

# **ANTHROPOLOGY ANARCHISM AND AFRICA**



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## *John Pilgrim*

### **Introduction**

#### *Anthropology, Anarchism and Africa*

The three long pieces in this issue, **Harold Barclay** on the nature of his discipline and its relevance to anarchism, **Colin Ward** on an anthropological investigation of music in Milton Keynes, and **Angus Calder** on a tour of Central and East Africa he made last year, were made available to us while working on the forthcoming issue on sociology and anarchism. They were all too long to fit into that particular issue but at the same time were joined by more than alliteration. All three are ultimately about people in one way or another making meaning of their lives without, or in spite of, the state.

Anthropology is important to anarchists because it was through the work of anthropologists that the detail of how stateless societies actually worked became available. They provide us with a number of lessons. For propagandists the very existence of these societies, the fact that anarchy is a common form of organisation, is both comforting and a useful point to refute the all too common dismissal of anarchism as romantic idealism, or 'essentially daft', to paraphrase Norman Stone. In addition anthropology provides the essentially comparative perspective needed to avoid ethnocentrism and to demonstrate the enormous possible range of human behaviour. It is from anthropology that much of the evidence to destroy the idea of a fixed 'human nature' has come. It is not all one way of course. The discipline has also provided us with the evidence that statelessness is not enough, that anarchy and anarchism are not the same thing, that the stateless society is not automatically an anarchist utopia.

**Harold Barclay** sounds the further warning that we cannot derive ought from it. There is no logical connection. Nevertheless the anthropological evidence that it is possible to operate a society on anarchist lines, that no intrinsically gains-maximising human nature stands in our way, is a heartening one. He has written a number of times on the general theme of anarchism and anthropology and is

probably best known for his survey of *People Without Government*. If his personal conclusion points to permanent protest that bleak prospect may be modified by the following essay.

**Colin Ward**, a familiar name in these pages, shares Harold Barclay's belief that human society will never reach the shores of an anarchist utopia. Therefore he has never adopted what Alex Comfort once termed nineteenth century revolutionary fantasies, believing that the important thing is practical anarchism. By this he means the fostering and further development of those tendencies toward anarchist forms of organisation that already exist in our society. In the past he has found such tendencies in adventure playgrounds, in self-help therapeutic groups, in tenants' co-operatives. In this article, edited from a lecture given in Milton Keynes, he looks at Ruth Finnegan's anthropological study of music making in the area, and finds in it another parable of anarchy on the model that Kropotkin advocated.

It's worth noting here a point that Professor Finnegan misses, that the much derided skiffle movement, under attack from the popular music establishment of the time, did not die out overnight. Changing, growing, adapting to people's needs and interests, it ducked, divided, and became the very folk, blues, rock, country, early music and choral groups that Ruth Finnegan writes about. A classic anarchist technique, commended, my memory suggests, in Brando's *Zapata* film. The lessons of all this musical activity lie in its pluralism, the same thing that Comte, a founding father of sociology, and Proudhon, a founding theorist of anarchism, both considered so important. It is this very pluralism that has been most under attack during the Thatcher years of galloping centralisation. It is the survival of this multiplicity of bands and organisations that can give us hope for the future. Successful anarchy, as Colin Ward noted years ago, following the anthropologist Max Gluckman, "is a function not of a society's simplicity and lack of social organisation, but of its complexity and multiplicity of social organisations." Q.E.D.

**Angus Calder** does not write as an anarchist although he is on record as saying: "The Webbs used to divide the labour movement of their day into 'bureaucrats' and 'anarchists'. I know which side I'm on." He is Reader in Cultural Studies at the Open University in Scotland, a title which indicates that that particular bureaucracy did not know how to sort out his varied achievements in literature and history. Best known to *The Raven's* readers for *The People's War* and its sequel, *The Myth of the Blitz*, he has also published studies of

Pushkin, T.S. Eliot and Byron. He has indeed something of a reputation for making poetry in English intelligible to those who might be expected to find it difficult – in Britain as well as Africa. ‘The Great Days, and Now?’ is an impressionistic trip through territories he knew in the heyday of de-colonisation. It’s about poetry and music, disillusion, survival, and sometimes death, in post-colonial Africa.

The fourth item is **Peter Gibson**’s latest venture into sociobiology as a basis for anarchist theorising. This will undoubtedly cause some controversy, as much for its idiosyncratic view of anarchism as for an eighteenth century view of human nature that will have ethnographers, anthropologists and social scientists demanding evidence. Sociobiology has had a great vogue during the Thatcher years. This is partly because it can be used as a ‘scientific’ underpinning for the atomistic view of society to be found in Adam Smith. It also involves ideas of inevitability which comfort many who are appalled by the unending vistas of relativity opened up by ethnography, sociology and philosophy in the last hundred years.

Some readers may feel that there is a tendency to assert without evidence, in statements on the biological basis of behaviour for example, the easy comparisons with animals, or an antithesis of free will and genetics innocent of a social learning component. However this does appear to be the case for sociobiology and as such we have to consider it, if only to ask why money was available to develop this area of enquiry when cuts were being made everywhere else. Readers who wish to comment on sociobiology, from any angle, should write to me at Freedom Press and we’ll attempt to include their views in the forthcoming sociology issue.

*Colin Ward*

## **Anarchy in Milton Keynes**

Everyone has their own definition of anarchism. One I find generally useful is the first three paragraphs of the article Peter Kropotkin was asked to write for the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1905. This is the collection of volumes which (however repugnant we now find its sales techniques) is the place we look for a working definition of most things.

Kropotkin's first paragraph said that:

ANARCHISM (from the Greek, contrary to authority), is the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.

That's his first paragraph, and of course he has the usual problem of anyone writing an encyclopaedia definition, he has to be concise, but at the same time, to bring everything in. So his second paragraph goes:

In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the State in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international – temporary or more or less permanent – for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.”

Kropotkin was a scientist, a physical geographer in origin, and his third paragraph drew an analogy from physics and from biology, and you might even claim from structural mechanics and music. For he claimed that:

Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary – as is seen in organic life at large – harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State.

These opening remarks express the kernel of his argument for *society* as opposed to the State, and for the *community* as opposed to the government.

### Society or the State

The next stage in the argument for me, at least, was provided by the philosopher Martin Buber, who wasn't an anarchist, although he had strong anarchist connections. He was the friend and executor of a German anarchist Gustav Landauer, who made a very profound remark, which I quote from Buber's book *Paths in Utopia* (Routledge, 1949). "The state", said Landauer, "is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently." Buber wrote a brilliant essay called 'Society and the State' which was printed in English in the long-dead journal *World Review* in 1951, and reprinted in a book of his called *Pointing the Way*.

Buber begins by making a clear distinction between the *social* principle and the *political* principle, pointing out that "it is inherent in all social structures that people either find themselves already linked with one another in an association based on a common need or a common interest, or that they band themselves together for such a purpose, whether in an existing or a newly-formed society." And he then goes on to stress his agreement with the American sociologist Robert MacIver, that "to identify the social with the political is to be guilty of the grossest of all confusions, which completely bars any understanding of either society or the state".

The political principle for Buber, just as for Kropotkin, is charac-

terised by power, authority, hierarchy, dominion. He sees the social principle wherever people link themselves in the pursuit of a common need or interest. Then he has a very interesting flash of understanding, which I see endlessly illustrated in contemporary politics. What is it, Buber asks, that gives the political principle its ascendancy? His answer was: "The fact that every people feels itself threatened by the others gives the State its definite unifying power; it depends upon the instinct of self-preservation of society itself; the latent external crisis enables it to get the upper hand in internal crises ... All forms of government have this in common: each possesses more power than is required by the given conditions; in fact, this excess in the capacity for making dispositions is actually what we understand by political power. The measure of this excess which cannot, of course, be computed precisely, represents the exact differences between administration and government." Buber calls this excess the "political surplus" and he observes that "its justification derives from the external and internal instability, from the latent state of crisis between nations and within every nation. The political principle is always stronger in relation to the social principle than the given conditions require. The result is a continuous diminution in social spontaneity."

### **Neighbourhood and association**

I find this a devastating perception. And I think that a whole lot of people have always had an instinctive feeling that if any community can't organise itself, it is going to find governmental bodies filling the vacuum. There has been at least sixty years of effort to establish local community associations as voluntary, democratic, all-embracing bodies able to become unifying influences in every locality. These efforts are reported in a new book called *Enterprising Neighbours: the development of the Community Association movement* published this year by the National Federation of Community Associations. David Donnison provides an interesting introduction welcoming the honesty of this history because its approach to several questionable assumptions that a whole lot of worthy grassroots organisers take for granted, primarily the idea that "people want to spend their time making friends with neighbours rather than because they have shared interests".

We can define the two possibilities as communities of propinquity and communities of interest. In practice plenty of us belong, for



different reasons, to both, fulfilling Kropotkin's aspirations to "an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees" and so on. Students of the social problems that were said to arise in the vast new out-of-town housing estates of the inter-war years, like Dagenham outside London or Wythenshawe outside Manchester, were apt to attribute them to the fact that huge new settlements of people who were strangers to each other found themselves living together in places without the familiar community facilities of the places they had come from, and thought that what was needed was a programme of community building.

The lessons were supposed to have been learned in the post-war programmes of New Towns which culminated with Milton Keynes. In practice the stop/go financing of the New Towns all through the fifties, sixties and seventies meant that the aspirations for synchronising new housing, new industry *and* social and community facilities seldom really happened as planned and as described in the publicity material. But I do think it is fair to say that the money invested in most of the New Towns on the funding of community facilities, including paying the salaries of people described as Community Development Officers or some similar title, was well spent, and contrasts favourably with the experience of the post-war versions of those pre-war out of town housing estates which we all know about: the places where we love to see television films of the blowing-up by public authorities (not anarchists) of tower blocks which won't have been paid for until the early 21st century.

All the same, the worthy citizens who organise local community associations, whom we all know, when they pause and reflect on their labours, talk wistfully of the apathy and indifference of the people all around. They are not angry, they are just regretful that other people don't live up to a particular idea of society and community based on propinquity. It makes me ponder yet again, not only on the very significant observation I have quoted to you from Professor Donnison, but on Kropotkin's aspirations for an anarchist society.

### **Milton Keynes and music**

This is why I need to tell you about my discovery of anarchy, in Kropotkin's sense, in Milton Keynes. It is because I have been reading, with very great pleasure, the book *The Hidden Musicians:*

*music-making in an English town* by Ruth Finnegan, published last year by Cambridge University Press. She is an anthropologist from the Open University, so the particular English town she describes is Milton Keynes. The immense advantage of her ethnographical approach is that she refrains from making those value assumptions about music that most people automatically assume. As we all know, people talk about 'serious' music, meaning the music *they* take seriously, and implying that all other music is somehow frivolous.

Professor Finnegan has, I am sure, her own musical preferences, but she does not allow them to intrude on her study of *music-making*. I am reminded of Mark Twain's quip that "Wagner's music isn't really half as bad as it sounds".

Salvation Army bands, the Sherwood Sinfonia, the families dressing up for the Country and Western night, church choirs, the Morris Men and a hundred rock groups are all music, and when you consider the people hiring venues, arranging gigs, negotiating with visiting soloists, drawing up programmes, ferrying their children to rehearsals and carting tons of equipment around, let alone packing in the audiences, you realise that a vast and hitherto unrecorded proportion of the population anywhere is directly involved in the activity of music-making. In fact you feel that the whole population in one way or another is indirectly involved.

This is a remarkable social fact: that music-making is, more than anything else you can think of quickly, *the* cement of society, *the* expression of that social spontaneity that Buber was looking for, *the* most immediate and accessible example of Kropotkin's vision of "the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all imaginable aims; ever changing, ever modified associations which carry in themselves the elements of their durability and constantly assume new forms which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all."

Professor Finnegan manages to sweep aside endless assumptions: the sociologists' preoccupation with class, the distinctions we make between professional and amateur, and, above all, ideas about musical exclusiveness. The same busy performers can find themselves in a brass band one night, in a symphony orchestra another, and in an *ad hoc* jazz group at the weekend. This is the fluidity of involvement in changing communities that attracted Buber and Kropotkin. It's nice to think that a valuable element of the community quotient of any society, East or West, can be expressed in terms

of the sheer number of young people endlessly practising for their big performances in a local pub under the self-deprecating group names they choose (Ruth Finnegan lists more than a hundred, of which a mild example is 'Typical Shit'). This is the backhanded way in which shared enthusiasms hold communities together.

Let us take a look at some of the interlocking, mutually supportive communities that her book describes, seeing them as a measure of the community content of Milton Keynes.

### The music subculture

She notes how we have a socially defined canon of 'classical music' epitomised by varying combinations of professional players, live, broadcast and recorded, which "implicitly moulded people's views of music" but "there was also a whole grass-roots sub-culture of *local* classical music. Though perhaps 'invisible' to most scholars, in practice this was the essential local manifestation of the national music system ... one aspect was the provision of audiences with the necessary skills of appreciation for professionals coming to give concerts locally, but it extended far beyond this to the whole system of local training, playing, actively practising musical groups and public performances by local musicians."

One concrete example of this continuing tradition is the way in which printed scores and music parts, both vocal and instrumental, get passed on: "These were often borrowed rather than bought and when a local choir, say, found itself, as so often, singing from old and well-marked copies, it was easy to picture the earlier choirs 20, 30 or even 50 years ago singing from the self-same copies – and repertoire – of classical choral music in the day when, perhaps, those parts cost just one penny."

In Milton Keynes, as in anywhere else, the classical music tradition rests on highly trained *specialist* musicians, so it can be seen as a "high-art pursuit for the few". But looking a little closer, Ruth Finnegan sees that local musicians "varied enormously in terms of educational qualifications, specialist expertise, occupation, wealth and general ethos." Take the leading amateur orchestra, the Sherwood Sinfonia, where she found exceptions to the usual assumptions, "like the young sausage-maker, later music shop assistant, who besides being a Sherwood Sinfonia violinist was a keyboard

player and composer with a local rock group, or pupils from local comprehensive schools not all in the 'best' areas."

Take too the Brass Band world. Don't be deceived by the way that people imply that *that* sector is 'a world of its own' confined to families where it had become a tradition. There is endless evidence of this in the tradition of Salvation Army bands, works bands or Boys' Brigade bands, but we're all familiar with great and famous performers who belonged as much to the allegedly incompatible groupings of the dance band, jazz group or symphony orchestra. In Milton Keynes, Ruth Finnegan found that no other musical groups, except possibly a few church choirs, had such solid links, sometimes actual instruments and sheet music from long before the new city was conceived: from the Woburn Sands Band of 1867, the Wolverton Town and Railway Band of 1908 or the Bletchley Boys' Brigade Bugle Band of 1928. By the 1980s the constituents of, say, the Stantonbury Brass or the Bletchley Band and the new Broseley Brass had members of both sexes and all ages. Ruth Finnegan was assured that their political commitments were across the whole spectrum and the people involved included postmen, teachers, telephone engineers, motor mechanics, personnel managers, butchers, train drivers, clerks, labourers, storemen and shopworkers, "but also included computer engineers, a building inspector, a midwife and several schoolchildren".

Forget your assumptions: the brass band world was more representative of class and occupation in Milton Keynes than any political group. And exactly the same was found to be true of the folk music world. One of the things she observed in local folk clubs was their relative transience: "There were others too, even less long-lasting, which for a time engaged people's enthusiasm but faded out after a few years or months ..." like the Concrete Cow Folk Club. One leading singer at the Black Horse in Great Linford explained that "anybody's welcome to join in, play along, sing a song, add some harmony to a chorus or simply have a beer and listen".

### **Change and variety**

This is a reminder of Kropotkin's important stress on impermanence, and his insistence on "an infinite variety of groups ... temporary or more or less permanent ... an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium". In the brass world we emphasise the

continuity of tradition, in the folk world we love the way in which the mood and the venue change from pub to pub. I see, where I live in Suffolk, how as the venue changes, performers, some of them old friends, others complete strangers, adjust to the mood, the audience and the acoustics, and play along together, sometimes accompanying a singer none of them have met before, exchanging through gestures and eye-signals information about key and tempo, chords and harmony. It is exactly the same automatic reciprocity that you notice between the members of a string quartet, with the significant difference that people like the Amadeus had played together for forty years.

When the whole variegated patchwork of the folkweave pattern comes together, as in the Folk-on-the-Green Festival in Stony Stratford, they provide, as Ruth Finnegan comments, "a magnificent showpiece of local talent" bringing in other streams like Ceilidh bands to dance to, or the Morris-dancing groups. As one adherent told her, "by playing with other people you get another dimension to performance".

Then she moves to the world of music theatre, meaning opera, the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas, musical plays – not so much 'Oklahoma' or 'West Side Story' as local groups could never afford the copyright fees involved, but old favourites and, for example, the series of musical plays based on local history which emerged on the Stantonbury Campus, one of which I have actually seen. It also covers the pantomimes put on at Christmas by every kind of group from schools to Women's Institutes.

If your measure of the importance of music in human society is the sheer number of people involved in the actual production, music theatre must be the winner. Among performers it brings together both singers and actors, and it also calls for the utmost skill in scene designers, lighting electricians, painters and stage-hands, costume makers, and an enormous number of citizens involved in getting people to rehearsals, feeding and bedding them, booking halls, producing programmes, drumming up the audience and selling tickets. Many such ventures were conducted to raise funds for local causes, and Ruth Finnegan is eloquent about the meaning for the participants:

... local soloists flourished and even the less skilled chorus and small-part singers expanded, steeped in music for hours on end, attending constant rehearsals, studying their parts in every odd moment they could snatch from work or family – small wonder that one concluded 'I ate, slept and dreamt

music'. Some members had before had relatively little systematic musical experience, and for them such experience would be a revelation – as for the local plumber unable to read notated music who talked and talked of the *joy* of singing in operas and pantomimes and his discovery of the beauties of listening to music. For their regular audiences too, the public performances were not only grand occasions of theatrical display, marked by colour, movement, dance and dramatic as well as musical expression, but also an opportunity to hear well-known tunes and arrangements which even after the end of that year's performance could remain in the memory to evoke that *special* experience and lay the foundation for looking forward to next year's production."

### Fluidity and movement

Then there's the jazz world. The three best-known bands playing in Milton Keynes in the early 1980s were the Original Grand Union Syncopators, the Fenny Stompers and the T-Bone Boogie Band. Dr Finnegan discusses these three with a brief mention of dozens of others in the area. These groups won a huge reputation locally, with wildly unexpected combinations of performers and instruments. Talking of the T-Bone Boogie Band, she explains that "they presented themselves as a zany 'fun band', but their act followed many traditional jazz and blues sequences, with beautiful traditional playing interspersed with their own wilder enactments of blues. They spoke of these as 'improvised out of nowhere, on the spur of the moment', but they were in practice based on long hours of jamming together as a group." She goes on to say that "they saw themselves as 'a community band', playing 'to give other people enjoyment ... and for our own enjoyment as well', a hobby rather than professional enterprise. When they were approached by a recording company and offered money to go professional, they turned it down."

Her account of the fluidity of the jazz groups sounds like Kropotkin describing his ideal society. She sees the actual instrumental composition of jazz groups as "more variable than in most other musical worlds" and that "jazz musicians were tied neither to written forms nor to exact memorisation, but rather engaged in a form of composition-in-performance following accepted stylistic and thematic patterns".

For them, jazz was freedom, as compared with either classical music or rock. She says that “far more than other musicians they would break into smiles of recognition or admiration as one after another player took up the solo spot, and looked at each other in pleasure after the end of a number, as if having experienced something newly created as well as familiar. As one local jazz player put it, ‘we improvise, with the tunes used as vehicles, so everything the group does is original’. Local jazz musicians often belonged to *several* jazz bands, moving easily between different groups ... jazz in Milton Keynes is more a series of venues than an integrated and self-conscious musical world ... and both the musical activity itself, and the shared skills, pride and conventions that constituted jazz playing seemed to be a continuing element in their own identity and their perceptions of others.”

