

SOCI 309/339

URBAN SOCIOLOGY

Session Eleven

Social Problems - Ethnicity

Lecturer: Prof. Chris Abotchie, Department of Sociology

Contact Information: cabotchie@yahoo.com



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

College of Education

School of Continuing and Distance Education

2014/2015 – 2016/2017

godsonug.wordpress.com/blog

Session Overview

Introduction

- Given that a social problem is a negative phenomenon which has become so widespread that it impinges on the conscience of the majority of the people who then call for something to be done about it, **ethnicity qualifies as an urban social problem because of the heterogeneity of urban populations.**
- **Thus the strong in-group loyalty and the sentimental attachment to one's own group and its traits** finds frequent expression in the urban communities – particularly as ethnic groups have a tendency to segregate in identifiable communities in the city.
- **From a sociological perspective, ethnicity has the potential to bring about disintegration in societies.**

Overview contd.

- **Sociologists are thus interested in the study of ethnic groups and ethnicity from the point of view of understanding social behavior.**
- **It helps the sociologist to understand inter-group relations and the forces of integration and disintegration (conflict or cooperation), which constitute an important part of his study of the discipline.**
- Urban areas being heterogeneous communities perhaps experience the greatest impact of ethnic differences.

Session Outline

The main topics to be covered in this session are as follows: -

- Topic One: Ethnicity – definitions and impact
- Topic Two: Post independence ethnic rivalries
- Topic Three: Impact and containment of ethnicity

Objectives/Expected Outcomes for the Session

On the completion of this session, you should be able to:

- Define ethnicity and explain its impact;
- Explain why ethnicity is most pronounced after the attainment of independence;
- Discuss the negative impacts of ethnicity and suggest how it can be contained.

Reading List

Abotchie, C. (2016) Sociology of Urban communities, Accra, Olive Tree
Printing and Publishing, Chapter Ten: pp 130 - 143



Topic One

Ethnicity – Definitions and Impact

Introduction

- Ethnicity, as suggested earlier, is an urban social problem because of the heterogeneity of urban populations. Ghanaian urban communities are heterogeneous partially because the Ghanaian society is poly ethnic; in other words, the society is constituted not by one, but several ethnic groups.
- The exact number of ethnic groups is uncertain, but based on a variety of research statistics; it can be assumed that **there are over forty ethnic groups in this country, based on linguistic differences.**
- **Ethnicity has been one of the persisting de-stabilizing factors in some African nations.** The examples of Rwanda where disagreements between the **Hutus** and **Tutsis** led to one of the worst cases of genocide known in Africa; **the Biafran war in Nigeria** in the sixties was the result of an attempt by the Ibos to secede from the rest of Nigeria.
- Other African countries, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia have had their share of civil disturbances based on ethnicity.

Introduction –Evidence in Ghana

- In Ghana, the Ashantis and the Ewes attempted secession at one time or the other, after the country attained independence.
- The recent serious conflicts in Northern Ghana between the **Nanumbas** and the **Kokombas** and also between the **Andani** and **Abudu**, are illustrative of conflicts based on ethnic sentiments.
- **But perhaps, more specifically, ethnic divisions based on political affiliations in this country have the potential of becoming a destabilizing factor if deliberate policy measures are not instituted to reassure Ghanaians, that appointments to positions of trust in the country are based on functional specializations and not dictated by ethnic sentiments or nepotism.**
- Ethnic divisions and conflicts often find expression in the urban communities because it is in the city that the ethnic groups are often segregated in identifiable locations.

Ethnicity - Definitions

Definitions

- An ethnic group or tribe, from a sociological perspective, **is made up of an aggregation of people who claim direct ancestry from a common ancestor or ancestress, real or putative.**
- **They are a people who have one history of origin and therefore have a common destiny and aspiration.** According to Nukunya,(1992: 227) the term refers to **a group of people who speak the same language.**
- Since such a group also shares the same cultural traits, **language and culture** have become the definitive features of a tribe.

Definitions – A Strong In-Group Loyalty

- Specifically **ethnicity** or **tribalism** is subject to other definitions.
- A generally acceptable sociological definition of ethnicity identifies the phenomena as **a strong in- group loyalty and a sentimental attachment to oÿs own group and its traits.**
- Nukunya (1992) suggests that tribalism should mean **tribal organization or the interrelations between or within tribes.**
- However, as the language which identifies the group as an entity is shared by only members of the group, tribalism also implies a consciousness of being different as a group and an evaluation of other groups in terms of the standards of oÿs own group.

