

Afrophone Philosophies (UG) and (PG)

Overview

Afrophone philosophies (i.e. philosophies in African languages) are the philosophical discourses in African languages: the (oral or written) texts that are the channels of philosophical thought in Africa. In order adequately to approach and to understand these philosophical expressions in African languages, an interdisciplinary approach is indispensable, one which is informed by and draws on the methods and data from a range of disciplines: linguistics (textual analysis, semantics, translation studies), anthropology, history, literary theory and poetics, aesthetics, post-colonial studies, and others more. As we will be working with *texts*, we will especially profit from the insights elaborated in literature studies: the analyses of orality, performance, narrativity, theory of text and of genre, etc.

After a general lecture on the role of language and of genre in the expression of philosophical thought, in the first half of this course we will be looking at how "professional philosophers", i.e. thinkers who have articulated a scathing criticism of "ethnophilosophy", engage with communal thought. We will look at several case studies: the thought of the Akan, the Yorùbá, and the southern African concept of *ubuntu*. We will also look at a mutation of this concept in Swahili culture, *utu*, as elaborated by several Swahili intellectuals.

In the second half of the course, we will look at original writings in African languages. We will explore the existentialist novels of Swahili and Shona writers (Euphrase Kezilahabi, William Mkufya, Ignatius T. Mabasa) and the critical reactions to Western philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics) in the work of these authors. These fictional writings are not only explicit discussions of various philosophical issues, but they are also directly relevant in a broader context of cultural debate in/on Africa. They warn against the pitfalls of cultural essentialism - a constant danger in the understanding and self-understanding of African cultures. They contribute to the discussions, initiated from different standpoints by Senghor and by Mudimbe, on an African epistemology. They also pose general questions about philosophy and religion, for example regarding the role of free will in religious behaviour, the nature of reality, the being of God, and many others.

To conclude the course, we will look at the systems of esoteric knowledge found in Francophone West Africa and the reactions to these in non-fictional writings in Wolof and in Bambara as well as in contemporary artistic productions (films, fiction in African languages).

Teaching

10 weeks teaching with 3 contact hours per week (2 hours lecture and 1 hour tutorial). The course is taught in Term 2. The course "African Philosophy" (UG) and (PG) is a pre-requisite for this course. Exceptionally students may take "Afrophone Philosophies" (UG) (PG) without having taken "African Philosophy", after a consultation with the course convenor.

PG students must take both units if they wish to take this course as a major. The course can be taken on its own as a minor, after a consultation with the course convenor (regarding the issue of "African Philosophy" being a pre-requisite for this course).

Course objectives (UG)

- learn philosophically to analyze texts in several African languages (in translation), against the backdrop of the cultural contexts where these languages are spoken
- learn critically to reflect on the role of genre in expressing philosophical ideas
- develop the ability of fundamental reflection and critical analysis of central philosophical issues

- develop a critical approach to the underlying cultural presuppositions of philosophical discourses
- develop oral presentations skills (gain practice for giving conference papers)
- develop writing skills (learn to produce high-quality academic articles)

Methods of assessment (UG)

ONE oral presentation of 20 minutes to be given in the second half of the term, presenting the selected essay topics prior to the submission of the essays. The students are required to prepare handouts and/or a short Powerpoint presentation for this presentation. The presentation should include a brief mention of the readings for the essays. These presentations are intended to help the students develop the practice of giving a conference paper. The presentation will account for **20% of the total mark.**

TWO written analyses of readings of 500 words, to be submitted on the day of the lecture in Week 5 and in Week 11. Each of the analyses should cover ONE of the weekly topics covered respectively in weeks 1-5 and in weeks 7-11, the topics should be different from the essay topics, and the analyses should cover the required readings (listed under Readings) relevant to the topics. Each of the analyses will account for **10% of the total mark.**

ONE essay of 4500 words to be submitted on Day 5 of Week 1 of Term 3, valued at **60% of the total mark.** The topics of the essays will be chosen individually by each student but based on a consultation with the course convenor and approved by the course convenor. The essays help the students develop the skills to write essays and academic papers.

