

Summaries of articles

Notes on the Connections Between Social Space and Symbolic System

M. AUGÉ

The problem of the connections between natural and social space, social and individual space, individual and natural space can only be artificially broken down or analyzed in Africa. It is precisely the overlapping of these dimensions that we here endeavor to bring to light by means of the fundamental realities of the soil, the dwelling, and the human body. These realities are the tangible expression of the symbolic systems which the social life of individuals necessarily brings together from the very moment they are set into motion.

Space as an Historical and Structural Key: the Example of the Bamoum Country (Cameroun)

Cl. TARDITS

The task of historical reconstitution which continues in Africa must make use of all possible forms of information. Apart from the oral traditions, often rich but almost always placing before us certain presumptions, it is appropriate to make the greatest possible use of an analysis of the implantation into the soil of the constituent elements of society. Such analyses are customary in anthropology, rarely however going beyond the scale of the villages though they could be extended to the entire political sphere of a society. Investigations conducted in Bamoum country, beginning with the positions of all the descendance groups, have permitted the reconstitution of all the processes of the society's development since the foundation of the kingdom, probably in the 16th century, until the first decades of the 20th century, and brought to the surface the homological relations between the state and the subordinate entities which are not discernible at the level of discourse. History and structure are thus illuminated by means of concrete data which, moreover, may be used either to invalidate or substantiate the oral traditions.

The Appropriation of Political Space and Control

CL.-H. PERROT

A reading of the history of populating, that is to say, of the process of the creation of new human settlements and their variations, is a privileged means for bringing out the unequal forces of political units or hereditary groups in competition. In the case studied here of the Anyi-ndenye space on the south east of the Ivory Coast these variations are of two orders. In effect, if the appropriation of space by means of the creation of new villages develops unequally over time (phases of expansion are succeeded by periods of stagnation and, indeed, regression), it is also the case that over the course of the same period certain parts of the territory in question were rapidly populated while in others the number of villages did not progress. To these contrasts ecological factors are, by the way, not unrelated.

It is as if a strategy of the occupation of space was set into motion by political units or hereditary groups with unequal success. This strategy skilfully used, and sometimes turned around, the possibilities offered by the system of kinship. The "winners" in this competition were those who had the resources of this political strategy, in other words put, those who accumulate men in sufficient number to maintain their expansion.

Man, the Forests, and the Past in Africa

J. VANSINA

This contribution examines the relationship throughout recorded history of the rainforest environment in Africa and humanity, to conclude that at each stage the "environment" is a sum of biotopes mainly produced by mankind. Tropical forests are "humanized" environments; humanized through a dialectical interaction between extremely complex biotopes and several millenia of human activity following the introduction of farming in these areas.

***The Empire of the Bacwezi:
the Construction of an Imaginary Geopolitics***

J.-P. CHRÉTIEN

According to contemporary historiography the kingdoms of the great lakes of East Africa are to be derived from the former empire of the Kitara governed by the Bacwezi dynasty. A careful rereading of the written, oral, and archeological sources enables this interpretation to be called into question. The legendary cycle of the Bacwezi, kept up notably by the initiation cult of the Kunbandwa which was common to all the cultures of the region, gave rise to the ethnic and racial hypotheses of the first European explorers and was utilized by local ruling groups who felt themselves victims of the political transformations of the 19th century (particularly in the former State of the Bunyoro). The archeological proofs equally appear as questionable extrapolations. The history of this "empire" is that of the construction of an imaginary political space within an African culture.

Ethiopian Political Space

J. BUREAU

Two institutions symbolized the Ethiopian state and guarantee its perpetuity until the 20th century: the Crown of the Salomonians and the orthodox Monophysite Church. The Prince, emulating Constantine, extended his domain under the banner of

the Christ. And in the tumultuous wake of his armies, the clergy bore the sacred message, preaching, converting, building. Eventually, the empire would be that archipelago of parishes and monasteries placed under the protection of the Christian Prince. But it is not yet a nation state. To conquer was a duty but that logic of expansion has its reverse side. The Church had not at first the means to accomplish its mission, to convert and to civilize. The Empire also had to reckon with another force. Islam in the 20th century laid claim to as many followers as Christianity and with them numerous populations which although politically subject remained culturally unconquerable: in particular, the Oromo representing a third if not half of the Ethiopian population.

At the close of the 19th century expansion came to an end. The Emperor Menelik extended his territory but under colonial pressure accepted the delimitation of this domain within the bounds of internationally recognized frontiers: a phenomenon without precedent on the African continent. The international recognition of the Ethiopian frontiers thus completed the imperial mission but in no way leads to the unification of the people. Ethiopia remains divided into "one hundred nations" and it was necessary to await 1985 for the project of a federation of the Republics of Ethiopia, as in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution.

Space and the Metaphors of Intensity of West African Islam

D. ROBINSON

The historical literature on Islam in West Africa has emphasized a progressive islamization beginning with commercial minorities, passing to ruling minorities and finally concluding with rural majorities led by reform-minded scholars in an approximation of Islamic orthodoxy. Until the eighteenth century it is more accurate to stress a variety of forms of accommodation between Islamic and local forces. After this period confrontations between proponents of militant and accommodationist forms of Islam produce a general Islamic space and culture in which conflicts and competition among states, lineages and classes are shaped in Islamic terms.

The Explanations of the Crisis of Marxist Inspiration

S.-CH. KOLM

Several authors have attempted to provide explanations of the present crisis with arguments which find their original inspiration in Marx's viewpoint. Marx had two theories of economic crises. The "realisation crises" have been incorporated in Keynesian theory. More basic for this author was the "tendency law of the fall of the rate of profit", and some observers argue that such a fall has been observed since 1965 or 1968. However, historically profits have fluctuated without showing long run trend. Worst, there are many possible definitions of "the" profit rate, and at each time some fall and some others go up. The relevant one depends upon the theory of the effect of the profit rate on variables like unemployment, global income, etc. Marx has no such theory, and the several ones presented in this contemporary literature all suffer from a number of elementary logical flaws such as: firms behavior is rarely to "recover" a given profit rate; if some of their actions (increase prices, decrease real wages) raise their profits, why did they not do it before the rate's fall? such actions do not explain by themselves unemployment nor inflation; the discarding of less profitable equipment does not increase profit; all these actions cannot transform a progressive rate's fall into an abrupt crisis like that of 1974; the reasonings are presented as if capitalists were a single firm and they omit competition (which was not the case of Marx); that is in parti-

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cular the case for the so called "fordism" theory. Furthermore the eventual fall of the rate of profit is not explained, and Marx's own explanations are full of defects (he saw six of them). Ethical motivations are not well served if they are allowed to subvert elementary logics in the arguments.

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