

# AFRICAN FICTIONS IN REPRESENTATIONS OF WEST AFRICAN AND AFRO-CUBAN CULTURES\*

CATHERINE DAVIES

DEPARTMENT OF SPANISH, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

AND

RICHARD FARDON

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES,  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

What should interest us in the discussion of ‘the literature of fact’ or, as I have chosen to call it, ‘the fictions of factual representation’ is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble and correspond with each other.<sup>1</sup>

Two substitutions in its second half will adapt this epigraph – from Hayden White’s essay ‘The fictions of factual representation’ – to a concern with ‘the extent to which the discourse of the *ethnographer* and that of the *novelist* overlap, resemble and correspond with each other’. In the case of, predominantly anglophone, representations of West Africa the genres of ethnography and novel have conventionally been opposed, so that it makes sense to discuss shifting relations between them and to countenance the possibility of the two genres becoming blurred. In Cuba, by virtue of a different colonial history, distinctions between novel and ethnography were not institutionalized in the same way. From the perspective of discourses about West Africa, Afro-Cuban representations seem syncretic; they pay less attention to the distinction between an ethnography and a novel which is stressed in Africanist discourses. A contrast (overdrawn for heuristic purposes)

\* Catherine Davies is grateful to the British Academy and the Carnegie Trust for defraying the costs of research in Cuba during the summer of 1990, to Nancy Morejón for her advice at that time, and to Verity Smith for subsequent discussion of Cuban materials. Richard Fardon acknowledges a debt to participants in a seminar on ‘Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing’ held at the University of St Andrews in January 1987 (published as *Localizing strategies*, Edinburgh and Washington: Scottish Academic Press and Smithsonian Institution, 1990). The design of our argument by comparison is particularly indebted to Wendy James’s paper in that volume. Fardon also profited from papers presented to a one-day symposium ‘Images of Africa: the Depiction of Pre-colonial Africa in Creative Literature’ held at the University of Stirling in April 1989. Mary Douglas and John Peel kindly made bibliographic suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Hayden White, ‘The fictions of factual representation’, *Tropics of discourse: essays in cultural criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 122.

between oppositional and syncretic conventions of textualization puts in question the utility of any global distinction between the ethnography and the novel. The significance, and indeed possibility of stylistic innovation, depends upon the identity of the author and the character of his or her relation to earlier conventions. The conclusion to this line of argument suggests caution about claims to originality made on the grounds of style. To an extent, steps in representational fashion are choreographed in advance by the previous conjuncture of styles.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIES AND NOVELTIES IN WEST AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa was *the* critical site for the crystallization of British and French anthropological practice during the late colonial period (roughly 1930–60). Although elements of colonial ethnographic representation came from elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> their cathexis occurred in Black Africa. The implications of this for anthropological theory have been substantial. Colonial-period Africanist assumptions were exported as part of a package tailored to cope with interests in Black Africa. Problems of defining appropriate ‘units of study’ in ‘non-tribal’ parts of the world, tracing descent in the New Guinea Highlands, accounting for features of person and action in ‘less-structured’ settings (from Swat to Thailand), or analysing ‘social change’ almost anywhere, were only ‘problems’ in relation to the African exemplars of how colonial ethnography went to work.

Several geo-political conventions (or fictions) localized ethnographic descriptions within an African mosaic of a sub-continent, further divisible into regions, themselves divisible into states, chiefdoms and tribes. Delineation of Black, or sub-Saharan, Africa involved excision of an essential Africa<sup>3</sup> from its relations across the Sahara with Egypt and the Maghreb.<sup>4</sup> Within this larger entity, regionalization reflected

<sup>2</sup> One genealogy for the idea of segmentation in lineage-based societies could be traced from Middle-Eastern and Old Testament sources, via the Sudanese Nuer on the edge of the biblical world (see the epigraph to *The Nuer*) to the West African savannah, (see Paul Dresch, ‘Segmentation’, *Place and voice in anthropological theory*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, *Cultural Anthropology*, 28 (1988)). The notion of segmentation coalesced with that of the tribe – the maximal segmenting unit – that may have had Indian antecedents (see Barrie Sharpe, ‘Ethnography and a regional system’, *Critique of Anthropology*, 6 (1986), and with a conception of person as corporate office indebted to western legal theory (see Marilyn Strathern, ‘Kinship and economy’, *American Ethnologist*, 12 (1985)). Jewish and Christian readings reconverged in the nexus of segmentation and filial piety in Meyer Fortes’s writings on the Tallensi. There are numerous other ways of tracing, and contesting, such influences. The present point concerns the relational character of localization.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher L. Miller, *Blank darkness: Africanist discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> The excision of sub-Saharan Africa from its continental relations is double-edged. Anthropological structural functionalism with its emphasis on bounded units of study took the debunking of the Hamitic hypothesis (whereby anything complex south of the Sahara had been introduced from the north by the sons of Ham) as a critical contribution to re-evaluation of Black African history. Some more recent African scholarship has wished to reinstate a modified heliocentrism. From this later perspective colonial geography seems to involve denial of a wider African civilization.

political concerns, for which colonial partition into anglophone, francophone and lusophone Africas, and the presence of a white settler state in South Africa, established the major parameters. For anglophone colonial anthropology, East and Central Africa were distinguished under the auspices of regional research institutes run respectively by Audrey Richards and Max Gluckman.<sup>5</sup> Although earlier work was carried out from the London School of Economics by the Seligmans and Evans-Pritchard, under the inspiration of the latter Sudan became the preserve, by and large, of Oxford anthropologists. West Africa differed in degree of complexity. An influential start in ethnographic representation was made in the works of missionaries and colonial officers – such as Talbot, Rattray, and Meek – who provided the step between modern anthropology and its preceding genres. Dominant institutional linkages in Britain were then forged with Cambridge (for Ghana), University College London (for Nigeria), and to some extent Edinburgh (for Sierra Leone).<sup>6</sup> Different traditions of enquiry in the substantial French territories, allied to the diversity and antiquity of West African societies, produced regional representations of greater diversity than in East or Central Africa.

Such very close relations between colonial epoch, regional delineation, theoretical armature, and institutional entrenchment have made the challenges to conventions of ethnographic writing of the last fifteen years appear especially pointed to ethnographers of West Africa. Both Keith Hart and Elizabeth Tonkin have recently expressed the opinion that the older style of West African ethnography is now a dead genre.<sup>7</sup> To be dead, it must – at the very least – be identifiable.

The anthropological monograph assumed its ‘modern’ form by dint both of what it wasn’t and what it was. In the West African case, the broad category of what ethnography wasn’t included reports of missionaries, travellers and explorers, along with novels specifically set in West Africa or in a less determinate locality that might be West Africa. There was a sense that ethnography was a particular type of representation that could and should be distinguished from other representations.

<sup>5</sup> Other regionalizations were displaced by this exercise: notably the African perspective (see n. 4) and the culture stream notion especially associated with the German ethnographer Leo Frobenius. Language (cum culture) classifications persisted as reference points: thus the Nilotic focus of much Oxford anthropology and the idea of Bantu resemblances recently important to Luc de Heusch and Adam Kuper.

