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Making History in Banda

Anthropological Visions of Africa's Past

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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 ubiquitous 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 discussion; 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 referent, more or less explicit, against which to judge colonial change. The role of the precolonial 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 interest 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 concerned 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 construction 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 centrality 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 "historicity 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

history. A concern with the local spurred studies of how household economies were affected by involvement in cash crop production (e.g., Etienne 1977; Isaacman and Roberts 1995; Roberts 1984, 1992; see Berry [1993], Guyer [1988, 1991] for parallel concerns in anthropology).

As historians of Africa moved toward social history, the self-confident project of total history suffered a blow from poststructuralist and postmodern critiques prompted by the so-called linguistic turn in social history (Eley 1996; Joyce 1995; Reddy 1992; Vernon 1994). Critiques focused on the totalizing, universalizing qualities of a "modern" history committed to grasping society as a whole (Eley 1996:213). Drawing on semiotic stances in anthropology, Saussurean linguistics, and Foucauldian notions of discourse, some historians stressed the intermediary role of language in our experience of the world, and the power/knowledge relationship that inheres in the production of history. For example, White's (1973) *Metahistory* drew attention to the structuring force of narrative and rhetorical strategies, emphasizing the role of aesthetics in the production of history. Where earlier social historians stressed the evidence of experience as crucial to social history, critics claimed that experience was one among a number of foundational categories taken for granted in historical practice (Vernon 1994:88). By naturalizing experience, treating it as an unmediated, transcendent, transparent rendering of "reality," social history was accused of reproducing the ideological systems it purported to analyze, as essentializing differences created and reified by the categories that shaped "experience" (Scott 1991; for a critique see Downs [1993]). Critics refused "a separation between 'experience' and language" and "insist[ed] instead on the productive quality of discourse" (Scott 1991:793). Social historians were thus challenged to reorient their studies and "take as their project *not* the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself" (Scott 1991:797). The problem resonates with that of structure in anthropology in that categories that shape experience (class, gender, and so on) were taken as antecedent. In this sense, there is a common thread between a revisioned social history and a historical anthropology that seeks to historicize culture (as opposed to placing culture in history; Dirks 1996). Critics of social history suggest that it is no longer enough to ask how the everyday world of ordinary people came to be; rather, we must examine how received categories shape our reconstructions of their lives (e.g., "everyday life," "ordinary people"; Certeau 1984; Eley 1996:198).

Postmodern and poststructural influences have been most keenly felt through postcolonial critiques of Africanist historiography. Drawing on parallel critiques of Orientalism (Said 1978), African philosophers examined the invention of Africa and the construction of African studies (Appiah 1992; Mudimbe 1988, 1994). Historians began to reflect on the epistemological ethnocentrism of African historical studies (Newbury 1986), and to recognize that what passed as radical scholarship in the early independence period was rooted in nineteenth-century European epistemologies. "To claim that we were able to change others' worlds without changing ourselves, the epistemological and theoretical tools, and our narrative conventions, was just an

artifice" (Jewsiewicki 1989:36). The tension in anthropology over the centrality of lived pasts (Trouillot's [1995] "historicity 1") compared to the forces that shape history-making in the present ("historicity 2") thus resonated with parallel developments in history.

Archaeological visions of Africa's past

An enduring legacy of archaeology has been the commitment to a project of world prehistory that seeks a universal history of humankind underwritten by a progressive evolutionary vision. The study of prehistory received a major impetus from the discovery of deep time in the mid-nineteenth century (Trigger 1989:91–94), resulting in a powerful new allegiance between archaeological evidence and the comparative method (Kehoe 1991). Nineteenth-century antiquarians busied themselves with the task of filling in deep time, constructing the past of pre-literate Europe by reference to "primitive" societies from beyond Europe's borders (Lubbock 1865; Nilsson 1868; Wilson 1862).

