

## On the Concept of Tribe

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Both the definition of tribe and its application to a form of organization of peoples, societies and cultures of Africa, as of other parts of the world, remain controversial and confused. In the language of the anthropologist as well as in that of the other social scientists and in layman's jargon, such concepts as *tribe*, *subtribe*, *tribelet*, *tribal*, *tribal society*, *tribalism*, *tribality* have been used, misused and abused to cover a wide range of groups, frameworks of in-group mores, types of organization, patterns and levels of socio-political development, sources of division and disruption, or ways to distinguish peoples as tribesmen vs. peasants or as tribesmen vs. townsmen. Yet the content and scope of these concepts and their validity as methods of classification and comparison are not clear. No cross-culturally valid definition of these recurrent terms exists. So, according to circumstances and necessities, we use them as classificatory devices, as stages in a socio-cultural scheme of evolution, as synonyms for uniformity, traditionalism, rigidity, and backwardness, as manifestations of geographically, institutionally, ideologically narrowly constrained systems characterized by values that are bound in time and place. The difficulty arises from the necessity of dealing with a wide spectrum of socio-cultural systems which are to be covered by the terms (peoples with centralized political systems or segmentary societies; peoples without central government but with integrative ceremonies or associations, and peoples without such integrative mechanisms, who rarely if ever behave as common action groups) and with a wide range of numerically different groups (peoples whose numbers go into the hundreds of thousands and peoples who are barely a few hundred).

In the majority of studies in which these concepts are used, we are confronted with the anthropological viewpoints and interpretations of intricate situations, but rarely do we obtain any insight as to how the peoples concerned conceptualize and view these situations, how they classify themselves and others in their own folk systems, what characteristics they find to be significant, and/or what attitudes they have toward the matter of cultural affinities or differences. The considerable neglect, which we have shown in the past for these folk taxonomies, attitudes, sentiments and interpretations and the excessive weight, which we have placed on superficial trait-lists, warrant further investigation into the concept of tribe. This label

has become an established part of the anthropological terminology and methodology to the extent that it cannot easily be discarded on the grounds of difficulties and inconsistencies in defining it.

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In many anthropological works the concept of tribe and its derivatives occur without any definition of their precise meaning in context (1). Some authors adopt a sceptical attitude toward the use of these terms and for this reason omit them or substitute for them more or less adequate replacements, thus avoiding the issue but not solving it (2). Other authors attribute a more specialized and restrictive meaning to the term tribe referring to the internal territorial and political subdivisions found among a particular people, or simply, to "local sociocultural groups" (3). Finally, we find a variety of works in which various attempts are made at defining the concept *tribe*. A brief review of some classic definitions may be presented here.

*W. H. Rivers* (4) : defines a tribe as "a group of a simple kind, always in Melanesia settled in a definite locality which speaks a common language and is capable of uniting for common action as in warfare".

*G. A. Reichard* (5) : gives a working definition of a tribe as "an economically independent group of people speaking the same language and uniting to defend themselves against outsiders", and conceives of the tribe as "a closed society".

*Notes and Queries in Anthropology* (6) : "A tribe may be defined as a politically or socially coherent and autonomous group occupying or claiming a particular territory".

(1) I do not intend to pick certain authors for criticism but merely to indicate mostly from recent literature some examples whenever these are felt to be necessary. Examples of this instance are found in John Beattie, *Other Cultures* (London, Cohen and West, 1964) who e.g. (p. 139) opposes national and tribal, or Paul Bohannan, *Social Anthropology* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), who e.g. (p. 328) opposes universal and tribal religions, or Lucy Mair, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965), who reviews (pp. 11-13) two different usages of the concept tribe, without further attempts at definition.

(2) e.g. J. H. Steward and L.C. Faron, *Naïve Peoples of South America* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 17-21 and *passim*.

