

AFRICAN SOCIAL SCIENTISTS REFLECTIONS PART 1

**ANTHROPOLOGY IN POST-INDEPENDENCE AFRICA:
END OF AN ERA AND THE PROBLEM OF
SELF-REDEFINATION**

BY PROFESSOR ARCHIE MAFEJE

Heinrich Böll Foundation, Regional Office East and Horn of Africa

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Published by the **Heinrich Böll Foundation**,
Regional Office East and Horn of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

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Printed in Kenya by Colourprint Limited.

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Preamble

As the 21st Century approached, there were various multi-faceted efforts geared towards critical review of development in Africa. The spirit of this reflection was on Africa learning from the past, and seizing the opportunity to formulate a Vision for self-development and self-determination, in the new Millennium. In this spirit of Africa taking ownership and responsibility for her development, there was ambition and optimism expressed in the common question “Can Africa claim the 21st Century?”. Some of the initiatives that addressed this question were the Millennium Renaissance Program, the Omega Plan, and the emergence of the African Union. Africans took the onset of the new Millennium seriously, and people from all walks of life such as leaders, politicians and scholars reflected on the prospects for Africa in the 21st Century.

In line with this spirit, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Regional Office for the Horn of Africa, organized a meeting in Addis Ababa in December 1999. This was in addition to other efforts such as the Art Exhibitions, ‘Women Defining Their Millennium’, and ‘Drumming for Peace for the Millennium’.

The meeting, ‘**African Social Scientists Reflections**’, was one where Social Scientists and politicians in Africa met to critically examine whether the social science heritage is of any relevance to the Africa of the 21st Century. The Heinrich Böll Foundation wanted to be involved in this Reflection, and supported this meeting. This reflective thinking is closely linked to the modelling of the Foundation based on Heinrich Boell (whom the Foundation is named after), call to citizens to meddle in politics. Further, the Foundation strives to stimulate socio-political reform by acting as a forum for debate, both on fundamental issues and those of current interest.

The Foundation was glad to host and be part of the process of Reflection, and hopes that the publications will serve to stimulate and enhance discussions in Africa, particularly among those who wanted to participate and were unable to, for various reasons. Since all of the contributions were significant and can stand on their own, they will be published in a series titled ‘Reflections’, as

- 1) **Part I- *Anthropology in Post-Independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-Redefinition* by Professor Archie Mafeje.**
- 2) **Part II- *Law, The Social Sciences and the Crisis of Relevance: A Personal Account* by Professor Dani Wadada Nabudere.**
- 3) **Part III- *The Study of African Politics: A Critical Appreciation of a Heritage* by Professor Peter Anyang Nyong’o.**

I would like to extend our deep appreciation to Prof. Archie Mafeje who did the academic and copy editing of the papers submitted by presenters. The spirit of the participation at the meeting is captured in the background of the Introduction by Prof. Mafeje, which mainly contains extracts of the over 200 page-report of the proceedings of the meeting.

Prof. Mafeje is a well-known African scholar who has taught in a number of African universities as well as European and American universities. He now lives in Cairo where he pursues his interest in African social science research.

Many thanks to Prof. Dani Nabudere, currently Executive Director of the independent Afrika Study Centre in Mbale, Uganda, where he is also attached to the Islamic University of Uganda as Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science, who is one of our contributors.

Special thanks to Prof. Anyang Nyong'o, for his inception of the idea of '**African Social Scientists meeting**'. Prof. Nyong'o is a renowned African scholar who has taught in universities in Kenya and the U.S.A and who is currently a Member of Parliament in the Kenya National Assembly and a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS).

Aseghedech Ghirmazion
Heinrich Böll Foundation
Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa

Preface

African Scholarship: The Heritage and the Next Millennium

As the 21st Century draws nigh, there are many issues worth reflecting on with regard to social science scholarship in Africa. Some of the leading lights in the African social science scene have already left us, a person like Claude Ake. Others may have been sucked into the practical world of politics, and may not easily retrace their steps back to full time academia. But while they are with us, and while their memories are still fresh in fusing scholarship with practice, it may be useful to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on certain important issues and put them down on paper. Some have been involved in institution building in various places and may, from that vintage point, see how the knowledge that social science gives them becomes handy in building institutions.

More important, however, is the importance of bringing all these people together and asking ourselves one central question: **was it really worth it, this social science thing?** Where has it taken us to, where has it taken Africa? Which way is it likely to take us— and Africa—in the next millennium? Do we have anything to say to Africa in terms of culture, ideology, knowledge, development, values and the future from what we know, and from what we have learnt? In other words, is our social science heritage of any use to Africa of the 21st Century? Are we relevant to the next millennium? What are we handing over to this millennium?

A group of us came together some time ago in a small seminar in Addis Ababa and reflected on these issues. The seminar provided us the opportunity to go back to our own involvement in the social sciences and to reflect on what shaped our ideas and contributions to the advancement of knowledge. The series of publications that have followed from this discourse will provide several volumes that should be **a collection of some valued “wisdom” for those who can go a little bit farther.**

In any social science endeavour, a lot depends on the kind of questions we pose, how we conceive the problem. **Were we always asking the right questions?**

We cannot deny that political science, for example, was brought to us from western scholarship. In large part, the political theory tradition from Oxford and Cambridge laid the philosophical underpinnings of political science, perfected in the writings of Mazrui. The Committee for the Study of New Nations

of the USA in the 1950s/60s gave us a sociological and empirical bend to the study of politics. With scholarships and research grants, numerous books and articles followed, almost eclipsing the inclination towards political theory that was the heritage from the British.

The onslaught of Marxism from the late sixties until the fall of the Berlin Wall put Political Science in a precarious situation. The gravitation of all and sundry towards political economy resulted in a mix bag of things. As everybody insisted that they were now studying things that were **more closer to reality**, so did we get statements that were at times made from mere assertions and at other times so refreshing that they led to new avenues of asking even more complex questions. The major achievement of Marxism is that it made scholars aware that there were no simple answers to complex questions, even though so called vulgar Marxism tried to offer simple explanations to very complex problems. Perhaps more basic was the old adage that if appearances coincided with reality, science would be unnecessary.

The question that, on reflection, we need to ask ourselves is: whatever methodology and school of thought we were coming from, were we always asking ourselves the right questions? Surely an answer is as good as the question it is responding to. If we did not go very far in advancing knowledge about African politics, then we need to examine the kinds of questions we were posing. If we now want to produce more knowledge about African politics, we need to stop, reflect and pose the kinds of questions that will produce the knowledge we are so thirsty for.

The same concern will be expressed in the fields of anthropology, economics, sociology, jurisprudence and history. All these are disciplines that have rubbed shoulders over the last forty years as African scholarship struggles to explain what has been happening in the continent and the past and future of its peoples.

The reflections in the series of publications that will ensue from this project are journeys into the past. Mine for example, is the completion of an essay I have always wanted to complete since 1978. Mike Chege will recognize some of the issues and questions when it finally sees daylight; he is responsible for those discussions we had then. I may even borrow from some of the writings we did together.

P. Anyang' Nyong'o

Introduction

Background

The idea of organising a workshop for Intellectual Reflections by senior African scholars was first originated by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o in Nairobi in 1999 in consultation with Archie Mafeje. Anyang' Nyong'o believed that it would be a great loss if the senior generation of African scholars were to exit, without leaving behind a written testament about their intellectual legacy and what they individually consider to be their contribution in their respective disciplines. The idea itself was an excellent one but the mechanics for its implementation were not that easy. First, the category of "senior African scholars" proved not to be self-evident as some scholars fell in-between generations. Second, who was to decide which ones deserved the honour. Professional jealousies and academic deference or elitism were bound to play a role in the selection process. Third, although in reality it was not too difficult to think of some distinguished African scholars, in practice if all were invited, they would probably be too many and spread across too many disciplines to guarantee coherence in the deliberations. Eventually, it became expedient to limit the envisaged workshop initially to the social sciences and to no more than twelve identified participants. This was done with the supposition that similar workshops would be organised for other groups, including those who have distinguished themselves in the humanities such as literature, history, and philosophy. Finally, there was the perennial question of who would take enough interest in the supposed African gurus or icons to finance such workshops. It was a very pleasant surprise and a felicitous coincidence to discover that the Heinrich Böll Foundation Regional Office for the Horn of Africa would not be averse to financing such an endeavour. This certainly paved the way for future collaboration.

As a sequel to these developments the Heinrich Böll Foundation organised what came to be known as the African Social Scientists Reflections meeting at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Addis Ababa on 15-18 December 1999. The attendance was less than the organisers had envisaged. It had been hoped that all the social sciences would be represented, including at least one recognised specialist on Feminist Studies. Six participants attended:

Professor Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (political scientist)

Professor Andreas Eshete (philosopher)

Professor Archie Mafeje (anthropologist/sociologist)

Dr Thandika Mkandawire (economist)

Professor Dani W. Nabudere (lawyer)

Ms Zenebework Tadesse (observer by choice)

Those present were not discouraged by the less than expected number of participants and were determined to make full use of the opportunity as a starting point. Indeed, the meeting lasted for six full sessions over three days. The first session was devoted to working out a timetable. Peter Anyang' Nyong'o also took the opportunity to make some opening remarks. He reiterated the idea behind the meeting and emphasised the point that the main criterion for selection of participants was generation and contribution to the social sciences.

He indicated that such a contribution by individuals could be judged only by the extent to which they have been able to play a role in the indigenisation of the social sciences in Africa and in the deconstruction of Eurocentrism. He saw good prospects for interdisciplinarity in forging a new self-identity in Africa and in debunking imposed identities and forms of knowledge. Some points of clarification were raised and some elaborations made on Anyang's introductory remarks but no substantive disagreements emerged.

The rest of the session was reserved for reading the only three available papers for each of which a discussant had been assigned. It is worth noting here that all three papers were not written specifically for the "Reflections". Although written papers are better than no papers at all, they often divert the discussion away from the set topic of the workshop and authors often find it difficult either because of lack of time or the force of their own mental-sets to come around to the specific requirements of the task in hand. It is no doubt a bad habit that organisers should guard against in order to avoid disappointment.

Substantive Discussions

The second session started off with a presentation of a paper entitled “**Africa in the New Millennium: Towards a Post-Traditional Renaissance**” by Dani Nabudere. The author pointed out that the paper was written for a seminar on **Development and Globalisation** that was held somewhere in Scandinavia. In that context the paper covered a wide range of issues, starting from small village communities and women’s survival groups to “globalisation”. Appropriately enough, Nabudere’s proposed slogan was “Act locally, think globally”. Implicit in this epigram was the belief that it was local struggles in the villages that can guarantee African rebirth/resurgence/renaissance and ensure a rejection of neo-traditionalism that had been instituted by the colonial state. However, Nabudere warned that this should not be seen in isolation but in solidarity with other local groups elsewhere in the world. The argument here seemed to be that if the driving force towards globalisation is domination, then globalised resistance based on “global consciousness” is its antithesis. Then, it became a question how this view could be reconciled with Nabudere’s rejection of universalism in favour of “Africanity” or African self-identity.

In his advocacy of local groups as being the best hope for democracy and the future in Africa, Nabudere presented a very negative view of the African state and called for its “dismantlement”. He had no difficulty in pointing out that the African post-colonial has been a disaster politically, economically, and socially. In the circumstances neither development nor democracy has been achieved, he contended. In his view, this created the necessary grounds for a new “social contract” from below. Apart from the village communities and self-help groups, he did not specify what other forces the “below” includes or does not include e.g. traditional monarchs and chiefs who might be part of the “neo-traditionalism” to which he is strongly opposed. It seemed that in his modality “village community”/“global solidarity” Nabudere had omitted the national level and thus failed to address properly the National Question.

In debunking “nation-building” and the concept of the “nation-state” Nabudere was inclined to treat the state as necessarily antithetical to “democracy”. Whether this was inspired by theories of the “withering away” of the state, the current political trends in Europe, or the failure of the African state, it proved to be a very contentious supposition or proposition. Parallel to this, Nabudere excluded the national bourgeoisie or what he dismissively referred to as the “territorial bourgeoisie” from the “social contract” that was supposed to usher genuine democracy in Africa. In real terms, without the state and the national bourgeoisie or local capitalists, it seemed that in his paradigm Nabudere was

headed towards an unconscious creation of a palpable socio-political void in African societies. Although he referred to the case of the Somali Republic that has survived precisely because it relied on the traditional gerontocracy and local communities and to the revival of the kingdom of Buganda in Uganda and its self-globalisation to bolster his argument and to demonstrate the feasibility of what he calls “post-traditional” democracies, these might yet prove to be transient political episodes in time of a crisis and not the inauguration of a democratic developmental state in Africa. Diffuse local structures are no substitute for over-arching governmental structures in the process of development. Perhaps inadvertently, he acknowledged this point when he showed how the Ogoni, Ijo, and other groups in the Niger delta obliged the Nigerian government to do what they could not by themselves, namely, more equitable distribution of national oil revenues. But then he vitiated this insight by concluding that: “They show that a small ethnic group of ½ million people can have more impact on global capital than states”. This is a non-sequitor and is contrary to actual reality. The fact that African states are keener to make concessions to global capital than to protect their national interests does not mean that states in general lack the potential capacity to do so. It simply depends on the type of state one is talking about, as is implicit in some of Nabudere’s critical comments on the African state.

Commenting directly on the heritage of the social sciences in Africa, Nabudere referred to two diametrically opposed orientations. He characterised one of these as Eurocentric and subservient to European social science and the other as Afrocentric in that it is steeped in African roots and is committed to emancipating social science knowledge from the past. This came over as part of his intellectual trajectory for the 21st century in Africa. In this connection he made some scathing remarks about what Achille Mbembe tried to do during his tenure as Executive Secretary of CODESSRIA. He saw Mbembe’s intellectual agenda as a return not so much to Eurocentricity but as a return to “Western-centricity” in which Europe is combined with North America and which is aimed at making social science epiphenomenal or metaphysical under the aegis of postmodernism. To this, Nabudere objected most strenuously and urged African intellectuals to start where they are, namely, in the African villages. This tallies with Nabudere’s earlier view that the African renaissance will begin in the African villages. It also denotes his notion of “liberating research”. He complained that social sciences in Africa had not played their role in helping people liberate themselves. This was a surprising *volte-face* because in his initial discussion of the social sciences in Africa he had claimed that there was a tendency that was an antithesis of Eurocentric social science and had “Pan-Africanist roots” and that its role was to emancipate social science knowledge

from the past and to deal with the objective conditions in Africa. What could have been more serviceable? In addition, he talked proudly of their debates at Dar es Salaam University. Were they irrelevant and a waste of time? Apparently not, as will be seen in Nabudere's subsequent contribution to the "Reflections" entitled "**Law, the Social Sciences, and the Crisis of Relevance**".

There were many other points which Nabudere raised, including the role of the World Bank in Africa, the implications and the future of the "Washington Consensus", the global economy and prospects for the 21st millennium in Africa, and so on. But what proved most controversial are his views on (i) the significance of African village communities and self-help groups in the global context; (ii) the dismissal of the African state in favour of local communities in the period of reconstruction in Africa; (iii) failure to reconcile the need for a democratic developmental state in Africa with the emergence of the so-called "post-traditional" reconstructions in the villages; and (iv) the question of whether or not African social science has made any contribution in the development of the continent.

On the first issue Nabudere was accused of romanticising the village communities and of over-estimating their capacity to bring about radical national transformation. Instead of limiting himself to the dismantlement of the African state and celebration of local democracy, he was challenged to say precisely what it would take to create a "democratic developmental state" in Africa that would accept responsibility for all and ward off the deleterious effects of globalisation. In other words, what was his conception of the National Question in Africa in the present historical juncture? It was felt that this question was pertinent because the community groups from the developed countries e.g. the Scandinavian countries he saw as allies were protected and at times funded by their own governments. This is not true of African community groups. Instead, unlike the former, they are faced with the simple question of survival. Under the circumstances the moral and political injunction was that we should not celebrate life-long struggles for survival and exonerate African states from their social responsibilities.

On the second issue it was argued that under the present conditions in the world there is no way we could dissociate social democracy from a democratic state that accepts responsibility for social development. It was maintained that the latter task was too huge to be expected of under-capitalised and socially deprived village communities and groups. The obvious implication is that in our circumstances development "from below" can only mean democratic participation in national or sub-regional development and reconstruction. At the moment there is a lack of a clear theoretical perspective how this could be

brought about or how a democratic developmental state could be realised. One thing certain is that the progressive petit-bourgeoisie and patriotic bourgeoisie will inevitably play a critical role in its construction. This is a hypothesis, which engaged social science researchers might have to revisit afresh, instead of being guided by presuppositions.

