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TITLE: The Illusion of Alur – Ethnonymic Politics, Ethnographic Traditions and the Alur-ization of Aidan Southall

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TITLE: The Illusion of Alur – Ethnonymic Politics, Ethnographic Traditions and the Alur-ization of Aidan Southall

ABSTRACT: This article concerns some of the personal commitments and relationships that compelled British anthropologist Aidan Southall to write his seminal essay titled “The illusion of tribe” (1970). It analyses the contested ethnic movement that Southall’s doctoral work on the Alur obscured, the reasons for this act of concealment, and the ways these experiences shaped the ideas he later advanced in “Illusion.”

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Introduction

This article concerns the Ugandan origins of British anthropologist Aidan Southall's 1970 essay, "The illusion of tribe." In that seminal essay, Southall (1921-2009) offered sustained, trenchant criticism of African anthropology's propagation of the notion of tribe. He contended that the term held derogatory connotations and perpetuated the notion of "clearcut, isolated, enclosed" groups, which was "a complete travesty of the facts." Instead, anthropology needed to "hammer home" the idea of "interlocking, overlapping, multiple collective identities."¹ In the essay, Southall also sketched out the historical processes that had produced certain "supertribes" or new "tribal aggregations." He observed that in the literature particular ethnic categories had become institutions – established ethnographic frames – despite standing at odds, at least initially, with the ways indigenous societies represented themselves:

The named tribes which appear in the literature frequently represent crystallizations at the wrong level, usually a level which is too large in scale, because foreign observers did not initially understand the lower levels of structure or failed to correct the misrepresentations of their predecessors, or because some arbitrary and even artificial entity was chosen for the sake of easy reference, despite the realisation that it was fallacious or misleading (...) Yet it is these terms, of dubious validity in relation to traditional cultures, which have been adopted by Europeans, enshrined in the literature and fed back to the people during the period of dominant colonial influence, to the point at which the people themselves were left with no alternative but to accept

¹ Aidan W. Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5-1/2 (1970), 28-50 (35, 44).

them.²

This current explores the ways one particular ethnic category became institutionalized in the scholarship. But it illuminates a rather different – far less detached – sort of relationship between ethnographer and ethnographic field to that which Southall describes. In a similar vein to the contributions by both Katherine Bruce-Lockhart and Alison Bennett to this special issue, this paper explores the affective, human dimensions of Southall’s own engagement with the Alur ethnic category which began with his doctoral fieldwork in Uganda’s West Nile District in the late 1940s. It argues that it was this relationship that, paradoxically, fuelled the arguments Southall advanced twenty years later in “The Illusion of Tribe,” despite being barely mentioned in that essay.

Southall’s doctoral monograph *Alur Society* has been hitherto seen as a precursor to “Illusion” in the sense that it demonstrated his unusually early interest in the relationship between history and ethnicity.³ Though his monograph was littered with references to the Alur “tribe,” for Southall this was a “new tribe” which had emerged out of heterogeneous elements through the process of “segmentary state” formation. Over the course of centuries, the ritual supremacy of Alur princes, striking out on their own away from the core highland polity Okoro, had led to the “Alur-ization” of the neighbouring Lendu and Okebo ethnic groups to the west and south west on the blurry, moving frontier of “Alurland,” Southall had argued.⁴

But the more specific question of ethnic nomenclature that Southall foregrounded in “Illusion” also had its roots in his doctoral fieldwork. These research interests developed out

² Southall, “Illusion,” 32-39.

³ David Parkin, “Eastern Africa: The View from the Office and the Voice from the Field,” in: Richard Fardon (ed.), *Localizing strategies: regional traditions of ethnographic writing* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 182-203 (190).

⁴ Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society: a study in processes and types of domination* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004 [1956]), xxxi, 7, 10, 246-263.

of his relationship with the Alur, and their relationship to their eastern, riverine fringe. His doctoral monograph was itself an ethnic monograph, titled *Alur Society*; but this act of naming also entailed an act of *un-naming*. Southall's doctoral project had been originally titled "An anthropological study of the Alur and Jonam."⁵ In his doctoral monograph, Southall had still written about the Jonam – a term meaning "people of the big river/lake" in many of eastern Africa's Nilotic languages – but he had not used that ethnonym. Instead, Southall subsumed the river people within the Alur category, as "lowland Alur" or, in some of his later work, "riverain Alur." The current paper analyses the contested Jonam ethnic movement that Southall's work obscured, the reasons for this act of concealment and the ways these experiences shaped the ideas advanced in "Illusion." It draws primarily on newspapers, published and unpublished work, and official and unofficial archives in Uganda and the UK including Southall's recently deposited papers at the Royal Anthropological Institute in London.

This paper engages with a growing literature concerning the history of ethnographic practice in Africa. It draws on concepts historical anthropologist Peter Pels developed to distinguish between three phases of the production of ethnographies: the "*préterrain*" (literally "fore-field") which refers to "the power relationships in which an ethnographer ... gets caught upon arrival in the field"; the "ethnographic occasion," which denotes the encounter between ethnographer and his subjects in the "field"; and the "ethnographic tradition," which entails the writing up of field notes into ethnographic texts.

One of the most "persistent influences" of the *préterrain* of indirect rule, Pels argues, has been "the tendency of academic researchers to adopt the tribal classifications and

⁵ Colonial Office, *Colonial Research 1949-50* (London: HMSO, 1950), 72.

territorial boundaries of the colonial administration.”⁶ But the power relationships that constitute the anthropological *préterrain* “are not limited to those introduced by European colonizers,” he contends, “they include indigenous ones, and the interaction between the former and the latter.”⁷ Focusing in part on these sorts of interactions – particularly Southall’s relationship with an Alur intellectual called Peter Claver Ringe – the current article draws inspiration from historian Lyn Schumaker’s exploration of the ways in which Africans appropriated anthropology to their own ends in the context of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in colonial Northern Rhodesia.⁸

But while Schumaker’s work focused on the Africanization of anthropology, the current paper examines the relationship between this phenomenon, on one hand, and the Africanization of an *anthropologist*, on the other. As such, the paper brings the insights of Pels and Schumaker into dialogue with anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen’s ideas regarding an oft-neglected aspect of the intensive participant-observation method. In a personal and candid account, van Binsbergen discusses “the genuine existential dimension of doing fieldwork” – that “intimate communion” by which the Nkoya of Zambia, for a time became “*my people*,” “*my tribe*” (original emphasis). The “Nkoya ethnic pathos swept me off my feet,” he writes. Their “eagerness to tell their tale, to have themselves put on the ethnographic and historical map” “positively attracted me” with a “very strong force.” “Their Nkoya-ness very soon became their main, even only, characteristic in my eyes,” van Binsbergen explains, “and I became more or less Nkoya-ized in the process.”⁹

⁶ Peter Pels, “Global ‘experts’ and ‘African’ minds: Tanganyika anthropology as public and secret service, 1925-61,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17-4 (2011), 788-810 (793).

