

SOME LOCAL IMPEDIMENTS TO SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG URBAN AFRICANS*

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THE PASSING OF any previously traditional society in the wake of urbanization entails what are by now readily recognized sociological problems. It is to be expected that urban Africans in Rhodesia will, in general, experience problems which are similar to those that have been experienced by other emerging social entities in the process of 'modernization'. But at the same time it must be recognized that the prevailing plurality in 'Rhodesian society' will have particular consequences for urban Africans in Rhodesia. Therefore it is useful to discuss some of the external conditions in the social and material environment of the changing 'community'; put another way, our concern is with impediments to social change which have a local origin and do not apply universally or in all parts of Africa.

This is not to suggest that had external conditions been more equitable for urban Africans, problems determined by changing internal relationships in the 'community' would have been averted in some way. The corollary, that, in other places, external conditions are always such that they are conducive of positive processes of social change is also not intended.

The research that informs the subject of this paper shows that urban Africans experience problems of an internal community nature such as: cultural and structural incompatibility; ambivalence in the definition of community; wide cleavages of 'social type' inhabiting the same locality; and disruption of familial structures and roles. The argument pursued in this paper is that political domination of Blacks by Whites, to the extent that the latter impose adverse external conditions on social change among the former, exacerbates (all other things being equal) the normal and expected problems encountered in situations of urban modernization. Local forms of domination are viewed as unnecessary and extra impediments to the total of social change among urban Africans.

Research findings reported below are drawn from four surveys conducted in Salisbury between 1969 and 1971. Three were conducted in Highfield Township and the final survey was conducted in the townships Highfield,

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The term 'urban Africans' refers to the relatively settled population inhabiting African townships in Rhodesia. Excepted from this definition are African domestic servants, who constitute 20 per cent of the African adult population in Salisbury, men living in 'single status' in hostels, such as the 2 400 men in Harare township in Salisbury, and itinerant components of population to be found in towns from time to time.

Kambuzuma and Dzivaresekwa. The first two surveys have been published,¹ the third exists in manuscript form and the last has yet to be written up. We draw on this information firstly for a discussion of problems and impediments for change, and secondly for a substantive illustration of the situation.

EXTERNALLY IMPOSED PROBLEMS

Process of Urbanization. In Africa urbanization has not been analogous to any western model.² Van Zwaneberg makes this very clear with particular reference to Nairobi.³ As the development of Salisbury is sufficiently similar to that of Nairobi, some of Van Zwaneberg's points may be applied to the local situation. Until recently, more attention has been paid in Rhodesia to rural than to urban development. Unlike the course of urbanization in the West, industrial technology and the growth of industrial production in Rhodesia has not been the major determinant of rural to urban migration. For example, manufacturing enterprise in Rhodesia accounted for about 13 per cent of African employment at the time of the surveys, and has not changed significantly since then.⁴ Rather, the present urban African population is engaged primarily in servicing, in one way or another, European settlement and administration.

One consequence of this development in the urban area, together with forces pushing people away from the rural areas,⁵ has been a very slow development of an urban proletariat. Modernity without stability has serious consequences both for the mass of urban Africans and for the plural society. Internal changes within the community promote a situation where traditional familial security is relinquished before any guarantee of an alternative can be established. Lack of stability and a type of employment likely to increase remuneration and to develop proletarian solidarity leaves urban Africans with little bargaining power in negotiations with the external system. The revolution in rising expectations and lack of fulfilment of these expectations gives rise to an explosive socio-economic situation running parallel with political disaffection.

Housing and Population. It is almost unnecessary to state that the African

¹ P. Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield African Township* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Dep. of Sociology, Occasional Paper No. 6); *Two Aspects of Social Change: Highfield African Township, Salisbury* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Dep. of Sociology, Occasional Paper No. 7).

² T. G. McGee, *The Urbanization Process in the Third World* (London, G. Bell, 1971), 13-31.

³ R. van Zwaneberg, 'Social Poverty and Urban Theory: The Growth of Nairobi in Comparison with Western Cities' (Makerere Univ., East African Universities Social Sciences Council Conference, 1971).

⁴ Rhodesia, *Monthly Digest of Statistics, January, 1972* (Salisbury, Central Statistical Office, 1972), Table 14.

