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ANTHROPOLOGY AND AFRICA—A WIDER PERSPECTIVE¹

THE LUGARD MEMORIAL LECTURE FOR 1959

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL research in Africa has been characterized by an intensive, microethnographic approach, which has stressed the understanding of institutional arrangements and their functioning within a given society; and, exceptionally, the analysis of custom in depth. Comparisons have been eschewed, while the broader distributional studies that played an important role in the earlier researches of anthropologists in North America and Polynesia, in Africa have been all but lacking in the scientific literature. The result has typically been the ethnographic monograph rather than the ethnological or ethnohistorical study.

The reasons why the researches of anthropologists have come essentially to be ethnographic, pointed primarily towards description and the analysis of internal relationships, are not difficult to discern. For one thing, the need for primary factual materials, gathered through first-hand, controlled investigation—materials, that is, that are basic to any systematic mode of scientific analysis—has been urgent. The vastness of the field, the large number of societies, the great variety of languages, the methodological problems presented by social aggregates of a size never before studied by the use of existing ethnographic procedures—all these have made it imperative that research be centred on description and analysis. Moreover, a re-examination of propositions long held valid as to the nature and functioning of African cultures was especially called for. There are no more fascinating pages in the history of anthropological effort, indeed, than those which tell how objective study in Africa revealed that what had generally come to be accepted as ways of life lacking in organizational and symbolic complexity were, when scientifically examined, found to be well-integrated systems of institutions, values, and beliefs.

Today, the tradition of field research, conducted by those having a well-formulated

¹ The 1959 Lugard Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor Herskovits in London on 6 April 1959, on the occasion of the annual Meeting of the Executive Council of the Institute. [Ed.]

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theoretical structure to guide their investigations and requisite training in method, is firmly established. Analyses of specific cultures have given us a vast store of substantive data as a basis for increased understanding of problems, both of scientific and immediate moment. And even though many African societies remain unstudied, we have detailed information on enough of them to make it possible, with a measurable degree of sureness, to plot the overall patterning of the cultures of the continent, and in some cases certain of their individual aspects as well. Cognizant of the range of variation in African modes of life, we can also anticipate that institutions or traditional modes of behaviour, not heretofore recorded, will come to light to sharpen our insights, and refine our theoretical formulations.

I should like to suggest, however, that it is more than timely for us to move to a further level of analysis, enlarging our focus and directing our effort toward studies of macroethnographic scope. I envisage this effort as involving in particular two dimensions which have had but limited attention from Africanists, though their consistent use in other world areas has shown them to be significant as well for theoretical and methodological clarifications that have bearing on Africa. The first of these has to do with the use of distribution studies for the understanding of the historical relationships that have made of a given cultural scene what we find it to be at a particular moment. This takes on added importance with the development of interest in African ethnohistory, and the essential contribution that comparative anthropological investigations on this level can make to ethnohistorical research. The second concerns the application of the theoretical concepts and methodological instruments that have been developed in the study of cultural dynamics. As I see it, this approach can be brought to bear on all studies that are concerned with cultural change, a topic that not only holds great importance in the contemporary African scene, but is one of the aspects of Africa that makes of the continent an unexcelled laboratory for research into problems of human behaviour in general.

There have been some beginnings towards extending the horizons of research. For Africa as a whole, several steps have been taken towards achieving this larger view by setting up schemes for the classification of African cultures into areas through the use of combined ecological and cultural criteria. As long ago as 1924 it seemed to me that, because of the insights a classificatory device of this kind had yielded in differentiating the aboriginal cultures of North America, it was worth the attempt, even with the fragmentary materials on hand at the time, to draw up a comparable classification for Africa.¹ Like other classifications of African cultures that have been made, this one initially had the utility of any such instrument. That is, it helped me to sort out the data, and gave me a sense of relationships over the continent that I found useful when examining the nature of the contacts between African peoples, so as to study mechanisms for the spread of culture they indicated to have been operative.

However, it became evident that there were further uses for a classification of this sort. The very need to describe, in broad terms, the characteristics of the cultures found in the various areas that could be differentiated led me, in time, to see how, for example, underlying local patterns made for regional differences in reaction to situa-

¹ Herskovits, M. J., 'A Preliminary Consideration of the Culture Areas of Africa', *American Anthropologist*, vol. xxvi, 1924, pp. 50-63 (revised as

'The Culture Areas of Africa', *Africa*, vol. iii, 1930, pp. 59-77).

tions of contact that had to be accounted for in order to reach significant understanding of the contemporary African scene. I have discussed this point elsewhere, so that here I need mention only how the differences between the characteristics of the East African Cattle Area and of the Guinea Coast can aid us in explaining observed differences in response to innovations resulting from contact with European custom; how the fact that in the west there were the institutions of money and the market, a substantial degree of specialization of labour, well-organized political systems, and the like, made for greater hospitality to what was introduced than in the eastern and southern parts of the continent, where these were lacking.¹

