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THE COHERENCE OF GROUPS

*Monica Wilson
University of Cape Town*

**Centre for Applied Social Sciences
University of Natal
King George V Avenue
Durban 4001
South Africa**

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Monica Wilson,
Professor of Social Anthropology,
University of Cape Town.

One of the basic questions in social anthropology is : why do groups cohere, and why do they split? ¹ This paper is an attempt to examine the problem with reference to field-material collected in Langa. ²

An African community has long been settled in Cape Town. In 1879 there were nearly 4,000 Xhosa working in the Western Cape, including 2,500 women and children; the number grew steadily until, in 1960, the official figure for greater Cape Town in 1960 reached over 65,000 (9% of the total population), but that was probably considerably lower than the actual African population. Territorial segregation has not, until recently, been rigidly enforced, and for a hundred years Africans have lived mingled with other groups.

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1. Preliminary notes on this topic were discussed by the Africa Seminar at the University of Cape Town. I am indebted to its members for valuable comment and criticism.
 2. A study of Langa was begun in 1955. Field-work was carried out by Dr. A. R. W. Crosse-Upcott, and Mr. Archie Mafeje. I have been responsible for formulating problems, framing questions, supervising field-work, and writing up the material. The study was planned as a complement to another investigation carried out by Dr. Sheila van der Horst and Mr. Doxey into the character, mobility, and turn-over of the African labour force in the Cape Peninsula, and investigations on the Coloured community of the Western Cape, and of the housing and administration of Africans, undertaken by the University of Stellenbosch.

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Langa was established as a model African township in 1923; it was built on the Cape Flats, eight miles from the city centre, and was planned from the start to accommodate families. The proportion of women was just under a third in 1930 (359 men to 100 women), and it changed appreciably only in 1956 when further single quarters for men were built, and many men who had been living scattered through greater Cape Town were forced to move to Langa. The proportion in 1961 was 866 men to 100 women, and the changed proportion has been accompanied by a marked increase in disorder. The township now numbers well over 25,000 persons - between a third and a half of the African population of greater Cape Town as given in the official returns.

Langa was established as a 'respectable' township, as opposed to the slums of Ndabeni; it was the headquarters of the Administration and most of the Churches, and the site of the single African High School in the Western Cape; families were led to believe that they might settle there permanently. In 1927 there were already men who had been in Cape Town for thirty years, and who formed a settled community with sports clubs and African traders and eating-house owners (as the evidence presented to the Native Economic Commission of 1930-32 shows), so many of those first established in Langa were townsmen. Still, today, families of this original nucleus of townsmen, 'those who came from Ndabeni', 'expect to have the last word'.

The residents of Langa, like other South Africans, classify people on the basis of colour : it is a segregated township, and the line between African, Coloured, and White, is sharply drawn, though constant intermingling occurs in the city at work, and in a lesser degree in recreation. Sex divisions are sharply drawn also - more rigidly in occupation and dress than among Coloured or White people. Then comes the classification into townsmen, migrants, and iibari, the half-and-half group who are 'pushing in and trying to be absorbed' but are not yet accepted as townsmen. Members of these last three categories - townsmen, migrants, and iibari - are distinguishable by their dress, walk, manners and speech, and most conspicuously by their expenditure, for the migrants are concerned to save every penny they can to send home, and they live austere on mealies or mealie meal with inadequate additions, whereas the townsmen and iibari spend whatever they have in town, on providing homes and supporting their families if they are with them, or on clothes, food, drink, and amusement for themselves. In Langa the migrants live in the single quarters known as the barracks and zones; the townsmen proper live in houses, either as householders, or sometimes as tenants; and the

iibari live mostly in rather more comfortable single quarters known as the flats, though many of them who used to live scattered through greater Cape Town, wherever they could rent a room, have been forced recently to move into the stark single quarters known as the zones. So the categories are, in large measure, distinguished by where they live as well as how they live.

