

Lecture

What is an Anthropologist?

*Academic Lecture on the Occasion of the Honorary Doctorate
in Anthropology at the University of Kinshasa on 4 April, 2007¹*

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Mr Dean Shomba Kinyamba

Your Excellency, Ambassador of
Belgium, Johan Swinnen

Your Excellency, Monsignor Nzala
Kianza, Bishop of Kwango Diocese

Dear Professor Lapika Dimomfu, my
Promoter

Dear Professor Mwene Batende, my Co-
promoter

Dear Colleagues

Dear Students

Distinguished Guests

Throughout this address, I would like to invite you to follow us, namely my wife who is here with us today and myself, into four journeys or comings and goings; firstly, between Flanders and Congo; secondly, between our University of Leuven and the University of Kinshasa (Unikin); thirdly, between the clash of civilisations and the role of the anthropologist of tomorrow; and finally, between lifting my mourning period for two fellow anthropologists and my auspicious good wishes.

Journey 1: What Did I Come to do in the Congo, Between 1965 and 1974?

One does not become an anthropologist by birth, but nevertheless ... In other words, the anthropologist is rooted in a family novel and its places of memory.

From my mother and my father I cherish the memory of their giving a diligent and very warm welcome to numerous assistants and dealers who stepped over our parental farm. The farm was situated on the border with France and just a dozen kilometres away from the North Sea. During the night we could see the lighthouse in the port of Dunkirk. The farm stood on a piece of land bordering that part of France where persons of my parents' generation spoke Flemish, whereas my cousins and nieces indulged in the French language adopted by the French state and thus spoken in schools. During my childhood, the on-foot smuggling of farm produce, tobacco and strong alcohol was

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rampant. It turned this *borderzone* into a hunting ground: residents such as my father would help small smugglers who walked by to avoid being detected by the somewhat rapacious glimpse of Belgian or French customs officers.

In my childhood fantasies and memories, the borderzone thus constitutes a driving force of my 'family novel' and people's ingenuity and boldness. Besides, the borderzone casts my mind back to family traumas caused by the two World Wars into which my father, mother and uncles perished had been sucked, and grand-uncles perished. In the family novel, the borderspace also marks the tension my parents experienced in their own childhood between the Flemish language spoken at home and the colonising French language spoken at school and in well-off circles in Flanders. It is this tension that they have passed on to us, their children.

The Intercultural Borderspace and the Intersubjective Borderlinking Constitute the Anthropologist's Biotope

I first set off for Kinshasa in 1965, finding myself in the centre of a frantic and newly independent Africa. The West was basing its optimism on its trust in exact sciences, industry, nation-state, and on intellectuals' commitment to people's emancipating conscientisation worldwide. As a young man, I was fascinated by the cultural differences and the encounter with the *other* in his or her individual and socio-cultural originality. I felt particularly attracted by the way Charles de Foucauld, a former officer in the French armed forces, became a hermit and self-taught anthropologist while living among the Touareg in Tamanrasset, on the south border of Morocco. His life has never ceased to instil in me an ideal of respectful encounter with the *other's* genius.

During my philosophical studies until 1968 at the Canisius Institute of

Philosophy in Kimwenza, it was especially Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (focusing on the person-to-person relationship, the lived body and sensoriality) that served as our gateway through the then emerging Bantu philosophy pioneered by Hountondji, Kagame and Tempels. I have just revisited my lecture notes taken some 40 years ago during Father Johan Allary's classes on militant Négritude. It derived its inspiration from Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre. It was embodied in the writings of Senghor, Césaire (notably his 1950's *Discourse on Colonialism*), Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Sembene Ousmane, and their successors. In 1967 Johan Allary and I bravely undertook to set up a small Africanist library at Canisius, quite ostentatiously close to the Rector's room.

In my third year of philosophy, Lévi-Strauss's writings came to be an exemplary source. I was especially moved by the widely appealing and radically non-ethnocentric humanism, and thus by Lévi-Strauss's structuralism to which I dedicated my Master's dissertation. Opening a school of thought for Western postmodern intellectuals who no longer positioned themselves as universalist role-models, Lévi-Strauss radically invalidated the scandalous norm of the racist hierarchy between cultures. It is still worth saying that such a hierarchy was introduced by evolutionist anthropology and applied by colonial ethnography. I distinctly remember how I learned the basics of the Koongo language during my regular visits with Professor Dirven to Kimwenza village, and how we led efforts at Canisius to have some communal life among fellow students coming from three continents and having very different sensibilities and civilisational aspirations. Both experiences taught me how much, among ourselves, we valued very differently the connection between facts and words, feelings and thoughts, sign and reason – which moreover we defined differently.

