Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

Introduction

Binsbergen, W.M.J. van

Citation

Binsbergen, W. M. J. van. (2003). Introduction. In *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality* (pp. 15-48). Münster: LIT. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9677

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	Leiden University Non-exclusive license
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9677

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 0.

Introduction

0.1. African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality

This book brings together fifteen essays investigating aspects of interculturality. It operates at the borderline between two disciplines:

- anthropology (in which field I was trained at Amsterdam University, took a Ph.D. at the Free University (Amsterdam) in 1979, occupied various professorial chairs, and in the years 1980-1990 served as one of the scientific directors at the African Studies Centre, Leiden); and
- intercultural philosophy, in which field I have occupied a chair at Erasmus University in Rotterdam since 1998.

I seek to make, with this book, a contribution to intercultural philosophy, by formulating with the greatest possible precision and honesty the lessons my extensive intercultural experiences as an anthropologist have taught me.

The kaleidoscopic nature of intercultural experiences is reflected in the diversity of these fifteen texts. Many belong to a field that could be described as 'meta-anthropology', others are more clearly philosophical; occasionally they spill over into belles lettres, ancient history, and comparative cultural and religious studies. The ethnographic specifics supporting the arguments are diverse. They derive from three of the African situations in which I have conducted participatory field research as an anthropologist: the North African highlands of Khumiriya (north-western Tunisia); urban and rural life of the Nkoya people of Zambia; and healing cults in urban Botswana. My fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau (1983) is not specifically represented in any of the chapters,[1] and the discussion of the globalisation of

[1] Yet my work in Guinea-Bissau was in many ways a preparation for the present book. It was during that fieldwork that I crossed for the first time the line separating objectifying knowledge production, and personal participation, by becoming a patient of local healers. In 1985 I was invited to give seminars on my Guinea-Bissau experience at the Research Unit Symbol and Symptom, Africa Research Centre, Catholic University Louvain, Belgium, and the discussions there, under the stimulating chairmanship of my long-standing friend and colleague René Devisch, were to have a deep and lasting impact on my anthropological practice.

Southern African thought and society in chapter 14 reflects not only my extensive Botswana fieldwork and my theoretical work on globalisation, but also my shorter excursions into South African and Zimbabwean society over the years. In chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 14, problems of interculturality are discussed within specific local African contexts. However, other chapters have a non-localised theoretical focus (chapters 2, 12, 15), deal with the whole of Africa (chapters 4, 8, 11, 13), or start with a local African context and expand the argument so as to encompass long-ranging continuities in space and time (chapters 7, 8). More than thirty years separate the oldest piece (chapter 1) from the more explicitly philosophical pieces that have been written in the last few years; in between is a series of papers written in the late 1980s to late 1990s and addressing an intercultural problematic while still largely relying on anthropological, as distinct from philosophical, conceptual and analytical resources.

How do these separate pieces together present an argument on interculturality? Let us review the four constituent Parts of this book one by one.

0.1.1. Introducing Part II: The construction of intercultural knowledge through anthropological fieldwork

After the Preliminaries of Part I, Part II presents anthropological research as a mode – until recently it was, for nearly a century, the privileged, if not only mode – of intercultural knowledge production by specialists identifying with the North Atlantic region.

The oldest piece (chapter 1) simply evokes the classic practice of anthropological fieldwork as a standard procedure in such knowledge production. It introduces themes that will remain with us throughout Parts II and III: the dependence of intercultural knowledge on personal relations between the subject seeking knowledge and the community whose, or about which, knowledge is being sought; and the way in which knowledge production is intimately related to the personal history and psyche of the producer. In chapter 1, written in 1969 soon after my first fieldwork, the problem of scientific knowledge production is certainly touched upon – after all, anthropological fieldwork had been presented to us, as students of that generation, as an agonising but superior method for the production of valid intercultural knowledge. Yet such methodological concerns merely appear here as problems within North Atlantic social science which in itself is taken for granted. They scarcely stand out yet as problems of *interculturality*. Interculturally, my central conscious problem then was to survive under the onslaught of the other society. It is only in the last weeks of the fieldwork, when the project can no longer shipwreck, that the hosts as described in this piece regain something of their own true humanity and begin to stand out as suffering human beings – but which twenty-one year old, desperately seeking to realise the splendidly Faustian intellectual career that will make him forget his childhood suffering and at the same time live up to his mother's exalted expectations, would have done much better? I have taken my ironic distance from the pathetic and irritating budding professional anthropologist in my

novel *Een buik openen* (1988) – doing justice to the beauty, the humanity, the hospitality, the tenderness, of my Tunisian hosts – long before I could unmask him epistemologically, in the present book.

Chapter 2, which concentrates on the work of the French Marxist anthropologist Pierre-Philippe Rey, makes it clear that already in 1979 I had woken up, in practice although not yet in terminology, to the project of intercultural philosophy, seeking to formulate – in the Marxist idiom of the time, which had informed the theoretical framework of my first major book *Religious change in Zambia* (1979, 1981) – a 'theory of the peripheral class struggle': one that could bring out the hegemonic assumptions, and the exploitative and subjugating relations of production, surrounding the practice of anthropology, as the then dominant form of intercultural knowledge production.

The concept of 'hegemony' refers to the political, ideological, economic and military processes by which, in the interaction between social groups or categories, one social group or category effectively reduces – often to practically zero – the possibilities of other social groups or categories for defining their own goals, priorities, destiny, and for realising those. The dominant group or category makes instead the other social groups or categories subservient to the realisation of the goals, priorities, destinies, of the dominant group. In Greek Antiquity, hegemony was exclusively conceived in terms of the military, political and economic relations between city states, particularly Sparta and Athens. In the course of the twentieth century CE,[1] partly as a result of Gramsci's work,[2] the concept has widened so as to stress ideological factors and to apply to groups and categories typically wider than the nation state (for example North Atlantic hegemony, White hegemony, male hegemony, technocratic hegemony, the hegemony of the capitalist mode of production). Foucault reminded us once more of the fact – well-known to generations of anthropologists and historians – that hegemonic relationships at the macro-level (for example North Atlantic hegemony over the global society and economy) are reflected, implemented, realised, in intimate personal relationships, for example between masters and servants, men and women, teachers and students. Knowledge production is never neutral but either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic,

---

[1] My systematic use of CE and BCE to calibrate dates even when the period of reference is manifest, is no mere affectation. In the first place, most of my readers will not be historians. In the second place, taking one's own perspective for granted is a most common but also a most detestable geopolitical and hegemonic strategy, whereas we need to develop – with the assistance of intercultural philosophy – a sense not only for the universal and perennial, but also for the ephemeral and accidental, in our own statements as well as in those of others. In the third place, my usage calls attention to the fact that the 'Christian' or 'Common' Era (CE) is a hegemonic North Atlantic concept whose particularism we should not dissimulate. For the great majority of people in the contemporary world, the traditional (and most probably erroneous) year of birth of the founder of Christianity is an unlikely and irrelevant calibration point for time reckoning. As is the case with so many hegemonic concepts, this calendrical concept reveals its hegemonic nature precisely by its unfounded but taken-for-granted claim to universality.

[2] Gramsci 1975, 1977.

i.e. reinforcing a particular hegemonic structure, or seeking to explode that structure.[1]

In chapter 3 (1984) I find myself caught in the aesthetic contemplation of the dialectics between thou and I at the girl's initiation rite of the Zambian Nkoya, a stance that renders problematic my major identities as a Westerner,[2] an adult male, and an anthropological observer meant to return to my North Atlantic home after a spell of fieldwork. Like the concentric scales that make up the body of an onion, these layers are analysed, and cut away, one after the other, and in the process we learn a great deal about Nkoya sexuality – ending up with the stalemate of an intercultural promise unfulfilled.

Chapter 4 continues the line of chapter 2 when, almost a decade later, with greater complexity and with a less narrowly neo-Marxist anthropological analysis, I reflect on the future of anthropology in Africa, identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the anthropological model of knowledge production through fieldwork, and pinpoint the assumptions of inequality on which that model is based. The extensive Postscript by which I seek to bring this piece up to date, makes it clear that others at the time have felt the crisis in anthropological production in similar ways as I did, and that in the one and a half decades elapsed since, some advances have been made to counter the inequalities in which that crisis originated. I did not wait for anthropology to remedy itself: the crisis proceeded in me a highly idiosyncratic response to be detailed in Part III.

The descriptive fieldwork chapters 1 and 3 vividly convey the complexity and perplexity of intercultural encounters 'in vivo'. But they do more than document a particular mode of intercultural knowledge production. In essence they are about the agony produced by the naïve knowledge model employed in classic anthropology. On the basis of this model, anthropological fieldwork dictates total immersion and extreme adaptation in the field: a mimicry that amounts to the virtual prohibition on the fieldworker's mediating, in the fieldwork situation, her[3] own and innermost self

---

[1] Cf. Bernal 1994; Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Csordas 1988; Foucault 1963, 1973, and in Rabinow 1984; Geschiere 1986; Semmes 1992; Winant 1994.

[2] Established usage disregards the cardinal directions and ignores the Eurocentric implications implied in fixing to a particular geographical position what is in essence a relative standpoint; e.g. by the shortest route, Europe is east for the Americas, and the North Atlantic region as a whole is east for Japan and China. Yet for convenience's sake I follow this usage and write 'Western', 'Westerner', to denote the hegemonically-inclined cultural traditions of the North Atlantic region especially Europe. In this connection, the opposite of Western would be South or Southern, and by implication Western itself may become North, Northern. I reserve 'western' and the other three directions, written without initial capital letter, to denote mere geographical position, unless the word is part of a proper name, e.g. Western Province (formerly Barotseland), an officially designated province in *w*estern Zambia. For the subdivision of continents however I follow established usage again and write South Asia, not south Asia.

[3] I am aware that anthropologists come in two genders. But since anthropology is a discipline to which women have greatly contributed from the beginning, and since many of the dilemmas inherent in the anthropologist's role remind us of similar dilemmas in women's roles in many societies including the North Atlantic one, I will often defy the shortcomings of the English language by implying a female gender for the anthropologist.

as constructed throughout the previous years of her life before fieldwork. The rationale of this model is the assumption that:

(1) living (or rather *emulating*) other people's lives is an adequate way of learning about their life and how they structure it,

to such an extent that

(2) given only the proper methods, it is possible to arrive at an analytical, distant, textual (or cinematographic, or using any other medium as the case may be) representation of what constitutes other people's lives – a representation that is essentially without distortion, free from projections, transferences,[1] one-sided impositions and omissions, on the part of the representer.