(3) In his classic work on *The Nuer* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1960), E. E. Evans-Pritchard (p. 5) substitutes the term *people* (defined as "all persons who speak the same language and have, in other respects the same culture, and consider themselves to be distinct from like aggregates") for tribe, and restricts the latter term to political subdivisions within the Nuer within which the "rule of law" pertains. The concept of "local socio-cultural groups" is used as a qualification of tribal society by J. H. Steward and L.C. Faron, *op. cit.*, p. 17 and applied to an aggregate of similar bands with a stronger awareness of belonging and better integration.

(4) W. H. R. Rivers, *History of Melanesian Society* (Cambridge, Vol. I, 1914), p. 150.

(5) Gladys A. Reichard, *Social Life*, in *General Anthropology*, ed. Franz Boas (New York, D. C. Heath and Co., 1938), pp. 413-414.

(6) *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, 6th ed. (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 66.

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A. Hoebel (7) : Defines a tribe as "a social group speaking a distinctive language or dialect and possessing a distinctive culture that marks it off from other tribes. It is not necessarily organized politically".

In all these definitions emphasis is placed on the criteria of language and of locality or territoriality. Some also emphasize distinct culture (conceived in terms of trait lists), economic or other autonomy, social or political coherence, and/or defensive unity. Among other things, one is struck in these definitions by the vagueness of the criteria. What is the criterion for distinctiveness and separateness? What degree of coherence, of autonomy or of common action is required? How can dialect and language be equated? Valid definitions cannot be based on circular arguments whereby the entity to be determined is defined by reference to itself.

Some of the difficulties implied in the definition and application of the concept are evidently due to the nature and the insufficiency of the documents in our possession. Others are due to the multiplicity of systems covered by the concept and to the nature of the very mechanisms through which unity, conformity, sense of belonging are achieved. Culturally coherent groups, which are strongly aware of their distinctiveness and uniqueness, may not be politically integrated, may not possess integrative ceremonies, councils, assemblies or associations, may rarely or never cooperate or join together in common action, may not have a common network of descent traditions, may not have well-defined physical boundaries. On the other hand, they may be internally divided by strife, competition, feuding. They may also exhibit many ties with distinct groups.

In a well-documented review article, R. Narroll (8) has summarized the six criteria traditionally used for defining tribes or whole societies as "the distribution of the particular traits studied, territorial contiguity, political organization, language, ecological adjustment and local community structure". This enumeration of criteria fails to take into account some other significant ones which are occasionally provided by the existing literature and which emphasize the sentiments and attitudes of the peoples concerned. Thus, e.g. R. Linton (9) has stated that "In its simplest form the tribe is a group of bands occupying contiguous territory and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in their culture, frequent friendly contacts and a certain community of interests". He has further visualized the tribe in terms of a series of interconnecting relationships to which the memory of common origins and the feeling of unity are added; he has emphasized the fact that because of the common process of incorporation

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(7) E. A. Hoebel, *Anthropology : The Study of Man*, 3rd ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 572. This definition does not basically differ from the earlier one by the same author given in 1949 in the first edition of this work.

(8) Raoul Narroll, *On Ethnic Unit Classification*, in *Current Anthropology*, V, 4, October, 1964, p. 284. He proposes as an ideal type the concept of *cultunit* defined (p. 286) as "people who are domestic speakers of a common distinct language and who belong either to the same state or the same contact".

(9) Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1936), p. 231.

and partial or integral assimilation the members of a tribe may trace diverse origin. Finally, in contrasting tribes with simple aggregates of bands he has stressed the psychological factors of the feeling of unity, the correlated clear-cut distinction between members and nonmembers of the tribe and the "concrete personal terms" as factors in establishing tribal solidarity (10).

A somewhat similar emphasis is found in D. Mandelbaum's discussion of the tribe (11). He states that such factors as common language, common territory, similar culture although usually present cannot "alone account for the existence of any tribe". The existence of a tribe is thus determined by the combination of these factors "that gives every person in the tribe a feeling of belonging with the other men and women of the tribe". The significant elements, then, in the definition of the tribe are the attitudes of the individuals and the various manifestations of them such as cooperation and reciprocal help.