The migrants in the barracks - amagoduka - are often referred to as amaqaba - those who smear themselves with red clay - but in fact very many of them, if not the majority, are school people, for migration to Cape Town has been selective, and it was school people - at first the older experienced men, and later on youngsters also - who sought employment in Cape Town, rather than illiterate pagans. There are men from pagan (red) families in the barracks now - numbers of them - but the cleavage between school and red is quite overshadowed by the migrant - townsman cleavage, and both pagan and Christian, if they came from the same village (or rural 'location') share the same barrack dormitory - the 'stable' - and belong to the same mess. Here a contrast with East London, as described by Professor Mayer, is obvious, and probably Cape Town differs also from other towns adjoining reserves.

Among the townsmen, Langa people distinguish between 'decent people' and tsotsis, and the more educated among the 'decent people' - teachers, nurses, professional men, well-to-do business men, and the like - are referred to as oosuse-me. They are regarded as 'keeping themselves to themselves', and form the nucleus of a middle class. Of the half-and-half people who are seeking to be accepted as townsmen, some identify themselves with the 'decent people', and those who have completed a high school course, or some professional training, are mostly absorbed very quickly, but many others with some education identify themselves rather with the wild young townees, and they are accepted more slowly. The iibari, as they are called, living in the flats, long remain distinct and turbulent.

In the broadest terms then, these are the categories into which Langa people classify themselves. What of the social groups?

Families occupy houses, and among those townsmen who can secure a house, and a permit for their wives to live with them, the elementary family of parents and children form a close-knit economic and social unit. Enquiries showed no general desire among townsmen to have additional relatives living with them - even if

houses were large enough to allow that - but very many men, who are not permitted to do so, wish to have their families with them. Twenty-eight per cent of the 26,211 Africans 'endorsed out' of the Western Cape in the last 27 months were women,¹ and many more of them are permanently excluded than men.

A study of genealogies shows members of extended families and lineages divided not only between town and country, but scattered through the larger towns of the Union, most commonly (among Cape Town people) Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, and East London. Men, and also women, move to find work and a permit to live; it is above all the need for a job which has disrupted traditional lineages and clans. They still have some significance in controlling marriage - mating with a clansman is still generally disapproved, though the taboo is openly questioned by some - but among the townsmen as opposed to the migrants they are of minor importance. The unity and distinctiveness of the elementary family appear in the changing usage of kinship terms, terms for parents and siblings being reserved, more and more, for own parents and siblings, and no longer used as they were, traditionally, in a classificatory sense. Own parents and own siblings are more sharply distinguished from paternal uncles and aunts and cousins as they cease to live in the same homestead and share a common concern in one herd of cattle.

The second type of group are the home-boy cliques so well described by Professor Mayer for East London. In Cape Town home-boys are those who come from one district, or village ('location'), or village-section; they share a room or portion of a room in the flats or zones; they mess together, the junior members preparing the food and the seniors exercising authority over them; they care for one another in illness and unemployment; and they often work for the same employer. The cliques change in membership as individuals return home to the country and others take their places, but continue in time, as the group from X district or village. The district registration number for motor vehicles - C.F.D. or C.D.X. and so on, remains emblazoned over the door, the sign that here live the men from Alice or Middledrift, or wherever it may be. Home-boy cliques are all important for the migrants but of much less significance to the iibari in the flats, and they are quite unimportant to the townsman. He - the townsman - may occasionally refer to X or Y as his 'home-boy', but there is no close-knit group of those coming from one country place who live and eat and work and amuse themselves together. For the country-

1. House of Assembly, Debates, March 30, 1962, c.3542.

man first coming to town membership of his home-boy clique is not, in fact, a voluntary choice unless he already has other friends in town with whom he can live. If he is billeted in the barracks or zones he automatically becomes a member of the clique from his home village, and it is only by deliberate action that he can later disassociate himself from it.

The third type of group is that created by Churches.

