

## EDITORIAL

The opening of *Africa's* second half-century seems a fitting time to review the place we have come to occupy in the field of African studies and to set forth the principles that will guide editorial policy over the next few years. *Africa* was not the first journal to be devoted to the study of Africa—being preceded by the journals of the Société des Africanistes in Paris and of the Royal African Society at least—but it broke fresh ground in coming much closer to its subject matter. The cultures and languages of Africa were to be studied, not just for their scientific interest, but in relation to the evolving needs of African societies; and the voices of Africans were to be heard in the debate. It being 1928, however, this project was pursued on the assumptions that the colonial framework would exist for an indefinite period in the future, and that African needs could be reconciled with imperial interests.

For the first twenty years of its existence, then, *Africa's* mythical charter derived from the Dual Mandate, and our principle theme was Culture Contact. In the 1930s *Africa's* contributors were much more concerned with the practical requirements of social—or rather, cultural—change, largely as perceived by ‘progressive’ administrators and missionaries active in the educational field, than they have ever been since. Even the missionary contributors—and our first editor, the linguist Diedrich Westermann, had a missionary background—soon turned from the mysteries of the *Hochgottidee* to the discussion of African languages, vernacular literatures and locally appropriate textbooks, and educational problems in general. African contributions, despite De Graft Johnson writing on Asafu Companies and C. M. Doke on European and Bantu languages in South Africa, were less often analyses of traditional African culture than essays in what might be called neo-African culture, as with the series “Voice of Africa”, consisting of poems in African languages, which continued sporadically up to 1948. The educational emphasis gave rise to a good deal of work on a now rather neglected topic, childhood and adolescence; and merged with the moral and pastoral concerns underlying the many articles on marriage and particularly Christian marriage in Africa. Prescription of what might be done—in fields as diverse as agricultural co-operation, produce marketing and craft-work—bulked as quite as large analysis of what was being done.

In all this the position of social anthropology, the academic discipline that then as now has stood closer than any other to the concerns of *Africa*, was exceedingly ambivalent. It is evident that both the missionary and the administrator interests had vested high hopes in anthropology; and the non-Africanist Malinowski, ever the entrepreneur and publicist for his poorly funded subject, was not one to seem to disappoint them. Many of his ablest students published their earliest work in *Africa*, and some of this, on topics like land-tenure and chieftaincy, was no doubt of the kind that Lugard, Chairman of the Institute, wanted to see; and “culture-contact” was the theme of a good deal of debate among Malinowski's disciples in *Africa's* pages in the mid-1930s. But the high point of the co-operation of the academic anthropologists and the practical men was reached with the notable group of papers on witchcraft in 1935; and thereafter the anthropologists increasingly pulled their own way. In recent years

anthropology has often been considered a rationalization of colonialism or as the handmaid of Indirect Rule, but it only came to dominate *Africa's* pages when Indirect Rule was all but buried and the end of colonialism was in sight. The years 1945–50, towards the beginning of Daryll Forde's long and distinguished editorship, mark a real divide in *Africa's* development. Max Gluckman's famous polemic of 1947 against the utility of Malinowski's scheme for the analysis of social change laid the theory of an epoch unceremoniously to rest. As Africans in the nationalist movements began to set their own priorities, the old colonial source of practical concern dried up, lost its moral plausibility; but what *Africa* lost in immediate relevance for social and cultural policy, it gained greatly in scholarship. A colonial owl of Minerva . . . ? Despite important work published by francophone scholars such as Balandier, Dieterlen, Zahan, Maquet, Griaule and others, *Africa* increasingly drew an English-language authorship, consolidated by the growing American interest which had first been noted in 1945. It was the heyday of 'British social anthropology' and few anthropologists of note who worked in Africa did not publish in the journal. In these years *Africa* may justly be said to have joined the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and the *American Anthropologist* among the premier organs of the discipline.

