Social Communication Methodology in the Study of Nation-Building

The basis of nationality is the sense of belonging to the same nation and the desire on the part of its members to live with each other at this level of community. When the political scientist wants to define or locate this subjective sense of community, he has used such objective criteria as common language, common history, common territory, and so forth. It is clear that all these criteria are an expression of something more basic—shared experience. This shared experience, which may lead to the necessary mutual trust among members of a given society and to the feeling that this group as a group is different from others, contributes continuously to national unity. National unity likewise makes shared experience more possible.

To determine the human and geographic frontiers of a nation the political scientist must find ways to examine this shared experience. The problems in the Tiers Monde are greater with regard to such research than they are in Europe because much of the necessary data are not available. Research at very basic levels with some new methods is necessary.

Karl W. Deutsch, professor of political science at Yale University, has proposed a quantitative interdisciplinary way to examine shared experience and, indirectly, the sense of community. He suggests that one measure the quantities of communications among a given people to find out how much contact they have. For this one must use criteria such as flows of letters, telegrams, movement of vehicles, trains, planes, telephone calls, mass media of communication, location of markets, settlement patterns, and population movements, he says. If it is possible to examine these different forms of communication,

or as many as possible of them, it is equally possible, he says, to estimate shared experience and make predictions about increases or decreases in shared experience.

The first stage in this process, that of physical contact, is called "mobilization". People who have intensive communications with each other are "mobilized" for shared experiences and are "mobilized" into a current of communications which may eventually change a physical relationship into an affective relationship.

The second stage is a change in the sentiments and attitudes of the people; it is called "assimilation". People find that, on the basis of shared experience, they communicate increasingly more effectively with members of a particular society than with others. In other words, when the "communication habits" of a population become increasingly standardized within a group composed of smaller groups, assimilation of the smaller groups to the larger one is occurring:

"If the statistical weight of standardized experience is large, and the weight of recalled information within the [smaller] group is relatively small, and the statistical weight of feedback information about the [smaller] group's peculiar responses is likewise small, then the responses of such a group would differ from the responses of other groups in the same situation by a converging series, until the remaining differences might fall below the threshold of political significance. This is the process of assimilation."

People may also find that there are advantages to be gained in belonging to this new community, but there may never be a conscious choice which is made.

Because a study of assimilation is a study of beliefs, values and conceptions, different kinds of data are necessary. Professor Deutsch says that there are also quantifiable. According to him, the "rate of assimilation" depends on certain linguistic, economic, and cultural "balances": similarities in linguistic habits must be balanced, for example, against differences in value, material rewards for assimilation must be balanced against rewards for non-assimilation. To measure values he says it is necessary to give psychological tests to considerable numbers of people and to measure rewards it is necessary, in part, to examine economic surveys to determine where people work and how much they get paid.

The problems involved in using these criteria are insurmountable at present. The data for these "balances" are lacking, and even if one had the men, the money, the machines, and the time necessary,

2. Ibid., pp. 91-92.
3. Ibid., pp. 130-131, 135.
4. Ibid., p. 133.
it would still be extremely hazardous to quantify values and to give
the kinds of tests in Tiers Monde countries he suggests. The researcher
who works alone is forced to find one or two manageable criteria
as a basis on which to estimate trends in physical contact and attitude
change. These depend on the conditions of research in the country
one has chosen.

Gabon, which I chose for such a study,1 is sparsely settled with
a population whose social structures are now of a decentralized,
egalitarian character.2 In times of peace loyalties have been limited
to a relatively restrained family circle. Gabon is also a country
with a very poor system of communication; there is no railroad, many
roads are impassable in the rainy season, and three of the nine adminis-
trative regions into which Gabon is divided, have had practically no
direct land communication with the capital, Libreville. The combina-
tion of these characteristics has sometimes meant that differences
between members of the same tribe were as important as differences
between members of different tribes. Second, it has meant that
organized violence involved fewer people.

Once I arrived in Gabon I discovered that a census which was
still in progress would have to be my main source of statistical informa-
tion. The Service de Coopération of the Institut national de la sta-
istique et des études économiques began a census of Gabon in 1960.
French and Gabonese statisticians who visited every village in the
country used one census form for each household. Every member
of a given household was, therefore, accounted for: name, age, occupa-
tion, place of birth, and relationship with other members of the
household were noted. Tribe or ethnic group was indicated for all
persons fourteen years old and over. Dossiers were then grouped
by administrative unit: village, canton, district, region.

The canton was the smallest unit with which I could work because
it could be located on a map more easily than villages and because
global ethnic data were available at the level of the canton.3 On
the basis of the canton it was possible to make an ethnic map and
to estimate the direction of population movements from canton to
canton. Within a given canton I could examine patterns of inter-
marriage and settlement when two different tribes lived in contiguous

1. I was in Gabon from June 1962 to November 1962 to complete research
begun in France for a doctoral dissertation: "Building the Gabonese Nation;
the Search for a New Order and the Role of the Fang Tribe in this Process",
unpublished, Harvard University, 1963.

