Against Alterity – The Pursuit of Endogeneity: Breaking Bread with Archie Mafeje

Introduction
The passing away of Professor Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje on 28 March 2007 was a great shock to so many within the African social science community and beyond. At a personal level, it was particularly shocking: Archie, as we fondly refer to him, was to be with us at Rhodes University (Grahamstown-iRhini) for Thandika Mwandire’s D.Litt graduation ceremony and we had worked frantically to finalise Archie’s travel arrangements just the Friday before he died. He was to return to Grahamstown in May for an audio-visual interview that I was to have with him, exploring his biography and scholarship; I had sent him the questions and he was keen on the project. Scholarship is biographical, and it is even more so in Archib’s case. It was going to be a time to break bread with this most engaging of scholars; elegant in thoughts and taste. I had wanted to test out some of my hypotheses regarding the contours of his works and life with him; ‘sort out’ a few nagging issues in his works. Although he had been in poor health for a few years, when we sat down to what turned out to be our last dinner in Pretoria in February 2007, he was in the best shape in which I had seen him since 2002. He had spent December 2006 and January 2007 in the Transkei (South Africa), among family members. He had received herbal treatment, he said, which proved quite helpful. His hands (especially the fingers) were much improved, and he was going back to Mthatha (in the Transkei) by mid-year. Walter Sisulu University in Mthatha had agreed to provide him a place to work and reflect; and he would be able to continue his treatment. I thought we would have him around for many years to come.

All these reflections are anecdotal, and as with anecdotes there will be as many as the number of individuals who encountered Archie. By themselves, they may be of limited intellectual significance. In this instance, it is in the personal that I seek the scholarly. The loss of someone like Archie pushes us to search for meaning that is both deeply personal and intellectual.

Meanings and Encounters
The meaning of Archie Mafeje for three generations of African scholars and social scientists is about encounters. For some it would have been personal, for others it was through his works, and for most in the community the encounter via scholarly works became personal and intimate. And Archie reciprocated more than most. Babatunde Zack-Williams, in an intervention at a February 2006 conference in Pretoria, spoke glowingly regarding the impact that Archie’s ‘The Ideology of Tribalism’ (Mafeje 1971) had on him. Tunde wondered aloud why Archie was absent from a conference in a city of his residence on how to reinvigorate the study of Africa. The impact that Tunde referred to is shared by many, but I missed that by some five years. My encounter was through his ‘The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective’ (Mafeje 1976). I was a first-year undergraduate student at Ibadan, and I had been rummaging through the journal section in the basement of the University of Ibadan Library. I came across a new issue of the Canadian Journal of African Studies and pulled the copy off the shelf. I suspect it was the name Mafeje in the contents page that drew my attention. I had never heard of him, which might be forgiven in a fresh undergraduate. I started nibbling through the article. By the time I got to the third page, I was hooked. I took the journal to the sitting area and buried my head in it. It was so elegantly written, with incredible detailed knowledge of the field and the debates from various parts of the world. His conceptual handle on the debate so rigorous and velvet, it was incredibly exhilarating. While taking no prisoners, he did not mind taking himself a prisoner too. Kathleen Gough had charged Anthropology with being ‘a child of Western Imperialism’ (Gough 1968), which I found delightful. In response, Raymond Firth (Firth 1972) rebuked Gough and others like her; quite the contrary, Firth insisted, Anthropology was a ‘child of Enlightenment’. Mafeje’s response in the 1976 article was: ‘What’s the point of dispute, folks? Imperialism is the child of Enlightenment, anyway.’ It was so elegantly written, with incredibly detailed knowledge of the field and the debates from various parts of the world. His conceptual handle on the debate so rigorous and velvet, it was incredibly exhilarating. While taking no prisoners, he did not mind taking himself a prisoner too. Kathleen Gough had charged Anthropology with being ‘a child of Western Imperialism’ (Gough 1968), which I found delightful. In response, Raymond Firth (Firth 1972) rebuked Gough and others like her; quite the contrary, Firth insisted, Anthropology was a ‘child of Enlightenment’. Mafeje’s response in the 1976 article was: ‘What’s the point of dispute, folks? Imperialism is the child of Enlightenment, anyway.’ It was so detailed and elegantly argued I walked on air for days afterwards.

