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THE CULTURAL
DIMENSION
IN
GEOGRAPHY

by G. J. Afolabi Ojo



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Introduction

From the time I first became actively engaged in the geographer's craft, I have often wondered at how varied are the dimensions in the discipline. I am using the word dimensions to mean perspectives or points of view. Outside the opinions held by professionals, there are certain views expressed by the layman who probably had a smattering of what is called geography in the secondary schools. The layman might have dropped the subject in class three or four shortly before starting his school certificate simply because he was unable to cope with drawing maps or interpreting contours or because he was lured away by the combination of science subjects. Although he might have become a distinguished physicist or lawyer afterwards, the questions he asks of a geographer are illustrative of what may be described, in loose terms, as the layman's perspective on the subject. Samples of such questions are: What is the altitude of Ibe? Why is the harmattan lingering on till March this year? How many miles, by road, is it from here to Kaura Namoda if I choose to go by the way of Ilorin, Zungeru and Funtua? Both here and elsewhere, as George Kimble has put it, "many people still think of the geographer as a dealer in terrestrial bric-a-brac, whose social function is to provide other people with answers to quiz questions".¹

A few other non-professionals who are more knowledgeable than our hypothetical layman concede that maps are the stock-in-trade of geographers to the extent that they raise high their eyebrows if they get to know of a treatise prepared by a geographer under the title, *The Spatial Organisation of Society*.² The same conception about the subject makes a librarian or bookseller classify a geographer's work entitled *Migrants and Malaria*³ under Medicine and Nursing rather than under Geography. In the same vein, some persons cannot believe their eyes when a professor of geography is made to abandon a game of lawn tennis only a few minutes after the start by no other natural element than rain. They expect that an expert in geography should at least be able to predict rainfall with split second accuracy even if he is not versatile enough to stop it.

One can justify the layman's views on two main grounds. In the first place, similar ones were current and acceptable in geographical circles at one time or the other during the long existence of the subject as a distinct body of thought from as far back as about 250 B.C. Generally regarded as the mother of the sciences, and a prolific mother at that, the subject has had numerous offspring, many of which have become firmly established as academic disciplines in their own right. And naturally geography continues to maintain maternal relationships with some of the offspring through such areas of specialization as biogeography, zoogeography, geomorphology, climatology, economic geography and political geography. The picturesque analogy used by an eminent British geographer in

addressing an American audience drives home this point, "Geography is a Los Angeles among academic cities in that it sprawls over a very large area, it merges with its neighbours, and we have a hard time finding the central business district".² If the professional experiences difficulty in finding the core of the subject, how much less the layman?

The second point concerning the justification of the layman's view of the subject is that geography has had such a phenomenal growth since the 1950's that even a professional not keeping abreast with developments in the subject may think in terms of a different type of geography from the one which up-to-date geographers know. Today's practitioners advisedly use the word "revolution" to describe the incursions of new methods, concepts, and interdisciplinary relationships which have accounted for major shifts of emphasis within the subject.³

These comments on the layman's point of view illustrate the fact that since geography has spanned two millenia it is to be expected that it would have developed numerous dimensions, especially as the subject was permissive enough in its formative years to accommodate practically any account which had to do with the earth's surface and man's use of it. Quite suggestive, in this respect, is the derivation of the word geography from the Greek *ge*, meaning the earth, and *grapho*, meaning I write. So the layman might still have been writing about the earth in the way I have mentioned.

Having said this much, by way of introduction, about the layman's views of the subject, let me address the remaining portion of this lecture to academic geographers and their numerous kith and kin. I propose to adopt the following procedure. Firstly, I shall briefly review some post-classical dimensions in the subject. Secondly, I shall refer specifically to the cultural dimension in the subject. Thirdly, I shall illustrate the cultural dimension with some selected case studies. Fourthly, I shall show how imperative it is to develop a cultural dimension in the subject. Fifthly, I shall indicate some of the numerous benefits that will accrue from adopting a cultural perspective in the subject. And finally, I shall conclude by making the point that for geography to contribute maximally to the totality of human welfare, both here and in the world at large, its cultural dimension must be emphasized.

Post-classical Dimensions in Geography

Till the 16th century most of the practitioners in geography were many more things than just geographers. They were mathematicians, cosmographers, astronomers, philosophers, poets and historians. Because of the variety of their background, their views about the scope and purpose of the subject were multi-dimensional. There was however one common strand in their various points of view, in the sense that they considered geography to be man-centred. Although they agreed in broad terms that the subject dealt with the earth as the home of man, the emphasis was strongly

on man. As such their geography was humanised as has been vividly illustrated by Mead who showed that:

even the descriptive vocabulary of geography evolved strongly along anthropomorphic lines until late in the eighteenth century. The human metaphor adopted in those days has persisted. A river has its mouth, its arms, its bed; a seacoast has its headlands, its necks of land, its nazes; a hill, its flanks and its brow; a mountain chain, its teeth.⁶

The views of most of these post-classical geographers were however distinct from each other in terms of the degrees of inter-relationship which they propounded as existing between man and environment. In this respect, three major dimensions of geographical thought became dominant, namely, geographical determinism, geographical possibilism and geographical probabilism. As important as these dimensions or theories are as landmarks in geographical thought, they can be referred to only briefly in this lecture.