Assumption (1) is reasonable and commendable – it is good and human to live with the people, to learn their language, to share their moments of joy and grief over a longer period and to compensate, by emphatic signs of identification, for the fact that somatically, socially, in terms of class position, in terms of power and income, in terms of the temporariness and the escapability of membership of the local community, the fieldworker stands out – in the eyes of the host group – as the utter stranger[2] in most situations and practically throughout her fieldwork. But, naïvely and with the blatant lack of erudition typical of the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, assumption (2) goes against the grain of all accumulative hermeneutical investigation in philosophy over the past two centuries. However effective our threshold-lowering mimicry as under (1), yet the representation as under (2) will always and necessarily remain defective and distortive. *Therefore the*

However, it is only fair to revert to the male gender when discussing myself as a fieldworker, or the peculiarities of fieldworkers in general.

[1] Kovel 1978: 311f gives the following useful definitions of these mechanisms:

> 'Transference: the conscious repetition of a past situation in a present situation. The concept has been strictly defined for psychoanalysis, in which vis-à-vis the therapist a transference version is developed of the original juvenile neurosis, which is then overcome in this way. But the concept of transference is applicable to any therapeutic situation – and in fact to any situation in which differences in power play a role.
>
> Projection: a defence mechanism whereby subjective characteristics are attributed to the objective world, as when we are angry at someone yet experience that person to be angry with us. Projection may or may not correspond with the truth; what counts is the role they play in the falsification of consciousness.'

From a more specifically Freudian perspective, in all such situations psychic energy may be said to be bound by a past conflict, while the more or less compulsive, symbolic re-enacting of that conflict, as a sign of neurosis, partially releases such energy in a way that is experienced as gratificatory, in other words *libidinous*. Although in everyday language the libidinous has come to be equated with the sexual, usually such re-enacting and release have no manifest sexual connotations.

[2] Notably, as a 'Sacred Outsider', as I shall characterise the situation of the *sangoma* and other ritual structural strangers in my forthcoming book *The Leopard's Unchanging Spots* – the overflow of what I could not accommodate for reasons of space and thematic unity in chapter 8.

professionalisation of anthropological fieldwork, turning it into the sole hallmark of the accomplished anthropologist (with all the disdain this implies vis-à-vis the museum anthropologist and the 'armchair anthropologist', whose main data set is an accumulative collection of localised, processed data, and not the amorphous, personal, utterly idiosyncratic field situation), *is largely based on an epistemological fallacy.* Given the power relations that surround anthropological fieldworkers (typically doctoral students and postdocs in the first, insecure and dependent half of their academic careers, desperately fighting for greater security and independence), they cannot make light with the expectations of total immersion and complete loss of self that senior, powerful colleagues impose upon them with a mixture of sincerity and sadism. Yet the problems of interculturality, in knowledge production, as well as in living together or any other human activity, are not solved by pretending to assume the other's identity, but by finding ways of negotiating one's own identity *and* the other's in a jointly constructed new situation for which neither of the two identities has fully prepared either of the participants in that new situation – the solution, in other words, lies in creative innovation negotiating between the various inputs and building them into a new, usually ephemeral, cultural product.

For ethnography this means that the claims of authenticity and validity based on successful and prolonged participation must be doubted just as much as the claims of reliability based on extensive, objectifying use of a quantitative, statistical method. The only kind of ethnography that could claim some intercultural validity would be an intersubjective one in which the ethnographer works closely together, not so much with her academic colleagues, but with her hosts, not only in the field (that is understood) but especially *subsequently*, during write-up, publication, distribution and marketing of the written product.[1]

Far from taking anthropological procedures and perspectives for granted, the chapters in Part II seek to express whatever is left unexpressed and unanalysed, in established academic anthropology, in relation to the interaction between the researcher and the researched in knowledge production. These chapters explore the epistemological, political and existential dimensions that open up once an anthropological fieldworker tries to take seriously both the professional prescripts for fieldwork, and the perceptions, values and beliefs of the host society. These two commitments turn out to be largely incompatible. In these pieces the researcher is inevitably taken where, professionally, he has been told he has no business to go, and where therefore professional anthropology neither helps him to survive, nor escape from.

---

[1] This is the model that informed the production of my main book on the Nkoya people so far, *Tears of Rain*; cf. van Binsbergen 1992b: Preface and chapter 2, for a discussion of the interactive participatory methods making this more than just my own book. A locally affordable Zambian edition was published in 1995 with the generous assistance of the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands.

The pieces brought together in Parts II (and to some extent those in Part III) convey the message that the production of anthropological knowledge through participatory fieldwork is problematic, for a number of reasons including:

- the idiosyncratic nature of the researcher's experience in the field;
- the extent to which that experience is influenced by transference from the researcher's individual past – repressed infantile conflicts and desires that inform the contact with the local participants and thus partly determine the flow of ethnographic information and conceptualisation;[1]
- the political, social and economic inequalities attending most interactions between representatives of the North and the South;
- the ethical problematic of temporarily imposing on a host community by means of the appropriation of local idioms of sociability (trust, friendship, love, kinship, belief, ritual), but for the sake of what ultimately appears to be merely an instrumental, Northern-driven and (from the point of view of the host society) centrifugal quest for the appropriation of local knowledge.

At the same time these fieldwork situations yet appear to produce intercultural knowledge of such detail, such depth, such validity as recognised by the hosts themselves, that one would not give up participatory fieldwork as a method despite the many pitfalls.

The fact that these problems are addressed by reference to my own successive field experiences might give the reader the impression that my situation has been unique. I think this is not the case. Numerous researchers in the field of religious anthropology have identified closely with the beliefs they initially merely came to study. A fair number of anthropologists have been initiated into a local ritual status, including René Devisch, Matthew Schoffeleers, K. Fidaali, R. Jaulin, Paul Stoller.[2] Their experiences have often been presented, even by themselves, as simple strategies of adaptation in the field. This view rendered their claims acceptable in professional circles, especially for as long as they remained confined to off-the-record conversations in the common room of anthropology departments and did not appear in print. However, when a researcher has claimed 'real' occult experiences and a personal belief in their reality and effect, like Paul Stoller, he has had hell to

---

[1] Recognising such transference and the way it reduces the hosts into instruments of the fieldworker's neurotic attempts at self-realisation, I obviously take a distance now from those passages in Parts II and III that appear to present the pursuit of Africanist fieldwork as, *primarily*, the researcher's construction of self. At the expense of making myself unusually vulnerable I have sought to indicate from autobiographical data how such construction of self, although it may yield insights of great profundity and rarety, yet threatens to corrupt the pursuit of fieldwork as an intercultural encounter and as a valid form of knowledge construction. I might have decided to leave these chapters out of this book. However, their inclusion was imperative in order to demonstrate the dangers, but also the possibilities, of intercultural knowledge construction, and the way in which intercultural philosophy may guide us here.

[2] Fidaali 1987; Jaulin 1971; Stoller & Olkes 1987; Devisch 1978, 1989; on Schoffeleers see chapter 6.

pay.[1] The strongest and most extensive claim of occult experiences in recent anthropology, that by Carlos Castaneda,[2] is at the same time the most ridiculed and contested.[3]

The contradictions informing the arguments in Part II are manifest. The chapters' message is that these contradictions cannot be resolved within an anthropological discourse. They pose a problem whose solution is suggested to lie in the formulation of a philosophy of interculturality, one that allows us to think through the situations of intercultural knowledge production within the wider context of intercultural social interaction, and that acknowledges the topicality of this problematic in the contemporary world of economic, political and cultural globalisation. Thus regarded, these chapters do not just deal with the fine points of professional methodology among anthropologists – they present a number of laboratory situations of interculturality, in all their contradictory complexity; and that, I submit, is their main claim to relevance in the context of this book.

A recurrent theme in these papers is that social relations are not entered into without engagement, without consequences. Especially if these relations, between the seeker of intercultural knowledge and the host community about which knowledge is being sought, are deliberately modelled after the models of close, reciprocal relationships current in the host society. Knowledge, of people and their socio-cultural practices, therefore, implies social and political commitment on the part of the acquirer of intercultural knowledge. Intercultural knowledge production (since it reflects the hegemonic structure of the modern world) is a risky process involving either the affirmation or the destruction of the Other's value and identity. Taken literally and to its extreme implications, the anthropological method for the production of intercultural knowledge balances between the Scylla of dehumanising objectification of the community studied (destruction of the Other, for example by *etic* imposition of alien, North Atlantic analytical models producing merely a spurious illusion of local knowledge), and the Charybdis of complete identification (destruction of the knowing subject and her scientific research programme, notably by 'going native' in a total affirmation of the *emic*). These chapters offer examples of both dangers embedded in an extensively described participatory practice.

I have just used the conceptual pair of *etic* and *emic* – one of the most powerful tools of social anthropology. In chapter 15 I will introduce these concepts in the following terms:

> '*emic* and *etic* express the distinction between an internal structuring of a cultural orientation such as is found in the consciousness of its bearers, on the one hand, and, on the other, a structuring that is imposed from the outside. *Etic* has nothing to do with ethics in the sense of the philosophy of the judgement of human action in terms of good and evil. Pike's terminology is based on a linguistic analogy. In linguistics one approaches the description of speech sounds

---

[1] Cf. Olivier de Sardan 1988.

[2] C. Castaneda 1968, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1977; cf. de Mille 1976, 1980; Murray 1979.

[3] With chapter 7 I may place myself in a similar position.

> from two complementary perspectives: that of phonetics (hence -*etic*), which furnishes a purely external description, informed by anatomical and physical parameters, revolving on the air vibrations of which the speech sounds consist; and the perspective of phonology, whose basic unit of study is the phoneme (adjective: 'phonemic', hence -*emics*): the smallest unit of speech sound that is effectively distinguished by language users competent in a particular language, basing themselves on the distinctive features of that speech sound. (...) Pike thus codified the two-stage analytical stance (both *etic* and *emic*) of the classic anthropology that had emerged in the second quarter of the twentieth century with such proponents as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Griaule and Leiris.'