Such an apparent elective affinity of an area and a discipline could not last for ever. If a date is required to make the beginning of a further shift, that of 1960, the *annus mirabilis* of African independence, seems appropriate; for it was the changed situation of Africa itself which lay at the root of a complex of causes that have required anthropology and *Africa* to take a fresh stock of themselves.

Firstly, anthropology passed under a cloud as a colonialist science in the eyes of many African scholars coming to the fore in African universities. While this may well be considered exaggerated in itself and was in any case much less strongly felt in the late 1970s than the early 1960s, it indicated that the journal needed to look afresh at the intellectual concerns of Africa itself.

Secondly, no doubt as a consequence of the greater political weight of Africa in the world, the 1960s saw a great international burgeoning of African studies and the appearance of many new journals, the *Journal of African History* (1960), *Cahiers d'études africaines* (1960), the *Journal of Modern African Studies* (1963) and the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1967) being perhaps the most noteworthy. In addition, a wide range of specialist journals began to appear in individual African countries. What was *Africa's* part to be in this enlarged orchestra?

Thirdly, there was a growing sense of crisis in anthropology itself, and particularly in British anthropology, that was not unrelated to the fact that it was largely based on African ethnography. For most contributors to *Africa*, the basic unit of study, whatever the precise focus of interest—be it witchcraft, language forms, chieftaincy or whatever—was a particular African society or culture; and this was mostly so whether the study was cast in an ethnographic present or whether it dealt with changes wrought in that society or culture by its colonial experiences. Oddly, Gluckman's critical assault on some of the assumptions of this model, made back in 1947, was not carried through, at least in *Africa*, to a positive definition of a new unit of study. Now, however, things have moved forward in two directions, and largely out of the domain of anthropology as that is usually considered. On the one hand, the horizon of Africa's past was pushed back, with incalculable consequences for how we place the baseline of any study of social change. It is noteworthy that the new African scholarship of the 1950s made its

mark in historiography before any other cultural discipline—and sad to record that, save for S. O. Biobaku's article of 1954 on early Egba government, little of this work came out in *Africa*. On the other hand, the boundaries of the unit of study have been forced open. Theoretically, this was effected in diverse and opposed ways—American political science focussed on 'nation-building' or the revived Marxist discussion of 'underdevelopment'. This trend threatened anthropology—a discipline much of whose theoretical power had lain in its analysis of social systems as wholes—with a rather more marginal position in African studies than it had once occupied. For, though an "anthropology of the nation state", in Fallers' phrase, could be conceived, the weight of anthropological practice tended to the study of what were increasingly part-societies, local studies or studies of particular institutions. In rural Taleland of the 1930s kinship came far nearer to giving you the crucial key to the constitution of the social whole than it could possibly do in urban Accra in the 1970s. The study of the new levels at which African societies were emerging, and which were very much the concern of African intellectuals themselves, seemed to belong to other disciplines and, to a large extent, other journals than *Africa*.

In formulating how *Africa* should respond to what is at once a changed subject matter and a changed context of operation, we must not forget that there are certain definite strengths of the tradition of scholarship most characteristic of the journal. Foremost among these is good analytical or theoretically-informed ethnography; for ethnography must continue to be an absolute prerequisite for any kind of achievement in African studies. This is to be taken in a narrower and a broader sense. As to the narrower, many African peoples or social areas are not well documented through careful field study, or are habitually characterised by anachronistic or misleading stereotypes. Ethnic labels (which in some cases anthropology has helped to create and which in others are linked with vested political interests) need constant reexamination in order that variety within, and links between, may be appreciated. The worst implication of the old 'ethnographic present tense' was the illusion it fostered that a people's culture could be described once and for all time. This ethnography requires to be carried out with a much greater use of controlled comparisons and of historical documentation, and an awareness of the changing relations between the units of ethnographic study and their wider regional or national context. But it is equally necessary that the essential qualities of ethnography are more broadly deployed, to substantive areas beyond the communities or cultural areas which were its traditional object, such as urban contexts and other situations where life is most directly affected by such forces as the world economy and the modern states. These qualities may be summed up as the grasping of realities 'on the ground', both in terms of concrete social relations and, through the concern with cultural form, with how they seem to the local participants. These are, indeed, the hallmarks of anthropology at its best, and they are likely to be especially valuable in recalling African studies, as they concern themselves more with national and inter-regional levels of social structure, to the real situation of those ordinary Africans in specific and local contexts who must be the point of reference for such otherwise abstract policies as 'national integration', 'development' or 'cultural revival'.