On the third issue even though there was a revulsion against any form of social and political romanticism, conceptually it is possible to reconcile development “from below” with a permeable “democratic developmental state”. These are two sides of the same coin and can only realise themselves through instituted forms of exchange. As the World Bank has come to realise, anti-state development perspectives are of no avail. The weaker the civil society, the greater the need for state inputs and solicitude. The logic of all this is well known to Dani Nabudere, as a committed socialist. Or is this no longer applicable?

On the fourth issue as to whether or not African social sciences have made any contribution to the liberation of the continent, this is one of the questions, which the “Reflections” were meant to answer. But *prima facie* it can be said that the contesters such as were found in organisations such as CODESRIA, SAPEM, AAPS, IDEP, and some university campuses in the first ten years or more after Independence made a historically important intellectual contribution. Furthermore, it can also be said that, although this might not have led to the liberation of the African people, these representations put on the nationalist agenda some important questions. Out of necessity, the outside world had to come to terms with some of these, no matter how grudgingly. This intellectual trend seems to be continuing against all odds. After reading Nabudere’s representations, nobody can be in doubt about the veracity of this assertion.

However, there are signs that the trend itself is ripe for auto-critique. Dani Nabudere’s paper provoked a great deal of discussion which, while not on the topic of the seminar, showed that critical African intellectuals are at the crossroads and have to rethink the political suppositions of the nationalist movement. Even those who think that it failed still have to contend with the problem of what constitutes authentic representations. This has nationalistic connotations that force those concerned to assert what they think are desirable new identities in the wake of the failure of the nationalist movement against globalisation and Northern universalistic claims. On the other hand, there are those who think that, seen in a historical perspective, the nationalist movement did not fail but got confronted at some stage with problems that it either could not have anticipated or did not have the intellectual and political tools to deal

with them. This being case, those who so think believe that there is no going back and that the only way forward is to identify these shortcomings and see how they could be rectified. This might be a beginning of a broader meta-nationalism that has a better appreciation of internal negative forces as well as the threat of globalisation than the nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s. African dictatorships might not be an aberration but a result of a combination of internal and external factors that go beyond individual petty dictators. The intensity with which these issues were debated at the workshop by a small group of African intellectuals shows that the Africans might be down but they are not defeated. When it came to their continent and its reconstitution for the future, the participants simply could not stop talking, which is an indication that they do not have enough opportunities to exchange views until they reach some consensus or get to know the complexities of their common desire. Till this is achieved, they will not be able to acquire the necessary cohesiveness to act as effective advocates of social and political transformation.

The second day saw the presentation of Thandika Mkandawire's paper entitled "**African Intellectuals and Nationalists**" that was written for a conference in Australia. The presentation was very concise and to the point. In summary it could be said that the paper was written in defence of the nationalist movement in Africa and the role of African intellectuals in its evolution. Mkandawire argued that there has been an undue concentration on the failures of the nationalist movement and less on its achievements. In his view this is equally true of the African leaders. He believes that immediately after independence African leaders made significant progress in development by investing in education for all, by improving healthcare facilities and infrastructure, and by making a serious drive towards import-substitution. Given this kind of endeavor, he believes that they cannot be accused of having sought high office only for personal gain. This is all true but what became an issue is subsequent failures. It is possible that because of their belief in themselves and in their cause the first generation of African leaders found it difficult to surrender power. Their ensuing desire to stay in power obliged them to find illegitimate ways of clinging to power. This included abuse of power that detracted from their original nationalist goals. This was a destructive and perverse response for which they must be held accountable, despite Mkandawire's justified demand for mitigation. Irrespective of their initial achievements, African leaders and their governments are indictable for having created a negative model for political self-reproduction. Those who came after them, including the military, found a ready-made model for self-aggrandisement that did not need any pretence about development. The African citizens are now enduring the effects of this legacy.

Arguing a case in mitigation Mkandawire contended that African intellectuals thought the same about development as their political leaders and that they endorsed the national project that comprised nation-building, economic and social development, democratization, and regional cooperation. While this is true, it can be pointed out that it did not commit African intellectuals to the same power mongering as their “presidents for life”. Instead, they got disaffected and started to express views that were critical of the behaviour of their governments. Hence, African governments in general became anti-intellectual. It was not out of any cynicism or belief that they could do without intellectuals, as Mkandawire is inclined to think. It was a straightforward political reaction to a potential social threat. In so far as this is true, Mkandawire might have gained by not identifying the nationalist movement as a dynamic social phenomenon with its particular leaders who are by definition more finite. It has to be acknowledged that leaders at a given historical moment are an important index of their movements but at the same time they are not their embodiment. The nationalist movement in Africa has not failed. It continues to usher different historical phases which bring about the atrophy of its erstwhile leaders. Critical African intellectuals, unlike their atrophied political persecutors, are an organic part of the dynamic nationalist movement on the continent. To be so, they do not have to be beholden to existing authoritarian African regimes nor do they have to be seen pottering in the mud. Their job is to create through the critical intellect socially and politically relevant ideas.

Even though he castigated African intellectuals for not be organic enough, he seemed to hold a strong brief for them, especially against their foreign detractors. He argued that African intellectuals do not only exist but are also a force to reckon with. He protested that the fact that there is no written sociology of them does not mean that they do not exist. He referred in particular to the work of CODESRIA and the phases through which it went during his stewardship. The record was so positive that he takes pride in it. But he seems to suggest that even so they did not become part of the nationalist movement. The veracity of Mkandawire’s claim is seriously in doubt. In fact, it is arguable that it is the nationalist fervor that kept the African intellectuals in organizations such as CODESRIA, SAPEM, and AAPS buoyant. It is the same that has exposed them to accusations of being subjective or ideological, as if there are anywhere in the world intellectual representations that have no underlying value-premise. Organic African intellectuals have been in the forefront of the struggle for “democratization” in Africa since its inception in the late 1980s, which is a struggle for a “second independence” or a new Pan-Africanism. The fact that these struggles have not yet come to fruition does not invalidate the observable fact. The struggle is relatively young and, contrary to Mkandawire’s suggestion in his presentation; it was never part of the nationalist agenda at independence

because it was assumed then that the overthrow of colonial imposition would automatically bring *uhuru*.

In addition to its prescriptions, the nationalist agenda also had prohibitions. Mkandawire referred to these as taboo topics. Among these was any acknowledgement of tribal and ethnic claims. These were believed to be incompatible with national unity and hence the adoption of a one-party system on pragmatic grounds. Mkandawire wondered how the so-called national unity could be achieved in the face of cultural and linguistic diversity. He found it ironical that, if achieved, the same unity could militate against regional cooperation or Pan-Africanism. This harked back to Nabudere's pre-occupation with local identities and organizational structures. It seemed as if we had moved from the earlier nationalist obsession with the state to a new obsession with ethnicity as the essence of democratic pluralism. As will be seen, regarding the latter, Mkandawire objected most strongly to the treatment of the "state" and "ethnicity" as dialectical opposites. This approach was viewed with skepticism by several members of the group. Mkandawire himself was not convinced that ethnic identities were necessarily the building blocks of a democratic developmental state in Africa. This issue was debated further after Mkandawire's presentation that dealt largely with African intellectuals rather than African *social scientists*.

During the discussion Mkandawire's view about the African intellectuals were strongly challenged. In particular members of the group found his contention that African intellectuals were alienated from the nationalists unwarranted. Numerous cases were cited to show that African intellectuals had always been inspired by nationalist struggles and that these gave justification for their claim to an independent identity. Mkandawire did no more than quibble about minor details. In fact, his was a hard line to hoe because he was talking not to Australians but to the very subjects of the process whose personal histories are known to him. There was even a suggestion that the nationalist representations of African intellectuals were so persistent that they have had an impact on research and development programmes abroad. Reference was made to the book that Mkandawire himself helped to edit, *Our Continent, Our Future* (1999) which had a devastating effect on the so-called Washington Consensus. It would have been very unnatural for Mkandawire not to acknowledge such a great feat by militant African scholars. However, even such a concession did not stop the participants from piling it on Mkandawire by asking, for instance, how would he characterize the intellectual representations of African scholars who worked under the auspices of CODESRIA, AAPS, SAPEM, and OSSREA. The point was made and Mkandawire could not respond in kind. Nonetheless, there was

a plea that Afrocentrism or the deconstruction of Eurocentrism should not be construed as an absolute rejection of the influence of European thinking on African scholars but rather as a rejection of assumed European intellectual hegemony. Nabudere in particular insisted that this was an intrinsic part of the process of globalisation. None of the participants was willing to accept globalisation as a felicitous happening. This might also be a nationalistic reaction against the threat of globalisation, which is not a matter of ignoring it but rather of resisting it instead in order to guarantee self-autonomy or a multi-polar global system.

After the lively and sustained exchange on African intellectuals, the debate reverted to the question of “development” and “democracy”. At stake was the perennial issue of whether development was a necessary condition for democracy or the other way round. After moving back and forth for about one-third of the whole session, the participants gradually came to the conclusion that the two were not mutually exclusive, as is implied by the idea of a “democratic developmental state”. In turn, the latter concept provoked a return to the earlier debate about the necessity or the dispensability of the state. The majority view was that under the present circumstances in Africa and globally the state was a necessary major player. Mkandawire was most insistent on this point, despite the fact that in his presentation he blamed African intellectuals for concentrating too much on the state. The ultimate question put to those who shared this position was who is going to bring about the institutionalisation of the desired form of state in Africa. No ready-made answers could be given to this question and consequently the participants retreated into anecdotes and personal dialogues or bantering among themselves as if to release tension. It is apparent that African scholars are not sure of the agency of their proclaimed African renaissance or democratic developmental state. They have the conviction but not the requisite sociological knowledge or wisdom. The burden for research in this area might yet fall on the African social scientists themselves. After all, the guiding principle is that men and women can only raise such questions as can be answered.

Finally, a special appeal was made to Mkandawire that he should continue from where they left off in *Our continent, Our Future*. It was felt that it is not enough for African economists to deconstruct the World Bank paradigm, *without offering an alternative for future development in Africa or an African economic perspective for the 21st century*. Indeed, Mkandawire told a number of stories which showed that neo-classical theory was at sixes and sevens, if not totally bankrupt, and that the new generation of economists were able to show this, without meaning to and to the embarrassment of the World Bank gurus. This is

just what the participants wanted to hear from a seasoned African economist and, accordingly, demanded a written record of this legacy by someone who has been through it all. Whether this is a burden or an honour, it was left to Mkandawire to decide. In the meantime, we are all waiting with anticipation.

The next submission was by Peter Nyang' Nyong'o in a paper entitled **The Study of African Politics**. According to the author, the paper had gone through various stages. Originally, it was intended to be part of an introductory text on African politics way back in 1978 but events overtook him and his collaborator, Mike Chege. This partly explains the fact that the paper was very much dated. This notwithstanding, Anyang' assured the participants that, while he did not intend to produce a new text, he had every intention of developing the paper further. To this end, he proposed to divide the paper into four parts.

Part I reviews the contributions of other social scientists to the study of politics, particularly anthropology, sociology, and "American sources". Part II is concerned with "recent theories" on politics, especially "dependency" theory and political economy. Part III, called "The Present as History", concentrated on the state of the arts. "What is it that we are now doing in studying politics?" This involved a discussion of governance, democracy, and the state. Part III, which had not been written yet but designated as "The Future as History in the Making", was meant to answer the question: "What is African politics likely to be like in the next millennium?"

Against this background, Anyang' started off by discussing the influence of anthropology on the study of African politics. In his view what was most striking and enduring was the classification of African societies into those that had a state (centralized) and those that were Stateless ("acephalous"). This dichotomy was supposed to have certain implications for the study of politics and for the future political development in Africa. Whereas Anyang' inferred that one of the implications for the former was that "acephalous" societies were not amenable to the study of politics, he did not consider the implications for the latter. For instance, did centralized traditional states in Africa predispose the post-colonial states towards authoritarianism? Or *vice versa* can the "acephalous" be used as a model for egalitarianism at the local level in a way that is reminiscent of Nabudere's model?

Among other things, this would mean that, if there was "tribal equilibrium" as anthropologists were inclined to believe, it did not connote the same thing. In passing Anyang' had observed that the anthropologists were not interested in analysing internal or external contradictions. A more dynamic approach to African politics would have to investigate these in a historical perspective so as

to illuminate the present, instead of limiting itself to “tribalism” or “ethnicity”.

The next topic Anyang’ introduced was “American sources”. This referred specifically to American “behaviouralism” which is supposed to have overthrown both British political philosophy and structural-functionalism as espoused by Talcott Parsons and Max Weber (Max Weber might have influenced Parsons but he was no structural-functionalist, as is shown by his ideal-type constructs such as “charismatic leader”, “traditional leader”, and “modern bureaucracy”). The latter aside, Anyang’s main target was Systems Analysis as advocated by David Easton (1965). Easton’s behaviouralism became very influential, especially in East Africa, as is shown by the earlier work of such writers Goran Hyden, Martin Doornbos, and others. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether it overthrew structural-functionalism or even British speculative or interpretative political philosophy that was stoutly maintained by Ali Mazrui throughout, despite its gross under-representation in Africa. In the mid-1960s when James Coleman was in East Africa, he managed to establish some form of neo-structural-functionalism, which was in effect a return to the anthropological tradition of looking at politics from the point of view of existing institutions and structures and not from the point of view of competitive incumbency. This is where tradition is supposed to shape the emerging new structures. This is best exemplified by the volume entitled *Government and Rural Development in East Africa: Essays on political penetration* edited by L. Cliffe, J. S. Coleman, and Martin Doornbos (1966). In addition, behaviouralism was in competition with modernisation theories in Africa (David Apter had joined the club as far back as 1961; see his *The Political Kingdom in Uganda*) that made individual behaviour contingent on *value-orientation*. It transpires, therefore, that Anyang’s suppositions or assertions about the influence of the various sources he alludes to on the growth of political science in Africa need further investigation.

Anyang’ makes an interesting supposition that behaviouralism in the social sciences in general was instigated by the American desire to provide a bank of knowledge on the “new nations” that was serviceable to American imperialism. This claim, plausible as it is, would be very difficult to verify. But to validate his case, Anyang’ referred the participants to the programmes of the Committee on the Comparative Study of New Nations that was officially sponsored in America. Interestingly enough, to back up his hypothesis, he refers to the Latin Americans who, unlike the Africans, were “not impressed with behaviouralism” but instead detected its imperialist underpinnings. In his view, this claim finds confirmation in Raul Prebisch’s work that inaugurated the “dependency” theory in Latin America, which found its highest edification in the writings of Gunder Frank. Here, it is obvious that Anyang’ is laying the

ground for the theoretical negations of behaviouralism *a la Americana*. Indeed, in the early 1970s the *dependencia* theory took the centre stage in development theory in Africa. Although it was not limited to political science, it had a great impact on political scientists with leftist leanings. Among these may be mentioned Colin Leys who worked on Kenya, Bonnie Campbell who worked on Cote d'Ivoire, and Claude Ake who worked within a general Pan-Africanist framework. However, as Anyang' pointed out, it was Walter Rodney, the historian from the University of Dar es Salaam who popularized the *independencia* theory in Africa in his best seller, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1971). What does this tell us about the bulk of African political scientists? Anyang' was disturbingly silent on the latter.

Nonetheless, he saw Political Economy as another important source in the development of political science in Africa. While approving of Political Economy as a useful general framework within which to work, he accused it of being reductionist in that in its concern about the economic base and the political superstructure it forgot about the "actors". He commended the so-called Dar School for having made a detailed study of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" in the East African countries. But even in this case, he contended, the emphasis was on the "dominant" classes and not so much on the "dominated" classes. As a corrective to this, he referred to the Kenyan Debate towards the end of the 1970s (see *Review of African Political Economy*, 20, 1981) in which they sought to find out what the various categories of actors were actually doing. According to him, this helped them to comprehend class-formation not in terms of only two major classes (the classical dual model). For all he could see, Anyang' believes that during the period in hand African politics became a study of authoritarianism. Unhappily, this assertion does not tally with Anyang's other claim that from "1968 to the 1980s very little was written on African politics". If so, how did "authoritarianism" become a major pre-occupation?

