

REPORTS

A CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY IN PRAGUE

Petr Skalník

“Africa of the past, Africa of the future. The dynamics of global conflicts, peace and development. Asixoxe – Let’s Talk! Conference on African Philosophy.” This was the title of the two-day encounter of Africanists and interested non-Africanists at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic taking place in Prague on 2–3 May 2017. The organisers were the Centre of Global Studies of this institute and the School of Asian and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Actually, the second part of the conference took place later in London for another two days. However, the meeting at Prague was autonomous and self-contained. The animus was Albert Kasanda, a Congolese of Belgian nationality who is a researcher at the Centre whose director, Marek Hrubec, gave full support to the idea of the conference and financed it out of the Centre’s research programme “Global Conflicts and Local Interactions.”

The topic, past, future, conflicts, peace, development connected with African philosophy, was a novelty in the Czech context, although Alena Rettová, originally trained at Charles University’s African studies and now a reader in Swahili Literature and African Philosophy at SOAS, has published widely in Czech and English on this lesser known branch of knowledge. The first day’s keynote lecturer was Severino Ngoenha, a professor at the National University of Mozambique in Maputo whose talk was a truly philosophical deliberation aiming at a future just society in Africa. Even though Ngoenha did not use empirical data, his lecture called forth a vivid discussion. The following papers were more concrete and concentrated on particular topics. Petr Skalník of the University of Hradec Králové analysed succession in the West-African chiefdom of Nanuŋ as a case of indigenous African democracy. Jan Záhorský of the West Bohemian University of Pilsen summarised Ethiopia’s history as a struggle between tradition and innovation. Zuzana Uhde of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic spoke about borders in Africa as

a source of global injustice, while Michelle Clarke of SOAS talked on environmental ethics and speculative fiction in Africa. Valéria Bankóová of Charles University addressed the problem of population growth and human security in Kenya. Marek Hrubec chose to discuss social recognition as a pre-condition of future development in sub-Saharan Africa. His paper led to a lively discussion. The paper by Jiří Krejčík of the Institute of Sociology brought in Mahatma Gandhi and violent or non-violent resistance in African politics. Finally, Vladimír Klíma, one of the most senior Czech Africanists of the first generation, discussed the Boko Haram case in Nigeria. The exacting programme of the first day was animated by a drumming session of the Rev. Leonardo Teka, an Angolan living in the Czech Republic.

The second day was opened by a keynote lecture presented by Alena Rettová. She critically surveyed major writers on African philosophy and analysed Swahili utopian or futuristic novels. Stephanie Rudwick of the Universities of Leipzig and KwaZulu-Natal interpreted the movement “Rhodes Must Fall” from the viewpoint of Afropolitanism. The latter was also the subject of the paper by Albert Kasanda, who questioned African identity and its re-conceptualisation. Finally, Jan Prouza of the University of Hradec Králové submitted to scrutiny the intrastate conflicts in West Africa. The conference was a clear success and it is expected that a similar gathering will be organised in 2018. The participants were invited to submit their revised papers to the journal *Modern Africa*.