Religion is another significant factor in the delineation of the tribe. This is made clear by P. Bohannan (12) who, although not defining tribe as such, contends in his discussion of universal and tribal religions that religion is a method of characterizing the group, of creating and recreating it, in that subscription to and efficacy of the rites and the beliefs are limited to membership of such groups. This, in turn, contributes to a conceptualization of the universe in "our group" and the outsiders. In my own fieldwork in the Congo I have been struck by the fact that whatever the differences or similarities between, or characteristics of, the Bembe, Lega and Nyanga might have been, the basic fact was that the Lega ultimately ascribed order and existence in the universe to Kinkunga and Kalaga, the Bembe to Abeca and the Nyanga to Ongo.

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At this point a few general observations can be made with regard to the factors and features to be taken into account as elements for a more precise concept of tribe.

1. — The criterion of locality and geographical distribution seems largely relevant, but rigid application of the concepts of tribal boundaries and geographical contiguity should be avoided. As P. Bohannan has pointed out (13) tribal boundaries do not necessarily exist and the boundaries which we draw do not necessarily correspond to social divisions in terrestrial space. In their search for clearcut practical, territorial and administrative subdivisions the colonial powers, followed by many a scholar or other expert, have

(10) *Ibid.*, pp. 232-236.

(11) David S. Mandelbaum, *Social Groupings*, in *Man, Culture and Society*, ed. H. G. Shapiro (Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 235-236.

(12) Paul Bohannan, *Social Anthropology* (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), p. 328.

(13) Paul Bohannan, *Africa and Africans* (New York, The Natural History Press, 1964), pp. 124-125.

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mapped out the African continent in neat tribal areas, thus giving a simplistic character to the highly complex ethnic situation of Africa and making various miscalculations about political and cultural relationships, conceived in the antithetical terms of unity and diversity. In this process, speech communities, empires and kingdoms, congeries of groups known under common nicknames by their neighbors, have all been lumped together as tribes. In many cases this lumping process has caused many heterogeneous groups, exposed to induced common leadership and common administrative cadres, to develop a new consciousness of unity and many fairly homogeneous groups, divided over a number of decades by superimposed administrative and authority structures, to develop either a stronger sense of separateness or a stronger awareness of their belonging, with all the inconsistencies and conflicts that these new attitudes entail. The traditional aspects of tribal distribution are more nuanced for the very reasons that territorial and cultural exclusiveness operates in human society to only a limited degree. Thus many geographical areas of Africa are simultaneously occupied if not by different tribes, at least by large sections of different tribes which may or may not, each of them, have preserved at the same time a more homogeneous cradle. Culturally homogeneous groups, going under a single appellation such as the Cokwe in the Congo, may be scattered over wide distances, and their various local sections may virtually be cut off from one another. There are innumerable contact zones between different cultural entities, where the transitions from one entity into the other are smooth and almost imperceptible (14). Thus, for example, in the Eastern Congo, it would be impossible to draw a valid cultural boundary between the two cultural entities that are known in the literature as Bembe and Lega (15). These two politically uncentralized tribes have many linguistic and cultural features in common and large sections among the Bembe are aware of common origins with many of the Lega clans. Yet both groups are also very much aware of their differences which have been caused by their relative autonomous social and cultural development and by multiple differential influences which they have undergone from other pre-established or surrounding cultural entities. However, a large number of both Bembe and Lega groups, which happen to take up the spatial areas adjacent to both core areas and which are often spatially intermixed or at least contiguous with one another, exhibit a gradual series of smooth transitions from Bembe into Lega and vice-versa. For both Bembe and Lega there is no problem involved in assigning a place in their ethno-historical and genealogical records to any of these groups. They are at the same time conscious about the unique peculiarities of these transitional groups and often classify them as

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(14) Meyer Fortes, *The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, in *African Political Systems*, ed. M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 239-240, emphasizes the lack of precise territorial, linguistic, cultural and political boundaries, and the existence in the transition zones between tribes of "communities equally linked by residential contiguity and by structural ties to both".

