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Refracted visions of Africa's past

The study of Africa's past has been divided, pie-like, between disciplines with separate yet overlapping histories: history, archaeology, and, more recently, anthropology. These divisions mirror disciplinary boundaries that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as the academy took its modern form. During the present century, these divisions at times blurred, yet each discipline carries with it the freight of its own history (Wolf 1994:1), the assumptions and methods that shape inquiry, the prism through which disciplinary perspectives are refracted. In this chapter, I examine the historic turn in anthropology (cf. McDonald 1996) and its relationship with African history, examining the promise of a robust multidisciplinary understanding of Africa's past. Few studies have delivered on that promise, and I examine how now-rejected paradigms continue to inhibit meaningful integration of historical, anthropological, and archaeological insights into Africa's past. More specifically, I examine a series of epistemological legacies that shape methods of historical reasoning, including progressive evolutionism, the direct historic approach, structural functionalism, and tribal models. I argue that these legacies actively create and maintain a series of silences about Africa's past, silences that are perpetuated by contemporary academic practice.

Silences in the production of history

The textbook history of our youth was a history of states and statesmen, of men primarily, and Europeans predominantly, with a firm focus on events of evident significance. It was a history peopled by few, absent of many. It was a vision that first *Annales*, then British social historians worked to expand by including those absent from European history – peasants, workers, and women. These scholars sought to write *total histories*, inclusive of all. Others worked to produce histories inclusive of non-European peoples – to demonstrate that Africans had a history which could be retrieved despite a dearth of textual sources. Yet these acts of inclusion entail silences of their own, for silences enter the process of historical production at multiple moments: "the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)" (Trouillot 1995:26; emphasis original). Uneven power inheres in each of these moments, actively creating mentions and silences. Thus, history is a dialectic of mentions and silences, silences that cannot be overcome merely by expanding the empirical base of history (Trouillot 1995:48–49).

Trouillot's exploration of how power shapes mentions and silences in the history of the Haitian Revolution provides a springboard for examining the epistemological and methodological challenges of working at the intersection of anthropology, history, and archaeology. Though I argue that archaeology has much to contribute, we should not envision archaeology as merely filling an empirical void – adding to the evidential base of African (or other) history. Rather, we need to examine how archaeological evidence creates its own mentions and silences, exploring the power of archaeology in the production of history. Further, we must examine the unacknowledged power of methodology in shaping our vision of African history, interrogating the silences created by: foundational categories like structure; ethnographic models; essentialist views of identity and ethnicity; the mentions and silences of documents and oral histories; the foundational categories of ages and stages in archaeology; and forms of historical reasoning that render the partialities of early accounts more complete by reference to later sources.

Envisioning Africa's past

Constructions of Africa's past were long shaped by the perception that African societies represented earlier stages in human development, and therefore a distant past. A pervasive and persistent progressive evolutionary view – widely held by colonial officers and early scholars alike – contributed to the view that Africans lacked history. African societies were perceived as bounded units that could usefully be slotted into a unitary evolutionary hierarchy. Contact with the "outside," and therefore "history," was perceived as recent and the source of only superficial change. A traditional present connected seamlessly with a relatively unchanging past. These assumptions differentially molded the perspectives of the disciplines among which the study of Africa's past was divided. When these assumptions were questioned, each discipline responded in terms of existing agendas. Differences remained in foundational concepts, and in the type, scale, and temporal context of the societies focused on by each discipline, differences that sabotaged efforts at interdisciplinary cooperation in the experimental moment of the early independence period (Vansina 1962; Vansina et al. 1964; cf. Robertshaw 2000; Schmidt 1978, 1990; Vansina 1995). We are now arguably in the midst of another experimental moment. The recent rapprochement between history and anthropology has seen historians more attentive to the social dimensions of history, and anthropologists attuned to the temporal dimensions of cultural production (Dirks 1996; Eley 1996; Faubion 1993; Feierman 1993; Moore 1986:1; Sahlins 1993). Yet each discipline has brought to the rapprochement working assumptions and practices from earlier disciplinary incarnations that lend distinctive shape to their end products. In this chapter I briefly consider the epistemological legacy that each discipline – anthropology, history, and archaeology – brings to the study of Africa's past, and reflect on the challenges of working in interdisciplinary spaces. I do not intend an exhaustive historical treatment. As Ortner (1995:176) observed, "In this era of interdisciplinarity, scholarly exhaustiveness is more unattainable than ever." Rather, I sketch the preoccupations of the disciplines, focusing on Anglophone literature.