2. The population of Gabon is about 500,000; the density of the population
is about 1.5 per square kilometer. See Guy Lasserre, Libreville: la ville et sa

3. I am very grateful to the Service de Coopération and particularly to
M. François for permission to consult their unpublished data.
villages or in the same village. These quantifiable data served as a basis for a study of mobilization.

In order to validate conclusions based on the quantitative census data I took a tour of the country during which I visited every region and lived in a few selected villages for periods of three days to a week. In the course of this tour I found that one way to investigate attitudes and assimilation was by oral histories and conceptions of kinship.

My use of these histories was different from that of Professor Hubert Deschamps who had made an extensive tour of the country in 1961 to collect and record oral histories as part of a large project to write the history of Gabon.¹ As an historian he was naturally interested in recording the facts of the past. For me, as a political scientist, the "truth" was irrelevant. I was interested in history as ideology: how were present relationships between tribes justified in the history, what was the place held by neighboring tribes in a given history, how were history and conceptions of kinship influenced by present settlement patterns. I thought that these two criteria, settlement patterns and histories, could serve as a basis for estimations of trends in assimilation and mobilization and could show the relationship between non-quantifiable attitudes and quantifiable social communications. The following are some of my findings.

MOBILIZATION

Gabon may be crudely divided into three general zones of mobilization: places where people are relatively non-mobilized, where they are partially mobilized, and where they are mobilized for intensive contact with people of different ethnic groups. I have called these zones Heartland, Contact, and National.

The Heartland Zone is a group of contiguous cantons in which one ethnic group or tribe clearly predominates with at least 80% of the total population. Internal communication is fairly good and may be better than means which link the area with other parts of the country. Contact Zones are on the edges of Heartland Zones; from about 50% to 80% of the people belong to one tribe. Such zones are cantons in which people of different tribes live in adjoining villages or in the same village; or they are centers of attraction such as administrative posts and markets to which people from different Heartlands travel regularly. They are most likely along roads and rivers which provide a link between Heartland Zones. There may be more

mechanical means of communication in a Contact Zone than in a Heartland.

National Zones are groups of contiguous cantons and large centers of attraction in which no tribe accounts for 50% of the total population. The internal means of communication are best here: they are public, mechanical, and regular. It is usually the one place where most decisions affecting the whole country are made.

A. A Heartland.

The largest Heartland in Gabon is that of the Fang who account for one-third of the total population of the country. The center of this Heartland corresponds with the administrative region of Woleu-Ntem in the northern half of the country along the Camerounese frontier.

The region is relatively isolated from the rest of Gabon but has regular contact with Cameroun and Spanish Guinea by land and water. The only road to Libreville has been in poor condition even during the dry season; the rains often close the road completely. While there is regular air and telegraphic communication between Libreville and administrative centers of Woleu-Ntem, there is no regular land transportation. By contrast, fair roads extend into Cameroun and Spanish Guinea where close relatives of the Fang, the Bulu, live. Merchandise is imported along these routes while coffee and cocoa exports leave Woleu-Ntem through the Cameroun. Some Fang take advantage of the road to the Cameroun to attend Camerounese technical schools and go to Camerounese hospitals (particularly a missionary-run hospital not far from the frontier). Radio Cameroun is a popular source of information and entertainment.

For 14 of the 16 cantons of Woleu Ntem there is a regular service of autocars which link the administrative centers of the region. For example, two little Renault cars leave Oyem, the administrative capital, every day for each canton except that of Medouneu to the far west and Lalara to the south. There are frequent cars from Oyem or Bitam to Spanish Guinea and Cameroun.

Another means of internal communication has been a regional newspaper published by some Fang teachers. In 1962 it contained mainly Fang stories and essays on “the true Fang custom”. In spite


2. Neither Libreville nor Port-Gentil, which are both on the ocean, have a port which can adequately accommodate large ships.
of the great preponderance of Fang in the region, it was printed in French and was issued in only 75 copies.

About 55,000 out of a total adult population of 56,500, or 98% are Fang in this region.¹ In the canton of Woleu, for example, there are 5,531 Africans of whom 5,473 are Fang. Non-Fang live in well-defined quarters in the town of Oyem; most of these people are Bulu merchants from southern Cameroun or Bakota who have moved from a neighboring region to work as servants or to attend a Roman Catholic secondary school.

While these “foreigners” move into the Woleu-Ntem, the present Fang residents are fairly stationary. The census indicates that 80% of the men between the ages of 15 and 59 were born in the place the census taker found them. However, only 12% of the women were born in the place they were counted.² This does not mean that many Fang have not moved outside the Woleu-Ntem for many have; it means that Fang males, who still live in the region, have an interest in continuing to live in the village where they were born and that they find wives outside their village. Several women in each of the villages along the Guinea and Cameroun frontiers indicated that they were born in these neighboring states.