We would like to publish in *Africa* more articles relevant in this way to development. This will return us somewhat to that practical emphasis of our first twenty years which has become again an important aspect of the Institute's work in

other directions, especially the Environmental Review Unit and the Language and Education Unit. Development is a subject which in its essence involves making linkages between academic disciplines and studying linkages between social levels. Two kinds of studies here seem of especial importance. The first is studies in the zone where the social sciences and the environmental and natural sciences overlap: field studies in medical sociology or cultural ecology, for example, where important work is now being done and which are of great relevance to policy in such fields as agricultural development or rural health-care provision. The second kind is less a matter of potentially 'applied' research, but is crucial for an understanding of the context in which research is conducted and applied; and also takes us to the heart of the problematic issue of the nature of the emergent national societies. Since development is substantially a matter of governments attempting to modify the productive and other activities of their subjects in desired directions, it raises fundamental questions concerning the character of the relations between the political centre and peripheral regions, and between governments or political classes and the common people, and concerning the class structure of which it is both a product and a source. We consider that the analysis of these topics is an essential complement to the provision of data directly useful to policy.

Historical perspectives are virtually implicit in the study of development though they clearly run well beyond it. We have already suggested (and regretted) that *Africa* was fairly marginal to the great surge of African historiography over the past generation; and *Africa* is not now principally a historical journal. But we do hope to attract to a greater extent contributors who are interested in drawing from and contributing to historical studies. This has indeed begun to be the case since the early 1970s and that is appropriate to the present situation of African history. Its viability is now soundly established and the field is fairly well defined in terms of its major questions; and at one of its major frontiers, where the historian needs to go beyond written documentation of the orthodox kind, we are beginning to get over the feeling that the only message to be derived from the anthropologist's view of oral tradition is a bleak scepticism about its use for historical reconstruction. If the battle in principle is won there is a great deal yet to be done in carrying it through in particular areas. The relevance of *Africa's* ethnographic tradition is obvious, since historical techniques must be combined with profound acquaintance with the culture and institutions of the area concerned. While this will mostly relate to the pre-colonial period, another field where we would like to see *Africa* make a significant contribution to historical studies is in social and economic history, especially at 'ground level' from the early colonial period. This is a period where oral tradition of a somewhat different kind—from participants—can yield vital data; and it is data which is constantly being lost irrecoverably as elderly men and women die. Which field-worker in this area has not bitterly regretted that he omitted to ask a certain question of Chief X before he died at the age of 84? Precisely because colonial documents are sometimes so plentiful compared with what went before, we may tend to neglect the unique value of oral testimony for this period; yet it is crucial in such fast-growing fields as urban social history, the study of religious and cultural change, labour and agricultural history, which are in any case close to the concerns of *Africa*.

The final area to be touched on may seem superfluous to mention since it is probably already more closely associated with *Africa* than with any other Africanist

