Ethnic Assimilation in Accra, Ghana

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Abstract

Ethnic group relationships are typically evaluated by calculating measures of residential segregation or clustering, such as the index of dissimilarity at the global level and/or the location quotient at the local level, and the majority of studies focus on urban areas in richer countries. However, very little literature exists on ethnic patterns of residential clustering within cities of developing countries, and even less on the most extreme measure of intergroup assimilation—ethnic mixing within households. In this study we use neighborhood and household-level data from the 2000 Census of Ghana to provide a novel assessment of the spatial pattern of ethnic assimilation in the capital city of Accra.

Extended Abstract

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

There is a great deal of literature on inter-ethnic relationships in developed countries. Coleman (2006; 2007; 2009a; 2009b) has suggested that Europe and North America are becoming more diversified while the rest of the world may be moving in the opposite direction. The entire discussion of ethnicity in this context, however, is based on national origins. On this assumption, countries that receive immigrants will become more diverse, whereas countries that do not receive immigrants will not do so. At the scale of analysis that compares one country with another there is nothing necessarily wrong with this approach, but it ignores the fact that within many developing countries, including those who are sending migrants to the rich countries, there is often a great deal of cultural and ethnic diversity that may importantly influence the course of demographic, political, and economic events. This described most of Europe prior to the end of empires and the rise of nation-states in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it describes many modern developing nations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and western Asia, where Europeans imposed national boundaries on ethnically diverse groups. Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Iraq, and Afghanistan are among the more recent examples of countries whose artificially created boundaries have put competing ethnic groups into violent conflict with each other. In Nigeria, of course, the Biafran War (Nigerian Civil War) of the late 1960s was another such example and after the country was re-united the decision was made not to include questions about ethnicity/tribal origins in the census. In Lebanon, ethnic tensions have been so high for so long that even a census itself has been avoided since 1932 (Weeks 2011).

In developed countries a major concern regarding ethnic diversity is the way in which immigrant or other minority groups adapt and accommodate to and, perhaps, eventually assimilate into the host country. Ethnic groups may find themselves residentially segregated from the dominant group and/or they may isolate themselves into relatively closed communities. Either of these results is likely to dramatically slow the process of assimilation and, as a result is likely to increase the chances of inter-ethnic conflict.

Ameliorating or mitigating conflict is an important function of civil societies and intermarriage has long been a key sign of bonding among diverse groups. History is replete with stories of marriages between kings and queens, or the sons and daughters thereof, as a means of building alliances and avoiding conflict. The literature suggests that this operates at the local level, as well, when seemingly diverse individuals discover mutual compatibility and decide to share their lives. Here the goal is not conflict avoidance, but the literature suggests that this will be a beneficial consequence. Indeed, the assimilationist model of ethnic relations posits that intermarriage is the most significant indicator of the breaking down of ethnic divisions within a society.

Although a great deal of work has been done by population and urban geographers, sociologists and anthropologists on the residential segregation and concentration of ethnic groups within cities, the focus to a large extent has been on urban centers in the developed world such as the United States (US) (Doeppers 1974; Farley and Frey 1994; Johnston, Poulsen, and Forrest 2004; Burgess and Wilson 2005; Johnston, Poulsen, and Forrest 2006), the Netherlands (Logan 2006), and Australia (Poulsen, Johnston, and Forrest 2004). In terms of global variations in segregation patterns, the black–white dynamic continues to be an important feature in the US, with an emerging literature focusing on residential patterns of Hispanics (Weeks, Weeks, and Weeks 2007; Iceland and Nelson 2008; Weeks and Weeks 2010). A different type of segregation can be found in countries that are traditional receivers of immigrants such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In Europe, a distinction has been made between southern European cities characterized by smaller immigrant populations and lower levels of ethnic and social segregation, and northern European cities characterized by larger immigrant populations and higher segregation levels (Kaplan and Woodhouse 2004).

The debate has not engaged Africa as it has the countries of Europe and America. In other words, very little work has been done on ethnic/racial urbanism in the developing world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of studies on racial residential segregation that have been published recently on South Africa (Tomlinson, Beauregard, and Bremner 2003; Lemanski 2006) and Kenya (K'Akumu and Olima 2007). In the African context, the ethnic question has received a negative connotation due to the extent to which it has been exploited by politicians and people in authority in the past, especially in times of national crises, resulting in many civil wars on the African continent, as noted above.

