
Editorial presentation of the second special issue of CEA on African towns (not on 'the African town'). In this issue the methodological accent is put on micro-analyses concerned mainly with small social groups and qualitative rather than quantitative descriptions of social practices and processes, resulting into three principal themes: strategies of insertion into the urban milieu; 'informal' economic actions; a provisional and partial attempt towards a wider synthesis on social stratification processes.


The practical experience of a multidisciplinary team working on family de-structuration and group formation in African towns has led to the conclusion that an anthropological, rather than sociological, approach is best fitted for the study of a number of urban situations. The anthropologist is, however, confronted with a variety of methodological, theoretical, and practical (as well as ethical) problems often quite different from those encountered in rural field work. This paper is an attempt to define these problems without setting forth any actual solution.

J.-M. Gibbal—Far away from Mango: Tiokosi in Lomé.

The Tiokosi used to be a military dominant minority in Northern Togoland. Their southward migration has turned them into a dominated urban minority. As they settled down in Lomé only recently their insertion has been more difficult than that of other Northern groups. The Tiokosi urban community tends to be mostly inner-oriented and to keep close links with its home-district of Mango, as demonstrated by the importance of remittances to the families left behind. The strong group-individuality of this urban community, the feeling of exile experienced by its members do not preclude internal contradictions and conflicts. There is a degree of social stratification with clientship. The latent tension between youth and elders has been rather strengthened in Lomé insofar as it overlaps in part a confrontation between job-holders and unemployed. The contradictions inherent in a double status of village- and city-dweller are perpetuated at the first generation level, while the city-born children are in danger of being cut off from Mango.

D. Pontié—Lomé's Moba.

An investigation of the 2,500 Moba settlers in Lomé, analyzing the reactions to an urban environment of these savannah peasants, first observed in their native milieu. A previous knowledge of the rural society avoids the levelling down and
standardization frequently inherent in the global analysis of an urban population. This study in urban anthropology sets forth a continued village control of marriage, solidarity networks, and social welfare. Cases of juvenile delinquency are submitted not only to the judgment of town-dwellers but also to that of Northern people, which play an important role in the reintegration of dissidents.


Étude comparative de la situation des étudiants des écoles coraniques de Kano, avant la période coloniale, pendant cette période et de nos jours, montrant comment une institution précapitaliste réagit à l'introduction et à l'évolution du capitalisme, et s'articule aux institutions capitalistes de façon imprévisible et souvent contra-dictoire. Cette catégorie sociale, recrutée dans la paysannerie, s'est développée au xixe siècle, à la suite de l'établissement de l'empire de Sokoto ; le capitalisme colonial marchand (arachide) a utilisé ses membres comme travailleurs temporaires ; de nos jours, ils constituent une proportion importante de la main-d'œuvre industrielle non qualifiée, les emplois supérieurs étant réservés aux bénéficiaires d'une éducation de type moderne, généralement citadins. Un des résultats de cette situation est que les conflits sociaux du secteur industrialisé s'expriment souvent en termes de valeurs précapitalistes.

M. C. Diop—Functions and Activities of the Murids' Urban 'Dahira' in Senegal.

The murid brotherhood which was at first a purely rural organization has spread into the Senegalese towns especially after Independence. Its traditional agrarian structure, the daara, in charge of the ‘Wednesday field’ cultivated for the marabout’s benefit, could not be successfully transplanted into the urban context. Instead of the religious, economic and residential unity of the murid villages, the city was characterized by a non agricultural economy, a diversity of ethnic origins and social status, and the spatial dispersion of the faithful, who could no longer provide their leaders with gifts in kind (produce). The dahira developed as an adaptive answer to these problems: in the new urban setting, it has taken over the functions of the rural daara, assuming the same finalities (especially in terms of the marabout/taalibe relationship) through different ways and means.

M.-F. Adrien-Rongier—Bangui's 'Kodro': A Forgotten Urban Space.

In Bangui three specific modes of urban adaptation are to be observed not so much in the city’s centre and allotted wards (as is usually the case with official enquiries and declarations) as in the kodro, which occupy some 75% of the built up area. For the last fifteen years the town has grown rapidly without the benefit of a consistent employment and education policy. Hence the nature of the kodro’s social and economic practices, as exemplified by the Gbaya of the Gbafio ward: persistence of a family-based habitat, co-existence of agriculture, trade and wage-earning activities with a sexual division of labour, economic survival organized on kinship terms. While the administrators’ and technicians’ studies ignore or deplore this state of affairs, the government has chosen to control it by delegating a part of its authority to the ward chiefships while ‘forgetting’ this urban space, which remains, for this reason, underequipped.

