

INAUGURAL LECTURE¹

CHALLENGES FOR SOUTH AFRICAN ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

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Mr Vice Chancellor Saleem Badat

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Deans of faculties other than Humanities

Colleagues in the Rhodes Community, both current and emeriti

Colleagues in my department, both current and emeritus

Students

Family members – my wife Diana, my step-son Richard, my daughter Zoe, my mother Dilys, my brother-in-law David, and my new sister-in-law, Agata

Members of the Grahamstown community not already covered ...

Introduction

Towards the end of one's career, there's a powerful inclination to look backwards instead of forwards. You become more interested in histories, biographies and obituaries; you reflect on your own life and career. It's not inevitable, and it can be resisted. Marshall McLuhan was well into his 50s – an obscure Canadian Eng Lit academic – when he had his vision of the nature and future of the media and anticipated a 'global village' that the Internet has turned into a reality since his death in 1980 (McLuhan and Powers 1989) – but more on that in due course.

Cui Bono?

At first I gave into the tendency to look back. Initially, for this lecture, I thought to analyse my own career in South Africa in terms of who benefited most from it: South African anthropology and my students ... or me. I would call the lecture '*Cui Bono?*' But then I realised, with Latin tags on the way out, younger colleagues and students in the audience might think I was referring to a traditional Australian greeting (Coo-ee) and an Irish philanthropist pop singer (Bono). The title would be totally mystifying to many until I explained that it meant 'to whom the good' – in other words, who benefits? But there were other objections to this project besides the title. Even the most

¹ Presented live on 7 October at Rhodes University and accompanied by copious PowerPoint illustrations that are not included in this version.

postmodern of reflexive anthropologists would balk at making such a self-assessment – it was not for me to judge. Anyway, I already knew the answer:

My career in South Africa has not been impeded by political harassments, imprisonment or conscription. I did make some small negligible contributions to the ‘struggle’ through writing or drawing, and I did some community service, on campus or off in the same way. At a critical stage I assisted with the process that eventually produced a national staff association, now called NTESU.

The only price I have paid for these distractions from serious publishing at a critical stage of my career was deservedly slow promotion. I continue to contribute to the community mainly through membership of the older of Grahamstown’s two very active Rotary clubs. It’s all I have time for, but nothing to boast about.

In sum, I’ve enjoyed what my long-term colleague and Grahamstown’s Citizen of the Year (another Rotary initiative) Michael Whisson likes to call ‘sheltered employment’ – his typically ironic way of reminding us of how privileged we academics are, doing what we enjoy, in pleasant surroundings, among intelligent colleagues and the cream of our youth, with plenty of flexi-time and opportunities for subsidized travel. And now I have benefited again by being promoted to full professor without sufficiently earning my keep through subsidies on academic outputs. Whatever I might have given back through teaching and administration the net is in my favour, and I am grateful beyond words.

Future of Anthropology?

Abandoning the *Cui Bono* framework left me without a topic. Then something happened that jogged me back to the future. I was strolling across the quad which links (or separates) the Anthropology department from the Sociology department when a wag of that department hailed me. “Hey Robin, I see your Inaugural’s coming up. Are you going to talk about the future of anthropology? That shouldn’t take long!”

One of the great things about being an anthropologist, especially in South Africa, is that you readily understand kind of behaviour. It’s an example of a ‘joking relationship’ first identified by one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology, Arnold Radcliffe-Brown, in a famous essay ‘The Mother’s Brother in South Africa’ (1924, also 1940). Joking relationships occur between relatives, such as the mother’s brother and sister’s son in patrilineal societies that lie outside the line of authority and inheritance. The wag might not have been so cheeky to his Head of Department, but he was quite happy to have a go at me!

Nonetheless, I was provoked. Dammit, I thought, I’ll show him and anyone else who doubt it that anthropology *does* have a future in this country and I’ll do it in such a way that my natural tendency at this stage to look back at my discipline, my career and even world history can also be indulged. I’ll do a McLuhan and consider the future, but in relation to the past – my career, anthropology, anthropology in South Africa, and the field that I’ve been increasingly involved with the last couple of years: Information and Communications Technologies for Development or ICT4D in Geek-speak.

Digital Divide

Ever since the World Wide Web began in 1994, agencies interested in development have been trying to address ‘the digital divide’ – the gap between those who have access to ICTs and those who don’t whether in Africa or other developing countries – or interrogate the motivations of those agencies that prioritise such action (Wade 2002; Conradie et al. 2003; Thompson 2004; Anderson 2005; Langmia 2006). The divide is very real – and growing. According to a digest of UN statistics in the latest issue of *The Rotarian*, organ of Rotary International which is trying to address this problem through 189 computer projects in 56 countries: Internet access in the US is eight times greater than in the entire continent of Africa; London has more internet users than all of Pakistan. This is not surprising because the cost of accessing the internet is twice as high in poor countries than in rich ones, and the benefits even to those who have access in poor countries are not that great. Internet services are influenced by the fact that 80% of provider profits are made by serving the most affluent 20% of users.

Anthropologists are increasingly interested in TLCs, but not only or necessarily in their roles in development. There is also a growing literature on how people in the Third World who have not necessarily had access, and especially private access, to computers and via these the Internet, or even landline telephones, have leap-frogged to cell phone use and via these to Internet use (Horst and Miller 2006; Tenhunen 2008; De Bruijn et al. 2009). The interest here is as much in how new technology is appropriated locally, drawing on local culture, and how the technology in turn contributes to changes in culture and society, as on development *per se*.

