



Invitation

Thursday, October 20th, 2011, 6pm

'Recentering Africa': The Academy & Terms of Analysis - Knowledge, Philosophy and practical relevance

Roundtable Discussion with Paulin Hountondji (Benin)

Venue:

Conference Hall
Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

In Cooperation with

ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION



 **AFRICA VENIR**



Gesellschaft für Afrikanische
Philosophie e.V.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

From the 1970s onward, through his sharp and clear critique of 'ethnophilosophy', Paulin Hountondji established himself as a leading voice in the field of African philosophy that was audible far beyond. His widely quoted *Sur la 'philosophie africaine'* (1976), also in its English translation as *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983 & 1996; German 1992), became a distinct example of a universalist kind of postcolonial criticism of a prejudiced Eurocentric research perspective on 'knowledge' and 'philosophy' in Africa. With other academic African philosophers, he argued that 'ethnophilosophy' was misconceived in casting communal worldviews as 'philosophy', thereby perpetuating an essentialist idea of difference as well as double-standards in scholarship ('mythologies as African philosophy'). Hountondji's definition of African philosophy emphasised the role of individual authors and their reflexive texts as part of ongoing critical discourses in African cultures. Yet his parallel insistence on philosophy's proximity to science and literacy was often read as a rejection or dismissal of orality and its discursive traditions as philosophically irrelevant, resulting in harsh counter-critiques. In response, Hountondji encouraged and facilitated research projects on traditions of science and literacy in African contexts in the production and maintenance of 'endogenous' knowledge (1994; 1997). This term, in contrast to 'traditional' or 'indigenous' – terms that Hountondji rejects for their pejorative connotations – is emphasised to represent research trails that may unearth and explore further the wealth of African intellectual traditions in their own terms and contexts (as well as their comparative potential). In the last instance, however, Hountondji insists on the ongoing political critique of a gross imbalance of global power relations that are reflected in the academy and the institutionalization of scholarship worldwide. This imbalance needs to be redressed and for this, Hountondji addresses the challenge of re-centering Africa in political terms so that others may follow suit.

This interdisciplinary round-table discussion will address matters of ongoing and current political and intellectual urgency arising from Paulin Hountondji's work and the issues mentioned above. It follows in the tracks of a Round-Table discussion at ZMO two years ago, with the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, "Terms of Analysis in African Studies: Do we need 'Conceptual Decolonisation'?" (below, see links to announcement and audio-documentation on ZMO website).

All are welcome!

Organized, introduced and moderated by Kai Kresse (ZMO), in collaboration with: Gesellschaft für Afrikanische Philosophie; AfricAvenir; Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

http://www.zmo.de/veranstaltungen/2009/Einladung_RoundtableV20_10.pdf

http://www.zmo.de/veranstaltungen/2009/MP3_roundtable%20conceptual_decolonization%2020_10_09.mp3

http://www.zmo.de/Mitarbeiter/Kresse/index_e.htm



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Paulin J. Hountondji: bio- and bibliographical information

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A citizen of Benin, Paulin J. HOUNTONDJI was born in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1942. He studied Philosophy at the Ecole Normal Supérieur in Paris in the 1960s, among others with Louis Althusser, Jaques Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur, and he defended his doctoral dissertation (on Husserl) in 1970. Paulin J. HOUNTONDJI was Minister of Education of Benin (then Minister for Culture and Communication) from 1990 to 1993. He was Vice-President of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH) from 1998 to 2002, and from 2002 to 2005 he was Vice-President of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA, based in Dakar). Currently, he is member of the Steering Committee of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP). He was appointed end March 2009 as President of the National Council for Education in Benin. He is currently Professor of philosophy at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou, and Director of the African Center for Advanced Studies in Porto-Novo (Benin).

His publications include: African Philosophy, Myth and Reality (2nd ed. 1997; orig. 1976); Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails (ed.; 1997; orig. 1994); The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa (2002; orig. 1997); La rationalité, une ou plurielle? (ed.; 2007); L'ancien et le nouveau: la production du savoir dans l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui (2009).

Further speakers

Anke Graness

has worked on African and intercultural philosophy for many years, and wrote her PhD on Henry Odera Oruka's conception of social justice, based on the idea on a common 'human minimum' (published by Campus, 2011). Over the last years, she was editor-in-chief of the print journal 'Polylog – Zeitschrift für Interkulturelle Philosophie', based in Vienna.

Joshua Kwesi Aikins

a political scientist by training, who is currently completing his PhD project on 'Reshaping the politics of development – the dynamics between Western-style and indigenous political institutions in Ghana' at the Graduate School in History and Sociology at the University of Bielefeld. He has also worked on colonial history and Africans in Berlin, and on figures of black resistance.

Kai Kresse (moderator)

Vice-Director for Research at ZMO. He has worked and published interdisciplinarily on matters of knowledge, philosophy, and intellectual practice in Africa, particularly the Swahili coast. Among his publications are 'Philosophising in Mombasa' (2007) and 'Knowledge in Practice' (with T. Marchand, 2009).