

Conflict of Rationalities: The Destiny and Destination of Research on Africa

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There are many of us saying and even demanding that research on Africa should be intensified and further increased. Its destiny is linked to the future of Africans' self-awareness and their radical de-alienation. However, the current direction of some projects gives us cause for constant concern in that the fundamental question they raise is whether what drives them is science or a certain unstated but active ideology.

In other words has science become a slave to or a pseudonym for an ideology? If we restrict ourselves to anthropology we can attempt to unpack the very many implications of this question. What are the objectives the researchers set for their work? Are they simply aiming to prove a theory? Are they merely intending to collect material for their university teaching? Are they undertaking their investigations without any objective in view, but to order and for a purpose they are unaware of? Are they doing this work in order to present their conclusions to a critical audience? In short, what are their motives and the structural constraints framing their discourse?

Research and the destiny of Africans

Some critics of the ethnological approach wonder what use these studies have been and now are to Africans.

Of course publications are enjoying a period of considerable prosperity. But do the African informants, who have made it possible to produce these books, have any way of getting to know the results obtained?

Are scholars involved in the indigenous or native world? To put it another way, does science portray the prevailing situation in Africa that concerns Africans?

In this connection let us look at the behaviour of a man who, at the height of the colonial period, went as far as he possibly could to involve himself in African

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realities. This was Georges Balandier. In *Afrique ambiguë* the idea of 'the colonial situation' is a very important one. It expresses the need to embrace the study of the Fang in Gabon and the Ba-Kongo in the Congo from a dynamic viewpoint, taking into account and analysing latent tensions, conflicts and crises. The interplay of internal variations associated with a single 'contact situation' and analysed with reference to the Fang and Ba-Kongo led the author to describe how 'the urbanization process, in a country where towns came about because of colonization, and the increasing expansion of paid employment at the expense of the old subsistence economy, seem to be significant phenomena'. The notion of 'colonial situation' is a conceptual complex without which no 'current concrete study of colonized societies that is trying to gain a complete awareness' could be carried out. Noting the imbalances underlying societies in the process of transition or change, the author, in order to remain alert to all the factors involved in the colonial situation, even details the meaning a certain African conservatism can sometimes assume. Conservatism may not be a sterile manifestation but may have a 'functional' value insofar as it serves to give meaning to the innovations that know how to use it, formally at least, and come to be accepted because of it, and it can have a dynamic value in that it helps to affirm a culture representative of a whole society of some considerable importance.

Without a doubt this approach and the one employed in *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, which was concerned to take account sociologically of all the values produced or readopted in order to tackle the colonial threat, satisfied the objective the author had set himself, that is, to look, among other things, at a situation where 'the rise of the new nationalisms . . . gives this problem an acuity and topicality that can scarcely be ignored'.

There are several observations to be made about such an enterprise.

In its methodology it does not operate a hidden discrimination between societies, confining Africa, as many other authors do, within the framework of ethnographic societies. In this sense it has become a classic for any sociological, dynamic approach to the African field. With R. Firth, E. Leach, M. Gluckman, Apter, W. Wertheimer, etc., the sociologist's attention is now focused on social imbalances, the fault lines in the overall structure of any society, the conflicts inherent in any society and how to deal with them by producing effective means.

Even if the native reveals here and there some misunderstanding in the items of information analysed, the method is appropriate and corresponds to its objective. However, there is one problem that remains unresolved. The author himself talks about the acuity and topicality of problems 'that can scarcely be ignored'.

How can researchers, who stand outside the society's concerns, combat this indifference? Can European science go beyond what is called an 'approach' and gain access to a real apprehension of the African situation? We should state categorically that what we are talking about here is not the researchers' status as foreigners (we are human beings and nothing human should be foreign to us, as the African Terence said) but their position as 'deliberate' outsiders as regards the problems or contradictions that divide the groups making up the society being studied and whose subjective and objective parameters must be included in the analysis.

The wish to combat indifference does not appear to be compatible with the researchers' ideology of objectivity. Holding to this ideology, researchers act as if

there were the object to be studied on the one hand and themselves on the other, maintaining a relationship of radical exteriority. However, the subject-researchers are immediately penetrated by the object of study. The line between external and internal passes through the subject-researchers, if we only take into account the spontaneous or developed theory with which they apprehend the situation. The wish to combat indifference is all the more *incompatible* with researchers' ideology of objectivity because this ideology is closely linked to the 'myth' of the neutrality of the observer. Taking these myths and this ideology together, does not the researcher in Africa leave things in their original state?

