

# The End of Anthropology: The African Debate on the Universality of Social Research and its 'Indigenization'

## *A Study Dedicated to Archie Mafeje*

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### About a Special Relationship with Archie Mafeje

Cairo became acquainted with Archie Mafeje almost four decades ago, first as a young political militant in the leadership of the Unity Movement, one of the liberation movements in South Africa, then as a prominent Professor of Sociology in the American University in Cairo in the 1980s. I made his personal acquaintance as a political militant, when I was myself the coordinator of African liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Then I became a friend and an associate in the Arab African Research Center (AARC) in 1995. All through his career, he was appreciated by Egyptian social circles as a critical intellectual and an astute observer of society. He always commanded a special social status as the husband of a prominent Egyptian researcher, Professor Shahida El-Baz, and the father of a promising young daughter, Dana Mafeje.

I had the pleasure of taking part in the session held in his honor in Dakar by the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), as one of the prominent researchers in Africa, of the stature of J. Ki-Zerbo, A. Mazrui and I. Shivji. During that meeting much was said about his extensive career as a pioneer in laying the foundations of African

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Ethnography and Anthropology, since his master's thesis in the University of Cape Town, back in 1962, about local African society. We also noted how UCT, under the influence of apartheid, refused to appoint him as a staff member, which triggered numerous demonstrations of protest on the part of students of many universities. Such persecution forced him into self-exile, to gain his PhD from Cambridge in 1966, followed by a long trek among the universities of Holland, Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Egypt and Namibia, to rest at last in the African Institute in Pretoria, in collaboration with the young scholars of the new South Africa, where he coaches the holders of scholarships in a program of higher education named after him, the 'Archie Mafeje Programme'.

In this brief introduction, we cannot review the extensive scientific contributions of Mafeje to the body of African Studies. I can personally name at least ten books,

apart from the scores of published studies and articles in Africa and abroad. However, Archie Mafeje must be read in the original to appreciate his debates over Colonial Anthropology, and the liberation of African Social Sciences. One should also read his analysis of modes of production in the African context, the economic, agricultural and social effects of colonialism in the African South, the ethnography of the agrarian question, the discourse of African intellectuals in the Continent and the Diaspora and the devastating effects of Structural Adjustment Programs. We can never ignore the great efforts of Mafeje in the UN Economic Commission for Africa, in CODESRIA, in FAO, and other bodies in search of an 'Alternative Development for Africa', and his close examination of social protest movements from Soweto to the Great Lakes, and elsewhere.

I personally took part in translating his book on *African Social Formations*, which was published in Arabic in 2006, a few months before he passed away. I wrote the introduction to that book in Arabic, and would like to present here that introduction, in English, for the benefit of his students and friends in Africa and elsewhere, as a token of my great esteem for this distinguished scholar.

## The End of Anthropology: To the late Archie Mafeje

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### Introduction

The cry proclaiming the Death of Anthropology came several decades ago, from the European camp that saw the inception of this epistemological order under the name of 'Colonial Anthropology'. P. Worsley (of Britain) was the first, presenting his paper entitled 'The End of Anthropology' to the anthropological congress in 1966. This concept was again discussed in an African congress in Dakar in 1991, where A. Mafeje announced the death of Anthropology in Africa. He reiterated this concept in an important

study where he announced that Anthropology had committed suicide, and that a new beginning of this science was to be heralded.

Anthropology is one of the social sciences most attached to the world political and economic order, as it was closely linked to colonialism, and the expansion of industrial then financial capitalism beyond the European boundaries. Thus the anthropologist became a vulnerable colonialist, as James Hawker once said (1963), as Anthropology was created by the colonial administration as a means to

'enhance' its effectiveness. Some young American anthropologists even considered it an imperialist science as it was closely connected to the American wars of the 1960s. Such an assessment has meant different approaches to this science from the French school (of the *Annales*) on one hand, and the Marxist school or that of Historical Materialism on the other.

Such a varied outlook to this science may explain why its African protagonists declared its 'death' in their Dakar congress in 1991, or in Mafeje's studies, in pursuit

of a new birth on new foundations for its methodological and theoretical basis, and aiming at new social objectives.

