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## SHOULD INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY TAKE OVER FROM ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF CULTURE?

In reaction to Wim van Binsbergen's *Intercultural Encounters*

by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek

*ABSTRACT.* This article provides a critical analysis of the argument in van Binsbergen's book *Intercultural Encounters*. In a radical and comprehensive exposition, *Intercultural Encounters* provides epistemological, knowledge-political and moral arguments to discard Anthropology as a mode of intercultural knowledge production. Analysing van Binsbergen's claims, it is suggested that, rather than discarding Anthropology altogether, a hermeneutically more sophisticated and self-reflective Anthropology is called for. It is further suggested that van Binsbergen does not establish how Intercultural Philosophy can actually do the job of replacing Anthropology and include in Philosophy the empirical study of culture. Finally, it is suggested that van Binsbergen's greater objective of establishing a truly intercultural knowledge production requires attention to the political economy of knowledge production. Intercultural knowledge production requires that the actual production of cultural knowledge is democratized and 'decentered' all over the globe.

*KEY WORDS:* Intercultural knowledge production, Intercultural Encounters, Anthropology, Intercultural Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Political economy of knowledge production.

*RESUME :* Analyse du livre de Wim van Binsbergen *Intercultural Encounters*. Dans ce livre, par voie des arguments épistémologique, morale et politique de connaissance, l'ethnologie est disqualifié comme méthode interculturelle de production de la connaissance. L'article argumente qu'on a besoin d'une Anthropologie plus herméneutique et plus auto-reflexif, sans disqualifier l'ethnologie en principe. En plus, van Binsbergen ne démontre pas si la Philosophie Interculturelle peut déplacer l'ethnologie comme science empirique. Finalement, il est suggéré que le grand objectif d'établir une vraie production interculturelle de la connaissance fait nécessaire des analyses de la économie politique de la production de la connaissance, voir, la démocratisation de la production des connaissance culturel – mondial et décentré.

*MOTS CLE:* production de savoirs interculturels, Intercultural Encounters, ethnologie, philosophie interculturelle, herméneutique, économie politique de la production des savoirs

Criticism of Anthropology and self-criticism of the discipline are not new. In fact, since the exposure of its role in colonial rule and in fostering Eurocentric prejudice about so-called ‘primitive’ peoples, Anthropology has developed to be one of the most self-critical disciplines in the academia. However, the criticism that Professor Wim van Binsbergen advances in his recently published book *Intercultural Encounters* goes beyond all this. Himself a distinguished anthropologist of religion, his fundamental criticism leads him to desert the discipline of Anthropology and shift to Intercultural Philosophy. Such a criticism deserves careful attention because, if it holds, then it cannot remain without consequences for the intellectual landscape in the Human Sciences, as it would put Intercultural Philosophy central stage in academic concerns with culture.

The present article investigates whether Anthropology can be repaired after van Binsbergen’s criticism. My angle of approach is narrower than van Binsbergen’s. I limit myself to considerations from the point of view of the Philosophy of Science.

*Intercultural Encounters* is a captivating book. It recounts van Binsbergen’s personal intellectual development through a presentation of his own key publications over a period of thirty years. The original texts are enriched with his comments and analyses produced today. *Intercultural Encounters* thus reconstructs the story of van Binsbergen’s discovery of a range of internal contradictions in Anthropology. The book mixes the theoretical discussion of these methodological issues and Gordian knots of the discipline with the personal drama of living through these contradictions. And a drama it is, because both professional and personal integrity are at stake. The thirty years of intercultural encounters recounted in the book raise not just methodological or professional issues, but also political, moral and biographical ones. Finally, in van Binsbergen’s view, it raises the question of personal integrity as a person living in an intercultural world. Honesty and authenticity in constructing one’s own deepest convictions and relating with cultural others in an unprejudiced way requires a rejection of Anthropology and a radical conversion towards Intercultural Philosophy.

The various levels of the argument in *Intercultural Encounters* can be outlined as follows. A first level concerns epistemological and methodological questions related to Anthropology, especially anthropological fieldwork.

Van Binsbergen discusses these with reference to the history of his own intellectual production and his own fieldwork experience. At a second level, the book addresses questions of the politics of knowledge and the justification of, what he calls, a “North Atlantic” knowledge practice. The hegemonic position of North Atlantic knowledge traditions is itself an issue, but this obtains extra weight when these traditions address other parts of the globe. How does this North Atlantic knowledge relate to the self-interpretations produced elsewhere? What knowledge is produced when, for instance, an ethnographer fully participates in another form of life, and how is this knowledge affected when such experiences are reported in academic writing? How to decide which interpretations are more valuable? How even to reach a situation where the agent’s own interpretations are taken seriously? The politics of knowledge thus leads to a third level of questions relating to fairness, honesty towards fellow humans, and authenticity of oneself. Are the honest and open human relations in the fieldwork situation betrayed by having a second agenda of representing the cultural experience in a foreign paradigm? Can the anthropologist be true to her/ himself when incisive cultural experiences, roles played, and friendships solidified are ignored after the fieldwork period in favour of interpretations fitting the regular scientific paradigm?

Van Binsbergen’s argument is complicated because it addresses all three levels of the argument and concludes that Anthropology is seriously problematic at all these levels. It is epistemologically naïve, has a knowledge-political bias towards the North Atlantic, and leads to unfaithful attitudes to both one’s fellow humans in the field work situation and to oneself. Nevertheless, all these elements of criticism connect together into one line of reasoning which I will represent below. For van Binsbergen the train of dilemmas have an important biographical dimension as well, because he became himself a locally qualified healer in the Southern African tradition of Sangoma. As an anthropologist, such experience as a Sangoma healer is respected, but the discipline expects finally a rendering of such fieldwork experiences in terms of regular anthropological theorizing. Here van Binsbergen protests, both for personal and for professional reasons. Why should he become unfaithful to Sangomahood, his fellow healers and himself, and why should the North Atlantic paradigm of understanding automatically demand precedence in explaining Sangoma healing practice?

The core of van Binsbergen's argument is an epistemological criticism of Anthropology.

The enterprise of Anthropology is built upon gathering ethnographic data, where fieldwork is the instrument and ethnographic monographs and articles are the result. The idea of fieldwork is that the foreign context of meaning is captured by immersing oneself into the form of life concerned. Thus cultural phenomena can be understood from within the cultural context of meaning and can be experienced as they really are, in an 'emic' way, from within. Having gained understanding of cultural phenomena, then the issue is to present the results carefully and honestly in academic writing.

Van Binsbergen points out that, despite all due attention to anthropological professionalism and unprejudiced attitudes, the idea of fieldwork is a case of naive inductivism. First of all, because of the assumption of gaining access to the cultural facts as they really are; second, because of the assumption that the framing of these findings in academic textual forms is not distorting. Anthropologists tend

“to improvise their way when it comes to epistemological and methodological foundations”. (497).

If both the problems of access and of representation were given due attention, then we would have to move to different modes of intercultural knowledge production instead of Anthropology, he argues.

As for the problem of access, the empiricist claim ignores the constructivist aspect of empirical science and experience in general. There cannot be a complete shedding of one's original mindset, linguistic conditioning and cultural attitudes. On top of that, by formulating the specific research questions and scope of one's study, choosing concepts, theories, and other study-specific arrangements, the observer adds to the construction of the object of research. Even with a completely *emic* approach, including the continuous validation of the ethnographer's interpretations in day to day acting and communication of a community, one cannot claim to reach an unproblematic, untainted understanding. We need to replace a classical objectivist model of knowledge acquisition, where the subject gains unproblematic access to the object, with a communicative model, where the people studied can 'speak back' and interpretations are questioned, confirmed or adjusted.

In the words of van Binsbergen:

“Ethnographers (...) can only claim credibility provided that, in their fieldwork and in the production of published texts, ample provision has been made to turn their ethnography into a form of ‘communicative action’.” (504)

As for the problem of the representation of findings in academic vocabulary, using scientific notions and following textual forms that are standard in the discipline, here too Anthropology has naïve assumptions, according to van Binsbergen. He describes this act of representation as a certain form of appropriation, of aggression, and of expressing power differences. Ethnography ignores these problems. Van Binsbergen argues that, in fact, Ethnography is not even neutral but is based upon a preliminary choice for North Atlantic worldviews. Where beliefs and interpretations under study differ from the North Atlantic worldview, there the last one remains unchallenged and the worldview under study needs to be explained in terms of what is considered sensible in the North Atlantic. For instance in the case of witchcraft, the standard idea of the non-existence of witches is not questioned, it is only the witch belief that needs to be explained from factors that are acceptable in the North Atlantic.

Thus, the epistemological criticism immediately results in a knowledge-political argument, because if access and reporting are less than neutral, then of course questions arise as to whose biases and paradigms dominate the knowledge process. Van Binsbergen calls ethnography ‘Eurocentric’ because it does not treat the collective representations of other cultures on a par with the North Atlantic ones. The representations that have to be explained, that are put into question, are always those of the society studied. Those of our own are not questioned, they are even taken as the criterion for identifying what needs to be explained in the foreign culture. The explanatory vocabulary is automatically that of the North Atlantic. Thereby, basic norms of openness and fairness in intercultural communication are breached, and the hegemonic position of North Atlantic paradigms is confirmed. This unreflective representation in academic texts is a case of “subordinating objectification” (509).