(15) The author did field work among these groups from 1949 to 1953, under the auspices of I.R.S.A.C. whose generous support is herewith acknowledged.

"guardians of the frontiers". But these distinctions are conceptual and not physical, and any attempt at drawing precise boundaries on the maps would have to make arbitrary classifications of people and would even have to dissect villages into sections. Much more intricate situations prevail in other parts of the Congo, such as in the Kwango-Kwilu regions, where the same space is taken up by fragments of different ethnic groups, which have partially maintained their distinctive cultural uniqueness, and have indeed preserved their distinctive ethnic appellations, but which are nevertheless sufficiently adjusted to one another to be able to operate together in a multi-ethnic society.

2. — Listings of cultural traits would be insufficient in the above-mentioned, as also in many other cases. Many cultural traits and many aspects of social life have a wide distribution, which does not necessarily go by area and a mere listing of them is often so simplistic as to become a meaningless criterion in defining and sorting out tribal entities. Among the Lega of the Eastern Congo for example there are such fairly dispersed groups as the Basi'asumba and Bause. These groups lack the single most vital Lega institution of *bwami*, which is simultaneously a quasi-voluntary association, a pedagogical system, an initiation school, a moral philosophy and a mystery (in the Greek sense of the term). Lega are very conscious of the fact that originally these two groups were very distinct populations, already established in the territory when the Lega themselves immigrated, and they attribute among others their lack of the bwami institution to this historical fact. Yet, it would not occur to them to exclude these two groups from Lega society or to treat them as strangers, as the more recent immigrant groups are classified. Both groups are linguistically and culturally sufficiently integrated into Lega society, and the tradition of prolonged friendly interaction or peaceful coexistence with them is so strong that they have become an integral part of that society.

This situation can be contrasted with attitudes prevalent among the Nyanga (16). Intermixed with this small tribal group, which is politically subdivided into a large number of petty autonomous chiefdoms, are various sections of people such as Batwa-Pygmoids, Batiri, Baasa, Hunde, etc. Between the Nyanga and the few Pygmoids there is a prolonged tradition of friendly association and contact which is expressed in permanent joking relationship and ritual. It would not occur to the Nyanga to classify these Pygmoids as Nyanga, although they consider them to play a vital role in the organization of rituals connected with chieftainship. Although the Batiri and Baasa have been in long friendly contact with the Nyanga and although linguistically and culturally they are strongly marked by the Nyanga, they have in Nyanga thinking merely remained offshoots of the Kumu.

Both the Lega and Nyanga cases illustrate the fact that a mere listing of cultural traits will not be sufficient for defining tribes, but that a very significant factor is to be found in the folk system of classifications and

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(16) Fieldwork among the Nyanga was undertaken from 1954 to 1957 and intermittently after that year under the auspices of I.R.S.A.C.

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interpretations, i.e. in the nature of the attitudes, feelings and sentiments. In the Nyanga-Baasa-Batiri case we are dealing with clearly separate, though culturally not fully distinctive, entities.

3. — Economic autonomy, or other unspecified forms of autonomy cannot serve as criteria because such elements of definition are merely derived from earlier misconceptions about the nature and amplitude of traditional economies. The transtribal importance of exchange, barter, marketing and trading systems and even the trans-tribal significance of standards of value is well acknowledged in the modern literature (17).

4. — The criteria of social and political coherence or of defensive unity have little cross-cultural validity. At any rate, it is difficult to establish clear notions about the degree in which, and the frequencies and intensities with which, such elements of social interaction would be required to validly ascertain the critical tribal unit. Tribes are internally segmented and divided into many factions or equivalent levels of competitive action groups which may or may not intensively or casually interact with one another, which may stand in fragile but friendly association with one another or elsewhere may feud against one another. However, whenever such conflicts are given violent expression, the legal and moral implications of such violent actions, their incidence, the modalities for solving and settling disputes, etc., may be of great value in the definition of the tribal group. It is interesting to note e.g. that E. A. Hoebel defines the Comanche as a "peace group" (18), i.e. as a group whose members believe that disputes and conflicts between members must be channelled through arbitration. Warfare and hostility between two groups is in itself no indicator of tribal distinctiveness nor is common defensive action necessarily an aspect of tribal discreteness.

