



## **Archie Mafeje and the Pursuit of Endogeneity: Against Alterity and Extroversion**

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### **Abstract**

Professor Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje passed away on 28 March 2007. The meaning of Archie Mafeje, for three generations of African scholars and social scientists, is profound and about diverse encounters. For some it was personal; for others it was through his works, and for most in the community the encounter via scholarly works became personal and intimate. The meaning of Mafeje for generations of African scholars is found in his uncompromising aversion to the ‘epistemology of alterity’ – the ‘othering’ of Africa and Africans – and the advancement of scholarship grounded in the centring of African ontological experiences. It is in this aversion to alterity and pursuit of endogeneity that we locate Mafeje’s lasting legacy for new generations of African intellectuals. This paper, which is personal and intellectual, involves a close and critical engagement with these aspects of Mafeje’s scholarships.

### **Résumé**

Le professeur Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje est décédé le 28 mars 2007. Le sens d’Archie Mafeje pour trois générations d’universitaires africains et de spécialistes en sciences sociales est profond et porte sur trois différentes sortes de contacts. Pour certains, c’était personnel, pour d’autres, c’était à travers ses œuvres, et pour la plupart de la communauté la rencontre à travers les œuvres universitaires, c’était devenu personnel et intime. Le sens de Mafeje pour des générations d’universitaires africains se trouve dans son aversion intransigeante à l’encontre de l’«épistémologie de l’altérité», l’«altérité» de l’Afrique et des Africains, et le développement de la recherche fondée sur le centrage des expériences ontologiques africaines. C’est dans cette aversion pour l’altérité et la poursuite de l’endogénéité que nous situons la contribution durable de Mafeje pour les nouvelles générations d’intellectuels africains. Cet article, qui est personnel et intellectuel, inclut un engagement étroit et critique avec ces aspects des recherches de Mafeje.

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## Introduction

Professor Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje passed away on 28 March 2007. It was a great shock to so many within the African social science community and beyond. The loss of someone like Archie Mafeje pushes us to search for meaning that is deeply personal and intellectual.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of Archie Mafeje for three generations of African scholars and social scientists is about encounters. For some, it would have been personal; for others it was through his works; and for most in the community, the encounter via scholarly works became personal and intimate. And Archie reciprocated more than most. Within the wider African social science community, many will highlight Mafeje's "The Ideology of 'Tribalism'" (Mafeje 1971) as the moment of such encounter. On a personal note, it was his "The problem of Anthropology in historical perspective" (Mafeje 1976), as a first year undergraduate student at the University of Ibadan. My encounter, in person, was not until the 1992 CODESRIA General Assembly in Dakar, Senegal. The attraction is not simply the elegance of his erudition and expansive knowledge of his fields of study. Much more is the sense that one was encountering an 'authentic interlocutor' for African experiences and ontological locations. It was in the affirmation of these experiences and locations that Mafeje became an 'iconic' scholar of the African social science community.

This paper presents a critical engagement with aspects of such interlocation in Mafeje's scholarship. This is at two levels. Against the prevailing (mis)representations of Africa and the Africans, an important aspect of Mafeje scholarship was devoted to a vigorous combating of what he referred to as the "epistemology of alterity." No discipline came up for harsher rebuke from Mafeje than Anthropology, the field of study in which he received much of his graduate education. Beyond 'protest scholarship', however, Mafeje's works equally involve a resolute affirmation of endogeneity — a scholarship grounded in and driven by the affirmation of African experiences and ontological accounting for the self. Although it is difficult to separate Mafeje's works into the blocks of those exclusively engaged with endogeneity and others concerned with contending with discourse of alterity — indeed engaging in one is immediately a defining premise for the other — I focus on the two in distinct sections of the remaining parts of this paper. We conclude by drawing out lessons from Mafeje's scholarship for a new generation of African scholars.

A celebration of Mafeje's scholarship cannot be about supine adulation — he would find that condescending. This paper involves a critical engagement with Mafeje's works used to highlight this twinned project of relentless combating of alterity and extroversion and affirmation of endogeneity;

it is a continuation of the dialogue that we were having up to the time of his death. More importantly, it is in such critical engagement that we can add value to Mafeje's work and extend the frontiers of his works, hence honour his memory with our own works as a community of scholars.

