Accommodation and conflict in an African peri-urban area

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article est basé sur une enquête menée par l'auteur à Mulago, un faubourg de Kampala, Uganda.

Un nombre sans cesse croissant d'Africains vivent aujourd'hui dans des conditions bien différentes de celles de leur vie traditionnelle. Il résulte de là que les groupements de personnes non apparentées prennent désormais une plus grande importance. Il semble que les anthropologues aient jusqu'ici trop exclusivement centré leurs études sur l'aspect tribal de la société africaine, ce qui n'est pas de grande utilité dans les conditions de changements rapides et d'hétérogénéité qui caractérisent les nouveaux milieux urbains. Il faut ajouter que les anthropologues déplorent l'évolution de la communauté vers des formes d'associations modernes. Cela apparaît clairement dans les études sur les changements sociaux qui s'expriment presqu'exclusivement en termes de détribalisation, d'individualisation et de commercialisation. La plupart du temps, on a ignoré les conséquences positives et fonctionnelles de l'urbanisation et de l'immigration. De plus, la concentration des études anthropologiques sur l'évolution des formes et des fonctions institutionnelles a fait négliger l'étude des changements de structures à l'intérieur des systèmes sociaux ou de leurs parties constituantes. L'auteur avance que la société urbaine (africaine) comprend un grand nombre de sous-groupes hiérarchiquement ordonnés, et que les problèmes d'adaptation et d'intégration des nouvelles communautés urbaines réflètent la tension qui existe entre ces sous-groupes, et qui se manifeste dans le commerce et les occupations, ainsi que dans l'administration politique et juridique.

L'auteur conclut qu'on pourrait expliquer la structure de la société urbaine de l'Afrique par une série de propositions sur l'ethnocentrisisme en-groupe et hors-groupe qu'il considère comme un important mécanisme d'adaptation fonctionnelle.

Introduction

Today, an increasing number of Africans pass a good part of their life in an altogether new setting — in the emerging industrial, commercial and administrative centers most of which,

certainly those of East Africa, are the product of European colonization. Increasingly, too, urban Africans in particular are part of a new community reaching far beyond the cultural, political and economic frontiers of their traditional life. For example, as many urban Africans are young unmarried migrants without local family ties, non-familial associations assume particular importance. Tribal associations and settlements, neighbourhoods, lodgings, factory and office centered associations, recreation groups, savings and friendly societies, new political groupings and the like, and religious associations have resulted in very major structural changes at the level of basic and traditional relationships.[1]

In recent years anthropological studies in Africa, as elsewhere, have concentrated on the changes in institutional forms and functions brought about by situations of contact. However, this cliché-ridden conceptualization has largely obscured the fact that change has primarily resulted in structural changes *within* social systems rather than basic change of the system as a whole.[2] As such, it yet remains to be documented that norm change must precede social change. It is far more likely (and far more clearly documented) that new norms are incorporated in the established patterns of life and as such receive indirect sanction by the society among whose people change is taking place. Furthermore, a great deal of urban African research has concentrated on the documentation of basically vital demographic facts as these have been brought to light by a large number of surveys.[3] While this has provided us with the basic documentation upon which hypotheses and further research must be based, until recently we could draw upon a few attempts setting out theoretical for-

[1] See, for example, SOUTHALL (1961: 4) who writes: "But apart from generalizations about individualism, weakening of sanctions, secularization and commercialization, no clear picture has emerged of the trend of structural change within tribal communities at the fundamental level of family, neighbourhood, and small group relationships."

[2] It now appears to be fully recognized that this is so even in such instances when contact resulted in the introduction of previously unknown economic, political and religious systems such as cash cropping and plantation economies, indirect rule and new forms of local government (or imposed political offices), monotheism and other Western ideologies and practices.