<sup>6</sup> Fortes, J. and E. Goody, Hart, Verdon and Schildkrout represent a continuing Cambridge involvement; Forde, Kaberry, Morton-Williams and Bradbury were at University College London in the early 1950s – Harris, Last, Burnham, Richards, etc. were to come later; Little, Littlejohn and Fyfe created a Sierra Leonean interest at Edinburgh. West African interest in the U.K. later dispersed, with Africanist interest in the Centre for West African Studies in Birmingham, at Sussex, and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Hart, ‘The social anthropology of West Africa’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 14 (1985), 243–72; Elizabeth Tonkin, ‘West African ethnographic traditions’, in *Localizing strategies*, ed. R. Fardon (Edinburgh and Washington: Scottish Academic and Smithsonian, 1990), 137–51.

Relatively little of the ethnography of West Africa – especially in the English language – has been written by West Africans. Anthropology was associated by some African historians with the racist anthropology of the late nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Thus, anglophone African interest in West African societies became institutionalized in university departments of history, sociology and philosophy but not, by and large, social anthropology. Representations of local forms of society from the village community to the street life of the new cities had to be sought in ‘imaginative’ rather than ‘ethnographic’ literature. The implications of this counter-literature for ethnography could be ignored thanks to the distinction in genre. Novels were understood to be extended prose fictions and ethnographies extended prose facts; the conventions appropriate to them differed.

Like the modern ethnography, the West African novel was defined both by what it was and what it wasn't. Chinua Achebe's first four novels serve as examples of West African novels straddling the time of independence (from *Things fall apart* (London, 1958) to *A man of the people* (London, 1966)). In an article devoted, in part, to discussion of Achebe's first novel, Christophe Dailly sets the scene:

Modern African literature has grown out of the breach opened in our indigenous cultural history by the colonial experience. The growth of modern writings in Black Africa can then be accounted for by the social and cultural upheaval brought about by the encounter between the West and Africa. Modern literature does not only apprehend the state of incoherence which our presentday society is passing through; it also endeavours to fill in the gap between the two protagonists. The novel, as an imported mode of expression (unknown to old Africa) is an offshoot of the new society. Using a foreign language in the expression of African ways of life, the novelist is particularly concerned with the integration of our social experience into the process of cultural development. In this sense, we can talk about the novelist as a cultural policy-maker.<sup>9</sup>

This formulation is part of Dailly's espousal of the need for novelists to ‘bridge the past and the present in order to arrive smoothly in the future’.<sup>10</sup> However, many of the terms of his statement work as well for ethnography as they do for the novel: ethnography also is a ‘child of colonialism’; its form and language are European but it also seeks to express ‘African ways of life’. Like the novel, ethnography is caught between the West and Africa and ‘endeavours to fill in the gap’. Ethnography is presently supposed in some quarters to be caught up by the crisis of representation; however, the novel has flourished despite an ambiguous status in West Africa. Whatever it has become, in its origins the novel was a western bourgeois art form. In defining

<sup>8</sup> J.F. Ajayi, *Christian missions in Nigeria 1841–91* (Ibadan: Longman, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> C. Dailly, ‘The novelist as a cultural policy-maker’, *Présence Africaine*, 125 (1983), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Dailly, ‘The coming of age of the African novel’, *Présence Africaine*, 130 (1984), 118–31.

what the West African novel should be, Achebe himself has frequent recourse to two examples of what it is not. His 1975 lecture 'An image of Africa: racism in Conrad's *Heart of darkness*' created a storm that was revived with the republication of the article.<sup>11</sup> The same text has earned particular feminist censure for its representation of African women. 'Where it could be said that in the colonial novel the colonized male encounters not himself but his antithesis, the colonized woman encounters only erasure'.<sup>12</sup>

The other target of Achebe's denunciation is Joyce Cary, one-time colonial officer in Borgu (Northern Nigeria), whose representative entrepreneurial African in *Mister Johnson* is (in the words of Robert Wren) 'a culturally vacuous stage Irishman dressed in black skin and voiced with a bad approximation of West African pidgin English'.<sup>13</sup> Appalled by that novel, Achebe recalled that his first book 'was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of the prodigal son'.<sup>14</sup>

A West African novelist describes his intentions in terms of the re-presentation and revaluation of the Igbo village life and of the impact of the colonial order on that regime. More generally, the West African novel about West Africa is to be defined by distinction from both the European novel and the European ethnography of West Africa. Architects of misrepresentation and victims of their own incomprehension feature among the *dramatis personae* of the early Achebe novels: from the district commissioner of *Things fall apart* (London, 1958), who casts the suicide of Okonkwo (dramatic conclusion to the novel) as at best a 'reasonable paragraph' of his projected *The pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger*, to the man from the British Council (in *No longer at ease* (London, 1960)) who 'cannot understand' how a young man of the promise of Okonkwo's grandson Obi could land himself in court. These figures are emblematic of numerous uninformed Europeans who composed misleading accounts of the African past.<sup>15</sup> The parallel with ethnography's mission to illuminate what remained obscure in earlier accounts is striking. Evidently, Achebe means his writings to convey a truth; and he has recently reasserted his wish that they also have effects, answering the 'fashionable claim made even by writers that literature can do nothing to alter our social and political conditions' with the retort 'Of course it can!'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and impediments: selected essays 1965-87*, (London: Heinemann, 1988). The essay provoked correspondence in the *London Review of Books* during 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Abena P. Busia, 'Miscegenation as metonymy: sexuality and power in the colonial novel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 9 (1986), 369.

<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Wren, *Achebe's world: the historical and cultural context of the novels* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1980), 107.

<sup>14</sup> Achebe, *Hopes and impediments*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Wren, *Achebe's world*, ch. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'Travelling white', *Weekend Guardian* (21-22 October 1989), 7.

## CROSSING OVER

The rights to represent West Africa are contested between writers who accredit their texts, to a large degree, by their opposition to the shortcomings of other texts. However, a number of recent ethnographers of West Africa have determined to challenge the genre characteristics of the classical monograph. A summary of these characteristics will give a base line to our discussion. Most instances of an ethnography can be distinguished from most instances of something else by their possession of a number of the following characteristics.

- (a.) *Temporalization*: ethnographies are usually synchronic representations. Events illustrate processes but do not furnish the organizing framework of the narrative. The significance of this 'ethnographic present' has been identified with a denial of history or coevalness between the investigator's society and the host society. Synchronic accounts also tend to overplay the systematic quality of social life thus creating impediments to the analysis of change.
- (b.) *Narration*: ethnographies are typically monophonic, although the narrator is not identified by the first person. Dialogue is rare, although indirect reporting of snatches of direct speech is common. The text is organized by topic. These restrictions are violated in arrival scenes, scenes of local colour and so forth. Such scenes have been interpreted as legitimating devices.
- (c.) *Localization*: ethnographies occur in spaces bounded by ethnic terms and cultural systems. Their larger context is defined by the geo-political considerations discussed earlier.
- (d.) *Unity of purpose and content*: the inclusion or exclusion of materials is justified by reference to a theoretical agenda. The ethnography aspires to an explanation of the materials presented.
- (e.) *Authorization*: in addition to the foregoing, it is understood that the ethnography relies upon the privileged experience of the ethnographer.
- (f.) *Characterization*: ethnographies are writings about ethnic subjects. Ethnography is a kind of tribal biography. The collective agent has a character and career that the ethnography typifies.

