanding of bureaucracy because, according to him bureaucracy is essential for the flowering of democracy. Peppe Roberts and Gavin Williams discuss the twin issues of gender and peasants in their essay "Democracy and the Agrarian Question in Africa: Reflections on the Politics of States and the Representation of Peasants' and Women's Interests", arguing that peasants' and women's interest have been neglected in Africa in both the capitalist and socialist states. They argue that socialist need to look at the "gender relations of production and reproduction and to reconstruct their ideological pretensions and practices" [p.92].

The final paper, in this first part, called "Discourses of Democracy in the South African Left: A Critical Commentary", is by Darly Glaser. He takes a critical look at the diversity of leftist discourse on democracy in South-Africa. His view is that models of democracy proposed by the left do not incorporate political pluralism and civil liberties and that these qualities have to be incorporated in the struggle for socialism.

The second part of the book focuses on specific case studies: Oloka-Onyango (The National Resistance Movement, "Grassroots Democracy" and Dictatorship In Uganda) looks at grassroots democratic practice in Uganda, Haynes (Inching Towards Democracy: The Ghanaian "Revolution", the International Monetary Fund, and the Politics of the Possible) writes about the efforts made to bring about democratization in the wake of Ghanian coup of December 1981; Mohammed Salih (Pastoralists, Socialism, and Democracy: The Sudanese Experience) focuses on pastoral society in Sudan and the relationship of the society with democracy and socialism, Parson (The Peasantariat, Politics, and Democracy in Botswana) takes up the issue

of democracy in Botswana; Allen (Gender, Participation, and radicalism in African Nationalism: Its Contemporary Significance) discusses the decline of women in post-colonial power and participation (with special reference to Kenya and Zambia); while Thompson's paper (Beyond the Nation-State? Democracy in the Regional Economic Context) deals with the prospect of democracy in Africa. What emerges from these case studies concerning democracy in Africa is not cheering. The prospects for democracy and socialism in Africa are bleak.

The conclusion of the volume, by Goulbourne, (Conclusion: The Future of Democracy in Africa) deals with the resurgence of politics in recent times. He points to the challenge to the monolithic state institutions by the ordinary people and advocates participatory rights as a basis for socialism and sees multipartyism as an essential ingredient to overcome the constraints on civil and human rights imposed by the one-party states of Africa after independence.

Most of the papers in the book are of good quality and contribute to the ongoing debate on democracy in Africa.

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The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy by Olusegun Oladipo, Molecular Publishers, Ibadan, 1992.

Reviewed by Kolawole Aderemi Owolabi

The fundamental challenge confronting the philosopher in virtually all societies is the challenge of how to reconcile his theoretical vocation to the practical needs of the society. This challenge becomes more pressing and the society more demanding when there is acute crisis in the community. This situation according to Olusegun Oladipo is the predicament of the African philosopher today. In his book The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy, Oladipo argues that the genuine challenge of African philosophy is not that to define the discipline in relation to Africa, neither is it one of orientation, but rather to make philosophical discourse relevant to the situation of the African man.

The book is a collection of four essays linked together by the basic theme of the meaning and essence of the idea of African philosophy and how the said idea can be meaningful as a solution to Africa multidimensional crisis. As the sub-title of the book depicts, two of the four essays, precisely the second and the third critically reflect on the positions of the two main orientations in African philosophy - the traditionalists and the modernists. On the whole, the four essays hover around the question: how should the African philosopher practice his discipline in relation to the problems of his immediate society?

The first essay in the volume titled "The Crisis of Relevance" highlights the problem of relevance facing the African philosophers. Oladipo's argument is that African philosophy in its present situation is externally induced, which leads to the poverty of African philosophy. The author proceeds to maintain that the two fundamental orientations in African philosophy, the traditionalist and the modernist reflect on externally defined problematics. According to the author the modernists consider the traditional Western philosophical problems as universal problems and seek to maintain the status quo. In this manner,

Oladipo continues, the modernists neglect the genuine philosophical problematics in Africa.

