

Henry Clarke from Parkview Collegiate addresses the African Studies Conference at York, during the Black Experience in Toronto session. To his left is Atkinson professor Wilson Head.

From corporations crippling Kenya to foundering athletes, African Studies Conference stimulates thought, debate

Stories and photos by
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The casual observer of post-independence Africa is confronted with a kaleidoscopic image, a complex picture incorporating aspects of primitive tradition and modern technology and industry.

But the concepts "primitive" and "modern" are loaded words, and they carry with them a great deal of misunderstanding and ambiguity.

Perhaps an even more loaded and ethnocentric term is the concept of development and socio-economic change.

Development aid is usually considered, at least by those who give it, as a good thing. But few Canadians are actually aware of what economic aid means to developing countries, where the money and technical expertise go.

and what effect this material has on the reality of the Third World.

Stephen Langdon, from Carleton University, suggested in a paper on development in Kenya that multinational corporations actually generate an increase in poverty, despite the large sums of money they inject into Kenya's economy.

He said they do this by monopolizing, for example, soft drink and processed food industries, which allows them to establish consumption preferences in Kenya for commodities like Coca Cola and processed foods which the local entrepreneur cannot meet.

This blocks the development of local industries, and while it fosters symbiosis between the state and international sectors, Langdon believed that it hinders an integrated internal economy.

Joel Gregory and Victor Piché, both

demographers from the University of Montreal, held that the real nature of the problem facing Africa—specifically West Africa—is not population growth, as previous researchers have suggested, but rather underdevelopment.

"It is dangerous to characterize population growth as one of the major obstacles to development," Piché stressed. "It obscures the possibility that the real obstacle to development may be the existing hierarchy that perpetuates dependency and inequality."

He further recommended the re-evaluation and redefinition of concepts like "progress," "development" and "economic growth."

The classical definition of development carries with it the assumption of increased productivity and increased per capita income. Piché and Gregory

questioned this in their paper; they saw development in terms of participation by all the people, and echoed the findings of Stephen Langdon that growth and development are often mutually exclusive.

In most African countries today, economists have empirical evidence indicating considerable growth and modernization in Africa's economies. But as Piché indicated during his address, "This obscures the fact that modernization and growth work in favour of existing elites, and in most cases, in so far as the majority of people are concerned, may in fact have no relationship at all to development".

He pointed out that in West Africa, as elsewhere, the existing system of production, distribution and consumption is geared toward metropolitan centres and their large-scale industries.

Rather than devising programmes of fertility control through contraception, which only a small metropolitan elite would be inclined to accept, Piché and Gregory stressed the need for rural development and the increased study of rural-urban migration as a population phenomenon, and a lessening of emphasis on fertility reduction.

Canada's role in Southern Africa as a member of NATO came under considerable fire in a session of the conference on Canada and Southern Africa.

The Toronto committee for the liberation of Southern Africa TCLSAC, with John Saul as their spokesperson, charged that Canada's military role in the area, as a member of the NATO alliance, supports imperialism.

NATO's presence in Southern Africa has been "officially" explained as a necessary deterrent to a Soviet threat to the shipping routes around the cape. John Saxby, also with TCLSAC, indicated that the Soviet Union lacks the support capability for a large fleet in the Cape area.

He contended that NATO is really there to protect foreign investment in the area, and to ensure that Southern Africa remains within the international capitalistic community.

Event draws plaudits, pans

The fifth annual conference of the Canadian Associates of African Studies was held at York in the latter part of reading week, from February 19 to 22.

Reflecting the interdisciplinary approach being applied to the study of Africa, the conference touched on topics ranging from the rise of capitalism among Bushmen hunter-gatherers of Botswana in southern Africa, to Canada's involvement on the African continent in the form of development aid and economic planning and counselling.

The conference drew participants and observers from many disciplines and backgrounds. Close to 600

educators and diplomats from the U.S., Canada, Africa and Europe attended, and over 160 papers were presented.

Other sessions dealt with African Socialism, the Status of Women in Africa, Black Africans in Toronto, African Military Regimes and African Art and Literature.

Reaction to the conference was just as varied. One participant from the audience, during the session on Blacks in Toronto, described the proceedings as "a petty bourgeoisie conference".

However, the conference was applauded by most as the best forum for discussing issues affecting Africa today.

Dialogues exhibition of art displays pieces tied to ritual

The African Art exhibit, entitled Dialogues, is on display in the York Art Gallery until March 16.

The exhibit includes a variety of African sculptures from West, Central and South Africa, which now belong to various Toronto collections.

Michael Greenwood, curator of the York Art Gallery, said there has been little reaction from African conference participants.

While the display is classified by most collectors as an "art exhibit", some of the pieces are more closely related to specific rituals and ceremonies, with a closer kinship to religion and its expression than to "art" expression per se.