[3] While literature has become extensive, yet of uneven quality, the most extensive coverage has been achieved in FORDE (1956) and SOUTHALL (1961).

mulations. However, the recent publication of a series of papers introduced and edited by Southall (1961) is an important point of departure. The introductory summary by Southall is a closely argued theoretical formulation attempting to draw together a considerable body of literature.[4]

Finally, anthropological studies have traditionally been concerned with 'tribalistic' studies which frequently had two negative consequences. First, an isolated entity, generally referred to as "the tribe" and "tribesmen" have been the starting point of analysis. But this approach often totally neglected that tribal boundaries lacked definition and that tribes were frequently on the move and hence in contact with other groups. Secondly, all too frequently, anthropological studies have focused on and repeatedly put forward the concept of 'detribalization' as a major theoretical orientation. While it is evident, as Gluckman (1961: 69-70) has pointed out, that the "moment an African crosses his tribal boundary to go to town, he is 'detribalized' out of the political control of the tribe", it is more significant that new norms and forms of social relationship emerge. Yet certain tribal norms, particularly on the level of small group behaviour, have often a remarkable tenacity of survival (Mitchell 1959). Certainly one of the less insightful interpretations which have accompanied certain studies of social change is the view that changes of traditional political authority, the rise of nationalism, of the emancipation of women, of subsistence changes and of the new migration to urban areas has a major detrimental and negative effect on the African population as a whole. However, certainty in the face of ignorance is not alien to scientific inquiry. Certainly, both Van Velsen (1960) and Watson (1958; 1959) have given us new and creative insight into the positive and functional consequences of rapid change particularly in regard to migration.

I.

The proposition is frequently put forward that the differences between urban and rural social structure are considerable.

[4] See also SOUTHALL (1956: 557-578; 1957).

Below I set out what have frequently been considered major differences.

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Rural	*Urban*
1. Particularistic	1. Univeralistic
2. Low mobility	2. High mobility
3. Restricted role function	3. Multiple role function
4. Ascribed status	4. Achieved status
5. Close solidarity	5. Diffuse solidarity
6. Institutionalized functions	6. Non-institutionalized functions and considerable social anomie
7. Relatively homogeneous groupings	7. Considerable heterogeneity and composition
8. Considerable integration, stability and unity	8. Overall minimal integration, stability and considerable diversity
9. Norms, sanctions and structure supported by traditional political authority and kinship roles	9. Changing norms and structures, unpremeditated action, idio-syncratic conduct and structural differences

The reason for introducing such a typology is to point out that in rural social organization membership for individuals and groups is defined in terms of belonging to a number of particularistic yet over-lapping and interdependent sub-groups and structural divisions which order kinship, political, economic and ritual spheres all of which are highly institutionalized. However, in urban society individual and group relations tend to be marked by participation in relatively isolated sub-systems contained within the urban configuration. It is one of the propositions put forward in this paper that in urban society the strains and lack of stability are consequent not merely upon problems of integration *within* the constituent groups comprising the sub-systems but that the problems of accommodation and conflict in heterogeneous urban societies reflect tensions primarily *between* the main sub-groups and categories of people of which such (African) urban societies are composed.

II.

The densely populated area surrounding the predominantly non-African municipality of Kampala has been reported on by Gutkind (1960) and Southall and Gutkind (1957). A marked feature of this all-African area, which is under the control of the

Buganda Government, and which exercises its political authority through a cadre of minor chiefs is that the African inhabitants of this area comprise an extremely heterogeneous group of between thirty to forty ethnic groups. Each of which may be treated as a sub-system ordered hierarchically according to cultural, language, occupational and social characteristics. It is the hierarchical ordering of these sub-systems in the context of a heterogeneous urban society that results in considerable tensions of accomodation and integration which, in the case of Ganda versus others, can be seen in terms of an in-group out-group relationship.

A closer analysis of the parish of Mulago, one of twelve sub-divisions of the (sub)county surrounding the municipality will clarify this interpretation.