⁷ Peter Pels, “The construction of ethnographic occasions in late colonial Uluguru,” *History and Anthropology* 8-1 to 4 (1994), 321-351 (322).

⁸ Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁹ Wim van Binsbergen, “From tribe to ethnicity in western Zambia: the unit of study as an ideological problem,” in: Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere (eds.), *Old Modes of*

Before Southall – ethnographic traditions on the upper Albert Nile c.1864 to c.1949

The area that Southall was to claim as his ethnographic domain had been claimed by others before him. A succession of different ethnographic traditions had been initiated and abandoned between the 1860s and 1940s. The first written reports pertain to the eastern fringes of this area: on the banks of the Albert Nile as it flows out of Lake Albert. No name resembling “Alur” features in the first half of the 1860s and in the early 1870s in the accounts of British explorer Samuel Baker who heard about of these lands but never visited them. He did, however, record the terms used to refer to its inhabitants by peoples of neighbouring areas to the east and south. Baker’s map is somewhat jumbled but clearly evinces his awareness of people his informants knew as “Koshi” (Koc) in the north of this riverine zone. Baker was also informed of several other notable places along the river between Koc and the lake. On Baker’s early 1870s’ map he marked “Foquatch” (Pakwac), “Foobongo” (Pabungu), “Farrakatta” (Paroketto), and “Faimoor (Panyimur).”¹⁰

Other Europeans elaborated on this ethnographic tradition for a time in the mid-1870s. It is during this period that a label resembling “Alur” first appears in the historical record, though not in reference to the people of the river. In the service of the Turco-Egyptian government in 1872, Baker declared the whole Albert Nile part of the vast, ill-defined southernmost section of Equatoria province. Three years later the riverine area witnessed its first European visitor, British officer William Chippindall, who had been sent overland down the east bank of the Nile, tasked with clarifying the geography of the north end of Lake

Production and Capitalist Encroachment (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 1985), 181-234 (187, 199-200, 205, 211-212, 223).

¹⁰ Samuel Baker, *The Albert N'yanza Vol.2* (London: Macmillan, 1866), 96, 126-127; Samuel Baker, *Ismailia* (London: Macmillan, 1874).

Albert with a view to setting up forts by which to consolidate Turco-Egyptian territorial claims. In March 1875, Chippindall reached a northern riverine locality which he believed was the territory of the “Koshi tribe” and was met to by their “chief,” a man known as “Wadelai” (more correctly “Wodlei,” meaning “son of Lei”). Chippindall recorded receiving information that “in the hills to the west of the Koshi” was “where the Lour tribe live.” These findings appeared in an account titled, “Observations on a journey to the Koshi tribe,” which the Royal Geographical Society published under a different title later that year.¹¹ Riverine use of the term “Lour” (or similar) to refer exclusively to the people of the highlands was also encountered by one of Chippindall’s colleagues, the Italian Romolo Gessi, a year later. During the two stops he made along the upper Albert Nile, he met Wodlei and another chief located much closer to the lake. Both men used the same term, rendered “Luris” by Gessi, to refer to the people of the hills, with whom they were often at war.¹²

Within a few years, however, Europeans came to categorize both the highlanders and riverine people as “Alur.” This phenomenon was largely down to the ethnological endeavours of a more renowned European in the service of the Turco-Egyptian government. Silesia-born Mehmed Emin (better known as Emin Pasha) first arrived among the riverine communities in the late 1870s. Emin visited Koc, which he considered to be just one of the small polities straddling the Albert Nile, the names of which Baker had marked on his map earlier in the decade. But Emin claimed that all these units were simply “subdivisions of the large country of Lur or Alur.” Emin’s ethnic taxonomy, which appeared in a series of published ethnographic reports, seem to have been based less on self-ascription by Africans than on the

¹¹ Royal Geographical Society Archives, JMS/3/93, W.H. Chippindall, “Observations on a journey to the Koshi tribe” (1875); W.H. Chippindall, “Journey beyond the Cataracts of the Upper Nile Towards the Albert Nyanza,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 20-1 (1875), 67-69 (68).

¹² R. Gessi, *Seven years in the Soudan*, (London: S. Low, Marston & Co, 1892), 108-109, 324

similarities and differences he perceived in terms of their languages, customs, dress, physique and skin pigmentation.¹³ Chippindall's paper and Gessi's travelogue were soon eclipsed by Emin's more widely disseminated works.

Emin's ethnic categorizations became further embedded after the Albert Nile came to mark the division between two colonial territories in the late 1890s. However, the Alur label was not readily accepted by all those upon whom it was foisted by the British Protectorate of Uganda (on the east bank) and the Belgian king Leopold II's Congo Free State (on the west bank) during this period of nominal colonial administration. For example, the appellation was either rejected or endured reluctantly by the people of Koc and their ruler, who had been controversially selected by the British as paramount chief of the riverine area now known as Wadelai District on the east bank. In 1901 a rather resigned Ali (son of Wodlei) informed an administrator that although the "Caoch" (Koc) "are now called" "Lurus," the "real Lurus" are a very big tribe and are inhabitants of a very extensive country south-west [i.e. across the river and inland].¹⁴ The people of Wadelai "are miscalled Aluru," wrote one contributor to a missionary magazine a year later; "in reality are known to each other as the Wa-caotch."¹⁵ These sentiments were still being expressed along the river almost a decade later, according to a revealing account by the British administrator Chauncy Stigand, who visited the northern riverine area on the west bank on its transfer from the Congo Free State to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in June 1910:

the Alurr, at any rate those of the north, do not call themselves by that name, and say that it was given them by the old Egyptian Government (...) In any case, it is

¹³ Emin Pasha, *Emin Pasha in central Africa: being a collection of his letters and journals* (London: G. Philip & Son 1888), 143, 160.

¹⁴ Michael Moses, "A history of Wadelai," *Uganda Journal* 17-1 (1953), 78-80.