One visitor to the exhibit, commenting on the strong ritual significance of some of the pieces, said that they did not belong in private collections in Toronto. Much of their meaning and significance is lost as display pieces, she explained, adding that they more rightfully belong in their respective cultural contexts.

Panel considers race problems in Toronto, criticizes the lack of community involvement

Perhaps the most popular session of the conference was the one dealing with "the Black experience" in Toronto. Stedman lecture hall D overflowed into the hallways with the crush of people trying to attend. Also in attendance were about a dozen plainclothes police although their effectiveness was questionable. Discussion between the audience and the panel was lively and sometimes heated, but things never got out of hand.

One of the panelists was Charles Roach, chairman of the Toronto committee on racism, who discussed the Canadian government's green paper on immigration policy. Roach criticized the green paper for being "obsessed with race" and he described it as "a rigged, half-baked study written in very difficult language to endorse a certain reaction from the Canadian populace."

NO DISTINCTION

One of the green paper's more subtle ambiguities is the lack of distinction made between ethnic and national groups. As an example, Roach indicated the report's grouping of Negroes and West Indians in the same category by race and its description of them as "people with novel and distinctive features."

Roach stated, "We do not need a debate on immigration. The green paper is designed to deflect public attention away from the real issues and causes of the shortage of jobs, poor housing and the economic situation. It is cruel to suggest that newcomers are stealing the jobs."

Roach further suggested that selection of immigrants is very much influenced by the racial and financial background of the applicant.

CLARKE SPEAKS

Also present on the panel was high school teacher Henry Clarke from Parkview Collegiate who discussed the problems of Black youth in Toronto. Clarke stressed the fact that the biggest problems for Blacks in high schools is a basic failure of communication—between teachers and Black students and between Black students and the rest of the student body.

"The result is that too many kids are suffering," said Clarke.

Clarke talked about the stigma that is attached to vocational schools like Parkview and the idea that they are for slow learners. School officials in the past have misinterpreted poor performance by some Black students as an indication that academic goals were not high priorities for these students.

NO OPPORTUNITIES

"Some of the students are counselled to get into sports or music but there are not that many opportunities for Blacks in Canadian sports because, except for hockey, athletics in Canada are low-geared," Clarke said.

Clarke also spoke of the frustration many Black athletes have in some Toronto schools. "There is no doubt that some Blacks are the best athletes in some schools but they quit in frustration and go to community schools, not to get a higher education, but to play basketball. After a few years they have nothing left," he said.

George Brown from the Ontario commission on human rights was on the panel and he traced the failure of communication that Clarke mentioned

to a lack of community involvement and comprehension of issues.

Mr. Brown stressed that the O.C.H.R. was mandated in 1962 to handle individual complaints and that is has no power to implement change. "Change has to come from the people, from the communities involved. Without community involvement, the O.C.H.R. cannot function properly," he said.

He cited the U.S. example of the civil rights movement of the 1960's. "The community broke down the doors by raising issues involving policy decisions and the provision of community services. The commission here in Ontario handles individual complaints. This does not remove the responsibility of the community to make demands and strive for the changes," said Brown.

In light of the situation in some of Toronto's high schools, Brown emphasized that the communities must press for change in school policy towards minority students. He pointed out, however, that in certain instances the racist policies within the schools originate, not in the schools, but in the communities themselves.



The head and shoulders of a Luvale area woven costume figure with facial mask, cord and wood. Life size. R.O.M. collection.

Reporter nabbed

An Excalibur reporter caused a mild flurry of excitement in last week's African studies conference during the panel on Canada and South Africa presented by the Toronto committee for the liberation of the South African colonies (TCLSAC).

While TCLSAC member John Saul was expounding on Liberals and Liberation, detailing the hazards which Canadian foreign aid presents to developing nations, the reporter raised his camera and began taking pictures.