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To the present author it seems that much progress can be made in the sharper delineation of a broader and more valid definition of and in the application of the concept tribe through more thorough investigation of a combination of the following criteria and factors :

1. — Of relevance are the existence and actual usage of a common ethnic name which is self-determined by the group concerned, and not imposed on it by outsiders. The currently known and used ethnic names require a full investigation as far as their origin, meaning, folk usage, etc., are concerned. We all know that some of the current appellations under which tribes are known are extremely dubious and irrelevant, since many have their origins in geographical names, linguistic features, speech communities, nicknames and catchwords, or in traditions which developed within the colonial administrations. Just how much credibility these appellations deserve in

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(17) Cfr. Daryll Forde and Mary Douglas, *Primitive Economies*, in *Man, Culture and Society*, ed. Harry Shapiro (New York, Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 334.

(18) E. A. Hoebel, *Law Ways of the Comanche Indians*, reprinted in *Law and Warfare. Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict*, ed. Paul Bohannan (New York, The Natural History Press, 1967), p. 184.

terms of folk images is one of the problems to be solved. In exploring this point for the Lega, I can make the following comments.

Many of the broadly conceived genealogies constructed by individual or associated clans indeed trace their origins back to an ancestor called Lega or in some versions Leka or Idega; but many also fail to do this and trace their clan origins back to such ancestors as Ikama, Shile, Batukya, Beia or Kisi, whom some spokesmen say were sons of Lega himself. However, many clans which are an integral part of the Bembe tribe and whose members would not be classified as Lega also trace their origins back to such ancestors as Ikama or Shile. Many sections of other populations, which are known under such tribal names as Mituku and Bangobango are said to be, respectively, agnatic and uterine descendants of Lega. The term *mulega* (in the singular) occurs regularly in the "words of the land", as the Lega call many of their proverbs, and refers to the human being — preferably a male — *par excellence* : the full-fledged member of the local community, who has gone through the initiations and excels in virtue, or the person with whom one traces close kinship connections. When speaking among themselves about their own subdivisions, the Lega rarely use this appellation — although increasingly they have been doing so under the influence of administrative practice. They tend to view themselves internally as comprising five major subgroups, which are named and have a regional basis and which are characterized by minor cultural differences and particularly, although not politically centralized, by a greater awareness of their unity and their capacity for common action in marriage, defense, and initiations. Each of these groups exhibits the basic traits of what we call Lega culture, merges into the others through personal contacts and relationships and is sufficiently adjusted to the others so as to effectuate smooth transitions. However, each of the subdivisions is also sufficiently adjusted to other neighboring groups which are not called Lega, so as not to constitute sharp cleavages with them. These five constituent sections of Lega, although never engaging in common action, are sufficiently aware of their common ethno-historical and cultural ties and sufficiently bound together through inter-personal contracts and relationships (primarily channelled through marriage, perpetuation of kinship ties and *bwami*) so as to make up a separate group of people. On the other hand, the adjustments with adjoining sections of non-Lega groups are sufficient so as not to make them completely distinct from them. The whole matter can be viewed as a system of cultural and ethno-historical intergrading expressed in a continued series of many intermediate and transitional forms and attitudes. Thus there exists a double awareness among the Lega : on the one hand, taken as a group in contrast to others, there is a consciousness of deeply rooted historical separateness and autonomy in plurality, on the other hand, as a segmental, internally differentiated group, there is a sentiment of incomplete distinctiveness from other groups.