0.1.2. Introducing Part III: From anthropological fieldworker in Southern Africa, to North Atlantic diviner-priest: An experiment in intercultural philosophy

At one point in my researcher's career, it turned out that the only way in which I could cope with the contradictions of my professional and existential situation was to join the Southern African ecstatic healing cult that formed part of my study object in the town of Francistown, Botswana. Thus I effectively became a *sangoma* diviner-priest. Part III of the book is entirely devoted to this somewhat exceptional response to the methodological and theoretical problems of anthropological fieldwork.

In the light of the critique of anthropological fieldwork as a method of intercultural knowledge production, it is clear that the agony underlying my 'becoming a *sangoma*' was in the first place a professional one (although my discussion does allow glimpses of a more individual psychological problematic that acerbated the professional one shared, in principle, with my anthropological colleagues). In my professional education, I had learned to ignore the hermeneutic chasm between the represented (the people and their cultural orientation) and the representer (myself), and instead to comfort myself with the warmth of sociability as a honorary and temporary, but active, member of local African communities. Contrary to such expectations, the Francistown people largely rejected me in my role of fieldworker because they could not forget that historically I was to them foremost an Afrikaner (a White, Afrikaans-speaking Boer in Southern Africa), and hence a hereditary enemy. This response could only have the effect of destroying my professional habitus, and of reviving all the lifelong insecurities and infantile conflicts that I had so far managed to keep covered under the carpet of my successful intellectual identity. Deep and great historical pain had forced people in Southern Africa to call the fieldworker's bluff. This was 1988-89, almost two hopeless years away from Nelson Mandela's release from his South African prison cell.

In chapter 3, in the discussion of Nkoya female puberty ceremonies, cultural boundaries, although hurtful, still managed to produce a delicate balance between the researched and the researcher, and to keep intact the conventions of anthropological fieldwork as an obvious method of intercultural knowledge production, to be taken for granted. But not for long. In subsequent years, covered by chapters 5 and 6, I allowed myself to be captured as a patient of Southern African *sangomas*. I recognised in myself a strong desire for the *sangomas'* spiritual technology and local status and power. Moreover I adopted a political stance that

made me see in local ritual and belief an idiom of sociability whose rejection by an outsider like myself could only reinforce, instead of redress, the distress and pain which North Atlantic conquest has brought to Southern Africa. The third reason to become and remain a *sangoma* has been epistemological: I have reason to suspect (as set out in detail in chapter 7) that the North Atlantic truth in these matters – to be summarised as

> 'African gods do not exist, and African divination is merely clever impression management'

– is just a local, parochial, Eurocentric and ethnocentric home truth.[1] I came to be increasingly convinced that *sangomahood* constitutes an independent access to valid forms of knowledge, even though that African ritual specialism relies on divination, other forms of ancestral intervention, and witchcraft beliefs, neither of which – from the perspective of North Atlantic scientifically-underpinned common sense – could readily correspond with any empirical reality. The fourth reason for my becoming and remaining a *sangoma* lies in the dynamics of interpersonal therapeutic relations such as I have engaged in throughout the years as a *sangoma*, not only in Southern Africa, but also transforming that mode of therapy so as to be able to administer a globalised format of *sangoma* therapy worldwide, by means of personal consultations and more recently predominantly through electronic mail. In this continued practice I am constantly forced to admit that *sangoma* divination does produce valid knowledge which is acknowledged by my clients and then lends such an aura of revelatory truth to my subsequent therapeutic directions that many clients are able to step out of earlier impasses in their life and at long last release their own powers of self-redefinition and regeneration. In other words, I have found in *sangomahood* something that works, and that, at least in my hands and after the transformations I have effected upon it, also works beyond the cultural context in which I initially found it – it has turned out to work *interculturally* among inhabitants of the North Atlantic, regardless of somatic characteristics or cultural background, and even among non-believers and sceptics.

Like Part II, Part III largely consists of a researcher's self-reflexive account of his own procedures of knowledge construction. Here a familiar problem arises: that of introspection. In fieldwork, the anthropologist is her own principal instrument of research. Introspection therefore – although often[2] considered a suspect source of knowledge – would be the most appropriate method of elucidating these problems. I use this method extensively in this book. However, given the enormous influence, upon intercultural knowledge production through anthropological fieldwork, of idiosyncratic autobiographical contingencies and of transference, the discussion of these procedures of knowledge production forces one to dissect rationally and

---

[1] Harding 1997, cf. 1994; also section 15.5, and van Binsbergen 2001c, 2002b, 2002c.

[2] But not always on good grounds, and not unanimously; on the contrary, throughout the history of philosophy introspection has led to brilliant lasting contributions, to which such names are attached as Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Descartes, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Ryle, etc. Cf. Dalmiya 1993.

objectifyingly one's own contradictory roles, strategies and identities – to the point of indecent exposure. There are social and aesthetic limits to the extent to which one can do this in print; and I may already have overstepped those.

A remarkable tension may be observed in the accounts of my experiences as an anthropological fieldworker: even with the best techniques of participant observation, applied with the most painful stringency and self-denial, the promise of merging between me and the other, as contained in the naïve anthropological epistemology, is never fulfilled – since the interpretative distance all the time eclipses the existential encounter precisely when the latter is at its most effective. Apparently in an attempt to resolve this contradiction symbolically, scattered over these accounts is the recurrent image (with tragic echoes of my own childhood) of a *hieros gamos* – a sacred marriage of mythical dimensions (for example between heaven and earth, sun and moon, the North Atlantic and the South) that is amply prepared and negotiated yet never consummated. In chapter 1[1] it is the young fieldworker's serene contemplation of the young and happily married Najma bint Hassuna, proud mother of four children and proud adept of the cult of the local shrine of Sidi Mḥammad. In chapter 3 it is the slightly older fieldworker's serene contemplation of the budding Nkoya girl dancing the coming-out dance that marks her attainment of nubility. In chapter 5 it is the significantly older fieldworker's serene contemplation of Jane Sinombe, learner typist, and daughter of the distant high priest who a year later would oversee the decisive final steps in my 'becoming a *sangoma*'. Jane acted as the *psychopompos* ('soul guide') who led me to her father's High God shrine. And in chapters 5 and 6 it is the serene contemplation of MmaChakayile, an emaciated alcoholic cult leader approaching the age of seventy, but appearing in her trance as the incarnation of beauty and purity, and luring by that image the fieldworker over the edge of trance and towards his own locally recognised *sangomahood*. All these may be read, in Jungian terms,[2] as occasions when the *intercultural encounter* finds itself transformed into the young hero's quest under the aegis of the maternal archetype, or into an 'encounter with the *anima*'; the latter is the female archetypal *alter ego* that lurks in the subconscious and whose manifestations across the threshold of consciousness may bring about immensely powerful emotions to the point of breakdown of the personality. Lacanians would rather recognise here Lacan's reformulation of the Oedipus complex as an all-overriding desire of being reunited with the mother.[3] The longing to reach the other shore, and to leave behind the boiling ocean of intercultural contradictions, sets the stage for these raptures, and their account is mainly written not in academic but in literary prose. But the quest for the *hieros gamos* is highly ambivalent in that it is instigated not only by the realistic hope of acceptance but also by the mythical certainty of rejection; the quest is ultimately designed to fail, not to succeed. Only

---

[1] And much more so in my novel *Een Buik Openen*, van Binsbergen 1988a.

[2] Jung 1974b: Part II ch. ii, and 1987.

[3] Lacan 1993.

when this insight is finally allowed to register, can the compulsion be broken and the researcher escape from the curse of a self-destructive longing for which the anthropological fieldwork model only provided the ready vehicle. Here it becomes manifest that the personal quest for intercultural knowledge underlying the present book is to a considerable extent idiosyncratic, and transference-driven; that its insistence on the dissolution of boundaries is not entirely intersubjective and neutral, but also reflects a personal neurotic problematic. Though brutal and distortive appropriation is argued to form a standard, and regrettable, mode of knowledge production in the anthropology of my colleagues, my own alternative and equally distortive strategy has been to aspire to be appropriated (accepted, to the point of being formally adopted): by the Nkoya and their royal court ceremonial, and by the *sangomas* in Botswana. This 'quest to have others appropriate me' now appears as a chronic professional disorder, partial recovery from which may only be brought about by a change of climate: away from institutionalised anthropology, through a migration to the lonely pioneering frontier area of intercultural philosophy, under the scorching sun of conceptualisation and rationality, where textual representation comes to stand in the place of real-life encounters.

As set out in Chapter 5, I was brought to accept the status of *sangoma* diviner-healer-priest which was offered to me, and so I myself have become the certified exponent of a local African belief and therapy system. Soon this specialist role was to be exercised not only in Botswana but also in the North Atlantic, in combination even with a professorial chair in anthropology. Inevitably I found myself caught in all sorts of epistemological, social, medical and legal dilemmas; a meticulous discussion of these dilemmas (in the other chapters of Part III) allows us to draw the intercultural lessons from becoming a *sangoma*. Instead of being a merely performative leap into anti-intellectualist obscurantism inspired by shallow and guilt-ridden feelings of intercontinental solidarity, the intercultural adoption and practice of a local system of belief and ritual forces us (according to the argument in chapter 7) to address explicitly the contradictions inherent in established North Atlantic procedures of intercultural knowledge production. Not only does Part III challenge, on political grounds, the common condescending assumption, among North Atlantic students of African religion that reductionist deconstruction is their only permissible analytical stance. Proceeding from the political to the epistemological domain, the argument of chapter 7 leads us to suspect that, when an independent epistemology outside the North Atlantic (like the *sangomas*' epistemology) acknowledges sources of knowledge not recognised in North Atlantic scientifically underpinned convictions, recognition in itself may bring these sources to flow and to yield valid knowledge. We are thus reminded of the dangers attached to any attempt to think interculturality along lines of conceptualisation and epistemology exclusively set by North Atlantic intellectual traditions.

Chapter 5, drafted in 1990, still takes for granted the naïve anthropological perspective (the assumption of the possibility of total understanding and totally

faithful representation by total identification and immersion), only to protest against it; as if I was saying to myself:

> 'If I am not allowed to join my hosts as an anthropologist, let me go for even more total identification, and try to become like them even in ways that are incompatible with my habitus as an empirical scientist.'

The subsequent chapters in Part III record the continued struggle with the contradictions inherent in such an attitude. This inevitably raised the question of integrity.