⁵ For the most recent surveys of the literature, see J. C. Mitchell, 'Factors in rural male absenteeism in Rhodesia' and G. K. Garbett, 'Circulatory migration in Rhodesia: Towards a decision model', in D. Parkin (ed.) *Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa* (London, International African Inst., 1975), 93-112, 113-25.

housing shortage is one of the most pressing physical and humanitarian problems of the urban area. However, urban settlement in terms of sheer physical presence⁶ together with a social commitment⁷ to urban life means that housing will be increasingly demanded by natural urban population increase as well as migrants to the city. Already in many townships there is a population that does not have formal family residential rights. Such people comprise lodger families, lodgers who would bring their families to town if accommodation were available, young families living in parent's houses and related lodgers, some with their families already in town and others with a wife and children in the rural area.

The dwellings in African townships are evidently designed as family accommodation; but very few dwellings house only elementary family members. In Highfield there is a mean of 2.16 lodgers per dwelling; 8.8 per cent of the dwellings are inhabited by lodger families and single lodgers in the absence of the landlord; and some of the enlarged families consist of two elementary families.⁸ Very often this implies that a number of households inhabit one dwelling. Such a situation is a problem for the family where overcrowding, inconvenience and disrupted domestic life makes the home an unattractive environment.

It can be shown, however, that in 50 per cent of cases in Highfield people have confined their households to the elementary family without the physical pressure of limited housing space. This leads one to conclude that there is some preference for this type of family structure, yet the phenomenon of the enlarged family, which occurs in all types of housing, will probably increase as shortage of accommodation becomes more acute.

Rack-renting has become a real problem; in 1969 the modal cost of a rented room ranged from Rh\$3.00 to Rh\$5.00, but many people are paying from Rh\$8.00 to Rh\$10.00 for one room. One case is known where a home owner (absentee, renting a house in Harare) is collecting Rh\$43.00 on a four-roomed house.

Dzivaresekwa Township deserves special mention. There the people are particularly poor and the cost of a half unit (Rh\$4.60) seems particularly high when this has to be found from the wages of a domestic servant; preliminary data shows that although the families inhabiting these dwellings are relatively small, many people live below a subsistence level.⁹

Priority of Facilities. It cannot be assumed that the communities of the urban African townships are similar to communities in any depressed western residential community where work is sought in a city beyond the community and where the administration of local government is in the hands of some outside interest. African townships in the urban areas of Rhodesia are in

⁶ Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield*, 17-24.

⁷ Stopforth, *Two Aspects of Social Change*, 54.

⁸ Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield*, ch.3.

⁹ At this time 91 per cent of private domestic servants earned less than Rh\$20.00 per month; see Rhodesia, *Wage Distribution of African Employees: June, 1971* (Salisbury, Central Statistical Office, mimeo, 1971). Table II.

legal and political reality social enclaves within an urban system dominated by Europeans. Whether these townships are administered by central or local government, official standards are based on limited 'instant' modern development where planning priorities require a minimum modern house in the first instance, the last concern being for tenure and title of property.¹⁰ These standards accord well with urban community development in highly developed states, but it is doubtful whether they ease the lot of an underdeveloped people.

Turner in a study of priorities among a community of a *barriada* in Lima, Peru, discovered that the first concern of the people was for security of tenure of land. The second concern was for a minimum house which could be extended as the family increased in size and this was followed by a concern for community services, such as education. Only last came a concern for modern facilities, such as transport and electricity.

Research data on Highfield township indicates a similar pattern of needs. The basic concern of the modern urban dweller is for security of tenure from which to base new and costly aspirations. There is much emphasis on community services, especially education. Urban Africans are often treated as sojourning migrants and no allowance is made for space to accommodate increase in family size (exceptions to this rule are the core-housing schemes in Highfield and Kambuzuma townships). The instant modern standard is costly, both for residents in the townships and for the agencies erecting such townships. The initial incentive to community development is blunted by 'serving up' a complete physical environment into which the community must fit.

One solution to the housing problem for urban Africans lies in an adequate knowledge of the definition of community priorities by Africans themselves, combined with a notion of minimum facility standards to ensure sanitary and adequate living conditions. Definitive research directed at these priorities might well reveal that alternatives to the instant township exist, whereby Africans could make more efficient use of their limited resources and whereby present revenue allocations could be more effectively employed.