¹⁵ Anonymous, "Wadelai," *Mengo Notes* 3-2 (1902), 14.

convenient to use this name in describing this group of people, for whom no other name appears to exist (...) In many cases the actual name by which a tribe calls itself is only discovered after the tribe has been known and described for a number of years under another name. It then often saves confusion to continue calling them by the name by which they are already known.¹⁶

This enduring sense of difference between the people of the river and those of the highlands was to a certain extent reflected and intensified by the system of administration and nomenclature introduced in 1914 when the west bank of the river again changed hands. The Uganda Protectorate gained this territory from the Sudan in the midst of rampant sleeping sickness across the river, where a restricted zone had been declared, and opted to force the survivors living on the east bank to relocate west of the river in the newly named West Nile District. The official tasked with establishing administration in West Nile was District Commissioner A. E. Weatherhead. He divided the southern section of the district into three “Alur” counties: Okoro in the highlands, Padyere in the midlands, and Jonam along the river. Okoro was named after the core highland polity; Padyere (which contained mainly Okoro ‘chieflets’) meant literally ‘the place of the middle’; and Jonam meant ‘people of the river’.¹⁷

It appears that the term Jonam had not previously been committed to paper. But it may have previously been omitted by Europeans due to its ostensibly limited, topographical connotations. It was clearly imbued with some deeper, socio-political meaning, however. Though it seems no traces of Weatherhead’s own justification for this nomenclatural system survive, he is reported to have later spoken of taking the “greatest care” over the matter.¹⁸

¹⁶ Chauncy Hugh Stigand, *Equatoria* (London: Constable & Co., 1923), 105-107.

¹⁷ Uganda National Archives (hereafter UNA), Provincial/Northern/1/0670, “Provincial Commissioner Northern Province – Report on the Northern Province for November 1916.”

¹⁸ Royal Anthropological Institute Archives (hereafter RAI), MS466/1/23, Southall’s notes of conversation with Weatherhead, (4 June 1952).”

The deep-rootedness of the Jonam designation is suggested by its local resonance within just a decade of its adoption as a county name. A Catholic missionary in the mid-1920s stated that the highlanders and river people “call each other by distinct names, Jokoro and Jonam, and those of Okoro have absolutely no wish to belong to Jonam and vice versa.”¹⁹ The antiquity of categorizations signifying groups’ positions in and relation to the environment and other peoples is evidenced by the presence of this system of social thought in all of the dispersed Nilotic-speaking populations of eastern Africa – from what is today South Sudan through to Uganda and to western Kenya.²⁰ The people of Okoro were themselves also known as *jo-malo* (the people of the hills) or *jo-got* (the people of the mountains), and referred to the people of midlands as *jo-piny* (the people of below).²¹

The physical environment had no doubt engendered a socio-cultural boundary between highlanders and riverine peoples. Between the neighbouring riverine polities, which were within easy reach of each other by canoe, linguistic and cultural affinities had been forged through generations of contact. The river had served an important function as both a political frontier and a conduit across which these communities shifted back and forth to escape famine, disease, conflict and incursions by outsiders. The river also enabled connections with Bunyoro, which most of the riverine polities claimed to have originated from or migrated through, and to whom they all acknowledged ritual suzerainty. Ecological and economic differentiation may have combined to provide the roots of ethnic distinctions. While most groups combined agricultural, pastoral and hunting activities, the balance

¹⁹ Ercole De Marchi, “Rose e spine,” *La Nigrizia* 8 (1925), 114.

²⁰ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (London: HMSO, 1960), 6; Okot p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), 17; Bethwell Alan Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 37-38; William Ochieng, *The First Word: Essays on Kenya History* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), 28.

²¹ RAI, MS466/1/6, Southall’s field diary entry for 23 May 1947.

between these modes of subsistence was markedly different between the highlands and the riverbanks. And it was only the latter that provided direct access to fishery resources.

While officials and missionaries in the 1920s were still somewhat convinced of the overarching validity of the term Alur, the ethnographic tradition had also begun to shift to incorporate the lowland/highland distinction rather than reverting back towards the early 1870s' categories tied to small polities. "The Jokoro, or mountain men, are hard-working," the Catholic missionary noted, "the Jonam, or men of the river (Nile), are lazy, and much love fishing."²² Whereas the language of the highlanders was "much affected by the Lendu and neighbouring tribes," asserted one administrator, "the Jonam" were "originally one with the Jopaluo" ("a Nilotic-Bantu people who live near the [Victoria] Nile, principally on the stretch between Lakes Albert and Kioga"). He considered only the highlanders to be "Alur proper."²³

In the 1940s, local ideas of Jonam as a discrete entity, separate to Alur were further sharpened, and gained currency among certain Europeans. For the people of Jonam County, and the officials who ruled them, invocations of the Jonam category became inextricably tied to several unifying concerns – threats originating beyond the boundaries of the county. One was the collective territorial claim to the east bank of the Nile which was voiced with increasing frequency amid both growing fears that this area had become Acholi territory in perpetuity, and devastating famines on the west bank.²⁴ Perhaps even more than had been the case in the past, invocations of the Jonam category became linked to control of fisheries at the north-western shore of Lake Albert and along the Albert Nile. Over the course of the war, the Albertine fishing industry had boomed in response to demand from the gold mines of the

²² De Marchi, "Rose," 114.

²³ R.E. McConnell, "Notes on the Lugwari Tribe of Central Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 55 (1925), 439-467 (441).

²⁴ RAI, MS466/1/11, Southall's field diary entry for 19 June 1950.

Belgian Congo. The Jonam category also signified lowlanders' determination to maintain their independence from the highland Alur ruling dynasty.²⁵ Catholic missionary Joseph Crazzolaro noted at the turn of the 1950s that both the Alur and Jonam "themselves maintain vehemently that the two names cover two well distinct tribal groups: the one is never the other."²⁶ Certain Alur ethnic patriots did not share this view, however. The Alur Okoro dynasty and its supporters harboured designs over the lowlands which was the only one of the three counties remaining beyond their political control after the amalgamation of Padyere into Okoro in 1938.

These Alur-izing pretensions resented by the riverine people were embodied most clearly by an African teacher called Peter Claver Ringe. Like other local intellectuals in northern Uganda in the 1940s – who have been largely overlooked in the historiography (see Otim, this issue) – Ringe was engaged in ethno-historical writing. In the introduction to a basic Alur grammar and vocabulary book he produced at the behest of the District Commissioner in 1948, Ringe included a brief, tendentious account. It subsumed the riverine people under the Alur category, casting them as subjects of the "Alur dynasty" of Okoro, and descendants of one eponymous "Alulu." "The Alur people live (...) [from] the western side of the River Nile, extending westward as far as the Nile-Congo watershed," Ringe claimed. "All recognised as the only real chief (...) Jalusiga."²⁷ But his Alur-izing project did not manifest itself just on paper. While working in the highlands at the Nyapea Catholic mission's prestigious St. Aloysius College, Ringe gained a reputation for discouraging lowland students' assertions of difference. Students claimed, for example, that Ringe change the letter 'o' that featured in many of the prefixes (e.g. in the name *O-kello*) of the Acholi

²⁵ British Library Sound Archives, Klaus Wachsmann Uganda Collection, C4/4967, "Wer mikwaya Okoro ku junam" (17 January 1950).

²⁶ J.P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo* v.2 (Verona: Istituto Missioni Africane, 1951), 200.

²⁷ P.C. Ringe, *A simple Alur grammar and Alur-English-Alur vocabularies* (Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1948), i-ii.

Lwoo orthography dominant in the lowlands to the ‘u’ preferred in the highlands (e.g. *U-kello*).²⁸

Assertions of Jonam ethnic difference also spoke of social and political relations between the people of the river. Jonam identity was invoked in moral claims regarding redistribution of resources amid class formation in the 1940s. It was also central to conflicts over legitimate authority which grew increasingly bloody from the middle of the decade.²⁹ For the Koc ruling dynasty and its supporters, the term Jonam also conjured a distinct tribal community over which they claimed the hereditary right to rule. For lowlanders who opposed this subordination, the same ethnic designation evoked a history of small independent polities. Jonam ethnicity was also a means by which people forged communities Kampala, Arua and Gulu. Via Jonam diasporic networks new arrivals in these urban centres could access employment opportunities and other resources. Tellingly, by the early 1950s, Jonam had the highest rate of membership in the Uganda Police of any ethnic group in relation to their size.³⁰ From about the Second World War, these urban-rural ethnic networks were also responsible for the dissemination of a form of dance, *njige*, that became strongly associated with Jonam category.³¹

Official recognition of these assertions of difference emerged in the 1940s. On the basis of recommendations by district officials, the Jonam category was included in the schedule of tribal names for the 1948 census, which counted their population at about 15,942 – about a quarter of the size of the Alur population.³² This distinction was accepted by

²⁸ Nicholas Onegi p’Minga, “Behind the hidden curtain of Karamoja,” (c.2010, unpublished manuscript).

²⁹ Southall, *Alur Society*, 314-315.

³⁰ Aidan W. Southall, “Alur migrants,” in: Audrey I. Richards (ed.), *Economic development and tribal change* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1954), 141-160 (144).

³¹ Bodleian Library for Commonwealth and African Studies (hereafter BLCAS), MSS.Afr.s.1329(7), “Lanning to Wachsmann, 15 February 1950”.

³² Hoima District Archive, MinPap106A(192), “DC Bunyoro to Assistant to the Katikiro, 13 June 1948”; East African Statistical Department, *Census of population: Uganda: 1948*

Southall in notes he made on the “Jonaam & Aluur” over the course of a two-week trip in the highland Okoro County in mid-1947, during a vacation away from Makerere College where he had taken up a three-year lecturing post in Social Studies in 1945.³³ Advised by anthropologist Raymond Firth to undertake a PhD, Southall enrolled at the London School of Economics in 1948. With the support of the incoming director of the new East African Institute for Social Research (EAISR), Audrey Richards, he secured funding from Colonial Social Research Council. This funding enabled him to start his “Anthropological study of the Alur and Jonam” as a Colonial Research Fellow in Uganda in August 1949.³⁴

In Southall’s fieldnotes from stays in Jonam County in December 1949 and June 1950, he made liberal use of the designation “Jonam” – or “Junam,” as he more frequently rendered it. Based on indigenous categorizations of those who “speak Junam,” Southall also compiled comparative lists comparing the “Alur” and “Junam” (or “Dhu-Junam”) languages. He also referred to the existence of *njige*, which he described in his notes as “the authentic” and “traditional” “Junam dance.” While visiting what had been the pre-colonial lowland polity of Koc, Southall noted that his informants “won’t admit any other name but Koc and Junam.” Furthermore, the residents of Jonam County referred to the highlanders and their territory as “Alur,” he observed. “Alur [are] also called ‘jumalo’” – “people of the highlands,” Southall added.³⁵ He did record one statement seemingly to the contrary: a riverine clan head called Pola apparently told him that they had “been always called Junam (...) but it was correct to call them Alur too for they were all one.” But even this appears like

(Nairobi: East African High Commission, 1950), 43. Also see: Richard Posnett, *The Scent of Eucalyptus: A Journal of Colonial and Foreign Service* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2001), 25, 35, 73.

³³ RAI, MS466/1/6, Southall’s field diary entry for 23 May 1947.

³⁴ United Kingdom National Archives (hereafter UKNA), CO 927/62/2, “Governor of Uganda to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 February 1949.”

³⁵ RAI, MS466/1/10, Southall’s field diary entries for 1, 3 & 4 December 1949; RAI, MS466/1/11-12, Southall’s field diary entries for 18-24 June 1950.

a rather equivocal appeal to unity.³⁶ While transcriptions in Southall's notebooks reveal that he had read Emin's account, they also demonstrated that he had seen the conflicting evidence offered by Baker and Stigand, if not that of Gessi or Chippindall. The passage from Stigand's book that demonstrated early twentieth-century riverine resistance to the Alur label was transcribed and underlined in Southall's notebook.

Alur-izing anthropology, c.1949-c.1956.

But Southall suppressed the Jonam tribal category in what appears to have been his first doctoral research paper. Delivered in December 1950 at the first annual conference of the EAISR at Makerere College, the paper was titled "The Alur." It referred to the people of the river as "lowland Alur."³⁷ A year or so later there was later some equivocation regarding these designations in a draft thesis chapter Southall composed. "Tribe is here defined in terms of the common awareness of being a named group inhabiting a continuous territory, possessing a common language, common basic cultural forms, and a common ethnocentric political philosophy," Southall explained. "None of these distinctions is absolute", he conceded, however. "All refer only to the politically dominant group upon which the social structure is focussed" – i.e. "the *true Alur*" who lived in "the highlands" (emphasis added). "On some of the fringes of tribal territory," Southall acknowledged, "there is increasing hesitancy as to whether the dominant groups call themselves Alur or not, or else they consider themselves Alur secondarily and something else primarily." "For convenience," however, he resolved to use the terms "lowland Alur" and "highland Alur."³⁸

³⁶ RAIA, MS466/1/13, Southall's notes on language and history (n.d.).