The traditionalists, on the other hand, who according to the author appear to be committed to the African problematics are also indirectly receiving their *modus operandi* from the West. The attempt of the traditionalists to present African culture as rational and tenable is not serving the interest of Africa according to Oladipo. Instead, it is meant to convince European audience. Therefore the traditionalists and the modernists are unable to "make any significant contribution to self knowledge in Africa" [p.5]. According to him, the two orientations, are entrapped in "European epistemological ethnocentrism" [p.9].

To break this eurocentric scholarship, Oladipo suggests that the African philosopher must address Mudimbe's question "The question of what it means to be African and a philosopher today" [p.10]. Hitherto, according to the author, the question of the meaning of the adjective *African* has received unsatisfactory treatment. Those who conceive *Africa* as a geographical concept, the author says have a narrow conception of it. While those who see it as a cultural concept have a too broad conception of it. The way out therefore is for the alternative question of Mudimbe to be addressed. When the genuine question is raised, the African philosopher will see his or her task as that of creating "a tradition of thinking and discourse whose main focus will be on issues affecting the interests and aspirations of Africans" [p.19].

In the second and third chapters, Oladipo amplifies the earlier discussion of the neglect of the fundamental problem by the two orientations. In chapter two, he discusses the failure of the traditionalists to address the question of what the attitude of the African Scholar to the cultural heritage of his people should be. According to him, this is the approach the traditionalists should take, rather than arguing that Africans have a unique world view different from the Western scientific mindset. In taking this path, he says, the traditionalists have failed abysmally and have helped to further the absurd myth that every belief can be rational. Instead the traditionalists should exploit the link

between the indigenous culture and the socio-economic situation of African man today, according to Oladipo. The failure to recognize the connection between the two marks the climax of the failure of traditionalism. This failure notwithstanding, the author maintains that the traditionalists should be commended for entrenching the need to be critical of Western culture and the attendant modernization in African philosophy.

The third essay in the book, devoted to a critique of the contribution of the modernist orientation, commences with highlighting the objectives of the modernist orientation. The modernists he says are the first generation of trained philosophers who imbibed the Western mode of practising the discipline. This background is responsible for their desire to maintain autonomy of the discipline. These philosophers are not willing to allow what they see as the "debased" form of the discipline to override their version. In this respect the modernists begin to become advocates of the status quo in African philosophy, according to him. According to the author, the contributions of the modernists can however be seen in light of the role they played in revitalizing the debate concerning the focus of African philosophy and in insisting that the development of Africa rests on her acceptance of the scientific culture. But this contribution is minimal, according to the author. Minimal because they fail to "clarify for Africans the nature of the various obstacles that impede the development of their societies" [p.72]. According to Oladipo the modernists have failed to realise their potential. They failed, he insists, not only in changing the African world but also in interpreting it.

The last essay in the volume, titled: "Philosophers and Human Interests in Africa", is the attempt of the author to shift the focus of the debate in African philosophy to social problems, which he considers the only exit from the dilemma facing African philosophers. The premise of the conclusion of this essay is that scholarship, in whatever form, is a social phenomenon, a product of human interaction. The author proceeds that the offshoots of scholarship, that is, knowledge and truth are meant for the social community. He continues

Knowledge and truth, therefore are not important intellectual qualities in and for themselves. They are important in human intellectual endeavours simply because a commitment to their realisation provides a surer way of overcoming some of the obstacles - natural and social - to human development and social progress [p.76].

Based on this fact, the author submits that the commitment of the scholar is not to these abstract concepts but rather to society. The demand for relevance is therefore the legitimate demand of any society. According to him this quest for relevance is a challenge to and a responsibility of every scholar.

Therefore the African philosopher can face this challenge and be responsible towards his community in two fundamental ways. First of all, he can contribute to the development of his society by employing his knowledge and tools of his discipline to carry out a critique of the African culture. Unlike the traditionalists who perceive the culture as an ideal, the African philosopher, in this respect, should conceive the culture as a dynamic phenomenon that can be further transformed. Oladipo also warns that both African culture, and modern culture should be subjected to the philosophers critical scrutiny.