Geographical determinism recognized the elements of the environment as stimulating or inhibiting man in his varied activities. The view which it upheld was that man was at the mercy of the environment. It vested the environment with the role of producing the differences among peoples, nationalities and civilizations. In other words it accorded the environment with the power to direct, control and determine the course of human action.

Geographical possibilism, as an ostensible reaction to determinism, stressed the scope of man's action rather than the limits. The possibilists asserted that "there are no necessities but everywhere possibilities and man as a master of these possibilities is the judge of their use".⁷ Put differently, nature was seen as being no more than an adviser. Man's free will was recognized as clearly more forceful than nature in the process of man's use of the resources of the earth.

Another dimension of thought in respect of the interaction between man and the environment was that of geographical probabilism. Although it shares "the philosophy of man as part of a closely knit environmental syndrome"⁸ with determinism and possibilism, the ability of man to rank the options open to him by assigning to each an order of preference is recognized. In simple terms, the probabilist is aware that "at one end are those cases that are purely deterministic and at the other those that are purely possibilistic, while in between are the great majority which reflect the whole gamut of varying probabilities that arise from the differing degrees of influence exerted by numerous interacting factors".⁹

Many geographers today consider probabilism a satisfactory explanatory model because it approximates more to reality than the other causal theories and also because it makes room for the identification, isolation and weighting of the interacting multi-factors involved in human action accompanying the use of the earth's surface.

The Cultural Dimension in Geography

The major weakness of all the aforementioned dimensions is that they have assumed two principal interacting factors; man and environment, or land and people; although it may be granted that either of the two might consist of numerous subfactors. Furthermore, with particular reference to probabilism, it has been shown that man does not necessarily follow or adopt the line of action which normally has the highest probability. Put differently, man is not an optimiser. Rather he is a satisficer who at any particular time chooses a course of action which is satisfactory enough but not necessarily the most logical or profitable. The fact that man is not necessarily an optimiser but a satisficer has been for me one of the most important issues in the determination of human activities in different parts of the world. I often ask myself a series of questions in this connection. What makes the man in the tropics develop a certain way of life and, as it were, stay put there? Why is it that a certain land area assumes a particular pattern under one group of people and a completely different pattern under another set of people? How far is it true that if the inhabitants of the United States and tropical Africa were interchanged, after a few years the U.S. landscape of megalopolises, skyscrapers, and superhighways would shift to tropical Africa, while the bush fallow landscape, settlements of huts with low skylines, and ribbon-like road networks would be established in the U.S.?

My reaction to these questions has made me to develop the view that there are more than two principal actors, man and environment, in the evolution of our man-made landscapes. I have persistently included a third actor which is culture. In other words on the earth's surface, instead of two principal actors, man and environment, there are at least three: man, environment and culture.

Let me quickly add that there are those who may wonder whether the third actor, culture, which I have recognized as worthy of a distinctly separate identity should not have been subsumed as an attribute or sub-factor of man in the man-environment complex, or of people in the land-people complex. It is true that in the ordinary sense of the word, one could hardly think of man and people without the idea of culture. But, in fact, in geographical circles, until recently, culture was not given a separate identity and it was hardly accorded any prominence when man or people were considered. Especially among many British geographers, culture is a recent geographical concept just finding its way into the dictionary of geographical terms.

During the early days of geographical thought in this country the book which blazed the trail of prestigious publications on the subject was *Land and People in Nigeria* whose title portrayed rather accurately its scope and coverage. Considered in retrospect, the book is now known to have fallen disproportionately short in its treatment of Nigerian culture. I have always wished to see the book rewritten in substance and in title as *Land, People and Culture*

in Nigeria. In the alternative I have cherished the hope and nursed the ambition to write a book of similar coverage and title at the earliest opportunity so as to provide the warp and woof of the full geography of Nigeria. By thinking in terms of land, people and culture instead of just land and people, I am deliberately adding another dimension to the scope of the subject. Other parallels of the trilogy of this idea are habitat, economy and society; land, man and mind; space, resource and response; place, work, and folk; ecology, economy and ethnography, and so on.

In concrete terms I have recognised the need to go beyond the level of geographical probabilism and get out of the dispute concerning causal relationships between man and environment in order to reach the level of understanding which the functional contribution of culture generates. This dimension I call geographical culturalism, a term which portrays the main idea I have been proclaiming over the years and which I will continue to articulate until a more meaningful idea is discovered.

