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Tribalism in modern British Central Africa

During the last twenty years, fourteen members of the staff of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia have studied both tribes and urban situations in British Central Africa. In this lecture I discuss some of the results of our researches. I am going to concentrate on describing how we see the persistence of tribalism into modern times, in spite of the industrial revolution which has produced such great social changes. Our main argument is that in the rural areas membership of a tribe involves participation in a working political system, and sharing domestic life with kinsfolk; and that this continued participation is based on present economic and social needs, and not merely on conservatism. On the other hand, tribalism in towns is a different phenomenon entirely. It is primarily a means of classifying the multitude of Africans of heterogeneous origin who live together in the towns, and this classification is the basis on which a number of new African groupings, such as burial and mutual help societies, are formed to meet the needs of urban life. In both rural and urban areas, these affiliations to fellow tribesmen have to be analysed as they operate alongside new forms of association, such as Christian sects, political pressure groups, and economic groups. These new groups are clearly more important in the towns than in the rural areas. Persisting loyalty to a tribe therefore operates for a man in two quite distinct situations, and to a large extent he can keep these spheres of activity separate.

The study of whether tribalism is dying out, or persisting and growing in strength, was obscured in early British studies by a fundamental fallacy in sociological analysis. It is easily understood that Government administrators and missionaries should think of an African miner in the new copper mines as being the same man as he who left his tribal home a short time before. These men of affairs therefore considered

(1) Conférence prononcée à l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études. VIe Section, devant le groupe des étudiants de sociologie de l'Afrique Noire.
that the African tribesmen who came to the towns were undergoing a process of « detribalisation », in which they were changed; and change here meant being spoilt. Worse than this, in the towns, away from the control of their chiefs, they fell gullibly into the arms of agitators. Most British administrators, and many missionaries, considered that Africans who tried to form trade unions or political associations, and Europeans who tried to help them, were subversive, corrupting the simple and honest tribesmen. I myself found that this attitude had persisted among administrators in Northern Rhodesia as late as 1947. I remember an intelligent Labour Officer, in the Department responsible for the relations between European employers and African labourers, telling me that things would be better if the Northern Rhodesian European Mineworkers Union went out of existence, and the problems of European mineworkers were handled by the Labour Department. As I say, we can understand that many administrators should fail to read the lessons of the last two hundred years of history, which show that modern industrial towns have everywhere produced specific types of associations arising from the needs of urban life, and hence that we must expect these associations inevitably to develop in Africa. It is important to remember that the early British administrators came largely from upper-class and middle-class country backgrounds, and hence knew little about the problems of industrial society. In Africa, they lived and ruled in vast rural domains, and the traditions of a paternalistic government looking after simple tribesmen developed there. Later administrators continued to be drawn from the same groups, with in addition sons of professional people. I met no administrator who was acquainted at firsthand with the problems of industrial life. All newly appointed administrators served their first years on rural stations, and thus were indoctrinated with the Government tradition that towns and mines were almost places of iniquity in an Arcadian tribalism, where the decent natives were exposed to luxurious temptation and seditious developments.

These doctrines were never, of course, explicitly formulated, but they ran like a thread through the approach of administrators to the problems of modern life, until the end of the War, and perhaps the advent of a Labour Government in Britain, brought some change.

It is more surprising to me that British and other anthropologists were to some extent influenced in a similar way, and I am not sure that all have yet escaped from these influences. Our anthropologists, like our administrators, were reared on the rural tradition of the tribes. For them, the tribe was the « zero-point », the start from which people
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changed as they came under urban and other Western influences: hence the starting-point of analyses was the original tribe and the original tribesman. Correspondingly, when some anthropologists began to study Africans in the towns, they saw the problems to be studied as those arising from the adaptation of a tribesman to urban conditions, and formulated these in terms of a process of «detribalisation», which had to be analysed and measured as the tribesman slowly changed. This view of the problems seems to me to be implicit in the papers of some delegates who attended the conference on African urbanization at Abijan.