Course objectives (PG)

- learn philosophically to analyze texts in several African languages (in translation), against the backdrop of the cultural contexts where these languages are spoken
- learn critically to reflect on the role of genre in expressing philosophical ideas
- develop the ability of fundamental reflection and critical analysis of central philosophical issues
- develop a critical approach to the underlying cultural presuppositions of philosophical discourses
- learn to give conference papers
- learn to produce high-quality academic writing

Methods of assessment (PG)

ONE 20-minute oral presentation of the essay topics to be presented in the tutorial before the submission of the essays. The students must prepare handouts and/or a Powerpoint presentation as a basis for the oral presentation and must discuss the basic bibliographical sources for their essays in the presentation. This presentation is intended to help the students develop the practice of giving a conference paper and will account for **20% of the total mark.**

TWO written analyses of readings of 1000 words, to be submitted on the day of the lecture in Week 5 and Week 11. Each of the analyses should cover ONE of the weekly topics covered respectively in weeks 1-5 and in weeks 7-11, the topics should be different from the essay topics and should discuss ALL the required readings (listed under Readings) PLUS at least TWO additional readings of about 30-50 pages each (selected from Additional Bibliography or independently found by the student) on top of the required readings. Each of the analyses will account for **10% of the total mark.**

ONE 5000-word essay to be submitted on Day 5 of Week 1 of Term 3. The topic of the essay will be chosen individually by each student but based on a consultation with the course convenor and approved by the course convenor. The essay will account for **60 % of the total mark.**

Week 1: The languages and genres of philosophy

If we wish to study philosophical thought expressed in the medium of African languages ("Afrophone philosophies"), we have to explore several fundamental issues. The debate hinges on the issue of language: why is Afrophone expression important? What are the differences in expressing ideas in European and in African languages? We must also question orality and writing as channels of philosophical expression: is writing a prerequisite for philosophy? What are the qualities of orality that contribute to the expression of philosophical ideas or that are obstacles to the development of philosophical thought? These questions converge in the question of the role of genre in the expression of philosophical thought: given the absence of a discourse called "philosophy" in most Sub-Saharan African languages, what texts do we approach to find philosophical thought? Even more importantly, *how* do we approach different genres as *philosophy*? What methods do we need adequately to analyze the specific genres that are employed to express thought in African languages? In this introductory class, we will also address the relationship of philosophy and philosophical thought to other domains of intellectual pursuits and scholarship: religion and cosmology, oral and written literature, non-fictional texts (historiography, ethnography).

Readings

- Barber, Karin. 2007. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics. Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2, "Genre, society and history", pp. 32-66.
- Kresse, Kai. 1999. The Problem of How to Use African Language for African Thought – On a Multilingual Perspective in African Philosophy. *African Philosophy* 12/1: 27-36.
- Kresse, Kai & Kwasi Wiredu. 2000. Language matters! Decolonization, multilingualism, and African languages in the making of African philosophy. Kwasi Wiredu in dialogue with Kai Kresse. (Dialogue originally from 1996.) In: *polylog. Forum for Intercultural Philosophizing* 1.2. <http://www.polylog.org/them/1.2/dlg1-en.htm>.
- Rettová, Alena. 2007. *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*. Středokluky: Zdeněk Susa. Chapter 1, "Towards Afrophone philosophies", pp. 27-46.

Additional bibliography

- Barber, Karin. 1999. Quotation in the Constitution of Yorùbá Oral Texts. *Research in African Literatures* 30/2: 17-41.
- Bauman, Richard & Charles L. Briggs. 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59-88.

