Social Science in Africa: Problems and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the delicate relationship of social science in Africa to the political, social and administrative context. It is argued, in contradition to the defeatist views of, for example, Mehryar (1984), that social scientists do both their profession and their societies a disservice if they surrender the study of social problems to politicians and administrators.

Social science and social policy

Few, if any, African societies have escaped traumatic economic, political, social and technological changes since Independence. As a result, values and practices, organisations and institutions that once suited a community's needs, now collide with innovations, often with unpredictable and socially disruptive consequences (Bloom and Amatu, 1983; Uchendu, 1977). These interactions may be initiated from within Africa or introduced from outside, but, in either case, their consequences, both short-term and long, are hard to predict and even more difficult to moderate.

Social policies are designed in an ideal world to deal with the consequences of change. Marshall *et al* (1978) have analysed the two fundamental questions which guide them, and although they wrote about the more industrialised urbanised societies, where the social sciences have a longer history of cooperation with government, their questions apply equally to Africa. (1) What are the concealed and the open theories of social justice that are used by government to justify their policies? (2) What does government know, or believe, to be acceptable to the communities or groups that will be affected by these policies?

In Africa, even in formal constitutions there are scanty signs that governments recognise the need to articulate either question. On the contrary, despite the widely differing social and political systems in Africa, a few

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assumptions about the nature of society — and hence of justice — seem common to governments:

1. a strong tendency to authoritarian and hierarchical government, with which is associated a suspicion of participatory democracy;
2. a conflict between lip-service to the idea of national identity and the lively persistence of 'ethnic', linguistic or smaller regional groups;
3. the pervasive influence of the extended family and the 'ethnic' group as the dynamic and cohesive force behind wider economic, political and social organisations. The growth of a small wealthy class has barely touched this influence. Rather it tends to reinforce it;
4. there is male domination or even male monopoly of power and influence in many sectors of society. In particular, there is little or no effective sharing of political power by men with women. Father or elder brother rules! There is not yet even one female head of state in Africa, and only in Mozambique, Angola and among South African Africans have women been encouraged to take a significant part in political activity, despite their part in the struggle for Independence as, for example, in Ghana.

What governments know or believe to be acceptable to the citizens equally depends upon the assumptions held by governments about the mechanisms of consultation. Mechanisms that were practical and acceptable to nations of villagers are no longer adequate. There are few leaders who, like Nyerere, Gowon and the young Nkrumah, have understood the necessity to maintain an emotional rapport with all the communities within the society. Now, even their efforts would be inadequate or inappropriate as new constituencies have grown up. Many new economic, political and social interests have been taken up by new groups, old power groups based upon older interests have lost influence. No one can predict the future clearly, except that many observers note that power is increasingly urban-based.

Rein (1976) considers three further issues.

(1) How, if at all, do the administrators of policy take into account the need to harmonise individual needs, wants and goals with social goals? Do administrators take seriously such harmonisation, or do they brush it aside with arguments about 'common good' being paramount? For example, when the Nigerian government was planning the new capital, Abuja, there was some consultation with the local people who were going to be dispossessed about their wishes and needs for a new settlement. But there was no question about the decision to build the new capital, although many Nigerians were sceptical of its necessity and resentful of the huge expenditure. It may be asked if social scientists are concerned about the fundamental *ethical* problem or if, and how, such harmonisation of individual and social needs may be maximised. In Africa the social sciences have tended to shun such questions.

(2) Rein asks if social scientists should challenge the administrators or

government that employ them.

(3) He further asks if they should be 'moral critics', moving beyond the conventional limits of 'pure' and 'applied' research to question the very foundations of the ethical soundness of the policies whose consequences they study empirically.

The social sciences have nowhere in the world had no struggle in asserting their independence. In Africa, as elsewhere, social science has never been encouraged to explore the fundamental conflicts of their societies. Vested interests, inside government and the most powerful economic groups, do not care to have their positions challenged, even by the indirect challenge of showing the consequences for the wider society of their limited perspective. In Africa there is an additional taboo that arises from the shame of admitting that in post-Independent countries the economic and political inequalities, the maladministration and political violence (and many social problems), are less and less plausibly blamed on the inadequacies or even mischief of colonial administrations. In 1987 the governments of 1987 are responsible for 1987's problems! It grows less and less acceptable to youth to blame yesterday's white governors when today's brown ones are often manifestly no better.