Between a quarter and a third of the people of Langa were attached to local congregations in 1959, when figures were collected. There were thirty denominations, each organized independently of the other; fifteen of them owe their origin directly to missionaries from Europe and America, fourteen are independent offshoots organized and led by Africans, and one is organized as a separate 'Bantu Church', but in communion with the mother Church.

Fourthly, there are very many clubs : sports clubs, choirs, bands, dance clubs, savings circles, and social clubs; and judging from the membership recorded in 1954¹ in greater Cape Town - totalling 11,000 - it seems probable that about a quarter of the people of Langa are attached to some club or another. But this is no more than an informed guess, for we do not know how many people belong to more than one club, and Father Botto (who made this useful study) did not include innumerable small clubs - home-boy choirs, savings circles and the like, and also Langa probably has more 'joiners' than some other African communities in the Peninsula.

Political parties and trade unions were not investigated because I thought it too dangerous both for those who gave information, and for the investigators, to make any detailed enquiry. Remember that during the period of investigation the two major political parties were banned, that a state of emergency was proclaimed, and a riot occurred in which several people were killed, and that there has been sporadic fighting between the men in the flats and the police since then. Also that two journalists have been sent to gaol for refusing to give the sources of their information to the police. So due allowance must be made for this large omission

1. R. Botto, Some Aspects of the Leisure Occupations of the African Population in Cape Town. Unpublished M. Soc. Sci. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1954. 168p.

I am indebted to Professor Batson, Director of the School of Social Science, University of Cape Town, and to Father Botto for permission to quote from this thesis.

in the analysis.

Returning then to our problem, why do groups cohere and why do they split, we may ask ourselves: do the same principles apply in the various types of groups investigated in Langa - families and lineages, home-boy cliques, Churches, and Clubs? In the most general terms they do. Groups - whether voluntary, or based on birth or locality, as are families and home-boy cliques - ultimately cohere because they serve common ends; they unite their members in the achievement of one or more of the ends of mutual aid. Conflict within groups occurs over the ends to be achieved, the methods of achieving them, and rivalry for leadership. The coherence of a group depends upon the balance between the strength of common purpose and the intensity of conflict within it. If a common end (or ends) is passionately sought disagreement over methods and rivalries over leadership are submerged; if the common end weakens then the group disintegrates.

Any analysis is complicated by the fact that one group may serve many ends, and different ends for different people, or the same type of group may serve different ends in different societies. For example, a lineage among the Pondo served economic and religious ends which a lineage among white South Africans does not, and men join a sports club in Rondebosch primarily for recreation whereas a sports club in Langa may be equally important for the opportunity it affords of leadership. In Rondebosch, office in a sports club is commonly regarded as a burden, because the members are busy with other things, whereas in Langa office is eagerly sought. Opportunity for leadership for Africans is circumscribed in a way it is not for whites, and it is probable that conflicts within groups become more intense where outlets for leadership are limited, the rivalries of leaders leading to fission.

The lines of cleavage within groups also vary with the society: in Langa, we can trace them constantly recurring between colour groups between members of an elementary family and wider kin groups; between townsmen proper, migrants, and those partly absorbed; between the 'decent people' and the tsotsis; between the new middle class and the rest of the community; between local groups from the country; and between those from the farms and those from Reserves. There are also certain subsidiary lines of division between local groups in town, the people of Langa being distinguished from those of Nyanga, Kensington, Windermere, Retreat, and other communities.