Contiguous with the Woleu-Ntem are eight cantons which are an extension of the Heartland. The Fang have moved into these particular cantons partly because the ways of communication exist. For example, the administrative region of Ogooué-Ivindo has three cantons adjacent to the Fang Heartland. In two of these cantons the Fang represent 80% or more of the total population and in the third they represent only 2% of the total population. The difference is that the two cantons with high Fang percentages are linked to the Woleu-Ntem by a river and a road while the other has no such link.

In the sixteen cantons of Woleu-Ntem plus the eight cantons in adjacent regions which constitute the Heartland there are 70,000 Fang out of a total Fang population in Gabon of 106,000. On the basis of settlement patterns 66% of the Fang are, therefore, non-mobilized. Their contacts are almost exclusively with other Fang. Table I indicates that over half the Gabonese have no contact with people of tribes different from their own.

Not all the tribes of Gabon have Heartlands; of those who do have Heartlands 62% live in them. The total population of the country (14 and older) was approximately 285,000.³ If the total population

¹. Unless otherwise noted all census figures refer to people 14 and older.
³. All the calculations, unless otherwise noted, are my own; they are based
of Gabon is taken into account, 56% live in Heartlands and are thus non-mobilized.

Table I also indicates that only the Bandjabi have a higher percentage of their total population in the Heartland than the Fang—69% compared with 66%—but the Bandjabi Heartland has only 26,500 people who are separated administratively into two regions while the Fang have a Heartland of 70,000 of whom 55,000 live in one administrative region and completely dominate it. All tribes, except the Fang, must share a regional administration with other Heartlands, they are all paid the same prices for their coffee or cocoa, they belong to the same sections of the single political party, and in the elections of 1964 had to form joint electoral lists. In other words, it is more difficult for them to remain without absolutely any contact with different tribes than it is for the Fang.

Some people have more contact with “foreigners” than they want and are actually attending the disappearance of their own Heartland. For example, the Bawandji with only 26% of their total population in the Heartland are being surrounded by the Bandjabi. Census data indicate that most Bandjabi in the area were born in neighboring

on the unpublished material which I cited earlier. Because some aspects of the census were not complete when I consulted this material, it is possible that the published results will be somewhat different from my own. I do not believe this will affect the validity of this discussion for which proportions are more important than absolute numbers.
cantsons while the Bawandji were born in the place they were counted. The Bandjabi have been attracted to the administrative post of Lastoursville and have travelled along the road which links their own Heartland with this center of attraction. The area is becoming a Contact Zone.

B. A Contact Zone.

The Bandjabi are not the only people who are moving or who have moved towards Lastoursville; the Bakota have moved down from their Heartland in Ogooué-Ivindo as well. In one canton between Lastoursville and Makokou, the administrative capital of Ogooué-Ivindo Region, the Bakota account for 1,000 out of a total population of 3,000. The Bakota cleared a path from Makokou into this region when workers were needed in the gold mines here. Out of 56 villages in this canton 35 are mixed. In these mixed villages there is sometimes considerable intermarriage. Doumé, for example, is really three villages which have been regrouped by the government. The dossiers indicate that there are 129 marriages of which 59 or 46% are between partners of different tribes.

There used to be more Bakota in this canton. The gold is no longer mined by the company which used to be there, and the Bakota have been moving back to their Heartland. In one village, called Behamba, in the Bakota Heartland in Ogooué-Ivindo there were only 32 inhabitants in 1954 and 93 in 1956. Census data indicate that the newcomers were born near Lastoursville. The fact that the newcomers were born in a Contact Zone did not prevent them from moving to a Heartland. Once the center of attraction disappeared they had no more interest in remaining and became “demobilized”. This instability is characteristic of Contact Zones, and considerable movement of population is characteristic of Gabon.

A more important Contact Zone is that around Makokou where the Fang, the Bakota, the Bakwélé and others meet. Makokou exists by day only. It is located on a main road and two rivers which are used by the people to travel to this “post”. They come to deal with the administration, to go to the market on Saturday, to buy sugar or cloth at one of the European-owned shops, to go to school or to church. The people travel by canoe or by the trucks used by the

1. They were regrouped as were other villages in order that there might be enough people to set up a school and an infirmary. This is part of the government’s village regroupment program.
2. Data from partial village censuses, 1954-1959, Makokou.
3. The census experts found that for every hundred residents in a given place 12, on the average, were absent at the time of the census and 7 of those present were visitors. Recensement et enquête démographiques, op. cit., p. 26.
administration to collect coffee beans for the small factory where they are sorted and roasted for export. The only regular transportation by land is provided by privately owned Renault busses each of which “holds” 20 people. Once or twice a week it is possible to take one of these busses or possibly a truck to Libreville.

At night Makokou disappears. Everyone except the European merchants and civil servants goes home to the surrounding villages. The Bakwélé live up the Ivindo River which extends northeast from Makokou towards the Congolese frontier; the Bakota and Sháke live up the road to the east and along the Liboumba River which extends towards the southeast; the Fang live to the west and northwest along the road to Libreville and near the Mvoung River which comes into the region from Woleu-Ntem.