The second way by which African philosophy can be society-oriented, according to Oladipo, is by reflecting on existing ideologies. The African philosopher must not only be aware of the fact that there are two senses of ideology, he must also inform society about this. Oladipo says that there is ideology in the good sense and ideology in the bad sense. Ideology in the good sense, he maintains, recognises that there are socio-cultural variations which make any ideology to be contextual, while ideology in the bad sense, quoting Wiredu is "a ready-made set of ideas meant to be adopted by governments as the exclusive basis for the political organization of society" [p.95]. This debased sense of ideology must be vigorously denounced by African philosophers for the sake of the ideal development.

But the African philosopher, the author advises, must not end his discussion with this negative rejection of ideologies. Instead he should

proceed to develop alternative social theories that will manifest the goals and desires of the African people. As we know, such a programme must be informed by a proper understanding of the value-system of the African people. The value system should not be seen as a static but as a dynamic enterprise.

In conclusion, the author maintains that by the zealous commitment of the African philosopher to the African needs, the African philosopher will not shrink from his responsibility to humanity in general. The ideal way to make a start is to allow his commitment to begin at home. He says

We cannot contribute to what Earl Lovelace calls 'the essential task of building a new and humane society' by running away from the reality of our situation or trying to forget our experiences. Rather, it is our experiences that must provide the standpoint from which we make our contribution to the world. [p.100]

On the whole, The Idea of African Philosophy is an attempt to shift the focus and direction of African philosophy from theoretical questions to pragmatic issues. The book is written in very simple language. The simplicity of expression combined with the rigorous treatment of the theme make the work a significant contribution to the literature on African philosophy. The commitment to pragmatic-oriented scholarship by the author is sustained throughout the book. Ironically, it is in this persistent proclamation of the need for social relevance, that the book exhibits its shortcoming. Shortcoming in the sense that there are obvious overlapping and overflogging of this presentation. In every page of the work, one can identify a line or two that explicitly or implicitly maintain this point.

The fundamental objection that I have against the work therefore is that it overemphasises the need for social and practical relevance without ever once considering the fact that philosophy qua philosophy is supposed to be a theoretical enterprise. Philosophy in Western society is the attempt of the said society to meditate in a theoretical

manner on baffling questions of life. Much as we agree with the author that such a reflection is for the society, we still believe that the rigour of theoretical analysis can not be sustained if we are too committed to the issue of practical relevance.

Historically, in the Western society, psychology, economics, political science and other social sciences branched out of philosophy when they began to focus on issues that are very practical. As we know, the theoretical aspect of these disciplines are still being carried out today by philosophers. This question then can be raised against Oladipo's desire that African philosophy should be fully practical: Are we not saying that philosophy should close down and become appropriated by the social sciences? He denies this claim on page 99 of the book, claiming that his objective is not to ask philosophy to close shop.

But if the author is not saying that directly, the implication of his statement is not far from it. If he says that philosophy, a discipline known for its theoretical nature should be fully practical, is he not saying indirectly that the discipline as it is, ought to go? If we say that philosophy should be purely practical because of social exegesis, to whom do we give the traditional duty of philosophy? How do we distinguish between philosophy and the social sciences? Which discipline will now take over from philosophy and continue to perform its task of theoretical meditation? Or are we saying that theory is not desirable? Such a claim will not be surprising because the desire for practical relevance is presently persuading people from diverse disciplines to denounce theory. But can we even discuss practice without theory?

The question can also be raised against Oladipo's stand that, African philosophy throughout its history has persistently reflected on metaphilosophical issues, neglecting real theoretical work. Can we, in the light of this fact advocate a completely practice-oriented discourse in African philosophy? What is going to be the theoretical foundation of such a practical venture? It is true as Oladipo says that there is serious crisis in the African society. But it is also a justifiable claim

that before most of the said societal issues can be resolved, we need to thrash out some theoretical issues at the foundational level, which is yet to be done in Africa. For instance, one manifestation of the crisis in the said society is the lack of visionary and responsible leadership. But, have we done enough theoretical reflection on the issue of leadership in Africa? Without this type of theoretical work, the practical problem can not be alleviated. The desire for practical solutions to societal problems which is the motive behind Oladipo's position is shared by many scholars - including this reviewer - but such a desire should not blind us from seeing the obvious fact that a problem that is not articulated well through theoretical reflection can only receive a pseudo-solution.

Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel by O. Oladipo. Options Book and Information Services: Ibadan 1993.

Reviewed by W. Storm.