A study of sports clubs in Langa was particularly instructive in demonstrating lines of cleavage. Kinship is irrelevant in sport but the cleavages between Coloured and African, between townsmen and migrants, between farm people and those from the Reserves, and between local groups in the country and also in town, are reflected in splits which have occurred. For example, the first non-white Rugby players in Cape Town were Coloured people, and their strongest club was the Busy Bees. It included a few African members. As their numbers increased the Africans formed their own section, still constitutionally linked with the original club. This was in 1923. There were complaints of Coloured 'domination' and friction increased until, about 1928, a Bantu club was formed, open to any African. Later on an independent African Busy Bees club emerged; most of its members came from the Border where three large and famous schools, and Fort Hare, had nourished an interest in rugby. Then there came a split between those from King William's Town and East London 'who knew more about rugby than those from smaller centres such as Peddie, Mount Coke, and Alice.' The townsmen controlled the club and 'tended to choose (teams) from among themselves and their friends to the exclusion of the amaqaba from country villages who know nothing about rugby'. When the group which felt itself 'discriminated against' had enough members to form a club they withdrew from the Busy Bees and formed the Harlequins. These two clubs still flourish in Langa. Most members of the Harlequins come from villages and country towns on the Border, and they live in the barracks and zones in Langa, whereas the majority of the Busy Bees come from King William's Town, East London, and Grahamstown, and they live in Salt River, Woodstock, and District Six, so rural-urban differences, home-boy loyalties, and territorial cleavages in Cape Town are all expressed in these two clubs. However each group is, in a sense, one of home-boys to the other. When there are matches in Langa between various teams the Busy Bees always cheer the Harlequins and the Harlequins reciprocate. If a fight breaks out the boys from these two teams rally to each other's help. As the Harlequins increased in numbers they too split, this time on the basis of Reserve versus farm people, a cleavage which was evident thirty years ago in the Eastern Cape, and which Dr. Vilakazi has noted in Natal. The Red Lions who broke away from the Harlequins mostly came from the Fort Beaufort and Adelaide area; 'though they knew more about rugby than the Harlequins members who came from villages in the Reserves', the villagers 'would not be commanded by squatters and vagrants who had lost their traditional customs'. The farm people, for their part,

'could not waste their time trying to teach unteachable sheep from the villages'.

When the first generation born and brought up in Langa had grown up they asserted their difference from the migrants by forming their own club, called the Mother City, whose rules of membership debar those who have not lived for at least five years continuously in Cape Town, and so exclude the iibari from the flats. Some of them refer to it as a 'skollies team', or one made up of 'landless wanderers', 'ooClever'. Its great rival at present is the Bush Bucks, a club whose members live in the flats; they come from the Transkei and Burgersdorp, and split off from a larger Thembu team when a cleavage emerged between the Queenstown boys who 'could not be bothered with amaqaba from the country who had never seen rugby before' and those from the Transkei and Burgersdorp.

So the story goes on. As the number in any rugby club increases splits are liable to occur. Exactly the same sort of thing happens in other sports clubs, in choirs, bands, and in the home-boys messes. The precise lines of cleavage are fascinating and might delay us a long time. Tracing them is like following a theme in a composition by Beethoven which recurs again and again in various keys. In practice there are various complicating factors which I have not mentioned and a sports club rarely consists solely of home-boys; the specialized aim of the association - playing rugby or making music, or whatever it may be - sometimes begins to override other loyalties to the point that even colour distinctions are ignored, and a Coloured man keeps goal for a Langa club, or a brilliant African cricketer joins a Coloured club where the standard of play is higher than in any team in Langa. Furthermore, home-boy groups are sometimes based not solely on membership of a given village but partly also on attendance at the same boarding school.

What puts a stop to the process? How do the common ends which we have postulated as the basis of all groups operate to stop fission? The soccer clubs in Langa offer a handy example. A split has threatened for some time in the Transkei Lions club but the members have decided to stick together because they are the only country club likely to beat the detested town boys in the Langa Blues. 'Langa must be beaten at all costs' they say, and one Thembu added: 'Though there are enough of us to form our own club, we don't wish to weaken the Transkeian Lions and if we

formed an Engcobo club our boys who are members of the Lions would have to resign and join us'.