### **Dissent and co-operation**

Then she moves to the country and western world, describing the Milton Keynes Divided Country and Western Club, going strong in Bletchley since the mid 1970s. The club’s name, she says, indicated certain options. One of these was in dress: ‘divided’ between those who chose to come dressed ‘just as you like’ and those who preferred ‘western dress’. Either was acceptable, and around half had opted for one or another version of ‘western’ gear which could range from a token cowboy hat or scarf or to the full regalia. “In contrast to rock and jazz events,” she explains, “the audience sitting round the tables was family based, with roughly equal numbers of men and women, several children, and people of every age from the twenties upwards, including middle-aged and elderly people; only the late teenagers were absent. It was a ‘family night out’ ... the secretary welcomed individual visitors from other clubs to interest and smiles from his listeners – an established custom in country and western clubs, in keeping with their general atmosphere of friendliness and personal warmth”.

She makes it sound almost like a meeting of a religious sect like the Shakers in nineteenth century America: “As the evening went on, more and more people got up to dance, adding to and developing the music through their rhythmic movements in the dance – one of the age-old modes of musical expression and appreciation. The atmos-

phere was relaxed and unselfconscious. and most people whatever their age, sex or build looked remarkably carefree as they danced to the band – the middle-aged woman with her tight jeans, jersey and big leather belt over her well-rounded bulges, the visiting technician and grandfather with his broken smoke-stained teeth, gleaming gun and cowboy gear, the young wife out for the evening with her husband, drawn in by his general interest in country and western music and now sharing his enthusiasm – and scores of others.”

The country and western world was a co-existence of people interested in the ‘western’ aspects and those who most valued the *music*. This co-existence was summed up in the very name of the Milton Keynes Divided Country and Western Club, which as Dr Finnegan says, at first sight suggests dissension, but in practice symbolises fruitful co-operation and an ultimate sharing of interests between these wings of the country and western world.

She moves on to another musical scene, rock and pop, a catch-all phrase since meanings and definitions are always shifting with what Derek Jewell calls the continual flux of the vocabulary of popular fashion. Dr Finnegan describes how “Milton Keynes was swarming with rock and pop bands. They were performing in the pubs and clubs, practising in garages, youth clubs, church halls and school classrooms, advertising for new members in the local papers and lugging their instruments around by car or on foot. There were probably about 100 groups, each with their own colourful names and brand of music ... From the amount of time, trouble and (in many cases) money the players invested in their music, and from their own comments, it was clear that they got great social and personal satisfaction from their band membership – ‘making people listen to what you say’ and ‘finding a way to express ourselves’ – rather than regarding it primarily as a profitable enterprise ... The players’ ages, educational backgrounds and occupation were more varied than most of the generalisations about modern rock music and youth culture might suggest.”

She is greatly sceptical about the succession of scholarly writings about mass culture, one influential group seeing it as “essentially ruled by the market place, soporific and non-artistic, delivered by non-creative and commercialised performers to passive and brain-washed mass audiences,” another group of Marxist critics seeing it as dominated by a capitalist power elite, while yet another declares that it is a “cultural struggle” with “the working class struggling to assert their own radical claims against the capitalist world” – a form of



working-class youth protest.

These views obviously aren't convincing when applied to "the amateur grass-roots local performers and their face-to-face audiences," but all the same, "local participants and observers were still to some extent affected by this series of assumptions and were prepared from time to time to make effective use of such images as their own publicity".

Her own conclusion is that "the most prominent single characteristic of rock players in Milton Keynes – apart from their variety – was their interest in expressing their own views and personality through music-making: a stress on individuality and artistic creation which accords ill with the mass theorists' delineation of popular music". A striking feature she saw running through all the bands was a sense of personal pride and achievement. Her final word on them was that in such bands "their members felt they could really make some individual mark ... in contrast to the hierarchies and insecurities of school, work or the social services, playing in a band provided a medium where players could express their own personal aesthetic vision and through their music achieve a sense of controlling their own values, destiny and self-identity."

## Creativity

She goes on to discuss the processes by which musicians in Milton Keynes learned the techniques of their art, the nature of performances. Whether the performance was seen as an 'engagement', a 'concert', a 'recital', a 'booking' or a 'gig', there were several forms of social organisation required: "mechanisms to frame the occasion as somehow apart, prior preparation by organisers, and the crucial presence of an audience, not just as passive recipients but as active and experienced participants themselves playing an essential role in constituting the occasion as a musical event". Then she moves to an analysis of composition, creativity and performance. A lot of musical composition happens in Milton Keynes in several ways. "The first is the well-known classical mode of prior-written composition by an individual. This mode is assumed to be *the* natural form of 'composition' in most serious writing about music." A lot of that happens here, like the work of John Dankworth, working nationally and internationally, not primarily through local musical networks. There's

a lot of church composition, hymns and carols, and a lot of music written for local school music festivals, or for the big music dramas from the Stantonbury drama group.

But there are other models of composition which, she sees, “overlap and mutually enrich each other”. And she concludes that “once one understands the validity of *differing* systems for creating original music, each autonomous in its own terms, it becomes clear that there is indeed a remarkable amount of musical creativity and the grass roots. In all forms of music, but perhaps most strikingly of all in the prior-composition-through practice of rock groups, the local musicians are quite consciously and deliberately among the modern-day musical composers.”

### **Pluralism and commitment**

I have quoted at length from Dr Finnegan’s account of the different musical worlds of Milton Keynes. She is well aware that there are others too. There’s the big range of Irish music, both associated with groups like the Erin Singers and the Green Grass Social Club as well as the St Patrick’s Day Mass of the Milton Keynes Irish Society. Or there’s the Austrian, Swiss and German music at the Bletchley Edelweiss Club, or the Milton Keynes Welsh Society, or the Hindu Youth Organisation that celebrated the Diwali Festival, or the Buddhist group associated with the Peace Pagoda, or the musical traditions of the Sikh community and the Muslim population, each with their own musical traditions. Or the Milton Keynes Pipe and Drum Band or the celebration of the Chinese New Year with dragon and drum beat. She stresses once again that “in the limited sense in which the metaphor of ‘musical world’ is meaningful, there is a *plurality* of such worlds in local music-making.”

Then she examines the home, the school and the churches, clubs and pubs, not only as the physical *places* for music making, but as providing “a complex of expected roles and opportunities for music” which continues year after year. After all “music does not just happen ‘naturally’ in any society, but has to have its recognised time and place, its organisation of personnel, resources, and physical locations”. And she has two chapters, one called ‘Working at it’ and another on ‘Small working bands’, which illustrate the huge time and effort that vast numbers of people, a much wider group than actual performers, put

into making music happen. Once more, I can't resist quoting from the book at length:

Not surprisingly some groups were more effective than others in attracting the necessary personnel, coping with the various constraints, and more or less meeting their participants' aspirations, but even the smallest of them – the precarious church choir of four members as much as the 90-strong Milton Keynes Chorale – ultimately depended on the ordered commitment of its participants: without that none could continue.

When one thinks of local music, then, the correct impression should not be either of the 'cultural desert' that some picture, or of a set of smartly operated and highly efficient groups, or yet of the natural co-operation of communally oriented or selfless individuals, but rather a variegated landscape made up of a whole series of differing kinds of groups and activities, some tightly organised, visible and populous, others more informal, some struggling or on their last legs, some starting up and perhaps benefiting from the dissolution of others, some established but still vulnerable, some in direct competition with other groups at some times but joining in co-operative ventures at others, some lasting over the years, and some appearing for just one or two events then lapsing. In the rich tapestry that makes up local music, what all these groups and activities have in common – whether large or small, 'successful' or not, harmonious or quarrelsome or mixed – is the need for a constant input of organised co-ordinated effort from those who at one level or another participate in them.

Now where have you seen this kind of language before? Well precisely in Kropotkin's definition of anarchism with which I began. Just to complete the saga, I will quote from Ruth Finnegan's next paragraph. "Many of the pictures we are given of cultural activity in this country rest on a top-down model (patronage coming from the state or the large commercial concerns) or on a model of culture, and more specifically music, as essentially and ideally the preserve of specialists or as primarily conducted through the mass media or large-scale professional concerts. Local music-making falls easily within none of these models. Nor does it fit the also common idea that amateur cultural activities are somehow natural, easy and carefree, costing nothing and outside the normal sphere of those who are interested in organisational processes. On the contrary, the organisational processes of effective work, decision making, communication, choice between alternative methods of achieving objectives, delegation of responsibilities and, above all, co-operation in the attaining of more or less agreed ends can all be found in the processes

of running local amateur music – indeed they must be found there if it is to continue.”

My claim is that this book encapsulates a marvellous piece of research, described with great sensitivity, and beautifully written. Yet nearly everyone I know in Milton Keynes has never heard of this book, published last year, and the one who had heard of it said, correctly, that it was so ludicrously expensive (£35) that he could never dream of buying it. I myself have never seen it reviewed anywhere, yet I see it as the most enlightening piece of anthropological or sociological research that I have read for years. Obviously the price has nothing to do with any wishes of the author.

Yet if I were the marketing manager of the Cambridge University Press I would have instantly seen the opportunities of a paperback run-on, on newsprint if it's any cheaper, of several thousand copies with big lettering on the cover saying 'Music in Milton Keynes: the truth at last', and I would have touted it around every bookshop and newsagent in Bletchley, Stoney Stratford, Wolverton and central Milton Keynes, and would find that vast number of citizens would want to buy it, if only because on the evidence of this book, a very big proportion of the people who live there are involved in one or another of these plural worlds of music in Milton Keynes.

### The lessons

I've just referred to a failure in marketing, and this gives me the chance to draw an obvious implication from this book. For ten years we have been lectured by our rulers about the virtues of the market economy, the alleged magic of the market, and this by a clever propaganda trick has been described as the *enterprise* culture. Now enterprise has nothing to do with making a profit by buying cheap and selling dear. In the very last paragraph of her magnificent book Ruth Finnegan reflects that "*the reality of human beings is to be found not only (maybe not mainly) in their paid employment or even their thought, but also in their engagement in recognised cultural practices ... Among the most valued and, it may be, most profoundly human of such practices in our society is that of music.*"

If my purpose was just to write about her book, that is where I would end. But I want you to reflect on what an interesting world we would be living in if we organised everything the way we organise our

music. I mentioned Martin Buber's perception of the social principle as what happens wherever people "link themselves in the pursuit of a common need or interest" and Kropotkin's concept of this kind of voluntary co-operation as a social structure which would "represent nothing immutable. On the contrary – as is seen in organic life at large" he went on " – harmony would result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitude of forces and influences", but above all, "would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes ... temporary or more or less permanent – for all possible purposes."

Suppose this was the way we chose to organise our work, or our education or the production and management of housing, or our health services, or our transport, or any of the things that make life possible and enjoyable in Milton Keynes or anywhere else?



*Peter Gibson*

## **Anarchism and the Epigenetics of Politics**

### **Failure of Anarchism**

Our beliefs must, to a large extent, be coloured by our experience of childhood when we had little or no say in events that affected us. Later, we have at least an illusion that we have a choice in what we believe in. My understanding of anarchism, as I have already written (*The Raven*, 1988) started in childhood. I was, at times, surrounded by anarchists – I saw them at parties and meetings. Children are commonly thought to be noisy but this is how I saw most anarchists. Perhaps under these circumstances they were louder than they would have been under others. I was unable to see what they had to make a noise about. In retrospect I suppose they were likely to have had more conventional backgrounds than mine and felt their shift in beliefs was worth making a noise about. The reason for relating this is the possibility that my experience of anarchists as a child has subsequently influenced my view of anarchism.

As an adolescent I had no particular interest in society moving towards anarchism or in any other direction. My only concern, if any, was the need for nuclear disarmament. I was none the less aware that this was likely to be impossible without some radical change to the political system. At the back of my mind was a Darwinian belief in a struggle for supremacy between differing methods of social organisation. Such a struggle appeared to be an historically developing process. What became increasingly clear to me with age was that anarchism as an achievable goal was remote. I saw a number of possible explanations for this.

A simple reason for the failure of anarchism to come about was that whatever had gone wrong with the organisation of society happened in the distant past – the ‘wrong turning theory’. A biological analogy that has occurred to me since is the evolution of our present carbon based life system. Silicon would have been an equally successful alternative. Presumably the two systems were incompatible and the success of carbon was simply a matter of chance. A wrong turning for silicon. Interestingly, the struggle between carbon and silicon may not have been resolved. A challenge has returned in the form of the computer silicon chip. The whole of evolution has been a matter of competing systems. The supremacy of one species of organism ensuring the failure of another. Possibly there is no such thing as chance and that carbon is in some way superior to silicon. Where the margin of superiority is small success may depend on what we like to think of as chance.

Another explanation, as I saw it, was that anarchism had yet to happen – the ‘withering state theory’. The problem was that there was really no evidence that the state, in whatever form it took, would wither. I came to see anarchism as simply at one end of a continuum of ideas on how society might be organised. However, what was difficult to explain was that there really were and still are pockets of anarchism existing within society – a ‘subculture theory’. In these, people organise themselves along anarchist lines for specific purposes. Anarchism has varied from revolution, the Spanish Civil War is a much quoted example, to education such as the White Lion School in Islington. A problem is why these subcultures never expand to take over the whole of society. If they are to be likened to silicon they must wait their day.

Now, I see anarchist behaviour not just as a subcultural phenomenon but as existing to varying degrees in all social and political behaviour. It is a matter of expediency. Anarchism is a part of human behaviour. What is more, this is recognised politically and held in check as a result. Government, in its broadest sense, sees social order as largely depending on education and persuasion in various forms. Both depend on placing emphasis on intellect and the ability of reason to control behaviour. To an extent this succeeds but what is not appreciated is that both intellect and reason are gene driven and self-interested. The view is not, of course, new. What is new is the scientific explanation given by sociobiology and I suggest it accounts for political and anarchist behaviour.

### Epigenetics and politics

Our ability, as humans, to use intellect to our advantage is indisputable. However, our success is clearly not all we might hope for. In spite of this, a popular view is that all our problems can be overcome by intellect. Many people find the belief attractive because our intellect distances us from other animals and particularly those primates to which we are most closely related. Although it is overlooked that all these living species have existed far longer than we have without intellect. The demarcation has helped foster a belief in the general supremacy of intellect. The illusion of the great importance of intellect stems from our evolution. We feel, as individuals, we are *numero uno*. As long as collectively we were not, that worked fine. Now that we have become so the belief is clearly to our detriment.

A misconception about intellect is that it evolved for the purpose of organising ourselves socially. There are no good reasons for thinking this and, if anything, the reverse is true. Our intellect has evolved as a biological device for working out and implementing survival strategies for our reproductive success as individuals. The logical conclusion has been to manipulate our environment on such a scale as to seriously alter it. Although our success or failure as a species can be seen to depend on the power of our intellects the view is not entirely correct. The greater part of our behaviour is not controlled by our intellects but is genetically determined in the same way as it is for other animals. Generally, people do not wish to understand the genetic control because it conflicts with their view of their intellectual supremacy.

Evidence for thinking there are unseen genes controlling our behaviour is overwhelming. The majority of the genes are not discreet units acting in a simple Mendelian fashion but are complex groups, polygenes, interacting with one another. They underpin all behaviour that is common to everyone and work within the constraints imposed by our environment. An obvious example of the effect of the environment is growth in body size which is dependent on both inheritance and diet. Intellect is genetically determined. It is purposeful and governed by self-interest. Those genes giving individuals the capacity for reason, for example, have been an evolutionary success. In conjunction with other genes they give individuals and their immediate kin who also bear them increased reproductive potential. Genes are not to help the people next door unless, of course, they are kin. A



hard reality is that if these neighbours are not kin they are then normally viewed, from the point of view of genes, as something that is potentially exploitable. The interests of the genes and their bearers, our thinking bodies, cannot be separated.

Our behaviour, then, has evolved to increase our chances of survival not as a species but as individuals. Since species are composed of interbreeding individuals many of the characteristics will be common to species. Other genes to those controlling intellect and reason are important in determining general social behaviour. This behaviour was incorrectly thought by Kropotkin to have evolved for the benefit of the species. In defence of Kropotkin, our understanding of what is social is confused. Social insects such as ants and bees living in a colony are closely related to one another genetically. Again, tribes or small communities of humans consist of closely related individuals. The individuals, whether insect or human, under these conditions behave in an altruistic manner towards one another because this is in their gene's self-interest. With humans, the larger the group the less closely related individuals become. This must be true of people living in cities, for example. Social behaviour, then, evolved for the benefit of related individuals and their offspring. What is difficult to explain is why in modern societies people tend to behave as though they are genetically closely related when they are not.

Although all human behaviour is controlled by genes for the benefit of individuals, some behaviour is less gene specific than others. This indirect genetic control has been referred to by sociobiologists as epigenetic. The point at which epigenetic control merges with purely cultural behaviour, which is not genetically controlled, is fuzzy. Where this boundary lies is the nature versus nurture debate. It is a concern about the degree to which free will exists. Specifically, it is to what extent are morals, the way we think we should behave, determined by intellect. If there is a problem here it is to some extent contrived. Hume, the philosopher, pointed out that our moral sense revolves round how we use 'is' and 'ought'. Many of our cultural beliefs are based on what we think human behaviour ought to be rather than what it really is. Again, Huxley, the biologist, pointed out the paradox that cultural morality is opposed to natural morality or what is now known as epigenetic behaviour. The proponents of nurture, the ought faction, have fudged the issue for what appears to be a very good reason. They stand to gain from the confusion. Convincing people of how they ought to behave can be very self-advantageous. This cultural trick is the basis of the anarchist 'conspiracy theory' of politics.

### **Success of exploitation**

Political systems must be considered as epigenetic. They are gene driven in that they are purposeful strategies aimed at organising other people for self-advantage. This seems, from the gene's point of view, a reasonable system since most of us, as unrelated individuals, are biologically in competition with each other. Our genes are competing for a greater share of resources. These, however large, cannot be divided equally for that would then frustrate the drive for advantage. The view is not a justification for existing political systems but a bald statement of how we appear to behave. The inevitable consequence of government is an unequal division of resources. This need not be the secret intention of governments but simply a consequence of genetical drives.

Political systems, then, are simply strategies for exploiting people. They are formed from alliances between small cooperating self-interested groups of individuals. Such systems only operate because they are exploitative. What is not clear is whether people who are exploited are powerless to defend themselves or are willing participants. Because society is rigged in favour of exploiters there is good reason to think that most people are unable to do anything about it. More accurately, they could do something about it but as individuals they stand to lose more in the process than they would gain. Biologically there is a need to exploit all resources for the purpose of reproduction. Individuals through political strategies attempt to gain wealth which potentially increases their reproductive success. For all animals this process is costly in time and resources, and particularly for birds and mammals that rear their young. For humans with a politically rigged system the effort of avoiding exploitation is greater for the majority of individuals than the exploitation itself. The assessment of the effort does not require any intellect or reason as we understand it. Other animals, for example, that need to carry out this type of calculation do so effectively without the use of intellect.

There is the possibility that people who are exploited actually solicit their own exploitation. That is, as noted by anarchists and others, they behave as though they gain from it. Although they must lose something they may well gain from the system that is set up for their exploitation. In spite of present day society being managed for exploitation, people may still be better off than if society did not exist. Most people, as it were, pay a price for exploitation. There is a strategic consideration. A problem is to know whether we as indi-

viduals might gain more from some alternative strategy – anarchism for example. Apart from uncertainty, what pushes most people to favour the *status quo* is their epigenetic behaviour. We tend to behave as though we are all kin. As noted, there is an apparent confusion about who is kin and who is not. A speculative explanation for this was given previously (*The Raven*, 1988). It is that humans have many of the features of juveniles of other mammals and especially our close relatives the primates. We are neotenous. One of the characteristics of juveniles is that they are dependent on their parents. Perhaps this child-like dependency of humans that persists throughout life has opened the way for exploitation.

Humans, compared with other animals, are pre-eminent in their ability to communicate through language. The ability is important for both cooperation and exploitation. Acquisition of language must have evolved for the selfish promotion of the relevant genes within related individuals. Chomsky and other people have argued that the acquisition of language in childhood is essentially genetically controlled. Although the words used in a specific language are learned there is an inherited deep seated syntax. The argument is supported by the constantly changing use of words to produce different languages based on an effectively unchanging grammar. New words simply develop through variations in use and pronunciation of already existing ones.