Other attempts at discerning some of these broader relationships are to be noted. Schapera's volume on the Khosian peoples² analysed historical derivations, and demonstrated similarities and differences between Bushman and Hottentot cultures that revealed unities which had hitherto gone unnoticed. The researches of Lindblom³ into the distributions of specific cultural traits provided a method for controlled mapping that laid the groundwork for a possible series of systematic comparative studies of material cultural elements which, as we shall see, can point the way towards an understanding of the earlier contacts between the peoples of Africa. Lindblom's method derives added importance from the fact that it stands in contrast to the essentially tendentious mappings of cultural traits by Frobenius which, both methodologically and theoretically, were so oriented towards establishing a preconceived thesis that, if I may bring in an item of anthropological history, his work became a very real factor in turning Africanists away from the use of other methods of distributional analysis.

In the field of languages, the earlier classifications by Meinhof,⁴ Westermann,⁵ and Werner⁶ stimulated the re-examination of language relationships by Greenberg,⁷ and this in turn has led to the continuing refinement of his categories as those whose work has been projected against a screen of smaller dimensions have commented on the assignment of particular languages to particular groupings. Olbrechts⁸ has described the art provinces of the Congo, while Wingert,⁹ Fagg,¹⁰ and others have delimited traditional styles on a continental scale. Merriam's mappings of the musical areas of Africa¹¹ is another facet of this broad approach to African cultures. In the field of social structure, the delimitation by Richards of the matrilineal belt¹² that stretches across the central portion of the continent illustrates the promise that an approach of this kind holds for the more extensive comparative sociological analyses foreshadowed in various collaborative works, of which the first was the volume edited

¹ Herskovits, M. J., 'Peoples and Cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa', *The Annals, American Acad. of Pol. and Soc. Sci.*, vol. ccxcviii, 1955, pp. 11-20.

² Schapera, I., *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa*, London, 1930.

³ Lindblom, G. K. (ed.), *Smärta Meddelanden*, Stockholm Ethnografiska Museum, 1926 and later.

⁴ Meinhof, Carl, *Die Sprachen der Hamiten*, Hamburg, 1912.

⁵ Westermann, D., *Die Sudansprachen, eine sprachvergleichende Studie*, Hamburg, 1911.

⁶ Werner, Alice, *Structure and Relationships of African Languages*, London, 1930.

⁷ Greenberg, J. H., *Studies in African Linguistic*

Classification, New Haven (Conn.), 1955.

⁸ Olbrechts, Franz M., *Plastiek van Kongo*, Antwerp, 1946.

⁹ Wingert, Paul S., *The Sculpture of Negro Africa*, New York, 1950.

¹⁰ Fagg, William, in *The Sculpture of Africa*, by E. Elisofon, London, 1958, *passim*.

¹¹ Merriam, A. M., 'African Music', in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (W. R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits, eds.), Chicago, 1959, pp. 49-86.

¹² Richards, A. I., 'Some Types of Family Structure amongst the Central Bantu', in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, eds.), London, 1950, pp. 207-51.

by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard,¹ wherein a preliminary classification of the political systems of Africa was set forth. Similarly, in the study of cultural change, we may note the analysis of the changing position of chiefs in British Africa resultant on the impulses set in motion by the policy of indirect rule initiated by Lord Lugard, that was so well presented by Mair in last year's lecture in this series.²

From the examples cited, it is evident that a sense of the need for a broader approach to the study of African cultures has been manifest, however subsidiary its traditional role in African anthropological research. It is of relevance, however, to make explicit here the fact that with a few exceptions, such as the discussions in the introductions to the collaborative volumes I have mentioned, even these broader attacks have remained descriptive. In one sense, this follows logically. Before the data can be considered, they must be sorted out on the basis of some conceptual scheme, either geographical or stylistic or historical or functional, to name but a few of the possible criteria. Only after this has been done are we ready to begin to assess relationships, discern mechanisms at work, and master the perspective necessary to reach valid scientific generalizations on which to base predictions that lie within an acceptable range of probability.

