

## *Asixoxe-Let's Talk!*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015, SOAS, University of London, UK

For the second year running, the *Asixoxe-Let's Talk!*, conference on African Philosophy has taken place at SOAS, University of London. Organised by Alena Rettova, Associate Head of the Department of the Languages and Cultures of Africa and Senior Lecturer in Swahili Literature and Culture, and Benedetta Lanfranchi, SOAS PhD candidate, *Asixoxe* spanned two days (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015) and attracted participants from other UK universities as well as further afield. In its infancy, the conference has become a platform for students to present and develop their work in response to feedback. In her opening words, Rettova stressed that despite being a student-oriented conference, the quality of content remains high and the discussion stimulating. The relative inexperience of the students brought a unique energy and an approach symptomatic of a truly existential encounter. In the early stages of their careers, studying Philosophy is not merely an academic experience, but a formative and ontological one as the very foundations of students' conceptual schemes are challenged. In Rettová's words, »grappling with the diverse perspectives on how the world is conceptualized across disciplines and across cultures is a humbling experience; you are exposed to your naked self and left to recreate that self with the conceptual repertoire of other cultures«.

A range of philosophical traditions were represented, including ethics, political and analytic philosophy along with continental philosophies such as existentialism, structuralism and post-colonial theory. Transcending the boundaries of these schools of thought, insights from anthropology, literature, and linguistics highlighted the enriching potential of interdisciplinary approaches. Whilst the regional focus was predominantly African, with a variety of area-specific studies (South Africa, Senegal and Tanzania among others), the conference also included contributions on the cultures and philosophies of Asia (Chinese and Japanese) and Latin America (Bolivia). This gave the conference a universal relevance by examining Afrophone and Afri-

can philosophies by examining them outside of their geographical origin.

An explicit intercultural focus was present in Aleksandra Manikowska's (BA Chinese Studies) paper on the influence of Maoism on the political theories of Julius Nyerere, and in Katherine Furman's (PhD candidate, LSE) and Yola West-Dennis's (BSc Philosophy and Physics, Bristol) presentations on the applications of British analytical philosophy to, respectively, South African politics and Yorùbá epistemology. Interdisciplinary concerns were pervasive in the papers which highlighted the philosophical relevance of literature in African languages. Roberto Gaudio (PhD candidate, Bayreuth) analysed the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger on Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi's poetry. Livia Cossa (BA Politics and African Studies) studied the repercussions of Nyerere's thought in three genres of Swahili poetry. Katya Nell (BA Swahili and Development Studies) offered an original interpretation of William Mkufya's novel *Ziraili na Zirani* as an allegory for the revolution of the proletariat, and Christine Gibson (BA Swahili and Social Anthropology) elaborated the link between Said Ahmed Mohamed's novel *Dunia Yao* and theories of artistic *mimesis*, including the innovative reading of the concept by anthropologist Michael Taussig. Becca Stacey (BA African Studies) explored the existentialist perspectives embodied in four characters in the Swahili novels *Kichwamaji* and *Ua la Faraja*. The links between epistemology and African literature were considered in Alena Rettová's paper. The importance of language and multilingualism in philosophy was the topic of Ella Hiesmayr's (BA Philosophy, Vienna) paper. Ida Hadjivayanis's (Teaching Fellow in Swahili, SOAS) paper on initiation rituals in Luguru society combined gender theories and anthropology, and the role of anthropology in philosophy was theoretically discussed by Adam Rodgers Johns (BA African Studies and Social Anthropology). Estrella Sendra (Mphil/PhD candidate, SOAS) examined the influence of Negritude on cultural festivals in Senegal. Conflicting Euro-American, Far Eastern, and African theorizations of technology were compared by Aviv Milgram (MA Religion in Global Politics). Some presentations covered relatively little studied areas of African philosophy: the philosophy of the Mozambican thinker Severino Elias Ngoenha was reviewed by Anaïs Brémond (MA History, LSE). The two concluding papers offered in-depth critical readings of the Kenyan philosopher and theologian, John S. Mbiti. Claire Amaladoss (BA Swahili and Development Studies) compared Mbiti's pre-

sent-oriented view of time with the phenomenological study of time by Edmund Husserl, while Hannah Simmons (BA African Language and Culture) contrasted Mbiti's and Cheikh Anta Diop's concepts of time as two distinct possibilities to project the future of African philosophy.

The success of the Asixoxe conference is testament to the significant growth and development in the area of Philosophy at SOAS in recent years and this will be further established by a new BA Programme in World Philosophies starting in 2016/17. This course will incorporate introductions to African, Buddhist and Latin American philosophies along with other regional and religious trends such as Islamic philosophy. There is no doubt the addition of this programme will ensure SOAS remains a fertile environment for flourishing philosophical thought.

–Hannah Simmons, and Claire Amaladoss, SOAS, University of London, UK