D. Poitou—Juvenile Delinquency and Urbanization in Niger and Nigeria.

Among the factors contributing to the growth of juvenile delinquency in West Africa, urbanization and the change from a traditional to an urban way of life play
an essential role. The first part of this paper shows why delinquency is primarily an urban phenomenon and how the city *per se* can be considered as crime-generating. The sharply contrasted examples of Niger and Nigeria, at the opposite ends of the urbanization spectrum, reveal the operation of the processes which contribute to the worsening of unbalance and dysfunction in a context of uncontrolled urban growth. In both countries, in spite of their different characteristics, it seems that urban juvenile delinquency is chiefly the result of an anomic situation stemming from the disruption of traditional family and community life.

E. Le Bris—*Geographical and Social Content of the Notion of Residence. Some Considerations Drawn from Biographic Enquiries in Lomé and Accra.*

The study of the migrations and urban settlements of country-born people in Africa is impeded by the inadequateness of such usual concepts as that of residence. Before the implementation of large scale enquiries, it is necessary to secure a better understanding of the phenomenon through a thorough investigation of small social and spatial units. The collection of life-stories in Accra and Lomé has allowed to deepen the notion of life space and residential system in order to give a better account of the situation of new town-dwellers.

A. Osmont—*Strategies of Kinship and Residence in an Urban Context.*

A number of previous studies have advanced the hypothesis that the European-type nuclear family forming a single residential group is becoming or has become the rule in African cities. Starting from the study in depth of a Senegalese family urbanized for five generations, A. Osmont establishes that the descent group, the extended family with several residential units, remains the main basis of social and economic relationships in today's urban milieu.

A. Morice—*Kaolack's Bikes.*

In Kaolack mopeds are used as cabs. This peculiar trade is more organized than it looks at first sight. Its history, since the time when hawkers began to repair and rent old bicycles, has been characterized by tense relations with the local authorities, together with never-ending internal conflicts: hence the self-imposition of a compelling hierarchy. The drivers pay a daily fee to the owners in exchange for the right of using the vehicles for money-earning purposes. They, in turn, frequently employ 'apprentices' to ensure a maximal use of the bikes. Young 'taxi-men' station themselves around various strategic locations in the city 'garages' where they come under the authority of elders who are tacitly recognized as spokesmen by the officialdom. Enquiries among these tradesmen have evidenced several traits common to a number of so-called 'informal' activities: exploitation of apprentices, functional turnover of juvenile labour force, persisting paternalistic social relationships, structuration effect of the dubious legal status of the trade. Following repeated requests from the motor-cabs, moped taxis have been prohibited. One may well wonder whether this prohibition is not more or less consciously aiming at reinforcing the precariousness of the apprentices' status as well as the power of elders.

G. Laval—*Niamey: An Enquiry on the 'Tabliers'. The Reconquest over Decay.*

Most of the European-style shops in Niamey have not survived the colonists' departure. Their role in retail trade has been taken over by the *tabliers*, that is the streethawkers using collapsible stalls (*tables* in local French, hence their name).
They are not to be considered as parasites, but rather as a successful adaptation to the consuming habits and the buying power of the new inhabitants of the main streets of the former ‘White’ city. However this type of trade runs contrary to an official policy supported by the Europeanized élite, which maintains services and goods undergoing a process of degradation. The tabliers’ trade is not an informal one. They are organized in ‘guilds’ which control current prices and regulate the transaction. They do not compete with ‘regular’ shops but, rather, answer the basic economic needs of a Black population in the process of reconquering the city.


During the last few years a number of home-industries have been established in Third World towns. This study of joinery workshops in Maradi (Niger Republic) describes the genesis and growth of this type of small-scale enterprises in order to see whether their strategy and the conditions of production allow for the accumulation of a surplus. The analysis shows a heterogeneous economic situation, with a number of workshops unable to develop, while a minority are expanding due to a variety of social and economic factors.

M. B. Diouf—The Cooking-Pot War: Restaurant-Keepers in Dakar Industrial Area.

Contrary to some sociologists’ assertions, the so-called ‘unstructured’, ‘traditional’ or ‘informal’ sector of activities in African towns is not totally separated from the modern one: they show enough functional links and relations to be considered as a single system. This is exemplified by the case of the Senegalese women who manage cheap eating places in Dakar’s industrial district. The growth of modern industry demands a numerous and inexpensive labour force made up of impoverished rural migrants. These low-paid wage-earners can afford only cheap food provided by the gargotières who, in turn, barely make a living out of it. As well as the industrial workers, they are kept in a precarious situation by management policy and government intervention. Thus the ‘modern’ or ‘formal’ industrial sector depends on the existence of the ‘informal’ food trade, which could not survive without the patronage of the exploited workers. It is only through a kind of political hypocrisy that they can be presented as totally unrelated entities.