The use of language to manipulate other people is almost self-evident. Orwell, in *1984*, popularised the notion that language and mass communication are used as a means of political control. Governments have always been concerned to standardise language, whereas subcultures usually attempt to isolate themselves through developing new or variants of old ones. The use of slang is an example. Possibly there is evolutionary survival value in preventing communication between groups of people. This would help account for the gradual proliferation of languages when not artificially preserved by political states.

Language at all levels of social contact is manipulative. Politics is a logical extension of language. This is not to deny the existence of additional controlling influences such as coercion, punishment and reward. Biologically, language can be thought of as tinkering with epigenetic controls. Because politics is dependent on language it is popularly but incorrectly thought of as a solely cultural, as opposed to epigenetic, activity. The point has already been made that unwarranted importance is attached to our intellect and ability to reason.

Although language has also come to form the basis of culture it would nevertheless appear to be biologically aimed at maximising reproductive potential. This is achieved through different strategies. One of the most important is the formation of alliances and is central to politics.

### **Cooperation through self-interest**

Formation of alliances is epigenetic behaviour and therefore motivated by self-interest. Machiavelli is famed for pointing out the importance of self-interest in *The Prince*. Kropotkin considered the importance of self-interest in the animal kingdom as a whole in *Mutual Aid*. He wanted to show that the formation of alliances was in the general interests of most species of higher animals. This is a group selectionist view and is in detail, as I attempted to show (*The Raven*, 1990), biologically incorrect. There is little evidence that species as a whole or even genetically unrelated groups within a species form alliances for mutual benefit. Clearly, different species and individuals within a species can benefit from each other's behaviour. However, this behaviour comes nowhere near the self-sacrificing cooperation that Kropotkin appeared to have in mind. He was confusing species with family groups. Cooperative behaviour in animals in general is seen between kin. This is the kin selection theory. Only by this theory can self-sacrifice or altruism be explained. When cooperative alliances within society are examined closely the activity of participating individuals is seen to be selfish because they are concerned with promoting the success of their own genes and not those of other people.

Complex human societies are not based on kinship but are driven by epigenetic exploitation. This does not, however, exclude much of the human mutual aid or cooperation documented by Kropotkin. Such reciprocal altruism incorporates a 'tit for tat' system which operates much as its name implies (*The Raven*, 1988). It is self-interested but has the virtue of being simple and cannot be corrupted. All it requires is that individuals should be able to recognise other people's attempts at exploitation. Any exploitative behaviour is countered by a refusal to cooperate. It is not hawkish in that retaliatory action in the form of direct punishment is unnecessary. Such a system already exists in other animals since it has a genetic basis. It does not, however, appear to be as effective in humans. This

is due partly to the reasons I have gone into – the failure to distinguish between kin and unrelated individuals. But also, probably, partly because our genetic behaviour can to some extent be overridden by our intellect. Although there is no ignoring intellect if we can use it to recognise our self-interest then it will reinforce a tit for tat strategy.

Theoretically, tit for tat is one of a number of competing strategies. These systems have been simulated as computer 'games' and tit for tat was found to be the most successful at holding its own. It has also been found to be comparable to real strategies evolved by higher vertebrates such as mammals and birds. It is, of course, also used by everyone in their dealings with other people. Its importance as a general animal survival strategy has only been recently recognised by sociobiologists who, as noted, have put it on a scientific basis. A defect of the tit for tat strategy is that it can only operate successfully in the long term. Tit for tat requires individuals to meet each other on many occasions. Therefore, people have to know who they are dealing with and expect to continue to do so in the future. In complex urban societies this cannot be easily achieved.

A tit for tat system, then, would appear to require a stabler, simpler and decentralised society than exists in developed nations. The need for these conditions has already been pointed out by anarchists and others. We cannot return to a pre-existing state and I cannot visualise changing to a radically different and as yet unspecified one. All we can do is to 'make the best of a bad job' and recognise the self-interested nature of our behaviour. The virtue of sociobiology is it exposes the limitations of our behaviour and how this reflects on the way society is organised. It explains the difference between how we think other people should behave and how we all actually behave. I suggest that sociobiological theory should be of great interest to anarchists because it contains much of what many already believe. Central to anarchist belief is an individualistic view of social organisation.

### **Summary**

Many people have a problem in appreciating what sociobiology offers because they believe in unrestricted free will and the unfettered ability to organise through reason. Other animals do not suffer from these cultural delusions. They have genetically based systems that have operated for vastly longer periods than humans have existed.

We cannot ditch culture but we can attempt to sort out what is relevant to self-interested strategies. Sociobiology has many features in common with anarchism.

### **References**

Background to the biological arguments used in this article are given in my two articles in *The Raven* – ‘Anarchism and the Selfish Gene’ (vol 2, issue 6, pages 167-173, 1988) and ‘Kropotkin, Mutual Aid and Selfish Genes’ (vol 4, issue 16, pages 364-370, 1991).



## *Harold Barclay*

# **Anthropology and Anarchism**

### **Introduction**

There are several branches of study which make humans their chief object of examination – anthropology is different because of the manner it sees and studies them. It is for one thing holistic, i.e. anthropologists at least pay lip service to the idea of viewing society as a whole. Economic relations, for example, cannot be properly understood in abstraction from the total cultural milieu, away from the ties of kinship, social stratification, political structures, religion, and so on. Nor can such things be treated ahistorically, or in ignorance of the physical environment. In addition it is sometimes necessary to consider not just the cultural whole but the biological nature of the species itself – the origin of culture is one problem which demands this. The approach we term holistic is most evident in ethnography, that is those reports which describe the ways of life of people around the globe, and in archaeological studies of now defunct cultures.

A second way in which the anthropological approach to humanity may be unique is in specific techniques of investigation. Natural historians, anthropologists attempt to blend into the background and may take anything from six months to six years to complete 'the fieldwork'. An ethnographer employing participant-observation techniques will attempt to 'assimilate' into the group being studied, establishing rapport with the intention that people should act naturally and in an uninhibited fashion, minimising the extent to which

behaviour is biased by the presence of an outsider.

Clearly such methods are open to criticism. There is a tendency toward emotional involvement with those being studied, rather than the scientific detachment which is usually expected. In addition ethnography is essentially case study work whose characteristically open-ended questioning militates against statistical analysis. Nevertheless, these procedures are well suited to in-depth analysis of small groups and it is because of this that anthropology has come to be associated by many with the study of (so-called) primitive peoples who live out their lives in small groups.

Another characteristic of anthropology concerns its historical development. In the nineteenth century the study of social relations was taken over by sociology. Classical archaeology claimed the ancient Mediterranean civilisations, along with Mesopotamia and Iran. This left various cultures and groups outside the studies of established disciplines, the sub-Saharan African peoples for example or the American Indians, the 'classical' civilisations of America, and the whole of human history before civilisation. The developing discipline of anthropology, intent on studying humans the world around, was well suited to absorb these areas of investigation.

It must be stressed that contemporary anthropology is not confined to the study of the 'primitive'. The majority of present day anthropologists are students of industrial communities or peasant societies and therefore overlap with history, sociology and other social 'sciences'. It can be difficult to decide whether a particular work is anthropology and sociology but the attempt to draw sharp lines between them is an empty exercise.

Another source of confusion is national variation in the use of the word 'anthropology'. In the US and Canada physical anthropology will be included along with studies of culture (i.e. behaviour that is learned and shared). In Britain physical anthropology hardly exists as a separate entity, archaeology is quite separate; while in France the term refers to physical anthropology, and the American or British concept of social anthropology is sociology or ethnography. None of these differences are important in themselves as long as one is aware of the possible sources of confusion. The two important points to be aware of are:

1. That all the sub-disciplines of anthropology, physical, cultural, social, archaeological or linguistic, are all involved in the natural historical study of the human species in all times and all places.
2. That, with the exception of physical anthropology, all branches of



anthropology are concerned with humanity's most characteristic feature – culture.

### **Human behaviour is learned**

Human behaviour is acquired. It is learned in a social context and tends to be shared by individuals, transmitted, often by deliberate inculcation, from generation to generation. Culture, as anthropologists use the term, is all the things that human beings learn as part of the society, or societies, in which they live. The distinguishing mark of the human animal is the high degree of dependence upon acquired phenomena.

### **Anthropology and anarchism – ethical issues**

#### *Objectivity*

All knowledge reflects a particular socio-cultural context and this is as true of anthropological knowledge as anything else. In recent years therefore we have become increasingly critical of the idea of a pure value free objectivity, in social or any other form of science. As the physicist Heisenberg wisely noted *we do not have a science of nature but a science of human knowledge about nature*. In anthropology therefore we recognise that, like the other social sciences, we interpret observed data and recognise the difficulties of being objective. An important question arising out of the above topic is the extent to which anthropologists have knowingly or unknowingly been manipulators or exploiters of the innocent. There are three main areas:

#### *The role of government and the ethics of anthropologists*

1) the original motivation for anthropological data collection was presumably to find out how 'the natives' think and act. Although some funding came from museums and universities much came, and continues to come from governments and corporations, either directly or indirectly, and they are hardly likely to do this through pure love of knowledge but to facilitate the direction and regulation of peoples concerned. In the United States and Canada much of the impetus for investigation of the Indians and Inuits arose from the

government's desire to manage them with the minimum of fuss. Later anthropologists invaded the Pacific Islands as American interests expanded, particularly Micronesia, Polynesia and the Philippines. At the same time they entered Latin America, part of America's neo-colonial empire since the Monroe Doctrine was promulgated.

The same pattern applies to the French in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, and to British colonial policy. Government encouraged ethnographic researches as an aid to policy making for their own interests. Evans-Pritchard's now famous study of the Nuer would never have been carried out had that splendidly recalcitrant people not posed a vexing problem to British administrators. Portugal alone of the colonial powers surviving to the twentieth century never developed any significant anthropological study. And much of what is today known as applied anthropology entails studies explicitly directed toward finding ways in which people can best be adjusted to and assimilated into the contemporary world.

Many anthropologists of course dissociate themselves from these conservative motivations. They are among the most outspoken defenders of disadvantaged peoples. One near universal result of field-work is that the investigator returns home a defender, if not an advocate of the people he has studied. However, regardless of his motivations, attitudes or sources of finance, anything published may be used by anyone else including governments and corporations. And it remains true that in the past anthropology has been too closely wed to imperialism and other great power sources.

2) It can be argued, and has been, that the anthropologist is simply making a personal career at the expense, one way or another, of a local population. There is an element of truth in this which is probably why so many become advocates of the people they have studied and whom they are aware they can never fully repay. But relationships are by definition reciprocal. Field workers often see learning how they might serve the community to be part of the job. And it is not unknown for members of such communities to exploit the anthropologist. It is also quite common to find a community themselves acquiring an interest in the project, learning from it and gaining considerable satisfaction and prestige by their participation. In sum the anthropologist is always engaged in an asymmetrical form of reciprocity. One can hardly have a balanced exchange and equal gain for both sides when the relationship is unequal to begin with and the dominant party is transient as well.

3) Another ethical issue affecting the anthropologist's rapport is the extent to which deceit is employed to facilitate acceptance and obtain information. Almost every anthropologist faces problems in trying to explain to informants why he or she is among them. In the majority of cultural contexts the whole idea of anthropology and anything related to it is utterly foreign. So some anthropologists might say they wish to learn the language (true but only partly so) or that they wish to study the history of the people. Deceit may find its way into other research activities as well. A suspicious shaman or medicine man might be told that information is desired from him which can be used in curing illnesses in other parts of the world. For public relations purposes certain anthropologists have joined in the performance of religious rituals when they have totally different religious beliefs but wish to make it appear they were believers. In recent years anthropological organisations have become very sensitive to the problem of deceit and of protecting the anonymity of informants. Therefore there has been a much greater effort to discourage misleading behaviour and statements by anthropological researchers.

### **Theory and Data: the implications for anarchism**

In general one may say that for every principle about humans and human nature that has been made by anarchists one can find in the anthropological literature both substantiation and disproof. There is, however, a growing consensus among anthropologists about certain ideas pertaining to humanity that would please any anarchist. First, let us consider what might be called the *principle of the biological unity of the human species*.

For some time antedating the rise of anthropology as a distinct discipline and extending down to recent times as part of the history of anthropology itself, there has been a struggle between monogenetic and polygenetic theories of the origin of homo sapiens. Polygenetic theory argued for the divergent origins of the so-called races of humans. Emphases upon differences in appearance and differences of origin of human groups have been employed to buttress arguments about the superiority or inferiority of such groups. If one claims that blacks are mentally inferior to whites then it is of considerable help to usher in evidence which presumably demonstrates that the foundation stocks of the two populations are totally unrelated. Monogenetic theory, by contrast, argued that all humans are one species sharing a

common ancestral line. Today, this is a prevailing view in anthropology. Variations among present populations are seen as a consequence of the biological process of adaptation but any such variation amongst humans is of very minor significance and involves at best only a handful of genes which relate to such factors as hair form, the amount of bodily hair, presence or absence of an epicanthic fold on the eye, skin pigmentation, overall bodily form (whether lanky or squat) and height, head form and various facial features.

Forty years ago practically every anthropologist agreed that the human species was divisible into races, although there was little agreement as to how many races there were. Today this view is no longer so widely held and an increasing number of anthropologists hold that homo sapiens is a unitary species which may have local variation but such variation does not justify classification into separate races (subspecies). Briefly, the argument for this point of view is as follows:

a) Certain allegedly racial characteristics such as head shape and bodily height are too affected by environmental factors to serve as the indicators of race they once were used for.

b) There is an incredible amount of overlap and mixing between populations. Races are at best 'ideal types'. They are a summary of certain presumed genetic traits which tend to be prevalent in some populations. Yet any given individual within that population may not have all these traits or even a few of them. Thus, a broad flat nose is presumably a characteristic of West Africans, but there are some West Africans with narrower noses than some Norwegians.

c) It has already been noted that so far as we know none of the so-called racial features is of much significance, especially in the contemporary world as far as adaptation and survival are concerned. Perhaps under aboriginal conditions a squat, blocky frame with lots of subcutaneous fat adapted the Inuit or Chuckchi better to an extremely cold climate. But clearly as cultures have changed and become increasingly *the* mechanisms by which humans adapt to the physical environment this biological feature loses importance. Scandinavians, for example, lack these qualities and have lived in the northern extremes of Europe for 2000 years with great success. It probably should be stressed that intelligence is not a factor which can be associated with any alleged races. It cannot be said for an absolute certainty that there are no

variations amongst 'races' in intelligence because so far *no one has devised a proper culture free test which could examine native or inborn intelligence, nor has anyone offered an adequate operational definition of race which could be used in such testing.*

d) The term race had been so politicised and transformed into an ideological term that it has muddled its use for biological purposes. Race today has far more serious implications for humankind as a political and ideological tool that it probably ever had as a biological reality. For these reasons many would abandon the use of the term race in relation to humans while, of course, continuing to investigate the bio-genetic variations that do occur within the species.

To sum up, anthropological data seems to show that humans are a single species with common ancestry. If it is possible to say the species is divisible into some kinds of races, any differences are of very minor importance. Whether one travels to the middle of the Amazon Basin, or amongst Australian Aboriginals or citizens of Moscow, one will find in each of these populations a normal range of intelligence: a few dimwits and a few geniuses with a goodly majority just average sorts.

### **Co-operation and human nature**

A second anthropological generalisation relates to *principles of reciprocity and co-operation*. Social Darwinists applied the doctrine of survival of the fittest and the struggle for existence to the human social world and argued for the paramount importance of struggle and competition between individuals. Those who are successful in such competition are seen as the best. This was, of course, quite amenable to a burgeoning capitalist economy offering as it did a justification for the superiority of the rich and powerful and for the inferiority of the poor and disadvantaged. The notion that competition is a necessary and universally dominant feature of the human condition therefore has become a common part of the middle class creed. The data of anthropology does not dispute that competition is an element in human relations, but there is an enormous variation amongst different cultures in the expression of this phenomenon. The well-known Pueblo Indians, especially the Hopi and Zuni, of the American south west are an example of people who inhibit competitive expression. It is even difficult to teach Hopi and Zuni children Euro-American

competitive games and sports. Yet there is no reason to doubt that Pueblo culture has not been in its time a very successful adaptation.

Not only is there great variation from culture to culture in the expression of competition, but within a given culture there are some areas in which competition may be encouraged and others where it is definitely discouraged. The contemporary cultures of Western Europe and North America are a case in point. American children, for example, may be taught to compete vigorously in games and sports and in school grades. Later they will be expected to continue this competition in the business world. On the other hand, it is expected that one should co-operate in the home and also in the neighbourhood and parent organisations. Similarly, while the North West Coast Indians were notorious for their encouragement of intensely competitive feast and gift giving ceremonies (potlatches), it is often not adequately stressed that the sponsorship of a potlatch depended first upon the co-operative effort of a large group of kinsmen.

Peter Kropotkin was one of the earliest to attempt to counter the Social Darwinist emphasis on tooth and claw struggle when he wrote *Mutual Aid: a Factor in Evolution*. In it he catalogues countless cases of co-operation both in the natural world and in human societies. Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss stressed the idea of reciprocity as a fundamental and universally important feature of human societies. Reciprocity is a system of exchange found in every known human group. Items (gifts) are passed from one person or group to another with the implicit assumption that in the future items (gifts) will be offered to the donors by the recipients. Reciprocity takes different forms, but the fundamental type is a balanced reciprocity in which there is an exchange of goods of approximately equal value between participants who, at least in the context of the exchange situation, are of equal standing. Reciprocity then entails co-operation and mutual aid and is the essence of Proudhon's notions of mutualism and contract.

Both archaeological and ethnographical research support the hypothesis of the cardinal importance of co-operation in human groups. Some form of human family has proven to be the most enduring of all institutions, having survived for thousands of millennia. Whatever the type of family, none operates on a principle of survival of the fittest, at least with the relation between parents and dependent children where a sort of communist arrangement exists in which one receives according to need and gives according to ability.

Families, and indeed all kinship groupings, are in some way mutual aid associations. They could not be otherwise.

Reciprocity is an explanation for one theory for the origin of the family. It holds that in the period of roughly one to three million years ago, our ancestors acquired a taste for meat. Females would have been restricted in any hunting and scavenging activity by the presence of immature dependent offspring. Males, on the other hand, were free to indulge in far-flung hunting and scavenging. A relatively permanent bond between adult males and female provided meat and protection and females reared the young and foraged for vegetable food and small animals. This is also an explanation for the origins of the sexual division of labour.

Hunting and gathering was the only way of life for humans until the advent of plant and animal domestication about 12,000 years ago. Ancient hunter-gatherers, as well as those who survived to modern times, necessarily engaged in extensive co-operation amongst members of the group. Hunting, for example, invariably entails elaborate co-ordination of the activity of several participants. The more simple the weapons one has the more dependent one is on collective hunting. The isolated independent hunter is more a product of the rifle and the steel trap.

The origins and the possibilities for culture are dependent upon the evolution of co-operative and reciprocity institutions, since such institutions provide for some permanency of positive relationships which in turn provide for the exchange of ideas and the transmission of tradition, which is the heart of all cultures.

### **Sex roles**

Anthropological materials suggest several *principles concerning sex roles*. In every human society differences between female and male are recognised by expectations of differing behaviour and the assignment of different tasks to each sex. Invariably this involves according some prior status to males. There have been and are cultures which give more equality between the sexes as there are those which make male supremacy an important article of faith and practice, yet even in the latter there are usually segments of life in which equality does occur or in which the female prevails over the male. Often in male dominant societies it is the public face of social life in which such dominance is held to be imperative, whereas in the privacy of the home the situation

may be quite different. Such is certainly the case amongst Egyptian peasantry where men have priority except in the haram (the section of the house restricted to family members). Here there is considerably more give and take so that opinions of women, especially older women, can sometimes prevail.