journal: culture. However, it seems worthwhile to say why we consider cultural topics, apart from their own intrinsic interest, to be important in relation to the other emphases. By 'culture' I do not mean another name for 'society' nor, as often by American academic usage, a domain of study that especially belongs to anthropology; and I mean a wider reference than such things as traditional festivals, musical or literary forms, linguistic idioms (though these are all included)—namely symbolic and expressive forms, belief-systems and criteria of judgment, idiom and style in general. We feel these to be important, not just on the same grounds that culture, so defined, is everywhere an object of human concern and a force which helps constitute social relations, but in a way particularly true of Africa at its present juncture. It is surely significant that cultural questions are so much more the subject of public debate in African countries than elsewhere in the Developing World, that "cultural revival" (whatever its contents, from arts festivals to projects for developing indigenous languages as educational media) is so much on the national agenda, that Institutes of African Studies are so important within African universities, even that the African contributors to *Africa*, considerably more than Europeans or Americans, seem over the last few years to be drawn to cultural topics. In this respect, the cultural emphasis of *Africa's* editorial policy in its first decade or so seems very prescient. The importance of culture is implicit in any emphasis on the relevance of history, since what we call a people's culture is the precipitate of its history (whether known or not) as well as the form in which that history is a constituent of contemporary reality; and it is the ground from which any policies of development must proceed. In recent years powerful new insights have been derived from viewing contemporary African realities in the light of how they have been determined by the role Africa has come to play in the international division of labour, through the penetration of the capitalist world economy. But, if pushed to its logical extreme, this view can only represent Africa's own past as a residuum, something only there to be eroded by external forces, and the significant differences between the regions or societies of Africa as lying in how far, and to what extent, they have been subjected to these forces. The fatalism that must follow with respect to Africa's capacity to make its own future can hardly appeal much to Africans themselves and seems, in any case, to be too easily adopted. Africa's history and its evolving product, African culture, must be seen as a resource, not a residuum, and its understanding as a way of keeping the future open.

While these are the areas of work which we feel to hold particular promise, it will be the editorial policy of *Africa* to hold an open mind to new lines of research and to establish even wider editorial contacts. With this in mind, we are setting up for the first time an international body of Consultant Editors, drawn from African countries as well as from North America and continental Europe. We hope by this means to attract submissions from a wider range of quarters than has been customary, especially in Africa and the francophone world. We also intend to have more issues of *Africa*, either wholly or in part, to be devoted to particular themes—such as the recent issue on "Small Towns in African Development"—and here too we hope that guidance as to both topics and contributors will be derived from the Consultant Editors. We thus hope *Africa* will succeed in combining its known and distinctive contribution to African studies with an adaptation to the changing needs and interests of our field.

J. D. Y. PEEL

### Consultant Editors, *Africa*

The following have accepted the Editor's invitation to act as consultant editors:

Kwame Arhin · Boubacar Barry · Maurice Bloch · Peter Ekeh · Steven Feierman · Luc de Heusch · Goran Hyden · Ntole Kazadi · B. E. Kipkorir · Harriet Ngubane · David Parkin · T. O. Ranger · Paul Richards · William A. Shack · Emmanuel Terray · Abdelkader Zghal.

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

JOHN BEATTIE, lately professor of African studies at the University of Leiden and formerly lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Oxford, is the author of *Other Cultures*, *Bunyoro: an African Kingdom*, and *The Nyoro State*, as well as numerous papers in social anthropology and the ethnography of the Banyoro.

DR. ROBIN LAW is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Stirling, Scotland. His full-length study, *The horse in West African history*, will be published later this year by the IAI and Oxford University Press.

PIERRE DE MARET is with the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren and is associate professor in African archaeology at Brussels University. He has been doing field work in West Central Africa since 1970.

FREDERICK QUINN did anthropological and historical work for advanced degrees at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has published extensively on the Beti people of Cameroon, and has served in diplomatic postings with the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, Ouagadougou and Yaoundé and elsewhere.

MICHEL VERDON is at present assistant lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. He has done extensive fieldwork on both the Ghanaian and Togolese sides of Eweland.

J. J. DE WOLF, senior lecturer in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University, Netherlands, did fieldwork among the Bkusu during 1968-69 with the aid of the Dutch Foundation for Tropical Research, WOTRO.

We regret to announce the death, on July 16 1980, of Professor A. N. Tucker, a former research fellow and long-term friend of the International African Institute. An appreciation by his collaborator, Margaret Bryan, will appear in the next number of *Africa*.