Moral questions also derive immediately from this argument. The participant observer is unfaithful to the communicative interaction and shared experiences within the community. The dishonesty is that the participations

in the community and personal interactions are, finally, only instrumental. It is a practice of

“joining them in the field and betraying them outside the field” (507).

Finally, the persons in the host community are not taken seriously, social roles and friendships are betrayed and the full meaning in the local life is sacrificed to a rendering in academic formats. In addition, van Binsbergen maintains, the ethnographer is dishonest to him/ herself. Authentic experiences of oneself may be ignored or denied. In the case of van Binsbergen’s experience as a Sangoma healer this was a vital observation, because he considered it betrayal of his own authentic experiences and the Sangoma worldview to practice the expected professional distancing in order to fit this Sangoma truth into an acceptable ethnographic format.

I will here investigate van Binsbergen’s argument only from the point of view of Philosophy of Science. For that purpose, I first try to locate the problems he raises within the range of issues addressed in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Van Binsbergen’s criticism raises in particular two kinds of issues. First, the problem of the outsider gaining access to, or understanding of, the meaningful behaviour of others. Within this problem domain, van Binsbergen accuses ethnographers of naive empiricism (regarding the status of fieldwork data and regarding possible distortions in framing cultural experiences in academic formats and vocabularies). The second problem area concerns the theoretical framework of the interpreter her/ himself. Within this problem domain, van Binsbergen accuses ethnographers of an uncritical attitude towards their own, North Atlantic knowledge practice and metaphysical assumptions. The first point relates directly to van Binsbergen’s moral complaint about Anthropology, the second relates to the knowledge-political complaint concerning the hegemonic attitude of North Atlantic academic paradigms.

In view of these problem domains, I ask the question whether the failings that van Binsbergen accuses Anthropology of are necessarily part of the discipline (and should thus lead to abandoning it), or can they be overcome by a more sophisticated practice of the discipline (and should thus lead to a repair operation). I am not concerned with the factual question of whether anthro-



pologists sometimes, frequently, or even always commit the crimes indicated. After all, van Binsbergen's argument does not build on such a factual statement but on the principled one that ethnography is a misguided enterprise.

*The possibility of a sophisticated cultural hermeneutics*

The issues of understanding cultural others in Anthropology can be placed in the general chapter in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences concerned with the interpretation of thought and action, the chapter of Hermeneutics. Such questions of interpretation become especially urgent when it concerns interpretation across boundaries of time (as in the historical sciences) and culture (as in Anthropology). In how far, and with what methodological precautions, is such interpretation possible? In how far will our own vocabularies, agendas and paradigms always distort results? And can such interpretations of the foreign, the 'other', really challenge our own theoretical and metaphysical assumptions? These questions have been discussed in highly interesting work in Philosophy, the Theory of History, and in the Theory of Cultural Studies. From these discussions I will tap to assess van Binsbergen's argument.

A preliminary observation is necessary here. For interesting discussions of these fundamental methodological questions we have to turn to the philosophically more sophisticated discussions on the Social Sciences and History. Such discussions take seriously the fact that acting human beings, the objects of study, are themselves interpreting their own actions, and do so within a specific historical context of action. We cannot understand their action without grasping the interpretations that actors themselves have of their situation. This self-interpretation of social actors raises the issue of the 'double hermeneutics' involved in doing Social Science. The academic analyst interprets human action, but the action cannot be understood without, again, interpreting the self-interpretation of these actors. It does not suffice to explain human action from a purely third-person point of view, referring to objective factors such as calculable benefits, dangers, and possibilities in the situation. We need to trace how the actors themselves perceived these

benefits, dangers and possible courses of action. Thus, we have to recover the intentionality of the action, as we say in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Of course one can try to model human action and motivation, for instance by assuming that humans are use-maximalist or that they have a certain standard understanding of their world. This can often be a useful strategy for practical purposes and is used in much social science research, but it is a shortcut that avoids the difficult issue of reconstructing people's life-world and motivations.

Motivations and interpretations of actors are not directly assessable through observation. That makes Social Science a difficult science. The work to be done is hermeneutics, the reconstruction of the meaning of the action or ideas concerned through understanding the context of meaning, the life-world of the actors and (in the case of individual actions) the specific intervention that the person under study intends to make. Different strategies of hermeneutics have been tried. A basic difference concerns, for instance, hermeneutics conceived of as empathy, as a psychological identification with the actors concerned, or hermeneutics conceived of as the reconstruction of contexts of meaning, as an almost linguistic exercise.

Anthropological fieldwork is a hermeneutic technique. The immersion in the other cultural context which is pursued creates a very low threshold for gaining understanding, and the participation in actual interaction provides "a unique function of validation", as van Binsbergen calls it, because the appropriateness of the interpretation is immediately put to test in actual social action and communication. At the same time, van Binsbergen warns that it is naïve to assume that fieldwork therefore results in unproblematic and reliable data and interpretations. Despite anthropological techniques, the paradigms, assumptions and biases of the fieldworker who is coming from a different society cannot be blotted out. The questions of getting a good grasp of the data and of attaining sufficient fit of ones interpretations with the data are still on the agenda. The unavoidable constructive activity of the observer makes that the validity of the fieldwork results cannot be assumed. Van Binsbergen's conclusion is that, finally, validation

"cannot be done without involving them",

i.e. the actors.

I make two observations at this point. First I would note, contrary to van Binsbergen, that this kind of hermeneutics is not basically a moral issue. Trying to recover people's interpretations and swapping between the roles of participant and analyst (insider and outsider) is not wrong as such. The whole idea of studies across cultural boundaries can be viewed as an attempt to move, in some way, understanding of social or mental phenomena from cultural context A to context B (say from the Azande to Western Europe). This exercise may involve for the investigator playing different roles in A and B. But it is symmetrical in the sense that an investigator from context A would have to make similar moves, but then starting from the other side, when investigating cultural context B.

The hot issue in understanding across boundaries is the quality of the understanding, namely the issue how we can be sure that our interpretations actually fit the meanings of action and ideas of the actors themselves. In Historiography this problem of "fit" appears for instance in the problem of 'anachronism'. We easily make sense of observations by projecting our own mode of understanding onto the data. Sometimes such an interpretation can clarify a range of other phenomena and thus seem a successful explanation. Nevertheless, it will still be deficient if the interpretation assumes on the part of the actors information, understanding, concepts or motivations that they could not possibly have had. Just like historians applying anachronistic interpretations, investigators of culture may apply interpretations to cultural actors that they could not have shared.

Thus, the issue in studies of culture is if the interpretation finally produced by the analyst can plausibly "fit" with that of the actors. The historian Quentin Skinner provides a sophisticated discussion of this problem in his famous article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas". Skinner notes that approaching the material with preconceived paradigms is both inescapable and dangerous. It is inescapable, for instance, because of the vantage point, and the linguistic, theoretical and problem contexts from which the observer engages in the research. There is, for instance, always a tendency to apply one's own familiar criteria of classification and discrimination. The observer

"may 'see' something apparently ... familiar ... and may in consequence provide a misleading familiar-looking description" [Tilly 1988, 45].

Also,

“the observer may unconsciously misuse his vantage point in describing the *sense* of the given work” [Tilly 1988, 47].

According to Skinner, there may always be different interpretations rendering the facts, however, these should at least be compatible with what the meaning of the action could have been for the actor. Thus, there is a strong negative requirement, namely to

“exclude the possibility that an acceptable account of an agent’s behaviour could ever survive the demonstration that it was itself dependent on the use of criteria of description and classification not available to the agent himself” [Tilly 1988, 48].

Notions, ideals and motivations etcetera that were not available in the context of action of the agent cannot have been part of his motivation. He states the positive equivalent of this requirement as:

“any plausible account of what an agent meant must necessarily fall under, and make use of, the range of descriptions which the agent himself could at least in principle have applied to describe and classify what he was doing” [Tilly 1988, 48].

This “in principle” is vital especially for the historical sciences. It cannot be more than a hypothetical test to what the motivations or views of the agent could at all have included.

In another formulation, Skinner states that:

“no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done” [Tilly 1988, 48].

Interestingly, Skinner’s criterion for an acceptable interpretation gives the objects of research the right, in principle, to respond, to speak out. Although, like in the case of history, this is a hypothetical response, there is some ‘speaking back’. Skinner seems to indicate here requirements for a hermeneutical approach that avoids the criticisms of naïve empiricism that van Binsbergen directs at Anthropology. This suggests that Anthropology can, at least in this respect, in principle be repaired. In Action Research approaches to Social Science this element of ‘speaking back’ of the agent, the check of the investigated actors, is given a central place.

The second problem domain in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences which van Binsbergen addresses is that of the status of North Atlantic theoretical and metaphysical frameworks. Van Binsbergen accuses Anthropology of uncritical acceptance of such frameworks. Again, my discussion is limited to the question if such uncritical acceptance is inherent in the discipline and again my conclusion is that with a more sophisticated hermeneutical approach the weaknesses of Anthropology may be repairable.

In order to present a more sophisticated version of Social Science, I refer to the interesting views of who may be called the father of modern hermeneutics, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his view of hermeneutics, Social Science is necessarily a self-questioning tradition, a process of self-reflection, of attaining self-knowledge. At the same time, however, the specific historically and culturally situated character of Social Science knowledge is not something that can be overcome, because it is part of our human condition.

