

Notes on contributors

University, Amsterdam. Already as a student she developed an expertise on Marxist theory, in combination with active political practice. At the African Studies Centre, Leiden, she did library research into women and rural development in Africa. She taught at the Free University, Amsterdam, and now lives in Paris.

Simon Simonse (1943) read social and cultural anthropology at the University of Utrecht and the University of Leiden. He held research appointments at the Municipal University of Amsterdam and the African Studies Centre, Leiden. He taught at a teacher-training college, Zaïre, at Makerere University, Uganda, and at a College for Social Work, Amsterdam. He is now Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, University of Juba, Sudan.

Preface

Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere

This book is the result of a long series of meetings of the Amsterdam Work-group for Marxist Anthropology, extending over a number of years. Early in 1977, the initiative to found this work-group was taken by Simon Simonse. His interest in French Marxism had already resulted in his Dutch translation of Nikos Poulantzas's *Les Classes sociales devant le capitalisme aujourd'hui*, published with Socialistiese Uitgeverij Nijmegen (SUN). The members of the work-group were recruited according to the time-honoured anthropological principle of the personal network. The first to be enlisted were Wim van Binsbergen, Klaas de Jonge and Jos van der Klei; at the time, all were attached to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, some fifty kilometres from Amsterdam, where all work-group members lived and where meetings invariably took place. Soon Johan van der Walle joined the work-group. He was then working on a Dutch translation, commissioned by SUN, of Emmanuel Terray's *Le Marxisme devant les sociétés primitives*; regrettably, this translation was never published. Finally, Reini Raatgever and Peter Geschiere joined the work-group; they were then in the process of discovering French Marxist anthropology in the context of a seminar led by Geschiere at the Free University, Amsterdam.

By 1977, the work of Meillassoux, Godelier, Rey, Terray and other French Marxist anthropologists had hardly met with any recognition in the Netherlands. For the members of our work-group, getting acquainted with the ideas of these anthropologists was a rewarding and thrilling experience. Often the discussions went on well into the small hours, and our enthusiasm increased as our glasses were emptied. From the outset our discussions were

focused on concrete matters: time and again the more general insights offered by the French School were tested in the light of our own field-work experiences — which basically meant Africa (except for van der Walle, whose research had been on the Dutch and German peasantry). Reini Raatgever had not yet herself done any field-work, but she more than made up for this by a profounder knowledge of the works of Marx and Althusser. In this way, she increasingly came to function as the Marxist conscience of our group. It became apparent that the French School had certainly not yet managed to propound a fully-fledged theoretical scheme. None the less, its general insights turned out to open up new and unexpected perspectives upon our own field-work materials. Moreover, we found that precisely the confrontation with our empirical data, collected from a different theoretical perspective, afforded all sorts of opportunities to criticize and further develop the French theories. In this respect the French School's body of ideas represented for us no less than a breakthrough in anthropological theory, as is clear from the publications of the members of our work-group since 1977, in this volume and elsewhere. In 1980 the work-group, in association with the African Studies Centre and the Free University, invited Claude Meillassoux to the Netherlands for a series of lectures. Similarly, in 1981 Terray came to Amsterdam and Leiden. Both occasions confirmed that the work of these anthropologists can lead to stimulating discussion — precisely because of the open, non-dogmatic character of its theorizing.

In the course of 1978 the group began to contemplate the idea of a collective volume to emerge from our group discussions. The first phases of this process of intellectual production passed fairly swiftly: the application of the French School's general ideas soon resulted in a number of interesting papers. But, as was to be expected, turning these papers into a collective volume was a much more time-consuming and arduous process. Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere were entrusted with the editorship. In their insistence on uniformity and precision of presentation, style and theorizing they proposed alterations which only after further group discussions — now of a pragmatic, rather than theoretical nature — led to the Dutch version of this book. It was published as *Oude produktiewijzen en binnendringend kapitalisme* by the Free University, Amsterdam, in association with the African Studies Centre, Leiden (1982) — the first volume in

Matthew Schoffeleers's new anthropological series. Each member of the work-group wrote his or her own contribution; however, the many successive versions of each chapter have been subjected to group discussions of such frequency and incisiveness that as far as general content is concerned, the book can only be regarded as a collective product of the work-group as a whole.