While in Kimwenza, and then here at the University of Kinshasa Campus, I got infused by the aspiration for 'mental decolonisation' – as the expression was

coined by Mabika Kalanda. As a young Belgian after Congo's independence, I felt torn between a depressing consciousness of shame towards those Africans, recently colonised, with whom I rubbed shoulders, and a moral debt and desire for reparation. At the same time, I was concerned by a persistent attraction to what I fathom was some sort of 'hide-and-seek' game that the Congolese people had invented in face of their 'alterisation': how did they manage to resist or parody what was then described as 'the civilising mission', which demanded that they should be converted, educated and develop in the white man's image?

And, I must say, the calls to regain social and cultural legacy expressed themselves only much later in such terms as Zairian authenticity, enculturation, endogenisation or Afro-modernity.

The Decolonisation of Lovanium University and its Emancipation as UNaZA (Université nationale du Zaïre) Heralded for Me a Trans-subjective Repositioning as an Aspiring but Allochthonous Anthropologist

Upon completion of my philosophical training, I originally wanted to study agronomy as a step towards sustainable development. Nevertheless, I was incited to undertaking a training course in anthropology. After my one year of undergraduate studies at the University of Louvain, I came back to the Congo in 1969 to live with a small community in Livulu and later in the then student residential accommodation known as Home,⁷ with the aim of studying anthropology here at the University Campus. I gained exposure to the radical aspiration for mental decolonisation expressed by those students associated under the name of 'Présence universitaire'. The dissertations I submitted to the department of sociology and anthropology, by way of examination for various lectures, focused on the following questions: how can we understand, in their own terms, the daily practices of Bandundu villagers who were very much devoid of trade goods as well as their modes of production and exchange, their palavers and their rites? The Dakar School for African Psychopathology, to which the course on psychopathology introduced us, inspired my enduring interest in medical anthropology and intercultural psychoanalysis.

During the 1970–71 academic year, as students we felt mobilised by President Mobutu's powerful call to decolonise the Zairian sovereign identity. At the same time, the popular imagination bestowed upon the white man the title of 'uncle' – a role that was defined in terms of duties rather than rights towards nationals. I left the campus of Kinshasa in July 1971. At this time my Zairian fellow students who were still in full education got forcibly recruited into the army at the Tshatshi military barracks on 4 June, following a spate of arrests for their so-called civic insubordination and high treason against the Head of State. As far as my personal story is concerned, this raid of the army into University life enforced the choice I had just made, which was not to seek permanent residence in the Congo. In fact, I had chosen to reverse my itinerary: to learn in depth about life here in the Congo and make it truthfully known in Europe. It was in keeping with such a choice that I had left the Kimwenza community one month earlier, a community that had so generously offered and allowed me access to the very rich Congolese experience and for which I remain evermore grateful. I gained and took the freedom to devote body, mind and soul to an audacious, though temporary, adoption within a village community in Bandundu. (I must point out by way of gratitude that I began my first anthropological research in association with the Congo's Institute for National Museums, IRSAC or Institute for Scientific Research in Central Africa, and the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research.)

This region of Bandundu is located away from the major public scene, which increasingly became the battleground for two competing ideologies: the party-state's ideology for the recourse to authenticity versus the so-called Eurocentric civilising mission of the churches and the non-governmental organisations for development. In Kwango, I had only just become a witness to major stakes in economic zairianisation undertaken by the Mobutist nation-state. And paradoxically, within the host Kwango community, the cultural shock brought about through the zairianisation movement prompted my search for a deep layer of cultural and identity authenticity, both from below the prejudiced gaze that the colonial mission projected on to the 'native' Kwango people (namely of Yaka,

Koongo and Luunda ancestry) and from below those models and prejudices devised by colonial masters and partly internalised by the people.

During the Research, it is the Access to the Intersubjective and Collective Memory or Intermemory that Constitutes the Main Crucible for a Professional Anthropologist

Here, I would readily compare my anthropological experience through participant observation to that of some twenty African and European anthropology PhD students whom I was able to accompany as promoter during their fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s. Anthropological research is carried out in proximity, and sometimes face-to-face, with host communities. Anthropologists heed the plurality of words and listen to both common and dissident views. They listen to collective hopes or traumatic memories blocked in the patients' body. Whoever works among individuals and groups becomes intoxicated by their practices, in a fever that gives one a taste for their audacity, but also summons one to share the wounds inflicted by life. Anthropologists thereby go so far as to turn their attention to gestural expressions and body language: they seek to grasp the hopes and fears in groups and persons. You may consent that after such an interpersonal adventure, it is no easy task to disentangle, in the anthropological writings, 'who really speaks' and 'who acts' in the transmission of messages and signs between the living and deceased, between the visible and the invisible universe as one find them in divinatory oracles, dreamwork or sacrifices.