The powerful new evolutionary synthesis that guided both anthropological and archaeological studies in the late nineteenth century naturalized the existing world order and legitimized the domination of Europe over its colonies (Trigger 1989:110–147). The "Big Sequence" communicated a message at home as well, for although change was viewed as natural and inevitable, the emphasis on *gradual* change simultaneously reinforced the status quo. Thus Pitt Rivers believed archaeology could "show the working classes the slow pace of self improvement in the prehistoric past, and the dangers of over-rapid change" (quoted in Dennell [1990:552]).

The early twentieth century saw increased emphasis on diffusion and migration as sources of change in both anthropology and archaeology (Trigger 1989:150–155); however, progressive developmental ideas were not altogether abandoned (Stocking 1974:422–424, 1987:152). The appeal of diffusion and migration was shaped by several factors: nationalism and class conflict at the end of the nineteenth century that directed attention to the origins and movements of ethnic groups (Trigger 1989:161–167); the growing complexity of archaeological evidence and new knowledge of regional correspondences; and practical concerns of dating (Childe and Burkitt 1932). Cross-dating relied on comparing archaeological sequences in areas with no documentary record (i.e., pre-Roman Europe) to those associated with literate cultures (i.e., the Near East and Egypt). Yet despite the emphasis on diffusion, an evolutionary classification continued to shape archaeological inquiry. Gamble (1993:40–44) terms this meshing of diffusionism and evolutionism the *imperial tradition*, which divided the world into innovative centers where new technologies originated (Europe and the Near East), and passive hinterlands to which innovations subsequently diffused (Africa). The result was an "erasure of local history" (Schmidt and Patterson 1995:4). African archaeology emerged within this intellectual milieu, with profound implications for archaeological visions of Africa's past.

Africanist archaeologists have historically eschewed theory (Schmidt 1995:133), often viewing themselves as constructing basic culture history that was theory-neutral; however, progressive evolutionism is implied in the age/stage framework that

underwrites African culture history (Stahl 1999b). During the colonial period, Africans were assumed to be late-comers to the revolutionary developments that marked human progress – agriculture, metallurgy, and civilization – and because of a presumed lack of time depth, Iron Age sites were perceived as inherently uninteresting (Clark 1990:189). Lack of interest in Iron Age sites stemmed from an assumption that the Iron Age graded into the ethnographic present. Thus Iron Age sites, especially those that were late in time, were assumed to have been inhabited by peoples little different from contemporary Africans in rural settings. Political motivations also shaped disinterest in Iron Age studies in southern Africa, where investigations might invite controversy over the links between archaeological sites and the marginalized Africans in the settler colonies of Rhodesia and South Africa (Hall 1990:64; Kuklick 1991).

Thus on the eve of African independence, archaeologists perceived Africa as a backwater. Later prehistory was seen as a mosaic of invasion and diffusion that introduced crucial developments into Africa from the Mediterranean world (Andah 1995; McIntosh and McIntosh 1988:102–110; Okafor 1993; Sinclair, Shaw, and Andah 1993:16–31; Stahl 1984). Iron Age sites were assumed to represent ancestors of contemporary African agriculturalists, who were perceived by colonial officials and scholars alike as relatively backward peoples. Several authors have examined the racism inherent in assumptions about later period archaeology that denied African achievement, especially pronounced in the interpretation of Great Zimbabwe (Garlake 1982; Hall 1990, 1995; Holl 1990; Kuklick 1991; Trigger 1989:130–138). Scenarios of stagnation were shaped by a submerged evolutionism and a preference to see change as due to outside influence, a fact made more obvious by the paucity of direct evidence (Holl 1990:310; Stahl 1984:20).

African independence redefined the importance of the precolonial past. New states required new histories that demonstrated the achievements of African peoples, and their intellectual capacity to make their own history (Temu and Swai 1981:18–22). Retrieving African history required new sources, including archaeology, and a focus on the Iron Age sites that represented the historic heritage of African peoples. Archaeologists turned their efforts to two new ends: (1) forging national histories for newly emerging nation states, which translated into increased attention to Iron Age sites; and (2) countering the image of Africa as an unprogressive cultural backwater.