By marshalling the resources which are available to us for comparative analyses of this kind, we are in a position at the present time effectively to compound the results of scientific findings from the careful ethnographic studies of the past decade or two, and project these for study on the larger canvas of the continent. In urging this broadened approach to Africanist researches, however, I must make it clear that I am in no way erecting a specious dichotomy between the particular and the general. The need for fresh materials from unstudied societies, and for the fresh insights that come from the intensive, independent re-study of peoples whose ways have already been described, are fundamental to our scientific task. Yet it is essential that we move further, building on this foundation so as to develop generalizations that will not only sharpen the cutting edge of our tools, but will even more importantly allow us to probe more deeply into problems of moment in the day-to-day life of the people and, beyond this, to extend our knowledge of the springs of human behaviour and the organization of human societies everywhere. With this caution in mind, then, let us examine in turn each of the macroethnographic dimensions of research that I have named—the first, the distribution studies which I see as a basic component of ethnohistorical documentation; the second, the utilization of theory and methods developed in the study of cultural dynamics, that can be profitably applied to our studies of cultural change.

Interest in the history of Africa is no new thing. It is a commonplace in the literature of early contact that one reason why early European travellers were received as they were was because they were able to put the story of the people, as conceived by them, 'in a big book' for all to know and admire. With the development of the various nationalisms in the continent, the need of those who did not have a technique of writing to provide an historical base for their aspirations became apparent, even though this sometimes meant the elevation of mythic theories of origin, or other aspects of oral tradition, to the level of established historic fact. European concern with the history of Africa, on the other hand, tended to make of it a part of the general

¹ Fortes, M. and Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (eds.), *African Political Systems*, London, 1940.

² Mair, Lucy, 'African Chiefs Today', *Africa*, vol. xxviii, 1958, pp. 195-205.

field known as the history of the expansion of Europe. It dealt largely with the penetration of Europe into the continent, with the diplomatic manoeuvring for territorial hegemony, with the implementation of resulting agreements through the establishment of political and military controls, and with tracing how these impulses worked out in ensuing decades. Where available, Arabic sources were called on, but except for the belt reaching across Africa just south of the desert, there was but little attention paid to these materials.

This was logical in the climate of scholarly opinion of the time, and of the traditions of historical research that prevailed; and, as with all efforts of scholarship, our understanding has been deepened by the contribution of such studies. Yet here, too, it became evident that if we were to have a really adequate perspective on events in Africa, this was not enough. The realization grew that the dramatic character of recent change was actually only the continuation of an age-old process; that before the impact of Europe, there was contact with Asia and the Arabic north, while within the continent there was a continuous flow of migration and conquest. Such an idea, indeed, was fundamental in Sir Harry Johnston's early attempt to describe it,¹ though he based it on such inadequate resources that his paper did little to stimulate further investigation. Yet as he adumbrated, and as became more and more apparent as our acquaintance with Africa grew, assumptions of earlier years as to the static character of African societies needed re-examination.

The recent changes in these societies, which seemed so radical when they lay on the flat plane of the present, were found to differ only in degree from the currents that moved in earlier times. Africa, we have come to realize, is neither a congeries of self-contained societies, each unique in its development, nor have these societies lived in isolation from the rest of the world. The picture is rather one of a continuous movement of peoples within the continent, as well as of interchange between it and the outside, with the resulting stimulus to change that arises out of the taking over of ideas and techniques incident on cultural contact. The slope of the curve of change, that is, became steeper with the penetration of the continent by Europe, but the line that described it remained smooth. And as far as interaction with the rest of the world is concerned, it became evident that Africa had always been much more a part of it than had been thought. Perhaps the Geographer Royal of France was more realistic in this regard than he knew when he wrote in 1656, 'Afrique est une presqu'Isle si grande, qu'elle fait la partie la plus méridionale de nostre Continent'.²

One result of this re-examination was the introduction of ethnohistory as an added component in Africanist studies. I do not know when this term was first applied in Africa or by whom; but I am of the impression that in so far as Africa is concerned, it is of independent origin. This is a matter of interest because, as I have explained elsewhere, it had become well established a decade or two earlier in the terminology of anthropologists on the other side of the Atlantic. Whatever its derivation, it represents a development of major importance in Africanist research. Its value is that it commits the scholar working as an ethnohistorian to mobilize every possible resource in his study of a given historical problem. He is in consequence free to focus all

¹ Johnston, Sir Harry H., 'A Survey of the Ethnography of Africa, and the former Racial and Tribal Migrations on that Continent', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. xliii, 1913, pp. 374-412.

² Sanson, N., *L'Afrique en Plusieurs Cartes Nouvelles, et Exactes; et en Divers Traictés de Géographie, de l'Histoire . . .*, Paris, 1656, p. 1 of sig. A.

relevant approaches on his problem, without being limited to the techniques of one particular discipline.