'Is integrity at all a viable concept in intercultural situations?', I ask in chapter 6, where I deal at length with the apparent contradiction embodied in my position as a North Atlantic White who is both a university professor and a *sangoma*. The answer is hard to give, because the very notion of integrity conveys the sense of the monolithic – one person, one culture, one commitment, one standard to measure them by. In a globalised context, where values and other cultural contents are flowing as much as people and commodities, and many boundaries are dissolving, integrity may not be the most obvious concept to assess the value of ideas, of actions, of a person. Instead, I have tried to render my own claims to integrity in the field of *sangomahood* susceptible to debate by offering a detailed discussion of background, contradictions, personal aspirations and doubts, thus at least giving signs of the earnestness, and of the willingness to make myself vulnerable, that in many mono-cultural settings are taken for signs of integrity. The central lesson is this chapter is that integrity (best exemplified by the closed, bounded, integrated, and lineal characteristics of *the book* as the central symbol of North Atlantic civilisation)[1] can only be realised, be thought, within any one cultural orientation, and not at the intersection between such orientations, not *interculturally*. This disturbing thought implicitly threatens to defeat the whole of the present book's project: seeking to derive lessons from intercultural situations, it cannot aspire to the kind of shining integrity so blissfully waiting for philosophers who have wisely (?) stuck to one cultural orientation – their own. This abyss opening up in chapter 6 may be identical to the one concerning knowledge in chapter 7: there, an examination of the implication of the common (although – as I admit there – not totally state-of-the-art) definition of knowledge as 'justified true belief' reveals that – just like integrity – also knowledge can very well be defined and assessed within one cultural orientation, but becomes an extremely complex and contradictory concept when applied interculturally. It appears as if this book's project, whose *integrity* has first been recognised to be inherently problematic, must also give up almost all hope of producing valid intercultural *knowledge*– a somewhat depressing thought in a book whose focus is the philosophy of interculturality.

However, chapters 6, 7 and 8 also offer other, more dynamic, solutions to the problem of intercultural integrity: if *sangomahood* is a responsibility to insert

[1] In chapters 13 and 15 I come back to the book model as informing our taken-for-granted contemporary notions of 'culture'.

oneself into the stream of life force and to assist others in doing so, and if this is to bring about the transformation of death into life on which *sangomahood* revolves, then it cannot remain a learned lesson faithfully and punctually brought into practice. On the contrary, its claims to integrity have to be assessed by a different standard, notably by the extent to which the *sangoma* manages to realise such transformation in the sense of redefining *sangomahood* into a new and viable form. In chapter 7 the details of such transformation are presented and analysed with both frankness and confidence when I deal with my attempts to create and mediate a *sangomahood* that has a global format and uses the Internet as its vehicle. The earlier abyss of multiculturality into which integrity and knowledge threatened to sink, is argued to be chimerical, an artefact of the boundary imposition we are tempted to engage in for geopolitical, hegemonic reasons. Instead, a unitary epistemology is argued to create the possibility of an intercultural truth that renders (epistemological, and cultural) relativism an obsolete position.

The anti-relativist thinker proclaims to measure all cultural orientations, even the weakest in terms of power and numbers, even the one whose bearers have undergone the greatest historical wrongs, by a common standard that has global validity and applicability. This is the reason why, despite my awareness of what is considered politically correct and intercontinentally polite today, I refuse to give in to familiar North–South pressures that often turn global intellectual debate into a popularity contest, and shun from engaging in real incisive debate with Southern colleagues. However, I take my African colleagues, be they social scientists, historians, philosophers or *sangomas*, as seriously as I take myself. Therefore, it is my historical duty to engage in free and open debate with them – not because I deny their and their ancestors' historical pain (I acknowledge that pain especially in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 14 – I come from my own history of under-privilege, and know suffering on that basis; and I have been publicly chosen to be a servant of ancestors both European and African), but because any other attitude on my part would perpetuate and aggravate their greatest pain: being excluded from common humanity. This is why, at various points in the present book, I viciously fight condescension in the North–South debate; and this is why, at other points in this book, and in my other works, I engage in critical debate with distinguished and esteemed African colleagues such as Gyekye, Mazrui, Ramose, Oruka, Mudimbe – or, for that matter, with an Asian-born intercultural philosopher like Mall.

In the late 1990s I could still write:

> 'The surplus value which *sangomahood* yet holds for me, has also been the reason why in later years I could not bring myself to probe into the epistemological status of my *sangoma* knowledge and of the representations of the supernatural that *sangomahood* entails.'[1]

Do I truly believe in the tenets of Nkoya witchcraft and kingship which I act out in Zambia? Do I truly believe in the *sangoma* world view which I act out in Botswana,

[1] See section 5.3.

the Netherlands, and worldwide on the Internet? For many years I have postponed facing up to these obvious and legitimate questions, because I felt that any attempt to discursively answer these questions, would take me back to the condescending, deconstructivist anthropological stance I had hoped to escape from by 'becoming a *sangoma*'.

I have in the meantime realised that this was leaving the thinking of and about *sangoma* half-way undone, so that the lessons this process contains for interculturality would not be allowed to be articulated – as if I was running away from them myself. I have since, in newly written chapters 7 and 8, remedied the epistemological vacuum surrounding my earlier view of *sangomahood*. This helped me to develop and express the view that the self-evident relativism informing my earlier pieces on *sangomahood* threatened to defeat my entire intercultural project; in the place of relativism, I now propose a non-relativist unitary epistemology in line with my adage (most fully developed in the concluding chapter 15) that 'cultures do not exist'.

Chapter 15 (1999) presents the proud *tour de force* in which such an overall theoretical perspective is being attempted, in an argument that reaches back to many of the preceding chapters, and thus offers a fitting conclusion for the book as a whole. It is important that that argument emphatically identifies as an exercise in intercultural philosophy; for I repeat, a resolution of the contradictions of intercultural knowledge production brought out in Parts II and III could not be reached within the anthropological discourse but only in some meta-discourse such as intercultural philosophy. (In chapter 12, I will even go so far as to claim – in challenge to the pioneering intercultural philosopher R.A. Mall – that no such resolution is likely to be achieved in any language-based discourse, but only in non-lingual or peripherally-lingual practices.) At any rate, being a programmatic and polemical overview, written moreover at the very beginning of my practice as an intercultural philosopher, limitations adhere to chapter 15 which could not be remedied there without destroying that chapter's manifestly effective argument, and which instead have been in part compensated in the most recently written chapters.

One of the principal reasons the North Atlantic region has had both for studying 'other cultures', and for reifying these as absolutely and insurmountably different, has been: *to allow North Atlantic civilisation to construct itself on the basis of a claim of a rationality and science incomparably superior to the thought processes engaged in by humans in other continents.* One of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is then to explode such hegemonic projection from the North Atlantic. Intercultural philosophy can do so by taking seriously the human thought processes elsewhere, by approaching in their own right the belief systems based on them, and particularly by exposing the geopolitical, class, gender, racial, and other collective interests that have imposed the violence of boundaries between subsets of humankind in the first place. Clearly, here lie enormous problems that a substantial literature on belief, rationality, and interculturality has helped us to appreciate. To this literature I add, as my personal contribution culminating in the present book:

- my own extensive and painful confrontation as an anthropologist with non-Western world views in a number of fieldwork settings;
- my long-standing practice of one non-Western knowledge system as a *sangoma*;
- my extensive evidence that knowledge sources not recognised by North Atlantic science can yet yield valid knowledge;
- my attempt to formulate a non-relativist unitary epistemology;
- and my long-ranging historical and comparative analyses that help establish the empirical conditions which underpin my claims that 'cultures do not exist', that all human knowledge production is interconnected and therefore subjected to a converging epistemology.

Chapter 7 comes closest to unfolding the epistemological problems that *sangomahood* poses. It presents an argument in which the extrasensory knowledge apparently produced by *sangoma* divination can be appreciated to be just that, in the context of a wider argument about the structure of the world beyond the boundary conditions constituting sensorialist rationality. In this way it argues the importance of the study of cultural orientations outside the North Atlantic region: not only for reasons of equality, recognition, and some sort of preservation of biodiversity in the field of culture, but also for a fourth reason that is neither political, nor emotional, nor humanitarian. This reason is simply the following: sensorialist rationality has so restricted the sources of knowledge which are recognised and admissible in the North Atlantic and global contexts, that other cultural orientations' familiarity with other sources of knowledge, and with the procedures – the mental technologies – of tapping these sources, will add immensely to humanity's knowledge about the world and about itself.

Chapter 8 originated in my personal experiences as a researcher and *sangoma*, and this lends the specific structure and tension to the chapter. At the culmination of my initiation as a *sangoma*, I re-visited the Nata shrine of the High God Mwali in northern Botswana, and here was confronted with two riddles. One concerned the self-proclaimed identity of the shrine's high priest as 'Mbedzi'; the other concerned the identity that was there unexpectedly imposed upon me: of – allegedly – belonging to a 'kind of people whose traditional dress is the leopard skin'.

For the first riddle, an answer presents itself with my discovery of historical cultic relations between the South Central African Mwali cult, and the great religions of South Asia.

The second riddle proved far less easy to answer. After an initial, abortive survey of identity construction through leopard symbolism in Europe, South Africa, and South Central Africa, I embarked on a pain-staking analysis across three continents, and with a time range from the Upper Palaeolithic to the present day. I carefully trace leopard symbolism in sub-Saharan Africa; in the Eastern Mediterranean basin between the Neolithic and Late Antiquity; in Christianity (with excursions into

Judaism and Islam); Ancient Egypt;[1] and Asia (with special attention to India and China). In the process, I paid considerable attention to ancient astronomies as relatively well-documented and enduring formal systems yielding the kind of historical and comparative data we need in order to make sense of leopard symbolism in space and time. At long last I did find the answer to the second riddle, and again it points to massive Indian influence on South Central African cults. The obligation to wear a leopard skin turns out to be rooted in the legal requirement, stipulated in the Hindu *Institutes of Vishnu* from the early first millennium CE, for religious students of *Kshatriya* (warrior) caste status to wear a tiger skin. When I hit upon this text passage, the earlier part of my quest had already made me aware of the symbolic equivalence, *grosso modo*, of leopard and tiger in much of Asia.

