

# **Poverty, Spirits and Community**

## **Explorations in Intercultural Philosophy**

Henry Murray Hofmeyr

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Supervisor: Prof. J P Hattingh

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:  .....

Date: ..... 1 / 3 / 2009 .....

## **Abstracts**

### **The Philosophy of Poverty and the Ethics of Ubuntu**

The question posed in this article is if and how the ethics of ubuntu could play a role in poverty eradication in a capitalist economic system. I address this question by investigating a specific poverty eradication project proposal called Pela Nambu, aimed at utilising the principle of participation that exists in the "second economy", combined with the instruments of wealth creation of the "first economy". After describing and expanding the Pela Nambu approach, I interrogate some of its main assumptions, and find that the ethics of ubuntu does not really have a chance to be mainstreamed as the philosophy of poverty has to reckon with the fact that the multinational corporation is the dominant institution of our time. For Pela Nambu to succeed, "first economy" participation will need to be in the form of partnerships and not charity. The present Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility performance of companies is not encouraging. Yet, the new Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment codes and the increased marketability of differentiated products does offer an opportunity that initiatives like Pela Nambu could fruitfully explore.

### **From hauntology to a new animism? Nature and culture in Heinz Kimmerle's intercultural philosophy**

Derrida has proposed a new spectrology in an attempt to deal with the ghost of Marx. Kimmerle shows that Marx has forgotten nature, and enquires about Derrida's forgetting Marx's forgetting. With specific reference to African culture he asks whether a new animism should not be explored within the framework of a new spectrology. Derrida uses the concept animism, but not in terms of the being of things in and of themselves, which could positively be thought as animated. Kimmerle proposes a way in which Western philosophy could be opened to African philosophy in order to understand the problem of animated nature more adequately. African philosophy has a concept of the universe of spiritual forces, in which nature and its powers are completely integrated. This paper explores these issues in dialogue with a number of African philosophers, while linking them to certain contestations within environmental philosophy and ethics, especially Murray Bookchin's critique of spirit-talk in Deep Ecology. Kimmerle's work on the relationship between Africa and Hegel sets the scene for an elaboration of his re-evaluation of animism which is compared to the ground-breaking hypothesis of Bird-David. A relational epistemology is understood in ethical terms, and it is implied that such an epistemology would be more adequate for a new humanism that would

be new in going beyond the western tradition, and in the process gain a more inclusive concept of 'person' and 'community'.

### **The community and the individual in Western and African thought: Implications for knowledge production**

The tension between the group and the individual is a pervasive condition of humanity that is resolved differently in Western and African knowledge systems. The polarity of "I think therefore I am" versus "I am because we are" does not do justice to the role of the individual in African knowledge systems, and recent attempts in Western philosophy to formulate a "philosophy of we". A contextual philosophy of knowledge production is concerned about the we as the carrier of traditions. It is a philosophy of the in-between cultures and knowledge systems that is engaged in dialogues aimed at the formulation of universals. Intercultural (or contextual) philosophy becomes the 'contemporary idiom' within which to express 'the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society' (Nkrumah).

## **Opsommings**

### **Die Filosofie van Armoede en die Etiek van Ubuntu**

Die vraag wat in hierdie artikel gestel word is of en hoe die etiek van ubuntu 'n oplossing bied tot die probleem van armoede in 'n kapitalistiese ekonomiese bestel. Ek benader hierdie vraag deur 'n ondersoek te doen na 'n konkrete armoede uitwissingsvoorstel genaamd Pela Nambu, 'n projek wat daarop gerig is om die beginsel van deelname wat in die "tweede ekonomie" sou bestaan te kombineer met die instrumente van welvaartskepping van die "eerste ekonomie". Na 'n beskrywing en uiteensetting van die Pela Nambu benadering stel ek nadere ondersoek in na 'n paar van die belangrikste uitgangspunte daarvan, en bevind dat die etiek van ubuntu nie werklik 'n kans het om die hoofstroom te beïnvloed nie – solank die filosofie van armoede moet rekening hou met die feit dat die multinasionale sake-korporasie die dominante instelling van ons tyd is. Pela Nambu kan slegs slaag as "eerste ekonomie" deelname die vorm aanneem van ware vennootskappe en nie van filantropie nie. Maatskappye se huidige prestasies op die terrien van Korporatiewe Sosiale en Omgewingsverantwoordelikheid is nie bemoedigend nie. Tog is daar geleenthede om waar te neem, soos die nuwe "Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment" kodes en die toenemende bemerkbaarheid van gedifferenseerde produkte, tendense wat Pela Nambu verder sou kon ondersoek.

### **Van "spookkunde" tot 'n nuwe animisme? Natuur en kultuur in die interkulturele filosofie van Heinz Kimmerle**

Derrida het 'n nuwe "spektralogie" voorgestel vir 'n toepaslike omgang met die spook van Marx. Kimmerle wys daarop dat Marx die natuur vergeet het, en doen navraag na Derrida se vergeet van dit wat Marx vergeet het. Met spesifieke verwysing na die kulture van Afrika vra Kimmerle of 'n nuwe animisme nie oorweeg moet word binne die raamwerk van 'n nuwe leer van spoke nie. Derrida gebruik die konsep "animisme", maar nie in die sin van die eie werklikheid van die dinge as hulle as self-besied gesien sou word nie. Kimmerle stel 'n manier van kyk na die filosofieë van Afrika voor wat die oopstel van Westerse filosofieë vir die filosofieë van Afrika sou behels, om so die probleem van 'n geanimeerde natuur meer toepaslik te verstaan. Die filosofieë van Afrika het 'n konsep van 'n geheel van geestelike kragte, waarin die natuurkragte volkome geïntegreer is. Die artikel ondersoek hierdie sake deur in dialoog te tree met 'n aantal filosowe van Afrika. Die sake word ook verbind met sekere kontestasies binne die veld van omgewingsfilosofie en -etiek, in die besonder Murray Bookchin se kritiek op die geeste-diskoers van Diepte-Ekologie. Kimmerle se werk oor die verhouding tussen Afrika en Hegel dek die tafel vir 'n uiteensetting van sy her-evaluasie van animisme, wat ek vergelyk met die baanbreker-hipotese van Bird-David. Ek interpreteer 'n relasionele epistemologie in etiese terme, en die implikasie is dat 'n sodanige kennisleer beter

sal pas by 'n nuwe humanisme. 'n Nuwe humanisme sal nuut wees daarin dat dit die Westerse tradisie te bowe gaan en in die proses lei tot 'n meer inklusiewe konsep van 'pesoon' en 'gemeenskap'.

### **Die gemeenskap en die individu in die denke van die Weste en van Afrika: Implikasies vir kennisproduksie**

Die spanning tussen die groep en die enkeling is eie aan die mens en dit word verskillend aangespreek in die kennissisteme van die Weste en van Afrika. Die polariteit van "Ek dink daarom is ek" teenoor "Ek is omdat ons is" laat nie reg geskied aan die rol van die individu in die kennissisteme van Afrika nie, en ook nie aan onlangse pogings in die Westerse filosofie om 'n "filosofie van die ons" te formuleer nie. 'n Kontekstuele filosofie van kennisproduksie is besorg oor die ons as die draer van tradisies. Dit is 'n filosofie wat "tussen-in" kulture en kennissisteme is en wat deelneem aan dialoë gerig op die uitwerk van universele beginsels. Interkulturele (of kontekstuele) filosofie word die 'kontemporêre idioom' waarin die 'konstellasie van humanistiese beginsels wat die samelewing van tradisionele Afrika onderlê' (Nkrumah) uitgedruk moet word.

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## General Introduction

The three separate articles presented here in partial fulfilment of the requirements of an MA degree in Philosophy share a common philosophical approach – that of intercultural philosophy as conceived by Heinz Kimmerle. I will use this general introduction to spell out the basic points of departure of this approach.

### ***A New Conception of Difference***

According to Kimmerle it is a habit of Western thinking to think difference merely as the opposite of identity and not in its own specific meaning.<sup>1</sup> To be different means to be other than the self. Concepts are characterised and specified from their opposites: Something white is not black, short is not long/tall, etc. Thinking in opposites, or binary thinking, belongs to the main stream of the Western tradition of thinking.

The new concept of difference is situated outside binary thinking. And yet, it must be taken into account that our language is formed by the habit of thinking in opposites. Something other, the 'non-identical' (Adorno), cannot be signified adequately. Adorno and Heidegger have each in his own way tried to think the particular as the non-identical or the different that is no longer thought within the framework of identity as the opposite of identity. The French philosophers of difference (as Kimmerle calls them) have followed their lead. To call them 'post-modern' philosophers is not fitting. The philosophies of difference are not directed at 'modernity' (whatever that might mean philosophically), but at the whole of Western philosophy. This 'whole', according to Heidegger, is metaphysics, and the philosophies that come after it might be called 'post-metaphysical'. But the issue is for Kimmerle not so much about 'post' as about a new way of thinking altogether.

That this new way of thinking is predominantly practical and political, and that it has an emancipatory interest has, according to Kimmerle, been overlooked by Habermas in his critique of 'post-modern' philosophy and its presumed neo-conservative tendencies.<sup>2</sup> The philosophies of difference follow a different path of thinking from Habermas' thought: What must be comprehended rationally is taken by them as widely as possible, but is also experienced in its limitation. This experience of the limits of the rational is then further reflected upon, in order to make possible reasonable dealings with the other of reason. In this

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1 Kimmerle, H 2000a. *Philosophien der Differenz. Eine Einführung*. (Schriften zur Philosophie der Differenz, Bd. 9). Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

2 Kimmerle 2000a:17

way an area is reconnoitred and kept open that would otherwise be occupied by uncontrolled irrationalisms (e. g. fascism or Stalinism).

Kimmerle's special interest is to continue thinking difference in an effort to overcome the ethnocentricity of philosophy since the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> Enlightenment philosophy sees world history as a unitary development that finds a climax in the European culture of the 18th century. This way of seeing characterises this philosophy as identity-thinking. It results in the myriad arguments by thinkers like Kant and Hegel concerning why non-European cultures have not produced history or philosophy. This identity-thinking, in which difference is always thought of in terms of the original identity, must be countered with a concept of difference where difference of cultures expresses a difference that is not reducible to unity.

### ***Culture and Cultural Difference***

In his programmatic 'prolegomena' to a volume entitled *The multiverse of cultures* Kimmerle describes his project as an attempt to find an alternative to the Eurocentric view of relationships between cultures in the wake of colonialism.<sup>4</sup> From this Eurocentric point of view the world forms a unity that is politically, economically and culturally controlled by Europe. Parliamentary democracy, the free market system and the Christian religion are seen as universal concepts – valid for the whole world. A universe of European culture is the background for Kimmerle's alternative 'multiverse of cultures' that emphasises the multiplicity of cultures with their political, economical and religious structures.

Kimmerle has in mind a new take – as far as the European tradition is concerned – on the relationships between cultures. This presupposes a particular definition of culture: 'the endeavour of a group of people to give shape to a particular form of life, such that this form of life could survive in the midst of other cultures and in the midst of nature'.<sup>5</sup> In his *Philosophien der Differenz* Kimmerle, in the face of Van Binsbergen's argument that cultures do not exist,<sup>6</sup> continues to maintain that the fact that the being of a person is characterised by a specific

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<sup>3</sup> Kimmerle, H 1997. Verschiebungen im Urteil über andere Kulturen. Analyse und kritische Auswertung der Aufzeichnungen H. Hesses *Aus Indien* (1911-1959). In Schneider, N et al (eds) *Philosophie aus interkultureller Sicht / Philosophy from an intercultural perspective* (Studies in Intercultural Philosophy, 7). Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 95-106.

<sup>4</sup> Kimmerle, H 1996. Prolegomena. In Kimmerle, H (ed.) *Das Multiversum der Kulturen*. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 9-29).

<sup>5</sup> Kimmerle 1996:10

<sup>6</sup> Van Binsbergen, W 1999. 'Culturen bestaan niet'. Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden. Revised version as internet paper at <http://home.soneraplaza.nl/mw/prive/vabin/gen3/> (accessed 25.6.2001).

culture does not refer to something external or coincidental, but to an inner characteristic of the person's way of being human. Globalisation does not cancel this. Cultures remain different parts of this emerging whole, which would otherwise lack structure and life.<sup>7</sup>

Knowing that he opens himself to the accusation of thinking of culture in 'essentialist' terms, Kimmerle adds that belonging to a culture is no static or unchangeable phenomenon. What a specific culture is, is always changing. This is why he finds the concept 'cultural identity', as something that must be preserved and respected, inappropriate and problematic. Culture must be understood dynamically as becoming and in the process of permanent change and as having always been such. One of the causes of such change is the encounter with other cultures that can result in a mixing of cultures, something that has reached gigantic dimensions in our time. This often results in xenophobia, which is based in an elementary feeling of fear in the face of the foreign and different. Fear leads to hate. But the encounter with the stranger can also lead to the desire to know what it is that makes him/her/them different, and to the exploration of positive possibilities inherent in the processes of cultural mixing. These include the proliferation of possibilities for thinking and action in a situation where problems have become so big that a single culture is unable to solve them. Kimmerle's objective is humble: 'We here want to try to strengthen the latter, positive way of reacting'.<sup>8</sup> The opposite tendency to globalisation is the critical reflection of the traditions of the own culture and its contribution to the 'patchwork' of a possible worldwide cultural community.

The term 'patchwork' is from Lyotard who has coined the phrase 'patchwork of minorities'. Lyotard has been very influential in stating that the 'grand narratives', as totalising systematic interpretations of the world and life as such, are no longer valid. Concretely they were only valid for a majority that acted as if for the whole of society and thus created false universality. When these are no longer accepted within a society, only fragments of meaning remain, each accepted by a concrete grouping. The relationship majority-minority disappears and is replaced by a 'patchwork of minorities'.<sup>9</sup>

The critical importance of discerning an adequate response to globalisation emerges when one considers the often fatal alternative movement of groups emphasising and consciously constituting themselves in terms of ethnic belonging. This tendency has caused the most gruesome atrocities in recent years and more often than not ends in genocide and war.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:200-220

<sup>8</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:197

<sup>9</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:35

<sup>10</sup> Kimmerle 2000a

Kimmerle speaks of the lasting difference of cultures even in their worldwide unification. This phenomenon must be seen against the background of the fact that traditionally single cultures have been evaluated variously. History has known a multitude of cultures that have claimed superiority over others. This has resulted in exclusion or domination and simultaneous incorporation. Colonialism is a concrete example of this political side of the relationship between cultures. The development of mechanisms of exclusion with regard to the foreign is a characteristic in the development of Western culture. This is why Kimmerle not only emphasises the lasting difference of cultures, but simultaneously, and just as strongly, their equal status. A process of rethinking is necessary in view of the prevalent attitude of superiority, whether in the religious, political, economic or scientific area. This, in my view, is Kimmerle's most convincing argument for maintaining the notion of cultural difference. Cultural 'sameness' is false universality, as it has been and still is created under the conditions of cultural imperialism.

### ***The Equality of Cultures***

The crux of Kimmerle's view of cultures is the equality of cultures. Kimmerle bases his conceptualisation of cultural equality on the following statement:

all cultures that still exist today [are] equally old, while they have maintained their existence ... from the origins of humanity until today. That they are equally old then also means that they have each in their own way fulfilled the role or task of a culture and thus have equal rights.<sup>11</sup>

This means, as a formulation of adequate conditions for the transferability of Western concepts to non-Western regions: If the concept 'multiverse of cultures' is taken seriously, one culture can take over something from another only if both agree to it on their own accord. 'Equally old' implies equal validity and being of equal status.

The somewhat unusual grounding of equality on cultures being equally old might appear less unusual if one presupposes as background here Hegel's philosophy of history. For Hegel the true was the viable, and that meant that each historical period had to formulate its own truth. But there is progress in history, and each new period with its viable truth represents a higher level of the coming to self-consciousness of the world spirit. Hegel's own time he viewed as the culmination of this process of progressive self-consciousness, which the spirit finds in reflecting on the concrete expressions it generates in history. The fuller the coincidence of spirit and concrete expression (embodiment), the greater was the self-consciousness, the

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<sup>11</sup> Kimmerle 1996:10

recognition of the self in the other. The goal is thus the removal of otherness. The goal is identity. To say that all (surviving) cultures are equally old thus means that the idea of progress is dropped, while the idea of process is maintained. Kimmerle advocates 'more emancipation which is not necessarily combined with modernization of the Western style.'<sup>12</sup>

### ***Intercultural Philosophy***

The shift in post-Hegelian European-Western philosophy with regard to its views of other cultures is to be welcomed, but Kimmerle remarks that from the point of view of intercultural philosophy, an alternative view has not yet been thought through to its final consequences.<sup>13</sup> Habermas, for example, states that domination-free communication is the ideal. He, however, at the same time introduces new power structures in elevating this model, which actually belongs to the Western-European tradition, to a criterion valid for all inter-cultural communication. This according to Kimmerle is another example of the 'good will to power' that Derrida has diagnosed in Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy.

The great contribution of post-Hegelian critical philosophy is the critique of European-Western philosophy, without which intercultural philosophy would not have been possible. It became possible to define philosophy from Plato to Hegel as but one form of philosophy, whose claim to be the only philosophy has been shown to be invalid. This critical and subversive movement that characterises contemporary European-Western philosophy is coupled with a self-limitation of thinking with regard to what it is able to do. It is Kimmerle's central hypothesis that specific forms of this different kind of thinking are also to be found in other cultures.<sup>14</sup>

Asking the question what philosophy can contribute to the struggle against neo-Colonialism, Kimmerle firstly draws attention to the fact that this field is controlled by politicians and business-people, and philosophy should not pretend to be better at politics and business than their practitioners (as neo-Marxist philosophers would have it).<sup>15</sup> Philosophers should do their own thing, and that is to critically analyse the ways of thinking of their time, as presupposed also by politicians and business-people, and to suggest alternative ways of thinking. Kimmerle differs from Marx's view that philosophy is not politically effective on account of being part of

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<sup>12</sup> Kimmerle, H 2000b. Introduction. In Kimmerle, H and Oosterling, H (eds) *Sensus communis in multi- and intercultural perspective. On the possibility of common judgments in arts and politics* (Schriften zur Philosophie der Differenz, Bd. 8). Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 11-16, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Kimmerle 1996

<sup>14</sup> Kimmerle 1996:27

<sup>15</sup> Kimmerle, H 1994. *Die Dimension des Interkulturellen. Philosophie in Afrika – afrikanische Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte.* (Studien zur interkulturellen Philosophie, Bd. 2). Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi.

the superstructure. He cites the insight that philosophy knows no development in the sense of progress as an example of a possible influence of philosophy on politics, business, science and technology, with their focus on optimal development. Neither does art know of such a development. Philosophers from Africa and the Western world could therefore cooperate on the basis of complete equality. Kimmerle's own contribution to this co-operation is aimed at no more than freeing the way to gaining a perspective on African Philosophy for a Western-European audience. He is adamant that African Philosophy cannot yet be adequately grasped in its specificities – especially not by a non-African.

Kimmerle addresses the problem of, on the one hand, a tradition of domination and oppression based in 'othering' and exclusivist discourses on difference, and on the other hand, the domination implied in a presumed sameness when the criteria of sameness are defined from the point of view of a powerful culture, the one that drives the processes of globalisation. What would be an adequate philosophy of culture in view of this problem, asks Kimmerle?<sup>16</sup> A first step would be to address the cultural specificity of philosophy against the background of a cosmopolitan orientation that apparently runs in an opposite direction, and to investigate how these tendencies influence each other reciprocally. This will require a meticulous investigation into the relationship between determinations that are presupposed to be formally universally valid, and determinations that are concrete and particular. This enterprise, Kimmerle claims, is something altogether different from the debate between cultural universalism and relativism, which in his view proceeds from the wrong alternatives. The universally valid determinations are not concretely at hand. This is Kimmerle's point, based on a new concept of difference. That is why intercultural philosophical dialogues are his preferred medium for articulating the commonalities and differences of the philosophies of various cultures; and hence the importance of clarifying the conditions of intercultural philosophical dialogues.

### ***Intercultural Philosophical Dialogues***

The conditions of possibility of intercultural philosophical dialogues include firstly the equal status already mentioned which implies openness based on the mutual acceptance that the validity of one's own position is just as non-absolute as that of one's partner in dialogue. Secondly, the validity of the results of dialogues is not derived from normative theoretical premises, but depends on the success of the dialogues as dialogues in the true sense of the word. Kimmerle uses the term 'methodology of the deed' to refer to a kind of philosophy that leaves the writing desk and seminar room to be confronted by the everyday reality of another culture, and participates actively in the exchanges between the philosophies of different

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<sup>16</sup> Kimmerle 2000a



cultures.<sup>17</sup>

For Kimmerle the differences between the philosophies of different cultures are radical in that they concern root issues. Intercultural dialogues are not about making the differences disappear, but about creating a new, third position that is different from both starting positions. Commonalities do not usurp the differences, but both commonalities and differences shift to constellations which are always new.

Kimmerle's alternative to the cultural relativism/universalism debate deserves further clarification. He argues that in order to grasp the equal status and enduring difference of cultures in clear concepts, the particular and universal determinations of being human must be contrasted with each other. He refers to the Ghanaian philosopher K. Wiredu who identifies three 'supreme laws of thought and conduct' that are universal: The law of the excluded third; the principle of induction; and in ethics the categorical imperative (only do what you would want to see others do). These universals are contrasted with the particulars of his specific culture (the Akan) in the areas of religion and morals, conceptual issues, and the interpretation of democracy and human rights. Such investigation often leads to the discovery that presumed universals were actually cultural specifics, especially with regard to European concepts of values that through colonialism have been accepted by Africans as universals. It is thus important to formulate the universal determinations adequately, as well as the mixture of both universals and particulars which makes intercultural philosophy possible.<sup>18</sup>

Kimmerle proceeds from the assumption that each formulation of universal determinations is done in a specific language, and is thus presented in a particular cultural colouring. For example, Wiredu's third 'supreme law' is formulated in the language of Kant ('categorical imperative'). Kant bases this claim to universal validation on the assumption that the categorical imperative is a law of pure reason. As such, like the categories of time and space, it is a so-called transcendental. Transcendentals are general and necessary laws of reason per se that are not affected by linguistic and cultural particularities. They are thus the conditions for the possibilities of objective, scientific, valid knowledge. Kimmerle argues that this claim has become indefensible in this form, as a result of the conditions of contemporary thinking. Thinking has become conscious of its determination by language.

This insight gives Kimmerle occasion to distance his concept of intercultural philosophical dialogue from Habermas and Apel's notion of communicative rationality. He argues that they still accept the presuppositions of transcendental philosophy. They agree that reason can no longer claim general validity with regard to the substance or content of thought and conduct.

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<sup>17</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:199

<sup>18</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:203

Yet they insist on the necessary and general procedural validity of rationality. In communicative rationality rational argumentation/discourse remains the final validation for each and every truth claim. If you beg to differ, you will just have to formulate your point as a rational argument, according to the Aristotelian dictum of the force of the better argument. That, according to Kimmerle, is the central idea of communicative rationality, and this is where intercultural philosophy as conceived by him proposes an alternative way, on the basis of the insight into the close link between thinking and the language in which it occurs. This implies that universals or transcendentals cannot be formulated, nor articulated, discursively.<sup>19</sup>

If procedural rationality no longer qualifies as a universal, says Kimmerle, only one option remains: 'to presuppose universal determinations of being human that cannot be formulated nor in any other way articulated discursively.'<sup>20</sup> The question then arises: how does one think something that cannot be formulated? Kimmerle suggests one possible answer to this question by making use of Derrida's notion of the future. Justice, democracy, friendship, and genuine philosophy are not given anywhere and can thus not be described as phenomena. Yet, they are coming. Kimmerle insists: this quasi-messianic expectation of these universals is just one possible way of dealing with them in thought, without articulating them.

Kimmerle explicates the nature of dialogues as conceived from the point of view of intercultural philosophy.<sup>21</sup> These dialogues are only worthy of that name if

- The partners in dialogue deal with each other on the basis of complete equality, informed by the equal status and value of all philosophies.
- The partners in dialogue are open towards the possibility that their own position would be shown to be false or in need of modification. This openness is informed by the insight that no philosophy is absolutely true, and that all are subject to improvement or modification.
- The partners in dialogue proceed from the assumption that the other(s) has/have something to say to them that they would in no way have been able to say of their own accord. This assumption goes hand in hand with the refusal to acknowledge any authority external to the dialogue (e. g. procedural rationality) as a contributor to the result of the dialogue.

The goal of intercultural philosophical dialogues is not to reach agreement in everything, but in each case to formulate the agreements and disagreements.

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<sup>19</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:206

<sup>20</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:207

<sup>21</sup> Kimmerle 2000a:207

Although Kimmerle does not expect that problems that seem to have no solutions in the context of Western thinking could be solved in dialogue with the philosophies of other cultures, he is convinced that the intercultural dimension of doing philosophy unlocks an enhanced problem-solving potential.<sup>22</sup>

Intercultural philosophy as conceived by Kimmerle imposes a limit, and thus creates space. This is the space and moment of the 'in-between', of the future. Kimmerle extends an invitation and a challenge that I endeavour to take up by reflecting on three issues from an intercultural perspective: poverty, spirits and community.

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<sup>22</sup> Kimmerle, H 1995. *Mazungumzo. Dialogen tussen Afrikaanse en Westerse filosofieën*. Amsterdam; Meppel: Boom, 23.



# **Philosophies of Poverty and the Ethics of Ubuntu**

*Dedicated to the memory of Rev. Eddie Bruwer, 3.2.1931 – 27.12.2008*

## ***Introduction***

This article, as the title indicates, deals with two main issues – the conceptualisation of poverty and an approach to ethics that is derived from a particular life-form. The implied link between the two subjects is that the application of this kind of ethics will contribute significantly to poverty eradication.

Over the years I have had the privilege of participating in dialogues across the social divide and the energy and feelings of mutuality that are often generated by such conversations invariably result in the resolve to together engage in action to address the wrongs. It sadly has also been my experience that many of the initiatives generated by such noble sentiments came to naught when confronted with the harsh realities of the dominant economic order. Nevertheless, at the end of 2006 I once again joined a group of people from both sides of the social divide in a poverty eradication project.

It is still too early to say whether we will be successful this time, but I find it worthwhile to already at this stage present to a broader public a description of the approach we have embarked on as well as of the contestations surrounding key assumptions of this particular approach. The aim of this step is to invite others to join the conversation and even the project itself in the hope that a wider discussion will result in a better plan and more participation when we reach the implementation phase.

The first part of the title of this article is derived from Proudhon's 1847 essay "The Philosophy of Poverty" that called forth the critical response "The Poverty of Philosophy" by Karl Marx. An attempt to speak of a philosophy of poverty in our time requires a brief historical and theoretical sketch of the main issues of Marx's critique and of the critique of Marx. In a first historical and theoretical section I provide, in broad strokes, a context for the particular poverty eradication project that is the subject of description and scrutiny in this article.

The project is called *Pela Nambu* – a Tsonga idiomatic expression that means "cross the river". In subsequent paragraphs I explain what *Pela Nambu* is all about and my personal involvement in its initial phase. This is followed by clarifications of the framework and main concepts that form the pillars of the *Pela Nambu* approach to poverty eradication. The most important of these is addressed with the term "the economy of affection", which I argue is an

apt expression of what Hardt and Negri call affective labour as a main form of immaterial production.<sup>23</sup>

The use of the term “the economy of affection” in the Pela Nambu founding documents gives occasion to introduce the second part of the title of the article – an ethics of ubuntu. A brief description of what should be understood with the use of this term in this context forms the background of the principal question addressed in the article – how a poverty eradication project that is founded on an ethics of ubuntu could have a realistic chance of success in a world dominated by narrow economic concerns and an economy specifically dominated by the modern business corporation.

One of the insights of Marx against Proudhon that has in my view retained its validity is the role assigned to the poor *in* the economy. The original Pela Nambu concept assigned a central role to the “two-economy” discourse introduced by former President Thabo Mbeki. I reproduce the figures of the poverty phenomenon in South Africa that supports the notion of a “gap” or “divide” (or river) between the rich and the poor. Yet, in a section named “Interrogations” I subject the two-economy discourse to scrutiny and find with Marx and, more recently, Du Toit and Neves, that it is not a matter of the poor being excluded from the “first” economy, but of the poor being adversely integrated into the one and only economy. Rosa Luxemburg and Harold Wolpe are remembered for their work on the deliberate peripheral integration of the poor into the economy as a strategy – inherent to capitalism – of exploitation. I conclude that an antagonistic relationship exists between the capitalist economy and an ethics of ubuntu and that poverty eradication projects should not steer clear of a proper philosophy of poverty that includes a critique of capitalism.

The critique of capitalism that I introduce is not that of Marx, but of two Dutch scholars from a Calvinist/Reformed background, Goudzwaard and De Lange, who argue that Immanuel Kant was responsible for the inability of classical modern economics to entertain the notion of accountability, amongst other things. I elaborate this critique of modern economics by referring to the economic thought of amongst other African philosophers the Kenyan Odera Oruka, who attempts to restore a holistic view that regards the economy as part of a complex web of being and thus assigns pride of place to accountability.

The question, however, remains – how to speak practically of accountability in a globalised world in which the dominant institution is no longer the church, the monarchy, or the state, but the business corporation. I closely follow the book on the business corporation by Joel Bakan and the documentary film based on it to try to grasp the contradictions that

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<sup>23</sup> Hardt, M & Negri, A 2004. *Multitude. War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.

characterise our world. An adequate understanding of the nature of the business corporation illuminates the negative findings of a recent book on Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility in South Africa. Black Economic Empowerment in its first phase only addressed ownership in the economy and not how the economy operates.

I subsequently present my research into present possibilities of non-adverse economic participation of the poor in the economy. I specifically refer to a supermarket chain operative in the Vhembe district of the Limpopo Province. In view of the supermarket chain's battle to stay in business and its apparent lack of any concern than to address the bottom line, I ask: What would a Pela Nambu affiliated, cooperatively structured, socially responsible enterprise do differently – and retain the same levels of service excellence at the same price levels? The implied answer is that the nature of the economy enforces a particular approach in which an ethics of ubuntu will not have an impact except as survival strategy for the poor that will keep them integrated in the economy but adversely so.

Yet, I do not end on that negative note. The new Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment codes do present opportunities to change the way of doing business in South Africa. I also introduce a proposal by Daan Toerien about how Local Economic Development can benefit from an approach of producing highly differentiated products using low technology. In this Pela Nambu has a role to play, starting with an adequate analysis of technology and markets. This proposal is also a concrete contribution to finding ways in which affective labour combined with cognitive labour as forms of immaterial production could become biopolitical production.

In the conclusion I offer a short description of the revisions to the Pela Nambu approach that would flow from my investigations into its key assumptions.

In order to make clear what is meant with the use of some of the above concepts a number of issues of history and theory must first be addressed.

### ***Some Issues of History and Theory***

In his "The Poverty of Philosophy" Marx repudiated the Utopian Socialists, responding specifically to Proudhon's "The Philosophy of Poverty" (1847). This provocatively-titled publication brought to an end his friendship with the French philosopher who referred to himself as an anarchist. Proudhon defined anarchy as "the absence of a master, of a sovereign".<sup>24</sup> He also called himself a socialist, although he opposed state ownership of capital

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<sup>24</sup> Proudhon, PJ 1999 [1840]. *What Is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, p. 277

goods in favour of ownership by workers themselves in associations. He proposed the introduction of labour money as a counter measure to the unfairness of capitalism. The underlying theory was that labour is the true measure of value, and that value is derived from the labour necessary to produce products. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* and subsequently in *Capital* Marx criticized the theory of labour money. Value should rather be seen as determined by relations between demand and supply.

The cornerstone of Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty* is the concept of the "constitution of value": "Equality among men is produced by the rigorous and inflexible law of labour, the proportionality of values, the sincerity of exchanges, and the equivalence of functions, — in short, by the mathematical solution of all antagonisms."<sup>25</sup> Proudhon wanted to introduce justice without curtailing individual freedom. He recognized that justice needed a fair measure of value. He thus introduced the term "constitutive value" that registers absolute value in terms of the proportionality of products.

Marx, apart from criticizing Proudhon for his neglect to mention the work of Ricardo, who used a related concept, had a problem with Proudhon's concept as presenting a set of normative criteria for judging the fairness of exchanges in society. Marx countered that the value of what is produced is only shown as a gravitating point through the fluctuation of market prices caused by incessant changes of supply and demand.<sup>26</sup> Later on, in *Capital* III chapter 10 Marx explained more accurately that this relationship should be realised not between value and market prices, but between prices of production and market prices.<sup>27</sup>

Marx indicated that Proudhon knew too little of economic questions and that without a thorough knowledge of and sharp insight into the workings of the dominant powers the will to change was impotent. Also in the writings "The Holy Family"<sup>28</sup> and "The German Ideology"<sup>29</sup> Marx and Engels criticised their former friends Bruno Bauer, Mozes Hess and Max Stirner (the Young Hegelians) for not giving sufficient attention to the relations of production and the conditions under which people live. The Young Hegelians' critique of established religion might

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<http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=ProProp.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all> (accessed 15.11.07)

<sup>25</sup> Proudhon, PJ 1847. *System of Economical Contradictions: or, The Philosophy of Poverty*.

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/philosophy/ch06.htm> (accessed 6.3.07)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch01b.htm>. See Nishibe, N 2006. The theory of labour money. Implications of Marx's critique for the Local Exchange Trading System (LETS). In: Uchide, H (ed.) *Marx for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Routledge, p. 89-105.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch10.htm>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/index.htm>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>



sound very radical, but changes nothing to the factual situation. Marx thus tried to “put Hegel on his feet”. Hegel explained human alienation in terms of the spirit having lost itself on account of entering matter. The solution is rediscovering itself in matter and taking matter up into itself. This to Marx constituted alienation, as philosophy loses itself in abstractions by not giving attention to the concrete conditions under which we live and think.

In conceptualising the conditions of the working class of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Marx has developed a philosophy of the poor of the industrialising countries. The reasons for their poverty he analysed in a way that is still regarded as valid in our time: The capitalists (or private owner of the means of production) appropriate for themselves the surplus value produced by the workers, the value that is not used in the process of production. The surplus value is invested in the production process and is increased exponentially. This is called the self-valorisation of value, the cause of the accumulation of capital and the exceeding wealth of the capitalists. On the side of the working class, the parallel process is that of progressive impoverishment.

From a methodological point of view the major contribution of Marx is, in the words of Hardt and Negri, whose analysis I will follow, “that social theory must be molded to the contours of contemporary social reality.”<sup>30</sup> The implication of this is that Marxist theory also has to change as historical and social circumstances change. Old theories can grow inadequate. Capitalist production and capitalist society have changed since the time of Marx and these changes call for a review of theory.

According to Hardt and Negri we are currently in the midst of a major paradigm shift – from the hegemony of industrial labour to that of immaterial labour, or “the immaterial paradigm of production.”<sup>31</sup> In this paradigm networks take precedence over discipline. Discipline characterized the previous paradigm (Foucault). Another tendency of the emerging paradigm is a fundamental shift in the role of production. Marx agreed with Proudhon and the classical political economists Smith and Ricardo before him that in capitalist society labour is the source of all value and wealth. Marx realised that this labour is social labour, that the effort of each individual is commensurable with that of others because each contains a common element – abstract labour. Abstract labour is the source of value in general. This is where we find an important difference between Marx’ time and our time.

Marx used quantity as the measure of labour and value. Value is ultimately expressed in measurable, homogeneous units of labour time. Hardt and Negri maintain that labour does remain the fundamental source of value in capitalist production, but they question the kind of

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<sup>30</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:140

<sup>31</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:142

labour involved and its temporalities. The regularity and rhythm of factory production and its clear separation between work-time and non-work time, and with it the division between work-time and the time of life, is declining in the realm of immaterial labour.<sup>32</sup>

Material production creates the *means* of social life. Immaterial production creates social life *itself*. The latter includes the production of ideas, images, knowledge, communication, cooperation and affective relations. Using a term of Foucault, Hardt and Negri calls immaterial production "bio-political."<sup>33</sup> In their earlier book *Empire*, they defined biopower as

a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it—every individual embraces and reactivates this power of his or her own accord. Its primary task is to administer life. Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself.<sup>34</sup>

Biopolitical power is expressed as a control that extends through the depths of consciousness and bodies of the population and across the entirety of social relations. We live in a society of control rather than a society of discipline. In the society of control, biopolitical power comprises the whole of society. It produces the social body, and our individual bodies. It is the ground of all productivity and therefore the ground of life. Within the society of control "power is exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (through welfare systems, monitored activities, etc) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and desire for creativity."<sup>35</sup> Under global capital, biopower mostly creates wealth and power for others and is not under individual control.

In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri introduce the concept bio-political production. They argue

that the dominant form of contemporary production, which exerts its hegemony over the others, creates 'immaterial goods' such as ideas, knowledge, forms of communication, and relationships. In such immaterial labour, production spills over beyond the bounds of the economy traditionally conceived to engage culture, society, and politics directly. What is produced in this case is not just material goods but actual social relationships and forms of life. We call this kind of production 'biopolitical' to

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<sup>32</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:145

<sup>33</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:146

<sup>34</sup> Hardt, M & Negri, A 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Hardt & Negri 2000:23

highlight how general its products are and how directly it engages social life in its entirety. ...

Biopolitical production ... is immanent to society and creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labour.

(Hardt & Negri 2004:94-95)

The reason why I find Hardt and Negri's approach fruitful for this study is the fact that they specifically address a feature of Marx's method that constitutes a major problem for a South African context, and for other "Southern" countries where the majority of the employable population is unemployed. From Marx they take over the notion that class is a political project, although they acknowledge the truth of the liberal notion that there is a multiplicity of social classes.<sup>36</sup> The major difference from liberal conceptions is their insistence, following Marx, that class is determined by class struggle: "An investigation of economic class, then, like an investigation of race, should not begin with a mere catalog of empirical differences but rather with the lines of collective resistance to power. Class is a political concept, in short, in that a class is and can only be a collectivity that struggles in common."<sup>37</sup> Their theory becomes specifically useful for my purposes when they identify class as a biopolitical concept that is at once economic and political, and this also means "that our understanding of labor cannot be limited to waged labor but must refer to human creative capacities in all their generality. *The poor ... are thus not excluded from this conception of class but central to it.*"<sup>38</sup>

Hardt and Negri argue that their definition of the multitude ("singularities that act in common"<sup>39</sup>) is possible, in spite of the postmodern fragmentation of identities, because there is no actual or conceptual contradiction between singularity and commonality. Therefore, the multiplicity of types of labour, forms of life, geographical locations, etc. do not prohibit communication and collaboration in a common political project (ask not "what is the multitude?", but rather "what can the multitude become?"<sup>40</sup>). This approach enables Hardt and Negri to overcome the limitations and exclusion inherent in the concept of "the working class" when they conceive of the multitude (as a class concept) as "all those who work under the rule of capital and potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital."<sup>41</sup> There is thus no political priority (e. g. waged labour) amongst the forms of labour: "all forms of labour are today socially productive, they produce in common, and share too a common potential to

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<sup>36</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004: 103-104

<sup>37</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:104

<sup>38</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:105, emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:105

<sup>40</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:105

<sup>41</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:106

resist the domination of capital."<sup>42</sup> The conditions do exist for the various types of labour to communicate, collaborate, and become common in a proletariat in its fullest definition – all those who labour and produce under the rule of capital.

Hardt and Negri operate with the concept of hegemony: there are forms of labour that are hegemonic in that they exert a power of transformation over other forms of labour. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries industrial labour was hegemonic in the global economy (although remaining a minority in quantitative terms). Everything else (e. g. agriculture) was forced to industrialise. Today it is "immaterial labour" that has replaced industrial labour as the hegemonic form of labour – labour "that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response."<sup>43</sup> Immaterial labour has two sub-forms: intellectual labour and affective labour. Affective labour "is labour that produces or manipulates affects such as feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion."<sup>44</sup> Immaterial labour should be understood as biopolitical labour – "labour that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself."<sup>45</sup> Affective labour is biopolitical production on account of directly producing social relationships and forms of life.<sup>46</sup>

The hegemony of immaterial labour has the tendency to transform the organisation of production. Where the assembly line of industrial labour functioned according to linear relationships, immaterial production is characterised by countless relationships of networks that become the dominant form of organisation, while cooperation, information and communication become the norms of production. The products of immaterial labour are in many respects immediately social and common. "The becoming common ... is the biopolitical condition of the multitude."<sup>47</sup>

If that is so, what about the life-form that has been variously described but for which Hardt and Negri use the term "the figure of the peasant"? Indeed, this figure "may pose the greatest challenge for the concept of the multitude."<sup>48</sup> The problem is the becoming common of the peasant form of agriculture. This form is characterised by labour on the land, subsistence production, and only partial integration into larger economic systems. The nature of the (non-) integration of the poor into the economy is contested in the South African discourse, as will

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<sup>42</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:106-107

<sup>43</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:108

<sup>44</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:108

<sup>45</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:109

<sup>46</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:110

<sup>47</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:114

<sup>48</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:115

become clear later on. The becoming common through becoming biopolitical, is a condition of becoming part of the multitude.