The ethnohistorian, in fact, draws on four kinds of resources, on those of history, archaeology, oral tradition, and ethnology. The first two may be thought of as giving him his 'hard' materials, which can be taken as much at face value as any of the data of history or archaeology, and are subject to the same reservations with respect to their interpretation. Both are important; the historical documents, which often give information on relationships and orientations that date from the time when the non-literate people of a particular region had their initial contact with literate societies, and the archaeological, which project the data from any given society into far earlier periods than literacy, either indigenous or attained through contact, can reach. In the case of both, the methodological problems involved present no difficulty, for they do not differ from the problems of conventional historical or archaeological research. Difficulties do arise, however, when we move to the use of the other two categories of data. For here the question of historical reconstruction enters, with all the snares that can be present when, in an area where certainty is the goal, the student must discipline himself to work with data from which the most that can be obtained depends on skilful balancing of probabilities.

If we glance at the development of African ethnohistory, we find that, unlike elsewhere, it grew out of the interest of historians rather than that of ethnologists. The reason for this is not far to seek; most of the ethnographic work in Africa tended to overlook the factor of historicity, gaining in this way a tighter texture in assessing relations between aspects of contemporary orientations, it is true, but sacrificing a sense of time depth. A vacuum was thus created into which, logically enough, the historians and, to some extent, the archaeologists moved. Now, we recognize the historian's control of the techniques of evaluating written documents, and his competence in relating these to antecedent archaeological materials; but when the values in oral history, or probabilities deriving from comparisons of ethnographic data, are also weighed it must be concomitantly recognized that an ability to handle other methods than those of conventional historical research are needed. If we put it somewhat differently, we must accept the fact that ethnohistorical study demands the control of both ethnological and historical materials, and the employment of the methods of both disciplines. In terms of any index of certainty, the conclusions derived from the ethnographic data must be lodged on a far lower level than those derived from the study of historical documents. They therefore demand a particular kind of competence, involving different criteria of relevance.

This is not the place to detail these criteria, which have been repeatedly set forth in the anthropological literature. Whatever the problem to which they have been applied, they derive from the technique of plotting the distributions of various elements of culture, and inferring time depth from observed similarities and differences. The method was developed in the early decades of this century, and was subjected to continuous criticism, which has resulted in its refinement, and especially a recognition of the limits of its utility. Even in the most extreme diffusionist reconstructions, however, those which were most severely criticized, elements of strength were found, such as the methodological principles of form and quantity developed by the German-Austrian school. These principles have continued to guide reconstruc-

tions but have been shown to be valid only when used in terms of functional relations between the elements whose distributions are being treated, rather than when conceived of as a series of traits making up a complex which exists primarily in the mind of the student. Again, such a concept as is embodied in the age-area hypothesis, which has more recently been so effectively put to the test by Hodgen, an historian,¹ who turned to written documents to demonstrate its weaknesses, can be utilized only with proper restraint.

Experience has shown that if historical reconstructions are to have validity, the area involved must be one in which contacts between peoples can be assumed, if not proven, and where the materials in the cultures compared are functionally set in sufficiently similar ways to reduce the chances of independent development to a minimum. This, and other considerations, were stated most clearly by Sapir in a famous monograph, published in 1916, entitled 'Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture',² wherein he discussed the various approaches to historical reconstruction that make for greater or lesser degrees of probability in assessing historical relationships. Those who are interested in African ethnohistory, to whom I have shown Sapir's work, have found it to be as stimulating as it was to students in the Americas in earlier years when, without the historical or archaeological components that are recognized parts of present-day ethnohistorical studies, anthropologists were attempting to recover the historical relations between the aboriginal peoples of the New World. Ethnohistorians have also found of importance a work that represents what I have long held to be the best example of the applications of the principles which guided Sapir. I refer to the studies of the Sun Dance as found among the Indian tribes of the Plains area of North America by various anthropologists during the years 1915-20, particularly the summary paper by Spier, in which he brings together the reports of the individual studies contained in the volume, and shows how inductions based on plotted similarities and differences can be used to reveal relationships.³

At this point, however, I must enter another caution. Because I urge that ethnohistorical research in Africa can profit from the mastery and use of techniques developed in an earlier period for reconstructing the historic contacts between peoples without written languages, I do not mean that we should by-pass other developments that have taken place since then. Ethnohistory, as conceived at the present time, is not the same as the historical reconstruction of past decades. Yet, granting this, the fact remains that ethnohistory, viewed in relation to the recovery of the African past, has as yet nowhere realized its potential. I have named the four components of this approach, and have indicated that of these, the comparative ethnological one has not been exploited in Africa to any appreciable degree. We need look no further to document the point than the report of the most recent Conference on History and Archaeology in Africa, held in London in 1957.⁴

¹ Hodgen, M. J., *Change and History* (Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 18), New York, 1952.

² Sapir, E., 'Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture, A Study in Method', *Memoir 90* (No. 13, Anthropological Series), *Canadian Geological Survey*, Ottawa, 1916 (reprinted in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir*, D. G. Mandelbaum, ed., Berkeley,

1949, pp. 398-462).