Two of the four cantons around Makokou are mainly Bakota and Sháke who account for 5,000 out of a total population of 5,800. One of the cantons is Fang; they number 4,400 out of 4,900, and the fourth canton is Bakwélé with 1,700 out of 2,300 of the population of the canton. All these people have tended to move towards Makokou or have been regrouped in villages closer to Makokou where they meet at the market or where some of them work during the day.

Census date indicate that a very few people are even moving into areas of tribes different from their own. For example, Fang and Bakota are sent to Bakwélé villages to teach in primary schools (the only secondary school, a collège, exists in Makokou). Fang catechists are sent to Bakwélé villages and Bakota catechists are sent to Sháke villages. Some Bakwélé have moved into Fang and Bakota areas.

There are examples of intermarriage, but they appear to follow certain patterns. For example, in a village of 100 people there may be five or six married couples, but all the men are Fang and the women are Bakwélé and Bakota. There are no examples of Fang women married to Bakota or Bakwélé men.

The people listen to Radio Gabon and Radio Brazzaville. The prefect receives Gabonese newspapers about two weeks after they are printed but other people do not appear to read these publications. Many men have worked in Brazzaville and older people remember that cloth and sugar used to come from Brazzaville before the road to Libreville was improved in the 1950’s.

Table II indicates that not very many people live in Contact Zones.

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1. The total population in the region is 25,876 of which there are 8,595 Bakota 14 years and older, 7,251 Fang, 2,278 Bakwélé, and 1,581 Sháke.
Seventeen per cent of those who have Heartlands live in Contact Zones. If the total population is taken into account, 21% of the Gabonese are partially mobilized.

C. A National Zone.

The single National Zone of Gabon is in the shape of a triangle formed by 18 cantons and the three cities Libreville, Lambaréné, and Port-Gentil. There is a regular system of land and water communications in this area. Libreville and Lambaréné are connected by the best national road in the country on which regular transportation is assured by small busses. Lambaréné is then linked with Port-Gentil and the Atlantic Ocean by navigable section of the Ogooué River. Ships and boats move regularly between Libreville and Port-Gentil and between Port-Gentil and Lambaréné. Merchandise is brought to Lambaréné from Port-Gentil and Libreville. The weekly newspaper Effort Gabonais is more likely to be found in this triangle than elsewhere, and the national radio broadcasting company is heard more frequently than other stations.

The area delimited by Libreville, Lambaréné, and Port-Gentil has been called a type of island because of its isolation from the rest of Gabon. Since 1958, however, a road has extended south parallel with the Ngounié River from Lambaréné to link the National Zone with the southwestern part of the country. Regular trans-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Population in Contact</th>
<th>Total Population in Gabon</th>
<th>Percent in Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bawandji</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakota</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bateke</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massango</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavoungou</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakwelé</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambamba</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsogo</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>9,100</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fang</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>105,600</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandjabi</td>
<td>4,800</td>
<td>38,200</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eshira</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>13,400</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bapounou</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>35,600</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>258,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
portation assures communications between Lambaréné and this area.

Every Sunday in 1962 a truck left Tchibanga, in the far southwest near the Congolese frontier, to collect manioc and vegetables for workers in Port-Gentil. The truck, which also took passengers, was driven to Lambaréné where the vegetables were transferred to a boat which left on a Monday afternoon for Port-Gentil, down the Ogooué River. The boat also took on passengers.

In the National Zone there are about 84,400 people 14 years and older; the Fang, the largest single group,¹ account for only 22,600 or 27% of the total. Few of these people were born in this zone: for the age group 15 to 59 only 25% of the men were born in the place they were counted during the census, and only 20% of the women were born in the place they were counted.²

No tribe occupies a single solid zone, and most cantons are not contiguous with a Heartland Zone. Villages are interspersed ethnically, and within each village several ethnic groups are represented. In canton Lac Nord there are 1,800 people: 500 are Fang, 400 Bapounou, 190 Omyènè, 140 Eshira, 50 Bakélé, and 520 others from almost every tribe in the country. The 28 villages are all mixed and inter-marriage is frequent. In the village of Guelimoni, for example, there are 25 married couples of which 14 marriages are unmixed and 11 are mixed. Contrary to the “patterns” in Contact Zones there are examples of people from any given tribe in this canton marrying people from any other given tribe.³

Libreville, the largest city in Gabon (with a population of about 35,000 now), is divided into five “groups” each with four or five quarters which have a chief.⁴ Some “groups” used to be predominately Omyènè; they arrived on the coast before the other Gabonese. But now members of other tribes, particularly the Fang, have moved into every part of the city. The Fang account for 34.2% of the total African population and 40.5% of the total Gabonese population.⁵ The other large groups are the Omyènè with 15.1% of the Gabonese population and the Bapounou with 10.9%.⁶