In such a deeply moving trans-subjective experience – and regardless of whether he is male or female, novice or fully fledged, autochthonous or allochthonous – the anthropologist can be captivated by fascination, enthusiasm or even awe. The anthropologist is often likened to a romantic or rebel in pursuit of a more authentic human inasmuch as he does not feel good about himself or his belief. This experience applies to an African anthropologist who, in common parlance, 'comes to live amongst his own people in the village or the city'. Yet, the same is true of a European anthropologist seeking an adoption in a different society. Anthropologists are, thus, torn between fascination for the unknown and a desire to learn from subordinate people who are

jettisoned in their *otherness* by Eurocentric ideological constructs lurking behind salvific progress and sovereign Reason. As far as my own experience is concerned, in 1972 I arrived among a grouping of villages known as Yitaanda in North Kwango. (Let me note in passing that Yitaanda represents a thinly populated settlement of thirteen villages standing within a one-day walking distance from the Angolan frontier, on the one hand, and bordering the Wamba river on the other – that is, some 60 km in the north of Imbela Catholic Parish and about 450 km in the southeast of the capital city, Kinshasa.) My arrival in this settlement revived my childhood memories at the banks of the North Sea.² As a child I experienced, in the face of its powerful tides, a fear of being engulfed by an indefinable and massive otherness. I experienced some similar feeling upon my arrival in Yitaanda. At the same time, however, I felt some sort of fascination that makes you desperate for an encounter with such a high tide that gently submerges you only if you give yourself over to it while sitting by the beach.

Of course, without being invited, still muttering the local language and unaware of people's genuine sensibilities and interests, an anthropologist arriving in a local community or a given network has no option but to give himself or herself up to the most hospitable family within the group, in a collusive and mutual exchange for good wishes and attractive promises. Your hosts make you feel completely harmless through welcoming you and, for instance, granting you a status akin to an ancestral figure – which makes you into a classifiable and partially controllable member. The fate of my little story suggests that upon my arrival in Yitaanda I found the head of the grouping in death agony. He was an ailing octogenarian known as Taanda Kapata. A delegate of the regional chief of Luunda descent arrived in Yitaanda some weeks later in order to start the holding of palavers for succession. He called me Taanda N-leengi – a name that somehow raised me to the status of a 'reborn' figure. In particular, such a name entrusted me with the authority to undo the fate of Chief Taanda N-leengi. As a matter of fact, N-leengi was Kapata's predecessor in title and was exiled in 1939 by the colonial power to Oschwe in the Region of Lakes in the northeast of Bandundu. His alleged crime was to have participated in the

anticolonial prophetic movement known as *Bamvungi*. And in this mythical construction engineered by the envoy of the Luunda chief, I came down as the reborn Taanda N-leengi reappearing in the white colour of death after Kapata's rule, which began in 1939. (Needless to say, the fact that my name René literally means 'the reborn' was completely unknown to my hosts.)

For the inhabitants of Yitaanda, I flatly contradicted the stereotypical image of the white through my quite modest, unimposing and lasting presence in the same village. Such modesty was evidenced through my submission to the elders' authority, through the help I offered in the building of my own hut, or again, through my occasional participation in hunting expeditions, long walks to visit neighbouring village communities, celebrations and dancing. I deliberately tried to acquire the status of a friendly and caring Yaka elder, who would listen to others and provide a sympathetic gaze. In other words, I achieved the status of someone to whom people could entrust the treasure of their language, or even the heart of their culture.

For any anthropologist who loyally partakes in a host or adoption community, there is an ensuing feeling of mutual adoption. This borderspace between the host community and an anthropologist doing fieldwork and writing his or her dissertation, articles or books, is also moved by the unspoken and a face of shadow. On the one hand, the host community projects on an anthropologist, whether autochthonous or allochthonous, the imaginary of Eurocentric emancipation triggered by his or her appearance, his or her questions and his or her financial means, however limited. An anthropologist, then, realises the extent to which his or her gaze and listening are on his or her side distorted by the available methods, theories, instruments for analysing kinship, domestic economy, residential patterns, rites of passage, art of speaking and figurative art, etc. On the other hand, given that, as anthropologists, we strive for an intersubjective encounter within an intercultural borderspace, a shadow zone unwittingly springs from inside ourselves: it is a zone inhabited by our preferences, desires, refusals, denials and hardly conscious traumas. Further, it is a zone encompassing intergenerational hopes, fates and debts that deeply inform or

afflict us. This shadow zone, within ourselves and tying in with our Eurocentric education, steers our listening, receptiveness and our writings in our encountering with the host group.