³ Spier, L., 'The Sun Dance of the Plains Indians; Its Development and Diffusion', *Anthro. Papers, American Museum of Natural History*, vol. xvi, part 7, 1921, pp. 451-527.

⁴ Jones, D. H., 'Report of the Second Conference on History and Archaeology in Africa', *Africa*, vol. xxviii, 1958, pp. 57-58.

We must recognize, moreover, that in the limitation of its approach, current African ethnohistory does not differ from other attempts at historical reconstruction. The early diffusionists, whether their aim was world-wide reconstruction of cultural contact, or their researches were carried out on a more restricted scale, worked only on the ethnographic level; archaeology entered only casually, while the historical documents were quite disregarded. Nor have either of the other two variant forms of ethnohistory which developed in the New World utilized all of these components. Afroamerican studies, one of these variants, have welded historical documentation, traditional accounts, and ethnographic comparison into a firm structure; but archaeology, not being germane to its particular problem, has not been called on. The other variety, which tied in the archaeological finds from Indian mounds to the writings of the early explorers so as to give a more secure dating of the materials, has tended to refer the data neither to reconstructions based on ethnographic comparisons, nor to the traditions of origin and migration of the surviving peoples who lived in a given region at the time of its discovery.¹

In Africa, the task of the ethnohistorian is complicated by the need to clear away a lush undergrowth of theories concerning relationships, many of which rest on assumptions more clearly to be understood by reference to the principles of the sociology of knowledge than to the findings of disciplined scholarship. Examples of these theories abound. There is the early comparison of Zulu and Hebrew words, or the later one of Ashanti and Hebrew concepts of deity, called on to 'prove' the derivation of these peoples from the lost ten tribes of Israel. The attraction of Egypt as a place of origin for African cultures has been great, and is still lively. To make the point, we need only consider the extent to which concepts of kingship found among African peoples have been ascribed to this source, on the basis of data which, at best, can only be regarded as anecdotal, and without any attempt to analyse within specific societies the relevant inner structures or underlying systems of values. The validity assigned to traditional mythic history, which often reaches beyond anything that the most confirmed euhemerist would claim, has also bedevilled the serious student of African ethnohistory. I need only refer you to the recent critique by Goody of Meyerowitz's presumed history of the Akan peoples² for a demonstration of how judiciously tradition must be used for such a purpose, valuable though it may be when referred to the other three components of the ethnohistorical approach.

The task and the opportunity of ethnohistory are clear, and both are of dimensions in keeping with the complexity of the African scene. With certain cautions observed, the results cannot but provide the depth essential to more perceptive understanding. But the ethnohistorian must always be aware of what he can, and cannot, do. Only to the extent that there is 'hard' documentation, whether archaeological or historical, can he be specific as to actual time; otherwise, he can but indicate probabilities. Distribution studies must always be undertaken within limited areas and, though field research can provide further comparable data, the comparisons themselves must include full analysis of published sources. Just as reconstruction on the

¹ Mention should be made of the journal *Ethnohistory*, published by Indiana University, and sponsored by the American Ethnohistoric Conference. It is concerned primarily with studies of early American Indian-White acculturation, relating

historical documents to the ethnographic data, with occasional reference to archaeological findings.

² Goody, Jack, 'Ethnohistory and the Akan of Ghana', *Africa*, vol. xxix, 1959, pp. 67-80.

basis of ethnographic materials cannot reveal actual time of contact, so the direction in which a given complex of comparable cultural elements may have spread cannot be established by this means. Herein lies one fallacy of the association of Egypt with Subsaharan Africa as cultural donor only. In terms of scientific objectivity, and the well-established fact that culture-contact means cultural exchange, the conventional ascription is pointedly unrealistic. Another consideration those engaged in ethnohistorical studies must keep in mind is that the spread of culture is not necessarily a function of the migration of peoples. Migrations will, to varying degrees, result in the diffusion of cultural items; but ideas and techniques move from people to people, often attaining almost world-wide distributions, without those at the point of origin having themselves changed their place of residence. In the African field, where there has been so much preoccupation with migrations, this fact of cultural borrowing without ethnic displacement calls for particular emphasis, for it seems to have been overlooked.

Because of the richness of the materials, and the many untested hypotheses concerning its past that have been advanced, Africa is the world area most ready for the use of the ethnohistorical method. Here all the components are of relevance; and while the farther back we move in time, and the broader the area of our reconstructions, the more tentative will be our conclusions, I have no doubt but that this is the best path to the resolution of many of the puzzling questions concerning which speculation has been so extensive. The Hamitic question, the early contacts with North Africa and the Mediterranean, the observed unities within given areas, particularly in West Africa and the Sudan where the matter has been much discussed, and above all the reasons for the many similarities found in the cultures of the Subsaharan continent as a whole, call for a controlled methodological attack through the instrumentality of concerted ethnohistorical techniques.

