BOOK REVIEW

Cities, Society, and Social Perception: A Central African Perspective by J. Clyde Mitchell, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, xxiii + 336 pp.

This work by J. Clyde Mitchell is a collection of his articles on South Central African societies written during the period of more than two decades starting from the late 1940s and which he has brought together in this single volume. In this latest work, however, the author has greatly revised his method for processing his data and has altered his theoretical framework, making this much more a new piece and not a simple rehash of his older articles.

Rhodes-Livingstone School.   J. C. Mitchell is without doubt one of the eminent pioneers in urban anthropology and from the 1940s and 1950s, as a protégé of M. Gluckman, was one of the central figures of the Rhodes-Livingstone school whose members did some epoch-making work in the area of anthropological urban research. This group opposed the view of primitive society as a "well-ordered whole" held by Radcliffe-Brown and his followers, and their static analytical methods of social structure and functions. Against this view, Mitchell and his group drew attention to such things as the conflicts that arose in poly-ethnic situations, and they stressed the need to bring into the scope of analysis the changes taking place within the colonial society.

It was Mitchell's studies in the Copper-belt towns of Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) that pioneered anthropological urban research and opened the way for the field of urban anthropology. The birth of this new discipline inevitably brought the need for a new methodology and perspective. African tribal studies, as the discipline stood in the 1940s, had developed its understanding of African society through the study of structured groups, such as the clan and lineage (what Mitchell calls categorical relationships.) This methodology, however, was unable to understand the movement of the individual members who make up the diverse ethnic groups within African society and who have been leaving their traditional livelihoods and moving to the urban centers. This methodology also could not help researchers grasp the seemingly chaotic but continually repeated interactions that make up the reality of African urban society. To overcome this, Mitchell and the others in the Rhodes-Livingstone school turned their attention to the unstructured personal relationships in society, and analyzed the process through which the individual establishes the network of social relationships that surround him, by adopting different behavior principles and norms in various situations in urban society. Their theoretical method came to be known as the "situational approach" or "network analysis," and using this method they published a stream of articles elucidating the multifarious relationships that make up urban society.

Mitchell's own methodology developed basically along this line. But the distinguishing feature of his work was his abundant use of quantitative analysis and its incorporation into his studies. His was not an ethnographic methods, and Mitchell's attempt to grasp urban society through a quantitative approach, something few anthropologists of his day were familiar with, was another of his pioneering steps. It can be argued that Mitchell's methodology was developed partly in response to the needs of the colonial

administrations of the day which were looking for more quantitative information to meet the requirements of their urban planning. Likewise, other anthropologists in the field had already become convinced that "more systematic methods like the application of the statistical concept are necessary."[1] However Mitchell's approach went far beyond the level of the "social survey" method current in the 1940s and 1950s and was successfully able to cut out cross sections of urban society and bring them into sharp relief. In so doing, he held up for criticism that the then dominant functional structuralist paradigm which made his studies highly valued pioneering work in the field of urban anthropology.

But the question can be asked whether the achievements of Mitchell's work still hold an attraction for most of today's urban anthropologists. Since the 1960s new theoretical methods, such as phenomenological thinking and neo-Marxist approach, have been developed and it has to be asked how Mitchell's work has stood up to these newer methodologies. In bringing together and rewriting the articles in this volume, Mitchell has taken into consideration the testing and criticism of these newer theories.

Criticism from B. Magubane: Structural Specification of Context. With this latest work, Mitchell has responded most consciously to the criticism that has come from Magubane. In a broad sense it is possible to regard the various quotes that Mitchell employs from Marxist adherents such as Castells and Wallerstein as a reaction to Magubane's criticism. And what has this criticism been?

