

EDITORIAL

The way forward for *QUEST*

Looking back

The publication of the present volume XVII of *QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* marks the end of a period of transition, and further consolidation of our journal as one of the very few surviving periodicals devoted to philosophical debate in and about Africa.

In the transition period now behind us, two volumes appeared that were entirely devoted to the philosophical implications of recent major changes occurring in the Southern African subcontinent:

- XV-2001, *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, edited by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek in his capacity as outgoing *QUEST* Editor; and
- XVI-2002, *Truth in Politics: Rhetorical Approaches to Democratic Deliberation in Africa and beyond*, edited by Pierre-Phillipe Salazar, Sanya Osha and Wim van Binsbergen – the latter two in their capacity of Member of the *QUEST* Editorial Team and incoming *QUEST* Editor, respectively.

These thematic volumes dealt with issues of the greatest importance:

- the emergence of *ubuntu* philosophy as a new and mainly Anglophone branch on the imposing tree of the African philosophies of Being Human, whose earlier branches (from Kagame on) were largely Franco-phone
- the rekindling, mainly from the newly democratic South Africa, of the originally Diopian idea of the African Renaissance
- the attempted creation of moral and political conditions for post-

conflict and post-trauma sociability, through the procedures of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), whose contradictory philosophical implications – with special emphasis on the potential and limitations of a modern rhetorical perspective inspired by Protagoras, Aristotle and Cicero – *QUEST* explored in a special volume devoted to *Truth in Politics*.

This temporary concentration on Southern Africa was certainly justified. More than ever, Southern Africa has been articulating itself in recent years as an integral part of the African continent, and the changes occurring in the subcontinent are of the greatest relevance for Africa as a whole. Moreover, South Africa has been a country – throughout the twentieth century CE – where philosophy has thrived, due to a combination of a highly developed urban, industrial, educational and academic infrastructure, and the prominence (in addition to the long-standing presence of Islam) of Christianity as a world religion, in the training of whose clergy philosophy has always played an important part.

However, this sustained concentration on Southern Africa through two special volumes also implied elements of discontinuity for *QUEST*:

- the absence of Francophone contributions,
- the near-absence of reviews,
- a relative over-representation, within the *QUEST* pages, of other disciplines than philosophy
- a relative under-representation of contributors who could meaningfully qualify as Africans in Robert Sobukwe's sense of accepting Africa as their home
- a relative under-representation of certain themes that have occupied *QUEST* from its inception:
 - the possibility, the definition, and the critique, of a specifically African philosophy, and
 - the reflection on themes of socio-political transformation *throughout* the African continent.

The present Volume XVII

We flatter ourselves that with the present volume, this discontinuity is largely remedied.

A modest *Reviews* section once more concludes this volume.

Francophone contributions (Duran-Ndaya Tshiteku, Malango Kitungano) once more declare *QUEST*'s determination to be emphatically bi-lingual – however great (and conspicuous!) a burden such bilingualism imposes on an Editorial Team that so far happens to be entirely Anglophone, and that lacks both the financial resources and the time to hire Francophone editorial assistance.

With a predominance of contributors who are in every respect African intellectuals from and in Africa, the present volume returns to *QUEST*'s perennial themes such as the debate on the nature of an African philosophy, in which Hountondji has played such a major role (extensively discussed in Sanya Osha's opening article in this volume). Professor Hountondji is one of the members of the *QUEST* Advisory Editorial Board and as such will feature below in the context of the launching of *QUEST* XVI. Used to seeing his seminal, though iconoclastic work in African philosophy dismissed by his African colleagues, he will be gratified by the careful and balanced, if not uncritical, reading that Professor Osha accords his work. Along the same lines of the debate on African philosophy, this volume has F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo's extensive review of Imbo on Okot p'Bitek.

With the exception of some of our Senegalese colleagues, African philosophers have so far kept largely aloof of the Afrocentrist debate – if they have not adopted the dismissive attitude of some of their most cosmopolitan brothers (Mudimbe and Appiah) vis-à-vis this intellectual movement. Nonetheless that movement has developed into a major identity expression among African Americans and in certain branches of Africa-related scholarship; this was reason to consider (Malango Kitungano) once more the heritage of Cheikh Anta Diop, its potential relevance for African philosophy, as well as some of its recent criticisms. In a forthcoming volume, XIX, we shall devote further attention to Afrocentricity as a key development in recent, Africa-based identitary strategies.

Clearly, Diopian thought situates itself in a critical reaction to the racism

that was implied in mainstream North Atlantic approaches to Africa of an earlier vintage. Against the same background we may situate, in the present volume, the exploration of patterns of African jurisprudence (Idowu) from a point of view of legal philosophy. This is a vast field of enquiry, of which one would hope that a further instalment will go beyond the well known anti-racist critiques of the works of Hume and Hegel by writers such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Henry Louis Gates Jr. – and beyond the blaming of, specifically, Jews for the marginalisation of Blacks.¹ By the same token, there is room for a consideration, in the near future, of the discourses and debates around the Islamic *shari‘a* code from a perspective of African jurisprudence.