Anthropological visions of Africa's past

Historically oriented studies in anthropology bear the imprint of an ethnographic genre developed through the writings of British social anthropologists. This genre has been extensively critiqued and its contours are well known (Asad 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 1983; Hymes 1969; Koponen 1986; Thornton 1983; Vansina 1987; Wolf 1984). Its focus was on simple societies in rural contexts, perceived as bounded and isolated from neighboring societies, little changed from a traditional past (cf. Lewis 1998). Under the combined influences of French sociology and a colonial concern to establish effective governance, anthropological attention focused on social structure and political organization (Moore 1993). Yet despite an emphasis on social statics (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950), it is naive to suggest that anthropologists were unaware of the changes wrought by missionization and colonial rule (cf. Goody 1990, 1998). As Moore (1994:29–73) has pointed out, anthropologists of the period wrote about culture contact and social change (Fortes 1938; Gluckman 1958; Mair 1938; Malinowski 1938, 1945). Importantly, however, they treated the topic separately from their structural-functional descriptions of tribal societies, producing two genres:

> One was the closed description of the way of life of particular African peoples, a kind of timeless abstraction of "the way it probably was" before the colonial period, as if native life could be conceived as a self-contained system uncontaminated by outside contacts. The second mode of description was entirely different and was concerned with the historical moment at which the fieldwork was done. This genre provided data on everything from labor migration to the impact of colonial institutions.
> (Moore 1994:39)

This split in the literature thus flowed from the sense that the study of culture contact was ancillary to the central project of the structural-functionalist (Thomas 1989:6).

The preoccupations of mid-century anthropology created a distinctive prism through which African societies were viewed, a vision refracted by a lingering progressive evolutionary view of the world. These characteristics included: (1) an emphasis on social statics – structure – disembedded from the dynamics of culture change as evidence of "modernity" was stripped away (Goody 1990); (2) a focus on kinship and political systems, and a concomitant lack of interest in the material world; (3) a concern with functionally integrated, bounded cultures, associated with territories and conceived as types (acephalous, segmentary, etc.); (4) primary emphasis on tribal or "primitive" societies, with less attention to indigenous African states, or so-called detribalized peoples (Ekeh 1990); (5) a focus on homogeneous groups that corresponded to the anthropological notion of "tribe," and a concomitant lack of interest in more heterogeneous societies that often occupied the interstitial areas between homogeneous "tribes" (Kopytoff 1987:4–5); and (6) a lack of interest in connections between societies of different scales (Goody 1990; Sharpe 1986).

Anthropology faced a growing crisis of relevance in the immediate postcolonial

period, marginalized in Africa because of its focus on "primitive people and their quaint customs" (Shaw 1990:219; also Ekeh [1990:665–666]). Partly in response, anthropologists developed an interest in the temporal dimensions of social process through the 1970s and '80s (cf. Cohn 1987; Evans-Pritchard 1962). The roots of this interest were diverse (Faubion 1993). Ethnohistory[1] drew attention to a long history of change that flowed from European encounters, whether direct or indirect (Cohn 1987:57–58; Trigger 1982, 1985). Growing attention to global interdependencies wrought by capitalist expansion led proponents of modernization, dependency, and world systems theories to see economic change as a catalyst to social change. This challenged a vision of non-western societies as isolated and bounded social units. Drawing on the work of Braudel, Wallerstein (1974) argued that a capitalist world system had united the globe from the sixteenth century. His work resonated with that of anthropologists studying New World peasant societies (Mintz 1985; Roseberry 1988:162–165, 1989; Wolf 1982). Wolf combined insights from decades of research among peasants with Wallerstein's global perspective to document how the lives of non-European peoples were affected by the expansion of European capital. His book (Wolf 1982) brought the work of ethnohistorians, previously marginal within mainstream anthropology, to the attention of a broader audience.