Rein argues that the central question of social policy is to investigate, as fully as techniques permit, the needs, wants and goals influenced by policy decisions. A politically sensitive issue follows. Although it is technically possible to monitor the effects of policies in which governments are unused to scrutiny and challenge, even detached professional monitoring is unwelcome. Monitoring challenges the very root of authority: that government, father, knows best what the people, the children need, want and *ought* to want. The inexperience and instability of many governments, the weakness of administrations, often with too few experienced and trained professionals to run them, are understandably sensitive to scrutiny and evaluation. Barren and irrelevant policies abound because of the severity of Africa's economic, social and political problems, with which no existing administration or infrastructure is strong enough to cope. The record of African governments in accepting the *bona fides* of critics, even those of unexceptionable moderation, has been unworthy of the continent's need for criticism. Few countries have never closed down educational institutions, arrested academics and students, nor shackled the media. Alas, social scientists are not famous for their boldness!

Rein argued that social scientists and policy makers should 'try to question the orthodox and established pattern, trying to discover where it is vulnerable and what alternative approaches are required'. Commendable advice. But unless the educational and political systems and the mass media are free and encouraged to criticise society, there will be little or no incentive for debate to take place. Too often every questioning, especially by younger people, is perceived as a potential rebellion, and education is controlled by starving it of

funds and of the stimulation of contact with the wider world outside Africa.

The deeper motives of both the orthodox and the *soi-disant* radicals are equally suspect by the truly independent critic. Those who zealously criticise, reject or seek to destroy the orthodox, are often tainted by their own dogmatism. If they obtain power they usually become inflexibly determined to introduce and maintain a new orthodoxy. They proceed to establish on their new dogma a new rigid social structure, which will stimulate opposition and, in its turn, be torn down and rebuilt. This unstable flight from one socio-political system to another is to search for the one magical formula to cure all evils.

Rein assigns the role of moral critic to the social scientists, but they, like the policy makers, have their individual and collective values, beliefs and attitudes. These are rooted in both individual experience and in class and other social loyalties and affiliations. Perplexing questions arise about the complex of individual and social constraints, inducements, fears and fantasies that influence the political and ethical views upon which policy is ultimately based. Many a decision is permeated by the irrationalities of the policy makers' indifference, or even hate, towards group or community. In recent years the irrationalities of chauvinism in its varied forms has done much to weaken the rational elements in decision making, and nervous intolerance of the more educated has weakened many once lively academic communities, leaving no *practical* alternative to criticism from outside Africa, with all its possibilities for wilful or innocent misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Tizard (1976) has warned of another significant distortion of thinking about policy: the conviction that 'only long-term goals are important'. This discourages 'short-term goals and indications of immediate well-being. Only when we abandon notions about the supposed or hoped for long-term prophylactic values, Head Starts and permanent cures, will we begin to examine the characteristics of the environment that contribute to immediate happiness'. By rejecting contemporary problems with the argument that they are local, trivial or temporary, and that they can only be solved when long-term, more radical policies are carried out, government ineptness and lack of sensitivity can be excused. The infallible wisdom and authority of the father can be maintained. The discontented children can be hushed.

Societies, like individuals, can be characterised as either over-optimistic or euphoric, or over-pessimistic and defeated. The former are frenetically confident of their ability to improve everything. An ideological position, a new constitution, a charismatic leader, yet another 'War against Indiscipline' will show the route to a better world. Alas, although there have been many roads to Utopia, none has yet led a society anywhere near to that elusive destination. The pessimistic society is equally impractical. It is distinguished by the belief that society cannot be changed by human intervention. One must await the intervention of a religious or political God, or one must patiently expect a

religious or a secular millenium. Unwillingness even to attempt realistic change is often associated with an obdurate determination to maintain the *status quo*, and hunger, ignorance, disease and political and social insecurity continue.