### **Enduring Ties: Contesting Alterity and Affirming Endogeneity**

If there is a common thread tying all of Archie Mafeje's professional writings, as distinct from his more political writings, it will be the relentless contestation of the epistemology of alterity and the pursuit of endogeneity. Endogeneity, in this specific case, refers to an intellectual standpoint derived from a rootedness in the African conditions; a centring of African ontological discourses and experiences as the basis of one's intellectual work. I use 'endogeny' here as a short-hand for intellectual works driven by endogeneity. "To evolve lasting meanings" Mafeje (2000:66) noted "we must be 'rooted' in something." Central to endogeneity is averting what Hountondji (1990) referred to as 'extroversion'. In spite of the claims of being nomothetic in aspiration, social analysis is deeply idiographic. Those who exercise undue anxiety about being 'cosmopolitan' or universalist fail to grasp this about much of what is considered nomothetic in the dominant strands of Western 'theories'. All knowledge is first local; "universal knowledge' can only exist in contradiction" (Mafeje 2000:67). It is precisely because Max Weber spoke distinctly to the European context of his time, as Michel Foucault did for his that guaranteed the efficacy of their discourses. "If what we say and do has relevance for our humanity, its international relevance is guaranteed" (Mafeje 2000:67).<sup>2</sup>

### **Against Alterity**

While 'The Ideology of "Tribalism"' is often cited as the launching of Mafeje's attack on alterity, the drive for the centring of the African 'self-knowing' is evident in *Langa: a study of social groups in an African township* (Wilson and Mafeje 1963) co-published with Monica Wilson, his supervisor at the University of Cape Town. The preference for the research subjects' own self-definition — e.g., 'homeboys' rather than 'tribesmen' — in the book presaged his 1971 paper. A similar mode of writing, which proceeds from the subject's perspective, is evident in two of his other works published in the 1960s: "The Chief visits town" (Mafeje 1963) and "The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community" (Mafeje 1967). However, in contrast to the muted negation of alterity in these earlier works, 'The Ideology of "Tribalism"' was a more self-conscious critique of the continued use of 'tribe' and 'tribalism'.

Mafeje's paper was not new or alone in contesting the concept of 'tribe' and 'tribalism' — cf. Vilakazi (1965), Magubane's 1968 paper (republished in 2000:1-26) and Onoge's 1971 paper (published 1977); that much Mafeje (1971:12, 1996:260-1) himself specifically mentioned.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Mafeje's intervention was a focused 'deconstruction' (Mafeje 1996, 2001) of the categories on conceptual and empirical grounds. Empirically, Mafeje argued, the word 'tribe' did not exist in any of the indigenous South African languages — or to the best of my knowledge, any that I know. Conceptually, those deploying the concept are unable to sustain it on the basis of their own definitions of tribe(s), (hence tribalism). It is a method of critique that defines Mafeje's scholarship, anchored on conceptual rigour or its absence.

'Classical anthropology' Mafeje noted (quoting Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's 1940 *African Political Systems*) defined tribes as "self-contained, autonomous communities practicing subsistence economy with no or limited external trade" (Mafeje 1971:257). Others (citing Schipera's 1956 *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies*) would define tribes as a group of people who claim "exclusive rights to a given territory" and manage "its affairs independently of external control" (Mafeje 1971:257). In this sense, tribes are defined by subsistence economy, territoriality, and ruled by chiefs and/or elders. Anthropologists and others who persisted in using 'tribe' and 'tribalism' as their framework for analysing Africa were violating their own rules. Territorial boundedness, political and economic isolation, and subsistence economy no longer apply under the conditions of colonialism. To argue, as Gulliver did (in the 1969 edited volume *Tradition and Transition in East Africa*) that they continue to use 'tribe' not out of 'defiance' but because Africans themselves use it when speaking in English (Mafeje 1971:253-4) would be woolly-headed. Mafeje did not "deny the existence of tribal ideology and sentiment in Africa... The fact that it works... is no proof that 'tribes' or 'tribalism' exists in any objective sense" (1971:258-9). The persistence of 'tribalism' in such context is "a mark of *false consciousness*." (Mafeje 1971:259, emphasis in original). More importantly, that cultural affinity (what he called "cultural links") is deployed in securing "a more comfortable place" is no evidence of 'tribalism.' More forces may be at work than 'tribal' identity, including occupational and class identities. Mafeje cited Mitchell's monograph, *The Kalela Dance* (Mitchell 1956) and Epstein's *Politics in an Urban African Community* (Epstein 1958), which both point to such alternative explanations.

At the heart of Mafeje's argument is Anthropology's conceptual conundrum. The categories might have been valid once, Mafeje argued, but not anymore because the colonial encounter ended the territorial and political isolation of the 'tribes' and their subsistence economies. Further, the

‘territoriality’ that was supposed to be the conceptual basis of ‘tribes’ did not exist in Mafeje’s reference group, the AmaXhosa; they were never organised under a single political unit even when found in the same region. This is a theme Mafeje returned to in his 1991 book in the case of the Great Lake Region of East Africa. In spite of these, anthropologists who studied sociational dynamics outside the ‘tribal homelands’ persisted in deploying the categories. It is this invariant commitment to the categories that Mafeje called ‘tribal ideology’ or the ‘ideology of tribalism.’ It was no longer scholarship but ideology — not that Mafeje thought scholarship could be non-ideological.

