

SOCI 309/339

URBAN SOCIOLOGY

Session Two

The Concerns of Sociology Applied to the Urban Community.

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Session Overview

Introduction

- Having defined sociology after Ginsberg (1961) as **the scientific study of society, that is, the web or tissue of human interactions and interrelations, their conditions and consequences**, how does this definition translate into specific studies by the sociologist?
- In other words, what does the sociologist do, in his approach to the scientific study of society - if in the words of Ginsberg, the sociologist has for his field, the whole life of man in society?
- Specifically, what are the main concerns of the sociologist and how are these manifested in the urban community?

Session Outline

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

- Topic One: The Main concerns of sociology - Basic structure and the forces integration and disintegration.
- Topic Two: The main concerns – Social change.
- Topic Three: The main concerns – Human associations and social problems.

Objectives/Expected Outcomes for the Session

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

- Explain the utility of the basic structure of the urban community.
- Describe the manifestations of social change.
- Explain the functions of associations and the nature of social problems.

Reading List

Abotchie, C., (2016) Sociology of Urban communities,
Accra, Olive Tree Printing and Publishing Chapter
One pp 1-17



Topic One

The Concerns of Sociology Applied to the Urban Community

Main Concerns of the Sociologist

As a social science discipline, sociology is mainly concerned with the study of the following:

- The **basic structure** of society – that is, a study of the social institutions – that is the established or normative patterns of behaviour which ensure the orderly attainment of basic needs of individuals through interaction with other people in the society.
- The **forces of integration and disintegration**, that is, the social forces (that is, issues, events or factors) that hold the society together or bring about conflict,
- **Social change** - both in form and structure,
- **Human associations**, such as political parties, trade unions, ethnic, religious and groups or fellowships etc.
- **Social problems**; for example, crime, delinquency, unemployment, prostitution, suicide, etc.

The urban sociologist applies these concerns to the study of the urban community.

Main Concerns – Basic Structure

Basic Structure

- Given that urban areas are communities - in the sense that the residents are able to meet their basic needs without reference to, or depending on other communities, the urban settlements do require basic structures, **that is, normative patterns of behavior (or institutions) which enable the communities to function.**
- Louis Wirth (1938) one of the founding fathers of urban sociology, described the urban area as **a constellation of institutions. This definition is based on the assumption that the urban settlements are communities in which the residents' time is divided between several distinct and divergent community segments.**
- For example they work in one place (economic institution) and sleep in another (home – that is, family and marriage institution). Similarly they worship in some other place (religious institution) and go to school in another (educational institution) and then seek health care in yet another place (health institution). When they are either in trouble or experience any form of injustice, they go to the police – the political institution.

Basic Structure - Hobbes

- The functioning of all of these institutions requires to be coordinated in order to ensure the maintenance of law and order – (the political institution). **These constellation of institutions together constitute a basic structure.**
- These institutions are **rules of behaviour in the absence of which, according to Hobbes (!946) man would live in a state of nature, governed by his reason in the service of his passions.** The individual's survival in this state of nature requires that he has power – and more power to secure the power he already has.
- The ensuing struggle by all the people for power will result in a state of a war of all against all, and the life of man according to Hobbes (whom you may have encountered in our earlier discussions) would become solitary, nasty brutish and short!
- This is how critical it is for urban and other communities to have basic structures. The urban sociologist is interested in identifying what would happen if any of the components of the structure that is, the institutions, become dysfunctional.

Forces of Integration and Disintegration

Forces of Integration and Disintegration

- The urban sociologist is concerned as well with the social forces which hold the urban communities together or tend to disintegrate these communities.
- The **forces of integration** include: *economic bonds* – such as in the work situation where a variety of functional specialists from varied racial, ethnic and educational backgrounds interact on a daily basis to bring about the attainment of the objectives of their organization.
- **This is organic solidarity** - in the process of which the different workers get to understand their dependence on each other and form enduring friendships.