In Gadamer's view, any hermeneutics necessarily involves a "Vorverständnis" (a pre-understanding) by the interpreter of the object. Again, because this Vorverständnis changes over time (if only through the results of academic works of interpretation, but also because of cultural and political processes of change), hermeneutics is, finally, a never ending process. Hermeneutics throws light on the object of research in ever new ways, from an ever shifting starting position. Hermeneutics in this philosophical form is an exercise of always redefining our relation to the historically (or culturally) 'others'. In this sense, it is an indirect way of questioning ourselves, of attaining self-knowledge.

The history of the anthropological study of "traditional systems of thought" may illustrate that Anthropology may learn something from Gadamer and that investigations in the Vorverständnis involved would have helped. One can think here, for instance, of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl who analysed the difference between 'primitive' thought and science in terms of the mental make-up of the humans involved. Or of E.E. Evans Pritchard whose final assessment of the knowledge system of the Zande people, in his famous study *Whichcraft and Oracles among the Azande*, is that Zande thought is not based upon fact, as, supposedly, Western science is. Or of Robin Horton's assessment of indigenous knowledge systems as being 'closed', i.e. not aware of different knowledge systems and not exposed to a process of criti-

cism, as supposedly Western science is. In its own hyperbolic way, this history of western theorizing tells more about shifting views of Anthropologists about themselves than it tells about the others, the ‘primitives’. Part of the implicit *Vorverständnis* is a constantly shifting conception about what Western thought or Western science is. From Lévy-Bruhl’s idea of Western man with a scientific mental make-up, to Evans Pritchard’s positivistic idea of science as based upon fact and Horton’s Popperian idea of science as critical rationality. It could be noted that subsequent developments in Science Studies, which stress the social construction of knowledge, again suggest different interpretations of the thought of cultural others.

This example confirms van Binsbergen’s accusation of anthropologists’ uncritical acceptance of North Atlantic paradigms. However, it also shows that a more critical, hermeneutical approach to Social Science that takes note of Gadamer’s reflections upon hermeneutics would include a clearly self-reflective element. So again, my conclusion is that the failures that van Binsbergen indicates are not inherent in the discipline. Anthropology may at first sight seem a one-sided process of subjecting others to one’s interpretations, it seems possible, however, to practice a hermeneutically sophisticated Anthropology which involves both dialogical elements in advancing interpretations and a self-reflective attitude towards Western paradigms.

### *The Challenge of Intercultural Knowledge Production*

The previous argument addresses van Binsbergen’s conclusions as to Anthropology. However, it does not yet do justice to the broad and challenging problematic which he advances so forcefully, namely the future of intercultural knowledge construction. Even when we conclude that Anthropology as a discipline does not need to be discarded on methodological grounds, then it could still be valid to argue on other grounds that we need to advance to new forms of knowledge production which better fit the present globalised intercultural world. Van Binsbergen’s effort to table the issue of the production of knowledge about culture (as well as his related attack on the idea of cultures as distinct units of analysis) is a very important one. On the one hand, in studies of culture we are still struggling with a complicated colonial heri-

tage, and on the other hand contemporary processes of cultural globalization cry out for strengthening of the cultural impact ('cultural citizenship') of intellectuals in the South.

In van Binsbergen's account, the road towards truly intercultural knowledge production involves replacing Anthropology by Intercultural Philosophy, thus substituting a communicative knowledge practice that avoids asymmetries for a naively inductive and hegemonic one. This is a challenging, revolutionary project which raises question both about the knowledge practice that is deserted, namely Anthropology, and about the one adopted, namely Intercultural Philosophy. I will conclude by making a few remarks about both.

I would suggest that intercultural knowledge production today requires both Anthropology and Philosophy. Anthropology in sophisticated hermeneutical forms as illustrated above, but also Anthropology-expanded. This need for expansion derives from a concern with the political economy of knowledge, rather than with epistemological, political and moral criticisms as raised by van Binsbergen. We have to raise questions about who produces knowledge, where, addressing what questions, and in the framework of which projects or objectives? From this point of view, anthropological studies should be conducted by both Northerners and Southerners, locating the studies both outside and within the North Atlantic and contributing with their studies to critical assessments of views held in their own cultural context. Such an expanded agenda for Anthropology involves what could be called a counter-Anthropology which may focus on the North Atlantic, and/or may be practiced by those from outside the North Atlantic. As such this is not so new. Studying pockets of Western societies with anthropological methods, even anthropological studies of scientific research communities, are already being done, and contribute much to a more realistic understanding of the West and of science. The importance of a focus on the political economy of knowledge production is that a renewed and truly intercultural knowledge production cannot be expected without addressing the incredible global imbalances, in terms of dominance of Western paradigms as well as in more material terms of who produces knowledge and discourses, where and in what social and cultural environments. With almost all centres of knowledge production located in the North Atlantic, the cultural biases observed by van Binsbergen in Anthropology may simply be repeated in the

new discipline of Intercultural Philosophy.

With a more sophisticated anthropological practice as a first leg of intercultural knowledge production, and counter-Anthropologies as the second, then Intercultural Philosophy may be the third. But what is this thing Intercultural Philosophy?

For van Binsbergen, the prime attraction of Intercultural Philosophy is that it is basically a communicative, dialogical form of knowledge production. It does not involve the model of the subject gaining knowledge about the object. Philosophy seems to be based upon interaction and equality. Such statements about Philosophy tend to be highly idealistic, as if suddenly power-free communication reigns if we pretend to be philosophers, and as if we can rise above the violence, commercial interest and manipulations which shape the world of discourse and power. To seek the advantages of Intercultural Philosophy in that direction would certainly be mistaken. However, Philosophy is a different form of discourse from the Social Sciences, where reflexivity about such methodological problems such as acquiring knowledge and representation of knowledge in the framework of theories (van Binsbergen's two basic methodological criticisms of Anthropology) receive all attention. Furthermore, the basic form of interaction in Philosophy is discussion, which may facilitate better the dealing with knowledge-political issues. Hegemonic positions and cultural biases, which certainly will always be there, will more easily be challenged in Philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The assessment of van Binsbergen's argument in this paper suggests some

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<sup>1</sup> Two questions relating to Intercultural Philosophy remain unaddressed by van Binsbergen. First of all, it remains unclear how the Intercultural Philosophy can include empirical studies. Philosophy being the discipline that addresses presuppositions as well as consequences of empirical studies, but not being an empirical discipline itself. Second, van Binsbergen did not explain why a new type of Philosophy, Intercultural Philosophy, should be invented to be the vehicle of intercultural knowledge production. Given his own argument that "Cultures do not exist", it does not seem to make sense to speak of 'intercultural' as if cultures exist as identifiable units. Rather, we would need regular Philosophy sensitized to addressing issues of cultural difference.



diversion from his own conclusion. His epistemological, knowledge-political and moral arguments do not force us to discard Anthropology all together. Rather, a hermeneutically more sophisticated and self-reflective Anthropology is called for. At the same time, van Binsbergen's greater objective of establishing a truly intercultural knowledge production can itself be strengthened by considerations about the political economy of knowledge production. Intercultural knowledge production requires that the actual production of cultural knowledge is democratized and 'decentered' all over the globe. This is a necessary basis for counter discourses and for a challenging Anthropology, or counter-Anthropology. Finally, it remains unclear in van Binsbergen's argument in how far Intercultural Philosophy can actually do the job of replacing Anthropology and include empirical study of culture. The argument in this article suggests that a much greater role of Philosophy (Intercultural Philosophy if you like) is called for in intercultural knowledge production. Firstly in order to put conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues much more in the forefront of discussions than is presently the case, and secondly in order to foster communicative modes of knowledge which can make knowledge production about culture itself an intercultural exercise.

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## ENTRE LE MARTEAU ET L'ENCLUME

Ou la dialectique *être proche / faire des analyses* dans la recherche du terrain

par Julie Duran-Ndaya Tshiteku

*ABSTRACT. The privilege of knowledge has long been a privilege of the western world. Renowned anthropological scientists have produced insights that are recognizable to Africans, but ever so often these scientists have used theories and methods conceived in a world that is utterly alien to the world they studied. The writer of this article is an African woman who sees no option but to use the same methods and theories, since they constitute the standard of quality in scientific work. In this connection, the challenge is to avoid habitual methods like interview and participant observation. Although these methods are common in the western scientific world, they are appreciated as violently intrusive by African subjects of study. From an African perspective, these methods impose upon the interrogator a sense of obligation towards his interviewees that is most often left unredeemed. By contrast, the method used by the present author is often plain conversation, underlining the equality of researcher and her empathy with the research subjects. In such encounters there is no sense of superiority; they are facilitated by the fact that, in this case, the researcher and the researched share the same roots. Such highly personal methods, however, pose the danger on the one hand that the researcher may become too involved with the research subjects, or, on the other hand, that she may be exposed and accused of hypocrisy. Yet the conversational method advocated here may go some way to solve the African researcher's dilemma of wanting to be accepted by the intercontinental scientific establishment and, at the same time, staying faithful to her own people that are the subjects of the research.*

*MOTS CLE: Ethnologie; méthodologie et concepts des scientifiques, dilemme du chercheur autochtone*

J'ai choisi délibérément dans le titre de mon intervention les termes marteau et enclume. Je l'ai fait ainsi pour faire ressortir la difficulté que j'ai eue lorsque la possibilité m'a été présentée de faire une thèse de doctorat en ethnologie. Pour une chercheuse autochtone dans cette discipline il n'est pas aisé de trouver une méthodologie adéquate permettant de saisir les transformations sociales, objet de mon étude pour laquelle j'ai pris comme cadre les

femmes congolaises lettrées qui deviennent membres d'un mouvement religieux.