A common myth holds that matrilineal societies are matriarchal, or at least afford sexual equality. It is true that in many matrilineal societies, especially those which also practice matrilineal residence or residence on marriage with the bride's mother, women have a better social position. Yet it is still males who command the public life and tend to have an upper hand elsewhere. In matrilineal systems it is not one's father who has the authority, but one's mother's brother. In inheritance, likewise, legacies do not pass from father to son, but some items may go from mother to daughter, while others, particularly political and ceremonial roles, pass from mother's brother to sister's son. Because of the female place in the system of inheritance women can assert themselves more. Yet we find that matrilineal systems are rather unstable arrangements usually as vested interests in property become greater. Fathers increasingly demand a right to allow their sons to inherit from them. Further, a substantial number of matrilineal societies practice avuncular residence in which a youth, often at marriage, establishes his home with or near to his mother's brother. Consequently, properties held by the matrilineal kin group are readily controlled by the males of that group.

There are no known cases of matriarchy, that is societies in which females are dominant over males or, more directly, societies ruled by matriarchs. In addition it seems likely that matriarchy is, in terms of the whole sweep of human history, a relatively recent innovation, probably given its major impetus when gardening arose ten or more thousand years ago. That is, the hypothesis is that women as gatherers of vegetable materials in pre-agricultural times would take on horticultural activity with the advent of domesticated plants and that gardens would then be passed from a mother to her daughters. When, as is so often the case, an activity, in this instance cultivation, becomes of central importance to the society men tend to take over and patriarchy or non-lineal descent arises. (Another aspect of this, however, is that simple gardening becomes transformed into agriculture or extensive cultivation most commonly with the acquisition of large draft animals. The teamsters of this world have with few exceptions been men, so that this too puts the men more into the centre of cultivating concerns.)



If anything, earliest human societies were probably of a non-linear or bilateral character: they were neither patrilineal or matrilineal. Males managed external relations of the group, hunting activity and probably shamanic or religious affairs, but there was some degree of egalitarianism between the sexes. Indeed, it is among non-linear societies – those of the hunter-gatherers such as the Mbuti Pygmy or the Inuit, on the one hand, and modern industrialised Euro-American societies on the other, that we find the most extensive equality. One reason for this is, of course, a built-in egalitarianism in such arrangements. That is, neither mother's nor father's kin are held to be paramount and inheritance may pass in any number of ways.

The anthropological literature has long recognised the arbitrary nature of the sexual division of labour in different societies, the point being that there are actually only two jobs which are determined by one's sex: child bearing and breast feeding. Other activities are determined by local cultural tradition. Yet hunting, feuding and warfare seem to be almost exclusively male domains. There seems to be some recent evidence to suggest that prolonged, vigorous physical activity in women inhibits fertility and thus, it is argued, those societies which curtailed such activity in women would produce more offspring and have a higher likelihood of survival (see, for example, Susan B. Graham). Depending upon the cultural milieu, men in one society may be seen as the only individuals to make pots, while in another this is a job appropriate only for women. The same is true for basket-making or house building or other crafts. It is no more 'natural' for women to be nurses or office secretaries than it is for men to be dentists or carpenters.

In recent years anthropological investigations have given greater recognition to the contribution of women in various societies. This is in part because more women have become involved in research so that one is given a different perspective than the traditional male's eye view. It was once thought that man the hunter provided the great bulk of the food for hunting gathering communities. Now it is recognised that the hunting activity outside the Arctic regions provides less than half of the food requirements and women's foraging the bulk of it. Studies show as well that among horticultural and agricultural people women often contribute more than their share of the physical labour. One of the effects of the adoption of draft animals seems to be a lessening of women's labour. Such was clearly the case with the adoption of the horse by the Plains Indians. In pre-horse days women carried most of the belonging on a change of campsite and, of course,

everyone walked. The horse was a force for women's liberation when it was given the burdens to carry and provided both men and women with a ride. Rather ironically, restrictions on women's movements and requirements of dress in some Muslim countries also act to remove women from labour in the fields. Veiling, for example, inhibits manual labour and veiling, like excessively long finger nails, originated as a symbol of the well-to-do lady who did not have to work.

While I have stressed here heightened awareness of the role of women in the economic sphere on the part of anthropologists, it is also apparent that the importance of females in other activities is being increasingly appreciated. In addition, in the past often implicit in much anthropological research was the notion of what men do is somehow more important than what women do: men wheel and deal in the realm of community politics while women only stay at home and babysit. Hopefully this attitude as well is disappearing.

Finally, we may note one other area in this subject of sex roles to which anthropological investigations have made a contribution. A common Western notion is that men are, by their inherent nature, dominant and aggressive as well as rational, while women are retiring, passive and emotional. Comparative ethnography demonstrates that these qualities are heavily influenced by differing cultural values. No doubt in a majority of cultures men are considered properly more dominant and aggressive. Yet there are people in Sub-Saharan Africa and New Guinea, for instance, amongst whom women are quite aggressive. There are others, such as the Hutterites, Amish or some Pueblo Indians, who strongly discourage aggressive behaviour in both sexes. In Iran it is the men who are expected to be emotional and to weep in public; women should be more stoic and self-controlled. I do not suggest that all these qualities are entirely culturally determined – that is, learned. Men and women *are* biologically different and the behaviour of males amongst mammalian species does differ from that of females. *The peculiarity of the human species is, however, that what is biologically given is so often of less importance than the ability of humans to mould and alter behaviour through the cultural process.*

## Authority

Of major importance to anarchists is what anthropologists have to say about political systems, government and the state and *principles of authority*. It has already been noted that human societies have tended to emphasise the priority of the male. Similarly, it seems that there is an emphasis on the pre-eminence of elders. I think it is quite understandable how this could arise. An older person, but not a senile one, would have countless experiences to share with others in addition to being a major storehouse of tradition. By his acquired expertise he acquires pre-eminence. This is also the rationale behind the seniority of parents over children. The older a person is the more one demonstrates an ability to survive and that itself deserves being listened to. As with anything else there is considerable cultural variation in the power vested in elders and parents. Inuit are often presented as a case of notable parental leniency and a more egalitarian relationship with children. The situation among some Arab groups entails a condition in which there is considerable leniency with infants but once children become six or seven years old they are literally forced to live like adults. They are now supposed to have acquired the faculty of reason.

Elders are invariably among the leaders of a community, but leadership may also be vested in other prestigious persons as well. Leadership of some kind is another apparently universal feature of human societies. We call leaders those individuals who are looked to for guidance and are more successful than others in having their express desires followed. These qualities often derive from the ownership and control of any scarce resource or from holding some kind of political or religious position. But they may also derive from more personal attributes such as oratorical skill, the capacity to persuade or that ambiguous quality known as charisma. In some societies all the leaders might well be considered as 'men of influence'.

In the early days of anthropology the fact that a society had recognised leaders of some kind, meetings or councils in which issues were discussed and decisions made, and rules of behaviour which were somehow enforced meant that it had a form of government. Clark Wissler, apparently following this kind of vague and ambiguous conceptualisation, made government one of the universal institutions of culture. Often the politics of hunter-gatherers, particularly, was referred to by such descriptive terms as "simple democratic community" (Radin, page 30). Julius Lips in Franz Boas' *General Anthropology*, recognising there was something wrong with the blanket usage of

the term government, preferred to write of 'government-like' or 'pre-government', adopting the latter from K.N. Llewellyn (Boas, page 490). If each society had a government it was held that each possessed rules of behaviour which could therefore be called laws. It must be said for this kind of interpretation that many anthropologists sought to find government and law in all societies, especially from those so called primitive ones, at least in part in order to stress the similarities between the contemporary 'civilised' world and the rest of humanity. To assert that Australian Aboriginals had law and government was to assert that they too were human; they were not 'lawless' savages.

In contemporary anthropology one still finds those who incorporate everything political under a heading of law and government. More commonly there is a tacit recognition that some societies have governmental political systems while others are anarchic. A major clarification of this distinction was made by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who in his early life had an interest in Kropotkin and anarchism. Radcliffe-Brown proposed the term sanctions to apply to the manner in which a social group reacts to the behaviour of any one of its members. There are positive sanctions which demonstrate approval, but more importantly in a society are the negative sanctions which express disapproval of some behaviour. One class of sanctions is diffuse sanctions which are spontaneously applied by any one or more members of a community. Their application is not restricted to the holder of any specific social role. Responsibility for and the right to impose the sanction is spread over the community at large. Further, when and if sanctions are applied is variable, as is the intensity of the sanctions imposed.

Diffuse sanctions include gossip, name calling, arguing, fist fighting, killing and ostracism. Duelling and formal wrestling matches are less widespread forms. And Inuit at least have ritualised song competitions in which two opponents try to outdo one another in insults before an audience which acts as judge. Diffuse sanctions may be resorted to by an individual or a group. And their effectiveness is enhanced as the entire community joins in participation of the sanctions. Vigilante style action and feuds are common forms of diffuse sanctions which depend upon collective action.

In many societies fines and other punishments are meted out by an assembly. In such instances assembly members act as mediators rather than judges and are successful to the extent that they can convince two disputing parties to come to some compromise. That is, such assemblies lack the legitimate claim to a monopoly on the use of

force which is characteristic of governmental structures. Sanctions of this type Radcliffe-Brown called organised sanctions.

Religious sanctions entail the threat of supernatural punishment. There is an important differentiating feature among religious sanctions which Radcliffe-Brown did not mention. That is, some religious sanctions require a human executor and others are believed to be automatic. In the first, power is vested in the hands of a few specialists. Examples of this are priests as necessary intermediaries or witches who control 'black magic'. On the other hand, the belief that breaking one of the ten commandments automatically commits one to hell represents a kind of religious sanction of the latter type. Religious and diffuse sanctions are universal features of human societies. Organised sanctions which Radcliffe-Brown calls legal sanctions are only imposed by 'constituted authority'. That is, these are laws, duly enforced by delegated individuals who alone have the authority to resort to violence in order to enforce the rules. Thus, legal sanctions are restricted to those societies which possess a government with defined specialist roles recognisable as policemen, court justices and law-makers.

In sum, we may recognise in this classification differing kinds of political systems. Some are clearly governmental in which legal sanctions are prevalent while others lacking this type of sanction depend upon diffuse and religious sanctions and are anarchic polities.

### **Societies without the state**

In contrast to government, the recognition of the fact that some societies have states and others do not occurs very early in anthropology. Lewis Henry Morgan distinguished between primitive societies and states by attributing membership in the latter to territory and of primitive societies to kinship. But such a dichotomy has only limited utility since in several societies a kin group is coterminous with a specific territory. Morgan's view was not dissimilar from that of Henry Maine, who conceived of status and contractual societies. Membership in the first is determined by kinship affiliation. Leaders in such systems are not rulers, but fathers and grandfathers. In the contractual society territory of 'local contiguity' replaces kinship as the basis for community membership and a state is created. That is, in a contractual society leadership cannot be vested in senior kinsmen since such a system is composed of a heterogeneous population and is not a

uniform group of kin. Thus, other patterns of leadership arise: the state and government. Similar dichotomous typologies were also quite independently developed by Ferdinand Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*) and by Emile Durkheim (mechanical and organic solidarity).

In 1940 Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, as editors of *African Political Systems*, introduced the distinction between state and stateless societies explicitly recognising that the latter had no government. They saw three types of stateless politics:

Firstly, there are those very small societies ... in which even the largest political unit embraces a group of people all of whom are united to one another by ties of kinship ... political structure and kinship organisation are completely fused ...

Secondly, there are societies in which a lineage structure is the framework of the political system ...

Thirdly, there are societies in which an administrative organisation is the framework of the political structure. (pages 6-7)

These authors differentiated kinship from lineage, but in actuality both types one and two above are sub-types of any kind of system in which kinship is coterminous with political relations. The difference lies in the presence of a prevailing and elaborate lineage structure in the second.

In a recent work, Bernardo Bernardini argues for the addition of two other kinds of stateless systems. In one "the political structure is based on villages of cognatic kin with the villages related to chiefs and headmen who are vested with political authority". The other type exists "where the political system is based on the framework of age class systems" (Bernardi, page 25). In my judgement this age class type is not a bona fide stateless system. Where age classes are the prevailing political expression in a society we find the age class occupying a senior grade invariably is entrusted with judicial, executive and legislative powers while the occupants of a junior grade act as police and warriors. It is true, as Bernardini emphasises, that this is all temporary power which will have to be ceded within a few years to an immediately junior class. It is also true, as Bernardini points out, that there is a distinct diffuseness to the system. I would suggest that rather than a stateless society we have in these cases a peculiar form of state organisation. In each there is a territorial sovereignty coupled with a delimitation of the exercise of political power into the hands of specified classes holding specific statuses (grades). Those in one

senior grade have a monopoly on the power to judge and to enforce their rulings by calling on the junior policeman grade. Further, not all those in the ruling grade have equal authority, for formalised leadership appears in many of these systems, such as the Abba Gada of the Boran of Ethiopia and the Laibon of the Massai in Kenya and Tanzania. This is not as centralised an arrangement as one finds in the 'normal' state nor is there a prolonged rule by a single class. Furthermore, each man may expect to assume some executive authority during his life. Therefore, not only is this a diffuse government, it is an example of a decentralised democratic state which happens to be based on the continuity of state power through a succession and circulation of age classes rather than a succession and circulation of parties and elites.

We may therefore dispense with the age class type and proceed to consider in somewhat more detail the other four kinds of alleged stateless societies.

*Societies in which political and kinship structures are one, but in which lineage organisation is rudimentary or absent.*

In the kind of polity of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's first type we may locate most hunting and gathering societies. It may well be that before eight or ten thousand years ago this kind of arrangement was the universal political system of humankind. In it the largest grouping is what anthropologists have called a band. This consists of only a small number of individuals, usually a few dozen at the most, who exploit a given territory together and are identified with that territory. Band members are almost always somehow related to one another. They may be kin through relationship to one's father or to one's mother or by marriage. Invariably there is a patrilocal orientation, in that the paramount figures in the group tend to be agnatically related males. Their fathers and paternal grandfathers were in the band before them. Australian Aboriginals seem to be more gerontocratic than other hunter-gatherers, but in any case a man may achieve prestige through proving his expertise in some important activity. A successful hunter will be recognised as an authority in that realm and this will have a certain halo effect in other areas of community decision making. To demonstrate a close and influential connection with the supernatural world or capability as a curer of disease lends pre-eminence to a person. Emphasis is more on what has been called 'natural' authority. That is, a person becomes a 'man of influence' because he has achieved expertise in a crucial activity. In such societies there is also a greater equality between the sexes. Communal decisions are made through

group discussions and consensus is ordinarily sought before action is taken, although in cases of serious disagreement the band may split as one group of dissidents goes off on its own or joins another band. Neither judicial or police power is vested in any single individual or group. Even band leaders can only suggest or cajole, but they are leaders in part because of their ability to convince others. This does not mean that force is not applied in these societies. It is, but it is in the form of diffuse or religious sanctions, not legal ones. Sometimes a single individual may be able to terrorise or lord it over a whole band. Thus, an Inuit shaman may employ his powers to scare others into submitting to his will. But in due course that same shaman may find his life suddenly cut off as he is 'executed' by one or more others in the group – an extreme form of diffuse sanctions.

*Societies with elaborate lineage structures*

By lineage structure is also meant the segmentary lineage system. What we may call the 'ideal type' of this system incorporates the following components:

1. Membership in the significant groupings within the system – the lineages – is based upon putative patrilineal descent and relationship to others in the group.
2. The maximally integrative unit, the 'tribe', is segmented into major branches which are often referred to as clans. These in turn are subdivided into further groupings which are still further sub-divided. The number of levels of segmentation varies from one culture to another. In some cases each clan is divided into 'maximal' lineages which are composed of 'major' lineages, while these are divided into 'minor' lineages which are the equivalent of a group of families descended from a common paternal grandfather or great grandmother. Each individual member of the tribe then belongs to a group within each of the levels of segregation. In analogous fashion, each person in a modern state belongs at one and the same time to territorial segments: household, municipality or county, province and nation.
3. Aside from the fact that segmentary lineage systems are not based on territory but presumed kinship, another way in which they differ from the subdivisions of the modern state is that a person ordinarily becomes fully aware of his membership in any segment only when a given segment is threatened from outside by another segment. This is known as 'complementary opposition'. That is, my minimal lineage may be in conflict with a minimal lineage within my minor



lineage, in which case it would be expected that all members of the minimal lineage will unite against the members of the other minimal lineage. If, however, a member of my minimal lineage is insulted or assaulted by a person from another *minor* lineage then the conflict between my minimal lineage and that other within my minor lineage should be set aside as we unite as a minor lineage opposed to the other minor lineage. Should someone from another clan assault a member of my clan then again we must, temporarily at least, forget our internal quarrels within the clan and unite against the opposing clan. Complementary opposition means minimal lineage, clan against clan and tribe against tribe. Conflict never entails, for example, an entire clan against a specific minimal lineage. Complementary opposition means that one is largely aware of his group affiliation when his specific group is in opposition to another segment of the same level of organisation. It further suggests the corporate character of the groups involved. The unit is conceived as a single person; an injury to one is an injury to all, just as guilt of a member extends to include the whole body. Finally, complementary opposition suggests the equality of units in terms of size and power. That is, for example, all clans should be approximately the same size and have the same strength.

4. Leaders of tribes and their segments are elders who have achieved status as influential men. Any power they have does not rely on a police force, rather it must be earned and continually validated. The successful leader has a canny ability to assess and then verbalise popular opinion on an issue, to sway others by convincing argument and elegant speech, to demonstrate wisdom and justice, display generosity and skilfully employ his connections with other men of influence. he is first among equals although often a little more equal than others. He is also a mediator in disputes rather than an arbitrator. He is not a ruler.
5. To avoid leaving the impression that under such an arrangement all life is a continual violent struggle, three points should be made:
  - i) It is very likely that death from violence is lower in a segmentary lineage system than in the modern welfare state.
  - ii) In nearly all segmentary lineage systems there are mechanisms for quickly putting a stop to violence and revenge. Non-involved yet interested other parties may intervene to try to calm the situation and offer their services as mediators. Various kinds of pressures may be applied by those not directly involved not only to accept mediation but the decision of the mediators as well.

iii) Lineages are mutual aid associations. Mutual defence is only one facet of a network of obligations. Lineage mates aid one another in sponsoring rites of passage such as marriages and funerals, in numerous economic activities, and often lineages rather than individuals are the land owning and controlling unit.

Segmentary lineage theory has been criticised to the extent that it purports to provide an adequate explanation of the political relations in those societies which depend upon such structures. In other words, it has been claimed that the segmentary lineage system is the only mesh in the network of political relations. However, within the past three decades further analysis has suggested that in those societies where this form of organisation prevails that system alone is inadequate to explain the various ramifications of political life and, further, that system does not operate precisely according to the model. Important discrepancies exist.

In addition to lineage obligations an individual builds personal friendships outside of kinship: one acquires ties to unrelated neighbours. One gains working and trading partners who are not kin. From birth one has ties to kinsmen related through the mother and through the father's mother, and marriage leads to the acquisition of affinal kin. Especially amongst those people who are Muslim, an individual often builds close ties to religious figures and organisations. And where age class systems exist these may operate as counteracting forces to segmentary lineages. Any of these ties may assume considerable importance and some can in specific circumstances override those obligations to lineage mates. For instance, if my lineage becomes embroiled in a conflict with a lineage to which my mother belongs, I may very well choose to sit on the sidelines and avoid involvement lest I do harm to my maternal kinsmen. I may even seek to assume a conciliatory role in the affair.

Segmentary lineage systems are widespread in Sub Saharan Africa. They are also found among Berbers, Arabs and Afghans, but among them mainly in precarious association with the state.

There are a number of modified forms of this system. One which is a sub-type lacks the strong segmental character and corporate nature of the lineage groups. While these unlineal kin groups are of central importance, other important organisational forms operate to enmesh the individual in a network of obligations and relationships which make government a redundancy.