From such considerations we proceed to study the following aspects of Anthropology:

- I. The main criticisms addressed to the objectives and methods of Anthropology;
- II. The attempts to reconstruct Anthropology as a support for development in the post-independence state;
- III. The efforts to transform the theoretical concepts and methodology after the declaration of the end of the old Anthropology, then trying to indigenize it in the context of African realities.

This means debating the doctrine of the universality of the social sciences when applied to African societies, meaning the need to fragment epistemological disciplines for the benefit of globalizing holistic scientific values. In such a pursuit, various African parties look out for new traits of African Anthropology, or Ethnography as constructed by Archie Mafeje.

### The Critical Standpoint

Some critics of Anthropology lay stress on the functional role of the anthropologist rather than on the methodology of this science. This may explain the abundance of debate around the scientific personalities that contributed to anthropological research, such as Edward Evans-Pritchard, Charles Seligman, Nadel, Malinowski, and others. However, their connections with colonial and imperial administrations were always mentioned with regret, as a mark on their scientific activity. Such a position led P. Rigby to point out that Evans-Pritchard's son helped the US forces in Vietnam in the 1960s as a continuation of his father's role in the Sudan with the British forces! We also note Malinowski's studies on acculturation in South Africa as a theoretical basis for the ideologies of apartheid there.

However, Critical Anthropology went further to more advanced critical perspectives, although it remained reformist within the old framework. In this connection, there are several trends, such as:

- The Apologetic Stand: this continues the conservative position by maintaining that the anthropologist was a 'colonialist against his will', and that

many of them enjoyed their work, and were fond of the people they worked upon. Such a standpoint was taken to the extreme by Talal Asad (1973), who maintained that considering the old anthropology as simply 'colonial' was both arbitrary and naïve. In contrast, both Mafeje and Rigby considered such conservative criticism as a sort of self-defence, or protection of the scope of employment, and one that does not offer a theoretical or epistemological correction. Thus they conclude by declaring the death of the science to give place to a new epistemological order;

- Some researchers considered that 'renovation', if any, still came from the North, which means that African Anthropology is void of substance as the African contributions are next to nothing, despite the efforts of the Nigerian Bassey Andah and the Ghanaian Kwesi Prah. Thus African Anthropology still claims no African anthropologists. In the West, however, there appeared some real innovations, as in *Reinventing Anthropology*, by Dell Hymes (1972) and *Writing Culture* by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986);
- What is common between the new Northern renovation and the new epistemological order is that both pursue the school of modernism and postmodernism. Thus the claim that the old Anthropology was functional, or functional/structural such as to lead to fragmentation of epistemological methodology, and rejection of inclusive studies of society and state, also applies to the postmodernistic school, which tends to study local cultures and minorities, or fragmented themes of linguistics, literature or rationalities. Some noted that the North pointed its criticism toward Anglo-Saxon functionalism, trying to reform it, while the Francophone scholars did not resort to functional anthropology, as they had adopted the policy of integration, which produced a sort of cultural imperialism that leads to a call of cultural dialogue, and not getting rid of Anthropology;
- The critics of Anthropology could not approach any of the schools of historical materialism, political economy or social historiography. They would not even approach sociology despite their claims of interdisciplinary methods. The Afrikaner and Afro-Ameri-

can intellectuals in particular played a negative role in devising a Critical Anthropology, either through the romanticism of some, the developmentalism of others, or the involvement of still others in the imperialist anthropological institution.

Hence came the attack of Archie Mafeje and Ben Magubane on the old Anthropology, and declaration of its demise, in order to put up the basis for a new African Ethnography. Such an attack was motivated by the abuse of the Apartheid system, of the so-called 'Apartheid Ethnology' to establish racial segregation, and it was only normal for South African scholars to proceed with such an attack.