Week 2: "Look who's thinking": philosophy and proverbs

Oral literature, in particular proverbs and divination verses (especially the Yorùbá *Ifá* corpus), have been exploited in African Philosophy as a source of "authentic" African philosophical ideas and evidence of African philosophical activity. Yet, the ways in which these corpuses of sayings, proverbs, or oral verses have been utilized in philosophy often remain far from being convincing: to say that "there are no crossroads in the ear" is a "formulation of the principle of noncontradiction" (Gyekye 1995: 7) or that "a medicine does not go two ways" is "a direct expression of the law of the Excluded Middle" (Oluwole 1999: 93) seems, to say the very least, to be making problematic shortcuts between proverbs and logic. Similarities have been pointed out between the fragments of Greek Pre-Socratic philosophers and proverbs. But many methodological questions regarding the approach to proverbs and other oral texts have been left unanswered. For example, what is the unit of philosophical interpretation? The whole corpus of proverbs? Or an individual proverb? Or selected sets of proverbs? Who selects them and what criteria should be employed in this choice? How do we account for the contradictions between individual proverbs? For the inherent polyvalence of proverbs? Whom do we ascribe this philosophy to? Is it ethical to ascribe philosophies to ethnic groups (the "myth of primitive unanimism", criticized by Hountondji)? Who is the "author" or who/what fulfils the "author function" (Foucault) as the unifying element resolving conflicting meanings and interpretations? We need to know how to deal with genre-specific

qualities of texts before we can reflect on their "philosophical content", and this is particularly relevant for oral sources. This lecture will examine the approaches to orality and oral texts, especially proverbs, in African Philosophy and constitute a foundation for our further debates on conceptual systems attributed to ethnic groups or speakers of specific languages.

Readings

- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *The Death of the Author*. In: *Image, Music, Text*. Ed. and trad. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, pp. 142-148.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980 (1979¹). What Is an Author? In: Josué V. Harari (ed.). *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. London: Methuen, pp. 141-160.
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1995 (1987¹). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought. The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Chapter 1, "The question of philosophy in African culture", pp. 1-57.
- Wanjohi, Gerald Joseph. 1997. *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gikuyu Proverbs. The Kihooto World-View*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa. Especially Chapter 3, "Proverbs as the Source of African Philosophy", pp. 75-93.

Additional bibliography

- Barber, Karin & P. F. de Moraes Farias (eds.). 1989. *Discourse and Its Disguises. The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Centre of West African Studies.
- Burke, Seán. 2004 (1992¹). *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Imbo, Samuel Oluoch. 2002. *Oral Traditions as Philosophy. Okot p'Bitek's Legacy for African Philosophy*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Kresse, Kai. 2002. Towards a postcolonial synthesis in African Philosophy – conceptual liberation and reconstructive self-evaluation in the work of Okot p'Bitek. In: Olusegun Oladipo (ed.). *The Third Way in African Philosophy*. Ibadan: Hope Publications, pp. 215-232.
- Madu, Raphael Okechukwu. 1992. *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths. The Hermeneutics of Destiny*. New York et al.: Peter Lang.
- Wauchope, Isaac Williams. 2008. *Selected Writings 1874-1916*. Edited and translated by Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende, with an introduction and notes by Jeff Opland. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of Southern African Historical Documents. Chapters containing proverb interpretation, pp. 245-311.

Week 3: The "Akan conceptual scheme"

Arguably no other ethnic group or nation has been more represented in African philosophy than the Akan of Ghana, thanks to the many renowned philosophers who are of Akan origin. The "Akan philosophical tradition" has been discussed by Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Kwame Gyekye, and others; Akan philosophical concepts have been compared to Ewe concepts (Dzobo 1992) and to Yorùbá philosophy (Gbadegesin 1991). The Akan have their own philosophical anthology - a collection of philosophical texts authored by Akan philosophers (Kwame 1995). On many levels this prolific activity challenges the idea of ethnic philosophical traditions as monolithic bodies of thought that all speakers of the language and originating in that particular culture unanimously adhere to. These above-mentioned Akan thinkers are "professional philosophers", critical of "ethnophilosophy" and its assumptions. However, if we examine the way they describe their nation's philosophical thought, we see that the dangers of ethnophilosophy lurk on every page. This raises questions about ethnophilosophy and ethnic thought as such: is it at all possible (and necessary) to avoid the pitfalls of ethnophilosophy? What other ways are there to draw on African intellectual traditions? The topic of this lecture is the qualities and problems of collective thought, as they manifest themselves in the writings of Akan professional philosophers.