Definitions – Location and Sense of Direction

- Based on the definitions of both tribe and tribalism, it is clear that, belonging to a tribe gave one a **location unity and direction**, and it answered three essential questions regarding:
 - the people's **origin**
 - their **collective role** as related to or determined by their environment, and
 - **their direction** (that is, their aspiration as a people)

Negative Connotations – Attempted Abolition of the Terw̄ Trid'è

- Negative connotations and attempted ad'olitioŸ in Ghana
- The term trid'è has however attained a non-prestigious connotation, and has been **used particularly by Europeans to denigrate the people of Africa and other developing countries.**
- As an illustration, The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1979) defines a tribe as “a group of (primitive) clans under a recognized chief and usually claiming a common ancestor. As Nukunya (1992) points out, **this definition is derogatory based on its reference to tribes as priw̄iti|é, because, as this definition connotes, belonging to a clan or having a chief as a leader is indicative of primitiveness.**

Attempted Abolition - Kutu Acheampong

- In its modern usage, the concept of the tribe or tribalism is so emotionally charged that most people, including both politicians and intellectuals, would have nothing to do with the concept because of the stigma that it brings to those with whom it is associated.
- **So significant was ethnic sentiments in the Ghanaian society in the seventies that the NRC government of Kutu Acheampong instructed in 1972 that the word *trid'e* should be deleted from job application and other official forms designed for requesting various types of public services.**

Abolition – An Exercise in Futility

- In response to this instruction the term „trid’è was removed from documents requiring information about oÿès ethnic origiÿ for example on application documents for jobs, import or other licenses, passports etc.
- **Empirically however, the „atteÿpted ad’olitiø of the term proved to have been an exercise in futility,** because the ethnic origin of Ghanaians is easily identifiable from their family or first names.
- Any application form bearing the name of **Gaglozu** or **Acheampong** must obviously have come from an Ewe and an Akan respectively, even though the applicants have not indicated their ethnic origin on their forms.

Question

To what extent is it always true that that Ghanaian family and first names easily give away the ethnic origin of those who bear those names? Discuss with illustrative examples.

Topic Two

Post Independence Ethnic Rivalries

Introduction

- **Before the advent of European colonialism the various ethnic groups in the Gold Coast and in Africa as a whole, lived independently as sovereign units. In other words, the various ethnic groups did not regard themselves as belonging to one nation.**
- On the advent of colonialism, these tribes were brought together to constitute a colonial territory, with the same citizenship and common national aspiration, as well as institutions, which cut across traditional group boundaries.
- Significantly however; these tribal units did not abandon their separate identities. **The colonialists apparently thought that having brought these groups together, they would lose much of their original tribal consciousness.**

Introduction - Ethnic Groups still Retained their Identities

- The colonialists forgot one thing, namely, that these groups had a geographical location and a language, which differentiated them spatially and linguistically.
- The colonialists however succeeded to a large extent in keeping the Gold Coast administratively united until it attained independence in 1957.
- What then was the origin of the tribal contentions in the country and how are these related to the struggle for independence?

Tribal rivalries – Post Independence Africa

Post-Independence tribal rivalries

- After independence in most African states, the separateness of the tribal entities began to manifest.
- Events in Ghana sometime after independence are illustrative, namely, when the Ashantis and then the Ewes tried secession from the rest of the country. Ethnic conflicts in other parts of Africa are equally illustrative as for example, in Nigeria, the Congo, Ethiopia, the Sudan and Rwanda, including the multiple coup d'états on the continent which were often dominated by ethnic rivalries.
- **These events suggest strongly that the problem of ethnicity in the modern African state is a post independence phenomenon and has become quite significant.** Indeed, some observers have consequently suggested that unless tribalism is neutralized in Africa, the developing nations on the continent will find it difficult to forge ahead.

Ethnic Rivalries – Sharing of Assets

Sharing of Assets

- According to Assimeng (1981) tribalism is related essentially to the question of sharing the assets of a nation which becomes manifested usually after a nation unites to defeat some sort of an external enemy.
- For example, during the struggle for Ghana's independence, the people of the Gold Coast jointly considered the British as a common enemy. However after the country attained independence, the various ethnic groups began to ask for their pay offs.
- In other words, the question was, which ethnic group played what role in the struggle, and what should be the reward for its people?
- This meant that, in place of the common enemy, tribalism became heightened.