### The Attempt to Reconstruct Anthropology

African politicians played a role, directly or indirectly, in the attempts for 'self-emanicipation' from Anthropology by refusing to create studies of this discipline in the new universities in the post-independence states. This came about owing to the direct experience of some of them (Kenyatta, Nkrumah, etc.), or because of the conditions of building the modern state/nation, and the need for developmental sociology, and evading the fragmenting Anthropology of tribalism and racism. The Anglo-Saxon anthropologists tried to save their reputation when they adopted the theme of 'Social Change' in their congress in Kampala (1959), but to no avail. The counterattack came from African anthropologists in their congress in Yaoundé (1989), and in Dakar (1991). In these congresses the Africans raised the slogan 'Post Anthropology', while some of them went to the extent of declaring the Death of Anthropology. Yet the historians of these attempts consider such moves for renaissance, or constructing development anthropology, to be still in the pragmatic stage, and as not constituting a negation of the old epistemological order, on the road to creating a new African Ethnography.

In this connection we would point out to the pragmatic stand of Kwesi Prah (in Dakar, 1991), who noted that British Anthropology insisted on functionalism as a non-historic order rooted in 'European Culture'. He concluded by urging Africans, likewise, to study 'African Culture' within the framework of national construction, and delve deep into self-study, while constructing an African Anthropology as an interdisciplinary system that might

make use of Marxist methodology in social analysis of the salient social phenomena (CODESRIA, 1991).

To stigmatize the pragmatic stand, Mafeje pointed out the position of A. Bujera (Kenya), who highlighted the role of Anthropology in development as being a recent trend in the USA, where investors planned to develop Africa with the help of the anthropologists. He contended that this field must not be left wide open to the Westerners by themselves while they lacked comprehension of African culture and ethnography.

Some opposed this developmental trend as bereft of a theoretical basis, and accused its protagonists of presenting a new imperialist form of the old anthropology (E. Leach), or at the best, trying to utilize Anthropology as a mechanism for projects that the local bureaucracy cannot manage. Ifi Amadiume proposed to the Dakar congress the liquidation of Anthropology, to be replaced by African Social History, or Sociological Historiography, which was a sure indication of her being influenced by Francophony and the French *Annales* school of social history, and the reliance on Oral History, Folklore and other popular arts as a source for the interpretation of society. The influence of the school of Cheikh Anta Diop on the anthropologists of francophone West Africa was evident by the inclusion of the 'situation of women' as a new topic for Anthropology.

Dr Abdel Ghafar Ahmed (Sudan) took part in the debate about Anthropology in his contribution to Talal Asad's book (1973), followed by a number of sociological anthropological studies on Sudan from a critical viewpoint. Yet Mafeje considered him a vulnerable developmentalist 'against his will', despite his open criticism of Colonial Anthropology and traditional functionalism. Ahmed collected his contributions on the subject in *Anthropology in the Sudan* (2003), building on the premise that the old anthropologist was indeed colonialist against his will, because of the context and political environment in which he worked. The developmental approach, however, came in the context of the total society in the modern state, rather than the previous fragmented society. This change in approach was applied to his studies on unity and diversity in Sudanese society. Thus, Ahmed made his theoretical and field contribution on the theme of the disintegration of

the authority of the tribe, and assessing the authority of the elite on a political and class basis, and as the foundation for the hierarchy in society as a whole, and not the tribe as an isolated entity as in traditional Anthropology.

Therefore, Ahmed's studies reflected his efforts to develop Anthropology rather than declare its demise or negation. Thus, the titles of his various contributions – *Unity and Diversity*, *The Changing Systems in Rural Areas*, and *Anthropology and Development Planning in the Sudan* – point to the possibility of transforming the role of Anthropology in the social context of the Sudan.

### What End to Anthropology?

Talking about the 'End' of Anthropology does not mean its complete negation, but rather the negation of its functional non-historical legacy, and its methodology, which refused any historical approach to, let alone the social history of, the total social edifice. While the rejection was aimed at Colonial Anthropology as mentioned above, the attempts at its transformation came from the 'North' in the form of modernistic or postmodern methods that led to the reference to 'postanthropology'.