In the first issue of the monograph series Dialogue in African Philosophy the Nigerian philosopher Olusegun Oladipo discusses the relation between philosophy and literature. He formulates in the first part of the essay the thesis that the great African novel can only be written by an African writer who becomes a philosopher. Oladipo defends this by stating that philosophy and literature are related - as forms of social consciousness and as constructions in language. In the second part Oladipo highlights his concept of philosophy. On the one side he speaks of philosophy as a world-view, which as a theoretical view is placed consciously. This in contrast to a communal world-view, which is according to Oladipo usually unconscious and non-rational. In this context Oladipo refers to systematization and prognosticating as functions of philosophy, of a philosophical world-view.

The third part of the essay is dedicated to the relation between philosophy and literature. Oladipo first discusses the relation between philosophy and literature as forms of social consciousness and the

relation between philosophy and literature as constructions of language. He then discusses the shared elements of philosophy and literature which determine the relation between philosophy and literature. The first element is that both deal with the same object, namely human life in its various aspects. In addition both, according to Oladipo, provide a framework for interpreting human life and both try to identify new possibilities and trends. To substantiate this view Oladipo looks at the novel Anthills of the Savannah of Chinua Achebe. Achebe attempts, according to Oladipo, to give an explanation of why Kangan is a state in which the people (at least the poor and oppressed) are alienated from their rulers. A third shared element is that they use the resources of language to interpret and evaluate human life with a view to discover some hidden relationships and unforeseen possibilities and by doing so sharpen the perception of the reader. As last element he poses that both are also modes of interaction between writer and reader. In terms of aims and means, Oladipo points out that the aims of philosophy and literature are the same but that the means may be different.

At the end of the third part of this essay Oladipo also pays attention to the language question in Africa, namely writing in your mother tongue (with the possibility that the rulers put you in jail, e.g. Ngugi ma Thiong 'O) or the tongue of the (ex-) coloniser (with the possibility that you alienate yourself from your native people). Oladipo argues that the language question is not only a problem for litterateurs but for all African intellectuals (and thus philosophers too).

The nature of the modern African novel is discussed in the fourth and last part of this essay. Oladipo shows that the African novel is a product of political-economical and social-cultural experiences.

Oladipo's essay "Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel" is an interesting essay and the clue seems that the great African novel can only be written by a philosopher because when written by a litterateur it remains a time-dependent text. Oladipo suggests thus that philosophers produce time-independent texts. Another thing to observe is that Oladipo's discussion is limited to the relation between the written

literature and written philosophy. In my opinion an African philosopher should also pay attention to the relation between oral literature and oral philosophy, as well as to the relation between oral and written philosophy. The consequences of orality should not be ignored. Even in the U.S.A. this problem is appearing because more than 50% of her inhabitants are, as consequence of radio, telephone and television, functionally illiterate and thus orally oriented. The U.S.A. seems also under way to get its own language question, because at this moment already more than 50% of her inhabitants has Spanish as their first language. Will Spanish become the future language of the philosopher?

Remarkably enough, Oladipo said nothing about the reception of African philosophy and African literature in the world. African literature production has received worldwide recognition with several Nobel-Prize winners and a wide audience. It does not, therefore, seem self-evident that African literature should learn from African philosophy and not vice versa. So an average student will have read a book of Achebe and never read something of e.g. Hountondji. In my case I read Achebe's Things fall apart and Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol long before I read something of Hountondji. Shouldn't one expect that if the great African novel would be written by an African philosopher the reception of it would go the same way as the reception of African philosophies in non-African philosophical circles nowadays?

CONFERENCE REPORT

**COMMENT FAUDRAIT-IL "DIALOGUER" LA DEMOCRATIE
D'UNE MANIERE DEMOCRATIQUE ENTRE
L'AFRIQUE ET L'EUROPE**

**(Quelques réflexions sur un Congrès International
à l'Université Erasme Rotterdam du 29- au 30 octobre 1993)***

Gerd-Rüdiger Hoffmann

De quelle manière faudrait-il prétendre à une diffusion de la démocratie? Autrement dit: comment faudrait-il instituer la démocratie d'une manière démocratique?