African societies seen as ethnographic societies

At all events these difficulties experienced by scientists, who are nevertheless very interested in studying African reality from a sociological standpoint, are expressed on another level by those who deliberately class African societies among the ethnographic societies, meaning they are fragile and precarious, threatened with irrevocable disappearance. In their view these societies are not viable. This non-viability shines *through* various new attempts to establish concepts that define ethnographic societies: societies without writing, societies without machines, under-developed societies . . . Thus it is asserted that written culture is bound to eliminate oral culture, machine technology (the technology of alienation) is bound to wipe out other types of technology (technology as mediation). It is claimed that these are scientific factors by which to evaluate a society's level of development and its inclusion in either the lower category of 'ethnographic' or the higher category of 'sociological' societies.

But how has the fact that the *Bamoun* society has produced a system of writing allowed it to avoid being treated as an ethnographic society? How has the use of the *vai* writing allowed Sierra Leone to avoid being considered as an ethnographic society? And do the societies that use *Nsidibi* in Calaba (eastern Nigeria), *Basa* and *Mende* (in Sierra Leone and Liberia) receive different scientific treatment?

Without underestimating Lévi-Strauss's assessment, for instance, of ethnocentrism or the relevance of his general theory of thought based on ethnographic studies, let us say that an approach such as his has nothing in common with the disparate study of unique, so-called 'original' societies that other researchers might undertake without ending up with general conclusions that identify the implications and object of their work. Not every researcher has the gift of developing a general theory of humanity by comparing many cases and drawing lessons from them.

If it cannot reach general conclusions as significant as those articulated by Georges Balandier and Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, the ethnographic enterprise sets out from an implicit philosophy of history based on an unfounded evolutionism. The ethnographic enterprise is backed up by a certain spontaneous norm of society which allows it to look down condescendingly on the miserable fate of societies other than the normative one.

It is as if history were a river (a European one naturally) flowing toward a certain end: European society, and carrying along the corpses of societies that are different, depositing them at each bend. And so it is because they see African societies as

potential corpses, and for that reason seriously threatened with extinction, that they try to collect their last stirrings of life. They study them for something other than themselves.

It is not understanding their working principle, the many forms of their ability to integrate new elements and produce new values, that interests them.

Primitive, savage, race, etc.: are these analytical concepts or realities to be found in Africa?

Primitive

The 19th century, in the shape of Ribot, arrived at a certain definition of psychology: 'the study of the adult, white, civilized male', and this psychological norm has its equivalent in ethnography.

Ribot had simply completed the projects of his predecessors, among them (a) Auguste Comte, who limited his work to the healthy adult male, (b) Lelut, who introduced a refinement: white man. As we can see, four criteria were required to define psychology: health, maturity, colour, civilization.

We only have to transfer these criteria to anthropology to see how the normative society took shape that has been a kind of obsession for some ethnographers throughout its history.

Many present-day ethnologists, each for different reasons, have denounced this ethnocentrism; it seems so inherent in the mode of being of the ethnographic enterprise that all condemnation appears pointless! Are all those who use the words 'primitive', 'savage', 'race' (in a normative context) as cautious as, for instance, Van der Leeuw, Lévi-Strauss and the geneticist Jacques Ruffé?

The primitive, in Van der Leeuw's *Structure de la mentalité primitive* and *L'Homme primitif et la religion*, has by no means the sense of the inferior that, for example, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl gave it. Van der Leeuw's intention was to get at a pure essence of the thing described by identifying what is fundamental. As in *Dilthey* it is about identifying an ideal type of structure.

Consequently, for Van der Leeuw as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss the concept of the primitive does not connote a relationship of *anterior-posterior*, inferior-superior. Nowhere has the primitive in this sense existed or been discovered.

For Van der Leeuw there is a relationship, between the primitive and the modern, of purity to impurity in the manifestation of essence. For in the primitive the pure essence of the mentality identified is not denatured by any other structure, while in the civilized it is denatured by aesthetics and science. One of the fundamental points in Van der Leeuw's work is the interweaving and cohabitation of the consciousness of the primitive and modern human. In addition we have to think of several norms and not a single norm as implied by the normative concept of normal.