Such attempts led in turn, to the fear that 'Imperialist Anthropology' would come to replace the old 'Colonial Anthropology', as propounded by the French and Marxist schools. However, most African scholars consider all such attempts as 'Northern' efforts at reproduction of the old theme under new global conditions.

Here, stress was laid on the necessity to indigenize social sciences in the African anthropology congresses (Hountondji in 1993, and Mafeje in 1996). They refused to accept the holistic European advance while refusing such totality for African society, or that European postmodernism could lead to the old colonialist fragmented empirical outlook to be applied to Africa and the Third World alone while Western society would benefit alone from globalization (Mafeje 1996). Samir Amin also reiterates this theme when he writes: 'The capitalist society of the Center, based on Rationality, is now exporting Irrationality only to our World in the South.'

### Reconstructing the Old Concepts

Such refusal came first as a rejection of the old concepts of traditional Anthropology. This was the work of young African anthropologists who rejected the

concepts of 'Tribalism' and 'The Characteristics of Human Races', and others, which they attributed to colonialism and its lackeys. We shall review in brief some such contributions.

P. Rigby denounces such attempts in his *African Images* under the title: 'The Racist Ideology Creates the Legend of the Hamites', where he denounces the extravagance in extolling their social ascendancy over their neighbors owing to their Caucasian ancestry, etc. He points out the discourse about the peoples of East and Central Africa, where some colonial anthropologists like Hinde proposed the utilizing of some such groups to dominate other groups for the benefit of the colonial power. The claim was that this group (the Massai) were superior as Hamites over their neighbors of the Nilotes as the anthropological studies asserted.

The same 'theory' of racial superiority of the Hamites was also extended to Rwanda and Burundi where the Tutsi were utilized to dominate the Hutu in accordance with the recommendation of another anthropologist. Such claims called for a special assessment of the physical, psychological and mental characteristics of the Tutsi to explain the continued discrimination to their benefit, and their domination of the Hutu, and even explain the post-independence struggles and colonialist interventions. Here we find Rigby tracing Hamite legend:

in the 19th century, as J.H. Speke applied it in 1865, for the first time, on the studies about East Africa. The anthropologists adopted this legend once more in the 20th century till 1950, in the form 'Hamite Nilotes'. This last form was applied in 1953, in the ethnographic survey of Africa under the direction of Galvier and his wife. This survey tried to establish the 'inferiority of the Negro Race' by claiming that the history of East Africa cannot be explained except by an invasion by Caucasian Whites!

Mafeje and Southall and others – according to Rigby – refuted the Hamite legend, but it continued as popular mythology in the historiography of East Africa. Cheikh Anta Diop also refuted the mythology of the Hamites, by stating that the claim that the Dinka, the Shiluk, the Nuer or the Maasai had a Caucasian origin was tantamount to claiming that the Greeks were not White! Such claims amount to saying

that any civilized group in Africa has a non-African origin, meaning that the Dinka or the Maasai were different from the 'primitive' masses around them. Indeed, such groups have a very long history in Africa.

This was also a denial of Seligman's school that claims that the pastoral Hamites came in waves of migration from the Caucasus, passing through North Africa and the Nile valley. This school reached such conclusions after the study of the animistic tribes in Nilotic Sudan, and the claim that the intermingling between these superior immigrants and the local Negroes produced the Maasai and the Baganda, and later, the Bahima Nkule, and so on. Such claims – according to Rigby – were passed on by the followers and colleagues of Seligman, such as Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard.

The contribution of Mafeje in challenging the colonial anthropological concepts appeared first in his study on the ideology of tribalism (1972), followed by the study of the ethnography of the region of the Great Lakes (1991). He considered that it was not easy to separate social sciences from ideology, and that had the Africans written their history, the results would have been different. Thus we should look for the motivation behind such writings.

