Some Comments on the Mafeje–Moore Debate*

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Several issues from the Mafeje-Moore debate in *CODESRIA Bulletin* nos. 2 and 3 (1996). One relates to the place of African scholars in African studies as conceived in the West. Second, concerns the unending emphasis by African scholars on colonial period anthropology in Africa. Last is the general question of historical process in anthropology studies on Africa.

The Mafeje-Moore debate must be seen in the light of the discussion on the role and relevance of Africanists in African studies today. The central thrust of Mafeje' s argument (1996) is that Western scholarship has always neglected or discriminated against contributions by African scholars to African studies. He illustrates this discrimination by putting his experience at the centre of the critique of Sally Moore' s book on Anthropology in Africa. He opines that this omission leaves her book lacking important perspectives of anthropology and Africa which totters her analysis.

Moore on the other hand finds Mafeje' s personalizing of the critique a mere ' wish to relive the glory of their youth when they protested the anthropology of the colonial era in the Oxbridge seminar of the late 1960s' (1996:22). Her response scats from the pertinent issue of the place of the African scholar *vis-à-vis* Africanist scholars in the production of anthropological knowledge on Africa. She does not respond to the important issue of the role African scholars play in transforming the study of anthropology in Africa and the discipline at large. Instead she points out a few Africans like Kenyatta, Dike, Busia etc. to illustrate that she did not neglect them. Moore has no worry parading Kenyatta and Dike as anthropologists. She does not inform readers that she referred to them only in relation to Africanist i.e. Dike is quoted on what he says about Herskovits while Kenyatta appears only as a student of Malinowski (see Moore 1993). Furthermore they appear only in the footnotes. Yet these names were meant to show that Mafeje' s critique was ill-conceived and in bad taste.

Sally Moore' s book on Anthropology and Africa emerged from a chapter that appeared in Bates, et al. (1993). The stated aim of this book, says Zeleza (1994:181): ' Is to provide a defence for the study of Africa, not on its own terms, but to promote the marketability of Africanists…' To achieve this objective, Africans are treated as mere objects of study while Africanist scholarship remains business as usual. Thus, these Africanist contributors have no qualms about the relevance of African scholars in scholarship. The realities of Africa and African contributions to issues of disciplinary transformation and social justice are considered of no value. In a sense, that is why in Moore' s rejoinder, her only reply to the omission of African anthropologists is that she had to ' make choices' (1996:22) a right which she reserves and which nobody denies her. However, in the process of making choices, she denies others the right of understanding their self-reflections. The fact of making choices is not contestable, but which choices, why and for who?

What is evident is that the Western perception of Africa influenced Moore' s disproportionate emphasis on Western texts which were suitable for cementing her argument. By dismissing the colonial anthropology theme, Moore achieves the aim of not saying what she intends to mean. Colonial anthropology has a lot of relevance for anthropology and Africa even today. This is where many African scholars deserve a fair hearing. Do the likes of P' Bitek (1970), Mafeje (1971) and Magubane (1971) deserve any place in this? Or are the words ' inventive vituperations' fair and adequate summaries of their long-term labour of debunking Eurocentric and racist notions of Africa by Anthropologists? It makes one wonder what happened to Sally Moore' s sense of sober judgment and uninsulting commitment to scholarship (p. 23).

It is true as Mamdani (1995:609) puts it that: ' I have always taken it for granted that, should I want to study North American society, I would approach it through its own intelligentsia, through their writing, their self-reflection' . This is not so for Africanist scholars who seem to believe that African scholars have no ability of self-reflection and identification. They hold that studies by Africans suffer certain defects. This has become a very critical issue in the attempts by African scholars to publish their views on Africa. Recently Hyden (1996:5) bluntly put it that:

> Africans wishing to publish with European and North American companies often run into difficulties because their manuscripts have usually not gone through the same rigorous peer scrutiny and advising as the case is with those submitted by scholars based in these countries.

This of course is an untenable and discriminatory excuse that cannot effectively stand fair judgment. What is true is that often, African scholars have been forced to include Africanist texts in their bibliographies (Yankah 1995) while on occasions they have been denied journal space on the pretext that their sources are old and outdated. On other occasions, editorial double-standards have worked to effectively shut out most Africans, from publishing. Such was the case with the *Journal of African History* until Nigerian scholars decided to boycott it en masse (Johnson 1995). The consequence of all these is that most African scholars are unable to publish thereby giving Africanists disproportionate say on things African. Does this say something about Moore' s choices?

