

Comment on the Reply

LEONARD BLOOM +

Pearce's misconceived 'reply' is intellectually dishonest, totally without understanding of the position of social scientists in Africa (and elsewhere), and inadequate, impressionistic and unsubstantiated. It's intellectually dishonest because I am accused of faults that reside in Pearce's mind and not in my article. It is inadequate because it slides into mystifying, populist fallacies that are irrelevant to my paper, and do nothing to suggest positively how the social sciences might better serve Africa. Its impressionistic, nihilistic tone and unsubstantiated, wild accusations will be read with skepticism by her social scientist colleagues.

Pearce's critique of my paper begins by misrepresenting the theme of my paper. It wastes time with a turgid section that rubbishes the social sciences, and it ends with a misty ethical-political section. This last is particularly odd, because Pearce seems to base much of her critique upon my using ethical-political arguments. The paper is disappointing because it is so busy with scholastic choplogic that the opportunity to add to the discussion of an urgent problem is ignored. The paper is barren because it has not one item of observation or research, and yet she accuses me of not writing a 'descriptive sociology'.

Pearce's paper is largely constructed around her opinions of the methodology of the social sciences. Not everyone will agree with her conservative and somewhat old-fashioned views. There is, repeatedly, the explicit criticism that I make normative claims, yet Pearce replies with *her* covert normative judgments, which appear to be little more than a sentimental anti-intellectualist position that social scientists must avoid 'pretensions' and should remember that they are human beings too. Whoever has denied this platitude?

Pearce claims that I give reasons to those hostile to the social sciences 'for intensifying their hostility'. Her fiery hostility to social sciences is hardly likely to moderate the hostility of government. Would she prefer that we fall over backwards to placate governments, and abandon the attempt to combine social commitment and methodological detachment? Has she never heard about the fate of the unhostile and conforming social scientists in Nazi Germany? With more political and philosophical sensitivity Pearce could have usefully supplemented my paper with the fruits of her experience - if she has had any experience in tackling the problems that I identify. She might, too, have tried to fill the descriptive gaps about which she complains. If, however, she seeks sociological description she might glance at Bloom and Otong (1987).

Essentially Pearce comments on a paper that exists in her head. I did not 'prepare us for a descriptive sociology of the social sciences in Africa' because I didn't intend to. If Pearce wants such a sociology, she is free to write one. I was concerned about a worrying problem in Africa - a problem with which many social scientists are troubled. Pearce, a fellow in a university with a social science faculty, shows a lack of sensitivity to those of her colleagues who strive to employ their skills, experience and commitment to the social, administrative and political problems of Zimbabwe. They would rightfully resent her impetuous attempt 'to lay bare the pretensions of social scientists'.

Pearce's opaque style does not help the reader with 'the problem of intelligibility'. What precisely is meant by the ugly sentence that there is a "tendency within social science writing to inflate complexity of ideas with obscurity of expression and to perceive in the latter evidence of the former"? Does Pearce mean that there are *some* social scientists who *sometimes* use jargon, and that jargon *may* be confusing? But what is judged by Pearce to be jargon may be judged by a social scientist using it as a concise, time-saving technical term. In itself this, and similar remarks by Pearce, betray her prejudices about social sciences and add nothing to the debate. More serious are some tendentious and sweeping generalisations, quite unfounded, that a moment's thought should have edited out, that reveal her hostility to the social sciences.

Three examples: Pearce claims that I think that 'social scientists are entitled to play social critic because of a superior understanding of social problems'. The emotive use of 'entitled' and 'play', to suggest that social scientists are frivolously indulging in some mysterious game, is a breach of one of the 'laws of thought' which so trouble Pearce. She has forgotten about the inadmissibility of arguments *ad hominem*!

There is also one total misrepresentation, Pearce writes of 'Bloom's faith in the success of statistical analysis'. This is not a matter for faith or lack of faith. We are not debating the existence of fairies. With one breath, however, I am assailed for ignoring evidence, ie statistical data among other sources. With another breath I'm assailed for my 'faith' in them!

It is difficult to take seriously a writer who cannot understand that the stresses and problems of a post-colonial society can cause individuals and groups to experience alienation; who cannot understand that writing of the Third World as a hospice is a dramatic image. If the Third World is no more than a hospice, then it is perceived as a world that is dying. A dying world is a world that we need not strive too vigorously to restore to health. Has Pearce never heard of, or even used, metaphors? It is neither 'trivial' nor 'completely illegitimate' to mention a view, not rare in the west, that Africa can be written off - a terminal patient in a hospice.

Pearce does 'not wish to deny the failures of Africa', but she seems not to understand that 'Bloom's explanation of the cause of Africa's woes' does not exclude the study of the political, economic, historical and social environment: a socio-cultural study does not, however, exclude the study of psychological processes, even psychopathology. Whatever Pearce might think, Africans are people too - including those in positions of power. It is entirely legitimate

to explore the irrational aspects of African, as of any, people in power. This view is not racist. It is a legitimate part of the complex study of psychology and social structure.

Where could we go from here? Pearce's paper is negative. It is admitted that the 'challenge...seeks less to present new empirical evidence...than to demonstrate the weaknesses' of a social science approach. Pearce attacks positivism, thus strengthening the impression that she is less concerned with studying social problems than in pontificating about them. Had Pearce shown a stronger interest in the difficulties of Africa she might, perhaps, have suggested some possible areas of research or better methods of enquiry. We are left with nothing.

May I tentatively suggest that there are some broad directions in which research might proceed? It would be useful to have more case studies of political socialisation, of 'traditional' vs 'non-traditional' attitudes towards authority, and the social psychology of moderating authority, and of the personality and other characteristics of those who seek and those who secure power. I hope that Pearce's unsatisfying paper does not discourage her social scientist colleagues from pursuing further some of the issues that I raise.

Reference

- Bloom L. and Ottong J G (1987) **Changing Africa: An Introduction to Sociology**, Macmillan, London.