In this connection, Mafeje makes the following analysis, in which he notes that the Western system of concepts leads to the occurrence of the term 'tribalism' in any study, using the colonial European terminology about Africa. Even a century later, European ideology still stuck to the term tribalism to describe African society. The British insisted on the use of the term and their students in East Africa and the South used it after them, despite the fact that the Southerners never used this term, but referred to the 'nation', the 'people' and the 'clan', or sometimes to the 'land' (of the person). Anglo-Saxon anthropology always looked for the pure tribalism that fitted the policy of indirect rule advocated by Lord Lugard, and Sir Donald Cameron. Some anthropologists thought such policies helped conserve social consistency and stability. Later when these anthropologists started studying urban societies, they attributed some folkloric phenomena penetrating urban society, such as dancing of rural origin, as an indication of persistence of tribalism in an

urban context (e.g. Mitchell's study on the dance of the Kalela in the Copper Belt), to evade any reference to social or class distinction in the towns.

When anthropologists started the study of social change, they again referred to tribal resistance to change, rather than its disintegration or loss of stability. Watson even refers to tribal stability in conditions of monetary economy. Here we find a divergence between politicians and anthropologists, the former attributing the failure of attempts at modernization to tribalism, while the latter think tribalism lies behind the success or failure of modernization, as the case may be.

It remains to answer the query whether tribalism may exist without tribes. If we accept the classic definition that 'Tribes are self-sustained groups with little or no external trade', then anthropologists will have to explain whether all African political entities are tribes. What about the large kingdoms such as the Lwabola or the Zulu? Or shall we accept calling them super tribes as some anthropologists do?

Schapiro tried to evade the discrepancy by calling the tribes 'separate political groups' that administer their affairs without foreign intervention... thus the tribe is considered as being above all known forms of human organization. Culture as a criterion of assessing the tribe was only introduced with the advent of modernism, and the contributions of political and social studies (J. C. Mitchell, M.G. Smith).

According to Mafeje, the anthropologists' concept of the tribe, large or small, may be acceptable for pre-colonial societies, where the tribe lived in relative isolation as an entity defined in time and locality, and living a subsistence economy. Such a definition cannot, however, be applied after the intrusion of European colonialism, and their inclusion within the capitalist monetary system and the world market. The new division of labor, and the new modes of production and distribution, gave African societies a radically different basis. Thus it is no more a question of scope, but rather qualitative changes of the social and economic order. One cannot totally deny the role of the tribe in Africa, but we must differentiate between resorting to one's tribe as a token of integrity and self-esteem, and using it as a means to remain in power, in the capital of the modern state, or exploit-

ing one's tribesmen in the context of a modern society.

To simplify Mafeje: tribalism becomes an ideology with no objective existence as claimed. It becomes some sort of false consciousness of the so-called members of the tribe, and an aberration that the elite resorts to while exploiting their 'tribesmen'. It is ideology in the Marxist sense, but also ideology for the Africans who share the Western ideology with their colleagues in the West.

With social change, people often belong to the region rather than the tribe, such as the Transkei in South Africa, or the immigrants in Cape Town. Thus the concept of region comes before that of the tribe, as has the criterion of culture that the British anthropologists ignored because they were isolated from structuralism. In South Africa, Xhosa speakers share a common culture over a very wide region, even though they belong to different political entities. Culture is utilized in South Africa to attain a higher social status, so can we also call this tribalism? Indeed, some still call it tribalism!

Why maintain the concept of tribalism so much in an urban context and a market economy? First, because it helps embroil the nature of the economy, and the power relations between the Africans, and between them and the capitalist world, as the concept of feudalism was used in Latin America to cover up imperialist capitalist relations.

Mafeje introduces the concept of 'Regional Characteristics' in order to facilitate situating the cultural elements in a wider society, as well as understanding the class transformations in that society. He maintains that anthropologists need to use a concept that may be generalized to cover human societies, and that tribalism cannot be such a concept.