It is quite conceivable that Anyang's estimation is uninformed and, therefore, unjustified. The period between 1968 and 1975 was dominated largely by the *dependencia* theory, which did not have politics as its field of reference. It could be said that the period between 1975 and 1985 was dominated by political economy, which did not make any distinction among the disciplines. However, from 1986 onwards **democracy** became the major pre-occupation among African social scientists. Although the debate was open to all, the political scientists predominated by far. Reference could be made to well-known African political scientists such as Claude Ake, Mamndani, Ibbo Mandaza, Nzongola, Tandon, Molutsi, Sithole, Nnoli, Jinadu, Jibrin Ibrahim, Founou, and Peter Anyang' himself. This could have been a prelude to the democratization movement that reached its climax in 1990. If these representations are

considered “very little”, then what about the period thereafter in which the debate on **ethnicity** became almost an obsession among political scientists of all generations. Virtually, all the political scientists enumerated above engaged vigorously in that debate throughout the 1990s. But, in addition, there was a whole crew of younger African political scientists, most of whom participated in the multi-national project on **Ethnicity in Africa** sponsored by CODESRIA and coordinated by Nnoli. Their exact composition, numbers, and their individual contributions are readily available in CODESRIA, which is now headed by one of their leading lights, Adebayo Olukoshi. There is, therefore, absolutely no justification for Anyang’ to have ignored all this wealth and to limit his references on African political scientists to only four members of the old guard. It is also worth noting that Anyang’s systematic review of the growth of African political science stopped where *dependencia* and political economy ended i.e. the mid-1970s. Thereafter, he broke out into an unsystematic discussion of a variety of interesting topics about African politics. For somebody who is actively involved in politics, this is perfectly understandable. But it might not be what was expected, as the discussion that followed his presentation will show.

The first question that was raised after Anyang’ had rested his case was on the anthropological connection in the development of political science. Was the anthropological heritage facilitative or detrimental? Immediately, Anyang’ could not say “yes” or “no” because he had not considered in any depth the negative impact its designating categories might have had on the conceptualisation of the questions that political science sought to answer. He was clear on the question of invention of “tribalism” and graciously deferred to the “Dean of tribalism”, namely, Archie Mafeje whose seminal paper on the subject that was published in 1971 led to a turn-about in the thinking of African social scientists about the bogey of tribalism. The same was not true of the question of “ethnicity” that has been with us for the last twenty years. Democratic “pluralism” presages that “ethnic” identities be recognised. But the fissiparous tendencies to which this leads have proved bothersome. “Ethnicity” is definitely not a colonial invention but that of the African nationalists in retreat. Although not referring to this specific point, in the course of the discussion Anyang’ made a very pertinent observation, namely, that the post-colonial state was not solely a colonial invention but that of the African nationalists as well. It is conceivable that “ethnicity” is indeed a creation of beleaguered African leaders or presidents for life. But then this thesis is contrary to the presuppositions of those who consider recognition of such local identities as a necessary condition for democratic pluralism. Any political scientist, let alone a practicing politician, would be hard put to deny this moral claim. This granted, what would be the

social and philosophical limits to such claims? Could some of these claims be spurious or simply anti-revolutionary? This question could have provided grounds for a hot debate between Anyang' and Nabudere who was the designated discussant but during the discussion they were interested in complementing each other than on crossing swords. Thus, everybody kept skirting around the issue of ethnicity in Africa. Was it a matter of interpretation or a substantive issue? Was it a question of expediency or a matter of principle? The issue became so intractable that the philosopher participant from, significantly enough, Ethiopia suggested that the issue should be dealt with "from case to case". Philosophically understood, this meant that the issue could not be theoretically clarified and could only be dealt with substantively. Interestingly enough, the same speaker at another critical moment surmised that the phenomenon might be transient, given the fact that in another few decades the majority of the African population will live in the urban areas where local identities will matter less. As would be expected of any philosopher, this was a perfectly logical inference but does not exhaust the field of discourse. Ethnicity is not a rural phenomenon. It is only invoked in the rural constituencies by national leaders who are usually based in the urban areas. As a matter of fact, it manifests itself most strongly in African central bureaucracies where contestation for power is most concentrated.

Although Anyang' in his presentation gave the impression that anthropologists were concerned only with tribes and their equilibrium, this is not entirely true because they had carried their mischief to the urban areas. They found "tribal associations" in virtually every African city. This is so much so that one of them, Max Gluckman, objected to their tribal fixation and declared that "when an African comes to town, he is urbanized" and that "an African miner is a miner like any other miner in the world". These were very brave pronouncements but they did not change the anthropological paradigm. Nevertheless, even within that paradigm there were some very beautiful urban studies that became classics in their own right. Among these may be mentioned E. P. Epstein's *Politics in an Urban African Community* (1958) and Mitchell's famous *Kalela Dance* (1956). These were intellectually inspired and intellectually inspiring studies by the *avant-garde* British anthropologists but they could not comprehend the behaviour of Africans, except in the tribal metaphor, irrespective of the context. Thus, their texts were mistaken in conception but not in ethnography detail. In other words, there is every possibility of deconstructing them, without denying their ethnographic relevance in a social historical perspective. This is thoroughly consistent because at some point in the discussions there was a complaint that while African political scientists insisted on Afrocentrism, they seemed to be ethnographically innocent, unlike the anthropologists. Accordingly,

the participants emphasised the necessity of an ethnographic grasp in the study of African politics. The question is no longer who are these people you are talking about but rather what are they about. In other words, the *Kalela dance* by the Kalenjin-speakers is not just a dance but a statement that could be understood otherwise i.e. decoded. Such great attention to ethnographic detail could explain the apparent incoherence of African social formations and the authorship of current authoritarianism in Africa, without assuming an original sin.

From the point of view of political science, this takes us further away from political economy and drives us towards some form of particularism. Indeed, some participants complained not so much about the universalist pretensions of political economy but more about its leveling effect where distinctions among various forms of existence and being are reduced to a “common denominator”. Interestingly enough, from an academic point of view, some felt that not only does this lead to superficiality but also to the disappearance of disciplinary boundaries. This was an interesting *volte-face* on the part of those who so spoke because in another context they are known advocates of interdisciplinarity and in the discussions in the workshop they were dabbling in all sorts of subjects. This points to the need to outline the legacy of the various social science disciplines so as to be able to see more clearly their weaknesses and strengths and their undeniable lines of convergence. Although this seemed to be a contradiction in terms, after some exchange of views the participants agreed that the fault lied not in political economy but in the indolence of those who used this approach. It was argued that, as the work of classical economists such as Ricardo demonstrates, political economy is not incompatible with detailed and painstaking studies. This was an interesting resolution of the problem. But it did not solve the problem of the disciplines in that ideography is what is supposed to distinguish the social sciences from the humanities. In the meantime, there is evidence of growing convergence between the humanities and the social sciences e.g. anthropology and social history, cultural anthropology and literary criticism, and possibly economics and social philosophy, as will be seen in the next section. Finally, it was pointed out that political economy was not necessarily radical. Nonetheless, those who claimed so did not carry this point to its logical conclusion by declaring that political economy is positivist, as Marx did in his *Critique of the Political Economy*. The relevance of this would be that those African social scientists who chose to use this approach combined it with neo-Marxism which, ostensibly, would be anti-empiricist and openly normative e.g. against exploitation or poverty. It is apparent that African social scientists have a number of theoretical and methodological issues to clarify for themselves. Perhaps, this is why the organizers decided to invite at least one philosopher.

Appropriately enough, the following day started off with a presentation by Andreas Eshete. His was an oral presentation in the absence of a written text. Nevertheless, he honoured his brief, as is shown by his opening remarks: “In general I will speak on how philosophy, in particular social and political philosophy, influenced the social sciences. The idea being that this might be useful to the exercise that we are undertaking here”. In a very systematic and consistent manner, as it behoves a philosopher, he sought to show first of all how there was a shift in philosophy from an obsession with the “epistemic” which gives priority to conceptual issues to a concern with substantive issues. He attributes this *gestalt* shift to the impact of social movements such as the anti-Vietnam war movement and the civil rights movement in the United States, and to factors that were internal to philosophy itself. According to him, this shift in perspective was inaugurated by John Rawles’ seminal work, *Theory of Justice* (1951). He credits Rawles for having tackled headlong substantive issues in philosophy for the first time. This as it may, there is some doubt about the critical effect of the social movements cited because he anticipated them by a good ten years. Irrespective of the possible disjuncture in chronology, what emerges is that Rawles reinstated “contractarianism” as against the utilitarianism of the 19th century. This idea was certainly going to have a great appeal to Nabudere, who in his presentation advocated a “new social contract” in Africa. This would be compatible for, according to Eshete; Rawles was not very Catholic with respect to methodology and thus borrowed freely from other disciplines such as the social sciences, choice theory, and history.

In both theory and methodology Eshete found a definite affinity between Rawles and Sen. To justify his case, he referred the participants to Sen’s *Developmental Freedom*, which was based appropriately enough on his address to the World Bank. Like Rawles, Sen is credited for having evolved a concept of justice that should inform social development or existence. In Eshete’s view this echoes back to the classical economists who were concerned not only with economics but also with social issues. He warned his listeners that they would be surprised to learn that Adam Smith believed that economic development depended on historical and cultural contingencies. While he upheld the principle of sensitivity to difference, Eshete resisted the idea of dividing the world into “localism” versus “cosmopolitanism” and described the belief that “there are only local stories to tell” as “anti-theoretical”. While he would not commit himself to universalism, he maintained that all societies have the same problems and that the only difference is that the developed countries do not recognise this. They are, therefore, impervious to the fact that by helping underdeveloped countries to solve their problems, they are by the same token solving their own problems. This is what the theory of justice would predicate. But this would be at variance with *actually existing* imperialism. The theory of justice might be able to re-

define the terms of reference but it cannot guarantee their translation into practice. This is not a philosophical question but a political one. In practice how does one get the developed and underdeveloped countries to identify with one another? For the time being, it must be acknowledged that, if universalism exists, it exists in *contradiction*. This poses a very serious dilemma for intellectuals in the Third World. “International justice” is a perfectly logical construct but one that is very difficult to realize in practice. As Eshete hypothetically asked, if national resources are constitutionally recognised as common property, why cannot the same apply to world resources? We all live on the same globe and suffer equally the consequences of development in any part of the world. In Eshete’s view, this renders any rules of exclusion illogical and irrational. He believes that it is important to make this apparent to the developed countries. But, from all appearances, it seems that enlightened self-interest is harder to administer than the quest for relative advantage. Eshete asked rhetorically: “What exactly are the obligations of the well-advantaged to the rest?”. He wanted to know whether this should be seen as a matter of charity, as an obligation to humanity, or a matter of justice. To those who are on the receiving-end, the answer is self-evident.

Interestingly enough, when it came to the discussion, the questions raised were mainly technical and not social philosophical. For instance, quite a number of participants sought an evaluation of the representations of known black pretenders such as Mudimbe, Apiah, Cornell West, and Sergut Berhan. First, Eshete noted that he tried to talk not so much about the influence of philosophy on the social sciences but rather about the impact and relevance of the new social and political philosophy. Having said so, he pointed out that this tends “to exclude a great many African and African-American philosophers”. He cautioned that this does not mean that they do not address public issues but that they do so “sometimes naively, sometimes not so naively, *but as activists*”. To illustrate his point, he used Edward Said (perhaps, unjustifiably since he is not a philosopher) as an example. He observed that Edward Said draws a lot from philosophy in his work “but where philosophy has a bearing on his work, it is on his work on culture –not on the Palestinian issue. “On the Palestinian issue he speaks much the same way that Chomsky would be talking about journalists – he speaks as a public intellectual not as an academic”, he elaborated. Edward Said’s representations notwithstanding, in the course of the discussion it transpired that Africans and African-Americans who have philosophical pretensions have a better market value as public intellectuals rather than as academics. It seemed that this was one explanation why they did not feature in the new social/political philosophy and did not engage in the debate on the theory of justice.

The next point of interest was the post-modernists, be it in an ambivalent way or outright skepticism. If there were still any lingering doubts about the post-modernist philosophers Eshete was more than willing to disillusion those concerned. Contrasting them with the philosophers of justice such as Rawles and Sen, he stated quite unequivocally: “Post-modernists are people who are skeptics about the very project of justifying anything. They are confident that any project of justification can be shown to rest ultimately on considerations of interest, on contingent things. Ethical justifications, rational justifications, or writing, conversation on anything like that they think are epiphenomenal. “So most of the stories they tell are negative stories about how everything can be unmasked.....Of course, one can see for instance why it is that people from the Third World would be drawn to that unmasking because there is a great deal to be unmasked”, he concludes. It appears, therefore, that the project of the post-modernists is deconstruction, without reconstruction. As of now, Eshete informed the participants, post-modernism has been naturalized by Americans and is of no consequence in its native France. However, this did not exhaust the discussion on post-modernism for, as Eshete himself acknowledges, the most interesting and striking work inspired by post-modernists is in anthropology. As is known, writers such as Rorty, Fabian, and Escobar contributed greatly to what came to be known as “critical anthropology” or “reflexive anthropology”. Although championed by Northerners, this had a bearing on anthropology in Africa where anthropology loomed large among the social sciences and where there was the greatest pressure to “decolonise” anthropology. This means that for those who propose to use anthropological antecedents, there is a compelling need to rethink their theoretical connotations. This also applies with equal force to those who see local communities and “traditional” institutions and forms of social organisation as the probable source of social democracy in Africa. As had been pointed out “cultural diversity” is not without problems and so is the so-called “dialogue between cultures” at the global level. It would appear, therefore, that even in the case of post-modernists a point has been reached where critique of critique has to be seriously contemplated. Eshete pointedly accused the post-modernists of partiality, if not nihilism. Nobody seemed to disagree.

The next and the last oral presentation was given by Archie Mafeje. It was a straightforward account of how anthropology developed as a discipline, its impact on Africa, and of how Africans reacted. In accordance with the terms of reference of the workshop, Mafeje also gave an account of the role he played as an African anthropologist. His main thesis was that anthropology is a child of imperialism. Not only did it play a critical role in the subjugation of Third World peoples but also was premised on *alterity* i.e. it was based on the epistemology of subjects and objects. This being the case, anthropology was

bound to be plunged into a deep crisis by contemporary struggles against colonialism. It had to adjust or die a natural death. In the meantime, the few practising African anthropologists were called upon to lead the way in the deconstruction of colonial anthropology. With a few exceptions, they were not able or willing to do this as a matter of course. Instead, it was some rebellious groups in the North who took the initiative. This did not suffice because they themselves could not dispense with the problem of alterity. Eventually, they gave up the ghost and retreated to where they hailed from or into exoteric subjects, interdisciplinarity, and African studies. This seems to have dissipated colonial anthropology altogether.

For the African anthropologists, Mafeje reported, the decision had already been made for them by their governments after independence. The nationalist governments that were committed to “nation-building” simply banned anthropologists as peddlers of “tribalism”. Consequently, most African anthropologists went underground for a long thirty years. When they emerged in 1991 at a special seminar in Dakar, they seemed totally lost and disoriented. According to Mafeje, who is one of the African anthropologists who did not go underground; this confirmed what he had suspected. He was, therefore, interested in pushing the African anthropologists to justify themselves. To a very large extent, this was all in vain. In the meantime, he continued with his own deconstruction of anthropology that started in 1971 when he published his article, *The Ideology of Tribalism*. This was followed by other works, including *The Theory and Ethnography of the Interlacustrine Social Formations* (“interlacustrine” was the original term used by anthropologists for the Great Lakes region) and *Anthropology and Independent Africans: Suicide or End of an Era*. The upshot of all this was the assimilation of anthropology into social history while emphasising the importance of the study of ethnography in all the social sciences in Africa.