I was not to meet Archie Mafeje in person until 1992, at the CODESRIA General Assembly in Dakar. It was an incredibly engaging experience, and I got a copy of his Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations (Mafeje 1991). He autographed my copy with the words: With pleasant memories after a most vigorous encounter with the irreverent but a wel-
come sense of rebellion – Dakar 15/2/92. The ‘irreverence’ was around the debate we kicked off at the assembly on ‘icons’. I had argued that a viable intellectual community develops around iconic individuals, events and/or ideas. I told Archie that we won’t act like the Orthodox Church; we won’t polish our icons and put them on a pedestal. When we disagree with them, ‘we will kick their butts’. He was quite tickled by it. Jibrin Ibrahim would later take a dip at being Iconoclastic in an article, ‘History as Iconoclast: Left Stardom and the Debate on Democracy’ (Ibrahim 1993). The problem is when you denote Issa Shivji for ‘manichean vituperations’, as Jibrin did, you should expect to have your feathers plucked; and plucked his feathers were. The ‘icons’ were not going to roll over and die or rock in their chairs watching the sun set (Amin 1993; Mafeje 1993). Even so, Archie and Samir were as gentle as one could expect of them in the circumstances. Issa stayed out of it. Archie’s focus was on conceptual rigour as a prelude to political action as well as empirical misrepresentations of what the iconic ‘Left stars’ did or did not do. He probably thought Jibrin was mistaken but not an ‘enemy’.

My take on the idea of ‘icon’ and iconic ideas was quite different from Jibrin’s. It was about constructing our intellectual community rooted in ideas firmly grounded in our conditions and drawing critical scholarly inspirations from those who went before; not in squeamish adulation but critical engagement. But to return to Archie, the Theory and Ethnography of African Social Formations is another example of what M Ahmad M amdani called Archie’s ‘artesan’ approach to intellectual work: painstaking and rigorously argued.

The 1992 encounter speaks to what many people confuse as intellectual arrogance and a gladiatorial stance in Archie Mafeje. He demanded of you a rigorous engagement with your field, extensive depth of knowledge, and knowing your onions inside out. But even the most brilliant mind is not infallible; Archie knew that. He lived on rigorous intellectual engagements and a willingness to engage with you if you thought he had not finely tuned his ideas. But ideas were not just esoteric things for their own sake. They are important because they mean so much one way or another to the lives of millions on our continent. That is why he comes across as fierce on ‘dangerous’ ideas – as in his contentions against Ali Mazrui – or those who dissent on the epistemology of alterity (Mafeje 1997b:5). It would equally explain why he chose not to have a public spat with Ruth First after her response (First 1978) to his article on the Soweto Uprising (Mafeje 1978b). Ruth First was a comrade even though they inhabited different points in the anti-Apartheid struggle.

Against Alterity

If there is a common thread tying all of Archie Mafeje’s professional writings, as distinct from his more political writings, it will be the relentless contestation of the epistemology of alterity and the pursuit of endogeneity. Endogeneity, in this specific case, refers to an intellectual standpoint derived from a rootedness in African conditions; a centring of African ontological discourses and experiences as the basis of one’s intellectual work. ‘To evolve lasting meanings’, Mafeje (2000:66) noted, ‘we must be “rooted” in something. Central to endogeneity is averting what Hountondji (1990) referred to as “extroversion”. In spite of the claims of being nomothetic in aspiration, social analysis is deeply idiographic. Those who exercise undue anxiety about being “cosmopolitan” or universalist fail to grasp this about much of what is considered nomothetic in the dominant strands of Western “theories”. All knowledge is first local: “universal knowledge” can only exist in contradiction (Mafeje 2000:67). It is precisely because Max Weber spoke distinctly to the European context of his time, as Michel Foucault did for his that guaranteed the efficacy of their discourses. ‘If what we say and do has relevance for our humanity, its international relevance is guaranteed’ (Mafeje 2000:67). In this paper, I will limit my focus to this aspect of Mafeje’s works. While ‘The Ideology of “Tribalism”’ is often cited as the launching of Mafeje’s attack on alterity, the drive for the centring of the African ‘self-knowing’ is evident in Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township (Wilson and Mafeje 1963), co-published with Monica Wilson, his supervisor at the University of Cape Town. The preference for the research subjects’ own self-definition – e.g., ‘homeboys’ rather than ‘tribesmen’ – in the book preaged his 1971 paper. A similar mode of writing, which proceeds from the subject’s perspective, is evident in two of his other works published in the 1960s: ‘The Chief Visits Town’ (Mafeje 1963) and ‘The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community’ (Mafeje 1967). However, in contrast to the muted negation of alterity in these earlier works, ‘The Ideology of “Tribalism”’ was a more self-conscious critique of the continued use of ‘tribe’ and ‘tribalism’.