Hardt and Negri correctly remark that a very small portion of the rural population of Africa qualifies to be called peasants in the sense of being independent, small-holding farmers who produce primarily for their own consumption. The prevailing economic ideology of neo-liberalism is that an economic actor can only survive by producing commodities of the highest quality at the lowest cost, and that is only possible through specialisation (e. g. single-crop agriculture on huge consolidated estates), technological innovation and the widest possible distribution. The redundant former tillers of the soil on communal land tracks become the rural poor who have either no land or not enough of it to make a living on.

Are they, the poor, excluded from the multitude? Hardt and Negri say no, the poor are in fact included in social production. They acknowledge that an inversion of perspective is necessary to understand this – the poor are not only victims but also powerful agents: “The closer we look at the lives and activity of the poor, the more we see how enormously creative and powerful they are and ... how much they are part of the circuits of social and biopolitical production.”<sup>49</sup> Apart from other activities the very strategies of survival require extraordinary resourcefulness and creativity. With the growing dominance of immaterial production (cooperation and the construction of social relationships and communication) the activity of also the poor becomes increasingly directly productive. One example of this is the role of the poor in the generation of linguistic communities and common languages. Although they remain subordinate in the linguistic community, they help generate this community. This paradox inverts the traditional image of the poor – they are active and productive but also antagonistic and potentially rebellious.<sup>50</sup> The poor in the new paradigm are thus becoming part of the common. Hardt and Negri claim they are following Marx when they claim that “real wealth, which is an end in itself, resides in the common; it is the sum of the pleasures, desires, capacities, and needs we all share. The common wealth is the real and proper object of production.”<sup>51</sup>

In this article I appropriate Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude without necessarily explicitly using it too much. The issue at stake for me, too, is the becoming common of the poor and Hardt and Negri’s conceptual innovation allows me to understand the production of a specific life-form as biopolitical production and thus as a contribution to a common creation of value. The specific life-form is that of the South Africa poor, specifically the rural poor – a concept that includes the inhabitants of informal settlements and shanty-towns that encircle

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<sup>49</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:129

<sup>50</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:132

<sup>51</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:149

South African towns and cities. The word “peasant” is not appropriate here and I prefer to use a term that Heinz Kimmerle employs when referring to the ultimate other of the Western subject when she engages in intercultural dialogues – the members of a mainly oral culture.<sup>52</sup> One of the advantages of Hardt and Negri’s reformulation of Marx’s method is that they allow the use of cultural categories to describe what is also described in economic terms.<sup>53</sup>

Hardt and Negri share Kimmerle’s conception of difference which I have described elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> The new concept of cultural difference is based on the notion of singularity.<sup>55</sup> In stead of defining the others in terms of the self, and often depicting the non-European other as an anachronistic survivor of the past (either the primordial past of the primitive or the historical past of the peasant), cultural difference is conceived “in itself, as singularity, without any such foundation in the other” – and the others as equal participants in the common present.<sup>56</sup>

In this article I use the theory of Hardt and Negri to help me describe the issue at stake and understand afresh concepts that became unproductive in the conceptual framework of the industrial paradigm. I simultaneously explore the concepts of the multitude and of biopolitical production and affective labour in the very practical environment of designing a project that has poverty eradication as its goal, in South Africa, today. This I will do by confronting a specific philosophy of poverty – one that takes seriously the fact that the multinational business corporation is the dominant institution of our time – with the ethics of ubuntu.

## ***Pela Nambu – Cross the River***

### **The Proposal**

At the end of 2006 I became involved in a poverty eradication project called Pela Nambu, a Tsonga expression meaning “cross the river”. The divide in question, according to the initial analysis on which the project was based, is the gap between the first and the second economies. The project as initially conceived was about bridging the gap.

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<sup>52</sup> Kimmerle, H 2008. Spiegelungen westlichen und afrikanischen Denkens. Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, p. 103-104.

<sup>53</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:121

<sup>54</sup> See the general introduction to this thesis. See also Hofmeyr, HM 2002. Discourses on cultural difference and liberation? In: Duncan, N, *et al. Discourses on difference. Discourses on oppression.* Cape Town: CASAS, p. 155-181.

<sup>55</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:125-127

<sup>56</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:125-126

The mastermind behind the project was the retired missionary and development consultant, Rev. Eddie Bruwer. After some years of pioneering work in the deep rural areas of north-eastern South Africa, and some time as mission secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church, he co-founded CAN (Church Action in Need), a grassroots ecumenical organisation working with the poor. Since the 1970s he was deeply involved in this work. For the last 10 years of his ministry he was Secretary for Charitable Services of the Uniting Reformed Church. In 1994 he first published a book that described his specific approach to fighting poverty: *Beggars can be Choosers. In search of a better way out of poverty and dependence*. The fourth edition appeared in November 2006, and was expanded to contain a new chapter on "The Poor Man's Capital. From poverty alleviation towards poverty eradication – a proposal."<sup>57</sup>

The title of the book reveals the basic approach that goes against the grain of the folk wisdom that beggars must be happy with whatever they get. According to Bruwer the power to veto is the only power the poor have: "The language of poverty is silence. The veto is a silent way of resistance."<sup>58</sup> Or: "Since the veto is a quiet one, there is no possibility of arguing. Alternative action is the only argument."<sup>59</sup> When the poor do speak, eventually, it is by aggressively and sometimes violently attacking the power structures and symbols of the upper and middle classes. "The basic cry of the poor is for human dignity."<sup>60</sup> The book is about searching for and offering an alternative to the veto which would be a breaking of the silence.

Bruwer offers a critique of what he calls "Western-style development" from a Christian perspective. He concedes that logical explanation and the development that has followed in its wake have been major forces in overcoming magic and witchcraft. But other aspects in traditional African life are better expressions of Christian love than the practices of development, and they should have been left unchanged.<sup>61</sup>

"Development" is too much tied up with Western culture, with the result that non-western cultures are associated with "under-development", and are thus seen as inferior or worthless.<sup>62</sup> Yet, there are indigenous knowledges and practices far more suitable to African realities: an economy of affection and sharing; the celebration of life; and community relationships filled with family-related expressions.<sup>63</sup> The proposal of "the poor man's capital" –

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<sup>57</sup> Bruwer, E 2006. *Beggars can be choosers. In search of a better way out of poverty and dependence*. 4<sup>th</sup> (expanded) edition. Pretoria: IMER.

<sup>58</sup> Bruwer 2006:13

<sup>59</sup> Bruwer 2006:14

<sup>60</sup> Bruwer 2006:14

<sup>61</sup> Bruwer 2006:18-19

<sup>62</sup> Bruwer 2006:20

<sup>63</sup> Bruwer 2006:109

now the final chapter of the book – includes the idea of the worth, also in economic terms, of certain indigenous practices, as will become clear. Bruwer engages in what Hardt and Negri refer to as an inversion of perspective that will allow a view of the poor not only as victims but also as powerful agents.<sup>64</sup>

The obvious alternative to “Western-style development” would be community development, and Bruwer welcomes some of the principles of this variation of “development”.<sup>65</sup> Bruwer, however, implies that communities should not be expected to overcome the hopelessness left by the trauma of poverty on their own. In his later proposal (“The Poor Man’s Capital”) he emphasises the importance of partnerships, as will be described below.

The original meaning of “development” is still present in the word as in the developing of a film – uncovering what was hidden:

Maybe this is something like the revelation and liberation of creation the apostle Paul talked about in Romans 8:18-21? If understood in this biblical way, *development* reveals the enormous hidden reality and potential in all creation and especially in human beings. ... What a loss if we think of development only in terms of Western technology! What is the unknown potential of the people of the Southern Hemisphere – regarded as being poor – still waiting to be uncovered?<sup>66</sup>

The importance of choice hangs together with the acceptance of responsibility. Development should make choice possible. Taking into account the shifts that took place in recent theological reflection, especially the influence of Liberation Theology, Bruwer opts for the term “liberating development”.

Development is:

- not an add-on process but a transformation that takes place in the mind, evokes the will to choose, actively participate in and even drive the process;
- not the decoration of a Christmas tree but the process of growth of a real tree, growing from its own roots;
- not turning the person into a helpless child that gets a gift when it cries, but supporting someone to become a full and mature human being, exploring life and encouraging growth and choice;

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<sup>64</sup> Hardt & Negri 2004:129

<sup>65</sup> Bruwer 2006:22

<sup>66</sup> Bruwer 2006:24-25



- not a laborious effort, swimming against the tide, but the opening of wings and gliding on the air currents of faith, hope and love toward the discovery of new possibilities;
- not an instant experience, but a process.<sup>67</sup>

Bruwer devotes a chapter to the role of culture and its indigenous custodians in the transformation of rural poverty in Africa. He argues that indigenous rulers possibly represent the "vital missing part of our national body in the re-birth of the African."<sup>68</sup> But indigenous systems are in need of re-evaluation and adaptation in order to play a constructive new role in the war against poverty and dependency. The strategy should be rural productivity. The indigenous economy of affection, creatively adapted, can play a major role in the birth of a new economic era, widely desired. Adaptation could include the use of modern technology within the known framework of indigenous knowledge and wisdom.

This brings us to the proposal contained in the last chapter of the book, "The Poor Man's Capital." Already in Dullstroom where he originally settled after his retirement, and then in rural Kestell, in the North-Eastern Free State, not far from the would-be "homeland" Qwa-Qwa, where he lived until shortly before his death, Bruwer became involved in local development projects. The idea of "the poor man's capital" came to him as a result of the closure of an abattoir in Kestell. He relates the circumstances:

A decade after liberation I found myself in a small town in rural South Africa. Despite significant political transformation the economic process went far slower. I looked for government supported projects "on the books" but only found the rests of failing and frustrated ex-participants asking for more grants. What however particularly struck me was the way in which some individuals already comfortably enjoying middle class status could enjoy generous Government and Corporate Business' assistance and support to either start a prosperous business or source large sums of money from the corporate sector for so-called community projects. The community indeed did benefit but found themselves at the receiver's end of the benevolence of others.

The ghetto mentality of the so-called "location" where the unemployment rate was almost 60% and the frustration of a nearby former Homeland started haunting me. Money for infrastructure projects was flowing in, but not at the rate that could satisfy the multiple needs of a community with an unemployment rate of 60%. Dissatisfaction was growing. The Community started organizing themselves in "Concerned Groups" and was complaining about what was called "Service Delivery" putting enormous

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<sup>67</sup> Bruwer 2006:112

<sup>68</sup> Bruwer 2006:123

pressure on Local Government. My observation was that what eventually manifested in a splash of violent protest was a mere symptom of a deeper frustration about The Gap between some who gained from the new dispensation and others who did not. It was as if I was on a railway station where a multitude of people were waiting with valid tickets to catch the first train to travel to a common destination but every time the train passed only some could find space to embark because of some remote system that determined the bookings. For the waiting multitudes there were food parcels, pocket money and development toys to keep them happy.

It was then that an additional tragedy happened. The local abattoir that employed 40+ people closed down. In a small town this is catastrophic and neither the king's horses nor men could do anything about it. Until ... I stopped with my car in front of the advertisement advertising the sale of the abattoir. I knew what the price was. I looked across the veld to the area where a housing project built with State money with the intention to provide 100 families with new houses was almost completed. It was as if a jigsaw puzzle came into place when I realized that the value of these houses that were supposed to become the property of the future inhabitants would equal the value of this property/business for sale. Property, in business terms is capital, not a mere shelter. The Community – a very evasive concept - became concrete as an identifiable committed group of people who could become the primal role players in the shaping of their own future by using their humble property as combined collateral that could be used to borrow money to buy their share in this enterprise. Why could the Government, that was so generous to assist some selected individuals, not assist this collective? Why could the many friends that were willing to assist my friend not come in as real business partners with this new business entity [a co-operative] to ensure a professional approach to this venture? Why would the Bank not be willing to come to the party and invest in this new venture by making a Smart Card available and make further money generating tools such as a bank account, savings and discounts available for this identifiable 'Community'? Why would big business that is so willing to give substantial discounts to the affluent minority buying with their Membership Cards not agree to negotiate about discounts on basic commodities when it comes to the neediest segment of society buying with a Smart Card? Why could the well-known stokvel system not be used and up-graded as base for development into an organisation to form a bigger community of communities with the potential to mobilize large numbers of grass root people? The generation of wealth through the use of own capital would come within reach of the poor. A culture of micro-loans could be turned over into a culture of utilising own resources in partnership with big business. Small could be beautiful but big could become powerful.

The jigsaw puzzle became a picture. It was a divine moment of Godly inspiration that overwhelmed me.<sup>69</sup>

The gist of the “poor man’s capital” proposal, eventually translated into the Pela Nambu project, is spelled out in this quotation. The “indigenous knowledge” of “I am because I participate” is applied to the local community (second economy), private sector (first economy) and the state:

A programme needs to be developed that will give significance to all the ingredients, and will therefore give meaning to the lives of all those who participate – Rich and Poor. It has become an issue of praxis. The way in which the Poor (or, better-stated, the people from the Second Economy) are incorporated in this process is as important as the goal of poverty eradication itself.<sup>70</sup>

The proposal starts with an analysis of poverty in South Africa. Bruwer uses the “two economies” hypothesis that was first introduced into the public discourse by former President Thabo Mbeki. In the first economy prosperity is based on capital and the aim is the creation of more wealth. In the second economy economic activity is interwoven with social interaction. The aim is enhancing social relations on which survival depends. Between the two economies exists a gap. The closing of the gap would imply the becoming common of the poor.

“The Gap” prevents the fruits of economic growth from reaching the majority of the population. Poverty *alleviation* will not bridge the gap. It amounts to charity that leaves the structures unchanged. Poverty *eradication* will imply “a marriage” between the two economies, or “to bring the two economies within touch of each other.”<sup>71</sup> Because of the importance of the manner of the participation of the poor, the proposed principle is: “Start with what the Poor have, and build upon what the Poor possess.”<sup>72</sup> The poor are the subjects of poverty eradication.

The metaphor of a bridge is utilised to explain the proposal. A bridge needs pillars at both sides of the gap that it bridges. The pillars at the second economy side of the gap will have to be built using the normal construction material: capital. “The secret will be to transform what

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<sup>69</sup> Bruwer, E 2007. From the horse’s mouth. The Pela Nambu story. Unpublished document prepared for the Pela Nambu business plan writing process.

<sup>70</sup> Bruwer 2006:134

<sup>71</sup> Bruwer 2006:136

<sup>72</sup> Bruwer 2006:136

the poor possess into capital, and so provide the valid entrance ticket into the formal economy."<sup>73</sup>

"The Poor Man's Capital" is to be derived from three sources.

Firstly a community bank is proposed based on stokvel practice. After describing the workings and some examples of stokvels, Bruwer asks: "Isn't it possible to elevate this known and popular phenomenon into a next level of operation, and to apply it to generate new business opportunities?"<sup>74</sup> As example he refers to Enoch Munano's organisation called the South African Christian Organising and Training Society (SACOTSO). By the time Bruwer first wrote the proposal, Munano still was his much appreciated partner.<sup>75</sup> When I got involved, a break had occurred and nobody knew how far SACOTSO had progressed. But originally Bruwer was optimistic that "SACOTSO provides ample proof that pooled financial resources is possible at grass roots level, and that simple peasants can take control over their own development."<sup>76</sup> Bruwer's report on Munano's progress might be somewhat optimistic, but can be read as a programme of action:

- Transform the stokvel system into a viable vehicle for economic transformation, based on self-reliance.
- Link small groups, formed around common activities (e. g. pre-school parent communities) into a community of communities.
- Link the regular stokvel savings to a smart card system, thus bringing the programme into the modern economy, and opening up new financial services possibilities.
- Appoint auditors for overall financial accountability and trustworthiness.
- Channel a percentage of the stokvel and smart card savings into a community-based development trust, to possibly grow into a community or village bank.<sup>77</sup>

In this way small face-to-face communities at local level (the renowned Schumacherian "small is beautiful") are linked to each other to simultaneously pay heed to the truism that "big is powerful" (a community of communities). The key lies in numbers. The project will require mass mobilisation and the momentum of a movement, without sacrificing the communal identity of the organisation. Individual membership would be via small stokvel-like groups and individual monthly contributions, set by the particular group.

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<sup>73</sup> Bruwer 2006:137

<sup>74</sup> Bruwer 2006:138

<sup>75</sup> See Bruwer 2006:105-106

<sup>76</sup> Bruwer 2006:139

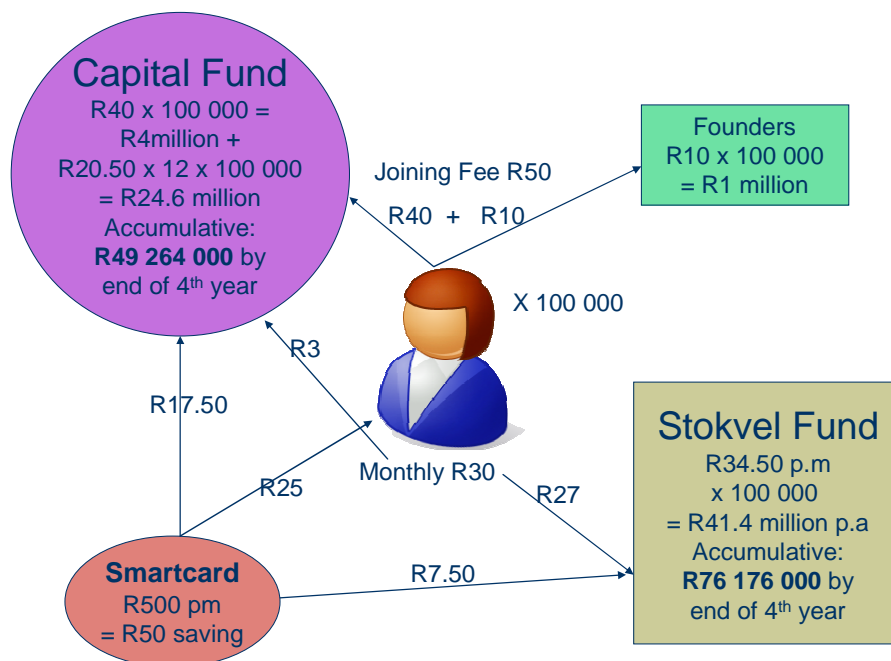
<sup>77</sup> Bruwer 206:139

Securing a smart card from a major commercial bank was always going to be the centrepiece of the programme. As this project was conceptualised the imminent introduction of smart card technology was announced in the press. Each contributing member would be issued with such a card that would have the following functions:

- Symbolic: a “belong to” or smart membership card, providing a common identity.
- It replaces cash for day-to-day basic needs commodity expenditure.
- Discounts are negotiated with retail suppliers.
- Allocations to the community-based development trust fund are done automatically.
- Grant payments are also facilitated via the smart card.<sup>78</sup>

With the smart card the original vision became possible – making use of modern technology within the framework of transformed indigenous life-forms.

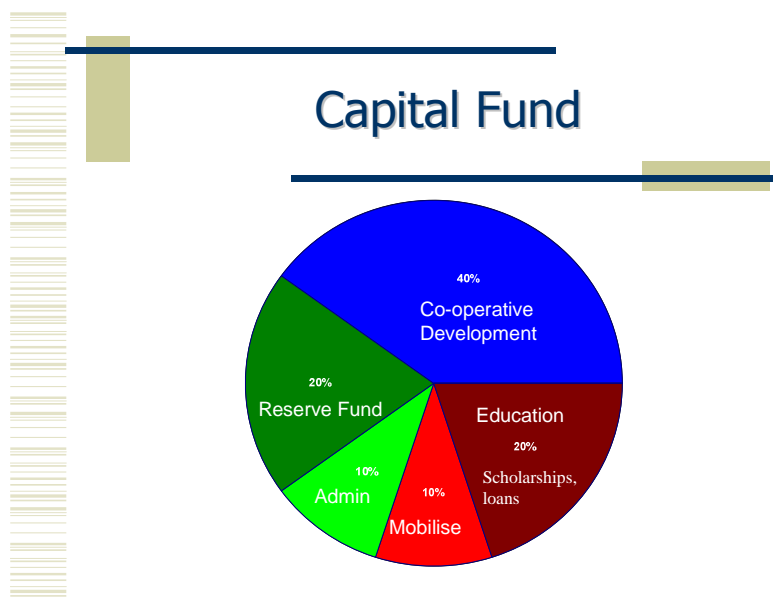
The proposal for using membership fees and a portion of the discount on smartcard transaction to accumulate capital is illustrated in the following figure. The projected sums of capital are based on a membership of 100,000.



The Capital Fund is conceived as a community-based trust fund for the developing and financing of new and ongoing enterprises and initiatives for sustainable development. 50/50 partnerships with competent, reliable and benevolent First Economy enterprises will be formed

<sup>78</sup> Bruwer 2006:140

and these could apply for cheap loans from the Capital Fund. The money will be allocated as follows:



According to the original business plan the reasons why Pela Nambu is different and why it would succeed where other projects have failed are:

- It is about capital
- It is about self-reliance
- It is in agreement with the World Bank's approach of community driven development
- It is in agreement with the solidarity principle which constitutes affective production
- New members undergo an intensive orientation programme so that they know exactly what to expect
- Participants are constantly mentored and coached
- It is simultaneously "small is beautiful" (personal relations in small groups) and "big is powerful" (thousands of groups)
- Short-term incentives are combined with long-term investment
- It is about the "bridge": partnerships with the first economy

The second source of the "poor man's capital" identified by Bruwer was based on a long-term vision of the re-valuation of labour, or "sweat capital".<sup>79</sup> Tracing the practice of under-valuing labour to slavery and colonialism and offering a critique of the present government's one-sided emphasis on job creation while keeping the system in tact, Bruwer calls for a radical change. If labour is re-valuated, "[i]t should become normal for the (organised) labour of the project to tender on the same level as the developers, and to share in eventual profits attached to the project."<sup>80</sup> In stead of the present situation where a contractor employs wage-labourers who

<sup>79</sup> Bruwer 2006:140-143

<sup>80</sup> Bruwer 2006:141

do not share in any profits, workers, organised in a professional and legal way, should be given the opportunity to tender for the labour contract. This would bring about a professionalization of labour with the resultant higher skills levels and responsibility for quality work, as well as a more equitable share in the overall value of the project.

It is in the context of the re-valuation of labour and its professionalization that Bruwer introduces the concept of cooperatives.<sup>81</sup> He refers to the positive experiences of Mondragón in Spain, and the kibbutzim in Israel, and to the fact that South African legislation to regulate cooperatives is in place. He however warns that South African cooperatives will have to grow from African cultural experiences, and not be forced on the people as a foreign ideology.

A well-structured cooperative system is foreseen as the workers' arm of the community-based development trust. Through action training (another key concept in Bruwer's approach) an ethos of unity, participation, hard work, skills development and entrepreneurship would be fostered amongst the workforce involved in cooperatives. Action training and learning involve working on real problems, focusing on learning and actually implementing solutions. It is a form of learning by doing. By using the knowledge and skills of a small group of people combined with skilled questioning, individuals are enabled to re-interpret old and familiar concepts to produce fresh ideas - often without needing new knowledge.

A percentage of the profit of successful projects would go into the development fund, to be utilised for financing new sustainable development projects. The use of the smart card would simplify transactions. Partnerships with the private sector would be of vital importance for the overall success of the programme, as will become clear below.

The third source of the "Poor Man's Capital" is derived from the ideas of the Peruvian economist Hernando De Soto. In his influential publications *The Mystery of Capital* and *The Other Path* De Soto proceeds from the observation that the single most important source of funds for new businesses in the United States is a mortgage on the entrepreneur's house. His plan is to make homeowners out of the world's poor squatters. He wants the vast areas that fall outside the formal legal property system to be given individual property titles. That will give the poor access to credit, loans, and investment, as their dead assets are transformed into live capital. Bruwer now applies this reasoning to the South African government's programme of providing housing for the poor: "In the understanding of the poor South African peasant his/her RDP government subsidised house has become the clearest (perhaps only) share in the victory in the war against apartheid."<sup>82</sup> This property could be used to secure more capital. Once again Bruwer refers to an indigenous practice: "It is a well-known African

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<sup>81</sup> Bruwer 2006:142

<sup>82</sup> Bruwer 2006:143

tradition to have pooled property in the form of a herd of cattle of an extended family.<sup>83</sup> This principle should be reintroduced. Individual RDP house owners could avail their property to a pool to be used as collateral security for loans to generate capital for labour-intensive development. The property owners will become shareholders in the resultant enterprise, as will the 50/50 investment partners from the “first economy”.

“To be is to participate” is the indigenous knowledge at the heart of Bruwer’s proposal, and participation is also and specifically for first economy enterprises.

Pivotal to the whole process of successful grass roots development is the need for competent, reliable and benevolent partners in business. Internal processes and structures ensure stability. External partners secure growth.<sup>84</sup>

Bruwer claims that a partnership approach would be neither top-down (the rich thinking and doing for the poor) nor bottom-up (the poor must be self-reliable). The aim is to establish stable, sustainable and profitable cooperative enterprises.

To get the process of implementing the proposal going, Bruwer foresaw the establishment of an institute or central office to act as a catalyst.<sup>85</sup> Preliminary steps in this direction were taken in the second half of 2006 when the engineering asset and project management company Pangaea agreed to host the initial process. A working group under the chairmanship of the Pangaea managing director was established, and I was invited to become a member. Subsequently I was involved with the drafting of a business plan that was to be used to secure funding for the start-up.

I must now first describe in more detail the key assumptions of Pela Nambu.

### ***Key Assumptions of the Pela Nambu Proposal***

The proposal as explained above clearly proceeds from at least three key assumptions that need further elaboration. The first of these involves the economy of affection in the “second economy” which goes hand in hand with an ethics of ubuntu. The second is that the two-economy hypothesis indeed provides an adequate conceptualisation of poverty in South Africa. The third key assumption is that the poor are indeed in need of the “package” of benefits that would go with membership of Pela Nambu.

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<sup>83</sup> Bruwer 2006:144

<sup>84</sup> Bruwer 2006:145

<sup>85</sup> Bruwer 2006:146-147



## An "Economy of Affection" and the Ethics of Ubuntu

In the literature on African Philosophy there is consensus that African thinking has the human being at its centre.<sup>86</sup> This must, however, not be interpreted as anthropocentrism. The centre is not to be seen independently of the whole of existence. The human being is not seen primarily as an individual, but as individual in a community. Human communities are imbedded in and interrelated with the natural environment, which again are part of nature as a whole and the whole cosmos of heaven and earth.

Mogobe Ramose gives an exposition of "Motho ke motho ka batho" (the Sotho version of the common Bantu proverb meaning literally "I am because we are") in his book *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*.<sup>87</sup> "The central concept of social and political organisation in African philosophy ... consists of the principles of sharing and caring for one another," writes Ramose.<sup>88</sup> Ubuntu, he argues, is a gerundive, "a verbal noun denoting a particular state of being and becoming at the same time."<sup>89</sup> Ubuntu is about "the suspense of be-ing having the possibility of assuming a specific and concrete character at a given point in time." This hangs together with the view that "because motion is the principle of be-ing, the forces of life are there to be exchanged among and between human beings."<sup>90</sup> Ubu- denotes the being of the world as a whole and -ntu stands for the differentiation of the whole that occurs in the process of being known. In this process a central position is accorded to *umuntu*, the human being that speaks and knows. The relationship between person and community as expressed in the Zulu proverb "Umuntu ngumuntu ngamuntu" could thus be translated as "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane respectful relations with them."<sup>91</sup> This, according to Ramose, expresses not a "humanism", but a "human-ness", and thus denotes a process, an injunction, a command "to actually become a human being."<sup>92</sup> Two philosophical principles are presupposed here. Firstly, "the individual human being is the subject – and not an object – of intrinsic value in its own right." Secondly, "*motho* [a person] is only and truly human in the context of actual relations with other human beings."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See Kimmerle, H s.a. Ubuntu: mens en menselijkheid in het Afrikaanse denken.

Dialogen tussen Afrikaanse en Westerse filosofieën. <http://kimmerle.op.het.net/frameText5.htm> (accessed 13.4.2002). See also Hofmeyr, HM 2005. The community and the individual in Western and African thought: Implications for Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Studies* 4:1&2, 53-67.

<sup>87</sup> Ramose, MB 1999. *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books.

<sup>88</sup> Ramose 1999:192

<sup>89</sup> Ramose 1999:192

<sup>90</sup> Ramose 1999:192

<sup>91</sup> Ramose 1999:193

<sup>92</sup> Ramose 1999:52

<sup>93</sup> Ramose 1999:193

The South African philosopher Augustine Shutte has emphasised that ubuntu must be understood in terms of the world-view of persons in which it has its roots, a worldview quite different from the materialist and dualist view predominant in scientific culture.<sup>94</sup> The universe in the ubuntu worldview is a universal field of interacting forces. Everything that exists (stones, plants, animals, humans) is expressions of interacting forces. Both the physical and the spiritual are encompassed in the central category of *life*. Stones also have life-force (living energy), but less so than animals. The universe is "a graded system of life-force".<sup>95</sup> This grading must be understood not in terms of low and high, but of concentric circles or "spheres of force, from ancestors and chiefs, through ordinary people, until one reaches animals, rivers and the things of nature in the outermost sphere."<sup>96</sup>

Shutte spells out the important consequences of this view of the universe for the way in which one views persons, and for ethics. Firstly, the "self" is conceived as outside the individual body, the result and expression of all the forces acting upon human beings. The self is the sum total of all the interacting forces. A person's appearance, acts and relationships, and the surrounding environment are manifestations of the life-forces that make him or her what he or she is. The human self is not (as since Descartes in Western philosophy) something that first exists on its own and then enters into relationships with its surroundings. The self rather is the relationships by which it is constituted. As a person has many different relationships, the main project of someone's life is to integrate the different selves. Conflicts can and do arise, and as they are detrimental to a person's life-force, they must be solved by unifying the interacting forces that constitute a person. How best to unify the forces is the subject of ethics. Shutte also refers to the political repercussions of this approach: Personal integration depends on social integration. The alienation characterising Western society is something African society tries to prevent at all cost.

The consequence for what can be called an ubuntu philosophy of education is that a life is seen as a progressive increase in vital force. Becoming a person is a process of construction, of building up an identity: "A person who is generous and hospitable, who welcomes strangers to her house and table and cares for the needy, increases in vital force. She builds up an identity that is enduring, that will not disintegrate – even in death – but continue to be a centre of life for all."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Shutte, A 2001. *Ubuntu. An ethic for a new South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

<sup>95</sup> Shutte 2001:22

<sup>96</sup> Shutte 2001:22

<sup>97</sup> Shutte 2001:25

Personhood thus conceived is a gift, as the woman in the above quotation would have been incapable of such generosity without herself in her youth having received such hospitality from one or more significant others. The Western notion of scarcity does not apply to ubuntu. The more you bestow the force of life, the stronger it becomes.

The ethics of ubuntu is about the fullness of humanity: "Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded."<sup>98</sup> Another person is seen as "another self". Their good is my good, and the other way round. So you respect others and show them reverence and sympathy and strive towards personal integrity – a wholeness of character in judgements, decisions and feelings.

Shutte acknowledges that ubuntu has its roots in a different world from contemporary South Africa, but is convinced that it still has an important relevance for our situation. He gives some examples of how ubuntu is alive and well, not only as an ideal, but "as a spirit in people and ways of living, in families and organisations and enterprises of various kinds."<sup>99</sup> Yet, circumstances have changed and are changing to such a degree that it should, in combination with the authentic European humanist tradition, be reformulated as an ethic of ubuntu for a new South Africa. This is what he attempts, with chapters on various aspects of life and society. Interestingly enough there is not a separate chapter on the economy, and the chapter on work (chapter 9) speaks of the issues that interest us here.

At this stage it would seem that the "economy of affection" that is central to the Pela Nambu project, and the centrality of participation, is in line with the philosophy and ethics of ubuntu. The question that needs to be posed is how such an ethic could become common under the conditions of global capitalism. We will return to this question and Shutte's thoughts when we engage in "Interrogations" below.

Ubuntu is an apt example of the riches of the poor. As the Venda oral poet and singer Daniel Luambo once sang:

People of old were rich indeed  
But alas, they only earned five cents  
They had cattle kraals, so they were rich  
...  
Nowadays we are truly ashamed  
Nowadays we are truly overcome

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<sup>98</sup> Shutte 2001:30

<sup>99</sup> Shutte 2001:32

Now even if we get money we are overcome.<sup>100</sup>

The second part of the quotation, however, makes clear that this wealth had been lost. The difference between rich and poor has since the introduction of a capitalist economy grown to such an extent that some influential commentators have coined the expression “dual economy” or “two economies”. The Pela Nambu proposal originally operated with this distinction, which must now be further elaborated as much depends on an adequate concept of the South Africa poor.

### **The “Two-Economy” Discourse**

In August 2003, President Thabo Mbeki in his address to the National Council of Provinces spoke of a ‘First Economy’ and a ‘Second Economy’ operating side by side:

The second economy (or the marginalised economy) is characterised by underdevelopment, contributes little to GDP, contains a big percentage of our population, incorporates the poorest of our rural and urban poor, is structurally disconnected from both the first and the global economy and is incapable of self generated growth and development.<sup>101</sup>

According to the *2005 Development Report: Overcoming Underdevelopment in South Africa’s Second Economy*<sup>102</sup>, the need for second-economy interventions is doubly important because of the short- and medium-term limitations of what the first economy can offer, and on the other hand because of the necessarily large gaps in the social safety net. Second-economy interventions, according to some, can and should be designed to equip people to either link to or eventually be absorbed in the first economy. The Report finds government’s second economy interventions inadequate. The shift from a welfare state to a development state needs a coherent second economy strategy, which seemed to be non-existent.

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Hofmeyr, HM 1990. ‘n Brief uit Venda. In Hofmeyr, HM *et al Wit Afrikane? 'n Gesprek met Nico Smith*. Bramley: Taurus, p. 152-166, 160.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Skinner, C and Valodia, I 2006. Two economies? A critique of recent South African policy debate. In Bond, P, Chitonge, H & Hopfmann, A (eds). *The accumulation of capital in Southern Africa. Rosa Luxemburg’s contemporary relevance*. Proceedings of the Rosa Luxemburg Seminar 2006 and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society’s Colloquium on Economy, Society and Nature. Durban: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; UKZN Centre for Civil Society, p. 107-118, 107.  
<http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/files/RL%20Capital-africa.pdf> (accessed 13.3.07).

<sup>102</sup> Synthesis Report of the 2005 Development Report: Overcoming Underdevelopment in South Africa’s Second Economy. <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Document-60.phtml> (accessed 9.2.2007).

## Poverty and Under-Development in Figures

The report quotes the following figures to give an idea of underdevelopment in South Africa: South Africa's per capita GDP was \$11 240 per annum in 2001, making the country one of the 50 wealthiest in the world. However, strikingly poor social indicators resulted in a ranking of 111 out of 175 countries in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) for that year. South Africa's HDI ranking declined from 93 in 1992 to 115 in 2003, and it is one of only a handful of countries that has experienced a decline since 1995. Despite being among the 50 wealthiest nations in the world, the country now has a life expectancy that is among the 30 worst, while projections of mortality suggest that this measure will deteriorate further as deaths from the HIV/Aids pandemic increase. The following facts and figures are also quoted:

- 40% of the population live in poverty
- 20% live below the PPP-adjusted "\$1 a day"
- Official unemployment is at 30.5%
- South Africa has the highest Gini-coefficient in the world
- The racial disparities in South Africa's development indicators have also remained largely unchanged.

*Access to banking* (or lack thereof) is another telling measure of poverty 53% of the population are without formal access to banking facilities and 37% are completely unbanked, of which 99% are Black and in the 16-29 age group, living on tribal land and in urban townships, with no property or assets.

The Report draws a distinction between two kinds of entrepreneurship – "opportunity entrepreneurship", which indeed may be stimulated by a growing economy, and "necessity entrepreneurship", which is the province of smaller, survivalist enterprises that are more likely to emerge counter-cyclically. The argument of the 2005 Development Report is that both types of enterprise are important and merit support, but that government policy tends to acknowledge and cater to the former at the expense of the latter. The suggestion is that government initiatives must be appropriately differentiated in order to reach each group effectively.

The main issue is the type of support services offered. In an integrated economy, in which many firms produce outputs as inputs for other firms, potential micro-entrepreneurs will want to take loans to enable them to cater to an identified market. "Opportunity entrepreneurs" would fit this description.

In a dual economy those in the second economy are less likely to be able to take advantage of such opportunities. Potential first-economy firms are not accustomed to doing business with the informal sector and will also not take advantage of such opportunities. As a result, such small enterprises as exist in the second economy tend to be “necessity entrepreneurs”, or “the non-entrepreneurial self-employed”, whose demand for credit (not to mention eligibility) is limited by the fact that they are unable to form contractual relationships with buyers in order to ensure a reasonably constant cash flow.

The Report quotes the experience of Khula Enterprise Finance as instructive. Launched in 1995, its strategy was based on the assumption that there were enough linkages between the first and second economies to generate demand for credit for micro enterprises that would act as suppliers to the first economy.

This assumption was proved wrong: there were not enough linkages. The result was a dramatic reduction in the number of credit retailers through which Khula could extend its capital, and an “upgrading” in the nature of the client base of those retailers that managed to remain. Khula then opened “micro-credit outlets” in order to cater to the smaller enterprise clientele it was not able to reach through its intermediaries. It was thus trying to encourage credit uptake among a category of entrepreneurs for whom credit is often not the most immediate need.

The government, believing that the existing institutions do not cater adequately to poorer entrepreneurs, introduced two new small business credit schemes and the new apex institution, the Micro-Agricultural Finance initiative of South Africa (MAFISA). There is thus a continuing emphasis on micro-finance/micro-credit. But, asks the Report: *What about encouragement, monitoring and advice?*

The Pela Nambu project initially accepted the two economy hypothesis and the imperative of “bridging the gap”. It responded to the critique of the 2005 Development Report by envisioning a coherent strategy of bringing “necessity entrepreneurs” into the fold by not only making credit available, but by concentrating on the establishment of networks informed by the principles of the “economy of affection” and brokering the partnerships that would provide encouragement, monitoring and advice. According to Dr Kosie van Zyl, retired civil servant and generally known as the real author of MAFISA, who acted as a consultant to the Pela Nambu business plan writing team, ongoing and intensive mentoring, monitoring, encouragement and control are prerequisites for the success of projects of this nature.<sup>103</sup> Pela Nambu therefore foregrounds ongoing training, continuous support, gradual progress to greater independence

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<sup>103</sup> Input at draft business plan discussion meeting, Pangaea boardroom, Pretoria, 8.5.2007.

and unflinching demands of discipline and accuracy in its approach to cooperative enterprise development.<sup>104</sup>

### **Pela Nambu and Research on the Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion**

The members of the Pela Nambu business plan writing team were all people who either had experienced poverty and social exclusion or have for many years worked in and closely with poor communities. Yet, at a crucial stage of the drafting process it became necessary to test the project's assumptions regarding the needs of the poor potential members of Pela Nambu against the findings of proper research. In the area of poverty studies everything is contested, including the definition of poverty and thus saying who the poor are and what they need.<sup>105</sup>

The Pela Nambu project is committed to some important principles that determined the kind of approach to poverty research that would produce usable results. It was conceived from the start as a breaking of the veto of silence exercised by the poor.

On 5 June 2007 Prof. Michael Noble delivered a lecture entitled "Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion"<sup>106</sup> in the form of a power point presentation at the University of Venda. This lecture was subsequently repeated at the SANPAD 2007 Poverty Challenge Conference in Durban on 26 June 2007. The research report on which the lecture is based has been published in May 2008<sup>107</sup>, but I will use information presented in the lecture and in the power point presentation in search of an answer to the question what it is that the people, the poor and socially excluded people of the second economy want. The lecture is based on research undertaken by the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy at Oxford University in the UK.