I have said that it is surprising that anthropologists should adopt this point of view, because the whole stress of our analyses lies on the difference between persons and the roles they occupy in the social structure. Furthermore, our theories stress the extent to which the social structure exerts pressure which controls the behaviour of the occupants of roles. Hence it has always seemed to me that we must approach the study of African towns dominantly by regarding them as towns: in short, the fact that Africans now live, for longer or shorter periods, in towns, will influence their behaviour far more than the fact that they come from tribal homes and cultures. An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner: he is only secondarily a tribesman. That is, I would anticipate that as soon as Africans assemble in towns and engage in industrial work they will begin to form social relationships appropriate to their new situation: they will try to combine to better their conditions in trade unions, and so forth. Of course, these Africans continue to be influenced by many factors arising outside the urban situation: the rapid growth of the towns and their own inexperience of towns, the constant movement of African labourers between tribe and town and between towns, and the tribal culture and life from which they come, as well as customary linkages and hostilities between different tribes. But even these tribal influences operate now in an urban milieu, and not in a rural milieu. Thus I stated in an early essay that «in a sense every African is detribalised as soon as he leaves his tribal area, even though he continues to be acted on by tribal influences. He lives in different kinds of groupings,

(2) See essays in L. P. Mair (editor), Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa, Memorandum XV of the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, 1932 (here only I. Schapera and M. Fortes took the point of view I shall advocate). The view I am criticising emerges clearly in B. Malinowski, The Dynamics of Culture Change (Yale University Press, 1946); cf. my critical essay, An Analysis of the Sociological Theories of Bronislaw Malinowski (Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 16, 1948).
earns his livelihood in a different way, comes under different authorities. He walks on different ground, for roads and pavements may be paved; he draws his water from taps and his food from stores; etc. etc. He is ruled now not by District Commissioner and chief, but by District Commissioner and municipal authority and location superintendent and European manager. In my own view, therefore, it seemed essential to start analyses of town life by saying that the moment an African crossed his tribal boundary, he was «detr ibalised», outside the tribe, though not outside the influence of tribe. Correspondingly, when a man returns from the towns into the political area of his tribe he is tribalised — de-urbanised —, though not outside the influence of the town.

The first study of a British Central African town was by the late Dr. Godfrey Wilson, first Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, in the mining town of Broken Hill. Wilson formulated some of his main problems in terms of the changes in behaviour of African town-dwellers, according to the length of time they had resided in the town. His study is penetrating and important, but I consider it was still dominated by the tribal outlook I have been describing. My colleagues who followed Wilson in making studies of Rhodesian towns have approached these from the opposite point of view. That is, they have started their analyses on the assumption that they are dealing with town-dwellers, many of whom come from tribes and retain ties with these tribes. Here perhaps the most important books are Professor J. C. Mitchell’s The Kalela Dance, and Dr. A. L. Epstein’s recent book on Politics in an Urban African Community.

One main theme of Epstein’s study is an analysis of how, during the growth of a copper-mining town, typical urban associations and industrial groupings ousted European attempts to work with authorities based on tribal affiliation. I summarise this history fairly briefly, and will then draw out some of the sociological implications which have been analysed by Mitchell and Epstein. When the copper-mine at Luanshya was established in the early 1930’s, Europeans provided the managerial and skilled working force: the heavy labour was performed

(4) An Essay on the Economics of Detribalisation in Northern Rhodesia, in 2 parts (Rhodes-Livingstone Papers Nos. 5 and 6, 1941 and 1942).
by thousands of Africans from tribes spread over British, Belgian and Portuguese territories. The mine, like many industrial enterprises in Europe's industrial revolution, had to provide both order and some social services for this heterogeneous population. Government's resources were not adequate for these tasks, and in any case both European and African mineworkers dwelt on the private property of the mine. The mine provided houses for Europeans and Africans, hospitals, recreational facilities, institutions to distribute food to the Africans. The Africans were housed in a vast compound under a Compound Manager (later called African Personnel Manager). He was responsible for the housing and welfare of the Africans, for dealing with their working conditions and complaints, and for maintaining order among them and settling their quarrels. In this work he was aided by African clerks, mine police, etc. Faced with thousands of Africans of different tribes, the mine officials, reasonably enough, thought that it would be wise to deal with them through representatives of the tribes as groups. Therefore the Compound Manager instituted a system of Tribal Elders. They were given special houses and robes. His idea was that the mine management could communicate with its African labourers through the Elders while the Elders in turn would inform the management of the wishes and complaints of their tribesmen. In addition, the Elders would see to the welfare of newcomers to the mine until these were allocated houses or found friends, a most important duty in a system of migrant labour with men moving constantly from tribe to town and back again, and between town and town, and between jobs in each town. Finally, the Elders acted as judges in the small disputes that arose between men and their wives. The Elders together constituted a Council. The people themselves welcomed this institution. Meanwhile a similar system was established in the Municipal Location which had grown up in the town, distinct from the mine's compound.