The new army of political scientists trooping into Africa in the periods immediately before and after ‘independence’ would go on to deploy the same mode of writing and thinking. If the anthropologist could be excused because the study of ‘tribes’ is his/her *raison d’être*, the Africanist political scientist had no such excuse (Mafeje 1971:257). The result is that similar phenomena in other parts of the world are ‘explained’ differently — with ‘tribe’ or primitivity being Africa’s explanatory category. The tribal categories are used simultaneously to explain ‘pattern maintenance and persistence’ and the failure of ‘modernity’!

Much in the same way that Magubane’s vigorous critique of the Manchester School (Magubane 1971) was liberating for many African students studying Anthropology or Sociology in the United States at the time, Mafeje’s paper, of the same year, had similar edifying effects on the same cohort of African students studying in the UK or Anglophone Africa, as Zack-Williams noted.<sup>4</sup>

The problem is that Mafeje pursued his line of thought at the expense of conceding that the category might have been valid at an earlier time (Mafeje 1971:258). Not only does Anthropology deal with its objects of enquiry outside of history, it is ill-equipped to address the issues of history. The ‘isolation’ (political and economic) and territoriality that were supposed to define the African communities before colonial encounter hardly stands up to scrutiny when approached from the perspectives of History and Archaeology. Neither about Africa, Asia or the Americas, is it possible to sustain the claims of territoriality and isolation. None of the groups in West Africa that are still routinely referred to as ‘tribes’ would fit the definition hundreds of years before the first intrepid anthropologist arrived on their door steps. Further, the very act of naming and labelling requires encounter. ‘Germanic tribes,’ as a label, is only feasible in the encounter with the Greek or Roman ‘Superior Other’ who does the naming and the labelling. Isolation is thus unimaginable. *Alterity rather than any conceptual validity is foundational to labelling one community of people a ‘tribe’; another nation.* The Germanic tribal Other is immediately the ‘Barbarian’; an inferior Other. The appropriation of such

alterity by the labelled is one of the legacies of colonisation, such that it is still possible for Africans themselves to speak of their local potentates as ‘tribal authority’! What is required at the level of scholarship and everyday discourse is the complete extirpation of the category of tribe; evident in Mafeje’s works, from 1963 to 2004, but insufficiently extirpated, conceptually, in 1971.

The same extirpation cannot be said for the category of ‘Bantu-speakers’ (Mafeje 1967, 1991), which he used as a shorthand for speakers of “Bantu languages” (2000:67). Even if it is possible to categorise the 681 languages referred to by linguists as belonging to the ‘Bantoid’ sub-set of the 961 languages in the Benue-Congo group — itself a ‘sub-family of the Niger-Congo phylum’<sup>5</sup> — labelling the languages as ‘Bantu’ is the ultimate in extroversion and alterity. While the languages may share linguistic characteristics and *Bantu* generally means ‘people’ (*Abantu* in IsiXhosa), none of the groups is self-referentially ‘Bantu.’ The labelling is rooted in European alterity, which found its apogee in the Apartheid racist group classification, with all Africans designated ‘Bantu’ — hence Bantu education, etc. A geographic classification, similar to ‘Niger-Congo’ rather than Bantu, might be less eviscerating. Even if one were to accept the singularity of classification involved: ‘961 languages’ as so linguistically close as to be given a name, it does not explain why Africans have to absorb the alterity. What more, other linguists consider Malcolm Guthrie’s method, which is the source of the classification, as deeply flawed. The role of missionaries in inventing the fragmentation of African languages and then scripting exclusive ethnic identities on the back of such fragmentation is widely known (Chimhundu 1992). Undoing this fragmentation has been the essence of Kwesi Prah’s Centre for the Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Cape Town. The idea of ‘Bantu-speakers’ is an aspect of the inadequate ‘negation of negation’ (Mafeje 2000:66) that I had hoped to explore with him in the audio-visual interview planned for May 2007. It is a task that we must take upon ourselves as surviving African scholars.

### ***Negation of Negation: Mafeje on Anthropology***

Mafeje’s (2000) *Africanity: a combative ontology* is perhaps his most eloquent and elegant enunciation of the twinned agenda of the “determined negation of negation” (ibid, p.66) and the pursuit of endogeneity. The former requires an uncompromising refutation of the epistemology of alterity which has shaped modes of gazing and writing about Africa and Africans. Such negation of alterity is the beginning of the journey to affirmation; a method of scholarship rooted in the collective Self and speaks to it without the anxiety regarding what the western Other thinks or has to say. In its specific sense, the two write-ups (Mafeje 2000, 2001) were in reaction to the ‘cos-

metropolitan’ anxieties of the post-modern monologue that dominated the pages of the CODESRIA Bulletin in the preceding three years. Mafeje’s pieces were an ode to a recovered patrimony. However, Mafeje’s ‘determined negation of negation’ goes back much further, and its object was the discipline of Anthropology as the epitome of alterity.