We need to think of the norm while attending to children, poets, farmers, scientists, company bosses . . . the elements of primitive mentality that every ordinary human possesses are not rudimentary traces as evolutionists would be inclined to say.

Savage

It may be with regard to this cohabitation and interweaving of the primitive and modern mental structure in the modern human sciences that the author of *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* and *La Pensée sauvage* does not agree with Van der Leeuw.

In order to understand his position and the conversion he undergoes in *La Pensée sauvage* we need to remember that the concepts 'savage' and 'primitive' do not have the same history. It was in the 18th century that the former became a *normative concept*; and the *empirical concept* of 'primitive' took on its value in the 19th century. Lévi-Strauss inherits the different history of these two concepts. 'Savage' is a name and image given to a norm of life and used to judge and depreciate the norms of history and culture. The primitive is the rudimentary, the undifferentiated primal.

In distancing himself from the idea of the cohabitation of primitive and modern structures, he thus tried to dispose of the concept of development that denotes the movement from one structure to the other. Whatever the level, savage or cultured structure, both completion and non-development are possible. Thus, if some peoples do not have a history (or have a certain kind of history), it is not a sign of inferiority; it just means that they did not wish to have one. For them myth is an unswerving loyalty to a past conceived of as a model of timelessness. Furthermore there is an identity of approach and no hiatus between savage thought and educated thought. Quite simply, determinism came into play before it was known and represented. For Claude Lévi-Strauss the universes of savage thought and of educated thought have so much in common that researchers are starting to accept the message as the object of knowledge, and to take account of physiqués and semantics, just as savage thought considers information as carrying meaning.

By preferring the savage–educated pairing, in the biological sense, rather than the primitive–civilized pairing, and rejecting the concept of development by saying no to the coexistence of primitive and modern structures, Claude Lévi-Strauss nevertheless still agrees with Van der Leeuw in not recognizing the discoverable existence of what is nothing but an ideal type.

This was already Rousseau's approach when he defined the state of pure nature, together with the youth of the world and the state of war, as all three constituting the state of nature. Rousseau always insisted he wanted to be radical, that is to say, dig down to the very root. So the state of nature he gets to has never existed and perhaps never will, unless it has existed in a space without location!

Race

We come now to the concept of race; there have always been specialists in physical and physiological anthropology who divide up people hierarchically into three categories: the *Leucoderms* (white), the *Xanthoderms* (yellow) and the *Melanoderms* (black). However modern geneticists have made some very important discoveries in this area.

To take just one example, Jacques Ruffié, head of a blood typology centre and professor at the Collège de France, has stressed the important role of ecological and

external conditions: climate (heat, cold), nutrition, psychosocial conditions, upbringing from birth, etc. In this line of thinking he, together with other specialists, asks that we should talk of peoples rather than races.

Some will object that in the 18th century Buffon in *De l'homme* already stressed the part played by climate in what he called the varieties of the human race; and this is so. But modern geneticists' project is different insofar as it is not based on the ideological prejudice of the ethnocentric, expansionist and dominant implications associated with Buffon's monogenics.

Do these scientific developments interest those who are above all determined to find some races inferior and locate the points of weakness that might hasten their disappearance?

Thus it does not seem as though the scientific precautions taken by the researchers who developed the concepts of savage, of primitive, of peoples (instead of race), by restricting and specifying their applicability, have any influence on the ideology of certain specialist travellers who are determined to bring back living primitives whose exotic nature entertains the mind.

Ethnography, a science that cannot be verified?

I shall start by stressing how the research process demonstrates the specifically colonialist nature of the ethnographic project.

First of all, the interview/interrogation is the exercise of a power that is conceivable and exerted only in the context of a relationship of subordination. Indeed the researcher addresses the informant in the following way: 'Tell me everything! Tell me everything about yourself, your family and your society's secrets. You are ordered to do so.' It is not by chance that ethnographic production has recorded a leading role for administrators, soldiers and priests. All these people had definite power in the colonial situation. They wanted to create superior knowledge for the authorities. For example, well-known anthropologists such as Meek researching among the Ibo after their revolt, or Ratray, or Nadel, who was an officer in Khartoum, and not forgetting E. Evans Pritchard, dispatched among the Azande as an information agent, were obeying a colonialist requirement to domesticate the natives. Even if they apparently came as students (domineering students nevertheless, backed by the authorities), they opened up the way for others to come and dominate, command, impose their will. The work of these men appeared to be a system for gathering information designed to assist decision-making by the colonial power, which was faced with various problems: landholding structures, chieftains, revolts, religious organization, manipulation of symbols, etc.