¹ Such blaming seems to reflect, not so much the history of ideas across the millennia, but especially the very recent history of the difficult interaction between Blacks and Jews as two marginalised groups in urban Northern America during the last century and a half; cf. Berman, Paul, ed., 1994, *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments*, New York: Delacorte; Washington, Joseph, ed., 1984, *Jews in Black Perspectives: A Dialogue*, Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Berlinerblau, J., 1999, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena controversy and the responsibilities of American intellectuals*, New Brunswick etc.: Rutgers University Press.

Citing Brackman’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1977, Idowu attributes ‘Ham’s curse’ to the Talmud, i.e. to a compilation of Jewish rabbinical texts from the early first millennium CE. However, this should not make us ignore the fact that the account has a much longer history, going back to the Old Testament, in a section (Gen. 9: 25-27) written in Palestine more than half a millennium before the Talmud, and adopted by Christianity by the time of the Talmud’s emergence. In that passage, Noah, allegedly recovering from drunkenness and realising ‘what his younger son [largely implied to be Ham] had done unto him’, is already said to curse Ham’s son Canaan.

And why was not Ham himself thus cursed? Perhaps because the name Ham (‘Hot’?) referred to an immense geopolitical area encompassing most of the Biblical world, with a phenotypically highly diverse population, whereas the name Canaan (of uncertain etymology in West Semitic, and in Afro-Asiatic in general) may have specifically carried African, Black somatic connotations, and in fact could be given a Niger-Congo etymology in the proto-Bantu **káán*, ‘to refuse’ – a possible echo of (Middle Bronze Age or earlier) social exclusion, on somatic grounds, of what I propose to have been (proto-)Bantu speaking Blacks in West Asia, *prior to the historical emergence of Judaism* in the Late Bronze / Early Iron Age. Cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., ‘Explorations in theory and method of ethnicity in Mediterranean proto-history’, in: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., & Woudhuizen, F.C., in press, *Ethnicity in Mediterranean proto-history*, Oxford: British Archaeology Reports.

Among the featured articles in the present volume a theme in Ancient Greek philosophy, notably the reconsideration of Gorgias' scepticism (Alumona), reflects a continuous strand in *QUEST*: the reflection, not only on the emerging canon of African philosophy, but also on the North Atlantic / Western tradition – in the awareness that academic philosophy in Africa (whatever one may think of Hountondji's central thesis) developed *at least in critical contact with* the Western tradition.

Finally, as a reminder that *QUEST*, an *African Journal of Philosophy*, has an firm interest in theoretical issues even beyond their immediately recognisable African applicability, the British aesthetician Gerald Cipriani shares his phenomenologically-orientated thoughts on noetic validity in aesthetic interpretation – the first time, if we are not mistaken, that modern aesthetic theory is drawn within the orbit of *QUEST*.

QUEST Laboratory

What is new is the section *QUEST Laboratory*, which – in the present volume and subsequent ones – aims at the *initiation* of critical debate and discussion on specific topics, and thus seeks to continue and intensify one of the main functions *QUEST* has had over the years. Both 'laboratory' and 'initiation' suggest that contributions in this section are primarily selected, not for their balanced academic qualities in form and content, but for their apparent potential to direct our philosophical reflection and debate in novel and promising directions.

In the present volume, the *QUEST Laboratory* section contains the proceedings of a special *QUEST* Colloquium held in Leiden, the Netherlands, on 23 March 2004. This colloquium was to mark the publication of the special issue *Truth in Politics* (*QUEST* volume XVI), and thus the transition of *QUEST* leadership from its illustrious co-founder and long-time editor, Dr. Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, to the present Editor. During the colloquium the office of Editor was formally transferred, and the first volume produced under the new leadership officially presented to Professor Paulin Hountondji of the University of Cotonou, Benin. Professor Hountondji is one of the focal points of the network of African philosophy, and a long-standing mem-

ber of *QUEST*'s Advisory Editorial Board.

The theme of that workshop, held in Leiden, the Netherlands, on 23 March 2004, was '*The transcultural framework for the construction of African knowledges*' / '*Le cadre transculturel pour la construction des connaissances africaines*'.² The theme was particularly appropriate. For the material reality of *QUEST* itself has been that of a 'transcultural framework for the construction of African knowledges', ever since its first years as a combined local and expatriate initiative of Roni M. Khul Bwalya (†) and Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, when both were teaching philosophy at the University of Zambia (1987). For as a venue of philosophical publication, *QUEST* is

- published originally in North Atlantic languages of communication (French and English)
- patterned originally after North Atlantic formats of philosophical production (notably the published scholarly article – whose format is neither that of African sages, nor Socratic, nor peripathetic)
- supported by typographical, printing and financial skills and facilities largely situated in the North,
- yet emphatically (and truly) African in its contributors, themes, concerns, and identity – generally considered as a major African resource for philosophical knowledge production.