‘The problem of Anthropology...’ (Mafeje 1976) was an intervention in the debates between different factions of anthropologists.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the new generation of anthropologists with radical orientation; on the other hand, an older generation of ‘mainstream’ anthropologists. Kathleen Gough represented the former and Raymond Firth, the latter.<sup>7</sup> Mafeje acknowledged Magubane (1968) as one of the new generation of African scholars mounting a vigorous repudiation of mainstream anthropology.<sup>8</sup> ‘The problem of Anthropology...’ was elegantly written — in the best tradition of Mafeje’s scholarship. Elegant erudition aside, Mafeje’s contention was that Anthropology had passed its ‘sell by’ date, and it was time to move on to something different. “Among the social sciences” Mafeje argued, “anthropology is the only discipline which is specifically associated with colonialism and dissociated with metropolitan societies” (1976:317). The alterity associated with anthropology is not accidental or temporal; it is immanent. If as Raymond Firth (1972) claimed, anthropology is “the legitimate child of Enlightenment”, the leading intellectuals of the Enlightenment, unlike latter day anthropologists, were preoccupied with accounting for “the moral, genetic and historical unity of mankind” and “had little regard for exotic customs” (Mafeje 1976:310). However, in so far as the scholarship of the Enlightenment “sought to make its own anthropological viewpoint universal” (ibid.) it inspired a ‘civilising mission’ in relation to non-European peoples — a pseudonym for pillage and imperialism. Anthropology, as a discipline, is rooted in this venture; it is in this sense that contrary to Firth’s claim, Anthropology is a child of imperialism, and a foster-child (if not grandchild) of Enlightenment. English socialists like Beatrice Webb, for instance, did not think it strange to talk of East Asians as savages (Chang 2008); Christian missionaries took such labelling for granted: a pervasive conception of Africa and Africans that has received a renewed impetus. Anthropology is one discipline founded on such inferior othering of its ‘objects’ of study. Unlike Gough and others who sought to reform Anthropology, Mafeje’s contention is that epistemic ‘othering’ is *so immanent* to Anthropology as to be its *raison d’être*. The point is not to reform it but to extirpate it.

Mafeje uses ‘anthropology’ in at least two senses: anthropology as a conceptual concern with ontological discourses (Mafeje 1997a:7), and Anthropology as “a historically defined field of study”. The former has to do with origin of something — as in his discussion of the “anthropology of

African literature”. The latter has to do with a discipline rooted in the ‘epistemology of alterity.’ While Mafeje associate the latter with the discipline, it is equally as much a mode of thinking and writing that considers the ‘object’ as the inferior or the exotic Other. It is the latter that one would classify as the ‘anthropologized’ reasoning about Africa; a discursive mode that persists, which constitutes for me the *curse of anthropology* in the study of Africa. As a discipline, however, Mafeje was careful to distinguish between the works of Colonial Anthropology (most emblematic of British Anthropology) and works of practitioners such as Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux. The former is more foundationally associated with anthropology “as a study of ‘primitive’ societies” (Mafeje 1997a:6); the latter, Mafeje insisted, must be taken seriously: “their deep idiographic knowledge, far from diminishing their capacity to produce nomothetic propositions, has helped them to generate new concepts” (Mafeje 1991:10). They approached the African societies on their own terms — without alterity.

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

Further, ethnography is no more unique to Anthropology than quantitative method is to Economics. The methodological opaqueness of the anthropologist’s ‘field method’ quite easily gives way to methodological licence. Since the function of anthropologists is to ‘explain’ exotic, foreign cultures and strange customs to their compatriots, methodological licence and the erroneous coding of the ‘objects’ of Anthropology are taking on the same instrumentalism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries new age of Empire as applied Anthropology did under colonialism. Closely associated with the epistemology of alterity is erasure, which becomes distinctly imperial at inter-personal levels; and those attempting erasure tend to employ derision and intellectual bullying.

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

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

On the second charge, her response was that she did nothing of the sort and listed several African scholars she claimed she cited. Other than Mudimbe, she engaged with none of the authors. When she did, if one can call it engagement, they were part of general citation rather than an engagement with their ideas. The two references to Onwuka Dike (Moore 1994:11, 15) were from his obituary on Melville Herskovits. You would hardly know that Dike founded the famous Ibadan School of History. The references to Jomo Kenyatta were either incidental to her discussion of Malinowski or an oblique reference to Africans publishing "ethnographic monographs of their own peoples" or "emigration" (Moore 1994:132-3). In the latter, Kenyatta was part of five Africans grouped together, but the reader will have no idea what exactly they wrote. The reference to Paulin Hountondji was second hand, and part of African intellectuals who "rail against what they see as the misreading of outsiders" (Moore 1994:84); hardly an evidence of intellectual courtesy.