The research followed what is called "The Democratic Approach" to poverty research:

to try to discover whether there is a public consensus on what is an unacceptable standard of living [...] and, if there is a consensus, who, if anyone, falls below that standard. The idea underlying this is that a person is in 'poverty' when their standard

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<sup>104</sup> Pela Nambu Business Plan, draft 14.6.07, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Spicker 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Noble, M 2007. Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion. Unpublished Power Point Presentation. Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy at Oxford University.

<sup>107</sup> See Wright, G 2008. Findings from the Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion Project: A profile of poverty using the Socially Perceived Necessities Approach. (Key Report 7). Project 4.3.1 of the Department of Social Development's Social Policy Analysis Programme.

<http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=85437> (accessed 23.8.08).

of living falls below the minimum deemed necessary by current public opinion. This minimum may cover not only the basic essentials for survival (such as food) but also access, or otherwise, to participating in society and being able to play a social role.<sup>108</sup>

The 'consensual' or 'democratic' approach provided for a survey undertaken of the general population to determine an inventory of 'socially perceived necessities'. These are a list of the possessions, services and activities which are regarded as essential for an acceptable standard of living in South Africa today. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that all groups in society aspire to the same lifestyle and so have broadly similar views as to what comprise necessities:

The validity of [this] approach rests on an assumption – that is empirically verifiable – that there are not wide variations in the definition of necessities among different groups of society. Otherwise, the definition of an unacceptable standard of living just becomes contested and the opinion of one group against another argued again and again.<sup>109</sup>

Over 50 focus groups were involved in the research, from low, middle or high income population groups. Attention was given to gender balance, and to special constituencies, e. g. farm workers, plantation workers, etc. The research was undertaken in five provinces using nine of the eleven official languages. Limpopo Province and specifically the Vhembe region were particularly well represented in the research.

The focus group questions explored what people regarded as essential possessions, activities and services which cause one to feel that they are not 'excluded'. The focus group discussions generated a list of these to assist with the construction of questions for the social survey that was conducted during the second stage of the research.

The purpose of the second stage was to assess through a representative sample survey the extent to which an inventory of possessions, activities and services are regarded as necessities. This was achieved using the HSRC's 2005 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) and repeated in SASAS 2006. This in effect produced a democratically derived set of indicators of relative poverty and social exclusion.

During the third stage the 'essential' items list was used to measure the numbers of people who do not have these items because they cannot afford them or do not have them otherwise provided.

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<sup>108</sup> Mack and Lansley, quoted in Noble 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Pantazis et al, quoted in Noble 2007.



The socially perceived necessities are listed here, with the percentages of people who regard them as necessities:<sup>110</sup>

<b>Item</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Main electricity in the house	92
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather, e.g. rain, wind	90
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89
A place to worship in the local area (church, mosque, synagogue)	87
A fridge	86
Street lighting	85
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	81
Having police on the streets in the local area	80
Tarred roads close to the house	80
Paid employment for people of working age	79
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	79
A flush toilet in the house	78
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	77
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	76
A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the street	75
A large supermarket in the local area	75
A radio	74
Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	74
A fence or wall around the property	74
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	73
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	72
Regular savings for emergencies	71
A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	69
TV	69
Someone to lend you money in an emergency	66

<sup>110</sup> Copied from Noble 2007.

A cell phone	63
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	62
A bath or shower in the house	62
Burglar bars in the house	62
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	56
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	55
A sofa/lounge suite	54
A garden	51

Noble interprets the results in terms of three themes emerging:

- service provision/infrastructure-oriented ( $\alpha=0.8459$  )
- social networks ( $\alpha=0.7259$ )
- material possessions ( $\alpha=0.7511$ )

When urban versus rural responses are compared, a correlation of 0.919 was found. 37 (of 38) items were defined as essential by 50% or more of urban respondents and by 50% or more of rural respondents. There are instances where items are defined as 'more essential' by urban respondents than by rural respondents. In urban areas, issues of air quality and security are more prominent than for rural respondents. 71% of rural respondents defined a cell phone as essential, compared to only 58% of urban respondents. One item which rural respondents rated as a necessity but urban people did not, using the 50% threshold, was a wheelbarrow. These differences are easily understandable in the light of deficient fixed line telecommunications in rural areas, and the use of wheelbarrows to transport water in under-serviced rural areas.

What could Pela Nambu learn from this research? When looked at from the perspective of membership benefits, it would seem that a bouquet offering the following should be attractive – and only those items that could realistically be included are listed:

- Home-based care: A home care service should be offered involving the members of the primary group one is a member of. This service is to be included in the "contract" that members enter into with each other and the group when joining. This would be a way of reviving the *ubuntu* sentiments without relying on them to take effect automatically, just because they are expected to belong to the inherent ethos of the second economy. The training of members in basic first aid, and in basic patient care would be part of the package, as would be procedures to access specialised care when needed. It would of course be naïve to speak of home-based care in South Africa today without realising that it refers first and foremost to the AIDS pandemic.

Eventually Pela Nambu will have to move beyond mutual care in groups and get involved in establishing the required institutions in conjunction with the state.

- Housing: Pela Nambu should enter into partnerships with Habitat International and other volunteer organisations involved in the provision of housing and replicate best practice to make it possible for members to acquire basic housing or improve existing housing in a cooperative way.
- Funeral insurance: It should be clear that this service is a must in the list of services offered. A comprehensive package of relevant insurance products will be a key ingredient of the membership advantages.
- Playgroups for young children: The training of suitable members of primary groups as nursery nurses and their employment by the organisation to look after and care for young children provide a service with a multiplying effect (personal development, skills training, job creation, stimulation of children, etc.).
- Financial services: Some items on the list are provided for by the basic Pela Nambu plan bringing financial services to the poor through smartcard technology and primary groups pulling resources according to the stokvel model.

I find it significant that having a garden has made it into the above-50% of the necessity list. I interpret this to include a vegetable garden. Socially and environmentally responsible companies must do much more to promote and legitimise permaculture gardens for food security and beautiful living. Pela Nambu will play a role in this.

Many of the items on the list have to do with sufficient income to afford living essentials and are thus connected to employment for a decent wage. The sequence of steps of the Pela Nambu project is first membership of an organisation with specific benefits associated with membership. The benefits are to be attractive enough to ensure rapid membership growth until a critical number is reached that would ensure sufficient capital and a strong enough network of groups to allow for cooperative enterprises and subsequent employment opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

This brings to an end the preliminary sketch of the Pela Nambu approach. In the next section the first two of the key underlying assumptions will be further elaborated and interrogated, as well as the viability of the cooperative as business vehicle. I will firstly return to the two-economy discourse. Whether the poor are not sufficiently integrated or adversely integrated in the economy is a crucial point that will influence the priorities of the Pela Nambu project. Secondly and related to this issue, one has to become concrete and ask whether the present structure of the global economy really favours the ethics of ubuntu – not as a survival strategy for the victims of the system but as a way of doing business. To answer this question I will

pursue the notion that the dominant institution of our time is the business corporation. The corporation, as an institutional psychopath, has been put together in such a way that it deliberately adversely integrates the poor into its operations and systematically recreates the concept of the ideal human being in its image.

## ***Interrogations***

In this section the main assumptions of the original Pela Nambu proposal are interrogated. These are the validity of the two economy discourse and the possibility of a becoming common of the ethics of ubuntu in a capitalist economy.

### **A Critique of the Two-Economy Hypothesis**

Perhaps because it corresponds so well to common experience of the continued divided nature of South African society, the two-economy hypothesis was taken as a given by the members of the Pela Nambu working committee. Then came the "Living on the Margins" conference in March 2007 at which Andries du Toit and David Neves from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape delivered a paper. They argued that the "two economies" analysis is not an adequate way of understanding poverty in South Africa.<sup>111</sup>

Du Toit and Neves traces the origin and meaning of the "two economies" metaphor. The term was introduced by President Mbeki in his August 2003 "Letter from the President" and has become pervasive ever since, explaining persistent poverty in terms of the poor being "trapped" in a second economy. The "Poor Man's Capital" analysis taken over by Pela Nambu does exactly this. Du Toit and Neves argue that "it is not a satisfying or adequate account of the real dynamics of economic marginalisation; moreover it perpetuates some problematic misapprehensions about the supposed relationships between 'margins' and the 'centre' in South Africa."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Du Toit, A & Neves, D 2007. In search of South Africa's second economy: Chronic poverty, vulnerability and adverse incorporation in Mt. Frere and Khayelitsha. Paper read at the Living on the Margins Conference, Stellenbosch, 26-28.3.07.  
[http://www.livingonthemargins.org/downloads/Du\\_Toit\\_and\\_Neves\\_dsi.pdf](http://www.livingonthemargins.org/downloads/Du_Toit_and_Neves_dsi.pdf) (accessed 28.3.07); Hadland, A 2007. Searching for Mbeki's Second Economy. *Sangonet* 27.3.2007.  
[http://www.sangonet.org.za/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6764&Itemid=373](http://www.sangonet.org.za/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6764&Itemid=373) (accessed 28.3.07)

<sup>112</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:3

The introduction of the two-economy metaphor represented a significant shift in the government's conceptualisation of poverty. It boils down to an admission that GEAR will not by itself solve poverty, and that there is a "structural disjuncture" in the economy itself. Yet, Du Toit and Neves are not satisfied with the President's conceptualisation of the nature of the disjuncture. It refers concretely only to lack of skills preventing poor people from being employable in the first economy, and to the problems poor people experience in obtaining credit. Most importantly, "the functioning of the 'first world economy' itself was not problematized: in fact, the 'first world economy' was still seen as the powerhouse that would generate the resources that would be used to benefit those in the 'third world' economy."<sup>113</sup>

Du Toit and Neves want to trace the untested assumptions that enter policy discourse on the back of the second-economy hypothesis. The elementary dichotomy that is for instance set up between "integration" and "disconnection" can easily smuggle in the assumption that lack of integration is bad, and that disadvantage is the result of disconnection. The underlying assumption remains unexamined – "that this larger system into which people need to be integrated will necess[aril]y function to their advantage."<sup>114</sup>

Research into the livelihoods of the marginalised poor and the precise nature of their links with the mainstream economy, conducted in rural Mount Frere and urban Khayelitsha, has shown that the poor are actually thoroughly integrated into the mainstream economy, *but adversely so*. The task is to better understand the nature of this adverse incorporation.<sup>115</sup>

One of the consequences of adverse incorporation is sharper economic differentiation between households. This undermines cooperative work arrangements (e. g. work parties) and thus social capital – a concept that Du Toit & Neves do not like. They describe the complexity of the issues. Cooperative work arrangements rely on specific social and gender relations, and on an underlying set of social and moral principles: "A conservative, patriarchal rural cultural ideology that enforces a collective commitment to an agrarian, Xhosa way of being."<sup>116</sup> The survival of this life-form is dependent on lack of integration into the mainstream economy.

The nature of the integration becomes clear if one "follows the money". Cash is transported to Mount Frere in armoured transit vans. It is deposited into ATMs, strategically placed near the supermarket chains. Local people withdraw money from funds in most cases deposited there by distant relatives or by the government as social grants. The money moves a few metres into the supermarket from whence it is eventually collected again by armoured transit vans to

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<sup>113</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:4-5

<sup>114</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:7

<sup>115</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:12

<sup>116</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:14

be taken to wherever a retail giant's profit goes. Mount Frere is fully integrated, but adversely so: "what is lacking is a network of internal interconnections and meaningful local multipliers to constitute a functioning local economy."<sup>117</sup>

The "adverse integration" into the single economy of Khayelitsha residents is described thus:

Khayelitsha's residents are (largely) redundant as unskilled workers, yet they are valued as consumers; they are isolated from the city's economic epicentre, yet are decisively present as citizens and voters; they are constructed through racialised discourse of crime and fear as a potential threat to Cape Town's lucrative tourist industry, yet they are themselves objects of tourism.<sup>118</sup>

The obstacles preventing poor people from beneficial participation in the economy are not caused by disconnection, but from the nature of their relationship with the mainstream economy. The manner of their integration undermines "their ability to constitute themselves powerfully as economic actors and social agents."<sup>119</sup> The result is that self-employment and informal sector activity is mostly survivalist in nature. If they do not make it as entrepreneurs or as small or medium sized business owners, the reason is sought in cultural factors, or in "not having the right mindset", but almost never do people reflect for a moment what it takes in terms of ingenuity, strategic knowledge and the huge effort to run a successful business at the margins of the economy.

It should now be clear that Du Toit & Neves prefer the word pair "centre - margin" above "first and second economies". Yet, this does not mean that they operate with a neat dualism: "Although the notion of the 'margins' and the 'centre' might still have some imaginary force, they need to be imagined as part of a fractal topography, a shape in which both centre and the margins are everywhere present."<sup>120</sup> The conclusion reached by Du Toit and Neves is directed at policy: "Rather than aim at 'eliminating' the second economy or hoping that it can somehow be transfigured into the first, policymakers would do better to look carefully at measures that can ameliorate existing power imbalances and reduce inequality."<sup>121</sup> Policies should be designed "which value and support the fragile survival strategies that take shape on this hostile and difficult terrain."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:17

<sup>118</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:19

<sup>119</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:23

<sup>120</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:29

<sup>121</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:33

<sup>122</sup> Du Toit & Neves 2007:33

Pela Nambu is not in the first place about policy, but is a project addressing poverty eradication within a particular existing policy framework. Yet, it should take heed of the conceptual clarification brought about by Du Toit and Neves, and address its strategies to the realities of the experience of the poor. Some tuning of the basic concept had to be done in the light of the findings of this research. At a strategic planning meeting (strategy and tactics) on 27 and 28 August 2007 the assumptions underlying the “the gap is the problem and the bridge the solution” approach had to be questioned and revised. Not everybody present was willing to part with the two-economy discourse, and the addition of the “adversely integrated” position was accepted by consensus. The image of the bridge was subsequently replaced by the image of a lever on a winch: It is not about building a bridge and crossing the river, but about eradicating the gap. The lever would be partnerships. And the main concern of Du Toit and Neves, that the second economy discourse would result in constructing the first economy as the norm was heeded by the poor person’s capital-approach from the start. This once again became clear during the discussions at the strategic planning meeting, specifically when the legal entity of Pela Nambu registered businesses was debated. Some, informed by research into the difficulties of starting and running a cooperative enterprise,<sup>123</sup> wanted no prescriptions in this regard. Others felt strongly that Pela Nambu businesses must be cooperative enterprises as a matter of principle. Otherwise Pela Nambu affiliated enterprises would just replicate what is normal in the economy: profits above all, pay workers as little as possible, externalise costs to the environment, etc. And if entrepreneurs would therefore shun Pela Nambu because of the restrictions and complications that go with the cooperative as a business entity? Are there enough “social business entrepreneurs”, as Muhammad Yunus calls them? These are people who want more than profit-maximisation, whose deepest motivation is to make a difference to the world:

They are social-objective driven. They want to give a better chance in life to other people. They want to achieve their objective through creating/supporting sustainable business enterprises. Their businesses may or may not earn profit, but like any other business they must not incur losses. They create a new class of business which we may describe as “non-loss” business. ... Social entrepreneurship is an integral part of human history. Most people take pleasure in helping others. All religions encourage this quality in human beings. Governments reward them by giving tax breaks. Special legal facilities are created for them so that they can create legal entities to pursue their objectives.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> See Philip, K 2003. Co-operatives in South Africa: Their role in job creation and poverty reduction. [http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000786/P872-Co-ops\\_October2003.pdf](http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000786/P872-Co-ops_October2003.pdf) (accessed 15.4.2007).

<sup>124</sup> Yunus, M s.a. Writings on Social Entrepreneurship. Rebuilding through Social Entrepreneurship and Social Business Entrepreneurs are the solution. Grameen Foundation USA Publication Series, p. 3-4. <http://www.grameenfoundation.org/pubdownload/dl.php> (accessed 12.10.07).

But is the concept of capitalism capable of a “broadening”, as Yunus suggests should happen?<sup>125</sup> Skinner and Valodia remember the insights of Rosa Luxemburg and Harold Wolpe into the relationship between the mainstream of the capitalist economy and its ‘underdeveloped’ components.<sup>126</sup>

Harold Wolpe in the 1970s wrote on the relationship between the mainstream of the apartheid economy and the periphery.<sup>127</sup> At the time liberals argued that capitalism would ultimately undermine apartheid as more and more of the periphery came to be incorporated into the mainstream of the economy. Wolpe, using Marxist analysis, argued, just as Du Toit and Neves today, that there was in fact a close relationship between the mainstream and the periphery, but that this relationship was exploitative.<sup>128</sup> Wolpe argued that capitalism entered into, lived off, and transformed the African rural economy.<sup>129</sup>

Luxemburg, in her seminal *The Accumulation of Capital* wrote:

Capital ... must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction in order to utilise all productive forces of the globe ... This labour power, however, is in most cases rigidly bound by the pre-capitalist organisation of production. It must first be ‘set free’ in order to be enrolled in the active army of capital.<sup>130</sup>

Skinner and Valodia use the analysis of Wolpe and Luxemburg to highlight “the exploitative nature of capitalist accumulation vis-à-vis the underdeveloped sector.”<sup>131</sup> Their research into the South African labour market further supports the findings of Du Toit and Neves that the informal economy is thoroughly linked to the formal economy. The growth of the informal sector, and the general informalisation of labour, is not the result of the failure of the mainstream economy to incorporate the periphery, or the inability of people living on the margins to be mainstreamed. It is rather the direct consequence of “the particular form of

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<sup>125</sup> Yunus s.a.:3

<sup>126</sup> Skinner & Valodia 2006

<sup>127</sup> See Wolpe, H [1972] 1995. Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid. In Beinart, W & Dubow, S (eds) 1995. *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*. London; New York: Routledge.

<http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/files/Wolpe%20Economy%20&%20Society%201972.pdf> (accessed 16.10.07)

<sup>128</sup> I want to express my gratitude to Prof. Len Hulley of Unisa who introduced me to this analysis when he held a guest lecture in the Department of Missiology at the University of Pretoria Faculty of Theology in the early 1980s.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Skinner & Valodia 2006:110

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Skinner & Valodia 2006:110

<sup>131</sup> Skinner & Valodia 2006:116



mainstream economic development in post-apartheid South Africa".<sup>132</sup> Maximisation of profits therefore prescribes that labour should be informalised (70% of workers employed by Woolworths are casual labourers), in a country where 69% of the potential workforce in 2005 survived on R1000 and less per month.<sup>133</sup>

Apart from the conceptual issue of the use of the two economy discourse, the thinking behind Pela Nambu, from *Beggars can be choosers* through "The Poor Man's Capital" has been in line with the gist of Du Toit and Neves' argument, that the lens through which the poor view the nature of links and connections is normative, and that the strengthening, support and enhancement of the agency of the poor in their struggle for survival is the point of departure.<sup>134</sup>

But how to speak of the divisions that do exist, and what name, in line with "adverse integration" would be accurate to describe the nature of the relationship between the centre and the periphery, the mainstream and the margins? In this regard I find the response of Jeff Guy to Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* immensely helpful.<sup>135</sup>

"Whatever the theoretical aspects," Luxemburg wrote, "the accumulation of capital, as an historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist social strata and forms of social organisation."<sup>136</sup> She refers specifically to dependence on sources of labour, materials for production, and on markets to absorb surplus value. Luxemburg spoke of the pre-capitalist economy as the "natural economy", which the capitalist economy cannot leave intact, because it is useless to it. It must be exploited to the point of its destruction. In order to gain possession of its means of production and to transform it into a market for its surplus goods, the land, its labour and the natural economy must be terminated. She applied this argument to the South Africa of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Capital officially took over the reigns in the new South African Union which replaced the small peasant republics by a great modern state, as envisaged by Cecil Rhodes' imperialist program. The new conflict between capital and labour had superseded the

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<sup>132</sup> Skinner & Valodia 2006:116

<sup>133</sup> Skinner & Valodia 2006:113

<sup>134</sup> See Du Toit & Neves 2007:29, 33.

<sup>135</sup> Guy, J 2006. 'No eyes, no interest, no frame of reference.' Luxemburg, Southern African historiography and precapitalist of (sic) modes of production. In Bond, P, Chitonge, H & Hopfmann, A (eds). *The accumulation of capital in Southern Africa. Rosa Luxemburg's contemporary relevance*. Proceedings of the Rosa Luxemburg Seminar 2006 and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society's Colloquium on Economy, Society and Nature. Durban: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; UKZN Centre for Civil Society, p. 26-45.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Guy 2006:30-31

old one between British and Dutch. One million white exploiters of both nations sealed their touching fraternal alliance within the Union with the civil and political disfranchisement of colored workers.<sup>137</sup>

Guy finds the fundamental structure of her argument, although based on limited source material, and occasionally archaic in its terms and definitions, still "remarkable, robust and provocative," and capable of further development.<sup>138</sup> The latter he attempts by taking as point of departure the persistent theme of her historical analysis, which is the contradiction that "Capitalism must interact with non-capitalist modes at all stages of its history."<sup>139</sup> At all stages of its historical development capitalism needs access to the means of production and labour power of non-capitalist modes of production.

In order to better understand the pre-capitalist mode of production and its "articulation" (Harold Wolpe) with the capitalist economy, Guy applies conventional Marxist categories to pre-capitalist African modes of production: "These were societies organised around the production and accumulation, not of material goods as commodities, but of labour power as a commodity, as people."<sup>140</sup> He describes the productive process amongst the Zulu as being controlled and organised by men, but realised by the agriculturally productive, and the reproductive, capacity of women who had value against cattle. Political status and social power depended on the number of cattle/people/labour power by a male homestead-head possessed and controlled. The largest homesteads were those of the head of state who also had authority over all the homesteads which made up the polity.

This was a patriarchal system, and although women, on the basis of their (re)productive role, carried significant social power, political power was exercised fiercely in line with patriarchy, age and descent. Where colonial forces did not attempt, or did not succeed in smashing pre-capitalist societies, the impact of capital splintered these social structures along the fault lines created by patriarchy, age and gender.

To answer the question as to when exactly the pre-capitalist mode of production was terminated, Guy asks: what factors define the pre-capitalist mode? He answers that the pre-capitalist mode of production in the homestead was directed to the production and accumulation of labour power. Its termination coincides with the moment the production in

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<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Guy 2006:33

<sup>138</sup> Guy 2006:33

<sup>139</sup> Guy 2006:33-34

<sup>140</sup> Guy 2006:37

the homestead becomes directed to the production and accumulation of material commodities.<sup>141</sup>

Guy illustrates his point by relating the life story of a hypothetical Zulu chief, based on a real case study. Patriarchal authority, polygamy, the payment of bride wealth and kinship obligations continued to be practiced and defended vigorously by the chief all his life. But at a certain stage he was, in fact, no longer working within a pre-capitalist mode. In practice, this shift is discerned in the fact that income was predominantly sourced from interests on loans, savings, the sale of agricultural produce, and wages (however meagre) earned by his children.

Despite the continued existence of social and cultural practices from the pre-capitalist era, the defining pre-capitalist circuit of women and cattle realised as labour power had been broken and inverted: people were no longer the aim of production: people produced commodities.<sup>142</sup>

Guy uses his analysis to shed some light on the notions of "Africa" and "African". As Wolpe in the 1970s, he attempts to bring to bear on that debate a perspective that relies on economic factors rather than race as the primary category of analysis.

I find his analysis helpful in clarifying the difference between two "economies", or rather, two orientations within the economy, and for assessing the nature of the challenge of relying on the "indigenous knowledge" of the pre-capitalist economy in the commodity-oriented capitalist economy. The stated aim of Pela Nambu is, in modified language, to make accessible to people adversely integrated in the commodity-oriented economy the capitalist instruments of wealth creation, while relying on and enhancing the people-orientation of the pre-capitalist mode of production.

This is an extremely ambitious aim that will have to take into account the ruthless nature of commodity capitalism and its inherent tendency to destroy non-capitalist economies in order to make them accessible to exploitation, which means adverse integration into commodity capitalism for their members.

### **How could the Ethics of Ubuntu be viable in a Capitalist Economy?**

In this section I further follow Guy in his helpful distinction between humane and inhumane orientations of economies. The modern capitalist economy is inhumane in being oriented to the production of commodities. I follow Goudzwaard and De Lange in tracing the history of

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<sup>141</sup> Guy 2006:40

<sup>142</sup> Guy 2006:42

economic thought that has resulted in this inhumane economy, and listen to two African philosopher's critique of the dominant economy in the West informed by African ways of thinking about the economy. In order to explain the absence of social responsibility in capitalist economic theory I introduce the research of Joe Bakan on the modern business corporation as the dominant institution of our time. Understanding the nature of the corporation illuminates the bad showing of South African businesses in a survey on Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility.

### **Humane versus Inhumane**

Guy refers to *ubuntu* in illustrating what happens to indigenous knowledge when it becomes integrated into the commodity economy. Even within an analysis along economic lines social categories remain important, because certain aspects of the pre-capitalist mode were retained and articulated within capitalism (e. g. chieftainship and patriarchy). They were transformed, though, along with the system in which they played a central structural role.

Pre-capitalist social practices outlasted the pre-capitalist mode of production: they played an important role in the period of articulation: they are active to this day as capitalist accumulation continues to wreak havoc on South Africans.

But while this continuity might be socially and politically central, it is structurally peripheral. It is a remnant of an African mode of production, a social system long gone: a mode of production in which value was created by the productive and reproductive power of women, and in which the aim of production was people. It was a system, I want to suggest, epitomised in a word which has achieved wide currency today: *ubuntu* – the importance of reciprocal relations between people, communal concern and responsibility for others, the significance of others for ourselves – a concept, I would suggest, with its origins in the southern African precapitalist mode of production whose unique feature was the creation of value through people.<sup>143</sup>

The continuity of this social concept within a commodity capitalist mode (e. g. *Ubuntu Marketing Philosophy*<sup>144</sup>) boils down to "the continued existence of a humane concept in inhumane conditions", which confirms the contradictory nature of history.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Guy 2006:44-45

<sup>144</sup> See Van den Heuvel, H, Mangaliso, M & Van de Bunt, L (eds) 2006. *Ubuntu in Global Management*. Amsterdam; Pretoria: Rosenberg Publishers/Unisa Press.

<sup>145</sup> Guy 2006:45

The distinction between humane and inhumane is derived from the orientation of a particular economic system – whether it is people-oriented or thing-oriented. The particular form of the pre-capitalist people-centeredness is not normative. It is in need of becoming other with regard to how it assigns roles. But its people-centeredness makes it humane. To claim “Africanness” in support of advocating continued patriarchy within the framework of a commodity economy will merely enhance the inhumaneness of that system. At the same time the prospects are bleak for retaining humaneness in any significant way within a fundamentally inhumane system. What would need to happen for a shift from commodity to people orientation to become possible, and what would be the potential contribution of “I am because I participate” to such a shift? And what to do in the mean time? To answer these questions a more thorough analysis of both the capitalist economy and ubuntu is needed.

To start with the last: Shutte uses the ethic of ubuntu to evaluate the realities of the world of work in a capitalist economy. Within the context of the global opposition between the developed and undeveloped parts of the world, he refers specifically to “life-destroying poverty and violence that produces in crime and war, in uncontrollable diseases and the disintegration of the natural environment, in lack of basic literacy and useful skills.”<sup>146</sup> These scourges, thanks to modern science and technology, are no longer unavoidable. And yet they are not avoided. We have the power, but do not use it, because our values are not that of ubuntu. A successful businessperson who subscribes to ubuntu would distribute his profits according to the values of personal growth and community. Scarcity is not really an issue, as ubuntu describes a life worth living in ways that would not block fair distribution.

The solution to the predicament according to Shutte is thus a complete change in priorities:

- Subsidiarity between the different levels of organisation must replace the pyramid structure where a small minority at the apex has all the power and wealth.
- Self-realisation through other-dependence.
- Organising the sphere of work for the sake of the personal growth and community of the worker, involving co-ownership and subsidiarity.
- Putting persons before products.<sup>147</sup>

Shutte’s inspirational proposals, however, seem to depend on personal decisions. The problem is that modern economic theory does not recognise any other value than efficiency in the service of greed. Shutte does also not adequately take into account the nature of our time’s dominant institution. Analyses of so-called value-free economics, followed by a

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<sup>146</sup> Shutte 2001:164

<sup>147</sup> Shutte 2001:167-171

characterisation of the contemporary business corporation therefore have to be the next topics.

### **The inhumane commodity economy**

A useful analysis of the process that led to “value-free/scientific” equalling the devaluation of the human is contained in *Beyond poverty and affluence. Towards an economy of care*, originally written in the mid-1980s by Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, two Dutch economists from a Calvinist/Reformed background.<sup>148</sup> Their analysis shows that poverty, environmental degeneration, and structural unemployment belong together. They test the hypothesis that the global crisis might be the result of erroneous linkages between economic theory and practice. It certainly looks as if somebody has made a grave error of calculation somewhere.<sup>149</sup>

Classical economic thought laid the foundation for the calculation that most of Western society now endorses. The classical economists worked in the framework of the philosophical position of Utilitarianism with its “felicific calculus”: happiness is the product of subtracting what is painful (disutilities) from the sum of what is pleasurable (utilities). Marketable goods are utilities, and the toil of labour producing them disutilities. This “happiness equation” is the root of the now ingrained assumption that a rise in the productivity of labour equals an increase in happiness. With this “self-evident truth” go a number of assumptions:

- Happiness is something we achieve and not receive
- The source of happiness lies directly in the amount of goods and services produced and sold in the market
- The less work we do and the more leisure time we have, the happier we are.<sup>150</sup>

The second calculation of the classical economists also gained the status of a self-evident truth in our time – the market is the norm. It must not be interfered with and be followed wherever it goes, and will automatically lead to a better future for all. Adam Smith still had the poor in sight when he believed that the invisible hand of the market will ensure their participation in the expanding wealth. This notion has been translated into the assumption today that a poor country desiring material prosperity must demonstrate its resolve to welcome the free-market

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<sup>148</sup> Goudzwaard, B & De Lange, H 1995. *Beyond poverty and affluence. Towards an economy of care. With a twelve-step program for economic recovery*. Foreword by Maurice F. Strong. Translated and edited by Mark R. Vander Vennen. Grand Rapids, Mic.: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC Publications.

<sup>149</sup> Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995:41-42

<sup>150</sup> Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995:43

economy to its shores, which will mean the end to its “informal” economy, as well as the end to poverty.

Goudzwaard and De Lange find these assumptions not only questionable, but misleading. They are based on the Enlightenment’s naïve belief in human progress, a Deist vision of society, and a mechanistic worldview. Added to that is the assumption of recent modern capitalism that equates positive capital return to the social desirability of a project or product. If people buy it, they must want it, and if they want it, it must be good for society.

This market logic leads one to expect that, proceeding from the basic doctrine of the enlightened self-interest of the individual, and disqualifying any government intervention in the market, following the market will lead to an equal distribution of resources. There is thus no need to consciously address the division of the expanding prosperity. The same goes for the environment (the operation of the natural order allows for unrestricted exploitation) and unemployment (the market will spontaneously increase employment). These assumptions have proved themselves to be misleading in their demonstrable effects. Issues such as the living conditions of the poor, and the work hours of women and children had to be addressed by governments around 1850 as the market was not going to take care of them. Goudzwaard and De Lange points out that Marxism’s response to capitalism was still framed by the classical approach to economics, and that Marx and Engels’ vision of humanity and the environment contains nothing that would prevent them from being turned into objects of progress: “...for *both* Smith and Marx it is *labor* that produces human well-being, and for both, human well-being consists primarily in the abundance of produced material goods, thanks to an unfettered application of industrial technology.”<sup>151</sup> Neoclassical economic thought, for its part, washes its hands of any normativity and merely offers explanations of economic reality and its universally valid laws and undeniable facts. The argument here is that the notion of a “value-free” economic science is a dangerous misconception.

In exploring how the search for a value-free economic science came about, and at what price it could be had, Goudzwaard and De Lange implicates not the usual suspect Adam Smith, but Immanuel Kant. Although Kant’s quest was the possibility of reliable, objective knowledge, he himself starts from a certain form of calculation. He proceeds from the jumble of impressions, a chaos above which hovers the spirit of reason as the beginning of all order. The order in question, however, is not yet a human society, but the order needed for objective knowledge as the driver of science.

When Kant’s ideas were applied to economics, some difficulties arose, as human behaviour is less predictable than the movement of matter in space. And science wants knowledge that is

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<sup>151</sup> Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995:47-48

predictable and certain. Just as Kant was first and foremost concerned about order in thought, his followers in economic theory constructed a thought space within which certainty, elusive in the real world of human behaviour, could be had. The price they had to pay for the construction of this space was to rid the field of study of economics from all changes and developments that contained any seed of uncertainty.

Thus was born the "data circle". Economists, applying what the neo-Kantian Strigl called "economic categories", would be able to say that someone wants something and the amount wanted and that was it. Everything else was "data", as for instance the reasons why the stuff was wanted, or understanding the desire. The factual existence of the desire is taken as a given and is not studied further. The existing social order and nature also fall under data. Economists take them for granted, and any further questions are referred to other disciplines. Only measurable entities fall within the ambit of economic science, which means that economists restrict themselves to the processes of the market mechanism. The price economics has paid for the status of a science, however dismal, is the loss of credibility on four fronts:

- Needs and desires, capricious as they are, are treated as data. Yet, when it comes to meeting these needs, the value of efficiency is introduced. The ban on value considerations is thus only applicable to ends, not to means. And if all needs presented to the market are just accepted, is that not a form of assigning value, of legitimising these needs? And if the ability to act on a need requires material means, is it not logical that the needs of the rich would be legitimised and prioritised? The absence of any tools to do needs criticism seriously jeopardises the credibility of economic science.
- Nature and the environment become data. The environment only registers in economic analysis after its protection is listed as an economic need. Only objects of use are recognised as economic objects of study. Economists refuse to recognise that human living space and human health are legitimate economic objects, because, if they did, they would have to concede that we could economically squander nature, health and the environment. By relinquishing the original task of the economy to care for the household, modern economics suffer a further serious loss of credibility.
- The neoclassical economic approach eliminates the possibility of economic accountability. The exclusion of questions of value from economic science leaves only human actions expressed in prices and quantities for investigation. In this way any assigning of responsibility for economic damages to their economic agents are excluded from the area of competence of economic science. The result is a treatment of the symptoms and never the causes of economic ailments. All desires are treated at face value. "But in so doing modern economic theory fully accommodates itself to our



social order, an order whose deepest structural principle has become this: 'Always obtain more for oneself.'<sup>152</sup>

- Modern economics pushed labour from the centre (where it still was in classical economic thought) to the periphery. As just one of the production factors, labour, along with land and capital, received its economic value from the market. Labour becomes instrumental, without any intrinsic value. The fact that human well-being depends to a large extent on the quality of work is ignored. Yet, the loss of the quality of work is not measurable and does not register in the market – people do not spend money on it. Further, only compensated work constitutes labour in the labour market. People not involved in paid work falls outside the economic reality recognised by modern economics. And yet it is often the unpaid work done in the informal sectors of many poor countries that keep those societies afloat.

The adverse effects on society and the environment of the capitalist economy are not accidental, but can be traced to its core assumptions.

### **Modern Economics from the Perspective of African Philosophy**

I now introduce alternative visions from philosophers from a culture that has a clear recollection of a different way of doing things. One should, of course, speak of African philosophies, as there are as many perspectives as there are philosophers. And yet, there are also commonalities that justify the distinction between African and Western philosophy. From the points of view of intrinsic value and the ontological priority of community in African philosophy Ramose critiques the globalised economy. He makes the following points:<sup>153</sup>

- Everything in the globalised economic system is subordinated to profitability, even labour.
- Profitability is indissolubly linked to marketability.
- The marketability of everything means the commoditisation of everything for the sake of maximum profit.
- Economic fundamentalism is a religion, the dogma of which is constituted by
  - Dislocation of industry
  - Deregulation
  - Maximum profit.

Ramose evaluates the global economy in terms of a holistically conceived notion of human rights informed by ubuntu philosophy. The central human right is the right to life, which

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<sup>152</sup> Goudzwaard & De Lange 1995:55

<sup>153</sup> Ramose 1999:167

implies every individual's freedom to strive towards the defence and protection of his/her life. With the right to life, the right to work is also given, as is the right to property. Further, the right to food is presupposed by the right to life. An individual's striving to stay alive is limited by what is acceptable to social morality, and by the requirements of natural, and in particular, distributive justice. The latter presupposes that all humans are of equal worth, and thus an equal claim to the right to life. It further acknowledges the need for distributive mechanisms in the face of scarcity. The right to life is more original than society and society recognises this right and proceeds to make rules for its protection and control. The contract theory of the state is all about the voluntary consent of the members of society to exercise their right to life in accordance with agreed upon rules. According to Ramose:

The actualisation of this right means unimpeded access to food even though this may be subject to certain rules. It is hardly conceivable, therefore, that in assuming membership of a state, human beings can willingly enter into a contract negating and abrogating their right to life in the sense of denying themselves the natural duty to acquire and own the necessities of staying alive.<sup>154</sup>

The state does not assign the rights, but recognises them. The market, however, is inextricably bound to profit-making, and thus undermines the foundation of the state. Not the inalienable human right to subsistence, but money now enjoys absolute sovereignty. Even the value of the human being is determined by money. It is simultaneously the measure of value (substance), and the means of exchange (function). This translates into the sovereignty of the economy, the reality of our time.<sup>155</sup> The "deadly logic" of economic sovereignty subordinates labour (the right to subsistence) to the privilege of being employed.<sup>156</sup> In this way millions are precluded from the right to subsistence.

Precluding millions or people from the right to subsistence flies in the face of a further aphorism of ubuntu philosophy: "if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life."<sup>157</sup> The individual human being is thus "the basic and primary value of all values."<sup>158</sup> Western human rights philosophy agrees on this point. But the free market undermines the credibility of the rights corpus. Ramose identifies the difference between a Western conceptualisation of human rights and ubuntu philosophy of human rights as one of conceptual emphasis:

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<sup>154</sup> Ramose 1999:183

<sup>155</sup> Ramose 1999:188

<sup>156</sup> Ramose 1999:190

<sup>157</sup> Ramose 1999:194

<sup>158</sup> Ramose 1999:194

The Western human rights philosophy emphasises the idea of the human as a fragmented entity upon whom rights may be pasted on the basis of contingency, whereas the African conception underlines the idea of a human being as a wholeness acquiring rights as such. ... It follows then that far from being nostalgia for an obsolete tradition, the invocation of the *ubuntu* human rights philosophy is a credible challenge to the deadly logic of the pursuit of profit at the expense of preserving human life.<sup>159</sup>

Elsewhere, in the article "The ethics of *ubuntu*" Ramose himself recognises the problem of "[a]cting according to this maxim in a context dominated by the precepts of the free enterprise economic system".<sup>160</sup> But that article does not proceed much further than "prescribing mutual recognition and respect complemented by mutual care and sharing".<sup>161</sup> The problem formulated by Guy and alluded to be Ramose of "the continued existence of a humane concept in inhumane conditions"<sup>162</sup> makes a mockery of ethics and undermines the legitimacy of human rights. In order to explore further the differences between a human-oriented and a thing-oriented economic system, the views of some other African philosophers will now be presented.

According to Hegel civil society originates to regulate the multiplication of needs. Renate Schepen has found that needs so conceived do not play a major role in African philosophy.<sup>163</sup> In the absence of a well developed concept of civil society, African philosophers emphasise the role of family. The whole of humanity is seen as a large family. The fulfilment of the own needs cannot be separated from the fulfilment of the needs of other. Hegel's notion that the recognition of the needs of the other is limited to the sphere of the family, while in society one only cares about your own needs, is foreign to African tradition. According to the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye, Akan social philosophy does not oppose the common good to the individual good.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ramose 1999:195

<sup>160</sup> Ramose, MB 2002. The ethics of *ubuntu*. In Coetzee, PH & Roux, APJ (eds) 2002. *Philosophy from Africa. Second Edition. A Text with readings*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 324-330, 329.

<sup>161</sup> Ramose 2002:329

<sup>162</sup> Guy 2006:45

<sup>163</sup> Schepen, R 2004. Mooier dan goud. Een filosofische diagnose van armoede. Doctoraalscriptie Praktische Filosofie: Sociale wijsbegeerte en Wijsgerige ethiek voor de Faculteit der Wijsbegeerte van die Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

<sup>164</sup> Gyekye, K 1987. *An essay on African philosophical thought: the Akan conceptual scheme*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poverty in a traditional African community is defined in terms of basic needs: food, shelter and clothing. If these needs are fulfilled, a person can no longer be called poor. Someone who constantly would want more (as described in Hegel's conceptualisation of civil society) would be seen as greedy. In an interview with Schepen, Gyekye made mention of the criterion of the violation of someone's humanity. Deprivation that leaves one's humanity in tact does not qualify to be called poverty.<sup>165</sup> The fulfilment of the basic needs of the other is a goal in itself in a traditional community, and corresponds to the idea of humanity as one large family. Each has a moral duty to care for others. Gyekye typifies a traditional African society as a caring society.<sup>166</sup> The family must provide in the basic needs of all its members, irrespective of their contributions to the family.