A few questions were put to Mafeje. One of them was whether he found any value in Vansina’s work in relation to his. He answered in the affirmative and argued that a dynamic study of ethnography serves social historical reconstruction. This would manifest itself as a combination of oral or ethnographic texts and “oral tradition” in Vansina’s sense. One of the implications of this is that writing of history is not the monopoly of professional historians. People also write their own history that becomes a justification for contemporary social claims. This is where social history meets ethnography, he concluded. This explanation served as a response to another question as to how one would reconstruct traditional anthropology, if indeed it has atrophied as a discipline. Anthropology becomes social history, without abandoning its methods and techniques for studying ethnography. Yet, another question was

raised in relation to Chiek Anta Diop's work. The reply was that what Mafeje was proposing is in principle the same, except for designation of units of analysis. He believes that Diop's unit of analysis was too wide to be conceptually encapsulating and verifiable. As was pointed out by one of the delineation of units of social analysis cannot help being somewhat arbitrary. But the interesting thing is that once established such conceptual units create new identities that are capable of perpetuating themselves. This is what the invention of "tribes" in Africa is all about. Whether we like it or not, colonial governments and colonial anthropologists created new identities in Africa that are now part of contemporary social reality. This would suggest that there is a constant interaction between chroniclers and their subjects, irrespective of the truth or falsehood of what is being told. The growth of "nationalities" and now "ethnic federalism" in Ethiopia was cited as a supreme example of this. In passing it was noted that indeed African governments are also playing an active role in shaping the development of social sciences, as is demonstrated not only by the banning of anthropology but also by the banning of sociology in both Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal and of political science in Malawi – all for political reasons. This brought to a close the discussion on Mafeje's presentation as well as of all the substantive discussions in the workshop.

Closing Remarks and Conclusions

It was left to Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, the originator of the project, to make the closing remarks. He reported that a few proposals had been made. One was to give the participants up to March 2000 to produce their final drafts. Second, it had been suggested that a website be open so as to facilitate the posting of the texts and exchange not only among those present but also with those who had been invited but could not attend. In addition, he nursed the idea that those who had not been invited might be able to contribute to the discourse on their own accord. In his view, this meant that, apart from the posting of the papers, the participants would have to have a good write-up that would take off from the one or two pages that went out earlier as a concept paper. He felt that there was a need to rework the latter so that those in attendance knew exactly what the project is all about. He surmised that this would help those who visit the website to understand that the papers presented at the Reflections workshop were "not just collected from all over the place but were produced as a result of a particular concern". With due respect, the idea of a special website was rejected as too expensive and unnecessary. The participants were convinced that alternative means could be found with the assistance of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

As far as the final product was concerned, he saw two possibilities. One was to suppose that each of the participants would write a paper of about fifty pages and that these would be put together in a book form. The other possibility would be to let the participants "feel free to write their contributions as they felt, as the spirit moved them". In this case their contributions could be as long as possible, as short as possible, or whatever but in all instances as solid as possible. In his view, the second option would mean the contributions would be produced as individual monographs – some small and some big – but all self-contained.

In response to Anyang' suggestion divergent views emerged. There were those who cherished the idea of writing just as they pleased. There were those who felt that by so doing their colleagues would open the door to cuckooland. They argued that, as a matter of principle and discipline, the contributors should adhere to the original idea of a sustained review of the growth of individual social science disciplines in Africa accompanied by an auto-critique since any intellectual heritage has its own virtues and lapses. Auto-critique was considered essential so as to guard against any form of intellectual narcissism. Pursuant to this line of reasoning, it was suggested that the review of the growth of the disciplines should not be seen simply as a narrative but also as an exercise in provocation i.e. it should have a cutting edge. Some felt that there was a moral imperative that those who initiated the Reflections project should have the necessary confidence to expose themselves to criticism by others, which is the

surest way of provoking a debate. Great pressure was exerted on the economist to write an account of the development of economics in Africa that went beyond the “Washington consensus” and which indicated the prospects for the 21st century. Likewise, the philosopher was invited to write a piece on the contribution of African philosophers to the development of social sciences in Africa. He declined, surprisingly, on the grounds that he was not very familiar with the work of African philosophers. However, he was willing to write a contribution on the impact of philosophy (meaning social and political philosophy) in general on the social sciences. It had been hoped that Zenebework Tadesse would write a piece on the development of feminist studies in Africa and her contribution. But this remained unconfirmed.

After much digression and reminiscing it was more or less agreed that the original idea would be the guiding principle for writing or rewriting the papers. Some felt that the deadline was perhaps too close and unrealistic. But the Heinrich Böll Foundation representative found the proposed deadline convenient for her purposes. As a compromise, it was suggested that, instead of thinking of a compiled volume, the papers could be published as a series according to their availability. Although this suggestion was not strongly contested, there was a feeling that a “unified voice” would have had the right impact. It was also regretted that some disciplines such as history were not represented. Regarding procedure, it was agreed that: (i) all substantive papers would be commissioned and drafts would be circulated to all participants for comments; (ii) Archie Mafeje would act as academic editor for all the papers, taking into account the comments by individual participants; and (iii) once published the papers would serve as a basis for a more inclusive workshop, as was originally envisaged. Finally, it was understood that the Reflections project would last for two years. But the participants could not agree how often they would meet per year. This was partly because they could not vouch for their own adherence to the proposed deadline and projected date of publication of the initial batch of papers. Above all, they did not have a working budget since this could not be guaranteed in advance.

The workshop was considered a great success, in spite of the low attendance. The organizers were satisfied that where things did not work out the way they wanted it was not because of lack of effort. The determination to canvass more support for the project remained, despite the practical difficulties and sensibilities mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. Out of expediency, the idea of publishing the papers in a series as they become available has been adopted. The first in the series will be Archie Mafeje’s paper entitled **Anthropology in Post-independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-definition.**

Anthropology in Post-independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-definition

Introduction

When a few of the older generation of African scholars decided to come together and to reflect on the state of the arts in their respective disciplines and to evaluate their own role and what they might leave behind as their contribution and intellectual legacy, it was not a sign of self-confidence or arrogance. Rather, it was an expression of an uncertainty about their own contribution and ability to blaze a new trail for future African social scientists. It was a moment of self-interrogation or reflexive thinking. Personally, I welcomed the opportunity because I believed that this is what I had been doing all along with respect to anthropology and my own role and contribution. I was, therefore, curious to find out what my contemporaries in the other social science disciplines thought was their particular role and what might be honestly considered their intellectual legacy. This took the form of intellectual group therapy where failures, shortcomings, struggles, successes, and uncertainties could be easily aired in the knowledge that one was not alone.

I began to doubt the validity of colonial anthropological categorisations when I was doing fieldwork in the urban and the rural areas in South Africa in the mid-sixties. By the 1960s there were no tribes to talk about in South Africa and there was no absolutely division between town and country, thanks to labour migration since the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1884, and the incorporation of the African societies into the British colonial state towards the end of the 19th century. But from the era of racial segregation under the British settlers after the defeat of the Boers to apartheid after the takeover by the Afrikaners in 1948, all South African governments maintained the classification of Africans according to “tribe”. This was even so despite the fact that some chiefs as a reaction to white oppression had become black nationalists and their followers had become Pan-Africanists (known as *Ama-Afrika* Poqo in South Africa meaning Africans by themselves and for themselves).

I hinted at this contradiction as early as 1963 when I was an MA student at the University of Cape Town in an article entitled simply, “A Chief Visits Town”. This earned me great recognition among colonial anthropologists but my message was lost on them. It was not until I went to Uganda (1965-1967) and to Tanzania (1969-1971) when I realised that the ideology of tribalism was pervasive in colonial Africa as well as post-independence Africa. This struck me as odd and at variance with facts. It prompted me to write an article entitled “The Ideology of Tribalism” (1971). From then on I embarked on a long

deconstructionist journey with respect to colonial anthropology. However, I was not alone. As will be seen, there was a general disillusionment with colonial anthropology in the late 1960s, which developed into a veritable rebellion in the 1970s in the hands of a younger generation of anthropologists.

Historical Background

It is fair to state that deconstructionist paradigms in anthropology emanated from the North and continue to predominate. This in itself has made things doubly difficult for the reconstruction of anthropology in Africa. Consequently, the interrogation of northern perspectives on African anthropology inevitably become part of the problematique. Socially, politically and ideologically, they are an inescapable point of departure of any serious deconstructionist discourse from the South. As such, they are very important historical and intellectual antecedents. However, their priority or historicity does not commit us to a bland chronicle of all anthropology, as has been the case in liberal apologetics or revisionism.

Rather, it guides us to a particular genre of texts with their own synchrony and diachrony. It is this which informs our choice of points of reference. Thus, the issue is not general familiarity with a taken-for-granted anthropology but rather its status in post-colonial countries. Implicit in the title of this essay is a number of questions. First is the self-identity and role of African anthropologists since independence. Second is the question of whether in the post-independence period there could be African anthropology, without African anthropologists. The third issue is whether or not any authentic representation by African anthropologists would necessarily lead to the demise of anthropology as is traditionally known. If the latter, what would make such representation distinctly “anthropological” as against any other representations by African social scientists? These questions have been on the agenda since independence, without being fully addressed by African anthropologists. Instead, most took refuge in departments of sociology and engaged in micro-studies or thematic studies in the place of the holistic anthropological tradition.

Looked at from a historical perspective, it could be said that on the main African anthropologists did not anticipate independence in their professional representations. What this would have entailed is an anticipatory *deconstruction* of colonial anthropology so as to guarantee a rebirth or transformation of anthropology. This process was left exclusively to Europeans and North Americans with two notable exceptions, Mafeje (1970) and Magubane (1971), both from South Africa where anthropology had been used as a direct instrument of racial oppression. This lack could be attributed to such factors as the intellectual hegemony of the North, the intellectual immaturity of African anthropologists or the static conception of what anthropology was about. For instance, if it is about the “primitive world” or “tribes”, then a post-independence African might simply be embarrassed by such terms of reference and choose to be silent. The Northerners took this silence for granted and began to speak on behalf of the other, as will be seen.

Since the passing of colonialism anthropology had been pronounced dead several times. The prophets of the impending doom were not just ordinary anthropologists but eminent anthropologists and leaders in the field e.g. Levi-Strauss, Jacque Maquet, James Hooker, Peter Worsley, and Rodney Needham. In the majority of cases the relationship between the supposed demise of anthropology and the end of colonialism was made explicit. For instance, Hooker (1963) sketches the changing historical fortunes of anthropologists. While not denying the fact that the anthropologist was the handmaiden of colonial governments, he depicts the anthropologist as a reluctant colonialist who sympathised with the “people” he/she studied. Nonetheless, he conceded that because of the objective association with colonialism the anthropologist found himself or herself stigmatised and rejected by the anti-colonial Africans. This implies that for the success of his or her profession, the anthropologist depended on the acquiescence of the subjugated peoples.

The following year, Jacque Maquet (1964), made a similar observation in his paper. He argued that liberal-minded and sympathetic as the anthropologist was towards colonised or primitive peoples he/she was nevertheless responsible for generating ideas, which were ideologically serviceable to the exploiting powers. He maintained that in this context, the anthropologist was not only a member of the ruling white oligarchy but also a representative of the European middle classes, which were the architects of colonialism. He, therefore, predicted that with the breakdown of the colonial relationship and the disappearance of the primitive world anthropology would lose its *locus standi*. Interestingly enough, he further surmised that its subject matter would be divided between history and sociology and that this would create the possibility of producing a less subjective body of knowledge. Once again, the implication here is that anthropology is not only bourgeois but is peculiarly colonial by circumstance.

In 1966 all of a sudden Levi-Strauss who had no inhibition in writing about “savage” or “primitive” minds in reference to the colonised natives of South America came to realise that anthropology was an unsustainable colonial imposition. In his article, “Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future” (1966), he expressed appreciation of the growing hostility in developing countries towards anthropology, which he admitted has been part of the appallingly violent process of domination that established and maintained colonialism. With the same candour, he declared that for anthropology ever to be viewed as legitimate by native cultures, it must undergo a transformation and disengage itself from the colonial system. Not only this but that anthropology must become a study of society from the inside, breaking down into a number of disciplines. As an article of faith, he affirmed that anthropology would survive in a changing

world by allowing itself to perish in order to be born again in a new guise. He did not say what guise but his premonition echoed Maquet's.

In 1968, Peter Worsley in a paper entitled simply "The End of Anthropology" expressed fears about the future of anthropology not so much because of its colonial parentage but rather because of its theoretical parochialism and fixation about the "primitive" world. Given the fact that the emergent relations in post-colonial societies are of the "modern" type, Worsley called for a new universalism outside the old imperial frame. He believed that this would provide an alternative to the disintegration and fragmentation of anthropology. This was contrary to Levi-Strauss' and Maquet's prognosis and closer to the point of view of another Britisher, Rodney Needham. Needham (1970) made no reference to the colonial constitution of anthropology but rather to its lack of theoretical coherence and rigour. Whether true or not, this would not account for the disintegration of a discipline but rather for its atrophy over time. It is precisely the latter that Worsley wanted to guard against by arguing for a "developmental" and "processual" anthropology in the post-colonial epoch. All these could be looked upon as vagaries of anthropology in the hands of disillusioned mainstream European anthropologists in the wake of the anti-colonial revolution, especially in Africa.

In contrast to the mainstream critique of anthropology, in America this became the business of a younger generation of disaffected anthropologists. Theirs was a collective radical protest, which appeared in the form of a symposium in *Current Anthropology* in 1968. Among those involved were G.D. Berreman, G. Gjessing, and Kathleen Gough. Berreman (1968), was less concerned about the survival of anthropology than its complicity in American imperialist domination and exploitation in the Third World. In this context he raised the question regarding the ethical and moral responsibility of the American anthropologist. Similarly, Gjessing (1968), expressed concern about the fact that anthropology had been associated with western colonialism and had been responsive to imperial demands. Echoing Maquet, he emphasised the fact that anthropology had been ideologically serviceable to the dominant powers and that its perspective was essentially that of the Western middle-class. He urged the anthropologist to look outside this framework and be willing to ask questions, which might be subversive of the wider imperialist system. For him the ultimate responsibility of the anthropologist was commitment to the cause of the oppressed.

In the same symposium as the above Kathleen Gough (1968), who did not exactly belong to the younger generation, shocked the anthropological

establishment on both sides of the Atlantic by outrightly declaring anthropology “the child of Western imperialism”. Even so, she did not write off anthropology. Instead, as is revealed by the title of her paper, she sought to radicalise anthropology by suggesting that it ceases to interpret the non-western world from the standpoint of the values of Western capitalist society. She boldly proposed that anthropology should include in its research agenda the problems posed by the growth of revolutionary struggles against Western, primarily American, imperialism. She urged anthropologists first to ask how they might free themselves from the limitations imposed on them by their own Western background. This could have been written by a militant Third World anthropologist. But the underlying assumption is that the agents of anthropology were necessarily white Westerners — an inaccurate but historically justified assumption.

The Americans found their counterpart in what was known as the “New Left” in Britain, whose members were organised around the *New Left Review*. Their critique was more restrained and more academic than the American one. It concentrated more on the omissions of British anthropology than on its acts of commission. For instance, David Goddard (1968) attributed the decline of British anthropology not to anti-colonial struggles but rather to the relegation of the human identity to the “primitive” in a colonial setting. In his view, this made it possible for anthropologists to eschew universal questions regarding humanity. He saw this as a detraction from the work of the founding fathers such as Durkheim, whose work had a “metaphysical” dimension. This view was to be challenged later by Raymond Firth (1972), a leading figure in British anthropology who described himself as a “liberal anthropologist with socialist interests”, denied absolutely that anthropologists were indifferent to the fate of the colonised. He claimed that on the contrary anthropologists sought to gain respect for the people they studied. He also used the opportunity to warn Kathleen Gough and other “gut Marxists” that “anthropology is not the bastard of imperialism, but the legitimate child of the Enlightenment”. Goddard’s critique might have played into the hands of idealist colonial anthropologists such as Firth.

The same could not be said of Jairus Banaji (1970), who belonged to the same circle as Goddard, argued that since the end of the Second World War British anthropology had faced two problems, which it was unable to resolve. First, he suggested that, born out of imperialism, the discipline was unable to adapt to an anti-imperial world. This was made even harder by the simple fact that its traditional subject matter and units of analysis were no longer applicable in a changing colonial world. Second, he believed that because it had failed to respond to the challenge of structuralism, functionalist anthropology was

stagnating or in a crisis. Perhaps unjustifiably, he offered anthropology only one solution, namely, historical materialism with its theory of “social formations”. He exhorted “Marxist anthropologists” to expose the cruelty of imperialism and to substitute it with new forms of knowledge and political praxis. These were the beginnings of the British critique of anthropology. The object was not necessarily colonial anthropology, as was the case with the American anthropologists. Secondly, the debate was largely muted and idiosyncratic and, consequently, it did not amount to a “deconstruction”, as an analysis of later studies will show. But before this, there is an interesting African interlude.

