Africa
Spectrum

Blinded by Sight: Divining the Future of Anthropology in Africa

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Abstract: Using the metaphor of the elephant and the three blind men, this paper discusses some elements of the scholarly debate on the postcolonial turn in academia, in and of Africa, and in anthropology in particular. It is a part of the context in which anthropology remains unpopular among many African intellectuals. How do local knowledge practices take up existential issues and epistemological perspectives that may interrogate and enrich more global transcultural debates and scholarly reflexivity? Many an anthropologist still resists opening his or her mind up to life-worlds unfolding themselves through the interplay between everyday practice and the manifold actions and messages of humans, ancestors and non-human agents in sites of emerging meaning-production and innovative world-making. African anthropologists seeking recognition find themselves contested or dismissed by fellow anthropologists for doing "native", "self" or "insider" anthropology, and are sometimes accused of perpetuating colonial epistemologies and subservience by fellow African scholars who are committed to scholarship driven by the need to valorise ways of being and knowing endogenous to Africa. This essay calls on anthropologists studying Africa to reflect creative diversity and reflexivity in the conceptualisation and implementation of research projects, as well as in how they provide for co-production, collaboration and co-implication within anthropology across and beyond disciplines.

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As a metaphorical basis for this contribution[1], let us consider the story of the blind men and the elephant. Several versions of the story exist; some mention three blind men and others six, while still others talk of mice instead of men. Like an anthropologist wanting to outgrow his armchair, the blind men were curious to encounter an elephant, rather than merely contenting themselves with stories about this "queer" and "strange" animal. Even the aspects of the elephant discovered vary from one version of the tale to another. In the version I am familiar with, the three blind men collaborate. They hold hands in anticipation, as the merchant who offers to take them to an elephant leads the way. They each contemplate and imagine how they will touch the elephant. The merchant coordinates and controls the encounter like a scientist conducting a laboratory experiment. Arriving at the destination where his herds of elephants are, the merchant asks the blind men to sit on the ground and wait. Then he leads them, one by one, to touch the elephant. The first blind man feels the left foreleg and then the right, and in a moment akin to Archimedes' "Eureka!" he exclaims: "So, the queer animal feels like *that*!" Then he slowly returns to the group to announce his findings. It is now the turn of the second blind man. Whether by design or not, the merchant leads him to the rear of the elephant. The blind man touches the tail, which wiggles a few times, and he exclaims with satisfaction, "Ha! Truly a queer animal! Truly odd! I know now. I know." He hurriedly steps aside to make way for the third blind man, who touches the elephant's trunk, which moves back and forth, turning and twisting. He thinks, "That's it! I've learned."

The three blind men thank the merchant and go on their way, bubbling with excitement. Back together, like anthropologists at a conference, they decide to share and discuss their findings. The second blind man takes the lead in their panel discussion "This queer animal is like our straw fans swinging back and forth to give us a breeze. However, it's not so big or well made. The main portion is rather wispy," he proclaims. "No, no!" the first blind man shouts in disagreement. "This queer animal resembles two big trees without any branches." "You're both wrong," replies the third blind

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man. "This queer animal is similar to a snake; it's long and round, and very strong."

They argue, each insisting that he alone is correct. Of course, there is no conclusion for not one has thoroughly examined the whole elephant. Yet, how were they to know? They were not able to see it; how could they describe the elephant in whole? Sight would have enabled the blind men to see the elephant, and not simply to feel it. But seeing does not necessarily translate into knowledge. Even if they were armed with all their physical senses and used them to good effect in bringing the elephant home to their senses, it is still possible to question the extent to which they could claim to know the elephant in full. If, as some would argue, reality is much more than that which we can see, hear, touch, smell and taste, this means there is knowledge over and above what our senses tell us.

The focus in this story is not on physical blindness or sight, but on ways of seeing and knowing. Thus, the same story could be told of three men with full sight and all their other senses intact, the challenge being how to represent the elephant, which they had never encountered before. The story is a metaphor for another kind of blindness – that which comes from preconceptions, prejudices and assumptions about what constitutes reality, a blindness of which all humans are guilty. How does one keep one's preconceptions in check in order to do justice to encounters with difference? Put differently, is it possible to achieve the level of objectivity needed to see and represent the elephant for what it truly is – a complex and nuanced reality that cannot be easily reduced to its constituent parts or limited to sensory perceptions? Does it matter what the elephant has to say (if it could speak) about how it is perceived and represented? How does one account for the eventuality that the elephant could be beyond knowing by one individual or even by all blind men taken together? We must grant that intimate encounters with the elephant, however deep and convincing, are always approached from particular angles and perspectives, and that such encounters are further compounded by the dimensions of being an elephant that are beyond appearances. Even the most industrious and creative of explorers can achieve only a partial account of what the elephant is. Like ethnographers, the blind men are so focused on their areas that they are, consciously or not, oblivious to the existence of other areas – a situation made worse by their reluctance to accept that others could be right about the elephant as well. The fact that the elephant is larger than the individual or even collective experiences of it is lost on each of the men. If they were scientists, they might have understood that science is a collective pursuit, and that no one has a monopoly on insights and the truth. Social truth being negotiable, it requires humility and mutual accommodation on the part of those who lay claim to it. These is-

sues are discussed in greater detail under the sub-themes of negotiating truth in African anthropology; privileges of belonging; and divining the future of anthropology in Africa.

Negotiating Truth in African Anthropology

There is a sense in which Africa has been very much like the elephant in this story to anthropologists. Armed with purported selfless scientific curiosities and muted or overt ambitions of dominance and *missions civilisatrices* – all informed by familiarity in varying degrees with our own societies, social backgrounds and positions – we anthropologists have sought to understand the African by analogy. Inspired by the Malinowskian model about making an objective field science of our obviously subjective endeavours (Clifford 1988: 21-113; MacClancy and Fuentes 2011), we have mapped or parcelled Africa out into zones and often defined and confined those zones racially, geographically and culturally (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a; Schipper 1999). This is evidenced by a certain reluctance to admit or translate into action our admission of the inevitability of subjectivity in ethnographic encounters and representations (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988, 2012). We may acknowledge in principle that we are all products of nature and nurture, and that our discipline is best served by reconciling and not dichotomising the two. But in practice, we, like religious fundamentalists, deafly resort to environmental, biological and cultural determinism in how we relate to the things and people we study, in such a way that would make many an observer wonder what has become of our instinctive claim to "scientificity" (Morris 2012). Many of us pay lip service to reflexivity – the ability to determine, surface and factor in the extent to which our dispositions, social backgrounds and social positions influence, in often veiled and subtle ways, the perspectives we hold on how different or similar to us those we study are. Few of us are ready to consider reflexivity as a process – something deserving of more than token mention in the prefaces, introductions and methodology sections of the books and journal articles we produce to justify our status and salaries. Yet it is glaringly evident that reflexivity as a process starts with the very conceptualisation and implementation of research. Reflexivity is not expected to take leave of one once one has taken leave of the field. What is demanded of us, if what we churn out as anthropological knowledge is to be taken seriously by our peers, and especially by those whom we claim to study, is evidence of reflexivity as a process (Collins and Gallinat 2010a: 3-8; Englund 2011a). As Pierre Bourdieu argues,