These six 'fictions' of West African ethnographic discourse are hotly contested. Even in their own time, certain works seemed to be dubious members of the category 'ethnography'. Retrospectively they have come to seem part of the prehistory of the new. Examples of such 'hybrids' might include Elenore Smith-Bowen's *Return to laughter* (1956), and Mark Freshfield's *Stormy dawn* (1946): novels written by ethnographers and based in their research among Tiv of Nigeria and Ga of Ghana respectively (the pseudonyms are of Laura Bohannan and Margaret Field). What within the text was to separate these from a non-anthropologist's work: like Esther Warner who wrote *Trial by sasswood* (1955) on the basis of first-hand experience of Liberia?

Where indeed is the dividing line between Elenore Smith-Bowen writing about witchcraft among the Tiv in an 'ethnographically accurate' novel, and Laura Bohannan recounting how Tiv elders explained *Hamlet* to her as a plot involving witchcraft between close patrikin?<sup>17</sup> Or between Mary Smith's biography of *Baba of Karo* (1954) and her husband's published researches on the Hausa states?

Many of these marginal works, often written by women, drew upon few of the 'fictions' of West African ethnography but shared the conventions of contemporary West African novels, predominantly authored by African men.

(a.) Temporalization is determined by the sequentially narrated actions or events with which the novel is concerned. With few exceptions West African novels of the period were realist in conception.

(b.) Narration. It is difficult to generalize about the author's or narrator's voices: the first person is frequently employed, but the narrator is sometimes difficult to pin down. Angela Smith suggests that the narrator of *Things fall apart* (1958) is by turns insider and outsider, tribesman and district commissioner.<sup>18</sup> Direct speech appears commonly, and English is modified to distinguish the standard English from pidgin English and from African languages in translation. As Achebe stated in 'Colonialist criticism', '... let nobody be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it'.<sup>19</sup> In *A man of the people* (1966), Achebe's narrator is distinguished from the author – a strategy not explicitly available to ethnography, albeit the *persona* of ethnographer can be read as a 'fictional' creation distinct from the author.

(c.) Localization corresponds to the action of the novel which expands and contracts in range. Often the African/European cultural boundary is emphasized rather than the tribal boundaries of ethnography.

(d.) Purpose and content are unified narratively through plot rather than by explicit reference to theoretical arbiters.

(e.) Authorization of the text appeals to insider status by virtue of membership of a culture or by virtue of personal characteristics more general than ethnographic expertise and presence. In short, authenticity rather than exotic experience underwrites the text.

(f.) Characterization is of African individuals rather than of collective agents. In a significant reversal, 'stock characters' tend to be the Europeans.

<sup>17</sup> Laura Bohannan, 'Shakespeare in the bush', *Natural History*, 75 (1966), 28–33.

<sup>18</sup> Angela Smith, 'Tribesman or district commissioner? The role of the narrator in *Things fall apart*', Symposium on 'Images of Africa: the Depiction of Pre-colonial Africa in Creative Literature', University of Stirling, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Achebe, *Hopes and impediments*, 50.

The poles of this contrast between the classic ethnography and the West African realist novel are overdrawn; few works are 'pure' representatives of either. There is also room for argument over the specification of the genres. But there can be little doubt that representations of West Africa have generally been considered to belong to genres, and that relations between these genres have been marked by tension. Indeed, the genres have recently been thrown into relief by attempts to depart from the classic terms of the West African ethnography. Although more 'traditional' ethnographic texts probably continue to be written in greater number, critical attention has been drawn to writings that attempt, in the terms proposed here, to blur the distinction between ethnography and the novel. Innovative works have not, for the most part, been produced by members of the old institutional centres of West African study which dominated colonial ethnography. Indeed, a majority of the authors are not British-based. Moreover, most of the 'new' ethnographies have been authored by men. A brief review is called for.

At the fairly 'traditional' end of the spectrum we could note Nigel Barley's two volumes of reminiscence (*The innocent anthropologist* (London, 1983); *A plague of caterpillars* (London, 1986)) and single volume of ethnography concerning the Dowayo. The differences between the 'serious' academic book, and what the cover blurbs describe as travelogues Evelyn Waugh might have written on acquaintance with the *Bafut beagles*, conform closely to the genres we have distinguished. Barley has no apparent desire to innovate or blur the genres that his writings tend to reinforce. Similarly, Robert Brain based his novel *Kolonialagent* (London, 1977) on historical events in his fieldwork area, but it is readily distinguishable from his ethnographic works.

Other writers on West Africa have blurred or juxtaposed genres of representation. Paul Riesman's 'introspective' ethnography of pastoral Fulani is an early example of a new sense of reflexivity.<sup>20</sup> Michael Jackson's career has been a barometer of changes in genre: from a standard, Cambridge-style, first ethnography, through a second book and articles concerned with Kuranko narratives, to a third that blended dramatized history, biography and autobiography.<sup>21</sup> Another approach to the intermeshing of ethnography and autobiography is Joseph Shepperd's description of the Cameroonian

<sup>20</sup> *Freedom in Fulani social life: an introspective ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> *The Kuranko: dimensions of social reality in a West African society* (London: C. Hurst, 1977); *Allegories of the wilderness: ethics and ambiguity in Kuranko narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); *Barawa, and the way birds fly in the sky* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986). Many of his essays are collected as *Paths towards a clearing: radical empiricism and ethnographic inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). For an extended review of Jackson's development, see Marilyn Strathern, 'Review of *Barawa*', *Mankind*, 17 (1987), 241-2.



Ntumu in which descriptions sent home to his dissertation supervisor alternate with the narration of his life in the rain forest.<sup>22</sup> The most dedicated proponent of reflexivity has been Paul Stoller whose publications include a 'memoir of apprenticeship' to Songhai sorcerers (with Cheryl Olkes), an ethnography of possession that also includes chunks of direct speech and a sequential report of events that occurred during his fieldwork, and an anecdotal account of the way that the Songhai conceived of him as the 'son' of Jean Rouch the celebrated French ethnographer and film maker who preceded him as an ethnographer of Songhai.<sup>23</sup>

Stoller has summarized the philosophy underlying his position in a review of a collection of stories about the life of the Nzema by Vinigia Grottanelli:

When ethnographers have penetrated the other's world as deeply as Grottanelli has, they are often – and should be – impelled to select a literary genre (a story, a life history) that faithfully represents experience-in-the-field. These are genres which eschew generalization in favour of a discourse that reflects experience – of ethnographers and ethnographic others – too complex and textured to be erased in the totalized accounts of ethnographic realism . . . the epistemology of narrative ethnography . . . is today sweeping the social sciences and the humanities . . . narrative ethnographies . . . borrow elements from fiction: dialogue, plot, character. Narratives . . . humanize the ethnographic enterprise, making it accessible to wider audiences.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the terms of this summary involve a naive realism: another's world is deeply *penetrated*, particular literary genres *faithfully reflect* and *represent* experience (even for others), moreover narrative is essentially humanizing. There is a tendency in the new ethnography of West Africa for 'the contingent nature of the field experience' to become the subject of ethnography.<sup>25</sup> As Jackson writes approvingly of Stoller's memoir:

. . . the author's experiences blaze a trail for the reader into another reality . . . But Paul Stoller does not lead us into this clandestine, shadowy world in order to browbeat us with interpretive schemes or console us with talk of structure or system: rather, he leaves us free to decide for ourselves the significance of the hallucinatingly vivid experiences he undergoes.