The late Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka also takes the family as his point of departure in developing a "parental earth ethics".<sup>167</sup> Odera Oruka advocates global justice that would include the right of everybody to a subsistence minimum:

For all human beings to function with a significant degree of rationality and self-awareness, they need a certain minimum amount of physical security, health care, and subsistence ... Below this minimum one may still be human and alive. But one cannot successfully carry out the functions of a moral agent or engage in creative activity.<sup>168</sup>

These are minimum conditions for the maintenance of humaneness in the universe and are therefore the concern of a universal ethics.

Odera Oruka is concerned about global survival that is in the balance due to global capitalism's destructive successes. Social inequality and ecological catastrophe are related effects of Judaeo-Christian individualism typified by Odera Oruka as "possessive individualism" that disrupts the "complex web of being" of which humans are a part.<sup>169</sup> A change in perspective to a view that regards humans as part of nature is necessary in epistemology. "Parental Earth

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<sup>165</sup> Schepen 2004:43

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Schepen 2004:43

<sup>167</sup> Odera Oruka, H & Juma, C 1996. Ecophilosophy and Parental Earth Ethics (On the Complex Web of Being) in: Odera Oruka, H (ed.) 1996. *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology. Vol. 1: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics*. Nairobi: DIANE Publishing Company; Odera Oruka, H 1993. Parental Earth Ethics. *Quest 7*; Odera Oruka, H 1997. The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to a Human Minimum, in: Graness, A & Kresse, K (eds.) 1997. *Sagacious Reasoning. H. Odera Oruka in memoriam*. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 47-59

<sup>168</sup> Odera Oruka 1997:53

<sup>169</sup> Odera Oruka 1996:115

Ethics" is a proposal for such a new perspective that honours the interrelatedness of all the parts of the whole.

The family serves as a metaphor for the current world situation. All members have a common origin, but the fate of the different members depends on a variety of factors, including individual luck and talents. Two principles govern the relationships of the individuals to the family (community), the parental debt principle; and the individual luck principle. The two fundamental principles are further divided into specific rules:

1. Rules that describe specific duties of the individual to the family<sup>170</sup>
  - 1.1 Family security rule (all members remain dependent on the protection of the family however self-sufficient they may be at any specific moment in time).
  - 1.2 Kinship shame rule (the life conditions of a member impact on that of the other and no member, however fortunate, can be happy if a sibling lives in squalor).
  - 1.3 Original debt rule (nobody is solely responsible for his/her affluence or misfortune)
  - 1.4 Individual and family survival rule (those suffering misfortune may ask for, actually demand support, but their resources could also be appropriated by other members if they squander them, to be used productively for the common good).
2. Rules that protect individual property and the right to use individually produced surplus to individual advantage.<sup>171</sup>
  - 2.1 Personal achievement rule (what the person possesses is due to his/her special talents)
  - 2.2 Personal supererogation rule (everyone can do with their possessions as they please)
  - 2.3 Family public law rule (any family member who contravenes the right of another will be subjected to family public law and punished or reprimanded and ordered to restore justice).

The parental debt principle always trumps the individual luck principle, should conflicts arise. Individual freedom is limited by concern for the community. But individual luck is a principle, and thus Odera Oruka acknowledges the role of reward for individual efforts in economic development. Personal responsibility for one's fate is also given due regard.

Odera Oruka has chosen the metaphor of the family to express the organic unity of nature. The element of kinship is essential for an ethics of universal reciprocal responsibility. Environmental protection and redistribution of wealth amongst the nations of the world are both based in this earth ethics, which is "parental" in being first in the sense of original, the basis for all further ethics. Social theory and ecological thinking are interrelated on the basis of the complex web of being.

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<sup>170</sup> Odera Oruka 1996:123-124

<sup>171</sup> Odera Oruka 1999:125

The inclusion of voices such as that of Ramose and Odera Oruka is informed by the dialogical approach to articulating poverty and conceptualising its eradication followed here. The theoretical framework of this approach is Heinz Kimmerle's intercultural philosophy and Hardt and Negri's recognition of immaterial labour as the emerging form of production, characterised by the production of knowledge, communication, social relations and cooperation. The title of this article, however, functions as a constant reminder of the methodological principle of Marx that social theory should reflect social reality. Social reality is that the poor as the majority of the world population are adversely incorporated into the world economy, that the income gap between the rich and the poor is becoming ever larger and that the disregard of and disrespect for the poor are mirrored in the dominant view of nature. I will now address the crucial question – what is the dominant institution of our time and how is it constructed?

### **The Corporation: Dominant Institution of our Time**

How does the world work for capitalism in the age of globalisation? The documentary film "The Corporation" by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan, based on the book by the latter titled *The Corporation. The pathological pursuit of profit and power*,<sup>172</sup> powerfully makes the point that the modern business corporation is the dominant institution of our time. Just as the church ruled the medieval period and the state the modern period, the business corporation is a pervasive presence in all our lives. In order to understand "how the world actually works," one should find out how the corporation works. I rely here on the film and the book for insight into the dominant institution of our time.

The main legal innovation that made possible the modern corporation was when it assumed the status of a legal person, as archival footage used in the film explains:

Incorporating would give you the big advantage of what you want right now — limited liability. You start with a group of people, who want to invest their money in a company. Then these people apply for a charter as a corporation. This government issues a charter to that corporation. Now that corporation operates legally as an individual person. It is not a group of people. It is under the law, a legal person.<sup>173</sup>

Of this legal innovation, commentators have the following to say:

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<sup>172</sup> Bakan, J 2004. *The Corporation. The pathological pursuit of profit and power*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>173</sup> For transcripts of all interviews and archival footage used in the film, see

[http://www.thecorporation.com/media/Transcript\\_finalpt1%20copy.pdf](http://www.thecorporation.com/media/Transcript_finalpt1%20copy.pdf) and

[http://www.thecorporation.com/media/Transcript\\_finalpt2%20copy.pdf](http://www.thecorporation.com/media/Transcript_finalpt2%20copy.pdf). See also the film's synopsis:

[http://www.thecorporation.com/index.cfm?page\\_id=312](http://www.thecorporation.com/index.cfm?page_id=312).

The 14th Amendment was passed at the end of the Civil War to give equal rights to black people. And therefore it said, "no State can deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law." And that was intended to prevent the States from taking away life, liberty or property from black people as they had done for so much of our history. And what happens is the corporations come into court and corporation lawyers are very clever, and they say, "oh you can't deprive a person of life, liberty or property. We are a person, a corporation is a person." And so Supreme Court goes along with that. (Howard Zinn, Historian)

And what was particularly grotesque about this was that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed to protect newly freed slaves. So, for instance, between 1890 and 1910, there were 307 cases brought before the court under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. 288 of these [were] brought by corporations, 19 by African Americans. (Mary Zepernick, Coordinator, Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy)

Six hundred thousand people were killed to get rights for people, and then with strokes of the pen over the next thirty years, *judges* applied those rights to capital and property while *stripping them* from people. (Richard Grossman, Cofounder, Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy)

The film then enquires brilliantly into *what kind of person* a corporation is. Using the Personality Diagnostic Checklist of the World Health Organization, and proceeding from the rationale of "externalities" (the corporation's operating principle of externalising the costs to society of its operations) the corporation is diagnosed with a highly anti-social "personality": it is self-interested, inherently amoral, callous and deceitful; it breaches social and legal standards to get its way; it does not suffer from guilt, yet it can mimic the human qualities of empathy, caring and altruism. Thus, the institutional embodiment of global capitalism fully meets the diagnostic criteria of a "psychopath."

Another crucial point the film makes, once again brilliantly, is to show the discrepancy between the moral uprightness of the managers and employees of corporations, and the total disregard for any considerations apart from maximising profit of the corporation itself. A poignant scene in the film is where Sir Mark Moody-Stuart (at the time Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell) and his wife serve tea on their lawn to an outfit of Earth First activists who arrived on the doorstep of their country home. The protesters chanted and stretched a banner over their roof that read, "Murderers". Note that the couple did not call the police. They are extremely nice and civilised people who rather engaged their uninvited guests in a dialogue about human rights and the environment. They even apologized for not being able to provide

soy milk for their vegan critics' tea, while a few thousand kilometres away Shell Nigeria was flaring copious amounts of gas, making it one of the world's single worst sources of pollution. And then there is Ken Saro Wiwa and the other eight, of course, but let's not spoil a good argument with unfair insinuations. We all know Shell carried no influence with the Nigerian dictators. They were just doing their best to get cheap fuel to the service station where I routinely fill up my tank in order to do my bit of burning natural resources and adding to the carbon overload. One of the commentators in the film compares the corporation to a shark:

A corporation is an externalizing machine in the same way that a shark is a killing machine. Each one is designed in a very efficient way, to accomplish particular objectives. In the achievement of those objectives, there isn't any question of malevolence or of will, the enterprise has within it, and the shark has within it, those characteristics that enable it to do that for which it was designed. (Robert Monks, corporate governance advisor)

The third point of interest here, persuasively made by the film, is the role of corporations in the commoditisation of literally everything. Corporations have no built-in limits on what, who, or how much they can exploit for profit. In the fifteenth century, the enclosure movement began to put fences around public grazing lands so that they might be privately owned and exploited. This was no doubt a reaction to "the tragedy of the commons", as some of the pro-corporation commentators in the film try to explain. Today, even living organisms are patented:

We've all been hearing about the announcement, that we have mapped the human genome. But what the public doesn't know, is now there's a great race by genomic companies, and biotech companies, and life science companies, to find the treasure in the map. The treasure are the individual genes that make up the blueprint of the human race. Every time they capture a gene and isolate it, these biotech companies they claim it as intellectual property. The breast cancer gene, the cystic fibrosis gene ... it goes on, and on, and on. If this goes unchallenged in the world community, within less than ten years, a handful of global companies will own, directly, or through license the actual genes that make up the evolution of our species. And they're now beginning to patent the genomes of every other creature on this planet. (Jeremy Rifkin, President, Foundation on Economic Trends)

The film shows how corporations have invested billions to shape public and political opinion. It asks the pertinent question: When they own everything, who will stand for the public good?



In the Age of Biology the politics is going to sort out between those who believe life first has intrinsic value, and therefore we should choose technologies and commercial venues that honor the intrinsic value. And then we're going to have people who believe, "Look, life is simple utility. Its commercial fare", and they will line up with the idea to let the marketplace be the ultimate arbiter of all of the Age of Biology. (Jeremy Rifkin, President, Foundation on Economic Trends)

The complicity of "the knowledge industry" (what used to be the academy) in assisting corporations in maximising profits is another startling finding of the film. The Initiative Corporation used child psychiatry to help corporations formulate their ads and promotions so that children would nag for their products more effectively.

They are tomorrow's adult consumers, so start talking with them now, build that relationship when they're younger... and you've got them as an adult.

Somebody asked me, "Lucy is that ethical?" You're essentially manipulating these children. Well, yeah, is it ethical? I don't know. But our, our role at Initiative is to move products. And if we know you move products with a certain creative execution placed in a certain type of media vehicle then we've done our job.

You can manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying your products. It's a game. (Lucy Hughes, Vice President, Initiative Media; Co-Creator, The Nag Factor)

The film also makes the point that democracy is a value that the corporation just does not understand. Corporations have actually often tried to undo democracy if it presented an obstacle to their single-minded drive for profit. And corporations do not hesitate to take advantage of democracy's absence either. One of the most shocking stories of the film is about IBM's strategic alliance with Nazi Germany in doing the computing for the extermination camps.

As our time's dominant institution, the corporation also dominates our way of thinking:

The goal for the corporations is to maximize profit and market share. And they also have a goal for their target, namely the population. They have to be turned into completely mindless consumers of goods that they do not want. You have to develop what are called "created wants". So you have to create wants. You have to impose on people what's called a philosophy of futility. You have to focus them on the insignificant things of life, like fashionable consumption. I'm just basically quoting business literature. And it makes perfect sense. The ideal is to have individuals who

are totally disassociated from one another. Whose conception of themselves, the sense of value, is just how many created wants can I satisfy. (Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor, MIT)

Part and parcel of the creation of a way of thinking, is the prescription of roles:

Every institution provides the people who are members of it with a social role to occupy. And typically institutions that are vibrant and have a lot of power, will specify that role in some sense as a list of virtues. It's true for churches, for schools, for any institution that has power over people and shapes them. The corporation likewise. It provides us with a list of virtues, a kind of social role, which is the "good consumer". (Mark Kingwell, Philosopher)

According to Chomsky the driving force behind privatisation is not only profit for Wall Street but also the reinforcement of the corporation's particular conception of humanity. Privatisation of the social security system is designed in part "to undermine the very dangerous principle on which Social Security rests, namely ... that you care about whether a widow down the street has something to eat. You're not supposed to do that. You are supposed to only gain wealth, forgetting about all but self..."<sup>174</sup> Bakan concludes: "A century and a half after its birth, the modern business corporation, and artificial person made in the image of a human psychopath, now is seeking to remake real people in *its* image."<sup>175</sup>

Branding is an integral part of this process. Naomi Klein, author of the groundbreaking *No Logo*, and more recently of *The Shock Doctrine*, explains the difference between branding and advertising:

When I was researching the take over of public space when I started off I thought okay this is just advertising. We've always had advertising. It's just more advertising. But what I started to understand and what I understand now is that branding is not advertising it's production. And very successful corporations, the corporations of the future do not produce products. They produced brand meaning. The dissemination of the idea of themselves is their act of production. And the dissemination of the idea of themselves is an enormously invasive project. So how do you make a brand idea real? Well, a good place to start is by building a three dimensional manifestation of your brand. For a company like Disney it goes even further where it's actually building a town, Celebration Florida. Their inspiration, their brand image, is the all American family. And the sort of bygone American town. And that's where you see the truly

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<sup>174</sup> Quoted in Bakan 2004:135

<sup>175</sup> Bakan 2004:135

imperialist aspirations of branding which is about building these privatized branded cocoons. Which maybe you start by shopping in and then you continue by holidaying in but eventually why not just move in? (Naomi Klein, Canadian journalist)

What is happening in a corporation-dominated society is the subjugation of *everything* to the commercial.

What happens if we wake up one day, and we find out that virtually all of our relationships that are mediated between us and our fellow human beings are commercial? We find out that virtually every relationship we have is a commercially arbitrated relationship with our fellow human being? Can civilization survive on that narrow a definition of how we interact with each other? (Jeremy Rifkin, President, Foundation on Economic Trends)

The documentary filmmaker and provocateur extraordinaire Michael Moore comments on the poverty of connection that results from such a reduction:

I went to Littleton Colorado, where the Columbine shooting took place, and I didn't know this, but when I arrived, I learned what the primary job is of the parents of the kids who go to Columbine High School. The number one job in Littleton Colorado: they work for Lockheed Martin, building weapons of mass destruction. But they don't see the connect between what they do for a living and what their kids do at school. Or *did* at school. And so I'm kind of, you know, up on my, you know, high horse, thinking about this, and I thought, you know, I said to my wife, we both are sons and daughters of auto workers in Flint Michigan. There isn't a single one of us, back in Flint—any of us, including us—who ever stopped to think, this thing we do for a living, the building of automobiles, is probably the single biggest reason why the polar ice caps are going to melt and end civilization as we know it. There's no connect between, "I'm just an assembler on an assembly line, building a car, which is good for people, and society, it moves them around." But never stop to think about the larger picture, and the larger responsibility, of what we're doing. Ultimately, we have to, as individuals, accept responsibility for our collective action and the larger harm that it causes, you know, in our world. (Michael Moore, documentary filmmaker)

With regard to the specific issue of global poverty, the film shows how corporations regard the poor as consumers (commoditised essential services), cheap labour (sweat shops in export processing zones), or not at all.

With regard to the sweat shops:

We went through the garbage dump in the Dominican Republic. We always do this kind of stuff, we dig around. One day we found a big pile of Nike's internal pricing documents. Nike assigns a time frame to each operation. They don't talk about minutes. They break the time frame into ten thousandths of a second. You get to the bottom of all 22 operations, they give the workers 6.6 minutes to make the shirt. Its seventy cents an hour in the Dominican Republic. That's 6.6 minutes, equals eight cents. These are Nike's documents. That means the wages come to three tenths of one percent of retail price. This is the reality. It's the science of exploitation. (Charles Kernaghan, Director of the US National Labor Committee in Support of Human and Worker Rights)

Not everybody, however, agrees that this is a bad practice:

Let's look at it from a different point of view. Let's look at it from the point of view of the, the people in Bangladesh who are starving to death, the people in China who are starving to death and the only thing that they have to offer to anybody that is worth anything is their low cost labour. And in effect what they're saying to the world is they have this big flag that says "come over and hire us, we will work for ten cents an hour. Because ten cents an hour will buy us the rice that we need not to starve. And come and rescue us from our circumstance." And so when Nike comes in they are regarded by everybody in the community as an enormous godsend.

What happens in the areas where these corporations go in and are successful? They soon find that they can't do anymore in that country because the wages are too high now. And what's that another way of saying— well the people are no longer desperate. So okay we've used up all the desperate people there they're all plump and healthy and wealthy. Let's move on to the next desperate lot and employ them and raise their level up. (Michael Walker, Fraser Institute, a "market solutions" think tank)

The film is on Kernaghan's side. Kernaghan provides the film with one of the answers to the "what can we do" question. His exposure of the use of Honduran child labourers to make items for Kathy Lee Gifford's clothing line sold in Wal-Mart stores across the world, is often cited as the beginning of mainstream media coverage of the sweatshop phenomenon. His organisation was also involved in a 2003 class action lawsuit filed by sweatshop workers in Saipan. The allegations included unsafe working conditions, forced abortion policies and "off the clock" hours, where workers were not paid for working overtime. A settlement of 20 million dollars was reached whereby The Gap clothing distributors did not admit liability. In the mean time they have apparently significantly cleaned up their act. Kernaghan:

Sometimes it surprises me how effective you can actually be. After we beat the Gap I walked past these Gap stores and I looked at them and I think my god there's like 2000 of these stores across the country. Look at all that concrete, look at the glass, look at all the staff people, look at all the clothing. Look at that power. You can still reach these companies. You can still have an effect. (Charles Kernaghan, Director of the US National Labor Committee in Support of Human and Worker Rights)

Although the film ends on a surprisingly hopeful note, the immediate prospects are bleak. The assumption that I am testing is that partnerships with businesses from the "first economy" are feasible, and that such partnerships would be good for Pela Nambu supported cooperative businesses. In view of the inherent operating principle of corporations, the answer is clear: Such partnerships will only come about if they will be profitable for the business partners, and profitability for the business partners will not necessarily spell advantage for the Pela Nambu affiliated enterprises. In the South African context, however, profitability must reckon with a number of regulations and charters, of which Black Economic Empowerment is the most prominent. But with all the talk of a revival of the concept of citizenship, and the demands of corporate social responsibility influencing the decisions of large companies, a question to be answered is whether there is any realistic hope that Pela Nambu affiliated enterprises will reap the benefits of social corporate responsibility initiatives. A recently published book investigates just this issue, the volume edited by David Fig *Staking their claims. Corporate social and environmental responsibility in South Africa*.<sup>176</sup>

### **Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility in South Africa**

According to Bezuidenhout, Fig, Hamann & Omar, the industrial policies of the apartheid state contained three key elements.<sup>177</sup> Firstly, import substitution industrialisation was aimed at protecting local industries from competition. Secondly, the state set up state-owned corporations to drive a programme of industrialisation. Thirdly, a dual labour market was created, with black labour excluded from the limited welfare provisions and labour rights enjoyed by whites. The environment also suffered from apartheid's pattern of industrialisation and land use. Here is a significant link between poverty and environmental degradation, as the negative impact on the environment was primarily felt by the poor.<sup>178</sup> As a child growing up in what was in the 1970s becoming the totally overpopulated "homeland" of Qwa-Qwa I

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<sup>176</sup> Fig 2007

<sup>177</sup> Bezuidenhout, A *et al* 2007. Political economy. In Fig, D 2007. *Staking their claims. Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility in South Africa*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 13-94.

<sup>178</sup> Bezuidenhout *et al* 2007:15

witnessed first hand the devastating effects of this infamous policy on the beautiful but extremely fragile environment of the Maluti foothills. Bezuidenhout *et al*/list other examples, of which the mining industry is paradigmatic for the disregard of the inherent worth of both poor labourers and the environment in the exploitation of the mineral riches on which the economic development of the country depended. One of the major South African debates was on the relationship between business and the apartheid state. On the one side of the “race/class debate” were the revisionists, among them Harold Wolpe (see above), who argued that major corporations had been central to the creation of the apartheid system. On the other hand the liberals argued that apartheid was bad for business and its regulations an obstacle in the way of the development of an industrial capitalist economy.

From today’s perspective it would seem that the liberals won, as the democratic government has consistently come out in support of big business, refusing to back any claims or lawsuits demanding compensation for apartheid-era profits. The point made by Bezuidenhout *et al*/ is that the beefing up of Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSER) initiatives was a strategy, in addition to the co-opting of elements of the new leadership, “to ameliorate any severe critique of the record of business under apartheid”.<sup>179</sup> Business lobbies eventually succeeded in convincing the government to abandon the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), on the basis of which it won the 1994 election, in favour of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme (GEAR). This already happened in 1996, and some of the consequences were:

- The model of multi-stakeholder policy-making made way for a less transparent, less participatory, more pro-corporate top-down approach.
- The more rigorous implementation of privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation, with a resultant loss of jobs, and more flexible labour and environmental protection standards.
- Service delivery was now defined as a non-core function, to be outsourced and privatised, with the result that the poor were excluded from essential services.
- The shedding of capacity, with detrimental effects on the state’s ability to regulate the private sector and enforce compliance to standards.

On the basis of these developments Bezuidenhout *et al*/ conclude: “Thus the state actively forfeited its role as an agent of redistribution in a country whose levels of wealth and poverty are extreme. Under GEAR, there was neither growth nor more employment nor a significant degree of redistribution.”<sup>180</sup> With a state not willing, and where willing not able to enforce measures that would address the dire consequences of apartheid for society and the

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<sup>179</sup> Bezuidenhout *et al*/2007:21

<sup>180</sup> Bezuidenhout *et al*/2007:25

environment, the stakes were high for the success of CSER programmes undertaken by business. The outcome was predictably disappointing. We have learnt enough of the inherent nature of the corporation as the dominant institution of our time to know, in spite of all talk of the triple bottom line, that there is in reality only one bottom line and that the other two will always serve the one. The shareholders will always trump the stakeholders. The finding regarding environmental responsibility:

The corporate focus on feel-good community and biodiversity enhancement projects often represents attempts to create more positive corporate images while diverting consumers away from the fundamental question of how to ensure that there is at least corporate environmental compliance with existing national norms and standards, especially on pollution and waste management. Until this can be resolved satisfactorily, corporate environmental responsibility will remain in the realm of public relations and greenwash, rendering private sector initiatives susceptible to accusations of business as usual, narrow self-interest, and an ability to redress the unjust environmental legacy of the apartheid past.<sup>181</sup>

How could this be resolved? Interestingly enough the corporations with the best scorecards are multinationals that are subject to international codes of conduct.<sup>182</sup> The effect of global conscientisation is therefore not to be overlooked. But severe gaps and contradictions exist. South African firms prefer a more voluntary corporate social investment (CSI) approach, which can be justified as investment with a possible return, be it in the form of enhanced reputation, markets or brand recognition. It is also in line with South African business' consistent denial, also during the years of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, of past abuse, and thus a shunning of responsibility: "Development is therefore seen as an add-on option rather than as an integral part of taking responsibility for restitution."<sup>183</sup> To be sure, CSER is primarily about how profits are made in the first place, and not merely about how a certain proportion of profits is spent on worthy causes, which is what CSI as philanthropy boils down to.<sup>184</sup>

The intersection of the social and the environmental is evidenced in the current sustainable development discourse. The old conflict between environmental protection and economic development was addressed in the Brundlandt Report *Our Common Future* (1987) that introduced the concept sustainable development. It even found its way into the 1996 South

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<sup>181</sup> Bezuidenhout *et al* 2007:30

<sup>182</sup> See Fig, D 2007. The context of corporate social and environmental responsibility. In Fig, D (ed.) 2007. *Staking their claims. Corporate Social and environmental Responsibility in South Africa*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 1-11, 5.

<sup>183</sup> Fig 2007:8

<sup>184</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:39

African constitution, and thus into the popular vocabulary. At the NEPAD and Social Development Conference at the University of Venda in 2005 I became aware of a certain inflation suffered by the “sustainable” part of the word pair. Sustainable development has just become a way of political-correctly saying “development”, or “a synonym for poverty eradication”.<sup>185</sup> Although the more holistic approach should be lauded, as it recognises the inter-relationship of disregard for the environment and for people, the consequence has been that the “new discourse on sustainable development in South Africa, especially in official and business circles, seems indistinguishable from classic modernisation narratives, with the added business imperative of good neighbourliness.”<sup>186</sup> I could not find a better example of the absurdity of this diluted approach to CSER as the fact that the 2002 best sustainability reports, hosted by KPMG, was won by none other than – wait for it – British American Tobacco of South Africa. Bezuidenhout *et al* prove themselves as masters of the understatement with their comment: “it could be argued that [BAT’s] core business is fundamentally at odds with social responsibility.”<sup>187</sup> Michael Moore would have been delighted.

What is clearly needed is an ethics of responsibility. The study *Staking their claims* devotes a chapter to CSER in the food and drink sector, and concludes that little responsibility is taken by the industry to ensure food security within South Africa:

This would entail taking an interest in supporting land restitution, small-scale agriculture, adequate extension for small farmers, low input and organic farming practices, affordable food prices, and the like. Apart from some limited forays into short-term hunger relief, the food and drink industry remains aloof from taking on such broader responsibilities.<sup>188</sup>

The result of the enquiry is that the private sector cannot “voluntarily redress some of the worst social inequality on the planet”. In South Africa

CSER is still too fragmented and partial to be effective on its own as a tool for transformation. Social and environmental transformation in South Africa cannot be delivered voluntarily in the marketplace. In the context of a developing country with such a high degree of social exclusion, it is still necessary to build compliance through enhancing the state’s capacities in fiscal, regulatory and enforcement arenas.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:42

<sup>186</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:42

<sup>187</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:54

<sup>188</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:86

<sup>189</sup> Bezuidenhout et al 2007:87



But what then of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)? This is one area where the state has enforced regulations. Southall and Sanchez investigate the interrelationship between BEE and CSER.<sup>190</sup> They ask two questions:

- To what extent is BEE seen as a fundamental aspect of CSER by established corporations?
- To what extent do black-owned corporations see themselves committed to the further pursuit of CSER?

The answer to the first question is that the corporate sector is taking BEE seriously as an integral part of CSER. The flipside is a tendency to claim that the wider social obligations are met by doing only what government requires, and that, at the time of the research on which Southall and Sanchez based their findings, was BEE within a framework that remains further unaltered in terms of how profits are made. The result is the creation of a black corporate elite and not the empowerment of the wider black community.<sup>191</sup> The ANC was complicit in this by legitimising the new black capitalist class as "patriotic bourgeoisie".<sup>192</sup>

The reasons for this are relevant for the Pela Nambu initiative. The main problem of poverty against the background of South Africa's apartheid history is that blacks lack capital and can thus not participate on an equal footing with whites in the capitalist economy. According to Southall and Sanchez, this problem can be solved in three ways:

- Blacks must be given or loaned capital by the private sector
- Blacks must be granted favourable opportunities by the state
- Blacks must club together as multiple individuals to consolidate small savings into meaningful amounts.<sup>193</sup>

Pela Nambu, based on the concept of the poor person's capital, and on the principle of participation, relies on all three, with the last coming first. This could be seen to be commensurate with the ideals of the national democratic revolution, the historical ideological position of the ANC. Legitimising emergent black capitalists as patriotic can be deconstructed to contain the hope that "a pool of activist capitalists would undertake business, invest in the country and create jobs ... making capitalism more humane and sharing the benefits of

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<sup>190</sup> Southall, R & Sanchez, D 2007. The impact of Black Economic Empowerment. In Fig, D (ed.) *Staking their claims. Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility in South Africa*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 207-240.

<sup>191</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:237

<sup>192</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:223

<sup>193</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:222-223

capitalist accumulation.”<sup>194</sup> There is the further hope that black capitalists would retain their responsibility towards the communities from which they have come. Southall & Sanchez point to the severe tension that exists between these two notions.<sup>195</sup> Capital accumulation runs counter to social obligations. The temptation of Milton Friedman-type economic orthodoxy would be great – a business, black owned or not, pays taxes and provides employment and whatever more is claimed from it would amount to theft. And to expect black-owned business to diminish their survival chances in a hostile environment by exposing themselves to additional bottom-lines, would be unfair. What is more, Southall and Sanchez have found that black businesspeople regard themselves as patriotic by just being black and successful in business, and that they have no further social debts to pay as white businesses have.

This is the dilemma faced by Pela Nambu, too, and the reason it insists on investing in cooperative enterprises is to prevent its beneficiaries from shedding their social responsibilities. But I have elsewhere demonstrated that the cooperative form of enterprise in a cut-throat business environment might expose the inexperienced beginner business persons to undue risk. A broadly defined definition of corporate citizenship that operates with a strong emphasis on responsibility will have to be embraced by Black empowered companies, too. Southall and Sanchez conclude by formulating a vision that corresponds significantly with that of Pela Nambu:

To be sure, community and union-based collective funding of black-owned industry may be an important step towards the elaboration of a vision of socially responsible stakeholder capitalism that avoids the excesses of both the colonial and contemporary American corporate models.<sup>196</sup>

For Pela Nambu and similar initiatives to work, BEE companies will have to recognise that patriotism narrowly defined is not enough.

The history of labour union investment companies is instructive in this regard. A number of unions have set up investment arms that paid returns into trusts. The income received by such a trust would typically be distributed to union members or their families by way of education bursaries or housing loans, etc. A lot of money was at stake and the merchant banks and financial services companies got interested. But the union investment companies had their roots in worker-based and cooperative self-help initiatives and intended their assets to be used for broad-based BEE and as a vehicle for the restructuring of the South African political economy. Union investment should differ from capitalist investment by prioritising social

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<sup>194</sup> Hassen, quoted in Southall & Sanchez 2007:223.

<sup>195</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:223-224

<sup>196</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:237

responsibility. Such an approach, according to the counter argument, would put worker's money at risk, or not get the highest returns. In practice, the "very preliminary analysis" of Southall and Sanchez suggests that the potential of union investments for promoting broad-based BBE and/or socially responsible investment "has only been modestly realised" due to a lack of a clear political strategy and policy guidelines.<sup>197</sup>

The dilemma of the conflict between safe and maximum profit investment and social and environmentally responsible investment could only be resolved if enough resources are made available to create the environment in which alternative enterprises could survive. The input of Dr Kosie van Zyl in the Pela Nambu deliberations in this regard is to be taken seriously.<sup>198</sup> Van Zyl emphasised the importance of holding the hands of the people involved in start-up businesses. The quality and frequency of mentoring and support will determine success or failure. The experience with the establishment of Financial Service Cooperatives (FSCs) is instructive. These were registered under the Act on Cooperatives and although they were deposit-taking organisations, they were exempted from the Banking Act. According to Van Zyl, this action of the state resulted in a nightmare. The state only made R1 million available for information campaigns, training, establishment and monitoring. Only four of the 170 FSCs survived, and with the other collapsed the credibility of the driver of the initiative, the Department of Agriculture. At the Muhammad Yunus micro-credit seminar hosted by the University of Venda in 2006, on occasion of Yunus receiving an honorary doctorate from that university, repeated mention was made of the problematic nature of the South African culture around these matters, especially when the state is involved. Compared to a country like India, for instance, there seems to be a lack of seriousness about the payback of loans. Government officials are keen to write off debt, especially against the backdrop of less than satisfactory service delivery and a spirit of entitlement.

Pela Nambu would need a powerful and determined driver with a well established presence and enough support from big money and with high profile business people on board. Van Zyl is of the opinion that universities could play a crucial role, especially black academics and alumni in influential positions. The state's blessing is crucial, but not its money at this stage. Van Zyl, with the experience of too many failures to back him up, warns that this will be a long process, with 90% planning and 10% implementation at the initial stage.<sup>199</sup> Van Zyl could not emphasise enough the importance of trust. Many people have burnt their fingers with collapsed initiatives and pyramid schemes, and suspicion of new initiatives is understandable. As said before I offer the present article as a contribution to the planning phase.

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<sup>197</sup> Southall & Sanchez 2007:236

<sup>198</sup> Meetings on 8 and 25 May 2007 and email correspondence of 4 June 2007.

<sup>199</sup> I regard the present study as part of the planning process.

## ***Core Economy Participation: Present Possibilities***

In this section I firstly take a closer look at what a core economy enterprise, in this case a retail business would be able to offer if it should agree to enter into a partnership with Pela Nambu. I then look into the promise held by the new broad-based form of BEE for initiatives like Pela Nambu. Lastly I revisit the theme of Local Economic Development and present an analysis of opportunities that might exist as a consequence of the global move to commoditisation (inhumane thing-orientation).

### **Partnerships**

The Pela Nambu proposal relies on the willingness of first economy enterprises to participate, and participation has the ring of ubuntu to it. With regard to a retail partner that would honour smart card transactions and give discounts, there was a positive response, which I will now describe.

On 15 May 2007 I had an interview with an executive of an investment company that operates one of the major retail chains in the Limpopo Province, with high visibility in the Vhembe region – RAPS.<sup>200</sup>

In response to my presentation on Pela Nambu the executive revealed that they were earlier approached with a similar proposal and they did not respond positively due to not being convinced that their customers will shift to doing business with a card. The dynamics of the concept, however, he found promising, and they would look favourably at a proposal that convincingly addresses the issue of trust. His company's main problem is that they are growing out of their cash flow (they have established 8 new stores in the last few years) and any partnership that could help them address that problem would be attractive to them.

The executive explained how their chain operates: There is a distribution company, a guild and several retailers (local RAPS stores). The distribution company (DC) is BEE compliant and buys products in bulk to sell again to the retailers. Individual (privately owned) retail outlets can buy from the DC or from whom they prefer. The guild, of which shop owners are members, must ensure that shops buy from the DC by making that the most attractive option for them. This means that they communicate the needs and preferences of their customers to the DC, in order to guide the buying of the DC. If a shop owner is particularly satisfied with a supplier, the DC might be convinced to buy from this supplier. The bottom line is that an 80% and above loyalty to the DC ensures a payback of 1% of all transactions at the end of the year to the particular store. The stores in their group have a 97% loyalty rating. At present the 1%

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<sup>200</sup> Not their real name.

payback is their profit. The RAPS shops themselves actually run at a loss. Turnaround time is three years.

The investment company borrow money and build a shopping complex (the latest one cost R10 million). They then take in a 50/50 partner to co-own the RAPS store, which is an anchor tenant. This partner can buy them out as soon as s/he can or wants to. As soon as all the shops have moved in and started trading, the investment company sells the complex (the latest one fetched R30 million). With this money they build two more complexes. And so on. Their major problem, as referred to above, is that they constantly grow out of cash flow. This is relevant to Pela Nambu, as any partnership that might improve their cash flow situation would be attractive to them.

The executive gave some insight into their experience:

- 80 000 customers enter their shops on a daily basis.
- Their stores lose money on groceries (packed products).
- Their speciality departments make money (e. g. butcher, fruit & veg, bakery). They ensure that these departments are well developed.
- The "basic basket" differs considerably from shop to shop. They can give accurate statistics on local preferences.
- Customers prefer to use cash for transactions.
- Their shops prefer to buy fruit & veg locally. A woman who won the Limpopo female farmer of the year award a few years ago was put into business by their company.
- Although they are not wholesalers, they in practice already adopted the "RAPS Spaza" concept. Smaller outlets get supplies at cost and retail in more remote areas.

Why they would be interested in a partnership with Pela Nambu:

- "Feet". They will be keenly interested in a loyalty programme that would ensure that more people buy at their stores and not others. Exclusivity will thus be a condition, for them and for Pela Nambu. He foresaw no problem with them granting exclusive discounts to Pela Nambu cardholders – as long as Pela Nambu can offer what it promises – customer loyalty.
- There are no specific BEE issues with which Pela Nambu would be able to assist them.

- If they could make an extra R1 per person entering their shops daily (the current figure is 80 000), his creditors would be much happier. He made the following suggestions off the back of his head:
  - Cell phones: They would like to roll out cellphone services in all their stores. They will take a percentage of the profit on each airtime transaction.
  - Eskom: If they could sell more Eskom cards and take an admin fee per transaction, they would increase cash flow.

In his reaction to the Pela Nambu concept, he made a distinction between dynamics and mechanics:

- As for the dynamics of the concept, he reacted positively. He had to discuss it with his partners, but agreed that the organisation that will succeed in implementing this idea will be very successful. They were previously approached with a similar plan. At the time they saw a major problem, which also constitutes the single most important constraint that Pela Nambu will have to overcome. This concerns the issue of trust, which is addressed in more detail below.
- As for the mechanics, he could not commit himself, but said a 5% discount on a basket (the contents of which to be determined by local preference) is not out of the question.

With regard to his major reservation, the issue of trust: His own background was in banking and he told us that 1.8% of his previous employer's customers used internet banking when he left the bank 2 years ago (2005). Only 10% of their blue chip customers used internet banking. The greatest challenge will be to overcome the distrust of their customers – who are potential Pela Nambu members – of any kind of money card (they abandoned the idea of introducing their own card).

Their group will seriously look at a partnership proposal that "brings to the table" a realistic plan to either increase customer loyalty, or make customers spend more money while in the shop (as said before, R1 per customer per day would already be worth their while).

The *modus operandi* of RAPS stores presents a good case study in the dynamics of the core economy's presence in the margins. In principle this business model does not prevent the size of the gap between the economies to be diminished. People from the margins are prevented from acquiring (or building) a shopping complex, or buying a 50% stake in a local RAPS store (to eventually be increased to 100%), by:

- The lack of capital
- The lack of confidence
- The lack of expertise
- The lack of knowledge of and of how to make use of such opportunities.

But if they should be organised and empowered to get thus involved, would it be enough from a social responsibility point of view? Note that it is the declared intention of the stores to buy locally only the fruit and vegetables. This is laudable and Pela Nambu could be a partner in the support of local and emerging farmers to become preferred suppliers. But much of the income of the store leaves the area in very much the bleak way described by Du Toit and Neves in their Mt Frere narrative. Local spaza type businesses are also put out of business as they cannot compete with RAPS, although more remote spazas may benefit from partnerships with RAPS. As for BEE, the distribution company is compliant, and local stores do not have to do more in this regard. They also do not feel obliged to support poverty relief programmes unless they benefit (more money spent in their stores; customer loyalty). There is no sense of responsibility for local food security. They in any case do not make a profit on grocery sales locally, and supplying quality merchandise at competitive prices is their business, and that, they would argue, is enough. They have ample problems of their own to stay afloat in the war zone that is the capitalist economy (cash flow problems, nervous creditors, competition). What would a Pela Nambu affiliated, cooperatively structured, socially responsible enterprise do differently – and retain the same levels of service excellence?

I will eventually make a tentative proposal in this regard (and let there be no doubt that easy solutions do not exist). But first I present an update on the opportunities that exist for Pela Nambu with the publication of the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment codes in February 2007.

### **The Promise of the Broad-based BEE Codes of Good Practice**

The critique of the limited impact of BEE on CSER that I presented above makes a compelling case for a more broad-based approach to empowerment. It is far too early to say whether the Broad-based BEE codes that were promulgated in February 2007 have made a significant difference to the negative findings on the role of BEE. Yet, I will argue that the new shape of BEE, if implemented diligently, holds a promise for Pela Nambu that might allow the project to overcome some of the major challenges mounted here against its original conception.