> Reflexivity takes on its full efficacy only when it is embodied in collectives which have so much incorporated it that they practise it as a

> reflex. In a research group of that kind, the collective censorship is
> very strong, but it is a liberating censorship, which leads one to dream
> of the censorship of an ideally constituted field that would free each
> of the participants from the "biases" linked to his or her position and
> dispositions (Bourdieu 2004: 114)

It is still very much the tradition and practice to approach ethnography as a
monologue, soliloquy or ventriloquy (on a quest for the legitimation and
prestige that comes with the single-authored monograph of the anthropologist as lone ranger) rather than as a dialogue (inclusive, flexibly sourced,
resourced and disseminated) (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988,
2012; Marcus 2012). Ethnographic representations of Africa are often
blindly crafted and served as delicacies without rigorous, systematic dialogue
with the Africans in question. Adequate provision is also not made for competing perspectives and epistemologies within and beyond our discipline,
over and above the token interviews and conversations we undertake in the
field. Even as we are interested in knowledge as co-production (Schumaker
2001; Tilley 2011), our reflex is to minimise that co-production with key
local intermediaries (be these informants, research assistants, "native" anthropologists, scholars from other disciplines, or ethnographers who are not
perceived as anthropologists) by either completely ignoring their voices
(even as we claim that only those directly concerned with the beliefs and
practices we seek to understand can speak in a practical way on their own
behalf), contributions and perspectives (especially when these are counter to
our representations as trained and professional anthropologists from the
"outside"), or reducing these to a footnote or a list of names and chance
occurrences in the "Acknowledgements" section (Bank 2008; Collins and
Gallinat 2010a: 4; Englund 2011a).
    Yet, as René Devisch argues, productive co-production should take the
form of the popular interpretation of the French notion of *connaissance* –
comprehending – to mean *co-naissance* (literally "co-birth" or a form of being
"born with" the Other, but colloquially referring to experiential knowing
and shared insight). This popular interpretation of *connaissance*

> offers an insightful linguistic rendition of the sensual, intercorporeal,
> dialogical and non-appropriative comprehending and co-implication
> of subjects and their life-worlds. It is the mode of reception and encounter in which the anthropologist is engaged by virtue of the sensory, emotional and thus corporeal or 'fleshy' sensing of, and co-implication in, the significant inter-animating features of life-world and
> subjects.

The knowledge or knowing generated from such emotional and intersubjective encounters is co-produced in compassionate communal action (Devisch 2011: 218).

Despite this possibility of co-birth, there is little anthropological co-production going on. Monological, non-reflexive and non-inclusive representations of parts of an arbitrarily mapped-out and confined Africa continue to be the dominant mode of comprehending the continent. And despite their problematic nature, the insensitive representations generated are often extrapolated and conflated to make it sound as if knowledge (however problematic its origins and articulation) of the parts amounts to knowledge of the whole – or, as if anything is knowable to anyone who comes knocking with questions. Thinking (and, by proxy, scholarship) through analogy and mimicry has been used and abused in initiatives of intellectual expediency, as we seek relevance and conversations with fellow scholars and taken-for-granted intellectual traditions. We attend conferences and answer calls for contributions to scholarly publications with our modest ethnographies about which we are ready to be everything but modest. We draw on thin subjective accounts of our very limited experiences to make the most extravagant claims on being African. Like the blind men and the elephant, we have, as anthropologists, tended to relate our experiences of unfamiliar Africa to the world with which we are familiar, aiming to persuade our intellectual peers of how knowledgeable we are of Africa in its complex multiplicities.

Privileges of Belonging

"Tribe", with or without secrets,[2] is the anthropological equivalent of a hard currency. It has been and remains central to anthropological transactions. The resilience of its lure and allure in the discipline is without question. According to Ronald Cohen (1978: 380-383), the term "ethnic" or "ethnicity", while abundantly employed in the West by sociologists, was quite rare in the work of anthropologists before the 1970s. "Led by theoretical concerns", we anthropologists tended to "underplay the multiethnic quality of the societies" we studied, often accepting without questioning labels "arbitrarily or [...] inaccurately imposed" by the colonial administration. But as Cohen points out,

> In ideological terms, "tribes" are a fundamentally colonial concept derived from the Latin term *tribus*, meaning barbarians at the borders of the empire. This etymology reflects and explains the significance of

2   See *Secrets of the Tribe* (documentary film by José Padilha, 2010).

the word in Western culture, its link to imperialist expansionism and the associated and overgeneralised dichotomisation of the world's peoples into civilised and uncivilised [....] the "raw" and the "cooked" of human historical experience. Unfortunately, anthropology has become the Western technical scientific vehicle for the development of this invidious distinction, describing, tabulating, and generalising about the "raw" side of the dichotomy (Cohen 1978: 384).

Thus even though "multiethnicity is a quality of all societies", the Western bias of anthropologists led to the imposition of a false dichotomy between the "tribal" societies of the non-Western Other, and their "ethnic" opposites of the developed Western world (Cohen 1978: 399). Today, the frontier and composite nature of African societies is hardly in doubt (Kopytoff 1987; MacGaffey 1995), nor is there doubt that many an anthropologist has embraced "ethnicity" in the study of Africa (Lentz 1995; Comaroff and Comaroff 2008, 2009; Bangstad et al. 2012: 121-126). However, the very resilience of the term "tribe" shows that we do not necessarily abandon our *habitus* simply because science and new knowledge have questioned conventional wisdom.

So far, I have written as if my belonging to the anthropological mainland or "tribe" were a *fait accompli*. I have used "we anthropologists" in an all-inclusive manner, as if every anthropologist is a bona fide one. What if, as a black African, I were to be denied citizenship and belonging to the anthropology tribe? What if I were told that, regardless of my training, professional position and aspirations, I am not really an anthropologist? I am inauthentic, a veritable fake! My genealogy does not warrant inclusion. I am of the wrong race, the wrong class, the wrong place! Not only am I African, I am black and of rural origins. If white, I could be in Africa, but not of Africa, even if I have not known any other reality all my life. Somehow, anthropologists who study Africa seldom bother to "know" white Africans, almost as if being white and African were a contradiction in terms.