Following Agyei-Mensah and Owusu (2009) and Weeks et al. (2006), we delve more deeply into the issue of ethnic diversity and assimilation in Accra, Ghana, building on existing knowledge of whether or not culturally diverse people are living in the same neighborhood. Most studies of ethnic assimilation stop at this point, but we move to a finer scale by

examining the pattern of interethnic residence within households. Indeed, knowing the latter will allow us to know how much of a neighborhood's diversity is explained by within-household variability, not just diversity among households. Using data at both the household and neighborhood levels we aim to answer the following questions: (1) Are some ethnic groups more likely than others to intermarry and/or to share households with other ethnic group members? (2) if so, is there a spatial pattern that is observable in ethnic assimilation at the neighborhood level? And (3) if so, can we explain the spatial pattern?

Data and Methods

We use the 2000 census micro-sample as our data source, with households coded according to the ethnic self-identification of all household members, and georeferenced to the EA (census tract) level, with aggregation to what we call the "vernacular neighborhood" (Weeks et al. 2010). The term "vernacular neighborhoods" refers to neighborhood boundaries that are broadly recognized and agreed to by residents of a given city—in this case Accra, Ghana--even if they may have no premeditated and formal definition. These are the place names, for example, that would be provided to a taxi driver, especially since there is no comprehensive street address system in Accra. In Accra, 88 of these neighborhood boundaries have been created by Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) by grouping together contiguous EAs (comparable to census tracts). Most neighborhoods are residential or mixed commercial/retail/residential and they average 20 EAs per neighborhood, with a minimum of one and a maximum of 85.

The first neighborhoods in Accra were the largely autonomous Ga settlements of Nleshi (James Town—English Accra), Kinka (Ussher Town—Dutch Accra, originally Fort Crèvecoeur), and Osu (site of Christiansborg Castle—Danish Accra). These places date back to the 17th century and were still the essence of Accra in 1875 (Parker 2000). During the first quarter of the 20th century, Accra grew. "As elsewhere in the colonial world, advances in Western medicine interacted with imperial ideologies to create a new emphasis on sanitation, order, and racial segregation, which conditioned the reformulation of urban space and of social relations in the growing city" (Parker 2000:195-196). It was during this time, for example, that the "Cantonments" neighborhood was planned, financed and acquired by the colonial government for expatriate civil servants (Agyei-Mensah and Owusu 2009; Acquah 1958). It is located to the northeast of central Accra and is still one of the more elite areas of the city, and is home to many foreign embassies, including that of the United States. "Characteristic of the rigid social structure of the colonial period were the sharp boundaries between these elite preserves and the bordering slums and squatter settlements. Administrative divisions created highly visible ecological barriers in Accra" (Brand 1972:297). At the same time, however, a more middle class neighborhood, Adabraka, was established in the 1920s as a new residential and commercial area to the northwest of the older parts of the city (Pellow 1977).

The original villages that eventually formed the city were scattered along the coastline because the Ga were, and still are, active in the fishing trade. Newer neighborhoods have generally been created inland. In the 1880s a "zongo" (quarter) was built north of Ussher Town. This was by Salaga market (the first and largest market in the city) and the area was settled by Hausa (Muslim) settlers from northern Nigeria (Parker 2000). Another

predominantly Muslim quarter, Sabon Zongo, was settled in 1907, in order to relieve some of the congestion in the older quarter (Pellow 2002). The village of Nima was built outside of the city boundaries after WWII for returning Hausa soldiers (Acquah 1958). It became part of the municipality in 1953, and by 1958 it was officially designated as a slum needing remediation (Harvey and Brand 1974). The post-WWII era saw the building of the airport to the northeast of Nima, and the University in Legon to the north of the airport. These have been relatively elite areas since their inception. After independence in 1957 the city expanded considerably, and many of the vernacular neighborhoods have grown up in the post-Independence period, a time that has also been associated with an increase of the Akan population in the city. Overall, then, ethnicity has been one of the factors that has influenced the history and location of neighborhoods within Accra.