But meanwhile, far more comprehensive patterns of continuity and differentiation throughout the cultural history of the Old World[2] had become discernible, enabling me to situate *sangomahood* in great detail, and with great scope in space and time, within the Old World's evolving cultural history of symbolism, spirituality, and shamanism. During fourteen months from late Spring, 2002, I postponed the publication of *Intercultural encounters* in order to complete this new quest. I collected the scattered and fragmented data from such diverse disciplines as comparative linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, even genetics; reconciled the inevitable contradictions between these disciplines, their paradigms and their findings; straightened out the complex methodological requirements of such a quest; and wrote out my results – into what was originally (like chapter 7) an afterthought to chapter 6, but effectively turned out to be another, fully-fledged book in its own right. Incorporating that book here would have had the advantage of meaningfully pursuing the line of argument on *sangomahood* and bringing it to its ultimate conclusion. However, doing so would not only make the book absolutely unmanageable in size, but – with such a massive imput of original empirical historical research – would also detract from the, at times already shaky, intercultural philosophical orientation of the present book. So the reader must inevitably miss, in this book, my final objectifying account of *sangomahood*, in which I draw the detailed and world-wide cultural historical lessons of my fifteen years of immersion in this spiritual idiom. But the companion volume *The Leopard's Unchanging Spots: Towards a World History of Shamanism from the Perspective of the Southern*

---

[1] I will capitalise 'Ancient' when it designates a specific civilisation that flourished in previous millennia and has no direct continuity with the present, e.g. 'Ancient Egypt', 'Ancient Mesopotamia'.

[2] By 'Old World', I mean Africa, Asia and Europe, regardless of historical period. The term is not meant to exclude the inhabitants of Oceania, Australia, and the Americas from the mainstream of human cultural history, but simply to admit that, largely as a result of research undertaken over the past hundred years, the global collectivity of scholars involved in the production of scientific knowledge happens to be best (but still very imperfectly) informed with regard to historical processes, and their interrelations, in Africa, Asia and Europe. And of course, distinguishing these three continents as if they were viable units of cultural history, and linking them into a comprehensive Old World, reflects a late modern geopolitics that is greatly influenced by North Atlantic hegemony.

African Sangoma *Cult* has already been drafted in full, and, given time, health, and ancestral assistance, will be out before long.

0.1.3. Introducing Part IV: 'From cultural anthropology to intercultural philosophy'

Meanwhile, participatory fieldwork as reported in localising and particularising monographs is not the only procedure of intercultural knowledge production open to the Africanist anthropologist. Comparative and historical work offers additional approaches, ultimately relying, at least in part, upon the knowledge construction through fieldwork but not necessarily marred by the latter's contradictions. Some of these approaches are pursued in Part IV.

These chapters explore, in broad general terms drawing examples from many different local linguistic and cultural settings in Africa, some of the basic technologies of sociability and anti-sociability around which African community life can be said to be organised: reconciliation and witchcraft.[1] It is the attempt at generalisation that allows these chapters to steer the argument away from the pitfalls of idiosyncrasy, identification and transference that form the great themes in Part II and III. What emerges is, in the first place, exercises in intercultural explanation, not primarily at the *emic* level of faithfully rendered local concepts and texts but at the *etic* level of the distancing description of enduring structures, procedures and social technologies. Here a number of basic tools of analysis are deployed and shown to go some way towards a structural, generalising understanding of African situations: such concepts as cosmology, virtuality, the village, community, globalisation, kinship, class, and class conflict.

Along these lines, chapter 9 discusses – inspired by Kant's theory of *sensus communis* as springing from aesthetic judgement – symbolic production as affirmation of either universalist or particularist constructions of community, on the basis of ethnographic material from the Nkoya people of western central Zambia.

Chapter 10 considers the production of knowledge and of ignorance under the specific politics of intercultural knowledge production obtaining in the same part of Africa in the context of international development intervention.

Chapter 11 (on reconciliation) presents:

(a) *a model of an African hermeneutic social technology* (that of reconciliation, on the basis not of demonstrable legal principles but of the *invention* of points of agreement, more or less by sleight-of-hand but still within a given socio-cultural framework) *that, in its turn, can serve*
(b) *as a model of intercultural knowledge production in general*.

---

[1] I would have preferred to be able to offset, in this book, chapter 11 on reconciliation against my recent piece on 'Witchcraft as virtualised boundary condition of the kinship order' (van Binsbergen 2001b), but this appeared in print too recently to be included in the present book, which is already of excessive length anyway.

Much of the sting may be taken out of the methodological and epistemological problems presented in Parts II and III once we realise that intercultural knowledge is, in the first place, *representation*: a hermeneutics that at best indicates, obliquely, many of the basic traits of the original, but yet always produces a secondary product that is essentially new, different, and distorted. Intercultural knowledge production, therefore, is a form of mediation closely resembling African reconciliation: it is not necessarily truthful, cannot even claim or afford to be totally truthful, yet it *works*, in the sense that it demonstrably informs and supports a social practice much in the way that an anthropological fieldworker's intercultural knowledge is demonstrated to *work* when it allows her to elicit progressively positive and supportive recognitions of sociability on the part of the host community.

Here lies the transition to Part V, towards an intercultural philosophical orientation rather than an anthropological orientation.

0.1.4. Introducing Part V: Exercises in intercultural philosophy

It is with a certain reluctance and nostalgia that I make this transition towards Part V.

Crossing from anthropology to philosophy has enhanced my awareness of the philosophy of science and of epistemology; it certainly made me appreciate more clearly whatever was wrong with the kind of anthropology I had engaged in until then, and it has given me some of the tools needed to articulate that insight. Yet I cannot bring myself to distance myself completely from my earlier scientific work, with all the long years of painstaking and passionate research and writing this has involved. I may have become a philosopher, of sorts, but I remain an empirical scientist. I cannot jettison the truth procedures that, however critically assessed and renewed, constitute my identity, my habitus and ethos, as a scientist. This is not to say that in the last analysis every philosophical argument is to undergo an empirical test. But, at any rate, those aspects of a philosophical argument that directly amount to a statement about empirical reality, or that imply such a statement (and on second thoughts, most philosophical statements have such implications, certainly indirectly), must be treated with the same procedural carefulness developed within the empirical sciences (be they natural or social).

Most of my philosophical colleagues are philosophers in the first place. Ever since they were adolescents, they have spent their life exposing themselves to the canonised literature of philosophy. They did not build up an oeuvre and a name as empirical scientists. They can afford to be primarily concerned, not with the empirical grounding of their arguments, but with the latter's conceptual and discursive formal correctness and elegance. Here the dextrous and detailed reference to the ideas of great philosophers is often the hallmark of professionalism and a major factor in the authority accorded to my colleagues' arguments. In the last few years, I have learned to imitate them somewhat in these respects. After all, I am an experienced fieldworker who has mastered the art of picking up a local cultural orientation and emulating it in his own behaviour and speech. There is no reason why I could not apply the same technique after shifting my fieldwork location to the

Rotterdam philosophical faculty – an ironical statement, of course, because I moved in order to become something other than a fieldworker, and to be a colleague, not an observer, of the local philosophers. Yet of course my reading, for decades, has been largely in a very different direction from that of my philosophical colleagues, and I will never be able to catch up in this respect. This is one of the reasons why my work, even if intended as philosophical, inevitably continues to display the hallmarks of a stranger and outsider in the eyes of my philosophical colleagues. Another reason is that my empirical bias forces me to acknowledge, in all sorts of arguments, the empirically given situation (often a concrete intercultural situation whose contradictions and complexities I have lived through myself, and which has helped to shape me as a person) as a compelling constraint upon my freedom to generate statements. By contrast, my philosophical colleagues tend to opt for a much greater independent creativity in conceptualising and rendering reality, in combination with a much greater fidelity (informed by their much greater erudition) vis-à-vis the canonical philosophical literature. Their assumption appears to be that in the last analysis a philosophical argument should not allow itself to be dictated by empirical reality; my point of departure, on the other hand, is that a philosophical argument which demonstrably does not submit to being compelled by empirical reality, particularly not by a personally-lived-through reality, is uninteresting and futile. As a result (and I make this claim extensively in chapter 15), philosophy in my hands comes close to being an empirical subject once more,[1] and occasionally comes close even to being an autobiographical confession and apology. The difference in style between my own writing and that of my philosophical colleagues is unmistakable and occasionally produces misunderstanding and irritations both in them and in myself. This is part of the peculiar position I have come to occupy between disciplines, and I have given up trying to disguise it with ever more reading, ever more erudite window-dressing. I might even co-opt one of the greatest philosophers in the Western tradition to my side, tendentiously reading Plato's exhortation of *sōízein ta phainómena* ('doing justice to evident manifestations' – commonly interpreted as having only one very narrow reference in connection with the movements of planets against the night sky) as an empiricist credo; in a way it is one, after all.

Reluctant, nostalgic – yes, but only up to a point. For it has been my own free choice – and a felicitous one – to try and confront in intercultural philosophy the dilemmas that oppressed me in anthropology, and so in Part V the book's central problems are addressed not so much in an evocative or empirical way (as in the preceding Parts) but in a discursive manner: *what is the nature of intercultural knowledge? And under what conditions can reliable, valid and relevant knowledge be produced across (what is commonly taken to be) cultural boundaries?*

---

[1] 'Once more', for this is how the Western philosophical tradition started out in the first place, with the Presocratics, Plato and Aristotle: as a way to account for empirical reality by meta-empirical theory.

Intercultural philosophy represents a discourse ideally capable of identifying and supplanting the defective models of thought and the naïve epistemologies with which I, for one, began to produce intercultural knowledge as a budding anthropologist. It alerts us to the performative nature of identity claims, and helps us to deconstruct 'culture', and especially 'cultures' and 'cultural boundaries'. This is the case even though the concept of culture has come to constitute one of the most powerful collective representations of the contemporary world (particularly the North Atlantic region); by its very political nature, this concept must be distrusted as a self-evident tool of detached philosophical analysis. In intercultural knowledge production, the distortive effects of *projection* and *transference* are obvious; but intercultural philosophy reminds us that also *identification*, even identification for the best reasons of political solidarity, does not necessarily lead to statements that are logically and conceptually compelling, as well as empirically sustainable, in other words, that are *true*. At the same time it forces us to reflect on the possible cultural limits of any truth claims, and to explore the epistemological and conceptual conditions under which truth could be (must be) established interculturally.