³⁷ A.W. Southall, "The Alur," paper presented at the 1st Annual Conference of the East African Institute of Social Research, Kampala, 17-23 December 1950.

³⁸ RAIA, MS466/11/13, Aidan Southall, "Ethnic composition" (n.d.).

But even these brief caveats and admissions were not present in his thesis he submitted in 1952 or the doctoral monograph that it developed into over the three to four years that followed. While averring their “ethnic heterogeneity,” Southall maintained in his thesis that “the Alur may be accepted as a tribe in the sense of [anthropologist Meyer] Fortes’ socio-geographical region or in virtue of an ideological unity and a likeness accepted as dogma.”³⁹ In the first of only three rather perfunctory references to the Jonam category, Southall cited the aforementioned Pola’s statement expressing unity; in the second he dismissed the categories *jomalo* and *jomalo* as simply “ecological” divisions of “Alurland”; and in the third – somewhat contradicting the second – he conceded that “within the general body of the Alur” the term Jonam reflected a “particular sense of common identity.”⁴⁰ In the population data Southall mined from the census 1948 for an appendix to the monograph *Alur Society*, he even replaced the term “Jonam” with “lowland Alur.”⁴¹

Why by late 1950 had Southall chosen to resist the officially-sanctioned view of the ethnic landscape? Perhaps Southall privileged the account of Emin over that of Stigand or Baker because of the former’s scholarly reputation. Maybe he was anxious to defer to the definitions employed by the professional and amateur anthropologists who he come before him, including his erstwhile Cambridge lecturer Jack Driberg, and a host of other colonial officials and missionaries.⁴² It is also possible that he had taken to heart a statement made by the doyen of “Nilotic Studies” who was to act as his external examiner. In E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute earlier in 1950, he had

³⁹ Aidan W. Southall, “Alur society: a study in processes and types of domination,” PhD dissertation, London School of Economics (London, 1952), 63.

⁴⁰ Southall, ‘Alur Society’, 62, 72, 67, 99.

⁴¹ Southall, *Alur Society*, 349-350.

⁴² J.H. Driberg, *The Lango* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923), 9-31. A comprehensive list of other publications on “the Alur” was compiled by R. Breugelmans in the 1940s and reproduced by Southall in *Alur Society*, 385-388.

claimed the term “Alur” “generally included the Jonam”.⁴³ After all, this more expansive definition of the Alur had been, until relatively recently, “sanctioned by [three quarters of] a century of use,” to modify Evans-Pritchard’s own justification for adopting the term “the Nuer” in one of his monographs.⁴⁴

But to understand this act of concealment, it is necessary to assess other aspects of the *préterrain* and the ethnographic occasion. Southall’s decision to collapse the distinction between the Jonam and Alur categories spoke of the powerful impact of the “proselytising culture” of the Alur heartlands.⁴⁵ He devoted what he termed the intensive part of his fieldwork among the Alur highlanders. For most of the 20 or so months Southall spent in West Nile and the north-east Congo he was located at the Alur core and the highland areas over which their influence strongly extended; he spent only a few weeks in the lowlands across two or three visits. While Southall argued that ‘the traditional process of domination and assimilation’ by Alur of non-Alur, ‘can no longer occur’, recruitment had continued by other means.

Certain relationships formed early in Southall’s fieldwork proved crucial in his own recruitment. Perhaps most notable was his bond with the bane of the Jonam ethnic separatists, Peter Ringe, whom he had first encountered during his short visit to the highlands in 1947. Southall was much taken by Ringe, who had in the 1930s become the first person from his area to study at Makerere College in Kampala. By 1949, Ringe had been appointed as both an African member of the protectorate’s Legislative Council and honorary secretary of the Alur Language Committee formed by the West Nile District administration at the end of the Second World War. His various commitments seem to have left him little time for

⁴³ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, “Nilotic Studies,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 80-1/2 (1950), 1-6 (4).

⁴⁴ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 3.

⁴⁵ Southall, *Alur Society*, 60

significantly increasing his ethno-historical output before his death in 1957. In Southall's eyes, he was "an exceptional man, born out of his time."⁴⁶ But in many ways Ringe was very much *of* his time: he was a typical ethnic entrepreneur. He wanted to put the Alur on the map; but he also wanted to remove the Jonam category from it.

Alur ethnic patriots such as Ringe exercised a strong influence over Southall and the assumptions he brought to bear on his ethnography. On Southall's return to West Nile in 1949, Ringe was one of the men with whom Southall spent time in "relaxation and helpful discussion" at Nyapea. The anthropologist later described him as "an absolute Godsend for me," as he "knew everybody and everything."⁴⁷ But "as with all social relationships, informants and fieldworkers use (and sometimes exploit) each other," to quote one of Southall's later colleagues.⁴⁸ Ringe often weighed in on matters concerning history, according to Southall's field diaries, and generally helped the young anthropologist to "start off on the right foot." It is highly likely that he had a role in both selecting Palei in Nyapea sub-county as Southall's main field site, and identifying a student who could act as his interpreter and assistant for the duration of the fieldwork.⁴⁹ One of Southall's supervisors at the LSE, Raymond Firth, later emphasized the importance of 'the informal, often covert, constraints' which, paradoxically, "often tend to be largely a function of the positive assistance that the anthropologist receives."⁵⁰ This paradox manifested itself strongly during Southall's doctoral fieldwork.

⁴⁶ Southall, *Alur*, xii; John W. Burton, "An interview with Aidan Southall," *Current Anthropology* 33-1(1992), 67-83 (72).

⁴⁷ Burton, "Interview," 72.

⁴⁸ Leonard Plotnicov, "Letter from Nigeria: humbling the ethnographer," in: Hermine G. De Soto (ed.), *Culture and contradiction* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 455-465 (456).

⁴⁹ Southall, *Alur*, v, viii-ix; RAI, MS466/1/6, Southall's field diary entries for 23 May 1947 & 19-20 August 1949; RAI, MS466/1/13, Southall's notes on language and history, 15 June 1950; Burton, "Interview," 72.

⁵⁰ Raymond Firth, "Whose Frame of Reference? One Anthropologist's Experience," *Anthropological Forum* 4-2 (1977), 145-67 (146).