Even if the survey project did not lead to enslavement by the colonial power and may have given rise to an anti-power discourse, or even, in the case of Jomo Kenyatta (*Facing Mount Kenya*), a discourse of contestation, the interview/interrogation nevertheless remains in and of itself a manifestation of the enslaving power.

This manifestation of enslaving power is clearly demonstrated in the discrimination the colonial researcher insisted on making between good and bad information, to the extent that we see a social distribution between the prominent local figure and

the common man. The local figure is the one who serves; he is one who obtains knowledge from his relatives and compatriots and puts it at the researcher's disposal.

The researcher called for people to spill the beans or rather implied it. The researcher addressed this request to the prominent man (the extractor of knowledge) or any other informant: 'Tell me everything'; 'Tell me everything the group knows, does, thinks and wants.' The native informant became in a sense a defendant who was allowed to speak only to admit what he knew. People tried to extract from the words of the defendant/informant a truth he spoke about himself and his group; from it they produced the scientific fact. In this sense the district chief was a salient figure. He was first of all, or so it was thought, a tax collector. It was in this vein that the *Eveil Togo-dahoméén* of December 1932 (no. 12) wrote the following about such a one:

When we see a district chief passing by, carried along in his hammock and surrounded by pretty women all dressed up waving fans, or else sitting comfortably back against the cushions in his car, we say: 'There goes a happy man'.

Wrong, the poor man is not so happy. He bears his worries with him. And the biggest of them is that bundle of capitation tax slips he still has on his hands, for which he cannot find owners because the household heads keep out of his way, that bundle of slips worth two or three thousand francs which the Administration expects to be paid in cash on the nail.

In short here we see the complex interplay and the struggle in ethnography between power and knowledge. In these conditions nothing tells us whether the survey leads to accurate revelations about the societies studied, for it is true that the information obtained is the end result of a veritable trial of strength. Did the informant cough up everything as he was asked to? Or did the results betray the failure of the project? Then what is the nature of the 'fact' produced by the ethnographer?

At all events, in order for this project to be a scientific one, the researcher ought finally to test the conclusion he reached.

But there is such contempt for the native's opinion about the ethnographic study's provisional or final conclusions that we are right to wonder what can possibly guarantee the scientific discourse that the ethnographer researching in Africa claims to come up with.

Does an important work of ethnography that starts from these partial pseudo-scientific studies not run the risk of rushing off in false directions?

There seem to be limits to the ethnographer's illogicalities. The ethnologist can always compare the 'original' case he is brought with other cases and uncover the gaps or errors despite the uniqueness and originality of the society concerned. And so he can discover a scientific fact he has never observed.

In these circumstances, is one required to go into the field, 'one's own' field? Are ethnological theories about Africa not becoming a bit of a carnival, that is, the celebration of a reality or event that has never existed anywhere?

The ethnographer's and ethnologist's journey: their motives

And so the ambiguity of Africa scholars' behaviour and approach leads us, in one way or another, to wonder about their motives!

Maybe we ought to heed the significant and personal response of an eminent student of America rather than Africa, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who wrote in *Tristes Tropiques*:

Today I sometimes wonder whether ethnography did not call me, without my suspecting it, because of a structural affinity between the civilizations it studies and my own thought. I lack the aptitudes to keep carefully tilled land whose crops I would harvest year by year: I have a Neolithic mind. Like the natives' bush fires it encroaches sometimes on unexplored territories; perhaps it makes them fertile in order to get some crops from them quickly and leaves behind it a devastated area.¹

You have to be motivated by a great ideal to be self-reflexive and adopt this humble attitude in line with your logical convictions. Indeed the same author says elsewhere:

One day maybe we shall discover that the same logic is at work in mythical thought and scientific thought, and that human beings have always been as good at thinking. Progress, if that word can be applied then, would not have had consciousness for its arena, but the world where a humanity with constant faculties would have been continually grappling with many objects over its long history.²

Here we see that the work of the ethnologist was a calling for him. The journey, that movement to get to an 'elsewhere' and apprehend an 'other', was the means to fulfil that vocation. His ideas clearly show the logical and epistemological benefit he drew from achieving it.