We can assume that when ethnohistory realizes its full potentialities, we shall have established a firm base-line from which we can study change in more recent times. In other words, we shall have a key to significant continuities and discontinuities, in time depth. But there is also the need to consider the present in similar broad scope and, to the extent to which our scientific apparatus justifies it, assess probabilities of future change. In this instance, as in that of ethnohistory, I should like to call attention to certain resources which have not been drawn on to the extent that expectations of return from their use would seem to justify. Just as we have gained greatly from intensive studies of single African societies, so have we profited from the studies of change in particular regions, and in special phases of life in these regions. And enough of these have been done to allow us to think of possibilities for taking a systematic comparative view on a contemporary continental scale. The approach I have in mind derives from certain generalizations bearing on cultural change, which developed out of studies of comparable situations in other world areas.

Our discussion of ethnohistory was concerned mainly with questions of method; here we will examine the applicability of a conceptual scheme. I refer to the theoretical structure that underlies all analyses of cultural dynamics. Let me recall here, in briefest outline, the essentials of this theoretical structure, which derives from our conception of the nature of culture and its role in shaping the behaviour of men. Most important in this system is the proposition that, except for those aspects of

behaviour which are immediately related to the nature of the biological organism, something that can be held as a constant and need therefore not concern us in this context, is that most of the ways in which men react to the demands of their social settings are learned. At base, the learned nature of culture accounts for the psychological plasticity of human social response, for the varied conventions, ranging from the perception of the natural world to the values assigned to a particular kind of act or thought, which confront us when we study the traditions of the peoples of the world. This, we may say, is what marks the essential unity of man.

All this is a commonplace in anthropological thought, which we take for granted in executing our researches and in phrasing our theories. Yet in science nothing is commonplace; every position, each hypothesis, must be continuously re-examined. And it is one such re-examination of a basic hypothesis with which I am concerned here. For in the African scene, an absence of historical perspective has given rise to the point of view I have mentioned before, that change in Africa is something new; that, moreover, the dislocations incident upon the recent experiences of African societies are so extensive that they constitute that phase of contemporary African life on which it is essential to focus our attention. Yet, if we look at the situations with which we deal in terms of the basic principles of cultural learning I have enunciated, we must begin systematically to model our researches so as to project the changes we study against the background of antecedent patterns of behaviour in terms of a theoretical position which holds that change is but one side of the coin, of which the obverse is the stability of custom.

I should like here to mention briefly some researches of an analogous character with which I have been occupied for many years. This has to do with the responses of Africans brought to the various parts of the New World in the course of the slave trade, and of their descendants, to the European cultures to which they were exposed. It is self-evident that these New World Negroes were subjected to a degree of dislocation that finds no parallel in Africa itself, not even in the most extreme situations, such as exist in the urban centres of the Union of South Africa. In the New World, pre-existing social identifications were rendered far more difficult than could ever be possible in Africa, while the fact that as slaves these peoples were in no way free agents in determining the course of their lives posed a problem for them that is scarcely even suggested in the African scene. Yet in various parts of the New World they have retained integrated aboriginal African traditions, in some exceptional cases in pure form, but everywhere to some degree.

What they have done is what peoples under contact, we are coming to realize, always do. If they are under restraint, they retain as much of an earlier tradition as the new situation in which they find themselves permits. Where they can make their choices freely, they accept innovations to the degree that these new elements are in consonance with their pre-existing patterns. For the most part, whatever freedom of choice they may have, they respond by retaining meaning and value, casting these in new forms, through a process which I have designated as cultural reinterpretation. This is what Africans and their descendants in their New World habitat did; and this, once we are sensitive to the mechanism of adjustment under change implied in the concept of reinterpretation, is what we can see Africans doing in Africa itself.

Other concepts employed in the study of cultural dynamics can also be called on to

advantage in taking the large view of continuity and change in Africa. Thus we can conceive of reinterpretation as essentially a means whereby societies in contact effect psychological reconciliations between elements of their cultures which show identifiable similarities in form or meaning. However, we can go beyond this, for in many situations of contact between peoples, innovations may be enough removed from the prior experience of the recipient group, so that their acceptance must be additive. By this I mean that the observable adjustments to contact, whether in Africa or elsewhere, can be thought of as lying on two levels—where what is introduced can be referred to, and in some manner equated with, some comparable pre-existing element, or where an innovation is extraneous in form and function to the pre-existing culture to which it is presented.