Ce tiraillement sur comment fonctionner dans un cadre scientifique occidental en restant congruente avec moi même se traduit dans une constatation faite par l'anthropologue néerlandais Arie de Ruijter dans la revue *Internationale Samenwerking* (1999), suivant laquelle même si l'idée de la hiérarchie de la culture a été abandonnée depuis l'époque coloniale, beaucoup de scientifiques européens, inclusifs des anthropologues pensent toujours avoir le privilège de la connaissance. Surtout lorsque les africains commencent à penser comme eux, alors tout ira bien avec eux. L'idée de me réaliser sujet des attentes complexes m'étranglait. Il me fallait fonctionner dans la tradition des recherches ethnologiques, avec certaines méthodologies et certaines exigences d'objectivation avec des concepts que je n'oserais pas prétendre maîtriser. Et même si je les maîtrisais, je n'oserai pas les utiliser sans me faire violence. Bien sûr qu'écrire une thèse de doctorat est un processus de transformation mais l'idée de transformation signifie surtout devenir ce qu'on est. Ce qui était aussi le leitmotiv de mon étude sur ma culture, en marchant dans les traces des différents penseurs qui ont fouillés avec beaucoup d'efforts, dans des conditions parfois difficiles les mécanismes d'idées éloignées en vue d'obtenir des données et puis de les objectiver dans certaines formes des traditions théoriques et des méthodes scientifiques.

Grâce à ces savants, les réalités africaines sont devenues perceptibles et les africains peuvent même se reconnaître dans beaucoup de discours. Mais il y a aussi des écrits qui présentent certaines facettes de cette culture comme quelque chose de puérile, y adjoignant des connotations négatives comme on peut le lire dans leurs yeux. En effet différents scientifiques africains (Mudimbe, Buakassa, Houtoundji) ont reproché à leurs pairs occidentaux et à leurs acolytes autochtones d'étudier la réalité africaine au travers des lunettes des théories et méthodes confectionnées dans des contextes étrangers, parfois hostiles et ayant une aversion à l'égard des peuples qu'ils étudient. Mudimbe par exemple dans ses récusations amorcées dans *l'autre face du royaume* et poursuivies aussi bien dans *l'odeur du père* que dans *'the invention of Africa'* présente l'ethnologie comme une science coloniale, née et au service de la colonisation, incapable, de part ses préjugés et son processus de production, de fournir une compréhension adéquate de la société africaine. Ces échos se retrouvent aussi chez J.M. Ela qui dénonce l'aliénation et

l'étroitesse des concepts fondamentaux utilisés par les sciences sociales occidentales pour rendre compte des formations sociales de l'Afrique.

Tous proclament un changement de discours, pour reprendre l'expression de Kizerbo, un changement de l'instrument linguistique de connaissance et de production scientifique, car

'la dépendance commence par le verbe'. Mudimbe demande aux africains de 're-analyser les appuis contingents et les lieux d'énonciation, de savoir quels nouveaux sens et quelle voie proposer à nos quêtes pour que nos discours nous justifient comme existences singulières engagées dans une histoire, elle aussi singulière';

afin de ne plus penser par procuration ou de ne plus rechercher ce que Mudimbe a appelé 'la filiation spirituelle et méthodologique'.

Ces constatations des penseurs africains traduisent bien le dilemme dans lequel je me suis trouvée et surtout l'idée d'être prise en sandwich. Mais les discours des spécialistes africains se limitent souvent au niveau des protestations et des contestations. Il existe toujours un vide théorique effroyable qui ne cesse de se creuser chaque jour davantage. La dépendance économique oblige de s'aligner dans un certain ordre. Un proverbe néerlandais ne dit-il pas *wiens brood men eet, diens woord men spreekt*.<sup>1</sup>

Devant ce vide conceptuel et aussi vu l'absence d'un cadre africain privilégiant la promotion des recherches et des connaissances, comment ne pas être une amphibie, participant à la communauté des savants et porteuse de l'influence de ma propre forme culturelle? Comment écrire un livre qui vaille la peine sans être accusée de trahison? Et puis que faire de mes souvenirs personnels? Ma première source de connaissance n'est-elle pas la maison de mon père? Les savants font une distinction entre la perspective interne émique et celle savante 'étique' qui est l'objectivation de la réalité des autres. Comment faire la lecture d'une autre vie comme si la mienne n'était pas tout à fait parallèle?

Dans cette intervention j'aimerais montrer les solutions qu'une telle étude m'a forcée de rechercher dans l'accès à l'information et leur analyse.

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<sup>1</sup> Littéralement: 'On parle la parole de celui dont on mange le pain'; c'est-à-dire, on ne peut pas s'exprimer avec toute liberté dans une situation de dépendance économique, sociale, ou mentale.

*L'accès à l'information*

J'avais des raisons très personnelles pour vivre de l'intérieur un mouvement charismatique des femmes congolaises. Je pensais qu'avec certains atouts comme être congolaise, ayant différents éléments socioculturels (la maîtrise des plusieurs langues du Congo, la participation à certaines pratiques de solidarité patriotique, la conscience de la manière dont les relations se construisent et s'entretiennent, la connaissance de la façon dont les femmes congolaises communiquent) et armée de mon expérience d'il y a quelques années auprès des tziganes à Bruxelles. Mais étant donné que cette recherche concerne les problèmes ayant trait au domaine des forces occultes, il fallait être prudente car il s'agit là des questions appartenant à la sphère de ce dont on ne parle en milieu congolais qu'avec des personnes très familières en qui on a confiance. Car, lorsqu'il s'agit du *kindoki*, comme je l'ai vécu dans la maison de mon père, c'est une porte ouverte de demander à quelqu'un '*crois-tu à la sorcellerie?* L'obligation de se montrer évoluée intervient et pousse à ce qu'on réponde négativement, pendant qu'un nœud se forme dans les tripes et qu'on est pris à la gorge.

Et puis les accusations de sorcellerie créent des ruptures qui se reproduisent de génération en génération entre les familles, les habitants d'un village, les voisins, les amis.

Consciente de tout cela, je savais qu'il y avait aux Pays-Bas et à Bruxelles différentes communautés congolaises de prière. Je savais aussi comme je l'ai vécu parmi les tziganes qui m'appelaient soit '*gadgot*' soit '*petite dame chocolat*' qu'il y avait parmi les ressortissants congolais en Europe une dichotomie langagière, séparant les gens qui prient et ceux qui ne prient pas *bato ya lusambo* (les gens qui prient) *batu ya mokili* (les gens du monde). Ceux qui prient nomment ceux qui ne prient pas les gens du monde, les païens. Ce qui est une manière de créer des barrières et la limitation des fréquentations. On doit être identifié comme membre d'un groupe localisé pour être accepté.

Et puis il y a une méfiance entre les congolais due aux actions relatives au contrôle de la véracité des histoires racontées par les migrants à L'IND<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Service d'Immigration et de Naturalisation', branche de l'administration étatique néerlandaise avec rélevance particulière pour les Africains vivants en diaspora.

(*Immigratie en Naturalisatie Dienst*) lors de leur demande d'asile aux Pays-Bas. Les Congolais qui sont actifs dans la société néerlandaise sont considérées comme des agents d'information dont la tâche consiste à vérifier les motifs politiques de la migration donnés par ceux qui se disent poursuivis politiquement au Congo.

En étant consciente de ces obstacles, je souhaitais fonctionner normalement et c'est pour cela que j'ai opté pour l'expérimentation. Entre 1998-2002, j'ai commencé à suivre assidûment mes copines aux activités de leur communauté religieuse aux Pays-Bas et en Belgique. Je ne me suis pas d'abord présentée comme chercheur parce que je ne voulais pas subir un traitement spécifique. Un tel statu pouvait me faire courir le risque de glisser vers des comportements subjectifs de la part de mes copines, c'est à dire, infléchir d'une manière consciente ou inconsciente la manière de parler. Je me comportais comme membre du groupe, en participant autant que possible aux diverses situations de la vie de mes compatriotes adeptes du mouvement religieux, en partageant les repas, les boissons, la musique, les danses, les soucis, en rendant des services. Grâce à ma maîtrise du néerlandais, je jouais des rôles d'interprète auprès des écoles et des crèches, en écrivant ou en traduisant des lettres, auprès des tribunaux, lors des accouchements.

C'est à travers des causeries qui ont eu lieu dans ces différentes situations que j'ai récolté le matériel nécessaire pour écrire mon livre.

### *Pourquoi les causeries*

L'importance de la communication en anthropologie a été largement signalée par différents africanistes comme Wim van Binsbergen et Johannes Fabian. Fabian (1990: 4) insiste dans la majeure partie de ses travaux sur la primauté du dialogue sur l'observation comme il l'indique dans l'extrait ci-dessus:

‘Je reviens sur ma réflexion convaincante que l'ethnologie est essentiellement et non accidentellement communicative et dialogique; conversation et non l'observation doit être le moyen de conceptualiser la production des connaissances ethnologiques’.