South Africa, for example, has an estimated population of 50.5 million, of which, according to Statistics South Africa, "Africans" are in the majority at 40.2 million (79.5 per cent of the total population). "Whites" and "coloureds" are estimated at 4.5 million (9 per cent) each, and "Indians/Asians" at 1.3 million (2.5 per cent).[3] I have been in South Africa for three years now, and despite the country's long association with whiteness – I might also add that not all white South Africans have direct ties with Europe – very few studies of whiteness by visiting anthropologists exist. Yet, South

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3   See *SouthAfrica.info*, South Africa's Population, online: <southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm#introduction> (15 August 2012).

Africa has not only attracted some of the most renowned anthropologists from Europe and North America, it has also produced and exported its own anthropologists to some of the most prestigious institutions in North America and Europe (Bank forthcoming 2013). How and why is it that historians (especially expatriate South Africans) have long been writing so seriously and at such length about whites and whiteness? And why does this tradition, also commonly witnessed in historical ethnographies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997), dry up in the ethnographic present of post-Apartheid South Africa?

There is very little published research by white anthropologists in South African universities on white South Africans. There are very few ethnographies to substantiate or contest what sociologist Melissa Steyn and psychologist Don Foster (2008) – both South African academics – argue are white discursive practices circulated in the mainstream press that aim to enact, establish, entrench and promote "the dominant white ideology" in post-Apartheid South Africa. What little anthropological research does exist is largely unpublished and mostly on non–English-speaking whites (cf. van der Waal and Robins 2011) or on "poor whites" (cf. Teppo 2004). Neighbouring Zimbabwe – where "the political disenfranchising of whites has failed to render them symbolically unthreatening" (Fox 2012) – boasts more published anthropological studies of whites than does South Africa. Such ethnographies of whites – their limitations notwithstanding (Hartnack 2012) – argues author of *Whiteness in Zimbabwe* (2010), David McDermott Hughes,[4] "address a significant gap in scholarship" given that "we study 'down' to marginal and disempowered people but rarely study 'up' to the privileged". The overwhelming tendency in South Africa is to study down, but hardly ever horizontally or upwards. If the dearth of studies on white South Africans is anything to go by, it would appear that to most South African anthropologists knowledge of the country they inhabit must be confined to knowledge of blacks (indiscriminately considered) or of whites who have failed to live up to the comforts of being white (Crapanzano 1985; Thornton 1990; du Toit 2001, Steyn 2001; Magubane 2004; Kalaora 2011; Fox 2012).

The relatively little anthropological curiosity regarding whites in South Africa might suggest that South African whites are – regardless of their internal hierarchies of purity – beyond ethnographic contemplation or that because they have the same genealogy as the majority of anthropologists who have arrogated to themselves the business of mapping out and docu-

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4   David McDermott Hughes' Response to Bram Büscher's *Review of Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging*, in: Conservation and Society, 9, 3, 259-260, online: <www.conservationandsociety.org/text.asp?2011/9/3/259/86 997> (30 September 2012).

menting the cultural diversity of their country, their essence defies taming by geography and by the social (Morris 2012). This leads to some white South African anthropologists claiming explicitly or implicitly that objectivity is not only a possibility, but a reality made possible by their physical or social distance from the people, things and places studied, even when one is amongst and participates in them. Far from being determined by race, place, class, gender and/or age, whites in Africa determine race, place, class, gender and age for themselves and for others. Yet, as Graham Fox (2012) argues, "[to] understand whiteness is to better understand the lived experiences of contemporary Africa", where, "though colours of skin no longer differentiate people according to value or virtue, the colonial histories embedded in that skin are visible, powerful and indelible".

If belonging to Africa is a contested and ambiguous relationship (Nyamnjoh and Shoro 2011), belonging to the tribe of anthropology is not any different.[5] In what pertains to Africa, there are some hard-core notables or royalty of the tribe who feel there is no such thing as a "native" anthropologist, as authentic knowledge is possible only through a distant outsider who does not share the same emotion and intimate attachments as someone local, however problematic such distinctions may be. Yet, upon closer examination, such distinctions between "insider" and "outsider", "native" and "non-native", and "etic" and "emic" are hardly informed by any systematic, rigorous scrutiny of objective indicators of these otherwise arbitrary labels.

In what way is a black South African labour migrant from the Eastern Cape, who resides in Langa and works in the city of Cape Town, more of an insider in Cape Town than a white South African anthropologist who has lived all of his or her life in the suburbs of Cape Town (Sharp 2011; Bank and Swana forthcoming 2013)? Yet almost systematically, white South Africans in Cape Town are not subjected to anthropological studies, as white anthropologists (resident or visiting) confine themselves to research themes that take them to township dwellings, housing black and coloured South Africans, and to rural areas. These sterile dichotomies make it possible for white South African anthropologists to conceptualise and research issues as if they were not part of the society, relegating reflexivity to the token state-

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5   For a sense of the contentious debates on belonging in anthropology see, for example: Tales from the Jungle: Margaret Mead and the Samoans, *BBC FOUR*, Autumn 2006, online: <www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/09_september/12/four_anthropology.shtml#margaret (19 April 2012); Tom Harrison: The Barefoot Anthropologist, *BBC FOUR*, Autumn 2006, documentary narrated by Sir David Attenborough, online: <www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/09_september/12/four_anthropology.shtml#harrisson> (18 April 2012); and *Secrets of The Tribe* by José Padilha (2010).

ment of "I am white, middle class …". The question of problematic categories such as "native" and "non-native" in anthropology remains unresolved, and distinctions between insiders and outsiders continue to be informed more by prejudices and preconceptions than by the objective reality of the lives of those so labelled. The fact that black, coloured and Indian/Asian anthropologists[6] are just as loathe to study up the hierarchies of race and place demonstrates the extent to which anthropologists uncritically reproduce the disciplinary status quo.

Reacting to this point at the 2012 Anthropology Southern Africa Conference[7] where an earlier version of this paper was circulated, Kharnita Mohamed, until recently a researcher at the Institute for Social and Health Sciences at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, notes:

> Black and coloured students tend to study horizontally, usually within their natal communities (which is fascinating as something strange seems to happen, they start to disassociate from their natal communities, what are universities doing to produce this kind of effect?). Where do the black Ph.D.s go? And if the black progeny of South African anthropology departments cannot be found, what does it say? Looking at the conference, most of the senior people are white and yet surely, they are training and have trained black M.A.s and Ph.D.s, where are they? White Ph.D. students seem to have more seniority, in the association, than black people who already have their Ph.D.s and the black Ph.D.s seem somewhat disengaged. And then, if the same black Ph.D.s who are trained in South Africa are not seen or treated as equivalent to their counterparts with educations from elsewhere, what does it say about the pedagogical approach? (Kharnita Mohamed, comments, 2 September 2012).