Readings

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2004. Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person. In: Lee M. Brown (ed.). *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives*. Oxford et al.: OUP, pp. 21-34
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1984³ (1977¹). Akan Concept of a Person. In: Richard A. Wright (ed.) *African Philosophy. An Introduction*. Lanham, London: University Press of America, pp. 199-212.
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1995 (1987¹). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought. The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Chapter 2, "The Akan conceptual scheme", pp. 59-103.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. 1987. The concept of mind with particular reference to the language and thought of the Akans. In: G. Fløistad (ed.). *Contemporary Philosophy. A new survey*. Volume 5: *African Philosophy*. Dordrecht et al.: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 153-180. Also in: Safro Kwame (ed.). *Readings in African Philosophy. An Akan Collection*. Lanham et al.: University Press of America 1995, pp. 125-150.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. 1996. African Philosophical Tradition. A Case Study of the Akan. In: Parker English & Kibujjo M. Kalumba (eds.). *African Philosophy. A Classical Approach*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp. 99-122.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. 1998. The Concept of Truth in the Akan Language. In: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.). *African Philosophy. An Anthology*. Malden, Massachusetts, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 176-180.

Additional bibliography

- Dzobo, N. K. 1992. Knowledge and Truth: Ewe and Akan Conceptions. In: Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (eds.). 1992. *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*. Washington, D. C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-1/chapter_iii.htm.
- Ephirim-Donkor, Anthony. 1997. *African Spirituality. On Becoming Ancestors*. Trenton & Asmara: Africa World Press.
- Gbadegesin, Segun. 1991. *African Philosophy. Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York et al.: Peter Lang.
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1997. *Tradition and Modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kwame, Safro (ed.). 1995. *Readings in African Philosophy. An Akan Collection*. Lanham et al.: University Press of America.
- Minkus, Helaine K. 1984³ (1977¹). Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy. In: Richard A. Wright (ed.) *African Philosophy. An Introduction*. Lanham, London: University Press of America, pp. 113-147.
- Müller, Louise F. 2008. The reality of spirits? A historiography of the Akan concept of 'mind'. *Quest* XXII: 163-184.
- Opoku, A. A. 1946. *Asensusuw ho nyansa. (Correct Thinking.)* Accra: Scottish Mission Book Depot.
- Sawyer, Harry. 1972. Ancestor or creator God? A review of Danquah's "Akan Doctrine of God". In: *Congrès international des africanistes. Deuxième session, DAKAR, 11-20 décembre 1967*. Paris: Présence Africaine, pp. 283-300.
- Wiredu, Kwasi and Kwame Gyekye (eds.). 1992. *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*. Washington, D. C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-1/contents.htm>.

Week 4: The philosophy in/of the Yorùbá language

The Yorùbá of Nigeria boast an impressive body of writings on "their" philosophy and also here similar criticism applies as that which we raised in relation to the "Akan philosophical tradition": we are dealing here with "philosophy" attributed to a collective entity - the totality of people speaking one of the many dialects of Yorùbá. This week's lecture continues the reflection started last week: are there ways to go around this problem of collectivity in philosophy? The Yorùbá case study offers an interesting solution in the form of the project of philosophy extracted from language. Barry

Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo applied the methods of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy to Yorùbá language and formulated "Yorùbá theories" of the self, of knowledge and truth, or of moral values. In the lecture we will critically examine Hallen and Sodipo's suggestions. We will especially look at the interface of semantics and philosophy: where does one end and the other begin? Can we say that the meaning of a word is the "philosophy" of the speakers of the language from which the word is taken? Who is the philosopher, then, if all speakers of the language have access to these meanings?

Readings

- Hallen, Barry & J. Olubi Sodipo. 1994. The House of the 'Inu'. Keys to the Structure of a Yoruba Theory of the Self. In: *Quest VIII/1*, pp. 2-23.
- Hallen, Barry & J. Olubi Sodipo. 1997 (1986¹). *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft. Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 2, "An African Epistemology: The Knowledge-Belief Distinction and Yoruba Discourse", pp. 40-85.