Mais lorsqu'on survole la littérature ethnologique au sujet de la méthodo-

logie de recherche, on a l'impression que l'interview et l'observation participante sont les outils les plus utilisés par les chercheurs dans leur récolte des données. En même temps bien d'africanistes se disent réellement intéressés à connaître les personnes des sociétés qu'ils étudient. C'est pour cela qu'il arrive même que les ethnologues se marient avec une femme autochtone pour pouvoir fonctionner comme une personne normale. Mais comment peut-on connaître une personne en adoptant une technique de communication qui est associée dans sa culture à une interrogatoire devant le tribunal? Comme si il était question d'une torture. Le terme même '*pourquoi*' qu'on emploie souvent dans ces types de contact met l'interlocuteur sur la défensive.

Par l'interview, non seulement on ne se rend pas compte qu'on fait violence, mais aussi que s'installe une dette et ce dernier point est écœurant.

Dans les pays du tiers monde le blanc est associé à l'aide. Les africains pensent que les aéroports occidentaux foisonnent des bienfaiteurs, qui attendent de les prendre en charge de suite qu'ils ont franchis les bureaux de l'immigration.

Sans que celui qui interviewe s'en rende compte, il laisse flâner l'impression d'être investi d'une mission de redresser la situation de ceux qu'il interroge; un peu avec un air '*je vais vous débrouiller ça!*' L'européen est considéré comme représentant du monde civilisé, qui rapportera à sa société la vie médiocre des gens qu'il étudie afin qu'elle soit améliorée. Récemment, lors d'une journée d'étude organisée au centre d'études africaines F. de Boeck présentait un interview fait à Kinshasa dans le cadre de son nouveau livre *The possibilities of the impossible: Kinshasa and its heterotopia* (2004). La réponse de son interlocuteur, un écrivain congolais, selon laquelle 'la ville appartenait à chaque homme de bonne volonté' trahit les attentes voilées dans ses mots. Ainsi je voyais défiler devant moi les souvenirs de mon enfance et mon travail dans les organisations de développement. Où j'ai vu des chercheurs et des coopérants au développement, armés des papiers, des caméras, des enregistreurs, des boîtes de sardines et de *corned beef*, posant des questions sur la vie, mettant l'interviewé sous une pression insupportable ou s'adonnant à l'observation participante comme s'ils s'amusaient avec la réalité des autres pour finalement partir et ne plus rien laisser entendre d'eux.

Mon étude concerne la souffrance des autres, des femmes qui contrairement à moi-même ont des problèmes de réalisation de soi. Qui suis-je pour



encore les agresser dans ce qu'elles sont en empruntant des façons pour extraire l'information qui humilient d'avantage? J'ai choisi de causer (*kosolola*) avec mes copines. Causer c'est être en plein dans la réalité congolaise. Les causeries (*masolo*) mettent l'accent sur le désir de vouloir se connaître réellement à travers l'interaction au sein de laquelle l'égalité et la notion d'empathie (Rogers 1968) sont au centre. La causerie insinue que l'entretien est un échange entre une ou plusieurs personnes au sujet des vécus respectifs; au cours duquel on se raconte des choses sans sentiment de supériorité.

Ces causeries n'étaient pas programmées d'avance et je n'avais pas à l'esprit une structure précise pour les diriger. Et puis il ne s'agissait pas du simple jeu question/ réponse, mais une interaction qui valorisait au moins psychologiquement la position des personnes et donnait le sentiment de reconnaissance et non l'installation du gêne.

Je n'ai rien noté en présence des personnes, sauf lorsque les circonstances de la participation à l'initiation l'exigeait. De même que je n'ai enregistré que lorsque cela était possible lors des rencontres publiques.

C'est lors de ces causeries et les différentes communications que j'ai pu rassembler différents récits des femmes, leur motif d'adhésion et leur histoire sociale.

Il est certain que cette manière de travailler demande un grand investissement de temps et qu'elle présente plusieurs dangers. Il y a d'abord le danger d'enracinement. J'ai la position de luxe d'avoir des contacts réguliers avec mes compatriotes et de fonctionner incognito. Ces contacts ne se limitent pas seulement à la recherche. Mais les moments les plus délicats sont ceux au cours desquels on est obligé de prendre position comme lorsque j'ai été malade et que je devrais me faire soigner par le mouvement que j'étudiais. Bien que je pouvais bien me projeter dans la vie des autres, je ne partageais pas les solutions qu'on leur proposait. Le danger d'enracinement peut être solutionné par un bon encadrement familiale et académique.

Et puis il y a aussi l'hypocrisie qui pourrait être attribuée à cette manière voilée de faire les recherches. Mais l'hypocrisie est assez vite découverte et peut avoir des conséquences désagréables pour le chercheur. Des exemples de scientifiques qui ont été chassés de leur terrain sont légions.

Ce qui est important dans mon choix de l'expérience d'adhésion et les causeries, c'est d'abord le désir de connaître, puis de savoir que les personnes sont respectées dans leur être et surtout de ne pas avoir créé des attentes.

*L'objectivation et ses pièges*

Comme on l'aura remarqué dans la partie ci-dessous mon étude à une large dimension ethnographique empirique. Il n'est pas seulement un travail d'archive. Mais pour comprendre les entendements des autres les académiciens ont créé des exigences. Il y a des règles d'interprétation qui stipulent le recours à des concepts analytiques comme points de repères pour tout travail qui se veut scientifique. C'est en partant de l'interprétation des données du terrain dans la lumière des différentes terminologies que se sont créées des arènes pour les débats, chacune avec une orientation particulière pour renseigner.

Comment interpréter mes données en partant de l'opposition faite par les savants occidentaux entre ce qu'ils nomment le sens commun et le sens savant fut un grand obstacle. Le sens commun est présenté comme interne, c'est à dire, les petites idées autochtones, emiques, liées à la manière dont les personnes expliquent leur chose en s'inspirant des codes de leur culture construite par l'histoire; et le sens savant c'est l'étiq, les grandes idées des savants occidentaux modernes. Mais comme l'écrit Olivier de Sardan (1989: 127-135) les concepts qu'ont produit les académiciens pour faire leurs analyses sont issus de leur propre contexte culturel, en partant d'une compréhension empirique du réel fondée sur les catégories perceptives et cognitives qu'ils partageaient avec ceux qu'ils observaient. C'est alors évident que ce sens savant ne peut être qu'ethnocentrique, avec des représentations subjectives. Ma tension s'est développée entre ces deux tenants construit comme une conjuration ayant comme objectif de me faire peur et de m'éloigner de ma propre réalité, avec ma sensibilité locale et des idées que j'ai reçues comme idéologie. Utiliser sans critique les concepts me semblait alors une trahison, une tentative de m'éloigner de ma culture.

Et comme mon étude concerne les transformations sociales et a comme cadre un mouvement religieux, je vais montrer un exemple, inspiré de mon récent séjour de travail à Kinshasa, ma lutte avec les concepts et la manière dont je l'ai résolue.

*Conversion, syncrétisme ou repentance?*

Lorsqu'on survole la littérature sur la naissance des mouvements religieux en Afrique, on a tendance à utiliser comme concept analytique les terminologies syncrétisme et conversion entre guillemet de Horton (1971, 1975), en invoquant le système d'étage dans la structure de la pensée africaine, la cosmogonie lié au microcosme et Dieu associé au global, de même que la continuité et la discontinuité du noyau cognitif du mode de pensée des africains. La conversion de Horton a lancé la communication entre différents observateurs des cultes syncrétiques africains,<sup>3</sup> chacun s'est positionné surtout sur l'aspect d'oscillation de tout genre des sujets africains se butant aux ouvertures des horizons et qu'à travers la religion apparaissent des nouveaux types de structure d'autorité, des nouvelles sociabilité, des nouveaux systèmes économiques et aussi les couches plus profonde dans les nouvelles idées sur l'homme et la femme. Beaucoup de choses ont été dites dans ce débat, mais même des années plus tard j'ai difficile à intégrer les termes conversion et syncrétisme comme concept analytique dans la réalité que j'ai rencontré. Ces mots contiennent quelque chose de religieux là où suivant nos observations la dimension 'religieuse' des mouvements religieux congolais n'est qu'apparence. Ce qui est essentiel c'est ce que devenir adepte est une transformation qui exige qu'on incarne les nouvelles attitudes et les nouveaux comportements dans la vie quotidienne.

*Exemple: la transparence des revenus de la femme*

En milieu rural congolais la division du travail est telle que dans le foyer, l'homme et la femme ont chacun des rôles pour assurer le bon fonctionnement du ménage. Ils sont complémentaires et collaborent dans la production des biens de consommation. Par exemple l'homme doit assurer l'habitation et certaines dépenses de luxe comme l'achat de la viande et de l'immobilier.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Peel 1968a, 1968b; Fisher 1973; van Binsbergen 1981; Geertz 1986; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991 – en particulier, chap. 6, 'Conversation and Conversion', pp. 243-251; Ranger 1993, etc.

La femme produit certains vivres, avec des activités agricoles et du commerce (N'Dongala: 1982: 191). Une femme qui n'est pas productive est déconsidérée.

La littérature signale même que la femme avait un grand rôle économique. Van Wing rapporte que dans les sociétés pré coloniales, la répartition des tâches était telle que c'était des femmes que dépendait la réussite économique, familiale et sociale du foyer. L'expression consacrée aux femmes dans la société Kongo met bien en valeur cela. Elles furent appelées *mbongo muntu* ou créatrices des richesses (N'Dongala 1980: 381).