While Mafeje’s paper was not new or alone in contesting the concept of ‘tribe’ and ‘tribalism’ – cf. Vilakazi (1965), Mgabaza’s 1968 paper (republished in 2000:1–26) and Onoge’s 1971 paper (published 1977) – that much Mafeje (1971:260–1) himself specifically mentioned. Nonetheless, Mafeje’s intervention was a focused ‘deconstruction’ (Mafeje 1996, 2001) of the categories on conceptual and empirical grounds. Empirically, Mafeje argued, the word ‘tribe’ did not exist in any of the indigenous South African languages – or, to the best of my knowledge, any that I know. Conceptually, those deploying the concept are unable to sustain it on the basis of their own definitions of tribe(s) (hence tribalism). It is a method of critique that defines Mafeje’s scholarship, anchored on conceptual rigour or its absence.

‘Classical anthropology’, Mafeje noted (quoting Fortes’ and Evans-Pritchard’s 1940 African Political Systems) defined tribes as ‘self-contained, autonomous communities practicing subsistence economy with no or limited external trade’ (Mafeje 1971:257). Others (citing Schapera’s 1956 Government and Politics in Tribal Societies) would define tribes as a group of people who claim ‘exclusive rights to a given territory’ and manage its affairs independently of external control (Mafeje 1971:257). In this sense, tribes are defined by subsistence economy, territoriality and rule by chiefs and/or elders. Anthropologists and others who persisted in using ‘tribe’ and ‘tribalism’ as their framework for analysing Africa were violating their own rules. Territorial boundedness, political and economic isolation, and subsistence economy no longer apply under the conditions of colonialism. To argue, as Gulliver did (in the 1969 edited volume Tradition and Transition in East Africa) that they continue to use ‘tribe’ not out of ‘defiance’ but because Africans themselves use it when speaking in English (Mafeje 1971:253–4) would be woolly-
Kalela Dance cited Mitchell’s 1956 monograph, occupational and class identities. Mafeje be at work than ‘tribal’ identity, including curing ‘a more comfortable place’ is no called ‘cultural links’) is deployed in se-
portantly, that cultural affinity (what he 1971:259, emphasis in original). More im-
categories might have been valid once, deploying the categories. It is this invari-
side the ‘tribal homelands’ persisted in Africa. In spite of these, anthropologists
the colonial encounter ended the territo-
Mafeje argued, but not any more because 
for Africans themselves to speak of their
grounded. The Germanic tribal Other is im-
Community of people a ‘tribe’, another a
Bantu speakers’ as is linguistically
affected by the experiences of the political and economic) and territo-
tion’ (political and economic) and territo-
Bantu group – itself a ‘sub-family of the Niger–Congo phylum’7 – labelling the lan-
guages as ‘Bantu’ – labelling the lan-
guages as ‘Bantu’ as well, had similar effect.

Much in the same way that M agubane’s vigorous critique of the M anchester School (M agubane 1971) was liberating for many African students studying Anthropol ogy or Sociology in the United States at the time, M afje’s paper, of the same year, had similar edifying effects on the same cohort of African students studying in the UK or Ang lophone Africa, as Zack-Williams has noted.6

M afje pursued his line of thought at the expense of conceding that the category might have been valid at an earlier time (M afje 1971:258). Not only does Anthro-
pology deal with its objects of inquiry outside history, it is ill equipped to address the issues of history. The ‘isola-
tion’ (political and economic) and territo-
M afje’s reference group, the A ma X hosa; they were never organised under a single political unit even when found in the same region. This is a theme M afje returned to in his 1991 book in the case of the Great Lake Region of East Africa. In spite of these, anthropologists who studied sociational dynamics out-
the ‘tribal homelands’ persisted in deploy-
ing the categories. It is this invariant commitment to the categories that M afje called ‘tribal ideology’ or the ‘ideology of tribalism’. It was no longer scholar-
idealistic. The new army of political scientists troup ing into Africa in the periods immediately before and after ‘independence’ would go on to deploy the same mode of writing and thinking. If the anthropolo-
the ‘tribes’ is higher raison d’être the Afri-canist political scientist had no such excuse (M afje 1971:257). The result is that similar phenomena in other parts of the world are ‘explained’ differently – with ‘tribe’ or primitivity being Africa’s explanatory category. The tribal categories are used simultaneously to explain ‘pattern maintenance and persistence’ and the failure of ‘modernity’!

Negation of Negation: Mafeje on Anthropology

Mafeje’s (2000) Africanaity: A Combative Ontology is perhaps his most eloquent and elegant enunciation of the twinned agenda of the ‘determined negation of negation’ (ibid., p.66) and the pursuit of endogeneity. The former requires an uncompromising refutation of the epistemology of alterity that has shaped modes of gazing and writing about Africa and Africans. Such negation of alterity is the begin-
ing of the journey to affirmation: a method of scholarship rooted in the collective Self and speaking to it without the anxiety regarding what the western Other has to say or think about us. In its specific sense, the two write-ups (2001, M afje 2000) were in reaction to the ‘cosmopolitan’ anxieties of the postmodern monologue that A chille M mbembe sought to foist on the CODESRIA community. The
year 2000 marked the reappropriation of the institution from the intellectual misuse to which it had been subjected. Mafeje’s pieces were an ode to a recovered patriarchy. However, Mafeje’s determination of negation goes back much further, and its object was the discipline of Anthropology as the epitome of alterity.