Essentially Magubane says that Mitchell and the others of his ilk have not shown enough concern for the reality of European colonialism that was ruling over Africa. Magubane's criticism is that when dealing with the individual social relations and perceptions of African town dwellers, Mitchell wrote as though the matter of individual free choice lay on the side of the African. As a result, Magubane asserts that Mitchell completely mystified such real social forces as class and colonial domination and vindicated the supremacy of the Whiteman over the African.[2]

Mitchell refuted this criticism saying that any "complete mystification" was a result of the distortion in Magubane's own assertions.[3] However, apart from the minor misinterpretation of details in Magubane's criticism, Mitchell gives very much thought to the essential problem posed by Magubane, and his attempt to answer it provides the basic tone running through the revisions in this new work. Keeping in mind that Mitchell is responding to Magubane's criticism, a look will now be taken at a number of the chapters in the book.

In Chapter 1 (The Situational Perspective), Mitchell revises the concept of "situation." Up to now "situation" has been used as the keyword for discussing the context of the society and behavior of people. Mitchell instead limits "situation" to only those aspects of society associated with the cognition of the actor. He also proposes the new concept of "setting" by which he means those aspects of the society's total structure grasped by the researcher. Through this new concept of "setting," Mitchell tried to overcome Magubane's criticism of not giving sufficient weight to such structural aspects as Africa's colonial situation and class structure.

1 M. Fortes, "Time and Social Structure: An Ashante Case Studies," in *Social Structure: Studies Presented to Radcliffe-Brown,* ed. D. Forde (London: Clarendon, 1949), p. 59.

2 B. Magubane, "A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa," *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 12, Nos. 4–5 (October–December 1971).

3 J. C. Mitchell, "Comment" to Magubane's article, *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 12, Nos. 4–5 (October–December 1971).

It needs to be pointed out that Mitchell has not been totally ignoring this structural aspect. In an article published in 1966,[4] he had already taken up such elements as the political and administrative systems and economic differentiation, all of which he regarded as external determinants. Therefore Mitchell's concept of "setting" is not something that suddenly appears in this work. Rather it has to be seen within the context of the continuing development of his methodological framework.

The micro level situation and its surrounding wider context was one area where Mitchell was not careful enough about his research. This time he has worked hard to rectify this problem. In Chapter 2 (Cities in a Divided Society), he recognizes the dual structure of African urban society with its split between monetized economic institutions and traditional indigenous forms of economic organization. Chapter 3 (Labour Circulation and Urban Growth) is connected with the same issue. Here Mitchell sees proletarianization and not detribalization as the fundamental process at work. In Chapter 4 (The Perceptions of City Life), he takes up the problem of the polarization of society between the town life of the Whites and the tribal life of the Africans with its concomitant negative image that Africans have of the city. His conclusion is that this is not the reality; rather it is a reflection of the structure. In Chapter 7(Comparative Urbanism: Early American and Recent African Cities), Mitchell points out the strong historical parallels that can be drawn between the development of cities in the United States from 1860 to 1910 and those in Africa between 1930 and 1960. He takes the Sicilians in New York and Red migrants in South Africa as examples of the negative evaluation of cities that is rooted in urban life. He then attributes the cause of this phenomenon to the pressure coming from the dominant power group in urban society. That is to say, Mitchell clearly sees that there was an ideology, such as the "melting pot" (America) or "detribalization" (Africa), working to reproduce the "Anglo-Saxon way" (America) and the "civilized way" (Africa) as self-evident frames of reference, but, at the same time it often mystified the reality.

Thus it can be said that the strucural specificaion of context, which Mitchell overlooked and which Magubane criticized, has been incorporated into Mitchell's analytical framework. It cannot be denied that this framework contains a number of controversial points, nevertheless "structure" does fall within its scope.

Cognitive Specification of Context.   However Mitchell's true value lies not in this area; but rather in the extension of his analytical methods to encompass "situation," i.e., the cognitive aspect of context. Chapters 4, 5 (Social Status and Its Perception), and 6 (The Perception of Regionalism and Ethnicity) are the most successful chapters in this sense where his work really come into its own. This is particularly true of Chapter 6, dealing with cognitive ethnicity. He bases his research on the everyday experiences of town dwellers, and the vividly detailed and quantitative analysis of the way these people form social distance between themselves best exhibits those characteristics that have become Mitchell's trademark, and which makes this chapter the outstanding article in the book.