Additional bibliography

- Eckles, Jr., Oswald. 2005. *The Philosophy of Olodumare and Shango*. New York, Lincoln, Shanghai: iUniverse.
- Gbadegesin, Segun. 1991. *African Philosophy. Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York et al.: Peter Lang.
- Idowu, E. Bolaji. 1962. *Olódùmarè. God in Yoruba Belief*. London et al.: Longmans.
- Hallen, Barry. 2000. *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful. Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Ogunyemi, Y. D. 1998. *Introduction to Yorùbá Philosophy, Religion and Literature*. New York: Athelia Henrietta Press.
- Oluwole, Sophie B. 1992. *Witchcraft, Reincarnation and the God-Head. Issues in African Philosophy*. Lagos. Excel Publishers.
- Oluwole, Sophie B. 1999. *Philosophy and Oral Tradition*. Ikeja, Lagos: African Research Konsultancy (ARK).

Week 5: Ubuntu

This week will explore the concept of *ubuntu* (humanity, personhood), a concept with narrow links to central moral concepts in many African cultures (the related words in other Bantu languages inevitably carry moral connotations, cf. the Swahili *utu* or the Shona *(h)unhu*, but the concept is important also in West African cultures, e.g. the semantics of the Yorùbá expression for "person", *èniyàn*). *Ubuntu* is seen as a form of "African communalism" (the priority of community over the individual) and is summarized in a few proverbs that exist in several Bantu mutations, most famously *motho ke motho ka batho* (Tswana) or *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Xhosa, Zulu) - "a human is human through people". The philosophy of *ubuntu* has had an immense societal and political impact due to the way it was employed in the reconciliation process in South Africa. This lecture will therefore also explore the aspect of social and political relevance of African philosophical ideas, in particular the possibility to use "traditional African philosophy" in contemporary political and legislative processes.

Readings

- Ramose, Mogobe B. 1999. *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books. Chapter 3, "The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a philosophy", pp. 49-66.
- Shutte, Augustine 2001. *Ubuntu. An Ethic for a New South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. Chapter 2, "The African Vision", pp. 16-33.
- Yali-Manisi, David L. P. 1952. *Ubuntu*. In: *Izibongo zeenkosi zama-Xhosa: zabuy' iindlezan' entlazaneni*. [Cape Town] : Lovedale Press, 1952, p. 78-79. Translated in: Jeff Opland. 2005. *The Dassie and the Hunter: A South African Meeting*. Scottsville, South Africa : University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, pp. 60-61.

Additional bibliography

- Battle, Michael. 2009. *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*. Foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. New York: Seabury Books.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2004. *Versöhnung, ubuntu, pardon : quel genre?* In: Barbara Cassin, Olivier Cayla, Philippe-Joseph Salazar (eds.). *Vérité, réconciliation, réparation*. Paris: Seuil, pp. 111-156.
- Quest (2001) Vol XV no1-2 - special issue on African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy, online: <http://www.quest-journal.net/2001.htm>.
- Samkange, Stanlake John Thompson and Tommie Marie Samkange. 1980. *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy*. Salisbury: Graham Publishing.
- Tutu, Archbishop Desmond. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness: A Personal Overview of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. London et al.: Random House.

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: Anthropology of philosophy: the Swahili context

In this week we will start moving away from anonymous philosophical concepts and approaching texts authored by known and named individuals. The project of the German philosopher and anthropologist, Kai Kresse, consists in the study of philosophical texts by individuals identified as prominent intellectuals within a specific cultural context. Kresse conducted his fieldwork in Mombasa, Kenya, and concentrated on the work of three Swahili poets and religious thinkers, Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany, Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo, and Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir. We will study the concept of *utu* in the work of Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo, as analyzed by Kresse, and examine the tradition of employing poetry to express philosophical ideas in Swahili culture. We will also look at this concept of *utu* as elaborated by several other writers from different epochs of the development of Swahili literature (George Mhina, Asha Kunemah, Kyallo Wamitila, etc.).