The only African scholar she discussed with any degree of ‘seriousness’ was Valentin Mudimbe, and even so, it was in a remarkably derisive and imperial manner. She referred to him as “a Zairean who lives in the United States,” like he did not belong. Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* was dismissed as “complex, indigestible, and highly opinionated” (Moore 1994:84), without any apparent awareness that to label someone opinionated is to be opinionated. If one were to look for the enduring tendency to treat Africans and their intellectuals as children, one need to go no further than read Moore. She would make similarly condescending remarks about Mafeje in a later article (Moore 1998), labelling his work as driven by ‘polemic strategy’, ‘noises’, ‘diatribe’, etc. As before, Moore failed to engage with a range of Mafeje’s works or even the ‘Anthropology and Independent Africans’ (Mafeje 1998) to which she claimed she was responding. The response was more condescending than a matter of intellectual engagement. How, for instance, is the crisis of funding that African universities face an answer to the alterity immanent to Anthropology? It was as if Africans will have to choose between alterity and generous funding. Yet the high point of the rejection of alterity was when research funding was readily available *within* the universities themselves. University of Ibadan (Nigeria) rejected the idea of a Department of Anthropology in the early 1960s when it did not have any problem of research funding and its staff had no need to seek external funding. The researches undertaken by Kayode Adesogan,<sup>9</sup> in Organic Chemistry, were funded entirely from grants from the university (Adesogan 1987). It led to his contributing more than twenty new compounds to the lexicon of Chemistry, precisely because his scholarship was rooted in endogeneity (Adesina 2006:137). The same can be said of the diverse schools of History in Africa — from Dar-es-Salaam, to Ibadan, and Dakar. They flourished in the periods *before* the funding crisis. What they shared in common was an uncompromising rejection of the colonial racist historiography (Adesina 2005, 2006). The difference in Chemistry and History is that alterity is not immanent to them. History did not originate in the study of the ‘primitive’ Other nor reserved for it. It was, therefore, amenable to epistemic challenge on its own terms. The same cannot be said for Anthropology!

Mafeje was fundamentally right in seeing through this in his review of Moore’s book. He ended the review by saying he did not mind the candour of those who write about Africa as:

Simply a continent of savages (read ‘tribes’) and venomous beasts... As a matter of fact, I like black mambas lethal as they are and wish Africans could learn from them. Perhaps, in the circumstances their continent would cease to be a playground for knowers of absolute knowledge and they in turn would lose their absolute alterity (1997b:14).

It was a ‘call to arms’ that many failed to heed. The debate in *African Sociological Review* 2(1) 1998 is interesting for the persistent claims by the professional Anthropologists that Mafeje’s critique was ‘*passé*’ (Laville 1998). If Anthropology has transcended its alterity, why do so many anthropologists persist in exoticizing their ‘objects’ of enquiries? When the professional anthropologists transcend alterity, how will the result be different from Sociology? If, as Nkwi (Nkwi 1998:62) argued, “the trend in African Anthropology is towards the interdisciplinary approach” is the ‘discipline’ still a discipline? Nkwi is right in arguing that more Africans were engaged in active objections to Anthropology than Mafeje acknowledged: Mafeje mentioned himself and Magubane. A case in point is Omafume Onoge at Ibadan. But Mafeje was referring to focused dissembling of Anthropology’s epistemology of alterity not the “narcissism of minor differences” within the camp (cf. Ntarangwi et al., 2006) that the deliberations of the African anthropologists he was critiquing represented. Most Africans simply walked away from the discipline rather than dissipate their energies in arguing with the ‘owners’ of the discipline. Central to this is the inherently racist nature of its discourse — alterity. I recognised the racist epistemology in my first term as an undergraduate; Mafeje (1976) only confirmed what I knew. More than 30 years later, we have African students expressing similar feelings within a few days of being in their first year Anthropology class at Rhodes University. It is either the discipline has overcome its epistemology of alterity or it has not. Clearly it has not, precisely because whatever the negotiations around the ‘protective belt’ of the discipline’s core discourse, the core remains rooted in alterity.

The claim to field method (ethnography) as a defining aspect of Anthropology is equally intriguing. Ethnographic technique was used before the rise of Anthropology and is used in other disciplines beyond Anthropology. As Mafeje (Mafeje 1996) noted, he did not have to be an anthropologist to write *The theory and ethnography of African social formations*. I made extensive use of ethnographic technique in my doctoral study of a Nigerian refinery (Adesina 1988); I did it as a sociologist. A discipline’s claim to being mono-methodological is hardly a positive reflection on its credibility. Research problems suggest the research techniques to adopt not the discipline; most research issues would require multiple research techniques, not being wedded to a particular research technique.