A case in point is the Tonga of southern Zambia. They are a matrilineal people numbering about 150,000 engaging in cattle herd-

ing and cultivation of corn, millet and sorghum. Tonga have no chiefs or rulers, although they have influential persons who act as advisors, mediators and coordinators. These have no authority to force others to obey them. A central mechanism of social control is the membership of each individual in a number of different groups, which in turn are part of a network of further obligations so that any negative action against an individual or group resulting from one set of ties has its counter-restraining effect resulting from affiliation with other groups and individuals. Everyone has a close connection with his own matrilineage, his matrimonial clan and that of his father. Clan ties are further extended through marriage alliances with other clans. Further, each clan has a set of other clans with which it maintains 'joking relations'. In these one should never become annoyed at the behaviour of his clan joking partner. So, in this way, bonds aimed at avoiding hostility are extended to a large segment of the Tonga population.

One also belongs to a neighbourhood which draws additional people who are not otherwise part of one's social network. Additionally, one establishes links through special brotherhood pacts and a system of loaning cattle to non-kinsmen. (By spreading one's cattle around one avoids a concentration of animals which in case of epidemic, raid or other catastrophe could destroy much of a person's capital investment.) By one connection or another a person ordinarily finds that effective restraining measures are built up to cover the important social relations one might have.

#### *Administrative polities*

The third type of stateless society in Evans-Pritchard and Fortes' classification is one in which an administrative apparatus constitutes the political framework. I believe that closer examination of examples of this type will show that many, if not most, exhibit certain rudimentary governmental and state qualities. Consider the Ibo, the second largest ethnic community in southern Nigeria. They presently number some seven million and have traditionally been town dwellers, and marketing and trading are major activities of these people noted for their aggressive business-like activities and their individualism. Throughout Iboland there are at least two different kinds of polity. Thus, some Ibo towns have 'kings' and a governmental structure which is intrusive and not typically Ibo. Over most of Iboland the traditional highly decentralised and acephalous political system has prevailed.

Much of the Ibo social life is dependent upon participation within

a patrilineage structure, the fundamental unit of which is the compound under the supervision of its senior male. Related and neighbouring lineage segments and compounds comprise a village which is ordinarily the maximal unit of social integration and control. Within the village complaints and legal proceedings are undertaken by compound heads or by groups of mediating third parties each of whom may be called upon to settle a dispute. But such mediators have no power to impose their decisions. Thus, if one is not satisfied by this procedure he appeals to other institutions. The elders within each village who form a specific age grade, comprise a deliberative, legislative, judicial and executive body to whom an injured party may appeal. The elders do not act unless they are called upon to do so. They function as a court, deciding guilt or innocence and assessing fines and punishments. Punishments are meted out by the young members of the age grade association. That is, the Ibo age grades with responsibilities associated with each grade. The members of the younger grades are, among other things, responsible for bringing witnesses and culprits to the village courts and for executing punishments decided by the court. One found guilty of stealing, for example, may be tied up for days on end without food, or if he is caught red handed he is carried around the village along with what he has stolen and those on the street curse him, spit on him and ridicule him. There is no power of capital punishment, but a murderer is expected to hang himself if caught.

Aside from this governmental technique, Ibo society has other methods for imposing sanctions. There are associations of titled men which exert considerable influence. Such organisations offer various titles which a man may purchase and so acquire prestige. Religious sanctions are imposed by *dibia* associations which are for religious specialists. There are associations for herbalists, for diviners or medicine men; each requires a considerable initiation fee and leads to a member's ordination as a priest within the association. Most important among such individuals are the oracles through whom the gods speak, making predictions, answering questions and, thus, operating as a major force directing people's behaviour.

Ibo society, to use Bohannan's term, has a multicentric power system (Bohannan, page 301 ff). Clearly it has a government, but this government is minimal and is sovereign only over a small population. In addition there are several distinct loci of power. While in the usual state a monopoly on the use of violence to impose rules derives from a single source, among Ibo there are several legitimate centres of power so that nobody can claim such a monopoly. Ibo are best seen

as having a marginal or rudimentary form of government and one may wonder to what extent this may also be true of other societies of this 'administrative' type.

*Independent village chieftaincy*

The final type of stateless society is the one suggested by Bernardini in which there are autonomous villages composed of cognatic kinsmen who are related to 'chiefs' or headmen who are vested with political authority. However, it needs to be stressed that this phraseology is misleading. The political authority of chiefs is highly circumscribed and in many of this type it may be said not to exist at all. Once again, then, we must note that these leaders are not rulers; they do not have access to a police force. At the same time some of these kinds of societies border on formal government. Thus, among certain New Guinean peoples it is considered legitimate for the headman to use his own physical force to enforce his will and he is often the strongest and biggest man in the village.

New Guinean societies particularly are characterised by the 'Big Man' who is the man of influence in the community. He must achieve his status, and does so, through a variety of means. He must be physically strong and have correct male characteristics of aggressiveness and boastfulness. He must be a successful warrior, have appropriate influence with the supernatural and be a capable orator and mediator of disputes. Probably of most importance is his success in the economic sphere.

The New Guinean economy is based on the gardening of yams in particular, and the keeping of swine. Any Big Man is one who is a successful gardener and pig care is done by women. This means the size of one's garden depends on the number of wives one has. A proper Big Man has a large garden and is a polygynist. In addition his household rears many pigs, some of which may be loaned out to others. With an adequate economic base a man can then build up a personal following by making loans and holding pig feasts so that others will become indebted to him, so enhancing his wealth and influence. At the same time, with his feast-giving he builds a reputation as a generous man. Perhaps the Big Man is not far removed from Max Stirner's ideal, or the hero in an Ayn Rand novel.

In the Philippines also there are a number of cultures in which the political system is characterised by influential men similar to Big Men. Yet in most New Guinean societies there is a lineage structure which acts as a supplement to the Big Man oriented political system. In

contrast, a Philippines people like Ifugao are bilateral and therefore much more atomistic.

The work of Pierre Clastres, and consequently his observations on Amazonian Indian politics, have become well known amongst anarchists. These Indian groups have a village level organisation each with a headman, but the headman has little or no authority. Pierre Clastres asks why there should be headmen who have no power. He recognises the chief's importance as a peacemaker and mediator, but argues that these functions should not be confused with the nature of chieftainship. To explain this nature we must turn to the relationship of the chiefly role to reciprocity. The chief is involved in an exchange entailing women, words and wealth. Most of these Indians practice polygyny. The chief is always the man with the most wives; often the only polygynist in the village. At the same time, the chief is expected to enthral the group with his oratory – no speech, no chief. He must sponsor feasts, support the community in hard times and always demonstrate his magnanimity and generosity. Through these mechanisms the chief continually strives to validate and revalidate his position. But such demonstrations are not, as one might think, proper reciprocations to the community for the excess of wives or for the position the chief has. Women are of such 'consummate' value that all the words and all the gifts provided by the chief are insufficient to qualify the situation as reciprocal, that is, equal exchange. As such the chief in his position defies reciprocity, that basic law of social relations. Such an asymmetrical relationship is identified with power and that with nature. In opposition to them stand reciprocity, society and culture. People in archaic societies realising this conflict and the contradictions of the fundamental social law see power as enjoying a privileged position; in fact 'power' should be made 'impotent'. The final synthesis in this dialectic is paradoxical. The chief's most unreciprocal acquisition of multiple wives puts him in a condition of perpetual indebtedness to his people so that he must become their servant.

While Clastres' argument has merit, he provides little empirical data to substantiate it. Especially absent is any idea of what the individuals involved actually think about power and chiefs. Both Clastres and his mentor, Claude Levi-Strauss, have investigated the chiefly role in the Amazon according to structuralist principles, but they have apparently reached different conclusions about it. In contrast to Clastres, Levi-Strauss offers the usual conservative explanation that a true reciprocal relationship is involved (Levi-Strauss,

page 309). Colson has suggested that an emphasis on reciprocity perhaps overemphasises the altruism involved, neglecting the fact that many people do not give in the 'spirit' of reciprocity so much as out of fear of reprisal if they do not give (Colson, 1974, page 48).

Gertrude Dole has developed another explanation for the powerless chief in South America. She maintains that many of the known anarchic tribes on that continent were once much less so. Disease particularly reduced the population of many groups to the point where they can no longer function as self-sufficient and separate entities. Consequently various remnant groups consolidate. Headmanship was normally a kind of hereditary office through the male line, but a man often dies before his eldest son matures so that one from another family is appointed successor. This man himself may be from a family which has provided headmen in another tribe. This leadership is distributed among various families producing claims to succession in several patrilineal lines so that the chiefly position becomes weakened. Dole argues that the strength of headmanship is tied to lineality because it provides a standardised and exclusive channel for the exercise and transmission of authority. Where this disappears the authority of the chief is undermined.

In sum, this typology of four kinds of stateless societies demonstrated that their anarchic qualities may vary considerably. Yet, it also shows that a large number of people in the world have and do live in enduring governmentless, stateless political systems and there have been a variety of ways in which this has been achieved.

### **A note on freedom**

A survey of ethnographic studies will show that anthropologists have not devoted a great deal of space to explicating conceptions of freedom in different cultures. Perhaps it is a difficult term to get at since many people throughout the world seem to lack a conscious or verbalised conceptualisation of it. Freedom seems to be a term which has been most discussed in European circles since the eighteenth century. However, two pertinent generalisations regarding the relation of culture to freedom have frequently been expressed by anthropologists as well as others.

One is that culture is both a liberating and a constrictive force. The rules and regulations of all societies channel every individual along certain lines and not along others. It is easy to see culture as an

inhibiting force curtailing individualistic or deviant behaviour. However, in providing rules culture permits us to better predict the behaviour of others and thus frees the individual from the constant worry of what to expect in others. In cultures such as modern western ones where there is little consensus about the rules and where many seem to be at a loss as to what the rules are, there is an increase in anxiety and other related problems.

The case of language is an appropriate example. This most important of all aspects of culture includes all sorts of rules regarding grammar and pronunciation. Communication would be impossible otherwise. We do not have freedom to speak in any fashion we please. By having rules of our language so well embedded in our minds from an early age we are freed from continually struggling with having our most simple thoughts understood by others. We can tend to more important matters.

Obviously some cultures are more liberating than others. Thus certain societies have been called 'loosely structured' because there is consensus on a set of rules, but a considerable amount of leeway is tolerated in their interpretation and implementation. In 'rigidly structured' societies there is a most minute specification of rules, so that a margin of tolerance hardly exists. The Thai are perhaps an example of a loosely structured people. Orthodox Jews or Arabs may be rigidly structured.

Another generalisation points to weaknesses in the stateless societies concerning the protection of individual freedoms. It was briefly indicated above how under certain conditions, such as among New Guineans, an anarchic polity can degenerate into the tyranny of one man.

A reliance upon diffuse sanctions can readily become oppressive. The taunts, gossip, ostracism and violence which often comprise such sanctions can be unyielding and unforgiving. And we know from our small town life there is little place for refuge from such sanctions so long as one desires to remain within the community. Not only can diffuse sanctions readily get out of hand, but they can be a force for conservatism, stupidity and intolerance. But this may not so much reflect the nature of diffuse sanctions as it reflects the temperament of the people. A more tolerant and loosely structured people would not employ sanctions with the severity of the narrow minded or those who seemed obsessed with revenge. We might like to think that a better educated people might also be less severe. Perhaps it is more true to say that those possessing wisdom would not employ sanctions oppres-



sively. Further, it is interesting to note how often in politics in which diffuse sanctions prevail there is an emphasis on personal self-restraint and avoidance of violent situations. Such people recognise the significance of individual responsibility.

It is, of course, said that the state maintains order and so would prevent the excesses of diffuse sanctions which might be uncontrolled in an anarchic system. Perhaps this is true, but states have a way of imposing even more virulent forms of oppression and violence. History shows that the overwhelming trend for all the hundreds of states which exist and have existed is towards oppression and domination. Even granting, for the sake of argument, that the liberal democracies are more tolerable, the 'liberality' is limited to the homeland while they are oppressors abroad. Lee has suggested that the state may be more effective in reducing certain kinds of violence such as individual fights, but it creates more forms such as war (Lee, pages 398-399).

### **On the origins of the state**

How the state originated has been a question of importance to anarchists and it is one that has interested some anthropologists as well. It is fair to say, however, that anthropologists' contributions in this area have been as much in criticism of various theories as they have been in offering original theory. In this section all of the theories of state origin which have been advocated will not be reviewed. Rather, those which have had some importance within anthropology will be briefly summarised.

Firstly, we may consider those theories which have been developed by anthropologists themselves. One of the first was that of Heinrich Schurtz, who argued that state organisations arose out of men's sodalities such as secret societies, age classes and clubs. In these sodalities, as in the state as well, membership is not based upon kinship. Members may be recruited on the basis of age, sex and territory. Invariably these organisations are involved in the regulation of behaviour in the community. The brief discussion above of age class systems is sufficient to demonstrate the political role of these organisations and the extent to which they assume governmental functions.

A.M. Hocart argued that the earliest government-like functions were assumed by ritual specialists, some of whom, in the course of

time, became fully fledged rulers of states as part of a general process of increasing specialisation in the division of labour. A considerable body of evidence can be garnered to support this view. Religious specialists control what is considered important knowledge and such control can readily be used to manipulate others and accrue wealth and more power. Religious specialists often act as mediators in disputes and in time such a role is evolved into that of arbitrator, that is, a judge with enforcement powers.

Robert Carneiro urges a demographic theory of state origin. He holds that where you have population growth coupled with delimited agricultural recourses there will be pressure to expand the territory. This provokes increased warfare, which requires a military organisation, and that is correlated with increased centralisation of political power. Thus, states are created. Carneiro offers, then, another version of the conquest theory of the state, only he tries to provide an explanation for the drive to conquer through a kind of demographic determinism.

These several theories contribute to our understanding of the origin of the state by emphasising specific crucial factors in potential state evolution. At the same time no single one can be taken as the exclusive explanation, particularly because they ignore other crucial factors. For one, none addresses the roles of property and hierarchy. Such a gap is filled by Engels, who, drawing on and explicating the earlier views of Lewis Henry Morgan, tied these to marxist theory. With Engels and Marx the growth of private property generates social class differentiation and this in turn provokes domination by the propertied class over the propertyless. The state appears as the political arm of the dominant class in order to reinforce its power and control. In recent years the marxist explanation has attracted considerable support in anthropological circles. Certainly no one would deny the fundamental significance of property and social hierarchy to the state's evolution. Yet the Engels-Marx thesis may be criticised for its narrow emphasis on economic factors. It completely underestimates the importance of power through knowledge, whether this be in the form of purveyors of priestcraft as in earlier times or of technocrats and bureaucratic managers of modern times. Pierre Clastres has turned Engels and Marx on their heads, arguing that "perhaps one must acknowledge that the infrastructure is the political, and the superstructure is the economic" (page 171). He is referring specifically to the rise of the American Indian states which were dependent upon an agricultural system of the same technological level as the archaic

'savages' of the forest. The real revolution, he sees, was the rise of the state with its administrative networks and hierarchical authority, not economic transformation.

The theory of state origin was shared in some fashion or another by Henry Maine and Emile Durkheim, although it is more often implicit in their writings than explicit. Here the theory commences with the argument that there have been two basically different kinds of human society, which have been noted earlier in this essay. On the one hand there is the small, 'folk' community based on kinship. On the other there is the complex society based upon contract and territory. In the first, Durkheim stressed a mechanical solidarity or simple division of labour based on sex and age. In the second there was a complex specialisation of task constituting an organic solidarity. Both Maine and Durkheim held that in the transition from the simple type to the more complex type there would occur a change in the kind of legal structure. Thus, for example, Durkheim writes of the prevalence of 'repressive' law in the simpler society, by which he essentially meant a system of collective revenge. With the differentiation of the social order through the shift in the division of labour towards specialisation there is also a shift in the legal system. The society characterised by organic solidarity cannot function with repressive sanctions alone. What is necessary is a restitutive or cooperative law which aims to re-establish an equilibrium and compensate injured parties. Durkheim says nothing about the state *per se*, but we may surmise, as we surmise from Maine's thesis as well, that the state arises as a regulatory device in a complex highly differentiated and thus heterogeneous society. For both Maine and Durkheim there is a minimal differentiation of individuals in the simpler society. In Maine's view one's status is his kinship status. This being so, polity and kinship are fused. However, once society is no longer based on kinship alone, once we commence treating people as individuals with separate contractual relationships, or in the Durkheimian perspective, once we introduce a complex and specialised division of labour in which individual specialists become mutually dependent upon one another, we require something different than a kinship basis for social order. Since everyone is no longer someone else's kinsman, since we no longer have a homogeneous society, how can social order be maintained? The most common solution seems to be the introduction of the state and government. At least this seems to be the case with those societies which have developed an urban, literate culture. The argument that the state is found in all complex societies and consequently must be a necessity

for them is one which is not without fault. First, it tends to be circular in that social complexity is in part defined by the presence of social ranks, classes and distinctions, states, governments and bureaucracies. Secondly, it confuses the need for co-ordination of complex structures with the need for a state. It seems likely that since the state is so common among complex societies that it has perhaps been perceived as the easiest way to handle the problem of integration of disparate parts. At the same time there are other techniques as alternative to state organisation. I refer particularly to what may be called acephalous segmented network systems, examples of which include the organisation of several major social movements (see Hine), the co-ordination of international postal services and of railway services (Barclay, 1986). Thirdly, the argument becomes a functionalist one explaining the state as a grand organiser and keeper of the peace, totally ignoring Engels and others' view of the state as an instrument of class domination. It also ignores the state as a creator of violence and discord, perhaps as much or more than would occur in its absence.

Karl Wittfogel developed a technological determinist thesis concerning the origins of the state. He observed that the ancient civilisations of Egypt and Asia arose on the banks of great rivers. These 'hydraulic civilisations' all had water problems; the rivers became the source for elaborate irrigation works. These in turn depended on the organisation of central mechanisms for control, and hence engendered the development of the state. Paul Wheatley reviews the evidence for Wittfogel's claim and finds it wanting (page 292 ff). In China the large-scale hydraulic works were intended mainly for transportation rather than agriculture. Furthermore, they were not products of a centralised government except where they were specific military ventures. rather, they were made and maintained by local or regional groups. For Mesopotamia Robert Adams has written that "there is nothing to suggest that the rise of dynastic authority in northern Mesopotamia was linked to the administrative requirements of a major canal system" (Kraeling and Adams, page 281). The Mesopotamian walled city-state complex arose a considerable time before any large scale irrigation and must therefore have other causes. In the Andean region as well, urban development occurred first and only sometime later did major irrigation canals appear. Canals associated with the Nile were primarily built for transportation of stone for pyramid building and other public works or for draining swamps. Egyptian sources give no indication whatsoever of a role for irrigation

canals in administration. If such technology were actually crucial for the creation of the Egyptian state one would expect otherwise.

In more recent times we may note from the anthropological record several people living on the island of Luzon in the Philippines who had a highly decentralised, anarchic polity as well as a complex system of rice irrigation. Therefore, it is not that complex irrigation systems require state management but they require some kind of coordinated management – a management which apparently can also be achieved by decentralised, egalitarian means.

Elman Service, among others, has argued for another theory of state origin which stresses control of economic resources, but also seeks to take into account other factors as well. This view emphasises the role of 'Big Men' as centres for the redistribution of wealth. It is argued that in certain systems 'Big Men' build a body of supporters and dependents by acquiring influence and prestige through asserting such characteristics as their physical prowess, bravery, oratory, ability to mediate disputes, their influence with supernatural forces and shrewdness and luck in economic exchanges. The Big Man's supporters contribute goods which are ceremonially distributed by the Big Man as gifts to invited guests from other groups. This enhances his prestige and broadens his influence. At the same time, his dependents enjoy his protection and generosity, receive loans from him and are able to bask a little in his glory. They, of course, also fear him. As the Big Man enhances his wealth and power, trade amongst the groups increases, labour specialisation becomes more widespread and population increases with increased wealth production. The social order becomes more heterogeneous, composed of groups of diverse interests so that inter-group conflict becomes more common and more important. Thus, the mediator-mystagogue roles of the Big Man are augmented. He can turn some of his dependents and retainers into armed guards and enforcers, abandoning his role as mediator for that of arbitrator-ruler. Thus, human societies which once were all egalitarian, acephalous and anarchic entities are transformed into hierarchic, authoritarian states. At the same time some of the more favoured henchmen of the Big Man, through their own machinations and especially through being able to establish themselves as centres of lesser redistribution systems, are able to increase their own wealth and power so that they are increasingly differentiated from the rest of society. An elite class of controllers of wealth and power with the Big Man at the top is created over a subordinate class of producers of wealth.