Siyakhula Living Lab

The Vice-Chancellor has just mentioned my association with computer science and information systems adepts at Rhodes and Fort Hare; that I found them a deep rural research site where they have been very busy providing computer access (Dalvit et al. 2007). Recently this project has been included in an international effort to create ‘Living Labs’ – a longer- term and more holistic approach to the complexities of extending ICT and the necessary training and facilities to poor rural communities. Solving the technological problems of delivering especially computer-based ICTs and the training of local people associated with these takes longer than could have been envisaged at the outset and taking the technology beyond such relatively sophisticated and motivated constituencies as, say, school teachers and senior students, is also a gradual process. It also requires good knowledge of local conditions and local people. It is this recognition that gave rise to the ‘Living Lab’ movement and within it, the Siyakhula Living Lab among connected communities on the Wild Coast, former Transkei.

By its nature as well as design, the Living Lab programme is future-orientated, and the other participants – academics, postgrads and representatives of their funders – are generally much younger than me. Being with this dynamic bunch encourages me to think more positively about rural development and the future even if I am also drawn to reflect on the past. Interesting as the Siyakhula Living Lab research is, I’m not going to go into much detail about the more technical aspects of this technology-orientated project because

- a) I still don’t fully understand the science of it and probably never will

- b) I don't want to steal the thunder of another who might want to give an Inaugural on this topic next year.

However, I shall be returning to social and economic aspects of the research with which I have been directly involved towards the end of this lecture.

Deconstructing My Title – *Challenges For South African Anthropology In The 3rd Millennium*

As one does when provoked, especially by one in a 'joking relationship,' I may have over-reacted with my title ... In place of cautiously extending present trends into a near future five or perhaps 10 year hence, as any responsible academic might, I appear to be imitating religious zealots or crazies like Adolf Hitler with the millennium reference. What is he trying to do, you might ask? Claim that anthropology will endure for 1000 years, even in South Africa? Destroy such reputation as he might have, taking with him the credibility of his department and the committee that promoted him?

Well of course I'm not going to look at challenges for anthropology in our country over the *entire* 3rd Millennium! So why do I introduce the millennium concept into the lecture at all? Why does the provocation of a colleague and my involvement with those who are trying to bridge the 'digital divide' in South Africa make me think in terms of millennia at all?

Comparing Millennia

It's a rather lateral and far-fetched thought, but it occurred to me that there are certain correspondences between society at the turn of the 2nd Millennium and society now, at the beginning of the 3rd Millennium. If I recall my 'arb credit' in Mediaeval history at Durham University long ago correctly, the scarce resources that made enviable careers and a good standard of living possible around 1000AD – besides extensive landed estates – were being able to read and write, and a knowledge of Latin. Latin was still the great European lingua franca and marker of the well-educated (Bloch 1965: 75-78). If you had those advantages, even if you only owned property in common as a Benedictine monk, a decent living could be yours. If you lacked literacy and Latin it was OK so long as you had land – and many Feudal lords got along fine without either; but if you lacked Latin *and* literacy *and* you were landless, your life could be 'nasty, brutish and short.'

Of course life is in so many respects very different around the 3rd Millennium, and has been going that way for at least half of the time between 1000 and 2000AD. The shift to a World System, the rise of mercantilism, including slavery, and then industrial capitalism and colonialism followed by neo-liberalist supremacy under conditions of globalisation and information technology have transformed all human societies – especially those on the diminishing global periphery – beyond recognition (Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989; Wolf 1982).

However, there *is* a way in which the period we are living through resembles that of a thousand years ago: Substitute English for Latin and computer literacy for standard literacy and you will see what I mean. Just as you couldn't get anywhere in Europe then without Latin – and, one might add, in the Muslim empire without classical Arabic – and without being able to read and write in either case – so in the contemporary period, roughly a thousand years later, people all over a much wider world feel they need to know English – and to be computer literate – if they are to get on in life.

Here are two out of many possible ‘proofs’ of the current ascendancy of English:

1. Friends and children of friends here in Grahamstown and ex-students I keep up with are all making good money in the Middle and Far East meeting the demand for English – and there are countless others I don’t know directly doing the same.
2. According to a former Honours student’s research report, parents in the outer black suburbs of Queenstown are transporting their toddlers great distances so they can attend private English-medium pre-schools. Why do the parents go to such trouble and expense? So their children will grow up fluent in English, get good jobs overseas and send money home, or so they told my student.

Of course there’s a downside to the dominance of English, as there was to the dominance of Latin at the turn of the 2nd Millenium. Marc Bloch, the great French historian of Feudalism , acknowledged the great advantage of Latin’s pan-European hegemony: Latin providing the intellectuals of the age with an international medium of communication. (It would certainly have made it easier for the University at Bologna in Italy to give rise to Oxford and Cambridge in England, since everyone involved could easily intercommunicate in Latin.) But Bloch also pointed out a rather profound disadvantage of Latin’s hegemony: being no one’s first language in Europe yet indispensable for most legal and educational purposes, fluency and subtlety of communication was impeded. People who were highly articulate in their home languages couldn’t necessarily find the right word or idiom in Latin. They had to resort to approximations if their thoughts and intentions. Bloch thought this factor – the dominance of Latin and the incessant movement between the two planes of language that it necessitated – from the vernacular to Latin and back again – was one of the factors in the absence of mental precision, which he found to be a characteristic of the Feudal period (Bloch 1965:78).

What about the new literacy – computer literacy –, including exploiting the capabilities of one’s cell phone to the full? Everyone in this room, especially the younger ones, knows how essential mastery of these technologies has become. And those on the other side of the digital divide are beginning to clamour for access – computer labs in township and rural schools, affordable connectivity, the \$100 lap-top and so on. Could this, like Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, expedite the rediscovery of vernaculars and restore ‘mental precision’ to a country like ours? This is not my field, but it is close to the interests of Lorenzo Dalvit, digital educationalist, who has revolutionised the language lab at Rhodes and works closely with the Siyakhula Living Lab. He might agree with me that computers can assist in developing vernacular languages. Later, improved translation software may obviate the necessity of English as a common language and lead thus to a renaissance in vernaculars, much as happened in Europe in the Renaissance (with a capital ‘R’) and even earlier in some countries, such as England. If ‘mental imprecision’ induced by the constant movement between vernacular languages and English is also retarding development in contemporary South Africa, then a renaissance in vernacular use here in the future, just as in Europe from the 15th Century, may help to integrate and develop our ‘rainbow nation.’

By making this comparison between the turn of this millennium and the last one, I am not predicting crusades for the next few decades – though relations between fundamentalist Muslims and conservative Christians have been on a war-footing for some years already. Nor am I claiming that

the Black Death is imminent – though Hiv-AIDs and the new strains of flu might make you wonder about that too. I am rather wondering whether we should be encouraging the spread of English in the interests of greater global integration in the age of the Internet, or against it to avoid mental and socio-cultural confusion among speakers of other languages, especially in developing countries. On the mode of the 2nd Millenium, the restoration and development of vernacular languages along with the spread of computer literacy might, after all, lead to religio-political re-alignments as in the Reformation and beyond these to a new kind of Enlightenment. Those great movements were unfortunately accompanied by major civil and international conflicts. Given the current rate of time-space compression that globalisation is generating, the socio-political and cultural correlates of the rise to dominance of a single, global lingua franca and new form of literacy will come faster than their 2nd Millennium counterparts, whatever they turn out to be.

I find speculations of this kind interesting, not least because they can give direction and co-ordination to development policies, especially those linked to ICT, of which the SLL project is a part. But the anthropologist should really stick to his last – the more micro levels of society. History really doesn't 'repeat itself.' And it is probably anyway best left to historians.

Role of Anthropology

So what role should anthropology have in this development state of South Africa as we proceed into the 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium? What are the challenges my discipline faces, including those of assisting colleagues in other disciplines, even other faculties, such as my collaborators in the SLL project? I can't address these questions yet because I realise I've taken it for granted thus far that you all know what anthropology is and that you know much or anything about anthropology in South Africa, even at Rhodes.

Anthropology in General

For those who don't know, there's no shame in that. Anthropology is not a school subject; it's generally only taught at tertiary level; it has different facets; and it has changed a lot since the end of colonialism. Small wonder that it is not well understood by the general public and even colleagues in other fields!

The stereotypes popularised in cartoons reflect the confusion and retardation of the popular understanding of anthropology. Sometimes we are portrayed like palaeontologists and archaeologists; other times like explorers of the colonial era. It's all very confusing. I can't claim perfect knowledge of anthropology in general or in South Africa, because both are changing so rapidly, and it's very hard to be a head of department, do your teaching and research, *and* keep up to date with what is happening in your discipline in the world and even in your country. But here goes.

Anthropos means 'human being' in Greek; so anthropology is the study of humans in the most general sense. The Americans identify four fields in Anthropology – physical or biological, cultural, social and linguistic. The British have split it into two sub-disciplines: biological anthropology and social anthropology.

Anthropology in South Africa

In South Africa the English-medium universities adopted social anthropology from usually British founders of their departments. (Radcliffe-Brown, mentioned earlier, was incidentally instrumental in launching anthropology at both UCT and Rhodes.) These universities tended to be quite comfortable with structural-functionalism, the dominant paradigm in British anthropology until the 1960s. They were not influenced by the processual approach and action theory which were already challenging structural functionalism in Europe. They left biological anthropology to anatomists in medical schools, such as Raymond Dart, Robert Broom and Philip Tobias. This suited the Calvinist Afrikaner ascendancy, which was quite fundamentalist and thus rather edgy about evolution.

In the Afrikaans-medium universities, *volkekunde* was preferred to British anthropology, unsurprisingly. A product of the German romantic tradition, *volkekunde* became controversial when it was seen as justifying apartheid, especially by the liberals and Marxists in the social anthropology paradigm (Hammond-Tooke 1997; Sharp, J. 1981).

However, South African anthropology was more complicated than that, even before African nationalism began to influence emerging black anthropologists and Neo-Marxism became the paradigm of choice for all opponents of apartheid from the 1970s. Both Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking anthropologists had a strong tradition of empirical research mostly in rural areas and concerning black African communities. White anthropologists in South Africa followed the traditions of their discipline everywhere by favouring studies of *indigenous* societies – usually the racial as well as the cultural ‘other.’ Until recently, black anthropologists studied indigenous societies, usually their own, and no one spotted the double-standard. The doyen of black South African anthropologists, the late Archie Mafeje has justified the black tendency toward auto-anthropology by attacking the focus on ‘the other’ in anthropology, seeing it as essentially colonial (1998); yet he has also endorsed the empirical tradition, even criticising African Marxists for not doing their own fieldwork and de-emphasizing cultural difference (1980).

My view, articulated in a recent paper (Palmer 2007), is that discouraging indigenous anthropologists in the global South from engaging the racial, ethnic or cultural ‘other’ denies them a crucial element of the anthropological experience, and risks their marginalisation – unless all anthropologists the world over shift to auto-anthropology or ‘anthropology at home’ studying only their own societies and forsaking ‘the other.’

However, this doesn’t appear to be happening on a large scale. In my department, at any rate, the *opposite* trend is discernible, as black colleagues who might have essayed auto-anthropology at earlier stages of the career now confront ‘the other’ in their research programmes. I think of Rose, the Mauritian Creole raised in Malawi, studying Arabized Africans in Zanzibar; of Joy, the South African creole, encountering Congolese migrants on her turf and at home in the DRC.

South African Anthropology has a relatively long and significant history, producing many whose contribution to the discipline has been more global than local. One thinks of the émigrés Max Gluckman, Isaac Schapera, Meyer Fortes, Archie Mafeje and more recently, John and Jean Comaroff and Deborah James; and Philip Mayer, Monica Wilson and David Hammond-Tooke who largely

remained in the country, for most of their careers at least, but were influential internationally nonetheless.

Personal Experience of SA Anthropology

When I joined UCT in 1974, apartheid and isolation had been exacerbating the unusual and not necessarily constructive aspects of anthropology in South Africa. Adam Kuper, another expatriate South African anthropologist, has provided this overview (1987:4):

The Anthropology (and historiography) of Southern Africa is dominated by locally based scholars. The political-intellectual traditions ... provide the primary points of reference. Arguments are normally formulated in terms of one or other of these traditions, and, as often as not, they are judged in political terms as much as by academic criteria. Any contribution from outside must pass through the filter of this local discourse before it is absorbed. This can be disconcerting for an outsider ... The problem is in part that the theoretical fashions which may rule in Europe or America at any particular time can be quite different from those that might be current in South Africa. By the same token, local theoretical debates can sometimes seem very exotic to the outsider. And, crucially, the political issues are naturally more urgent for those on the spot ... (1987: 4).

As you know from the V-C's introduction, I came back to South Africa as just such an outsider in mid-1974, having spent all my later formative years in the UK. It was quite an adjustment, especially as sports and academic boycotts and later sanctions made South Africans even more inward-looking, divided and politicised – on and off campus.

The kind of anthropology and research interest I brought from Britain made some sort of sense to Michael Whisson, my first HoD as a British expatriate himself. But it must have seemed very alien and irrelevant to others, within and beyond anthropology. Although I was publishing successfully in my field in my early career as you have heard (Palmer 1977, 1980, 1984), and recently had another invitation to revisit that material (2007b)) I badly wanted to belong in South Africa, and so as soon as I graduated (in 1981) I made myself available for local projects. As you have also heard, these have come my way successively and in various forms ever since (Palmer 1984b, 1997a,b,c, 2002; Shackleton et al. 2007; Everingham et al. 2007).

If I had been a sensible academic and dedicated careerist I would have continued in the field I began with, Italian migrants and migrant communities, perhaps broadening it out to include Italians and other southern Europeans in South Africa. Outputs come more easily if like the cobbler in the proverb, you 'stick to your last.' But then I would never have ventured beyond Cape Town and Grahamstown, except for tourism purposes and student field trips. I would never have experienced at first hand places like Mthatha, Bisho, Keiskammahoek, Gwabeneni and Gcinisa in the former Ciskei, and the landscape and people of Dwes-Cwebe in the former Transkei. I would have been like so many of my white friends and colleagues; I would not have the slightest inkling of how the black majority live in this country and region, as people not as statistics or racialised abstractions such as 'the community.'

SA Anthropology Since the End of Apartheid

But I digress. I haven't yet dealt with what happened to South African anthropology after the break-up of the political log-jam and the coming of democracy. The main development, in my experience, was the *toenadering* that saw the English-speakers and Afrikaans-speakers unite in a common professional association, to which the Afrikaners even brought a valuable dowry – their journal. *Volkekunde* was on the wane and this was acknowledged by the appointment of an English-speaker, John Sharp, to Chair first the reorganised department at Stellenbosch, and next the department at Pretoria, which he has subsequently transformed in racial and gender terms. Transformation is happening to so many of the departments that remain in South Africa. I add this qualifier because, sadly, anthropology has declined or been incorporated with other disciplines in some universities – not this one, fortunately, where it has retained its independence and goes from strength to strength.

Post-colonial rejection and the 'Crisis of representation'

South African anthropology has also skirted or survived two inter-linked crises that might have caused its total extinction: its association with colonialism and the challenge by postmodernists. Because South Africa has such a different history from other former colonies in Africa, there hasn't been the rejection of anthropology as 'the handmaiden of colonialism' by incoming post-colonial regimes of the 1950s and 1960s that led to the closure of anthropology departments and caused so many African anthropologists to rebrand themselves as sociologists (Asad 1973). This movement was a spent force by the time it became South Africa's turn to internally decolonise. Since the 1990s anthropology has been making a come-back in the rest of Africa. In 2007 the University of Kinshasa even bestowed an Honorary Doctorate on the white anthropologist and Belgian national, René Devisch, who had devoted much of his life to understanding rural and urban Congolese societies (Codesria Bulletin 2008).

It probably also helped that some anthropologists had actively opposed apartheid, and one, David Webster, had paid the ultimate price. Anthropology had also already begun to reform itself at the global level. The euphemistically-named 'crisis of representation' of the 1980s had challenged the Enlightenment notion of a scientific approach to the study of society, underscored by the belief that objectivity was attainable. In its place, postmodernists, including poststructuralists, were climbing on the bandwagon that interpretive anthropologists under the influence of Clifford Geertz had already rolled out. Nietzschean philosophy was back in vogue, Antonio Gramsci's prison diaries (1971) were dusted off, Michel Foucault's tomes (1977, 1980) were massively popular and influential, and Pierre Bourdieu, anthropologist turned sociologist, enjoyed a spectacular rise in popularity (1980).

At the same time, and especially in a South Africa imbued with libertarian and democratic sentiments, there was support for feminist anthropology (see e.g. Moore 1988); for participatory approaches to research; and for the proposition that identity is constructed, contingent and most likely hybrid (see e.g. Apparadurai 1996; Wilmsen and McAllister 1996). Rapprochements with other disciplines and interdisciplinary team research became more common, and the lifting of the academic boycott permitted new international partnerships, collaborations with other Africans and their anthropology associations, and new sources of funding.

It hasn't all been plain-sailing: the old division between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking is being replaced with occasional attempts at exclusion on racial grounds; some potential leaders in the discipline have continued to emigrate without the excuse of disgust for apartheid or persecution. Although the need for research and applied anthropology in the rural areas and townships is as great as ever it was, I worry about the decline in interest in rural fieldwork among especially younger anthropologists and postgraduates that seems to have accompanied postmodernism.

Recently a former colleague sent me an article by Jonny Steinberg, an investigative journalist doing a lot of work that anthropologists should be doing. The article refers to conditions in the south of the Cape Peninsula, where three very different communities live side by side: Prosperous, mostly white Fish Hoek; mostly coloured and struggling Ocean View; and the predominantly Xhosa-speaking shack settlement of Masiphumelele, with almost universal unemployment, deep poverty and a very high murder rate. Steinberg discusses the startling findings of a group of UCT **sociologists**. "Over a 15-month period, they have been spending many a day and evening with children and adolescents in all three of these communities: at school, at home, and in discussion groups. They gather thousands of pages of notes recording young people's thoughts about school, about parents, about the future, about dating and sex" he reports, and then goes on to discuss their startling findings.

In thanking my correspondent for this piece, I asked where the anthropologists were in all this (there are three anthropology departments in the Western Cape – at UCT, UWC and Stellenbosch). I suspected I already knew the answer, and he confirmed it with this reply:

Anthro students have been so bombarded the past 10 years with the James Clifford teachings of postmodern reflexivity and racialised identity politics – which their teachers too easily conflate with critical thinking – that they no longer move from the campus but rather leave fieldwork for sociologists and journalists, only to take them apart, and ritually so, in the narrow confines of departmental seminar rooms every Tuesday.

And we're not even talking about rural areas – the South Peninsula, for heaven's sake! I well remember Michael Whisson doing fieldwork there in the 1970s, camping in a farm outbuilding on the edge of Ocean View because the apartheid state wouldn't let him stay in this 'coloured township,' yet determined to do direct research nonetheless.

Challenges for the Future

A challenge for South African anthropology as we move deeper into the 3rd Millennium seems to be how to maintain its tradition of empirical research, which has helped to define it since even before it became an acknowledged discipline (Hammond-Tooke 1997) – how not to surrender that role to sociologists and tireless, intelligent and articulate investigative journalists such as Steinberg.

An even more important challenge than the maintenance of identity and role (though the two are connected) is that of making a meaningful contribution to the development of our faltering development state, South Africa. In this case, the challenges are too numerous, the possible responses from anthropology too multi-fold for me to deal with them comprehensively in the time

remaining to me (you'll be relieved to hear), so I shall merely return to the challenges that I am most familiar with, those of the rural Eastern Cape, including my latest concern with the introduction of TLCs on the Wild Coast.

Land Reform and Rural Development

One of the major challenges, which persists in my research area and elsewhere is that of land reform, including making successful land claims work for local development in the post-settlement period. Here I must pay tribute to my colleague, Chris de Wet, who simply by doing his anthropological thing thoroughly and conscientiously has made an enormous difference to a poor community in the former Ciskei. I was able to witness the difference at first hand when, together, we took a bunch of international students in the course of our Winter School to Keiskammahoek district in July. Chris's meticulous documentation of the betterment removals of the 1960s in Chatha village was crucial evidence in its successful land claim (de Wet 1995). The large settlement that resulted is being invested in restoring its irrigation system; in providing much needed community and educational infrastructure; and in developing tourism in the area. The students also visited Keiskammahoek town and St Matthews, which I had studied in the 1980s and 1990s (Palmer 1977a), now sorry wrecks in many ways. When we asked the students which they considered more developed: the town which had benefitted from huge investments in the Bantustan period, or Chatha village; they mostly opted for the village! This is a huge compliment to the partnership between Chris and Ashley Westaway of the Border Rural Committee in securing recognition for land claims in betterment areas, which were not initially included in the restitution legislation – and a major indictment of the management of small towns in the former homelands since 1994.

My involvement in research at Dwesa-Cwebe on the Wild Coast, another land claim case, has not had such positive outcomes as that at Chatha (Palmer et al. 2002). Although Dwesa-Cwebe was, like Chatha, an ultimately successful land claim case, the claim was already on-going when we were there and did not depend on our data. My main collaborators were Herman Timmermans of the ISER and Derick Fay, then a Ph.D. student from the United States. Our contributions were, successively, to prepare the community for co-management of the reserve (Palmer et al. 1997b) and for the post-settlement ecotourism development (Palmer et al. 2002), among other more academic concerns including documenting the history of land-reserve issues and establishing the nexus between poverty, local livelihoods and natural resource dependency.

For those unfamiliar with the situation, endemic and seemingly intractable poverty on the Wild Coast is linked to the history of the area as part of a deliberately underdeveloped labour reserve. Land reforms (restitution of the nature reserves in the case of Dwesa-Cwebe) that were part of the preparation for development under the failed Wild Coast SDI have been frozen since the passing of the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 that is supposed to sort out the vexed relationship between the new democratic and traditional systems of land administration. Until that is sorted out, the Development Plan that was supposed to be implemented after the land settlement remains suspended. In the absence of development, certain long-term socio-economic trends persist at the local level: The traditional three-generation extended family residential unit continues to fragment, most frequently into female-headed households composed largely (but not always) of adult women

and minors of both sexes. The middle-generation is absent, either employed or work-seeking in town, accompanied by their children or those of relatives finishing off high school there. With a severely depleted local labour force, field cultivation has long since given way to enlarged gardens next to the homestead that can be more easily managed by women and children.

Surveys of two villages at opposite ends of Dwesa-Cwebe in 1998 and in a follow-up survey in 2003-4 revealed the economic stagnation of the area. Household cash incomes were tiny, with few households having more than R375 a month. Any increases in the availability of casual employment through poverty relief projects were largely negated by retrenchments of breadwinners in town and in some cases their return, to depend on already welfare dependant family-members at home. Continuing reliance on 'free' local natural resources caused many to regret the deal whereby the integrity of the nature reserve was guaranteed by the settlement in return for ecotourism-related revenues and employment opportunities that had not materialised (Shackleton et al. 2007).