Readings

- HANDOUT WITH TRANSLATIONS OF SWAHILI POETRY distributed by the convenor of the course
- Kresse, Kai. 2007. *Philosophising in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute. Chapter 5, "Ahmad Nassir's poetical moral theory. *Utu* - how human beings ought to behave", pp. 139-175.
- Rettová, Alena. 2008. 'The horns of my thoughts are fastened together in a knot': transformations of 'humanity' in Swahili and Shona literatures. In: Anja Oed and Uta Reuster-Jahn (eds.). *Beyond the Language Issue - The Production, Mediation and Reception of Creative Writing in African Languages*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, pp. 263-274.

Additional bibliography

- Kresse, Kai. 2003. "Swahili Enlightenment?" East African reformist discourse at the turning point: the example of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33/3: 279–309.
- Kresse, Kai. 2004. "Making people think": the Ramadhan lectures of Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir in Mombasa (1419 A.H.). In Scott S. Reese (ed.). *The transmission of learning in Islamic Africa*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 212-243.
- Kresse, Kai. 2009. Knowledge and Intellectual Practice in a Swahili Context: 'Wisdom' and the Social Dimensions of Knowledge. In: Kai Kresse and Trevor H. J. Marchand (eds.). *Knowledge in Practice: Expertise and the Transmission of Knowledge*. Special Issue of *Africa* 79/1, pp. 148-167.
- Rettová, Alena. 2007. *Lidství ni Utu? Ubinadamu baina ya Tamaduni*. In: *Swahili Forum XIV*: 89-134. http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/SF_14_06%20Rettova.pdf.

Week 8: Existentialism in Swahili and Shona

For many reasons, in particular for its capacity to express African historical oppression and suffering and for its analysis of the concepts of alienation and authenticity, existentialism has, implicitly or explicitly, played a major role in African literature and scholarship in general. A number of authors have been inspired by the ideas of existentialism and employed them in their creative writing. In this lecture we will analyze four Afrophone novels, Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Kichwamaji* (1974) and *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (1975), William Mkufya's *Ua la Faraja* (2004), and Ignatius T. Mabasa's *Mapenzi* (1999), the first three in Swahili and *Mapenzi* in Shona (interestingly, the word in the Shona title, *mapenzi*, meaning "lunatics", means "love" in Swahili!). The novels depict individuals exposed to oppressive conditions of many kinds: physical or mental disease (hydrocephalus, HIV/AIDS, madness), cultural and intellectual alienation, the experience of war, hunger, rape. They philosophize about the human condition in different ways, showing despair or seeking hope, lacking a meaning of life (in the absence of religion or of political ideology) or claiming there are ways to transcend the limits of individual life through procreation or in creative work. In this class look at the manifestations of existentialism in these novels. Additionally, we will compare the novelistic expression of existentialism with the expression of existentialist ideas in literary texts of other genres, such as song lyrics and poetry.

Readings

HANDOUT WITH TRANSLATIONS OF PARTS OF NOVELS AND POEMS distributed by the convenor of the course

Crowell, Steven. 2010. Existentialism. In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>.

Diegner, Lutz. 2002. Allegories in Euphrase Kezilahabi's early novels. In: *Swahili Forum* 9, pp. 43-74.

Rettová, Alena. 2007. *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*. Zdeněk Susa, Středokluky. Chapter 8, "Manje, sekudya kwatinoitawo sadza, zvimwe chete nehupenyu: Existentialism in Swahili and Shona literatures", pp. 195-220.

Additional bibliography

Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1974. *Kichwamaji*. Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House.

Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1976 (1975¹). *Dunia uwanja wa fujo*. Kampala, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau.

Mabasa, Ignatius. T. 2004 (1999¹). *Mapenzi*. Harare: College Press.

Mkufya, W. E. 2004. *Ua la Faraja*. Dar es Salaam: Mangrove Publishers.

Rettová, Alena. 2011. L'existentialisme et la littérature swahili. In: Virginia Coulon & Xavier Garnier (eds.). *Les Littératures africaines. Textes et terrains*. Paris: Karthala, pp. 427-442.