In these circumstances, social scientists (if they are at all tolerated), are in danger of becoming driven by crisis and compelled by panicky governments to find speedy solutions to insoluble emergencies. They are being blamed for their ineffectiveness when the problems are found to be more difficult to understand than governments hoped, and therefore more intractable.

Social policy and human needs

In Africa we have largely wasted the opportunity to study systematically the human consequences of economic, political and social change. The opportunity to consider the consequences of ecological change, and to arrest its devastating effects before it is too late, has been almost totally ignored. Social scientists have too often been conscripted into the wasteful role of proposing *ad hoc* justifications for *ad hoc* policies, cobbling ways to save them from failure.

`But must the social sciences be so wasted? Even sceptics such as Mehryar (1984) and Moghaddam and Taylor (1986) grant a limited — if highly politicised — role to the social sciences.

Mehryar's bitter and tendentious paper argues that psychology (and, no doubt, other social sciences) has two functions: 'by acknowledging the real cause of . . . poverty and backwardness' and by 'reminding (people) of the need for political struggle'. He continues by rejecting the 'Western' tradition that individuals are responsible for their actions, and observes that social scientists are 'often part of the machinery of control'. Moghaddam and Taylor plead for a psychology that rejects colonial attitudes towards 'Third World' societies.

Mehryar's paper is as value-laden as the views that he rejects, and proposes nothing more practical than seeking 'a target for change . . . in the hearts of the ruling elite'. Moghaddam and Taylor propose that social sciences should be 'appropriate'. Appropriateness is defined by six criteria, ie social sciences should be applied to the questions of "1.self-reliance, 2.needs responsiveness, 3.cultural compatibility, 4.institutional feasibility, 5.economic suitability, and 6.political practicality". The proposal of these writers is compatible with my view that an essential task of the social sciences is to remind governments and administrators of basic human needs and wants, and of the many ways that they can be harmed.

One approach to the question, 'What are basic human needs?' is to consider the domain of social psychology. Moscovici (1984) and his collaborators divide the field into three broad divisions:

(1) the nature, formation and change of attitudes. This includes the central topics of conformity and obedience, innovation and the influence of minorities, the changing of attitudes, and continuity and change in behaviour and experience;

(2) the interactions between members of groups and between groups. How are group decisions made? How are novel, creative decisions made?

(3) thought and social life, possibly the most crucial section, includes such essential questions as: how do we think in everyday life, how are events explained, to what causes are events attributed? What is the community's collective view of reality? How does it interpret such social phenomena as health and illness, childhood, occupations? How are classes of people perceived? How are language, thought and communication related?

Moscovici's domain is largely cognitive and offers an over-intellectualised view of human needs and activities. It omits another aspect of human needs, made familiar by psychoanalysis. The quality of relationships between males and females, members of different generations and within generations, of which the relationships of love, sex and aggression are fundamental, cannot be ignored.

Looking further at Moghaddam and Taylor's criteria: 'self-reliance' refers to a country's confidence in using its own resources — not 'isolationism' but 'a genuine exchange between equals' outside that society. A major psychological and sociological problem is that of shifting attitudes away from narrow, sectional, chauvinistic loyalties towards an orientation that embraces wider circles of meaningful contact, both within Africa and beyond it. Another criterion depending upon a changing psychology is 'political practicability': 'how feasible is it to implement (policy) given the political limitations existing'. The psychological and social factors that inhibit or that encourage continuity or change are modified by policies, whether or not they are taken into account. The people resist changes or accept them; they weave them into the fabric of society or that fabric is, itself, rewoven. A major problem in Africa has been the almost total indifference by government and administrators to the *socio-psychological* consequences, and hence feasibility of policies.

Social scientists could be well-placed to evaluate the extent and manner of the harm and the welfare that programmes might bring about to those directly and indirectly affected by them. The administrators and government themselves may pay the price of creating economic, political and social instability for their policies: it is arguable that sensitivity to what the people need and want might have avoided more than one deposed head of state. In moving boldly beyond their classical positivistic, hypothesis-testing and fact-finding roles, social scientists would cease responding to the questions: 'Professional independence good or bad'. They would be responding to a

more difficult question: 'Professional independence — what is the price for selling it to governments by tacitly refraining from looking into what policies mean to the people, how they feel about them and how they might respond to the damage done by them'. Berry and Lonner (1975) include papers that discuss social problems as they were perceived both by administrators and by 'those administered'.