Situated at a discursive plane where (and that is the great advantage of the transition from cultural anthropology to intercultural philosophy) abstraction has been made from specific personal experiences and the idiosyncrasies of anthropological fieldwork situations, and having already above preluded upon the contents and strategic contribution of some of these chapters making up Part V, their specific arguments do not require much more introduction than they give themselves in their opening sections.

Chapter 12 deals with the theoretical problems raised by globalisation and the possibility of an intercultural hermeneutics as proposed by R.A. Mall, the leading intercultural philosopher in Germany. I identify globalisation as a central problem for intercultural philosophy. *Philosophy is the dialogical development of a special language that expresses, in an innovative yet intersubjective manner, aporias of the human experience as characteristic of the philosopher's own historical situation* (although such expression usually includes references to other times and other places). Philosophy thus roots in a concrete spatio-temporal collective situation, whence it derives its empirical impetus and its touchstone. The empirical investigation of globalisation is obviously not the philosopher's task, but a spate of recent empirical research demonstrates that globalisation does indeed entail profound changes and has far-reaching effects. It does create crucial aporias in the contemporary experience awaiting philosophical exploration. After sketching a framework in which these aporias can be appreciated in relation to one another, I turn to Mall's intercultural hermeneutics as a major attempt to face up to this philosophical challenge. The critique of Mall's approach helps to situate him and his work in the global space that – in a way he does not self-reflexively problematise – constitutes his obvious habitat, and brings us to formulate a number of research priorities for the investigation of interculturality: the nature of culture and cultures, the possibility of intercultural communication (fact or wishful thinking?), and the

role of language as a violent, estrangingly divisive, tool precisely when utilised for thinking interculturality.

Chapter 13 seeks to define a theoretical framework within which the expansion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Africa can be understood from an intercultural philosophical perspective, and with emphasis on Africa. What is the place of ICT in Africa, and what is the place of Africa in a world increasingly dominated by ICT? In this chapter's argument I seek to explode the apparent contradiction between Africa and ICT. I do so by a two-step argument. In the first part I confront African thinkers like Mazrui and Gyekye, who have argued that African culture and ICT are incompatible. Here three two-tiered statements are discussed and largely dismissed:

(1) (a) ICT is owned by the North, and hence (b) ICT is irreconcilably opposed to African culture;
(2) (a) ICT is metalocal world culture, without local specificity and local validity, in other words owned by everyone and no one, and hence (b) ICT is in principle devastating for any localising cultural identity owned by a specific set of people, such as the African identity;
(3) (a) ICT is inimical to culture as owned by a specific set of people, and hence (b) ICT is inimical to the African culture or cultures and to the sets of people that claim ownership of the latter.

Having advanced a philosophical argument to the effect that ICT is just as much and as little owned by Africans as by any other collectivity in the contemporary world, I proceed in the second part of the chapter with a more empirical argument setting forth some of the ways in which the African appropriation of ICT is actually taking shape.

Chapter 14 brings out the complexities that arise once philosophical concepts are taken out of the ivory tower and applied to the rich empirical reality of African societies. An empirical corrective is then absolutely necessary, and especially a corrective from the social sciences: one that does not just consider (like most philosophers do) the individual person and his rationality. Set against the background of my personal intellectual and political itinerary, the argument explores the contents, the format and societal locus of the concept of *ubuntu* as propounded by academic philosophers, managers and politicians in Southern Africa today. The concept's utopian and prophetic nature is recognised. This allows us to see a considerable positive application for it at the centre of the globalised urban societies of Southern Africa today. *Ubuntu* philosophy is argued to constitute not a straight-forward *emic* rendering of a pre-existing African philosophy available since times immemorial in the various languages belonging to the Bantu language family. Instead, *ubuntu* philosophy is a remote *etic* reconstruction, in an alien globalised format, of a set of implied ideas that do inform aspects of village and kin relations in many contexts in contemporary Southern Africa. The historical depth of these ideas

is difficult to gauge. Their original format differs greatly from the academic codifications of *ubuntu*. After highlighting the anatomy of reconciliation, the role of intellectuals, and the globalisation of Southern African society, the argument concludes with an examination of the potential dangers of *ubuntu*: mystifying real conflict, perpetuating resentment (as in the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission), and obscuring the excessive pursuit of individual gain. Finally, the potential released by *ubuntu* will be brought to bear on this argument itself, in a bid to overcome what otherwise might appear to be merely a stalemate between South and North intellectual production, and a replaying of classic moves familiar from the Gadamer/Habermas debate on tradition and the critique of ideology.

The somewhat more systematic outlines of an intercultural philosophy are primarily explored in the concluding, ambitious chapter 15. Based on my 1999 inaugural lecture at the Erasmus University, this argument presents the outline of a research programme that may yet reap the positive benefits of the intellectual and existential struggle evoked in Parts II and III of this book. In chapter 15, I seek to explode a fair number of self-evidences that have so far haunted the investigation of interculturality and that, as far as I am concerned, *should all be discarded* if any progress is to be made in intercultural philosophy. I am particularly addressing the following illusory assumptions:

- that 'cultures' (plural) do exist;
- that identities proclaimed within the public arenas of the contemporary multicultural society are authentic and free from performativity;
- that everyone has one and only one culture, and is inevitably tied to that one;
- that it is meaningful to speak of intercultural philosophy in the sense of comparing the ways various philosophical traditions of the world have dealt with perennial themes (such as the nature of world, the person, morality, time, force, life) without first investigating the conditions and the distortions of *interculturality* as such;
- that philosophy can afford to ignore empirical evidence as produced by the social and natural sciences;
- that Africa is a patchwork quilt of discrete, localised, bounded cultures;
- that ethnography is *ipso faco* a valid form of intercultural knowledge production;
- that intercultural philosophy as it has been pioneered over the past decade has already substantiated its claims of constituting a valid form of intercultural knowledge;
- that in cultural analysis we can afford to ignore comprehensive long-range correspondences in space and time, across millennia and across thousands of miles;
- that Greece is *the* cradle of the North Atlantic, and subsequently global, civilisation;
- and that cultural fragmentation is the original condition of humankind instead of

a secondary product of historical group interaction.

Even despite the fireworks of chapter 15, I must resign myself to the fact that this book offers, not an accomplished and elaborate philosophy of interculturality, but the fragmented yet sustained lessons from a lifelong quest to arrive at an intercultural knowledge that is both scientific and existential, both empathic and politically responsible, both *emic* and *etic*, that addresses both the mind and the heart, and that shuns North Atlantic hegemonic imposition and instead seeks to open up new forms of valid knowledge that are available elsewhere and that yet share in the same common regime of truth.

It is not in the first place for lack of ability, or lack of familiarity with an established discursive format in either anthropology or philosophy, that my leading ideas appear scattered over the book, with the dynamics of their emergence over decades still clinging to them, and always near to the specific empirical context in which they happened to present themselves as puzzles and challenges to myself. Merely summarising, in an abstract manner, the insights to which this complex trajectory has led me, without allowing the reader to tread this trajectory for herself, would have been pointless. This book is a pioneering work. Let it be as tantalising to read as it has been for me to write. I propose it be treated as prolegomena, that will help us to construct a proper abstract theory of interculturality, but only after the present book's explorations and contradictions have made us aware of at least some of interculturality's complexities and pitfalls.

Finally, what does come through clearly in the intercultural philosophical exercises that make up the last Part of this book, is the *need for particular kinds of dynamic, alternative logic* – capable of acknowledging difference without entrenching itself in difference. In the world today, the practical logic underlying such actual intercultural encounters as make up the reality of our globalised social world, is characterised by kaleidoscopic fragmentation, inconsistence, pluriformity. Here – whatever their theoretical claims to universality – logical connections based on concepts and their relations have *in practice* only a limited, local validity, beyond which other such connections, of rather different relational content between rather different concepts, hold sway.

The increasing devastation of social, political and economic life on the African continent; the hardening of enemy stereotypes between, on the one hand, North Atlantic governments and part of their subjects, on the other hand an increasingly vocal Islam that continues to expand in Europe and Africa; the incapability of solving the Palestinian conflict and, instead, the creation of more and more scenes of war, violence, and historical cicatrisation and humiliation in the Middle East and (on 11 September 2001) on the USA eastern seaboard – these developments are the result, not simply of a universal human condition, but (among other factors) of the failure of North Atlantic hegemonic pretensions of universality, rationality and objectivity to translate themselves into world-wide dialogical communicability. The

contentious *Clash of Civilizations*[1] (now the received wisdom at the Foreign Offices of Washington, London and even The Hague) is largely an artefact of the unitary and ethnocentric illusion, as if *one* consistent logic connecting *one* well-defined set of concepts would already be capable of encompassing the totality of contemporary experiences world-wide. Ultimately supported by such arrogance as North Atlantic security and weaponry seemed to afford until recently, it is an entrenched, bookish pipe-dream, a fallacy in practical intercultural logic, even more than a fallacy of cultural and ethnic theoretical analysis (which it is also, as chapter 15 suffices to bring out).

If North Atlantic hegemony constructs the contemporary world in terms of hard binary oppositions (as is commensurate with the logic of the formal organisations, the legal texts, and the weapons technology in which North Atlantic power and identity are largely invested), then the reactions from the rest of the world can only be of two kinds:

- either a crumbling away in the face of such conceptual violence (as in the case of Africa today),
- or a head-on confrontation through an equally intransigent conceptual counter-violence, as in the case of Islam today.

Physical violence including war are only possible if justified and sustained by conceptual violence, however dim and crude. In intercultural situations, conceptual violence invariably implies the violence of representation, since it is only after a translation into terms more familiar to us that we can conceptualise the cultural Other.

Of the violence of representation, and of the tendency for it to absorb, through transference, infantile conflicts which can only warp the validity of intercultural representation and render it even more violent than it inevitably has to be, this book offers many detailed examples – at the expense of making its author (reverting to a form of relentless presentation of self which is normally reserved for the field of belles lettres) exceptionally vulnerable, as an anthropologist, as a philosopher, and as a human being struggling for integrity, insight, true human encounter, liberation from the burdens of the past, love.

But on the positive side, this book does indicate some of the directions in which such dynamic, alternative logics may be found:

- in Derridean deconstruction and *différance*;
- in Lévistraussian *savage thought*, which (whether we intellectuals like it or not) is the inconsistent standard mode of thought of most human beings in most situations world-wide, and also of ourselves unless we are in a specifically marked technical academic mode;

[1] Cf. Huntington 1996.