<sup>22</sup> *A leaf of the honey and the proverbs of the rainforest* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Stoller and Olkes, *In sorcery's shadow: a memoir of apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); 'Son of Rouch: portrait of a young ethnographer by the Songhai', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 60 (1987), 114–23; *Fusion of the worlds: an ethnography of possession among the Songhay of Niger*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> 'Review of Vinigi L. Grottanelli, *The python killer*' (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), *Anthropological Quarterly*, 62 (1989), 104. Stoller overlooks ethnographic shortcomings in Grottanelli's book on the grounds that we already have a rich literature on Akan-speaking peoples. In a review of Kwame Gyekye, *An essay on African philosophical thought* (*American Anthropologist*, 91 (1989), 216–17), he adopts the opposite view, castigating the author for ignoring the diversity of Akan-speakers. Current polemics over style seem in danger of introducing a double standard of ethnographic appreciation.

<sup>25</sup> Stoller, 'Son of Rouch', 118.

All this is 'a far cry from the arid intellectualism of so much anthropological writing'.<sup>26</sup> The author's experience addresses 'us' – presumably a Western outsider 'us'. There appears to be no necessity to imagine an African, or Songhai, readership for such works. There is, of course, a long tradition of leaving Westerners alone to commune with their preconceptions about Black Africa as the possible site of hallucinatingly vivid experiences. Although European ethnographers appear to be converging upon the 'fictions' of African novelists, it is not clear that they are doing so for a shared purpose.

The innovative representations of Dowayo, Ntumu, Songhai and Kuranko generally avoid particular political or economic issues. Their subjects tend to be assimilable to a general European concern with the exotic Other, and the writings tend to confirm this exotic character. Most writings by African novelists have a diametrically opposed character: they can be indexed to particular political concerns which they seek to render comprehensible. From this perspective, the genres of ethnography and novel seem not to have become blurred but instead to have exchanged their functions. Ethnography has become authenticated autobiographical quest while the novel has become an engaged activity that seeks comprehension of prevailing contemporary circumstances. The switch could be related to the changing political position, and sense of responsibility, of the anthropologist with the decline of overt colonialism and of the colonial centres of ethnographic writing.

#### CUBAN COUNTERPOINT

The colonial conjuncture of European and West African cultures gave rise to representations which belonged to distinct and opposed genres: ethnography and the imaginative literatures of European and African authors. Comparison with Cuba is instructive because clear genre demarcations were of much less importance there. If the relation between genres can be characterized as oppositional in the West African case, then the contrastive Cuban instance can be termed syncretic. The conditions for the difference between the two must be sought, in the final analysis, in the political history of the hispanic Caribbean and the original form of society which was its outcome.

Cuba was a colony of Spain until 1898. On independence in 1902 it passed immediately to a position of quasi-colonial dependence on the United States of America; after the revolution in 1959, it became economically dependent on the socialist block. Like the rest of the Caribbean, Cuba is a racially and culturally mixed society. Slavery was officially abolished in 1886. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, an estimated 850,000 African slaves were imported into Cuba. They formed a black or 'coloured' population that at different times formed between 34 and 70 per cent of total population. In 1981,

<sup>26</sup> Michael Jackson, 'Review of P. Stoller and C. Olkes, *In sorcery's shadow*', *American Ethnologist*, 15 (1988), 390–1.

about a third of Cuba's ten and half million population was considered black or mixed.<sup>27</sup>

The slaves had been taken from many areas of West and Central Africa but, on arrival in the New World, found themselves categorized according to seven specific places or 'nations' of origin. The people and culture which came to predominate was the Yoruba, known as Lucumí in Cuba, whose beliefs in *orisa* along with Roman Catholicism contributed largely to the syncretic religion of *santería*. In 1948, Bascom was able to converse fluently with Yoruba speakers in Cuba.<sup>28</sup>

Even had African slaves been considered to possess a culture worthy of study, metropolitan Spain was largely devoid of the institutionalized ethnographic concerns of the British and French colonial powers. The first modern ethnographer to study, and indeed name, Afro-Cuban culture was himself a white Cuban: Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969). His initial interest was in jurisprudence, and he studied in Barcelona under the founder of the Institute of Sociology there, Salas y Ferré. His first fieldwork was in the prisons of Spain, and his work in Cuba also began in the black 'underworld'. For more than half a century after 1906 he published widely on such subjects as the negro fraternity houses, Afro-Cuban feast days, stories, an Afro-Cuban dictionary, and seven volumes on Afro-Cuban ethnomusicology.<sup>29</sup> His important work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940; *Cuban counterpoint: tobacco and sugar*, 1970) was published with an introduction by Malinowski. Ortiz's neologism *transculturación* was endorsed by Malinowski as a description of the process by which the African cultures brought to Cuba by slaves had mixed with that of the Spanish to produce a new and original Cuban culture. In contradistinction to concepts like acculturation or diffusion, Malinowski noted that transculturation did not imply a differential importance in

<sup>27</sup> Jean Stubbs, *Cuba: the test of time* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1989), v, 73. Jorge and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura afrocubana: el negro en Cuba, 1492–1844* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1988), 28–44, 137, 151.

<sup>28</sup> William Bascom, *Shango in the New World* (Austin: University of Texas, 1972), 13. 'At the time of our research in Cuba it was estimated that there were about two hundred babalawo [Ifa diviners] in Havana' (20).

<sup>29</sup> Among Ortiz's main publications are: *Hampa afrocubana: los negros brujos* (Madrid: F. Fe, 1906); *Hampa afrocubana: los negros esclavos* (Habana: Revista bimestre cubana, 1916); *Los cabildos afrocubanos* (Habana: Universal, 1921); *Glosario de afronegrismos* (Habana: Siglo XX, 1924); *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Habana: J. Montero, 1940) [*Cuban counterpoint: tobacco and sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Vintage, 1970)]; *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (Habana: Ministerio de Educación, 1950); *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (Habana: Ministerio de Educación, 1951); *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*, 5 vols. (Habana: Ministerio de Educación, 1952–55); *La secta conga de los 'matiabos' de Cuba* (Mexico: Dirección General de Difusión Cultural, 1956); *La antigua fiesta afrocubana del 'Día de Reyes'* (Habana: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1960). For two excellent recent appraisals of Ortiz's contribution to Cuban culture see Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban condition: translation and identity in modern Cuban culture* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), 16–33 and Antonio Benítez Rojo, *La isla que se repite: el Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* (Hanover: Ediciones del Norte, 1989), 149–85, 155, 157, 167.

the syncretized elements. Although he did not wholly accept functionalism, Ortiz was at first clearly influenced by functionalist ideas in his description of a coherent culture composed of elements of different origins. The tradition of inquiry he founded was an indigenous growth, rather than a colonial and metropolitan study of people who were Other and elsewhere. Ortiz's work identified and legitimized a contemporary culture which had been systematically neglected and downgraded as a subject of study in academic circles. Moreover, he set out to study this culture 'objectively', although a book such as *Contrapunteo* defies all classification. In so doing, Ortiz attempted to found an ethnographic tradition by establishment of the Institute of Afro-Cuban Studies and at the same time his interdisciplinary approach made possible the explosion of creativity in narrative, dance, music, drama and poetry of the Afro-Cuban period in Cuban culture (1925–40).

