

Reply

'The Shared Borderspace', a Rejoinder¹

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

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

Towards an Ethics of Intercultural Polylogue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By contrast, the intercultural comparison, which North Atlantic social sciences propose to us, is often rather selective. They join forces with those modalities that set up and confirm any increase in production, management, education, gender equity, unanimity, freedom and democratic consensus. However, it is inevitably the case that the same comparative vision leads to an assessment in the face of the big feast of assimilation (of the Beautiful, the Good, the Just, the Order, Reason and Truth) to which Western modernity would have convened humanity as a whole. The more the modernistic comparative vision aims at a classification, the more it is inevitably exposed to multiple senses and forms of otherness. The question confronting any anthropologist operating in this multifaceted world marked by ‘the end of the grand narratives on modernity’ (see François Lyotard’s *La Condition postmoderne* 1979) is this: how can anthropology sharpen its ambition to translate competing analogous and objectifying systems into incomparable heterogeneousness? Is the sort of anthropology emerging after postmodernity, that is, after the collapse of modernistic craze² for the universal, not facing the need for an epistemological refoundation of its own conditions of possibility?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Towards a Reappropriation of Local Knowledge Forms and Practices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Towards an Intercultural Emancipation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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