Aspirations, Discrimination and Politics. Education and urbanization have led to a spectacular rise of socio-economic expectations. It is clear that parents' aspirations for their children and the aspirations of children themselves are very high. It is equally clear both objectively and to the township residents that these expectations are not being met.

Research on life goals and styles reveals that 86.2 per cent of respondents in Highfield are dissatisfied with their standard of living. Low wages and lack of money were the chief complaints. Ninety-five per cent of respondents expressed the wish that their children should have a better life than theirs, stating that better education, jobs and wages could achieve this.

¹⁰ For a discussion of alternatives for the provision of urban housing in underdeveloped states, see J. C. Turner, 'Barriers and channels for housing development in modernizing countries', in W. Mangin (ed.), *Peasants in Cities* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 15-16.

While change within family institutions is still retarded by traditional culture, other areas of life not related to traditionalism have developed more quickly. This represents another differential in change which causes ambivalence, but the chief social and community problem regarding life goals is the apparent difference between what people want and what they are likely to get.

Discrimination in education, jobs, housing, social life, treatment by authorities, and in the courts, is one of the chief topics of discussion and dissent among township dwellers. Both real and imagined discrimination has led Africans to distrust the European and his machinery. This remains the most obvious and pervasive problem felt within the community, as well as a general difficulty for race relations at the national level.

There are two main political problems experienced by people living in African townships, one a general objective problem of power distribution, the other more subjectively felt by the population. The problems are as follows:

- (i) In the light of political development in Rhodesia since 1965 and the limited African representation in Parliament, it has been clear that the African townships were to remain social enclaves within the wider context of metropolitan and national growth.
- (ii) Expression of African political feeling has had little outlet: 55 per cent of respondents in Highfield felt that nobody represented African political opinion and 71 per cent felt that it was difficult to take an active part in politics. The dramatic rise to prominence of the African National Council after the Pearce Commission reflected the political deprivation among Africans.

The political aspirations of the township dwellers are at odds with the intentions and policies of national and local government in Rhodesia. This provides for community strains which are felt by all people, sophisticated and otherwise, educated and ignorant, old and young.

Social Security. African urban dwellers live a precarious life at the mercy of any unforeseen circumstance that might arise. Few people own their own houses and security of tenure is doubtful if illness or death occurs. Very few people have insurance policies, belong to a trade union or have security of job tenure. Similarly few people belong to pension schemes which can secure their old age. Urban dwellers are also dependent to a large degree on decisions made by the township administration.

Unfortunately the role of the police is misunderstood (this has been exacerbated by police raiding which is one of the most unpopular features of township life) and police are regarded as enemies of the community rather than providing security for community members. Similarly the township administrations are viewed with suspicion.

Problems of social security posed by inimical external relationships intensify problems of change in the internal community system. Lack of security in the urban environment militates against the volition to modernity and creates ambivalent attitudes to the value of modern achievement. Yet,

despite lack of security and official as well as informal barriers to advancement, research in Highfield reveals that this desire for modernity is more efficacious than traditional culture in determining the emerging social structure in the urban township. This trend reinforces the finding from an African sample in Durban where government policies of 'cultural revivalism' tend to disrupt social change but not to eclipse the urbanization of the Blacks.¹¹

SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Some pressures, however, arise both from within and without urban African communities; and the example chosen is to help demonstrate the futility of *ad hoc* solutions to social problems without prior consideration of sociological conditions, especially processes of change, which enter any equation of problem — solution in society. The example chosen here focuses on socio-economic differences within township populations. Admittedly this is related in some measure to racial inequities in Rhodesia which at the present time constitutes an external community reference for most Africans; but it will become apparent that far from diverging, external and internal problem foci converge in real situations, and so preclude any unidimensional approach to urban African society.

Urban Mass and Urban Elite. Further to Kileff's study of urban African elites resident in Marimba Park and Westwood, Salisbury,¹² we replicated a structured enquiring survey¹³ among a group of elites residing in an area of Highfield African township commonly referred to as Chitepo Road (the area has subsequently been renamed Mangwende Drive) at the beginning of 1970.¹⁴ The assumption that this group of people would represent socio-economic elites was confirmed by the results of the study which were compared with sociographic material available for the masses of the township.¹⁵ Among the sample of Chitepo Road, 35 per cent of respondents were recorded as belonging to the second urban generation (born in town) as opposed to 14 per cent among the sample of the whole township ($p < .02$). While educational achievement among the mass of adults in the township peaks at Grades 6-7, the select group of Chitepo Road shows a strong trend toward secondary and higher education congruent with educational achievement reported by Kileff in his independent study of elites in Salisbury. Occupational differences between elites and the masses of urban Africans reflect the

¹¹ L. Schlemmer, 'City or rural "Homeland": A study of patterns of identification among Africans in South Africa's divided society', *Social Forces* (1972), 51, 153.