Most of the Elders or Tribal Representatives, chosen by the Africans themselves, were fairly closely related to the royal families of the tribes concerned. The authority system of the tribe was projected into the urban, industrial sphere.

This system of administration worked fairly well until, in 1935, there were major disturbances throughout the area of the copper-mining towns (which is called the Copper Belt). These disturbances arose out of African demands for better pay and working conditions. A strike began in two other mines, and the Superintendent at Luanshya asked his Tribal Elders what would happen in Luanshya. They assured
him that there would be no disturbances there. The Superintendent asked the Elders to go among the miners and calm them, but one of the Elders, a senior man, was driven away from a meeting and accused of being in league with the Europeans. A mob stormed the Compound Office, and the Elders had to seek sanctuary within it. Clearly they had neither influence nor power within the strike situation. Yet after the disturbances, the Elders resumed their previous role. By 1937 there was some forty accredited Elders on the mine, and Epstein says that "the system of Tribal Elders operated satisfactorily in the main, and was appreciated by the mass of the people" (p. 36).

I have time only to touch on Epstein's analysis of the background to this development. He stresses the tribal background of the Elders— their frequent affiliation with the families of chiefs, their acquaintance with tribal customs and values, their skill in adjudicating in disputes, and so forth. Yet, in a way paradoxically, they came simultaneously to be associated with the European mine management. During the strike they were driven away as in league with the Europeans. Two important elements in their positions have therefore to be stressed. First, as tribal representatives, whose authority was based in the political system of the tribe, they had no connection with the situations in which African miners worked in the mine itself. Here the workers were organised in departments and gangs within which tribal affiliation was irrelevant; and it was in this situation that common interests had brought the miners to joint action in the strike. This was industrial action, and here tribal divisions and allegiances did not operate. So the Elders lacked all influence over the workers in this situation. But, secondly, in the administrative system the Elders had become representatives of the mine itself, in dealing with its workers, and hence when those workers came into conflict with the mine, they regarded the Elders as enemies. When the strike had ended, the Elders could resume their former role.

This position changed slowly until a second series of strikes broke out on the Copper Belt in 1940. There were disturbances, with shooting of miners, at Nkana mine, but none at Luanshya. At Mufulira mine a strike committee of seventeen men was set up to negotiate with the management. At all mines, the authority of the Elders was rejected, and the strike committee at Mufulira was the beginnings of a new regime which was to oust tribal affiliation as a basis for handling industrial matters among African miners. For eventually after the War, the British Government (now a Labour Government) sent out trained unionists to help Africans form trade unions. The development
of trade unionism was present among the Africans themselves, but it was now encouraged by Government policy. Eventually, the African Mineworkers Union emerged as a powerful, organised, industrial union throughout the mining towns of Northern Rhodesia, negotiating with the management. As its last step on the way to power, the Union insisted that the Tribal Elders system be abolished, for the trade union leaders saw the Elders as a threat to their own authority, and as a means which the mine might use to oppose them. A referendum was held among the miners: 85% of the 35,000 miners voted, and of these 97% voted for abolition of the Tribal Elder system. The trade union had finally ousted the formal organised power of tribal representatives from the industrial field, though later I will describe how tribal affiliation continued to influence trade union politics.