‘The Problem of Anthropology…’ (Mafeje 1976) was an intervention in the debates between different factions of anthropologists: on the one hand, the new generation of anthropologists with a radical orientation, and on the other, an older generation of ‘mainstream’ anthropologists. Kathleen Gough represented the former and Raymond Firth, the latter. While Mafeje mentioned M agubane (1968) as one of the new generation repudiating mainstream Anthropology, M agubane was never an anthropologist; he trained at the University of Natal as a sociologist.

As mentioned earlier, ‘The Problem of Anthropology…’ was elegantly written – in the best tradition of Mafeje’s scholarship. Elegant erudition aside, Mafeje’s contention was that Anthropology had passed its ‘sell-by’ date, and it was time to move on to something different. Among the social sciences, Mafeje argued, ‘anthropology is the only discipline which is specifically associated with colonialism and dissociated with metropolitan societies’ (1976:317). The alterity associated with Anthropology is not accidental or temporal; it is immanent. If, as Raymond Firth (1972) claimed, Anthropology is the legitimate child of Enlightenment, the leading intellectuals of the Enlightenment, unlike latter-day anthropologists, were preoccupied with accounting for the moral, genetic and historical unity of mankind and had little regard for exotic customs (Mafeje 1976:310). However, insofar as the scholarship of the Enlightenment sought to make its own anthropological viewpoint universal (ibid.), it inspired a civilising mission in relation to non-European peoples – a pseudonym for pillage and imperialism. Anthropology, as a discipline, is rooted in this venture; it is in this sense that, contrary to Firth’s claim, Anthropology is a child of imperialism, and a foster-child (if not grandchild) of Enlightenment. English socialists like Beatrice Webb, for instance, did not think it strange to talk of East Asians as savages (Chang 2008); Christian missionaries took such labelling for granted: a pervasive conception of Africa and Africans that has received a renewed impetus. Anthropology is one discipline founded on such inferior othering of its ‘objects’ of study.

Unlike Gough and others who sought to reform Anthropology, Mafeje’s contention is that epistemic othering is so immanent to Anthropology as to be its raison d’être. The point is not to reform it but to extrapate it. Mafeje uses ‘anthropology’ in at least two senses: anthropology as a conceptual concern with ontological discourses (Mafeje 1997a:7), and Anthropology as an epistemology of alterity. While Mafeje associates the latter with the discipline, it is equally as much a mode of thinking and writing that considers the ‘object’ as the inferior or the exotic Other. It is the latter that one would classify as the ‘anthropologised’ reasoning about Africa – a discursive mode that persists and what I consider the curse of Anthropology in the study of Africa. As a discipline, however, Mafeje was careful to distinguish between the works of Colonial Anthropology (most emblematic of British Anthropology) and works of practitioners such as Maurice Godelier and Claude Mellasou. The former is more foundationally associated with Anthropology as a study of ‘primitive’ societies (Mafeje 1997a:6); the latter, Mafeje insisted, must be taken seriously: ‘their deep idiographic knowledge, far from diminishing their capacity to produce nomothetic propositions, has helped them to generate new concepts’ (Mafeje 1991:10:13). They approached the African societies on their own terms – without alterity.

Anthropologists may claim they are no longer concerned with ‘tribes’ but alterity remains their raison d’être. The study of the exotic Other is only a dimension of alterity; often the less-than-equal Other. As an undergraduate, I had the good fortune of studying in a university that insisted from the early 1960s to eliminate Anthropology. Even so, my first-year teachers included social anthropologists who came with Anthropology’s mode of native gazing, which struck me then as the Sociology of the primitive Other. It was probably the reason why Mafeje’s ‘The Problem of Anthropology…’ resonated so much with me when I first read it. The claims by contemporary anthropologists that they are committed to the wellbeing of their research subjects or that field method defines their discipline are rather lame. Even the most racist colonial anthropologists made similar claims of adhesion to ‘their tribes’. We will address this further later in this paper.

