

EDITORIAL

The role of the intellectual is an issue all over the world. Nevertheless, the discussions of this role and of the changing contexts of operation for intellectuals are mostly focused upon situations in the West. How do intellectuals elsewhere perceive their specific situation, and what views do they express about their mission? Recently, even major global institutions have come to praise the value of an open and lively Civil Society; what does this imply for the position of intellectuals? On the one hand, the legitimacy of critical thought, openness, plurality and experiment seems to have increased. On the other hand, actually sustaining an open public sphere is a different matter. In many situations intellectuals are still under siege: marginals in a hostile environment.

This issue of QUEST presents papers of a conference on these topical questions, and includes a number of additional contributions by African philosophers. The conference *The Role of Intellectuals in the Public Sphere* brought together academics, writers and social activists from a wide range of countries. It was organised jointly by the Lebanese American University in Beirut and the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development in The Hague, and took place in Beirut in February 2000. The conference resulted in interesting confrontations between the experiences of intellectuals from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The participants in these intercontinental exchanges were often astonished with their lack of knowledge about each other's situation. QUEST wishes to express its gratitude to the Prince Claus Fund for financial support towards the printing of the present issue.

The journal QUEST will undergo a reorganisation in the year 2002. The journal will find a solid institutional underpinning in the context of the well-established co-operation between the Department of Philosophy of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam and the Africa Studies Centre in Leiden. This reflects the dual institutional affiliation of the new co-ordinator, Wim van Binsbergen, who is professor of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy at the Erasmus University as well as one of the leading researchers at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. As from the 2002 volume of QUEST he will take over, together with a revitalised editorial team of philosophers from various African universities. While retaining its well established high standards of peer review, editorial scrutiny and house style, QUEST will be transformed into an Internet journal in PDF format (i.e. freely accessible for reading and printing, but not downloadable) with a limited printed version of each issue for libraries, contributors, and for those colleagues who are not connected to the net. Of course, originality, quality and relevance to philosophical debates in Africa will continue to constitute

the hallmarks of the QUEST editorial policy. We are confident that, with a changed team and a new production format, QUEST will make a major leap forward towards realising its goal of serving as an effective forum for philosophers in Africa and beyond.

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Editor