The most influential of Ortiz's successors has been Lydia Cabrera, who left Cuba for Miami in 1960. Not a professional anthropologist, she came from a wealthy, white Cuban family and established an interior design shop before studying fine arts in Paris where she remained as an artist until 1939. It was in Paris that she met members of the negritude movement, who directed her interests towards African cultures. Her work on Afro-Cuban culture, which she calls folklore, has included several collections of Afro-Cuban stories, in both French and Spanish; *El monte* (1954) a compilation of notes on religion, magic, stories and songs; studies of Yoruba language; and a monograph on the secret society *Abakuá* (1958).<sup>30</sup> In her collected stories, no clear distinction is drawn between the oral materials recorded from her informants and elements of her own creation.

What are these stories: the copied stories of a folklorist or artistic creation? They are bits of both. She remakes them in her way, imprinting on them her own personality . . . adjusting them to her own style . . . she would say I am not an anthropologist, sociologist, or folklorist. She does not want to submit herself to the methodology of any science.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lydia Cabrera's work includes: *Contes nègres de Cuba*, trans. Francis de Miomandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1936) published as *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (Habana: Veronica, 1940) with a prologue by Ortiz (22 stories); *El monte, igbo finda, ewe orisha, vitifinda; notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los criollos y del pueblo de Cuba* (Habana: Ediciones C.R., 1954); *Por qué . . . cuentos negros de Cuba* (Habana: Ediciones C.R., 1940 [*Pourquoi . . . nouveaux contes nègres de Cuba*, trans. Francis de Miomandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1954)] (28 stories); *Refranes de negros viejos* (Habana: Ediciones C.R., 1955); *La sociedad secreta 'Abakuá'* (Miami: Ediciones C.R., 1970); *Anagó: vocabulario lucumí (el yoruba que se habla en Cuba, prol. Roger Bastide* (Miami: Ediciones C.R., 1970); *Ayapá: cuentos de Jicotea* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1971) (19 stories); *Yemaya y Ochun* (New York: Chickeruku, 1980). Cabrera published 69 stories in all. Others who have researched into Afro-Cuban religions are Juan Luis Martín, Rómulo Lachatañeré, Teodoro Díaz Fabelo, Enrique Sosa, Rogelio Martínez Furé and the historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals.

<sup>31</sup> R.S. Boggs, 'Testimonio', *Homenaje a Lydia Cabrera*, eds. Reinaldo Sánchez, José Antonio Madrigal (Miami: Universal, 1977), 15. See also Rosa Valdés-Cruz, 'Los cuentos de Lydia Cabrera: ¿transposiciones o creaciones?' in *Homenaje*, 93–9.

By the 1930s the convergence of genres was already realized. Despite Ortiz's work and his attempt to institutionalize anthropology (Malinowski called repeatedly and without success for the United States government to establish centres of anthropological study in Cuba), there was little entrenchment of ethnographic concerns in Cuba and what existed was often in the service of the aesthetic agenda of the negritude movement. In a continuation of a similar tradition across the watershed of the 1959 revolution, the ethnographer and novelist, Miguel Barnet (1940– ), has written *novelas-testimonio* or 'documentary novels' of 'men without history' representing the diverse social and ethnic roots of Cuban culture. The first, and most famous, of these is *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966; *Biography of a runaway slave*, 1968). Although published in Spanish under Barnet's name, the biography is a free recapitulation of a runaway slave, the centenarian Esteban Montejo. In his introduction to the book, Barnet recounts the lively conversations that they shared and how, 'using the usual techniques of ethnological enquiry', he was able to elicit materials on Afro-Cuban religions, gods and rituals which he subsequently rearranged into a chronological account. 'We know that to make an informant talk is . . . to make literature. But we are not trying to create a literary document, a novel'.<sup>32</sup> The text is an early ethnobiography, written in the first person, and attempting to portray the unrolling of a life against a documented background from the perspective of the biographical subject. Significantly, in its English edition the *Biography* is attributed to Montejo's authorship under the editorship of Barnet.

Space permits discussion of only two examples of the incorporation of ethnography into narrative fictions. The exploration of Afro-Cuban themes, and the use of Yoruba terms, is a common characteristic of much *criollo* literature, particularly in poetry (Nicolás Guillén) and recently in drama. The tradition of narrative prose in European languages has been indigenous to Cuba far longer than in West Africa. Several narrative works by slaves were published in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The most widely read of twentieth-century

<sup>32</sup> Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1976), 7–12, 10 [Davies's translation]. This was published in English as Esteban Montejo, *The autobiography of a runaway slave*, trans. Jocasta Innes (London: Bodley Head, 1968 and New York: Pantheon, 1968). See particularly Barnet, 'The documentary novel', *Cuban Studies*, 11 (1981) for a methodological discussion. He has also continued Cabrera's work by collecting Afro-Cuban fables published as a children's book *Akeké y la jutía: fábulas afrocubanas* (Habana: Gente Nueva, 1978). Literature for children has become a sub-genre in itself. Julia Calzadilla, for example, has incorporated Afro-Cuban tales into her stories written for children. In *Los chichiricú del charco de la jicara* (Habana: Gente Nueva, 1985) she drew on Ortiz's research into Afro-Cuban words such as 'guije'/'jigüe' meaning 'sprite' or 'chichiricú' itself which was collected by Ortiz in his *Historia de una pelea contra los demonios* (Santa Clara: Departamento de Relaciones Culturales, 1959) referring to sprites from the Guinea coast.