The splitting of Churches in South Africa is notorious. As many denominations in Langa are due to splits in Europe and America as to those in Langa, nevertheless fragmentation is continuing. I suggest that splits occur when there is no strong sense of the Church as a Church, a corporate body, distinct from a number of individual Christians meeting together. It can at least be argued that the Anglican stress on the corporate body was what prevented the Order of Ethiopia forming an independent Church. It might be expected that the opposition and distinction between Christian and pagan, school and red, which still obtains in some, though by no means all, country districts would prevent splitting among the Christians. Perhaps it would be instructive to enquire closely into when and where splits in fact originated; I have the impression that the cleavage between Zionist and the older and more orthodox mission churches and their offshoots - Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic - is now as wide as that between red and school, and that pagans can join a Zionist group without in any way identifying themselves with the school community of the neighbourhood. Much more field work on this point is necessary.

Ownership of property tends to hold an association together as it does a lineage, and the club which has fields and a club house, or the Church which has buildings, will be less likely to split than one which does not. Enjoyment of common property is one aspect of common purpose. The clubs and small Churches of Langa fragment easily partly because they hold no property at all, and two social clubs which would otherwise have separated have retained a link because both hope to gain from monies collected for a social centre. The Keiskammahoek studies in land tenure showed that ownership of freehold land tended to hold lineages together; in Langa there is no immovable property which a lineage or family can acquire - neither land nor building may be owned (though the advantages of home ownership were discussed when Langa was built and one man actually acquired a house); and this encouragement to solidarity among kinsmen of successive generations is absent.

The size of the group which coheres in Langa is patently related to function. There is, for example, a minimum below which a sports club cannot fall, or it will no longer have a team, but Father Botto's evidence suggests that as soon as a rugby club has enough

members to field two teams it is in danger: the average size of a rugby club in Langa is only 36 members. Soccer clubs are rather larger, possibly because soccer does not carry as high a social status, and the competition for leadership is less. There are 35 African rugby and soccer clubs in Cape Town and the size is considerably smaller than in corresponding white clubs. Savings circles remain very small because if they increase above 7 or 8 members the danger of one welching is felt to be great, but if, on the other hand, they are smaller than three or four the advantages of co-operation are lost.

Success, or a measure of success tends towards integration; failure towards disintegration; more members are attracted by a flourishing club or school or Church or party than one which is failing to achieve its ends. One rugby club in Langa, a foundation member of the Western Province Union of 1935 - the Bechuanaland Swallows - ceased to exist altogether after it had been defeated 89-nil, and one formed by domestic servants did not last long, because they could not attend regularly and failed to win matches. Dr. de Vries of the World Council of Churches, sees the innumerable splinter Churches of China and Brazil and Africa as 'expressions of despair', of failure to deal with a revolutionary social situation.

The size of the co-operating group of home-boys varies both with the number of men in Cape Town from a given area, and the undertaking in view. A home-boys' mess commonly numbers 10 to 15 men, and dormitories in the Barracks which accommodate 25 men contain two messes; in the zones rooms are smaller, but those from one territorial area tend to occupy a whole block, and messes are formed of those from one home neighbourhood though they sleep in different rooms. All those from one magisterial district are recognized as home-boys in some sense, and they may be called together to discuss district affairs. Those who come from the area and fail to attend are criticized. But if there are 50 men from one district - as often happens in Cape Town - they do not all live and mess together; they subdivide by villages ('locations') and village sections, and whether village or village-section is the effective group for most purposes depends on the number of men in Cape Town from that area. Home-boy loyalties override traditional tribal cleavages: for example a Xhosa and an Mfengu from the same village are home-boys irrespective of the traditional tribal enmity, and a man from Mount Frere district who was not a Bhaca would never be excluded from the group of home-boys on account of the tribal difference, even though his fellows knew very well that he was not a

Bhaca by origin.

Men from Basutoland, Bechuanaland, or Zululand, who are few in number, may act as a group of home-boys for certain purposes - e.g. the burial of a fellow country man - but such groups of men who may not even have known each other before coming to town do not ordinarily live together, and are considerably different from the close-knit unit of those who grew up in one village, herding, fighting, and going to parties together. There are no tribal associations, though some semblance of tribal loyalties is expressed in the celebrations of Ntsikana's Day, Mfengu Day, and Moshweshwe Day, and during the emergency in Pondoland men from all the districts of Eastern Pondoland were called upon to contribute to a fund to help those at home.