Je l'ai mainte fois constaté dans mon entourage, les femmes ont d'habitude leurs propres biens (élevage, produit des champs ou autres activités commerciales) dont elles peuvent disposer à leur grés. Si la femme vend le surplus de ses produits de champ ou de son petit élevage, l'argent que cela lui rapporte et qu'elle noue dans une corde/ poche en dessous de ses pagnes autour de ses reins est son argent. Elle en dispose à sa manière comme par exemple acheter les ustensiles de cuisine. L'homme ne se mêle pas de l'argent de la femme et ne s'ingère pas dans ses affaires. D'ailleurs un homme congolais qui s'immisce dans les affaires des femmes est considéré comme un sous homme.

Mais dans les ménages dits modernes, et en occurrence en milieu urbain, un ménage idéal est celui où le fonctionnement de la maisonnée dépend du salaire de l'homme, chef du ménage. Il doit rapporter de l'argent 'frais' qu'il gagne grâce à ses activités. Les femmes, surtout les femmes lettrées ont appris dans les écoles missionnaires qu'il faut rester à la maison pour plier les chaussettes du mari. L'achat des vivres est l'affaire de l'argent que son mari lui donne. Mais les femmes sont actives et gagent de l'argent d'une ou d'une autre manière qu'elles cachent bien dans leurs soutiens. Les époux congolais n'ont pas l'habitude d'avoir des comptes en banque communs dans lesquels l'homme et la femme peuvent s'approvisionner. Même si la femme gagne quand même quelque chose, l'homme doit donner l'argent à son épouse pour l'achat de la nourriture et subvenir à tous les autres besoins du foyer. Lorsqu'il manque à ce rôle, la femme peut acheter les vivres dans son absence, les préparer, manger avec ses enfants et laver les casseroles. L'argent que gagne la femme, elle le considère comme n'étant pas essentiel au fonctionnement du foyer.

Les femmes congolaises sont très entreprenantes et ont actuellement un

pouvoir économique qui dépasse celui des hommes depuis le délabrement du système administratif congolais. Lors de ma récente visite à Kinshasa (juillet-août 2004), capitale grouillante du Congo, j'ai eu différentes causeries avec le couple Kalima, tous les deux conseillers conjugaux dans un groupe charismatique. D'après L. et N. Kalima,  $\frac{3}{4}$  des conflits qui leur sont soumis par les couples qui viennent chercher l'aide dans leur groupe de prière ont comme sujet l'argent. Les femmes ont plus d'argent que les hommes. Les ménages qui dépendaient en grande partie de la rémunération que les hommes recevaient comme employés des bureaux sont dupes des habitudes congolaises. Beaucoup de travailleurs congolais sont aujourd'hui impayés. Ils utilisent les bureaux pour parler de la politique pendant que les femmes sont actives sur les marchés et osent prendre des risques.

Dans un livre collectif publié sous la direction de Théodore Trefon (2004), l'article de A. Nzeza Bilakila (33-45) aborde une des dimensions de cet entrepreneuriat féminin remarquable dans la capitale congolaise. Les femmes passent des journées au port (*beachi*), voyagent partout au dessus des camions pour chercher des produits à revendre. L'apparition des nouvelles destinations de commerce comme les voyages vers Dubaï et la Chine pour se procurer de la marchandise est visible par les produits de l'orient vendus dans des petites boutiques qui sillonnent la ville; côtoyant les montagnes d'immondices et des sachets en plastic. C'est d'ailleurs pour montrer les obstacles à cet entrepreneuriat féminin que le chercheur congolais Thierry Nlandu souligne le danger des conflits armés sur l'activité commerciale des femmes. A cause de l'insécurité et l'incertitude provoquées par la guerre, les femmes ne voyagent plus ou restent longtemps hors de leur foyer.

Les femmes ont pris le dessus dans plusieurs ménages congolais. De leur revenu dépendent des dépenses pour le paiement de la location, l'achat des parcelles, l'envoi des enfants à l'école etc... Tâches normalement réservées aux hommes. Dans cette situation de renversement de rôle, disait madame Kalima, l'argent de la femme est devenu indispensable à la survie du ménage. Mais cette situation crée un déséquilibre et des tensions parce qu'il est anormal que la vie du ménage dépende de la femme quand elle est mariée et son mari est présent.

Les hommes dans ce type de situation et ils sont nombreux au Congo, ont un complexe d'infériorité parce qu'ils ne supportent pas d'être considérés comme des 'sous hommes', des '*mario*', terme qui est un métaphore

d'un homme qui vit grâce au confort offert par une femme. Mais les femmes ont surtout tendance à cacher leur argent et ne pas le montrer à leur mari, attendant que celui-ci entretienne le ménage sans qu'il en ait les possibilités. Certaines femmes qui sortent leur argent pour faire des dépenses dans la maison regardent leur mari avec dédain et le considèrent comme un vaurien.

Ce changement des rôles demande qu'on éduque les femmes et les hommes à ne pas considérer leur situation comme anormale comme me l'a assurée L. Kalima. L'extrait d'une prêche que je reproduis ici montre la manière standard dont on enseigne aux femmes de se conduire envers leur mari:

qu'il soit petit et toi grande, donne lui du respect, que tu aies le papier (entendre permis de séjour) et lui pas, donne lui du respect...

*Ndenge toza awa na, ça peut arriver que muasi nde azosala, mobali asalakate. Yo muasi ozotinda bongo epa na bino, sans koyebisa mobali nayo. ba réponse oza kopesa kaka ya mabe.*

Comme nous sommes ici, ... ça peut arriver que c'est toi la femme qui travaille, l'homme ne travaille pas. Toi la femme tu envoies l'argent chez toi sans dire à ton mari. Les réponses que tu lui donnes sont seulement mauvaises...

Que ça soit toi qui paie le loyer, tu dois respecter ton mari.

Dans les enseignements qu'on donne aux femmes comme cette prêche, on insiste pour que la femme soit respectueuse, même si c'est elle qui a l'argent. Qu'elle mène un combat pour la transformation de ses anciennes habitudes. La transparence du revenu, au lieu de cacher l'argent dans les soutiens. Les femmes doivent savoir qu'on construit le ménage à deux, qu'elles doivent aider leur mari. Les propos d'une congolaise dans la revue *Amina* (juillet 2004: 66) montre cet appel à la transformation de mentalité:

'heureusement il y a en République démocratique du Congo de nombreuses femmes vertueuses qui aident leur mari.'

Actuellement les hommes congolais paient les loyers et achètent des maisons grâce aux enveloppes que leur présentent leurs épouses.

Lorsque je considère les différentes attitudes des hommes et des femmes congolais, comme présenter l'argent au mari, les autres genres de famille élargie, la soumission aux responsables de leurs groupes de prière, je préfère

utiliser comme concept analytique le terme repentance (*kobongwana*) que les Congolais utilisent eux-mêmes. Ce mot est proche du redressement, connu dans la société congolaise pour corriger les femmes qui sont renvoyées dans leur famille par leur mari suite à leur mauvaise conduite dans le ménage. Elles sont considérées comme ayant subi une mauvaise éducation et doivent être rééduquées. Le terme repentance a alors un rapport avec la resocialisation comme redressement de conduite. Il y a ainsi une reproduction d'une réalité sociale vécue, comme ensemble des expériences et de mémoire sociale accumulées par les sujets et leurs expériences, dans l'histoire familiale et sociale.

*Conclusion: créer mes limites*

Ecrire une recherche est un processus de transformation et j'ai écrit au début de cet article que la transformation est un processus de devenir soi-même. C'est pour cela que je me suis donnée la liberté d'écrire ou de dire les choses de ma propre manière en restant dans les limites du compréhensible et au reconnaissable pour les congolais, en déployant un effort pour faire la paix avec la diversité des façons dont les êtres ont été vus et ont été considérés.

Créer son propre texte est un geste d'auto-libération. Mais j'ai conscience du fait que je dois essayer de m'émouvoir en prenant la liberté devant les conventions de la tradition africaine et les conventions scientifiques. L'astuce a consisté à naviguer entre ce que les académiciens nomment l'éthique et l'éémique, sélectionner les termes qu'il vaudrait mieux utiliser et utiliser ceux que les autres rejettent pour construire et parler de la vie des autres. Ce jeu des limites se construit parfois d'une manière impensable. C'est une recherche de la congruence avec moi-même. Dès lors je ne me gêne pas de devoir me défendre.

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## La dialectique *être proche / faire des analyses* dans la recherche du terrain

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READING WIM VAN BINSBERGEN'S RECENT BOOK  
*INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS*

by René Devisch

*ABSTRACT.* The author offers a critical though sympathetic assessment of Wim van Binsbergen's recent book *Intercultural Encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*. Realising that van Binsbergen's argument hinges on a passionate critique of the academic reification and estranging formalisation of cultural others, the author has chosen the greatest possible informality and intimacy for his own address: that of a personal letter as among friends. He understands the book as replete with multi-layered and multi-centred Janus-like texts, journeys and undertakings, in which the sustained field-work experience of over three decades is combined with an emergent intercultural politics of knowledge – taking issue with the sacrosanct positions of anthropology as well as with the political correctness governing North-South intercultural debate. A specialist in Central African religion – notably divination – himself, the author recognises his own ethnographic and analytical struggles most in van Binsbergen's chapters dealing with Southern African tablet divination and the ecstatic cult. A kaleidoscopic short review of twentieth century philosophy brings the author to recognise both the resonances in van Binsbergen's work, and the missed chances, especially those of linking up with feminist and Lacanian approaches. Suggesting that the book's struggle for 'intercultural encounters' aims at a sharing of the sciences at the borders, and at the linking of borders on the intercultural plane, the author advocates the psychoanalytical-artistic work of Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger as a further road ahead.