<sup>33</sup> There are numerous examples extending from nineteenth-century authors (the slave Juan Francisco Manzano published his *Autobiografía* in 1840) and Martín Morúa Delgado's novel *La*

Cuban novelists, Alejo Carpentier, was also an ethnomusicologist and greatly influenced by Ortiz's writings.<sup>34</sup> In Paris, during the early 1920s, he too became involved in the negritude movement. His first novel, *¡Ecue-Yamba-O!* (1933, *God be praised*) written as a 'social document' in 1927, is the life story of a plantation-born negro who is initiated into African cults in Havana and finally killed by the Afro-Cuban criminal elements of Havana society. Told in the third person with intercalated scenes describing rituals, cults and mythology, the novel is in the naturalistic tradition of Zola. By 1963 Carpentier opposed the republication of this early work on the grounds that the importance of the 'marvellous', the attitude that 'made a Cuban peasant entering a forest able to greet and speak to the trees' had entirely evaded him.<sup>35</sup> *Ecue* remained a book about magic rather than a suggestion of the 'state of magic'.<sup>36</sup> *El reino de este mundo* (1949, *The kingdom of this world*, 1967), written after a visit to Haiti and at the same time that Carpentier was working on *La música en Cuba* (1946), represents a more complex representation of diverse perspectives. At least three viewpoints can be distinguished: that of the narrator who does not share African religious faith, that of Ti

*familia Unzuazu* (1901) to the contemporary narrative of Manuel Cofiño, Miguel Cossío, José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Dora Alonso and Mirta Yáñez none of whom are black. Julia Cuervo Hewitt, 'Yoruba presence: from Nigerian oral literature to contemporary Cuban narrative', *Voices from under: Black narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Westport and London: Greenwood, 1984), 79–85, studies the influence of Yoruba cosmology in Cofiño's novel, *Cuando la sangre se parece al fuego* (1975) and Barnett's collection of stories, *Akeké y la jutía* (1978). Her more recent *Aché, presencia africana: tradiciones yoruba-lucumí en la narrativa cubana* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988) is probably the most exhaustive study of this subject to date. Julio Matas, 'Revolución, literatura y religión afrocubana', *Cuban Studies*, 13 (1983), 17–23, analyses how Antonio Benítez Rojo's short story 'La tierra y el cielo' (1969) deals with the substitution of Marxist awareness for traditional (Afro-Cuban) religious values. For a more general view see *Blacks in Hispanic literature*, ed. Miriam de Costa (New York and London: Kennikat Press, 1977) and Pedro Barrera, *The Black protagonist in the Cuban novel*, trans. Page Bancroft (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Carpentier frequently referred to the influence of his friend Ortiz. In the bibliography of *La música en Cuba* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946) he cites five of Ortiz's works and one by Cabrera, he uses the term 'transculturación' and in the chapter 'Afrocubanismo' he quotes extensively from Ortiz (286–304). In *Crónicas II* (Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1976) Carpentier writes: 'Roldán [Cuban composer] and I . . . went through a period of "childhood illness" at that time – Afro-Cubanism. We devoured Fernando Ortiz's books' (133, [Davies's translation]). He also describes how he frequented 'ñáñigo' [members of the secret society Abakuá] ceremonies with Roldán, who copied down the choreography and rhythms, and subsequently faced a death threat for having taken a foreign folklorist with him (134–5). See also his 'Este gran Don Fernando', *Repertorio Americano*, 47 (15 marzo 1952), 227–8. George K. Green in 'The early writings of Alejo Carpentier, 1923–49' (University of Columbia Ph.D. thesis, 1976), argues that Carpentier was first influenced by Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist, Ortiz being a participant rather than a precursor of the Afro-Cuban movement.

<sup>35</sup> In an interview with Mario Vargas Llosa, quoted in Frank Janney, *Alejo Carpentier and his early works* (London: Tamesis, 1981), 35 [Davies's translation].

<sup>36</sup> Janney, *Alejo Carpentier*, 36. Raymond D. Souza, *Major Cuban novelists: innovation and tradition* (London and Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976) writes that *Ecue-Yamba-O!* was a narrative manifestation 'of the growing interest in the Negro, which occurred in Cuba during the late 1920s. In part this concern was an outgrowth of the rapid development of anthropological data on the African in the western world' (31).

Noel, the novel's black protagonist, who does, and the views of diverse European colonialists during the period before and after the French Revolution. Only at the end of the novel, do the narrator's and Ti Noel's visions of a collective faith coalesce. Carpentier noted in his original introduction to the novel, . . . 'the sensation of the marvellous presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in saints can't cure themselves by saints' miracles . . .'. Carpentier wanted to show 'how popular beliefs are put to work in history to give faith in a utopian project and to provide the spiritual stimulation to revolution'.<sup>37</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal claims that the *real maravilloso* is only achieved when the cultured vision of the author coincides with the magical vision of the negroes.<sup>38</sup> However, another commentator finds instead a contradiction between narrative voice and perspective. The often-quoted scene of death by burning of the black revolutionary Macandal is interpreted differently by the watching slaves and the narrator:

Macandal moved the stump of his arm, which they had been unable to tie up, in a threatening gesture which was none the less terrible for being partial, howling unknown spells and violently thrusting his torso forward. The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: 'Macandal saved!' . . . the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry.<sup>39</sup>

For the critic Chanady, 'the apparent identification with Ti Noel and the negroes is revealed as a game and the mask is broken with the intrusion of empirical reality which distances the reader from the unfamiliar world'.<sup>40</sup> Here we reach the nub of a necessary tension, for just as the oppositional relation between genres can be questioned from a more syncretic perspective in the West African case, so can the motives of the syncretic mode be interrogated from the premise of opposition. The writings of Cabrera, Barnet or Carpentier could be open to challenge as appropriations of Afro-Cuban elements by Western-educated writers in the interest of their own imaginative

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Carpentier's prologue to *The kingdom of this world*, (1957) trans. Harriet de Onís, rev. ed. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), x. This prologue, included in the original Spanish edition, *El reino de este mundo* (Mexico: Edición y Distribución Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1949) was omitted subsequently. See an extended version of the prologue in *Tientos y diferencias* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1964).

<sup>38</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal, 'Lo real y lo maravilloso en *El reino de este mundo*', *Revista Iberoamericana*, xxxvii, 76-7 (1971), 619-49, 648. The critic quotes three particular passages in which this occurs: the description of the wax heads (part 1, i); Soliman's reaction to the statue of Paulina Bonaparte (part 4, i) and the description of the bull's blood in Christophe's palace (part 3, iii).

<sup>39</sup> *Kingdom of this world* (1990), 36.

<sup>40</sup> Amaryll Chanady, 'La focalización como espejo de contradicciones en *El reino de este mundo*', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, xii, 3 (1988), 446-56, 450 [Davies's translation].

fictions. In the case of the latter two, however, this argument would have to be set against their opposition to the black/white distinction as inimical to the establishment of a single Cuban national identity. Salvador Bueno argues that contrary to what occurred in Haiti and Jamaica, Cubans did not reject European culture. Afro-Cuban culture was, instead, revalued and integrated into the dominant Hispanic Cuban culture in the interest of a distinctive national culture: the search for Cuban identity took place *through* black culture. This attitude continues José Martí's creed that Cuban means more than white, more than mulatto, more than black.