The story of developments which Epstein gives for the municipal compound is similar, but not so clear-cut. He suggests that the monolithic structure of the mine with its centralised power over the working, residential, etc. lives of the workers, provoked the response of a monolithic African trade union, also catering for many aspects of the miners' life, and unable to tolerate any rivals. On the other hand, the municipal compound is inhabited by the employees of many different employers in various trades, by domestic servants, by independent tradesmen, and so forth. Hence there has been less pressure to combined action by Africans in trade unions, and less possibility of their organising thus. Nevertheless in the municipal compound also, developments have been similar to those on the mine. The authority of Tribal Elders, outside of the settlement of small disputes, has been steadily ousted by bodies including better educated and more profitably employed Africans, who have less connection with families of chiefs and who are more permanently settled in the town. Secondly, wherever the Government has set up administrative councils or even courts to help it deal with the heterogenous African population, a spontaneous opposition has developed in the urban population itself. The two processes have worked together, for the Government's policy has been based on the use of tribal affiliations, while the educated Africans have been insisting that leaders in the towns must be acquainted with urban ways of life, and need not be guardians of tribal custom. But here the position is far more fluid than on the mine.

Epstein goes on to point out that the dominance of the trade union did not eliminate tribal allegiances within the industrial field. To some extent, they have ceased to be so significant in industrial matters where the Africans are opposed in their interests to the European mine offi-
cials and management. But in matters between Africans, tribal affiliation is important. Thus elections within the union for official posts in the union have to some extent been fought on tribal lines: other tribes complained that the leadership was dominated by the Bemba tribe. And, at the other end of the scale, Nyakyusa tribesmen from South-West Tanganyika talked of forming a separate Nyakyusa trade union, though in practice they joined in a general strike. Epstein explains that the Nyakyusa are so far from home that during a strike they do not get support, as Northern Rhodesian tribes do, of food from their rural homes. In addition, they are mostly without their wives, so do not have women to cultivate gardens for them as additional support. But it is in the struggle for power in the leadership that tribal allegiances have most significance.

Nevertheless even here it is not straight tribal hostility and loyalty that are operating. During the early years of the mine, the posts open for educated Africans were largely taken by Nyassalanders, for the educational system in Nyasaland was earlier established and better than in Northern Rhodesia, and by Barotse, who were similarly advanced. The Nyassalanders had also early gained mining skill by going to work in Southern Rhodesian mines. Finally, Bemba, who are the nearest powerful tribe, had filled many of the minor authoritative posts on the mine. Hence while many Africans see the struggle for leadership on the mine in tribal terms, this covers a struggle between groups of different skill. After the firm consolidation of the trade union's power, a dispute began with the mines and the European trade unions not only for better pay for Africans, but also for the opening of better paid posts demanding higher skill. Hence the issue emerged, whether the union was to press for a few highly paid openings for a few well-educated Africans, or for much better all-round opportunities for the mass of relatively unskilled labourers. Out of this struggle, a new and militant leadership, more representative of the labourers, won many union elections. The struggle reached its climax when the mine management opened new skills to Africans and put them on a monthly salary, instead of payment by ticket of work done. It also insisted that they join a new and separate union, formed by salaried Africans and led by a Barotse. The old union came out on strike against this move; and eventually the Government, holding that this was a political strike, arrested sixty-two trade unions leaders and deported them to their tribal areas.

The significance for us of this strike is that it brought into the open the emergence within the African urban population of affiliations based
on what we can call "class principles". In the most recent struggle for leadership of the union, and in the formation of the new union, we see that there has emerged among the Africans a division of interests in the industrial field. As soon as the trade union had consolidated its power against the potential rivalry of old tribal leaders, its members (like allies in other situations) split apart in pursuing independent interests. This, perhaps, we might also expect from the history of Europe.

The division on class lines has what Dr. Epstein calls a "pervasive" effect. It spreads into many institutions. For the ideal of a Europeanised and civilised way of life is the ideal which the Africans now follow. Professor Mitchell has examined the effect of this situation on the Kalela dance. His analysis is based on the interpretation of how the general social situation influences the structure and actions of a single dance team. The Kalela dance is a very popular dance on the Copper Belt. It is danced by teams of Africans who come from single tribes. During their dances they mock other tribes, by alleging, among many unpleasant habits, that they have loose, and even perverted, sexual lives. Thus on the surface the dance proclaims proudly the virtues of the team’s own tribe, and derides other tribes. Yet the members of the derided tribes attend the performance and laugh as loudly as any at the salacious wit against themselves. Mitchell was struck by the fact that despite this surface of tribal competetiveness, the dancers had named their hierarchy of officials after the hierarchies of British military or civil dignity. Moreover, the dancers did not wear tribal dress: instead, they were dressed in smart and clear European clothes, and they had to maintain their tidiness and smartness throughout the dancing. This was insisted on, although the dancers themselves were mostly unskilled, and poorly educated, labourers. From this point of view he interprets the dance as reflecting the aspirations of all Africans after a European way-of-life, or civilisation, and he shows from other data how the values implicit here form a prestige scale for all Africans. But, he argues, these unskilled labourers are not striving through the dance to participate in the European part of Central African society: this is cut off from them by the colour-bar. They are striving in the dance to associate themselves with the new African élite. Mitchell shows that in political activity, such as the African opposition to the establishment of the Central African Federation, Africans of all classes and tribes (except the Barotse who are protected by special treaty) united against the Europeans. Internally, they are differentiated on a class scale, which people are striving to
ascend. This is one marked trend in the towns, and it seems clearly distinct from tribalism.

