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Anthropology in the 21st Century as a Borderless Discipline: Implications for Archaeological Studies in Nigeria

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Abstract

The dawn of the early 19th century marked the birth of anthropology as a science of humanity. Anthropologists were then noted for their interest in exotic culture, especially that of "primitive" societies. Between then and now, the discipline has traversed many areas of humanity. Its theoretical and methodological concearns have also extended into many other disciplines. How then has anthropology evolved its present status? What are the milestones in the development of anthropology until the 21st century? What are the implications of these milestones for the archaeology of Nigeria and by extension Africa in Africa? What does this portend for Nigerian archaeology? This study attempts all the above questions, and establishes the desirability of comparative, multi-disciplinary and community-centered research in archaeology. The paper also establishes the need for integration of anthropologists into archaeological studies of Africa.

Study Background

Humans have developed complex social and cultural institutions such as language, economic systems, complex technology, beliefs and ritual systems, family, kinship and many other non-familial organizations. All these have brought about the question of the position of human in nature and culture. Of course, the interrogation of this question started as early as 5 BC when ancient philosophers on human nature and culture started to shed light on human nature. The first classical work was that of Herodotus a Greek historian of the 5th century BCE, who established fanciful description of other societies based on their nature, behaviors and practices identified in their different localities. Complementing this effort was the historian Ibn Khaldun, who wrote muquddimah or introduction of history in the 14th century. The striking relevance of these classical works was that a foundation of a science of man is established. No wonder that Ibn Khaldun proposed to create a science to study "human society and its own problems vis the social transformation that succeed each other in the nature of society" (Lacoste 1984:169). Thus the awakening created by Ibn Khaldun led to sporadic exploration and explanation of culture beings in the context of nature. Human behaviors and cultural institutions were seen as having evolved as biological organisms did. Between the 5th and the 14th centuries, thinkers were concerned with the construction of theories, which were used to explain human behaviors and practices. Thus, from degenerationism, which provides the earliest explanation of cultural diversity, evolution was constructed. The construction of evolutionism became and remains an impetus, which has led to the development of many other theories to explain human culture. Although theologians have seriously attacked evolutionism, because it contravenes the divine process of development as presented in the Bible, evolutionism still remains as the scientific explanation to human development. Also, there is a theological opposition to the evolutionary thesis that humans evolved from apes or humans and the apes share a common ancestry. Since there exists no other empirical thesis to explain biological evolution of humans, evolutionism withstands the scientific test of time. There exist many other reasons for the subsistence of evolution even in the 21st century, as we shall explain later in this paper. From evolutionism, there came the birth of many other specific theories, which were constructed following systematic conduct of fieldwork on human behaviors and practice. Notably the historical particularism, functionalism, diffusionism, structural functionalism and ecological materialism were the theories in the later 19th century. The early 20th century marked the evolution of theories like sociobiology, symbolic interactionism and neo-evolutionism. Theories on culture and personality and language and culture also featured in the historical anal of anthropology in the early 20th century. This period saw many other theories in anthropology, which evolved from the knowledge of many other disciplines in social science and

humanities. Examples can be made from Thomas Saving's anthropological jurisprudence, Karl Polanyi's substantive idea in economic anthropology; the political-economic world system theory of Immanuel Wallestein, and the psychoanalytic analysis of culture and personality and action theory of Margaret Mead. Even medicine is not spared of anthropological trespass. Anthropological encroachment into medicine is obvious and justified by establishing medical anthropology, which is one of the fastest growing sub disciplines of anthropology (Okpokunu 2002:81-97).

Early anthropologists focused on human evolution, schematic construction of human development (material and non-material), modernization schemes, and colonial heritage, globalization of cultures and post-modern explanations of culture, all of which have explained the rationale for contemporary developments. The above suggest two important issues, which are relevant to the context of this paper. Firstly, since the 5th century, human beings have being concerned with knowing self through the investigation of human behavior and human adaptation in the environment, through knowing the human position in manipulating nature, time and space. This on the other hand calls for both the historical and ahistorical analysis of culture. The second issue, which emanated from the above, is that a particular discipline – anthropology was proposed as far back as 14th century as a science of man. This science embraces all aspects of human behavior, which include biological, archaeological, cultural, sociological, economic, psychological, legal, medical, historical, ecological and political aspects, and still continuing to widen its scopes without loosing its traditional forms and practices. Since anthropology has evolved to encapsulate all other disciplines associated with science of man, what is the domain of anthropology? How has it developed in theory and method within the last seven centuries? What is the success of anthropology in its multidisciplinary nature of studying human society? What is the implication of this trend to archaeology in Nigeria? All these form the context of discussion in this paper.