Do students of Africa recognize themselves in this evocation of their motives? Or do they cling to the contingent justifications handed out by politicians to conceal the true motivation?

It appears that this self-reflexivity that aims to grasp what motivates one's project is not peculiar to the many Africa scholars. Nevertheless a certain number of them have referred to that call to an 'elsewhere', that rush towards an 'other' or that difficulty in living in one's own culture. We will not dwell on the passages in *Afrique Fantôme* where Michel Leiris lays out the impressions of his project. In this regard Jean Guiart writes:

How should we understand, for instance, everything that shocks us today in the ghost that is Africa without putting the author back in his ultra-urban environment, his professional milieu of artists and aesthetes, without knowing which social circles he moved in, without knowing the topics discussed at that level, topics that define a certain French culture between 1920 and 1940; without knowing by what process the current state of Anglo-American anthropology was dissected, directed and transmitted to Paris, in particular by M. Mauss who had read everything; without knowing what were the excuses of the moment that leftist intellectuals gave themselves for a colonialism they lived off more or less explicitly; without knowing what the professed attraction for exotic societies could cover in terms of serene contempt for human beings; without looking for the link between

Gide's journey to black Africa and Michel Leiris's? Today hagiography is no longer acceptable on the level of 'general ideas' any more than on the level of the 'golden legend'. Career strategies are determined by cultural tradition, even if they are settled on with the best faith in the world. Writing is the intellectual's, the academic's and the researcher's essential technique. An act of will, each collection of written expression, whether article or book, is designed for an audience, whether wide or restricted, and is part of a system of socio-economic references. We have to live.

We should now consider a situation where the author minimizes his personal complexes and looks for a different justification for himself. Robert Jaulin, in *La Mort Sara*, asked himself about his project and says:

Perhaps I was running away from white people, not that I was seeking a context or a better world, an 'abstract' context, 'science', a better world, 'the other', still less was I concerned to work out, through that elsewhere, any problems of my own. Problems of my own: with their dual aspect, psychological, individual, or sociological, collective, civilizational.

. . . Neither master nor slave, I did not hoard, nor wish, not demand. Science or the elsewhere did not get me out of any 'moral' fix, did not take me away from any hidden drama, not that a drama created a problem in me as I had been taught distance in that respect; for sure I was running away from that drama without being able to admit it to myself, but it was not peculiar to or reserved for me; far from being hidden, it was open – it was the odious nature of our civilization.³

For Robert Jaulin the 'commerce with elsewhere' rather emphasized 'that uneasiness in the white environment'. So it was not in order to resolve his complexes that he had to go to Amazonia and Africa: 'I became a little bit African, a little bit Indian, not to lose myself or lose my whiteness, just that "my science", my project of respecting differences made each of us (them, me) move beyond himself, made him concerned to learn how to live the other's civilization'.⁴

Here too there is everywhere the call towards an 'elsewhere', towards 'the other', even if the manifest reason for that call is the search for dialogue.

But what is characteristic and novel in this author is the determination to use that dialogue to convince his African and Amazonian interlocutors of the validity of their culture. Through his research in Sara country he intends to help the Sara to live, intensely and without complexes, their own Sara values. And so we see what his research is leading to: helping minorities threatened with ethnocide to become aware of their place in the family of cultures that are the world's heritage. Science should not be a synonym for anaesthesia 'of cultural life, or indifference to the genuine problems that arise for human beings from day to day'. It should be in a sense understanding of the context and appropriate intervention for the good of 'the other' and of all.

In short these different motives, whether repressed or not, acknowledged or displaced, show that the journey to 'elsewhere' and towards 'the other' is for its beneficiary a sort of psychagogy. One of its significant episodes 'in the field' remains curiosity about the indigenous mode of 'initiation'. Most of the time this native initiation is both desired and rejected by the European researcher. That rejection,

halfway through the course of the initiation, ought to be questioned. Does it not represent a new awareness of the position of ethnocentric dominance?