In his book on the theory of ethnography (1991), Mafeje states that the first generation of European ethnographers in Africa contributed a considerable body of material that became the classics in the field. He also believes they adopted certain fixed concepts such as the tribe, the clan and the lineage etc. They also resorted to opposing categories for classification such as acephalous states in contrast with centralized ones, patriarchal societies in contrast with matriarchal ones, pastoral versus agricultural socie-

ties, etc. All such classifications were looked down upon with disdain by the British anthropologist Edmund Leach who named such methods 'Butterfly Collecting'. Apart from the clearly organic outlook of the functional structural anthropology, all such classifications are of an empirical and even static nature, trying to crowd various objects into a tight bag. They also create working modes of thinking that lead directly to an ahistoric stand. We note here that in biology, such methods of classification were abandoned for the more dynamic reactions of biochemistry that we meet in all forms of life. In human societies, some social phenomena may seem as various types, but in the last analysis they are found to be different manifestations, or permutations of the same phenomenon, such as types of existence or social classifications. All this makes us wary of falling into the snare of evolutionism or historicism.

Such studies may add to our acquired knowledge, but they have little effect on the classic ideological systems, as they use the same classified categories to reach almost the same results. Moreover, ethnographic description or theorizing is far from their center of attention.

However, such criticism does not by necessity include all historians of African societies. As we find in *Modes of Production in Africa*, edited by D. Grummey and C.C. Stewart (1981), a great effort by the authors to theorize African history. They tried to apply the concepts of historical materialism to the pre-colonial African history, using accepted epistemological concepts and arrays of Marxist concepts such as 'modes of production', 'classes', 'surplus value' and 'capitalist production relations', to explain that history. They made a serious effort to allure English-speaking historians away from their empiricism, without showing a similar will to learn from African ethnography except to extract the greatest amount of historical 'facts' and explain them by pre-accepted standards and classifications.

Mafeje says (1991) that he intentionally tried to evade all such generalizations. He took African ethnography as a standard by which to assess all previous concepts that he did not take for granted. Using such a method, some epistemological hypotheses per se, including Marxism, became subject to doubt, and must be subjected to cultural discussion, as Y. Tandon remarks. Instead of being

swamped by theoretical theses, Mafeje took one fundamental thesis and subjected it to his method of doubt and examination. He applied this system to S. Amin's thesis on the 'Tributary Modes of Production' whose history was different from that of the perspective of European history, and as such must be judged by its own terms.

I agree with Mafeje that the main aim of Mafeje's study was to establish a conceptual formulation of some of the phenomena and social relations in Black Africa, which had been examined in a biased manner by non-Africans for a long time. The aim was to show that most of these concepts were misrepresented to prove the lack of correlation between the universal language of social sciences based on the European historical experience and the local language as understood by the Imperialists.

The problem, as we see it, is the authenticity of social sciences, as some of their texts have no historical context, and in order to grasp them fully we must comprehend their historic context. The point here is not that social formations are governed by the related ethnography, but that the latter explains social classification, and codes of social conduct, and the ideological reproduction. A given social stratum need not behave in a certain manner anywhere in the world. African capitalists may set aside the possibility of doubling the surplus value, for reasons of kinship. In Buganda the proprietor chiefs will gain more value from making political dependants than from squeezing their labour force. To evaluate these development aspirations, all such ideas are relevant and credible, and even objective. We must keep in mind that all local dialects, as well as all languages, can mislead, and what may guide the analyst is the context. When we read local tongues, we do not face an object that is clear per se, and this is exactly the error of both the empiricists and the globalists. The deciphering of the symbol usually means an expert translation of an ambiguous language to make it more lucid. Thus when we insist on comprehension of local dialects, we have no intention of discarding the current scientific social language; rather we insist on a clear understanding of local experience, hence better credibility and objectivity. From the point of view of social theories this implies a thorough process of examination, classification and rearrangement.

Speaking on the liberation of the discipline, Mafeje recalled that among those who showed interest in developing a radical social theory in Africa and anywhere else, Samir Amin occupied a distinguished place. Although he cannot be considered among those who decline details, and go forward to present issues of forgone conclusions, yet he will always be consulted for his critical thinking and seeking out of new ideas. Although such ideas may not always be fundamental, they generally present logical conclusions.

Hence Archie Mafeje does not uphold the idea of the End of Anthropology in order to liquidate an epistemological order, but rather to put in its place a more appropriate alternative to the concept, which, in his opinion, leads to anthropological theorizing of another kind.

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