Because my promoter, Professor Lapika, has already expertly painted the research undertaken in the Kwango, let me then move one step further. Let me clarify that the Yitaanda society bestowed upon me the status of *mbuta* or elder. Henceforth it was a status inviting me to no more speak out my innermost, but to learn to know things and commit them to memory through amiable listening and clear-sightedness of heart. My wife, Maria, joined me during the last three months in Yitaanda. The day before we were bound to leave, Chief Taanda came to offer us some palm wine and asked then for our glasses saying: 'When Maama Maria gives birth, the first-born will be named after me; and in these glasses we shall continue to drink to that child's health.' That explains no doubt why our elder son, Oswald-Taanda, became an architect specialising in redevelopment of a city's or region's borderspaces or thresholds, which, for residents, mark both a fold and a place to outreach. And as Maama Maria can confirm, the two and a half years' intense learning at Yitaanda took me twenty-five years for its unpacking and decoding.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as already stated, there is another story following my first anthropological experience. And so I invite you to:

Journey 2: How to Contribute Towards Decolonising the Gaze of Alterisation in my Home Country and at the University of Leuven – Developing a Yaka Gaze Within my Flemish Original Culture

Whenever I return from the Congo to resettle in Flanders, I admittedly feel terribly upset at finding myself wrestling with an all-too-technocratic and modern male public discourse. Such a discourse continually and self-confidently gives priority to an ideological phrasing under the banner of the Enlightenment rationality and exact sciences – and to such ideas as the autonomous self and the individual human rights of modern Western society. It goes without saying that such ideas are no more than ethnocentric catchphrases being heralded as a universal project likely to lead towards the progress of all nations. In this

perspective, Western media and public forums as well as various academic debates continue to direct in an ethnocentric fashion those projective fantasies on to people living in Africa south of the Sahara.

Aware of what remains concealed in the intercivlisational borderspace, I cannot help wondering whether the North is not trying, without admitting it, to metabolise the shadow zone or the unthinkable of our technocratic, rationalistic and secularised civilisation – viz. the individual and collective *angst* for death, finitude, the unpredictable and the hybrid. It is likely that such fear of death or, more vaguely, this disturbing strangeness in the North Atlantic consciousness, finds its early sublimation in a double self-satisfaction. As a matter of fact, the media constantly remind us about the level of satisfaction that our technocratic environment is supposed to generate along with the influx of beautiful products, the transfer of our perfect technocracy and nice goods to the disadvantaged regions in the South. I wonder whether, at the same time and paradoxically, in its discourses and programmes for public healthcare, birth control and development intended for the South, the North – without having a lucid consciousness of its own motives – is not determined to try and spread more than ever its own death phantasms. In other words, are the media not contributing to repressing these phantasms by shifting them to an adversary Otherness, which Europe relentlessly merges with its phantasms of the ‘Black Continent’ and now the so-called ‘document-less immigrants’?

Besides, through my anthropological research among the people of Kwango and Kinshasa, I became acutely aware of my own Flemish cultural identity. When collaborating in some research programmes between 1980 and 1986 with a number of general practitioners and psychiatrists in Brussels and Antwerp, my attention was directed towards cultural mechanisms that shape and bring about certain symptoms. The implication of such collaboration is that the following were the key questions awaiting answers from an anthropologist evaluating his Yaka experience in his own Flemish soil: On the basis of which specific experience or culturally determined body image predisposition did Belgo-Sicilian male patients – aged between 35 and 45 – complain to their family doctors, five times more than their autochthonous peers,

about an epigastric condition? Was a Moroccan patient with a rather frequently mentioned right knee complaint not conveying an unspeakable problem of standing upright, virility or paternalistic authority?

In essence, the issues boiled down to stating how the Yaka seek, on behalf of their own subjects, to valorise attention for a meaningful consonance in beauty, or cosmetics, between the body, the group and the lifeworld. Hence, by developing this Yaka gaze within my original culture, I reversed or helped decolonise ‘Orientalism’ (as unmasked by Edward Said) – namely, the exoticisation or alteration of the African or the Asiatic created by the colonising European gaze.

This kind of mutual anthropology is something that can only be achieved through gaze ‘from there’ to ‘here’ and vice versa. I developed this approach in a course entitled ‘Anthropology of the Body’ – which I taught for 30 years at the Anthropology Department of the University of Leuven. Adopting a bifocal perspective, the course explored from the Yaka standpoint the culturally repressed encrusted in people’s living, display and depicting of the body, its borders and sensoriality within some Flemish environment. The course also dealt with the subjects’ weaving into the family novel and network as well as into the lifeworld. In the main, it tackled that interweaving in Flanders pertaining to expressive arts, the surgery and the witch craze in transition towards the Renaissance, as well as in arts and the media since 1970. This no doubt explains why the majority of doctoral theses written under my aegis have arisen from insights generated by this course on Anthropology of the Body.