In Jean Monod's view the ethnology that 'claims to be carried out to gain access to the other . . . is in actual practice nothing but a discourse of the self extending beyond its current borders through the denial of the other. It is an attempt to regain the self-other, the repressed self, by grafting onto the conventional self all the others, murdered with its complicity, whose beyond it also claims to be (they are our "past", etc.).'⁵

From the psychagogic journey to the new prospect

However, this long journey towards 'elsewhere' is moving increasingly away from outside-Europe to Europe itself. More and more ethnographic studies on Europe are being carried out. A new generation of researchers is studying witchcraft, social relations, games, traditional religion, etc., in Europe. Thus studies have been undertaken of the gift system in Ferden (Loetschental, Switzerland), the sites of traditional beliefs in France, witchcraft in Normandy, peasant customs in Algeria, names and nicknames in Minotion (a village in northern France), names in south-eastern Europe, the landholding system in Hungary, etc.

This means that 'elsewhere and other' are no longer to be found at the ends of the earth. They are close by, even though the group that is the object of study is still always different from the one the researcher originates from. But we might say that among its prerequisites the ethnographic project requires a minimum distance and movement to be maintained as a condition of existence of 'elsewhere' and 'other'.

If we add to that movement the fact that in France, for instance, there has been created in an ethnographic context a museum of French popular arts and traditions, the renewed prospect for the study of societies can only be striking.

Nevertheless the renewal that is visibly taking place remains ambiguous. Indeed the votive sites (trees, rocks, rivers . . .) that are mentioned as regards France, the various ethnographic elements studied, are presented with the idea that they reveal a past and a society that do not affect us.

Even when we are dealing with practices that are still alive, they are relegated to 'the olden days'.

An 'elsewhere' reduced to the minimum regains its force in 'the olden days'. And so time replaces space.

In this trend, which is taking shape before our eyes, we are witnessing a spectacle that is at first sight strange: famous French historians such as Duby and Leroy Ladurie, for example, appear to be attracted by ethnology, if not ethnography. They consider it to be a salutary element for scholars, who have to investigate in particular the temporal or chronological dimension. Maybe this is a compensatory phenomenon from one discipline to the other. In the context of Africa, however, we would have wished for the opposite phenomenon: to see ethnography become history.

Beyond the trend we have just noted, the complexity of African social reality requires the ethnographer to become a sociologist and African societies to be studied in a context that is no longer atemporal or reduced to a past firmly relegated to the past.

We should stress that studying African societies solely from an ethnographic standpoint misses an essential part of African social reality and creates an ambiguity that can only be resolved if two considerations are taken into account: first, the non-contemporaneousness of the different elements of the whole social phenomenon; secondly, science is not pure and simple logic, and this applies *a fortiori* to the human sciences.

The non-contemporaneousness of elements

Let us take a look at what is meant by the non-contemporaneousness of different elements! We should first note that the whole social phenomenon is made up of a certain number of elements among which the economic domain is not contemporaneous with the religious domain, just as the cultural domain does not evolve at the same pace as the political domain, etc. Every society displays the co-presence of these different domains without them being contemporaneous.

Society's dynamics consists of the manifestation of the interweaving and disparity in time-scales peculiar to these different domains. Though these statements are true with regard to every society, whether African, Asian, Oceanian, American or European, it is always possible to find domains everywhere whose slower time-scale sanctions the ethnographic approach.

Nevertheless we cannot treat the dynamic whole of society in a solely ethnographic manner by reducing its overall pace of evolution to that of the slowest area. This would be like taking Japan in 1971 and saying the only approach that accounts for its society's status is the ethnographic one, as was the case for the Japanese Ainous. The appropriate overall approach would be the sociological one, situating each domain in accordance with its own time-scale and using ethnography wherever necessary. Otherwise we will be dealing with authoritarian decrees of reduction and 'master discourses' expressing the dominator-dominated relationship, a discourse that will have no connection with 'scientific discourse'.⁶

Science is not pure and simple logic

We come now to the fact the science is not pure and simple logic: in other words this states what scientific discourse must be in order to fulfil the demands of the human sciences, which are conjunctural sciences, as is, *a fortiori*, their application to the African arena.

Although all research aims to produce a visible outcome, it would not be satisfied with the self-validation that some formal system provides. It must be experimental. Without this experimentation, which is not necessarily that of physics, chemistry or the natural sciences, unjustified results presented about some society or other can only result from a more or less explicit ideology and offer a simulacrum of a social system.

Finally, in order to avoid being a 'festival' within the endogamous community of scientists who 'enjoy without sharing', research on Africa must be carried out in

accordance with the concept of science seen as a practical process of transforming the world. For it is with this aim in view of transforming the world that the societies studied have produced their values and are modifying them to adapt to the current context. Thus the scientist's myth of neutrality and ideology of objectivity will be put in their proper place in the context of the conjunctural sciences.

