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SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND URBANIZATION IN A PERIPHERAL DISTRICT OF TANANARIVE - MADAGASCAR

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Introduction

Like most of the large African urban centres which have been the theatre of a more or less rapid expansion during the last two decades, Tananarive has seen its population increase^{1/} and its boundaries recede. The dynamics of its extension were not uniform in all the districts; in the Isotry district^{2/} it assumed an aspect which merits special attention. There an urban society evolved which, it is at once apparent, is different from the rest of the capital.

The original feature of Tananarive is that it used to be the capital of the "merina" monarchy which was organized in a city centred on the "Rova, fortified residence of the Sovereign." Around this centre were grouped, in very specific locations, each of the castes making up the old "merina" society. The subsequent development of Tananarive occurred within this existing urban structure which had become transformed and disrupted.

But within the town precincts, there is a district on the western outskirts, i.e. encroaching on the rice-field that lies at the foot of the hills on which the oldest districts of the city are perched, which is to be distinguished from the others: it only came into real existence at the beginning of the century, or in other words, since the beginning of the colonial era; its extension is among the consequences of the new situation created by the conquest.

^{1/} a population of 126,662 in 1939
a population of 171,052 in 1948
a population of 247,917 in 1960.

^{2/} a population of 20,295 in 1948
a population of 30,492 in 1960.

We will endeavour first to reconstruct the origin of Isotry, secondly to analyze its present internal sociological structure, and lastly we will draw some conclusions from that picture about the relations between Isotry and the rest of the town.

Origin of the Isotry district

The historical process of the founding of the district can be summed up in two periods:

1. The period around the year 1895 which saw the end of the "merina" monarchy and then the break-up of Tananarive society, and led to the introduction of western culture and administration.
2. An immigration movement, at first of city origin, i.e. originating from the upper town, followed later by an influx of rural dwellers coming from the countryside surrounding Tananarive.

In order to follow the changes in the old Tananarive society, we will recall briefly what the "merina" society was. Among the "Merina" there were three castes: the nobles or "Andriana," grouped around the Sovereign, the common people or "Hova" who were the most numerous, and the slave population or "Andevo."

Each of these castes fulfilled a definite function in relation to the Sovereign and occupied a specific position marked essentially by the fact of living at a certain place inside the city. Thus Isotry had had as its first inhabitants, on the one hand, the representatives of the lower class clan of the "Tsimiamboholahy" who cultivated the rice-fields that had been allocated to them there, and on the other hand, a population of royal slaves who engaged in various

services for the sovereign; tending the flocks, cultivating the rice-fields, etc. and later on, working at the royal gunpowder factory.

After 1895, this organization lost all significance; it no longer had any *raison d'être*. It collapsed, bringing with it the break-up of the system established by tradition. The elements making up Tananarive society broke apart and subsequently underwent regrouping at the family level. At that time there was an increase in the ranks of those already at Isotry: common people and former royal slaves. Soon afterwards, some representatives of the noble caste came to join them.

An immigration movement to Isotry occurred in the following years, and it is still continuing with its double intake from town and country: firstly there are urban immigrants who have come down from the higher districts or have been forced out of the central districts of the town: they are, in fact, impelled by reduced economic circumstances, inability to confront at the same time the new administrative and financial necessities of civic and professional life and the narrow social obligations that persist both among the great families and among the lower-class families involving more or less onerous money contributions; secondly, there are rural immigrants attracted to the town, not so much to escape the constraints of the new labour standards, as was the case before 1939, or to enjoy the advantages of urban life, as to seek and acquire the money tokens that have become essential (particularly for the payment of taxes).

In short, Isotry has become a zone of refuge for the most vulnerable victims of the new state of affairs, the world of colonization. The inhabitants have

built up there a human environment which has superimposed new factors of differentiation on the foundations of the former social structure.

Sociological differentiation at Isotry

An outside observer would seek in vain, at first sight, the indications of a new social stratification among the people living at Isotry. The population seems united and egalitarian, and there is no outward sign to disclose distinctions of a sociological nature.

However, it must not be thought that the former caste divisions have entirely lost all significance. For they still exist, though only assuming full importance in the forbidding of marriages between members of the three castes. The horizontal stratification which it used to be has changed into a vertical cleavage between three groups which social levelling has now placed on the same plane. Furthermore, the basic social unit has become the family, or more precisely, the household. But the vertical division does not involve economic differentiations. The latter rest essentially on two factors: one being the status of occupation of a dwelling as owner, tenant or lodger, and the other, whether the person concerned is wage-earning or non-wage-earning.

Present proportions of the castes at Isotry:

"Andriana"	13.7 per cent
"Hova"	47.6 per cent
"Andevo"	38.7 per cent

At Isotry, the overriding importance of finding shelter is leading to the grading of families as:

those who, through economizing and hard work, have ended by owning their dwelling. Thus, they enjoy the prerogatives of house-owners, whether the house is large or small. The house-owners represent 31.7 per cent of all the families;

those who are tenants, generally renting one or two rooms either during the period when they are preparing to become owners, or because their inadequate resources just enable them to pay rent for an indefinite period. Tenant families represent a proportion of 48.5 per cent.

- Lastly, those who, by virtue of being close or distant relatives or of being needy strangers who are granted hospitality because of simple concern for human solidarity are occupying a dwelling granted to them free of charge. We shall call both of these lodgers. They form a proportion of 19.8 per cent of all the families.