Further, ethnography is no more unique to Anthropology than quantitative method is to Economics. The methodological opaqueness of the anthropologist’s ‘fieldmethod’ quite easily gives way to methodological licence. Since the function of anthropologists is to explain exotic, foreign cultures, and strange customs to their compatriots, methodological licence and the erroneous coding of the ‘objects’ of Anthropology are taking on the same instrumentalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century’s new age of Empire as applied Anthropology did under colonialism. Closely associated with the epistemology of alterity is erasure, which becomes distinctly imperial at inter-personal levels; and those attempting erasure tend to employ derision and intellectual bullying.

In response to Mafeje’s (Mafeje 1996, 1997b) critical review of Sally M ore’s book (M ore 1996: 22), M ore sought to deride his claim that he might have prevailed on Monica Wilson not to use the tribal categories in Langa (Mafeje 1997b:12). M ore’s response was that while Mafeje might have been responsible for the fieldwork, Wilson produced the manuscript, an assertion that hardly reflects well on her own understanding of the process of producing a manuscript. Authorship, if that is what this concerns on Monica Wilson, does not mean exclusivity of even the most seminal ideas in a manuscript. Significantly, M ore confused ‘detribalisation’ used earlier by the Wilsons for a rejection of the category of the tribe or ‘tribalism’. Conversely, M ore failed to account for the recurrence of this rejection of alterity in two other publications by Mafeje (Mafeje 1963, 1967) in the same period. She might simply never have bothered to read them.

In response to Mafeje’s observation that she failed to account for the works of African scholars in her book with the lone exception of Valention M udimbe, a distinct form of erasure, Sally M ore’s response was twofold. First, that she left out the works of African scholars like M agubane and Mafeje because she concentrated on books and monographs not journal articles (M ore 1996:22). Second, that she cited many more other African scholars. On both accounts, she was less than candid. The sources she used are profuse with journal articles – German, French,
English, etc. (Moore 1994:135–60). Several of these are American anthropology journals, including *Current Anthropology* in which M agubane’s piece appeared. It is difficult to imagine that Moore was unaware of M agubane’s 1971 paper at the time it was published given the uproar it generated and her seniority – she was Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Southern California at the time.

On the second charge, Moore’s response was that she did nothing of the sort and listed several African scholars she claimed she cited. Other than M udimbe, she engaged with none of the others. When she did, if one can call it engagement, they were part of general citation rather than an engagement with their ideas. The two references to O nwuka Dike (Moore 1994:11, 15) were from his obituary on Melville Herskovits. You would hardly know that Dike founded the famous Ibadan School of History. The references to K enyatta were either incidental to Moore’s discussion of Malinowski or an oblique reference to Africanists publishing ‘ethnographic monographs of their own peoples’ or ‘emigration’ (Moore 1994:32–3). In the latter, K enyatta was part of five Africanists group together, but the reader will have no idea what exactly they wrote. The reference to Paulin H omitondji was second-hand, and part of an African intellectual who ‘rail against what they see as the misreading of outsiders’ (Moore 1994:84); hardly an evidence of intellectual courtesy.

The only African scholar she discussed with any degree of ‘seriousness’ was Valentin M udimbe, and even so, it was in a remarkably derisive and imperial manner. She referred to him as ‘a Zairean who lives in the United States’, like he did not belong. M udimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* was dismissed as ‘complex, indigestible, and highly opinionated’ (Moore 1994:84), without any apparent awareness that to label someone opinionated is to be opinionated. If one were to look for the enduring tendency to treat Africans and their intellectuals as children one need go no further than read Moore. She would make similarly condescending remarks about M afje in a later article (Moore 1998), labelling his work as driven by ‘polemic strategy’, ‘noises’, ‘diatribe’, etc. As before, Moore failed to engage with a range of M afje’s works or even the ‘Anthropology and Independent Af-
Anthropology was born of a European intellectual division of labour. When they stayed home and studied their own people, they did Sociology; when they went abroad to study other people, ate strange food and learnt strange customs and languages, they did Anthropology (A desina 2006). The idea of a ‘native anthropologist’, as Onoge noted, is a contradiction. In spite of protestations to the contrary, Anthropology is still more oriented towards the study of the ‘exotic Other’ than not. When they write about their own wards the study of the ‘exotic Other’ than Anthropology is still more oriented to- gist’, as Onoge noted, is a contradiction. Anthropology was born of a European repudiation of ‘disciplines’ in the social discussed at the planned interview are his with Mafeje about and would have dis- However, two issues that I have argued against Disciplinarity and other words, move over to doing Sociology. In earlier works, such as his review of Harold Wolpe’s On the Articulation of Modes of Production, Mafeje (1981) demonstrated such profundity as an inter-locutor, decoding the local ‘vernacular’. A dded to this was a more conceptually rigorous handle on what Etienne Balibar meant by ‘social formation’ and why Wolpe’s idea of ‘articulation’ is a misread-ing his trainings in Biology, Sociology, Social Anthropology, Philosophy and Economics rather their absence. Mafeje’s rejection of ‘epistemology’ is rooted in his aversion for dogmatism, but that is hardly the same as epistemology, which as any dictionary will attest is ‘the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity’. The study of specific epistemic standpoints - from positivism to Marxism and postmodernism - is the business of epistemology. The crisis of dogmatic adhesion to an epistemic standpoint can hardly be construed as a crisis of epistemology. Postmodernism’s pretension to being against grand narratives ended up erecting a grand narrative of its own. What it had to say that was brilliant was not new, and what was new was not brill-iant. We deconstruct postmodernism’s deconstructionist claims precisely from the standpoint of epistemology - accounting for a paradigm’s presupposi-tions, foundations, claims to knowledge production, extent and validity, as the di-cionary says.

