

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS AIDAN W. SOUTHALL**

Professor Emeritus Aidan W. Southall passed away on 17 May 2009 at the age of 88. He is survived by his wife, Dr. Christine Obbo, and a son and a daughter.

He was an internationally known anthropologist with a deep and passionate commitment to Africa and African peoples. He was committed to the role of anthropology to study and observe the lives of the people. His *Alur Society* was a path-breaking work of historical ethnography in northern Uganda. He challenged the view that lineage segmentation was, as previously proposed by others, the source of conflict. Rather it produced political centralization, which he documented in exhausting historical and ethnographic evidence. This book placed him at the height of international fame, serving as a model for many.

He drew considerable attention for his argument on the concepts of tribe and ethnicity and its related charge that the Nuer and the Dinka were not to be essentialised as separate peoples but as a single people at different ecological points.

Decades before anthropologists began to place “their society/people” in broader context and also examine culture and society in a historical context, Southall’s interests were on how African societies have been and are changing. This led him to the development of “Urban Anthropology” – another major contribution. He held a famed Wenner Gren conference at Burg Wartenstein with luminaries in the field. His urban anthropology put anthropology in dialogue with scholars in other disciplines, rather than being specialists of “small scale societies,” erroneously conceptualized as hermetically sealed. His book *The City in Time and Space* is another path-breaking work, with enormously ambitious comparisons of the development of urbanization in various parts of the world. *Townsmen in the Making*, co-authored with Peter Gutkind, is a theoretically incisive ethnography of Kampala, Uganda. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he collaborated with Michael Schatzberg of the Department of Political Science in compiling a bibliography on the small urban centers of rural Africa.

In his work on urban anthropology, Southall remained convinced of the Marxist approach, unlike many one-time Marxists. His theoretical approach was to analyze the development of the cities as they move through different modes of production.

He had a formidable command of the Alur language and other Nilotic languages, as well as Bantu languages, such as Luganda and Swahili, and, of course, French. His abiding passion for fieldwork and ethnography, however, was underscored by his interest in comparative method and social theories.

He was exceptional in his commitment to Africa. His rage over what Western colonialism did to the African peoples surfaced every now and then. When most non-African scholars left their “field” to take up positions in the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere, he went to Makerere in 1945 and stayed until 1964, spending close to 20 years in Uganda. His teaching positions included Makerere University, Syracuse University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in addition to numerous visiting positions, including the University of Chicago and the University of California, Los Angeles. He received numerous awards including a John Simon Guggenheim fellowship.

In addition to *Alur Society* (1956, republished in 2004 by Lit Verlag) and *The City in Time and Space* (1998), he published *Lineage Formation among the Luo* (1952), and *Townsmen in the Making: Kampala and its Suburbs* (1957). He edited *Social Change in Modern Africa* (1961), *Urban Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies of Urbanization* (1973), *Bibliography of Small Urban Centers in Rural Development in Africa* (1979, compiled by Michael G. Schatzberg), *Small Urban Centers in Rural Development in Africa* (1979), and co-edited *City and Society: Studies in Urban Ethnicity, Life-Style, and Class* (1985). In addition to these books, he published numerous articles in prominent journals, including *Man*, *American Anthropologist*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *African Studies Review*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, and in various volumes edited by prominent anthropologists.

He was passionate in his pursuit of anthropology and never succumbed to the malaise of an incessant pursuit of external validation of his worth. Nor did he seek his own personal gains, but to further his convictions, including his strong support of “native anthropologists.” He was an intellectual giant who always listened to others, and seriously. His short remarks, accompanied by his characteristic smile, belied his ability for keen observation of human behavior, not only in the field but when he was among his colleagues. He was a graceful and conscientious correspondent, leaving a sizable number of letters with his colleagues.

Dr. Obbo designed an exquisite memorial service, held on 19 May 2009, covering him with various African cloths, a white Ethiopian cloth embroidered with Ethiopian crosses over his coffin. It included a performance by a prominent British soloist.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE  
Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney