

## *Research Report*

### **African Views of Urban Life**

Many sociologists are interested in the effects of urban life upon migrants who move into cities. Louis Wirth (1938, 12) describes how city life affects social relationships causing them to become 'impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental'. Krige (1936, 1) follows this line of thinking and states that the African urban dweller experiences a 'chaotic welter of transition'. However, Gluckman (1960, 57) and Southall (1961, 25) have emphasized the Africans' ability to adapt to urban life. This paper analyses how Africans themselves view life in town. Rather than imposing Western categories on the data, the author has portrayed as far as possible the original African categorization of city life. In taking this approach we concur with Berger and Luckman (1966, p. 19) in their assessment of the sociologist's task:

Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. As sociologists we take this reality as the object of our analyses.

#### **METHOD**

A random sample of sixty-four Africans from Harari Township, Seki Tribal Trust Land and the Bikita Tribal Trust Land were asked to write a story about a person who lives in the city. The themes in these stories were tabulated and analysed using the method of content analysis.

There were recurring themes in the stories of both rural and urban Africans. The two dominant themes in their writings about city

life were Work and Money. The main characters in the stories were constantly thinking about the jobs and money they had or were hoping to have. They were also preoccupied with Food, Theft, Family, Clothes and Drinking. Important differences between the stories written by the city dwellers and those written by the country dwellers were that the protagonists in the country dwellers' stories were more concerned with Food and Family than were the protagonists in the city dwellers' stories.

The three profiles cited below show the emotional and relational content of the two most frequent themes, Work and Money. In the first, Work is associated with prestige:

This man is imagining that if he was a teacher, he would be a great man in Harari.

In the second profile work is associated with money, supporting a family, eating bread, drinking 'smart' beer and being happy. Not only is a certain amount of prestige involved in drinking 'smart' beer but a general kind of happiness or well-being results from having a job:

The man who lives in town thinks that his work should prosper so that he may be able to support his family at home. This person wishes to stay long in the town because he is happy there and he eats bread every morning. When he is off duty he thinks of drinking 'smart' beer. He thinks he will be happy if he stays in the town working.

In this third profile Work is linked with happiness, money and survival. Unemployment brings anomie and death:

This man can only be happy in town when he is working. All what he needs, or all what he lives on, comes from money. If this town man can not get job, all he had to do is to hang himself.

In other profiles work is similarly associated with money, happiness and general well-being, whereas the lack of work is associated with hunger, theft and death.

#### THEME FREQUENCIES

City Dwellers' Stories:	(per cent)
Work	14
Money	12
Drinking	6
Clothes	5
Theft	4
Housing	3
Education	2
Marriage	2
Football	2
Family	2
Other Sport	2

#### Country Dwellers' Stories:

Work	22
Money	11
Food	11
Family	9
Cars	7
Clothes	7
Theft	4
Education	2
Smoking	2
Bicycle	2
Cinema	2
Women	2

#### CONCLUSION

1. The relatively low frequency of Food and Family themes in the stories written by the urban dwellers might be because these two categories become less important for Africans as they become more urbanized. The possibility is supported by the findings of a recent study of the people living in two townships of Salisbury, Marimba Park and Westwood (Kileff, 1970, p. 152).

2. The high frequency of Work and Money themes in the stories written by the informants suggest that ideally Africans perceive the city as a place which provides one with suitable work and plenty of money. If this was obtainable in the rural areas then two important reasons for coming to town would no longer exist.

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