Anthropology was born of a European intellectual division of labour. When they stayed home and studied their own people, they did Sociology; when they went abroad to study other people, ate strange food and learnt strange customs and languages, they did Anthropology (Adesina 2006). The idea of a ‘native anthropologist’, as Onoge noted, is a contradiction. In spite of protestations

to the contrary, Anthropology is still more oriented towards the study of the 'exotic Other' than not. When they write about their own societies most still write as if they are outsiders. In 2007, it is still possible to come across a manuscript written by a Yoruba medical anthropologist with a title that reads in part: "...of the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria." It is the kind of extroversion that Hountondji (1997, 1990) warned against. Clearly, if the audience was conceived as Yoruba such exoticization would not be necessary.

Those who wish to study non-western societies in the tradition of Godelier and Meillassoux should get beyond casting these societies as exotic objects that need coding for the 'non-Native' audience and broaden their methodological scope; in other words, move over to doing Sociology.

### *Against Disciplinarity and Epistemology?*

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

Mafeje's rejection of 'epistemology' is rooted in his aversion for dogmatism, but that is hardly the same as epistemology, which as any dictionary will attest is "the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity". The study of specific epistemic standpoints — from positivism to Marxism and postmodernism — is the business of epistemology. The crisis of dogmatic adherence to an epistemic standpoint can hardly be construed as a crisis of epistemology. Postmodernism's pretension to being against grand narrative

ended up erecting a grand narrative of its own. What it had to say that was brilliant was not new, and what was new was not brilliant. We deconstruct postmodernism's deconstructionist claims precisely from the standpoint of Epistemology — accounting for a paradigm's presuppositions, foundations, claims to knowledge production, extent and validity, as the dictionary says.

### **The Pursuit of Endogeneity**

Right from the start of his intellectual career, Mafeje's rejection of alterity was not simply a matter of rebellion; it was immediately about affirmation. It is instructive, for instance, that not one of those who purported to contend with him in the *ASR* 'debate' showed an awareness of anything Mafeje wrote before 1991. As mentioned earlier, the idea of endogeneity is about scholarship 'derived from within', and that is not simply a matter of ethnography. Rather than works of anthropology, Mafeje's sole-authored works in the 1960s (Mafeje 1963, 1967) are works of profound 'endogeny.' They reflect a strong sociological mindset, combining fine field-craft with analytical rigour.

In his 1967 paper, "The role of the bard in a contemporary African community", Mafeje located the *imbongi* or bard in a comparative context, drawing comparison with the Celtic bards (Mafeje 1967:195-6). He demonstrated their role as social critics who can be withering in their poetic social commentaries. Rather than 'tribe' or 'tribal' Mafeje used the categories 'contemporary African community' and *Thembu* (the AmaXhosa sub-nationality); rather than 'praise singers' Mafeje located the practitioners of the public-performance poetry as 'South African bard' and 'South African traditional bards'. It was an immediate extirpation of the discourse of alterity that would have marked the *imbongi* as a 'praise singer' of a primitive culture.<sup>10</sup> The practitioners we encountered were poet-laurels; public intellectuals engaged in intellectual labour. The society itself and its various functionaries, the political contestations and conflicts that marked the 1950s' Transkei region in the wake of the rise to power of the Afrikaner National Party and its Bantustan policies were free game for the *imbongi*. The paper had the hallmarks of an intellectual effort to make sense of the social processes from the contested ontological standpoints of the human agencies being investigated. It was devoid of the intellectual anxieties with acculturation — who were 'trouser-wearers' or who were 'red-clay' people — that was emblematic of the anthropologized modes of writing in South Africa of the 1950s and the 1960s. The fieldwork for the paper was undertaken while Mafeje was a student at University of Cape Town between 1959 and 1963. Much later, Mafeje (2000) would highlight "standing on home ground" sufficient to apprehend a society from its own ontological standpoint as a marker of an 'authentic interlocutor' (Mafeje 1991) — in highlighting the

difference between the authenticity of Taiwo's (1995) grasp of Yoruba deity, *Esu Elegbara*, vis-a-vis Gates (1988); more in this below. Much the same can be said for Mafeje's 1963 and 1967 works; he did both works as a graduate student. It is this capacity to apprehend a society 'from within', without 'extraversion' (Mafeje 2000:67) that marked his scholarship and gave it the ring of authenticity and 'groundedness'.

The importance of *The theory and ethnography of an African social formation* — apart from its artisanal nature and conceptual rigour — derives from Mafeje's effort to understand the interlacustrine kingdoms — *on their own terms* — from within and without the burden of fitting them into particular 'universalist' typologies. In the process all manner of intellectual totems were overturned. I suspect that this is what Mafeje meant by his rejection of 'epistemology;' the freedom to allow the data to speak to the writer rather than imposing paradigms on them. What such scholarship calls for are authentic interlocutors able to decode local 'vernaculars': the encoded local ontology and modes of comprehension (Mafeje 1991:9-10, 2000:66, 68). Mafeje argued that this is what distinguished Olufemi Taiwo's (1995) accounting for the Yoruba deity, *Esu Elegbara*, from those of Henry Louis Gate and Kwesi Prah's (1998:156-184) interlocution of the Akan codes from Anthony Kwame Appiah's (1992) 'extraverted' account.