But asking 'the administered' challenges the nervous arrogance of those 'who know best' and who readily assume the mantle of authoritarian infallibility in societies where most people are politically ill-educated in the values, attitudes and practices of participatory democracy. Moreover to put such a challenge, however tactfully presented, raises the disturbing question of the social psychology of political failure in Africa. Broadly, the failure is closely related to the authoritarian conservatism of many social institutions and groups, so that criticising authority is emotionally equivalent to criticising the elders or the father, and by extension, is equivalent to opposing the mores of the family. The political socialisation within the family is rarely one that encourges participatory democracy, including both sexes and all age grades. An imposed loyalty to the father and the group exposes the group to considerable emotional distress and confusion if the father fails. If sibling rivalry becomes uncontrollable, the most bitter of strife results.

In evaluating the effectiveness of policy it is not too difficult to devise criteria that are rational in the administrators' eyes. It is far more difficult to devise criteria that are psychologically deeper. 'Effective' must lead to the continuation: 'and desirable for whom? with what positive and negative consequences for the people affected? with what consequences for social psychological cohesion, stability and happiness?'

How shall the professions be scrutinised?

It is almost banal to note that the applied social sciences are as exposed to bias and professional opportunism as are most other human activities. Yet the acceptance of a collective self-scrutiny by the profession is far from widely accepted. For example, two recent discussions of applied social sciences, Argyle (1980) and Cherns (1979), fail even to mention the problems of professional scrutiny.

Scrutiny is of two kinds. Firstly, it may refer to the status of a profession in a society at a given time. Secondly, it may refer to the biases and opportunism of a profession in relation to its institutional masters. At its most blatant, research and its implications for policy may be little more than sophisticated justifications of the political *status quo* and current ideology, either because a profession tacitly accepts its priviledged position in society, or because it is more or less openly playing the tune called for by its masters.

In Africa, even more than in more industrialised-urbanised continents, there are too few social scientists who are committed to studying applied

problems. Yet the problems proliferate, and social scientists may be tempted to go beyond their narrower competences. They are thus exposed to the impatient disenchantment of their society, or rejected by it when it is found that they may be little more wise than the administrators. The professions may then attempt to assuage a collective sense of guilt by justifying its methods and principles, pleading for more resources for better research. But if they are given more resources, governmental control and scrutiny will be more intense, independence more difficult to achieve, and the professions become even more weak and ineffective. Within the professions strain and conflict grows: some maintain detachment as the ideal, others advocate open political commitment to the *status quo*. So either the profession may claim over-energetically that it has solutions to society's ills, or it grows so modest about its competences that it leads government to doubt that it is competent to advise anything.

Action-research competes for resources with research into fundamental problems, and to the extent that the former are favoured and defined by governments, the social sciences become increasingly unsuited to explore the broader implications of research or to generate debate about the nature and functions of their discipline. Moghaddam and Taylor (1986) refer to the 'question of how feasible it is to implement a given type of (social science) . . . given the political limitations existing in a country'. Feasibility is likely to be differently perceived by government and by social scientists. One of the most delicate tasks of the latter may be to educate government to be more sensitive to what it is possible for the social scientist to do, both *qua* detached scientist and committed citizen.

Thus Africa's many compelling and urgent social problems press social scientists and governments to waive fundamental research. Instead, social scientists are driven to seize any opportunities to fund applied research, hoping that more basic or theoretical research and debate may become possible when times are more propitious. There is no certainty that this will occur. Meanwhile, the laity might become more familiar with the scope and limitations of social science research. But even this will not occur unless social scientists are more active in entering into dialogue with administration. The professional social scientists in Africa have been less than active in using the prestige and influence of regional and international bodies to educate their governments. Instead, too often, an opening address by a Minister is followed by governmental silence or no lessening of chauvinism and ideological suspicion.