This critique is not suggesting that anthropologists abandon studying down. Rather, it highlights knowledge gaps occasioned by failure on the part of both white anthropologists to study horizontally and black, coloured and

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6   I use these labels not necessarily because I share them, but because they are a resilient common currency within and outside anthropology. My aspiration remains to be able to claim and act as Joy Owen, who in reaction to an earlier version of this paper, said: "I'm more inclined to refer to myself as a human being, rather than a coloured or a black anthropologist. I'm disturbed by any call to identifying myself, as that restricts who I am – yes, of course, others impose their own definitions, but I do have the power, within myself, to ignore those definitions and live more fully who I am. That being is present, and yet still under construction. I'm not finite, and to define myself even as an anthropologist creates a box that I'm not happy to reside in – for it's just a persona that I can take up, or drop."

7   Held at the University of Cape Town, 31 August–3 September 2012.

Indian/Asian anthropologists to study up. For, as my colleague Andrew Spiegel noted upon reading this section of the paper in an earlier draft:

> I agree with you that there is still too strong a tendency for most of us in anthropology, and our students, to find ourselves engaged in research about the dominated – of whatever "racial" makeup. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that much of that research involves scrutinising relationships and structures of dominance and subservience between those who are dominated and those who dominate them. Part of the challenge for us in South Africa is to address the concerns of people who are dominated, and, unfortunately, Apartheid's legacy is such that those people tend primarily to have black skins. So we end up focusing on their life experiences, which include the pressures on them coming from those who dominate. Moreover, the concerns of research funding agencies too often tend to focus in that direction (Andrew Spiegel, comments, 26 August 2012).

Resilient frozen distinctions between "native" and "non-native", even when they reflect no empirical reality, means that black Africans from elsewhere on the continent are more likely to be perceived as "natives" in South Africa than whites born and raised in South Africa. Similarly, as the May 2008 xenophobic riots and violence demonstrated, black South Africans are more likely to be victims of xenophobic violence against migrants than are white South Africans or white migrants in South Africa (Landau 2011). Most strikingly, many a white South African anthropologist who should know better (given the euphoric current rhetoric of cultural identities as fluid, unbounded and beyond essentialisms) is likely to relate to me – a purported fellow anthropologist – as just another "native", only from elsewhere in the "Heart of Darkness". On a continent where ethnicity is overly prioritised as an analytical category, only "ethnic citizens" and "ethnic strangers" are visible culturally (Mamdani 1996) because those who do not fit neatly into either category are either unequivocally treated as cosmopolitan and without culture (Sharp 2006), or simply denied the very same cosmopolitanism with forcefully imposed racialised and ethnicised identities (Nyamnjoh 2006, 2010; Sichone 2008; Landau 2011; Werbner 2008; 2011). In other words, nativity in Africa is confined to blackness. Among Africans, those considered to be visible in these terms are "native insiders" (those who remain tied to their purported geographies of origin) and "native outsiders" (those who move away from their birthplaces and native lands of origin to other native areas or to cities where, in the case of South Africa, non-natives – whites – reside). Similarly, at university departments of anthropology in South Africa, students are defined and confined based on appearances, as difference is assigned and denied by anthropologists whose training and practice ought to

make them know better. Fellow South African anthropologists who happen to be black or coloured, even when trained by white South African anthropologists in South African universities, are regarded with ambivalence, and more likely to be considered inferior and/or as overly politicised and polemical in their research and scholarship. They are accused not only of being critical but of tainting their research with emotions of anger and hatred, usually supposedly directed at Apartheid and whiteness by extension. For white South African anthropologists, "natives" – black and coloured alike – are incapable of the emotional detachment required by objective science.

So, try as black and coloured anthropologists may to be seen and treated as equals among white anthropologists, local or foreign, they are almost invariably perceived as more "native" or as "the Other" – the very stuff that makes anthropology possible – and therefore cannot claim to practise anthropology; they should be inviting bona fide anthropologists to practise anthropology on them. Like every anthropologist would know, in tribal societies (mythical or real), the opinions of notables and royalty count more than the opinions of commoners, and democracy does not matter when the minds of the tribal chief and notables are made up. Thus, while some commoners and the odd amicable notables may be open to grant membership into the anthropology tribe to black, coloured and Indian/Asian Africans, chiefs and others who really count still consider such inclusion anathema. To some, it is tantamount to making public the secrets of the tribe, or throwing the baby of purity out with the bathwater.

How and when does one shift from being the elephant to being one of the blind men? In whose eyes is this shift recognised? Who authorises this shift? What does granting recognition to native anthropology and native anthropologists entail? What does it say about past and current fixations within the discipline about keeping the emic apart from the etic in the making of anthropological knowledge? Would anthropological insiders tolerate newly admitted members of the tribe critiquing and questioning their hard-won achievements in the making of a distinct field of enquiry? It is one thing to acknowledge the possibility of native anthropology, and quite another to actually begin to recognise native anthropologists and their achievements. The native anthropologist is like a leper, of whom Chinua Achebe writes: "Allow him a handshake and he wants an embrace" (Achebe 1974: 42). This would explain not only a reluctance to recognise black and coloured African anthropologists but also the ambivalence and discomfort towards them and their scholarship. Thus, a black, coloured or Indian/Asian African might have a residence permit or even a valid passport issued by the anthropology tribe but remain at the margins – compelled to feel like a second-class citizen among other anthropologists: an "outsider within" (Harrison 2008).