Rettová, Alena. 2011. Philosophy of the Powerless: The Singer, the Sage, and Philosophy in Africa. In: Hana Horáková, Paul Nugent, Petr Skalník (eds.). *Africa: Power and Powerlessness*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, pp. 92-106.

Week 9: The challenges to Western epistemology and metaphysics in the recent novels by Euphrase Kezilahabi

Euphrase Kezilahabi's novels *Nagona* (1990) and *Mzingile* (1991) brought a revolution to Swahili literature. Swahili prose fiction, up to the 1990s (and up to the present in the majority of novels and short stories), followed a predominantly realist mode of writing. It was Kezilahabi who started experimenting with the rules of realism in these two novels, disrupting the linear flow of narration, the habitual understanding of space, of personal identity, or of causation. This artistic experimentation has wider philosophical implications, as Kezilahabi explicitly elaborates in his PhD dissertation of 1985. *Nagona* challenges the notions of subject and object (i.e. the basic categories of Western epistemology), while *Mzingile* deconstructs Western metaphysics, as the belief that the being of things (and persons) is determined by "origins", i.e. "essences" or "ideas" in the Platonic sense. We can recall similar ideas presented by African philosophers and writers. The criticism of Western epistemology is in line with Senghor's attack on "Western reason" as an agency that "kills and dissects its object". The idea of "origins" is very relevant in an understanding of all forms of

cultural essentialism, including Nazism or the search for an authentic African "essence" believed to be found in Africa's precolonial past - an effort which guides much of African literature, philosophy, and politics until today. The manifestations of this belief in "origins" are debated by Kezilahabi both in his creative writing and in his dissertation. Kezilahabi's prose fiction is an intriguing combination of simplicity of language and complexity of ideas. We will focus, in this class, on these two novels and on the way the author presents his philosophical arguments using the medium of creative prose.

Readings

HANDOUT WITH TRANSLATIONS OF NAGONA AND MZINGILE, distributed by the convenor of the course

Diegner, Lutz. 2005. Intertextuality in the Contemporary Swahili novel: Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and William E. Mkufya's *Ziraili na Zirani*. In: *Swahili Forum* 12, pp. 25-35. <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/SF12Diegner.pdf>.

Rettová, Alena. 2007. *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*. Zdeněk Susa, Středokluky, Chapter 7, "Tulikuwa watatu, EGO, ID na SUPEREGO: Metaphysics, epistemology and ontology in Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and *Mzingile*", pp. 169-194.

Additional bibliography

Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1985. *African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin (Madison).

Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1990. *Nagona*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press.

Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1991. *Mzingile*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press.

Week 10: "The best of all possible worlds"? Conditions of creation, theodicy, atheism, and materialism in Mkufya's *Ziraili na Zirani*

Mkufya's epic novel, *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999), is undoubtedly one of the most complex works in Swahili literature. Through the story of an African atheist who organizes a rebellion against Heaven while he is sentenced to eternal torture in Hell, the novel poses, in a highly sophisticated manner, the classical questions of theology and philosophy: the possibility to account for evil in a world created by a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God (theodicy), the nature of sin, the question of the very being of God (the implications of atheism and of religious beliefs), the nature of reality (materialism, idealism), or the question of human freedom and free will in taking moral decisions. The novel has been translated, or rather an expanded version in English has been written by the author under the title of *Pilgrims from Hell* (unpublished manuscript). This will make it possible for us to discuss the novel in detail and to analyze the contribution the work makes to philosophy and to scholarship in general.

Readings

Mkufya, William E. 2006. *Pilgrims from Hell* (the author's translation of *Ziraili na Zirani*). Manuscript, will be distributed by the convenor of the course.

Rettová, Alena. 2007. *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*. Zdeněk Susa, Středokluky, Chapters 9 and 10, "Safari hii tusiwe na pupa ya kushusha utambuzi: The creation of a world in W. E. Mkufya's *Ziraili na Zirani*" and "Twaienzi dhahiri: Defining 'reality' in William E. Mkufya's *Ziraili na Zirani*", pp. 221-263.