The attempt to establish a syncretic national culture was renewed after 1959. During the 1960s, Castro's government refused to recognize a distinctive black contribution to Cuban culture on the grounds that to do so would be divisive. On Bastide's opinion 'throughout Black America – Haiti, Cuba and Brazil all tell the same story – Afro-American religion has been violently attacked both by capitalists and members of the Communist Party'. A recent study suggests a more positive attitude was adopted in the 1970s; in the early 1980s moves officially to recognize and encourage the expression of Afro-Cuban culture have been made. These have included a fresh appreciation of the works of Ortiz and Cabrera in particular.<sup>41</sup>

Relatively few post-revolutionary novels have been written by black Cubans. A significant exception is Manuel Granados (1930– ), one of the few novelists of Castro's generation who actually fought against Batista. His novel of the revolution *Adire y el tiempo roto* (1967) – *adire* is a Yoruba technique of batik dyeing – differs from all other novels on the subject in that the more important of its two protagonists is a poor negro.<sup>42</sup> From then until his recent novel, *Expediente de hombre* (1988), Granados has endeavoured to make Afro-Cuban culture relevant to contemporary people in contemporary genres. His mixture of *Ogún* and blue jeans draws upon elements of *santería* but emphasizes contemporary problems of race and class. By contrast to the six conventions of West African ethnographies and novels (distinguished earlier), Granados's narrative technique reveals the influence of the experimentation of the Latin American novel. The chronological structure of his two novels is fractured and rearranged. A variety of

<sup>41</sup> Salvador Bueno, *Aproximaciones a la literatura hispanoamericana* (Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1984), 442–3. Roger Bastide, *African civilisations in the New World*, trans. Peter Green (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1971), 123. Jean Stubbs, *Cuba: the test of time*, 77–8, 72. Julia Cuervo Hewitt in *Aché*, 281, points out that the principal objective of incorporating Afro-Cuban myths and legends into post-revolutionary narrative was to preserve the oral traditions, not the beliefs, within the framework of a new, socialist collective consciousness.

<sup>42</sup> Seymour Menton, *Prose fiction of the Cuban Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 65. Manuel Granados's narrative is: *Adire y el tiempo roto* (Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1967); *El viento en la casa-sol* (Habana: UNEAC, 1970) – 13 short stories including 'Referencia a María Candela' and 'La noche de San Bartolomé'; *Expediente de hombre* (Habana: U.N.E.A.C., 1988); *País del coral* (Habana: Ediciones Letras Cubanas, 1988) 12 new short stories; *El corredor de los vientos* (novel), in press.



narrative perspectives is expressed through first, second and third person, involving direct speech, free indirect style and stream-of-consciousness techniques. Hallucinations, dreams and Yoruba cosmological concepts stand revealed as elements of the texture of his protagonists' thought. Nonetheless, his novels remain adventure stories charting struggles against racial prejudice and class oppression. *Santería* elements are particularly important in two short stories, that Granados has twice collected, 'Referencia de María Candela' and 'La noche de San Bartolomé'. These works, centred on the Revolution, express the emergence of a new man whose colour should no longer be relevant; co-operation and mutual sacrifice between black and white are stressed.

The syncretic mode, product of a different history and form of society, is – to repeat – just as open to challenge as the oppositional mode. Consider the opinion of the Haitian writer Anthony Phelps:

I, a Negro from America, I am not a negro-american writer. I am not an afro-american writer. There is no negro-african literature in America. There is no negro-american literature, nor afro-american literature. We Negroes of the New World are not Africans in exile in America. . .

Is this a matter of a new form of imperialism? Systematically grouping all non white beings of black origin may be useful but it no less reflects an unacknowledged desire to maintain the separation of races, to preserve the colonial gaze of Europe over all that was, that is, different.<sup>43</sup>

In similar vein, the Guyanan Denis Williams finds that, 'the fact that one is constantly reaffirming negro values is a problem of impotence'.<sup>44</sup> Both oppositional and syncretic relations between genres – each, as we have argued, the explicable product of different histories – embody the capacity to generate argument. For a time, each can seem the answer to the other's problems. It remains for us to note the significance of this conclusion for the possibility of stable allegorical readings.

TWO ALLEGORIES: ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE THIRD WORLD NOVEL  
In an account of 'ethnographic allegory', James Clifford remarks how frequently anthropologists have recourse to the motif of rescuing cultures on the brink of extinction. Ethnography is a protracted allegory of the loss of pastoral values that must be restored (albeit only textually) through the efforts of the fieldworker.<sup>45</sup> Pastoral allegory

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Phelps, 'Littérature négro-africaine d'Amérique: mythe, ou réalité? Mise au point entre une histoire imaginaire, imaginée et une anecdote', *Anales del Caribe*, 4-5 (1984-85), 351-61, 353 [Fardon's translation]. Richard Jackson, *Black literature and humanism in Latin America* (Atlanta: Georgia University Press, 1988) believes that the classless society of contemporary Cuba will be the location of a genuinely Spanish-American humanist literature.

<sup>44</sup> Denis Williams, 'Ahora pertenezco al Caribe', *Anales del Caribe*, 4-5 (1984-85), 411.

<sup>45</sup> 'On ethnographic allegory', *Writing culture: the politics and poetics of ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

depends upon a sense of rupture with an imagined past; and this is easily envisaged in the wake of the contact of previously discrete cultures of disparate power. The allegory thus begs a broader context of ideas that may be shared by both the powerful and the powerless. The figure is, however, notably absent from writings on Afro-Cuban culture. Traces might be read in the work of Bascom, an outside observer, but Ortiz's notion of transculturation to describe a living hybridized culture runs contrary to the broader imaginative context in which pastoral allegory is possible. Transculturation emphasizes coalescence and transfiguration but not extinction; the elementary sources of the new civilization live on in modified form. The pastoral allegory seems specific to a particular conjuncture of genres, notably realized in Africanist writings.

Fredric Jameson, in an influential account of Third World literature, finds a different, national political allegory to be omnipresent in Third World biographical fictions. It is there, he feels, because the division between public and private attendant on the extension of fully capitalist relations has not yet occurred. 'The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third-World culture and society'.<sup>46</sup> For Jameson, Latin America is a special case in these terms, because indirect economic penetration and control occurred sooner there than in Africa or much of Asia because of the earlier destruction of the Spanish and Portuguese imperial systems. However, the nominal independence of Cuba did not end the struggle for national autonomy, and Jameson might have chosen any number of post-1959 Cuban novels which chart the Revolution through individual lives. Jameson's argument is shot through with problems – not just in the chimerical status of 'Third-World Literature' but also in failure to clarify the role of the reader in allegorization.<sup>47</sup> One of Jameson's main examples is drawn from West Africa: Sembene Ousmane's morality tale of corruption and greed, in which a member of the post-colonial elite is cursed with *xala* (impotence) by those whom he has dispossessed, so that he is unable to consummate his marriage to a young third wife. But Jameson is on safe ground detecting political allegory in Ousmane's work; given that writer's consistently radical views his allegory

<sup>46</sup> 'Third-World literature in the era of multi-national capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88, 69.