Key note speaker at the symposium was Paulin Hountondji. Having personally lived through the ups and down of African philosophical periodicals

² In connection with this Symposium, *QUEST*, in the person of its Editor, wishes to express warm thanks to the following persons and institutions: to Professor Hountondji, whose inventive use of an already scheduled trip to Copenhagen allowed him to participate in the *QUEST* symposium at minimum extra costs; to the African Studies Centre's Seminar Committee, for paying these costs; to the other speakers at the symposium, who waived the reimbursement of their travelling expenses in recognition of *QUEST*'s financial position; to Kirsten Seifkar, M.A., member of the Editorial Team in charge of everything having to do with communications, subscriptions, finance, logistics, and English copy-editing, and thus one of the secrets of *QUEST*'s survival and also of the symposium's success; and to Professor Sanya Osha, the other member of the Editorial Team – *QUEST*'s financial position did not allow him to attend the seminar, but *QUEST*'s new lease of life owes a very great deal to Sanya Osha's dedication, his philosophical expertise, his prolific writing, and his acute sense of quality.

for more than three decades, and famous for his theoretical insights in the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic implications of the production (including the actual publication) of philosophy by Africans, Professor Hountondji's address, even though delivered off the cuff, was a splendid introduction to the theme of the symposium. Regrettably, the speaker's many other inter-continental and local commitments did not allow him to offer his address for publication in the present volume.

Of the other four addresses, one – by the present Editor – illustrated the theme of the symposium by reference to both his editorial and his critical closing article in the *Truth in Politics* special volume XVI. In addition to singing the well-deserved praises of his predecessor, the outgoing Editor Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, this allowed Wim van Binsbergen to sketch the considerable dilemmas of hegemony and birthright inherent in North Atlantic leadership of an African journal. More in general, he questioned the wholesale applicability, to African situations today, of established Western mainstream approaches (such as Aristotelian rhetoric, modelled after political practices in Ancient Greece). Since the gist of that argument has appeared in volume XVI, there is no point in including it here.

The symposium contribution by Julie Duran-Ndaya Tshiteku, in French, sketched the dilemmas inherent in the situation where an African researcher from the Democratic Republic of Congo, herself a member of the North Atlantic diaspora, sets out to investigate the dynamics of religious self-organisation and mutant identity among her fellow migrants – whilst doing so in a format of knowledge production imposed by North Atlantic academic procedures governing the preparation and defence of the doctoral thesis. Having met with great recognition from the audience, her text appears here in an even more accomplished version.

The other two contributions, by the outgoing Editor Pieter Boele van Hensbroek and by the leading figure of African Anthropology in Belgium Professor René Devisch, explored the theme of the symposium by reference to the present Editor's book *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*, which had just been published; also these texts appear here in revised versions.

Touching at the very heart of the *QUEST* project, and bringing out into the open contradictions that either personal friendship, embarrassment, or political correctness usually make us gloss over tacitly, this small collection of

essays seems to be a fitting start for the *QUEST Laboratory* as a new, recurrent rubric. The incisive, polemical and occasionally highly personal form of the contributions, whilst perhaps contrasting somewhat with the sustained academic prose characteristic of the standard *QUEST* contributions, adds a dimension of frankness and directness that may be illuminating and inspiring, even though it can never replace the detached and polished academic product.

Conclusion

This then is *QUEST* volume XVII which we are now sending out into the world, with considerable relief and confidence. The relatively late date of its appearance reflects more than only the pangs of transition. Since Volume XVI was published, very major improvements were made in various essential domains, including

- in the peer review structure of the journal,
- the management of subscriptions and back issues and financial matters in general, and
- in the retro-digitalisation of all volumes of *QUEST* ever published (soon to be uploaded onto the *QUEST* website: <http://www.quest-journal.net>).

In these developments (which have greatly taxed the time table of the three members of the Editorial Team) *QUEST* has been very fortunate that the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands, – as one of the world’s finest centres of African Studies – has extended official hospitality to *QUEST* for the duration of a five-year period.

Another reason for the delay has been that we needed time to allow the fruits of the appearance of *QUEST* XVI to be reaped in the form of a larger number of submissions, of generally improved quality, – including more and more French contributions, as well as an increasing number of contributions from non-African scholars. This strategy has worked, as proves not only the present publication of Volume XVII, but also the simultaneous publications of Volumes XVIII (2004) and XIX (2005) – thus bringing *QUEST*’s publication entirely up to date.

Let me conclude by thanking my two fellow-members of the *QUEST* Editorial Team, the Advisory Editorial Board, and our authors, for their various generous contributions. I express our deep recognition towards the African Studies Centre, whose essential support (gained on the basis of Volume XVI) will greatly stimulate the growth, and ultimately complete Africanisation, of *QUEST*. And I invite African philosophers, intellectuals in general, as well as Africanists world-wide, to increasingly use *QUEST* as a venue of publication, and, more in general, as a locus of inspiration and debate; and thus to confirm, or – as the case may be – to challenge and correct, the editorial policy of which the present volume is the implementation.

Wim van Binsbergen