However, the present English version of this book differs substantially from the Dutch one. It was prepared when our work-group had virtually ceased to exist, its members having dispersed over Amsterdam, Leiden, Paris, Senegal, Southern Sudan and Maputo. For better or worse, this meant that for our editorial work we had to do without such guidance as the work-group discussions might have offered. Bonno Thoden van Velzen and Joel Kahn made helpful criticism of earlier drafts. Translation offered us the opportunity to correct such slight imperfections of style, terminology and bibliography as the original Dutch edition contained. Inclusion in the series of Monographs from the African Studies Centre meant that van der Walle's contribution on the articulation of modes of production in the history of the Dutch province of Drenthe had to be omitted. This has had the unfortunate effect that van der Walle is no longer manifestly present in this book, to which he contributed as participant in our work-group discussions. Likewise, van Binsbergen's chapter in the Dutch edition could not be included here: it has already been published as chapter 7 of his *Religious Change in Zambia*, in this same series of Monographs. However, his work on the ideological dimensions of the articulation of modes of production is here represented by an analysis of ethnicity in Western Zambia, first published in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (1981), and rewritten for the present book. New, in this edition, is also Wim van Binsbergen's and Peter Geschiere's chapter on anthropological field-work from the perspective of the French School. Originally prepared as a discussion paper in the context of Meillassoux's visit in 1980, this piece was extensively rewritten partly on the basis of work-group discussions and of Meillassoux's personal reaction. The Introduction, by Peter Geschiere and Reini Raatgever, was expanded, e.g. by a discussion of the reception of the French School's leading ideas in the Anglo-Saxon academic world. Considering the patchiness of this reception so far, it would appear as though, along with the application to a specific body of empirical data, the translation of French ideas for an English

audience constituted the main *raison d'être* of the present English edition.

Sheila Gogol Vuisje translated chapter 3, most of chapter 2, and (with Peter Geschiere) chapters 1 and 4; Wim van Binsbergen translated chapters 5 and 6, 7 (with Peter Geschiere) and 8 (with Don Bloch), and supervised the translation of the other chapters.

Neither the Dutch nor the English edition could have been accomplished but for the great material and moral support from the African Studies Centre, and notably its General Secretary, Gerrit Grootenhuis, (to whom we dedicate this book). Wilma Keijzer, Adriënné van Wijngaarden, Ria van Hal and Mieke Brouwer typed and retyped the successive versions with great accuracy and displayed the most incredible patience in the face of the editors' correction mania. Inevitably, translation and production of this book have taken a considerable amount of time; the contributions in it therefore reflect the international scholarly discussion up to 1982.

After the work-group members' present diaspora and current researches, they hope to resume their stormy and stimulating discussions within a few years' time. Meanwhile the present book is the provisional result of scholarly and friendly exchanges which over five years have taken place between academic petty-commodity producers. Aware of the pitfalls of exchange-value even in intellectual production, the authors have waived their royalties in a vain attempt to hang on to the use-value they hope their product possesses.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Emerging insights and issues in French Marxist anthropology

*Peter Geschiere and Reini Raatgever*¹

Current events and the relevance of current theories in Third World studies

In the social sciences theories seem always to lag behind current events. In the African continent, for instance, each new development seems to illustrate the inadequacy of the generally accepted insights of anthropologists, political scientists, economists or historians. Of course, it has become a commonplace to direct criticism of this nature to Parsonian modernization sociology, which prevailed in the field of African studies in the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast with the ambitious blueprints advanced by this type of sociology, the African states in their practical developments did not all tend to conform to modern — i.e. western — ideal types. In almost all the countries of Africa, within a few years after independence, democratic systems modelled on western examples made way for one-party systems or military dictatorships. And the relevance of a concept like nation-building to the understanding of, for instance, the complicated struggle between factions in the national politics of these countries has become increasingly questionable.

However, similar objections may even be raised with regard to the newer theories on imperialism, 'dependencia' and international centre-periphery relations — all of them concepts which came to play an important role in African studies since the late 1960s. It is becoming equally difficult to explain current developments in the African continent as a direct consequence of the interests of a few capitalist core countries. The view, for instance, of post-colonial governments as mere puppets of international capitalist interests