There is therefore no justifiable and fair reason why Sally Moore could state that her choices are representative of anthropological scholarship in Africa. African scholars are the main doors to understanding anthropology in and on Africa. They are significant to the transformations in anthropology as a discipline. Thus it was important that their reflections and personal experience be put at the centre of any discussion on Africa. Many of these early African scholars like Mafeje had intriguing experience in Western academies of learning which provide extensive corpus of testimony for upcoming scholars

in Africa and African studies in general. We therefore draw a lot of inspiration from their experiences which help shape future scholarship in Africa. Sally Moore may not be in position to benefit from their exposition.

Western scholars, perhaps with the exception of those who have gone beyond the short-lived participant anthropologists' tenure in Africa, perform Western studies of Africa for Euro-American audiences. New evidence suggests that most of them have a general dislike for fieldwork in Africa (Hyden 1996:4). For instance, forty per cent of British African historians had not visited Africa since 1983 (McCracken 1993:243). Instead they depend on official documents which give official and distorted versions of African realities. Such presentations must necessarily be counter-checked by African realities and African scholars are in the best position to provide this data. That is one reason why no effective study of Africa can avoid African scholars and Africans in Africa.

Secondly, Sally Moore mentions five critical debates current in anthropology today (1996:21). She uses them to demonstrate that anthropology as a discipline is up and alive in Africa. It was Mafeje' s contention that: ' there is no observable theoretical framework at the moment which characterizes anthropology as a discipline…' (1996:9). Moore found Mafeje' s emphasis on ' colonial mentality argument' reductionist and wrong. She includes the five themes i.e. colonial, global economy, gender, Foucaultian and post-modern critiques to illustrate Mafeje' s reductionism. But the question remains as to whether there exists any conceivable way of extricating these critiques from colonialism and its legacy in Africa' s historical experience.

In retrospect, Mafeje had emphatically argued that Moore' s book was ' a lie intelligently told' . This was not so much in what the book says but in not saying what it meant. The argument that Mafeje reduces all these themes to one colonial mentality argument indeed illustrates that Moore runs away from saying what she meant. Let us demonstrate this by showing how colonial the above five themes are and why Moore prefers to emphasize others and not the colonial one.

The fact that neo-colonialism exists in the developing countries today imply that colonialism never died. The themes which Moore highlights as current in anthropological discourse today bear witness to the persuasiveness of situation imperialism in Africa' s intellectual and social fabric. In the first place, all the five themes she mentions are of Western origin. African struggles to intellectually command their discourses have always been thwarted by Western economic, political and intellectual conspiracies. Unfair economic arrangements and discriminatory political decisions make sure that the West defines areas of social inquiry. It is because of this that the Western vision of the global is defended and assured of dominating world scholarship (Saltier 1995).

Given the centrality of power in the production of knowledge, discourses are hegemonically defined in Western terms. The postmodernist critique, for instance, is the latest neo-colonial mirage designed to put the least important as priority on African development agenda. Also, gender studies as defined by Africanists are cast in modernist terms, using African women as examples to validate Western theoretical approaches (Amadiume 1987:2-4). They reduce African women into examples, infuse in their lives irrelevant analytical tools which never permeate into the social fabric of African societies. Such analytical tools have no superior ability of combating the many exploitative programmes which African women face from external imperialist agencies and internal cultural trappings.

Postmodernism is therefore a leap forward in modernisation theory where themes like gender studies are being presented in new and sophisticated terms but they retain their initial modernist objective. What is defeating is that it does not answer the question of whether Africans have attained modernism or is it a case of premodern postmodernism (Aseka 1996:22). Such postmodernist themes like the Foucaultian critique have a hegemonic agenda in Africa and must therefore be interrogated. Foucault was a French poststructuralist who was greatly fascinated with Bentham' s elaborate architectural and administrative plan for constructing a model prison called the panopticon (Aseka 1997). He envisioned the building of a disciplined society to characterise the leap from the enlightenment to modern between the ' power to' and the ' power over' in Foucault which has been assertively expressed in the history of progress and modernity through western incursions of non-western societies. Power over other societies has been codified and legitimated under signs of manifest destiny and civilising mission. This further reduces the Foucaultian critique to colonialism.

In our view, some of these postmodernist critiques are misplaced in Africa. In their premodern variant, recolonization is the objective while in their postmodernist perspective, anthropology is being historicised while history is being anthropologised. The two objectives are however inextricable and are going hand in hand. This is distorting the historical method and seeking to replace it with anthropology. Indeed in Moore' s book, anthropology is finding new assertive ground. Some scholars are wondering why history has been a target of postmodernist onslaught especially as fronted by the donor community and world financial institutions. It is because the systematic collective memory of a people finds expression in history, yet it is the intention of these donors to capitalise on the alleged African ' short memory of hate' .