Being an authentic interlocutor, as others have demonstrated, does not come simply from being 'a native' (Amadiume 1987; Nzegwu 2005; Oyèwùmí 1997); it requires a capacity to take local 'vernaculars' as one's intellectual reference point or anchor. The result in scholars such as Amadiume, Nzegwu, Oyèwùmí, and others has been seminal contributions to African Gender Scholarship without the status anxiety of wanting to be cosmopolitan. The same applies to the diverse African schools of History.<sup>11</sup> Taking one's locale seriously enough to produce works of epistemic significance has always been the essence of enduring scholarship. Similarly, there is nothing in Mafeje's works that suggests that being an 'outsider' disqualifies a scholar from producing works of profound endogeny. For Mafeje (Mafeje 1981, 1991) the French anthropologist, Claude Meillassoux, is such an example. Nor does endogeny suggest a 'de-linking' from non-endogenous systems of knowledge. Mafeje's works demonstrates this, almost to the point of raising Marxist frame of analysis to the level of a distinct discipline (cf. Mafeje 1976, 1981, 1991). Even so, Mafeje would insist that the nomothetic aspiration of any theory or paradigm must meet the test of the idiographic rather than the tyranny of received paradigms that often obscures the ability to 'see' and comprehend social processes unfolding before us on their own terms.

In his engagement with Harold Wolpe's *On the Articulation of Modes of Production*, Mafeje (Mafeje 1981) demonstrated the depth of groundedness

that makes for an authentic interlocutor in decoding the local ‘vernacular’. A central assumption in Wolpe’s (1981:295) attempt at apprehending the ‘African redistributive economies’ is that “land is held communally by the community” and the primacy of land as a means of production. The idea of ‘communal property continues to suffuse the debate around the agrarian question in South Africa. Land, as Mafeje (1981:128) noted, was never a ‘communal’ property considering that ownership inhered in the lineage not the community; something entirely different from ‘the commons’ such as shared grazing land or watering hole. Significantly, Wolpe misread the processes unfolding in the periods the he was concerned with.

First “under the system of *quit-rent* all arable land is individually registered at the magistrate court in the name of the family head, who then accept liability for the annual rent... By this token” Mafeje (1981:128) asks, “are not all peasant cultivators in the reserves, far from being owners of land, tenants of the State in the strict sense?” In what way can one speak of communal land in such context?

Second, relates to the deployment of class analysis in the context. “To conduct class analysis we do not have to invent class, but rather to be alert to possible mediations in the process of class formation” (Mafeje 1981:130). In this regard, the idea that in a lineage system “a man who is a custodian of a plot of four acres belongs to a different class from one who has no such control, or to say a family which is bless with a hundred cattle belongs to a class above one with five cattle, is to reduce all social relations to mere quantities” (ibid). In the lineage system “the youth are the elders of tomorrow..., the elders are biologically committed to succession... despite their monopoly over the means of production” (ibid). What more, migrant labour system was inverting the line of dependence. Maintaining and ownership of prestige properties like livestock increasingly depended on ‘remittances’ from migrant worker. In the eastern Cape, Mafeje (1981:128) noted that the category of such migrants workers “who send part of the family (normally, old parents and younger children) to the reserves with some of the stock accumulated on white farms” are referred to as *amaranuga* (ibid). The elders come to depend on the younger people for the ‘means of production.’ A hurried deployment of ‘class analysis’, devoid of grounded understanding of the unfolding internal processes, risks imposing ‘nomothetic’ categories on the object of analysis (Mafeje 1981:133-6). One might further argue that claiming that “the class struggle [is] the motor of history” as Wolpe (1980:219) has to contend with Amilcar Cabral’s (1979:125) reminder that not all societies are ‘class societies’ and to insist on the mantra is not only to misrepresent history but to place people in such contexts outside of history. As Mafeje (1981:130) warned “class-formation is not only an object

of theory but also an object of empirical investigation.” It takes one with the insight of an authentic interlocutor to understand the limit of the nomothetic aspirations of received paradigms and modes of writing.

Added to Mafeje’s location as an ‘authentic interlocutor’ was his much more rigorous handling of the conceptual issue of what Etienne Balibar meant by ‘social formation’ and why Wolpe’s idea of ‘articulation’ misread Balibar {{3361 Mafeje, Archie 1981/f:133-6;}}; it was theme he would pick up later in his *The theory and ethnography of African social formations* in a more elaborate manner.