Naturally, the major educational, religious, and some of the major economic institutions are in the National Zone. Most intensive inter-tribal contact is possible here although there is still a tendency

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¹ In spite of poor communications with Woleu-Ntem many Fang have moved to Libreville and the rest of the National Zone.
³ This is less true of Omyènè who tend to marry other Omyènè and Mètis.
⁵ There were Congolese and Dahomeans in the capital during the census. Recensement et enquête démographique 1960-1961: Résultats pour Libreville, Service de Coopération, INSEE, 1962, p. 26.
⁶ Ibid.
towards ethnic regroupment. One of the two major Roman Catholic churches is predominantly Omyènè and the other is Fang; one of the largest primary schools located in an area where there are both Fang and Omyènè has gradually become exclusively Fang. If an area or an institution of one kind or another has a tribal rather than a national label attached to it, the most likely labels are Fang or Omyènè. (If the Bapounou continue to migrate to Libreville, there may develop “Bapounou” schools, etc.)

Table III indicates percentages of the representation in the National Zone of the various tribes which have Heartlands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Population in National</th>
<th>(Of which in)</th>
<th>Total Population in Gabon</th>
<th>Percent in National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Libreville)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eshira .....</td>
<td>4,970</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>13,400</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavoungou ...</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bapounou ...</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>35,600</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsogo ...</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>9,100</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fang ...</td>
<td>22,600</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>105,600</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandjábi ...</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>38,200</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambamba ...</td>
<td>1,870</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massango ...</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakota ...</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakwélé ...</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bawandji ...</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batéké ...</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS ...</td>
<td>53,456</td>
<td>12,750</td>
<td>258,000</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-one percent of those tribes with Heartlands live in the National Zone, and twenty-three percent of all Gabonese live where intensive contact with people of tribes different from their own is probable. These people are “mobilized”.

According to this table, the Batéké, the Bawandji, and the Bakota are poorly represented in the zone. Yet, they are the tribes with the highest percentages in the Contact Zones (40%, 78%, and 46% respectively—see Table II). This means that although they move around considerably, their contacts with the rest of the Gabonese are rather superficial. They are only partially mobilized, and they do not share many experiences with other peoples. They do not necessarily move from Contact to National Zones.

There is no inevitable and logical migration in stages from Heart-
lands to Contact Zones to National Zones; people may move directly from the Heartland Zone to the National Zone. Partial mobilization does not necessarily indicate people are on the way to full mobilization.

Table III shows that the four tribes with the highest percentages of their total population in the National Zone (the Eshira, Bavoun-gou, Bapounou, and Mitsogo) come from the same region, the Ngounié which is linked with the National Zone by the Ngounié River and the major route extending from Lambaréné to the south.¹ The people of Haut-Ogooué and neighboring Ogooué-Lolo are poorly represented in this zone: the Batéké have a bare 1.6%, the Bawandji only 6% of their total population, and the Ambamba 18%. These are two of the regions with no direct connection by land with Libreville. They are closely linked with the Congo (Brazzaville) with regard to communications.²

These percentages correspond with certain political realities. The two most important political leaders in the country after the loi-cadre were Léon Mba, a Fang of Libreville, who later became the country’s first President, and Paul Gondjout, an Omyènè, equally from the National Zone who was the secretary general of the major political party and became, for a time, the President of the National Assembly. (The leader of the opposition was M. Aubame, also a Fang of Libreville.) The ministers who founded the B.D.G. party and who were in every cabinet from 1957 to 1964 were an Omyènè of Libreville, a Bapounou from Ngounié and an Eshira from Ngounié. The Omyènè, Bapounou, and Eshira are not, after the Fang, the largest ethnic groups in the country but the largest percentages of their respective populations live in the National Zone. They have had the most influence in the National Zone along with the Fang and have had the most interest in participating in a government located there.

Table III lastly indicates that it is not only the cities where intensive inter-tribal contact is probable. Of 22,000 Fang in the National Zone 6,600 live in Libreville, 360 in Lambaréné, and 850 in Port-Gentil. This means that 14,790 or 65% live outside the cities. Mobilization and assimilation are not exclusively urban processes.

Assimilation

People may be assimilated by one another or everyone may be assimilated into a culture which did not previously exist. In Gabon both

¹ This does not count the Omyènè almost 100% of whom live in the National Zone because they do not have a Heartland. Until the present the Omyènè and the Fang are the two most important tribes, from the point of view of influence on Gabonese history.
² Imports and exports pass through the Congo, the Batéké have relatives across the frontier, and many people know Brazzaville better than Libreville.
processes are going on simultaneously. On the one hand, some small tribes without Heartlands are forgetting their history and adopting the language and customs or their neighbors. Some people consciously change their identity to improve their social position. Other tribes try to absorb their neighbors to gain power; they may claim that a neighboring tribe is really a clan of their own tribe that was separated and differentiated by historical accident or by the action of the White.