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) as practised in the 1990s with its focus on asset transfer eventually drew sharp criticism for not adding wealth-creation value to the economy. While the earlier version of BEE led to the enrichment of a few black individuals, the goal of Broad-based Empowerment is to distribute wealth across as broad a spectrum of South African society as

possible. In stead of focusing only on equity ownership and management representation, broad-based BEE introduced the seven pillars of good practice. The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (53/2003): Codes of Good Practice on Black Economic Empowerment was gazetted on 9 February 2007 in the Government Gazette. The seven pillars are represented by seven codes.<sup>201</sup> Each of the seven pillars has a relative weighting. Ownership and management account for only 30% of the total contribution. These two categories are called "Direct Empowerment":

- Ownership of 25% + 1 vote by black people – 20%
- Black management control – 10%

The pillars of "Indirect Empowerment" are weighted as follows:

- Employment Equity – 15% for "the equitable representation of black people in all occupations and at all levels of an enterprise" according to specified targets.<sup>202</sup>
- Skills Development – 15% if employers reach set targets in developing the competencies of black employees. The awarding of points for skills development is usually based on the investment of companies in the meaningful development of their black staff.
- Preferential Procurement from black-owned enterprises – 20% if compliance is reached with regard to the extent to which companies buy goods and services from BEE-compliant suppliers as well as black-owned entities.
- Enterprise Development – 15% if companies spend 3% of net profit after tax to "assist and accelerate the development, sustainability and ultimate financial and operational independence" of other enterprises, particularly small, very small and micro enterprises.<sup>203</sup>
- Socio-economic Development – 5% if a company spends 1% of net profit after tax on initiatives aimed at directly providing black people with a means of becoming economically active or initiatives intended to facilitate access to the economy by black people.

A company's rating level depends on the total score obtained against these categories. Qualifying Small Enterprises (QSEs) (companies with an annual turnover of between R5 million and R35 million) can choose in which four of the seven categories they prefer to be scored and each category contributes 25 points to a total of 100.

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<sup>201</sup> [http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee\\_regulatory.html#codes](http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee_regulatory.html#codes) (accessed 12.3.08)

<sup>202</sup> Statement 300. [http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee\\_regulatory.html#codes](http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee_regulatory.html#codes) (accessed 12.3.08)

<sup>203</sup> Statement 600. [http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee\\_regulatory.html#codes](http://bee.sabinet.co.za/bee_regulatory.html#codes) (accessed 12.3.08)



The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for the administration and regulation of the implementation of this policy and monitoring and evaluating its impact.

Black Economic Empowerment in its broad-based form has the potential to make a real difference to the South African business landscape. I will now refer to the example of the Nkomazi Community Trust and envisage a similar role for Pela Nambu. This I will do with the help of an article authored by John Maxwell.<sup>204</sup> Maxwell, former CEO of Morkels and now full-time social entrepreneur, focuses specifically on small- and medium-sized enterprises (or QSEs in the BBBEE codes) as potential partners of the Nkomazi Community Trust which he co-founded. If applied to Pela Nambu, the following scenario emerges.

Pela Nambu members will all be registered beneficiaries of its Development Fund that will have the legal status of a trust. The funds generated in this way will be used to provide for a number of their needs, including educational, safety, physical and social needs. The needs will be defined according to the democratic approach presented earlier. Pela Nambu will enter into agreements with a number of existing Public Benefit Organisations for the delivery of the required services. For instance, an experienced bursary organisation like Studietrust<sup>205</sup> would be well-placed to manage and administer the funds that become available for the education and training of the members and their dependants. Pela Nambu will make sure that its organisational and legal structure deliberately takes into account the requirements of a broad-based black economic empowerment ownership scheme that satisfies all the requirements of the BBBEE codes in terms of its own black ownership, management control, enterprise development and socio-economic development initiatives. Pela Nambu must therefore be a fully black-owned business that could confer BBBEE credentials on its small- and medium-sized business partners.

Furthermore the relationship between Pela Nambu and its business partners must be structured deliberately to provide for a maximum number of BEE points to be acquired by its partners from the three external elements of the BBBEE scorecard – Ownership, Enterprise Development and Socio-Economic Development. A QSE partnering Pela Nambu will be eligible for Level 4 (100%) BEE procurement recognition status. This will qualify it for government procurement tenders and for tenders from large companies that want to score BEE points by doing business with BEE compliant small companies.

One of the major concerns of entrepreneurs who pioneer business opportunities that lead to the establishment of small- and medium-sized companies is that alienating ownership will have detrimental effects on crucial business decisions on which the survival of the company might

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<sup>204</sup> Maxwell, JW 2007. A is for Apple, BEE is for Business. Part 3: The solution. <http://www.connectioneconomy.com/2007/03/19/bee-part-3/> (accessed 14.5.07).

<sup>205</sup> I am presently employed by this organization as its National Director.

depend. Pela Nambu could address these concerns by following Maxwell's proposal that the contractual agreement between Pela Nambu and its business partners provide for a way of painlessly withdrawing from the scheme if relationship difficulties should arise. There must also be multiple levels of participation. Full participation would include the transfer of ownership of the participating company through share equity and voter rights. Limited participation would entail a monthly payment towards enterprise development and socio-economic development.

Maxwell has structured the Nkomazi Community Trust in such a way that full participation requires a partner to give up a portion of its share equity to the Trust. Similarly Pela Nambu will initially not act as an investor and would only pay the minimum amount necessary for the shares to ensure a proper transaction. The BBBEE compliance target is 25% plus one vote in the hands of black-owned entities. Partnering companies would thus in practice give away shares in order to acquire black ownership. This will only be attractive to companies who find it difficult to involve a black investor or shy away from the risks involved in a sale of shares. The advantage of giving shares away to Pela Nambu would be the option of painlessly buying back the shares if deemed necessary at some later stage. The price will be determined by the growth in net asset value of the business during the period that it enjoyed BEE credentials conferred by Pela Nambu.

Pela Nambu would benefit from the deal through the dividends and profits paid by the business partner. This would probably not be the main income from the partnership as the partnering business might not make it to profitability or ever declare dividends. Maxwell has therefore build into the proposed deal the provision that each participating company pays a monthly contribution to the Trust, according to the size of the company. The monthly payments have the status of non-recoverable contributions to enterprise and socio-economic development as provided for in the BBBEE codes. They therefore earn additional BEE points for the partnering company.

Maxwell is presently involved in an effort to persuade the South African Revenue Service to change its rules to allow participating companies not to pay tax on their monthly contributions. At present those contributions are considered as dividends and taxed with 12.5% (Special Tax on Companies – STC). If SARS decide to accede to this representation the contributions will not only not be taxed but Pela Nambu will simultaneously be enabled to issue Article 18A tax exemption certificates to participating companies.

According to Maxwell's proposal a qualifying small company that participates fully in the scheme will earn 69 BEE points which is equivalent to a Level 4 BEE contribution status and 100% BEE procurement recognition level. Limited participation will translate into 40 BEE points

and Level 6 BEE contribution status and 50% BEE procurement recognition level. At present a formal statement by a company's auditors will have the legal status of a compliance certificate. This will change once the Department of Trade and Industry finalise the creation of a structure for legally accredited verification agencies.

BEE in its broad-based incarnation holds the promise of providing the necessary framework for Pela Nambu to enter into partnerships of the kind envisioned in its founding documents in a way that will make good business sense to companies. One can only hope that the leadership change in the ruling party will not weaken government's resolve to implement the BBBEE codes. This would address much of the criticism of government's deficient role in enforcing CSER in South Africa.

I now turn my attention to another development in the wake of the inhumane production system of global capitalism that presents an opportunity to Pela Nambu – the growing market for differentiated products.

### **Commodity Production *versus* Differentiated Products – Opportunities**

Recent developments in the inhumane corporation-dominate economy might just present Pela Nambu with opportunities to stay true to its original idea of doing business according to the ethics of ubuntu – in a way that makes business sense within the present economic system. I will first explain the role of technology in Local Economic Development and then refer to a concrete example of the kind of enterprise that could eventually form the mainstay of Pela Nambu's affiliated businesses.

### **Technology and Local Economic Development**

From Du Toit and Neves' analysis (the poor are adversely incorporated in the economy) it would seem that Local Economic Development (LED) should be a priority. One of the main features of the "adverse incorporation" is the armoured truckloads of cash that leaves the areas "at the periphery of global capitalism"<sup>206</sup> to the benefit of the shareholders, and not the stakeholders, leaving the local area mostly unchanged (with the exception of the "centres" or "complexes" that house the shops and ATMs). Conventional wisdom has it that one should not try to be a socialist in a capitalist system. Pela Nambu is about making the instruments of capitalist wealth creation available to the poor (those living in the margins), while relying on and strengthening certain social and cultural characteristics of marginal existence ("we exist because we participate"), and changing the system (the re-evaluation of labour).

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<sup>206</sup> Moore, D 2007. Introduction. *The World Bank and its (Sheepish) Wolves*. In Moore, D (ed.) 2007. *The World Bank. Development, Poverty, Hegemony*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 1-26, 1.

In the foregoing I have expressed a deep scepticism regarding the feasibility of such a project, on the basis of the nature of the dominating system and its dominating institution, the modern business corporation. The seemingly inevitable outcome of such a train of thought would be that Pela Nambu must rather re-conceive itself as a civil society protest and activist group. And yet, the following words are expressed in one of the founding documents of the organisation: "We are compelled by the situation to move beyond mere activism [entitlement] ..." <sup>207</sup> Much in this fragment could be contested, but the basic gist is taken seriously – that this is an effort that does not want to wait for a change in the global economic system, but that will take the present system as a given and sees enough opportunities in it that can be exploited in such a way that the system will be altered in the process.

One possible approach would be to take seriously an interesting phenomenon in the global economy: the rampant commoditisation of everything and the kind of technology that goes with it has opened up a market for differentiated goods and a different technology. In his book *Taming Janus. Technology, Business Strategy and Local Economic Development* (2005) the retired CSIR Vice-President Daan Toerien proposes an approach to LED that exploits this crack in the market. <sup>208</sup> In what follows I rely heavily on his analysis.

According to the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) one of the primary goals of LED is to increase the money spent in the local economy. "Local" refers to where the poorer part of the population lives, and LED is targeted at keeping the money in that area (as opposed to the outflow of capital that characterises the present regime with its "adverse incorporation" of the poor into the economy). The DBSA engages in the sustainability discourse when it defines the "economic" and "development" in LED as something different from economic growth that depletes natural resources. Development includes attaining more equality of income, the development of entrepreneurial, employment and life skills, more effective use of resources, and the betterment of life conditions for all. <sup>209</sup>

The World Bank defines LED as the building up of the economic capacity of a local area, which includes the productive capacity of local firms, entrepreneurs and workers. This includes the capability to respond to the (global) market. The importance of the local-global nexus is also emphasised by the German consultant Jörg Meyer-Stamer who defines LED in terms of competitiveness:

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<sup>207</sup> Bruwer, E 2006. *The Poor Man's Capital. The Bridging of the Gap. A proposal.*

<http://www.poormanscapital.org/PoorMans/ThePoorMansCapital.php>. (accessed 17.11.07)

<sup>208</sup> Toerien, D 2005. *Taming Janus. Technology, Business Strategy and Local Economic Development.* Stilbaai: DTK.

<sup>209</sup> Toerien 2005:6-7

[LED is] about companies thriving in competitive markets and locations thriving in a competitive, globalized world. LED is, therefore, mostly about processes that create improved local competitiveness. It is about local activities to make markets work better.<sup>210</sup>

We for once do not pursue the question whether competition could ever be fair,<sup>211</sup> and proceed with Toerien's argument. His entry point into the LED debate is the fact that the role of technology is ignored by all the views described above, while in reality "not every region will have the same technological choices and unless this is understood, LED strategies are in danger of pursuing unattainable goals."<sup>212</sup>

The Janus of Toerien's book title is the two-faced Roman god, keeper of the gates of heaven. The good face of technology is the fact that it relieves humanity from toil and drudgery. The bad face is the consequence of replacing humans with machines. Yet, technology is an irresistible force, leading to "the end of work" (Jeremy Rifkin). Toerien finds it curious that technology as a cause of "jobless growth" had escaped public debate in South Africa – despite, one may add, Margaret Legum's efforts.<sup>213</sup> To Toerien the prospects of jobless growth resulting from the "Third Industrial Revolution" are grim in terms of hopelessly locking large numbers of people out of the formal economy.

Pela Nambu relies on advanced technology to give its members access to the contemporary instruments of wealth creation. And indeed, a smart card or something similar (cellphone banking) can reduce transaction costs and increase savings. But on the job creation and investment side of the equation Pela Nambu has so far failed to come up with a convincing alternative. The reference to Mondragón in the founding documents suggests that a possible solution would be in high-tech manufacturing. Toerien's convincing analysis suggests that this is an idle dream. When Toerien speaks of "possibilities of resolving the dilemma", I am therefore all ears.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Quoted in Toerien 2005:8

<sup>211</sup> See Arnspenger, C & De Ville, P 2002. Can competition ever be fair? Challenging the standard prejudice. Université catholique de Louvain, Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (IRES) Discussion Paper no. 2002016. [http://www.ires.ucl.ac.be/DP/IRES\\_DP/2002-16.pdf](http://www.ires.ucl.ac.be/DP/IRES_DP/2002-16.pdf). (accessed 17.11.07)

<sup>212</sup> Toerien 2005:11

<sup>213</sup> Legum, M 2002. *It doesn't have to be like this! A New Economy for South Africa and the World*. Foreword by Clem Sunter. Kenilworth: Ampersand Press.

<sup>214</sup> Toerien 2005:48

Toerien proceeds from the verdict of Fairbanks and Lindsay that “the traditional way of competing is flawed ...”.<sup>215</sup> New ways of competition must be found in a global economy, which involves choosing the right economic development strategy. One factor to be taken into account in making these choices is Garelli’s notion of two types of co-existing economies – the economy of proximity, and the economy of globality and their accompanying value chains (local and global). Recently the economy of globality has severely weakened the economy of proximity around the world, and LED is about finding ways to restore some balance, without isolating the local from the global. The same can be applied to centre and periphery in one country. Toerien uses the further concept pair of attractiveness (in terms of foreign investment) and aggressiveness (in terms of finding foreign markets for exports) to explain the conditions of the export of goods and services, crucial for the local-global balance. A locality that succeeds in presenting itself as attractive to foreign investors will be able to create jobs locally. A foreign investment that does not create significant numbers of jobs, and makes the locality not more but less attractive is obviously not desirable.

Another pair of concepts introduced by Toerien, crucial for his argument, is derived from Morgan Stanley’s analysis of competitive companies worldwide. According to this study, the competitiveness of a company depends on it doing one of two things exceptionally well: product differentiation or low-cost production:

Enterprises must either have unique or differentiated products or services (and the ability of product innovation), or the ability to produce and/or deliver commodity products cheaper (or have the ability to reduce production costs faster) than anybody else.<sup>216</sup>

The distinction could thus also be formulated as that between differentiated products and commodities. Fairbanks and Lindsay found that the recurring error of developing countries (specifically in Latin America) is to assume that cheap labour and natural resources will give them the competitive advantage. They thus did not give sufficient attention to the creation of conditions for innovation.<sup>217</sup> They try to compete on price, not uniqueness. This has adverse effects on employment conditions. Commodity prices worldwide are declining and this means the pressure is on everybody to increase operational effectiveness. As everybody is doing the same, the sustainability of competitive advantage within the framework of commodity production is a question. The trend is increased automation, job losses, and worker apathy. Companies in developing countries often use marketing intermediaries who shield them from opportunities of organisational learning. They first produce and then look for a market, in

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<sup>215</sup> Quoted in Toerien 2005:50

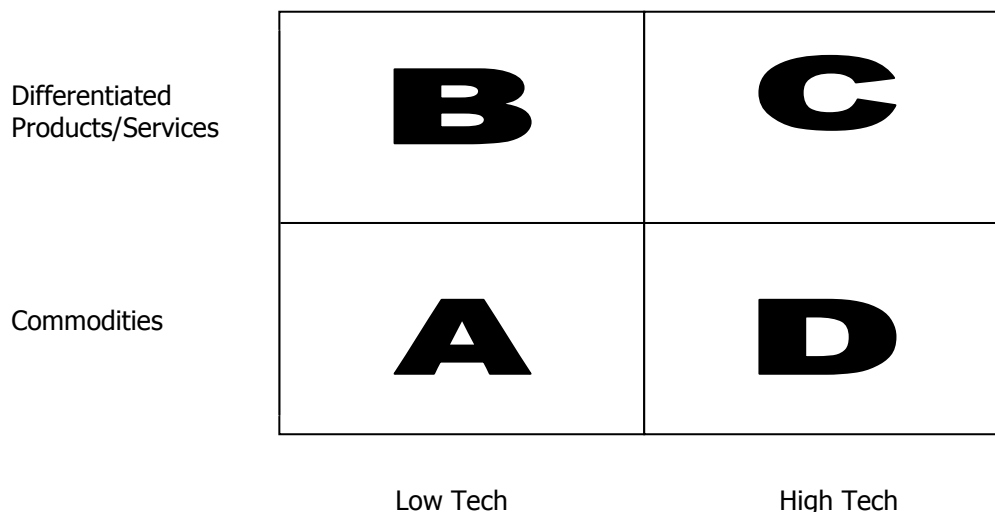
<sup>216</sup> Toerien 2005:60

<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Toerien 2005:61

stead of first learning what the market wants. They also do not prioritise trying to visualise the landscape of the future and thus do not engage in future-based planning.

According to Fairbanks and Lindsay commodity producing developing countries will not be able to increase the living conditions of their populations due to the downward price trend that impact negatively on the labour market. Toerien therefore introduces the issue of product and/or service differentiation: "The better a product is differentiated, the higher will it be positioned on its industry's learning curve and the better is its ability to attract price premiums."<sup>218</sup>

The crucial part of the argument, however, has to do with the link that is established between differentiated products and the kind of technology used in production – what is commonly called high technology and low technology. Toerien has devised a "competitive positioning diagram" or "Quad Tool" to illustrate the correlation between "high tech" and "low tech", and the four strategic positions that are available.<sup>219</sup>



Quad A: Low tech used to produce commodities

Quad B: Low tech used to produce differentiated products

Quad C: High tech used to produce differentiated products

Quad D: High tech used to produce commodity products.

Toerien formulates the difficult choice confronting South African policy-makers, which is also relevant to Pela Nambu: "to employ cutting edge technology to enhance the competitiveness of local enterprises and sacrifice jobs at the expense of less competitive enterprises and, therefore, run the risk of the eventual demise of those enterprises because of a lack of

<sup>218</sup> Toerien 2005:71

<sup>219</sup> Toerien 2005:73

competitiveness?"<sup>220</sup> Is there a win-win ("both-and") solution, one that will create jobs and competitive enterprises at the same time?

Adopting the Quad A position will not do, as the competitive edge in the commodity market is high-technology driven. To move into high tech needs massive investments and a skilled workforce. Technology, however, replaces people and significant job losses will occur. Protection against global competition will result in exclusion from global markets. In short, "all enterprises located in Quad A are at extreme risk".<sup>221</sup> And: "When a country's or region's economy is by and large dependent on commodities, the processes to keep the commodity-based enterprises competitive can in the modern computerized world only lead to an ongoing inability to create jobs and improve general living standards."<sup>222</sup> The "natural" move from Quad A to Quad D will thus entail "jobless growth", and an increase in inequality. But this is only true if an "either-or" approach is used. Toerien believes a "both-and" strategy is possible – create new enterprises in Quad B (high differentiation, low tech), while *simultaneously* moving existing commodity-based enterprises to Quad D.

Toerien identifies a number of common features of successful Quad B enterprises:

- These products or services are connected to "good or gracious" living. They are associated with an ambience that reflects the self-expression of the user, or they assist in amusing, entertaining or stimulating the user.
- They are founded on one or more of the following:
  - Outstanding and specifically human talent (not machine-reproducible).
  - Know-how that can be protected over time.
  - A natural or human-made attraction.<sup>223</sup>

To these features must now be added as critical success factors:

- effective branding
- quality management (the market for these kind of products is quite sophisticated)
- outstanding marketing
- competent logistics
- balanced production levels
- strategic pricing
- innovation

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<sup>220</sup> Toerien 2005:75

<sup>221</sup> Toerien 2005:84

<sup>222</sup> Toerien 2005:85

<sup>223</sup> Toerien 2005:89



- clustering of similar businesses.<sup>224</sup>

Toerien offers two case studies (Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio and Kapula Candles) to make the point “that world class enterprises are possible in rural settings in South Africa ...” and “that world-class capabilities are present in rural South Africa but these capabilities have to be discovered and unlocked.”<sup>225</sup>

I will now use Toerien’s argument and his case studies to propose a role for Pela Nambu in the development and support of Quad B enterprises by using Tambani Embroidery Project as an example.<sup>226</sup> The purpose of Tambani, according to the website, is “to set a group of disadvantaged rural African women on a path of self-actualization and economic empowerment.”

### **Tambani Embroidery Project**

The story of Tambani started in the early 1990s. Ina le Roux of the University of Venda Afrikaans Department (now demised) had just completed a MA in Religious Studies on the concept “salvation here and now” in a certain strand of Buddhism. For this she had to learn Sanskrit. One day after a class on oral literature a student waited at her office and told her that his grandmother knew many folktales. Ina came to ask herself why she would research a relatively foreign spiritual tradition while in the heart of Africa. An ancient world of Venda folktales opened up to her when she ventured into the remote villages, invited by students who had an aunt, a mother or a neighbour who knew *ngano* (folktales). She started a research project because she realised these oral texts would soon be forgotten as the new generation had other interests.

Tambani was the name of the oldest narrator in the village of Muswodi. In 1996 Ina completed a doctorate with the title “Only the words remained – A religio-philosophic interpretation of Venda folk tales.” This was an expanded version of her research report entitled “Verhale van verset en ander stories” (Tales of resistance and other stories).<sup>227</sup>

Le Roux shortly afterwards resigned her academic position to open a printing business in Johannesburg. But her ties to the storytellers and their plight, and the precarious position of the ancient stories in a modernising cultural setting inspired her to start the Tambani

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<sup>224</sup> Toerien 2005:89-90

<sup>225</sup> Toerien 2005:167

<sup>226</sup> See <http://www.tambani.co.za/>

<sup>227</sup> Le Roux, I 1995. Verhale van verset en ander stories. 'n Ondersoek na die Venda mondelinge prosa-tradisie – ngano. Unpublished research report, University of Venda, Thohoyandou.

Embroidery Project. The aim was to perpetuate the ancient oral tradition by “publishing” these folktales in embroidered form for a larger audience and at the same time to provide employment for women who live in abject poverty on the periphery of the economic mainstream in South Africa. In her own words:

Pastor Piet Mavhetha, who was my assistant during the research often talked to me about the poverty of his community, poverty that I could scarcely grasp. We thought of starting small embroidery groups along a dirt road beginning with the village of Folovhodwe then to Muswodi, Tshiungani, Matshena, Maramanzhi perhaps even to Dambale, Mananzhe, Domboni and Mutele. A small dirt road connecting unknown scattered villages, until you meet the open hearted women by name and there comes another initial on a carefully embroidered square.

Initially I trained two women to do the chain stitch, they trained sisters and friends and at present more than 65 embroiderers produce about 400 hand embroidered appliqué blocks per month, and they constantly cry out for more work. Many villages send messages to me asking me to train them too, “We are also poor! Help us too.” they say.<sup>228</sup>

The big break came when Le Roux discovered the North American quilting market. It turned out that millions of quilters all over the USA are forever looking for special and interesting appliqué blocks to integrate into their patchworks. The patches are sold with the name and a short biography of the person who has embroidered it, as well as a synopsis of the story that it tells.<sup>229</sup>

Le Roux has invested an enormous amount of time and energy into Tambani, and it has absorbed quite a bit of her financial resources. As a social entrepreneur, she has to keep her printing business going and can in effect only afford to attend to Tambani in her spare time. This she finds frustrating as she knows exactly what would be necessary to make Tambani really take off. This is where I see a role for Pela Nambu.

In terms of the features of successful Quad B businesses, Tambani indeed has great potential. The products produced by the Tambani embroiderers are certainly *differentiated*, and the production process is low tech. A captivating story can be told about the dynamics of the project, as well as the stories themselves. *Outstanding human talent* is involved. These stories have been told for centuries by the best storytellers in remarkable oral performances. The present day embroiders will have to master the techniques of their craft. Tambani has the

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<sup>228</sup> <http://www.tambani.co.za> (accessed 19.11.07)

<sup>229</sup> For an example of one such a folktale, see <http://www.tambani.co.za/folktales.htm>.

potential to become a *strong brand name* in quilting and craft circles. Le Roux's modest marketing efforts (a stall at but one US quilt exhibition per year – and there are many more) has already made an impact. *Quality management* has so far been done by a volunteer expert craft person, and its further development would be a priority as more resources become available. An *international market* that appears nigh insatiable has been tapped into, and aggressive marketing could do much for the present imbalance between production and sales. Le Roux is also presenting very successful Saturday home markets in Johannesburg. *Marketing* has only been done on a relatively small scale, and the response so far promises great returns if this is stepped up. *Production levels* are too high at present and Le Roux absorbs much of the overproduction. *Pricing strategies* need some expert intervention to make sure that maximum returns are generated without scaring off the potential market. *Innovation* will also benefit from increased focus, with Le Roux already responsible for organising storytellers to entertain guests at high level lodges like Lesheba Wilderness. The money the tellers earn through these performances has led to a renewed interest of the youth in the stories.

Tambani certainly satisfies the criterion of potentially being associated with *gracious living*. I have personally used some of the stories in my presentations (and sold some of the products) at exhibitions of Venda and Tsonga art at the Zuid-Afrika Huis in Amsterdam and the city museum in Zoetermeer in 2005. The fact that some of the stories can be told as evidence of female resistance against patriarchy certainly helped. The personal dimension (the biography and photograph of the embroiderer) and the story element qualify the products as vehicles of self-expression. They are not only beautiful to look at, but quite special in many ways, and allow the owner to relate the multiple stories behind the product.

An organisation such as Pela Nambu could play a role in *clustering* a number of such initiatives from the same geographical area together to ensure economies of scale, application of learning, and avoidance of duplication. But that is not all. I foresee a key role for Pela Nambu in optimising the opportunities presented by Tambani. Some of the primary tasks would be:

- Making sure that the ethics of ubuntu that is expressed in the dynamics of such a project is clearly communicated and forms part of the marketing message that differentiates the product.
- Brokering funding opportunities, and ensuring that Tambani gets all the government assistance it qualifies for.
- Providing the networking needed to involve other social entrepreneurs in product development, and quality management.
- Facilitating training to ensure quality.
- Assisting with the administrative work (facilitating payments, ordering materials, doing the books, etc.)

- Linking the project to innovation hubs at tertiary institutions.
- Fulfilling the potential of the project as a development multiplier.

The last bullet needs some explanation. Le Roux has already initiated some food gardens in the arid Folvodwe. Links to permaculture outfits, associated with the increased self-respect bestowed by the embroidery project, could see food security addressed (if something can just be done to keep the goats out!). Education is a big problem, as in most far-off rural settings. Networking with international and national volunteer organisations (VSO, AFS, SASVO, Teach South Africa, etc.) could see well qualified English, Maths and Science teachers from all over the world doing stints at the local school. The Rainbow crèche could also do with some know-how on how to make educational toys from junk and an internship or two.

Whether Pela Nambu would be well-advised to invest “the poor person’s capital” into Tambani and similar projects is a question that I cannot answer. I do know that government investment in new Quad B enterprises would make a lot of sense, and that large amounts of money are already available for projects that address broad-based BEE and skills development. The trick is to access these funds and use them accountably. This is where Pela Nambu could play a crucial role.

## **Conclusion**

In the previous section I have found that a revision of the way in which the gap between rich and poor is described would be in line with the original intention of the Pela Nambu project – the support and enhancement of existing forms of production amongst the marginalised participants in the economy. The question concerning the ways in which the ethics of ubuntu could be practised in the economy as presently structured proved to be a dilemma. Not much in terms of participation is to be expected of mainstream enterprises, not because businesspeople are morally reprehensible, but on account of the specific nature of the dominant institution of our time – the business corporation. The problem is that Pela Nambu enterprises would not constitute good investments of the savings of the poor if they do not operate according to the demands of the corporation-dominated economy.

The BBBEE codes present an opportunity for Pela Nambu to form the required legal entity that would confer BBBEE credentials on its business partners in return for significant empowerment measures that would capacitate Pela Nambu members to beneficially participate in the core economy.

In the final sub-section I presented Daan Toerien’s proposal regarding the opportunities for local economic development presented by a need for differentiated products in a commodity-satiated global economy. In the framework of this article I interpret this trend as a move away

from an inhumane orientation in favour of a desire to refocus on people. I ventured a concrete proposal of a kind of business enterprise that would fit the Pela Nambu approach and have a chance of success in the present economic dispensation. I will now conclude with a restatement of a possible role for Pela Nambu that would deviate in some points from the original project proposal – as necessitated by the foregoing interrogation of key concepts – and yet claims to stay true to its core intent and principles.

## ***Conclusion***

### **The Road Travelled**

I began this article by appropriating Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude. The issue at stake is the becoming common of the poor. I used Hardt and Negri's conceptual innovation to understand the production of a specific life-form as biopolitical production and thus as a contribution to a common creation of value. The problem is that the value of affective labour is not recognised in the dominant economy. Pela Nambu, the concrete poverty-eradication project described in the article, is distinctive in that it assigns value to what is called the ethics of ubuntu. It goes against conventional wisdom by saying "beggars *can* be choosers". Hardt and Negri would agree – the poor are creative and powerful. They do accede that one needs an inverse perspective to see this. They also describe their method as tendency discernment. Nobody knows which of the seeds they find will grow and bear fruit.

It has been my experience that dialogues across the social divide often result in the participants asking for a next step – we have found each other, we are one, let's do it together, start a project of mutual support and common participation to help eradicate poverty. My participation in Pela Nambu followed a decision to give it another go. It had all the ingredients – the methodology of listening to the other (the poor), assigning value to immaterial production in its cognitive (indigenous knowledge) and affective (ubuntu) form, making use of the latest technology and the potential to become really big without neglecting the face-to-face relationships of the small group.

I was subsequently entrusted with the writing of the project's business plan and engaged in various exercises of formulating strategy and tactics. These exercises require that the assumptions of each strategy formulation must be formulated and interrogated. The first assumption was that there was indeed something that can be called an economy of affection, or affective labour, in Hardt and Negri's formulation. Pursuing this assumption led to a study of what is in this article called the ethics of ubuntu. The problem was thus not the existence of ubuntu but how ubuntu could be applied in an economy that dances to a very different tune.

The second of the assumptions to be tested involved the original analysis by Rev. Bruwer of the nature and causes of poverty in South Africa. He took over the two-economy discourse from former President Thabo Mbeki and formulated the aim of Pela Nambu as bridging the gap between the first and the second economies. He had a rather benevolent view of the main actors in the "first economy" and expected them to engage in Pela Nambu's strategy of poverty eradication through participation. This hopeful and positive view of the major actors in the "first economy" did not stand up to scrutiny. The problem already lies with the two-economy hypothesis and its underlying assumption that participation of the poor in the "first economy" will solve poverty. This assumption implies that the "first economy" is the norm and that it will be beneficial to the poor to participate in it. I found convincing arguments to the contrary – the appropriate terminology is not first and second economy but centre and periphery, or core and margins, and the poor on the margins of the economy are not excluded from participating in the economy but adversely integrated in the one and only economy – by design.

The required revision of the Pela Nambu conceptualisation of poverty – to abandon the two-economy discourse in favour of a core-margins discourse – actually does not present a major problem to the project. Its stated intention can even be grasped more adequately with the use of the alternative terminology. The major problem is rather the implied malevolent nature of the major actors in the economy. What is wrong? At dialogues across the social divide one meets the persons occupying significant positions in major companies and they are morally upright citizens who would like to play their part in combating poverty, yet one soon discovers there is not much they can do apart from for instance channelling some CSI-money to a bursary fund to take care of the higher education of a poor but talented participant in the dialogue. A mere 1% of net after tax profit goes to CSI, and profit in some cases, as we have seen, is but 1% of procurement. They cannot change the rules of the game.

A major part of this article is thus taken up by an analysis of the business corporation as the dominant institution of our time, an institution that historically came into being when it was allowed to assume personhood before the law. But what kind of a person is the corporation? An analysis of the history of economics as a science found reasons why the corporation was made in the image of a psychopath that is now involved in recreating the ideal human being according to its own image. No wonder that a recent study of South African companies' response to the notion of Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility had such negative findings – the corporation only knows the responsibility to its shareholders to maximise profits at all cost. African notions of normative family values and parental earth ethics to be applied in the wider human community and economy would thus remain impotent until civil society activism successfully propagate a major overhaul of the way the corporation is structured.

Knowing that it has *become* what it is holds the hope that it could be changed into something else.

In the mean time the kind of enterprises envisaged by Pela Nambu cannot expect too much by way of participation from the private sector. Pela Nambu should also take care not to endanger the poor man's capital by investing it in business ventures that are doomed from the start, on account of complicating matters for ideological reasons.

In spite of all the cautionary findings I did encounter positive proposals of business initiatives that would suit the Pela Nambu approach. The Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment codes, if implemented, hold the promise of changing the way business is done in South Africa. Partnering an organisation such as Pela Nambu could become very attractive to a small enterprise looking for BEE points. Furthermore, the commoditisation of literally everything has created a market for differentiated products. A selling point of a differentiated product could be the fact that it was produced under circumstances that assigns a value to cognitive and affective production. The use of low-tech production methods could also become a positive factor in establishing the value of a product. The Tambani Embroidery Project was presented as an example of the kind of enterprise Pela Nambu could initiate and support. This is by no means an easy option. Participation by expert producers of immaterial products will be needed to ensure viable products. Investments by private sector companies would still be needed. The difference is that they will participate in order to make a profit – which is why they invest as a rule – and because the investment will present a genuinely good deal in terms of the present view of the dominant economy.

I now conclude with a brief re-formulation of the gist of the Pela Nambu project proposal, incorporating the most important revisions necessitated by the interrogation of the fundamental assumptions of the original proposal.

### **Pela Nambu in a nutshell – revised**

The name of the project could be retained. The Tsonga idiomatic expression from which the name is derived is not to be taken literally but figuratively as the overcoming of an obstacle. The logo could also remain the same: Poverty Eradication Through Participation. This now addresses the adverse integration of the poor in the economy.

The poor person's capital was the central notion of the founding document. The first source of this capital was to be a percentage of the monthly contributions of members combined with a portion of the discounts generated through the use of the smartcard. A large percentage of the accumulated capital would then be available for enterprise development along the lines of

the Pela Nambu principles – cooperative enterprises seeking 50/50 partnerships with “first economy” businesses. But would that be a sensible investment of poor people’s money? Only if the Pela Nambu enterprises could successfully compete in the economy. My analysis of the present structure of the economy has convinced me that the added complications of being a Pela Nambu enterprise would not enhance competitiveness in the commodity market. The capital needed for enterprise development should therefore be sourced from elsewhere, notably from businesses involving Pela Nambu as their BBBEE partner.

The benefit of Pela Nambu membership to a poor person would in the first place be an alleviation of being adversely integrated into the economy. Monthly membership contributions would thus be pooled and used to buy a bouquet of insurance products in accordance with the democratically determined needs of the members. All benefits are to go to the members of the insurance scheme. The poor person’s capital will refer to the value derived from the enhanced already existing social networks, and new ones built through Pela Nambu membership.

The membership card with its smartcard technology, or cellphone contract linked to a banking service will allow members/users the full benefits and these transactions will not be a source of revenue for Pela Nambu. Discounts will be given through to the users as added membership benefits. Agreements with retail companies will benefit members and will be directed at countering the adverse elements of integration of the marginalised poor into the core economy.

The capital represented by RDP house ownership should also be removed from the concept for the same reason as above – investing the money obtained against the houses as collateral into Pela Nambu enterprises would be too risky. One collapsed deal and the whole concept will suffer irreparable harm.

The re-valuation of labour, the third pillar of the poor person’s capital, must be pursued as a long-term strategy that will follow the more immediate need to make funds available for education and training. There is definitely a role for a Pela Nambu employment agency that can offer well-skilled workers with a desirable set of values to the market.

The major role of Pela Nambu as originally conceived, however, was to aid the becoming common of the poor, or to ensure that the values of the pooling of resources and of participatory production are translated into capital that is effective in the core economy.

I still see a role for membership contributions at a later stage, when members through participating in Pela Nambu enterprises have reached a certain level of income. But in the initial stage the capital contributed by the poor would be of the social kind. Pela Nambu would



be the name of the initiative that directs and focuses and organizes the membership to make effective use of the available opportunities offered by BBBEE. It could eventually offer its business partners much more than points on the BEE scorecard.

This leads to the role of Pela Nambu in Local Economic Development. Through formalized partnerships with innovation centres at institutions of higher learning and other research agencies Pela Nambu should develop franchise-type models of businesses that produce differentiated products. These partnerships would address the entire production process – from product research and development through to marketing and distribution. In this way local economic initiatives would be linked to the global market which would entail the becoming common of the poor in a concrete way.



# **From hauntology to a new animism?**

## **Nature and culture in Heinz Kimmerle's intercultural philosophy**

*For Heinz Kimmerle on his 78th birthday on 16.12.2008*

### **Introduction**

Heinz Kimmerle's approach to intercultural philosophy is characterised by his insistence on the equality of cultures, as a consequence of the concept of difference with which he operates. This leads him to propose that we drop the concept development and replace it with 'dynamic equilibrium'.

In this article, which was conceived within the framework of the question regarding a New Humanism, I first explore Kimmerle's struggle with the legacy of the exclusion of Africans as belonging to nature from cultured European humanity. This exclusion is the consequence of the dominance of a particular rationality that has been found to be inadequate for solving the problems of our time. Kimmerle proposes intercultural philosophical dialogues as a more appropriate approach to knowledge production in our time. He has published fine examples of such dialogues in practice. Some of these have been brought together in a Dutch language publication entitled *Mazungumzo: dialogen tussen Afrikaanse en Westerse filosofieën* (Kimmerle 1995). His intention is to break with the tradition of limiting oneself to the study of Western philosophical traditions in searching for answers to the urgent questions of our time, and to take counsel from the philosophies of other cultures. Although he does not expect problems that seem to have no solutions in the context of Western thinking to be solved in dialogue with the philosophies of other cultures, *he is convinced that the intercultural dimension of doing philosophy unlocks an enhanced problem-solving potential* (Kimmerle 1995:10-11). The problematical issues addressed in this book are truth, time, community, development, socialism and democracy, aesthetics and morality, spirits, and death.

I will deal in more detail with one of these, entitled, in translation 'The invisible world of spirits in Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* and in African thought'. This is the article in which Kimmerle develops further Derrida's political interpretation of spirits. Derrida calls for a new 'spectrology' (or 'hauntology') to address the political and social injustices in the world. Kimmerle says the logical consequence is to also explore the possibilities of a *new animism*, to address humanity's destructive relationship to nature, as a consequence of the dominant ontology in Western philosophy, the ontology of presence. The issue of spirits poses a serious challenge to

a New Humanism that wants to be new in the sense of being inclusive, and still humanism in the sense of being secular and rational.

Kimmerle's subsequent contribution to this theme is an essay entitled *Entgeistert. Ein Essay über den Verlust des Geisterglaubens und den Wirklichkeitsstatus der Welt der Geister* (2001), in which the above-mentioned article has been taken up as the last chapter. In this essay he re-appropriates the Kantian insight that the fact that we cannot reasonably know anything about the reality of spirits does not imply that they do not exist (Chapter 1). An alternative concept of rationality would judge differently (Chapter 2). The present absence (or as Mark Taylor (1993:80) formulates, the non-absent absence) of spirits is attested in the Western tradition particularly in works of fiction ('poetic descriptions'), but also in some philosophical texts (Chapter 3). The way in which (some) African philosophers presuppose the reality of the world of spirits might be a fruitful starting point for the formulation of a new animism, one that does not restore a pre-critical 'believe' in spirits, and also not an uncritical concept of reality (Chapter 4).

In the present essay I follow Kimmerle's argument, culminating in his suggestion regarding a new animism. In order to show the problems surrounding this way of thinking, I juxtapose the arguments of two African authors concerning belief in spirits. I subsequently trace the main objection to 'spirit-talk' to a debate in environmental ethics, the debate between deep ecology and social ecology. I do not intend to directly enter into that debate, but try to find a way to re-assess animism, avoiding the standard projections of Tylor who made the term (in)famous. For this re-evaluation I rely on the pioneering paper "'Animism' revisited" by Bird-David. In the process I try to establish how new animists might relate to the environment, and whether new animists could be new humanists, and vice versa.