## **Conclusion**

In its history anthropology has too frequently been dependent upon and manipulated by governments and other powerful institutions. Yet as a discipline it has retained a distinctly humanistic orientation. It is a liberal art in the best sense of that term: open minded and free from orthodox conventions. It has stressed the malleability and variability of humans and devoted a great deal of scholarship to the phenomenon of cultural change. Consequently it has pleaded for a more realistic view of human behaviour. At least, there has long been the emphasis upon an attempt to understand other people's points of view no matter how divergent they might be from our own. Anthropology has always been critical of ethnocentrism and has implicitly held that somehow if we understand others we will get along better.

I believe it is fair to say that anthropologists have demonstrated that humanity is one species and that physical variations between populations of humans is of minimal significance. The myth of racial determinism has been exploded. The data of anthropology tends also to discredit notions of social Darwinism. The practice of sharing, cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are all essential to the survival and prosperity of the human species.

Various generalisations can be made concerning the subject of power and authority. Some kind of legitimised power – that is, authority – is found in all societies, as are rules for behaviour which are reinforced by sanctions. These features are, however, expressed in differing ways. The governmental-state structure is only one type of behavioural management. The viability of anarchy, or the absence of government, is demonstrated by its widespread occurrence amongst a variety of cultures, although it is most characteristic of those with small, rural populations and limited technology.

In every society each individual is given a social status. One has a position ranked in relationship to others in the group according to traditional criteria characteristic of the specific culture. True equality of all individuals has not been achieved in any society, nor has it been a desired value for most. However, hierarchical structures wherein groups are stratified according to their access to scarce resources – whether wealth or power – are found in only a few societies.

For those who believe that we inhabit a progressing world and that progress is inevitable with Western Civilisation representing the pinnacle of that progress, it would be well to ponder the following: 'Civilisation' clearly correlates with true warfare, slavery, social classes

and castes, human sacrifice, state and government bureaucracy. The type of people once referred to as savages and primitive are invariably free from those encumbrances.

I would stress one final point, Namely, merely because human cultures have certain characteristics does not necessarily mean that it is the way things must be done or the way they ought to be done. All too often we find anthropologists, among others, making the argument that complex cultural situations make the state a necessity, when in fact it should be said that some form of coordination system is essential. Along similar lines, we are told of the necessity for authority and leadership in order to have a functioning human society, but there are different kinds of authority and leadership, ranging from the autocratic to the 'natural'. In the latter one is accepted as an authority in some particular endeavour because he possesses acknowledged expertise in that endeavour. One does not seek to dominate others through his or her authority. He seeks to share his knowledge so that others might be raised to the same level of ability. As we learn in introductory philosophy, it is an error to attempt to derive the 'ought' from the 'is'. Merely because societies are structured in a certain way does not mean they ought to be that way. For one thing, cultures are so variable one would be hard pressed to find a blueprint. And any generalisations about all societies, as we have been making in this conclusion, are of such a general nature as to be near useless for such purposes. What can be gained from these anthropological musings is a delineation of the limits of human behaviour, its immense variability, and its universalistic traits. Further, the study of human cultures provides us with a clearer notion of the sorts of consequences which might come from the adoption or presence of certain kinds of customs. For example, rigid and restrictive child rearing practices coupled with corporal punishment are invariably found in authoritarian societies. The lesson should be obvious.

### **Bibliographic Note**

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Other appropriate texts include Mary Ellen Goodman, *The Individual and Culture* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1959) and Harold B. Barclay, *Culture: the Human Way*.

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Finally, two titles concerning the concept of freedom are Dorothy Lee, mentioned in the first paragraph, and Paul Riseman's *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: an introspective ethnography* (University of Chicago, 1977).

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*Angus Calder***The Great Days, and Now?**

In November 1991, at last I managed to get back to East and Central Africa. The British Academy had given me funds for a field trip – to ‘study’ the current state of poetry written in English in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe. That largely entailed meeting old friends. I’d taught literature at the University of Nairobi from 1968 to 1971, in what intellectuals there now recall as The Great Days. In 1978, I spent a month lecturing in Malawi, from 1983 to 1985 I was external examiner in Uganda, during the terrible second régime of Obote. When I tell friends at home about these countries, I reckon they must think I’m mad to love them. The region has suffered under the hooves of the Four Horsemen. In Uganda, wonderfully fertile, not much famine but civil war, social breakdown, AIDS. In Kenya, hunger, corruption, brutal tyranny and horrific population growth. In Malawi, under what must be the most complete censorship on earth, friends won’t discuss any important issue openly except one to one, with no-one in earshot.

But David Livingstone wasn’t the first Scot to fall in love with Africa, and after me there will surely be countless more. There’s spectacular highland scenery and exhilarating musical culture. Beyond that, there is the African gift of laughter, allied with compassion for all Eve Tamson’s bairns. (Eve, as we now know from geneticists, was certainly a central African.) I went armed with four copies of Sorley Maclean’s collected poems, to show that in Scotland too we are ‘primitive savages’.

November 91 was an interesting month. Kaunda, President of Zambia for nearly three decades, suffered a landslide defeat in free elections. This reverberated through the whole region. In Malawi I

asked in the Government Hostel bar the ultimate, unaskable, question – “What happens here when the Old Man, Banda, dies?” No comment. But a few nights later, a man shouted at me across the Hostel car park where I had been seeing a friend off. “Hey! You! Scotch! You were very drunk the other night, you were saying very bad things.” “I just asked an obvious question, that’s all.” “You Scotch, I tell you what happens when Banda goes. Same as what happened in Zambia!” Not very logical – he was well tanked up. But forceful. I just hope that no-one overheard him.

I came back knowing that President Moi of Kenya was finished. Since then, opposition has been legalised and there has been news of ministers, party officials defecting. The same force is at work as brought down Honecker and Ceausescu. As in those cases, one rejoices, one fears... Multi-party democracy won’t in itself solve Africa’s problems. Uganda in the ’60s, when Obote was first president, was a multi-party democracy. The parties divided on ‘tribal’ lines.

Anyway, it was to Uganda I flew first.

## Uganda

**October 30:** Scotland yesterday was a land of overcast skies. Worse, the atmosphere after England’s win at Murrayfield was precisely that of national mourning. People spoke quietly, carefully, avoiding The Subject. When I arrived at Entebbe, the skies were overcast but the clouds were higher. To be back filled me with euphoria. The terminus building is still as awkward to get around as ever, but much brighter and cleaner than in 1985. A charming, quiet young taxi driver picked me up. It wasn’t for miles that I noticed that his windscreen was shattered, as if by a bullet aimed at his head. He reassured me – that wasn’t the cause – and said that a new one would reach him from Nairobi in about a fortnight.

Deep green vegetation. Rich red soil. Huge birds in profusion – kites, eagles, cranes. Lorries heaped with plantains – *matoke*, the basic diet. The colours and sheen of excellent fruit neatly arranged in roadside stalls.

V.S. Naipaul earned his knighthood partly by harping, in brilliant prose, on the pathos arising when Third World people mimic western life styles. For years, he was one of my gods. Not now. I don’t find the many shacks along the road which are labelled ‘beauty salon’ either

sad or comic. They are tokens of the enormous courage which people have had to develop, recovering from the dreadful years from 1971 to 1985. If women aspire, through straightened hair, to film star elegance, who am I to object? 'Art' and 'artificial' are words from the same root. All cultures, except perhaps those of isolated hunter-gatherers, have exhibited synthesis. The 'national dress' for women here (not so often seen now, I think, as it was twenty years ago) is derived from that of Victorian Englishwomen, with generous bustles.

**November 2:** For the practical purposes of 'research' I should either have omitted Uganda, or stayed longer, to seek out in their lairs the few once-published writers remaining in this country where nothing new is now being published. That would take time. The telephone system is virtually unusable. I've had interesting conversations with academics on the Makerere University campus, revived greatly since I last saw it, where I stayed in the guest house. I spoke to the young woman from Macmillan, the only 'multinational' publisher with an office here: the prospects of their bringing out poetry are nil. I leave with three unpublished collections given to me by Tim Wangusa, who got a novel into print with Heinemann a couple of years ago – two of his own, plus an attempted anthology.

Frankly, Ugandans face more urgent tasks than publishing verse in the alien *lingua franca*. Museveni's rule, with the national resistance council functioning like a one-party parliament, seems to be generally accepted. Newspapers utter freely. *New Vision* today reports that a handful of rebels in the east are now reduced to begging for food. Their leader is 'Hitler' Erugu, who is accompanied by his superstitious sheep called Ausi, which the rebels believe has the magic power to detect danger. The editorial rather smugly compares the situation here with the 'baffling' crisis in Yugoslavia.

Fair enough. When I walk into the city centre (in warm rain) to get Ugandan money to pay my hostel bill, I have to go carefully round huge puddles in the paths, but potholes in the roads themselves, so dominant six years ago, have mostly disappeared.

Uganda now gets plenty of foreign aid. The capital, slowly, slowly, is returning to an appearance of prosperity, though not of elegance. The new 1,000 shilling note promised later this month will help. Currently, 100 shillings are the staple currency, at about 1,750 to the £. A shopping expedition requires two bags, one for the purchases, one for the notes. I cash far too much – it's like trying to get rid of roubles in Moscow. To photocopy the mess that Tim has given me,

I go into a 'bookshop'. There's a completely random selection of maybe twenty secondhand titles on its shelves. The copying takes ages. The bill, for a huge wodge, is under £4... Never mind my little problem: the national football team is complaining, the paper says, of lack of boots. I am told that city hall has no telephones working.

## Kenya

On the plane to Nairobi, a grave but pleasant Makere scientist confirms what others have warned me: Nairobi is no longer a safe place in which to walk alone after dark. Ugandans are quiet people. After only four days in Kampala it was a culture shock to confront rude officials and hear fierce altercations at Nairobi airport. But the grim-visaged grubby taxi driver who beat off all competitors for the right to take me into town turned out to be a friend. He insisted on driving me to a hotel I'd heard of, in the sleazier part of the city centre. Good for him. The Oriental Palace, run by Indians, is new, clean, comfortable, and at current exchange rates (the Kenyan shilling drops daily) very cheap. Three 'Pinkerton' security guards patrol its entrance with truncheons to ward off the drunks, thieves and whores who prevail in this part of town. The restaurant serves good Indian food. The day ends well. Two young *msunqu* couples are in the bar, English but amiable. "We lost", says the lad from Southport when I cautiously ask about World Cup Rugby. Aussies beat Poms, 12-6. Kaunda, by the way, has fallen, too.

**November 3:** A day resting up and struggling with the phone. Not too useful here, either.

**November 4:** Nairobi, from my sixth-floor window, is still awash with jacaranda blossom. But new construction goes on manically. What for – huge office blocks in a country sliding into famine?

Out to Kenyatta University. The site was once a barracks from which Brits fought Mau Mau: the buildings still show that. No undergraduates here, or on any of the country's five other campuses. Moi had them all chased away after riots in July. Professor Nana Wilson-Tagoe, whom I've come to see, is a charming Ghanaian. She introduces me to a plump, fortyish, very cheerful colleague. Kenya's leading playwright. It's Frances Imbuga! Once my student, twenty years ago...



Nana's full of gossip, but whispers when anything political comes up, as if walls have ears. She recalls Scotland – how lovely Stirling campus is, how calm. And how much more prosperous and lively Scotland seemed on her last visit than when she first came in 1971. Even the cars seemed smarter...

The press in Kenya is amazing. I read my way through an entire issue of the *Daily Nation*, the most popular paper here. (It claims to reach 2.3 million in a population of 25 million.) It is oppositional, though no-way 'left wing' – much news and commentary, angled at businessmen, takes free-market capitalism for granted. Forbidden at the moment, though a legal technicality, to report the big news story – the months-long enquiry going on in Kisumu into the death, clearly murder, last year of Kenya's Foreign Secretary Ouko – it retaliates by producing a scoop calculated to rattle the government, a story about vicious clashes over land between Nandi and Luo people in the west. Lesser stories inside the paper tell of shocking riots in two schools and the headmaster of a third found beaten up by the roadside. The business and finance columns speak frankly about foreign aid, now being diverted from Kenya to Uganda by donors disgusted by Moi's habit of locking up and torturing opponents. The whole paper seems to be getting across one coded message: Kenya faces social breakdown and economic collapse and Zambian-style political change might be *better for business*. The Anglican Bishop of Kirinyaga gets the back page headline. 'Emulating Kaunda, Says Gitani.' Beneath this another Bishop, Catholic, 'Tells Errant Leaders to Resign' – that is, those involved in the country's countless financial scandals.

**November 5:** The University of Nairobi campus is depressingly unchanged, except that it's bereft of students and seems even dustier. Only the glossy Kenyatta Memorial Library, named after the dead tyrant, is new: impressive design, but, for literature and history at least, virtually no books bought in since the early 1970s.

Another ex-student, Henry Indangasi, is now head of the Literature Department. His gossip is shrewd, and all the more devastating in its implications because of its restraint. I learn of the sad corruption of certain men whom I taught and liked – one has four or possibly five wives and will do anything for money, another has nearly destroyed his once-brilliant prospects by blatant, punished, greedy dishonesty. My best student of poetry, Arthur Luvai, has left Nairobi – bad for me, since I can't see him, but good for him, since he's got a chair at the new campus, Maseno, in his home district.

Indangasi reacted against the Marxism which became an orthodoxy towards the end of the Great Days here by remaining one of the academic world's few unreconstructed Leavisites. He's not keen on multi-party democracy either. "I am a Kenyan. But I am also a Luhya. In elections, there would be a Luhya party. I would have to support that party."

These glossy new buildings... Luvai's anthology of recent Kenyan verse, *Boundless Voices*, which I read over dinner, has a good poem by him about the Safari Club monster now facing the university – skyscraping tower versus tree-scraping 'ivory tower' – from which a stone fell during construction straight onto the head of Stella Muka, a brilliant student actress. I suppose the new buildings mostly replace, like this one, facilities inherited from the colonialists. If they rob the centre of its mid-century sub-Raj character, one can't really protest on aesthetic grounds. But in human terms ... kids scabble for refuse to eat, unemployed school-leavers rob, beneath arrogant plate-glass signifying money.

The bookshops are depressing in a different way ...

Twenty years ago, in the Great Days, the Great Men, somewhat irregular university employees who were also internationally famous as the New Writers of East Africa freed by *Uhuru*, were denouncing cultural imperialism. The Kenyan novelist Ngugi, Okot from Uganda and Taban from Sudan, who both wrote poetry and polemics, and the exiled Malawian poet Rubadiri, found journalists, students and young writers ready to join the chorus. Amongst them, a few expatriate *msungus* like myself, rejoiced as 'English Literature' gave way in the syllabus to plain 'Literature', so I could and did teach Neruda and Li Po and R.K. Narayan as well as new African writing and Russian classics. ('Great Days' for me, indeed: intellectually, the best of my life.)

But the bookshops in Nairobi displayed upfront works by white writers, amongst them those of the settlers, Blixen and Huxley, along with glossy books about wild animals, wild birds and wild, 'picturesque' natives.

Twenty years later, the numerous bookshops in Nairobi display, upfront, precisely the same types of goods, except that the 'rediscovered' settler writer Beryl Markham and James Fox's (excellent) *White Mischief* have now joined the paleface tribe. At the backs of shops, often in textbook sections, one finds much the same selection of creative writing by Africans as on my last brief visit here in 1978. Achebe and other non-Kenyan stars. Plenty of work by Ngugi,

although he's been in political exile for ten years, after nearly a year in detention without trial.

Of the few new novels by Kenyans, only one is by a writer who wasn't well known to me in 1978. Apart from Luvai's slim anthology, no poetry it seems, has been published in book form since 1982.

The University Book Shop and the schools-oriented Text Book Centre are like museums. Here one finds stacks of copies of titles poured forth in the Great Days by local publishing houses now extinct (many of these, it must be confessed, are worse than mediocre). In the University shop I buy several copies of *Busara* Volume 1 Number 1, a magazine launched in 1968, to which, along with Taban, I contributed. There are no current literary magazines at all – in the Great Days there were always two or three.

I began to conclude that over the past decade or more, the energy which once sought expression in creative writing has gone into journalism: *The Nation* is splendid, *The Standard* also displays clever footwork against the Government. Though *The Times* is jointly owned by the ruling KANU party and Robert Maxwell and its editor Philip Ochieng, the most brilliant press gadfly of the Great Days, was recently sacked for getting out of step, at least, like the *Standard*, it prints verbatim the evidence coming out at the Ouko inquiry in Kisumu. It is plain as the snow on Mount Kenya that the minister was murdered by people very close to Moi. The doughty Scotland Yard man, Troon, who was obviously brought out to investigate the case in the hope that as an outsider he could be bamboozled into producing a whitewash, is telling the court how he saw through attempts to fool him ... He is becoming an African folk hero.

I am reminded of a conversation with the drunk and pretentious chairman of the Ugandan Writers Union, back in Kampala. He wittered about his soulful verse in the way really bad 'poets' do. I advised him to stick to his *métier*, which is journalism. A good pressman is worth fifty bad poets.

**November 6:** I meet Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye at the United Kenya Club, once the gracious resort of the white official class. It's still smart, but with traffic now so plentiful in this once-quiet quarter, it's hard for two people with low voices to talk on the terrace ...

Marjorie is the anthologist's nightmare. Born in England, she married a Luo, took his name. Her poetry at its best is extremely impressive. Editors seize on it to represent Kenya – then discover that they've foregrounded a *msungu*. Now in her early sixties, she hints in

her build at double-chinned Queen Victoria. Her accent, after nearly four decades of living with Africans in Africa, is surely unique. Since she comes from Southampton, there may be a John Arlott substratum. On the surface, it's quite unlike the way Africans speak English, yet transactions in Luo and Swahili must condition it. She lost her husband, a medical scientist, quite recently, but, much as she despises the corruption and bad manners of the Moi régime, she shows no hankering at all to get back to UK. Nor, though, does she pretend to be anything but a white former missionary.

She knew the poet Okot well, was one of the last people to see him before drink killed him a decade ago – “He rose to *shake my hand* – Okot, shaking the hand of a *woman*”. Her very moving elegy for him acknowledges his male chauvinism:

*So you are stilled – the long arm, sideways smile,  
the arch, back-handed question, the arrogant  
unhesitating machismo, all-embracing,  
the eyes in the back of your head, the story-telling...*

She thinks it was a trip he had with Rubadiri, ‘lecturing’ in Nigeria, which set him on the course which killed him. (Indangasi yesterday recalled Okot’s latter days in the Nairobi Staff Club, drinking all day on tick – “This place killed him”.) But Rubadiri, now washed up on yet another shore of exile in Botswana is, she insists, on the wagon. I’m glad. David, ten years older than me, one of the first black Africans to publish poetry in English, was my fellow student at Cambridge. His charismatic call, “Come South, young man”, was probably what lured me to Africa back in 1968.

Marjorie knows everyone. She used to run the best bookshop in Nairobi, and provided the city, in the late seventies, with a centre for poetry. She keeps up with what little now goes on, gives me a list of local poets (too many for me to see). It’s a sad tale: remaining copies of her own collection of poetry pulped, her brilliant protégé Khaminwa now silent, in exile, in Zimbabwe, feeble local writer’s workshops, the Writers Association bedevilled by politics and insane infighting, unable to use money gifted to it by the enlightened Swedish Development Agency so that it could start a magazine ... The newspapers still publish poems occasionally. So does *New Age* magazine, emanating from a Hindu organisation. She herself is the only East African poet in Adewale Maja-Pearce’s recent *Heinemann Book of African Verse*. Most embarrassing ...

I leave with regret – a taxi to Heinemann Kenya. Smart offices in

fashionable Westlands. But its Director, Henry Chakava (double first in Literature and Philosophy, as brilliant a student as I've ever had), is in a strange state. He moves oddly, as if adjusting to some invisible cripplement, swaying as he walks slowly. He woke up this morning, he tells me when I enquire, with a crampy pain in his left foot ... He's a brave man. He survived a vicious attack by robbers with pangas in 1980 and a bad patch when he kept receiving death threats: he published the oppositional novelist Ngugi.