As was mentioned earlier, Africans hardly featured in the debates mentioned above, with the exception of two. This is an interesting historical incidence. Ben Magubane and I were not aware of each other’s representations. Secondly, our representations were not a response to the debates in the North. They were a response to what we separately considered to be misconceptions of colonial anthropology from an *African perspective*. Magubane’s article (1971) was probably an Africanist reaction to Western cultural and intellectual imperialism. My piece on “The Ideology of Tribalism” (1970) was not any different. It was an attack on European ethnocentrism and a spontaneous call for indigenisation of social scientific concepts. In the present context of a conscious search for alternative forms of knowledge making, these two works assume greater significance than we had anticipated. One of our reviewers (Marfleet in Talal Asad 1973:279) had this to say:

“The two articles by Mafeje and Magubane have been among the most interesting studies of the anthropology/colonialism relationship. Each is concerned with the way in which one area of anthropological theory has been related to a specific part of the colonial system. Each makes an analysis in terms of the legitimacy that functionalist categories have had for the subjected sector of colonial society. An attempt has been made to expose ideology ‘from inside’. Hooker and Levi-Strauss among others had made an appeal for such a form of analysis. It is worthwhile noting that of all contributors to the recent debate only these two authors have been in a position to draw on the indigenous African experience”.

The question is: what was the African response? Why did we lose the initiative?

Seizure of the Initiative by Others

In the early 1970s there was a conscious attempt both in Britain and in America to draw together the strands, which had emerged, from the debates of the late 1960s. In Britain this was reflected in a volume entitled *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* edited by Talal Asad (1973). The American equivalent was *Reinvesting Anthropology* (1974) edited by Dell Hymes. The two books accurately reflected the distinction between the American and the British intellectual reflexes in earlier debates. The British were once again restrained and felt the need to qualify every statement they made unlike the Americans whose style was more abrasive and visceral. But in both cases the objective was to rescue or to revive anthropology.

Starting with the British endeavour first: it is apparent that it was not necessarily anti-colonial. Most of it was done from a British point of view, with the exception of James Faris, an American anthropologist. Unlike Abdel Ghaffar Ahmed, a Sudanese anthropologist who made his case in measured statements, Faris rammed into F. S. Nadel for his colonialist zeal and excesses in the Sudan. The issue was whether anthropology was a “handmaiden of colonialism”, as some members of the New Left in Britain had charged. The verdict was that anthropology was not “*merely* an aid to enlightened colonial administration”. Indeed, in his introduction Talal Asad (1973:16) actually referred to remarks about anthropology being merely a handmaiden of colonialism as “naive” and “wild”. Although he did not dissent in principle, Abdel Ghaffar established a convincing contrary case regarding the Sudan by referring to McMichael’s written request from the British government for trained anthropologists to be of service to the colonial administration in problematic areas such as Nuerland and Azande and to the subsequent recruitment of the Seligmans and Evans-Pritchard (Nadel did not have to be recruited; he was already a member of the club). In the light of his documentary evidence Abdel Ghaffar retorted that the emphasis on the “not merely” clause was an “attempt to avoid the question about the extent and influence” of the aid to which it referred.

Abdel Ghaffar was aware of the fact that there was a strong undercurrent among African intellectuals, as is shown by his reference to Brokensha’s observation that: “Most African intellectuals are at best indifferent to, or mildly tolerant of, social anthropology, and frequently they have strong feelings of hostility to the subject and its practitioners. This attitude is reflected in the small number of Africans who study the subject; when Kenyatta, Azikiwe, or Busia were students of anthropology in the 1930s, there was a very different climate, and it was not thought strange or inappropriate that they should concentrate on anthropology. But today African anthropologists face a difficult time, with little understanding

or encouragement from their own society” (Brokensha 1966:16 as quoted by Abdel Ghaffar in Talal Asad 1973:260). The Sudan is no exception, for Abdel Ghaffar clinches his argument by stating that: “The Sudan case shows that the indirect role of anthropologists — whether they were aware of it or not — was great; and that the reactions of the intellectuals in the country towards the subject are based on findings filling a large “number of files in the Sudan Government Archives” (Talal Asad 1973:269). Finally, he upholds Magubane’s approach to colonial anthropology in the work cited earlier and reserves the right to do the same.

This notwithstanding, the book as a whole cannot be said to be a deconstruction of colonial anthropology, for it assumes that anthropology had an existence which was independent of colonialism. This is reflected in the very title of the book: *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. This gives the impression that anthropology is prior to colonialism and yet, as is attested to by some senior anthropologists such as Hooker, Maquet, Gough and Levi-Strauss, who all happen to be non-British, the fundamental argument is that anthropology is in its intellectual constitution a product of colonialism and imperialism. With the collapse of colonial empires, it could not help being deconstructed in practice or suffering atrophy. This renders the British critique merely academic and certainly not intellectual because it does not recognise the antithesis that is implicit in the process of deconstruction, which is primarily social. Historically- and socially-speaking, what is the role of the colonised in the process of decolonizing received forms of knowledge in the context of social and economic reconstruction in the ex-colonial world? The obverse side of this question would be: what are the limits of Eurocentrism?

Anthropology and Imperialism

As is shown by the rebellious discourse of the late 1960s, the Americans, unlike the British, are not burdened with a colonial past and are more preoccupied with imperialism in which their country has played a leading role since the Second World War. As is known, this reached a climax during the Vietnamese War in which some anthropologists were involved as CIA agents. This provoked a storm of protest and raised questions about the responsibility of the anthropologist and the objectives of the discipline itself. *Reinventing Anthropology* was a response to this. When the book came out in 1974, it had, like *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, a cathartic effect. Yet, it did not inaugurate a new anthropology but perhaps marked the end of coherence in American anthropology. This might mean that it succeeded in deconstructing anthropology, without being able to reconstruct it. It must be admitted that the odds were against them. Not only were there no “Indians” to study any more in the Americas but also the self-definition of those who used to be objects of anthropology had changed dramatically since the 1960s. New identifies such as “Red Power” had become important reminders of the receding anthropological world. The absolute otherness of a variety of people universally known by a peculiar colonial-construct, which was as far removed from reality as India is from the Americas, had become an object of political and conceptual deconstruction. The authors of *Reinventing Anthropology* had raised this to a general moral or ideological principle against imperialism. They refused to grant anthropologists the right to do to others what they would not do to themselves. This was not only courting trouble in predictable ways but was also a genuine concern about the imperialistic role of American anthropology. This could not have been that hard to discern but the defenders of the *status quo* fastened on the fact that their critics were bereft of any viable theoretical alternative.

In the volume under discussion it was left to Bob Scholte (Hymes, 1974), who has a strong Continental intellectual background, to give a theoretical vent to this problem. His representations were more than an intuitive leap of imagination: they were studied and a direct response to the “Social Responsibility Symposium” in *Current Anthropology* and recommendations of the Ethics Committee of the AAA. The two cardinal terms in his discourse were “reflexive” and “critical”. The insistence on “reflexive anthropology” was meant to dispense with the traditional epistemology of subject/object in ethnographic discourse. The argument was that it takes two to create an ethnographic situation. In his words: “The ethnographic situation is defined not only by the native society in question but also by the ethnological tradition ‘in the head’ of the ethnographer” (Hymes, 1974:438). Quoting Fabian (Hymes, op. cit.: 440) he asserts that: “In anthropological investigation, objectivity lies

neither in the logical consistency of a theory, nor in the givenness of the data, but in the foundation (*Begrundung*) of human intersubjectivity". The full hermeneutic circle is finally reached when he declares (Hymes, op. cit.: 448): "The comparative understanding of others contributes to self-awareness; self-understanding, in turn, allows for self-reflection and (partial) self-emancipation; the emancipatory interest, finally, makes the understanding of others possible".

There are several methodological issues that are implicit in the above discourse which are worth highlighting. First is the unusual separation between the "ethnographer" and the "ethnological tradition in the head". There might be a contradiction here. Who is the "ethnographer" and who is the "ethnologist" or is there a discontinuity between observational and interpretative language? We will return to this question in our final statement. The second point is that "human inter-subjective" communication in knowledge making is logically a denial of the possibility of a neutral or meta-language, at least, in the social sciences. As such, it is an outright rejection of positivist claims in the social sciences, which were visible in the British encounter. Also, it is an unmistakable debunking of the ideology of "value-free" social science. Third, while the discourse is clearly "reflexive", there is nothing particularly anthropological about it in the classical sense. Could this be deconstruction, without a clear reconstruction? Or is this an inevitable negation of an unwanted colonial/imperial heritage? More will be said later. Fourth, the idea of "reflexive anthropology" foreshadows what became known as the "new ethnography" in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Once again, this is of special interest to us.

What of "critical anthropology"? It is fair to note that, regarding this concept, Scholte did no more than just waffle a bit and give up the ghost. There might be objective reasons for it. First, if by "critical anthropology" is meant an anthropology, which is constantly questioning its cultural, social, and epistemological foundations, this would be an intellectual cogitation without affirmations. The most we can demand is that intellectual affirmations whether they be from America, Britain, France, or Africa must be self-aware. But this is already implicit in the concept of "reflexivity", a self-conscious dialogue with the other so as to remove the premise of inequality in knowledge making, without surrendering self-identity. Far from relativising anthropology, this could mean in some instances its relegation to the past. Scholte's (Hymes, op. cit.: 443) statement that: "In fact, it is precisely the self-reflexive and self-critical study of anthropological alternatives which can filter out the particular from the general, the idiosyncratic from the universal, or the relative from the essential" is a confirmation of age-old European epistemological suppositions which contradict his notion of "reflexivity". What if the "other", the "particular" does not wish to be filtered out or assimilated but to remain the authentic self?

Whatever opposition they encountered, Scholte and his co-authors should derive solace from the fact that the same “establishmentarians” who proved so obdurate 25 years ago are now under pressure from their counterparts in government and university administrations to give cause for the continued existence of their unserviceable discipline. In his official response in *Anthropology Newsletter*, December, 1994 the AAA President, James Peacock, failed to give a viable alternative. Instead, he made some platitudinous statements about anthropology’s capacity to understand “cultural diversity”, without any reference to the effects of globalization, and about its “humanisation” of other sciences and humanities because it is “grounded on fieldwork”, without saying where and how. Nonetheless, he granted that the future of anthropology lied in “interdisciplinary linkages”. Once again, this was not reconciled with the increasing incoherence of the discipline and its prospect of being absorbed into other disciplines piecemeal. All this attests to the fact that the problems, which were raised a generation ago, still persist and that imperial anthropology is proving unsustainable. “Critical anthropology” which was denied and “Marxist anthropology” which was equated with communist ideology might have been a necessary dialectical antithesis, which could have ushered a new universalism. But this *terra nova* proved both threatening and undesirable to the Anglo-Saxon anthropological establishment.

In this regard, it is important to point out that, although what became known as French Marxist Anthropology received attention from the younger generation of Anglo-Saxon anthropologists and was sympathetically reviewed in Kahn and Llobera (1981) and Bloch (1985), it remained exotic. For epistemological and historical reasons it could not be assimilated into positivist and neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon anthropology. For that matter, “Marxist anthropology” is strictly-speaking a contradiction in terms because there are no disciplines within Marxist theory. Disciplines were a creation of positivism. If the French scholars in question choose to experiment with the principles of dialectical materialism and the methodology of historical materialism on what they called “primitive” or “pre-capitalist” societies, this does not make them anthropologists in the bourgeois or positivist sense. In fact, they became so eminent and intellectually exciting since the end of the 1960s precisely because they abandoned classical anthropology despite the fact that they have no record of colonial anthropology. Nevertheless, it is a question whether there are still such things as “primitive” or “pre-capitalist” societies anywhere in the world. A strong case can be made that the African societies on which they experimented are neither “primitive” in the bourgeois sense nor “pre-capitalist” in the Marxist sense. They are not isolated or self-contained. They are simply a backward or distorted part of the capitalist system. Consequently, they are neither pre-capitalist nor capitalist.

Social scientists of all sorts have not been able to discern fully the dialectic of this transition. But it would appear that the object of enquiry of so-called French Marxist anthropologists fell within the purview of *social history* in a manner, which is reminiscent of the *Annales*. Historical materialism tempered with ethnographic detail or oral history might be one of the most rewarding ways of studying African societies in *transition* but still awaits theorisation or systematisation. As will be shown later, even the French Marxist anthropological exotica proved to be of no avail.

End of Anthropology or End of Epistemology?

But for the time being we stay with the Anglo-Saxon anthropologists who are representative of what is called anthropology more than any other. With the hindsight of 30 years, it could be said that the “critical anthropologists” of the early 1970s might have succeeded more in deconstructing traditional anthropology than in reconstructing or “reinventing” it. If so, this could not have but contributed to the fragmentation or disintegration of the discipline. From the point of view of sociology of knowledge, it is conceivable that they were conservative rebels in that they were still committed to the bourgeois fragmentation or compartmentalisation of knowledge and its reproduction. If anthropology had become an impediment to the creation of new and liberating forms of knowledge, why did they not leave it to die a natural death, instead of talking about “our discipline” *ad nauseam*? Were they constrained by their own vested interests or lacked the creativity of the classical bourgeoisie who created the disciplines by abolishing previous forms of organising knowledge?

Our suspicion might not be unjustified because in *Reinvesting Anthropology* there were glimpses of the intellectual projections of the post-modern writers, who brook no disciplinary boundaries and are intent on exposing the iniquities of modern Western society. These glimpses were most visible in Bob Scholte’s contribution, which relied to an appreciable extent on writers such as Derrida, Pouillon, Radnitzky, and Habermas. It was exactly this trend, which the authors of *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) used 12 years later as a bridge to shift away from traditional anthropology to a post-anthropological ethnography. The striking thing about the contributors to the volume is that they straddle the disciplines from anthropology, history, literature, linguistics, to post-modernism. Their field of study was not limited to Third World societies but also included such topics as the formation of ideologies of superiority among American middle-classes in a period of social decline, elites in Polynesia and the United States, political rationality in France and the French colonies and other such unanthropological topics. Another feature, which distinguishes them, is that they are thematic rather than ethnographically holistic. As is remarked in the blurb: “The essays place ethnography at the centre of a new intersection of social history, interpretative anthropology, travel writing, discourse theory, and textual criticism”. We are further informed that: “Writing culture argues that ethnography is in the midst of a political and epistemological crisis: Western writers no longer portray non-western peoples with unchallenged authority; the process of cultural representation is now inescapably contingent, historical, and contestable” (*can* no longer would have been more appropriate than “no longer” in this context).

Although the term “ethnography” recurs in the book, it is apparent that the different authors use it in different ways — some descriptive, if reflexive, some interpretative, some literary, some historical, and some philosophical. James Clifford admits just as much when in the introduction he declares that:

“Ethnography is an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields where ‘culture’ is a newly problematic object of description and critique. The present book, though beginning with fieldwork and its texts, opens onto the wider practice of writing about, against, and among cultures. This blurred purview includes, to name a few developing perspectives, historical ethnography..., cultural poetics..., cultural criticism..., the analysis of implicit knowledge and everyday practices..., the critique of hegemonic structures of feeling..., the study of scientific communities..., the semiotics of exotic worlds and fantastic spaces..., and all those studies which focus on meaning systems, disputed traditions, or cultural artefacts.” (Clifford and Marcus, op. cit. , 3)

It would be more accurate to describe this as “non-disciplinary” rather than “interdisciplinary”. Also, it could easily be interpreted as an attempt to reintegrate social sciences and humanities. In an academic world, which is divided into disciplines, it would inevitably raise all kinds of epistemological objections. Interestingly enough, the word “epistemology” does not feature much in the book, except negatively. Indeed, Paul Rabinow in his contribution makes explicit the rejection of epistemology and its scientific pretensions. This is signified by the sub-title, “Beyond Epistemology”. Following on the footsteps of Richard Rorty (1979), he argues that: “..... epistemology as the study of mental representations arose in a particular historical epoch..., developed in a specific society, that of Europe, and eventually triumphed in philosophy by being closely linked to the professional claims of one group, nineteenth century German professors of philosophy” (Clifford and Marcus, op. cit. : 234). According to Rorty (1979), at issue here is the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for reason in modern professional philosophy. The second objection is that Western philosophy’s preoccupation with epistemology has led to the equation of knowledge with internal representations and the correct evaluation of these representations. It transpires, therefore, that the realm of philosophy is the mind (internal representations) and from this lofty position it reserves the right to judge all other forms of knowledge.