The 1980s saw growing attention to the implications of European expansion for culture change (e.g., Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1992; Mintz 1985; Moore 1986; Ortner 1990; Sahlins 1981, 1985; Stoler 1985; Trigger 1985; Wilmsen 1989). Historical concerns were firmly embedded in African anthropology by the 1990s (e.g., Berry 1993; Guyer 1988; Moore and Vaughan 1994; Moore 1993).These studies rejected evolutionary schema that severed connections between contemporary societies of different scales, slotting them into different levels of evolutionary development. They complemented anthropologically informed studies by historians who documented similar processes in Africa (Feierman 1993). But anthropologists questioned the primacy of the "core" in determining the response of the "periphery," prompting interest in the agency of local peoples in the face of global change (Moore 1987; Ortner 1984; Wolf 1982). Though the historical turn in anthropology lacks theoretical integration (Peel 1995:582), many authors have been concerned with the relationship between structure, event, and process at the local level (Moore 1986:1–12; Ortner 1990; Sahlins 1981; Stoler 1985:viii), and with colonization as a cultural process (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Sahlins 1993; Stoler and Cooper 1997).

In many respects the historical ethnography that has emerged departs radically from the modal anthropology of earlier decades. But in other respects historical anthropology (in its diverse forms) carries the baggage of an earlier anthropology in its: (1) continued emphasis on structure and its determinant role in history; (2) lingering reliance on the notion of relatively stable precolonial or precontact cultures that stand as a reference point for change in the colonial period; and (3) continued focus on relatively homogeneous "tribal" societies (Kopytoff 1987). I explore these in turn.

Historical anthropologists debate the role of structure in history. In his influential

study of the Sandwich Islands, Sahlins (1981, 1985) argued that cultural structures are reproduced through the actions of intelligent and intentional subjects who do not necessarily "use existing categories in prescribed ways" (Sahlins 1985:145). Though culture is always at risk of being transformed through action (1985:149), it is perhaps most so in contact situations, conceptualized as conjunctures of structures. Sahlins stressed the intentionality of subjects, an intentionality that can only be understood within a specific cultural context, and not by reference to an all-encompassing practical reason (Sahlins 1995). He warned against the imperialism of a historiography that treats cultures as recent and incoherent products of an encounter with the world system (1993:6–7). For Sahlins (1993:15), an encompassing structure provides the terms of debate for members of society – categories may be contested, but they belong to the same social universe, to a meaningful order of differences if they are to be contested at all. Thus, for some historical anthropologists, structure provides the vehicle through which meaning is forged, reproduced, and sometimes transformed (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; cf. Ortner 1990). Change is accomplished through structure. In some sense then, structure must be antecedent to change: "If culture must be conceived as always and only changing, lest one commit the mortal sin of essentialism, then there can be no such thing as identity, or even sanity, let alone continuity" (Sahlins 1993:4). As a methodological consequence, events that potentially transform structure (read "culture"; Roseberry 1989) are located outside culture. Culture is thus situated in history, but not genuinely historicized (Dirks 1996; Peel 1992).

While this raises issues of chickens and eggs and which came first, my concern here is not with structure in a theoretical sense. Rather, I draw attention to the methodological and narrative consequences of an emphasis on structure and structural coherency. Historical anthropological studies are largely preoccupied with changes associated with the penetration of capital and colonialism. When structure is conceived as transformed through a "conjuncture of structures" (Sahlins 1981:33–66), it becomes a prerequisite to establish the nature of cultural structures prior to the conjuncture. History is thus introduced after culture (Dirks 1996:27; also Peel [1983:1–7, 14], Thomas [1991:36–37]). This has narrative consequences. Early chapters are devoted to laying out – some more explicitly than others – the character of "precontact" or "precolonial" structure. The product is reminiscent of what American anthropologists conceptualized as "salvage" ethnography – the retrieval of culture in "grandfather's time." This presents a methodological conundrum – how to reconstruct a precontact or precolonial period that by definition precedes the written accounts of Europeans whose presence signals the beginning of a "conjuncture" (Etherington 1992). I take up these methodological issues in Chapter 2.