C'est là l'une des questions majeures que se pose Jan Hoogland, de l'Université Erasme, dans sa contribution au Congrès qui s'est tenu dans cette université, du 29 au 30 octobre 1993, à Rotterdam. Cette question fut au centre des discussions, à côté d'autres questions et prises de position autour de la dimension globale de la démocratisation - en effet nécessaire - des pays africains. Parmi ces questions, il y a les suivantes:

Premièrement, la prétention à l'universalité du modèle démocratique occidental est-elle valide? Si elle l'est, alors il serait sensé de l'introduire aussi en Afrique. Et toutes les autres formes de gouvernement politique existantes seraient à juger selon leurs efforts à s'approcher de ce modèle de démocratie.

Deuxièmement, quels effets aurait la démocratisation des nations africaines, jusqu'ici tenues comme sans importance, sur la démocratie européenne? N'est-il pas vrai que la démocratie occidentale ne fonctionne qu'aux dépens de la Périphérie? Mais il en résulte un dilemme. Car il faut croire que les Etats africains devenus démocratiques ne continueront plus à être tenus comme sans importance et sous privilèges; s'ils veulent garantir le fonctionnement de leurs sociétés. Les Européens devront donc renoncer aux privilèges qu'ils se sont réservés

face à eux, ce qui serait difficilement supportable pour le fonctionnement des riches sociétés européennes.

Troisièmement, n'est-il pas possible en fin de compte que les démocraties occidentales aient quelque chose à apprendre des formes africaines de démocratie? En tout cas il y a des signalisations que indiquent que, dans les pays européens, le regard devrait se tourner vers des voies nouvelles.

Pourtant c'est ce que Heinz Kimmerle, Professeur de *Philosophie Interculturelle* à l'Université Erasme, à Rotterdam, entend signifier lorsqu'il écrit:

"Ce qui se passe aujourd'hui dans la culture occidentale apparaît tellement incertain qu'on doit se demander si elle peut assurer pour longtemps encore sa continuité. Les revers de la médaille des succès admirables sur les domaines de la science et de la technologie sont les risques d'une catastrophe atomique, la création des stocks d'énergie et toutes autres formes de faux comportements écologiques. Ils indiquent que l'existence future et durable de cette culture ne va pas de soi. (...) D'autre part, l'ouverture à d'autres cultures comporte l'espérance qu'il est possible de trouver auprès de l'autre des éléments susceptibles d'aider à minimiser les risques auxquels la culture européenne fait face." [Kimmerle (1991, p.236)]

Selon Kimmerle, la prémisse qui devait être à la base de cette conférence est qu'il ne peut exister de philosophies supérieures d'une côté et de philosophies inférieures de l'autre. Une conférence organisé quelques jours plus tôt à Harare (Zimbabwe) par la Fondation Konrad Adenauer sur la démocratisation en Afrique avait suivi des prémisses tout à fait autres. Dans une interview à la radio, un des participants africains avait dénoncé le fait que les conférenciers venus d'Allemagne apparaissaient comme des enseignants s'adressant à des élèves et qui voulaient, avec un ton paternaliste, inculquer la démocratie aux autres. Un des organisateurs allemands répliqua qu'il y aurait à faire une différence entre *inculquer la démocratie* et apporter à de bons amis les

meilleures expériences vécues chez soi. Mais cela sonnait comme un ordre: *Vous devez nous être reconnaissants pour la grâce que nous vous faisons de vous faire part de notre savoir sur l'unique démocratie vraie que existe.*

Quelques-uns des philosophes invités à Rotterdam avaient déjà rassemblé beaucoup d'expérience politique autour de la démocratie en s'étant engagés dans les Conférences Nationales organisées dans leurs pays. En particulier, il faut citer Yacouba Konate de la Côte d'Ivoire et Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba du Zaïre. Déjà en 1984 l'article de Wamba publié dans la revue Journal of African Marxists sur la palabre dans les communautés villageoises africaines, dans le contexte du concept de démocratie et de la information du consensus, avait suscité une certaine sensation. Dans cette étude il posait un rapport étroit entre la démocratie et la palabre dans le contexte de sa région natale plus exactement chez les peuples du Zaïre, de l'Angola et du Congo parlant la langue Kikongo. Ce sont bien sûr des questions très spécifiquement africaines qui y sont traitées. Pour Wamba-dia-Wamba, les Européens pensent que les formes démocratiques actuelles, surtout celles des dominés, doivent être politiquement organisées d'une manière telle quelles soient utiles à la légitimation de la domination existante, et elles doivent donc être démobilisées. Il est pour cela nécessaire de prendre en compte démocratiquement les classes dominées et, de manière marginale mais sans relâche, à les faire participer à l'explication des autres.