Integration and Disintegration – Voluntary Associations

- Further, **voluntary associations** of various types exist in most urban areas based either on ethnicity, profession or religion; for example Town or District development associations (ethnic); the Bar Association, the Medical association, the Nurses Association, Teachers Association (professional) Men/Women Fellowships, Scripture Unions, etc., (religion) – all of these create opportunities close interaction, expression of common interests and mutual help.
- **These voluntary associations are particularly useful for newly arriving migrants who may not have any relations, friends or places of abode. Members provide what amounts to ‘extended family assistance’ to cushion the new migrants until they are in a position to support themselves.**

Forces of Disintegration

Forces of Disintegration

These are situations which bring about conflict and division in the urban community. When they come about, the forces of disintegration they bring about violence, tensions and social upheavals, fear and social disequilibrium and disorganization in the community.

They include racism, ethnicity or tribalism, crime and religious differences. Racism, ethnicity or tribalism constitute a problem in the urban communities because inevitably, these communities are made up of heterogeneous populations, that is, people from different ethnic groups or from different countries.

For example Accra is made up not only of the Gas but also of the Akan, Ewe, Guan, Gur, etc, as well as of Nigerians, Togolese, Liberians, Lebanese, Americans, the British, Chinese, Indians, etc.

Occasionally, tensions or conflicts do arise between these diverse urban groups which could bring about disintegration, when not brought under control.

Forces of Disintegration - Over Urbanization

- **Other disintegrative forces include over-urbanization.** Because of over urbanization - that is, the inability of the urban area to economically cater for its migrants- there is unemployment for a significant number of the migrants who may resort to crime and other social deviations such as prostitution for their survival.
- Further still, tensions which originate in religiosity do arise – between traditional worshippers and Christians or between Christians and Moslems. These tensions sometimes result in violence and loss of life, limb and property.
- **The urban sociologist is concerned with these tensions because they seriously impact the behavior of urban residents.**

Question

If you were asked to suggest measures that would ensure enduring solidarity (integration) in the urban communities, what would you recommend? Discuss with illustrative examples.



Topic Two

Main Concerns – Social Change

Introduction

- Social change, human associations and social problems are the last three of the issues with which the sociologist is specifically concerned. To what extent are these urban related issues?
- Social change, if you recall from our last semester's discussions, refers, according to Wilbert Moore (1963) to a **significant alteration of the social structure, which may originate endogenously or exogenously in any institutional area, bringing about changes in other institutional area which make for a further adaptation in the initial sphere of change.**

Social Change – The Ghana Example- Colonialism

- This means that changes occurring, for example, in the political institution will affect the religious, economic, marriage and family, education and health institutions. Changes occurring in these institutions ultimately have an impact on the political institution where the change originated. Let us consider the Ghana example
- The change brought about by colonialism in the Gold Coast exemplifies what Moore referred to in his definition as change originating from exogenous or external sources. **The change initiated by colonialism in Ghana originated in the political institutional area bringing about changes in other institutional areas and ultimately affected the original sphere of change – that is, the political institution.**
- Having militarily subdued the people of the Gold Coast, **the British colonialists took over the political administration of the country.** This is the sense in which it is a fact that colonialism originated in this country through the political institutional area.

Social Change in Ghana – Introduction of Christianity

- **Thereafter the changes initiated by the colonialists affected all the social institutions in the Gold Coast which had significant implications for both demographic and cultural urbanization in this country.** To illustrate this, consider the following:
- Firstly, as the political rulers of the Gold Coast, the colonialists supported the Missionaries who were already in the country, to extend their evangelistic work throughout the territory. They succeeded in establishing a number of churches and began to actively convert the indigenous people to Christianity.
- Today the majority of people in Ghana are Christians, making the nation a Christian country. This means that the traditional religion of the people in the Gold Coast began to be transformed to Christianity.
- **This transformation significantly impacted the religious institution in the country.**

Social Change – Monetization of the Economy

Secondly, the colonialists monetized the traditional economy.