A preoccupation with structure is related to another, largely unexamined, legacy of earlier anthropology – a focus on relatively homogeneous "tribal" societies (Ekeh 1990). As Kopytoff (1987) observed, anthropologists felt most at home in societies that fit a tribal model whose epistemological roots lay in the European search for national identity. As anthropologists became interested in historical issues, they

continued to focus on the societies that preoccupied earlier anthropologists. Few
were drawn to the study of "ethnically ambiguous marginal societies" that were ubiq-
uitous along what Kopytoff (1987:4) termed the "internal frontier." It is

> on the fringes of the numerous established African societies . . . [that] most
> African polities and societies have, so to speak, been "constructed" out of the
> bits and pieces – human and cultural – of existing societies. This posits a
> process in which incipient small polities are produced by other similar and
> usually more complex societies . . . Instead of a primordial embryo – a kind
> of tribal homunculus – maturing through history while preserving its ethnic
> essence, what we have here is a magnet that grows by attracting to itself the
> ethnic and cultural detritus produced by the routine workings of other
> societies.
> (Kopytoff 1987:3, 6–7)

Migration, ubiquitous in Africa, contributed to the formation of what Kopytoff calls
frontier societies (Cohen 1985:214–215). Such frontier areas are characterized by a
degree of ethnic fluidity that is revealed only in historical perspective (Goody 1990,
1998; Launay 1995). People have diverse origins, some migrating in as part of a larger
group, others as individuals or families seeking refuge, and still others as captives.
Frontiers are initially characterized by an institutional vacuum that is overcome by
a process of social construction as people forge a new society (Kopytoff 1987:25–39,
1999). While they may draw on the organizing principles of their societies of origin,
not everyone shares the same set of organizing principles. One of the challenges that
faces societies of multiethnic origins (and there are many, not confined to Africa) is
to forge organizing principles, some common understanding of how the world works
– a structure if you will. But we might anticipate two consequences: (1) a certain
"structural dissonance" early in the formation of a frontier society as members with
diverse backgrounds draw on their own principles of meaning and organization; and
(2) the resulting "structure" may look quite different from its donor societies, forged
as it were through processes of confrontation, compromise, and contestation shaped
by power and differential interest (see David and Sterner [1999] for a related discus-
sion; cf. Kopytoff 1999). Yet the very possibility of "structural dissonance" is negated
at the outset by a foundational assumption of cultural coherence in some historical
anthropological studies:

> In order for categories to be contested at all, there must be a common system
> of intelligibility, extending to the grounds, means, modes, and issues of
> disagreement. It would be difficult to understand how a society could
> function, let alone how any knowledge of it could be constituted, if there
> were not some meaningful order *in* the differences.
> (Sahlins 1993:15)

While an assumption of cultural coherency may work well in the study of societies
to which anthropologists have been drawn – i.e., those that best fit the tribal model
described by Kopytoff (1987) – what of frontier societies (like the Banda case study

considered in Chapters 3–7) forged from members of diverse ethnic-linguistic groups characterized by different political systems, forms of kinship, and in some instances distinct religions – different "schemas" to use Ortner's (1990:60) term? Part of the challenge would have been to forge a "common system of intelligibility," a process that implies power, contestation, and ultimately silencing. At the very least, in the interim, we can imagine the existence of competing systems of meaning and understanding that lacked overarching coherency, what Amselle (1993:15) calls "hybrid systems . . . with crossbred forms of logic (*logiques métisses*)." And perhaps the character of frontier societies is not so distinct from societies with more homogeneous origins if we treat culture as something that is not

> simply arbitrary rather than natural in the usual terms of semiotics, but as a particular conglomerate of constructions set in motion by agents, produced within and through social practices (especially practices involving power and inequality) operationalized in the modern age through the agencies of the state and the activities of capital.
> (Dirks 1996:36)

In some sense, then, the foundational category "structure" is called into question – but this need not imply incoherency or disorder; rather, it suggests that structure is something of a moving target – in motion, never quite secure, always formulating, never quite formulated, a site of struggle more intense at some times than others (Reddy 1992:156), a process implied in Amselle's term "primordial syncretism" that aims to capture "the idea of a multiplicity, a plurality of belonging at the beginning, which seemed to me to be the main characteristic of precolonial Africa" (Amselle 1993:29–30). If this is the case, history, which is usually conceptualized as being about change (Dirks 1996:31), does not depend on conjunctures or outside events; rather it inheres in the process of cultural production and reproduction in the face of local, regional, and subcontinental "events." Yet change should not be fetishized as implying only difference, or movement away from earlier practice, for, as Sahlins (1993:16–17) argues, change can be directed at maintaining continuity: "The first commercial impulse of the people is not to become just like us but more like themselves. They turn foreign goods to the service of domestic ideas, to the objectification of their own relations and notions of the good life" (cf. Gluckman 1958).