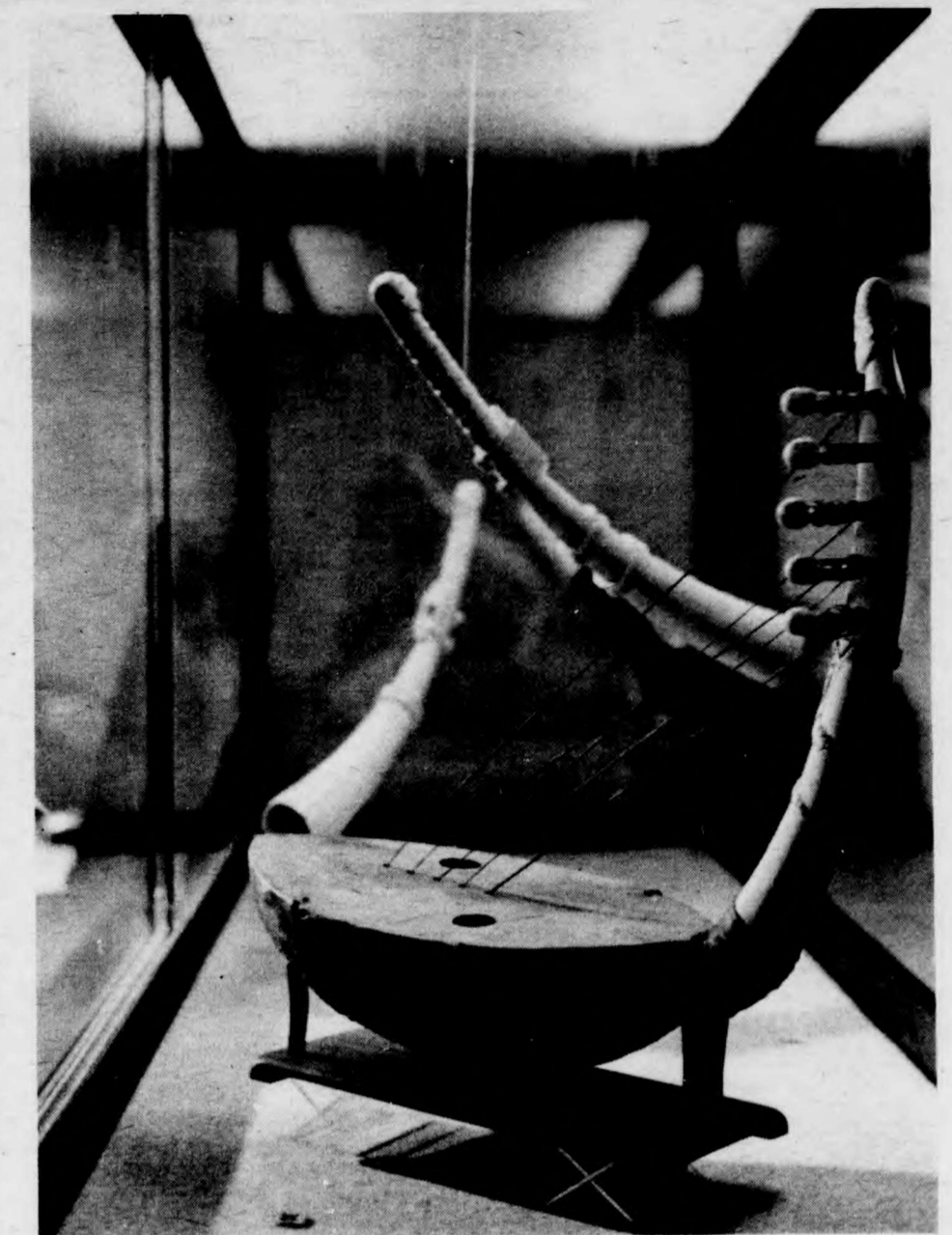
Instantly, the panel got very nervous, and people sitting behind the reporter asked him to stop.

Within five minutes, two husky gentlemen appeared at his side and asked him to produce some identification. Everyone relaxed when it was revealed he was not, as they had suspected, an RCMP agent.

A TCLSAC spokesman said the group was somewhat on edge, since "we just caught a Falconbridge and Gulf spy in our group, and we were recently attacked by the Western Guard who sent six of our members to hospital."



A scene from W. Soyinka's play The Swamp Dwellers, performed by Theatre Fountainhead under Jeff Henry's direction.



A Zande Bow Harp made of wood, skin, ivory and strings, from the R.O.M. collection. In the background are two Zande ivory trumpets.

Male bias in African studies

Three sessions of the African Studies Conference dealt with the changing role of women in the African context.

Until recently, most of the material available on the status of women and their roles had been collected by male sociologists and anthropologists. This situation resulted in a considerable male bias in much of the literature on African women, not only because of the gender of previous researchers and their tendency to react as males, but because a female informant is likely to be less candid with a male researcher than with a female one.

In a paper presented during the session on women's roles in East Africa, Patricia Stamp of York University suggested that traditional notions of male and female roles in African societies have been based on the rigid dichotomy that supposedly exists between internal and external spheres of society. Women are usually relegated to the domestic or internal sphere of

society while men are assumed to monopolize the political or external field.

This particular panel took a much wider view of the "inside". Stamp's work among the Kikuyu women of Mitero in Kenya indicated that the fact that Kikuyu women are the primary food producers in their society has wide political and social implications.

In the paper she presented, Stamp stated that Kikuyu women "appear to have a higher level of organization and group activity... directed not only towards co-operation and distribution of leadership roles within their own sphere of activity, but also towards a larger decision-making role in their society as a whole".

Commenting on the western phrase "women's liberation", the panel agreed that the derogatory connotations implied in the term tend to devalue the real struggle of women, not only in East Africa but around the world.



Seated woman holding a bowl, made of wood. From the Luba area. Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Murray B. Frum, Toronto.



Benin Relief done in bronze. From the R.O.M. collection.