*KEY WORDS.* border, border linking, Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, critique of anthropology, divination, feminist philosophy fieldwork, *Intercultural Encounters*, intercultural philosophy, Janus, Lacan, multi-centredness, multi-layeredness, scientific knowledge

Leuven, 22 March 2004

*Dear Professor van Binsbergen, dear colleague, my dear friend Wim,*

I hope that by addressing you this letter rather than a scholarly essay I might better live up to the spirit of your most innovative writing in *Intercultural Encounters*. Is a letter to a dear friend not a genuine mode of encounter? In

reading your path-breaking *magnum opus* I have relived the rich exchanges that we have shared over the past years. Itself an expression of a deeply ethical intercultural commitment, your book interweaves, in very subtle ways a number of poignant issues regarding the intercultural encounter and its elucidation. First, your work reflects a sustained effort to rethink the constitutive grounds of your hermeneutic-philosophical endeavour. This endeavour is, second, revealingly placed in confrontation with your passionate ethnographic sensitivity that resonates with the sociality, numinous powers, inventive governance and healing arts displayed and deployed by your many hosts. Third, the work gives full expression to your lucid, postcolonial interrogations regarding our ethnocentric blockage vis-à-vis open-minded intercultural encounter and science-sharing – whether in academia or cyberspace – between and across North and South and South and North. You thus invite us, as colleague anthropologists and philosophers, to rethink, in and from a multicultural variety of social scenes and epistemological presuppositions, our by definition limited and biasing modes of understanding reality and representation, meaning and agency, and culture and power, as well as space, place and time (or locality and belonging, identification and history).

Let me confess at the start how much I am both intimidated and fascinated by your *oeuvre*. And allow me to speak quite frankly in expressing my hope that my letter to you, dear friend Wim, may soon find itself enfolded somewhere in your book and thereby, I presume, escape the oblivion that might befall an all too sketchy scholarly essay relegated to the shadow of your fifteen solid chapters. Your relentless quest, chapter after chapter, to elucidate and theorise where you stand and from which perspectives and neo-colonial contexts of inequality you might speak, is part of your ethical positioning in the North-South encounter. All too much simplification and ethnocentric disfigurement has already occurred in the discourse that the North has shamelessly formulated with regard to the South. And in the present-day world context of both the wars of the sciences and increasing global interdependence accompanied by massive asymmetry, it is undoubtedly only the qualities of friendship, political solidarity and lucid expertise, such as yours, regarding anthropology's or philosophy's presuppositions and proper conceptual spaces, that might possibly offer the expatriate-anthropologist or -philosopher a legitimate forum for intercultural dialogue.

*1. First let me try to formulate how I understand your philosophical-cum-anthropological epistemic endeavour*

As announced by its cover drawing, your book is replete with multi-layered and multi-centred Janus-like texts, journeys and undertakings. These unfold in a spiralling movement between multiple scenes and voices that witness to various modes in which African societies develop, systematise and share knowledge in and through their world-making.

On the one hand, I as a reader am dazzled by your sharply designed and incisive debates (particularly in chapters 2 to 4, 9, and 12 to 14) regarding the opposition between endogenously heuristic perspectives and ethnocentric or exogenously imposed epistemes, whether in Africanist ethnography or intercultural philosophy. Your witty discussions range in focus from R.A. Mall to Mogobe Ramose's *ubuntu* philosophy, or move from reflection on Emmanuel Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement to analysis of Information and Communication Technology. Spurred by Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, your chapters 7 and 15 aim at re-designing some of Africa's knowledge contribution, in particular that of geomancy, to Global Cultural History. Again and again you put forward a lucid socio-political macro-analysis of post-colonial and post-apartheid Africa. Throughout, your book forcefully un-masks many sexist, gender-biased, racist and patriarchal power constellations and hegemonic modes of world-making as they are reflected, in particular, in the Centre-Periphery inequalities in internationally accepted knowledge production, or in the modernist disregard for the numinous, for human frailty, or for the paradoxical and the heterogeneous. And, you cannot but acknowledge that an unprejudiced polylogue has not yet gotten off the ground between, on the one hand, western-borne modern science (whose development owes much to the sciences of other civilizations) and, on the other, authentically non-western, civilisation-specific epistemes and sciences. Among the latter one thinks of Amerindian, Arabic-Islamic, Bantu, Persian, Ayurvedic, Hindu or Han-Chinese sciences, and other elaborate knowledge systems that entail diverse geometries and mathematics, each of them based on partially heterogeneous metaphysical assumptions regarding nature, the universe, time and logic.

On the other hand, I very much cherish your chapters successively dealing with

- shrines and saints' cults in northwestern Tunisia,
- Nkoya girls' puberty rites in western-central Zambia,
- tablet divination
- and with *Sangoma* in Francistown and across Botswana and South Africa.

These chapters vividly transmit something of the haunting unruliness and muddled intersubjective transferences – and in particular of the fleshy and seductive or at times disempowering intercorporeity – that typify the ethnographic encounter, as well as the physicality of knowing as a continuous becoming.

I confess, dear Wim, that your traineeship and practice as a *sangoma* deeply challenge me. I cannot help but surmise that you consider me, a hybrid ethnographer-psychoanalyst, as a disembedded and unfulfilled Africanist scholar. Yes, unlike cult initiates and healers such as yourself, I am as yet unable trans-subjectively, and hence intercorporeally, to bind myself, or for that matter the afflicted others who occasionally seek my help in Kinshasa, with the ancestral or healing cult spirits. I find myself capable only of poetically evoking the spirit realm of my Yaka hosts in southwestern Congo, and am not enabled to link up existentially with the most potent 'invisible realm', namely that of *ngoongu*, which I – all too romantically perhaps – depict in my writings on the Yaka as their primal maternal life-source, which ceaselessly and rhythmically oozes from the womb of the earth. Could we perhaps imagine the 'invisible' in Bantu cultures as the ever virtual? Moreover, would not the invisible and cunning realm of nameless ghosts (seemingly involving an imaginary similar to that of the North-African realm of *djiins*), imbricating as it does with the more institutionalised ancestral and cult spirits, be best understood as setting out the primordial axioms of a people's life-world? In the popular life-world of the Yaka, ghosts and spirits namely appear as the great organising unsaid. Through their cunningly unsettling effect on people's dreams and moods, spirits and ghosts – it appears to me – to a great extent offer people an imaginary space to externalise whatever is frustrating and alienating. Yet they thereby create an in-between or virtual, as yet unthought-of, space for exploring ever-new conduct.

Nonetheless, your endeavour by no means represents a surrender to a

romantic or *New Age*-type of escape away from globally accepted scholarly standards in the social sciences. It is preoccupied, rather, by the very humbling question confronting any social scientist, namely: in which domains do the models of the social sciences and philosophy make our worlds more predictable, first, and second, more communicable and consensual on the intercultural level?

Your book maintains a spiralling Janus-like tension between the contradictory impulses at work in the intercultural encounter envisaged by the social scientist: it reflects, on the one hand, the pull towards clarity of thought and, on the other, the more empathic fascination for the inexpressible, invisible, and hence numinous. Yet your work, perhaps in line with more classical anthropological traditions, aims at establishing a reliable point of view and a trustworthy hermeneutic, or even at achieving a voice of scholarly authority if not with regard to truth then to some ultimate nature of our social worlds. On the one hand, you are calling towards ever greater discursive scrutiny and polylogue in intercultural philosophy while, on the other, you share with us your intimate involvement with Nkoya puberty initiation, with fieldwork as initiation (in your novel *Een buik openen – Opening a belly*), as well as with initiation into divinership (which you describe in your *Becoming a sangoma*, chapter 5). Here, your highly sensorial, hence sensual, metaphoric depiction of such initiations, seen both as something *produced* and as an *affective weave embracing you*, is perhaps most genuine there where it conveys to us the Bantu mediumnic divination and healing arts. Unlike an objective sociological analysis, your sensual metaphoric and self-engaged depiction does not entail that the empathic anthropologist obnubilates what it is intersubjectively and intrasubjectively that his or her sentences report or discuss. On the contrary, such open-minded depiction lies perhaps at the very heart of the most valid form of intercultural encounter between the participant anthropologist and the host community. Indeed, the latter transferentially negotiates, produces and reciprocally corrects a real story, which then is simultaneously locally and transculturally relevant. Such mutually entrusted anthropological 'story' critically investigates and discloses – primarily from within the community's rationale but nonetheless for an external audience – the community's genius in the production and self-correcting of a reliable social knowledge, in brief, in world-making. From here, I would radicalise your intercultural endeavour and argue that all valid knowledge,

including science, is first of all local or site-specific knowledge, before it can be shared interculturally on a larger, and thus more dislocated, scale by means of a polylogue across heterogeneous epistemes. Across the globe, communities or networks generate intellectuals – some of whom we may call informal intellectuals – who seek self-critically to uncover their world, life and society along genuine and potentially most insightful lines.

