

УДК 316.32:572

RE-BRANDING OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN AFRICA: AN ATTEMPT IN RE-POSITIONING THE DISCIPLINE

Emeka Okezie (Kharkiv)

Language supervisor: Guseva A.G.

Summary: The article presents an attempt to reposition anthropology as a discipline in Africa. The outline of the history of the problem is provided. Growing needs and aspirations of students backed by academic ignorance towards the discipline are suggested as driving factors for its urgent re-branding.

Key words: anthropology, re-positioning.

Анотація: У статті пропонується спроба репозиціонування антропології як учбової дисципліни у Африці. Надано огляд історії проблеми. Суттєвими факторами ребрендингу антропології слугують потреби та уподобання студентів на тлі академічної неосвіченості стосовно дисципліни.

Ключові слова: антропологія, репозиціонування.

Аннотация: В статье предлагается попытка репозиционирования антропологии как учебной дисциплины в Африке. Представлен обзор истории проблемы. Существенными факторами для ребрендинга антропологии выступают растущие потребности и устремления студентов на фоне академической неосведомленности в отношении дисциплины.

Ключевые слова: антропология, репозиционирование.

1. ANTHROPOLOGY IN AFRICA

The teaching and researching of anthropology as a social science discipline in Africa has been affected both by the increasing rot in the public universities and it inherited stigma as a colonial discipline. The other problem arising from an underdeveloped economy, which equates the relevance of any discipline to its market value or ability to generate jobs for those who studied anthropology, has had a negative impact on the growth of anthropology as a profession. In this case, an average university student in Africa especially Nigeria cannot easily relate anthropology to an overarching need for employment on graduation. Thus, anthropology is often characterized as a discipline without employment or job prospects in the African economy.

But equally bestriding the above issues is the well known old dilemma of anthropology as a colonial discipline. In this case, the emergence and prominence of anthropology has been linked strongly to the exigencies of the colonial enterprise. Precisely, anthropology emerged clearly in the colonial contact period as an intellectual exercise to legitimize and/or justify colonialism. It is in this light that anthropology has been perceived as an effort to endorse the subsumed superiority of the colonizers in Africa. Therefore, while anthropology is, without doubt, beyond this parochial stamp, it was all the same utilized in furthering the imperial aims of the colonial powers. Hence, given the general abuse and misuse of anthropology by colonialism, there can be no argument about the need for a constant re-interrogation of the discipline. The obvious hijack and misuse of the discipline by the colonial enterprise in Africa [1; 2; 3; 6] makes such re-examination of the history, content and relevance of social anthropology worthwhile.

Therefore, the imperative of re-branding and marketing of the anthropological discipline to the public cannot be over-emphasized at this juncture in an attempt to reposition the discipline in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Anthropology needs marketing. In order for anthropology to be relevant to the public, the public needs to understand what it is that anthropologists do. The public in general is not aware that anthropology's holistic nature and comparative perspective give it a unique approach to social analysis and its method of participant observation fieldwork can be applied towards solving everyday problems. Anthropologists need to analyze their target audience, design a marketing strategy that addresses the needs of their constituents, and repackage its image so that it sells.

It has long been the view that the role of anthropology is to observe and to record culture leaving the practical application of its findings up to policy-makers and those in other disciplines. The problem is that those outside anthropology for the most part do not read their academic journals or attend their conferences. They write primarily for other anthropologists and the language they use in writing and speaking reflects the fact. By addressing solely themselves they have become isolated as a discipline and have let others who are more experienced and comfortable talking with the public, such as journalists, travel writers and those in

cultural studies, become the spokespersons supplying the public's need for "cultural" information.

It is also true that most African anthropologists prefer ivory-towerism and that is why the field seems arid in these aspects. Anthropology requires hard work and the humility of moving in to meet the ordinary people.