Sharing of Assets – Overthrow of Nkrumah

- Another illustrative example is that **during the latter stages of his rule, Kwame Nkrumah President of the First Republic became a common enemy, when his socialist policies grounded the economy to a halt.**
- Those were the days in the mid sixties, when Ghanaians in the urban areas had to queue for sugar, milk and toilet rolls, because, these so-called essential commodities were acutely in short supply.
- Ghanaians who had become very used to these so-called essential commodities as a part of their normal standard of life **began to grumble seriously, but could complain to no one, since the freedom of speech was curtailed as Nkrumah began to detain his political opponents for criticizing his policies.**

Sharing of Assets – The NLC

- Most Ghanaians became seriously disgruntled and consequently worked together in the army to remove him.
- **After Nkrumah's overthrow, the question arose regarding who did what?**
- The Ewes were of the opinion that the leader of the coup general Kotoka was the more instrumental, while the Akans favored their own man General Afrifa who provided support for Kotoka; but the Gas insisted that, if their man General Ankrah did not have knowledge of how to use a certain gun, the coup would have failed! (Assimeng, 1981).
- Ultimately, the leader of the coup, the Ewe man Kotoka, being of a modest and retiring disposition gave way to General Ankrah who was senior in ranking to be made Chairman of the National Liberation Council (NLC) of which he and Afrifa and other military and police officers became members.
- **This is illustrative of tribal rivalries, which arise during the sharing of a Yatio's assets.**

Sharing of Assets – Assignment of Power and Positions

- **Sharing of assets implies the assignment of power and positions to people and to the location of strategic developmental facilities such as airports or rail lines and other developmental projects.**
- **Of particular significance for ethnicity is the question of the assignment of power and positions.**
- **Most ruling political parties in Ghana and indeed other parts of Africa have been very cautious in their selection of Ministers of state in such ways as to ensure the so- called „ethÿiÐ d’alaÿÐé in the formation of governments, in order to avoid disaffection in unrepresented groups**

Sharing of Assets - Avoiding Disaffection

- This caution is often directed at ensuring national unity and also to give the impression that the government in power has the support of the main ethnic groups in the country.
- **A government that is seen to have been disproportionately dominated by a particular ethnic group to the exclusion of others, will create a sense of alienation in the neglected or under represented ethnic groups.**
- **This could lead to either apathy in the neglected groups or to disruptive inclinations**

Question

With reference to Ghana, discuss some of the significant lessons learnt from the inability of political parties to ensure judicious ethnic representation in their governments, after winning elections. Discuss with illustrative examples

Topic Three

Impact and Containment of Ethnicity

Introduction

- The problems of ethnicity identified both in Ghana and other parts of Africa as a whole suggest strongly that the problem has become quite significant. Indeed, as was noted earlier, some observers have consequently suggested that unless tribalism is neutralized in Africa, the developing nations on the continent will find it difficult to forge ahead.
- **Among some of the negative manifestations of ethnicity to be discussed in this section are ethnocentrism, nepotism and tribal stereotyping.**
- Needless to say, it is in the urban communities that these manifestations are mostly identifiable. What policy measures can be put in place to contain the associated problems?

Ethnicity - Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism

- According to Assimeng (1981) it appears that any time a particular term attains the status of a religion, it turns into some kind of a religion. Religion is used here to denote a devotion or sentimental attachment to an ideal. Indeed, it is the religious aspect of ethnicity/tribalism, which has attracted attention because of its negative effects.
- Assimeng suggested that tribalism can become a religion of despair, an exaggerated and fanatical adherence to the values of one's group which gives rise to what is called ethnocentrism.
- He considers **ethnocentrism as a condition under which a particular tribe sees itself as the center of the universe**; that is, the central pivot or the kingpin around which everything turns.
- In other words, it is a **negative mental attitude which makes ethnocentrics look down on other tribes as subservient or less important.**

Ethnocentrism

One Group Looks Down on All Others

- In what sense can one say that ethnocentrism is identifiable in Ghana? Do we have a situation in which any of the ethnic groups – for example, the Akans, the Ewes, the Ga/Adangme, the Gur or the Guan(g) consider themselves to be better than the other groups and thus have a tendency of looking down on all others?
- In other words, do the Akans or the Ewes, feel that they are much better as a group, compared to the other groups? And do they have a tendency of looking down on the other groups?
- **Indeed, at a smaller unit level, some families consider themselves better than others in the neighborhood, and have the tendency of openly displaying their symbols of status so as to demean the others. Does any evidence of this exist in your community?**