By doing this, students of Africa will show they have understood that it is in order to provide answers to practical problems, grab something from the world and transform something in the world, that African societies have conceived and achieved what may today seem to them unchanging, old-fashioned. In this way they will avoid innocently presenting work that could on other levels be used for any purpose (most often not for the good of Africa).

Raising awareness of problems and results

Researchers working on Africa can avoid this use of the results of their work only by rigorously recording the phenomena studied in a sociological context where sociology is seen as an experimental science. To take up an idea from Bourdieu: 'Sociology is in fact an experimental science; sociologists are not office workers who reflect on their lived experience but people who create methods of collecting not only others' lived experience but above all their behaviour, their real actions.' From this scientific knowledge of the actions, behaviour and speech of others the sociologist studying Africa manages to constitute a system of objective and intelligible relations. The sociologist's work must be integrated into the act of transforming the world of the actors studied. It is necessary to combat the purely formal aspect of the construction many students of Africa arrive at, as do their colleagues studying America, where these Africa researchers lose sight of what Alain Touraine says: 'Sociologists are no longer observers. Their research has of necessity become an intervention, even if it is rejected and its effects are cancelled out. The information gathered is sent back to the informant after it has been processed. The greatest success of research is that sociologists should manage to predict changes in their informants' behaviour brought about by the transmission of information about their behaviour.'⁷ And he adds later: 'Sociologists are not watching actors performing a play; they are helping to discover the play that will one day be written because it will first have been performed. Better still, they are working with the actors so that together they can learn to recognize what is involved.'⁸ Research can be concerned only with the relationship between sociologists and their object, never with that object alone. The subject-researcher is immediately penetrated by the object of study, as I wrote earlier when I denounced (so-called scientific) neutralism and objectivism in ethnography.

Being African before grasping reality . . . ?

But does this rejection of the ideology of objectivism and the myth of neutralism mean that the actors alone can grasp the sociological reality? To be more precise, is being African enough to grasp African sociological reality?

To answer yes would imply that sociology is a spontaneous project or science. However, it requires a break with spontaneous knowledge and the illusion of the transparency of sociological reality. Furthermore, the nature of sociology's object calls for a strict distance with regard to the actors' impressions, opinions and experiences. As Touraine writes: 'The object of sociology, social relations, never yields itself up immediately to observation. Relationship is concealed by rule, discourse, ideology. Actors, especially when they are involved in relations that challenge the society's main orientations and its mode of social domination, are not conscious and organized.'⁹ 'Sociology means explaining social behaviours, not through knowledge of the actors or the situation they are in, but through the social relations in which they are involved.'¹⁰ Furthermore, 'All actors tend to stand, consolidate their position, hide, behind an organization'¹¹ and it is necessary to draw out the sociological facts from the social facts in which they are imprisoned.¹²

But it would be a mistake to come back to the view of those scholars who maintain that being African prevents researchers from apprehending social reality without passion. Sociology is not astronomy.

To conclude, the rigorous training of African scientists and the intimate interest they have in the social realities of their environment create instead a presumption in favour of living, viable sociological study, since they are able to combine the theoretical dimension or knowledge with the day-to-day practice of the actors whose business it is to transform their society.

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, paperback edition, p. 39.
2. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, pp. 254–5.
3. R. Jaulin, *La Mort Sara*, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
5. R. Jaulin, 'Un riche Cannibale', in *Les Temps modernes*, p. 1063.
Editor's note: These criticisms have also been made by Francis Affergan in the context of the West Indies. He stresses the necessarily contradictory character of the anthropologist's and ethnologist's search for alterity. He highlights some sophisms in ethnological argument as well as the relationship between ethnologists and politics and a certain type of ethnocentrism. See Francis Affergan, *Construire le savoir anthropologique*, Paris, PUF, 1999. See also, by the same author, *La Pluralité des mondes*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997.
6. Compare Habermas's extremely well-known views on this topic in *La Technique et la science comme idéologie* (editor's note).
7. A. Touraine, *Pour la sociologie*, Points, p. 48.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
9. Jean Monod, 'Un riche Cannibale', in *Les Temps modernes*, p. 1063.
10. Touraine, *op. cit.* note 8, p. 16.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 25.