By this term, I mean that the interaction among the factors in operation in the making of the landscape of any given area cannot be accurately assessed in terms of their contribution and influence without reference to the type and degree of cultural parameters at work. In my view, therefore, the earth's surface, which is the object of study of geographers, consists of a mosaic of patterns which mirror the variegated culture types of the world. In other words, I accord significant importance to the cultural dimension in geography while conceding the fact that there are many other worthwhile dimensions. My stance is similar to that of Lewis Mumford who has suggested that "the history of civilization could be written in terms of the containers that given cultures created for themselves—containers for storage of grain, water or wine; for the channelling of irrigation waters or the control of floods; for the cartage and movements of goods and people; for the containment and shelter of kings and prelates, soldiers and servants, tradesmen and artisans".¹¹ I am of the view that the surface of the earth, being the setting of man's varied activities, can be studied in terms of the cultural landscapes which depict and contain the handiwork of man.

Some Selected Case Studies

My views along this particular line can be illustrated from some of my research and publications. In my work on Yoruba culture I looked at the geography of the region through the culture of the inhabitants as manifested in two forms, firstly in the mass of historical facts or oral traditions which surround some of the cultural complexes, and secondly in the evolving cultural landscape. The study delved into the concrete and abstract complexes of the culture of the area. The former comprises rural economies and settlement, the forms and patterns of which are concretely represented on the landscape. The latter consists of religion, philosophy and art which are not directly represented on the landscape.

In that study, after consideration of the weight of cultural factors in the use of space through time in the area, that is through adoption of geographical culturalism as my point of view, certain conclusions were reached. First of all, it was found that most of the cultural traits in the area were not brought en masse by waves of migrants; most of them were independently invented or developed. The land, people and culture of the area were seen as so inseparably intertwined that it was practically impossible to think of one without the other. Consequently, the diffidence which caused early writers to suggest a far-fetched place of origin for the people and a wholesale importation of the superb objects of art of the area, was misplaced. Secondly, it was discovered that the traditional culture was until recently virile enough to absorb numerous cultural traits from machine-backed Western cultures without changing its essence and form and at the same time gain in robustness and resilience. Such qualities were found to be due to the long standing interplay of the land, people and culture of the area. Thirdly, it was speculated that in the long run and with the full opening of the area to the forces of modernization nothing will be left of the traditional culture except such traits as could be synthesized with their foreign counterparts. In particular, the landscape will be drastically transformed, much more than it has been in the past; and in the process there will be an evergrowing dependence not only on the resources of the local environment, but also on those of the widening world. These findings, for whatever they may be worth, have emerged from a consideration of the interplay of environment, people and culture in the area, albeit the focus was on the last, culture.

In another study, I attempted to find the correlation between the urban morphology of Yorubaland and that of Western countries. It soon became obvious that different cultural considerations affected the patterns of the two areas. While in medieval Europe central cathedrals and churches, markets, craftsmen's homes and shops formed the centre of the city to be replaced by the central business district from the age of industrialization onwards, the focus of traditional Yoruba towns was the palace. As such the concentric, sectoral and multiple nuclei theories used to explain the urban morphology of the western world were virtually inapplicable in Yorubaland. Hence my work on Yoruba palaces emerged as a treatise posed on the fact that the palace, as a cultural institution, produced a planetary-like system of urban morphology and at the same time structured the settlement pattern of the kingdom of which it was the metropolis by virtue of its being the Oba's domain. In recent years the palace has been eclipsed in many senses by more imposing buildings erected by the government and public corporations and also by successful businessmen and former politicians. Nonetheless it continues to exercise some influence, which of course is diminishing rapidly, on the urban morphology, especially where the peripheries of the palace grounds can be leased to institutions and individuals who require plots of land within the central

parts of the town.

In a similar context of the role of cultural factors, I have studied the travel behaviour patterns of farmers in Yorubaland. It is interesting to note that the travelling behaviour patterns which were found derive a great deal from the attitude of the people to the importance of town life, from their attachment to traditional festivals and customs, and from the dominance of agricultural work in their scheme of economic activities. In some towns where farms are generally located far away from the settlement, periodic commuting takes place in addition to the daily pulsing of population out to the farm and back to the town. In Idanre, in particular, the farming population fluctuates periodically between the town and the farm at regular intervals of a fortnight.

This study on travel to agricultural working places in Yorubaland revealed three basic differences in commuting as practised in this part of the world and in the Euro-American countries. Firstly, large-scale commuting in Yorubaland is oriented to agricultural work and is essentially of a non-vehicular character while that in Euro-American countries is oriented to industrial work and is effected by means of vehicular transport. Secondly, the direction of flow of traditional commuting in Yorubaland is from within the town to the farms in the suburbs of the town, a phenomenon which reduces the daytime population of the Yoruba town while the reverse is the case in Euro-American countries in that the direction of commuting is from suburb to town centre and then back, a phenomenon which swells the daytime population of the Euro-American town. Thirdly, commuting in Yorubaland is of two types, daily and periodic; on the other hand, commuting in Euro-American areas is of daily frequency. These three differences are due primarily to the differing cultural factors operating in the two regions.

One more example of work which stresses the significance of cultural factors is on the spatial patterns of the expansion of commercial activities away from the market squares in Yoruba towns. The main market square in each town, as the name *ojo obo* (king's market) suggests, was often located in front of the *oba's* palace. All roads in the kingdom led to this marketplace upon which people converged at regular intervals of four days or multiples of four days. In traditional days the *ojo-obo* was designed to handle trade in locally produced goods. Other markets within the town or within the kingdom were scheduled to form a ring or system which ensured that marketing operations would take place each day in at least one of them. The need to expand the main marketplace in traditional days was therefore not as pressing as in later years when daily marketing operations became imperative. Shops and trading houses therefore continue to spring up in many parts of the town to cater for the rising distributive activities of modern times.