Problematizing the category of structure has important consequences for how we conceptualize a deeper past, a past beyond the conjuncture with capital and colonialism that has preoccupied historical anthropologists. For despite broad recognition that "'peripheral' populations do not acquire history only when they are impelled along its paths by the machinations of merchants, missionaries, military men, manufacturers, or ministers of state," and that "a truly historical anthropology is only possible to the extent that it is capable of illuminating the endogenous historicity of social worlds" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:24), historical anthropology has concerned itself primarily with the encounter between natives and newcomers. Historical anthropologists have seldom concerned themselves with a deeper past, other than to use it as a reference point for the changes wrought by western

expansion (Cohen 1985:220). Precolonial culture lurks in the distant past as a refer-ent, more or less explicit, against which to judge colonial change. The role of the pre-colonial seems to be linked to the nature of the society under investigation – it is less visible if present at all in the study of plantation laborers and peasantries (e.g., Roseberry 1989; Stoler 1985), but it remains an important referent for those who study societies that were the focus of an earlier anthropology (e.g., Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1992; Moore 1986). This structural legacy also has important consequences for how archaeologists model ancient African societies, a topic to which I return in Chapter 2.

Many historical anthropological studies focus on a lived past, retaining an inter-est in the standard historical question of how the past created the present; but others frame the question rather differently, asking how the past is selectively appropriated, suppressed, or invented in the present (Borofsky 1987; Chapman et al. 1989:5; cf. Trouillot 1995). Tonkin's (1992) analysis of oral history exemplifies this trend. Tonkin is little concerned with finding "residues" of the past in oral histories or with a lived past. Instead she analyzes oral histories as contemporary products, and is con-cerned primarily with how the past is mobilized in the present – producing, in effect, an ethnography of historical production. This literature builds on the "invention of tradition" literature that emerged from Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) influential collection. In anthropology, this has intersected with a growing literature on the con-struction of identity in the colonial and postcolonial periods (Cohn 1996; Launay 1995; Lentz 1994, 1995; Schultz 1984; Spear and Waller 1993; Spiegel 1994; Wilmsen 1989:24–63, 1995; Wilmsen et al. 1994; Worby 1994). These studies reject visions of ethnicity as primordial endowment, examining instead the conditions under which identity claims were invented, imposed, resisted, and grounded in claims about the past, acknowledging the knowledge/power/truth strategies that undergird ethnic formulations.

This literature points to a central tension in historical anthropology over the cen-trality of a lived past to the research agendas of scholars. Constructionism demands that we be attentive to the social, cultural, and political-economic contexts in which knowledge about the past is produced and to the power dimensions of knowledge production. But the danger of extreme constructionism is that we lose sight of the lived past, difficult as it may be to access. Trouillot (1995:2, 29) usefully distinguishes between "historicity 1" (sociohistorical process, or "what happened") and "historic-ity 2" (historical narratives, or "what is said to have happened"), but insists that we cannot focus solely on one or the other. The challenge for historical anthropology then is to write

> a historical anthropology of rural Africa in which time is not merely
> "structural" or process inevitably "cyclical"; in which "noncapitalist" worlds
> are not made to slumber in the ether of the ethnographic present; in which
> the past is reduced neither to evolutionary teleology nor to a succession of
> random events.
> (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:96)

But we should also endeavor to write histories in which the joys, sorrows, challenges, and triumphs that animated the lives of men, women, and children in the past – in short, their lived pasts – are not erased by a recognition that our knowledge of their lives is positioned and shaped by concerns of the present.

Historical visions of Africa's past

History coalesced around its distinctive evidence – written documents – excluding non-literate societies from its domain. It in effect became the study of civilizations and, more narrowly, the study of states and statesmen. Attention focused on individuals and events, rather than collectivities and structural relations (Ricoeur 1980:10). Only with the emergence of *Annales* history in France, and British social history in the post-war period, did emphasis shift to the history of collectivities and subaltern groups (Bloch 1953; Ricoeur 1980; Thompson 1963; Zunz 1985; for social history's deeper roots, Wilson [1993]). This new history drew on non-traditional sources – folklore, maps, and landscapes – to recover the history of ordinary people in building a "history from below." Both aspired to produce "total histories," inclusive of those who had been outside history (Wilson 1993:20–21). Experience became a foundational category (Joyce 1995:79; Tilly 1985; Zunz 1985) as social history became oriented around the problem of how ordinary people "lived the big changes" (capitalism and state making; Tilly 1985; Zunz 1985; cf. Cohen 1985), a trend exemplified by Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