Yet the dancing-team is a tribal team, deriding other tribes. Its actions have therefore also to be related to a persisting significance of tribal allegiances in the towns. Here Mitchell works out that tribalism in the town operates as a primary mode of classifying the heterogeneous masses of people whom a man meets into manageable categories. With his fellow-tribesmen he can converse, and he shares their customs and way-of-live. In practice, Mitchell discovered that there was far less tribal inter-marriage in the towns than is usually assumed, so that a man marries the sisters and daughters of his fellow-tribesmen. More than this, by the use of social distance scales, Mitchell found that all the many tribes in the towns were grouped into several limited categories by other Africans, and that specific institutionalised modes of behaviour had developed between various tribal categories. Thus he discovered that joking relationships between tribes in this region had developed in modern times, and were not, as previously thought, traditional. Mitchell thus stresses that tribes in towns form categories by which people group one another, and this categorisation determined a lot of action in casual as well as intimate relationships. Both he and Epstein stress that in domestic situations, where as we have seen most marriages occur within tribes, tribal custom and practice are effective, though much modified by the demands of the urban situation.

In short, to understand the persistence of tribal links in the towns we have to assess their significance in relation to dominant forms of association, which are produced by the demands of the urban and industrial situation. The people live in towns, as workers, and they associate here in terms of common interests which override tribal divisions. But tribal loyalties may influence the internal politics of these urban associations, and political struggles in these associations may, from historical accident, be cast in tribal terms. In leisure activities and in casual intercourse tribalism, in various categories, forms a basis for classifying people. Tribal allegiance and custom dominate in the sphere of domestic life, so far as the situation allows. And in many towns, though not in the Copper Belt, associations of mutual help, funeral societies, etc. are based on common tribal affiliation. But class relationships are becoming increasingly important and, in Epstein's words, pervade every situation. It is worth adding that Epstein found in a later study in a commercial town, that former pupils of certain schools felt themselves to be linked together.7

(7) Unpublished lectures on Ndola.
Epstein concludes his study by stressing that in our studies of the new African towns we can find plenty of systematic regularities. These are obvious in that people live and go about their business within the towns in relative peace and absence of fear. Hence clearly there is some kind of working, integrated social system in these towns. But the social system must not be thought of as rigid, tight, or self-consistent. The social field of the towns consists of many semi-independent areas of life, in which people associate for specific purposes: to run a home and raise children, to be entertained with friends, to work and improve status, to achieve political objectives, etc. Different principles of social organisation may be effective in the various areas of relations. Hence a trade union can oust Tribal Elders, and with them tribal authority, from the town, without affecting tribalism as a category or even loyalty to a tribal chief in other situations. Let me stress, too, that this situation is not confined to Africans. Tribalism acts, though not as strongly, in British towns: for in these Scots and Welsh and Irish, French, Jews, Lebanese, Africans, have their own associations, and their domestic life is ruled by their own national customs. But all may unite in political parties and in trade unions or employers federations. Tribalism in the Central African towns is, in sharper form, the tribalism of all towns.