African anthropologists seeking integration, interconnection and interdependence with the anthropology tribe are caught between and betwixt. While they are trapped at the frontiers of the anthropology tribe claiming anthropological belonging, fellow African scholars occupying the non-anthropological African heartland are accusing them of treason and betrayal of the struggle against intellectual decolonisation. Critique of anthropology as handmaiden of colonialism is widespread and reluctant to leave the scene just yet (Mafeje 1998; Adesina 2011; Nyamnjoh 2012), equally widely shared views notwithstanding, such as the following by Donald Donham, commenting on an earlier version of this paper:

> I wonder whether the notion of anthropology as the handmaiden of colonialism has not been carried too far sometimes? Certainly some of our concepts reflect dominant colonial categories rather than those of the people we study. And critique by African anthropologists and postcolonial theorists more generally [has] been essential in pointing this out to us. But compare anthropology to economics, say. Anthropologists haven't designed structural adjustment programmes that have created so much misery in Africa. They don't assume that a theory to be such has to be universal. In Ethiopia (without a colonial past, admittedly), anthropology was actually created as a field by Ethiopians in the 1980s because they thought that they needed it as form of national knowledge. Is there a way now for African anthropologists to reinsert a different kind of anthropology into the public sphere? (Donald Donham, comments, 3 September 2012)

African scholars critical of their beleaguered colleagues knocking at the borders of the anthropology tribe (ready as they are to forgive the West and its excesses on the continent) nonetheless extoll endogenous ways of knowing that define themselves mainly in opposition to Western ontologies and epistemologies, and characterise frontier scholars desperately seeking validation from the West as intellectually subservient. To Okot p'Bitek's Lawino, wife of the Westernised Ocol, "My husband's master is my husband's husband. My husband runs from place to place like a small boy, he rushes without dignity" doing the bidding of the white man. Rendered blind by the libraries of white men, Ocol has lost his dignity and authority by behaving "like a dog of the white man", lying by the door to "keep guard while waiting for leftovers" from the master's table. He has lost his "fire" and bull-like prowess and has succumbed to living on borrowed food, wearing borrowed clothes, and using his ideas, actions and behaviour "to please somebody else". He may have read extensively and deeply and can challenge the white men in his knowledge of their books and their intellectual ancestors, but to Lawino, this has come at a great price: "The reading has killed my man, in

the ways of his people. He has become a stump. He abuses all things Acoli; he says the ways of black people are black" (p'Bitek 1989: 91-96). And if Ocol has chosen the path of passive and sterile subservience, let him not, in frustration "shout at me because I know the customs of our people", customs that make him feel so desperately inferior to the white man (p'Bitek 1989: 46).

Frontier African scholars like Ocol must wonder why they should keep knocking for admission where they are clearly not accepted and where they risk persecution by fellow African scholars. They do not need a *sangoma* or *nganga* to tell them that the boundaries of the world and of disciplines are not to be violated, whatever their excitement around the postmodern turn (Zeleza 1997; Mbembe 2000). For the Christians among fellow African scholars critical of anthropology's history of active association and collaboration with the forces of conquest and dominance, African anthropologists desperate for recognition and legitimation by the West are worse than Judas Iscariot: For how can they not understand that no one must put together what God has put asunder? Frontier African scholars know the advantages of their frontier existence, but they are also not blind to its inconveniences. Belonging at the margins might have the advantage of enhancing their capacity to navigate and negotiate different identity margins, but it certainly is not always fulfilling, especially in the face of the stubborn insistence by those in the heartland of places and disciplines on frozen identities and categorical choices. In a world driven by the bounded logic of permanence, belonging to a no-man's land is not always an advantage. They feel it, and agonise about it, but few seem to fathom or share their predicament as scholars desperately seeking to negotiate and navigate the chasms and dichotomies that impoverish reality and the scholarship it engineers. Like some whites of South Africa or Cameroonian bushfallers – who are "married but available" identity-wise, they feel both here and there and neither here nor there, in a context where nothing matters more than a clear sense of "here" and "there" (Bangstad et al. 2012; Nyamnjoh 2011).

Back to the anthropology tribe where I am not seen to fully belong, much as I might delude myself to the contrary. I am, willy-nilly, seen as a black elephant, needing to be studied and understood by members of the anthropology tribe, who are, to varying degrees, blind, even if not always aware that they are. I have, in my legendary stubbornness, refused to be defined and confined. If and when I attend conferences, my presence is a challenge to members of the tribe who refuse to embrace difference even as they have made the study of difference their stock in trade. Some hope to adopt and adapt me (the only language of relationship they understand), domesticate me to embrace their perspectives so they can show me off as a

trophy, as a "Hottentot Venus" or "El Negro" (Parsons 2002; Crais and Scully 2009) of anthropology, with aspirations or ambitions of using me as a clearing agent for importing and legitimating their thinking in and on Africa. Our relationship of mutual manipulation and exploitation is characterised by a tense conviviality, as we seek quick solutions to occasional conflicts in the interest of the strategic advantages we crave. Others with fewer stakes in the elephants of Africa keep their distance (physically and intellectually), eager to continue with business as usual, even as their rhetoric of more inclusive and participatory anthropology makes evangelical waves worldwide.

Those who are charged with or who arrogate to themselves the role of policing the borders of the anthropological tribe are generally expected to be meticulous in how they define and implement inclusion. Visa and entry requirements are stiff, and graduating into permanent residency and citizenship is hardly an option even for the best of the outsiders. A thorough and elaborate regime of domestication is set in place to ensure acceptability and predictability of research and opinions that guarantees that few, if any, elephants are admitted who have not demonstrated their capacity to conform to and reproduce the status quo, even as they might from time to time appear to be critical. Elephants untamed and untrusted are kept at arm's length from intimate or close professional circles. If the boundary police and inhabitants of the anthropological mainland opt to keep the elephant outside of their conference rooms, editorial boards and classrooms, or to simply ignore the elephant's own self-definition and self-articulation, it is not so much that they are able to debate whether the elephant is what they individually claim it is – rather, the exclusion depends on whose claim of what the elephant is carries the day, depending on the competing hierarchies of credibility at play.

My modest recognition comes at a price. I have to bend over backwards most of the time to demonstrate that I can understand and articulate things from the standpoint of those who have afforded me, a mere black elephant, the prestige of feeling recognised and celebrated. My intellectual ammunition is most relevant when turned against my own intimate circles like witchcraft – fellow black elephants who share with me the same background and collective predicaments. I am made to understand what perspectives are encouraged and what unsettles the blinding and blind gaze of those who co-opt me from time to time. I am schooled to be critical of fellow black elephants, while endorsing the mediocrity or glossing over the excesses of the anthropology tribe. In my zeal and determination to prove that I am not inferior to those who study and classify the elephants of the world, I must betray whatever achievements I grew up acknowledging in Africa and by Africans. I seek to justify every whim and caprice of those

who hail from the anthropology heartland, just like a maid seeks to satisfy her madam (Nyamnjoh 2010).