For my part, the desire to understand the comings and goings between cultures, as well as their clash and flights, has never stopped. For instance, the French language that you and I adopt to state the distance between this language and our originary cultures and mother-tongues, is also the language which both ‘here’ and ‘over there’ has amalgamated our parents at school to learn about ‘*our ancestors, the Gauls*’. It is also the same language that is daily creolised, ‘cadaverised’ – according to the expression of a well-known Kinnois singer – and thus domesticated in the streets of Kinshasa. The iconoclastic laughter by the ‘cadavéristes’ is doubtless a wholesome vaccine that needs to be

exported to the West where life has, for the vast majority, become too dull as a result of intense mechanisation and computerisation.

Journey 3: The Anthropologist as Witness to the Clash of Civilisations

If the clash of civilisations is as hard as stones colliding in the tornado of capitalist globalisation, the more we welcome networks for intercultural encounter or interuniversity cooperation, the more we allow the borderspace to reveal itself in its fragile reality – a reality that appears as rich and flexible as the human heart is.

In 1986, I resumed ties with Africa in view of annual research stays. These stays lasted between three to six weeks among the residents of Kinshasa’s slums, and/or were intended for, or complemented by, the on-site supervision of a number of doctoral students. During the 1990s I was thus privileged to visit every single PhD student for some weeks within their chosen urban or rural community of origin or adoption. I found myself in ten African countries, including northern Ghana, southwestern Nigeria, southern Ethiopia, the bordering region of Lake Victoria in eastern Kenya, northeastern Tanzania, KwaZulu-Natal and northeastern Namibia as well as the cities of Tunis and Cairo. These fieldwork trips have increasingly provided strong evidence that from the 1990s onwards Africa is more than ever caught up in the clash of a very diversified and paradoxical set of civilisation scenarios. This period is marked by huge debates triggered in countries emerging from apartheid, dictatorship or totalitarianism. There were mobilisations for the recognition of crimes against humanity, such as genocide and slavery. Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies, Afro-American feminism and certain eco-feminist movements dewesternised social sciences and deconstructed their *phallo-logic-centric* biasing. In the same period, a big part of Africa became fatigued and strained under the terror of so-called warlords and HIV pandemics. The same Africa got together to fight for its own survival thanks to neighbourhood associations and tontines. It created its networks around burials or therapeutic collection, family, religious and metaphysical concerns and traditions. It is Jean-Marc Ela, the honorary doctor I promoted at our Leuven University

in 1999, who is the long-term champion of these 'people from below'.

The supervision of the doctoral theses that I was able to provide in various aforementioned countries pointed me towards a multiple dynamics underlying the reconstruction of a promising future, and from which I would like here to raise two points. Let me mention, at first, the parody and more or less ritualised or ensorcelling aggressiveness and/or mimicry through which countless communities turn intrusive violence or terror against itself in such a self-destructive way. On the other hand, it is through its spirit of humour, practical joke and creolisation that plural Africa confronts the life hazards in the city or in the desert or mining regions. It is the Africa of kinship and disenchanting young people and where (charismatic) communes of faith or local networks mushroom alongside associations for mutual support. However, Africa also challenges its life hazards through its ecological inventiveness in the breeding and farming, or the repairing broken-down cars, alike through the huge and prosperous interregional markets (such as at Kumasi or Onitsha). Hence not only has this plural Africa managed to domesticate its international, intraregional languages and universalist religions, but it has also locally adapted a number of globalisation trends of knowledge, information technology and consumer goods.

In an endogenous way or from inside, these local networks – creators of professional or ethnocultural identification – relentlessly mobilise, transform and reinvent their knowledge forms, their social and cultural, ethical and metaphysical values, in part dating back to immemorial times. These multiple basic networks require that per region or professional association, they should be entitled to their proper history and development, and this all the more inasmuch as such networks may also rest on contributions made by more fortunate nationals in the diaspora. Is true development in the North and South not concerned over and above all with a shared quest for a better living together, according to various modalities of exchange and mutual aid springing not only from the technological or economic order, but also from cultural and spiritual input?

It was thanks to the endless support from home by Maama Maria, my wife, and those who generously welcomed me during my stays, that I was able to experience such transhumance between Leuven, Kinshasa and other African networks. In this respect, I would like to mention first of all CERDAS (the Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in South-Saharan Africa), which is based here at Unikin. I would particularly thank you, dear Professor Lapika, the director of this Centre. You and your colleagues have continued, since the late 1980s, to offer me within the centre a platform for warm and fruitful exchanges. I thank you very much indeed. My thanks also go to Servico in Gombe for allowing me to benefit from their logistics. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Rectors of Scopenko at Mont Amba – Father Ngoma Bodi and his predecessors – for their hospitality since we had to abandon our anthropologists' house in Kingabwa during the September 1991 looting.

