

## OBITUARY

With the death of Professor Michael Garfield "M. G." Smith on January 5, 1993, after a short illness, the discipline of social anthropology has lost one of its commanding figures of the post-war period—a scholar known both for his theoretical and his applied social research in the Caribbean and West Africa.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1921 of Jamaican and English parentage, M. G. won an Island Scholarship which took him to McGill University. But the war soon intervened and he volunteered for the Canadian Army, serving in a front-line unit from Normandy through northern France, Holland and Germany. Much of this experience was grim, and when asked to recount his war stories, he preferred to say that he spent as much time as possible at the bottom of a foxhole composing poetry. It was through remarks like this that one occasionally caught a glimpse of other facets of a complex life—published poet, opera buff, amateur boxer—which usually remained hidden beneath a serious professional demeanour.

After demobilisation, he enrolled at University College London, soon switching from law to anthropology under the influence of Daryll Forde who had gathered around him an important group of Africanist lecturers and students. In contrast to his experience of legal studies, M. G. was attracted by social anthropology's commitment to the empirical study of on-going social situations, particularly those in then-colonial territories. Not only was M. G.'s stay at University College London an intellectually formative one, but it was also then that he met his wife, Mary Morrison, a student at the London School of Economics. Together they formed an enduring partnership that gained much from Mary's fundamental intellectual contribution.

After his studies at University College London, M. G. accepted a research fellowship at the Institute of Social and Economic Research of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica and embarked upon a series of ethnographic studies throughout the Caribbean which together constitute a corpus of work unparalleled in the region. It was during the highly productive period in the 1950s and early 1960s that M. G. laid the groundwork for some of his major contributions to social theory. On the one hand, there was his development of the theory of pluralism, elaborated in *The Plural Society of British West Indies* (1965) and in subsequent works such as *Pluralism in Africa* (edited with Leo Kuper in 1970) and *Pluralism, Politics and Ideology in the Creole Caribbean* (1991), which he offered as a new mode of analysis of complex multi-cultural societies. On the other, there was his 1960 publication *Government in Zazzau: 1800-1950*, a study of the political development of the pre-colonial Nigerian state of Zaria, which broke new ground through its combination of historical and social anthropological perspectives as well as its novel use of the concept of the cor-

porate group derived from the writings of Henry Maine and Max Weber.

His move from Jamaica to the University of California at Los Angeles in 1961 marked the beginning of a period of more active involvement in university teaching and in 1969, on Daryll Forde's retirement, M. G. returned to University College London to assume the chair of social anthropology. Over the next six years, the UCL department rapidly expanded under his dynamic leadership into one of the largest and most prestigious in the UK. However, when M. G. was offered the post of cabinet-level social policy advisor to the Jamaican government by his close friend Prime Minister Michael Manley, it was an offer that he couldn't refuse. M. G. threw himself into this work with his customary energy, all the more heightened in this case by his personal commitment to improving Jamaican social conditions. His major contributions to his country's social development had been publicly acknowledged in 1972 by the award of the Order of Merit, Jamaica's equivalent to a knighthood. M. G. took great pride in the recognition and liked to point out that he and Bob Marley were the first two holders of the honour.

M. G.'s final academic post before his retirement in 1986 was as the Franklin M. Crosby Professor of the Human Environment at Yale University. His output of publications never diminished, totaling some twenty-one major books in all, including two substantial manuscripts still in press on the study of social structure and on education and society in the Creole Caribbean. His list of professional honours was also large: President of Section H of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Wellcome Medal for Anthropological Research, the Curl Bequest Essay Prize, and Amaury Talbot Book Prize.

He remained committed to fieldwork right to the end. He undertook research projects and social advisory posts in Nigeria and the Caribbean throughout the 1980s, and the pace and intensity of his activity continually amazed his much-younger colleagues.

But if single-minded commitment to work was one of M. G.'s prime characteristics, this did not prevent him from being a loyal friend to those who understood and sympathised with his commitment. They will share with the wider anthropological community a sense of great intellectual loss and will want to join in offering Mary and the family their sincerest regrets and best wishes.

Philip Burnham, University College London

*Obi nni sono akyi mmoro huasu.*

The person who walks behind an elephant doesn't get wet from the dew on the grass.

- from *Three Thousand Six Hundred Ghanaian Proverbs (From the Asante and Fante Language)*, (Christaller and Lange 1990)