Mafeje demonstrated similar capacity to cut through prevailing mantras in his “Beyond ‘Dual Theories’ of Economic Growth” (Mafeje 1978:47-73). The village (‘traditional’ economy) is intricately linked to the ‘modern’ economy of the cities. Conceptual rigour found its validation in detailed attention to empirical data that emerged from an “insider’s” capacity to decode local ‘vernaculars’. Some 30 years after Mafeje’s critique of the ‘Dual Economy’ thesis, the debate on ‘two economy’ is going on in South Africa without as much as an acknowledgment of his contribution in these areas. Similarly, the collection of essays in a special issue of *Africanus*,<sup>12</sup> concerned with a critique of the ‘two economies’ discourse in South Africa and Wolpe’s ‘articulation of modes of production’ as the basis of some of such critiques, did not contain a single reference to Mafeje’s works in these areas.

For Mafeje:

Afrocentrism is nothing more than a legitimate demand that African scholars study their society from inside and cease to be purveyors of an alienated intellectual discourse... when Africans speak for themselves and about themselves, the world will hear the authentic voice, and will be forced to come to terms with it in the long-run... If we are adequately Afrocentric the international implications will not be lost on the others (2000:66-67).

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

### **Lessons of Mafeje’s Scholarship: Concluding Remarks**

The lessons that a new generation of African scholars can take from Mafeje’s scholarship are many. I will mention four:

1. Deep familiarity with the literature and subject,
2. An artisanal approach to field data and writing;
3. Immense theoretical rigour, and
4. An unapologetic and relentless commitment to Africa.

Over time, Mafeje moved from being proto-Trotskyite (in the tradition of South Africa's Non-European Unity Movement) to being Afrocentric<sup>13</sup> but these were simply the scaffolding for deep social commitment. Noteworthy is that a rejection of dogmatism did not result in eclecticism in Mafeje's hands. You cannot walk away from any of his papers without being struck by his voracious intellectual appetite, and deep familiarity with his field, even when he moved into new fields. He took the field craft seriously and was 'artisanal' in connecting the dots. But more significantly, his prodigious intellect was immediately grounded in addressing real life problems; scholarship (however profound) must find its relevance in engagement. Mafeje's works on agrarian and land issues, development studies, democracy and governance, liberation scholarship, African epistemic standpoints, etc., constantly challenged and prodded a new generation to think large and engage in issues around us. The policy implications are enormous. He was uncompromising in demanding that Africans must insist on their own space; be completely unabashed in rejecting every form of domination. But averting alterity is not about being marooned on the tip of criticism; it must move from negation to affirmation.

### ***Appreciation***

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### **Notes**

1. This paper is concerned more with the intellectual aspects of my personal encounters with Archie Mafeje. For the mix of the more personal and part of the intellectual in this paper see my "Against Alterity—the Pursuit of Endogeneity: breaking bread with Archie Mafeje" CODESRIA Bulletin 2008, No.3 (Special Issue for the 12th General Assembly).
2. Quoting Mao Zedong via Kwesi K. Prah.
3. Much of the claims of taking on Mafeje, especially Sally Moore's, failed to acknowledge this; further on this later in this paper.
4. See the comments of the African reviewers to whom Magubane's paper was sent by the editor of *Current Anthropology*. Onoge, who met Magubane in the US, described him as 'the most exciting African sociologist' of the time Omafume F. Onoge. 1977.

5. Cf. [http://www.powerset.com/explore/semhtml/Bantoid\\_langages](http://www.powerset.com/explore/semhtml/Bantoid_langages). Also see, <http://www.ethnologue.org/>.
6. The paper was the point of my encounter with Mafeje, having first read the paper as a first year undergraduate at University of Ibadan, while rummaging through the journals section in the university's library basement.
7. This distinction is, of course, relative. Kathleen Gough was born 1925 while Raymond Firth was born in 1901. The distinction is more one of relative accretion to 'classical anthropology.'
8. Magubane was, actually, never an anthropologist. He trained at the University of Natal as a sociologist. That he would be considered an 'anthropologist' in North America says more about the spatial division of labour when such scholars study Africa.
9. Retired professor of Organic Chemistry, University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Nigeria).
10. The similarity included the mode of self-appointment, being arbiter and conveyer of public opinion, etc. In this Mafeje registered a disagreement with the claim by the eminent linguist, A.C. Jordan, that the imbondi has no 'parallel... in Western poetry.' In the same breadth Mafeje pointed to the non-hereditary nature of the imbondi in contrast with the European bards.
11. See Toyin Falola's J. F. A. Ajayi and Toyin Falola. 2000 collection of JF Ade Ajayi's papers for insights into the methodological and epistemological issues that shaped the Ibadan School of History. Onwuka Dike was the founder and inspiration of the School.
12. Volume 37, Number 2, 2007. *Africanus* is a journal of Development Studies published by the UNISA (University of South Africa) Press.
13. My appreciation to Thandika Mkandawire, an enduring mwalimu, in this regard.

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