2. — To be considered are the ethno-historical traditions revealed in oral texts and sometimes also reflected in broadly conceived genealogical charts. It is my experience with some Congo tribes that these charts — to be verified



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by ethno-graphic fact — give a profound insight not merely into the origins ascribed to the various groups that constitute the tribe but also into the processes by which groups of different origin are tied together as a tribe, or by which homogeneous groups separate from one another, and the ways in which ties with neighboring groups are conceptualized. Both criteria draw heavily on folk images and folk classifications which have been much neglected in existing definitions of tribes and cannot be separated from investigations into the sentiments and attitudes which people adopt in this matter of asserting their relative cultural autonomy.

3. — The criterion of territoriality and geographical contiguity remains an important aspect to be explored. For, if it is true that many dispersed groups continue to be known under a single tribal appellation, it is also true that in most cases the present state of our knowledge does not permit us to ascertain to what degree they have maintained their cultural homogeneity or their awareness of commonality, nor to assess to what extent the usage of a common term has ever been justified. Whatever the case may be, this concept of territoriality should not necessarily be constructed in terms of territorial exclusiveness or rigid, easily drawn boundaries.

4. — Inventories of trait lists *per se* pretending to take into account all aspects of culture have proven to be unworkable or to be meaningless since many vital customs and institutions have a wide geographical distribution which necessitates the examination of the details of their structure and function. Aspects of economy, of material culture and of art have often proven to be the more relevant criteria for classification (19). However enough detailed work on these has not been done. With reference e.g. to art objects and their distribution, the emphasis has been on form and style, but little information has been provided on such other qualities of art objects such as their usage and actual use, their function (manifest and hidden), their meaning, specific technologies involved, types of materials, stages in the creative process etc. or on substylistic regions, transitions, actual extra-tribal distribution of objects, etc. Moreover, since by far the largest number of first-rate modern contributions on Africa have focused very heavily on select aspects of social organization, many vital features of life have been unduly discarded from the existing lists mostly because of sheer lack of interest in, or documentation about, them. I would like to mention a variety of traits selected at random such as : distinctive tribal marks, types of houses (not just their external form, but also the materials with which they are made or their internal plan), plan and layout of settlements in relation also to cultivated areas, which give a particular character to the human-made landscape, styles in dress, in walking (20), in sculpture, wherever

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(19) This point is also made by P. Bohannon, *Africa and Africans*, p. 128.

(20) I once took one of my Nyanga collaborators out to the city of Kinshasa. The man was very eager to find out whether there were any other Nyanga in the city, but could not get any information about it. One day walking through a street in Kinshasa, he exclaimed "Look over there, that is a Nyanga"! He did not know the person and had only seen him from the back at some distance but he judged it from the particular way in which he walked, and he was right in his judgement.

that is found, in ornamentation or in oral literature (this would of course not mean that one lists the different genres, but that one be informed about features of style, prosody, motive, etc.), cosmological symbolisms, particular world views that may sharply demarcate one tribe from another, etc.

Many less familiar unifying elements of social organization exist which certainly deserve greater attention, such as the particular distribution of clan, lineage and personal names. Certain auxiliary morphemes, in the form of prefixes by means of which these clan and lineage names are constructed, have heuristic value. In a clear-cut separation of Bembe, Lega and Nyanga, the distribution not only of the generic terms for clans and lineages is relevant, but also the contrastive occurrence of the formative prefixes *Basi-*, *Ba-* and *Bana-*. The majority of entries in trait lists may be so general and widespread as to have no heuristic value. But it seems that beyond the general recurrent features, there are always some vital traits to be found which mark a definite distinction and which are *the* significant discerning elements. One could list for the adjacent Nyanga and Hunde tribes hundreds of traits of social organization which are similar, if not identical, for both people. However, the single most significant distinction is the presence among the Nyanga of circumcision rites with all correlated beliefs and practices and their absence among the Hunde. Similarly hundreds of traits found in Bembe and Lega social organization would be similar or identical, but the elaborate seniority distinctions, which are not applied in intersex relationships and which focus on structural positions rather than on biological criteria, are present among the Bembe but absent from the Lega. Complementary filiation is extremely elaborate among both people and is correlated with similar sets of rights and duties, but whereas the patrilineal Lega trace relationships with seven patri-groups of so-called maternal uncles, the patrilineal Bembe recognize only five such groups. This is a basic difference between the two peoples.