¹² C. Kileff, 'Black Surbanites: Adaptation to Western Culture in Salisbury, Rhodesia' (Rice University, Houston, Ph.D. thesis, 1970).

¹³ See Stopforth, *Two Aspects of Social Change*.

¹⁴ Data on the urban African elites in this section appear in my two unpublished papers: 'Comparative Data for the Assessment of Processes of Social Change among Urban Africans, Salisbury' and 'Comparative Differential Social Change: Highfield African Township and Chitepo Road, Salisbury' (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Inst. for Social Research, Urban Studies Research Unit, Research Reports Nos. 4 and 5, 1973). Also a manuscript entitled 'Comparative Assessment of Processes of Social Change' is in preparation for publication.

¹⁵ Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield and Two Aspects of Social Change*.

general differences in educational achievement. Table I describes the distribution of occupations between respondents in Chitepo Road and the township, and incorporates figures from Kileff's study,¹⁶ which confirm the upward occupational mobility among African elites. Not surprisingly, the achievements among African elites are reflected in income: average income among the Chitepo Road group is five times that of the average wage for employed Africans (excluding agricultural and private domestic workers) in Rhodesia.¹⁷ It is objectively clear that in the case of elites and masses, differentiation among Africans has sociological implication both for relationships within the community as well as for the community *vis-à-vis* the wider society.

Table I
OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION
AMONG THREE AFRICAN GROUPS
(EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE)

Occupation	Highfield African Township		Chitepo Road		Marimba Park and Westwood	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Unemployed	13,8	77,2	—	37,5	—	37,1
Professional, Technical and Related	5,9	6,0	57,1	50,0	31,1	40,1
Executive, Clerical and Related	14,6	3,0	9,5	6,3	62,5 ¹⁸	8,6
Sales	8,4	2,4	4,8	—	6,3	11,4
Transport and Communications	16,7	—	19,0	—	—	—
Craftsmen and Production Process	25,5	7,2	—	6,3	—	—
Services	8,4	4,2	4,8	—	—	2,9
Other	6,6	—	4,8	—	—	—
TOTAL	99,9	100,0	100,0	100,0	99,9	100,1
NUMBER	239	167	21	16	32	35

¹⁶ Kileff, 'Black Surbanites', 50, 53.

¹⁷ The average wage for employed Africans was calculated from Rhodesia, *Monthly Digest of Statistics, November, 1971* (Salisbury, Central Statistical Office, 1971), Tables 14 and 16.

¹⁸ Fifteen of the twenty respondents in this category are described as business men by Kileff, 'Black Surbanites', 50.

In order to describe sociological differences between elites and masses among urban Africans, we extract comparative data from the relevant references above (only the most statistically significant differences among 40 plus significant differences are discussed here (Chi square values $p < .001$).

Table II

COMPARATIVE RESPONSES TO MODERN ORIENTATIONS

Variables		Percentage Response	
		Chitepo Road (N=37)	Highfield African Township (N=87)
Negation of Reciprocal Relations	Between parents and sons	84	44
	Between people in town and extended kin in the rural area	84	25
Positive Modern Urban Aspirations	People happier in town than in the rural area	60	35
	Preference for modern life achievements	97	73
	Preference for pension (rather than cattle) on retirement	78	32
Positive Acceptance of Change	Among the youth	56	12
Media Consumption	Newspapers read daily	92	26
	Regular listening to news broadcasts	78	45
Community Control	Preference for modern courts (as opposed to traditional courts)	76	39
	Adequate knowledge of the meaning (definition) of Community Development	68	33

Table II describes the most statistically significant comparative response to modern orientations between the samples of Chitepo Road (elite) and the township (masses). It is immediately apparent that elites not only experience modern orientations at a high level of consensus but that concomitantly traditional proclivities are valued in only a few cases compared with the masses of the township.