Alur ethnic entrepreneurs succeeded in enlisting the young anthropologist's unconscious support both for their crackdown on non-Alur orthography, and in the wider political project this reflected. In Southall's monograph he also literally put Jalusiga, the Alur hereditary chief of Okoro, front and centre: the frontispiece to *Alur Society* was a photograph Southall had taken of this man. As well as opting for Ringe's definition of Alurland as a ethno-territorial frame for his doctoral research, in sections of Southall's monograph written up after his thesis submission he took it upon himself to advocate for other Alur Okoro causes vis-à-vis the colonial state. In his monograph, Southall bemoaned the "remoteness and backwardness" of Alurland, the "major social evils" begot by labour migration to Buganda, and the lack of "official recognition" for the Alur. The latter issue could be remedied, he believed, through the creation of a "small district corresponding closely to the tribal area." An Alur district would have the advantage of "linking tribal esprit de corps to local development."⁵¹ Such advocacy and promotion constituted something of a departure from the "hear-no-evil, see-no-evil" approach Audrey Richards encouraged in EAISR scholarship.⁵²

Southall was willing to function as an anthropological advocate for the Alur and an agent of ethnographic Alur-ization because he had himself been subjected to this process. His stay in West Nile, which began when he was still in his twenties, was his first extended piece of fieldwork. It had a transformative impact on him. The content and tone of the acknowledgements and preface to his monograph strongly evokes anthropologist van Binsbergen's account of his own "Nkoya-ization." Southall wrote with great warmth and humour about his fieldwork in "Alur homesteads," learning the "Alur language" and drinking, dancing and digging among "Alur friends." He wrote proudly that he had become

⁵¹ Southall, *Alur Society*, 269, 279, 312. See also: UKNA, CO 822/1191, A.W. Southall, "Reversions to Paganism," 1955.

⁵² David Mills, "How Not to Be a 'Government House Pet': Audrey Richards and the East African Institute for Social Research," in: Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills, and Mustafa Babiker (eds.), *African Anthropologies*, 76-98 (90-91).

known as “JaPalei” (man of Palei) “across most of Uganda Alurland.” “There is a very strong case for having stayed in that first place for the whole time”, Southall later recalled. “In many ways, I wish I had.”⁵³ Southall maintained that he was treated as an “Alur of high rank” and that, by the end of his fieldwork, his “status as an eccentric European” was only “residual.”⁵⁴

Casting “The Illusion”: a contested ethnographic tradition since c.1956

That Southall had come to share certain Alur assumptions regarding their riverine eastern fringes became all the more obvious over the next twenty years or so. From the mid-to-late 1950s, he found himself confronted by a Jonam ethnic consciousness that was being sharpened further by democratic reforms and competition over the increasing resources of developmental late-colonial state and the market. With talk of independence in the air, little-known groups with little-known political grievances feared that there was only a narrow window of time in which they might receive redress before they were condemned to domination by bigger groups. Innumerable memoranda were sent through official channels. The ousted Koc dynasty sought its reinstatement alongside the rulers of large kingdoms like Buganda. Self-declared spokesmen for the wider Jonam community advanced their ethnically-framed territorial claim for the so-called “lost bank”, seeking for this case to be viewed in the same light as the *cause célèbre* of mid-twentieth century Uganda – the “Lost Counties” dispute between Buganda and Bunyoro.⁵⁵ Starting with the publication of 1959 letter announcing the existence of the Jonam Association in Kampala, the Jonam literati also

⁵³ Burton, “Interview,” 73.

⁵⁴ Southall, *Alur*, xi.

⁵⁵ UNA, OPC/86/6/16/5, “Record of a discussion with Mr. V. Owiny, in Lira on the 9th March, 1961”; UNA, CSO/101/No.17997, “Provincial Commissioner Northern Province to Secretary for Social Services, 4 July 1955”; Makerere University Library Archives, UG.PR./18/1, “Record of background talk given by Mr. W.R. Bazley, District Commissioner, West Nile (6 October 1959)”.

targeted the English-language daily *Uganda Argus* with their missives, adverts and photographs to both render their community visible and voice their grievances to the largest Uganda-wide audience possible.⁵⁶

Debates over the validity of the ethnonym “Jonam” developed in various public arenas, as peoples threatened by its significations articulated dissent. Self-identifying Acholi sought to undercut the Jonam claim to the east bank of the Nile as it threatened the integrity of Acholi District. “In the early centuries, there was no tribe known as Jonam,” one Acholi writer maintained. “It was in about 1910 (...) those [Alur] living along the Nile started to call themselves Jonam.”⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, the Jonam category also faced derision from Kampala-based Alur ethnic patriots (who had themselves begun to advertise meetings of the “Alur Association”).⁵⁸ One writer demanded to know whether the “Alur who are claiming themselves to be Junam (...) still believe that they are sons of water?”⁵⁹ The ethnonym became subject to similar mockery from members of the ascendant Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) in a March 1963 session of the National Assembly. Concerned by the prospect of both alienating UPC supporters in Acholiland and encouraging other similar claims around the country, these men rejected the demands for a West Nile-Acholi boundary commission voiced by a Jonam member called Martin Abe Okello – a Democratic Party representative for West Nile and Madi Central Constituency.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ugo A.L. Owiny, “Letter to the editor,” *Uganda Argus*, 31 October 1959.

⁵⁷ N. Kitara, “Letter to the editor,” *Uganda Argus*, 11 June 1962.

⁵⁸ “Argus Diary,” *Uganda Argus*, 3 February 1961.

⁵⁹ Aloysius Opyeniniya, “Letter to the editor,” *Uganda Argus*, 9 January 1964. For a later example of this sort of dismissal, see: J.P. Okumu and P.L. Unega, “Letter to the editor,” *Dwon Lwak*, 26 September 1967.

⁶⁰ Uganda Government Printer, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the National Assembly: First Session—Fourth Meeting Tuesday, 26th March 1963* (Entebbe: Uganda Government Printer, 1963), 197-217.

In Southall's papers from the start of the 1960s, the people of the river had remained the "lowland Alur" or simply "Alur."⁶¹ But it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to continue skirting the Jonam question in his scholarship. Southall was almost certainly aware of the broadcasting of this very public controversy, having taken the unusual decision to remain in Uganda after his doctoral research. He had spent the first few years of his post-doctoral career at EAISR as a research fellow before being appointed as both director of the institute and Makerere's first Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology in 1957. Southall was also no doubt cognizant of the fact that one of the urban diasporic manifestations of Jonam ethnic separatism had caught the attention of another British anthropologist, David Parkin, who was conducting doctoral fieldwork in east Kampala from 1962 to 1964 while attached to EAISR as a research associate. Though Parkin's research came to focus primarily on the city's Kenyan Luo community, his research also brought him into contact with other diasporic communities including separate Jonam and Alur "tribal associations."⁶²

Though deeply sympathetic to the territorial claim to which the Jonam category was inextricably attached, Southall demonstrated his partisanship in these ethnonymic politics in a paper he presented in January 1963. Based on incomplete evidentiary foundations, Southall's paper on the subject of elections in "Alurland" lent support to the popular interrogation of the Jonam designation by invoking the writings of past proponents of the Alur ethnographic tradition:

They were considered Alur by Emin Pasha eighty years ago and [were] still referred to as riverain Alur by Weatherhead fifty years ago. Since then they have tended to

⁶¹ Aidan W. Southall, "Homicide and Suicide Among the Alur," in: Paul Bohannan (ed.), *African Homicide and Suicide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 214-229 (219, 226).