Comparison of these findings with sample surveys of the *entire* Wild Coast in 1997 and 2000 reveals that Dwesa-Cwebe is not exceptional in its socio-economic status, especially after the Wild Coast SDI failed (Mitchell 2003: 46–62; Kepe 2001).

As only the second successful land claim on a protected area, and the first in the Eastern Cape, Dwesa-Cwebe has attracted considerable attention from other researchers. In 2004 another researcher with an interest in land issues (and American), Mark Everingham visited the area, guided by a local man, Kuzile Juza, with a long involvement in the local struggle. The next year Mark invited me to visit him at the University of Wisconsin and assist with an international symposium on land issues. Kuzile also attended. He made a positive impression on conference co-hosts, the Oneida Nation, who later offered the equivalent of R35 million for investment in the Haven Hotel, which had passed to the community along with the reserve in the land settlement. However, responsible agencies of the Eastern Cape government did not respond to this offer for reasons that remain obscure, and after months of a lack of response to our mediations, the Oneida withdrew their offer.

These various experiences highlight the challenges of developing the former Bantustans of our region, which are profound, perhaps intractable. The failure of the SDI; the disorganisation of the new provincial government; the inclusion of the area into new structures at local and regional level; and uncertainties at national level about land tenure on communal land – all of this has retarded the implementation of the Development Plan for Dwesa-Cwebe. The only tangible improvements have been water-reticulation throughout the area, some new schools and a few poverty-relief schemes providing some temporary employment and assistance. Now the most urgent need is for decent roads and universal electrification, and I am pleased to tell you that electrification, advancing slowly in an easterly direction along the coast, has just reached Mpume. Mpume is the westernmost village of Dwesa-Cwebe which was chosen for the original site of the Rhodes-Fort Hare ICT project, now the Siyakhula Living Lab, my current research involvement. Mpume and the villages connected to it by wi-fi connection now have electricity beyond the schools and can look forward to staying up later in the evenings, charging their cell phones themselves, perhaps buying a PC or laptop, starting an Internet café if they have the space ... The Living Lab is poised to take a great leap forward.

Involvement with the Siyakhula Living Lab

Until the project became a Living Lab from 2007, it was more of a technological exercise – installing the satellite dish at Mpume, recruiting and equipping other schools to connect to Mpume, and training teachers, learners and anyone else interested in the use and maintenance of the equipment. (The challenge of this is not to be under-estimated, and it continues as a huge part of the project.) With the change of status to a Living Lab came certain additional expectations from the funders, especially COFISA – the Co-operation Framework on Innovation Systems between Finland and South Africa (www.cofisa.org.za). One of these was that a baseline study or audit of the community involved should be taken, so that the researchers will no more about the history, demography and socio-economic profile of the community, as well as its prior experience of ICTs. As the only social scientist on the team, I suddenly became more central to the research.

We lacked the resources of funding and personnel to cover all of the mushrooming communities that have been incorporated in the Siyakhula Living Lab, so we restricted our inquiry to the original village of Mpume. While , as mentioned, I had conducted direct research in two ‘sample’ villages in Dwesa-Cwebe (Ntubeni, Cwebe) and had data via a collaborator on a third (Hobeni) hadn’t worked in Mpume before, and this time, even though I tried to recruit some in the interim, there were no social scientists available to help with the survey besides me. So we relied on the good offices of the IT and Information Systems postgraduate students in the project – Caroline Pade, Mitchell Kavhai, and Sibukele Gumbo – and the assistance of community members.

At the community meeting we called to seek permission for the survey, we thought the people of Mpume would welcome our plan for a sample survey that would only disturb a proportion of the households, but to our surprise they insisted that we visit every homestead! So that is what we did, covering 80 households. In addition, we organised focus groups drawn from five significant social categories in Mpume: the teachers, crafters, unemployed, elderly and youth. Together, the groups spanned the age-range present and reflected both the gender bias in favour of females and class distinctions, such as they are in this deep rural area. The conversations the researchers had with these groups contributed a qualitative dimension to the research – a corrective to the household survey results if this were needed; and an insight into local quality of life and issues from the perspective of five different categories of subjectivities.

Another five years on, and the findings from Mpume were very similar to those of our previous surveys: there was no substantive change in the demographic and socio-economic situation that I summarised above. Local demographics were skewed in terms of age (relatively few young and mature adults) and gender (relatively many mature and elderly women). Only casual employment, besides civil service appointments such as teachers and nurses, and few casual opportunities. Declining capacity for cultivation. Very high dependency on pensions and child grants. Because local demographics were a reflection of out-migration, we included absent members of households in our survey and found, predictably, that their characteristics were the observe of those at home – a higher proportion of males, in the active age-groups, with relatively high rates of employment and low welfare dependency; but still not in a position to make major economic contributions to rural relatives by means of remittances (Pade et al. 2009: ch. 4).

In terms of the qualitative findings: The crafters, who were all middle-aged women, found more to like about living in Mpume than other categories. The teachers worried about the difficulties of delivering good education under local conditions; the unemployed worried about ever finding work; the elderly mourned the passing of agriculture; the youth were disaffected. All mentioned an increased slide into dysfunction – apathy, teenage pregnancy, petty crime, vandalism and problem drinking – that threatens the community values that continue to be quite strong in Mpume and that local women especially hold so dear (Pade et al. 2009: ch. 5).