- Before they came to the Gold Coast, the indigenous people had their local monetary system – including the use of cowrie shells (sedie), dutu(iron) yawa (brass) dwete (silver) and sika futuro (gold dust).
- On the assumption of their political administration of the country, the British replaced the local monies with their pound, shillings and pence – making these the only legal tender. This meant that no local goods or services could be sold or paid for, using the old currency.
- **The monetization of the economy had significant implications for rural – urban migrations which have continued up to this day.**
- **Without the new currency, the local people could not give offerings at church, neither could they buy any of the very attractive goods brought in by the colonialists, like durable cast iron pots and pans, exotic drinks, wax prints, efficient farming tools, gun powder, nor could they pay their newly imposed taxes or school fees for their children.**

Social Change – Rural-Urban Migrations

- **Additionally the indigenous people could not get married without the new pounds shillings and pence; neither still could they pay their fines at the court of the chief or at the colonial courts, or indeed pay for treatment at the colonial healthcare facilities.**
- **There were three main options through which the new currency could be earned. These include (a) expanding the existing food crops to the extent that the farmer could eat some of his products and sell the left over for the new currency; (b) shift from food crop farming to cash crop farming – as in abandoning the cultivation of cassava, yams, plantains, etc., to grow instead, cocoa, coffee or copra which were readily bought by the colonialists.**
- **Thirdly, the new currency could be earned by working in colonial administrative offices, or companies for wage paid labour.** Since these job opportunities were open in the urban communities only, able bodied youth, men or women, educated or illiterate chose this as their option and began to migrate to the urban areas in search of wage paid labour. **This trend has persisted up to date.**

Social Change – Family, Education and Health

- The **family institution was impacted also** because polygynous marriages (one man having more than one wife) was no longer permitted for those who converted to Christianity. Christians were allowed to marry one spouse only.
- Further the existing **informal educational system carried out through the rites of passage was formalised and replaced by classroom education.**
- The **establishment of scientific/modern healthcare delivery systems** as for example the Korle Bu hospital, significantly impacted the existing traditional modes of health delivery.
- **These changes – especially the establishment of formal educational institutions by the missionaries brought enlightenment to the indigenous people which culminated in the agitation for independence.** The attainment of independence on March 6th 1957 meant the removal of the colonial administration. This concluded the ‘adaptation in the initial sphere of change’ (political institution) as suggested in the definition of social change.

Social Change – In Form and Structure

- **The social changes which occur in the urban areas are in two categories; namely, changes in form and in structure.**
- Changes in **form** refer to physical changes which can be seen and touched. For example the erection of high rise buildings, new schools, roads, bridges, parks and gardens, recreational facilities, new markets, malls – all of which impact the lives of urbanites in one way or the other.
- **Structural changes** refer to institutional changes which often find expression in policy or administrative or ideological regulations which also impact the activities of urban dwellers.
- These often include the enactment of new legislations by Parliament or by the municipal authorities to control institutional behavior, or traffic or the imposition of curfews, new taxes, levies or fees.
- **These changes may be intangible but do have significant impact on the lives of urbanites.**

Question

Historically, Ghana has experienced both endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external) factors of change. With illustrative examples, select one each of these changes and discuss their differences with reference to Moore's definition of social change

Topic Three

Human Associations and Social Problems

Associations

- The urban sociologist is similarly interested in the emergence of groupings in the urban areas, to establish their purpose and functions. These include Voluntary Groups or Associations such as political parties, trade unions, professional associations (e.g. the Bar or Medical Associations).
- There are, as well, Involuntary Groups. These are groups to which people belong based on factors beyond their control. Being a woman or a man, white or black or belonging to a family or an ethnic group are factors beyond the control of all individuals, but places us within certain groups or associations, which influence our behavior.