Methodologically, the paper combined both secondary and primary sources of data collection system. The primary source did not involve the conventional survey simply because the study here did not involve a specific and specified field location. This implies that in contemporary anthropology, not all subject matter of research, even when hard data are necessary, can be adequately explored with the rigor of a sample survey. As noted by Nyamujoh (2005) that in ethnography, subjective and inter-subjective accounts sometimes say much more on a phenomenon than does a dull and phony objective; simply because not all that counts can be counted and not all that can be counted are counts. Thus, the ethnographic ideas used in this paper have been harvested as I went along in my training as an anthropologist in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, where both in principle and in practice, archaeology is the domineering partner of the two courses. Indeed, having lived within the politics of archaeology over anthropology for over eighteen years, first as a student, then as a teacher in the Department, one observe(s) that archaeology and anthropology cultivate a lot of similarities which tend to promote inter-disciplinary research output. The method of inquiry employed here therefore reflects as one is passionate about anthropological theme, and having a way with the people, rich ethnographic insights flow through interactions with others anywhere, anytime. As an anthropologist, every time one is always doing fieldwork even when not formally on the field. Thus, the primary data used in this paper resulted from a multiplicity of inter-subjective encounters, ranging from personal experience cultivated through interviews and intensive conversations with colleagues in archaeology, most of them senior, following archaeologists to fieldwork, and juxtaposing the field experiences in archaeology and anthropology. Secondary sources consulted included review of journal publications, extracts from textbooks and scholarly materials from websites on the themes of this paper.

Anthropology: Context and History

The discipline of anthropology began in the second half of 19th century as earlier proposed by Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century as a science of humans (Lacoste 1984). The term anthropology has a Greek origin, from anthropos meaning human being and logia meaning to study. The concept of humanity is not only confined to cultural essence of human beings. Thus, anthropology can be defined as the scientific study of human nature, human society and human past. Being a scholarly discipline, it aims at

describing in the broadest possible sense what it means to be human (Schultz and Lavinda 1998; Aremu 2001).

Anthropology employs systematic analysis and comparison of all that remains of human past and what human is involved at present to interrogate humanity. The central focus of anthropology is of course the explanation of humanity. As I have earlier mentioned, the concept of humanity extends beyond culture to biological factors. People adapt to various ecological zones both in the past and at present. In this wise, the origin, migration and human settlement fall under this scope of anthropology. The implication of human origins and human biological makeup on beliefs, ethos, practices, behaviors and knowledge also form a cardinal part of humanity as conceived by anthropology. The functional part of humanity within anthropological concept is in fact contextualization of all aspects of humanity mentioned above on the sustenance of human beings in term of development. Thus, anthropology assumes a wider perspective of humanity.

Historically, anthropology did not begin with the above general ideas of humanity. From the writings of the earliest anthropologists, its idea was restricted to the analysis of human evolution through the study of earliest fossilized bones of humanlike creatures that is the artifacts and material traces left in the living, and that of the historically described people of the earth (Aremu 2001). At the earliest time, the anthropological explanation was restricted to "primitive" culture. No wonder Boas opined that anthropology should double up in collection of data on primitive culture because those cultures would soon disappear (McGee and Warm 1995). Thus, the analysis of theory and ethnographic model at this time depicted anthropology as the study of exotic cultures focusing on the study of traditional "local culture". Anthropologists in the early 20th century were busy describing culture as an organism, which grows from its rudiments to advanced stage. These anthropologists were motivated by the work of Charles Darwin, which draws culture to an analogy of plants (Ember and Ember 1973). This perspective opines that culture is deeply rooted in a home base. It is from the home base where stem (other cultures) emanates and still maintain firm link with the home base. The objective of anthropological studies at this time was the discovery of isolated people with authentic culture. Thus, the classical anthropologists as the latter anthropologists called the earliest ones, believe that all culture progressively develop from a particular home base; and they were concerned with location. Thus, their speculations about human origins and its culture began. They were concerned with the origin and how culture develops. They later began to make a distinction between humans and other animals through the comparison of their cultures. At this time, archaeology was employed by anthropologists as the instrument to discover human origins. Thus, archaeological account of origin in terms of "catastrophism" became an additional dimension in the classical account of human origins (Binford 1983).