While the localized processes of assimilation are occurring, a national culture influenced by Occidental and African civilizations is developing. Most Gabonese shared similar experiences during the colonial period which lasted for a century. Increasing numbers of Gabonese children are going to school (the country has about 80% of its children of school age in primary school) where they learn French. They all deal with the same government, work in some similar enterprises, produce the same crops for export, they vote in the same elections. At the same time the government has been trying to abolish the dowry and the matrilineal system which is prevalent among the people south of the Ogooué. A program of village regroupment mobilizes those who were previously isolated and contributes to a standardization of culture.1

While mobilization is a physical process, assimilation is more a question of beliefs which vary according to Heartland, Contact, and National Zones.

A. A Heartland.

People remember their particularistic histories best in Heartlands. In every village someone can always be found who remembers The Beginning; this same person can usually relate several generations of his own ancestors. The Fang of Woleu-Ntem remember their history best of all.

The Fang are intensely proud of their history and enjoy telling it. In his tour of Gabon Governor Deschamps found that Fang informants could relate as many as nineteen generations of their ancestors.2 They have an advantage over other Gabonese in that they have a written version of their history.

The story of the migration of the children of Afrikara appears in little pamphlets published in the southern Cameroun.3 It is accepted

2. Hubert Deschamps, op. cit., p. 92.
by most Fang of Woleu-Ntem as their standard history. These northern Fang or Bulu from southern Cameroun, who work in Libreville or in non-Fang territory south of the Ogoouë River, often carry it and show the pamphlet to other Fang who may never have seen it. Dr. James Fernandez has credited the story of Afrikara with having helped maintain a certain Fang sense of identity; by explaining why they live where they do and “by emphasizing their common origins it has persistently and almost single-handedly . . . maintained a group feeling”, he says.¹

In this history non-Fang are barely mentioned. They are, like all men, the sons of Hamata and like all Africans the sons of Afrikara. When the dispersion of Africans is explained and when the various Fang move into Gabon, there is not a word about non-Fang. The history reflects indifference towards non-Fang rather than hostility. Because there are so few non-Fang in the Heartland, people are not always aware or conscious of tribal differences, and this is reflected in their considerations of the past.

A certain Fang hostility to “outsiders” is reflected, however, in the problems of placement of civil servants in Fang territory. Prefects and other administrators who are not obliged to live in very close daily contact with the Fang of Woleu-Ntem are often Omyènè or members of other tribes. Teachers who live with the people in their villages and some sub-prefects are Fang. If they are not Fang, they may have trouble succeeding in their work because of Fang hostility. This is true in most Heartland, but some people must accept “outsiders” as teachers because they have no one qualified for the job.

The people of Woleu-Ntem are very much aware of differences between themselves and other Fang; this consciousness is sometimes accompanied by intense feelings of hostility. The Heartland Fang say they have kept the “pure customs” of the tribe, but that their relatives in the National Zone have been corrupted by contact with “foreigners”. By “foreigners” they generally mean the coastal Omyènè. The Fang of Woleu-Ntem associated the political party B.D.G. with the Fang of Libreville and the Omyènè; they preferred to support the opposition party, U.D.S.G. of Jean-Hilaire Aubame, when it existed. There are examples of this hostility developing into open violence between groups of Fang from Woleu-Ntem and groups of Fang from Libreville. In spite of this, there is a tendency today for Fang to call themselves “Fang” without reference to the Woleu-Ntem or to their clan.²

². By this I mean they say they are “Fang” when asked by a stranger. Older people will sometimes still say (Fang) Ntumu or (Fang) Mazouna, etc.
The only languages spoken in Woleu-Ntem are French and Fang. Non-Fang are obliged to learn the predominant language of the Heartland; if they marry a Fang and remain the Woleu-Ntem, they are more or less absorbed. Because the Fang are exogamous, most people are concerned about finding a marriage partner from a clan different from their own and because the dowry is rather high in Woleu-Ntem, they often go to the coast or to Spanish Guinea for a wife.

The people of this Heartland believe they account for about two-thirds of the population of Gabon. Because they say they don't benefit from the existence of an independent Gabon, there have been sporadic attempts to detach the area and unite it with Cameroun. Such tendencies have been discouraged first by the thought that the Fang would be a minority in Cameroun and second by the quick action of the government in Libreville.

B. A Contact Zone.

People may remember their histories in Contact Zones, but they show remarkable ressemblances with those of the tribes with which they have the most contact. These other tribes are given a role more important than that given to them in the Heartland; the part they play appears to be strongly influenced by what the present relations between the two groups are.

For example, Nze in the Contact Zone near Makokou is a regrouped village which used to be five villages—one Shaké and four Bakota. By making a detailed map I saw that there were two clearly defined quarters—Shaké and Bakota—and then I was able to establish the tribal identity of each resident by putting names beside the picture of the house and asking questions. Before I did this I inquired whether or not any Shaké men were married to non-Shaké women. Informants mentioned one or two. Once I had written the names of the heads of each household next to the house and asked the question about each person many more non-Shaké women were named. About one-third of the wives were non-Shaké.