I am very indebted to the very many warm receptions I have continually enjoyed in the Congo. Such receptions, along with the sense of dignity as their hallmark, did not shirk the task of restraining my discreet and reserved writing so as to avoid some exoticisation – a writing that undoubtedly appears, at times, as too aestheticising. While some of my writings discuss the so-called 'Africa that has gone off to a bad start' – either on the level of antecedents in the colonial era or through the way in which various young Kinshasa residents metabolise the shock and hybridisation between civilisation horizons through parody or roving – I have never been blind towards the injustice, exploitation and violence inflicted and acted in the public space of Kinshasa and elsewhere in the country.

Nevertheless, the more the affinity and the feelings of affectionate complicity grow between an anthropologist and his or her networks or hosts, the more the anthropological encounter becomes transferential. And such transference is better understood in terms of the literal meaning of *diaphorein* – which means to transport, carry through, move beyond and to be open to one another. Besides, the meanings and strengths so generated continue to regenerate in a face-to-face encounter between subjects. It is an encounter that underpins human subjects and which words cannot articulate or

translate. This encounter, both interpersonal and intercultural, can become an authentic human undertaking involving several and mutually enriching voices.

In fact, for about three weeks each year since 1986 and until 2000, I worked among the Yaka and Koongo population in the suburbs of Kindele, Selembao, Yolo, Luka-Ngaliema, Masina, Ndjili III and Kimbanseke. As fate would have it, these regular visits allowed me to witness people's uprisings, which one could only describe as *Jacqueries*, in September 1991 and January–February 1993. I was, I must admit, as badly shaken by the devastating side of these uprisings as I was when experiencing the endless deterioration of suburban infrastructure and most appalling living conditions in Kinshasa. Is this environmental deterioration a result of externalisation of violence inflicted on things rather than on fellow citizens? Is this the sort of violence that one experiences within oneself as a result of the clash of civilisations? The more the impoverished urban areas reflect the shattered memories of the so-called Eurocentric civilising mission, the more such enduring poverty and disillusionment – especially among immigrants from the hinterland – discloses what appears to me to be the paradoxical impossibility for reconciling solidarity and disparity in survival income.

In partial collaboration with CERDAS, including our late colleague Matula Atul, my work in Kinshasa also dealt with the healing churches of *mpeve ya nlongo* or with the consultations that patients seek from healers in addition to using medical services. I have recorded living narratives coming from the word of mouth of some twenty university undergraduates originating from the Kwango as well as numerous other narratives relating, among others, to night-dreams and to the exegesis sought from a wise person in the vicinity.

My interest, throughout, has been to understand exogenous and endogenous cultural matrices and horizons: what domain of imagination – whether persecuting or salvific – was at stake? What values or modernisation ideologies were being conveyed either through the media or street-based churches? I wanted to grasp the underlying reasons behind the desire for Kinshasa's residents to opt for healthcare or therapeutic consultation with a healer or medical practitioner – whenever they are felt haunted, frightened, made to feel guilty, ensorcelled, saddened or seduced by ostentatious consumption.

The CERDAS team welcomed many of my Leuven colleagues. I would mention a few: my colleague Filip De Boeck undertook his most important research during the 1980s among the Luunda inhabiting southern Bandundu. Besides, thanks to the support of Professor Kahang'a, De Boeck extended his investigations to the *baana luunda* phenomenon in Kikwit of entrepreneurial youngsters in the 'diamond hunt' from Angola. More recently, he has carried out further research into street children and the sociocultural imaginary in Kinshasa. Dr Peter Persyn, Mrs Pascaline Creten and Dr Jaak Le Roy joined Dr N-situ for research work with CERDAS regarding the quest for health parallel to medical treatment of Kwango population in health centres, healing churches or with folk healers. Later in this address, I will mention the research stay that Stefan Bekaert made among Sakata people, thanks also to Monsignor Nzala and Barrister Mr Mbu.

Peter Crossman's 1997 surveys, under my supervision, in six different African universities (from Tamale, Dakar, Addis Ababa, Kampala and Harare to Western Cape) squarely walked in the footsteps of intellectuals and so-called postcolonial scholars from Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa (I would mention, among others, Appiah, Ela, Ki-Zerbo, Kwasi Wiredu, Mazrui, Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Okot p'Bitek). These surveys echo UNESCO's appeal to 'durably reconstruct scientific capabilities' from diverse parts of the world. These capabilities constitute a vital humanity legacy in the same way as does biodiversity or ecological diversity. A commonsense proverb in Igboland of southern Nigeria goes that any practical or scientific knowledge is, at first or in its germ, a local knowledge mainly invented and practised in a regional language and in a local or professional setting. Thus, such a proverb consolidates the call different corners of Africa have heeded about reanchoring or endogenising university education on African soil. In other words, it is a call about valuing – within the lyceum and the university curriculum and research programmes – more of those African local or endogenous knowledges that colonisation and its legacy had obliterated. Let me mention, among others, the pioneering scholarly work by Paulus Gerdes and Wim van Binsbergen on mathematics or geometry that was practised a long time ago – naturally without being formally theorised