On aurait pu discuter de certaines questions qu'il aborde, notamment dans quelle mesure les deux niveaux différents que sont l'Etat et la communauté villageoise sont absolument comparables. On ne pouvait malheureusement lire qu'un résumé de sa Conférence. Pour des raisons qui confirment bien sa thèse selon laquelle la démocratie européenne vit au détriment des Nations dépendantes *non-européennes* il ne pouvait pas se rendre en les Pays Bas. Il n'avait pu venir que jusqu'en Autriche. Toute entrée dans les Etats du Benelux nécessite de présenter, pour les ressortissants du Zaïre, une attestation de l'ambassade belge à Kinshasa, c'est-à-dire donc de la *mère patrie*. Cette at-

tation ne vint pas, donc le visa pour les Pays Bas ne pouvait pas être obtenu, et donc la Conférence sur *Démocratie en Afrique et démocratie pour l'Afrique* à l'Université Erasme ne pouvait pas avoir lieu.

Pour d'autres raisons européennes (grève dans plusieurs compagnies aérienne) Massaer Diallo et Saliou Diallo, qui devaient venir de Dakar, n'avaient pas pu obtenir la possibilité de parler des éléments démocratiques dans la sagesse sénégalaise et dans les questions bio-éthiques que l'Etat devrait pouvoir se poser. La contribution de Marie Pauline Eboh, du Nigéria, dans laquelle elle se pose la question de savoir si la démocratie occidentale représente une réponse appropriée au problème africain, ne pouvait tout au plus qu'être lue intégralement. Elle estime que c'est une fausse conception des choses de croire qu'une forme définie de démocratie pourrait, sans modification aucune, être imposée à d'autres peuples.

Dans ce sens, la Soeur Kente dira: "Le vrai développement devrait être centré vers le peuple dans tous les domaines de l'activité humaine; l'homme comme centre doit être le principe guidant. Le vrai développement est un procès qui donne aux humains le pouvoir de réaliser leurs capacités, d'éduquer leur confiance en soi et de mener une vie de dignité et de satisfaction. Il devrait libérer le peuple de la peur d'être possédé et exploité." Cela peut-être assurément une exigence juste, mais qui, en Afrique (tout comme en Europe ou en Amérique) veut réellement se libérer de *la peur d'être possédé*? Et que peuvent réaliser les normes éthiques eu égard à la toute puissance de l'économie et de l'argent?

Les questions soulevées pendant la conférence par les participantes et participants européens étaient celles de la relation avec les minorités en général. Aussi le fait que les Etats-Nations, comme base de la démocratie, ne peuvent pas être organisés par l'Occident sans une grande immixtion faite de violence. Elisabeth Schipper (Rotterdam) disait à ce propos que *la démocratie et la philosophie sont 'par définition' interlinguistiques et interculturelles* et demandait de donner *la parole à la poule* (le mot *poule* instituait notamment une certaine confusion). Pour Yacouba Konate (Abidjan) aussi, la question de sa-

voir comment doit être organisé le rapport de la démocratisation nécessaire au sein duquel les majorités n'accordent pas d'attention aux minorités, et la question de la possibilité que ces minorités soient entendues, constituent des questions importantes.

Aucune de ces questions n'a pu être traitée ni même expliquée de façon exhaustive. Mais comme un commencement - une fois de plus - c'était une réussite. Tous les participants européens n'étaient pas disposés à trouver dans les contributions des collègues africains quelque suggestion qui soit utile. Du côté des Africains, la libération vis-à-vis du charme de la supériorité de la culture occidentale tout comme une attitude également critique à l'égard de leurs propres traditions constituent des conditions de projets susceptibles d'avoir de l'efficacité pratique.

*) Traduit de l'allemand par prof. P.Ngoma-Binda

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