The residents of Mpume claimed to have no experience of computers proper before the project began. Yet increasing numbers of local people had small computers that they didn't identify as such – cell phones! Nearly a quarter of locals have their own cell phones, and a further quarter and more report that they have access to one, via a neighbour or friend. They use their cells mainly for social purposes, with few reporting other uses. Although some people own 3G phones, they are not aware of the services beyond calling and texting that these phones can provide, such as access to government information, banking services, and Internet access. Affordability is a key factor in any extension of cell phone use. Most people can only afford to purchase airtime once a month. Without electricity at home,² residents charge their phones in other places or ways such as in schools, the local shops, home set-ups where solar power is available, or when they are in the town of Willowvale. This isn't a free service – the going rate is R3 a charge. So most people continue to communicate directly in the village or with neighbouring villagers. They mostly reserve their air-time for communicating further afield, especially with relatives and friends have migrated. These also send air-time to family members, especially parents (Pade et al. 2009: ch. 6). Air time is becoming an alternative currency, another kind of remittance in the non-territorial community of Mpume. Now there's a topic for further research in economic anthropology!

With cell phone use so restricted by affordability issues, and for other reasons, of course, there is growing local interest in using the computers that the project has been installing in the schools that are connected to each other and to the dish at Mpume by wireless technology. However, only half the population believe the computers are also for general use, and the training that is being offered for free by the research team and already-trained local teachers is open to all (Pade et al. 2009: ch. 6).

Computers can now be used locally to communicate with friends and access such things as news, sports, government services, and educational research (Wikipedia and Google). As electricity reaches homesteads and shops, private use and internet cafes in shops – entrepreneurship opportunities – become theoretically possible, but such extension will be limited in the cash-deprived local economy. The project has been working on this problem, with a scheme to provide a sub-regional service called *Village Connection* so that local people can call each other either free of charge or at very low cost. But thus far no service provider has agreed to under-write the service despite strenuous attempts by project leaders and others to promote it.

Affordability is also relative, of course. Using the Internet to access services such as banking and government business can represent a saving on travel costs to Willowvale or Idutywa to access such

² At the time of the survey – electricity was introduced in late 2009.

services directly. Travel costs even more than airtime or data bundles. Handsome Mpofu, a member of the research team, has developed software that will allow shopkeepers to extend credit direct from customer's accounts via their cell phones, thereby saving them from having to draw money physically from banks in town.

The more informed residents acknowledge that computer literacy and Internet access can assist them in various ways. Connectivity can enrich both the education and the leisure time of bored local youth, perhaps leading them to make more constructive use of their time than the more pathological pursuits that emerged from the focus group disclosures and improving their qualifications and abilities for future employment. Even if their destiny is not to remain in the area, connectivity can help them to make contacts both nationally and internationally that will enhance their prospects of employment and enrich their lives (see Burrell 2009 for a comparative instance of this).

ICTs can certainly assist in teaching and the running of the schools. Teachers know this and they are coming from all around to receive basic computer literacy training to enable them to connect and set up a computer and to use the Edubuntu open source platform, Open Office (Writer, Calc, and Presentation), Internet, and e-mail.

Training by the Trained

Such training, known as Pre-ACE also prepares them for a ACE in ICT, an Honours-level teaching qualification available at universities. The first generation – those who have already received basic training locally – are now passing on their knowledge to others beyond the children in the schools. Thus far the main demand is from teachers and other professionals from far and wide. Mpume and the other connected villages could become centres for training in the entire Mbashe municipal area and beyond. People attending courses need to be housed and fed. This could be a source of stimulation for a local hospitality industry – an alternative to the somewhat stalled tourism development of present times. And the advent of electrification is going to make all kinds of hospitality initiative so much easier to develop in the area – especially if Internet booking can be added to local repertoires.

While some of the ICT nestlings down at Dwesa are already learning to fly – and teaching others to do so – there's still a long way to go. Fortunately, now that the project has the status of a 'Living Lab' and longer term funding, Rhodes and Fort Hare are in it for the long haul. How much further into the 3rd Millennium these players and their funders will be able to continue to support and extend connectivity and training on the Wild Coast is of course unknowable. Perhaps government will take over the supply and training functions of the academics and funders and make a huge success of rural development using ICTs? There is growing interest in the project on the part of the regional Department of Education. However, experience to date in the broad field of rural development in the Eastern Cape suggests that non-governmental involvement is generally the most effective, and that Cofisa-Rhodes-Fort Hare should continue with its win-win formula of empowering *both* postgraduates and local people in the Siyakhula Living Lab.

Conclusion

We can now return to the linked questions I raised at the beginning of this lecture: Might the conditions at this stage of the 3rd Millennium mimic those at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium? Is the global dominance of English, like that of Latin before, facilitating the integration of a – now global – society? Or is the need for non-native speakers to continually translate back and forth actually holding affected societies back in the way that Bloch thought Latin's dominance was doing in Mediaeval Europe? Could the new form of literacy, which is computer literacy, address that problem, just as Gutenberg's innovation did in his time? And if so, is it not in the interests of especially the developing countries to have every citizen computer literate – where cell phones with their increasing versatility are also, of course, a kind of computer?