The post-independence agenda of African archaeology affected the types of archaeological sites targeted for investigation, with profound implications for our understanding of Africa's past (Stahl 1999b). In order to counter the image of Africa as unprogressive, archaeologists worked to document the antiquity of revolutionary developments (as defined by Childe [1936]; the transition to agriculture, metallurgy, and urbanism). Interest in these developments was shaped by the same submerged progressive evolutionary agenda that had underwritten an earlier African archaeology – the perception of Africa as backward could only be countered by demonstrating that it *too* was active in the story of human development (Rowlands 1989a, 1989b). Post-independence archaeologists targeted sites that were likely to

document these important revolutions, especially the early town sites that signaled the origins of complex societies (see R. McIntosh [1999] on how these endeavors were shaped by western imagery of cities). Progressive evolution is, after all, a race – it matters who got there first (Neale 1985:10). Little attention was paid to the relationship between societies of different scales (i.e., between urban centers and their hinterlands), in part because evolution is a cumulative phenomenon, rendering societies perceived as survivals of earlier stages (i.e., so-called acephalous societies) at best uninteresting, or at worst obsolete. The result was a winnowing of variability through time, with attention diverted away from so-called simple societies that were perceived as remnants of earlier developmental stages (Andah 1995; Stahl 1999b).

Ironically, the revolution in radiometric dating that placed Africa center-stage in the story of human origins further marginalized African archaeology in world prehistory. Archaeology was reinfused with evolutionary ideas in the 1960s (Trigger 1989:289–328), resulting in renewed interest in the origins of agriculture and civilization worldwide. Radiocarbon dates on early agricultural sites in Africa were disappointingly late in worldwide perspective, especially in light of Murdock's (1959) claims for antiquity (Stahl 1984). So too were dates for iron metallurgy (i.e., Tylecote 1975). Urban sites had long been assumed to postdate Arab contact, and not until the late 1970s was there archaeological evidence to the contrary (McIntosh and McIntosh 1984:74). These results confirmed, through scientific means, that African societies had been late-comers to all-important diplomas of progress. In more subtle fashion, it also confirmed the feeling that the lifestyle of present rural peoples differed little from their prehistoric ancestors. Steeped in a progressive evolutionist paradigm, archaeologists continued to employ the comparative method to draw connections between societies past and present. Using this well-established "omnivorous intellectual machine" (Fabian 1983:16), ethnographic snapshots of traditional cultures could be used to animate the lifestyles of the prehistoric past. Not surprisingly, the frequent (though not inevitable) result was a prehistoric past that closely resembled the "traditional" present.

Thus until relatively recently, archaeological interpretations of Africa's past were shaped by the following modal characteristics. (1) Although archaeologists were ostensibly interested in process, they were preoccupied with change *between*, rather than within, blocks of time (i.e., transitions between discrete ages/stages). Within these blocks, emphasis was primarily on statics – thus attempts to depict lifestyles of prehistoric cultures took the form of normative accounts, much like ethnographic snapshots. (2) An interest in economies underwritten by a progressive evolutionary agenda focused attention on the *origins* of technologies (potting and metallurgy) and adaptations like sedentism, food production, and urbanism. (3) The primary unit of analysis was the site, although sites were typically viewed as representative of larger units, loosely equivalent to the cultures/tribal entities described by ethnographers. (4) Though the scale of society varied through time, the emphasis in any given period (i.e., within the Iron Age) was on the most complex societal forms, effectively winnowing simple societies out of archaeological scenarios through time (Stahl 1999b).

And (5) the study of spatial connections between geographical areas was conditioned by an interest in diffusion of key traits like agriculture or food production.