At the close of World War II, Africa appeared to Europe as a continent without history. This vision was shaped by a "parched" documentary landscape (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989:16) and persistent evolutionary models (Fage 1970). African societies were seen as locked into evolutionary stages representative of a distant European past (Fabian 1983), with development and modernization as vehicles to pull Africa out of its evolutionary slumber. Early in the 1960s the Oxford historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, reiterated the Hegelian view of African history (Holl 1995) when he proclaimed to his BBC audience that Africa had no history, for "there is only the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe" (Trevor-Roper 1965:9).

Trevor-Roper's articulation of a widely held sentiment became a battle-cry for the first generation of Africanist historians who, in the wake of independence, sought to decolonize African history. The lack of scholarship on precolonial history was identified as a pressing void (Ekeh 1990:672; Fage 1970; Vansina 1962:128; Vansina et al. 1964), and expatriate historians and their African students began to assert that Africa had a retrievable past. Like *Annales* and social historians, African historians confronted a thin and inherently biased documentary record. They pioneered the use of new sources that required new methodologies. Vansina's methodological treatise (1961, 1965) marked the debut of a new approach to African historiography in which historians drew on a variety of non-traditional sources, including oral traditions, archaeological evidence, and historical linguistics. Massive efforts were devoted to collecting oral traditions before they disappeared (Birmingham 1970:55; Gray 1970; Vansina 1962), and in this regard, African history shared an agenda with

an earlier "salvage" ethnography. The focus was firmly on the precolonial, with the goal of creating an autonomous African past (Simensen 1990:268).

Significantly, however, the agenda of the new African historiography was still shaped by the progressive evolution to which it was ostensibly a reaction (Mudimbe 1994:xv). The assumption of progress was not questioned; rather, the goal was to demonstrate that Africa *too* had experienced progress, thereby enhancing respect for Africa and its newly independent nations (Neale 1985, 1986). "Where colonial writing had tried to show that Africans stood outside of the 'mainstream' of progress, post-independence writing sought to portray them as active within it; the mainstream, however, is a Western idea, and one which scarcely anyone thought to question" (Neale 1985:3–4). A generation of scholars thus worked to counter Trevor-Roper's claims, but, because they did not question the assumption of progressive development, continued to write African history in a "Trevor-Roperian" way (Fuglestad 1992:310). Their focus was on kingdoms and states and the "right to universality, and thus the acknowledgment of African contributions to the make-up of humanity" (Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993:1). Stateless, so-called acephalous societies were important only insofar as they represented precursors of more complex forms. Indeed, the prominent African historian Ali Mazrui expressed concern that more documentation of simple groups might perpetuate the image of Africa as unprogressive (Neale 1985:15).

Thus the focus of early African historiography was on states and statesmen, though an interest in economies developed early on. Its processual focus, an overarching concern with dynamics rather than statics, distinguished it from anthropology. But early independence historiography was shaped by values drawn from a European liberal tradition – "personal rights, constitutional freedom, and economic liberalities" (Simensen 1990:272), and marked by efforts to demonstrate the rationality of natives (Temu and Swai 1981:22; e.g., Wilks 1975; see critique by McCaskie [1992, 1995]; cf. Wilks 1993:xvi).

An early emphasis on precolonial societies was overtaken in the 1970s by a growing concern with the effects of European imperialism and colonialism (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Jewsiewicki 1986; Feierman 1993; Wallerstein 1986). More radical forms of historical interpretation emerged with mode of production analyses, and the study of peasants and the oppressed (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969; Terray 1977, 1980; see Jewsiewicki [1989:16–26]). Underdevelopment came to be seen as a systemic consequence of capitalism's expansion (Rodney 1972). But mode of production analyses suffered from ahistoricity; change was confined to specific conjunctures, specifically the penetration of capitalism. And because reconstruction of precolonial modes of production relied on colonial sources, anachronisms derived from the study of transitional forms were imported into the past (Jewsiewicki 1989:20). Mode of production analyses reproduced perceived divisions between societies of different scales by opposing "precapitalist" and "capitalist" societies, diverting attention from encompassing networks (Amselle 1993:16). As historians reacted against mechanistic formulations of capitalist penetration, they focused on the agency and resistance of ordinary people, prompting new work in African social