With a map and a tour of the village I discovered there were actually three quarters instead of two. The third section was about twenty minutes on foot up the road. Only Bakota were living here; they used to live with the other Bakota alongside the Shaké but moved out two years before. They moved out because a Shaké shot one of their sheep which was destroying a cocoa tree. The administration still just recognizes one chief and one village, but the isolated Bakota have their own chief now and have very little contact with the Shaké. In effect, these Bakota have become demobilized and differentiated
from the Shaké and the other Bakota. Oral history reflects these relationships.

In the histories of the Bakota and Shaké, who were still living together, each tribe has an important place for the other: they had been allies in wars, they had almost always lived together, they were close relatives descended from the same ancestors. The Bakota who were living by themselves first announced proudly that _they_ were the “pure” Bakota. They said they could not understand the Shaké accent very well. These Bakota claimed they were never allied with the Shaké, and were not descended from the same ancestors. The Shaké were, in fact, not mentioned in their history.

People are more conscious of tribal differences in Contact Zones than in Heartlands; the Bakota and Shaké who were living together were conscious of differences but tried to minimize them. In normal times such consciousness does not lead to open antagonism or violence, but during economic difficulties people associate their neighbors with their troubles. Coffee prices were down and the sub-prefect had not been sending the truck to collect coffee beans from the Bakota and Shaké villages. The people said that the sub-prefect, a Fang, preferred to buy from his relatives—this was the reason they had no money.

In Makokou tribal consciousness has contributed to small scale violence during the unsettling and insecure times of elections or other forms of political change. Widespread intertribal violence is uncommon; when it has occurred, it has been localized just around Makokou and of short duration.

Members of any tribe in Gabon are more or less acceptable as civil servants in the Contact Zone. Civil servants who come into the Contact Zone do not necessarily learn any of the local languages because there is not one dominant African language. Each people says it speaks its own language and French;¹ they say they communicate with other tribes in French or in the “few words” they know of the other language.

The patterns in intermarriage indicated in the census data are confirmed by attitudes. The Fang say that a Fang woman would never marry a Bakota man because Bakota are regarded as inferior; marriages between Fang men and Bakota women are, however, acceptable. There do not appear to be any rules with regard to Bakota-Shaké marriages although Bakota leaders indicate they would prefer to see Bakota men marry Shaké women rather than Shaké men marry Bakota women. The reason for this is that some Bakota believe the Shaké should become Bakota.

¹. Most Bakwelé speak Fang, however.
C. A National Zone.

Some people appear to have completely forgotten their histories in the National Zone, but are not alarmed about it. People from other tribes are most visible and everyone is most conscious of differences, but there is often a desire to get along and build something new called Gabon or Africa. Questions of "purity" and "true customs" are not posed here. People appear to adopt different customs most rapidly in this area, they speak many languages, and accept teachers in their villages from any tribe in the country.

The village of Dakar with some 200 people is located not far from Lambaréné. Séké, Nkomi (Omyènè), Fang, Bapounou, Bapindji, and Mitsogo live here, but in different contiguous quarters. The Mitsogo live in two different quarters according to their geographical origins. These various tribes have not been living together very long (except for the Séké and Nkomi-Omyènè) and intermarriage is still rare (except for the Séké and Nkomi).

The Séké came here first, then the Nkomi, and then the others after logging camps to which they had been attracted closed down. The Séké are becoming part of the prestigious coastal Omyènè ethnic group. Their chief says he knows nothing about any particular Séké history, and he is not concerned about it; it is the same as that of the "rest of the Omyènè", but he is not even sure about the details of Omyènè history. These people speak the Omyènè tongue, but their neighbors say that when the Séké are by themselves, they speak "Séké". Almost everyone in the National Zone speaks Fang and/or Omyènè.

The Fang of Dakar outwardly accept the Séké chief as the leader for the whole village, but they have their own leaders who have more authority among the Fang themselves. They arrived last and tend to disdain the non-Fang. There are no examples of intermarriage with the Fang. The Fang as well as the other people in Dakar send their children to one school which is staffed by a teacher from another region.

The workers in various industrial enterprises and private companies in Libreville and Port-Gentil are as conscious of tribal differences as are the villagers, but there is an added element: a conscious desire to get along with other workers for the good of all. The Gabonese sociologist, M. Laurent Biffot, found in a sample taken from three different enterprises that 27% of those workers interviewed thought workers tended to group themselves according to ethno-geographic affinities; 65.2% said workers tried to build an esprit de corps and to sympathize with other workers irrespective of
tribe.¹ In spite of this there are examples of members of one tribe becoming predominant in one office or section of an enterprise and then more or less driving members of other tribes out.