M. Agier—Foreigners, Landlords and Patrons: Social Improvisation among the Sudanic Traders in Lomé.

A description of social relationships among the inhabitants of the Lomé’s zongo, i.e. the urban ward populated with Muslims from the Sudanic hinterland. The ‘make do’ economy is dominated by the wealthier traders, mai gida, under a kind of patronage, derived from traditional hospitality duties and a network of face-to-face links designated by Hausa kinship and affinity terms, which take up a special meaning in this context.

G. Salem—From Senegal’s Bush-Country to the Latin Quarter: The ‘Murid’ Trade System in France.

In most French cities West African small traders of various origins peddle curios, cheap souvenirs and mock antiques. These peddlers are organized in networks with rear bases in their home countries. One of these networks is made up of members of the murid brotherhood, originally a rural movement which has been able, from an agrarian first stage, to adapt to economic and social conditions in
Senegalese cities, and from then on to migrate to Western Europe and build up a commercial system using as its framework the structures and practices of the brotherhood.

P. C. W. Gutkind—*Changement et conscientisation en Afrique urbaine : les travailleurs africains en transition.*

Pourquoi et comment les travailleurs des villes africaines prennent-ils conscience de leur position de classe ? Le développement d’une classe ouvrière urbaine est lié à des circonstances politiques et économiques spécifiques, coloniales et post-coloniales, concernant la main-d’œuvre, ainsi qu’à l’inégale pénétration du capitalisme. De telles conditions déterminent à la fois la conscience politique de classe et l’action — ou l’inaction — de la classe ouvrière, qui vont du soutien aux relations de clientèle au réformisme ou à la recherche militante de transformations radicales. Celle-ci, notamment, est fonction du niveau d’éducation et des efforts syndicaux autant que d’une réaction à l’exploitation et à la répression. Comment cette prise de conscience politique va-t-elle se développer ? Alors que son évolution vers la radicalisation, c’est-à-dire la lutte de classe, est lente et ambiguë, les travailleurs urbains et ruraux ont à faire face à ces questions : qui sont les ennemis — et les alliés — de classe ? Quelles alliances rechercher ? « Que faire ? » Comment réagir à l’exploitation ? La conscience de classe doit rejeter le chauvinisme ethnique (mais non la conscience d’une tradition culturelle) et la concurrence, dans la mesure où cette conscience s’emprunte dans le contexte historique du changement des modes de production, de l’appropriation des ressources, et de la solidarité d’un mouvement syndical militant. Le tout relève de la question plus générale de savoir quel genre de système de classes existe déjà en Afrique et dans le reste du tiers monde.


Considered from a macro-sociological viewpoint marginality, in Third World cities, is the product of a continuous process of proletarianization. This process affects the dominated social formations, within the framework of international capitalism. As pauperisation drives them away from the countryside, growing numbers of peasants flock into the metropolises which fail to accommodate them due to the weakness and outside-orientation of the modern industrial and commercial sector. They settle down in the spatial marginality of the suburbs and the economic marginality of the so-called ‘informal sector’ where they become the ‘reserve army of the industry’. However recent investigations in African towns show that the diversity of urban situations and socio-economic statuses pertains to a number of concrete determinants and demands a finer typological approach. Nevertheless the heterogeneous character of the marginal — or ‘informal’ — sector does not mean it escapes from capitalistic determination. A dynamic analysis of marginality as a process supports the assumption that it is in fact a modality of the capital/labour relationship. Marginality is a product of capitalism concurring in its widened reproduction. The domination of the modern sector upon the informal one explains how the production relationships are actually exploitative, even if covertly so. This domination implies a process of proletarianization and underproletarianization of the margin people.

A. Sinou—*The Founding Moments of Some Colonial Towns.*

One should not think that the roots of urban settlements along the penetration routes starting from St. Louis-du-Sénégal, have been imagined according to a planner’s rationality. In fact, the explanations given as to the choice of the sites...
refer to different categories of reasons; a multiplicity of arguments influenced the actual choice of locations and builders, when beginning to build, were determined by arguments which came out more from a system of tales than from technical evidence.


A strange narrative describing in terms of witchcraft and supernatural concepts the metamorphosis into a city-state of a Bete village (mid-western Ivory Coast). A brief definition of some of these concepts, especially that of 'wraith' or 'double', is necessary in order to understand that this narrative, far from betraying an escape into the realm of phantasmatic imagination, does in fact shed a metaphoric light on the underlying dynamics of village life. Objective data relating to rural exodus, back-and-forth movements between town and village, investment in the school system, and strategies of social mobility orientated mainly toward the state apparatus tend to delineate a new reality. The village no longer pertains to rural patterns but rather shows a trend toward dissolution within the attraction spheres of Eburnean society, i.e. towns (chiefly Abidjan) and state. In dreamlike fashion the narrative operates a condensation of facts observable in real life (emigration, school attendance) in a kind of wish-fulfillment which constitutes a privileged approach.