The area from which my data is taken comprises some sixty-seven acres most of which is densely settled with a population of 1339 people. The focal point of the area is the market and commercial area where the small retail Ganda traders (some seventeen of them in January 1954) predominate. While some non-Ganda occupy modest stalls only two non-Ganda traders were successful in carrying on small retail trade in the main street. Between 1953-1955 seven non-Ganda traders (four Luo and three Rwanda) started small shops of which three lasted between two and four months, and two from four to nine months. While no doubt small-scale African enterprise faces special difficulties unconnected with the specialized division of labour along ethnic lines, in every one of the five cases the non-Ganda shopkeepers gave place to Ganda who received preferential treatment by Ganda land owners and house owners. In 1953 a Ganda Association of Shopkeepers was formed with a view to "protecting Ganda trade in Mulago". This organization brought considerable pressure on Ganda land and houseowners to lease their property to Ganda only. Indeed, during 1954 this Association approached a number of Asian wholesalers in Kampala with the request not to supply non-Ganda shopkeepers in Mulago with commodities. As the capital which the majority on non-Ganda are able to sink into their enterprise is generally very small, Ganda traders with their greater wealth can operate better shops

which are often well stocked. While non-Ganda residents patronized non-Ganda traders as much as possible, the greater range of commodities in Ganda shops attracted non-Ganda trade. While commercial activity does not exist in isolation, the Ganda traders may be viewed as a distinct sub-system upon which other ethnic groups are dependent, a fact which not infrequently was brought out by non-Ganda who claimed that Ganda shopkeepers were cheating on weight, measure and change. In turn, Ganda shopkeepers not infrequently insulted and refused to serve non-Ganda.

Administratively the area is under the jurisdiction of a paid minor chief (Southall and Gutkind 1957: 183-185) who appoints half a dozen or so unpaid ward headmen who not infrequently are local landowners or their stewards (Southall and Gutkind 1957: 185-189). The power of the local chief is deeply entrenched in rather undefined traditional powers confirmed under the Uganda Native Authority Ordinance of 1919 (Uganda Laws 1935). It is the local chief and his assistants who jointly carry out various administrative and legal functions. The chief is charged with maintaining law and order and seeing to it that the instructions from the Buganda Government are carried out, the most important of which is the collection of various taxes.

It is this important function which places the Ganda chief in a politically dominant position which is, if not rejected outright, the cause of endless suspicion by non-Ganda who insist that as "visitors" they do not benefit from such taxes. Furthermore, non-Ganda claim that they alone are subject to special pressures in meeting their tax obligation but that many Ganda pay if and when they feel like doing so.

Apart from tax collection, the Ganda chief and ward headmen meet once a week at which time they constitute themselves as a "court" and hear "cases" laid before them. As the chief's judicial authority is not clearly codified in law his authority is limited to arbitration based on the consent of the disputing parties and their willingness to lay complaints before him. In this way a large number of minor disputes are settled relieving the (sub)county court and judges of a vast number of petty cases. Before disputes, acts of violence or thieving are laid before the

chief, the ward headmen try to arbitrate and thus further relieve the chief of many hours of patient listening.

It is below the level of the ward headmen that non-Ganda make special efforts to solve their own disputes by laying these before elders or appointed leaders of their tribal group. Non-Ganda not merely insist that a Ganda chief does not understand their customs and procedures of dealing with a wide variety of difficulties which arise, but that they are often handicapped linguistically when pleading their case before him. Furthermore, they claim that should their disputes involve Ganda residents their chances of a reasonable hearing and fair arbitration are very small indeed. Thus, there has come into being an informal system whereby various tribal groups attempt to resolve their own disputes, a procedure which in turn works against the uniform execution of law and order so vital in an urban locality that in any event has grown up with the minimum regimentation in a number of vital areas where control is normally considered essential.