Rabinow observes that: “This conception of philosophy is, however, a recent historical development. For the Greeks, there was no sharp division between external reality and internal representations. Unlike Aristotle, Descartes’

conception of knowing rests on having correct representations in an internal space, the mind” (Clifford and Marcus, op. cit.: 237). This insight could be extended to many more civilisations which, formally-speaking, never boasted of any epistemology e.g. the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Phoenicians, Persians, Chinese, Indians, Thais, Javanese, Japanese, Arabs, Incas, Aztecs, and the Maya, to mention the few which are recognised by the West. Yet, they achieved historically just as much in all fields of intellectual, artistic, and scientific endeavour. They had their own philosophies and styles of thinking which were not subject to evaluation by a yet unborn West. In this context one has often wondered why African philosophers got themselves caught between what they call “ethnophilosophy” and “modern philosophy” purely on the basis of Central European epistemology. Even the British pragmatists never involved themselves in this exotic pursuit; they left it to *émigré* philosophers such as Popper and Lakatos. Yet, their nation remained on top of the world until the end of the Second World War.

It is argued in *Writing Culture*, relying on post-modernist writers, especially Michel Foucault, that deconstruction of epistemology does not imply rejection of truth, reason, or standards of judgement but opens up other possibilities which had been denied — a “whole teratology of learning” in Foucault’s words, which had been repulsed. Its objective is to show that the idea of truth is a product of specific cultural and historical practices and what it claims within its domain could be achieved by other procedures. As Rabinow (op. cit.: 237-8) puts it: “From the acceptance of a diversity of historical styles of reasoning, of methods, and objects, Hacking draws the conclusion that thinkers frequently got things right, solved problems, and established truths.”

The importance of all this is the deconstruction of hegemonic structures. Rabinow (op. cit.: 241) insists that; “We need to anthropologise the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasise those domains most taken for granted (this includes epistemology and economics); make them seem as historically peculiar as possible” — anthropologically, the West does not “seem” to be, it is as peculiar as any other part of the world.

Whether *Writing Culture* is pastiche or *hochetpot*, it is interesting and truly innovative. It also has an important message for Third World scholars but it has no medium for communicating with them. There might be two reasons for this. First, while it talks about anthropology, it makes no reference to anthropology as is practised by Third World scholars, if at all. Instead, it emphasises *ethnographic* writing as collaboration with the natives who are not a counterpart. The frontispiece of the book features a white ethnographer busy at work, writing ethnography against the background of a passive dark native. This is very

symbolic and might belie the claim of “collaborative” effort. This leads to the second point, namely, that it is still a question whether ethnographic texts could be authored by anybody other than the subjects themselves. “Subjects” is the right word because the question raised could apply to the native interlocutor as well. This harks back to the separation between the “ethnographer” and the “ethnologist”. Logically, this question should not arise in what is effectively a post-anthropological discourse. In spite of the fact that the editors confess that *Writing culture* has no unified approach, it is quite apparent that the various contributors are post-modern and post-anthropological in their outlook. Therefore, there must exist certain underlying assumptions, which guided their work. In our view not only should these have been made explicit but also should have been used to set the stage for the process of reconstruction e.g. reintegration of human sciences, instead of “reinventing” or inverting anthropology. These concerns are addressed from an African perspective in the concluding section.

Reconstruction or Revisionism?

We now turn to our last entry in the genre of books, which are concerned, with deconstruction of anthropology, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* by John and Jean Comaroff (1992). We would have thought that this is coming nearer home because not only is the “ethnographic” setting African but it is also Southern Africa, an area with which I am most familiar. But alas! the book gives me no comfort. It seems to reject everything but at the same time it embraces everything ultimately. Whether this is attributable to its chosen terrain, “neo-modernism”, which stands between modernism and post-modernism, or to its rhetoric, which is a mixture of images, it is difficult to say. Whatever the reasons are, what is germane to our investigation is that, unlike its predecessor, *Writing Culture*, the book abounds in ambiguities. On the face of it, the book is about “ethnography” and “historical anthropology”. At the same time, the authors affirm their “commitment to neo-modern anthropology”. Is the latter synonymous with the former? Even if the answer were in the affirmative, this would not entirely dispose of the problem because the derivations of “historical anthropology” are themselves ambiguous. After conceding that British anthropologists “had been doing history all along” (p.20) and after denouncing the same historical practice as cyclical, utterly undiachronic, and two-dimensional, yet another compromise is reached: “judiciously and imaginatively used, this kind of history may be suggestive” (p. 21). In the process E. R. Leach is celebrated for his *gumsa/gumlao* “oscillating equilibrium” over 150 years but J. Barnes is given no credit for the cyclical development of the Ngoni political order over 130 years.

All this seems to be besides the point because since the British anthropologists met in Kampala in 1959 (See Southall 1961) to discuss “social change” in Africa in response to a constant charge by the younger generation that structural-functionalism was essentially historical and committed to equilibrium theories, it was acknowledged that their craft could do better but its architects did not know how. Senior anthropologists such as Firth, Audrey Richards, Fortune, and Leach (not Goody) escaped this charge only because they did not subscribe to the structural-functionalist doctrine and not because they were thought of as being historical in any sense. If anything, British anthropology in general was hostile to history, except for Evans-Pritchard. The 1968 recognition of history by the ASA (Lewis, 1968) was a culmination of a long battle. But it was of no avail because by then, as has been shown earlier, the attack was focused on anthropology as a “child” of colonialism or imperialism. So, anthropology had become historical by complicity. If so, anthropology, historical or otherwise, could not be reconstructed, without being deconstructed first.

If there were to be an historical anthropology, what would distinguish it from social history in the British sense a-la-Hobsbawn, Thompson, Darnton and Samuel, or in the sense of French *Annales*? We do not know for sure, except that the authors' "historical anthropology is anti-empiricist, anti-objectivist, anti-essentialist — except in the amended sense in which we deploy these terms — it is also anti-statistical and anti-aggregative" (p. 20). We had already referred to this total rejection/half-embrace mode of conceptualisation. However, there is another side to the story for to the question, "How, then, do *we* do an ethnography of the historical imagination?" the answer is: "To repeat: for us the answer lies in a historical anthropology that is dedicated to exploring the processes that make and transform particular worlds — processes that reciprocally shape subjects and contexts, that allow certain things to be said and done" (p. 31). If this is *definitional*, then its referent is yet to be made apparent. Whatever might be said in favour of historical anthropology, one thing that cannot be proved even by the worst idealist is that the subjects and objects of colonialism reciprocally shaped one another and mutually determined the contexts in which this was done. Otherwise, there would be no need for the decolonisation or deconstruction of colonial systems of thought and practice. This is irrespective of what the colonised did, including the Botswana, in self-defence or of internal contradictions among the colonisers. Colonialism was not an event but a purposeful activity, a historical process, which is decipherable in specific and in general terms. The claim that social history only deals with events (p. 37) might be only self-serving, since there is more than one school of social history, as will be shown later.

Although the discussion on ethnography comes first in the Comaroff's book, for strategic reasons we postponed its analysis until now. The Comaroffs subscribe to the idea that the two key concepts in anthropology are "culture" and "ethnography". It would have been more accurate to say in which anthropology because British structural anthropology was always at loggerheads with American cultural anthropology. While the Americans had very little use for the concept of "social structure", the British rejected "culture" as a non-concept. Consequently, unlike their American and French counterparts, they paid scant attention to *symbolic* aspects of social life besides religion (Victor Turner and Mary Douglas were two notable exceptions). Likewise, the concept of "ethnography" was more or less taboo among the British anthropological elite. Ethnography was thought of as "descriptive" and "untheoretical". Recognised pioneers in African anthropology such as Audrey Richards and Lucy Mair became victims of this intellectual prejudice. Mandatory as it was, fieldwork was not thought of as doing *ethnography* but simply as collecting raw data, which were to be used in writing scientific *monographs*. Therefore, the Comaroffs should not have treated "ethnography" as generic in all

anthropology. It is part of the new *problematique* and, as such, it is highly debatable, as was hinted in the review of the two previous works. What remains now is to investigate the Comaroffs' conception of "ethnography" and "culture".

After casting aside "the well-intentioned — some would say self-satisfied — view that ethnography celebrates the narratives, the consciousness, and the cultural riches of non-western populations, especially those threatened with ethnocide" (p. 15), the Comaroffs in a tangled and effusive pronouncement offer the following as their conception of "culture":

"...we take culture to be the semantic space, the field of signs and practices, in which human beings construct and represent themselves and others, and hence their societies and histories. It is not merely an abstract order of signs, or relations among signs. Nor is it just the sum of habitual practices. Neither pure langue nor pure parole, it never constitutes a closed, entirely coherent system. Quite the contrary: Culture always contains within it polyvalent, potentially contestable messages, images, and actions. It is, in short, a historically situated, historically unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action, signifiers at once material and symbolic, social and aesthetic." (p. 27)

According to this testimony, "culture" is everything. If so, the British "establishmentarians" could not have been far wrong in branding it as a non-concept. Nonetheless, they accepted the idea of a fluid field of reference, divisible into material and symbolic culture (signifiers) and full stop.

In contrast, the Comaroffs believe that "the place to begin is with the idea of culture itself. Still the anthropological keyword *par excellence*". But they seem unable to establish a conceptual relationship between "culture" and "ethnography" for in broaching this methodological issue, they declare that their "current obsession with agency, subjectivity, and consciousness can be addressed only in *ethnographic* terms, and thereby rescued from vapid theoreticism". (p. 37). Then, what key role does "culture" play in this as a concept? Is it the objective realm in which agency, subjectivity and consciousness manifest themselves? If so, in the emerging perspective what is the unit of analysis?

After dispatching to hell the ethnographic strawman of remote islands and archipelagos, the Comaroffs are faced with the usual task of offering an alternative. They start with an apology: "We are the first to acknowledge that it is not easy to forge units of analysis in unbound social fields. But it would be false to assume that an ethnography of the nation-state, of empire, or of a diaspora

presents problems unprecedented in earlier studies of, say, domestic production, possession rites, or lineage relation” (p. 32). They soon warm up to their subject:

“...what should define us is a unique analytic stance, less our locus than our focus. Whether our topic be head-hunting in the Amazon or headshrinking in America ..., voodoo exorcism in the Caribbean or voodoo economics on Capitol Hill, we should approach it from the same perspective: as meaningful practice, produced in the interplay of subject and object, of the contingent and the contextual” (Comaroffs 1992).

According to this stance, there is no unit of analysis, but texts (themes) that can be explored within specific contexts. The ultimate test is that: “Being rooted in the meaningful practices of people great and small, they are, in short, suitable cases for anthropological treatment”. (p.33). This takes us further away from the field of culture, bounded or unbounded. If it were granted, as it must, that all societies are amenable to ethnographical treatment (however this is conceived), what would be the significance of the southern Tswana in the work of the Comaroffs? Who are they, are they exotic or not; is their culture bounded or not; are they ethnographic objects or not, and why “chiefdoms” and not anything else? Schapera who studied the Batswana as an ethnographic whole during colonialism would have had no problem in answering these questions and would have certainly laughed at their discovery that primogeniture among the southern Bantu was realised through succession struggles. Otherwise, why would this generation of anthropologists talk of “fissiparous tendencies” among South African Bantu kingdoms where polygamy was the privilege of rulers? There are too many conceptual ambiguities in the Comaroffs’ work, despite its confident and evocative rhetoric, which is a mixture of modernism and post-modernism. Have they by this act unconsciously renounced all claims to epistemology in favour of eclecticism? Their “neo-modernism”, which is neither fish nor fowl, does not seem to be the way forward.

African Renaissance or Reaction?

Of all the disciplines in the social sciences, anthropology became the most controversial after independence in Africa. And yet, it was the most established discipline, at least, in sub-Saharan Africa (barring South Africa) before independence. Was it coincidental that the anthropological enterprise flourished so much in what was historically the last bastion of colonialism on the globe? Was it likely to survive the demise of colonialism and the intrusive forces of global capitalism? These two questions can be answered at two levels, namely, the political/ideological and the socio-economic level.

African politicians and intellectuals alike rejected anthropology as an instrument of colonialism. After independence they did not want to hear of it. The newly independent African governments put a permanent ban on it in favour of sociology and African studies. In the new African universities anthropologists got ostracised as unworthy relics from the past. From the point of view of the African nationalists, anthropologists were simply peddlers of “tribalism” which they as nation-builders sought to transcend. From the point of view of development theorists and practitioners, anthropology was not a modernising science and, therefore, was a poor investment. The few African anthropologists on the ground felt defenceless and “went underground” for three decades, as some of them confessed in a special meeting organised by CODESRIA in 1991 (whose proceedings still awaits publication by CODESRIA). The attack on anthropology was heart-felt and justified in the revulsion against the divide-and-rule policies of colonial governments. But it was ultimately subjective because the so-called modernising social sciences were not any less imperialistic and actually became rationalisations for neo-colonialism in Africa, as we know now. However, the important lesson to be drawn from the experience of the African anthropologists is that anthropology is premised on an immediate subject/object relation. If for social and political reasons this relation gets transformed, anthropologists might not be able to realise themselves, without redefining themselves and their discipline.

African anthropologists re-emerged for the first time since independence when they met in Yaounde in 1989 under changed social and economic conditions. Their concern was to rehabilitate anthropology and to legitimise themselves. But colonially defined units of analysis were a thing of the past, as has been acknowledged by those who were interested in “reinventing” anthropology. For instance, as Asad observes: “The attainment of political independence by colonial (*sic*), especially African countries in the late 1950s and the early 1960s accelerated the trend, apparent since the war, of socio-economic changes, involving these countries in the planned development of national networks of

communications; the promotion of education and of rural improvement projects; the shift of political power from `tribal' leaders to the nationalist bourgeoisie" (Asad 1973:12-13). In a similar vein, Hymes (1974:4) simply states that: "The situation in which anthropology found a niche as an academic profession in the United States around the turn of the century is gone. The implicit division of labour — anthropology on Indian reservations and in uncivilised places abroad, sociology at home and in Europe — has quite broken down." Likewise, Clifford (op. cit) declares: "A rapid decade, from 1950 to 1960, saw the end of empire become a widely accepted project, if not an accomplished fact ... Imperial relations, formal or informal, were no longer the accepted rule of the game..." (op. cit). Finally, referring to the untenability of holistic ethnography under modern conditions, the Comaroffs confess that: "In the past, our strategy for studying complex situations was either to run to the sociology of networks and symbolic interactions ... or to find enclaves within the alienating world of modernity. We looked for `sub-cultures', informal economies, and marginal minorities, for ritual and resistance to capitalism."

When African anthropologists assembled in Dakar in 1991 to review the status of and prospects for African anthropology, they did not pay much attention to the above concerns as being problematic. Most assumed that, if they had been given a chance by African governments, they would have done better than the modernising disciplines, which have contributed, to the present crisis in Africa in no mean way. Their claim was that they, as anthropologists, had a better understanding of African ethnography and culture. Both concepts were largely taken for granted. The concern was more with reorganising than with deconstructing anthropology. All took it as given that they were not going to reproduce colonial anthropology, which was the cause for their political and intellectual banishment. But what anthropology and how? is not a question, which was dealt with in any depth. It is interesting that the South African black representatives adopted what might be called matter-of-fact deconstruction in burying both racist Afrikaner *volkekunde* (apartheid ethnology) and isolationist liberal anthropology which treated Africans as archaeological specimens. Unable to invent an all-embracing anthropology, they suggested that the solution to the problem of anthropology is "interdisciplinarity". This could be considered as a post-anthropological proposal in so far as its authors were willing to dispense with anthropology in their desire to deal with national issues in modern South Africa. One thing certain is that they were not speaking on behalf of white South African anthropologists who are at best neo-colonial liberals.

A similarly pragmatic approach was adopted by Abdalla Bujra. After making what struck one as a stout defence of anthropology qua anthropology vis-à-vis other social science disciplines, he suggested that the only guarantee for the

survival of African anthropologists was to move in the direction of “development anthropology”, which has become a booming industry in the United States. His basic explanation was that donor and development agencies had come to realise that anthropological insights were essential in designing development projects. As far as Africa was concerned, he saw no reason why this anthropological role should be left to Westerners who might be less well versed with African cultures and their ethnography than African anthropologists themselves. True enough, we can do with less others doing things for us. For the same reason, we cannot adopt “development anthropology” at the calling of the other. In a period of deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional disciplines, what is the theoretical status of “development anthropology” and what are its constituent elements? Bujra fell short of spelling these out and might be under an obligation to do so.