I suggest (1) that tribal associations flourish only where linguistic and other cultural differences distinguish relatively small sections of an urban population, and (2) that their parallel in Cape Town is the home-boy groups, which vary in territorial span with numbers in town, and occasion or immediate purpose, and (3) that though home-boys' groups operate as friendly societies in town, their effective base is common interest in land-holding in the country. It is because common concern in land is so important that the village (which is most often the land-holding unit in the Transkei and Ciskei) is the basis of most home-boy groups. As Professor Mayer has shown for East London, and as the Cape Town evidence amply confirms, the unity of home-boy groups is maintained by focussing on country interests. As soon as a migrant develops any specialized interest differentiating him from his home-boys he is drawn out of the group and begins to be absorbed as a townsman. Only those interests which are shared with home-boys - and rugby or singing may be amongst these - are compatible with absolute home-boy loyalty, and directly the specialized interest becomes dominant they may clash. A case in point is that of a musician from Engcobo who joined a choir from another area, rather than that from his home, because their singing was better, but his country interests, as well as his preference for country music, keeps him to a country-based, rather than a town-based choir.

Any co-operation implies some subordination of the individual to the group. In most societies some measure of subordination is accepted as a matter of course and law is supported by the great majority, but, where order is maintained by force, any exercise of authority tends to be resented, for all authority is identified with

power. I follow here the distinction made by de Jouvenal between authority and power. He says :

'Power is something very different from authority. The distinguishing mark of the latter is that it is exercised only by those who voluntarily accept it: if the rulers have authority over only a part of their subjects, they may receive from that part a strength sufficient to subject the others to their power'.

In South Africa, today, existing laws are not felt to be right and just by the great majority of the population, and any exercise of control tends to be resented, for authority is identified with power and is itself resented as 'persecution' or 'discrimination' by the subordinate group. The dilemma is reflected in families, in schools and Universities,¹ and even in clubs. A jazz band in Langa, the Statelites, explicitly refused to have a leader 'though it was obvious who the leader was', and at one time teams at Fort Hare refused to elect a captain. Where, as in Langa, the natural authorities in a family, parents, are disgraced before their children, as they are in the night raids, this tends still further to bring all authority into disrepute. The search and arrest of parents before their children in night raids is a matter of much bitter comment in Langa. This situation then, in which there tends to be a general resentment of the exercise of all authority, militates against the coherence of groups.

Nevertheless, innumerable clubs and societies continue to operate and to provide experience of organization, of leading and of following, of working in committee, administering funds, keeping minutes, making and accepting decisions. The associations provide what W.H. White calls 'a training in organization skills', and I myself see them as the very school of civilization. The change in structure from a society based on kinship and locality, to one based on associations pursuing specialized interests, is apparent, as more and more migrants are absorbed as townsmen, and cease to

1. I was interested to find that in India University authorities were experiencing great difficulty in maintaining certain University regulations, and they attributed the disorders to attitudes which had been engendered during the period of the struggle for independence, when resistance to authority was regarded as true patriotism.

co-operate, first and foremost, with home-boys from their natal villages.

Although the splitting of associations goes on, many of the independent clubs seek affiliation in local unions (such as the Western Province Rugby Football Board) and they in turn link themselves with like groups in other towns, and national unions commonly, now, seek affiliation with international organizations. A savings circle, or Zionist leader's following, is independent and isolated in all except fund-raising, when it depends in some measure on outsiders; a home-boys' clique co-operates with other like cliques for arbitration in disputes and occasionally in matters concerning a wider home area, such as Eastern Pondoland, but in all other matters acts independently. Most Churches and sports clubs, however, are linked in national organizations, more and more of which have, or are seeking, international affiliation; thus wide-based groups do, in fact, persist and function in the field of recreation and religion as well as in economic activity.



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