<sup>47</sup> Jameson ties the public/private dichotomy solely to the penetration of capitalism, thus ignoring the highly variable readings that might be proposed of this dichotomy in non-capitalist societies. This is an element of a more general problem that the term Third-World tends to conflate societies with radically different histories and cultures (see Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's rhetoric of otherness and the "national allegory"', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–8). Moreover, Jameson does not question the status of the allegory. Although his argument appears to appeal to economic context rather than to the writer's intention, we have noted that Ousmane's allegory is self-conscious. Finally, Jameson's account of the context of allegory appears to stress economic to the exclusion of political factors, and national to the exclusion of all other identities. These criticisms do not imply that we find the attempt to generalize misplaced.

is not likely to be unwitting. However, the broader thesis requires all life stories to be allegorical, whatever the intentions of the writer; for this to be so we must suppose a readership determined to read national allegory into biographical forms.

The differences between the allegories proposed by Clifford and Jameson are instructive: Clifford's reader of ethnography (a type of collective biography) finds a lost past; Jameson's reader of a life story (a fictional biography) discovers a contested present. However, such allegories cannot be essential features of texts but only likelihoods in the relation between writers and readers. In a sense, all critical readings are allegorical. Under what circumstances are readers most likely to discover particular allegories, whether or not the writer intended them? Pastoral allegory presumes an ironic relation between the text and the world; national allegory assumes an isomorphism between the individual life and a national destiny. Representations of Afro-Cuban culture have not been readable as pastoral allegories: slavery was no enchanted or dignified lost world. Writers of African origin must reach back to a period before the African diaspora to find a pastoral scene. However, allegorical identification between the lives of Afro-Cuban individuals and the contemporary Cuban state have been explicitly political statements. Representations of Afro-Cuban culture by Cubans have been instrumental and not just allegorical in relation to the political and cultural affairs of the state.

African imaginative writers, like their Cuban counterparts before them, have increasingly appropriated the historical events and political circumstances of their new national states in order to address contemporary problems. With reference to Afro-Cuban historical themes in Cuban writing, one could point again to the work of Carpentier (*El reino de este mundo*, 1949; *Concierto barroco*, 1974), or to *Caniquí* (1936) – Antonio Ramos's novel of a runaway slave, or to *Los guerrilleros negros* (1975) in which César Leante draws upon Ortiz's work in portraying slave revolts as the forerunners of a distinctive black contribution to the Cuban revolution and as a symbol of the ongoing struggle for freedom. In West Africa, Ayi Kwei Armah has revalued the fall of the Asante Empire in the light of negritude; Kole Omotoso and Chinua Achebe have both subjected recent Nigerian history to dramatization; Wole Soyinka has used the autobiography of his early years to examine the influence of Christianity, the mobilization of women's resistance and his own formation as a writer.<sup>48</sup> Each has used

<sup>48</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *The healers* (London: Heinemann, 1978); Tom McCaskie, 'Armah's *The healers* and Asante history', Symposium on 'Images of Africa: the Depiction of Pre-Colonial Africa in Creative Literature' (University of Stirling, 1989); Kole Omotoso, *Just before dawn* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1988); Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (London: Heinemann, 1987); Wole Soyinka, *Aké: the years of childhood* (London: Rex Collings, 1981); on this work see also Obi Maduakor, 'Autobiography as literature: the case of Wole Soyinka's childhood memories', *Présence Africaine*, 137–8 (1986), 227–40, and James Gibbs, 'Biography into autobiography: Wole Soyinka and the relatives who inhabit "Aké"', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26 (1988), 517–48.

elements of biography, history, ethnography and the conventions of the social realist novel to engage the culture and politics of his time in debate.

However, not all works have been read as *national* political allegories. Camara Laye's *The radiance of the king* (1954), in which the indigent white Clarence searches for the redeeming African boy king, has been read as a parable of the inversion of racial and colonial values in an idiom of disconcertingly hallucinatory realism.<sup>49</sup> Nigerian women novelists, such as Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali, are not usually considered as national allegorists. The volume that Emecheta ironically entitles *The joys of motherhood* (London, 1979) has been read to determine whether its author is a feminist or a womanist or in some sense a specifically African woman. Alkali's novella, *The stillborn* (1984), has attracted particular attention by virtue of being written by an educated, northern Nigerian, Muslim woman and has elicited description as a 'social vision'.<sup>50</sup>

Syncretic narrative forms dealing with individual lives are always susceptible to being read as political allegories. Often they are written as such. However, it seems dangerous to propose the individual will most easily be read as the nation in allegorical form. Third World countries, like any others, have their divisions of race, ethnicity, class, generation and gender and an individual life may be about any or all of these. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, many Cuban writers were willing to put their art to the service of actively promoting an integrated culture in which only the fact of being Cuban was significant. As Soyinka has recently argued, writers are among Africa's culture producers, but their political allegories have not always found favour with the African governments that exile or imprison so many of them. African writers, Soyinka goes on to argue, suffer the fate of being twice bitten by denials of African history: first by the colonizing powers and then with equal vigour by independent African governments who dye 'their cloth a deeper indigo than the bereaved'.<sup>51</sup> The African writer cannot always control whether or how he will be read as an allegorist of the political.

<sup>49</sup> Roger and Arlette Chemain, 'Pour une lecture politique de *Le regard du roi* de Camara Laye', *Présence Africaine*, 11 (198), 154–68.

<sup>50</sup> Rolf Solberg, 'The woman of Black Africa, Buchi Emecheta: the woman's voice in the new Nigerian novel' *English Studies*, 3 (1983), 247–61; Marie Umeh, 'African women in transition in the novels of Buchi Emecheta', *Présence Africaine*, 116 (1980), 190–201; Donna J. Haraway, 'Reading Buchi Emecheta: contests for "women's experience" in women's studies', reprinted in *Simians, cyborgs, and women* (London: Free Association Books, 1991); Cynthia Ward, 'What they told Buchi Emecheta: oral subjectivity and the joys of "otherhood"', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, Special Topic: African and African American Literature*, 105 (1990), 83–97. Zaynab Alkali, *The stillborn* (Harlow: Longman, 1984); Rotimi Johnson, 'The social vision of Zaynab Alkali', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 22 (1988), 649–55.

<sup>51</sup> Wole Soyinka, 'Twice bitten: the fate of Africa's culture producers', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, Special Topic: African and African American Literature*, 105 (1990), 110–20, 116. Roger G. Thomas, 'Exile, dictatorship and the creative writer in Africa: a selective annotated bibliography', *Third World Quarterly*, 9 (1987), 271–96.

To conclude briefly with the new European and American ethnographies of Africa, the formal convergence between these and African novels transpires, in any other terms, to be illusory. The new works retain and even accentuate many features of older ethnographic writing: experience not only underwrites the text but becomes its subject, imaginative localization largely remains within traditional ethnographic terms. However, the literature that the new ethnographers want to write, to judge by their rhetoric, already exists. As long ago as 1962, Cyprian Ekwensi replied on behalf of the Society of Nigerian Authors to the charge that African novelists were insufficiently individualistic by reasserting the social and collective functions of art in African societies.<sup>52</sup> The biographical, historical and experiential sources of African creative literature are so richly articulated in West African imaginative writing that European evocations of African otherness might seem superfluous. Perhaps the proponents of dialogic engagements have simply not been listening.

<sup>52</sup> Austin J. Shelton, 'Behaviour and cultural value in West African stories: literary sources for the study of culture contact', *Africa*, 34 (1964), 353-59.