Emerging from the above trends were some classical theorists. The proponents of these theorists included Edward Tylor (1871) whose definition of culture is not only classical but remains the most comprehensive and detailed. Together with Herbert Spencer (1860) and August Comte (1853), social evolutionism was developed from Darwin's idea of biological evolutionism (McGee and Warm 1995). From these classical theories, Tylor, Morgan and Hebert Spencer pursued an evaluation of culture supporting their anthropological data with the extraction of facts from surface collection of material remains found in the cultures, which they studied. Thus, they used archaeological data. This continued until the late 20th century, and parts of these ideas are still upheld in contemporary discourse in anthropology.

The conception of exotic culture undoubtedly yielded divergent views about culture, which dominated the second phase of anthropological development. This second phase focused the analysis of culture, which is conditioned by cultural relativity. The predominant position at this time was collection of data about different societies using both historical and comparative model. Specifically the writing of Franz Boas, which centered on historical particularism, was the rave of that moment. Boas' idea was predicated on the concern that each society has its own peculiar culture, which is determined by the historical consciousness of the people. Thus, this approach believed on historical comparativeness in the analysis of culture. From this perspective, emerge cultural relativity, which is the central perspective on assumption about plural culture. Historical particularism also admits that the development of culture is determined by the people's geist, which is the people's historical background. To explain the thesis scientifically, ethno-history was adopted as a

method of data collection (McGee and Warm 1995), thus extending anthropological domain to history.

Boas' over-reliance on the particular history of a specific society drew its thesis to a sharp criticism. The critics such as Malinowski, Levi Strauss, and Radcliffe-Brown believed that looking critically at the internal structure of culture; one could find certain elements, which are not entirely the make-ups of a particular society history. The earliest work of Emile Durkheim, which was constructed on function of culture, served as impetus to this anthropological perception (Durkheim 1951). Anthropologists like Malinowski, Talcott Parsons, and Radcliffe-Brown began to look at the internal structure of culture that promotes the organic solidarity in culture. This new awakening spurred anthropology to critical analysis of both function and structure of culture. Having relied heavily on Durkheim's perspective, anthropology drove itself into a sociological realm, both in theory and methodology. The functional perspective, which dominated discussion at this time, was envisioned and pushed by anthropologists who mainly used sociological approach in their analysis. Another important feature of anthropology at that time was that anthropology had started studying smaller units of modern societies because of progressive extinction of the so-called primitive and exotic societies. Franz Boas earlier predicted this. George Murdock's work became one of the earliest anthropological fieldworks, which relied heavily on survey study. Murdock, being an ecological materialist, believed in the complementarity of quantitative with qualitative approaches (Murdock 1959).

The gains of classical and modern anthropological development were later fostered with new orientations emerging in the study of anthropology. More prominent were Ruth Benedict, Abraham Kardiner and Cora DuBois on personality and culture, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Wolf on culture and language; Marshall Sahlins and Karl Polanyi on economy and culture, Evans-Pritchard on politics and culture and Leslie White and Julian Steward on human ecology. Each of these works has established a distinct sub-field in anthropology. Culture and personality school has developed into what is now known as psychological anthropology, while studies on economy and culture evolved into economic anthropology, and the studies on politics and culture established political anthropology. The common denominators in all these newly emergent sub-disciplines are (i) the focus on culture; (ii) using both historical (synchronic) and ahistorical (diachronic) perspectives; (iii) conducting both qualitative ad quantitative fieldworks.