## **Hegel and Africa**

### **Identity-Thinking**

There is a particular concept of reason that has problems with conceptualising its other without replacing the other with itself. Adorno's (1980) description of 'identity-thinking' remains potent: identity is the identity of that which is understood and the concept of this. But this is mere pretence of identity, as it is imposed by the subject. Form is violently imposed on content. The particular has no place in the general. It is a matter of exercising power. The principle of identity is the principle of domination (Adorno 1974). Reason violates the object under the pretence of knowing it (Adorno 1980). Identifying reason, in subjecting nature by objectification, continues the principle of domination that rules in the natural world and as such ironically remains a function of nature from which reason was supposed to liberate itself.

It becomes itself object, or as Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) famously wrote in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: history (freedom!) returns to mythology. They added that mythology was already enlightenment.

### **Deconstructing Hegel**

Heinz Kimmerle (1994, 1995, 2000) has linked the philosophers of difference, especially Derrida, to Horkheimer and Adorno's pioneering insight into the importance of the other of reason. The expression 'the other of reason' refers to the forgotten and repressed side that reason had in the Enlightenment, as has been revealed in a psycho-analytical study of the deep dimension of this thinking (Kimmerle 2000:39). Deconstruction, which for Derrida is also the deconstruction of Hegel, presupposes that in critique or destruction the new, something constructive, is already implied. Derrida's deconstructive reading of Hegel has revealed the mechanisms of exclusion not only in Hegel, but also in Eurocentrism (Kimmerle 1994:106-107). It is nature, myth, the other of reason that is excluded. Hegel's 'treatment' of women as analysed by Derrida in *Glas* shows that Hegel could think of a woman only as the opposite of a man, for instance in Hegel's interpretation of the Antigone tragedy in his *Phenomenology*. As a sister, Antigone moves on the borderline of reason, but as a woman she is excluded from it. Her important role in the family, which indirectly contributes to the order of the state, notwithstanding, she is incapable of fulfilling a true moral task. The latter presupposes working within the spheres of civil society and the state that are the true moral spheres. Unlike the son, the daughter does not leave the home to enter these spheres. She stays in the home of her parents until she transfers to being wife and mother in her own home, never leaving the sphere of the home. She is thus not truly human, in the sense of not being a citizen.

### **Hegel and Africa, Africa and Hegel**

We are reading Hegel's exclusion of Africa as representative of how Africa has been, and still is, excluded from history, particularly the history of the West. The same mechanism of exclusion that Derrida has revealed in his deconstruction of Hegel's view of women is at work here. The colonies were open spaces into which civil society had to be extended, according to the dynamics of the historical process. But colonialism is not historical, as history is restricted to the history of states. This is one reason why Africa, for Hegel, has no history, and does not participate in world history. Hegel was badly informed about pre-colonial Africa and argued that Africa had never been an agent of the world spirit. The other reason is geographical: the spirit just cannot get the better of nature in Africa South of the Sahara – once again a notion stemming from faulty information. Kimmerle (1994) summarises the issue well by saying that we learn from Hegel much about the European view of the continent but nothing about Africa

itself. Nature as the other of reason and the exclusion of the other is at work in Hegel's characterisation of African religion as being on the first level of natural religion (wizardry). This is not authentic religion, just as Africans are not authentically human.

Kimmerle's (1994, 1996) explanation for Hegel's justification of slavery is particularly relevant. For Kant (the thinker of reason and freedom, the messenger of human rights, world citizenry and peace) Africans make particularly good slaves, as they are physically strong, but lazy. They must be punished for this laziness (and for being the plastic expression of the evil of human nature) through slavery, which should be seen as a form of education. According to Hegel (with his 'Philosophy of concrete freedom') the fact that Africans commonly consume human flesh (an assumption not supported by evidence) is indicative of the disregard for, and worthlessness of, human beings in Africa. This, according to Hegel, explains why in Africa slavery is the basic form of the law. It is therefore justified for Europeans to engage in slavery in the context of Africa, although it is wrong in principle. According to Kimmerle one can explain this view within the system of Hegel's thought only if one realises that Africans, to Hegel, are not fully human. They seem to have no religion and no state. Yet, they are not animals, as they do have something that resembles a state and some religion. But they are not free human beings, and the real humans (who are European, male citizens of a constitutional state) are allowed to make slaves of them and sell them like goods. Thus, Africa is situated outside of history as it does not manifest spirit (for Hegel, a decidedly European spirit), and Africans are on the borderline of humanity, somewhere between animals (nature) and humans (reason).

Kimmerle (1994) remarks that Hegel's thesis concerning the end of history (that goes hand in hand with the erasure of time) seems to have been fulfilled after the realisation of the constitutional state, although not in the way foreseen by Hegel. Instead of deepening itself, the European spirit with its corresponding economic and political structures has spread all over Africa and other parts of the world. It determines historical events in a universal planetary sense. Note that it is still 'spirit' and thus the exclusionary mechanisms intrinsic to it that is spreading. This leads to the major contradiction of universality without self-realisation, which is the flipside of self-realisation at the expense of universality. This is why Kimmerle opposes this kind of looking, by sending a reminder of the spirit of Africa that was excluded and left behind by the self-realising world spirit. This reminder is not in the first place directed against Hegel, but against Europe, which is in the process of spreading all over the world, and against the manner of the spreading. In Hegel the object of his thinking, Europe with its view of history, its spirituality and its attitude towards politics and economics, is under critique.

Hegel defined philosophy, and thus also his system of thought, as the thought and feelings of an age made self-conscious, as the development of concepts that are adequate to grasp a particular historical period. According to Kimmerle (1994), Marx and Adorno's critique of Hegel

aims to keep Hegel's project going. Hegel's conceptualisation is modified and rescued in such a way that it proves itself to be adequate for understanding Europe under the conditions of advanced industrial society.

Kimmerle (1996:102), in reference to the title of his favourite 'book' by Derrida, *Glas*, interprets this undertaking as producing a glass, like the lenses of spectacles or a pair of binoculars, through which the reality of a period can be seen for what it is from a philosophical point of view — more focussed, clearer than in ordinary perception. Hegel's lenses developed cracks in the next historical period, as it became inadequate as a means of revealing clearly what was happening — for instance the growing antagonism between rich and poor in capitalist society, a development that revealed the contradiction of civil society. In Hegel's philosophy civil society was supposed to be a form of the subjective realisation of universality. The crack in Hegel's glass caused by Marx in his reversal of the priorities, turning philosophy from standing on its head to standing on its feet, in a paradoxical way enabled a sharper view. Adorno's take has been polished by Marx's analysis, and he looks through the cracks caused by the experience of national-socialist barbarity (Kimmerle 1994:104-105). The negative, critical instruments of dialectical thinking are now more adequate — there is no reconciliation in sight, no identity to be had in a whole that is not the truth. It is not possible to see the whole through cracked lenses. But the cracks shift the focus to the particular, the non-identical. The cracks in the looking glass correspond to cracks in society. With Derrida, however, the cracks become so many that the glass shatters. Seeing through it therefore becomes impossible. Paradoxically this is again adequate: the fact that we cannot see and understand our world any longer through the lens of Hegel's philosophy, representing Western metaphysics, characterises the situation of Western seeing and understanding. The new, constructive element in deconstruction is the acceptance and affirmation of the negative, of the necessity to destroy the tradition of exclusion. The negative provides orientation in this endeavour.

The negative is the excluded, as Adorno has already shown. Hegel's exclusion of women from humanity is merely an instance of the exclusion of nature. Nature is excluded from having a right of its own and an enduring meaning alongside the spirit that works through human history. In Hegel's system the last vestige of nature, time, is finally, in the ultimate movement of the dialectic, erased or deleted. For Derrida the Jew, this erasure of the 'rest' conjures up the terrifying vision of the Holocaust, which, in spite of being the most negative consequence of Western thinking, still contains positive knowledge (Kimmerle 1994). This 'positive', in my interpretation, would be, apart from revealing the deadly nature of exclusion, something like 'never again'. And yet, Hegel has been proved right also in characterising history as cruelty and suffering. According to Kimmerle (1994:112) with this insight philosophy, particularly also

when it wants to be intercultural, constitutes itself as critical theory, and sides with those who work to diminish this cruelty and this suffering.

Hegel is therefore not yet played out. Kimmerle (1994:111) formulates his continued relevance in a controversial thesis: 'Hegel's philosophy means everything for Europe and nothing for Africa.' It can thus be fruitfully used to understand the Westernisation of Africa. But it cannot contribute to understanding the Africanisation of the West in Africa and the significance of this process for world history. For this understanding new approaches to a dialogical intercultural philosophy are needed. One of the most controversial topics in this dialogue is the belief in spirits.

### **A new Spectrology?**

Kimmerle (1995:192) links Enlightenment thinking with exorcising ghosts and spirits – an exorcism that spans a whole historical period. But the so-called exorcised, and presumable rendered absent, seem always to be present, in language at least, even though in Enlightenment language as negation: they are not, do not exist. They have a *mere* 'metaphorical meaning' and represent something in our own subconscious. Thus, we speak on the basis of an ontology of presence (an ontology that proceeds from the presence of being in entities) that tries to negate the absent, in stead of thinking it in its co-existence with the present.

Kimmerle traces Derrida's further development of Heidegger's insight into truth as an event of simultaneous opening and closure. The same goes for presence and absence. The other of reason is absent in what is rendered present in Enlightenment discourse. Notions of ghosts, spirits or phantoms serve the thinking of a radical form of absence in the present, something presumed by the dominant discourse as totally absent, unreal, hallucinated. Kimmerle formulates the dilemma: how can the presences of the absent be thought, without restoring a 'belief in spirits', or re-introducing an uncritical concept of reality (critique here in the sense of Kant's critical philosophy)?

Derrida attempts to prepare the way for an answer to this question by looking for elements of a new spectrology, or hauntology, in texts of Marx and Shakespeare – in order to put an end to the exorcism project of Enlightenment thinking. Kimmerle (1995) sorts through and arranges these elements to give as much shape as possible to this new spectrology, this hauntology as non-ontology, with its own logic, the logic of the phantom.

The key scene in Derrida's exposition is the appearance of the ghost to Hamlet in Shakespeare's immortal work. The ghost informs Hamlet that his father had been murdered



and that he has to revenge him: 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder' (1/5/25). This hangs together with Hamlet's observation: 'The time is out of joint' (1/5/188). And he must restore it, join it together again: 'O curséd spite / That ever I was born to set it right!' (1/5/188-189). This is then an element of the new hauntology: A personal fate being entangled with a general situation and the appearance of a spirit confronting with a task from the invisible world of spirits (Kimmerle 1995:154).

In revenging the murder of his father, Hamlet will simultaneously remove the concealed injustice upon which affairs in the state of Denmark are based. Denmark here represents the world. The world is out of joint, so fundamentally that time itself is out of joint, even if people do not yet see it. The sheer abundance of injustice creates a situation of fundamental out-of-jointness of the relationships between people, which translates into an out-of-jointness of time, of what Kimmerle typifies as the relationship between being (what is) and time (how it is what it is). The out-of-jointness of time includes the way in which time is thought, and has to do with the inadequate way in which the relationship between the present and the absent is thought. Thinking this relationship anew would at least be a first step on the way to thinking time differently, in such a way that the out-of-jointness is addressed and even remedied. The remedy would have been found if what is and how it is would be conceived in a way that what is would not be in such a way that it is not. I am referring specifically to the exclusion of Africans as what is absent from discourses of what constitutes humanity, as described by Ramose (1999). Another element of hauntology: The out-of-jointness of time is a condition for contact with the invisible world of spirits (Kimmerle 1995:155).

The acknowledgement of the spirits could be a condition for an alternative politics, of memory of generations of phantoms and their legacy, including Marx and Chris Hani. This would happen in the name of righteousness. The Greek word *dikè* also means to be correctly joined. To remember the phantoms, to revenge the injustice they were subjected to, contribute to bringing justice into being. The third element thus has to do with limits, the ultimate boundary between life and death. Memory of ghosts renders porous this boundary. The dead who have suffered injustice return and ask for revenge, to be put in the right, contrary to an unrighteous time. To learn to deal with ghosts includes learning to speak about them, speak against them, and to let them speak – to learn to listen. Derrida (quoted in Kimmerle 1995:156), with characteristic flair, coins the word 'injonctions' to refer to what ghosts say (command, claim) when the time is out of joint. The third element of hauntology: deal with spirits, stop ignoring/negating them.

A fourth element, closely tied to the previous, is the terrifying aspect of the appearance of a ghost. Our defence mechanism is to deny its reality. People experience ghosts as haunting them. They desperately try to get rid of them, or to stay out of their way. Another defence is

religion, in which ghosts are hunted, as happened when religion joined forces with all the other powers of old Europe in a holy hunt on communism (Kimmerle 1995:156). But, if ghosts appear when the time is out of joint, they will only disappear, and the haunting will cease when religion ceases, as well as all ideological veils and fogs that conceal reality. For Marx history is not made by the spirit, but by human beings' labour in and at history, led by the proletariat's leaders, the communist party. Leninism and Stalinism can be traced back to some of these features in Marx's thinking. If the revolution becomes reality, it ceases to have a mere ghostlike existence; when its ghost disappears, so does its spirit. Derrida thus thinks a revolution against the revolution, in which the spirit of revolution is preserved (Kimmerle 1995:157-158).

Marx participated in the exorcist-like spirit of the Enlightenment in his critique of the fetish character of commodities. Money and exchange value have ghostlike existences, independent of the intention of the producers of commodities. Marx opposes this by thinking the value of commodities without ghosts or spirits. And the question poses itself, also in reference to the use value of commodities: how to think a positive relation to the 'invisible world of spirits'? Marx wanted to overcome the ghostlike character of things with regard to their exchange value. Derrida is *en route* to a way of thinking in which one can hold on to the spirit of things in the midst of their utility value. Kimmerle (1995:159) asks: Would the obvious thing to do in this situation not be to look at other cultures (e. g. African culture) when you ask what the things are in themselves, what their own spirit, phantom or ghost might be?

Within the Western tradition of thinking the question concerning the being real of ghosts/spirits/phantoms must remain undecided. Kant's 'cannot know' with regard to the big metaphysical questions is valid here as well (Kimmerle 2001). According to Kimmerle (1995:158-159) this attitude can at least be nuanced when a text of KA Appiah (1992), for instance, is brought to bear on it. Appiah, born and bred in Kumasi, Ghana, educated in Cambridge, retains an 'invisible ontology' alongside his critical scientific thinking. SB Oluwole (Lagos) (1992) is looking for a framework in which the seemingly opposite/antagonistic positions of Western science and African spirituality can both be accommodated. The matter-of-fact way in which African thinking maintains the presence of spirits of ancestors in the world of the living might mean something for Western thinking concerning ghosts/spirits/phantoms.

### **A new animism?**

Kimmerle (1995:160-162) goes so far as to ask whether a new spectrology could be the framework within which a *new animism* can be thought. This question arises within an intercultural philosophical dialogue in which an aspect of 'African culture' has been considered

as positively contributing to a viable form of life, and not as something backward from the point of view of a normative 'rational', 'developed' or 'progressive' position. A new animism would entail reconsidering the question concerning ghosts/spirits/phantoms, in conjunction with the immense disturbance of Western humanity's relationship to nature. It would attempt to think the being of a thing, its 'soul', or spirit, in openness to African thinking concerning spirits.

In this regard the radical immanence of transcendence must be emphasised (Kimmerle 2001:74). In this point African thinking differs from the Christian and Islamic conceptualisation of spirits. For Africans the invisible world of spirits belongs entirely to this earthly and human world. The Supreme Being is far away and difficult to approach. Spirits and 'gods' have a mediating function. Some persons are more sensitive to the world of spirits than others, and are required to mediate in the contact with this world. But this does not mean that this world is remote. It is an immanent transcendence. In this world different spirits and gods relate to each other as interacting forces. According to Gyekye (quoted in Kimmerle 2001:74) their relationship (at least in Akan thought) should not be conceptualised in terms of a fixed pyramid-like hierarchy, but as a dynamic whole in which the hierarchy is determined by the interaction of spiritual forces present (or rather active, I propose) at a given time.

To this spiritual universe belong also natural things, saturated by life-force. There are forces behind storms, rain, rivers, seas, lakes, fountains, etc. Nature is animated. Kimmerle is adamant that this kind of religiosity is absolutely equal in status to the so-called 'great' religious traditions, or 'world religions'. This, of course is a fundamental revision of Tylor's animism theory. One can venture to say that Kimmerle is engaging in language politics by provocatively retaining the thoroughly discredited (on the basis of its evolutionary trappings) term 'animism' to refer to African religion. He uses the term 'tentativ, nicht ohne Ironie, mit bewusster Provokation', says Kimmerle (Personal communication 14.10.2002). 'Animism' is equal to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Taoism and Buddhism (Kimmerle 2001:75). Belief in spirits might be problematical in radically critical Western thinking. But the idea of nature being animated is increasingly plausible on the basis of recent developments in physics and evolutionary biology.

In Western philosophy, too, there are important points of contact with this kind of animism. Kimmerle (2001:75-76) identifies the thought of Nietzsche as coming the closest to the conceptions of this kind of animism. For Nietzsche 'life' is a fundamental category. He proceeds from the conceptualisation of a field of forces that is constituted by the 'will to power', and always in the process of being re-organised. However, even in Nietzsche nature is not the foundation of the universal force-field in the same matter-of-fact way as in African thinking. But Nietzsche might be a good starting point for a widening of the emerging new

spectrology to include a new animism, as an attempt of addressing the out-of-jointness of our time, as caused by the destruction of our relationship to nature.

This project, however, will also have to remember Marx, especially the Marx of the Parisian Manuscripts, written in 1844. In these Marx describes the work through which we as humans produce and reproduce our material existence as natural force. Work, as natural force, relates within nature to other natural forces. In *Capital* nature becomes mere 'thing', to be utilised by human beings according to their own goals. The dormant potencies in nature, the interaction of natural forces, are subjected to human measures. This later view, says Kimmerle (2001:76) makes impossible the idea of an animated nature in which humanity must find its proper place. And it is on this point that African thinking represents an alternative view. Even if Western thinking cannot follow this alternative view, to postulate the equality of this view is not foreign to Western thinking. Postulating the equality of animism, and African thinking generally, flows from the openness that belongs fundamentally to Western thinking as a thinking of the radical question:

Wer fragt, hat ja nicht bereits die Antwort. Wer radikal fragt, vermeidet es, eine mögliche Antwort zu präjudizieren. Er wird für Unerwartetes, gerade auch im Gespräch mit Andersdenkenden, offen sein (Kimmerle 2001:79). [*The person who asks does not already have an answer. The person who asks in a radical way avoids prejudging a possible answer. He will be open to the unexpected, specifically in conversations with different points of view.*]

In a personal discussion with me Kimmerle has somewhat revised his call for a new animism, after becoming aware of the persistence of prejudice and conceptual mistakes surrounding the term. He said that he would not answer his own question (a new animism?) directly with a 'yes'. What we need is not a new animism, but a new evaluation of animism. He continued:

Was wir im Kontext einer ökologischen Ethik wirklich brauchen, ist eine neue Naturphilosophie. Diese kann in interkultureller Perspektive von einem Dialog mit dem Animismus Wichtiges lernen: die Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben konkret und ernsthaft aufzufassen (personal communication 14.10.2002). [*What we need in the context of an ecological ethics is a new philosophy of nature. This can learn something important within an intercultural perspective from a dialogue with animism: to regard the respect for life seriously.*]

But first: The call for a new animism can indeed lead to serious misunderstanding. I now confront a 'positive response' with a 'negative response' by African scholars, and then show how this division is also to be found in environmental ethics.

## Contestations

### The spectre of 'philosophic racism'

In describing the relationship to spirits in 'traditional Africa', Kimmerle relies heavily on Parrinder, who has done most of his research in West Africa in the middle of the previous century. The problem here is whether Kimmerle is guilty of 'an uncritical repetition of the tradition of philosophic racism in Western philosophy'. This is how Ramose (1999:58) typifies De Tejada's characterisation, in an article published in 1960, of the fundamentals of Bantu law. Ramose agrees with De Tejada's 'suggestion that the musical conception of the universe can result in two interpretations of the musical rhythm, namely the rational and the emotional'. He, however,

definitely disagree[s] with his [De Tejada's] ascription of the 'emotional' as a distinctive feature of Bantu law, and, by extension, African philosophy. ... His not infrequent use and appropriation of 'unsere Logik' [our logic], 'unsere rationalen Logik' [our rational logic], coupled with his express ascription of Bantu thought to the 'magical' and the emotional, speak to an exclusivism which is psychologically more revealing.

From Kimmerle's conceptualisation of intercultural philosophy it should be clear that nothing would be further from his intention than to describe other cultures in a way that would open him to the kind of charge made by Ramose against De Tejada. His own proposal shows similarities to systems thinking as employed by Ramose:

Understanding thought as a system means recognising it as a whole-ness which includes not only the indivisibility but also the mutual dependence of the 'rational' and the 'emotional' (Ramose 1999:59).

Kimmerle criticises Western thinking for repressing/ignoring/absenting the 'other of reason' and is convinced that a remedy should be sought in opening Western philosophy up to African philosophy in which this reduction has not occurred in equal measure. From his interpretation of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* it would seem that his argument also implies an opening up to the result and consequences of the Western reduction for other cultures, a result that is equally repressed. A consistent theme in Kimmerle's thinking is the attempt not to think in terms of development/progress. He does this on the basis of his conceptualisation of difference. Kimmerle (1997:101) prefers to interpret various evaluations of other cultures (for instance) not in terms of development/progress, but as shifts in which emerges a more adequate evaluation of other cultures within the framework of the general world situation.

This position relativises his own conceptualisation of intercultural philosophy: an evaluation of a culture 'from an intercultural perspective' is in his view adequate/fitting with regard to the present world situation. This being adequate to the situation simultaneously implies a critical verdict over it. Here, too, the equality principle is fundamental. Philosophy and art, with regard to the core of their expressions, know no 'development/progress', only shifts, a becoming different/other, that is conditioned by their relation to the general world situation.

This is a crucial point that cannot be emphasised enough, especially in view of the problematic nature of discourses on cultural difference with regard to the themes of rationality, science, 'belief' in spirits, etc. Ramose argues that since Aristotle reason has been recognised as 'the distinctive and decisive criterion of the definition of a human being' (1999:13). The colonial 'quest for sameness' meant indifference to cultural differences if these were not obstacles to colonisation and Christianisation, and concentration on those differences that were. Ramose (1999:14) speaks of the 'epistemological dominance' assumed by colonisation and Christianity, unilaterally conferring on themselves the right to 'define the meaning of experience, knowledge and truth on behalf of the indigenous African'. The strategy here has been to deny 'the other' rationality, and hence to exclude him/her/them from being human. Ramose refers to Locke, Hume, Kant and especially Hegel in delineating 'the genealogy of racism as an aspect of the struggle for reason', and concludes that 'there is neither a moral basis nor pedagogical justification for the Western epistemological paradigm to retain primacy and dominance in decolonised Africa'. He says '[t]he independent review and construction of knowledge in the light of the unfolding African experience is not only a vital goal, but it is also an act of liberation' (1999:35-36).

I read Kimmerle's tentative exploration into an alternative 'epistemological paradigm' as congruent with Ramose's project of constructing knowledge in the light of the unfolding African experience. And yet, such is the quagmire of discourses on cultural difference that considerable differences of opinion exist on the usefulness or not of the characterisation of African culture in terms of a particular relationship with and view of the invisible world of spirits, as is evidenced in the following two views.

### **African spirituality affirmed**

PA Kalilombe (1994:115), in his description of African spirituality, defines African religion as 'a way of living in the visible sphere in relation with the invisible world'. This goes hand in hand with the basic holistic and integrating nature of African culture. Kalilombe (1994:116-118) does address the question concerning the specifically African nature of African religion, and he acknowledges the profound effects of the revolutionary changes that African culture is currently undergoing. Yet, he finds it possible 'to isolate some basic trends and orientations

that form the deeper underlying foundation against and over which the ongoing transformations are struggling' (1994:118), because the past is the more determinant (1994:119). One such basic trend is the notion that 'the world of realities consists of two interrelating spheres, the visible and the invisible, of which the visible is in some ways dependent on the invisible' (1994:120). In spite of the controversy surrounding the *force vitale* theory of Tempels, he finds that 'the idea of interacting forces is an enlightening intuition for a proper understanding of this question of the invisible' (1994:124). He thus holds that 'there is a mystical interaction of forces and wills between the two spheres [visible and invisible]' (1994:120).

He defines the presence of God, which is of a special type, in terms of this interaction: 'God's presence asserts itself through the interaction of ... the visible and the invisible' (1994:121, italics his). He emphasises the absence of a radical dualism in the way of thinking. The interaction-of-forces ontology explains why the community as interdependence through relationships is the central concept of humanity (1994:122). The primacy of community and cooperation can also be explained in terms of this ontology:

traditional African life was based in a simple technology with a minimum of 'scientific' knowledge of and mastery over the rest of the universe. We should perhaps state it more clearly. The relationship between the human community and the rest of the universe was not conceived of as a project of struggle where human beings would look at the world as an object or an adversary whose nature and working should be investigated and reduced to formulas so as to master and exploit it. Rather the universe is seen as a common heritage, its diverse components as potential partners in the shared project of existence. There is, therefore, a feeling of mutual dependence among the different parts: human beings, the animal world, vegetation, the elements, the heavenly bodies, the departed as well as the diffuse forces, visible and invisible, that circulate all around.

Success in living depends very much on how well these different parts interact, negotiating carefully and 'respectfully' the common resources available to all. There is a certain awe, something like a religious attitude, in this interaction: it is as if the whole universe possessed personality, consciousness, sensitivity, and 'soul'.

(Kalilombe 1994:123)

The governing principle of this whole complex of thinking is the distinction between the visible and the invisible, the latter being that what is beyond the range of ordinary perception.

Kalilombe distinguishes this category of the ordinary from what he terms the Western notion of the supernatural, as behaving contrary to the laws of the mechanical universe. The background notion of the African concept of the invisible is that the whole world of realities (spirits, persons, objects, words, gestures) are bearers of thought and efficacy at two levels: the ordinary, visible one that can be managed without access to special power; and the special mystical one that can be perceived and manipulated only with an enhanced perception and power – what he calls invisible. As forces from the invisible realm influence events in the visible, knowledge of the invisible and the power of dealing with it are of crucial importance for the community (Kalilombe 1994:124-125).

The spirits of the dead are the central area of the invisible, on account of their superior knowledge of the rules and art of successful living, and their identity formation role. They are also nearer to God, and to 'the bush', the realm of the forces of nature, and can thus influence both on behalf of their living relatives (Kalilombe 1994:126). Conversely, and importantly for 'hauntology', the spirits are dependent on the living. They are 'fed' through rituals of remembrance. Once forgotten they are cut off from the living and linger around as frustrated beings prone to mischief and harm (Kalilombe 1994:127). Kalilombe (1994:128) identifies two characteristic elements of African spirituality:

first, the consciousness that individuals and the community are committed to an ever-present struggle against menacing evil if life is to be worth living; and secondly, that in this struggle the decisive key is the availability of assistance from the invisible.

This is a good exposition of 'the kind of spirituality that one can deduce from African traditional culture' (Kalilombe 1994:130) in its standard form. But to understand the present state of African spirituality, one has to take into account the radical culture change in the wake of colonialism and globalisation dominated by the West, a change that has seen the traditional culture practically discredited, or demonised.

Colonialism ... inflicted a loss of independence on the native cultures. New norms and customs were imposed on the people in such a way that they had to live and act in conformity with a foreign worldview. It was continually impressed on them that their own culture was not valid: it was primitive, pagan, and retrograde. If they wanted to move forward, then they had to abandon it and adopt the civilized way of life of the West. Clinging to their own traditional culture was going to keep them backward and incapable of functioning successfully in the modern world.

(Kalilombe 1994:131)



Kimmerle's concept of intercultural philosophy does not accept this discrediting and mobilise thinking against it, by thinking equality on the basis of a particular conceptualisation of difference.

In Kalilombe's analysis the ability to 'modernise' (even though this was enforced on all) was not equally available to all. The large majority are 'left behind, trying to cope with the new situation as best they can' (Kalilombe 1994:131). A measure of survival is a struggle, and whatever is available is used: some remnants of the traditional culture still familiar to them, and bits and pieces of the new system. The struggle is an unfair one, and people become increasingly powerless in the face of modern forces. The draw cards of modern life are too strong to resist, and those who are forced to fall back on traditional culture do so out of desperation.

Kalilombe (1994:132) makes a list of Africa's woes, and then asks: 'How does all this tally with traditional culture and spirituality?'

This question is asked within the context of neo-colonialism, with its basic fact that the economy of the South is subsidiary to the North, the former being 'in practice the dependent and servant member'. The increased poverty and powerlessness of the majority of Africans does not mean that all groups/individuals are poor. Pockets of power and privilege exist side by side with extreme poverty and disadvantage. Traditional society certainly knew poverty, injustice, jealousy and suffering. 'But there is a radical difference, nonetheless, a difference not simply of magnitude, but rather of basic structure and orientation – a difference in spirituality' (Kalilombe 1994:132).

This different spirituality is based on a different worldview and governed by a different set of values and priorities: 'Central to this spirituality is the supremacy of the value of acquiring, possessing, multiplying, and enjoying material goods by individuals' (Kalilombe 1994:133). Kalilombe implies that initiatives that promote human well-being and proclaim the sacred value of the human person should recognise African spirituality as a potential ally in the struggle against the colonial legacy:

In our present world, cultures of greed and violence are creating death while people long for peace, security and joy. It may be that simple spiritualities, based on more human and humane values, like those coming from the weak and poor nations of the world, are the hopeful reserves for humanity's future survival.  
(Kalilombe 1994:134-135)

I take the following from Kalilombe: 'there is a mystical interaction of forces and wills' between the spheres of the invisible and the visible. The dominant rationality that willed the invalidation of Africa is not neutral but driven by the will to possess. African spirituality, as it existed before colonialism, cannot be restored, but can be re-evaluated within the context of looking for alternatives to the dominant culture of greed and violence.

### **African spirituality as false consciousness**

Jean-Marie Makang (1997:336) also produces a litany of Africa's woes: lack of productivity and deficient management, the squandering of common patrimony and national resources, injustice, oppression, exploitation, irrational choices detrimental to the well-being and emancipation of African people, bad distribution of political power, including its personalisation and confiscation within a few hands. He also looks for an adequate response to this sorry state of affairs. He (1997:335) propagates as an alternative to the two extremes of either archaism or 'capitulation to mass culture, secreted by Western capitalism', a view of tradition as 'regulating *utopia*' (Fabian Eboussi), as an ideology of society, permeating all fields of knowledge and all institutions of society, yielding concrete effects in society (Kwame Nkrumah). This implies pointing out common references in particular contexts in which Africans and African-descended peoples daily construct societies. He defines 'common reference' as 'a system of ideas, ideals, thought, opinions, values, beliefs, representations, aspirations, or attitudes which bind members of a group together in a common praxis which is geared toward a common purpose. He also uses the terms 'community of destiny' (destiny is 'the tension that allows a tradition to renew itself while it perpetuates itself' (Makang 1997:330)) and 'living tradition'. The latter 'is neither a repetition of practices and customs of the past, nor a dream of 'the origin' or of a 'lost paradise', but is meant to provide a utopian model of action, a mobilizing ideal'.

This last sentence is the culmination of an extremely sharp critique of the vital force ontology of Placide Tempels and his followers. Makang concentrates on three problematical aspects of this ethnological approach, all three aspects of the mystification of tradition:

*The problem of historicity:* The dynamic ontology, as expounded by Tempels, is unhistorical in that it denies the evolution of the Bantu world-view. The 'bush-people' are for Tempels the only authentic Bantu, on account of not having been spoiled by European modernity. This amounts to 'the praise of the past over and against the present, of archaism over and against progress, of the good soul over and against technical and material improvement,' tradition as nostalgia – dead tradition (Makang 1997:327).

The universe on which this tradition rests is mythical, and thus does not affect the ordering of things in the present, and cannot empower contemporary Africans to gain control over their own destiny. The ethnological discourse is characterised by emphasising the difference of the African people from the Western world as essential to understanding African mentality. It consciously or unconsciously complies with the Eurocentric discourse that denies any other place for Africans in the history of humanity apart from the one assigned to them through inclusion into the destiny of Europe – Du Bois's appendix idea. Apart from being mythical, the tradition has also been 'deadly compromised by the intrusion of the Western world ... defeated and marginalized by the present world order' (Makang 1997:328).

It will only survive by adapting itself to new historical situations, by learning from other traditions, assimilating from them those elements that can contribute to its revitalisation.

*The problem of generalisation:* The Bantu dynamic ontology is construed from a particular behaviour, observed in a specific ethnic group, and then without further ado presumed valid for all Africans. The reverse also happens. A general feature, applicable to most of humanity, is defined as specifically African. And what is 'Africa' in any case but a common geographical entity? African tradition or identity is a construction undertaken according to the needs of people.

*The problem of presumed African particularity (Culturalism):* The ethnological discourse has reduced African traditions and identity to culture, whereby culture is synonymous with folklore, which 'designates only artistic productions and external manifestations of Negro-Africans' emotional life, primarily in music, dances, and rituals' (Makang 1997:330). In the process African traditions are rendered a marginalised domain of African life in the contemporary global society. Paulin Hountondji has coined the term 'culturalism' to describe this reduction. Makang calls it an ideology in the Marxian sense. It is used 'to divert the attention of African people from the most crucial problems which confront them today, and which are political and economic in nature' (1997:330). During colonial times culturalism gave priority to the demand for cultural recognition over national liberation. In post-colonial times it is misused to divert 'the African masses and revolutionary forces ... from gaining true social consciousness and from organizing themselves for effective class struggle against their indigenous and foreign oppressors' (Makang 1997:331).

Cultural rehabilitation, or the rehabilitation of the humanity of African people, must be part and parcel of political liberation, as it is in the conceptualisation of 'negritude' by Aimé Césaire, as opposed to that of Senghor. Makang (1997:332) thus does employ a positive concept of cultural difference, one that proceeds from the fundamental assumption of equality.

For the present context Makang's argument is especially relevant where he links the discourse on cultural difference with the strategy, in the interest of continued Western control, to prevent Africans from acquiring 'what they lacked and needed most in order to become equal to the West', namely political self-determination and technical efficiency. The latter, gaining control over natural forces, is the reason for the superiority of 'the white man' (Makang 1997:332). Tempels never questioned Belgian colonial domination of Africans, while acknowledging technological mastery as the reason for Africans' recognition of 'the white man' as a superior force, surpassing the vital force of Africans. Yet, when modern Africans 'coveted this technique, they were reminded that it is not the technique or material success but the good soul that makes a great man' (Makang 1997:334).

For Tempels, says Makang (1997:334), 'the contribution of the African people to civilization is conceived neither in terms of scientific and technical efficiency, nor in terms of industry building or state building, but in terms of preserving a mystical and a moral view of the world.' Thus, he is more interested in learning from the West 'the secret of their superiority over us in recent history', of which key elements are 'technical know-how, efficient organization, discipline, unity, and effective domination over one's physical and social environment' (Makang 1997:334). The problem with the dynamic ontology of vital force is that this force belongs to the realm of dreams and the imagination, and has no impact upon physical reality. As such it can be used as opium to perpetuate the domination of Africans.

Makang (1997:335) does not argue merely for the acquisition by Africans of technology, but for taking over the technological worldview, to give up viewing the world in terms of vital force. It would seem that he actually concurs with Tempels' analysis, while rejecting his advocacy for the retention of such an ontology, as this would impact negatively on 'our quest for realization of a better humanity'. In this quest:

African people need to acquire this fundamental disposition according to which it is their essential mission as human beings to dominate and transform nature in order to acquire a maximum freedom from necessity and want, instead of perceiving themselves as people meant to live in communion with nature.

(Makang 1997:335)

Thus, argues Makang (1997:335), on the basis of his reading of Marx: 'The primary quality of the human being, as Marx shows, consists in transforming nature in order to impose one's seal upon it.' This view determines his concept of culture, as opposed to that of culturalism: 'Culture, understood as the construction of artefacts upon nature in order to create a human habitat, is an essential vocation of the human being.'

Is this the Marx of *Capital* or of the *Parisian Manuscripts*? There is some indication that Makang would be open to further dialogue when he says his concept of culture is also critical: The domination of nature should at the same time avoid 'the human tendency', to seek infinity and to overcome or negate one's contingency. However, a critique of the instrumental view of nature is lacking here. No new animism is to be conceptualised on the basis of this instrumental view of nature.

The point that must be made from an intercultural philosophical point of view, in terms of the concept of difference presupposed, is that the appropriate philosophy for a particular situation is not necessarily fitting for another. It might well be that in one situation the call for domination of nature is appropriate while in another a shift has occurred where the domination itself must be brought under control. From the latter perspective the very fact that memories are still available of people who have interacted with nature in an alternative way could prove significant. To make such a point for a particular audience does not imply that one is prescriptive with regard to another audience. The question would then be whether a particular philosophical position is appropriate for its context. Entering into philosophical dialogues would under the conditions of a global world seem an appropriate response. Dialogue presupposes equality, mutual respect, but also openness for critique, provided it goes both ways. One will then have to ask what concept of utopia is appropriate for a particular African context. And concrete institutions will have to be interrogated with regard to their ability to act as revolutionary forces in conjunction with 'the African masses'. But the attempt to re-evaluate animism can learn much from Makang. We will presently be reminded by Bookchin, too, that ecological problems have their roots in social problems.

### **From epistemology to ethics**

Can highly complex societies really learn anything from African cultures or are we exoticising? Leonhard Praeg (2000) has argued that the problems we experience with ethnophilosophy should not be allowed to kill ethnophilosophy. He specifically addresses the paradox that *ubuntu*, as something that characterises African philosophy, disqualifies the aim of a separate philosophy – autonomy. He eventually proposes that ethnophilosophy shifts from epistemology to ethics. This shift will allow an overcoming of the solipsistic *ego ergo sum*, as well as of a romanticised nostalgic 'I am because we are'. The proper expression according to Praeg would be 'we are as if we were'.

Applied to animism, as positively viewing everything as related and worthy of respect, which includes the possibility of a more comprehensive sense of community, this shift entails a moving away from the problematical ethnophilosophical nostalgia to an ethical view of the world, as it really is, and therefore should be. The implication of this for the dialogue with

African philosophers is that an extended concept of *ubuntu*, comprising the ecological community, could be taken as an injunction.

The ethnophilosopher Senghor had no doubt about Africa's essential contribution to the civilisation of the universal, which 'will be monstrous unless it is seasoned with the salt of negritude' (quoted in Praeg 2000:191).

The cultivation of negritude is thus justified as a contribution to a universal civilisation. Praeg identifies the contradiction incurred by Senghor. The particular African contribution must be cultivated, and yet it is already known that this contribution will be worthwhile, will be vital. This is the same problem that Charles Taylor has identified with regard to the thesis concerning the equality of cultures. I have tried to address this problem in a previous paper by substituting the 'equality of cultures' with the 'equal validity' of cultures (Hofmeyr 2004). Praeg reaches a similar conclusion to Kimmerle's notion of the discursive non-availability of universals, a state of affairs that legitimises the particular as such, and articulates the relation between ethics and ethnicity, as described by Miller: 'What is ethical would be a dialectical relationship between a transcendental truth and respect for the other, for difference. A self relating to itself has few ethical problems. In this sense, *there is no real ethics without ethnicity*' (quoted in Praeg 2000:132).

The problem addressed by Praeg (2000:134) is that:

[A commitment to Africa's particularity and performative difference is] faced with the paradox or dilemma that short of circumventing the historical invention of Africa with the aim of de-colonising and re-establishing its autonomy through a final act of liberation, [the] narratives that aim at re-inventing Africa only have recourse to the very discourses that invented it and made its oppression possible.

And:

the difference needed in order to sustain African philosophy is exactly the difference that needs to be undermined by it (Praeg 2000:194).

The particularity of African philosophy is *ubuntu*, but to maintain itself in the face of colonialism and oppression, it must assert Western style autonomy (see Makang's argument above). Praeg does both: he radicalises the critique of ethnophilosophy as exoticism, and he also recovers ethnophilosophy's 'dyadic logic as probably the first significant and positive contribution to/of African philosophy' (2000:207). This implies ceasing to think of the autonomy of African philosophy in epistemological terms, but rather in ethical terms,

transcending the epistemological through the fictional, the phenomenological dialectic between the essential and the imaginary through the ethical – affirming the *as if* that historically has and always will constitute the African self; Africa is, *means* replacing both the solipsistic certitude of the Cartesian ego and the nostalgia of the traditional *I am because we are* with a contemporary identity that is neither prior to nor post- the truth/fiction divide but irreverent of it; a celebration, instead, of the awareness that *we are as if we were*.