In this process of development, it has been observed that the tendency to concentrate in a central business district (CBD) which

is a striking feature of the urban land use of West European and American cities has not assumed the same degree of importance in Yorubaland and this can be traced to certain cultural antecedents. Instead shopping facilities spread out along the axes of the principal roads forming a definite pattern which I have described as a roadside shopping belt (RSB). Similarly the facilities associated with commercial activities such as catering, banks and insurance houses, which in West European and American cities, concentrate in the CBD, tend in Yorubaland to be located along the RSB.

The phenomenon of the RSB as opposed to the CBD in Yorubaland is indeed due to certain socio-cultural factors. In the first place, the inhabitants of the town were formerly inward-looking, in the sense that the market in the central portion of the town catered for their economic transactions. In modern times the towns have become more outward-looking because of modern trading commodities which come from overseas markets through the country's bigger cities to which the town's main roads lead. It therefore yields greater dividend for modern shops and retail stores to cling to the roads. Secondly, the older parts of the town which constitute the central portions and are therefore closest to the traditional market square have been used mainly for residential purposes. They do not have suitable facilities for shopping and are not conveniently accessible to vehicular transport. Therefore keen businessmen who want to use modern facilities such as accessible vehicular roads, telephones, water and electricity normally look for locations away from the traditional central parts of the town. Following this trend, there has been rapid expansion of the towns at the peripheries especially along roads leading to neighbouring towns. The RSB more or less follows this expansion. In short, commercial activities along the RSB are expanding at a rate which far outstrips expansion in the vicinity of the main market square such that a modern sizeable CBD in the Euro-American sense has not been developed in many Yoruba towns.

The main emphasis of the work already described is on the cultural dimension of geography. As I will show in greater detail later, this cultural slant is indispensable in the understanding and analysis of the geographical patterns evolving continuously on the earth's surface and especially in the developing countries of the world. If it is overlooked, there is the danger that the peculiar patterns of a particular area will be viewed and assessed from outside rather than from inside. Moreover, there could easily develop the tendency of forcing concepts and theories evolved in one cultural setting to the patterns observable in another or of simply interpreting the patterns of one place in the light of observations elsewhere. Needless to say, such a Procrustean exercise could lead to frustrating and disappointing results.

Need for a Growing Cultural Perspective

It is my conviction that there is a pressing need for geographers,

particularly those who operate in the developing parts of the world, to stress the cultural aspects of their work, in fact to develop a cultural approach in their teaching and research. Most societies in the developing countries are still in social situations which can be described as culture-bound. One cannot fully understand and appreciate some of the activities of the inhabitants or some of the developments on the landscape in such areas without reference to the culture of the people. Consider for example the contribution which a consideration of the cultural factor could make to our understanding of the pattern of land use in Yorubaland. In the traditional days, the urban land use pattern, especially its residential sector, was dominated by considerations of the hierarchical status which linked the oba with his chiefs and people. The individual houses conformed to this hierarchical order in the way which has been shown elsewhere:

Yoruba houses were arranged to reflect what may be described as the political organization of the society. In this arrangement, the inmates of a compound are responsible to the heads of the single families who in turn make the head of the extended family or patrilineage their focus. All of them gravitate to the chief of the quarter. As a result the compounds of the extended families, the units of buildings in the settlement, are built, as far as compatible with the terrain, around the compounds of chiefs to whom they are related or owe allegiance, thereby forming a district, ward or quarter of the town. All the quarters, with the chief's compounds, are designed to look towards the Afin where the Oba resides, since all of them have the Afin as the covering point of their interest.¹²

This view is complemented by the observations of Mabogunje on the urban land use patterns in traditional cities that were pre-industrial in their economic and social orientation:

Pre-industrial technology implies the dependence on animate sources of power for production and transport. It means small-scale, cottage, craft production units usually located within individual residences. Dependence on transport by foot or animal raises very high the costs in effort and sweat of covering any great distance. The general result in terms of land use was a simple pattern in which the most important families lived close to the city centre, near to the seat of administration (the palace), religion (the mosque or the shrines), the trade (the central market). The less important and poorer families were often displaced outward from the very centre to the margin of the city.¹³

Without this background knowledge of the socio-political organization of the inhabitants which is translated into practical form in the arrangement and location of the buildings they occupy, one

may have the superficial impression that the layout or morphology of the town shows a haphazard, disorderly assembly of compounds.