Ethnicity: Impact on Bureaucracy - Nepotism

Impact on Bureaucratic Procedure

- **Tribalism conflicts with the imperatives of bureaucratic procedure. Qualifications may be set aside and instead of statuses being achieved they may be ascribed to by one's tribesmen in the practice known as nepotism, which negatively affects social progress.**
- Recall that the rules of bureaucracy require that the division of labor in the work place should be based on functional specialization. But this rule may be ignored by appointing a tribesman who is not functionally specialized for the position.
- **This means placing a square peg in a round hole and creating inefficiency in the work place.**

Ethnicity - Stereotypes Based on Prejudice

Stereotyping

- One aspect of tribalism which has received attention in sociological studies, according to Nukunya (1992) concerns the practice of assigning stereotypes to tribal units.
- **The practice is based on prejudice and is aimed at developing hostile or negative feelings towards members of other tribes, and certain beliefs about them.**
- **It is based on the notion that just because of person's membership of a particular tribe, he has all the behavior traits assumed to be typical of that tribe.** However, since the characteristics associated with these groups are not based on any objective criteria, they are often inaccurate.
- For example, even though some Ashantis or Guans may not have lived in the Volta Region before, yet they know what sort of people the Ewes are.

Stereotypes – As Applied to the Dominant Ethnic Groups

Examples of these stereotypes include the fact that:

- the Ewes are intelligent and look like people;
- the Kwahus are money minded, thrifty and wisely;
- the Gas are said to be mostly interested in boxing and fishing and in nothing else;
- the Fanti have an expensive taste, they butter their bread on both sides; one should therefore be wary about marrying a Fanti girl;
- the Ashanti are ostentatious, arrogant and conspicuous show-offs;
- the Gurs are willing to do any kind of job, hardworking and honest.

Stereotypes not necessarily Negative

Tribalism in Reverse

- These stereotypes, according to Assimeng (1981), are mental pictures, which destroy reality and prevent access to empirical knowledge.
- **Stereotypes are not necessarily negative. Nukunya (1992), explains that as a result of certain qualities generally associated with, for example tribe X other tribes may tend to give tribe X a positive evaluation.** Positive evaluations such as these may derive from a high incidence of outstanding abilities of one kind or the other, rich resources and past achievement, among others.
- Further, there is the tendency on the part of some people to show overt appreciation of the members of other tribes in preference to their own tribesmen. The aim, according to Nukunya is to show that they are not tribalistic. This is known as **reverse tribalism or tribalism in reverse.**
- Reverse tribalism may be motivated by hypocrisy, lack of confidence and incompetence. (Nukunya, 1992)

Ethnicity – Tribal Associations

- **Utility: Tribal associations**
- Most writers on Africa appear to be of the view that there is a conflict between tribalism and nationalism and that this dichotomy threatens stability in new African nations.
- In this alleged conflict, there is the temptation to condemn tribalism outright. Perhaps this is wrong. **From the point of view of the sociologist, ethnic diversity needs not always produce negative results. One of the best illustrative examples of a positive tribal sentiment is the presence of Tribal Associations** in the urban areas, acting as **adaptive mechanisms** which make the adjustment of the new migrant less frustrating.
- **These associations assume some of the functions of the extended family and in this sense they offer social and psychological security to the individual, which is properly speaking, the responsibility of the state.** Without the tribal association, the adjustment of the migrant could be difficult.

Measures to Contain Ethnicity

Containing Tribalism

Given the dysfunctions of tribalism, as manifested in conflicts of various kinds, civil wars, political antagonism, nepotism, corruption, stereotyping and ethnocentrism, sociologists have suggested some policy measures aimed at containing the phenomenon. Among these are:

- A deliberate policy by governments or municipal authorities to **make people of different ethnic backgrounds share dwellings**, by allocating to, say, **Ewes, Akans, Gur and Ga/Adangmes**, a block of flats. This policy could create the kind of interaction, which leads to mutual understanding between the groups and could contribute to national integration;
- **Inter-tribal (mixed) marriages** must be encouraged. Even as shared dwelling places encourage positive interaction, inter-tribal marriages could further strengthen the mutual understanding;
- The **formation of political parties on purely tribal lines should be discouraged**. This can be achieved through verification by the authorities empowered to register political parties, to ensure that the founding members are drawn from all the major ethnic groups; in other words, drawn from all the regions of the country;

Measures to Contain Ethnicity – A Lingua Franca?