⁶² David J. Parkin, "Social structure and social change in a tribally heterogeneous East African city ward," PhD dissertation, University of London (London, 1965), 246-247.

regard themselves as a separate tribe and have been so regarded in the census... Since 1914 the Jonam lowlands have always formed an administrative county ... Ethnic facts were recognised by the formation of an Alur council in 1917, consisting of the recognised chiefs of all Uganda Alur, including Jonam.⁶³

In a 1968 conference paper, he offered a distilled reiteration of this contention, claiming that the Jonam “appear to have regarded themselves as Alur until the present century.”⁶⁴ In these papers and those that immediately followed them at the turn of the 1970s, Southall appeared determined to validate and perpetuate the application of the Alur ethnic category to the people of Jonam County.⁶⁵ This conviction was perhaps not surprising. Besides his vested professional interest in the Alur category, there was also the matter of his personal commitment. By the time he had left Uganda for Syracuse University in the United States in 1964 Southall was “a paid-up member of the Alur tribal association in Kampala,” as he himself admitted elsewhere, rather unnecessarily.⁶⁶

Southall’s 1960s’ contentions as regards to Jonam ethnicity clearly foreshadowed and motivated some of the arguments he famously put forward in 1970 in “Illusion”. But their silences revealed his personal and intellectual anxieties concerning the Jonam question. They exhibited his reluctance to either more thoroughly investigate the historical roots and

⁶³ A.W. Southall, “Micropolitics in Uganda: Traditional and Modern Politics,” paper presented at the East African Institute of Social Research Conference, Kampala, January 1963.

⁶⁴ A.W. Southall, “Cross-cultural meanings and multilingualism,” in: W. Whiteley (ed.), *Language use and social change: problems of multilingualism with special reference to Eastern Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 376-396 (382).

⁶⁵ Aidan W. Southall, “Rank and Stratification among the Alur and other Nilotic Peoples,” in: A. Tuden and L. Plotnicov (eds.), *Social Stratification in Africa* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 31-46 (44, 46); and “Ethnic incorporation among the Alur,” in: Ronald Cohen and John Middleton (eds.), *From tribe to nation in Africa: studies in incorporation processes* (Scranton, PA: Chandler, 1970), 71-92.

⁶⁶ Aidan W. Southall, “The concept of elites and their formation in Uganda,” in: P.C. Lloyd (ed.), *The New Elites of Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 342-363.

valences of the Jonam category or subject the Alur category to historical scrutiny – an undertaking one of the older generation of anthropologist of Uganda, May Edel, had briefly gestured towards in a 1965 essay on colonial-era “super-tribalization.”⁶⁷ Southall’s essays of 1963 and 1968 also demonstrated his reticence concerning the collective self-appellations that he had himself encountered on the ground at the time of his doctoral fieldwork.

Southall’s disquiet became perhaps more conspicuous in “Illusion” and certain other influential essays he published in the 1970s. As other scholars have argued, Southall’s writing at this time in some ways presaged the critical self-examination central to the ethnographic enterprise’s postmodern “crisis.”⁶⁸ Somewhat ironically, however, his own work on the Alur did not really feature in these essays. In pursuit of ethnic illusions to deconstruct, Southall felt more comfortable roaming widely.⁶⁹ Quite controversially, from 1976 Southall halted for several years to disrupt the ethnographic traditions of writing the Nuer, Dinka and Atuot of Sudan.⁷⁰ In the same year, in a far less well-known essay, he returned to the subject of ethnicity in Uganda. But Southall revisited his early ethnographic terrain only fleetingly in the article. Hinting at his growing awareness of his own vested interests, he appeared more uncertain of his previous claims regarding the past (and continuing) Alur-ness of Jonam County. While noting that explorer Baker “found no identifiable peoples called the Acholi” he also admitted that “nor does Baker mention Alur or Jonam, but only chiefdoms.” Southall also appeared reconciled, if for only a moment, to

⁶⁷ May Edel, “African Tribalism: Some Reflections on Uganda,” *Political Science Quarterly* 80-3 (1965), 357-372 (367).

⁶⁸ David Parkin, “Introduction,” in: Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society: a study in processes and types of domination* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004 [1956]), xi-xxvii (xxiii).

⁶⁹ Aidan W. Southall, “Ideology and Group Composition in Madagascar,” *American Anthropologist* 73-1 (1971), 144-164 (144-145).

⁷⁰ Aidan W. Southall, “Nuer and Dinka Are People: Ecology, Ethnicity and Logical Possibility,” *Man* 11-4 (1976), 463-491. For insights into the debates Southall became embroiled, see: LSEA, IAI/41/110, “J.D.Y. Peel to A.W. Southall, 3 January 1984.”

referring to “the Jonam” as “immediate Nilotic neighbours” to “the Alur.”⁷¹ Perhaps these statements reflected a degree of unease he felt as to his own dogged attachment to the Alur category, and the part he had played in authenticating it to the detriment of that of Jonam.

But the brevity of these admissions, and the obscurity of the essays in which they occurred, rendered them little more than internal dialogue. At any rate, Southall seemed to have overcome these reservations by the late 1980s and 1990s when he composed a series of passionate papers reflecting on his experience of “the Alur,” and their experience of Uganda’s dark post-colonial decades. Southall did, for the first time, acknowledge that his past certainties regarding the Alur had been misplaced. “At the time of my arrival,” he explained “they were accustomed to being called Alur and accepted the name.” “But they did not usually refer to themselves as Alur,” Southall conceded. “The Alur identity (...) remained somewhat vague. It is difficult to say which polities recognized this identity before the European intrusion clearly crystallized it.” Southall even expressed regret concerning his own youthful ignorance of the risks inherent in “establishing and demarcating one’s own distinctive ethnographic estate, with presumptively monopolistic property rights.” He was not yet prepared to fully renounce the category that had framed several decades of his scholarship, however. “Unlike many current ethnic appellations, the name Alur is not without valid foundation,” Southall contended, yet again adducing the ethnographic output of Emin as evidence.⁷²

Southall displayed a renewed blind-spot regarding the Jonam-Alur relationship in this period. On one hand, he averred his growing commitment to the idea that “man’s place in,

⁷¹ Aidan W. Southall, “The current state of national integration in Uganda,” in: D. R. Smock and K. Bentsi-Enchill (eds.), *The search for national integration in Africa* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1976), 307-331 (309, 316).