Against Disciplinarity and Epistemology?

However, two issues that I have argued with Mafeje about and would have dis-cussed at the planned interview are his repudiation of ‘disciplines’ in the social sciences and ‘epistemology’. Given his ill-health in the four years before his death, I thought it would be taking undue ad-vantage of his health condition to raise these issues on the pages of the CODESRIA Bulletin. In an intellectual appreciation such as this one these concerns are worth flagging. Mafeje’s rejection of disciplines, I suspect, derives from his recognition that to develop a robust analysis of any social phenomenon you need the analytical skill drawn from a divers-ity of disciplines. Nevertheless, to reject disciplinarity on such grounds is to confuse issues of pedagogy with those of research. While knowledge production is inherently inter-disciplinary, inter-disciplinarity works because each disci-pline brings its strength to the table of knowledge production. We address the broad scope of knowledge essential to rigorous analysis by offering ‘liberal arts education’, but in the context of discipli-nary anchor. From the point of pedagogy, transdisciplinarity is a recipe for epistemic disaster: you end up with people who are neither conceptually rigorous nor meth-odologically proficient. They are more likely to regurgitate than be profound. Mafeje’s own profundity comes from fusing his trainings in Biology, Sociology, Social Anthropology, Philosophy and Economics rather their absence.

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The Pursuit of Endogeneity

Right from the start of his intellectual ca-areer, Mafeje’s rejection of alterity was not simply a matter of rebellion; it was imme-diately about affirmation. It is instructive, for instance, that not one of those who purported to contend with him in the ASR ‘debate’ showed an awareness of anything Mafeje wrote before 1991. As mentioned earlier, the idea of endogeneity is about scholarship ‘derived from within’, and that is not simply a matter of ethnography. Rather than works of anthropolo-gy, Mafeje’s sole-authored works in the 1960s (Mafeje 1963, 1967) are works of profound ‘endogeny’. They reflect a strong sociological mindset, combining fine field-craft with analytical rigour. For instance, Mafeje located the imbongi or bard in a comparative context. Mafeje (1967:195): he drew comparison with the Celtic bards; an immediate extirpation of alterity that would have marked the imbongi as a ‘praise singer’ of a primitive culture. He demonstrated their role as social critics who can be withering in their poetic social commentaries. Rather than ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal’ Mafeje used the categor-ies of ‘South African bard’ and ‘South African traditional bards’. The profundity of The Theory and Ethno-graphy of an African Social Forma-tion - apart from its artisanal nature and conceptual rigour - derives from Mafeje’s effort to understand the interlacustrine kingdoms on their own terms - from within and without the burden of fitting them into particular ‘universalist’ typologies. In the process all manner of intellectual totems were overturned. I sus-pect that this is what Mafeje meant by his rejection of ‘epistemology’: the freedom to allow the data to speak to the writer rather than imposing paradigms on them. What such scholarship calls for are authent-ic interlocutors able to decode local ‘vernaculars’: the encoded local ontology and modes of comprehension (Mafeje 1991:9-10; 2000:66, 68). Mafeje argued that this is what distinguished Olufemi Táwó’s account of the Yoruba from those of Henry Louis Gate and K wesí Prah’s interlocution of the A kan codes from Anthony K warne Appiah’s. This capacity, as oth-ers have demonstrated, does not come simply from being ‘a native’ (Amadiume 1987; Nzegwu 2005; Ofú wi umi 1997); it re-quires endogeneity; it requires being authent-ic interlocutors. The result in the case of the latter has been seminal contribu-tions to African gender scholarship without the anxiety of wanting to be cos-mopolitan. The same applies to the diverse African schools of History. In earlier works, such as his review of Harold Wolpe’s On the Articulation of Modes of Production, Mafeje (1981) demonstrated such profundity as an inter-locutor, decoding the local ‘vernacular’. A dded to this was a more conceptually rigorous handle on what Etienne Balibar meant by ‘social formation’ and why Wolpe’s idea of ‘articulation’ is a misread-ing of Balibar. Similar capacity is evident in his ‘Beyond Dual Theories of Eco-nomic Growth’ (Mafeje 1978a:47-73). The village (‘traditional’ economy) is intri-cately linked to the ‘modern’ economy of the cities. Some thirty years after Mafeje’s critique of the ‘dual economy’ thesis, the debate on ‘two economies’ is going on in South Africa without as much as an ac-knowledgment of his contribution on these areas. Similarly, the collection of
essays in a special issue of *Africana*, concerned with a critique of the ‘two economies’ discourse in South Africa and Wolpe’s articulation of modes of production’ as the basis of some of such critiques, did not contain a single reference to Mafé’s works in these areas.