As to the money resources for the subsistence of the households, they are mainly derived from the work of the wage-earners (56.8 per cent of the total number of workers) and the non-wage-earners or workers on own account (41.2 per cent). Retirement pensions only occur in 2 per cent of households. Among the wage-earners, the spread of the salary strata and the percentages of wage-earners per stratum is as follows:

Wage Strate		% of Wage-earners
0	- 4,000 CFA francs ^{1/}	32.5 per cent
4,001	- 8,000 CFA francs	38.1 per cent
8,001	- 12,000 CFA francs	17.5 per cent
Over 12,000 CFA francs		11.9 per cent

We should stress here the slender money resources possessed by most of the families. Hence, sociologically, we note at Isotry the survival of a past which has collapsed, a survival revealed in the existence of the prohibition of marriage between castes. The new sociological structure is being built up again around economic factors, the most obvious of which are the status of occupation of a dwelling and the amount of income. These factors originated in the system of colonization. However, although a differentiation among the inhabitants of Isotry becomes apparent when the sociological structure is analyzed, it is neither perceived nor lived by the population itself.

Opposition between factors of differentiation
and homogeneity in the Isotry district

Psychologically the people of Isotry are, in fact, reluctant to establish differences and categories among themselves. They attach little importance to them and do not want them discussed for, since the population originated in a historical upheaval and has undergone a social levelling, it has created from scratch, and by tacit agreement, a new style of life which abolishes concern

^{1/} 50 CFA francs = 1 New Franc

with keeping up social rank and gradations in ways of living. Not only do the residents repudiate any kind of differentiation among themselves, but they fight against any factor which might establish any, as otherwise the difficulties and the socio-economic distinctions existing in the other districts of the capital would also be rife in their district.

Consequently, the inhabitants of Isotry see themselves in their own eyes as:

1. Equal to each other with regard to all aspects of their way of life and to social obligations, which they endeavour to simplify to the maximum extent;
2. in a special position in relation to the rest of the inhabitants of Tananarive, with respect to whom they assert themselves by opposing the latter.

As to the equality prevailing among them, the inhabitants of Isotry show this by restricting their needs so as to obtain what is strictly necessary with modest means: the clothes, the food, and the objects of general consumption of all of them are similar. The way they live gives the impression that there is no "outward sign of wealth" to betray any special feature among any of them. Social obligations, consisting among other things of giving a sum of money to those concerned in the various family events, are furthermore greatly reduced, and this applies to all families.

This egalitarian attitude is again reflected in the behaviour of the inhabitants to each other:

They show solidarity in the face of all trials, even when there is no tie of blood or friendship to warrant it; they tend to settle any disputes which might divide them inside the district thus ensuring that these matters remain among themselves; they withdraw themselves into a life inside the district. This life is evidenced by the existence of a number of small businesses and a small handicraft industry which provides a large proportion of the internal consumption of the district.

The inhabitants of Isotry are anxious to assert their original character as against the other inhabitants of Tananarive.

In telling us of his boldest aspiration, a man of the district said that it was to own a house "on the outskirts of the town," at "Faravohita," which is none other than one of the districts of the upper town. For him, Isotry was the town, and its outskirts, Tananarive.

This way of talking is related to the feeling the inhabitants of Isotry have for what is outside the district. The people profess an undisguised contempt for anything, whether ideas or persons or events that are alien to the district because of either being located outside it or else being introduced into it from outside. This contempt applies indiscriminately to everything that is not Isotry.

Together with its contempt, the population is unanimously against everything "that is not good for Isotry." It removes and combats anything that might challenge its simplified way of living and does not conform to the style of the district.

The fact that Isotry has reduced social obligations to their simplest expression established a further difference with the heart of Tananarive where these obligations help to keep up an extremely lively - but also burdensome - network of social relations.

Lastly, this Isotrian solidarity, in going beyond the family context and applying to all inhabitants without distinction, has become simply human solidarity.

In the upper part and the centre of Tananarive this is not yet the case, as the forms of mutual help are undertaken exclusively within the great families.

Consequently, the traits of Isotrian mentality to be noted are:

Its desire for economic equalization is a uniform way of life at the margin of existence;

its gradual breaking away from the traditional forms of social life and human relations;

its hostility to the upper part of the town of Tananarive, which has retained its hierarchies and its comparatively high standard of living as compared with that of Isotry.

Interpretation of the facts

From the foregoing, a number of observations emerge:

- Isotry is a world withdrawing into itself. Psychologically it is asserting its own fraternity and originality; economically, it is dependent on the outside since 67 per cent of its workers travel to other districts of the

capital. Nevertheless, it tends towards autonomy as regards consumption, which enables it to survive.

- The special feature of Isotry is that this situation is being lived not individually, but collectively, throughout a whole district, while in the rest of the capital this situation is scattered over Tananarive.

Hence, at Isotry it is a whole district which is likely to react collectively to future contingencies. For the moment, Isotry is a district of the people with a beginning of awareness of its position. If it were to become "proletarianized," its demonstrations of revolt would take on a collective form.

- At present, Isotry is tending to assert itself as against the rest of the town.

Isotry, whose way of living has been created from scratch by its inhabitants, is continuing its self-creation. Hence the spirit of Isotry is giving birth to a new mentality which is opposed to that of the other people of Tananarive.

It is essential to prevent Tananarive, on the one hand, and Isotry, on the other, from becoming two opposing poles alien to each other since that situation would be liable to produce conflict. There is an urgent need to reintegrate Isotry into the life of the capital. A propitious opportunity is offered at a time when the re-planning of the Isotry district in particular and the town of Tananarive as a whole is being contemplated. This re-planning ought to be accompanied by a dynamic development policy for the whole of the capital, the effect of which would be to attach Isotry in reality to Tananarive.