I hardly stop to ask why I am almost always the only one in this relationship who makes concessions when we debate, exchange ideas or socialise. How come when we talk of hybridity and adaptability, I and fellow black elephants are always the ones expected to demonstrate the extent to which we can accommodate or adapt, and seldom the other way round? Why are African mobility and "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Werbner 2008, 2011) seldom recognised or tolerated on their own terms (Nyamnjoh 2006; Sichone 2008; Sharp 2008)? Why does the dominant understanding of cosmopolitanism almost always entail me taking up the ways of the anthropology tribe, and hardly the outsider anthropologist embracing the ways of Africans? Even as participant observation and cultural relativism are celebrated in anthropological texts and rhetoric? Sometimes, when I am not carried away by my illusion or delusion of fame, I ask myself why I cannot afford the sort of autonomy of thought that challenges the legitimacy and hegemony of the anthropology tribe. What use is visibility or recognition that comes at the expense of my dignity and relevance to those with whom I share a common ancestry and humanity? If I am truly intelligent – a leading scholar, as I am sometimes made to believe despite my personal feelings of depleted humanity and dignity – it is intelligence that is turned against my fellow elephants whom I have to criticise and castigate relentlessly almost as if to divert attention away from the fact that I am also and will always be a black elephant to those who claim the status of bona fide insiders within my adopted tribe.

Like a victim of symbolic violence, my token and obviously contested inclusion has blunted my intellect and research endeavours. No longer am I sensitive to the sort of critical questions I used to share with others, when I used to take scholarship seriously and believed there was more to it than just a game of self and social positioning. Even if more African elephants were to assume a presence, what legitimacy would be accorded their version of who, what, how and why they are, given the overt or muted hostility to "native", "self", "auto" and "home" ethnography? (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 32-40; Collins and Gallinat 2010a: 8-10). Must enlightenment always come from without, even if in the form of blindness? How does one ensure that the mediocrity of the outside is not mistaken for excellence? What if it succeeds in imposing itself by silencing critique and discrediting alternatives? Where is the science in the reluctance to embrace "insider" wisdom in the construction of ethnographies? What does it mean, empirically, to distinguish between outsider and insider? Or to claim that one is African, at home or not at home? What qualifies one for or denies one the status of inclusion? Is it possible that the African ethnographic elephant, upon closer examina-

tion, could be far less at home than the assumptions of home bestowed by the ethnographic outsider might suggest? And is there any likelihood that – geographical difference notwithstanding – the outsider ethnographer might in some situations actually be more at home than the purported insider elephant?[8] If we as a scholarly community concede the need for negotiated and carefully articulated intersubjective accounts informed by the cultured blindness of the outsider on the one hand, and the supposedly untested insights of the insider on the other, what form does the production of such epistemological conviviality assume? How is copyright to be negotiated and attributed for the knowledge produced therefrom? And how is the subsequent blame, controversy or ridicule by various instances of legitimation – for not quite getting things right or for outright misrepresentation – to be shared?

The African ethnographic elephants mean little on their own terms in a game in which they are externally defined and confined exogenously, even when supposedly involved in the crafting of their stories. What if the elephants could speak back or were allowed to study themselves and to shape the world with their knowledge and ways of knowing? What if the elephants were to participate in proposal elaboration and presentation, in the design and teaching of courses about them, in examination committees and on the editorial boards of publishers and journals specialised in ethnography? How would the elephants explain themselves to the blind men of anthropological curiosity who have explored them since Bronisław Malinowski? How would the elephants proceed? And if they were to enter into a conversation with the blind men, how would they both reassure and convince these blind men about their reality as informed by their own blindness as human elephants? What power of articulation would the elephants use to convince the blind that their reality is far more nuanced and complex than the partial truths of anthropologists – whether taken separately or together – would suggest? How would the elephants seek to convince the blind men that knowledge of their parts, however thorough, cannot but caricature their elephant reality?

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8   I remember an experience in Lilongwe in the company of Harri Englund, a "white" Cambridge-based anthropologist, "brother" and collaborator of mine, when Malawian vendors tried to address me in Chichewa and were incredulous when Harri was the one who spoke Chichewa to them. As far as those Malawian vendors were concerned, Harri was their fellow African, not me, and rightly so! Important as sight might be, knowing the elephant requires more than dwelling on appearances. Similarly, being African or anything else for that matter is permanent work in progress (Nyamnjoh and Shoro 2011), involving actual relationships that determine rights and entitlements as well as responsibilities. Harri Englund (2011b) has contributed significantly to the valorisation of African languages in anthropology and scholarship in general, much more than most purported "more obviously African" anthropologists I know, myself included.

How would the elephants assist the blind to fathom their complexity despite the constraint of blindness?

What would it take to make the blind see? And once they are able to see, what would it take to ensure that they are subsequently not blinded by sight? If the elephants thought it possible to assist their blind explorers in knowing them – to the extent that knowledge is possible – how would the elephants facilitate the blind men capitalising on their other senses? Put differently, how would the elephant help tame the consuming arrogance of ignorance that often insinuates itself as knowledge by those with ambitions of dominance? The world is replete with what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has termed the "danger of a single story" (Adichie 2009). Single stories are particularly dangerous in contexts of myriad interconnections where researchers are challenged by the very nature of problems that require them to take/find/access holistic perspectives that straddle disciplinary frontiers (Parkin and Ulijaszek 2011), and foreground the intersubjective and the co-productive in the representations of social reality (Devisch 2011). Whatever its weaknesses, anthropology is well placed to translate into practice the quest for holism and frontier scholarship through intellectual and method-ological compassion, given its dialogical history of drawing on and feeding into other disciplines and fields, including the natural sciences, and literary and cultural studies, in the negotiation of its identity as a field science (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Parkin and Ulijaszek 2011; MacClancy and Fuentes 2011). No other discipline in the human or social sciences quite matches anthropology's critical self-consciousness and capacity for self-renewal through constant re-interrogations, ferments and resurrections. And no discipline can quite match anthropology's record at surviving with ac-commodation and conviviality Tom-and-Jerry-type violence from within and outside its ranks (Starn 2012; Clifford 2012; Marcus 2012).

What if elephants were unknowable? What if our conventional indica-tors of knowledge were inadequate for us to access and claim knowledge of elephants, even when armed with optimally efficient senses? What if the reality of elephants were larger than could be fathomed by the senses? Would we, the scholarly community, then be reduced to keeping up appear-ances of claiming knowledge that we could never really access however hard we worked at it? How would we, given this hypothetical truth, relate to oth-ers equally involved in keeping up appearances, only in a different way and with claims different from ours? Would we confront and contest, or seek to understand and accommodate them? Would we invite them to a discussion of how to provide a level playing field for competing sources of ignorance? As Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* advises, "The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place"

(Achebe 1974: 46). In this regard, far from simply ascribing or claiming our location as anthropologists, we must strategically work at determining our location shifts and the reasons why. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997b: 37-38) argue,

> Practising decolonised anthropology in a deterritorialised world means as a first step doing away with the distancing and exoticisation of the conventional anthropological "field", and foregrounding the ways in which we anthropologists are historically and socially (not just biographically) linked with the areas we study.