This formulation is clearly a conceptual one, since as far as actual instances of behaviour and response are concerned, no element possesses the degree of cultural autonomy that is implied in what I have said. The lesson we have learned over the past decades, that the life of a people is lived as a whole and not in pieces, should not be forgotten as we dissect a changing culture so as to analyse its components. I doubt whether, in actuality, we could find a case of pure cultural addition; that is, where no factor of reinterpretation entered. Yet we can come close to it, and there are some innovations that are so different from what a people knew in earlier days that they can conceptually be placed at the end of a continuum which stretches to a point where the cultures of both parties to a given contact have in common usages and symbols which suggest implicit identities, and the most extreme form of reinterpretation, called syncretism, results. Reference to a psychological concept may be helpful here, since the resolution of any problem in cultural dynamics rests on the responses of the individuals involved in a given situation of change. From the point of view of the individual, cultural contact means that what is new is referred to that totality of experiential background which comprises his apperceptive mass. In this situation, four possible responses will be elicited, three positive and one negative. Where there can be ready association of the old and the new, we have syncretism; where identification is not as clear, reinterpretation results; and where there is a minimum of concurrence, the additive factor comes into play, unless an innovation is rejected out of hand.

Instances of syncretism are difficult to come by in Africa. The end of the continuum of adaptation over the continent at the present time would seem to lie at the point of reinterpretation, as where in the political sphere an assembly of clan elders develops into a local government body, retaining antecedent patterns of discussion and decision making, but with the complex as a whole set within a new framework of authority. On the economic level, the private ownership of trees, which is traditional, may serve as a bridge towards the reinterpretation of earlier conventions of land tenure, rationalizing individual ownership of the land itself. An instance I have had occasion to refer to elsewhere,¹ where the complex of destoolment in Ghana was applied to the dismissal of a trades union official, offers a further example of the functioning of the reinterpretative mechanism. Or we can see the same phenomenon at work where the Ibo family and lineage contribute toward the cost of higher education

¹ Herskovits, M. J., 'Some Thoughts on American Research in Africa', *African Studies Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1958, p. 9.

for members who show promise as scholars, reinterpreting a pre-existing sanction for the extension of economic aid to those who take titles.

In the field of religion, resources for the documentation of the functioning of this mechanism on a comparative basis are extensive. There are, by now, an appreciable number of controlled researches into the developments that have taken place in the past half-century and more in this aspect of African culture. We may name a few of these: Sundkler's discussion of the rise of the Separatist churches in South Africa,¹ Shepperson and Price's analysis of the role of the Chitembe church in the development of nationalism in Nyasaland,² Balandier's study of the Matsui cult in French Equatorial Africa,³ Messenger's research into the adaptive function of new Christian sects among the Ibibio,⁴ Hodgkin's more general discussion of these movements as political phenomena.⁵ When we project against this background such comparable manifestations as Kibanguism or the Kitwala, in the Congo basin, or Kikuyu independent religious and educational institutions in Kenya, or Islamic separatism as represented by the Moslem Brotherhoods, we find them to be ways worked out by the peoples of Africa to maintain underlying sanctions of belief and behaviour under cultural change. They tie in with the other aspects of the culture, particularly in the sense of having political and economic implications as well as religious and moral ones.

The formulation I have described has relevance for numerous other broad questions which are raised in the study of contemporary Africa. Thus it has almost become an article of faith that members of what is called the African elite are, in terms of the concept of another day, 'marginal men', unable to find adjustment either in Western ways of life or in the traditional cultural setting in which they were reared. On the basis of first-hand contact with a considerable number of men and women in this category, living in many territories of the continent, I have been impressed with the need for a detailed re-examination of the position so generally held. Nor is this all; for the analysis of cultural contact must take more account of the two-way nature of the process than it has done. In precisely this same context, a study of the responses of Europeans to the African environment—and those of Asians, as well, in those areas where this might be pertinent—in terms of differences in the nature and intensity of their associations with Africans, call for the same type of comparative investigation.

What any analysis which moves from the theory of cultural dynamics entails is a balance between antecedent institutions and impinging forces, without prior commitment as to the extent to which either one or the other may dominate. The manner in which the concept of detribalization has in the past distorted our perspective in the study of such an important aspect of contemporary Africa as urbanization shows the need for an approach that balances all possible contributing factors. The normative assumption that a money incentive will necessarily provide the inducement needed to recruit a permanent industrialized labour force is another illustration of

¹ Sundkler, Bengt G. M., *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, London, 1948.

² Shepperson, George, and Thomas Price, *Independent African, John Chitembe and the Nyasaland Rising of 1915*, Edinburgh, 1958.

³ Balandier, G., *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique Noire*, Paris, 1955.