For the time being, it will suffice to point out that since 1985 there has been an ongoing debate on the status of “development anthropology”. The first question was whether “development anthropology” was a new version of applied anthropology as was evolved by colonialists (Grillo and Rew, 1985). Some highbrow anthropologists such as E. R. Leach are credited for having dubbed “development anthropology” as a kind of neo-colonialism’ (Ferguson n.d.). This view is confirmed by the work of writers such as A. Escobar (1991) who see “development anthropology” not only as a handmaiden of imperialism but also as a ploy for devising mechanisms for a soft-landing of schemes which local bureaucratic elites would otherwise be unable to manage on their own. Second, it is argued that in the circumstances “development anthropology” could hardly afford to be critical and theoretical. For this reason, “development anthropology” is held in low academic esteem and is not considered by mainstream anthropologists to be capable of contributing to the development of the discipline (for details see Ferguson n.d.). In an epoch of disintegration of the discipline could “development anthropology” be simply a ‘quick fix’ for the unemployed and unemployable anthropologists? Or worse still, could it be a surrender on terms by anthropologists who have lost faith in their own intellectual and academic enterprise in a world which has been transformed such that there can no longer be any self-imposing anthropological truths or meanings?

A rather different perspective was presented by Kwesi Prah. While he acknowledged that anthropology was a scientific response to the emergence of imperialism in the late 19th century and to the needs of colonialism, which sought to create the necessary conditions for the extraction of raw materials and for colonial trade, his main interest was in the internal constitution of Anglo-Saxon anthropology, especially. He rejected the ahistoricism of functionalism in no uncertain terms but at the same time noted how it was rooted in European cultural and scholarly traditions. He blamed the African anthropologists for

not doing the same. Accordingly, he urged them to go back to their cultural and intellectual roots so as to be able to develop a distinctly African anthropology. As the other participants, Prah did not identify the designating categories of this anthropology as against colonial anthropology. He merely emphasised the study of African culture as a necessary condition for self-knowledge and self-liberation. While he referred to ethnological writings of a pre-anthropological generation of African scholars, he did not refer to “ethnography” which proved such a critical concept in recent anthropological debates, as was seen earlier. However, he emphasised the need for anthropology to break out of its colonial mould so as to play an active role in the process of national reconstruction in Africa. Like the South African participants, he felt that anthropology could not fulfil this role, without being interdisciplinary. Without any warning, he recommended the Marxist methodology as the best tool for the study of society. Otherwise, Kwesi Prah’s idea of African anthropology is Pan-Africanist in conception. At the historical level this view has been echoed by Cheikh Anta Diop’s followers. But so far they show none of the erudition and rigour of a Martin Bernal in *Black Athena* (1991) or of a Mudimbe in *The Idea of Africa* (1994).

As would have been noticed, all the comments so far are about Anglophone anthropologists. The reasons for this are rather intriguing. The Francophones, who are often accused by their Anglophone colleagues of being partial to French colonialism, had no colonial anthropology to deconstruct. Starting from Marcel Griaule and Georges Ballandier to the present generation of French “Marxist Anthropologists”, there is nothing to suggest they were handmaidens of French colonialism in Africa. Instead, their work has been used by the radical left as a counterweight to Anglo-Saxon colonial anthropology. Yet, the French did their best to wipe out African culture and traditions and in the post-independence era they have proved to be the worst neo-colonialists. It could be asked, which intellectuals do the necessary ‘scientific’ rationalisations for them? One of the participants at the Dakar meeting, Paul Nkwi, suggested that colonial powers, which pursued assimilationist policies, had no use for anthropologists who perpetuated the separate identity of the colonised. If the French anthropologists are not guilty of colonial complicity, are they also not guilty of intellectual imperialism? If they are, what form does it take? This is a line of enquiry, which might show points of convergence as well as divergence, instead of talking about a cultural dialogue *in abstracto* in the wake of globalisation.

In her contribution to *Out of One, Many Africas* (Martin and West, 1999) Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch accuses French anthropologists for having flourished by appropriating African exotica for themselves. In her view, by turning their field into a private reserve, French anthropologists succeeded only in “cutting off anthropologists from realities as the concept of ‘traditional

societies' crumbled and the peoples concerned, eager for the modern way of life, refused to view themselves as isolated from the contemporary world". She believes that: "Many French researchers had trouble accepting the fact that they were no longer the only ones to control a domain that was in the process of decolonization. A number of them returned home to France. "The disillusionment of the 'generation of 1968' was added to the 'recruitment crisis' that was brought about – in France as in Britain by a lack of positions.", she concludes (op.cit.: 44). The verdict is that Africa, the private domain of European specialists, does not pay any longer. According to Coquery-Vidrovitch, "... From this stems the confusion of the French researchers, a confusion that expresses their own disenchantment more than that of their field of study: exoticism is dead;. Long live modernity". The quest by Africans for new self-identities implies an increasing role in knowledge making by indigenous scholars. But, as Coquery-Vidrovitch remarks, "there are still too many in France (and elsewhere in the West, one would add) who refuse to recognize that Africa has solid intellectuals whose revisionist approach is new and original". Therefore, there is little wonder that erstwhile specialists such as Jean Copans are so blinkered that they cannot find any *academicus Africanus* in modern Africa.

Critique of Critique

Although in the occasion of their resurrection after 30 years of hibernation, African anthropologists expressed some optimism about their future, by and large, their texts told a very different story. This was not so much about themselves as intellectuals but more about the virtual collapse of anthropology in Africa since the departure of the colonialists. Their representations were undeveloped and did not meet the challenge of the day. Far from marking a rebirth of anthropology, they sounded like a post-mortem of anthropology as they used to know it before independence. Those who found the idea of classical anthropology unsustainable aspired to multidisciplinary, without contemplating the implications of such an integration. Once anthropology is integrated into a broader non-disciplinary social science organised around chosen themes, what would be the value of maintaining anthropology as a discipline? If the value of anthropology is the study of ethnography in given cultural contexts, what would stop any African social scientist from learning how to make this essential dimension an integral part of his/her research? The insistence on bringing history and anthropology together also points in the same direction. Why could not all anthropologists turn ethnographically educated social historians in the African context? Finally, if the modernising social sciences in Africa were re-oriented in such a way that they acquired a sense of ethnography and sensitivity to given cultural contexts, what would be the special value of “development anthropology” and its status among other social sciences?

Perhaps, it would have been more pertinent to ask anthropologists how they survived as intellectuals for a whole generation, without practising conventional anthropology. For instance, it is not clear whether some of the work done by especially Nigerian anthropologists such as Bassey Andah and Ayodele Ogundipe is an attempt to resurrect, to indigenise or to transform anthropology into something else e.g. micro-sociology or social history. A review of such attempts by the authors themselves might have given us clues about unrecognised intellectual avenues, which could contribute to the reconstitution or indigenisation of the social sciences in Africa. It had been predicted by so many founders of anthropology, as was reported earlier, that under conditions of decolonisation in Africa and elsewhere anthropology would be shared out amongst other social science disciplines. In passing themselves off as something other than anthropologists, those formerly trained as anthropologists might have been doing precisely this. For it to be known and recognised, not only must its subjects acknowledge it, but they must also express it with the necessary intellectual candour. This is exactly what some of the northern critics of anthropology have been doing, giving rise to complaints by their conservative seniors that: “In the age of deconstruction and critical post-modernism, we have entered a conceptual free-for-all in which our disciplinary quest has no terrain of its own any more”. So, be it in the transitional stage.

Decolonising African Anthropology: A Personal Contribution

As one of the African anthropologists who did not “go underground” after independence, I have come to realise that anthropology, as a discipline, is dispensable. This conviction is born of a long practical and intellectual experience. In the 1960s I fully identified with the rejection of anthropology by the African nationalists. This was fully justified because we knew of no other anthropology, except colonial anthropology. The only way out of this dilemma was to participate in the ideological, political and intellectual deconstruction of colonial anthropology. The latter was difficult to realise because we were not prepared for it, organisationally and intellectually. So, it was left to individuals to live up to their own convictions.

In my case, this was not too difficult to achieve because in my academic life I had already started working on topics which were not particularly anthropological e.g., a study of social groups in an African township (1961), power and authority in the first South African Bantustan (1963), the political role of African bardic poets in contemporary South Africa (1965), and African large-scale farmers in Buganda (1966-67). By the time I reached Dar es Salaam at the end of the 1960s my work had become more thematic, less ethnographic, and more consciously deconstructionist e.g. – ”The ideology of Tribalism” ((1970, “What is Historical Explanation?” and “The Growth of Social Sciences in Historical Perspective” (1974). From 1973 onwards, as Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Development in The Hague, I worked steadily on African systems of land tenure and on agricultural and rural development, which slowly developed into the agrarian question in Africa, an interest I have maintained up to date. At the same time I ventured into more theoretical and methodological fields such as state capitalism and primitive accumulation (1975), science and ideology (1977), technology and development (1979), sociology of South African anthropology (1980), sociology of sociology (1984) and African historiography at various points in time. I even strayed into such fields as the sociology of African literature and philosophical representations (1988) and demography and economy in Africa (1990). Some of these were simply intellectual explorations and were not necessarily sustained.

What is of interest to us in the present context is that all what is said above was not anthropological, although it might have benefited from my anthropological background. Nor was it interdisciplinary, except the work I did in Uganda, which was more frustrating than anything else. It was *non-disciplinary* but drew from the insights of researchers in the different social sciences in Africa specifically sociologists, economists, historians, political scientists, social geographers, lawyers (especially those interested in land tenure), philosophers,

and literary critics. If I had attempted to be interdisciplinary, instead of simply learning from others, I would have got bogged down in intractable methodological problems, as each discipline would have demanded its pound of flesh. To avoid all this, I simply used the discursive method (not in its unflattering English sense but its original sense of *discursus* meaning a reasoned discussion or exposition). Secondly, I was not unduly concerned about epistemology. I knew in advance that I was not enamoured with positivism but my critical and radical stance inclined me towards Marxist thought-categories, with which I had familiarised myself since my undergraduate days for political reasons. Even in this choice I did not feel that I had to justify myself. I preferred to let my work speak for me. In retrospect I believe that Gunder Frank made a strategic and conceptual mistake when under pressure he declared himself 'not a Marxist' some years ago. It sounded as if he was denouncing Marxism, whereas it is probable that his point was that he was not committed to any epistemology even if his work in some ways was inspired by Marxism. This in fact was the spirit of the original *dependistas* (personal conversation with Osvaldo Sunkel).

This as it may, dispensing with existing epistemologies does not solve methodological problems in the inter-mediate term and the long run. What it does is to create space for the emergence of new styles of thinking. To survive, the emergent styles of thinking must not only be aware of one another but also of new styles of thinking within existing epistemologies. Therefore, while I was following my own *discursus*, I was monitoring very closely other tendencies in social sciences, especially in anthropology whose deconstruction I wanted to pursue to the end. I found value in keeping in touch with those who were supposed to be engaged in the same activity. I visited Claude Meillassoux's group several times in Paris and we invited him once at the American University in Cairo. I had several encounters with Talal Asad in Cairo between 1972 and 1992. When *Reinventing Anthropology* was being launched in 1974, I was in Canada and met Dell Hymes and some of his colleagues. In 1980 I attended the same conference on the Anthropology and History of Southern African in Manchester as the Comaroffs. I also attended one of their seminars on Historical Anthropology in Chicago in 1990. In the same year I was introduced to the post-modernist literature by a circle of friends in New York. This was kept alive back in Cairo by an erudite Egyptian neighbour who swears by the post-modern writers. The only group, which is entirely unknown to me, is the authors of *Writing Culture*, except Talal Asad.

Of all these groups, the one I found most conservative and under constructive is the British authors in the *Colonial Encounter*. They maintained academic propriety at the expense of radical intellectual departures. They exposed the colonial complicity of British anthropology but treated it as an historical accident

or incident. Talal Asad (1973:16) actually argued in mitigation that: "...anthropology is also rooted in an unequal power encounter between the West and Third World which goes back to the emergence of bourgeois Europe, an encounter in which colonialism is merely one historical moment." This is a fine point to make *a la* Levi-Strauss but it is yet to be proved that anthropology, as a discipline existed before colonialism. For the time being, we note that anthropology was not taught in Britain before the last quarter of the 19th century — 1884 in Oxford, 1900 in Cambridge and 1908 in London — and the first chair of anthropology not before 1908 when Sir James Frazer was made honorary professor in Liverpool. The British anthropologists more than any other in the imperial north seem to be haunted by their colonial past and complicity. In their post-colonial discourse they waver between half-denying it and wishing it away in the post-colonial era.

For instance, in what was supposed to be a prospective review of the legacy of anthropology in Africa Sally Falk Moore has this to say:

"These connections between anthropology and the colonial enterprise became the subject of considerable academic invective in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus the 'colonial connection' became a political issue among internal critics of anthropology just at the point at which such connections no longer had any practical relevance, that is, in a post-colonial reaction. Other attacks came from African academics who wanted to repossess the control of scholarship concerned with their own societies. This invective went on for decades... Apart from the vituperation of the 1960s and 1970s, which often became as drearily conventionalised as the conceptual straw man it attacked, there was in addition considerable serious questioning of the models on which so much anthropological theory had been founded. The ahistoricity and selective constructions of the structural-functional paradigm became strikingly clear. The 'colonial period mentality critique was only one dimension of the more general proposal that a new set of problematics be addressed" (Bates et al. 1993).

In this instance one does not know who should feel more insulted: those academics who participated in the debates of the 1960s and the 1970s or the Africans who were victims of colonialism and who are now often objects of neo-colonial intellectual prescriptions from the North? If Sally Moore had a good sense of sociology of knowledge, she would have known that no "invective" could continue for decades, without cause. The "vituperative" anthropologists she refers to, knew about anthropology as much as she does (if not more, judging

by her account) but their problem was how to define themselves in the post-colonial era. They could not do so, without exorcising the evil spirits. The “new set of problematics” she claims was neither sufficient nor was it ever realised, as is shown by her own work in Africa and of those whom she cites. These are disparate pieces of research ranging from archaeology of African law, African farming systems, primitive rebels to evaluation of development projects. And worse still, these are done by people whose original training was not necessarily in anthropology. At best, what they have in common is certain anthropological field methods and techniques but no unifying paradigms or theoretical framework. Thus for convenience, they operate under the rubric of African studies, which is multidisciplinary. This she confirms in the following words:

To say that African studies have played a central role in these theoretical and methodological transformations may understate the case. The large body of data that had already been accumulated on African society is bound to make Africa a continuing locale for anthropological research of major importance. The present focus of anthropology is more and more on understanding process over time, rather than on what were once imagined to be ancient and fixed ‘traditions’ and ‘customs’. African studies in anthropology are and will be central to the new processual studies, as well as to many other key projects in the discipline (Bates et al.1993:3).

This is an invitation to another endless “invective” but Sally Moore is unaware of it because she takes colonial predispositions for granted. She maintains the colonial epistemology of subjects and objects and sees Africa as a laboratory for testing theories, which could not be tested in the civilised world. This is reminiscent of the 19th century evolutionists. Lest it be thought that we are exaggerating, let us invoke *The Idea of Africa* by Mudimbe (1994:38) who happens to be one of her editors:

Knowledge about Africa now orders itself in accordance with a new model. Despite the resilience of primitivist and evolutionist myths, a new discourse — more exactly, a new type of relation to the African object — has been established. Anthropology, the most compromised of disciplines during the exploitation of Africa, rejuvenated itself first through functionalism ...and, towards the end of the colonial era, in France, transmuted itself into structuralism. In so doing, anthropology, at least theoretically, revised its own connection with what it was supposed to serve from its institution as a scientific discipline. In any case, in the mid-1950s it fused with other disciplines..., thus constituting

a new vague body known as Africanism or knowledge about Africa... The African figure was an empirical fact, yet by definition it was perceived, experienced, and promoted as the sign of the absolute otherness.