We used the micro-level data from the census to code the ethnicity of the head of the household and his/her spouse (or multiple wives, in some cases). If there is complete ethnic homogamy, then the ethnicity of the head and spouse will always be the same. We examined only persons who are in non-group quarters households, and from this group of persons we selected all individuals who were listed as the head of household on the census questionnaire. There are 365,529 such households, and of these, 234,562 (64 percent) were male heads and 130,967 (36 percent) were female heads. We then selected all persons who indicated that they were a spouse, and we matched them (by way of household ID) with the head of their household. There were 147,895 "first" spouses, of whom 128,739 (87 percent) are women, and 19,156 (13 percent) are men. There were also 1,689 second wives, and 106 third or higher-order wives. This process produced the following datasets: (1) male heads of household with one or more wives (n=128,739), (2) female heads of household with a male spouse (n=19,156); (3) male heads of households with no spouse present (n=105,823), and (4) female heads with no spouse present (n=111,811). Note that for those heads with no spouse, we matched them with the first person listed in the household after the head, on the assumption that this person would be the most significant member of the household besides the head. Ethnicity is coded into the broad ethnic groups described by Ghana Statistical Service in the census codebook (see Table 1 below).

Preliminary Household-Level Analysis

The initial matrix of ethnicity of males as heads compared to the first wife listed in the household record is shown in Table 1. Overall, 30 percent of male heads have a spouse of a different ethnic group, although there is variability among the ethnic groups, with the Akan being least likely to marry outside the ethnic group, and members of the numerically smaller groups, like the Guan and Grusi, being most likely to marry outside the ethnic group. It is also interesting to see that in every ethnic group (with a slight exception among the Mande) an Akan woman is the most common inter-ethnic spouse.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As a preliminary look at the spatial distribution, we calculated the proportion of male-headed households that had an interethnic spouse by our vernacular neighborhoods. The

overall distribution is shown in Figure 1, where it can be seen that there is considerable variability within neighborhoods of Accra in terms of the percent of households in which spouses are of different ethnic origins.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

We then mapped the spatial distribution as shown in Figure 2, where it can clearly be seen that the spatial pattern is not random. We thus calculated the Getis Gi* statistic of local spatial clustering to obtain the results shown in Figure 3. The high clusters of interethnic marriage are found in higher status areas of the city, including the university area, the ministries area, and the airport residential area, which includes many of the foreign embassies in the city. The one area with a statistically significant clustering of low levels of interethnic households represents a part of the city that is a receiving area for new migrants to the city from other parts of the country, and it is likely that ethnic group members will seek out others of their own group during the process of adaptation to the city.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Next Steps

1. Repeat this overview for female heads and for male and female heads with no spouse
2. Create household diversity/assimilation index and run regression of index according to household characteristics as measured by the census—total and separately for each major ethnic group of household head.

Neighborhood-level analysis:

1. Summarize household diversity/assimilation index for each neighborhood—total and separately for each major ethnic group of household head
2. Calculate and analyze measures of spatial association of the ethnic diversity/assimilation index.

Multi-level analysis:

1. How much of the residual variance from the household-level regression models is accounted for by the neighborhood-level variability in assimilation?

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Table 1. Percentage of Male-Headed Households by Ethnic Group in Which the Spouse is From a Different Ethnic Group, Accra, Ghana, 2000

Ethnic group of male head	Ethnic group of first spouse										Total %	Total N
	Not a tribal group member	Akan	Ga-Dangme	Ewe	Guan	Gurma	Mole-Dagbani	Grusi	Mande	All other tribal groups		
Not a tribal group member	26.4	30.8	17.9	12.3	2.2	0.7	5.9	1.7	0.8	1.3	100.0	18448
Akan	2.0	83.5	7.3	4.0	1.0	0.1	1.3	0.4	0.1	0.2	100.0	47768
Ga-Dangme	1.9	14.3	75.8	5.1	0.7	0.1	1.3	0.4	0.1	0.2	100.0	29522
Ewe	2.2	12.0	6.8	75.6	1.0	0.1	1.3	0.5	0.2	0.2	100.0	16866
Guan	2.5	18.0	6.6	5.7	63.5	0.4	2.2	0.6	0.1	0.4	100.0	2916
Gurma	3.3	10.5	2.5	4.9	1.7	67.2	6.9	1.0	1.0	1.0	100.0	1024
Mole-Dagbani	2.9	8.1	4.6	3.1	0.8	0.5	77.2	2.2	0.3	0.5	100.0	5625
Grusi	2.7	19.3	13.5	10.4	2.0	0.8	10.8	38.7	0.7	1.1	100.0	3965
Mande	2.7	7.3	8.5	4.5	1.0	0.5	3.1	1.1	70.1	1.2	100.0	1199
All other tribal groups	1.9	6.3	3.2	2.6	1.2	0.1	2.0	1.1	0.6	81.2	100.0	1406
Total N	7215	53878	31483	19326	3303	1013	7265	2423	1167	1666		128739