## *2. Let us then revisit your ethnographic fieldwork*

Dear Wim, am I fair when I sense in your book some ambivalence vis-à-vis ethnography? You quite evidently favour minute ethnographic specificity. Although you are tired of superficial and spectacular empiricism and a fetishisation of the local, you nevertheless urge your ‘local’ scientific interlocutors – be they African or Asian, Flemish or Zambian scholars, to debate and theorise until a consensus is achieved via clearly-defined analytic tools.

Although your at times very loquacious book and your introspective confession espouse to some degree your own society’s televisual conditions of social reality production, and comply to the mere text-bound production of highly-coded and extravert knowledge in North-Atlantic academia, your acute visionary sense, however, constantly struggles to untie these very text-bound, if not socio-culturally specific, intersubjective and discursive conditions of knowledge production. Beneath these resistances that I sense, to my mind the basic question that your book poses is this: in which fields exactly does fieldwork occur? In other words, in which intersubjective and trans-world spheres – partly nondiscursive – of drives and desire, memories and longings, power relations and shifting identities, numinous presence and delusions, does the ethnographic participant observation of initiation and divination, healing and trance-possession, for example, occur?

Radical feminist post-structuralist and post-Lacanian approaches – such as those advanced by Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Gail Weiss and Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, who break with Lévi-Strauss’ and Lacan’s so-called phallogocentrism – depict the largely non-representational and nondiscursive fields of intercorporeity and intersubjective encounter as unruly fields of *forces*. Fits of undirected and multisensory empathy, abet-



ted by shifting consensual and dialogical  *finesse*, can be said to make the encounter, and not least the encounter envisaged in anthropological, intercultural, fieldwork. The notion of forces is understood here both in the Freudian sense of impulse (want, desire, *drift*, *Trieb*) and in line with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the sensory and affective relational body. Unlike the Lacanian notion of desire, 'forces' evoke the embedding in the *flesh* of affects, wants and imaginaries. The French notion of *con-naissance*, literally co-birth, renders the sensuous intercorporeal and responsive encounter and comprehension so dear to you, Wim, much more aptly than the all too cognitively-oriented concept of knowledge. Your chapters on Nkoya puberty rituals and *sangoma*, in particular, demonstrate how much the encounter unfolds as a complex transferential and counter-transferential embroidery of approval or disapproval, information or exclusion, affection or rejection. Such encounter, based on the participants' embodied intersubjectivity, forges and re-forges their affects, old and new imageries, sensitivities and intimate memories, just as it does the anthropologist's insider's understanding of local idioms, conventions and practices.

Seen from this post-structuralist and post-Lacanian perspective, the 'real' is what the subject (such as the participant anthropologist) experiences and imagines as a relevant event, a piece of information, an intent. The 'real' arises out of both a libidinally-driven and a discursive transactional setting of fellow-subjects who share some *con-naissance*. According to Kristeva, the 'real' in an intersubjective encounter, such as the one that produces well-grounded intercultural knowledge, is more akin to Lacan's co-implicating orders of "the *real*, the *imaginary* and the *symbolic*", rather than to the empiricist's nude *facts*, depicted as they are by the inductive sociological account of their observable constituents and plots. Moreover, the bifurcation between the contingent (singular, place-bound) experiential, on the one hand, and the time-based (historical) discursive individual consciousness, on the other, constitutes perhaps the crucial founding moment of modern philosophy. It enabled the reduction of the real to forms of consciousness, experience and mental attitudes (subjectivity and agency) that underpin identity, meaning, process and history.

You yourself have been able to escape being seduced by a modernist historical perspective and the notion of the great universal river of western science inasmuch as your Africanist experience has led you to contest the

very basis of much modern thinking regarding what constitutes both the purity, impartiality and universality of scientific research. Indeed, your anthropological work is witness to that predilection of African societies to favour people's multi-sited knots, webs and weaves as the very tissue of becoming, rather than focussing on temporal developments or the subject's autonomy across the march of time. Becoming is then the process of spatialisation or localisation of transformation, articulation and embedding that a subject traverses across the space of existence. Life in Central Africa is a becoming, an intercorporeal, intersubjective and trans-world weaving of the threads of life.

*3 . Your intercultural encounters aim, it would appear to me, at a sharing of the sciences at the borders and at the linking of borders on the intercultural plane*

Though moved by sociology's founding desire to know the nature of social and political reality from the site-specific perspective of the collective actor, your book profoundly problematises ethnography's classical status insofar as it has been defined as a window on the real and the Other. Indeed, you have been a most committed fieldworker. Anthropological fieldwork in Africa, and the scholarly reporting it is assumed to produce, entail major dislocations or shifts from the centrality of the interactional or the verbal and the observable, to the transactional, the interior and the invisible. In these shifts, such as they occur in your various ethnographic fields, you have been led to impersonate some of the generative symbols and values that mobilise the intersubjective co-implication at play in the host group's leadership models as in their hermeneutic devices or mediumnic divination and healing. With regard to the anthropological report, you again and again allude to the detours imposed upon us in anthropological or philosophical writing. Indeed, classical-academic dissertation urges us to cleanse our text of all traces of unruliness, puzzles and doubts, chaotic desires, anxieties, subjectivity, and those transferential and invisible phenomena which are so much at play in our fieldwork. But, as you demonstrate, an ethically committed anthropologist cannot *a priori* exclude from the intercultural encounter whatever ap-

pears to be at odds with hegemonic modes of scholarly knowledge production. Entrenched in intercultural encounter, your book's horizon is beset by a host of concerns, of which I will here attempt to sketch only three.

An initial concern that underlies your writing is this: how can vital world-making practices of particular communities or networks – such as the cult of saints, puberty initiation rituals, tablet divination, initiatory healing (of, say, deeply depressed initiands), as well as communitarian modes of decision-making or sharing responsibility – breed in rhizome-like ways as webs or matrices across linguistic, cultural, intellectual and socio-political borders? In particular, can or should the compassionate anthropologist espouse the distress or the beauty, hence the dignity and numinous inspiration, of the host by way of a becoming part of himself or herself?

In spelling out another concern of yours, I rely heavily on Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger's (1999, 2000) grasp of matrixial border-linking. This concern might be posed as the question under what transactional conditions and along which intersubjective and epistemological tracks may an intercultural encounter yield a truly trans-subjective and transmuting border-zone that would allow for some measure of an in-depth border-linking of culture-specific knowledge practices? Such border-linking is neither a mere hegemonic or counter-hegemonic modality of colonising border-crossing, nor the postulate of a third or hybrid space of 'interbeing' or becoming-the-other. Your book again and again interrogates your readers as to the conditions under which a genuine intercultural encounter might come to unleash a dialectic and full accreditation of transsubjective and transmuting border-linking. How does the encounter yield a self-critical yet non-colonising knowledge-sharing that is able to move beyond the endless stereotypes to which alien societies and ways of life so easily fall prey? Such processes of science-sharing or knowledge-sharing perhaps entail the mutual acceptance that civilisation-specific sciences are to some degree society-bound institutional crafts seeking to unravel indices of quality of being and clarity of knowledge in parallel with the quests for reason and truth.

I know from our many encounters how much you are concerned with looking back from your African experience at your native society and the habitus of North-Atlantic scientists. Like you, I wonder whether the anthropologist returning home to the North, and perhaps embracing psychoanalysis or intercultural philosophy, is able precisely to unravel the unthought or

deeply suppressed in mainstream North-Atlantic consciousness, namely that which escapes the slipstream of ongoing scientific research? Is it not the particular role of anthropology and intercultural philosophy to privilege what French semiologists, such as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, have labelled as *signifiante*, in referring to processes of interactional and fluid meaning production that move beyond rigidity, known grounds and simulacrum? Such anthropological attention attuned to the intercultural encounter, both away from and back home, may thus come to grasp and endorse the as-yet-unthought-in-thought, the ever virtual as well as the ceaselessly unfolding and indeterminable, polymorphous fields of *connaissance* and intersubjectivity that so inevitably evade the snares of institutional power and the predefined tracks of knowledge.

Indeed, intercultural research may examine, for example, how emotions, knowledge or inequalities of power, as well as conceptual patterns of truth, help, crisis, pain, redemption or normalcy, and their opposites, are articulated in culture-specific ways. In the border-zones in-between communities or networks, to put it in Deleuzian terms, both difference and inventiveness are favoured in their own right, as they are manifested in such phenomena as ecstatic pilgrimage, cult initiatory identity, feminine hospitality or the healing cults. On a more daily basis, affective expressions such as tears of sharing loss, laughter and humour all yield intercorporeal energy and explore such border-zones. Here, one is situated in a fold of inter-being, of unstable body-self morphing, of inventing and inhabiting multiple subselves, of ties and places of sharing confidence or strategic resistance.

### *Conclusion*

You will have perceived, dear Wim, how the many journeys and shifts in your work have led me to rethink the anthropological endeavour and its research methods and theory. Many of your points have certainly brought me further along rhizome-like hermeneutic tracks towards more lucid intercultural border-linking. You have left us a most rich, colourful and dense intellectual embroidery, and this work is an important scholarly legacy. I thank you so much for having associated me in this celebration extending a new lease of life to *QUEST*, and hope that our exchange may become even more

challenging and rewarding.

*Van harte* – Cordially,

Renaat

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