That writer is on his mind today. He must phone Ngugi, who's in New England (he teaches at Yale) but has just gone ex-directory. I promise to give him the last private and confidential phone number I have for Ngugi in London, his normal base in exile. That's probably out of date, too. (Why doesn't Ngugi come back to Kenya? Indangasi asked me. "His books are freely on sale – they're used in schools." "Because", I replied, "I think he thinks, as I think, that there would soon be a strange and fatal car accident on the Limuru Road".

Henry's intelligence and humour are still there, but he seems slightly dazed. No wonder. Heinemann International have their own problems. They've just told him that Heinemann Kenya's finished, cut loose. He can keep the company, find a new name. Should it include 'Kenyan', he wonders aloud? He thinks no, he says, smiling – 'African'. Something with 'African' in it. Poetry? He can't afford to publish it. Luvai is an old friend. His anthology, alas, just isn't selling. Schools still go for *Poems from East Africa* ed. Cook and Rubadiri – twenty years old, entrenched in the stock cupboards and (I suggest) the routines of lazy teachers. Chakava's returned the latest collection from Angira, Kenya's best-known poet, with the comment that it was too abstruse to break into the all-important schools market.

Henry finally hands me over to his young colleague Ole Sunkuli, who specialises in books for secondary schools – the crucial market for local literature, if one exists. I do a deal with this handsome, highly intelligent young man (a Maasai worlds away from the 'picturesque' warriors seen on every rack of postcards here). He can talk to me for his regular interview feature in the *Sunday Nation* if I can discuss the Sales situation with him. And I want this to be at the Norfolk Hotel.

The Norfolk (see *White Mischief*) is a legendary place, one of the first watering holes for settlers. From the verandah Lord Delamere shot elephants. Down the verandah steps, outraged whites once kicked the nationalist leader Mboya. Or so it is said. Anyway, the university sprang up adjacent in days when beer prices were controlled. Academics and students invaded the settler sanctum. On the

terrace, Ngugi held court, Okot jested and sang. More routinely, here I'd be found just before sunset going over some new poems with a student writer or arguing with a historian colleague (for these were the days when Kenyan history was being salvaged from the contempt of white historians like Hugh Trevor Roper). Taban might be of the company or might not. If we weren't on good terms (and largely we weren't, though we're now, in mellow old age, fully reconciled) he would be talking Black Power to all and sundry at another table. Philip Ochieng might be there, with the lizard-dart of his tongue, or the brilliant Angira, poet and student of commerce, impossibly honest, worried about the nation's future. One little episode sums up the Great Days for me. Voice of Kenya broadcasting studios, were just down the road. On his way there, the then-Minister Mungai, dressed in a fashionable but informal jacket, is hailed from the Norfolk terrace. He reaches over the balustrade to shake hands warmly with Ngugi ... Changed times ...

I am touched to learn that when Taban passed through Nairobi a few months ago, he also insisted that Ole Sunkuli quiz him at the Norfolk. Maybe we're Dostoevskian doubles, after all.

Unfortunately, beer prices are now decontrolled. The scholars and writers have gone. *Msungu* tourists and yuppie locals prevail.

I tell Ole Sunkuli how exciting it was, how many people were part of the Great Days, not just Ngugi, Okot, Taban and Rubadiri, how enthusiastic the students were, how promising the young poets. Now long silent. Ole Sunkuli confirms my own theory. The heroes of the Great Days, paradoxically, by their swift success, throttled future literary development. The school syllabus was Africanised. The multinationals pounced. Books were set which became entrenched in the syllabus. With that market all but closed, local publishing firms set up in hope of reaching it struggled maimed towards quick or lingering death. Now even ex-Heinemann Kenya can barely afford to publish new fiction, let alone poetry ... Longmans, their multi-national competitor, ditto.

I am glad to be remembered as *mwalimu*, teacher, from the Great Days. But the field I worked in was soon overcropped, yields little now. Things might be different if Okot were still alive. Ngugi's departure for exile ten years ago clearly helped stunt local creativity. The market, anyway, doesn't want poems.

I cross the deserted campus to the French Cultural Centre, a plush place tucked behind the plate glass skyscrapers. Imbuga's play *Aminata* is to be shown in the theatre here. Waiting a long time for it to start

(African time surpasses even Hebridean time in its unpredictable flexibility) I am bumped into by John Ruganda, a brilliant, frightening playwright long self-exiled from his native Uganda. I last saw him when I last saw Okot – they were drinking double gins together on the Norfolk terrace at 11am on a Sunday morning. Ruganda's survived though. He's mellowed. His face still suggests a pickled egg with a sneer, but he's actually genial.

The play, a feminist fable, is fun, though not really suited to proscenium arch presentation. With its humorous vignettes, its blatant propagandist passages, the ceremonial dancing which concludes it, *Aminata* surely needs to be seen in a community hall, or even in the open. Imbuga himself is pleased with the production though. Afterwards, drinking with him and Ruganda I feel a sense of total relaxation such as only Africa has ever given me. Part of this effect tonight is certainly the fact that educated Africans retain a villager's sense of the strangeness of modernised existence. Isn't it odd, for instance, that the government owns everything below three feet underground, even the roots of trees? ... Ten minutes of laughter ensue from this perception and the speculations which it breeds.

**November 7:** Robert Maxwell is lost off his yacht. *The Kenyan Times* will duly provide a large and sycophantic obituary.

My lucky day. The phone works for me! I contact Angira at his office. Ringing Chakava with Ngugi's number, I learn that Maillu's in the office with him. I speak to Maillu.

A unique writer. In the mid seventies he proved that there was a popular market for books in English by flooding the streets of Nairobi (literally) with cheap paperbacks of his own works, voicing 'Common Man' sentiments, sold from the pavements like newspapers. These were denounced as rubbish by critics and as pornography by moralists.

When his publishing venture went under at the end of the decade, he turned his hand to writing for the multinationals, anything that would sell, children's stories, thrillers, romances, a book on African polygamy which (as he puts it) 'does well abroad'. Now he's back into self-publishing not with a whimper but with a megabomb – *Broken Drum*, the longest African novel ever published at 1,100 pages, the continent's riposte to *War and Peace*, covering two hundred years of Kenyan history. He is aiming at international paperback sales, like Wilbur Smith – a bushbuster. Is he shy, or just self-contained? He munches a modest hamburger while I eat steak: he clearly likes the fact

that one or two foreign academics have taken a critical interest in his work, but has no literary gossip, no interest in fine writers and their ways. When we part, I am wishing him luck sincerely. While 'serious' writers brood and wrangle, Maillu just goes on trying to work out how to earn an adequate income as an African author. As in 1971, what Kenya needs is a broadly based local publishing industry where books like Maillu's sell well enough to make it possible to print *Angira*.

*Angira*, true to his old form, arrives at the Oriental Palace at eight *exactly*, as promised. Jared, it's been too long...

Though he'd worked for the government since he left university (he currently trains people for the Agricultural Finance Corporation) he remains fierce about corruption and abused power. This tall, distinguished-looking civil servant, now 44, retains all his student convictions about truth, justice and poetry. He suspects that Chakava turned his poems down for political reasons. I insist that's unfair. Anyway, *Angira* goes on writing, what he thinks, for himself.

**November 8:** Back to the University. See Indangasi for lunch. Indangasi is sceptical about the Great Days. We talk about his colleague Owuor Anyumba, East Africa's major folklorist, now, sadly, very ill in hospital. The true hero, Indangasi thinks, from the Great Days. But he has published very little. His office is full of unexploited tapes from decades of field trips. I implore Indangasi to get money from somewhere, anywhere, at once, to ensure that they're copied. Otherwise, a careless cigarette could destroy the one-man equivalent of the School of Scottish Studies archive.

On my last evening in Kenya I have drinks and snacks with Imbuga and Ruganda, who were curious to see the Oriental Palace. They like it, reminisce about days when members of the student body boozed and whored in this area of town. I've bought copies of their plays. They sign them with pleasure. Perhaps this side-street hotel will replace the Norfolk as a venue for literary gossip?

Probably not. But *Mwalimu* is happy, if tired. Moi's on the skids. Ngugi might risk it back soon.



*Chimurenga Culture***Malawi**

**November 9:** At Nairobi airport the insolent daughter of someone's brother behind the counter where I had to pay my airport tax in hard currency refused to accept Scottish notes. I had to trek to another terminal and queue up behind eight huge young Finns – not a basketball team, just 'students', they told me – to change a travellers' cheque into dollars. However weak the US economy may be, dollars remain the most negotiable currency everywhere. I was fretting that I might be late for my flight. Needlessly – it took off three hours late. Air Kenya are in all kinds of financial trouble ...

After flying quite low over the desiccated, unpopulous terrain of Tanzania, Lake Malawi seemed vast, oceanic. I was rushed through checkout at Lilongwe and safely made my connection to Blantyre, along with numerous dark-suited, serious business-and-professional Africans. A quiet lot. How quiet Malawi at once seems after Nairobi, which teems with hustlers, boozers and boasters.

Professor Steve Chimombo at once presented himself at Blantyre Airport – semi-familiar from a book cover with a grizzled, curly mop of hair, a Mephistophelean beard and a huge grin. Steve is the best known poet writing in Malawi itself – two generations behind the exiled Rubadiri; one behind Mnthali, now self-exiled after a spell in detention; a contemporary of Chipasula and Mphande, both teaching in the States, and of Jack Mapanje ... After three and a half years in detention, without trial, it seems for uttering something subversive, Jack was released in May this year. He's now at the University of York – with his wife and children (which is important – no hostages).

As Steve and I head for his car, a very familiar figure steps up to shake hands: Ken Lipenga. When I taught here in '78, Ken and I went night after night to the OK Night Club, one of Zomba's three bars, where a mixed crowd of soldiers, policemen, whores and informers danced to music from a portable gramophone – 'Rivers of Babylon' over and over again. We talked outside over lagers in little bottles, the Carlsberg Greens made world-famous by one of Jack's best poems.

Ken has now left academic life. He is editor in chief of the Blantyre *Times*, an officially-controlled 'news'paper which actually exists to suppress 'news': everyone listens to BBC World Service for that. I'm

glad Ken's hanging around here to meet some VIP. He's just back from Edinburgh where Banda has been parading his Eldership of the Church of Scotland and his entourage have no doubt ransacked Princes Street with all the hard currency this very poor country can lay hands on, but cannot spare.

Steve takes me to Mount Soche Hotel for refreshment. It's plush – and *quiet*. Medieval theologians might have understood the dispute which Steve commences with a friend about whether Carlsberg 'Green' tastes different in brown bottles (though still with Green labels). Nevertheless, he at once impresses me. After the twitchy torpor of Nairobi's moribund 'literary scene', here, of all places, I find things happening, despite a censorship so feared that Malawi, according to a recent report in INDEX, is a land of 'zombies'. Anthony Nazombe (no zombie) managed to publish an anthology of Malawian verse quite recently. Steve himself has published a novel, *The Basket Girl*, and sold out a run of 1,000 copies by hawking it from office to office, shop to shop. And there's this rather glossy magazine for writers which he's started – *look!*

Steve's best known for a sequence of poems about the local god Napolo. When my plane touched down at Blantyre airport, Napolo at once signified his rage with a spectacular blast of lightning. As we drive on the almost empty fifty mile road to Zomba, the night is stormy. I know Government Hostel of old: here, too, Mapanje and I swapped many a Carlsberg. It's rather handsome, built for colonial officials, with twin corrugated-iron turrets and spick and span blue details on its curving white façade. At once, an exuberant figure rushes from the bar: Nazombe, whom I last saw years ago when he was a student at Sheffield, now Dean of Arts at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. Steve leaves me in Nazombe's hands. He talks about poetry and criticism with easy professionalism. I read him 'Hallaig' and send him on his way with my last copy of Sorley's poems. I fear for its safety as I watch from my room Nazombe, book in hand, huge umbrella in the other, pick his way homewards across the drenched lawn in torrential rain.

**November 10:** Steve picks me up back of four. He's a local man, born under Zomba Mountain, and his interest in Napolo needs no explanation. He drives me out into the countryside. Rain lashes, lightning flashes, clouds roll rapidly over the steep ridges. It's like the West Highlands, but we lack Napolo in Scotland to provide weather of such exhilarating, OTT, violence.

A party at the Chimombos. It's a remarkable party which is clearly enjoyed by the African guests, Ben Malunga from University admin. (the country's leading poet in Chichewa) and Gregory, a young lecturer in English. Moira's Malawian cuisine is delicious. Steve, having heard that when I was here in '78 I had made a point of never going to the white-dominated Zomba Club, had apologised in advance for the fact that there would be Scots at his party. "Steve", I'd said, "there are three kinds of people: black people, white people and Scots".

And what should I meet but a *German* Scot, a new sub-species. Manfred Malzahn who teaches English (forsooth) at Chancellor was in Edinburgh for several years and is an expert on Scottish literature. He looks like a Scottish intellectual (rather, in fact, like a cross between Alasdair Gray and Douglas Dunn). He sounds *echt* Lothian. He knows the nuances of football culture. His wife, a beautiful German opera singer, heavily pregnant, has only to smile while he and I gossip shamelessly. The other couple, Pat from Edinburgh, George from Kircudbright, agree with me that Manfred's quite uncanny. They've taught in various parts of Africa, with fourteen years back in Edinburgh in between. George has retired now and devotes himself to woodwork.

**November 11-13:** At breakfast a corpulent white man swims into view – Father Pat O'Malley. Pat's a devotee of Yeats and a connoisseur of Irish Gaelic verse. (Nazombe's already shown him Sorley's book, so that *was* spared by the rain.) Pat taught English at Chancellor for many years, now works for a Catholic development agency. We have a good crack. He puts me right. I say: "I'm enjoying this too much, being back". He nods and gives me terrible facts. Malawi has the highest infant mortality rate in this bitterly poor region which includes Tanzania and Mozambique. Barely half of its children enter primary school: then those who do start dropping out because their parents can't meet the fees ...

I stopped writing a diary when I reached this conversation. My stay remained specially pleasant. Chancellor's comely brick quadrangles under the spectacular backdrop of Zomba Mountain were always attractive. Now the Senior Common Room has been expanded so that one can lounge, rather privately, in a kind of huge bow window, looking out on sun, flowers, birdlife, weather. Here I talked to many academics and met the students who now run the legendary Writers Workshop.

This goes back two decades. In a situation where political clubs were impossible, student newspapers worthless if possible, the Workshop attracted scores of people to weekly meetings where stories and, still more, poems were circulated, read aloud and discussed. The half dozen students I met were very reserved at first, rather less so after their teachers, Chimombo and Nazombe, had left us. (Gregarious Manfred confirmed to me that Malawian students are hard to get to know.) The workshop, I learnt, still gets 80 to 100 participants to some meetings. I asked, did they consider pieces in Chichewa and Yao? Sometimes, yes.

This is important. I talked to Ben Malunga for an hour in his office in admin: a man slow and formal in English speech but not at all without humour. He took up writing in Chichewa as a student when he found that a trial attempt went down well. Though, as the language of Banda's own people, its status as official language might seem provocative, my enquiries always established that people from other parts don't mind using it. Ben's book of 23 poems, published by Christian Literature Association in Malawi, CLAIM, has, he drily observes, nothing Christian in it. It came out in January and by October had sold 700 copies. As I told him, that would be a triumph for a slim first volume published in London, let alone in Edinburgh. The last book of poems in Chichewa was published in 1981. Ben's is only the third by an individual author, and the others go back decades. I'm told Ben reads aloud very well, takes his book to local arts festivals. Radio here is bilingual and very popular – while I speak to him someone rings Ben to congratulate him on a poem he's just heard over the airwaves.

Malawian poetry in English, taking the country's small population and tiny readership into account, is one of Africa's cultural glories. Four out of the twenty two poets in Maja-Pearce's *Heinemann Book of African Verse in English* are Malawian. This isn't a proportion which many good judges would challenge and some, like me, would say there should be five or six. The standard is so high, I think, for two reasons. One is the strength and dedication of the English Department at Zomba, which has long encouraged in the Writer's Workshop good craftsmanship and a respect for the language's poetic tradition, without imposing Parnassian or Oxbridge conventions. The other is – censorship. That diverted very talented people who might have been journalists or novelists into poetry and ensured that their work would necessarily be subtle. To say anything important at all, it had to be thoughtful, riddling, witty.

But Malawi will be still more glorious if Malunga's success inspires complementary work in Chichewa. Ole Sunkuli, the young Maasai who interviewed me in Nairobi, jolted me to recognise that in the Great Days there twenty years ago, the issue of African languages was generally evaded by the impassioned controversialists who asserted the value of African culture against European conventions. Swahili, the *lingua franca* of Kenya, and an official language, has not been a literary medium recently – partly, I suspect, because there is in fact a rather ancient tradition of richly wrought poetry in the coastal area where Swahili is a mother tongue. Only the white woman, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, has dared to imitate those difficult forms – and she's done so in English. Here in Malawi, the popularity of Chichewa offers the hope of a body of poetry written from a present day perspective in the international mainstream – and in an African language.

Not hope, but fact, is the success of theatre in Malawi. The theatre arts department at Chancellor is headed by the energetic Chris Kamlongera, a Leeds graduate with an international reputation. The University's Travelling Theatre has long taken productions out to the rural districts. Recently, its significance has been diminished as other groups have teemed into existence. One of Kamlongera's colleagues, reacts coolly when I express astonishment: "What! Popular theatre? With *this* censorship?" The plays he says (they're in Chichewa, of course) are uncontroversial, anecdotal items about – for instance – marital relations. *Verb sap*. Theatre, as they knew in Ceausescu's Romania, brings people together into an audience reacting to what is conveyed by gesture and staging as well as by words – and these latter may be improvised. Marital problems? Like those between Husband Banda and his Wife Malawi, maybe ... when theatre flows, spring torrents threaten the ice.

Malawi's a country like no other. The régime isn't militaristic, though the army might yet become the key actor when the crisis of succession to Banda arrives. Malawi isn't, so far as one sees and hears, corrupt: a charming bank cashier went out of his way to work out for me that the rival establishment down the road would charge me less to transact a travellers' cheque. The tyranny, I'm sorry to say, is quasi-Presbyterian. Father O'Malley introduced me to a useful concept. The churches here haven't 'sold out'. They've 'bought into' the Banda régime. What they've bought is not just the puritanism which prohibits miniskirts but something covered by the word *umelu* – roughly, 'respect'. They give 'respect' to the authorities who

ensure that in return 'respect' is given to them.

In Kenya, male chauvinism is rampant, but I've never seen anything like the phenomenon which I encountered in Zomba this time, when I accepted with great delight an invitation to dine with two black Anglican pastors in their rectory. The young Rev. Evans picked me up on his motorbike: as I sat behind him clutching a strap while he chugged and bumped over dirt tracks, I applied techniques of mental dissociation which never fail me at the dentists. When we arrived at his house a young woman was standing outside to receive us. As I lurched off the bike with a bag of gifts in my hand, she suddenly knelt before me. Instinctively, I fell on my knees likewise and passed her the bag. Evans, I finally gathered, was not clear that these were gifts, so my wine wasn't served with his excellent *chambo* (like mackerel, but subtler, a fish from Lake Malawi). The young woman proved to be his servant. Every time she entered with a dish she knelt to present it. Is this another aspect of *umelu*? Even his wife would have knelt. Malawi has no well-known woman writer.

But the spate of male talent is diminishing. My last conversation on campus was with a very bright young lecturer in law, Garton Kamchedzera. The censors astounded everyone here when they passed a play he'd had accepted by the BBC for performance on its African Service. A £600 fee. In the land of the puny *Kwacha*, that's big money. There's been a little crisis going on. One *tambala* coins have been in short supply. Even expatriates seem really concerned. These coppers, worth about one-fifth of 1p, are, it seems, absolutely necessary for transactions in the local market ... This is not as odd as the fact that a popular brand of cigarettes is called LIFE.