These urban studies all emphasize that tribal associations in these towns do not dominate political life. Tribalism is not an organized set of political relations. Here modern urban tribalism differs radically from tribalism in the rural areas. In the rural areas, under British rule, each tribe is an organized political unit, with a complex internal structure. At its head, in Central Africa at least, there is usually a traditional chief, with a traditional council of elders, and a system of villages and other political units. For here it has been Government policy to rule through the tribal organization. Government has thus lent its powerful support to the continued working of the African tribal political systems, as systems. We may also say that continuing, and in the sociological sense conservative, loyalty to chiefs has been important here. Moreover, since the new industrial and urban political associations develop in the towns, they only affect tribal allegiances indirectly. But we also consider that the tribal system in the rural areas serves new needs of tremendous importance to the modern African.

All Africans now want to earn money. They must have money to pay taxes, and they want it to pay for clothes and other European goods, and for schooling and other welfare services. A few of the
Central African tribes have been able to earn this money by selling crops and fish; most of them migrate for longer or shorter periods to work in European enterprises, mainly in the towns. But they consider that they have little security in their industrial life. Housing as well as sentiment makes it difficult for them to rear children there; till recently, they could not own houses, which were tied to jobs, and this situation is only slightly changed; there is no provision for unemployment; sickness and accident compensation is very low; there is no provision for work by, or care of, the old, and there are few pensions, and those there are, are small. The insecurity of town employment is constantly brought home to them. All tribal areas have tales like the incident recorded by one of my colleagues, who, when working on the Zambezi River, one morning saw men appear on the other bank—the bank of another Territory. One of the men shouted for a canoe, and they were brought across. It was a policeman, repatriating an old blind man. He had left the tribal home thirty years before and never communicated with his kin: now, old and disabled, he was brought back to it, to be supported by whosoever would accept responsibility or feel pity for him. And finally all Africans remember the great depression, when the mines closed and thousands of them returned to their tribal homes—as millions of Americans were absorbed back into eking a living on the land in the same crisis. Industrial and urban life offers little security to the vast majority of African labourers, and for this security they cling to their land in their tribal homes. They mostly want to return home, and look forward to it, but in addition this security of land is an ever-present need in the total field where they make their living.8

We must think here of these tribesmen who get their money by going out to work as earning their total living in two widely separated areas. Basically they depend for security on the land, and many of them leave their wives and children to get their subsistence from the land. Here the old must live. Hence Watson says of the Mambwe on the border of Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia, that they raid the towns for money. If the tribesmen are to exploit their land and to raid the towns, they have to spread their economic activities very widely, and if they are to do this successfully, they need to co-operate with others. In short, there needs to be a group of kin, some of whom

go out any one time to earn money, while others remain at home and cultivate the soil and care for cattle—as well as wives and children. Some tribes seem to achieve this organised deployment of men more successfully than others, for a complex of reasons which Dr. Watson has examined, but which I cannot set out here for lack of time. Other tribes are markedly unsuccessful. But all turn to the land for ultimate support.

Land here is not an individual item of land which a man owns for himself and by himself. For he secures his rights to land in two ways. First, as a citizen of the tribe he is entitled to some arable and building land, and to the use of public pasturage, fishing waters, and wild products. Secondly, in all tribes except those who shift their gardens widely and have an abundance of land, he gets right to land from membership of a village and a group of kinsfolk. That is, a man’s rights to land in the tribal home depend on his accepting membership of a tribe, with all its obligations. He hold land as a Barotse, and not a Lunda, and the tribe jealously safeguards these rights. You all know that under Bantu systems of land tenure, which we may summarise as pre-feudal, the chief has to distribute land to his subjects, and he often does so through a complicated social hierarchy. I examined the development of land-holding in all the Central and Southern African tribes, and found that in no case, as land got scarcer and hence more valuable, had chiefs expropriated to themselves an unreasonable quantity of land. Instead, they had in various tribes, as pressure on land increased, steadily legislated to safeguard the fundamental right of every tribesman to some land. Thus the first step, taken e.g. among the Ngwaketse in Bechuanaland, was for the chief to take power to commandeer land allocated to a subject which he was not using, for distribution to the landless. Then the chief took power to take over for the landless people land which had lain fallow for a certain period: you will see that when this is done, the cycle of land degradation has begun. The final step is seen in Basutoland, where each family is restricted by law to $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres. People get around these laws by various devices, of course, but the trend of development in the view of both the leaders and the mass of the tribes is clear. Every man who is a member of the tribe has a right to live and support his family on the tribal land.