- in dialogue;
- in the mythomaniacal logic of association and projection that a century of psychoanalysis has taught us to recognise and that we should first of all use, not condescendingly and gleefully to detect the transference in *other's* behaviour, but self-critically, to identify such transference in our own construction of knowledge;
- in African techniques of reconciliation through creative and selective hermeneutics;
- in intercultural hermeneutics for which both cultural anthropology and intercultural philosophy, despite all their shortcomings as highlighted in this book, have proposed promising models and methods in the course of the twentieth century CE;
- in the notion, repeatedly employed in this book, of a *field of tension* that acknowledges difference without allowing the matter at hand to be entirely reduced to such difference;
- and (as best brought out in chapter 14) in a humility which, while recognising the violent bases of both its own and the Other's attempts at representation, continues to insist on the construction of a domain of encounter where not mutual *violence*, but sympathethic respect for each other's personal and collective *pain* guides our actions, grants us the promise of integrity, and allows us to recognise, and live (even beyond words), our shared humanity.

Only after we have sincerely explored and applied such customised and local logics, can we hope to surpass them and construct, beyond them (along such lines as proposed in chapter 7), a domain where the philosopher's and the scientist's hope of a unitary, non-relativist logic encompassing the totality of the contemporary human experience, may be more than a hegemonic imposition.

0.2. Provenance of chapters, and acknowledgements

Most chapters of the present book were previously published, either in English or in Dutch. All previously published texts have been very extensively revised, expanded and updated, in order to serve a number of purposes: the concern to reflect my current thinking; the concern to reflect developments in the various academic disciplines involved and in the world at large since the text was first drafted; and the concern to avoid at least some of the most striking repetitions and contradictions throughout the book. The book is therefore not a historically faithful reflection of my thinking and writing at any moment in the past, even though the chapter titles indicate the year in which a chapter's argument was first conceived. The book is a thematic treatment of related issues that happen to have a long history in my thinking and writing yet culminate in the present more or less sustained argument, fragmented though it is over fifteen chapters and an Introduction. Readers (if any) interested in the literal texts of original arguments will have to go back to the previous

publications. Only occasionally, when unmarked updating would have destroyed the structure of an earlier argument, have I left the text largely unchanged and instead added a footnote stating my current views or a current state of affairs.

However, I have not *systematically* projected my later views onto the earlier pieces. Thus it is only obvious that the notion of culture I am using in the older chapters is far more in line with mainstream anthropology of the last quarter of the twentieth century than with the concept of 'cultural orientation' elaborated in chapter 15.

The first version of chapter 1, on my first anthropological fieldwork in 1968, was written in 1969 at the request of Douwe Jongmans, who had been the principal supervisor of my Tunisia fieldwork, although my theses subsequently based on that research were supervised by others. The Dutch version of this paper circulated as an internal report within the Department of Anthropology, Amsterdam University, until a much revised and expanded version was published in 1987.[1] The English translation was made by Susan Janssen and Wim van Binsbergen. I wish to register my indebtedness to Douwe Jongmans, Klaas van der Veen, Marielou Creyghton and Pieter van Dijk, whose academic advice and logistic support were essential to the research-training project described here. I am indebted to the University of Amsterdam for a grant towards my 1968 fieldwork, and to the Musée des Arts et des Traditions populaires, Tunis, for research clearance in that connection. Later trips were made in 1970, 1979 and 2002, in which connection I express my gratitude to the Free University Amsterdam (1979) and the African Studies Centre, Leiden (2002).

A first version of chapter 2, on Pierre-Philippe Rey's work, was presented at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, in the Autumn of 1979; later versions at a seminar I gave as Simon Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, February 1980, and at a seminar of the Dutch Association of African Studies, Leiden, 4 November 1983. I am indebted to Martin Doornbos, Peter Geschiere, Terence Ranger, and Pierre-Philippe Rey, for their stimulating remarks, and to Ria van Hal, Adrienne van Wijngaarden and Mieke Zwart-Brouwer for typing successive drafts of this paper. The paper was published in: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., & Hesseling, G.S.C.M., 1984, eds., *Aspecten van Staat en Maatschappij in Afrika: Recent Dutch and Belgian Research on the African State*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, pp. 163-180, which has been out of print for many years. A German version appeared as: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1984, 'Kann die Ethnologie zur Theorie des Klassenkampfes in der Peripherie werden?: Reflexionen über das Werk von Pierre-Philippe Rey', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 9, 4: 138-148.

After having been drafted and repeatedly and extensively revised from 1984 onwards, chapter 3 was originally published in Dutch in 1987,[2] in a book *Afrika in Spiegelbeeld*, which I edited jointly with Martin Doornbos. The chapter was based

[1] Van Binsbergen 1987b.

[2] Van Binsbergen 1987a.

on anthropological and historical fieldwork I undertook in western Zambia and under migrants from this area in Lusaka, from 1972 to 1974, and during shorter periods in 1977, 1978 and 1981; and which I subsequently visited in 1988, 1989, 1992 (twice), 1994 (twice) and 1995. In addition to the persons and institutions mentioned in the general acknowledgements at the end of this section, I am indebted to the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) for financial support while writing up in the academic year 1974-1975. The English translation of chapter 3 was made by Juultje Heymans and Wim van Binsbergen. I am indebted to Martin Doornbos for stimulating comments. I am dedicating this piece to my eldest daughter, Nezjma, whose name derives from my first fieldwork. As a toddler she lived through the (especially medical) agonies of my first fieldwork among the Nkoya. Her first language was Nkoya. It was by imagining her as an adolescent girl undergoing the Nkoya puberty rites, that I opened up to their beauty and wisdom.

Chapter 4 is a revised version of an argument originally presented at the African Futures Conference, Centre of African Studies, Edinburgh, 9-11 December 1987, celebrating that institution's twenty-fifth anniversary. The original version was published as: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1988, 'Reflections on the future of anthropology in Africa', in: Fyfe, C., ed., *African futures: Twenty-fifth Anniversary Conference*, Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, Seminar Proceedings, No. 28, pp. 293-309. To the present version extensive references have been added whereas the original version had none; the original 1987 postscript has been incorporated in the main text now, whereas a new postscript has been added in order to comment on the 1987 situation from the perspective of 2002.

The specific fieldwork on which chapter 5 (as well as the rest of Part III) is based was undertaken in Francistown and surrounding areas, Botswana, in April-May 1988, November 1988-October 1989, and during shorter visits in 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1994, 1995, and 1999. I am greatly indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for funding and encouragement; and to the Applied Research Unit, Ministry of Local Government and Lands, Republic of Botswana, for local support. A first Dutch version was published[1] in a Festschrift for Gerrit Grootenhuis (director of the African Studies Centre, Leiden, in the 1960s-1980s). Earlier English versions of this paper were presented at the Seminar on 'Symbol and Symptom', Africa Research Centre, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, January 1991; and at the Seventh Satterthwaite Colloquium on African Religion and Ritual, Satterthwaite (Cumbria, U.K.), April 1991. I am grateful to Robert Baum, René Devisch, Ørnulf Gulbrandsen, Adrian Hastings, John Janzen, Murray Last, Cesare Poppi, Matthew Schoffeleers, Elizabeth Tonkin, Richard Werbner and David Zeitlyn for stimulating comments, and especially to Robert Buijtenhuijs, whose incisive and dismissive comments on an early version helped me to define my position much more clearly, although this did not prevent our further, and increasingly contentious, exchanges on

[1] Van Binsbergen 1990b.

this issue. A much shorter English version was published as: 'Becoming a *sangoma*: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 4: 309-344; I am indebted to that journal's editor and its publisher, Brill, Leiden, for their generous consent to include the greatly revised paper in the present book.

Chapter 6 originated in such a further exchange with Robert Buijtenhuijs: his draft of an Open Letter, intended to explode, within the Dutch Africanist community, my claims of being an initiated and certified Southern African diviner-priest. For reasons of collegial consideration Buijtenhuijs graciously gave up the idea of publishing his spirited draft, but, being less gracious myself, and having been greatly stimulated by Buijtenhuijs' thoughtful text,a revised Dutch version of my apology, revised so as to be independent from Buijtenhuijs' text, was published in a Festschrift for Matthew Schoffeleers in 1999.[1] In addition to Robert Buijtenhuijs I am indebted, especially to my beloved wife Patricia van Binsbergen-Saegerman, and further to René Devisch, Gerti Hesseling, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Jacqueline Bhabha, Ineke van Wetering, Richard Werbner, Jos van der Klei and Heinz Kimmerle, to the successive year groups of the students of my course on 'Some foundations of intercultural philosophy', Erasmus University Rotterdam, and to the clients who, from 1990 onwards, have applied to me for *sangoma* divination and therapy both in Africa and worldwide – all of whom have helped me to bring some clarity into the contradictions of pursuing an African ritual specialist role in a North Atlantic environment, and as a North Atlantic senior academic.[2]

Chapter 7 was written in the summer of 2002, after most of this book had been in preparation for years and had more or less attained its final shape. Working on the book, and circulating it for several years among my colleagues, my students, and the visitors of my websites, had enhanced both my confidence and my sense that something essential was still missing, that I was holding back in a way unbecoming a professional philosopher. I am indebted to those of my colleagues who have challenged my earlier views on *sangomahood*, and to my students and sometime assistants Louise Müller and Roderick van den Bosch, for driving home the inadequacy of this position. So finally, to the political and emotional arguments that I had been using to justify my 'becoming a *sangoma*', I now add epistemological ones. Thus I draw the systematic lessons which this anecdotal episode in one person's life can be argued to have for our understanding of interculturality, the human condition, and the structure of the world. An earlier version of chapter 7 was presented at the conference on 'Wereldbeelden, wetenschappen en wij: Naar meer kritische, verantwoorde en open wetenschappen' [World views, the sciences and us: Towards a more critical, more responsible and less entrenched conception of science], Centre Leo Apostel for the Philosophy of Science, Free University, Brussels, Belgium, 10 June 2003. I am indebted to Nicole Note for organising this

[1] Van Binsbergen 1998b.