⁷² Aidan W. Southall, “Power, sanctity, and symbolism in the political economy of the Nilotes,” in: W. Arens and I. Karp (eds.), *Creativity of Power* (Washington, 1989), 183-222 (184-188).

reaction with, and appropriation of nature” constituted “a major influence in the formation, elaboration and transformation of (...) identities.”⁷³ But, on the other, he revealed that he was not quite ready to apply these insights to the people of the Albert Nile. Their sense of separate identity remained, in Southall’s eyes, a construct of “recent decades.” They had “differentiated themselves more and more from the rest of the Alur, claiming to be a separate ‘tribe’ and succeeding in getting themselves enumerated as such in the Uganda census,” he argued. Southall conferred on the Jonam the status of a “new sub-ethnic group” – the implication of a previous and continuing “Alurness” remained.⁷⁴

Conclusion – an ambiguous ethnographic legacy

When Southall had left the Britain for Uganda in 1949, the object of his study was not just the “Alur.” But it had become so as the young ethnographer ironically became subject to, and an agent of, the very process of “Alur-ization” his work famously explicated. Southall made no secret of his personal commitment to “the Alur.” In the early 1990s he declared that scholarly neutrality was “a highly ideological posture.”⁷⁵ His readiness to “advocate for improvement for the Alur” in this period – even in a meeting with Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni – was admirably recalled by anthropologists Susan and Michael Whyte in their tribute to Southall.⁷⁶ Southall disavowed “tribe” as unit of analysis, and developed what he termed a strain of “virulent antitribalism”;⁷⁷ but over the course of a relationship that lasted about sixty years, he never renounced “the Alur”. Southall granted the “positive value”

⁷³ Southall, “Power,” 189.

⁷⁴ Southall, “Power,” (186,193); “Partitioned Alur,” in: A.I. Asiwaju (ed.), *Partitioned Africans: ethnic relations across Africa’s international boundaries 1884-1984* (London: Hurst and Company, 1985), 87-103 (91, 98).

⁷⁵ Aidan W. Southall, “Gann’s Struggle,” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 18- 2 (1990), 49-50.

⁷⁶ Christine Obbo, “Aidan Southall: A Tribute and Partial Memoir,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 10-2 (2009).

⁷⁷ Burton, “Interview,” 75.

of “ethnic particularisms” “in the struggle against oppression,” but was somewhat unclear about which “particularisms” were legitimate, and what constituted “oppression.”⁷⁸ He was deeply disheartened by what he perceived, and represented, to be the fragmentation of *his* people; he failed to acknowledge the visceral and vested nature of this stance. Southall’s story reminds us that even intercessional ethnography enacts power relations, in this case within an ethnonymic politics.⁷⁹

The case of the Alur and the Jonam sheds light on the curious, unpredictable ways in which a particular ethnographic tradition can gain or regain traction – how, in this case, an ethnic category can become an institution. “Subsequent writing tends to ignore the formative influence of the power relationships given in the *préterrain* and actualized in the initial ethnographic occasion, by either reproducing it in the same form (...) or by skipping it altogether,” Pels observes.⁸⁰ Similarly Barrie Sharpe emphasizes “the need to readmit precolonial and early colonial records to ethnography”, arguing that “a current tendency is to dismiss these sources on the basis of supposedly superior recent knowledge” even though, sometimes, these “more recent texts actually suppress important data.”⁸¹

The ethnographic tradition of writing the Alur that Southall re-established cast a large shadow on the *préterrain* of subsequent researchers who touched upon his ethnographic territory. In the early 1970s, one Makerere student from Jonam County used the introduction of his undergraduate agriculture thesis as an opportunity to bemoan the fact that “sociologists

⁷⁸ Aidan Southall, “The Ethnic Heart of Anthropology,” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 25-100 (1985), 567-572 (572).

⁷⁹ For more on ethnonymic politics, see: Gabrielle Lynch, “What’s in a name? The politics of naming ethnic groups in Kenya’s Cherangany Hills,” *Journal of Eastern Africa Studies* 10-1 (2016), 208-227.

⁸⁰ Pels, “The construction,” 345.

⁸¹ B. Sharpe, “Ethnography as a regional system: mental maps and the myth of states and tribes in Northern Nigeria,” *Critique of Anthropology* 6-3 (1986), 33-65 (58).

have always sought to classify Jonam with the Alur.”⁸² But most other scholars were more deferential, often explicitly so.⁸³ In a piece accompanying the “tribal map” in the government’s official atlas in 1962, Makerere sociologist John Goldthorpe asserted that, though now “conventionally regarded as a separate tribe,” the Jonam were – “from an anthropological point of view” – “those Alur who live by the Nile.”⁸⁴ Others scholars used footnotes to acknowledge that “whether the Jonam should be identified as a separate “tribe” is a debatable point.” But they resolved to follow the “precedent” set in the ethnic taxonomy of “authorities” such as Southall.⁸⁵ Most researchers have failed to demonstrate any awareness of the controversy, consigning it to a postscriptual existence, or to total oblivion.

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⁸² Valentine J. Akenda-Ondoga, “Some economic aspects of cotton production in Jonam county,” BSc dissertation, Makerere University (Kampala, 1971), 12.

⁸³ For another example from a student from Jonam County: A. Apecu, “The pre-colonial history of Jonam chiefdoms,” BA dissertation, Makerere University (Kampala, 1972), 14-17.

⁸⁴ J.E. Goldthorpe, “Tribal and ethnic groups,” in: *Atlas of Uganda* (Kampala: Department of Lands and Surveys, 1962), 36.

⁸⁵ Anne King, “A history of West Nile District, Uganda,” PhD dissertation, University of Sussex (Sussex, 1971), xviii, xxi-xxii; Emory Bundy, “West Nile,” in: J. Barkan (ed.), *Uganda district government and politics, 1947-1967* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin African Studies Program, 1977), 352-377 (353, f.4);

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