Figure 1. Proportion of Households in Each Neighborhood in Which the Male Head is of a Different Ethnicity Than His Spouse
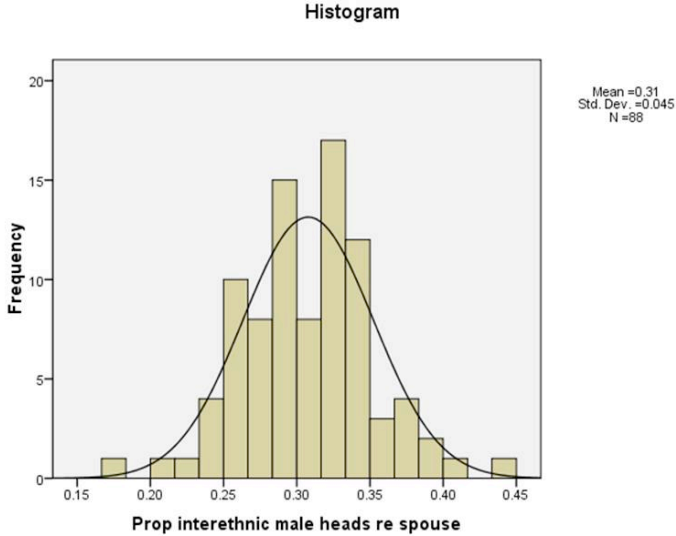
Figure 2. Proportion of Interethnic Households, Based on Male Heads of Household, by
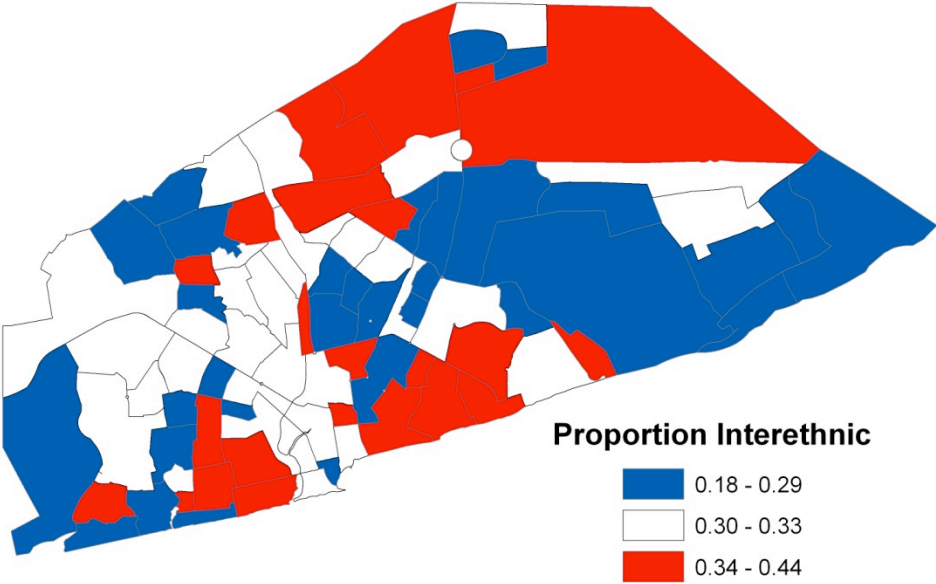Neighborhood, Accra, Ghana, 2000

Figure 3. Statistically Significant Spatial Clusters of High and Low Proportions of Interethnic Households, Accra, Ghana, 2000