What is germane to our discussion here is that throughout the course of anthropological development from the classical phase through the modern period, Archaeology is indispensable, even when anthropology trespasses into sociology, psychology, language, politics and economics, anthropology still falls back on the interpretation of the relevant material remains of humans in constructing the past with attempt to predict the course of human survival in the universe, putting in mind the context of time and space. It therefore becomes clear that there is an intersection between archaeology and anthropology. No wonder since 1900, a field of archaeology termed as ethno-archaeology was established (Hodder 1982). Ethno-archaeology until today is the midrib on which archaeology and anthropology are joined. According to Gould (1978), ethno-archaeology involves direct observation by ethnographic archaeologist through living in human societies", with particular reference to the archaeological patterning of the behavior in those societies" (Folorunso 2001:13). The implication of the above is that there seems not to be a separation between archaeology and anthropology since the former is a branch of and a tool for the latter to accomplish its goals of understanding humanity. Further expansion in the scope and contents of anthropology made possible by postmodernism. Post – modern or 21st century anthropology evolved a sub-discipline of anthropology known as applied anthropology.

Given credence to this new sub-field was the discovery that before this time, anthropology has traditionally been concerned with the study of culture–specific behavior and social structure. But as at the 21st century, there came the recognition of the inadequacy of behavioral approaches in anthropology. This led to the emergency of the self-critical views that anthropology was far from meeting its goals of cultural representation (Marcus and Fischer 1986). The outcome of this discovery was an offshoot of a new sub-discipline in anthropology, which is all – encompassing. Applied anthropology focuses on planned change. It is concerned with anthropologists' impact on human problems and the conditions under which such occurs. However, since applied anthropology deals with the application of anthro-

pological theories on improving human conditions, it is not restricted to only cultural anthropology, but also extended to physical anthropology and many other new sub disciplines of anthropology. The evolution of applied anthropology undoubtedly streamlined anthropology into two main categories. These are literary anthropology and applied anthropology. Literary anthropology deals with the description of culture, while applied anthropology has to do with the application of culture contents to development. It seems that the new domain of anthropology (applied anthropology) that drove the discipline to a more borderless position traversing all fields of humanity. The spirit of globalization further rekindled the relationship of anthropology to nearly all fields of humanity. Anthropology now interrogates many questions on human and development.

Implications for archaeological practice in Nigeria

The fundamental question, which this paper poses to answer, is the implications of the development of anthropology for archaeology in Nigeria. This question was formulated as a result of my reflections on the practice of archaeology in Nigeria, in comparison with practices of archaeology in other societies principally the developed societies. Having noted that archaeology and anthropology, especially at the University of Ibadan are two intimate fellows in terms of their institutional set up but not in practice, there arose in me the curiosity as to what benefit could this position earn archaeology in Nigeria. The founder of this department thought the two disciplines were complimentary to one another in searching for human uniqueness in the animal kingdom. At present in Ibadan, as in many Departments of Archaeology in Nigeria, it is difficult to establish that the two courses are mutually linked. This is contrary to the intention of the earliest archaeologists such as Professor Bassey Andah who cultivated the seed of intrinsic mutuality of archaeology and anthropology in Nigeria. For Andah, anthropology was not established as a course to guarantee the sustenance of archaeology but as a mutual complement to each other in probing man's uniqueness in animal kingdom. As consistently pushed by Andah (1995), should many problems confronting archaeological practice in Nigeria be resolved, knowledge of ideal culture needs be intensified in archaeology trainees. This position was further re-enacted by Schmidt (2005), when he examined the depletion of cultural heritage by the activities of multi-national corporations and Nigerian government policies. Such practices have set the euphoria of fears and intimidations on Nigerian archaeologists simply because the new crops of Nigerian archaeologists are least sensitive to ideal culture in multi-ethnic Nigerian society. The questions thus arise as to what extent should anthropology influence archaeology and vice versa in Nigeria? Can archaeology stand-alone without anthropology in Nigeria? And of course what do we stand to gain in complementarities of archaeology and anthropology in Nigeria?

My few years of anthropological fieldwork have convinced me that anthropology is expected to have more links with archaeology than to any other discipline. My memory of a recently concluded fieldwork at Egbeda on myth of origin, migration and settlement among the residents of Egbeda community in Ibadan, confirmed the above position. As a result of non-inclusion of archaeologists in the research team, interpreting the material culture in the field site proved problematic. The study failed with our inability to correlate the material with non – material data collected. Therefore, to establish certain positions, which could be scientifically valid by dating, was impossible. To correct that frailty, after leaving the field, we suggested a follow-up study to be conducted by archaeologists. This has begun and has started yielding outstanding discoveries.

