

existence of basic ethnic categories would seem to be a factor encouraging the proliferation of cultural differentiae.

In such systems, the sanctions producing adherence to group-specific values are not only exercised by those who share the identity. Again, other imperative statuses afford a parallel: just as both sexes ridicule the male who is feminine, and all classes punish the proletarian who puts on airs, so also can members of all ethnic groups in a poly-ethnic society act to maintain dichotomies and differences. Where social identities are organized and allocated by such principles, there will thus be a tendency towards canalization and standardization of interaction and the emergence of boundaries which maintain and generate ethnic diversity within larger, encompassing social systems.

Interdependence of ethnic groups

The positive bond that connects several ethnic groups in an encompassing social system depends on the complementarity of the groups with respect to some of their characteristic cultural features. Such complementarity can give rise to interdependence or symbiosis, and constitutes the areas of articulation referred to above; while in the fields where there is no complementarity there can be no basis for organization on ethnic lines—there will either be no interaction, or interaction without reference to ethnic identity.

Social systems differ greatly in the extent to which ethnic identity, as an imperative status, constrains the person in the variety of statuses and roles he may assume. Where the distinguishing values connected with ethnic identity are relevant only to a few kinds of activities, the social organization based on it will be similarly limited. Complex polyethnic systems, on the other hand, clearly entail the existence of extensively relevant value differences and multiple constraints on status combinations and social participation. In such systems, the boundary maintaining mechanisms must be highly effective, for the following reasons: (i) the complexity is based on the existence of important, complementary cultural differences; (ii) these differences must be generally standardized within the ethnic group—i.e. the status cluster, or social person, of every member of a group must be highly stereotyped—so that inter-ethnic interaction can be based on ethnic identities; and (iii) the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group must be stable, so that the complementary differences on which the systems rest can persist in the face of close inter-ethnic contact. Where these conditions obtain, ethnic groups can make stable and symbiotic adaptations to each other: other ethnic groups in the region become a part of the natural environment; the sectors of articulation provide areas that can be exploited, while the other sectors of activity of other groups are largely irrelevant from the point of view of members of any one group.

[*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), 10–19.]

The Informal Nature of Political Ethnicity

In the light of the foregoing discussion, a number of points can be made which can help in isolating the phenomena and processes of ethnicity.

Firstly, contemporary ethnicity is the result of intensive interaction between ethnic groupings and not the result of complete separatism. This is contrary to what one may call 'the glue theory of tribalism' which has been suggested by some writers. This theory states that during the colonial period, the colonial powers had acted as 'glue' in sticking together within the framework of new, artificially established, centralized states, some diverse 'tribal' groups, and that once the glue was removed when the colonial powers withdrew, each package state began to disintegrate and to fall into its original parts. It is of course true that many of the new states of Africa were originally created by the colonial powers. But during the colonial period a great deal of integration between the constituent tribal groups had taken place and this had given rise to increasing interaction between these groups. In British West Africa, this interaction was limited because of the policy of Indirect Rule and also because the strategic positions of centralized power were held by the foreign rulers. But the protective umbrella of Indirect Rule made it possible for some tribal groups to develop vital interests of their own while other tribal groups became relatively underprivileged. When the British withdrew an intense struggle for power ensued. The privileged became exposed to the danger of losing power and had to mobilize their forces in defence while the underprivileged aligned themselves to gain power.

Further and more bitter struggles broke out over new strategic positions of power: places of employment, taxation, funds for development, education, political positions, and so on. In many places the possibilities of capturing these new sources of power were different for different tribal groups, so that very often the resulting cleavages were on tribal lines. As a result of this intensified struggle, many tribal groups mobilized their forces and searched for ways in which they could organize themselves politically so as to conduct their struggle more effectively. In the process of this mobilization a new emphasis was placed on parts of their traditional culture, and this gave the impression that here there was a return to tribal tradition and to tribal separatism when in fact tribalism in the contemporary situation was one type of political grouping within the framework of the new state.

Secondly, tribalism involves a dynamic rearrangement of relations and of customs, and is not the outcome of cultural conservatism or continuity. The continuities of customs and of social formations are certainly there, but their

functions have changed. As Gluckman pointed out a long time ago, 'where in a changing system the dominant cleavage is into two culture-groups, each of these groups will tend to set increasingly greater value on its own endo-culture, since this expresses the dominant cleavage'.¹

Thirdly, ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, as traditional customs are used only as idioms, and as mechanisms for political alignment. People do not kill one another because their customs are different. Men may make jokes at the strange customs of men from other tribes but this by itself will not lead to serious disputes. If men do actually quarrel seriously on the grounds of cultural differences it is only because these cultural differences are associated with serious political cleavages. On the other hand men stick together under the contemporary situation only because of mutual interests. The Hausa of Sabo are united *vis-à-vis* the Yoruba because their unity is essential for their livelihood and for safeguarding their assets in the land and the buildings of the Quarter. Another tribal group may unite in order to mobilize votes in elections, to gain new benefits in development funds, or even to prevent the relatively scarce supply of women of the ethnic group from being taken by outsiders.

Finally, ethnic grouping is essentially informal. It does not form part of the official framework of economic and political power within the state. Otherwise, i.e. if an ethnic grouping is formally recognized, either as a state or as a region within a federal framework, then we are no longer dealing with ethnicity but with national or international politics. Thus according to this usage interaction between the regions of Nigeria should not be called ethnicity. Similarly the relations between various 'native authorities' during the colonial period cannot be called ethnicity since ethnic groupings under native authorities were officially recognized and a great part of their political organization was formally institutionalized. It is only when, within the formal framework of a national state or of any formal organization, an ethnic group informally organizes itself for political action, that we can say that we are dealing with ethnicity. Informally organized political groupings of this type have been called by different names. Bailey, borrowing a term from Easton, has called them 'parapolitical structures', and described them as those political structures 'which are partly regulated by, and partly independent of, larger encapsulating political structures; and which, so to speak, fight battles with these larger structures in a war which for them, seldom, if ever, ends in victory, rarely in dramatic defeat, but usually in a long drawn stalemate and defeat by attrition'.² Wolfe refers to the same kind of groupings when he states that 'the formal framework of economic and political power exists alongside or intermingled with various other kinds of informal structures which are interstitial, supplementary, parallel to it'.³

[*Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 198-201.]