I do not mean to imply that there is a special value or significance in any single one of the features or criteria mentioned; the validity of the approach lies in the combination of such detailed knowledge. Often the definition will be a matter of proportion, of coincidence, of frequencies of traits and variations, and therefore the simple trait list, even considerably refined, will not be sufficient. There are many culturally very similar groups which nevertheless form distinct and discrete units and many culturally heterogeneous groups which form a distinct single tribe. In other words, peoples' awareness of their linguistic and cultural bonds, their views about themselves and about their neighbors, and their ideas about the spatial organization around them are overriding, despite the differences from band to band or from region to region, or differences in dialect. J. Middleton has interestingly touched upon this aspect for the Lugbara (21). These people who trace their

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(21) John Middleton, *The Lugbara of Uganda* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 15-16.

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origins back to two different culture heroes, who are divided into two strongly different dialect clusters, who exhibit cultural variations, particularly in their material culture, have nevertheless a strong sentiment of closeness in culture, language, geography, spatial layout. Conceptually, if not politically, they "have the sense of being surrounded by members of a single system" (22). Although they have a strong sense of closeness to the Keliko and Madi, they have no doubts about their physical and cultural separation from them (23). In these instances, ethno-history and attitudes are powerful indicators.

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The concept tribe is first and foremost a device used by rural peoples for classifying themselves, for delineating themselves and their society from other groups which may or may not be similar to them in culture, and which may or may not be historically related to them. It is a method of social grouping, which fulfils certain functions and has certain purposes. It is used by rural populations, and in more recent times also by city dwellers, as an expression of separateness, distinctiveness and uniqueness which is rooted in history and which is subject to change and redefinition. The tribe is not any aggregate of people, but a group in the technical sense: it has a permanent existence, it has a name; there are established and accepted principles for membership; there are norms which permit and regulate its distinctive existence (24). The type of classification to which these peoples adhere is pragmatic i.e. it is flexible and adaptive, it operates with nuances and degrees, it leaves room for modifications and adjustments in time perspective. In the minds of the individuals who identify themselves with a particular tribal unit as distinct from another similar group, the critical elements are found not in a trait-list, but in an awareness, in a sense of commonality, in a feeling and certitude which all have deep roots in history

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(22) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

(23) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

(24) Lucy Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 13, gives a short but adequate characterization of the group in the language of the social anthropologist. In a recent study, *On the Concept of "Tribe" and "Tribal Society"* (Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences, ser. 11, vol. 28, 4, February, 1966, p. 528), Morton H. Fried rejects E. A. Hoebel's notion that the tribe is a social group on the grounds that if it were a group, "all its members would have to interact or at least participate in a theoretically interacting structure". He proposes (p. 529) that a tribe should be defined, "in terms of an aggregate and not a group, although expectably rare cases may be found in which a true group exists". It is my opinion that there is — often in the literature very inadequately ascertained — interaction channelled through extensive fields of personal and kinship relationships, dispersal of kinship groups whose members trace common descent, various associational linkages, participation in a common world view, etc. This potential for interaction between the members of tribal groups which have no visible integrative mechanisms and were not common action groups is clearly brought out in recent political developments in areas like the Congo or Nigeria.

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and in direct or indirect contact. The concept tribe is a heuristic tool that guides people, that helps them to discover sources and justifications for contact, for common action and interaction. As such, the tribe can be considered as a self-conscious group of people having the potentials for common action, having an interlocking network of institutions and mores, and having a basic set of common principles by which separateness and distinctiveness can operate, can be maintained and can be demonstrated.