Associations – In and Out Groups

- There are, as well, ‘in’ and ‘out’ ’ groups in the urban areas. In-groups are those aggregations with which an individual naturally identifies and owes a certain sense of loyalty; for example being a member of an ethnic group. Members of *in-groups* often refer to themselves as ‘we’ and refer to out-groups as ‘they’.
- *Out groups* are therefore aggregations to which the individual does not owe any loyalty nor identifies with. For example Christians would say we are Christians and *they* are non-believers; or some people would say we are Akans *they* are Ewes.

Associations - Primary and Secondary Groups

- There are **primary groups** which are small in size e.g. a family and within which interactions are basically informal, as compared with **secondary groups** which are larger in size and within which interactions are formalized.
- **Being a member of anyone of these groups in the urban area influences one's behavior and are therefore of interest to the urban sociologist.**

Social Problems

Social Problems

- A social problem is a **negative phenomenon which has become so widespread that it impinges on the conscience of the people who are then compelled to call for something to be done about it.**
- Given the agglomeration of populations in the urban area and the intensity of life and the active competition for the cultural goals, urban areas often experience the problem of over urbanization, defined earlier as the inability of the urban area to economically cater for its migrants.
- **Over urbanization presents a variety of these social problems.** Predominant among these is the problem of unemployment which often leads to crimes of various types, armed robbery, stealing, burglary, murder, rapes, drug-related crimes, bribery, corruption, violence and suicide.

Social Problems - Homelessness, Delinquency, etc.

- Additionally there are problems of homelessness, juvenile delinquency, prostitution etc.
- These problems create serious situations of disaffection, disorganization and social injustice in the urban area and are therefore of interest to the urban sociologist.

Defining Urban Sociology

- Based on the preceding explanations of the definition of the discipline of sociology and its main concerns, urban sociology is therefore to be defined as:
‘a scientific study of the urban community; that is the web or tissue of urban interactions and interrelations, their conditions and consequences. It has for its field, the whole life of man in the urban community’.

A Summary of the Session

Session Summary

Having completed this session I believe that you have learnt the following:

- Urban sociology is definable as ‘ a scientific study of the urban community; that is the web or tissue of urban interactions and interrelations, their conditions and consequences. It has for its field, the whole life of man in the urban community’.
- The main concerns of the urban sociologist include his study of the following: (a) the basic structure of the urban communities, (b) the forces of integration and disintegration, (c) the processes of social change, (d) the purpose of groups and associations and (e) social problems;

Session Summary Contd.

- The social changes which occur in the urban areas are in two categories; namely, changes in **form** and in **structure**. Changes in **form** refer to physical changes which can be seen and touched. For example the building of high rise edifices, roads, bridges, etc.,
- **Structural change** refers to institutional changes which often find expression in policy or administrative or ideological regulations which impact the activities of urban dwellers. These often include the enactment of new legislation by the government or by the municipal authorities to control institutional behavior.

Session Summary Contd. 2

- The groups and associations which operate in the urban communities include political parties, trade unions, professional associations (e.g. the Bar or Medical Associations).
- There are, as well, Involuntary Groups. These are groups to which people belong based on factors beyond their control. There are 'in' and 'out' groups as well as primary and secondary groups;
- **Urban areas often experience the problem of over urbanization**, defined as the inability of these areas to economically cater for migrants. Over urbanization presents the greater part of the problems in urban communities. Predominant among these is the problem of unemployment which often leads to crimes of various types, stealing, burglary, robbery, murder, rapes, juvenile delinquency, drug-related crimes, bribery, corruption, violence, suicide, etc.

Question

Discuss the importance of the basic structures in urban communities - with reference to what Hobbes said about the struggle for power in the absence of social control, and 'a state of a war of all against all'. Can urban communities survive without social structures?



Reading List

- Abotchie, C. (2016) Sociology of Urban Communities, Accra Olive Tree Publishing and Printing.
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- Henslin, J. (2006) Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings. Addison-Wesley, Prentice Hall.
- Milgram, S. (1970) The Experience of living in the cities in America, in American Sociological Review, Vol 107 pp 1461-1468.
- Nukunya, G. K. (2003) Tradition and Change in Ghana, Accra, Ghana Universities Press.