– in the basketwork or in the *mancala* probability games. We should not forget that the by-products of such probability games were applied in the millenary geomancy throughout South Asia and Africa. They are still present in certain sacred sculptures, dance steps or certain design patterns that elders draw on the ground when illustrating a story. In addition, there exists a wealth of mathematical knowledge that is practised in the infinitely complex and varied art of rhythms and melodies. The same applies to the notions of time and calendars, ecological knowledges, craft, ancient and new farming and pastoral techniques. Let us also think about local taxonomic knowledges in fauna and flora, pharmacopoeias and medical aetiologies, or diverse types of healthcare. Let us also mention the local arts of story-telling, legal or therapeutic palavers as well as contemporary letters, drama and plastic arts.

Having had the privilege, as anthropologist, of being shaped by this Africa consisting of multiple networks of endogenous knowledges and by postcolonial university exchanges, I can only tell you, if you allow it, my intercultural concern and interuniversity commitment. I express this commitment, in cooperation with Dean Shomba, Professor Mwene-Batende, the CERDAS members and in echo of African thinkers I have just mentioned, but also in echo of a recent book on *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa* edited by the Nigerian Professor Afolayan.

The first question to be asked is this: In order that the academic encounter of sharing and receiving 'glocal' (global and local) forms of knowledge become fully established, is it not the case that everyone, both in the North and in Africa, should more than ever devote themselves to reassuming more clearly the presuppositions, perceptions, forms of communication and ethical foundations of the double universe of knowledges at stake? There exist, on one side, specialised knowledges transmitted uniformly and hegemonically worldwide through 'uni-versity' education programmes, and on the other side, the 'diversity' of knowledges and endogenous cultural productions that are anchored in non-Western thought traditions.

The second question I wish to raise is this: is it not the role of the University to also promote itself, at certain levels and in a well-balanced mode, into 'multi-versity'? In so doing, it could carry out its

mission by producing interassociations and debating on creative platforms between colleagues, researchers, experts and artists from the surrounding communities and through a plural partnership involving North–South and South–South networking. Let us imagine interassociations trying to integrate into curricula the local systems of know-how. Indeed, as Franz Fanon remarked in his own time, we do not expect a Freudian-trained psychotherapist to successfully and straightforwardly apply some standard methods to a Bamileke or Sukuma hysteric. Nor can we see a British judge settling a divorce case in the city of Mbandaka. The complexity of human sciences demands that we learn more from, and listen to, the plurality of the current multi-world – a world where the human being, under its various versions and layers offers to us an unsuspected wealth that awaits deciphering through epistemological and metaphysical horizons.

Ladies and Gentlemen: at this juncture, I cannot help taking you into my brief journey no. 4, in order to address the question of:

How do I See Tomorrow's Anthropologist?

Is an anthropologist not someone who – on the level of academic, educational, professional or social co-implication with social networks, or in collaboration with public institutions and services – critically and effectively articulates multiple voices of the memory? Is it not his or her task to recall, in the professional context, the wounds and aspiration of 'people from below' in the city or the village? It is anthropology that, for 25 years now, has been fighting to decolonise human sciences inasmuch as it opposed cities against villages, modernity against tradition. Anthropology is a science standing close to the living experience of subjects in context. It is incumbent upon an anthropologist to undertake an inventory of local, plural and complex, ancient and modern forms of knowledge and arts, such as for appeasing and healing, production and sharing, as well as for contributing to the improvement in material, social, legal and hygienic conditions of existence for networks and society as a whole. Do these arts and local forms of knowledge make theoretical and practical suggestions that would allow us to provide some answers to the basic concerns of the majority of the population

on the planet? Among such concerns, which are also the anthropologists' concerns, we can mention hunger, exploitation and social exclusions, wars, pollution, deforestation, the plundering of resources, epidemics and the danger that many local languages in urban areas simply vanish. In the near future, anthropologists could offer themselves as an intercultural borderspace as well as an intramemory space between past and present societies, between North and South or even between South and South. Accordingly, such anthropologists may become not only interculturalists but also intergenerational diplomats. As such they ought to challenge the excessive Eurocentric modes of their discipline as well as their adopted perspective. Regardless of whether they are acting professionally or in their group of origin or their adoptive environment – and whether collaborating with social networks or public institutions – anthropologists should particularly prove amenable to the social and cultural genius. Can they also direct their minds away from what the scientific credo tends to obliterate? I particularly have in mind here what – in those areas relating to life, the sacred and people's core aspirations and commitments – stands apart from either a secularised modern and postmodern worldview or typically Eurocentric, logocentric and patriarchal modes of transmission and production canonised by academic knowledge. I also refer to what stands out from European vision of health development, education, public administration and so on.