In these villages and cities of the National Zone one finds the least resistance to change and the most desire for innovation. Everyone now realizes the importance of at least a primary school diploma. The Omyènè and the coastal Fang were the first to accept change and they hold most of the positions of power. The Fang of Woleu-Ntem first resisted the establishment of schools in their region to such an extent that the first school, set up in Oyem in 1929, had to be guarded. Within a few years, the priest who set up this first school says he was besieged by parents who demanded schooling for their children. Today the Fang have more teachers than any other tribe, they hold the most important positions in the churches, the government, and in the armed forces. Within the group of Fang in these positions the Fang from Woleu-Ntem are becoming more and more important. The isolated Batéké, Bakwélé, Mitsogo, and others who refused to accept innovations or who were never offered them have little power in independent Gabon. They now ask for schools so that there may be Batéké teachers and Batéké prefects.

This National Zone is the nucleus of the developing Gabonese nation. Shared experience is most possible and most intense in this area. Secondly, it is in everyone's interest in this area to build a supra-tribal community because one has a job, material possessions, and because one cannot necessarily count on the help of members of one's own tribe in times of insecurity and violence. No one would be completely secure.

In Heartlands people have few dealings with "foreigners" and have a degree of security from fear of foreigners that comes with the ownership of land and the sense of continuity of living in one place for a long time with one's own family. In Contact Zones people may move into villages with people who speak languages different from their own but may not possess fallow land—a type of investment—which indicates people have lived for a considerable time in a village and means that they have a definite interest in getting along with the neighbors.²

In the National Zone there is more possibility of intertribal violence which could lead to the destruction of the developing community


² Mlle Jean of the Bureau pour le Développement de la Production Agricole suggested the factor of fallow land to me. If one had data on who owned fallow land in every village, one could make a better judgment about the attitudes of people.
than in the other two zones. The danger comes from the gap between mobilization and assimilation: some people have intensive contacts but remain different from one another and unassimilated into the growing national culture.¹ Unemployment is one criterion for this gap. This is particularly serious in Gabon because Libreville and Port-Gentil are about the only centers of great attraction for the unskilled laborers. The census takers found that in the group 14 years and older 39% of the people of Libreville were unemployed. Once school children and housewives were subtracted 9% of Libreville’s population was found to be without employment. Most of these were adolescents who live alone.² They are a potential source of conflict and violence; they are a threat to a developing Gabonese nation. To determine the importance of these unassimilated people and the direction in which the Gabonese nation is developing social communications methodology is insufficient.

**ONE-THIRD OF A METHODOLOGY**

After collecting data on social communications one sometimes has the impression that the results of such research are mainly the determination of an inchoate mass of people contacting and assimilating without direction. If one tries to make predictions on the basis of these quantitative data, another Shaké might shoot another sheep and reverse what appeared statistically to be an irreversible process.

The usefulness of such methodology is in a study of “background conditions” to nation-building. To be fair, Professor Deutsch himself suggests this role for quantitative research:

> “The results of all these [quantitative] surveys together would not give us an answer about the future success or failure of political leaders or movements to unify Nigeria [for example], but they would give us a background of conditions and a measure of the difficulties under which such movements would have to labor.”³

There is a connection between communications and attitudes. To prove this the political scientist must undertake intensive research outside the main cities of a given country. For such research some of the methods of the sociologist and social anthropologist are most useful.⁴

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¹. See Karl Deutsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.
². *Recensement... Résultats pour Libreville, op. cit.*, p. 5.
⁴. I received an introduction to these methods in 1961-1962 at the Cours d’Initiation à la Recherche Africaniste at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris.
A study of mobilization and assimilation is the way to examine the slow processes which, behind the scenes, are building the necessary sense of community and sense of common nationality. But, these slow processes represent only one-third of nation-building; the other two-thirds are motivating force and politics.

An examination of the motivating force behind nation-building means what people want to build a new community, what are their reasons, how do they act, what are their tools? In Gabon the Fang have this role. The combination of the processes of localized assimilation and national assimilation will mean that a developing national culture will be similar to the French national culture but that aspects of tribal cultures will no doubt remain to distinguish Gabon from other nations. Because of Fang predominance and because they, for reasons that merit examination, are a motivating force in nation-building, it is likely they will contribute to the distinctiveness of Gabonese culture more than others. Yet, they have absorbed aspects of the cultures of other Gabonese, such as the Omyênè, so that it would be absurd to say that what is Fang is simply becoming what is Gabonese.

A consideration of politics means that one must examine the conscious policies of the government, the role of political parties, elites, foreign policy, other governments, even interpersonal friendships and antagonisms between leaders, and so forth. The government of Léon Mba had, for example, a civic education program and in 1962-1963 had grouped almost all leaders of all factions in the government. All this merits examination as a contribution to nation-building.

Even if this tri-partite method is used, it is useful to approach a given country with a great deal of flexibility. Unexpected data turn up, and the framework in which nation-building is proceeding may be different from what was expected. In a sense, the details of methodology become more clear as one is actually doing the study. By not trying to fit phenomena into a rigid schema but by using a few general categories and an interdisciplinary approach one may gain a better understanding of the human process of nation-building. More important, one may avoid the risk of losing the richness of a human experience when it is articulated by a social scientist.