It must be added also that rural land use possessed some order in its pattern of ownership and management. There were thick reserved forests belonging to the town as a whole or to certain quarters or wards usually in locations close to the town and sometimes forming a ring around it. In the unsettled days of the past such a forest afforded a place of ambush or of refuge whenever the town was besieged, especially if rocky hills and caves were not located in the vicinity. Portions of the forest land could also be cultivated during periods of emergency when it was not safe for the inhabitants to travel to distant farm lands. In addition, the reserved forest contained many shrines and groves and was a private place for staging some religious festivals including *oro* (bull-roaring) and *egungun* (masquerading). Beyond this ring forest, the land was divided among the extended families of the town. Because of the practice of bush fallowing, the plots of land cultivated by an individual or by members of a family were not necessarily contiguous, and were often fragmented and randomly distributed. However, behind this arrangement, there was a logical pattern based on the social structure of the inhabitants of the town.

Similar examples can be cited from the Yoruba culture area and from elsewhere in technologically developing areas to show that the interaction between man and environment in the use of land was put on an orderly footing through the culture of the people. Contrary to the uninformed view that the pattern of land use lacks rhyme and rhythm, there was superb order based on customary laws and regulations which were adhered to religiously.

Another reason why it is necessary to emphasize the cultural dimension in geography is that the attitudes and values which prevail among the vast majority of the people in the developing countries are still socio-cultural. In his study, *Migrants and Malaria*, Prothero has indicated the need to understand and take into account many different facets of people's ways of life, for these are relevant in the planning for and promotion of the eradication of malaria. He stressed that distribution and movements of population, forms and patterns of settlements, types of dwellings and the materials of which they are constructed, occupations and social relationships and many other ordinary features of life are important and may be highly significant in their influences. These observations of Prothero underscore my view of the need for geographical culturalism in studies of this type.

It is well known that although action is played out in a real environment, the decision to act in space is based on the environment as perceived. This perception is in turn a function of the culture. We may illustrate this point with some examples of cultural or behavioural barriers to travel which is a means of increasing man's action space. Although it may sound strange to many of us, it is true that in many parts of this country some people still find it

necessary to subject their travel decisions to the advice of super-natural forces. Some consult the oracle of divination (known as *Ifa* in Yorubaland) before embarking on any journey outside the limits of their daily action space. The oracle normally had numerous occasions of answering in the negative to requests for information concerning the propitiousness of a proposed travel, if only to give the impression that it is not a yes-deity. Being skilled in the natural laws of probability, the yes and no answers of the deity normally add to fifty-fifty in the long run. However not all the yes-answers ended up with the enquirers actually undertaking the proposed journeys because many of the yes-answers might be made dependent on the offering of certain prescribed sacrifices not all of which could be made at the convenience of the enquirers.

Another inhibition to travelling comes through the taboos to which some people subscribe. For instance there are days of the week or month which are believed to be unsafe to embark on a long journey or to travel at all. Some believe that to travel during the first few days of the new moon or of the month or of the year is to risk being stranded abroad indefinitely with little or no prospect of a return. Many people avoid travelling on the last day of the week or month or year for similar reasons. Until recently, movements of people, especially in the villages, were restricted on many occasions, particularly during religious festivals for *oro* (bull-roaring) or *isemole* (home confinement).

Even today in many minds the attitude to travelling in vehicular transport is still fraught with fears and superstitions, some of which are thoughtfully expressed in the bold slogans written on many lorries. The following examples speak for themselves: Safe Journey, Save Me O Lord, Don't Make This The Last, The Lord is My Shepherd, Allah De, Into Thy Hands O Lord I Commend My Spirit. As a supplement to these solicitations the average Nigerian possesses the knack of rationalising the causes of any travelling accident. The more calamitous the accident, the more far-fetched the fabrication as, for example the rumour that a recent plane crash in the country was caused by overloading with smuggled goods. All these expressions represent a cultural adjustment to a low level of safety due to poor transport facilities and lack of adequate management and control.

The point worth stressing is that cultural barriers or constraints can affect travelling behavioural patterns at any level of technological development whether vehicular or non-vehicular. As has been shown in the study of distances, the physical or geographical distance is the least meaningful in evoking the response of most individuals to travel because the intending travellers have to take into consideration time distance, cost distance, social distance and cultural distance, all of which may compose the mental distance upon which decisions are based. Especially in social journeys in intra-urban settings, the social and cultural distances may become more significant than any other, primarily because contacts are

based on socio-cultural considerations. As an illustration, it is well known that the traditional quarters of a town are relatively distant from the Government Residential areas (former Reservation) and the Sabo quarters (*Sabon-gari*) of many Yoruba towns as if they are not all in the same town. In fact, a *Sabon-gari* in particular could be nearer in terms of cultural distance to another *Sabon-gari* in a neighbouring town than it is to the indigenous quarters of the town in which it is found.