As a matter of fact, the first generation of anthropologists in Africa were either colonial officers or those strongly linked to the colonizing powers. This fact gave anthropology the unenviable toga of quasi scientific narration aimed at legitimizing the colonial enterprise. Without doubt, the initial anthropology of Africa was stimulated equally by curiosity and the need to understand the way of life of the indigenous Africans in order to facilitate the colonial project. Therefore, in Nigeria, as in the case in some other parts of Africa, anthropology represented the white man's efforts to understand the "strange" culture and social practices of Africans who were then labeled either primitive or barbaric. The plight of anthropology in this regard has not been helped by the glaring inability of African anthropologists to revive the discipline.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE PUBLIC

The pertinent question before us is what the potential markets for anthropology knowledge need that they are not currently providing? Anthropology like other institutions in the contemporary world is in an intensely competitive market. It is impossible for anthropology to compete for money, time and resources when the public doesn't understand what they do and they don't understand the audience for anthropology. Funding for research is shrinking. Those who apply for research grants not only need to demonstrate that they have a worthwhile project, but also that as anthropologists they have the best framework for carrying out research and delivering it in a format that is useful. It is getting harder to get research published. The book publishing industry, driven by a need to supply the large chains, is becoming more and more focused on the authors and subjects with proven popular appeal. Anthropologists need to find ways of presenting their research to audiences that might benefit from the knowledge. It must also learn how to communicate with people from all walks of life.

Anthropologists must demonstrate a relevancy to today's issues and communicate in a format that accommodates the public's need for clear, concise information presented in an engaging and entertaining format. Anthropologists must come out of academic towers and talk with the people outside the discipline and outside the university. They must strive to make their ideas more accessible to the public by speaking to, writing for, and interacting with their communities, without which the future of anthropology in Africa will remain gloomy.

3. REPOSITIONING ANTHROPOLOGY IN AFRICA

There is an urgent necessity for anthropology to speak in a language that the general public can adequately fathom, in order to save the future of the discipline in Africa and must, especially in Nigeria, where all interest is shifting towards sciences at the detriment of arts and social sciences disciplines. Nevertheless, there is a growing exigency for African anthropologists to come out of the colonial framework of researching in anthropology and offer authentic and

different discourse rather than remaining content with a submission to the disciplinary borders drawn by Euro-American scholars. This in the view of Prah creates a situation where the intellectuals of anthropology in Africa have established no tradition worth the name but are content to operate as simply 'local correspondents' for western intellectuals [6]. In view of this, there is a need for the development of authentic African anthropology which would do away with the study of African peoples and societies as 'distanced others'. In other words, a more in-depth and integrative approach is required.

In consonance with the foregoing, the bid to give anthropology a fitting status in both academic and development discourse in Africa calls for some systematic advocacy. There is, thus, a need for advocacy by anthropologists as a way of raising the popularity of the discipline and the establishment of a strategic plan which focuses on institutional strengthening of universities to teach anthropology, a dynamic curriculum, research and dissemination channels, and professional values and bonding.

Finally, Ezeh observed that African neocolonial lot is not going to improve if we taboo anthropology [4]. It will surely worsen by so doing. Why? Because we may have abandoned a very vital tool in the onerous task of trying to understand man. Whatever it is that we want from postcolonial Africans, indeed from any people, we cannot get it unless we know their true autochthonous social behaviour, knowledge which only anthropology can give.

References

1. Akiwowo A. The Role of the Social Scientists in Africa / A. Akiwowo // The International Social Sciences Journal. Paris: Unesco, 1976. – Vol.28. – No. 1, – P. 198-201.
2. Anugwom E.E. Behind the Clouds: Teaching and Researching Anthropology in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: CODESRIA Bulletin / E. E. Anugwom. – №14. – 2007. – P. 43-64.
3. Diop M.C. Report on CODESRIA's WORKSHOP on Anthropology / M.C. Diop // Africa: Past, Present and New Visions. CODESRIA Bulletin. – № 3. – 1992. – P. 1–5.
4. Ezeh P.J. A Survey of Socio-Anthropological Thoughts / P. J. Ezeh // Enugu: Echrissi & Co. – 2000.
5. Otite O. Rediscovering Anthropology as an Instrument of Development in Africa / O. Otite // Keynote Address presented at the 1997 Conference of the Pan-African Association of Anthropologists. – Legon: University of Ghana, 1997.
6. Prah K.P. Anthropology in Africa: Past, Present and New Visions. CODESRIA Bulletin. – № 3. – 1992. – P. 11–15.