Consequently, Africa is being invented through language games, fracturing and fragmentation of discourse. There is an Afro-pessimist emphasis to justify recolonization. Through postmodernist eclecticism, facts are selectively being used to explain poverty, war and anarchy in Africa. Colonialism is sacrosanctly left out as an explanation. Thus, Africa' s alleged mentality for war and genocide is used to validate the colonial era as good benevolent and to vouch for a recolonisation prophylactic. ' Even the degree of dependent modernization achieved under colonial rule' , we are told, ' is being reversed' (Mazrui 1995:36). The core of Africa' s current problems emanating from colonialism is overlooked. That is why Sally Moore would rather we emphasize other themes and leave out the colonial one. But some of the critiques that Moore offers are mirages, defined in Western academies of learning and couched in Western ideologies. They are a product of Western hegemonic intentions in Africa, designed to perpetuate neo-colonialism. By overlooking colonial anthropology, Moore participates in overshadowing eye opening historical experiences for Africans. By neglecting African anthropologists Moore hoped to set aside an inspiring and memorable historiographical past whose significance exists to date and

offers redeeming inspirations to Africans and Europeans of real good will. Just how successful she does it is illustrated by Mafeje' s critique.

Thirdly, methodology demands that Moore explains which anthropology for which Africa. History has the method to unravel this question. As a discipline, anthropology was intended to study the primitive other. The ' other' as distinct from the European was an object of intellectual curiosity and fascination. The African other was studied ' to illustrate the past conditions of life which have existed in our own country and in Southern and Western Europe…' At least that is the message we so clearly get from Harry Johnson. But anthropology first came to Africa for the benefit of colonialism. British anthropologists were mainly trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) for the benefit of advising colonial administration. It also had to elaborate the myth of the primitive African for whom colonialism was meant to civilise and modernise (P' Bitek, 1970). Colonial structures and institutions became indices of measuring change. It would be too much to expect Moore to quote P' Bitek (1970) and Magubane (1971) given that they don' t share her anti-colonial mentality cup of tea. But this is the cup of tea that Africans will never forget.

Magubane' s article (1971) revolutionalised the perception of change and process in anthropology. The diachronic structural functionalist approach innovative as it may have been merely took static snapshots of events. Social change was studied against the background of culture contact where they committed the ' fallacy of the ethno-graphic present' (Smith n.d:82). African values and institutions were seen as unchanging traditional givens which further reinforced the view of the ahistorical Africa awaiting the modernism of colonial rule. These were very feeble attempts at historicising anthropology which failed to achieve much. It is because of these failures that Mwanzi (1972:1) suggested that anthropology must either become history or nothing at all because whenever anthropology is associated which history, there has been nothing but recognizable error.

First, colonial rule was premised on the view that Africa had no history. It was given impetus by the alleged ' ahistoricity' , ' statism' and uncivilised nature of Africans. Colonial rule was further justified on the basis of the binary logic of civilised/barbaric, traditional/modern, static/dynamic etc. The contribution of anthropology in colonial times was to study the small self-contained units called ' tribes' and explain how colonialism detribalized them. However, African anthropologists contested the phraseology of colonial discourse. The early and most extensive challenges to this phraseology were Magubane' s and Mafeje' s 1971 articles. Other scholars may have talked about these distortions, but not with the experiential thoroughness evident in the above two articles. In their view anthropology was misplaced in Africa given its lack of appreciation of change in Africa. Anthropology, they argued was the curse of African studies. Moore can explain if anthropology has shed off these hideous scales since then.

In a nutshell, the experience of anthropology in Africa may be long and enriching to Western scholarship but racist and imperialist to Africa. Everyday discourse in any human society is shaped by the historical experience of that society. Africans may not have been the most brutalised people in history but they are probably the most humiliated in their dehumanising experiences of enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism (Aseka 1995:1). It is definitely too much for Sally Moore to expect us to forget about the relationship between anthropology and colonialism. In terms of scholarship, decision-making and social justice, neo-colonialism is still rampant. We cannot therefore fail to interpret Africa' s challenges from a colonial angle, yet we experience neo-colonialism from our houses to the streets, from the offices to eating places, from lecture halls to publishing houses and even from the kitchen to sleeping places. Our determination as Africans is that nobody including Sally Moore takes advantage of our motto of forgiving but not forgetting.

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