- **Nepotism**, that is, the deliberate practice by people in positions of trust to appoint people of a particular ethnic group into public offices **must be severely punished**. Diligent monitoring of new appointments by the press can lead to the exposure of the practice.
- **The abolition of the Zongo** is recommended, because the zongo is a tribal zone in the urban area which segregates migrants predominantly of a particular ethnic group, from the local people; and thus entrenches in this group, the sentimental attachment to its own group and its traits.
- **Serious efforts must be made by governments towards the development or adoption of a lingua franca**, that is, a national language. **When achieved, the lingua franca will create a strong national identity and integration**. Caution is however required in the selection of the language to be adopted or developed, since this could lead to divisions among the heterogeneous populations in the urban area.

Summary

In this session you have learned that –

- Although rule breaking is what social deviance is all about, yet defining the notion of what constitutes social deviance has been problematic. Four main schools of thought have contributed to the definition of the concept. These include the **statistical, legal, pathological and sociological** approaches to the definition. **Statistically**, the concept refers to any behavior that varies widely from the norm; **legally**, it is defined as actions or inactions which violate the provisions of the criminal legislation and are punishable; **pathologically** deviance is a product of an illness and **sociologically** it is a significant departure from the norms set for people in their various social statuses;
- Of the five adaptations to anomie, **innovation** is productive of criminality. Innovators in the urban communities mostly commit economic crimes such as smuggling, drugs dealing, bribery, corruption, tax evasion, **d'laDk** market currency deals, stealing, robbery, internet fraud (**sakawa**) etc.
- The main aim of these crimes is to make a lot of quick money or avoid the loss of money or property or gain a personal or business advantage.

Summary contd. 2

- **Criminal behavior is learnt through interaction with other people mainly in intimate personal groups.** The learning occurs during the process of verbal and non verbal communication and includes (a) the techniques of committing the crime which are sometimes very complicated or very simple; (b) the specific direction of motives, drives rationalizations and attitudes.
- Ethnicity refers to a strong in- group loyalty and a sentimental attachment to one's own group and its traits. It also implies a consciousness of being different as a group and an evaluation of other groups in terms of the standards of one's own group. **Ethnicity has been one of the significant de-stabilizing factors in Africa. Some of the affected nations include Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan.**
- In Ghana, the Ashantis and the Ewes attempted secession at one time or the other, after the country attained independence and the recent serious conflicts in Northern Ghana between the **Nanumbas** and the **Kokombas** and also between the **Andani** and **Abudu**, are illustrative of conflicts based on ethnic sentiments.

Summary contd. 3

- **Ethnicity is a function, essentially to the question of sharing the assets of a nation usually after a nation has attained political independence.** The sharing of assets often becomes manifested when the nation unites to defeat some sort of an external enemy. For example, during the struggle for independence, the people of the Gold Coast jointly regarded the British as a common enemy. However after the country attained independence, the various ethnic groups began to ask for their pay offs. This resulted in a scramble for positions often results in tribal rivalries, regarding which tribe member gets what position.
- **Other manifestations of ethnicity arises after political parties win elections and have to ensure an equitable distribution of power and positions to the ethnic groups in forming a government**
- **To contain ethnicity, sociologists have suggested that there should be a deliberate policy of sharing dwellings (blocks of flats) between members of the different ethnic groups, encouraging mixed (inter-ethnic) marriages, discouraging the formation of political parties on tribal lines, punishing nepotism, abolishing the zongo and developing a lingua franca or an indigenous national language.**

Sample Question

Does Ghana have a problem of ethnicity/tribalism? Discuss with illustrative examples, and suggest possible measures to contain the problem.



References

- Abotchie, C. (2016) Sociology of Urban Communities, Accra Olive Tree Publishing and Printing.
- Asamoah, A. (2007) Classes and Tribalism in Ghana, Accra, Woeli Publishing Services.
- Assimeng, J. M. (1981) Social Structure of Ghana, Tema, Ghana Publishing Corporation.
- Nukunya, G. K. (2003) Tradition and Change in Ghana, Accra, Ghana Universities Press.