Broadly similar results of the effect of the cultural factor in the relativity of people to their surroundings are found in other studies. For instance, from the mid 1960's, some geographers have studied the patterns of space preferences or the "mental maps" held by groups of people in different parts of the world. The areas already covered by such studies include the United States, Britain, Tanzania, Ghana and Nigeria which represent fairly different cultural types. Direct comparative studies between these different cultural types have, however, not been undertaken. Nonetheless some facts have come to light which reflect the overall influence of the cultural backgrounds of the people on the way in which they make up their mental images. For example in the mental map of thirteen year old students in Efon Alaye, Western Nigeria, it was found that:

while primary school pupils of thirteen years old may not have travelled very far beyond their home area, they already hold bright mental images of the major towns in the region. Indeed, the large cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ogbomosho and Akure are perceived as even more desirable than the perception-town, Efon Alaye, itself. This finding is in marked contrast to a similar study in Britain in which a local dome of high desirability was always centred upon the perception point.¹⁴

The study reached the somewhat irresistible conclusion that the ties of Nigerian children to the local area seem much weaker than those of their British contemporaries, and that strong images of urban areas seem to develop very quickly in Nigerian children. It is to be expected that the Nigerian children's perception of the residential desirability of the major towns should be high because most of the things they aspire towards, including education, office job opportunities, entertainment, and pleasurable city life, are known to be concentrated in the major towns. Moreover since the study was based primarily on the flows of information received through media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, migration, travel experience and family members, the source of information is more heavily loaded in favour of secondary than primary. Furthermore it is known that there is a general tendency on the part of students of this age-group to accept with little question information received through the educational media. Also, in a culture where people travel sparingly and only when it becomes a necessity, the far-off towns have the appeal and attraction of the

unknown. On the other hand, British children who have probably travelled more frequently to the neighbouring cities, which in any case are not too different from their own perception points in terms of the cultural products which the cities contain, are not likely to have a high perception of residential desirability for other towns or cities in their country.

One more point emerges from these findings which buttresses the assumption that the cultural background of the children concerned could have weighed heavily in the rating of their desire to reside in the major towns outside their perception point. It was reckoned that in the example of Efon Alaye students the information received from, and influence of, family members accounted for seventy-eight percent of their spatial perception. It is therefore not surprising that in this culture of extended family ties, where a man from the same village may well be called *brother* with many of the obligations implied by such a term, the desire to join a relative who has made the mark in a major town could affect the perception of geographic space for residential purposes.

Particularly for this study in the Yoruba culture area it is necessary to take into consideration the duration of stay for which the perception is being made. It could well have been very high for short stays abroad and very low for long stays. It is generally known that people in this culture area regard the residence outside their home origin as temporary even if they make all their fortune in the home abroad. They like to return to their home of origin from time to time to perform social duties and to take part in town festivals. In addition to these occasional visits, it is expected that at the end of what is regarded as a sojourn in a foreign land they will return to befitting edifices, erected and designed to create a feeling of being back in one's own resting place.

The foregoing analysis is meant to stress the significance of the cultural dimension in perception studies. Since one's perception or mental map of a phenomenon is dominantly affected by one's cultural background and attitude, it follows that one's responsiveness to change (or adoption index) which depends on one's mental map and mean information field depends in turn on one's cultural background. This is precisely why population migration, as has been mentioned, and intra-urban and inter-urban journeys which are expressions of interaction over space, cannot be treated reasonably in the same way as the movement of ordinary commodities such as goods, mail and capital. It is obvious that in human movements, "the agent which is being transported is itself active and generates its own flow. The origin and destination points take on significance only in the framework in which they are perceived by the active agents."¹⁵

This crucial point must be borne in mind especially in studies on spatial diffusion of man and his work. Such studies have assumed considerable importance in recent years especially since geographers have begun to view spatial patterns and relationships in a dynamic

sense over space and time. Hence it has also become a necessity to pay particular attention to the nature and characteristics of the carriers and barriers of the phenomena being diffused.

Whether spatial diffusion is of the expansion, relocation, contagious or hierarchical type, the carriers and barriers could be either physical or cultural or both. In general the carriers are man himself or man-made devices whilst the barriers have physical and man-made components. To illustrate let us concentrate on the barriers. It is now known that physical barriers such as mountains, deserts, swamps, lakes, and oceans are easily surmounted through increasing developments in technology, transportation and communication. On the other hand the really persistent barriers to the spread of ideas, innovations, peoples and other agents of modernization are characteristically cultural in nature, being linguistic, religious, political and psychological. In other words, these cultural barriers exist in the minds of men whether considered as individuals or as groups.¹⁴ Therefore if reliable deductions are to be made from studies of diffusion processes especially with regard to predicting patterns of future trends which are so fundamental to planning, the cultural variables that enter into the carrier and barrier processes must be properly pinned down and evaluated.

For some time, geographers hesitated to take into consideration aspects of human behaviour mainly because the issues involved were too numerous, nebulous and imponderable for analysis. The situation has become simplified with the availability of electronic calculators and computers. There is now hardly any limit to the number of variables that could be taken into consideration in the multifactorial analysis called for in the inclusion of behavioural aspects of human activities. In short, inadequacy of technical facilities should no longer be a hindrance.