For Mafé:

A frocentricism is nothing more than a legitimate demand that Africans study their society from inside and cease to be purveyors of an alienated intellectual discourse... when Africans speak for themselves and about themselves, the world will hear the authentic voice, and will be forced to come to terms with it in the long-run... if we are adequately A frocentric the international implications will not be lost on the others. (2000:66–7)

The resulting product may well lead to polycentrism rather than homogeneity/homogenisation... mutual awareness does not breed universalism’ (Mafé 2000:67).

**A Return to Intimacy**

**Archie, Bitter?**

Let me end by returning to the personal. One of the things I have heard said about Archie – apart from the tendency to describe his style of writing as ‘gladiatorial’ – is that he was in the end a bitter man. The same ‘Mafé scholar’ would claim that he never transcended his being defined as a victim of institutionalised racism. Hours before, we had dined at his preferred restaurant in Arcadia, Pretoria and we had engaged in the usual vigorous discussion of a range of issues. He won a few, but got his white wine wrong! Why would he suddenly go mute on me? The interview was not on record – there were no tapes; there was no reason why this most passionate of intellectuals should suddenly grow reticent. It was one of the ideas that I wanted to explore before we got to the formal, recorded, interviews.

Second, there is independent evidence of such absence of bitterness. A few years after the 1968 incident, Archie collaborated with others in a collection of essays in honour of Monica Wilson (Mafé 1975). Michael Whisson was a co-editor of the volume. Finally, when in February 2007 he raised the issue of his intellectual isolation over an intimate dinner, at his favourite restaurant in Waterkloof, Pretoria, it was about the disparity in the relative intimacy he enjoyed with the CODESRIA community and his intellectual isolation in South Africa: it was about his returning home to exile, not UCT, and it was expressed more in sadness than bitterness.

What did Archie have to say for his rejection of the honorary degree? The university’s manner of making amends should not be simply about him. In the absence of an acknowledgment of the injustice done to all people of colour who went through the university, as staff or students during the period of apartheid, accepting the honorary degree would be to individualise what is owed a wider collective. At the individual level, an acknowledgment of what is being atoned ought to precede the award, rather than an oblique assumption that it was, ipso facto, an act of atonement. Rather than bitterness, Archie’s rejection was based on principle; it was a decision that took him long and was hard to reach. A formal apology was sent posthumously to the Mafé family in South Africa – in a letter dated 5 April 2007 from Professor Njabulo S. Ndebele, the university’s vice chancellor.

**Generous and Loyal**

Archie was as gentle as he was vigorous in debate. Over dinner, with a glass of red wine and steak in tow, he was a ‘master craftsman’, but you need to listen carefully because of his constant reflexivity and the subtlety and nuanced nature of his discourse. Such reflexivity dots his works: a capacity to argue with and dismiss some of his earlier writings (see for instance, Mafé 1971, 1978a, 2000, 2001). Many of us who have had the privilege of this encounter will attest to how much of his ideas have shaped our scholarship; but that was because he did not expect you to treat him as an oracle. Listen, but engage with equal vigour. The age difference between you and him counted for nothing: he considered you an intellectual colleague, and if you are a comrade, he took you even more seriously and demanded more of you. In his last few years he nibbled at his food rather than ate heartily; the discussions you had seemed to fill him more than the food.