Thus on the basis of the selected variables reported in Table II, a comparison of a sample of the mass of urban Africans (living in a township) with elites among urban Africans (sample in Chitepo Road) shows that the elites:

- (i) Are generally more prepared to relinquish traditional reciprocity between the generations.
- (ii) Largely negate the probity of the extended family and opt for an independent existence of a conjugal unit in town.
- (iii) Are more prone to concede that people can be happier in town than in the rural area.
- (iv) Opt, in all but a single case, for life achievements that can only be pursued by participation in a modern, industrial environment (this aspiration is also well established among the masses).
- (v) Are more consistent in projecting their future aspirations and achievements within modern, urban contexts.
- (vi) Although in many cases decrying the radical changes among young urban Africans, are generally more able to accept these changes as positive rather than negative for the urban community.
- (vii) Show a very much higher incidence of reading the daily press.
- (viii) Are also more likely to listen to news broadcasts over the air.
- (ix) Indicate greater preference for western rather than traditional legal process.
- (x) And, most important, are more likely to know and *understand* abstract concepts which affect the urban African community.

It cannot be disputed that different socio-economic levels among urban Africans (this fact in itself supporting the view of emergent modern society) reflect different levels of participation in, empathy with, and conceptualization of roles homologous with modern social structure. If we consider these differences in the light of a general volition to African Nationalism in Rhodesia, strains commonly associated with relationships between elite and common African urbanites are explicable. Suspicion of the man of two worlds prevails. Common people see that the African elite very often associates with Europeans and consider that he understands the way of Europeans. Consequently common people often seek out an elite member to intercede for them with members of the white society but, at the same time, distrust the motive of the black elite. This attitude is often compounded among the African masses by a propensity to consider success as the consequence of cunning, and exploitation of others, rather than achievement within the bounds of a well-worn ladder of upward mobility. One would wish to avoid the clichés of class conflict when discussing emergent urban African society about which relatively little is known at the present time, yet embryonic clashes of interest cannot be avoided as a subject of interest. In an earlier report I commented:

Greater volition to modernity (by elites) is characterized by greater understanding of, participation in and choice of appropriate structures in politics, courts, agents of control and manipulation of social mechanism. Categorical inclusion (*vis-à-vis* the masses) as a result

of stratification and group protection is evidenced by many respondents in Chitepo Road who are more elitist in their ideas of community representation and authority . . .¹⁹

Brandel-Syrier notes in similar vein that the elite looks down on the African masses ('ordinary people') on the reef where African elites designate positions of inferiority by 'down naming'.²⁰ The causes of tension generated by social differentiation are therefore not only suspicion of elites among the mass, but equally a tendency among elites to claim an exclusive role in African society.

An African socio-economic elite is in a very ambivalent situation in the plural society of Rhodesia where conditions of white supremacy preclude (except in narrow ritualized actions) black elites from being accepted within the stratum appropriate to their achievement. Generally, the most common White is ascribed more status and recognition than the elite Black. Esteem among African elites is therefore difficult to achieve. A prestigious position might be recognized by both Whites and Blacks, but when it is held by a Black, however conscientious, he commands only grudging respect from the mass of Africans, patronizing recognition from white equals, and is the subject of racialistic disdain among most other Whites. External conditions bare down heavily on this group of Africans. They have totally relinquished access to security²¹ in the traditional, tribal, subsistence order; they have achieved success within the definition of a new order often with sufficient efficacy to secure material security in the short term but the more intangible rewards of recognition and full participation are not realized. Elsewhere, in a study of Africans in South Africa, we have shown that Africans who are oriented to modern reward systems are relatively deprived in that remuneration is insufficient to allow them an adequate level of material consumption, a feature of modern reward systems.²² Now this argument might be rationalized further by the proposition that normlessness among emergent Africans will continue to be a problem (even when equitable consumption patterns are possible) as long as the overall reward system of the society is not congruent with the actions, achievements, aspirations and values of the participants in the new order.

¹⁹ 'Comparative Data for the Assessment of Processes of Social Change . . .', 84.

²⁰ M. Brandel-Syrier, *Reeftown Elites* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 187.

²¹ The concept security is used in the sense referring to the overall reward basis complementary to the type of social order in which participation is manifest.

²² L. Schlemmer and P. Stopforth, *Poverty, Family Patterns and Material Aspirations among Africans in a Border Industry Township* (Durban, Univ. of Natal, Inst. for Social Research, 1974).