Additional bibliography

Diegner, Lutz. 2005. Intertextuality in the Contemporary Swahili novel: Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and William E. Mkufya's *Ziraili na Zirani*. In: *Swahili Forum* 12, pp. 25-35. <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/SF12Diegner.pdf>.

Mkufya, William E. 1999. *Ziraili na Zirani*. Dar es Salaam: Hekima Publishers.

Mkufya, William E. 2005. Mazungumzo na Lutz Diegner juu ya riwaya ya *Ziraili na Zirani*. In: *Swahili Forum* 12, pp. 37-62. <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/SF12Mkufya.pdf>.

Week 11: Esoteric West Africa

French scholarship disclosed Francophone West Africa (esp. Mali, Guinea, Senegal) as the home of secret societies and of esoteric knowledge, such as the striking astronomical and cosmological systems of the Dogon or the Bambara. The region has also been made famous through the art of the griots and versions of epics, such as the epic of Sunjata and other oral narratives of great historical depth. Famous artists, musicians and film-makers, originate from this area and have depicted its cultural riches in their productions. This lecture will explore these diverse forms of knowledge, starting with the observations of French anthropologists, who also perceptibly influenced the modern artistic (cinematographic or literary) depictions of the region's intellectual heritage, and ending with present-day Bambara and Wolof writings, such as Wulale's history of Ségou, fictional depictions of history in the work of Boubacar Boris Diop, or the aphoristic philosophy of Góor gi Usmaan Géy.

Readings

HANDOUT WITH TRANSLATIONS FROM BAMBARA AND WOLOF, distributed by the convenor of the course

- Austen, Ralph A. 2007. Beyond 'history': two films of the deep Mande past. In: Vivian Bickford-Smith & Richard Mendelsohn (eds.). *Black and White in Colour. African History on Screen*. Oxford: James Currey, Athens: Ohio University Press, Cape Town: Double Storey, pp. 28-40.
- Belcher, Stephen. 1999. *Epic Traditions of Africa*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Chapter 6, "Segou and the Bamana", pp. 115-141.
- Griaule, Marcel & Germaine Dieterlen. 1954. The Dogon. In: Daryll Forde (ed.). *African Worlds. Studies in the cosmological ideas and social values of African peoples*. London et al.: Oxford University Press, pp. 83-110.
- Masolo, Dismas A. 1994. *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Chapter 3, "Systematic Ethnophilosophy", pp. 68-83.

Film viewings

- Yeelen* (1987), dir. Souleymane Cissé.
- Keïta! L'héritage du griot* (1996), dir. Dani Kouyaté.

Additional Bibliography

- Castaldi, Francesca. 2006. *Choreographies of African Identities. Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Dieterlen, Germaine. 1954 (1950¹). *Essai sur la religion Bambara*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Diop, Boubacar Boris. 2009. *Les petits de la guenon*. Paris: Philippe Rey.
- Jóob, Bubakar Bóris. 2003. *Doomi Golo. Netti*. Dakar: Editions Papyrus Afrique.
- Géy, Góor gi Usmaan. 1997. *Nàmm Xel Tàggat Jikko. Xalaati Góor gi Usmaan Géy. Pensées*. Dakar: OSAD (Organisation Sénégalaise d'Appui au Développement).
- Griaule, Marcel. 1970 (French 1948¹). *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. Oxford et al.: OUP. (In French, *Dieu d'eau. Entretiens avec Ogotemmêli*, 1948.)
- Harney, Elizabeth. 2004. *In Senghor's Shadow. Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Sylla, Assane. 1994 (1978¹). *La philosophie morale des Wolof*. Dakar: IFAN. (First edition by Sankoré.)
- Traoré, Mamadou Lamine. 2007. *Philosophie et Géomancie. Vers une philosophie originelle africaine*. Bamako: Éditions Donniya.
- Wulale, Berehima. 1995. *Keko ye Foko ye*. Bamako: Sahélienne.