Once before the Ganda chief, non-Ganda must follow the procedures laid down by Ganda tradition. Both plaintiff and defendent must prostrate before the chief. Ganda are invariably heard first. The use of Swahili by non-Ganda is frowned upon. Arbitration is offered in terms of Ganda tradition. For example, in a case when a non-Ganda complained that a ward headman had treated him with abuse after the former had received help to catch a thief, the case was dismissed on the ground that the plaintiff would not have been so abused had he observed the Ganda custom of rewarding the headman with a gift in kind or in cash Complaints against a Ganda thief are frequently not upheld on the allusive ground that the more educated Ganda are not given to stealing particularly from non-Ganda who are merely "visitors". Violation of non-Ganda women by Ganda men is frequently also dismissed on the ground that non-Ganda are merely visitors and their womenfolk are compensation for Ganda "bearing the burden of an invasion by foreigners." The Ganda chief and the ward headmen take every opportunity to point out to non-Ganda that the only way for them to solve the problems arising from their immigrant status is by "acting like Ganda"

and talking like them. Yet even for those who are firmly settled, entry into Ganda society is prevented by Ganda ethnocentrism, i.e. the tendency of Ganda to judge other cultures by the standards of their own prevailing culture. To the Ganda, as to non-Ganda, ethnocentrism becomes an important instrument of *internal* social control within the group. Indeed it is important to recognize that for non-Ganda, in the heterogeneous setting in which each tribal group finds itself, ethnocentrism becomes an important device whereby the out-group adapts itself to the economic and political environment created by the dominant Ganda.

This point is seen more clearly when analysing the spatial distribution of the heterogeneous population (Gutkind 1961). It will then be found that the parish of Mulago comprises a series of tribal settlements with the Ganda dominating the dense commercial area and the smaller non-Ganda groups spaced peripherally around the market and main street. Such settlements, usually comprising a group of closely spaced houses, have their own internal political and social structure which reflects tribal custom. This is particularly reflected in dietary habits and not infrequently in the mode of dress, the arrangement of living space, the rearing of children and widely different sanitary standards. Not infrequently such ethnic enclaves stand in considerable isolation being surrounded by small plots. Depending on the degree of isolation the residents will feel either free or constrained to follow certain traditions such as occasional feasts and dances. The chief and his ward headmen rarely intrude in these ethnic enclaves but if this occurs they are treated with a mixture of suspicion-cum-politeness. Depending on the nature of the business calling for such a contact, it is customary for members of the tribal group to designate one or two of its members as spokesmen.

In the eyes of the Ganda such tribal settlements are ordered hierarchically. Certain groups are virtually compelled to isolate themselves because of the low status ascribed to the tribe by the Ganda. This is particularly true of those people whose customs and habits are treated with scorn by the Ganda, i.e. those who decorate or mutilate their body and those who eat certain food never taken by Ganda or those whose jobs are considered

extremely menial. Members of such tribal groups are treated as scapegoats in many situations. Women members of such groups are invariably designated as prostitutes and men as thieves and trouble makers.

Apart from these tribal settlements, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the adaptation made by the sub-groups in the larger urban setting are the various friendly societies, tribal associations, socio-cultural, recreational and occupational associations which have come into being in recent years (Little 1957). The objectives and organization of these "traditional-modernized" associations and their policy of ethnic exclusiveness of their membership renders them at one and the same time a functional adaptation emphasizing the in-group's ethnocentrism while acting as a deterrent to the rapid integration of the sub-groups in an urban milieu. To many a newly arrived immigrant, the tribal association becomes the only point of anchorage in an alien urban environment.

III.

In summary: the problems of accommodation and conflict in heterogeneous African urban society can be best set out in terms of a number of propositions about in-group and out-group ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism might well be viewed as an important functionally adaptive mechanism. While no doubt there is a correlation between in-group ethnocentricity and conflict with out-groups, as the result of the in-group's internal solidarity and conformity of its members, there is also a functional and positive association between in-group ethnocentricity and solidarity and adaptation not merely to the exercise of political and economic power by a dominant group vis-à-vis a large number of sub-groups but also as an adaptive mechanism between hierarchically ordered sub-groups. In as much as this functional adaptation leads to withdrawal from interaction with members of other sub-groups the emergence of an urban society whose members have a commen understanding and loyalty is hindered.

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