(Praeg 2000:211)

We are, as if we were human persons, who have the ability to relate in such a way to other persons, including non-human persons, that an in-between can emerge, in-between me and the tree, the hill, the river, the rock, the other human person.

## **New animism and environmental philosophy**

### **Deep Ecology**

The issue I want to explicitly take up now is the implication of a re-evaluated animism for ecophilosophy and environmental ethics. Few have worked out the implications of one such a reformulation of 'animism' more profoundly than the environmental philosopher Arne Naess, the 'father' of Deep Ecology. He formulates as the first of eight points held in common by supporters of the deep ecology movement: 'The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes' (Naess 1993:412).

According to Naess (1993:412), the ecosphere forms a whole and includes individuals, species, populations, habitat, as well as human and non-human cultures: 'Given our current knowledge of all-pervasive intimate relationships, this implies a fundamental concern and respect. 'Life' thus includes non-living entities, biologically speaking – rivers, landscapes, ecosystems.'

Naess (1993:418) formulates the main principle of what he calls 'ecosophy': 'Maximize (long-range, universal) Self-realization!':

I do not use this expression in any narrow, individualistic sense. I want to give it an expanded meaning based on the distinction between a large comprehensive Self and a narrow egoistic self as conceived of in certain Eastern traditions of *atman*. This large comprehensive Self ... embraces all the life-forms on the planet (and elsewhere?) together with their individual selves (*jivas*).

The second term of ecosophy formulated by Naess (1993:420) is 'Maximize (long range, universal) diversity!':

A corollary is that the higher the levels of Self-realization attained by any person, the more any further increase depends upon the Self-realization of others. Increased self-identity involves increased identification with others. 'Altruism' is a natural consequence of this identification.

This leads to a hypothesis concerning an inescapable increase of identification with other beings when one's own self-realization increases. As a result, we increasingly see ourselves in other beings, and others see themselves in us. In this way, the Self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others.

The resultant 'joyful sharing and caring' is linked by Naess (1993:420) to Kant's concept of 'beautiful actions', actions in which duty and inclination coincide. This insight shows an affinity with Kimmerle's use of the concept 'Achtung' (respect and reverence) in stead of 'tolerance' or 'respect'.

## **Social Ecology**

Amongst Neass' critics, the most vitriolic might be the social ecologist Murray Bookchin:

'Deep ecology' was spawned among well-to-do people who have been raised on a spiritual diet of Eastern cults mixed with Hollywood and Disneyland fantasies. The American mind is formless enough without burdening it with 'biocentric' myths of a Buddhist and Taoist belief in a universal 'oneness' so cosmic that human beings with all their distinctiveness dissolve into an all-encompassing form of 'biocentric equality'. Reduced to merely one life-form among many, the poor and the impoverished either become fair game for outright extermination if they are socially expendable, or they become objects of brutal exploitation if they can be used to aggrandize the corporate world. Accordingly, terms like 'oneness' and 'biocentric democracy' go hand-in-hand with a pious formula for human oppression, misery, and even extermination ...

To declare, as Arne Naess, the pontiff of 'deep ecology', has done, that the 'basic principles of the deep ecology movement lie in religion or philosophy', is to make a conclusion notable for *its absence of reference to social theory*.

(Bookchin 1995:229-230)



And that, I submit, is the crux: Is Derrida 'Saint Jacques' for siding with Saint Max Stirner? (see Bedggood 1999). Is Heinz Kimmerle's notion of a new animism sufficiently protected from 'its degeneration into an atavistic, simple-minded form of nature religion peopled by gods, goddesses, and eventually a new hierarchy of priests and priestesses' (Bookchin 1995:230)? Bookchin (1995:203) says 'the clear-sighted *naturalism* to which ecology so vividly lends itself is now in danger of being supplanted by a *supernatural* outlook that is inherently alien to nature's own fecundity and self-creativity.'

According to him natural evolution exhibits a wonderful power of its own to generate a rich variety of living beings. We need not people it with 'earth gods and goddesses'. He asks whether it is not the crudest form of anthropocentrism (the projection of the human into the natural) 'to introduce deified forms created by the human imagination into the natural world in the name of ecological 'spirituality' ...', and continues:

To worship or revere *any* being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that ultimately yields social domination, be it in the name of nature, society, gender, or religion. More than one civilization was riddled by 'nature deities' that were cynically used by ruling elites to support the most rigid, oppressive, and dehumanizing of social hierarchies. The moment human beings fall to their knees before *any* thing that is 'higher' than themselves, hierarchy will have made its first triumph over freedom, and human backs will be exposed to all the burdens that can be inflicted on them by social domination.

(Bookchin 1995:203)

Kimmerle (1995:159) refers to Schmidt's work on the concept of nature in the work of Marx. In this book the following quotation can be read, the words of the worker-philosopher Joseph Dietzgen addressed to Marx:

You formulate for the first time in clear, forceful and scientific terms what will be from now on the *conscious* tendency of historical development, namely, to subject the natural power of the societal processes of production, until now conceived as blind, to human consciousness.

(quoted in Schmidt 1974:136)

Schmidt (1974:210-211) agrees that the transition from the young Marx to the critique of political economy has been an expensive affair. Marx's important contribution has been the reversal of the idea of the mediatedness of all unmediated against its idealistic form. But some idealistic hubris has to continue working in Marx – that an entity is nothing in itself, but mere material for praxis. This goes against the tendency of Marx's work, the 'resurrection of nature',

'humanisation of nature', or 'naturalisation of humanity'. Schmidt recommends as remedy a reconsideration of the emancipatory role of human nature and the liberating power of sensuality in the work of the young Marx. What is needed, and will determine human survival, is the development of a concept of rationality that reconciles the total emancipation of the Gattung with the vital interests of individuals.

Bookchin (1995) interprets Marx in similar vein: nature must surrender to a conquering active-aggressive humanity. The natural world is a taskmaster that must be controlled. Deep ecologists assume the reverse of exactly the same – humanity is dominated by nature that must be obeyed. Social ecology claims to escape from this trap by re-examining the concept of domination. Bookchin holds that animals do not 'dominate' each other in the same way that a human elite dominates an oppressed social group. This shows that society, far from being the metaphysical opposition to nature, is one with nature in a graded evolutionary continuum on the basis of the extent to which human beings embody the creativity of nature. They do not merely adapt, but create, expressing nature's own powers of creativity. Natural history is a cumulative evolution toward ever more varied, differentiated, and complex forms and relationships.

According to Bookchin the question is not the opposition of natural and social evolution, but how social evolution can be situated in natural evolution and why it has been thrown against natural evolution – needlessly and to the detriment of life as a whole:

If social evolution is seen as the potentiality for expanding the horizon of natural evolution along unprecedented creative lines, and human beings are seen as the potentiality for nature to become self-conscious and free, the issue we face is *why* these potentialities have been warped and *how* they can be realized. ...

Whatever has turned human beings into 'aliens' in nature are social changes that have made many human beings 'aliens' in their own social world: the domination of the young by the old, or women by men, and of men by men. Today, as for many centuries in the past, there are still oppressive human beings who literally own society and others who are owned by it. Until society can be reclaimed by an undivided humanity ... all ecological problems will have their roots in social problems.

(Bookchin 1995:232)

It is against the background of Bookchin's insistence on social theory, and his thinking of humanity as having a place in nature, of nature itself becoming self-consciousness in human consciousness, that I now turn to the originator of the animism-theory, EB Tylor.

## Old animism

It is significant that Tylor ([1873] 1979) uses the term *animism* to refer to a spiritualistic philosophy that he opposes to a materialistic philosophy. He says: 'the deepest of all religious schisms [is] that which divides Animism from Materialism' (Tylor 1979:19).

He would have used the term 'spiritualism' if this term were not already associated with what he calls a particular modern sect. Animism thus means the general belief in spiritual beings. Tylor develops his theory of animism as a hypothesis concerning the origin of religion. One reason why the term carries such negative baggage is the evolutionary framework within which Tylor situates it. A few quotations should reveal the general trend:

'Animism characterizes tribes very low in the scale of humanity'; 'Animism is ... the groundwork of the Philosophy of Religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men'; 'One great element of religion, that moral element which among the higher nations forms its most vital part, is indeed little represented in the religion of the lower races', and so on (Tylor 1979:11). It should be clear that any talk of 'a new animism', or any re-evaluation of animism, will not take over any of the vulgar evolutionary view with which the original theory was joined at the hip. For Tylor, animism entailed

- the belief that human beings have souls that can have an existence independent of the human body;
- the belief that animals have souls that make it possible for humans to communicate with them, although, from the 'evidence' cited by Tylor, it would seem that these souls are quite easy to cajole;
- the belief in a 'theory of separable and surviving souls or spirits belonging to sticks and stones, weapons, boats, food, clothes, ornaments, and other objects which to us are not merely soulless but lifeless' (Tylor 1979:17).

It must be noted that the assessment of animism as primitive, was, in accordance with the views of August Comte, used by Tylor to describe the 'primary mental condition of mankind' as a state of 'pure fetishism, constantly characterized by the free and direct exercise of our primitive tendency to conceive all external bodies soever, natural or artificial, as animated by a life essentially analogous to our own, with mere differences of intensity' (Comte, quoted in Tylor 1979:18). A new animism differs with Tylor at this point. The system of interrelated forces, the dynamic whole of spiritual forces, the spiritual universe, to which natural things belong, as participating in life-force (Kimmerle 1995:162) must thus be conceived without the prejudices of a scientific modernism, or classical science.

## **Animism revisited**

In 1999 *Current Anthropology* published a paper by Nurit Bird-David in which she argues that even so-called primitive animism was misunderstood by Tylor and others and that it can be refigured as a relational epistemology. Her approach shows an affinity with Kimmerle's criterion of adequacy: 'The perspective to be employed is presented not as more valid than any other but as one now needed in studies of the complex phenomena which Tylor denoted as 'animism' (Bird-David 1999:68). I follow Bird-David's argument in support of Kimmerle's clarification of his original call for a 'new animism'. We do not need a new animism, but a re-evaluation of the phenomenon that has gone by the name animism, since at least Tylor.

In her review of the 'textual conversation' on animism to date (Tylor, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss and Guthrie) she shows how positivistic ideas about the meaning of 'nature', 'life' and 'personhood' made it impossible for these attempts to understand the local concepts. These theoreticians 'attributed their own modernist ideas of self to 'primitive peoples' while asserting that the 'primitive peoples' read their idea of self into others!' (Bird-David 1999:68). She points out that Tylor, whose monograph *Primitive Cultures* (published in 1871) was rewarded with the first chair in Anthropology at a British university, never did primary research in the localities that he theorised about. He relied on second-hand accounts of 'primitive people' and had his own direct experiences at spiritualist séances in London where he investigated what he called 'modern spiritualism'. He read the literature on 'primitive' or 'savage' people with his first-hand knowledge of séances and his supposition that the latter is a remnant of the former allowed him to use the terms 'spirit' and 'soul' and 'ghost' in his conceptualisation of 'primitive' animism. As a rationalist Tylor rejected the 'appearance' of spirits at séances as a delusion, and thus 'primitive animism' as delusionary.

The concept of spirit/soul/ghost used by Tylor was firstly dualistic – every person had a body and a 'ghost-soul' that was a 'thin unsubstantial human image', 'the cause of life or thought in the individual it animates' and 'capable of leaving the body far behind'. It also continued to exist and appear after the death of the body (Tylor, quoted in Bird-David 1999:69). Secondly, as indicated by Durkheim, Tylor identified the mind of a child with that of a 'primitive'. Thinking like a child the 'primitive' endows even inanimate things with a nature analogous to his own. Bird-David (1999:69) makes the point that 'Tylor read into the primitive view the modernist spiritualist understanding of 'one's own nature,' not the primitive's or the child's sense of 'his own nature'".

Lévi-Strauss criticised the theories of Tylor and Durkheim for placing indigenous peoples on the nature side of the dualistic split between nature and culture. But according to Bird-David (1999:70), although he correctly put them on the culture side, he retained the split and

located it inside the savage mind of indigenous peoples. This was not an explanation of animism but explaining it away.

Exploring an alternative interpretation along the lines of personhood concepts and ecological perception, Bird-David (1999:70) starts with the work of Irving Hallowell. He has found that the Ojibwa of Northern Canada have a different sense of personhood from the modernist one. The latter restricts the category 'person' to this side of the human-nonhuman divide, whereas the former conceives of 'person' as an overarching category with subcategories including human person, animal person, wind person, etc. Hallowell, says Bird-David, not only frees the study of animism from modernist presuppositions, but also from the assessment that animistic notions and practices are erroneous. She pursues his insights further through ethnographic material that she has collected during fieldwork amongst the Nayaka, a hunter-gatherer community of a forested part of South India. She wants to understand the senses of what the Nayaka call *devaru*, a concept that remains enigmatic to positivistic thought.

*Devaru* are neither spirits, if spirits are part of the spirit-body dualism that characterises the modern person-concept, nor supernatural beings, if the 'nature' in 'supernature' is conceived along Western lines. Bird-David (1999:71) introduces the concept 'superpersons' to denote persons with extra powers, and then allows this concept to acquire meaning by describing *devaru* in local contexts. Referring to a common practice in South Asian scholarship, she uses the term 'dividual' as 'a person constitutive of relationships' in distinction to the Western notion of an individual as 'a single separate entity'. To dividuate would then mean to be 'conscious of the *relatedness with* my interlocutor *as I engage with her*, attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens simultaneously and mutually to me, to her, to *us*' (Bird-David 1999:72).

She argues that the Nayaka do not individuate, but dividuate other beings in their environment: 'They are attentive to, and work towards making, relatedness. As they move and generally act in the environment, they are attentive to mutual behaviors and events.' And: 'They *make* their personhood by producing and reproducing sharing relationships with surrounding beings, humans and others' (Bird-David 1999:73). They appreciate that they share the local environment with such beings, which, different as they are, constitute a *we-ness* together with the human members of this relationship. *Devaru* are beings that are absorbed into this *we-ness*: 'By maintaining relationships with other local beings to reproduce their personhood, Nayaka reproduce the *devaru-ness* of the other beings with whom they share. ... These relationships constitute the particular beings as *devaru*' (Bird-David 1999:73). Bird-David summarises this part of her argument:

(T)he *devaru* objectify sharing relationships between Nayaka and other beings. A hill *devaru*, say, objectifies Nayaka relationships with the hill; it makes known the relationships between Nayaka and that hill. Nayaka maintain social relationships with other beings not because, as Tylor holds, they a priori consider them persons. *As and when* and *because* they engage in and maintain relationships with other beings, they constitute them as kinds of person: they make them 'relatives' by sharing with them and thus make them persons. They do not regard them as persons and subsequently some of them as relatives, as Durkheim maintains. In some basic sense of this complex notion, *devaru* are relatives in the literal sense of being 'that or whom one interrelates with' (not in the reduced modern English sense of '*humans* connected with others by blood or affinity' [The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1973]). They are superrelatives who both need and can help Nayaka in extraordinary ways.

(Bird-David 1999:73)

Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception is used to describe the way in which *devaru* are known. According to this view meaning is not imposed on things (see the reference to Adorno's critique of epistemology above), but discovered in the course of action. Information is picked up from the environment by means of attention. Gibson has it that this attention is 'a skill that can be educated' (quoted in Bird-David 1999:74), and knowing is developing this skill. Stories and models of things, words and pictures are aids to perceiving and not themselves knowledge. They facilitate knowing, induce an awareness of being in the world, and never copy or represent reality. Bird-David (1999:74) applies this approach to the Nayaka: 'Their attention is educated to dwell on events. They are attentive to the changes of things in the world in relation to changes in themselves.' Relative variances in the flux of interrelatedness of different kinds of persons are interpreted as manifestations of *devaru* in specific situations. At regular *devaru* performances (that involve what in modernist language would be termed 'spirit-possession') *devaru* are 'made alive', which means 'raising people's awareness of their existence in-the-world and, dialectically, producing and being produced by this, socializing with them' (Bird-David 1999:77).

Bird-David's (1999:77-78) argument culminates in a description of animism as a relational epistemology, a 'talking with trees' alternative to the modernist epistemology that would involve knowing a forest through 'cutting trees into parts'. 'Talking with' means a two-way responsive relatedness with a tree (for instance) with the possibility of the emergence of mutual responsiveness and even mutual responsibility. Knowing in modernist epistemology is 'having, acquiring, applying, and improving representations of things in-the-world', while the animistic way of knowing entails 'developing the skills of being in-the-world with other things', 'understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the

related viewer'. Both these ways of knowing are real and valid, and each has strengths and limits.

In his 'Comment' on Bird-David's paper Tim Ingold (1999:82) elaborates further on the concept of a two-way relatedness to components of the environment (e. g. trees) that results from a longstanding intimate engagement with them. Talking with a tree does not constitute an erroneous attribution of an inner intelligence that exists prior to interaction. It rather means responsiveness as 'a kind of sensory participation, a coupling of the movement of one's attention to the movement of aspects of the world'. The intelligence at work here would not lie inside the head of the human actor, nor in the fabric of the tree. 'Rather it is immanent in the total system of perception and action constituted by the co-presence of the human and the tree within a wider environment' (Ingold 1999:82).

In her 'Response' to Ingold and others, Bird-David refers to Martin Buber's I-Thou concept that specifically also includes animals, trees, objects of nature and God. She quotes Friedman's formulation of the role of the in-between in Buber's I-Thou: 'I-Thou ... cut[s] across the lines of our ordinary distinctions to focus our attention not upon individual objects and their casual connections but upon the relations between things, the *dazwischen* (there-in-between)' (Bird-David 1999:87).

The point Bird-David makes is not that relational ways of knowing do not exist within the context of the modern state and its institutions, but that they are not given sufficient authority, as is the case in Nayaka culture. It is thus a matter of giving authority, and a call for the giving of authority to relational epistemologies. What kind of epistemology is now needed becomes a matter of ethics.

### **Bookchin revisited**

Murray Bookchin died on 30 July 2006 of complications of a malfunctioning aortic valve in Vermont, USA. He was 85 years old. I want to honour the memory of the 'founder' of Social Ecology by further exploring his argument against spirits and the 'supernatural' in general. It is significant to note that social ecology as originally conceived by Bookchin included the insights derived from an exploration of what he calls preliterate 'organic societies'. These societies are called organic 'because of their intense solidarity internally and with the natural world' (Bookchin 1991:44).

These societies existed before hierarchy and capitalism emerged and Bookchin's interest in them is informed by the conviction that contemporary radical ecological politics can learn from their 'nonhierarchical sensibilities, practices, values and beliefs'. He positively took up into

social ecology the principle of the irreducible minimum, by which organic society guaranteed to everyone the material means of life; its commitment to usufruct rather than the ownership of property; its ethics of complementarity, as distinguished from a morality of command and obedience (Bookchin 1991:xiv).

His approach to inbetweenity involves the integration of the principles and values of organic society with the rationality, science and large parts of the technology of the modern world. The latter, however, would be redesigned 'to promote humanity's integration with the nonhuman world'. He thus has a selective integration in mind that would form 'the overarching practices of an entirely new society and sensibility' (Bookchin 1991:xiv).

Bookchin originally also examined organic society's religions and cosmologies, including what he calls 'its mythic personalizations of animals and animal spirits ... and its overall animistic outlook'. But he 'never believed that we could or should introduce their naïve religious, mythic, or magical beliefs or their cosmologies into the present-day ecology movement' (Bookchin 1991:xv). And yet, according to his interpretation, that is exactly what happened in new ecologies such as Deep Ecology and ecological animism that has emerged since the first publication of *The Ecology of Freedom* in 1982. He dismisses these approaches as 'mystical ecology' that threatens the integrity of the rational ecology movement. The latter tries to balance reason and technology with organic thinking and spirituality (Bookchin 1991:xvi). Bookchin's concern is that 'these practices' (and the list is much longer as the instances mentioned here) are cop-outs because they do not deal with the authentic problems of our time, which, for social ecology, are social problems from which ecological problems spring. The main problem is that capitalism has become more than just an economy. It is a society (Bookchin 1991: xviii).

In capitalism as a society people have come to resemble the commodities that they produce and consume. Fragmentation has become an ideology. Capitalist society has nothing to fear from mystical ecologies: 'it is profit, power, and economic expansion that primarily concerns the elites of the existing social order, not the antics or even the protests of dissenters who duel with ghosts instead of institutionalized centers of power, authority and wealth' (Bookchin 1991:xix). Bookchin understand 'nature' as an evolutionary development that should be conceived as an aeons-long process of ever-greater differentiation, up to the emergence of organic and sentient beings. It is 'a cumulative evolutionary process from the inanimate to the animate and ultimately the social, however differentiated this process may be' (Bookchin 1991:xx).



The principal distinction made by Bookchin (1991:xxi) is between first nature (non-human) and second nature as the social nature created by human beings. He emphasises that this distinction is not a separation, but reflects two developments of 'nature-as-a-whole'.

The use of the terms first and second nature is also to be found in the negative dialectics of Adorno who strongly influenced Bookchin. Adorno (1980) describes society as second nature, and one sense of this is negative, that society that is supposed to be the product of the history of freedom, becomes nature according to the dialectics of Enlightenment. Society is reified. In this context the negative implication of second nature is that the whole is the lie (against Hegel). The problem is how to get out, because it is the whole. Bookchin himself has suggested the exploration of 'non-identical' (Adorno's term, not Bookchin's) organic societies. Heinz Kimmerle works more with the simultaneousness of such societies with Westerners whose glasses have cracked to such an extent that they cannot see a thing. They must be told what it is that they cannot see, as a blind person would listen to a seeing person describing a landscape or a scene. If the non-identical interlocutors would now say 'spirit', imagine a blind person saying 'you can't be serious, it is impossible to see spirits, spirits do not exist' and go on to rant about how ridiculous and harmful it is to believe in spirits, and that secularism is the only solution. Kimmerle (1985:92) has dealt elsewhere with what would be happening here: the view that Europe with its order is superior to wild and chaotic Africa has its roots in Europe's own myths. Remember Tylor at the London séances, and then going home to write about animistic Africans! Kimmerle involves Heidegger: onto-theology is a combination of the Greek idea that the being of the cosmos finds its unity in the gods, and Jewish monotheism with its idea of direction through a single history. To that was added the logic of Aristotle with its metaphysical principle that everything must be subjected to an external order (see Hofmeyr 2005:58). Bookchin's reaction to spirit-talk might be mistaken for the anxiety experienced by Europeans when confronted with the threat of the regression into mythical times. The point is that he might be reading his own repressed ghosts into what is intended by ecological animists.

Back to the metaphor: Hopefully the blind person will be sufficiently conscious of her helplessness that she continues to listen, and that her non-identical interlocutor would be sufficiently patient to lead her to the tree so that she can feel the texture of the bark and experience the coolness of its shade and hear the wind rustling the leaves, knowing that it is the wind rustling the leaves *and* angels on a journey. Compare our poet Breyten Breytenbach's (1977:206) poem:

[n man]

moet weet as die wind deur die olyfbome waai  
dat dit die wind is wat deur die olyfbome waai  
en engele op reis.

The wind, invisible energy, is *muya* in Venda and *moya* in Zulu and spirits are *muya* as well. The blind person might hear why this particular tree differs from the others, that it is associated with the predecessors, and that rocks and lakes can also be sites of the non-absent absence of the predecessors.

An article by Clark (2000) on social ecology is very interesting in this regard, especially as he refers specifically to the concept 'spirit'. According to him the most radical dialectical and holistic thinking is repairing the ontological and political meaning of the concept 'spirit' (after all the exorcism of the young Hegelians, including Marx). Concerning Marx: he was right in identifying the fundamental irrationality of economic society as lying in its spirituality – the fetishism of commodities. Clark obviously does not want to hark back to Hegel's idealistic concept of spirit, on account of it being one-sided and dogmatic. Yet, the concept of spirit is an important means of expressing the human relationship to the becoming, developing, unfolding whole and its deeper ontological matrix. He quotes Kovel: spirit is what happens to us when the limits of the self disappear. 'Self' here is the narrow consumer's ego of economical society. The negation of ego-identity happens when we discover our relationship with the primordial continuum and its expression in the striving for wholeness and the whole. Note the importance of striving: the primordial continuum finds expression in processes of life, growth and development. Clark says, and that is why I relate his argument here: a social ecology can give expression to an ecological spirituality that will embody the truth of religion, which is a liberating truth if set free from the mystifying and grotesque expressions that it has found in the service of domination and conformism.

Baird Callicott (2001), writing about a multi-cultural approach to environmental ethics, has argued that diversity is good, but that there is also a need for a unifying process and discourse. Three global discourses are presently available. Global capitalism and geo-politics do not respect the other and are top-down. Post-classical science, on the other hand, has integrated the undermining of the epistemological priority of western rationalism in its foundation. The scientific accounts are seen as narratives. And yet, against post-modernism's critique, these narratives are grand. To be grand they have to satisfy certain criteria, e. g. imagination. The new grandness includes: embeddedness, not transcendence; cooperation, not conquest; wholeness, not fragmentation. The stories of post-classical science are more credible than any other available stories, and one ignores them at one's peril. But to be grand they have to be integrated with local knowledge systems. Reciprocal interaction between scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge, recognition of the organic relationship between the two kinds of knowledge, is called for, if an appeal to the human soul must be made by the post-classical scientific narratives. Without an appeal to the human soul and the emotions, and without addressing the symbolic, no narrative can claim 'grandness'. Local knowledge, as also contained and expressed in religious ceremonies, does exactly this. This

might be the adequate formulation of the problem that is addressed in hauntology: the failure of classical western science, and the logocentric philosophy based on it, to integrate local, indigenous knowledge into it.

And here in Africa local knowledge knows of spirits. Kimmerle has exposed himself to the foreign and in one of his latest books reports on his homecoming (*Rückkehr ins Eigene*). Back home he attempts to find more words after Kant stated our fundamental inability to know about the existence/non-existence of God/spirits, and after Derrida left the question open as to whether God and spirits are real (Kimmerle 2006:109). The direction into which Kimmerle takes a groping step ('Wir versuchen, uns einen Schritt weiter vor zu tasten' – the appropriate attitude for someone who knows he cannot see through his cracked glasses) is away from the Feuerbach-Marx-Bloch line where the mystery (radical questioning) is situated in the questioning philosopher. The reality of the human historical and social world is embedded in nature and in the cosmos in such a way that it cannot be fully explained in terms of itself. Philosophers have no name for that which religions call spirits and God. But that which the spirits represent – the reality of the absent present – can today be explained in terms of virtual reality.

The question that Kimmerle (2006:111) poses is: what does it mean when it is stated that God and spirits 'represent' something? Projection theory, from Feuerbach to Bloch, cannot answer this question satisfactorily, as it proceeds from a concept of reality that only accepts the relations of the human-historical-societal world as basis of explanation. But this world is not everything. It is embedded in nature and the cosmos. We do not know, however, how the forces of nature and the cosmos affect human life and the human-historical-societal world. A religious explanation of this interaction cannot be dismissed. It must be left open. The relationship between human beings in history and society and the reality that encompasses this world is one of openness. Kimmerle (2006:112) finds this openness an adequate expression philosophically of the 'whole' of human life and the world.

A philosopher who thinks along these lines would then prefer the term 'forces' above 'spirits' – forces that have an effect on human life and the human-historical-societal world, and that cooperate with the known and explained forces active in the world (Kimmerle 2006:112).

This is how Kimmerle reflects on what has happened to his own thinking as a result of his exposure to dialogues with African philosophies. From an African and an ecological perspective the question can be posed whether the term 'force' is appropriate if animism is about understanding the world as a community of living persons, only some of whom are human (Harvey 2006). It makes more sense to respect and revere a person than a force, and to communicate with a person in showing respect. Harvey (2006) poses entry into full

relationality as an improved means of achieving understanding of the world we live in. The ethical implication of an animist way of looking at the world would be that no environment is the exclusive domain of human persons, or any other persons. Whatever we need we must seek in honest engagement with a diverse community of similarly needy and desiring persons. This personalist dimension is what might be lacking in Kimmerle's preference for the term 'force'.

But what Kimmerle has in mind is a way of thinking that would replace the ideology of progress and the never-ending increase of technical control with a striving to find and maintain a dynamic equilibrium with nature. Such an equilibrium would include human labour as a force of nature that relates to other natural forces, as Marx still did in the Parisian Manuscripts. In this sense 'force' is an acceptable critical equivalent of 'spirit'.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, how does a new animism relate to a new humanism? The new humanism is new in that it goes beyond the western tradition. In Africa it immediately encounters the invisible world of spirits. This presents it with an opportunity to incorporate local knowledge into its endeavours to together solve the problems of today. The problems are immense, specifically those that pertain to our relationship to nature. Indigenous African knowledge suggests an opportunity to extend the community of persons, at least to include the predecessors and the places and sites of their invisible presence.

The fault line that runs through this article is Marx and the spectres. Derrida's Marx-séance prompted Kimmerle to embark on a re-evaluation of animism. He proposes that the African conception of the invisible world of spirits could point to an alternative view of humanity's relationship to nature than the ideology of progress that allows for always greater technical control of nature. This alternative view could be appropriated critically to allow a view of nature that is integrated in the universe of forces – dynamic equilibrium.

This 'holistic' approach has always been suspect of uncritically accepting hierarchy. This suspicion has been fuelled by the fact that one of the great thinkers of holism, the South African general and Prime Minister JC Smuts seemingly found no contradiction between his philosophy of holism and the practice of racial segregation and stratification in South Africa. The great philosopher of equality, Karl Marx, is invoked by or has inspired all the voices in this article critical of spirit-talk. Marx himself, however, has become a spirit, just as communism once spooked the whole of Europe. His analysis of the fetish character of commodities is read by Derrida as an instance of the great materialist admitting to the power of spirits.

In order to set humankind apart from hierarchical nature in the interests of equality, Marx allowed an ambivalence to enter his thinking. Kimmerle opposes the Marx of the Parisian Manuscripts to the Marx of Capital. Kimmerle (2005:103) says 'here as well the memory of Marx is imperative'. Any appropriation of spirit discourse should be critical, also in the sense of Marx's critique of material conditions.

In the mean time strong arguments have been made in favour of a view that Marx's view of nature throughout is not only compatible with environmentalism, but thoroughly ecological (see Tanuro 2007; Foster 2000; Foster 2002). Yet to ascribe the subsequent use of Marx in support of a promethean attitude to nature to an ambivalence in Marx himself is at least tenable. The issue at stake, however, is that it is possible to show that Marx's philosophy of equality is not intrinsically bound up with an instrumental view of nature. In the Parisian Manuscripts Marx describes human labour, through which we produce and reproduce our material lives, as a force of nature amongst other natural forces within one 'nature'. The implication, according to Kimmerle (2005:104-105), is that nature is animated and that humans must insert themselves in this force-field and adapt to it (*einfügen*).

It should be clear from the discussions above that this could not be intended to mean that:

- Africans should insert themselves and adapt to the existing force-field of global relations while Northerners continue to develop (realise) the potentialities slumbering in nature, and to bring nature's 'play of forces' under their dominion (Marx, quoted in Kimmerle 2005:104).
- Inequality in human society should be seen as part of a natural hierarchy, based in and legitimised by a spiritual universe.

Kimmerle (2005:105) is interested in the animism of African thought as a potential link to reclaiming a concept of nature in which the intrinsic value and meaning of nature is adequately recognised. This interest is that of someone who responds to Wiredu's 'The need for conceptual decolonisation in African thought' by endeavouring from the side of the previous colonisers to decolonise thinking (Kimmerle 2007:34). It is also a response to Hegel's conceptualisation of a 'religion of life' that does not follow Hegel's initial downgrading and eventual exclusion of African religion, by describing African religion as animism as a religion of life. The universe, including natural earth and human world, is part of a dynamic interaction of the forces of life. All beings in this interactive whole have a soul, which can also be expressed as the potential of each and every being to accommodate spirits. African religion, as religion of life, is a religion of spirits.

Kimmerle (2006b:251; 2007:35) introduces the distinction between a visible and invisible dimension of the world in his description of African animism. A visible tree can host an invisible

spirit. A relationship between human beings and the natural world is presupposed: 'A feeling of belonging together, of being brother and sister of the natural things, at least an attitude of respect for them are characteristics of this relation.' The 'feeling' is grounded in a specific ontology: 'It is the same life-force which is at work in nature and in human existence' (Kimmerle 2006b:258). Kimmerle links this religion of life to contemporary environmental philosophy as expressed by Van der Wal who argues that Western humanity must again learn to experience themselves "as part of the great animated connection of nature" (quoted in Kimmerle 2006b:259). Kimmerle refers to the efforts of Ramose, Kelbessa and Zwaal to use indigenous African conceptions of nature as a source of environmental philosophy and ethics. They all come to a similar conclusion, as expressed by Zwaal: 'the forces of nature which act on the human beings and the forces of the human beings which act on nature are and have to be kept in balance' (Kimmerle 2006b:262). Ramose's term for the desired attitude of humanity to 'Mother Nature' is the key to Kimmerle's whole project – 'reverence and respect', *Achtung* in German (Kimmerle 2006b:260).

The critique of religion in the wake of the Western Enlightenment, culminating in Marx's analysis of religion as false consciousness, is expressed in Bookchin's (1995:2003) critique of Deep Ecology quoted above: 'To worship or revere any being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that ultimately yields social domination, be it in the name of nature, society, gender, or religion.'

How does 'respect and revere' (Kantian *Achtung*) differ from Bookchinian 'worship and revere'?

Bookchin's whole project is about the critique and overcoming of hierarchy. Traditional African social worlds are mostly hierarchically structured as by far the most are fundamentally patriarchal. Although this hierarchical structure is mostly not that of a pyramid, or triangle, as one would find in state forms of social organisation, but of a circle, the way the circles making up the social structure are concentrically organised denotes a strict division between the centre of power and the periphery, between inside and outside. Nürnberger (2007:23) makes the point that 'the spiritual order reflects the social order, indicating that it is an order of power and authority.' As the social order is changing, the spiritual order should, too. But the change is brought about by the forces of Modernity, and Modernity is exorcistic. It is about super highways and supermarkets, and not about the supernatural.

In the mean time the fundamental dualism at the heart of Modernity is philosophically no longer tenable, although it is still very much dominant in Western culture. The dualism enabled the West to become immensely powerful. The connection between the development of Western scientific disciplines and imperialism has been made repeatedly. Slater (2004:223) has recently again remarked on the fact that the silencing of the non-Western other

accompanied the ascendancy of Western supremacy: 'There is incorporation, inclusion, coercion but only infrequently an acknowledgement that the ideas of colonized people should be known.'

Heinz Kimmerle has told me personally how his taking African Philosophy seriously has led to him no longer being taken seriously in the European philosophical community. In a series of questions directed at Kimmerle by Prof. APJ Roux during his guest professorship at the University of South Africa in 2004 Roux raised the point that African philosophy has no realistic chance of becoming a partner in intercultural philosophical dialogues due to a serious lack of institutional support. Wim van Binsbergen, Kimmerle's successor on the Chair for Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, makes the same point emphatically with regard to Africa's spiritual traditions. The challenge is to create space and institutional support for the African voice in South African academia. I have elsewhere argued that a Historically Black Institution like the University of Venda could play a significant role in this regard (Hofmeyr 2005). Van Binsbergen, who makes a distinction between useful and valid knowledge, gives a fair idea of what this would entail.

Van Binsbergen (2007) argues that validity depends on the intersubjectively recognised procedures by which a particular knowledge has been produced. If the aim is to affirm the validity of the spirit traditions from a non-mainstream intellectual tradition, translation and format become a problem. The spirit traditions are for instance phrased in a local idiom that conveys concepts and relations that are not (yet) in a shape fit for circulation outside the local meaning system within which they are at home. One of the major issues in this translation process would be hierarchy, as it has been addressed in this study. 'If the spirit discourse represents valid knowledge in the local field, how do we ensure that it may continue to constitute valid knowledge in a globalised, universalising context like that of the modern media, the Internet, and intercontinental scholarship?'

The problem is compounded by the dominant format in which life is organised today. Although this format is Western (or North Atlantic, to stay with Van Binsbergen's preferred term), it is spreading all over the world.

Religion, education, health care, the judiciary, economic exchange, recreation, political life, is now in the hands of formal, bureaucratically implemented organisations, whose structures of command, and whose internal and external legitimation, all depend on the formal written word, increasingly in a digitalised form.

(Van Binsbergen 2007)

This development has rendered the experience of social life very different from what it was for people in previous and alternative historical and social settings. People who are living close to local spirit traditions are progressively exposed to the progress march of this form of organisation. The only way to have them vindicated as valid knowledge in this context would be to recast them in the language and the format of this formal organisation. They need to become the subject of a formal institutional course of action, which includes being taught, funded, staffed, researched, published, rewarded, etc.

[I]f we want spirit ideas, however inspiring and valid, to be inserted, to be recognised, and to work, in a modern environment, we must see to it that these ideas undergo such a translation and format change that makes their reception in a formal organisational environment possible, without destroying their content and meaning in the process.

(Van Binsbergen 2007)

Heinz Kimmerle has ventured into Africa and African Philosophy relatively late in his academic career. Yet, he has achieved much by way of own work and inspiring others in Europe and Africa to take this field of research seriously. His grappling with similarities and differences between the way central problems of our time are conceptualised in African and Western philosophies can be regarded as a solid start. Especially his thinking on spirits and animism proved to be quite controversial in a de-spiritualised context. I hope this presentation and interrogation will serve further thinking along these lines, and that the necessary steps will be taken to institutionalise the intercultural dialogues that will assist us in finding a way out of the dangerous situation the world has been put into by the dominance of consumerist materialism.

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# **The community and the individual in Western and African thought: Implications for knowledge production**

*Dedicated to the memory of Dr Tom Leeuw, 1943-2008*

## **Introduction**

Education is concerned, in one way or another, with the transmission of tradition as the 'knowledge, skills and aptitude necessary both for preserving and defending the basic institutions and values of society, as well as for adapting these to meet changing circumstances and new challenges' (Habte and Wagaw 1999:678). The process of transmitting and breaking with traditions occurs within a 'we' (Kimmerle 2003). In the South African context, characterised by both the break with indigenous tradition caused by Modernity (colonisation), and the break with tradition within the colonising tradition, the question of the 'we' as carrier of tradition is particularly relevant.

In this paper I attempt to approach this question from an intercultural philosophical perspective as formulated by Heinz Kimmerle, the German philosopher who in 2003 received an honorary doctorate from UNISA for his contribution to African Philosophy and the dialogue between African and European philosophies. I start with a survey of African and Western positions to illustrate that one-dimensional oppositions between African and Western thought are no longer accurate. I follow Nyasani's argument that despite the critique of Ethnophilosophy by Houtondji and others, there is strong evidence indeed in African Philosophy of a primacy of the 'we' over the 'I'. I then use the careful analysis of Gyekye to show that one may, however, be justified in speaking of an emerging importance accorded to the individual. I subsequently introduce the argument of Kimmerle who has shown that this shift has its counterpart in Western thought, where new experiments in 'we'-philosophy, including that undertaken by Kimmerle himself, have emerged in the wake of the critique of metaphysics, which, in the Modern period, unambiguously since Fichte, has become the metaphysics of the I.

This convergence of content goes hand in hand with the formal constitution, through intercultural dialogues, of a 'we' as carrier of the tradition, the 'we' of cultural in-betweenity (Fanon/Bulhan). Intercultural (or contextual) philosophy is proposed as the 'contemporary idiom' (after the failure of Marxist-Leninism) within which to express 'the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society' (Nkrumah 1964:79), the project to which it remains committed.

Finally I pose the question as to whom should be involved in the dialogues that constitute the we as carrier of tradition. I follow Karp and Masolo's lead in defining African philosophy (or more generally African knowledge) as a collaboration between the producers of culture and scholars. I report on two projects undertaken at the University of Venda where the producers of culture have been included in the process of knowledge production in higher education.

### **The primacy of the community in African Philosophy**

According to Masolo (2003:74) the 'idea of African communitarianism [is] the distinguishing basis for a different definition of values and evaluation of their worth'.<sup>230</sup> The 'communalism' or 'collectivism' formulated as characteristic of 'the' African approach to life, based in the extended family as primary social unit, was regarded by Leopold Senghor (1964) as the point of departure for an indigenous form of socialism. He even believed that Africa could do without the socialist revolution seen as inevitable by Marx, as nobody in Africa had privileged ownership of the means of production. African socialism based in communalism would also do without the stages of atheism and the dictatorship of the proletariat of its European counterpart, as it always have and always would respect the principles of humanity and freedom.