My valedictory drink with friends in the Hostel bar was rather marred by a barrage of insects – not flying ants, but as large, built like dragonflies, flopping on to one's collar, whizzing up one's sleeve, strafing one's beer. African friends are unperturbed. They're harmless. I tell my favourite story from '78 about a spider, as large as my hands, I once met in my bedroom in up country Malawi. (I squashed it with a box of papers: woke up next morning to find that only its legs remained: the *other* creatures in my room had devoured it.) Kamlongera caps this with an even nastier tale about a scorpion he thought he'd killed in *his* bedroom somewhere. Next morning, it had removed itself. Going in search of it, he met a snake on the sill ... (I've never seen a live snake wild in Africa).

## Zimbabwe

**November 14:** My drive to Blantyre airport begins at 5.30am. Town and country are already awake. People are walking to work, children to school. Men and women hoe plots of land. Bright sun, but clouds whirling through the mountains which jut up as irregular as my remaining teeth. The vegetation here is so beautifully varied – palm trees, bluegums, flame trees, trees which resemble rowan and ash and oak – that it's hard to remember that Malawi's soil, overcropped, isn't feeding its people. Despite the strangely shaped crags and large tracts of unkempt bush, the landscape often suggests a perfect park. No wonder Livingstone saw Malawi as the ideal base from which to Christianise Africa ...

I think of Livingstone again in flight to Zimbabwe, over the vast Zambesi river. The emptiness of Africa from the air is deceptive. A huge town of huts would show as a brown nothing. But the faint roads wriggle through grim escarpments: acres of swampy land shimmer. That's not easy country. And over such Livingstone walked – among bugs and snakes – thousands of miles on foot, traversing from Botswana to Tanzania, from Mozambique to Angola. A very dangerous person to know: a callous liar at times. But a brave man ...

We swoop down to Harare's modern buildings, suburbs and estates of barrack-like orderliness, small fields in patchwork: but still, desiccation. The rains have been poor in Zimbabwe in recent years. Either because of this, or through politico-economic manipulations, a shortage of maize has developed in a country which used to export it.

And recently, as I discover at once, the Zimbabwe dollar has been devalued steeply: 8.50 dollars to the £. This means an airport taxi for £3, a posh hotel for the cost of a B and B in Oban, an excellent local beer for 30p, good cigarettes for 20p for 20, a fine meal for £2 ... It's uncanny. I feel guilty. A black police inspector I meet at a bar in the hotel complains that if *he* goes abroad his hard currency allowance barely pays for one night. "I would rather be a tourist here!" But he wears a smart dark woollen suit.

Till 1980, this was Salisbury, Rhodesia. The 'Courtenay' Hotel still stands in a street named after Selous, the notorious white hunter and imperialist, and still entertains white-settler types. They move without aggravation among well-dressed Africans. This gilded meleé isn't my scene.

**November 15:** The Brontë Hotel is, in fact, even more 'settler' in its atmosphere. But for £15 a night (equivalent) I am given a beautiful garden, a swimming pool, a room with a verandah.

Micere – Professor of Literature in the Education faculty – is a very well known Kenyan author, self-exiled here since 1984 and now a Zimbabwean citizen. This is a bad time to visit the university. Exam scripts are being marked. But Micere would be busy anyway – active in women's writing groups and in drama, giving devoted attention to mature students and postgraduates. Where she goes, excitement ripples. In her wake, I am at once introduced to a young man – the leading Shona poet – who is visiting the university on business, and can make a date to meet him.

I talk to Micere in her office about Dambudzo Marechera, who died of drink in the streets of Harare four years ago, aged 35. The first black writer from then-Rhodesia to get international acclaim, he won brief notoriety in the late seventies for wrecking the party (hurling glasses about, etc.) when *The Guardian* tried to present him with its Fiction Prize. Around that time I found him teetering on a kerb, about to fall under the traffic outside the Africa Centre in London and took him to my sister's flat nearby. Pouring still more whisky inside himself, he railed and boasted with prodigious eloquence. He was brilliant, self-hating, clearly doomed. Like me, over a longer, sadder, period, Micere and others here found they couldn't help him. Now, safely dead, he's a cult figure.

The campus is clean and gracious. Its bookshop is a delight after the dismal show at the University of Nairobi. Here one could teach comparative literature – there's lots of French, Spanish, Portuguese. There is a fine array of African titles, some printed locally, either at first publication or (photographically reproduced) under licence. For me, these are dead cheap – I could get eight or ten good ones for a tenner. Even books printed in Britain cost me much less than in Edinburgh. But for locals all books are expensive.

After lunch at the Brontë, I get Musaemura Zimunya on the phone. Everything's going too well. Musa – the leading Zimbabwean poet – will pick me up tonight and take me to a rock concert. Chenjerai Hove, who not long ago won the pan-African Noma Award *Bones*, will also be there.

I walk to the city centre. This is rather like Croydon with jacarandas and black faces: its architecture figures forth the gentle soul of R.F. Delderfield's London suburbia. The street names are a bizarre mixture: African heroes and martyrs (Chitepo, Machel, Nyerere) are



spliced with notorious colonialists (Baker, Speke and, inevitably, Livingstone). Fountains, despite the drought, play in Cecil Square, with its beautiful gardens.

More bookshops, more excitement. Kingstone's, the local equivalent of Menzies, in its big central branch has masses of European titles, but also a very large display of local books by Africans. Mambo, like nowhere in Nairobi, puts local authors up front. Behind them, books in English from other African countries, books from Zimbabwe in the two main languages, Shona and Ndebele.

After Nairobi, so peaceful, no hassle or hussle. I see just one pair of beggars, singing beautifully. You'd pass many more in Princes Street or the centre of Dublin, let alone the London rail termini. But, as Micere has briefed me, the sheen of prosperity is deceptive. In the townships ringing the city, life is grim.

When Musa shows up at eight we drive down dark quiet boulevards out of the city to the Seven Miles Hotel. This was presumably built as a roadhouse for white. Now it's crammed with Africans, well dressed or virtually ragged, young and old, preponderantly male. The great Thomas Mapfumo is to perform under canvas outside.

One of the books I bought this afternoon, a history of *Roots Rocking in Zimbabwe*, has briefed me about the man who at home and abroad epitomises Zimbabwean music. How to describe my extraordinary night out?

The concert arena has a few benches – people mostly stand or pass to and fro to the crowded bar at the back. Gradually it fills. A very tall man with fine eyes, aquiline features, looms into view. From book covers, I recognise Hove. Musa tells me that both of them seek inspiration at a Mapfumo concert once a week if possible. This is *Chimurenga* music, the music which won the guerrilla war of independence over fifteen years of violence (Mapfumo was imprisoned for a time). *Chimurenga* has gone on to assert the voice of the dispossessed in the new Zimbabwe. Musa and Hove themselves are celebrities; many come up and pay them their compliments.

Before Mapfumo's well delayed entry, I have ample time to see how the band works. At the back, a western-style drummer and three amplified guitars. (Musa assures me that the bass guitarist produces an uncanny imitation of a bush drum). At the front, a man with what looks like a bent tambourine, a man hitting a piece of wood with a stick, a third with an array of African drums – and three men playing *mbiras*, the instrument which gives this style of music its technical name. They are held like Homeric shields towards us: behind these

wooden circles, the musicians pluck invisible metal prongs. This instrument connects players and audience to the spirit world of the ancestors.

But the band numbers thirteen – or seventeen if you include the singer himself and his back up girls, which makes it about the same size as the Duke's and the Count's. At times a jazz front-line appears – trumpet, trombone, sax – to play accurate riffs.

Mapfumo latterly wore dreadlocks. Not now. He at last arrives in a costume which looks Indian (that is, from India) – a glowing sky blue cross between *dhoti* and *kitenge* over loose trousers. With his long ponytail, combined with his prominent forehead and beaky nose, his profile recalls a Native American ('Indian') chief: Geronimo or Sitting Bull. In his mid-forties, his face is sculpted with deep lines. His eyes are like a leopard's, unsmiling, stony, weary.

Tolstoy would have approved of his voice. It is not for fine singing. It reminds me of Bob Marley, of Woody Guthrie. It is gravelly, rather flat. It is for words. His timing of words does it. The words are his own, and the crowd's too – they sing along in Shona. Musa translates for me. "Hello my friend, long time no see. What's the news? Poverty and destitution, poverty and destitution." The African drummer takes up the chorus, growling into his mike as his hands keep up the beat.

The words are grim, but the crowd, now tight packed, are ecstatic. Everyone shimmers, the beat thrilling up through loose knees. A very, very tall man with wall eyes and little English insists that I dance with him. I do my best.

This is rainmaking music. As Mapfumo finishes his first set, the heavens open their gates. Lightning. Thunder. Torrential welcome rain begins to splash through the awning. Musa leads me to the hotel. When we come back from a crowded bar there, the concert area's awash. The very, very tall man is still dancing though. Heels skipping in an inch of water, he splashes mud on faces all around.

I find my wallet's gone. Who's counting? At Musa's suggestion, I gave him my cards. The cash was less than I'd have paid to hear Mapfumo in London. Somewhere in Zimbabwe, a young man will curse when he finds that Scottish notes aren't negotiable ...

**November 16:** I make Saturday my Sabbath. Write. Don't stir from the Brontë Hotel. As I try to read in the garden, I am distracted by a very loud conversation about politics at a table ten yards away. If you can't beat them ... I joined them. Christopher James, black as most Africans, is the son of a Welsh mining engineer who worked here, and

it proud to be Welsh. He's a railway inspector in Zambia, visiting one of his nine children, a quarter-Scottish son, Brian, paler than Chris, who's a 'boilermaker' in Harare. Chris is a jubilant supporter of Chiluba, who triumphed over Kaunda. I spring to the defence of the remarkable decent man. We concur in denouncing Banda. When the rain resumes, we move to a lounge indoors, whence newspaper-reading whites retreat as the loud, free talk continued. Mugabe is denounced. "Look", I say, retaining some caution from my days in Malawi, "aren't you afraid you'll get into trouble if you criticise the Head of State so loudly?" "No, not at all", bawls Christopher.

**November 17:** Micere's three-bedroomed flat is modest but pleasant. Unlike certain other Kenyan exiles here she hasn't set out to trade her skills for big bucks so as to acquire a mansion with a swimming pool, vacated by disgusted 'Rhodesians'. Micere's delightful daughters are home from their boarding school for the weekend, with a couple of friends. There are 'Rhodies' at their school, still obnoxiously racist. But the remaining whites don't make public displays of disdain: they congregate in private clubs with no explicit colour bar but very high subscriptions ...

Micere's an unrepentant Marxist: after all so is comrade Mugabe himself, in theory. In practice, Zimbabwe is taking the free market road and Micere is not happy with the progress of the revolution. (Nor, of course, were Mapfumo's audience the other night.) But speech and publication are genuinely free. One magazine in particular attacks Mugabe fiercely. She can live honestly here, though she'll feel under pressure to go back to Kenya when Moi begins to topple. We agree he's on the way out. I tell her the remarkable story of how a ring of civil servants using fax machines to circulate critical articles from abroad round Kenyan government offices were dumbfounded when a fax came from a mole inside the State House itself. She tells the still more extraordinary tale of her recent meeting in Kampala with a former close aide of Moi's who refused to murder political opponents who happened to be fellow Kikuyus when required to do so, fled the country, and is now conspiring with the opposition in and out of Kenya – with which Micere keeps very closely in touch.

What happened yesterday in Nairobi is flabbergasting. FORD – the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy – had called a rally. Some of its leaders were arrested in advance. Others, knowing that Moi's men were on the way, lay low until they stood and spoke at the rally. Government forces moved in, with BBC World Service tape recorders

present. American Embassy officials were arrested, so were foreign journalists. Moi denounced the event as an American plot. When Africa's chief centre of buccaneering capitalism, Kenya, is in the bad books of the world's great capitalist power, something has to change, soon ...

Micere shows me a Ugandan newspaper which, back in September, gave a very detailed account of the plot to kill Robert Ouko. It seems that not long before his murder, the Foreign Minister flew to Britain to plead with Thatcher to use her (undoubted) influence with Moi in his favour ... The truth, I suggest to Micere, is that so long as the Cold war lasted, the US and UK flattered and sustained Moi's 'model African democracy' for the sake of Kenya's Indian Ocean port, a key to policing the Soviets in the Indian Ocean. The Fall of the Wall was bad news for Moi as well as for Honecker.

**November 18-20:** My daily diary ceased. I was too busy. Zimbabwe is a hectically exciting place, for all the calm of its boulevards. A week to catch up with the literary scene wasn't enough: in a month I could have begun to understand the music and the remarkable local school of sculpture.

I spent most of a day at College Press, where I went to meet the young poet Chirikure Chirikure who works as an editor of books in Shona there.

In schools an African language – Shona or Ndebele, depending on the region – is compulsory up to O Level. According to statistics for 1990 which Chirikure showed me, more students took Shona at A Level (3,000) than English (2,450) and Ndebele (523) combined. But in the University's Department of African Languages, the subject is taught in English. Chirikure's book, published in 1989, was the first-ever collection by an individual Shona poet. It's been quickly followed by another from Samuel Chimsoro. These young men are innovators, breaking away from traditional uses of the language. Chirikure runs a radio programme which discusses verse in Shona with the young writers present in the studio. There are similar programmes for Ndebele and English.

Chirikure's work is mostly devised for public performance, with drums, by theatre groups. At Micere's flat one night I was given a kind of 'command performance' by the best-known 'performance poets' (Kalamongera in Zomba had told me they'd be hot stuff), Albert Nyathi, Cynthia Mingofa, who sings, and Titus Motseabi, who has appeared in Mayfest, combine as AlCyTi. They switch languages at

will. They all grew up in the Ndebele-speaking area, though Cynthia is Shona and Titus is ethnically Sotho. Their most popular poem with students is actually one given in Sotho – a language spoken only by a small minority.

It's wonderful to be in a place where diversity of language is seen as a source of enjoyment rather than grounds for division or despair. Students recently devised a play, which they toured successfully, in which consecutive scenes were spoken in English, Shona or Ndebele depending on the situation depicted. 'Guys from the ghettos' who can't afford drinks turn up at the National Gallery to hear AlCyTi, who deck themselves richly in traditional colours. Albert's red and black are associated with the spirits of Shona ancestors. Their audiences dance and sing. Chirikure, as an official guest, once appalled his hosts in North Korea by insisting that he had to perform his verse, live, with drums. Verse, drama, and even the rhythmically-voiced prose fiction of Hove, are part of a continuum stretching through the *mbira* music of Mapfumo and others back to the ancestors.

Okot, that controversial dead Uganda poet, would have loved all this. Chirikure has dramatised, with Shona music, Okot's most famous work, *Song of Lawino*, the lament of a village woman over her husband's westernised affections. The struggle for African culture had been back-burnered in Uganda and is in abeyance in Kenya where, under the new school syllabus, unbelievably, oral literature is taught in the course on 'English Language'. It seems to be dancing on in Zimbabwe with all the momentum generated by the War of Independence, *Chimurenga*, to Mapfumo's *mbira* beat. I hope so. Ghana was once, in the late fifties, the place where all was happening, all was to happen. Then came The Great Days in Nairobi ... Cross fingers. Touch wood. Ancestors help them.

College Press, like the other admirable local publishers, has been ruined by the recent devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar. Paper, which has to be imported, costs even more. Local readers can't afford local books. Chirikure and his English-language colleague, a native white called Margo Bedingfield who's happily in tune with African aspirations (not 'Rhodie') spell out the awful news: they just can't publish anything for two years, least of all poetry. Then – Oh magical Zimbabwe! – they tell me what they'll publish next year, including an anthology of Southern African poetry in which young Nyathi will appear. Why do they work on so hopefully? Johannesburg comes into it. Mugabe has allowed open relations with reforming South Africa.

A bigger market. New vistas. Maybe cheaper paper ...

Passing back through Nairobi on 21 November, I call on Chakava at his yet-to-be-renamed Heinemann Kenya. He's busy in conclave with his colleagues, I wait for hours to see him. He's much more cheerful. They've worked out how they'll manage short of multinational ties. He has to rush now ... "just one thing, Henry, I've thought of a name for your firm – *African Revival*." He smiles, perhaps to humour me. We'll see.



**Communication**

*Peter Gibson*

**Kropotkin, Barclay and Mutual Aid**

In my article on Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (*Raven* no. 16) I attempted to show the weakness in Kropotkin's argument which has become apparent as a result of sociobiological thinking in the last fifteen years. Harold Barclay (*Raven* no. 17) has criticised this determinist argument. Basically he acknowledges that there is a genetic influence on human behaviour but maintains it is of minor importance when considering mutual aid. This non-determinist or cultural view is popular with many anarchists. Their belief is that there are few barriers to the direction in which social organisation can progress. However, to deny the possibility of important biological restrictions to human behaviour is a serious error.

The objections to the sociobiological argument raised by Barclay are not new. The poorest is that since the genes for altruism have not been identified then all inferences that depend upon them are false. If this were the case we would have to deny our own existence for this depends on a vast number of genes that we know nothing of. The genes in the sociobiological argument are largely used to illustrate a mechanism for altruism, but as with most genes their existence is inferred.

Another objection raised by Barclay is that sociobiology is simply a description of what we already know about human behaviour. This argument is basically the one used against the Darwinian explanation for evolution. An example is that the statement "the survival of the fittest" is a tautology. Looked at simplistically it is. Fitness, however, does not simply refer to the ability to survive. It is the ability of individuals to out-compete others of its own species. No other explanation is as successful in accounting for evolution (which is not itself in dispute). Darwinians maintain that the evolutionary mechanism which is now generally accepted speaks for itself. The same argument applies to the sociobiological explanation for animal

behaviour. The dispute, then, is essentially over mechanisms.

Humans behave in a similar way to other animals with the exception that we have developed a culture. That is, information that is not genetically determined is perpetuated through tradition and writing. It is dependent on an intellect that other animals do not have. Barclay appears to believe that culture has been achieved through behaving altruistically. That is, in a manner that is advantageous to society and not to oneself. There is, however, no reason to believe that we behave in this way or even need to. An evolutionary mechanism for such altruism does not appear to exist. On the contrary culture depends on cooperative behaviour and this is self-interested. I challenge Barclay to give examples of social altruism that cannot be better described as cooperative self-interest. I illustrate the sociobiological argument with an example from *Mutual Aid*.

Cooperation in Bushmen and Eskimos arises from the extreme hardship of their environments. Barclay is mistaken in thinking they never need to store their excess food because they share it. In reality they never have an economically important excess. They are forced to operate a 'tit for tat' system and this can easily be shown to be the most stable stratagem where people are known to one another for most of their lives. In urban society the problems are very different but the explanation for people's behaviour is the same. Our genes give us the ability to assess the personal profitability of alternative strategies. We have, through culture, developed a technology that allows us to over-produce and we do not share this excess because we have the means to 'bank' it. Our success has depended on increased population allowing a system to develop which depends upon mutually exploiting alliances. Such a stratagem would be useless to small populations of hunter gatherers.

I suspect that what anarchists find so satisfying about *Mutual Aid* is that the evidence for their view of human behaviour is supported by how Kropotkin thought animals behave. *Mutual Aid* is a unifying mechanistic theory based on Darwinism. Potentially, it has great value because it is testable and predictive. The problem is it is incorrect in the light of present biological knowledge. That part of anarchist philosophy based on *Mutual Aid* has lost credibility as a result. An alternative is needed and the logical step is to consider sociobiology which, again, is based on Darwinism.



## Publisher's Notes

We are indebted to John Pilgrim who has been responsible for this issue of *The Raven*. He is also editing *Raven 19 on Sociology and Anarchism* which is well advanced and apart from unforeseen problems (and one must allow for them in publications written and produced by volunteers!) should be on sale by the end of September.

By the time this issue appears the fourth bound volume of *The Raven* numbers 13 - 16 (1991) with contents and index will be on sale at £18, in a limited edition of 200 copies. If readers can persuade their university or public libraries to purchase this volume (all four are still available) it would considerably help our financial viability.

*The Raven* is still published at a loss of over £1,000 an issue which is covered by Freedom Press literature sales and the modest but *much appreciated* donations from some of our readers. We can certainly do with more who value *The Raven* and can afford to 'subsidise' our publication.

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