The above experience also confirmed that anthropology has a greater role to play in correlating the material objects with oral data on the people being studied. Archaeologists may not conveniently handle this, unless they collaborate with anthropologists. This perspective seems to be the intention of Gould (1978) when pushing the position that archaeology should go beyond analogy but move into more critical analysis of both material and non-material data. However, fulfilling the above goals deserves an exploration into historical development of anthropology. Since the beginning of anthropology as an academic discipline especially in American perspective, it fails to depart from archaeology. Even for the British, where social anthropology is more appealing, physical anthropology deals with material remains of man. Through this perspective, a description of culture was made possible at the classical period. It was this same perspective, which was employed in mod-

ern and post-modern phases of anthropological development. What this portends for archaeology in Nigeria is beyond ordinary simplicity. In Nigeria, there is need for more Departments of Archaeology and Anthropology, where comparative and culture-centered studies would be objectively carried out. Combining anthropology and sociology in one department as many universities in Nigeria operate portends a greater danger to anthropology. Not all these departments do anthropology. In many of these departments, anthropology is just maintained as an appendage to sociology. Thus, in those universities, anthropology is vastly becoming endangered. But, at the University of Ibadan, where archaeology and anthropology were established as a single department, there is a more recognition for the two courses compared to what obtains in other universities where sociology marries anthropology.

The above notwithstanding, even at the university of Ibadan where there is a Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, the two courses are still maintained as strange fellows in their course contents and field practices. There are fewer courses, which impart equal knowledge of the two courses on the students. The development continues to produce archaeology students who see themselves exclusively as archaeologists, while anthropology students are equally distasteful of archaeology. This situation has continued to make archaeology and anthropology irrelevant in Nigerian national development. The situation would have improved if graduates of Archaeology could prove themselves equally as anthropologists and vice-versa. More desirably, departmental researches should reflect more of collaborative and multidisciplinary nature of Archaeology and Anthropology. This implies that the research exercise(s) in the department should involve combined efforts of both archaeologists and anthropologists.

Specifically, the imperativeness of the above is more incumbent on Nigerian national development as the quest for national development requires knowing and understanding the cultural diversities in Nigeria. For instance, to ensure a sustainable democracy in Nigeria, various traditional political systems need be well understood through both synchronic and diachronic assessment of the beliefs, perception, attitudes and practices relating to different systems. Similarly to cultivate the seed of national integration and unity, intersectional discourses are necessary, focusing on cultural nationalism, identity and inter-tribal relation in Nigeria, within the context of time and space. If either anthropology or archaeology is to be relevant in this task, there is need for more complimentarity between the two disciplines in Nigeria, as should be applicable to many other developing countries. Since anthropology has continuously relied on archaeology for the interpretation of material data, and through this, anthropology has developed more functional sub-disciplines, if archaeology should maintain a progressive fellowship with anthropology in Africa; archaeology should be more aggressive at creative and innovative studies, instead of tying itself stereotypically to settlement and early industrial studies. This position brings to mind the opinion of a prominent Harvard archaeologist, Phillip Phillips (1955), who emphasized the close ties between archaeology and the broader field of anthropology, when he published in his influential paper in 1955, and stated that "American archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing". By implication it is not only American archaeology that should have anthropological dimension. As Watson (1995:684) noted, 21st century archaeology needs to evolve a culture-historical approach, which archaeology can only acquire through close operational association with anthropology.

As archaeology has developed environmental and palynological approaches, the success which was made possible due to archaeological collaborations with botany and geography, there is a need for more archaeological collaborations with more disciplines inclusive of anthropology; history; and religious studies to mention a few. This further establishes that if archaeology wants to have more meaningful and relevant contributions to social discourse on humanity in Nigeria, and by extension in Africa, there is urgency for solid integration with anthropology which has diversified into many of the above mentioned areas of archaeological collaboration.

Conclusions

The foregoing discussion has traced the development of anthropology as a science of human. The paper has also established that starting from the beginning of anthropology, archaeology has been its Siamese twin, and has acted as a driving force in the interrogation of uniqueness of humans within the animal kingdom (Oke 2004), by creating insights from material remains of man. Therefore, archaeol-

ogy is an indispensable fellow to anthropology; hence, the need to reposition and refocusing the practice of archaeology in Nigeria to reflect this perception. It is only through this, that Nigerian archaeology can fulfill comparativeness, multi-disciplinary and culture–centered perspectives of postmodern research on culture and development.

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