[2] Cf. van Binsbergen 2001c, 2002b, 2002c.

exciting event, and to René Devisch and Dirk Aerts for stimulating comments on my paper made in that connection. The discussion, in this chapter, of the epistemological dimensions of *sangoma* science as independently unlocking – for such is my claim – sources of valid knowledge that happen not to be admissible to North Atlantic science, summarises more extensive arguments which I was invited to present before the Annual Meeting of the Netherlands Association for the Philosophy of Science, November 2001, and the UNESCO conference on African rationality held in Porto Novo, Benin, in September 2002.

Also chapter 8 was written from the summer of 2002 onwards, as an afterthought addition to this book, in a final attempt to live up to the lessons of chapter 7 concerning Old World long-range cultural interconnectedness, and the unitary underlying structure of truth and meaning. The chapter shows how a Southern African cult may contain many South Asian elements; it originally was to accommodate my extensive analysis of leopard-skin symbolism throughout the Old World, which however soon grew into a separate book, *The Leopard's Unchanging Spots*, currently being finalised for publication.

Earlier versions of chapter 9 were presented at the September 1997 meeting of the Research Group of the Dutch–Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy (NVVIF), and at the conference 'Common sense *(sensus communis*) in arts and politics in Western and non-Western philosophies', organised by the NVVIF and the Faculty of Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam, November 21-22, 1997. For useful comments I am indebted to the members of the Research Group and the conference participants, and particularly to my colleague Henk Oosterling. The piece has been published[1] in a collective volume edited by Heinz Kimmerle and Henk Oosterling and published with Rodopi, Amsterdam/Atlanta. I am indebted to the editors and publishers for their generous consent to include the paper in the present book.

Chapter 10 was originally presented at the Wageningen conference on 'Decision-making in natural resources management, with a focus on adaptive management', organised by IUCN-SUI, Tropenbos and the Department of Forestry of Wageningen Agricultural University, 23 September, 1999.

The first Dutch version of chapter 11 was originally presented at the symposium *Verzoend of verscheurd?* ('Reconciled or torn apart?') at the *Bezinningscentrum* ('Centre for Contemplation'), Free University, Amsterdam, 9 October, 1997. An earlier, Dutch version of this paper appeared in the journal *In de Marge*, December, 1997.[2] I am indebted to the Trust Fund of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, for funding a trip to South Africa in the context of which a much enlarged English version of this paper was presented at the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa, 21 April, 1999; I am grateful to the members of that institution for illuminating discussions in this connection.

---

[1] Van Binsbergen 2000a.

[2] Van Binsbergen 1997e.

The original Dutch version of chapter 12 was prepared for the Dutch–Flemish Day of Philosophy (theme 'globalisation'), Catholic University Tilburg, Philosophical Faculty, 30 October 1999; that version was published in the Proceedings of this conference: Baars, J., & Starmans, E., eds., *Het Eigene en het Andere: Filosofie en Globalisering: Acta van de 21e Nederlands-Vlaamse Filosofiedag*, Delft: Eburon, pp. 37-52. I am indebted to Raymond Corbey for chairing the panel within which the paper was presented, and for encouraging comments.

Acceding to the chair of intercultural philosophy, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam, turned out to imply membership of the Working Group on 'Philosophy of Information and Communication Technology' (FICT). In that connection chapter 13 was originally written and discussed on various occasions. The Dutch version has now appeared as part of a book edited by Jos de Mul: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2002, 'ICT vanuit intercultureel perspectief: Een Afrikaanse verkenning', in: *Filosofie in Cyberspace: Reflecties op de Informatie- en Communicatietechnologie*, Kampen: Klement, pp. 88-115. English versions were presented before the Theme Group on Globalisation, African Studies Centre (1999), Leiden; at the African Studies Centre's seminar; at the monthly seminar of the WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research) Research Programme on Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities (1999); at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ghana, 25 June, 2000; and at the International Conference on Globalization and New Questions of Ownership, African Studies Centre, Leiden, April 2002. I am grateful to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for financing my trips to Botswana (where part of the material for this chapter was collected) and to Ghana. For useful comments, I am grateful to the participants in these various groups and meetings, and moreover to Hans Achterhuis, Gerti Hesseling, Francis Nyamnjoh, Elli de Rijk, and Willem Veerman.

When Vernie February became a member of the theme group on Globalisation I initiated and chaired at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, in 1996, he kindled my interest in the emergence of *ubuntu* as a key concept in contemporary Southern African transformation processes – an interest since intensified through contacts with Mogobe Ramose, Oswell Hapanyengwi, and the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa; with the latter institution an ultimately abortive plan was worked out for a major conference on the topic. Against this background, a first version of chapter 14 was presented at the conference on *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy* held in May 2001 at the University of Groningen, organised by Pieter Boele van Hensbroek. The ethnographic passages in the present chapter are largely based on my anthropological and historical fieldwork in Zambia and Botswana, with extensions to Zimbabwe and South Africa, since 1971, for which I owe acknowledgements to: my family; to my African friends and relatives participating in these researches; to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands; the Trust Fund, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands; the University of Zambia; the Ministry of Lands, Local Government and Housing, Botswana; the University of Durban-Westville, South Africa; and the Human Sciences Research

Council, South Africa. For this specific chapter I am indebted, besides those already mentioned, to Simon Simonse, Marleen Ramsey, the participants in the Groningen conference, and finally to the members of the department of the Philosophy of Man and Culture (Erasmus University Rotterdam), as well as to René Devisch, Peter Crossman, and Koen Stroeken (Africa Research Centre, Louvain, Belgium), for illuminating criticism of later versions in April 2002. The text has now been published in a special issue on *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy* of the journal *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, under the editorship of Pieter Boele van Hensbroek; his editorship has also benefitted the version included in the present volume. I am indebted to that journal's editor for generous consent to include this chapter in the present book. Vernie February died while this book was in the final stages of preparation, and I dedicate this chapter to his memory.

Chapter 15, finally, is the substantially rewritten English translation of the text I presented during the inaugural ceremony when taking up the chair of intercultural philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 21 January, 1999. The text was simultaneously published as a small book: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1999, *'Culturen bestaan niet': Het onderzoek van Interculturaliteit als een Openbreken van Vanzelfsprekendheden*, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam: Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies. The English text was published as: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2002, ' ''Cultures do not exist'': Exploding self-evidences in the investigation of interculturality', *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 13: 37-114; in that connection I have been fortunate again to benefit from the stimulating editorship of Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, which was also reflected in the version included in the present book. An Italian version was published in 2002.[1] I am indebted to *Quest*'s editor for generous consent to include this chapter in the present book. Shorter English versions were presented at the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa, 25 April 1999, and at the Conference on African Epistemologies, École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France, 17-19 May 1999; I am indebted to the participants for fruitful discussions on these occasions, and to the Trust Fund of Erasmus University for funding these trips. I have dedicated this long and ambitious chapter to my friend and colleague, the anthropologist Richard Fardon. In what was also for him an extremely busy period (during which he had to write his own inaugural address for his chair at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London) he graciously offered to undertake my share of a joint book project,[2] releasing me to work on my own inaugural and thus easing somewhat the great pressure that predictably accompanied my absconding from cultural anthropology and my official entry into a new discipline, intercultural philosophy.

---

[1] Van Binsbergen 2002e.

[2] Fardon *et al.* 1999.

In connection with *Intercultural Encounters* as a whole, I would like to offer thanks to four categories of people.[1]

In the first place, to my wife Patricia, my children, brother and sisters, whose love has been my only constant beacon throughout the often perplexing and dangerous explorations on which this book is based – throughout, in fact, my life. I would not have stood the slightest chance of completing the arduous trajectory recorded in this book if I had not been elected to travel most of that road with Patricia, so it is to her that I lovingly dedicate this book.

Secondly, I thank those who made my periods of fieldwork in Africa into profound and unforgettable human encounters: Hasnawi bin Tahar, ᶜAbd Allah bin ᶜAisa†, Ghrib bin ᶜAisa, Dennis Shiyowe, His Royal Highness Mwenekahare Kabambi†, Mary Nalishuwa, Diketso Keamogetswe, Smarts Gumede†, Najma bint Hassuna, Ennie Maphakwane, Rosie Mabutu (MmaNdlovu)†, Elizabeth Mabutu (MmaChakayile), Antonio Ampa, among many others.

Thirdly, I thank those who through their own tireless efforts have greatly facilitated the writing and production of this book in the midst of my other duties: Louise Müller and Kirsten Seifikar as bibliographical and copy-editing assistants, and Mieke Zwart-Brouwer as secretary. Patricia van Binsbergen-Saegerman, René Devisch, Sanya Osha, Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Kirsten Seifikar, Louise Müller, and my Rotterdam students from the year 2000 onwards generously read the book in part or entirely, and while offering plenty of criticism have managed to reassure me of its relevance. Mary Warren conducted the (semi-)final editing with great skill and precision. I thank LIT Verlag for their reliable and sympathetic professionality, and Bookfinish International for their work on graphics, cover design and indexing.

And finally, I register my indebtedness to those who had a major impact on my professional life as a poet, an Africanist and an intercultural philosopher: Douwe Jongmans, André Köbben, Wim Wertheim†, Jack Simons†, Terence Ranger, Matthew Schoffeleers, Jaap van Velsen†, René Devisch, Richard Werbner, Henny van Rijn, Martin Doornbos, Richard Fardon, Jos Knipscheer†, Frank Knipscheer, Martin Bernal, the members of the Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology†, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences and specifically its working group on 'Magic and religion in the Ancient Near East' (1994-1995)†, the members of the WOTRO programme 'Globalization and the construction of communal identities'†, the members of the theme groups 'Globalisation and socio-cultural transformations' and 'Agency in Africa' at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the members of the International Network on Globalization, the members of the department of Philosophy of Man and Culture and of the Research Group on Philosophy of Information and Communication Technology of the Philosophical Faculty (Erasmus University Rotterdam), the members of the Dutch–Flemish Association of Intercultural Philosophy and

[1] The † indicates that the person thus marked is no longer alive, or that the group thus marked has been dissolved.

especially its Research Group, and finally my Ph.D. and M.A. students in Amsterdam, Leiden and Rotterdam. Among those who have helped create and sustain the unique financial, logistic, institutional, and social conditions that (for better or worse) led to the present book I should gratefully single out, in the first place, the Board and the Director of the African Studies Centre, Leiden (which I have been privileged to call my intellectual home since 1977); and the Philosophical Faculty, as well as the Trust Fund, of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (my philosophical *pied-à-terre* since 1998).