I am sure that honest fellow-feeling and sympathy and justice have contributed to this legislation. But in addition those who remain behind have an interest in the work of those who go away to the towns, for they bring home the money which the people require. In a way, those
who stay at home hold the land as security for support in money from those who go out to work. And those who go out to work pass money to those who remain, in payment for this security. So that they get security by their continued allegiance to the tribe, for they hold land from the chief in return for loyalty and support. Hence they adhere to their chiefs; and as they adhere to the chiefs, they accept with the chiefs, for the rural areas, the organized system of tribal political relations. Very few tribesmen wish to overturn the tribal political system as such, though new interest groups, and new élites, in the tribes may struggle for power in tribal councils. With acceptance of the tribal political system goes acceptance of many customs and observances built into that system.

In tribes where land is worked in co-operating groups of kindred, or where kin organise their departures to town as I have described before, security in holding of land also involves acceptance of kinship obligations, and with these of many other parts of the tribal culture. I cannot enter further into this part of our analysis, for my time is running out; nor have I time to deal with developments in tribes which earn money by fishing or selling crops.

We see, in short, that tribalism persists in the rural areas because of Government support, and because the tie to tribal land is of the utmost importance to a man. With this tie goes acceptance of the tribal political system with its culture, and of its smaller constituent groups with their culture. In short, tribalism in the rural areas consists of participation in a highly organized system of social relations, based strongly on the chief's rights as trustee for his people over the tribal land. Dependence on land and the social relations arising from this dependence, give modern Africans many satisfactions they cannot find in urban life, and also security against the vicissitudes of industrial employment. Tribalism in the towns is not such an organized system of political and other social relations. In the towns, specific urban-type groupings and industrial associations develop, and have ousted the attempts of Europeans to transplant African tribal authority systems to deal with urban-industrial problems. But tribal linkages and hostilities affect the struggles within these new forms of association, though sometimes they cloak struggles based on other principles. Tribal ties and attachments still dominate domestic life. And tribalism is a most important basis for grouping people into categories, which determine how a man treats those whom he meets casually. Some associations emerge in which fellow-tribesmen band together to help one another. But class linkages are also beginning to pervade the life
and the culture of the new towns. In all these respects, African towns differ only in degree from any town, anywhere in the world probably. In crisis, common interests arising from industrial and urban association seem steadily to overcome tribal ties and divisions.

To some extent, though developments in urban and in rural areas affect one another, as I have shown, the specific associations of each may exist independently. Tribal Elders were ousted from the mines by the trade union, yet the leaders in this move treated a visiting chief with respect — until he tried to intervene in an industrial dispute. The Africans’ lives are partly dichotomised, and they live in separate compartments — like other men. But there is a mutual influence, which I have not time to examine.

What, then, becomes of « detribalisation », the problem I raised at the beginning of my lecture? Perhaps my intellectual opponents are right, as well as myself. The African is always tribalised, both in towns and in rural areas; but he is tribalised in two quite different ways. As we see it, in the rural area he lives and is controlled in every activity in an organized system of tribal relations; in the urban areas, tribal attachments work within a setting of urban associations. Hence the African in rural area and in town is two different men; for the social situation of tribal home and of urban employment determine his actions and associations, within the major politico-economic system covering both areas.

Postscript

I make three points which were raised in the discussion after my lecture:

1. Though I speak of the separation of the African’s activities in town and tribal area, I do not consider that this is achieved without both social and mental conflict. Nevertheless, there is considerable resolution of this conflict through the separation of the spheres of activities.

2. The analysis made here is for Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and developments elsewhere may well be different. Industrial and other urban associations have developed less successfully, e.g., in the Union of South Africa, where legislation obstructing these associations are severe. In British Central Africa, until recently, Parliament in Britain had considerable influence on policy. In the Union of South Africa it appears that tribal affiliations in towns are more significant than in Rhodesia.

3. The whole situation of the chiefs is affected by the presence
of both a superior Colonial Government and European settlers. Hence in the recent political crisis chiefs aligned themselves with urban leaders. The development of local self-government, not dominated by settlers, might here produce a radical difference, as in Ghana; for an indigenous Government may require to reduce the autonomy of tribes and hence the power of chiefs.