I don't know the answers to these questions, and I am not even sure if they are valid, but when academics don't know they generate hypotheses and then test them in some sort of laboratory, including 'the field.' If the problem is not just a technical one but also a human one, then a 'living lab' is the appropriate place to do the research. To the extent that exploring the nexuses between computer-literacy, language, behaviour and social change is an interdisciplinary and even Inter-Faculty project, the Siyakhula Living Lab down on the Wild Coast could become a major focus of research involving all kinds of researchers from Rhodes, Fort Hare – and why not also include Walter Sisulu University? Unfortunately, as I have indicated, South African anthropologists have not generally been interested in technological innovations and how these are received (including rejected) by target communities. Nor is there much interest in the anthropology of education, though a few Honours students in my department have successively chosen this field for their personal research projects and revealed its potential and importance. As far as I know there is only one linguistic anthropologist still in academe in this country. These skills would be useful in addition to more general anthropological research skills both in assisting with Living Lab-type research and in addressing the problems associated with a continuing shift away from vernacular languages at ever-younger ages and what to do about it. At least Rhodes has Russell Kaschula, Head of African Languages the School of Languages, with a strong commitment to the vernacular and its preservation and promotion,

An obvious vehicle for the sort of research that will be needed into the future is the latest initiative of my department – the Inter-Faculty Development Master's programme that has been championed by Chris de Wet and is to be introduced from next year. The Inter-Faculty Master's will professionalise relationships like the rather *ad hoc* one that I, as an anthropologist, have with the IT and IS people who are also involved in the Siyakhula Living Lab. Graduates of the Inter-Faculty Master's programme from natural science or engineering background will have become used to working with anthropologists and other social scientists – and *vice-versa*. The result will be a more holistic approach to development, perhaps less dogged by failure than development projects hitherto.

The un-knowable at the start of this new enterprise, or course, is whether young anthropologists – or indeed anyone – will present themselves for this form of interdisciplinary training with its emphasis on field training. There are worrying signs of a growing resistance to field research in this country that seems to me to be a correlate of postmodernism. Curricula may need to be re-

orientated back towards empiricism – inspiring students with positive experiences of fieldwork and making them yearn for their chance ‘in the field,’ just as my generation and earlier ones did. Fieldwork need not involve encounters with ‘the other’ – anthropology ‘at home’ is now respectable – but in post-colonial societies in which the academic enterprise is so frequently to combat Eurocentric attitudes and colonial hangovers in the ordering of relations, it is important to become familiar with frames of reference other than your own. Living labs are of course good places to send rookie field researchers. They may not enjoy the lack of modern conveniences in the accommodation at places like Mpume, but at least they would be able to check email, facebook and twitter and download music in the field!

If the Inter-Faculty Development Master’s proves popular and begins to attract anthropologists and others with an interest in ICTs and living lab research, some bright young graduate of the programme might take my place in the SiyaKhula Living Lab after I retire (in three years’ time), and others might get involved even sooner than that. I was always too old to understand the technical side, and I’m sure the team would prefer the involvement of someone closer to them in age. Besides, a younger person would have more time to witness the unfolding of events at the SiyaKhula Living Lab and projects like it. He or she would be in a position to judge whether my concerns for the future turn out to be prescient, like those of Marshall McLuhan, or simply the ramblings of a new old professor beyond his sell-by date.

Personally, even though the only language I speak fluently is English, and I occasionally use Latin tags, I look forward to technology-mediated preservation and renaissance of all of our official languages; of a ‘reformation’ that will see the South become more independent of the North and maybe even generate a ‘protestant ethic’ of hard work, innovation and entrepreneurship after the last vestiges of colonialism have disappeared. I would like to see our rural areas develop themselves, maybe with a little help from sympathetic other indigenous groups like the Oneida of Wisconsin rather than being held in the thrall of perlemoen racketeers and corrupt syndicates. I hope I have also shown that there is a role for ‘living labs’ in all this; especially programmes that will train geeks and social scientists to work together and to appreciate the value of firsthand experience. Because the greatest challenge of them all is to reduce the vast gap between the haves and have-nots in this country, which was also a feature of Feudalism in Europe. ICT4D has the potential to reduce at least the *digital* divide. If this challenge is acknowledged and measures for redress urgently implemented, then maybe we will avoid in our region the prolonged conflicts that characterised the post-Feudal period in Europe and were then exported into the World System.

Following in the tradition of this year’s inaugurals, I would like to acknowledge certain individuals who have supported me in various ways in the course of my life and career, or have made a special effort to be here tonight.

I also include those who for various reasons, would have come if it had been possible or feasible. Collectively, I would also like to thank all of you who have come to this lecture, because your very presence is a mark of support.

As in the movies, I mention the cast in order of appearance:

- My mother Dilys Palmer, who is here tonight in her 90th year. She and my father (slide) were always pillars of strength, especially during the shaky start to my career.
- My only sibling Lynn, now in Vancouver, whose presence in Cape Town brought me out for the visit that led to the job offer at UCT, and who later took me in when a ridiculous ménage à trois was collapsing. She with her husband and charming young daughters as they gave me the space to write my first publication.
- Michael Whisson, my first and second HoD and close friend of 35 years' standing, who has also been, along with his wife Adrienne, supportive beyond his obligations as boss and colleague.
- My first wife Anne, who had to endure much of the long period of my thesis writing and early fieldwork absences while rearing my two sons far away from her mother and sister.
- Chris de Wet, colleague, co-researcher and friend for 30 years and a crucial champion of my promotion.
- My second wife Diana, who has had to put up with, in addition to my absences, my long hours at work or study time at home. It must be hard to be married to an academic if you aren't one yourself. Yet she supports, never complains and has made me happy beyond words.
- My step-son Richard, who has come all the way from Cape Town to support me on this occasion. I am sure my other step-son Paul and my surviving son Joe would also be here if they could be, but Paul has recently emigrated to Australia, and Joe has so many tutorials and lectures at this time that he can't get away. My other son, Rory is keeping my father, Raymond company.
- My daughter Zoë, who has fortunately returned from her gap-trip to New Zealand in time and is able to attend. She has helped to keep me happy and productive, especially after Rory and Joe left with Anne for Cape Town in 1992.
- My other immediate colleagues, also in order of acquaintance – Penny Bernard, Rose Boswell, Joy Owen and Silvana Barbali. I couldn't hope for a better team. And I would like also to thank our secretary, Des Bekker, for coming back to the department and restoring to it her special magic that makes my job so much easier.

Basta [it is finished]!

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