Benefits Accruing from the Cultural Perspective

By incorporating and emphasizing the cultural dimension in geography many benefits are bound to accrue to the discipline. In the first place, like their compatriots in the other disciplines of the social sciences, geographers will acquire greater depth in their understanding of man particularly in terms of his inner mind. From what I said at the beginning of this lecture, there is no doubt about the fact that geographers were among the first scholars to study man and his work on the surface of the earth. And as I have pointed out elsewhere:

the study of cultural phenomena is not new in geography. As a matter of fact it is as old as geography itself in the sense that the subject has long been man-centred even from the early days when its primary concern was knowing places and peoples. In other words, anthropo-geography dates far back in time. The contention here is that although geography has through the ages studied man, at no time, especially before the last two decades, has the subject been

so closely oriented to man in society, to the values of human actions and to those things that serve primarily human interests.¹⁷

Because of geography's close orientation to man in society and its search for the values of human actions and for those things that serve primarily human interests, the geographer must study human behaviour as distinct from and in addition to the study of man. Until recently,

the emphasis was placed on behavioural products rather than behaviour per se ... for instance upon completed migrations, completed journeys-to shop etc. ... [this] means that geographers have been one step behind in the reality of behaviour. By concentrating upon spatial pattern of behaviour, rather than upon the process, the decision rules governing the behavioural process have rarely been commented on, let alone subjected to precise analysis. A consequence has been the tendency to apply hindsight to situation.¹⁸

Actually what is now required is more foresight. As such it is necessary for the geographer to take into account not only the external forces operating on man to make him follow certain lines of action, but also the inner forces which propel him to action. By so doing, it will be possible to formulate some spatial behavioural laws which could enable us to anticipate the action of the "intendedly rational man who although limited to finite ability to perceive, calculate and predict and to an otherwise imperfect knowledge of environment, still differentiates between alternative courses of action according to their relative utility or expected utility".¹⁹

It is by having adequate knowledge of the motivations of man that planning for his needs and welfare could be successfully done. This is why geographers are no longer restricting themselves to what are described as the traditional questions in the subject namely, what? where? and when? Rather two other questions have been added: how? and why? These additional questions are often called process-questions and they are essentially cultural in dimension, especially in the human branches of the subject. It is pertinent to note that the what, where and when questions call for mere description and are therefore, the initial steps toward making explanations which come through answering why and how questions.

Evidently it is only when geographers can tackle and solve the why and how questions that they can become really imbued with foresight and the other necessary qualities for prediction. This is a condition precedent to being able to get to the next stage which consists of manipulating events to produce maximum benefits for the greatest number of people. We may, for purposes of emphasis, refer once again to the study of the perception of geographic surfaces, which is yet a frontier area of research for geographers, in order to appreciate the problems involved in obtaining information pertaining to how and why questions. The scholars who have worked

in this field confess that so far they have little idea of how the mental images are formed and how they change from childhood to adulthood. Such queries, though yet unanswered, are typical examples of the how and why questions, the solutions of which will add immeasurably to the understanding of the totality of perception studies and other similar branches of geography. Needless to say, they form an important strand of the cultural dimension in geography which should be further explored.

Conclusion: Cultural Processes in Man's Use of Resources

The foregoing account should have, by now, underscored the point that there is need to stress the cultural dimension in geography. By and large, the subject matter of the discipline is becoming more culturally than physically oriented. Increasing attention is also being paid to social problems and the role which geographers can play in solving such problems has formed the theme of many conferences, seminars and symposia. From these academic get-togethers the view is crystallizing that, "geographers have to further scrutinize their studies, research and teaching to see that in both content and methodology, they are geared more closely to the benefit and welfare of man in a rapidly changing society".⁵⁰

It is probably the consideration of this utilitarian point of view, which in itself derives from cultural consideration, that prompted geographers to become more involved in studies dealing with the two fundamental resources of the earth, namely space and time. As we know,

everything else that may be thought as a resource can be resolved as a component of one or both of these. Space is a continuum of land and water, atmosphere and biosphere, which presents a rich and varied range of resource opportunities, and conversely, resource limitations ... The time resource too is available in varying quality... It is not the quantity of time available that is different but its quality ... As man improves his use of time, his power over the environment increases together with his choice of land-use.⁵¹

As we know too well it is the combination of the use of space and time that produces the decisions and behaviour in man's varied activities. On a global scale, such activities have generated social problems of mammoth proportions threatening the survival of humanity. Some of the problems are overpopulation, diminishing natural resources, environmental pollution and international conflict. Time does not allow us to go into the details of these problems. In any case there has been a lot of hue and cry about their seriousness and it is a more useful exercise to concentrate on their possible solutions and to point out that the geographer has a significant part to play, as can be seen from the efforts already made in the United States. In that country, man was, until recently, rapacious and inconsiderate in his exploitation of the environment and its

resources. It required a complete re-orientation of cultural values to make the inhabitants realise that the rape of the environment could not go on indefinitely without detracting from the quality of life. Geographers in that country are among those in the vanguard of analyzing the spatial disequilibrium resulting from the misuse of environmental resources. They have therefore assigned a high order of priority to the study of the problems associated with cities, transportation, resources and environmental pollution.