The image of Africa's past that emerged from these archaeological investigations was difficult to reconcile with either historical or anthropological visions of African societies. As historians moved away from an early preoccupation with the glories of ancient states toward greater concern with European involvement and its consequences for Africa, archaeologists continued to focus on origins and antiquity, offering little to an interdisciplinary audience. The uncritical use of ethnographic description to animate archaeological remains created a past in the image of the present, and reinforced a sense of stasis prior to European intervention. In Chapter 2, I discuss recent archaeological research that departs from earlier practice, and demonstrates the potential of archaeology to deepen our understanding of Africa's past.

Working in interdisciplinary spaces

Scholars of the early independence period believed that a fruitful engagement between history, archaeology, and anthropology/sociology could shed new light on Africa's past. In retrospect, the interdisciplinary engagement promised by that experimental moment was sabotaged by the distinct epistemologies, questions, and methods that each discipline brought to bear on the study of Africa's past. We are arguably in the midst of another experimental moment in which there is incentive to work toward greater integration of anthropology, archaeology, and history. Disciplinary monologue has given way to dialogue between history and anthropology. There is a burgeoning interest in material culture and everyday life. Yet archaeology remains curiously isolated in this experimental moment. Few historians draw systematically on archaeological insights (Vansina 1995), and anthropologists even less so (Orser 1994:6).

While the time may be ripe for a powerful new synthesis between anthropology, history, and archaeology, working in interdisciplinary spaces, as this study does, is fraught with tensions that emerge from distinct epistemologies, foundational categories, and assumptions about the questions that count. Tensions also emerge from the distinct sources upon which each discipline draws. Most often these result in a subordination of one approach to the other or, worse yet, inattention to alternative approaches and perspectives. Yet these tensions are productive if viewed as supplemental. Dirks (1996:34–36) suggests that Derrida's notion of the supplement offers a way of theorizing the relationship between culture and history.

> A supplement is something that is added as if external to the thing itself, but its necessity paradoxically proclaims the essential inadequacy of the original. Supplementarity suggests why every dialectical structure must remain open, why no synthesis can be anything more than provisional. The supplement coexists with that which it supplements in a fundamentally destabilizing way. (Dirks 1996:35)

Conceiving of anthropological, historical, and archaeological perspectives, questions, and evidence as supplemental, rather than additive, places them in productive

tension, enabling us to see the possibilities and limits of their distinct forms of knowledge (cf. Hall 1992, 1994, 1999). Such a perspective also highlights the overlapping yet distinct processes involved in the production of mentions and silences within each discipline (Trouillot 1995).

A supplemental perspective necessarily draws attention to the questions and assumptions that shape inquiry within each field, and to where, within interdisciplinary spaces, those questions and assumptions are formulated. Questions and perspectives formulated in one arena may be at best unproductive or at worst disabling when translated to another. This suggests that the questions and assumptions that guide inquiry in one field may not be appropriate to others. For example, archaeology is disabled in a history that privileges textual metaphors and discourse, and in an anthropology that privileges meaning, for archaeological evidence is distinct from that of either history or anthropology (Stahl 2000a). We must acknowledge at the outset the role of power/knowledge/truth strategies in determining what counts as "evidence," lest we take the category of evidence as a given (Trouillot 1995). But both history and anthropology rely on evidence primarily based in language – what people said, and what people wrote about what they and others did. While powerful analyses can result when societies are viewed through the lens of their own epistemologies (Apter 1992; cf. Law [1995] for a historical example), archaeological sources – the material residues of life – are devoid of the linguistic cues that allow investigation of these epistemologies. While we access/create the reality of these material residues through language (i.e., in our descriptions of them), archaeological evidence is removed from the context in which it was used and imbued with meaning through language by the people who made and used the objects. While some archaeologists have experimented with textual metaphors and likened archaeological interpretation to a reading of the past (Hodder 1991; Hodder et al. 1995), applications have been less convincing than the rhetorical expositions of this stance (cf. Hall 1992, 1994, 1999).