The aspect of 'dewesternised' and postcolonial anthropological attitude I advocate is radically at variance with some deconstructivist positions in postmodern thought, more particularly in its extreme defeatist relativism of some Anglo-American kind. Quite paradoxically, these positions describe everything in terms of processes of hybridisation, creolisation, collage or plural cultural interbreeding under the aegis of globalisation brought about by businesses, politics and the media, more particularly video productions and musical bands. Such extreme relativism runs the danger of restoring a form of universalism that makes us inept to think about the *Other* in his or her originality, manifold layers as they appear in encounters. It is a discounting universalism claiming that globalisation and interbreeding processes will eventually erase the original syntax of local languages and cultures as well as the

endogenous reinvention or emancipation of some epistemological, ethical, architectural, therapeutic local traditions.

Returning to the more modest and concrete level of 'people from below' – to whom countless anthropologists ally themselves – I would contend that borderspace stands as a form of complicity constituted by humour and cheerfulness (which is so widespread in Kinshasa), or by mutual aid through networking and genuine hospitality, healing and mourning sessions and by the encounter between an anthropologist and his or her host community or between anthropologists of the North and the South. Such complicity can even become an intersubjective framework leading one another to unearth the ultimate issues unfolding in life. And in such a mutually enriching encounter of human dignity and hope an anthropologist and his or her host-community become established in each other in a form of intersubjectivity that is increasingly co-constitutive of interlaced worlds.

Stating, without grandiloquence, that my academic work was enriched by a prodigious variety of local forms of knowledge from different parts of Africa and by the wounds and wisdom of my host communities amounts to saying how I am blessed with the plenitude summoning me to pondering. I wish to mark this gratitude by making a donation to the Faculty of my publications and additional specialist books.

Mr Rector and you, Ladies and Gentlemen, please allow me to close this short speech with a *double wish*.

At this juncture, allow me to recall to memory two doctors in anthropology, namely the late Matula Atul who we keep all in our hearts, and the late Stefan Bekaert. Stefan died tragically in a cable lift crushed in the Alps by an American military plane flying back from a raid into Bosnia on 3 February 1998: thus 8 years and 2 months ago. Having lived intensely as a generous and subtle anthropologist for two years among the Sakata of Ntolo along Lake Ntumba – where I visited him in 1994 – Stefan defended his most mature PhD thesis in late 1997. A few months later we agreed that, upon his return from the Alps, he would come to the University of Kinshasa in March 1998 to take over my research networking here. Now let the prodigious number of eight years, according to the Sakata philosophy, urge us to mark a closure of such a mourning

period and replenish this past, which nevertheless does not pass by. Let this honorary doctorate degree allow us to lift the period for our mourning of both Stefan but also late Professor Matula Atul. Let us launch an appeal to young successors, who are as talented as our departed colleagues, to carry out our mission so that soon Congolese anthropology can ultimately have its real academic centre here: that is my first wish.

Thanks to you, the honorary doctorate confirms, quite conveniently, our complex interlacing, co-constitutive of what we are. On behalf of my wife, Maria, our family and on behalf of my colleagues of the Africa Research Centre in Leuven, as well as my fellow-feeling colleagues at the Belgian Royal Academy of Belgium and also at the Owerri Whelan Research Academy in southeastern Nigeria, and on my own behalf, I would like to express my very sincere thanks to you, Rector, Mr Dean, Professor Lapika (my promoter), Professor Mwene Batende, dear Colleagues, and to all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, who have attended this celebration. In particular, I would like to register my thanks to the Honourable Deputies and Senators who turned up today as well as to Your Excellencies the Ambassador of Belgium and Monsignor Nzala. Thanking you all for listening, I would like to finish with my last good wish: 'this is and brings felicity': *kyeesi*.

Notes

1. Translated from French by Paul Komba.
2. My research among the Yaka in Kwango (1971–74) and in Kinshasa (about three weeks annually from 1986 till 2001) was conducted in association with the Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa – IARA – at the KU Leuven. I acknowledge with thanks the financial support from NFWO (the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research), FWO (Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders), the European Commission General Directorate XII, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation in New York. The research was also carried out in conjunction with the IMNC (the Institute of National Museums of Congo) and the CERDAS (Centre for the Coordination of Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in South-Saharan Africa) based at the University of Kinshasa. The bibliography of publications for my research is hosted at http://perswww.kuleuven.be/renaat_devisch. See also <http://www.africaresearch.be>