In Nigeria, geographers are now advancing concrete proposals that could have impact on official thinking and action in the process of national development. We are becoming more and more aware of the necessity of the view expressed more than 2,000 years ago by Strabo, the prince of geography, that "one of the purposes of geography was to subserve the State".²² It is true that we have helped now and then in certain national assignments. For instance, for the 1962/63 census geographers provided the bulk of the manpower to delimit enumeration areas and provide the spatial framework and cartographic base for the census. We are doing broadly the same thing for the impending 1973 census. However it has not been feasible for the government to adopt the suggestion already made by a number of geographers that enumeration areas for the census should be based on the geo co-ordinate or x-y co-ordinate principle or simply on grid squares. Hopefully, it will be possible to adopt this method for the 1983 census. Similarly we are currently engaged at the national level, along with some others, to produce a national atlas which will portray at a glance the physical and human characteristic features of our country. All these efforts are in line with the contributions of traditional geographers. However a more meaningful type of contribution should come through projects that have far-reaching implications for national development.

Conscious of the fact that the inhabitants of this country have been living for quite a long time in a state of cyclic balance with their environment and that they are at the take-off stage of their economic development, and recognizing also the grip of the cultural past on the minds of the people, our department in life has shown considerable interest in man's adaptation to, and use of, the land and other resources. We have specially taken note of Zimmermann's functional theory of resources, expressed in a crisp statement that "resources are not, they become".²³ Furthermore we have recognized that "so pervasive is the role of culture in fixing people's perception and manipulations of natural phenomena that different populations, though occupying the same habitat, may have different resources".²⁴ In order to bring the expertise of each of us to bear on these issues, the members of Ife's Geography Department have been involved in joint research entitled the Environmental Resource Base Project. In brief, the objectives of the project are as follows: firstly, to determine the quality of the elements of the resources which jointly form the basis of the endowment of the country; secondly, to evaluate the resources specifically for their effective

and planned utilization and conservation; thirdly, to formulate locational policies for sound and profitable development of the resources and of the production processes in which they are used; and fourthly, to develop consultancy and extension service channels through which the results would be made available to both public and private users of environmental resources in Nigeria.

As the project expands, we intend to collaborate with other scholars in allied disciplines who share our objective to become the watchdog of our nation's resources, to ensure their exploitation and utilization in a way that no wanton destruction will take place, and to secure the preservation of those resources that are beyond human ingenuity to replace. Briefly, what we intend to do is to keep land, people and culture together in a state of dynamic and profitable equilibrium.

Within the short time of our research activities, we have become convinced that there is need for a national awareness of the environmental elements constituting the resources of the country and that the public must be better informed of the necessity to judiciously exploit and utilize these resources. These are issues which derive from the cultural component for which not only the geographer can provide the necessary leadership. Therefore, in order to provide an interdisciplinary forum for articulating these ideas and in order to help the nation pave the way for a more comprehensive and balanced approach to resource management and thereby improve the overall quality of the country's human environment, a conference on environmental resource management in Nigeria is being sponsored by our Resource Unit to take place in this university in July 1973.

It is likely that our findings will also be of benefit to some of the neighbours of Nigeria. In any case, in its full dimensions our objectives will be pursued at both national and international levels. It is an axiom that no nation can afford to work alone in matters concerning resource development. As noted by the United Nations Human Environment Conference in Stockholm last June in one of its principles, "Resources should be made available to preserve and improve the environment, taking into account the circumstances and particular requirements of developing countries and any costs which may emanate from their incorporating environmental safeguards into their development planning and the need for making available to them, upon their request, additional international technical and financial assistance for this purpose."²⁵

Especially because of their holistic approach to issues, geographers think in terms of the spaceship earth as a whole, and regard its various surface cultural differentiations as operating together in a world system. Because of technological developments, our world continues to shrink rapidly and the associated world system appears to be more and more manageable. As time goes on, there will be a strong tendency for a one culture zone to emerge. Already some contemporary cultural anthropologists who have specified a number

of fundamental universal values are of the view that, 'the same basic values of survival, mutual collaboration, the raising of children, the worship of transcendent entities, and avoidance of suffering, injustice, and pain, are manifested by all cultures. The surface forms differ, but the depth structures are isomorphic'.²⁴

The isomorphic depth structures are likely to surface more and more in future years, and the world will approximate to a global village of one main culture zone. Even then human spatial behaviour may become more complex rather than simpler. Certainly man in society will continue to be separated, for a long time to come, by birth, class and race. In addition clusters of people will be bound together by language, religion, and education, among other factors. In short those complexes of individual, institutional and social forces which introduced cultural differentiation among men would be at work for some time to come tending to perpetuate various forms of imbalance in welfare.

I wish to end on the note that the solutions to the problems of today and the immediate future will hinge a great deal, though not entirely, on the resolution of the cultural components which may be manifested, unmasked or seen in cloaked forms, as ideological and religious differences, racism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and economic imperialism. Certainly the world will desperately continue to need men and women with a clear view and involved concern for man's use of space over time in a way that will enable its inhabitants to combat these problems effectively and successfully. I am confident that geographers could be counted among such men and women and that they will be able to demonstrate that clear view and involved concern if, among other things, they emphasize the cultural dimension in geography both as an academic subject and as an applied science.

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