But language is not the only means by which people forge meaning in the world. Material culture plays an important role in the process, and anthropologists are coming to recognize the importance of the "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986). Material objects are endowed with meaning through *practice*, and indeed play a role in forging, transforming, and reproducing meaning. In this sense, material objects are indexical of the "manner in which social relations were mapped out in tangible forms" (Hall 1993:178). Hall is one of the few archaeologists working in Africa to have taken up the problem of meaning and material culture in the past, adopting a poststructuralist semiotic stance. In a study of the colonial history of urban Cape Town, "By viewing the past as a set of complex texts, intertwined to form a discourse, we . . . avoid privileging written documents over the archaeological record, or artefact assemblages over travellers' accounts, probate records and paintings. Rather, they are all different views on a past which is revealed through comparison and, particularly, contradiction" (Hall 1994:167). Archaeological "texts" are valued especially for insights into the conditions of the underclass, underrepresented in documents and invisible in paintings. By juxtaposing the material record of upper-class

diet – which reveals a reliance on locally caught fish – against textual descriptions that emphasize Indian Ocean fish, Hall illustrates the symbolic load carried by diet, and the efforts made by upper-class people to distance themselves from the diet of the underclass which they in part shared (Hall 1992, 1994, 1999). But Hall's methodology works precisely because of the overlapping character of his sources – in other words, the documents, paintings, buildings, and material residues were produced by residents of a single society (that of Cape Town), and many by members of a single privileged class whose European background facilitates an interpretation of meaning. What of places where the sources are more partial, less overlapping, and where people did not share in a European understanding of the world? Here the retrieval of meaning implied in a semiotic approach promises less. While we may be able to glean something of the relationships between objects from contextual analysis (Lightfoot 1995), their meaning remains opaque, relying heavily on analogical models (Chapter 2).

Historians of the linguistic turn privilege language, and by extension texts. But textual metaphors privilege forms of analysis derived from literate societies, and divert attention from other ways of perceiving the world – through smell, taste, touch, and hearing – sensibilities that may be "central to the metaphoric organization of experience" and thus "potent conveyors of meaning and memory" (Stoller 1995:22, 30). An emphasis on text thus reinforces the mind/body split characteristic of modern academic practice (Stoller 1995:27). Recognition of this has contributed to a burgeoning literature on the body as a site of historical practice, with special attention to dress (Cohn 1996:106–162; Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Hendrickson 1996; Stoller 1995; Weiner and Schneider 1989). Growing recognition of the constructive and reconstructive capacity of objects in social life has reinvigorated the study of "material culture" (Appadurai 1986; Arnoldi et al. 1996; Cohn 1996:76–105; Miller 1987, 1998; Thomas 1991), *potentially* paving the way for a more robust consideration of archaeological evidence in historical anthropological studies. But for archaeological sources, especially those produced by nonliterate cultures for whom documentation is limited, we must move beyond text and textual metaphors, setting aside perhaps the question of meaning for reasons that I take up in Chapter 2. Archaeological sources have the potential of taking us beyond what people said and wrote, to *what they did in the world*, helping us to explore "the intended and unintended consequence of their thoughts and actions" (Kirk 1994:233; also Peel 1995:606), in short, yielding insight into the *practices of everyday life*. It is the site of everyday practice that archaeology can contribute to a historical anthropology that is "dedicated to exploring the processes that make and transform particular worlds" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:31). The common ground of everyday life is a potentially rich site for integrating historical, anthropological, and archaeological insights into the local consequences of colonization (Lightfoot et al. 1998). As the Comaroffs observed, colonization is the "reconstruction of the ordinary. Of things at once material, meaningful, mundane" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:293). A focus on everyday life can divert us from rushing "too quickly toward an agenda which deals with the relations of 'larger processes, big social structures,

and whole populations' . . . [and thus] losing sight of the intimate areas of social life where real contradictions are managed and actual structures are enraveled" (Cohen 1985:228). While we should not expect ethnographic, historical, and archaeological sources to combine neatly, additively, to yield a composite view of everyday life, this study works to demonstrate that, viewed supplementally, a richer view of African historical practice can result.