

**Consensus and Conflict in African Societies:
An Introduction to Sociology - Margaret Peil -396 pp.
Longman · London · 1977 · £3.50**

The declared aim of this book is introducing the student to aspects of sociology which seem most important for analysing African societies in the post-independence period. The book draws most of its material from Africa and as such is useful as an addition to the literature of African societies. It provides a dictionary of sociological terms or concepts and familiarises the reader or the student with a range of theoretical ideas. This is followed by an attempt to apply the concepts to the African setting.

The first chapter is an introductory one, giving a general coverage of the field of sociology. The author presents the main ideas with which the sociologist approaches any area and the skills and interests that make up the sociologist's tools of analysis. The author approaches the subject matter in simple language. In the second chapter, she focuses on social organization, the structural relations between groups and people which make up the social structure of society. Here she discusses the fundamental aspects of social organization and includes the study of primary groups, patterns of leadership and authority and theories on the nature of social order. She further discusses other topics such as macro sociological and micro sociological ways of looking at societies. The study of the micro-order focuses on the human individual in what is called the behaviour setting. Peil also considers some elementary aspects of the macro-order, i.e., the larger patterns and units of social organization. Under primary groups, the major types of

groups are examined. The author also attempts to describe the general features of societies or social orders. This raises questions on wider questions of the way societies are held together. The two main theories which explain social order are the consensus and conflict theories, which imply 'unity' and 'diversity' - all this is at a general level.

Chapter three of the book shows how an individual's behaviour is shaped by the society of which he is part. This is what is called socialisation. Here the author discusses the socialisation process of an individual into his society and the relationship he develops with other individuals through social exchange. Chapter four deals with various aspects of social differentiation - the major themes which characterise modern society, e.g., social stratification, the growing significance of race and ethnic origin in advanced and developing nations. Thus, the chapter is concerned with ways in which one group of people is set apart from another. The first part of the chapter briefly discusses the Marxist concept of class and its application to a Third World situation. Despite its title, the book does not deal with some of the vital questions, e.g., class conflict, the nature of capitalism, the emergence of the national bourgeoisie and the emergence of political power, and the history of imperialism. The author neglects the class nature of the state. The relationship of the bourgeoisie to the multinationals is of considerable importance in analysing the dynamics of social structure in African countries. By failing to cover this aspect, the book ignores the most important aspects of conflict in African societies. Hence, though the book is only meant to be introductory, it is shallow and lacking in certain respects. The weakest part of the book is actually found in this chapter.

Chapters five to seven bring sociological analysis to bear on institution, the family, education, religion, the polity and economy. Here most, if not all,

topics or concepts introduced in the previous chapters are elaborated and applied, e.g., bureaucracy, social stratification, etc. Chapter eight is centered on the development of the city as a general site of human residence, association and work while chapter nine discusses the ascendance of an industrial order with new problems of organisation and control - problems of unemployment, housing, etc. The final chapter applies theories of social change to African societies. Here, the author aims at a better understanding of the factors involved in the adoption and rejection of change. As I mentioned earlier, the discussions in the book tend to be at a general level. The book is shallow and lacking in certain respects. But inspite of this criticism, the book is valuable and is a contribution to the study and understanding of African societies.

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