It is not too difficult to suppose that the “new Africa” Sally Moore talks about is the old exotic Africa of the Greeks, Romans, and early European writers: a hot piece of land on which pathetic beings live on roots, herbs, and camel’s milk; a ‘refused continent’ which produces and sustains so many venomous beasts which do not live in Europe [Ireland]; and above all a place where madness and melancholia reign supreme” (Mudimbe 1994:8-9).

If these images of alterity seem too remote and unreal, their persistence is such that every now and then they get the best of Africanists, if they be complacent. It was not so long ago that an American wit in the *Anthropology Newsletter* wrote to Powers That Be: “I wish that archaeologists who work in the ‘bush’ in Africa had something that repels cobras, black mambas, puff adders and other venomous snakes”. “Me too”, added the editor. As a text, how different is this from Robert Burton’s *Exotic Spaces* referred to above and written in the 17th century? It was in this context that I undertook to do a thorough review of Sally Moore’s book in the CODESRIA Bulletin, 2, 1996, accusing her of being an epitome of Eurocentrism and an arrogant apologist for colonial anthropology, which treated Africans as objects. I proceeded to demonstrate this by referring to exact texts in her book. My review caused great excitement in the United States but hardly any response from African anthropologists, apart from a few personal admirers who derived vicarious pleasure from the sheer clash of swords between me and Sally Moore. I began to wonder if 30 years of banishment had bred timidity among African anthropologists or they were simply unwilling to face the prospects of their discipline being deconstructed beyond recognition.

In the *Colonial Encounter* the question of alterity had been raised in the introduction by Talal Asad but more as an attack on the idea of a “civilising mission” than as problem of authorship of ethnographic texts. Likewise, the question of what was going to be the anthropologist’s ethnographic hinterland in the post-colonial era was left unanswered. Despite Sally Moore’s claim that in the 1960s and 1970s there was a “new set of problematics” to be addressed in British anthropology, *The Colonial Encounter* was predictably silent on the matter. There was general loss of direction and the younger anthropologists were experimenting with Althusserian and Marxist models. Otherwise, there was no agenda for decolonising anthropology in Britain. Personally, Talal Asad seemed to have shifted to historical anthropology themes such as the Arab

State (seminar at the Arab Centre in Cairo in 1992) and “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Anthropology” in *Writing Culture* (1986). In the meantime, it was apparent that British anthropology as a discipline had not much to offer to post-colonial Africa, precisely because it had no theoretical-construct for decolonising itself.

In contrast, in America, the authors of *Reinventing Anthropology* were insurrectionary. Their denunciation of imperialist anthropology took a strongly ideological and political turn. This drew an equally strong reaction from the anthropological establishment in the Anglo-Saxon world. If the representations of the former were largely unacademic, their arguments were not unintellectual. They simply ran into the sand dunes like seawater. Partisan anthropology was a non-starter. No one could hope to build a discipline that cared for the poor and fought against imperialism in bourgeois academic institutions in a leading capitalist and imperialist country such as America. Self-critical anthropology in relation to the other is the farthest they could go and could have forced a change of paradigm, if that had been sustained. All this hinged on that magical word in anthropology, “ethnography”. They neither discussed their conception of “ethnography” nor its location in space. Was it going to be a question of marginal groups in America or inhabitants of islands and archipelagos in the ex-colonial world? Equally, nothing was said about epistemology of ethnography itself. It is conceivable that the most important thing the would-be post-colonial anthropologists could learn from *Reinventing Anthropology* is recognising how difficult this might prove to be in an age of globalisation.

Whether one agrees with them or not, the Comaroffs contended very seriously with the problem of ethnography and the present historical juncture. For those Africans who still nurse the hope of developing a neo-modern anthropology in the form of either “development anthropology” or “historical anthropology” there is a great deal to ponder in the discourse of the Comaroffs. It raises the right questions for the believers but in our view it is not able to resolve them because it refuses to accept transcendent radicalism which countenances the possibility of disappearance of anthropology and end of epistemology in favour of new styles of thinking and new forms of organisation knowledge. *Writing Culture* serves as an interesting counterpoint to the perspective developed by the Comaroffs. First, it relates anthropology to a point where it could disappear in the welter of other disciplines and, second of all, in moving freely across disciplinary boundaries it liberates the ‘floating signifier’ from any epistemological shackles. While it talks about culture, it does not do so in the anthropological sense but in the sense of cultural criticism and poetics. In the title of the book this comes in the guise of “The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography”.

Nevertheless, in both texts the referent of “ethnography” is the same: ethnography is written by the interlocutor. The only difference is that in the case of the authors of *Writing Culture* the ethnographic texts are a product of intersubjective communication with the “other”. The Comaroffs reject totally such “subjectivism”, in spite of their avowed “anti-objectivism”, they declare: “To treat ethnography as an encounter between an observer and an other — Conversations with Ogotemmel (Griaule 1965) or *The Headman and I* (Dumont 1978) — is to make anthropology into a global, ethnocentric interview” (Comaroffs 1992:10). Finally, their concept of culture refers to a taken-for-granted universe and as such they have no intrinsic critique of culture but an extrinsic one, e.g. the missionaries and the natives in southern Botswana. This would suit those African anthropologists who believe in African culture with a capital ‘C’. But the rejection of insurgent black inter-subjectivity would in all probability be resisted.

Now, the stage is setting for me to commit myself irrevocably. When I wrote *The Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations: The case of the Interlacustrine Kingdoms* in 1986 (published in 1991 and not mentioned until now) I had taken into account most of the questions raised in the course of our discussion. I used the Interlacustrine social formations (I could have used the Nguni or the Sotho in South Africa for exactly the same reasons that I chose the Interlacustrians) both as a synthesis of my previous explorations and as a testing ground for my deconstructionist ideas. First, I did not use the concept of “culture” even though I recognised the fact that the interlacustrians shared more or less the same cultural and linguistic heritage. Although culture is often used to draw invidious distinctions among people, in fact it has no boundaries and can diffuse widely in space, especially under conditions of improved communication. For this reason, it cannot be used as a designating semantic category — perhaps as a general unbounded point of reference. Secondly, I did not use the concept of “society” for the same reasons as culture. Given the fact that according to common usage there are societies within societies and among societies, e.g. the “Nigerian society”, the “Yoruba society” from within, and the “West African society” over and above all, how could its definitional limits be determined? We can only accept it as a vague term of reference used for convenience. Analytically speaking, “culture” and “society” are counterparts of the same thing and are themselves cultural denotations. These assertions are unanthropological but are scientifically sound.

Instead of the discarded pair above, I used “social formation” and “ethnography” as my key concepts. Unlike Balibar (1970) or Samir Amin (1972), I did not use the former to refer to an “articulation of modes of production” but rather to the

articulation of the economic instance and the instance of power. The counter-argument was that on logical grounds we could not use an articulation of abstract concepts such as “mode of production” to designate the same concrete social reality they are meant to explain. The argument for the revision of the definition was that the concept of “social formation” has an organisational referent in which economics and politics are determinant. “Politics” refers to a myriad of activities, which can be subsumed under the concept of “power”. To balance the well-known Marxist concept of the “economic instance”, I invented what would have been “power instance”, but this proved too awkward linguistically. So, I settled for the “instance of power” which is actually inconsistent with the Marxist demarcation between the “infrastructure” and “superstructure”. Having committed my various crimes to my satisfaction, I adopted “social formation” as my unit of analysis *par excellence*. Consequently, in the course of my study the so-called interlacustrine ‘kingdoms’ became a series of social formations in-the-making which mutually influenced one another in such way that, had it not been for colonial intervention, through processes of variable domination and subordination, they could have easily become one social formation or State. Given the current mystifications about ethnicity in Africa since independence, this was most revealing to me. In other words, social formations have extendable instances, depending on the nature of intervening social and political forces, whether internal or external.

As units of analysis, my “social formations” were not defined according to their ethnography but according to their modes of organisation. So, it did not matter what people were called — Ba-Nyoro, Ba-Ganda, Ba-Hindi, Ba-Hima, Ba-Hutu, Ba-Tutsi, etc. — but what they were actually doing in their attempts to assert themselves. It struck me that in the ensuing social struggles people try to justify themselves and not so much their cause, which remains hidden. They do this by authoring particular texts which give them and others certain identities which in turn become the grammar of the same texts, the rules of the game or, if you like, the *modus operandi* in a social discourse in which individuals by virtue of their ascribed identities are assigned categorical statuses and roles. Now, we have arrived. It is these texts, which I refer to as “ethnography”. They are socially and historically determined i.e., they can be authored and altered by the same people over time or similar ones could be authored by people with a different cultural background under similar conditions. Therefore, “context” is most critical for their decodification. When I reiterated the old adage that “there are not texts, without a context”, one of my readers mocked me for stating the obvious but now “text” and “contextuality” are passwords in deconstructionist literature.

This notwithstanding, it should be clear by now that my concept of “ethnography” is radically different from that of the Northern theorists or conventional anthropologists. I do not write ethnography nor do I have any use for the term “ethnology”. “Ethnology” is a biological analogy dating back to the time of Westermarck whose main interest was to develop a taxonomy of human societies according to their basic characteristics. This created a predisposition towards associating human types with particular ethnological types in the same way that in biology, it is presumed that ontogeny breeds phylogeny. In the case of human societies not only does this imply fixed and closed systems but also has racist overtones. This is best exemplified by what happened in South Africa where Afrikaner ethnologists perfected a system of classification of African societies, which became a justification for the introduction of the notorious Bantustan system and the main pillar of the racist Afrikaner *volkekunde* anthropology. This argument might appear not to apply to seemingly innocent systems of classification such as dividing African peoples into tribes or dividing African political systems into acephalous and centralised types. Once again, one of my readers found my adversity to taxonomic categories incomprehensible.

But in fact, all ontological categorisations produce essentialist systems of classification, which become impossible to transcend in thought, e.g. ethnicity which is used as a parameter within which to site anthropological research. The alternative is historical categories which are interpretative but at the same time are not the monopoly of the observer, as is evidenced by oral history or literature. Effectively, this dispenses with the role of the ethnologist and leads directly to the question of how ethnographic texts are authored. Ethnographic texts defy ethnological stereotyping because they are equivocal. Whether this gives them such flexibility as to embrace the particular and the universal at one and the same time, as has been suggested by Amselle (Mudimbe 1994:52-55), it cannot be gainsaid. But it would appear that refutation of ‘ethnological reason’ does not necessarily dissolve the grammar of ethnographic texts. People carry in their heads certain classificatory systems or signposts, which are their source of identity or orientation. All this puts a very heavy burden on our concept of ethnography.

As I conceive of it, ethnography is an end product of social texts authored by the people themselves. It is our duty to study and understand these in their true context. This implies intersubjective communication, which is not necessarily uncritical.

In my earlier formulation of this problematique in 1995 I gave the distinct impression that I acted as an interlocutor who merely decoded ethnographic texts and made their meanings apparent to myself and fellow-social scientists.

As one of my foremost adversaries, Sally Moore, (1998) was quick to point out, this was no different from what anthropologists had always claimed to do. Although my primary concern was to acknowledge the subjects studied not merely as partners in knowledge making but as knowledge-makers in their own right, I had in fact unwittingly fallen into the trap of a “value-free” social science. It was as if I did not make any critical evaluation of the texts authored by contending subjects. This was a false impression probably fostered by a lingering inhibition about confessing or making apparent one’s value premise in undertaking any social science research. Yet, ideological biases are ever-present in the evaluation of social texts.

Looking back at my own experience as a field-worker, I was never a neutral interpreter of ethnographic messages. When I did field work in the Transkei (a former Bantustan in South Africa) in the 1960s, I heard two voices- one representing the Bantu Authorities / Bantustans and the other their antithesis. My subjective commitment inclined me towards the latter and took me to clandestine meetings for which I was arrested and jailed. Something similar happened when I was in Uganda in the mid-1960s. I interacted vigorously with the *mailo* landlords / chiefs in Buganda as well as the Ugandan nationalists. I was sympathetic to the voice of the latter. But this time I was not arrested but, instead, was offered Ugandan citizenship (since I had none in my native South Africa) by the Minister of Interior. This was a measure of my identification with the African nationalists in the 1960s. It is perhaps this inter-subjective communication, which I should have emphasized, in my earlier formulation, as it is a refutation of any suppositions about a “value-free”, neutral positivist social science. What is interesting about it is that it is not alienating. Far from this being the case, one’s intellectual work becomes part of current social struggles. In other words, it dissolves the traditional anthropological epistemology of subjects and objects and solves the problem of *alterity*, which was the hallmark of colonial anthropology. It transpires, therefore, that intersubjective communication, like all social communication, does not imply agreement or consensus. It could also entail dissension and possible conflict, which are often cathartic, if painful.

Apart from the problem of *alterity* in colonial anthropology, in my little monograph, *Anthropology and Independent Africans: Suicide or End of an Era* (1996), I consciously sought to replace “culture” as a critical concept with “ethnography”. This was done in the belief that “culture” is too broad a concept to be analytically useful and can easily lead to arbitrary categorisations and invidious distinctions among people. Secondly, I found the observation by the Comaroffs (1992) that culture is a contested terrain very suggestive. To

apprehend and to comprehend the dynamics of social existence and the meanings given to them, one has to get inside culture. The internal conflicts in countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Kwazulu-Natal, Lesotho, the Congo, Ethiopia and many more are illustrative of this. This notwithstanding, my rejection of “culture” as an analytical tool proved to be the only part of my discourse which elicited a response from, at least, three African anthropologists, namely, Kwesi Prah, Herbert Vilakazi, and Paul Nkwi (1998). The former two argued that “Culture” was uniquely the domain of anthropology, which has universal pretensions. From an Africanist perspective, this might seem true. But it does not explain why the study of anthropology got limited to exotic societies and why in modern times the so-called Cultural Studies are not a monopoly of any particular discipline. It is possible that Prah and Vilakazi are mistaking the study of “culture” for the study of human civilisations in a universal context. But even these would have their own specific ethnographies at different points in time. Indeed, Paul Nkwi in his intervention affirmed that anthropology was the study of “ethnography” universally. However, Nkwi has yet prove this, as there is no indication from the publications of the Pan-African Association of Anthropologists that this is the case or has ever been.

I believe that “culture” is a passive concept whereas “ethnography”, which connotes both agency and context, when used in the study of human civilisations is a lot more dynamic. In fact, it is coterminous with the study of social history and its agency. In this context the title of the Comaroffs’ book, *Ethnography and Historical Imagination*, is not without significance. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1999) reports that there has been a call in France for a rapprochement between anthropology and history. She believes that this is due to the fact that French anthropologists after the disillusionment with colonial exotica discovered that they did not have to go to Africa to study ethnography in rural France. However, she contends that because they still insist on micro-studies the synthesis to which they aspire will favour social historians. As if to rub the noses of the French anthropologists in the mud, she quips: “.... if sub-Saharan Africa is a ‘cultural area’, then Europe is one as well”. This marks the end not only of colonial anthropology but also of Area Studies in Anglo-Saxon America, as I have argued in my latest paper, “Africanity: A Combative Ontology” (forthcoming).

It seems to me that whatever vested interests African anthropologists might have in their discipline, after 30 years in the wilderness they have been overtaken by events both in Africa and in the North. Colonial anthropology is totally discredited and its foundations have been irreversibly undermined by decolonisation. Added to this have been deconstructionist intellectual rebellions from the North. The pressure for revising all forms of knowledge has continued

unabated. This is so much that now we can talk of post-modernist theories and a post-anthropological era. While this is possible, it does not instantaneously produce theoretical alternatives. Indeed, the post-modernists, who have been the most successful deconstructionists to date, have conspicuously failed to provide a coherent theoretical alternative. They have succeeded only in producing a nihilistic “Brave New World”. As Kwesi Prah has observed from an Africanist perspective, they have “made nonsense of essence”. From Prah’s point of view, who is the only African anthropologist with whom I have been having a continual dialogue, the essence is “back to our roots”. But then, if African anthropologists were to start “re-anthropologising” in the fashion of the Pan-Africanist Association of Anthropologists, the odds are against them, intellectually, ideologically, and politically. While Kwesi Prah freely admits that in his endeavours he is still in “the darkness before dawn”, it is not apparent that the said dawn will usher a new anthropology. As has been shown earlier, the emerging view among progressive scholars is that it will usher a synthesis between ethnographic studies and social history. Objectively, this is implicit in Kwesi Prah’s work, irrespective of what he calls it. It is, therefore, conceivable that “the darkness before dawn” is largely a matter of semantics, which probably could be clarified over time. But the dice has already been cast.

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