Knowing is a lifelong commitment to reflexivity, dialogue and accommodation.

Divining the Future of Anthropology in Africa

When playing the anthropology game, one gets the sense that the playing field is rather uneven and, sometimes, that one is playing with children who are so self-absorbed and keen to win at all costs that the goalposts keep shifting. This calls for a renegotiation of the field, the game and the rules – not by whims and caprices, but by reflective flexibility, adaptability and accommodation.

That anthropology is an uneven playing field is also evidenced by the different levels of debate in different regions where the discipline is practised. Ever since *Writing Culture* was published by Clifford and Marcus (1986) in the US, the kinds of points I am arguing – about the connection of anthropology with literature, the value of collaboration, the blurry boundaries of the field – have been argued. And some would say that they are widely respected now, if not accepted in every detail by everyone. They are certainly not assumed to be marginal. For a North American, then, it might be a little strange to hear me argue these points 25 years later, as if they have not been made before or are not widely accepted at least in some superficial form (*Cultural Anthropology* 2012).[9] I grant them that. We in Africa, in some universities more than others, are equally familiar with these debates. However, as the saying goes, the proof is in the pudding. We have yet to see in practice and in a compelling, systematic and widespread manner the sort of scholarship that suggests these debates have been embraced and internalised in the conception and implementation of research in and on Africa, which continues to be negatively affected by global inequalities, marginalisation, disconnection, and an uneven playing field (Ferguson 2006: 38-41).

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9   I am grateful to Donald Donham for comments in this regard.

Regarding the future of anthropology in and on Africa, I am not a good diviner. Indeed, few social scientists ever are, despite our investment in what Auguste Comte famously termed "*physique sociale*", whose goal is "*savoir pour prévoir, afin de pouvoir*" ("Know in order to predict, to be able to act"). However, as a blind, black "native" African with my modest experience with anthropology and knowledge of its contentious history and ambivalent present in Africa and among Africans, I do not need to be a diviner to witness the glare of the present. And even if I needed a diviner, I am only too conscious that, as Wim van Binsbergen argues on the future of anthropology in Africa,

> the essence of the diviner's task is not to predict or stipulate an unchangeable future, but to re-attach the distressed client (anthropology? the international community of Africanists?) to a pattern of symbols and relations; to restore – at least for the duration of the session – meaning and direction to that pattern (often through somewhat cheap theatrical means, which, however, should be vindicated by the formal virtuosity of the diviner's praxeological performance); and to confront the client, on the basis of the sense of illumination that is produced by the session, with a limited number of alternative courses of action, each evaluated in terms of the symbols that have been evoked.[10]

For anthropology to survive and thrive in Africa, we must not define and confine Africa *a priori*, racially, geographically or otherwise. It is important to be flexible and accommodating to the possibility of Africa surprising us in most unlikely ways by appearing where we least expect it, or being invisible where we most expect to find it. Similarly, we must not define and confine, *a priori*, Africans and their cultural identities. Like with reflexivity, we are required to pay more than lip service to the flexibility, negotiability and processual possibilities of identities in and of Africa. For this reason, nobody in the geography of "Africa" should be above the anthropological gaze. If this requires prescription and guidelines by the ethical committees of global and local anthropological associations, so be it. Like Pierre Bourdieu (2004: 114), I would argue that such collective discipline is liberating, as it is well placed to free African and Africanist anthropologists from the "biases" linked to our positions and dispositions.

We also need to put the Malinowskian baby of fieldwork and participant observation in perspective. While the ethnographic present is key, it

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10   Wim van Binsbergen, *Reflections on the Future of Anthropology in Africa: A 1987 Assessment now Greatly Expanded and with a 2002 Postface*, online: <www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/futureof.htm> (25 August 2012).

cannot be transformed into a master key with reckless abandon. In some contexts and situations, nothing short of historical ethnography and continuity quite does justice to our understanding of the present, without necessarily implying that we should subject the present to historical determinism (Wolfe 1999: 43-68). And in certain instances, we might need to go beyond historical ethnography, as Kharnita Mohamed suggests, to

> excavate our concepts. We should be doing genealogical readings of our concepts too. The autochthonous notions of home for instance in which we are trapped, have a long history. By way of example: As far as I can tell, autochthonous conceptions emerge out of the Hippocratic Corpus in the fifth century BCE, particularly in the text on airs, waters and places in which it is asserted that the environment produces certain kinds of temperaments, and of those temperaments not all can easily be transported. It is used to devastating effect in the Enlightenment (a good example is in Herder through the idea that like trees some people grow sickly and pale when transported). The notion of embeddedness in an environment and what the circulation of different bodies might mean draws upon these notions and they still underlie some of the conceptions and perdure, of course in relation to historical emergences in the political economy and so forth. What is interesting is how the anachronisms are reshaped to fit what was already there in different form and so become elusive (Kharnita Mohamed, comments, 2 September 2012).

Furthermore, fieldwork and participant observation do not have to be one-size-fits-all. Regional variations require flexibility rather than prescriptiveness. Along with these concerns about fieldwork are concerns about "native" anthropologists and anthropology "at home" (Peirano 1998; Hannerz 2010). Again, as critical overviews of debates and practices repeatedly demonstrate, anthropology is all the richer with creative diversity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Peirano 2005; Ribeiro and Escobar 2006; Collins and Gallinat 2010b; Hannerz 2010; MacClancy and Fuentes 2011). In recognition of creative diversity, therefore, anthropologists studying Africa should seek to reflect it in the conceptualisation and implementation of their research projects, as well as in how they provide for co-production, *à la* René Devisch (2011), and collaboration with "native" and "at-home" anthropologists and across disciplines.[11] Such co-production calls for team work over

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11   Far from implying the lack of collaboration, the call here is for collaboration to become part and parcel of every research conceptualisation, implementation and dissemination. Many practices exist that require further debates, distillation, consolidation, legitimation and popularisation within the discipline. Concerning South Africa, Donald Donham's *Violence in a Time of Liberation: Murder and Ethnicity at a*

and above professional collaboration, along with multi- and transdisciplinary endeavours, to include the very people we study in the conceptualisation and implementation of the research process. It is not to be confined to or conflated with co-publication. Involving the human elephants of Africa from the outset of our knowledge-production process is especially important since, unlike the elephants in the metaphor, who are substantial, real, incontrovertible, and unchanging, people and societies are not unchanging and do not want to be seen as if they were.[12] Given the fact of blindness as a human condition, it follows that human elephants are just as blind as their explorers and hence have no special advantage in knowing themselves. What I am calling for is not to replace the perspectives of the blind explorers with the perspectives of the elephants themselves, but rather to provide a platform and equal playing field for conversations from and between multiple perspectives on being and becoming an elephant informed by competing and complementary blindness (Nyamnjoh 2012). This calls for a critical interrogation our often unproblematised claims to scientificity – soft or hard – through our explicit or implicit suggestions that our ways of knowing are superior to the ways of knowing of fellow academics or of those we study. Such often unsubstantiated claims to superiority, if widely shared by scholars in powerful positions, are a licence to validate and impose mediocrities, ignorance and preconceptions as knowledge.[13]