Archie was a man of immense generosity of spirit and loyalty. I would arrive in his apartment outside Pretoria to find that he had neatly made the bed for me in the guest room, with clean towels and toiletries neatly laid out. After a long evening of dining out – and he dined like a Bedouin – he would engage you in discussions into the early hours of the morning: never about trivial matters. He would worry whether you were fine, if you needed coffee or tea. It would be a delight if you shared a glass of red wine, but that was because he did not expect you to treat him as an oracle. Listen, but engage with equal vigour. The age difference between you and him counted for nothing: he considered you an intellectual colleague, and if you are a comrade, he took you even more seriously and demanded more of you. In his last few years he nibbled at his food rather than ate heartily; the discussions you had seemed to fill him more than the food.
natural causes - he died of intellectual neglect and isolation. In spite of the enor-
mous love of his family and loyal, life-
long friends, Archie's oxygen was vigor-
ous intellectual engagement. He lived on
serious, rigorous and relevant scholarship.
Starved of that, he simply withered. A fler
four decades in exile, he returned home
in 2002 to exile. Yet the gradual dissipation
of our intangible intellectual heritage in
South Africa by our failure to nurture the
heritage we have in people like him is not
limited to him. The twenty-fifth anniver-
sary of Ruth First's assassination in
Matuso passed in August 2007 with few
national acknowledgments. This I find
confounding. If Archie's passing away
forces us to rethink how we engage with
this heritage we might as yet salvage
something for a new generation that des-
perately needs intellectual role models,
not just business tycoons.

Lessons of Mafeje's Scholarship:
Concluding Remarks

The lessons that a new generation of Af-

rican scholars can take from Mafeje’s

scholarship are many. I will mention four:

1. Deep familiarity with the literature and

subject;

2. writing;

3. Immense theoretical rigour; and

4. An unapologetic and relentless commit-

ment to Africa.

Over time, Mafeje moved from being
proto-Trotskyite (in the tradition of South
African Non-European Unity Movement)
to being Afrocentric, but these were simply
the scaffolding for deep social commit-
mnt, noteworthy is that a rejection of
dogmatism did not result in eclecticism in
Mafeje’s hands. You cannot walk away
from any of his papers without being
struck by his voracious intellectual appe-
tite and deep familiarity with his field, even
when he moved into new fields. He took
the field craft seriously and was ‘artisanal’
in connecting the dots. But more signifi-
cantly, his prodigious intellect was imme-
diately grounded in addressing real-life
problems; scholarship (however pro-
found) must find its relevance in engage-
ment. Mafeje’s works on agrarian and
land issues, development studies, democ-

racy and governance, liberation scholar-
ship, African epistemic standpoints, etc.,

constantly challenged and prodded a new
generation to think large and engage in
issues around us. The policy implications
are enormous. He was uncompromising
in demanding that Africans must insist
on their own space; be completely una-
bashed in rejecting every form of domi-
nation. But averting alterity is not about
being marooned on the tip of criticism; it
must move from negation to affirmation.

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Notes
1. Jimi O. Adesina is Professor of Sociology at Rhodes University, South Africa. He is engaged in a research project that explores the works of Archie Mafeje and Bernard Magubane, under the rubrics of Exile, Endogeneity and Modern Sociology in South Africa.

2. Quoting Mao Zedong via Kwesi K. Prah.

3. The shift from first-name term of endearment to formal academic reference is also because while the earlier part is personal, this and the following sections are more concerned with breaking academic bread with a progenitor.

4. Much of the claims of taking on Mafeje, especially Sally Moore's, failed to acknowledge this; see further on this later in this paper.

5. J.C. Mitchell, The Kalela Dance (Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 27, Lusaka, 1956);


6. See the comments of the African reviewers to whom Magubane's paper was sent by the editor of Current Anthropology: Onoge, who met Magubane in the US, described him as the most exciting African sociologist of the time (Onoge 1977 [1971]).


8. Tiyambze Zeleza has documented his own experience of the silencing of alternative voices to Mmbembe's monologue. The institutional dimensions drove CODESRIA to the precipice of extinction. For the relentless protection of our patrimony, generations of African social scientists will owe Mahmood Mamdani, the CODESRIA President at the time, a world of gratitude.

9. This distinction is, of course, relative. Kathleen Gough was born in 1925 while Raymond Firth in 1901. The distinction is more one of relative accretion to classical anthropology.


11. The similarity included the mode of self-appointment, being arbiter and conveyor of public opinion, etc. In this Mafeje registered a disagreement with the claim by the eminent linguist, A.C. Jordan, that the imbongi has no parallel in Western poetry. In the same breath Mafeje pointed to the non-hereditary nature of the imbongi in contrast with the European bards.

12. See Toin Falola's (2000) collection of J.F. Ade Ajayi's papers for insights into the methodological and epistemological issues that shaped the Ibadan School of History. Onwuka Dike was the founder and inspiration of the school.

13. Volume 37, Number 2, 2007. Africamus is a journal of Development Studies published by the UNISA (University of South Africa) Press.

14. My appreciation to Thandika Mkhandawire, an enduring mwalimu, in this regard.