Taking closer look at Chapter 4 first, Mitchell had people respond to thirty-two items, such as "a townsman should always help his relatives who live in the rural area" or "boys who have grown up in rural area do not know how to behave properly." There were five choices for responses ranging from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly."

[4] J. C. Mitchell, "Theoretical Orientations in African Urban Studies," in *The Anthropology of Complex Societies,* ed. M. Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966).

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From the results of the responses, Mitchell works up five categories: very definitely a townsman, mainly a townsman, partly a townsman, mainly a countryman, and very definitely a countryman; and he explains the trends taking place in each.

In Chapter 5 Mitchell asked respondents from three social groups (high socioeconomic status, low status of urban residence, and low status of rural residence) to rank the prestige value of fifty-six occupations. This value was divided into five levels, from "very low" to "very high," and from the responses Mitchell was able to examine the differences between the three groups. Taking for example the responses to the modern urban occupations, (A) laboratory assistant, (B) preacher, (C) trade union branch secretary, and (D) garage mechanic, respondents of high socioeconomic status ranked their prestige level in descending order as: A-B-C-D, while people of low rural residence status ranked them in the exact opposite order: D-C-B-A.

In Chapter 6, Mitchell analyzed the social distance between heterogeneous populations living together in urban centers. He considers the primary factors determining social distance between such populations to be: (1) geographic location—by which Mitchell means both the actual physical location of people as well as their proximity to each other because of social and artificial administrative units; (2) ethnographic characteristics; and (3) historical origin—what he calls the "reputation of the past." Working from this premise, Mitchell proceeded to measure the social distance between respondents living in a heterogeneous social setting by questioning them about seven situations that bring people together. These are: sharing a meal, having kinship by marriage, setting in the tribal area, living nearby, working together, allowing as a visitor, excluding from the tribal area. Results of this study demonstrate that locality-based social ties which are not strictly of an ethnic nature are the important factor in the formation of social distance.

It has been shown elsewhere[5] that there exists in Africa today a regionalism with flexible, ill-defined boundries, which has no basis in ethnicity in the strict sense nor in structured groups like clan or lineage, and which provides the basis for forming urban social relations. What is needed today is an in-depth elucidation of the essential character of this phenomenon, and here Mitchell's arguments play a useful role in raising the issue in question.

Criticism Solved? Mitchell has attempted to answer Magubane's criticism with his model of "cognitive aspects" (situation) and "structural aspects" (setting). However, both of these are two sides of the same coin since either can be seen depending on the observer's viewpoint. Thus I have to wonder if Mitchell has successfully been responding to Magubanes criticism. Unfortunately I do not think his response has been sufficient, the reason being that Mitchell has not sufficiently elucidated the mechanism of the dynamic relationship between the cognitive and structural aspects of his model. One will be the real substance, but the other will be false consciousness; or both will be different sides of the same object. This indicates a real lack of rigor in the model. What is required is an unschematic elucidation of the relationship, and what should be sought after, for example, is an analytical framework going beyond the model of either a class or an ethnicity type of alternative. Mitchell himself provides an important indication of the direction to take by bringing to attention a certain latent

  5 M. Matsuda, "Urbanization and Adaptation: A Reorganization Process of Social Relations among the Maragoli Migrants in Their Urban Colony, Kangemi, Nairobi," *African Study Monographs,* Vol. 5 (Kyoto: Center for African Area Studies, 1984).

power hidden in the everyday experiences, events, and practices of African people for resisting and compromising with the dominant power. The relationship between the cognitive and structural aspects can be approached through an analysis of this latent power. I very much would hope that the argument develop in this direction.

This latest work by Mitchell is of a high order and a genuine attempt to try and grasp the multidimentional aspects of context. While it could be argued that questions like cognitive or structure and class or ethnicity were matters that occupied anthropologists of the 1960s and are passé today; still there can be no doubt that this work will hold a most important place in the history of urban anthlopology, and for this reason it is definitely recommended.   (Motoji Matsuda)