Far from suggesting the absence of conflict, co-production invites us to provide for knowledge production and consumption as a conflictual and contested process within academia (Bourdieu 1988; 2004) and in different regions of the world (Zeleza 1997; Schipper 1999; Mbembe 2000; Canagarajah 2002; Connell 2007). Indeed, as my colleague Andrew Spiegel pointed out in a further reaction to an earlier version of this paper:

South African Gold Mine, 1994 (2011) is a special example of collaboration with the deeply empathetic visionary, Santu Mofokeng. In the study, Donham demonstrates admirably his gift at taking a moment to tell a story and the stories of the story, from many different perspectives, including those of white management. It is an example of multifacetedness and multiple perspectives in thick description that is both sympathetic and critical. I am grateful to Richard Werbner for bringing Donald Donham's book to my attention. Outside South Africa, other models of co-production and collaboration exist, such as CODESRIA and OSSREA. Langaa Research and Publishing Centre in Cameroon and the African Studies Centre Leiden, in the Netherlands, for example, have a collaborative research and publishing initiative that provides a platform for Dutch and associated anthropologists from other European countries to pursue joint research and publications projects with African counterparts.

12   I am particularly grateful to Michael Lambek for comments in this regard.
13   I am grateful to Antonádia Borges for her comments in this regard.

Questions that we all need to ask as we undertake our consistently reflexive analyses are: How, and to what extent, is a form of elitism and exclusion produced by the kinds of hierarchisation of and in academia that are central to practices such as global rankings of universities and research foundation ratings of individuals within the academy? Similarly we need to ask how and to what extent do the criteria used to assess institutions and individuals reproduce precisely the kinds of resistance to what one might (possibly dangerously) call "local knowledge" that your paper seems to want to challenge. The same can be said of the continuing dominance of scientific and with it statistical methods, and resistance to anything that is not clearly demonstrable in terms of modernist materialist thinking – and that cannot live up to Comte's injunction that knowledge is there (only?) to be able to predict in order to know how to act. (Andrew Spiegel, comments, 26 August 2012).

The era of the anthropologist as "lone ranger", if ever it existed, is over – creative team effort beyond lip service is the way of the future (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 17-18; MacClancy and Fuentes 2011: 12-14; Bank and Bank forthcoming 2013). Similarly, not only is ethnography by non-anthropologists possible (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 29-32; Collins and Gallinat 2010b; MacClancy and Fuentes 2011: 15-18), in Africa – where the image of anthropology continues to suffer as a result of its role as handmaiden of colonialism (Mafeje 1998; Adesina 2011) – such ethnographies should be actively sought from, for example, kindred disciplines and from fiction (Nyamnjoh 2011). Reacting to an earlier version of this paper, James Ferguson, co-editor of *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, said regarding this point:

I'm especially sympathetic with your point that we anthropologists need to look to writers of fiction as intellectual interlocutors. It's a suggestion we made back in *Locations*, but we didn't do much to follow it up, and I think it's especially important in southern Africa, where the call to have more engagement between a still mostly white anthropology and "African voices" tends to be countered with the view that there just aren't very many Africans with sufficiently high-level anthropological training. But as you point out, the people with the most interesting and sophisticated interpretations of their own societies may very well not have Ph.D.s in anthropology (imagine that!). The solution is surely to broaden the pool of people who count as social and cultural analysts, and then we might find that authors of fiction and other creative works make more interesting scholarly partners than most of our certified Ph.D.s (James Ferguson, comments, 31 August 2012)!

Reflexivity and co-production as processes might not be sufficient to over-
come blindness, but they most certainly are a useful starting point toward
the re-invention of anthropology around big questions – involving long-
term histories and comparisons – rather than the micro-sociologising that
has been developed as relevance-making.[14] Without these efforts, the human
elephants of Africa may well continue to defy knowing by anthropologists,
blind or sighted.

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[14] I am grateful to Michael Rowlands for this insight.

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Die Erforschung des Elefanten: Zur Zukunft der Ethnologie in Afrika

Zusammenfassung: Unter Rückgriff auf die Fabel vom Elefanten und den drei weisen Männern diskutiert dieser Beitrag einige Elemente der Debatte zur postkolonialen Wende in der Wissenschaft – innerhalb und außerhalb Afrikas und insbesondere in Bezug auf die Ethnologie. Unter vielen afrikanischen Intellektuellen ist die Ethnologie immer noch unbeliebt. Inwieweit greifen lokale Wissenspraktiken existentielle Fragen und epistemologische Perspektiven auf und stellen damit die globale transkulturelle Debatte und wissenschaftliche Reflexion infrage oder bereichern sie? Viele Ethnologen

scheuen sich immer noch, sich gegenüber Lebenswelten zu öffnen, in denen die alltägliche Praxis mit den facettenreichen Handlungen und Botschaften von lebenden Menschen, Vorfahren und nicht-menschlichen Wesen verwoben ist – an Orten, an denen zunehmend neue Bedeutungsformen und innovative Welten entstehen. Afrikanische Ethnologen, die sich um Anerkennung bemühen, machen die Erfahrung, dass sie von anderen Ethnologen infrage gestellt oder abgelehnt werden, weil sie angeblich eine selbstbezogene oder Insider-Ethnologie betreiben, oder dass sie von afrikanischen Wissenschaftlern – die selbst auf Stipendien angewiesen sind und sich daher bemühen, spezifisch afrikanische Lebensarten und Wissenswelten aufzuwerten – beschuldigt werden, sich kolonialen Erkenntnisinteressen zu unterwerfen. Der Autor des Beitrags fordert Ethnologen, die zu Afrika forschen, dazu auf, bei der Konzeptionierung und Durchführung von Forschungsprojekten auf kreative Vielfalt und Reflexivität sowie auf Möglichkeiten der Zusammenarbeit innerhalb der Ethnologie und über die Disziplin hinaus zu setzen.

Schlagwörter: Afrika, Wissenschaftstheorie, Ethnologie, Methode