Kwame Nkrumah (1964:70) aimed at developing a new kind of socialism attuned to the 'original humanist principles underlying African society.' At the same time his 'philosophical conscientism' wanted 'to remold African society in the socialism direction; to reconsider African society in such a manner that the humanism of traditional African life reasserts itself in a modern technical community' (Nkrumah 1967:1). Nkrumah (1964:99) called for 'positive action' that will 'represent the sum of those forces seeking social justice in terms of the destruction of oligarchic exploitation and oppression. Negative action correspondingly represents the sum of those forces tending to prolong colonial subjugation and exploitation.' Positive action included self-reference: the means by which 'the African personality' can penetrate every aspect of society through unleashing the powers of 'self-motion'. These powers are released through the dialectical tensions created when positive action is asserted against negative action. Nkrumah (1964:79) used the language of Marxist-Leninism as the 'contemporary idiom' within which to express 'the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society.'

Paulin Houtondji (1976) criticises Nkrumah's consciencism for being 'unanimist', for relying on the acceptance of a unified thesis of African cultural identity and of ignoring the fact that

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<sup>230</sup> For a more thorough exposition, see Bell 2002, Praeg 2000, Kimmerle 2005 and chapter 5 of Coetzee & Roux 2002.

African reality is pluralistic. He identifies consciencism as 'a classic philosophy of consciousness, in that it aims at restoring the lost unity of African consciousness and at articulating three separate ideologies into a single, unified system of thought.' Nkrumah had the ambition for consciencism to eventually become 'the collective philosophy of Africans, the African philosophy' (Houtondji 1976:149). In the process he overlooked the ideological conflicts in pre-colonial Africa and simultaneously elevated theoretical unanimity into a value to be struggled for. This Houtondji (1996:154) calls 'the unanimist illusion.'

In spite of Houtondji's and others' critique of ethnophilosophy (see Houtondji 2002), its basic assumptions proved tenacious. A great number of African intellectuals continue to use the concept of vital force as the basis of an African ontology and metaphysics. The Kenyan JM Nyasani (1989:13), for instance, ascribes the virtues of patience, optimism, mutual sympathy and empathy (according to him characteristic of the African way of life) to a 'peculiar mode of existence that extends the realm of the individual potentialities to embrace the life of others and their concerns.' Nyasani refers to the Congolese philosopher MT Ntumba's conceptualisation, based on linguistic analysis, of 'community' as opposed to 'the individual'. In the Lingala language the word for 'we' is 'biso'. It denotes the concrete environment in which an I always finds herself. The I becomes visible in the light of the other who is constantly encountered as a 'you'. Ntumba opposes this 'being us' with what he finds in French philosophy in the terminology for 'being me'. His statement that the philosophy of *moitié* is not eradicable in Europe goes together with the statement that the philosophy of *bisoité* (I-you-ness) is in Africa similarly not eradicable. There stands the primacy of I, here the primacy of we. Ntumba defines 'bisoité' as 'being with' — being with all and everything. But it also denotes being situated. 'Being with' excludes absolute being, as it always refers to being at a concrete place (Nyasani 1989; see also Kimmerle 1995:92-93).

Nyasani concludes that in Africa sociality manifests itself in acts of submersion or self-surrender of the 'I' to the 'we'. He attempts a metaphysical explanation for this 'curious phenomenon'. In the African mythical world the first Africans are still in existence. They are still present as invisible but involved spirits who influence the living to conform to the tradition that is their legacy. The erosion of tradition always implies the loss of vital life-force. The individual's life-force does not belong to her by right or naturally, but as a gift granted by the ex post facto reality of those who previously enjoyed it and continue to safeguard it in favour of the teleological realisation of the good of human existence — togetherness in perpetual communion and perpetual vitality. Nyasani uses the body-soul relationship to describe the psychosomatic relationship between the visible living and the invisible spirits. The ontological underpinning of the primacy of community is the mutual participation in the life-force as pre-ordained by tradition. This 'curious philosophy' has succeeded to keep generations of Africans

in a state of cohesion, mutual dependence and a healthy humanism. Nyasani (1989) argues that the world could look to Africa for the principles of social harmony and interdependence.

### **Radical or Moderate Communitarianism?**

Kwame Gyekye (Ghana) counters any tendency to essentialise 'the African' or 'the European' view and argues that communalism and individualism do not oppose each other in African thinking. Gyekye (1997:36-37) quotes a number of African voices to the effect that what he calls communitarianism (a term that he uses interchangeably with communalism) is the characteristic that defines Africanness:

Communitarian moral and political theory, which considers the community as a fundamental human good, advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence, a life in which one shares in the fate of the other – bearing one another up – a life that provides a viable framework for the fulfillment of the individual's nature or potential, a life in which the products of the exercise of an individual's talents or endowments are (nevertheless) regarded as the assets of the community as such, a life free from hostility and confrontation: such a life, according to theory, is most rewarding and fulfilling. ...

(Gyekye 1997:75-76)

But Gyekye asks the decisive question, the one that takes the debate further: what type of communitarian notion is intended here: radical or moderate?

Radical communitarianism "conceives of the person as wholly constituted by social relationships" (Gyekye 1997:37). This notion of communitarianism informed the African socialism of the first generation of post-colonial African rulers (Nkrumah, Senghor, Nyerere). Mbiti is mentioned in this regard, and the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti is chosen as a representative voice to be subjected to a philosophical critique to show the untenability of radical communitarianism and to reject its main decisions in favour of moderate communitarianism.

With regard to personhood in African thought, Menkiti is quoted as saying that personhood is something that must be attained through participation in communal life (Gyekye 1997:48). Participation is effected through the assumption of the obligations associated with one's stations in life (from child through youth to maturity). Gyekye agrees, but not with the notion that personhood is attained through social incorporation, and that social incorporation is intrinsically bound up with the various rites of incorporation. Being a full person "in the eyes of the community" presupposes having gone through the rites of passage. Gyekye (1997:48)

objects on account of it being unclear “whether this way of achieving personhood involves morality at all.”

So are we back at the tired old distinction between a shame and a guilt culture? Gyekye does not operate with these distinctions, but I construe his argument to at least in principle imply that if Menkiti should be correct, it would also be appropriate to characterise African culture as a shame culture. But Menkiti’s exposition of the “African” position is not adequate, and Gyekye sets out to separate the grain from the “bizarre” and the “incoherent” (Gyekye 1997:49). As is his method, Gyekye carefully analyses Akan proverbs in his conceptual clarification of what Africans mean when they say “community”, “individual” and “person”, and how these concepts are related to each other. This he does in an effort to contribute from an African perspective to the worldwide dialogue on the most appropriate type of relation between the individual (autonomy, freedom, dignity) and society (the precondition for a worthwhile life) (Gyekye 1997:35).

An important motive in Gyekye’s critique is the freedom of the individual member of the community to choose and re-evaluate the shared values of the community. Gyekye agrees with the radical communitarians that communal life is not something optional, to be entered into by the already constituted individual, but is natural. Yet, that assertion does not settle the further question regarding the priority of the goals and needs of the individual, or that of the community. Is the community a means to and end, or the other way round? The moderate communitarian view acknowledges the intrinsic worth and dignity of the individual human person, her individuality, effort and responsibility (will, initiative, identity). Gyekye quotes Akan proverbs in support of this view and concludes;

... we should expect a human society to be either more individualistic than communal or more communal than individualistic. But, in view of the fact that neither can the individual develop outside the framework of the community nor can the welfare of the community as a whole dispense with the talents and initiative of its individual members, I think that the most satisfactory way to recognize the claims of both communality and individuality is to ascribe to them the status of an equal moral standing.

(Gyekye 1997:41)

When addressing the issue of the common good, Gyekye elaborates further on the need for individual freedom in the face of the fact that some social relationships are harmful to individuals, e. g. social arrangements that provide for discrimination against some members. But the alternative to this weakness is not atomism. An atomistic arrangement of social life will in any case not solve the problem as individuals seen as atoms can do the same. A community

constituted on the basis of respect for others will deal with inhuman social relations more satisfactorily (Gyekye 1997:43). At the same time he asserts that participation in communal life is essential for personal well-being.

Gyekye (1997:46) addresses the stock argument for the priority of the community (derived from the priority of the common good) by pointing out that there is no conceptual opposition between common good and the individual good, as the common good properly understood is nothing but the human good: peace, freedom, respect, dignity, security and satisfaction. Civil society is based in the commonly shared recognition of these. Gyekye's (1997:47) problematical remark that the promotion of the common good is the task of the state, will not be further pursued here.

The main argument for a moderate communitarianism is the assertion that the individual, while by nature a social being, is other things as well. The communal structure cannot perfectly reflect the complexity of human nature, values and practices. These are fundamentally changeable, in response to new experiences. The ethos of the communal structure does not pre-empt a possible radical perspective on the community. A re-evaluation of the values and practices adopted by the self is possible (Gyekye 1997:53). In the final analysis it is the individual who makes the choice, although the community offers many of the options (Gyekye 1997:57).

Within this context Gyekye (1997:50) argues that Akan though distinguishes between an individual (a concrete being detached from the community) and a person (a concrete being situated in a social context, by definition pursuing and practicing moral virtue). Personhood is defined in terms of the capacity to choose one's ends (Gyekye 1997:57). The moderate communitarian position according to Gyekye thus holds that the self is a communal being as well as an autonomous, self-assertive being with the capacity for evaluation and choice. The radical communitarian positions underplays the creativity, inventiveness, imagination and idealism that some human individuals display in the production of ideas and the experience of visions (Gyekye 1997:59). Therefore:

Moderate or restricted communitarianism gives accommodation to communal values as well as to values of individuality, to social commitments as well as to responsibilities to oneself. ... I believe strongly that a moral and political theory that combines an appreciation of, as well as responsibility and commitment to, the community as a fundamental value, *and* an understanding of, as well as commitment to, the idea of individual rights, will be a most plausible theory to support. (Gyekye 1997:76)



## **Romantic Gloriana and Philosophy of Unscience**

An over-emphasis on the part of African philosophers on the primacy of the community in African thought may have something to do with a reaction to the prominence of the philosophy of the I in Western thought. African experience of Western colonialism and domination in the name of presumed 'superior' ideas and ideals often resulted in what Ali Mazrui and Ade Ajayi (1999:670) call 'romantic gloriana': 'It seeks to emphasize the glorious moments in Africa's history, defined in part by European criteria of impressive performance, including performance in creating material monuments.' They contrast this position with 'romantic primitivism', also called the 'philosophy of unscience'. Senghor is an exponent of the latter when he traces Africa's genius to intuition, to the wisdom of settled experience. The human instinct, educated by history, is a better guide to behaviour than the more precise computer. Nkrumah was an extravagant exponent of the former position. His cultural policy as independent Ghana's first president was to claim an African origin to almost every achievement in the history of science and culture before the computer (and he would have been pleased to hear recent claims that even this epitome of technical prowess was actually an African invention).

Mazrui and Ajayi characterise 'romantic gloriana' as accepting European values while rejecting European 'facts' about Africa, resulting in a tendency to agree that respectable societies are not 'tribal' and that centralised political systems are superior. Western 'facts' about Africa are thus shown to be wrong. Africa had in fact known statehood, empires and emperors since time immemorial. In contrast 'the philosophy of unscience' rejects Western values but accepts Western 'facts'. It takes pride in its lack of cathedrals and palaces, and in the egalitarian humaneness of its decentralised forms of social organisation. The tendency to oppose the rampant individualism of some forms of Western philosophy with African communitarianism reveals both: romantic gloriana in countering a presumed unitary system with an equally strong unitary system; and romantic primitivism in rejecting everything the West is believed to value. Contrary to the Western prejudice there *is* an African philosophy. And it is better, more humane, more moral than its Western opposite. The arrogant 'civilised' are the real barbarians! And the true 'dark continent' is not Africa but Europe.

## **A Western We-Philosophy**

The opposite view, that Europe with its order is superior to wild and chaotic Africa has its roots in Europe's own myths. Heidegger has called it 'onto-theology': the Greek idea that the being of the cosmos finds its *unity* in the gods, combined with Jewish monotheism that provides for direction of a single history. Add to that logic as formulated by Aristotle, originally conceived as an external ordering mechanism, but eventually expressing the highest metaphysical principle – that everything must be subjected to an external order. That, says Heinz Kimmerle

(1985:92), is *the* order on which everything still depends for Europeans, the loss of which they fear. The pervasive anxiety of Europeans in encountering the other is the threat of the regression into mythical times. Kimmerle pursues the reasons for this.

One of the external ordering mechanisms that emerged in a long process of experimentation is capitalism which, according to Kimmerle, goes hand in hand with I-philosophy. Their relationship is concealed, but not therefore less real. First there is Descartes (Second Meditation): 'Let it be attentively considered, and, retrenching all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. There certainly remains nothing, except something extended, flexible, and movable.' The 'something extended' retains no independent integrity, no form of its own – it is, in Aristotelian terms, a nothing. It is wax in the hands of the I, who wants to possess it in order to form it, and to form it in order to appropriate it. The senses of the I are impoverished in the process, reduced to the sense of possession: 'Nowhere is space for the colourful multiplicity of difference' (Kimmerle 1985:93).

According to Kimmerle (1985:93) Fichte is the real opponent of a philosophy of we. He literally designs a 'metaphysics of the I'. Behind the ability of the I to posit itself lurks the will to possess of the economy. Absolute freedom translates into everything else becoming lifeless possession.

This is the metaphysics that must be overcome, the history of patriarchy, to which the class society also belongs. In this overcoming the many gods also return. Kimmerle warns: to tell again of the gods does not succeed easily. We cannot follow Nietzsche's suggestion to forget history. Nietzsche did not yet know what terror history had in store. And his 'eternal return of the same' is not yet the overcoming of history. It is still too much of a historically conceived oppositional model. Kimmerle's alternative is the constantly renewed arrival of diversity, which makes histories with itself.

But it is not happening. Globalisation is revealing an identity that shows the I that wants everything multiplied to form the we of humanity. Its logic is commodity fetishism, the basis of universal collectivity. The global reciprocal exploitation amongst human beings corresponds with the ruthless exploitation of all natural resources. Kimmerle (1985:96), as a student of Bloch, formulates the hope that the we of humanity will not enduringly recognise itself in this mirror. But he despairingly asks: what else must happen to shock more than a few into recognition that *this* cannot be us?

Kimmerle's proposals for a philosophy of we shows interesting affinities to the philosophies of community formulated by various African philosophers on the basis of indigenous knowledge. He defines 'we' as in each instance a conscious formation of a component of natural history.

Those involved are mutually responsible and also responsible to live in equilibrium with the less consciously formed components of this process. That we can do this and will do it is the chance for our survival.

Globalisation will benefit more from the results and discourse of post-classical science than from geopolitical or economic discourses (Callicott 2001). Truly planetary thinking places planet Earth in the infinite diversity of the universe. Who, asks Kimmerle (1985:100), can then still think of Earth as anything but a space for possible diversity?

## **A Contextual Approach to Knowledge Production**

A contextual philosophy (see Hofmeyr 2004) approaches cultural difference without presupposing an abstract highest being from which all other beings are deduced. The latter scheme belongs to a philosophy of the 'I'. The 'we' is concretely situated in nature, history and society, and is thus linked to a particular culture. Similarities and differences are not to be found in a transcultural heaven of ideas, but in-between cultures, through dialogue. Intercultural philosophical dialogues as paradigm for the common search for knowledge challenge science and technology, and politics and economics, which depart from existing power relations, to become more dialogical.

The binary opposition between Eurocentrism and Afri- or Afrocentrism belongs to I-philosophy. The Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) discourse is almost inevitably drawn into this opposition. The structural injustice is such that one cannot really expect the alternative approach, that of difference and a philosophy of we to take root. Fanon and Dussel remind us of the conditions that must be reached before the 'we' can be inclusive of Africans and Europeans. Dussel (1996:73) describes the steps that must be taken: firstly the colonised must discover themselves as the innocent victim of a ritual sacrifice. After that must follow the 'guilty' verdict on Modernity's original, constitutive and irrational violence. Only then can a 'we' of mutual fertilisation take hold.

Fanon ([1956]) says something similar with his concept of what Bulhan (1985) calls 'cultural in-betweenity'. Fanon ([1956]:1) in his paper 'Racism and Culture' sketches the 'fragmented and bloody history' of the coloniser's shift from the denial of culture on the part of the colonised, to the recognition of a native culture in a hierarchy of cultures, and finally to the concept of cultural relativity.

Bulhan (1985:193) describes this third stage as a synthesis reached between the dominated and the dominant cultures and an unambiguous commitment toward radical change. Both dominated and dominant cultures are transformed as a new culture emerges, with unique aspects not found in either of the two other cultures. Fanon ([1956]:9) stresses the opening

up of the previously rigid culture of the dominant group to the culture of people 'who have really become brothers. The two cultures can affront each other, enrich each other.' Fanon concludes: 'universality resides in this decision to recognise and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded.'

The 'cultural In-Between', says Bulhan, is the region of cultural contact, confrontation and mutual influence. The dominated and dominant cultures coalesce with considerable regularity and intensity. In the process the one modifies the other and each in consequence loses its original character.

It is important today to avoid conceptualising Fanon's three positions in terms of a stages-dialectic. They should be recast as shifts on the basis of a philosophy of difference. The criterion applied should be the adequacy of a particular position for its context. To evaluate an earlier culture from a later point of view constitutes 'shifts, in which a greater adequacy is reached with regard to the evaluation of other cultures in terms of the total world situation' (Kimmerle 1997:101). Critique from an intercultural perspective of the most adequate of the previous positions also should not be seen as progress, but as a more adequate way of evaluating other cultures: 'That means that an evaluation "from an intercultural perspective" is seen as the most adequate with regard to the contemporary situation of the world.' It does not mean intercultural philosophy is uncritical. Being adequate with regard to a specific situation simultaneously implies a critical evaluation of it. Philosophy and art, 'with regard to the crux of their expressions, know ... no progress, but mere shifts, a becoming other, that is conditioned by their relation to the general situation of the world' (Kimmerle 1997:101).

What would a philosophy of higher education be like that gives a central place to African knowledge within the framework of a we-philosophy formulated in terms of the philosophies of difference? This philosophy of education will realise that the 'universals' that a university is concerned with do not yet exist, they are not available. The universals must be constructed in a dialogical process to which every member of the 'we' must freely participate as equals. Intercultural philosophy has already shown that such dialogues (or polylogues) are possible. Kimmerle (2002) has coined the term "philosophy of the deed" for a philosophical enterprise that leaves the writing desk and computer for the direct exposure involved in dialogues.

But who should be involved in the dialogues? Who are the members of the we as carrier of tradition? Bruce Janz (2003) is correct in arguing that studying the knowledge production process in higher education is as much African as studying indigenous knowledge systems or practices. He positively views Karp and Masolo's (2000) attempt to reframe African philosophy as a collaboration between the producers of culture and scholars. Ethnophilosophy located philosophy almost exclusively in culture, and critical or professional African philosophy has had

the tendency of locating philosophy in the scholarly community alone. Dialogue is thus needed and the skills of engaging in dialogue with people who live primarily in an oral culture. The scholarly and critical reflection (which is part of culture, also African culture) on cultural artifacts or practices should be supplemented with and balanced by dialogue with their producers. In this way the encounter with products of culture will become more than reports on static, uncritical and anonymous worldviews. The subject matter traditionally associated with ethnophilosophy will be interrogated with the questions of postcolonial inquiry — questions concerning agency, power, marginalisation and representation — as they relate to philosophical issues rooted in African communities.

In what follows I will report on two projects undertaken at the University of Venda involving efforts to include the producers of culture in the process of knowledge production in higher education. The theme remains the relationship between the community and the individual, and it is focussed here specifically on gender relations. This focus is informed by the following considerations:

- The primacy in Gyekye's argument for moderate communitarianism of freedom for individual critique of unhealthy communal arrangements.
- The link established by Kimmerle between I-philosophy and patriarchy.
- The preconceived idea that a rejection of unhealthy practices in communities should necessarily lead to an atomistic individualism. I will produce evidence that rejection of oppressive practices in a tradition does not have to coincide with the rejection of tradition as such.

### **Listening to a story**

My first example is a research project undertaken by my former colleague Ina le Roux in the first half of the 1990s, culminating in a research report containing 50 recorded and transcribed *ngano*, or Venda oral narratives, commentated and interpreted, entitled *Verhale van verset en ander stories* [Tales of resistance and other stories]. I have chosen one story from this collection.

The traditional healer (*nanga*) Masindi Maliyehe from Sanari in Venda tells the following *lungano*, which she has heard from her mother:

The first wife of a certain man asked a younger woman to become her husband's second wife. The rules of an ordered household are explained to the new bride 'that the porridge of this place is cooked and dished into this plate'. Everything has its place and her role is fixed. She does what is required of her, and keeps quiet. The husband enters her hut at night and she takes his food to his, but she never sees him. And eventually she asks: 'What of this man whom I never see?' 'I

only feel him between the blankets, what kind of a man is that?' 'I must make a plan.' The narrator explains: 'At night the man sleeps with the young woman, but during the day he does not act like a human being. She gets enough to eat, but the young woman feels neglected, she does not get enough of his company. She wants to see him with her own eyes and talk to him.' The old snuff tin forgotten at home trick is played and it eventually succeeds. She gets home only to find her husband as a snake basking in the sun. It is a shocking experience, also for the man, who uses one of the most obscene swearwords to express his reaction to being exposed. The young woman must flee for her life. The snake pursues her to the house of her own mother, who chops the snake in four pieces. The pieces are buried and pumpkin seeds planted on the graves. And then the daughter tells her sad tale to her mother, after which it started to rain. The pumpkin grows and yields enough food for the mother and daughter, but not for the children who do not belong to the man. The young woman now communicates with her husband-grown-pumpkin, who loves her. She grows used to him and there might yet be a future together.

(Le Roux 1995:277-309)

Le Roux, who has recorded this story in 1992, refers to the irony of the paternalistic situation where the man's every need is satisfied by the two women, but in the process he becomes more and more isolated. He does not participate in the daily jealous squabbles of his two wives, and remains the enigmatic outsider, the invisible husband, the hidden snake, the pumpkin who answers from behind the house in a song (Le Roux 1995:277). He is present as the absent.

The narrator, Masindi Maliyehe, expressed sympathy with the abandoned first wife. It is apparently a regular occurrence that the second, younger wife, with the help of her mother, succeeds in luring the husband away, leaving the first wife no option but to pack her things and move.

It is indeed a sad story from the point of view of the older wife, but it yields interesting insights regarding the relationship between the community (here a polygamous family) and the individual. The story employs a number of narrative techniques to draw attention to the drudgery and boredom of life as fixed role-playing ('that the porridge of this place is cooked and dished into this plate').

In order to make philosophical sense of this and similar stories, one needs an appropriate aesthetic (see Hofmeyr 1996). Vail and White (1991), in their groundbreaking *Power and the Praise Poem*, have proposed an aesthetic of Southern African oral poetry. An 'aesthetic' is here

'a set of assumptions about poetic performance held throughout Southern Africa' (Vail & White 1991:41). Two notions are central to this aesthetic:

- Poetic utterances must be read *as history*, 'as a "map" of peoples' experience' over a long period of time.
- Poetic utterances must be appreciated in terms of their importance *in history*.

The key concept here is poetic license, 'the convention that criticism expressed in song is licensed criticism', which Vail and White (1991:41-42) explains further by taking a specific song as example: 'The song declares in licensed fashion what was true at a moment in time. The song also transcends that original encounter, giving it permanent significance. ... A historical intervention has become a reading of history and, hence, a way to transcend that history.' Is this aesthetic helpful for a philosophical reading of the oral prose of *ngano*?

*Ngano* seldom have happy endings. Life is hard, especially so for women in the rural areas. This message is transmitted over and over, with each story. Women who have listened to such a story would typically respond: 'we know that story very well', meaning that the story has successfully 'mapped' their experience, has successfully refined their 'histories' into metaphor.

This transposition of experience into metaphor represents the event of transcendence in Vail and White's aesthetic. In *ngano* nothing is overcome on the level of the story itself, but the story as an expression of the experience, would represent a moment of insight, of comprehension, and therefore of overcoming:

... history as metaphor is not simply history as code. It is history as drama, evaluation, and judgement; history with the metaphysics included. The metaphors, elaborated into patterns of interpretation, are not simply vehicles for the events themselves. They are the means of comprehending those events in terms of permanent or changing systems of values, *a means of being equal to events and hence of transcending them*.

(Vail & White 1991:73 (italics mine))

In a *lungano* judgement is definitely passed. A certain ontology, a view of the world as it *really* is, and therefore should be, is presupposed. In the story of the second wife and the snake-husband there is a decidedly individualistic flavour to this ontology.

Stories like these are oral sources from which authentic African philosophy can be extrapolated. But great care should be taken to avoid reading into it whatever Afrocentric or Eurocentric agenda one has. Is individual action an indication of underlying structures (structuralism) or functions (functionalism)? Or is it evidence of rational thought and free will

(Janz 2003)? Are this dualism and its inversion the only options available? I agree with Gyekye and those scholars, some of them contributors to Karp and Masolo's book, who endeavour to make the construction of the person more complex than the simple scheme of community *versus* individual allows for.

At the same time, philosophies of difference are not relativistic, as is often claimed. Philosophies of difference remain part of critical theory in that they envisage a better world. Resistance against patriarchy is a datum of the indigenous knowledge transmitted by the *nanga* Masindi Maliyehe and the other Venda-speaking tellers of *ngano* known to me. I do not criticise patriarchy on the basis of Western values that are posited as universal. I have gained the knowledge that patriarchy is problematical from the most local and particular of places, from Sanari and Muswodi and Folovhodwe and Tshikundamalema. Patriarchy belongs to I-philosophy. The father posits order, a different order to the order of multiplicity and difference that threatens as chaos. The father posits a fixed order that is always the same. Order as this order is patriarchal. It is the origin of domination, and the condition for the possibility of state, politics and law, the structures of order as sameness (Kimmerle 1985).

Myth has a different order – dynamic and open to difference. The stories are always told differently. New and different stories are added as new situations cry for new solutions. It is only when the father appears that monotony is imposed. 'History' originates, as the story of the succession of rule, from father to son, although many children are also daughters (Kimmerle 1985:89-90). To allow them to speak, to take their knowledge seriously, is one of the primary tasks of we-philosophy with its polycentric approach.

### **Artists on gender equality**

My second example is derived from a joint project of Heinz Kimmerle's Foundation for Intercultural Philosophy and Art and the Philosophy Unit in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Venda. This project culminated in an exhibition of predominantly wood and some clay sculptures from the Vhembe region in the *Zuid-Afrika Huis* in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, (September - October 2005), and in the *Stadsmuseum* in the Dutch city Zoetermeer (November - December 2005). To enrich the viewing experience I collaborated with my son Andrew to produce a video on dvd with interviews with participating artists, and showing them at work in their rural studios (*Art & Legend*).

A common theme in the artists' *ars poetica* is portraying the dignity of African culture(s) and preserving it in a rapidly changing society. In some notable cases this aim goes hand in hand with celebrating and promoting gender equality as provided for by the democratic constitution of liberated South Africa. I reproduce here a sample of the transcribed interviews.



*Owen Ndou*

The artist Owen Ndou from Hamutsha in Venda specialises in woodcarving. He refers to himself as a self-taught artist who started out with self-made tools. He is passionate about his art and believes that through it he can contribute to the community:

I am trying to fight against poverty. I am using my career to fight against poverty. So it gives me that idea for teaching them a wood carving for I find this job very good. It keeps everyone busy. When someone comes to be an artist, you can find that he knows what he is doing, where he is going, you see, and really you can survive. And then, to make people to know art, art is a best or very much important thing. We use it to keep historically of our country. You see, I can carve the sculpture maybe politically, you see, when I mention it that I carved Nelson Mandela. *Long Walk for Freedom*. It makes South Africa to remind, to mind about the thing that has happened to the first black president, and I am the first artist who carved the sculpture of Nelson Mandela and De Klerk in one piece of wood. It was a very beautiful thing, and a human being size. So the first black president's hands were tightened with a very big rope, like a slave, in other words. And then De Klerk was cutting that rope, showing a big power for cutting it. Which means divided we fall. There is no more apartheid, division is gone. ...

Owen Ndou also feels strongly about the protection of the environment. He explained his views in this regard while pointing to a finished work that is part of his private collection:

[This sculpture] is an angel, holding the earth globe. Protection of the earth. It's our home. And if we can't protect the earth, you know, we destroy our ... our treasure. You see, so I'm trying to show people that each and everyone who do something wrong or bad, God is worried.

On 26 July 2005 when the interview was recorded he was working on a sculpture of a dancing woman:

They must know that women lived under oppression for more than more years in South Africa, just because of Apartheid. So, Apartheid is gone, divided we fall. There is no man, no woman, its 50-50. ... And the government said that this job is not for the woman, its good for the man, the women never drive a bus, the women never just get in the Parliament, they don't have something that they can say, you see. The women don't have decision, they didn't choose. They just do it, whatever they like it or not, you see. Right now they've got a lot of women in the

Parliament, each and every job, any job, they do it. There is no one who can stop them. They are free, they are happy. There is no more depression to the women, to the ladies. So now [pointing to the unfinished sculpture], they are dancing for freedom, which means freedom is coming, now. So this is the message that I'm trying to spread, you see.

*David Murathi*

David Murathi from Tshakuma in Venda specialises in portraying rituals in woodcarvings. On 24 July 2005 he explained the creative process thus:

Sometimes at night when I'm sleeping, I can see the sculptures passing, passing, and then one sculpture will stand in front of me. Then I must wake up and draw. When I draw, early in the morning I must go to the mountain and then find the piece of that sculpture, then I start to carve. And then, when I'm busy with this one, you can't find me busy with another sculpture. If this one is finished, it is then that I will start a new one. When I touch [a piece of] wood, already I will see the sculpture inside the wood.

He explained his mission as an artist indicating the piece he was working on:

This is the piece of the Vhavenda. We have our own dam, Fhundudzi. It's where we passed. We go there to make our sacrifice. To me I don't see money when I'm busy carving. When I carve the sculpture, to me I want this young generation to know about our culture, where we come from. If I don't carve culture we are going to kill our culture. And then I want to teach the young generation about how to be an artist.

Murathi often produces images from Venda mythology and tradition:

The name of the piece is "The journey of the witches", it is when the witches [go on] the journey of the night. They can go anywhere. They fly in order to bewitch. ... They can make someone to be mad, or make someone to die. This one and this one are the same, but different stories. This one is the "Journey of the witches", and this one is "Lightning witches". The bowl that they carry here is having a light, a lightning. They can go, they can fly, they can go somewhere, anywhere, when they want to burn the houses, or to kill someone.

This one is "Thifhula". ... It's a prayer of the Vhavenda. If someone dies, after five years or ten years, they must make remembrance. They must go to a sacred place, and they must pour beer into this bowl. The one to pour beer into this bowl is Makhadzi, the eldest sister in the family. Then they will kill a goat. When they kill the goat they eat all the meat and they bury that bones like someone who has died. After that they will pour beer on top of the grave of that bones. The bones, the meaning of the bones stand for the one who died, who passed away. In other way, they will make him or her to be an ancestor.

Murathi's passion for tradition does not prevent him from affirming gender equality. Commenting on a sculpture of a female figure with bound hands he said:

[Women were] oppressed. That time before democracy they were bounded. They don't know any job in the world. They just become maybe wives and sit at home. They did not do anything, they were bounded. Men are the one to go to Joburg to work for whites. But today they [women] can do everything. You can find them into the Parliament. Even to the jobs you can find them busy working anywhere.

The in-between situation of the artist is illustrated by the scope of Murathi's works:

This one is called True Love (*a sculpture of a male and female figure embracing*). It is to show us that when God created men and women, they need us to maybe expand the generation.

This one is called "Ten years democracy". When I was watching the TV I saw people dancing, ululating, celebrating because this is the ten years democracy.

This one is Makhadzi listening to ancestors after prayer. This is the bowl that they use to pray. Not any bowl, the bowl they are given by ancestors. This means that when someone carves a bowl, they must go with this bowl to the sacred place. When they arrive there, then they will pray for that bowl until their prayer is accepted.

*Azwimphelele Magoro*

In an interview recorded on 28 July 2005 Azwi Magoro in his studio at Muledani (Venda) explained at length how he uses his art to communicate to posterity the dignity of African culture and to record rapidly disappearing traditions:

I am doing fine art. The main purpose for doing this thing is to show something which is disappearing, the traditional thing which is disappearing nowadays. It is to show the new generation the dignity of our things in our culture. We cannot live without art, more especially here in Africa. Even if you see our floor there – we decorate our floors by smearing, by polishing it with the cow dung. Nowadays there are no more cows in our area. Even if they are there, they are very few, because everything is changing. Nowadays we just go to the shop or the factory to buy cement to make our floor nice, unlike before where we just go out or to the kraal just to collect the cow dung and go out to the river just to collect that nice soil to decorate our floors. And things are disappearing every day. So, we as the artists we have to make the sculpture to show the new generation about our tradition.

The artist as social conscience is particularly visible in Azwi Magoro:

Many people, or fathers, or parents, they are not responsible for their kids, for their children. I need people to copy from the natural thing like birds feeding the young ones. I was trying to show the birds and the nest and the young ones. This is the nest, this other one here this is the mother. ... Which means the bird is feeding the young one.

This is a decorative chair (*a huge sculpture — Magoro's entry into the subsequently cancelled 2005 Brett Kebble Art Awards*). Two women at the back trying to, helping each other to carry the pot. This chair, it's like politically, this chair, this is a woman figure and a chair on it which is a symbol in our life where some husbands are still looking down upon the women, so just like sitting on their rights, because they are the women, we just sit on them like this, on their rights. It is like sitting on the rights of the women. So, here in South Africa women and the men, we are the same, because we are the human being.

I would say the common thread in the thinking of the three featured artists is a commitment to African culture and tradition that does not exclude and actually goes seamlessly with the appropriation of democratic values as enshrined in the South African constitution. African culture is portrayed as dignified and worthy of retention, while a particular kind of arrangement that can be broadly called patriarchy is criticised and overcome. The

egalitarianism that is broadened in their vision to include women seems to be derived from African culture. Within the space provided by the South African constitution African egalitarian traditions is confronted with African patriarchy in favour of African gender equality. The Western influence plays a part in this dynamic process, but a polarity between Western individualism as expressed in the individual freedom of a woman, and African communitarianism as expressed in patriarchy and male domination, does not adequately assess the issues at stake. Kimmerle's insight that Western individualism derived from Descartes and Fichte is patriarchal as the rule of the same, and the domination of the single order should have alerted us to the fact that things are not all that simple. The same goes for Gyekye's argument in favour of an equal standing of community and person in African thinking, within the framework of an ontology that disqualifies the idea of an individual who is already a person without having entered into any relations with others.

The theme of the relationship of community and individual is, however, but one crucial issue to be clarified in the knowledge production process. According to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, for instance, the main political-ethical question to be settled today concerns the formation of concrete societies in the tension between reform and revolution (see Evers 2005). In the present article it is also formally the issue at stake, as it concerns the we in which occurs the process of transmitting and breaking with traditions.

### **The "we" of knowledge production**

I have cited the examples of *ngano* and of Venda artists in support of the argument that knowledge production in higher education should not only perceive the producers of culture as subjects to be studied, but rather as partners in dialogue. Knowledge production should not merely be knowledge about the other, but knowledge produced with the other. The "we" of the process of transmitting, reviewing and breaking with traditions should include non-literate knowledge producers. The University of Venda is ideally situated to provide space (for instance) for the artists of the Vhembe region (and beyond) to participate through their creative work and vision in the exploration of the as yet still elusive universals of the expanding we. The art exhibition centre that was erected on campus with a grant from the National Lottery could play a major role in this. The centre could provide the in-between space, with open lines of communication to the various academic departments and the artists and other producers of culture "out there".

Such an initiative will not be possible on the basis of Jürgen Habermas' discourse-theoretical approach with its universalistic premises and the inclusion of the other on that basis. Habermas (1996) argues that his approach implies the same respect for everyone and not only for those of your kind – respect for the person of the other as other. Kimmerle's

(2005:116) main problem with the position of Habermas is the latter's insistence that the other has to articulate her otherness on the basis of the rules of rational argument. According to Kimmerle this approach does not do justice to the other in her otherness. It prescribes to the other that she must share my method of reasoning. This implies that she would not be able to tell me anything that I would not in principle have been able to formulate on my own accord. The possibility of being told something that I would not have been able to discover on my own is a crucial demand posed by Kimmerle (2005:114) to intercultural dialogues. He argues that when Habermas speaks of "respect" for each and everybody, he actually would have been served well enough with the concept "tolerance" (Kimmerle 2005:117). The dialogues of contextual philosophy will have to be based in more than mere tolerance, an attitude that leaves the other alone, as long as I am also left alone in my ethnocentric assumptions. What is needed is respect as "Achtung" (regard) for the other that Kimmerle explores in his concept of dialogue. Dialogues differ from "discourses". Discourses are bound to the formulation of difference in the exchange of rational arguments. Dialogues take into account that there will always be a rest that is not comprehended. This fundamental presumption makes room for forms of communication that are not limited to what can be formulated in language (Kimmerle 2004).

In the case of the proposed expansion, on the basis of philosophies of difference, of the us, or the dialogues between different we-communities, the difference has to do with the oral-literary divide. The radical other is a member of an oral culture (Kimmerle 2005:117). This is the challenge of contextual philosophy with regard to difference – to expand the concept of philosophy, which is generally regarded as fundamentally linked to literate forms of communication and transmission, to include oral forms of communication. One of the characteristics of the oral form of communication to be found in what in some African cultures is called "palaver", is the role of intensity in shaping consensus (intensity in the Deleuzian sense of the word). According to Kimmerle (in Oosterling 2005:43) the principles in which the palaver is based are much more realistic than Habermas' notion of the domination-free space that he ascribes to Western parliamentary democracy. The levels of intensity of the participants are recognised in the palaver, and thus the fact that more is involved than merely the force of the better argument. "In the palaver specific mechanisms and rules are followed that take into account and give a corresponding form to the significance of the intensity of life that is introduced into the discourse" (Kimmerle in Oosterling 2005:43, translation mine).

On what basis is the we-group constituted? The dialogical approach proposes that the togetherness of the partners in dialogue is constituted through the adoption of a common theme, or topic to be discussed. The topic is the in-between, an empty centre around which the participants are grouped. The in-between topic (issue/*aporia*/problem) binds the participants together, but also leaves them free (Kimmerle 2004). Kimmerle refers to the

Socratic dialogues described by Plato. Dialogues between more than two participants (I-Thou) may be less intensive, but at the same time richer in perspective. A larger number of different perspectives must be related to each other and integrated within a common horizon. Plato held that the truth about a particular matter only emerges in conversations involving several participants.

Due to the inner dynamic of the life of the "we", dialogues can succeed or fail, partially or completely. In the "we" difference and thus tension remain. The aim is not to appropriate completely or even partially the position of the other. Enlarging the horizon of understanding in itself is already epistemologically and also ethically significant. The search for commonalities and convergences is today of primary importance. But holding on to diversity and not trying to harmonise that which is fundamentally different is also important (Kimmerle 2005:122). The envisaged "we" is by no means one in which the producers of indigenous knowledge are given a space in an academy further dominated by Western (or transatlantic) hegemony. The aim is a new equilibrium no longer regulated by Western principles (see Kimmerle in Oosterling 2005:90).

From the examples quoted above, it emerged that the everyday experience of the producers of culture are characterised by contradictions and tensions. What would be the role of the intellectual participant in dialogues where these tensions are attested to? Earlier I have proposed contextual philosophy as the 'contemporary idiom' (after the failure of Marxist-Leninism) within which to express what Nkrumah (1964:79) has formulated as 'the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society.' According to Marxism the intellectuals are supposed to conscientise the masses with regard to these tensions and contradictions, until the masses engage in violent revolutionary action. Marxist theory provides for a revolutionary event within the we that breaks with tradition. Experience, however, has taught us that the new forms of living expected in theory did not succeed in practice. Kimmerle (2004) thus rather reminds of Hegel who saw the role of the intellectual (artists, writers, poets, philosophers) as contributing to making conscious the contradictions – in support of the powers that are aimed at renewal in favour of the restoration of an equilibrium of anti-totalitarian and totalitarian tendencies. Non-violent change that goes hand in hand with the restoration of the inner dynamic of a we-group, would break with outmoded institutions, while retaining the link with tradition in spite of the break.

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