⁴ Messenger, John C., Jr., 'Religious Acculturation among the Anang Ibibio', in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (W. R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits, eds.), Chicago, 1959, pp. 279-99.

⁵ Hodgkin, Thomas, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, London, 1956.

this, as is the belief that exposure to parliamentary democracy will result in the transfer to the African scene of both form and sanction of this mode of government, without change. These are some of the preconceptions that experience, not research, has refuted; and the very fact that understanding has had to wait on experience documents the importance of having in hand a theoretical apparatus that takes all factors into account, and projects the special situation against a broad comparative background.

This, in essence, is why I have here been moved to suggest the usefulness and timeliness of adding to the intensive study of single cultures the macroethnographic dimension, cast within the framework of the historical and comparative scheme I have sketched.

Résumé

L'ANTHROPOLOGIE ET L'AFRIQUE — UNE PERSPECTIVE PLUS ÉTENDUE

LES recherches anthropologiques en Afrique ont été caractérisées par de nombreux travaux sur le plan micro-ethnographique. Le besoin pressant d'obtenir des éléments fondamentaux d'information et la vaste étendue de ce domaine ont exigé que les recherches soient concentrées sur la description et l'analyse. De cette façon, des renseignements détaillés ont été fournis pour une compréhension plus approfondie tant des problèmes d'intérêt scientifique que de ceux d'importance immédiate. Or, il est actuellement possible de dresser, avec une certitude justifiée, le tracé général des aires de cultures du continent et, dans certains cas, quelques-uns également de leurs aspects individuels. Il ressort de cet exposé que le moment est venu d'orienter nos efforts vers des recherches d'une portée plus étendue, c'est-à-dire sur le plan macro-ethnographique. Ces recherches impliqueront l'utilisation d'études de répartition pour bien comprendre les rapports historiques et l'application des notions théoriques et des moyens méthodologiques, qui ont été mis au point au cours de l'étude de la dynamique culturelle. En demandant que le sujet soit abordé d'une manière plus large, on ne cherche pas à dresser une dichotomie spécieuse entre le particulier et le général, car des matériaux nouveaux, provenant de sociétés qui n'ont pas été étudiées auparavant, seront toujours des éléments fondamentaux de notre tâche scientifique.

On s'est toujours intéressé à l'histoire africaine, mais on s'est rendu compte dernièrement que le caractère spectaculaire du changement survenu récemment n'est, en réalité, que la suite d'un processus séculaire et que l'Afrique n'est pas un amas de sociétés autonomes vivant isolées du reste du monde, mais plutôt le théâtre d'un mouvement incessant de peuples. Un des résultats de ce nouvel examen a été d'attirer l'attention sur l'ethno-histoire comme une adjonction importante aux études africanistes. L'ethno-historien dispose de quatre méthodes de travail: l'histoire, l'archéologie, la tradition et l'ethnologie; il doit contrôler les matériaux, tant ethnographiques qu'historiques, et utiliser les méthodes de ces deux disciplines. Pour que des reconstructions historiques soient valables, la région dont il s'agit doit être une zone dans laquelle on peut supposer, sinon prouver, que des contacts entre peuples ont eu lieu, et où les matériaux dans les cultures comparées sont fonctionnellement fixées de façons suffisamment analogues pour réduire au minimum les possibilités d'une évolution indépendante. La richesse des matériaux et les nombreuses hypothèses concernant le passé, qui ont été avancées mais non vérifiées, ont rendu l'Afrique la région du monde la plus propice à l'utilisation de la méthode ethno-historique qui constitue, sans aucun doute, la meilleure façon de résoudre bien des problèmes difficiles ayant donné lieu à tant de conjectures.

Les études concernant les réactions des Africains du Nouveau Monde aux cultures européennes ont démontré que ceux-ci retiennent généralement autant de leur tradition antérieure que permet la nouvelle situation dans laquelle ils se trouvent. Par un procédé dit de réinterprétation culturelle, ils donnent aux idées et aux valeurs anciennes de nouvelles formes. Il serait très rare de trouver un cas d'adjonction culturelle pure dans laquelle aucun élément de réinterprétation ne serait introduit.

Toute analyse qui se développe à partir de la théorie de dynamique culturelle implique un équilibre entre les institutions antérieures et les forces qui s'y heurtent, sans engagement préalable concernant la mesure dans laquelle les unes ou les autres peuvent dominer. Il a été démontré que les idées préconçues concernant certaines situations ont été réfutées par l'expérience plutôt que par les recherches. Ce fait souligne l'importance qu'il y a à travailler avec un appareil théorique qui tient compte de tous les éléments et projette la situation particulière sur un arrière-plan de comparaison très étendu, d'où la nécessité d'une perspective plus large dans les études africaines.

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