Mace (1973), discussing psychology, held the view that psychologists 'unlike most other scientists, cannot maintain even professionally, a state of complete political neutrality'. They cannot, therefore, ignore the latent political implications of their work. This applies to all social scientists. Consider, for example, seven of the major social problems affecting Africa:

(1) the influence on traditional values, beliefs, ideologies, information and skills of values, etc originating from outside Africa;

(1) the creation of wider, national, regional and Pan African loyalties and identifications out of communities with intense, local loyalties;

(3) communication in societies that are multi-lingual, multi-cultural and composed of few educated and many uneducated people;

(4) migration from rural to urban areas, resulting in grave distortions of traditional economic, social and political organisations;

(5) the creation of academic, vocational and professional education, suited to a rapidly changing Africa;

(6) the selection and training of workers in new occupations, trades and industries, including the largely neglected and inappropriate skilled women;

(7) the development of workable economic, social and political organisations and institutions.

These seven issues encompass innumerable theoretical and empirical questions that have barely been touched. It is, however, difficult to imagine a satisfactory report on any aspect of any one issue without its implied favoured position from which policies might be drawn. Yet there are few indications of an emerging, indigenous social science in Africa the concerns and questions of which differ significantly from the present ones, rooted in Western assumptions and values.

Bruckner (1983), however, in his disturbing book **Le sanglot de I'homme blanc: Tiérs Monde, culpabilité, haine de sol,** warns against assuming that different cultural and social patterns are *lived* by different types of human beings. He warns: 'Take care: running through this contemporary term, 'Third World', is a symbolic conflict in issue: that of the psychological space that we reserve in the future for non-European people. To speak of the Third World as though it were a hospice, is to shrink the psychological horizons of our contemporaries. It disqualifies four billion human beings as a future generation'. It is sociologically and psychologically meaningful to contrast two major divisions of mankind: the Western, industrialised and rich, and the Third World, rural and poor. It is sociological and psychological nonsense to treat these divisions as immutable. It is methodological nonsense if the social sciences in Africa fail to borrow from the universal body of social science methods, principles and findings whatever may be relevant to understanding the universal problems of change and conflict.

Africa's unique problems?

The previous reflections apply to both the more and the less technologically advanced societies, and the problems of non-African professional social scientists are shared by their African brethren. But there are problems that are more acute in Africa — and, perhaps, in other parts of the Third World.

Probably the gravest problem experienced by social scientists in Africa is the ignorance and suspicion of both administrators and the general public about the role and function of the social sciences and of their responsibility towards society. Professional detachment is often misinterpreted as implying indifference to social problems. Social scientists are seen as civil servants, and loyalty rather than 'to speak truth to power' (Wildavsky, 1979) is their principle duty. Caplan *et al* (1975) studied how social science knowledge was used in the USA, and found that senior executives ranked the contributions of social sciences in the following descending order of importance: (1) sensitizing policy-makers to social needs (2) evaluation of ongoing programs (3) structuring alternative policies (4) implementing programmes (5) justifying policy decisions and (6) providing a basis for choosing among policy alternatives. The effectiveness of all of these contributions depends upon **power's** readiness to listen to truth and to act upon it. It also depends upon **truth's** capacity to avoid speaking too softly, too obscurely and too hesitantly.

But professional independence and outspokenness is practicable only where the political and social structures and ideologies permit them. Or, at the least, do not hinder the growth of organisations and discussion of ideologies that challenge the status quo. In Africa, socio-political structures, both traditional and modern, do not readily accommodate the more-or-less encapsulated, self-regulating professions that Western societies are accustomed to. Such independent organisations are essential if development is to succeed. They are, however, emotionally intolerable in societies where social and political life are intimately and closely regulated and often subordinate to the demands of family, kin and region. Deviant organisations, like deviant individuals, are only with difficulty tolerated until roles are evolved for them. Professionals thus have conflicting emotional loyalties, for they are too tied into the family, kinship group, 'ethnic' or even linguistic group. They, too, are pressured to use their skills and influence to benefit those individuals and groups to whom they have a social obligation beyond their professional. It seems that professional independence will remain vulnerable until societies develop in which social mobility is common.

However, even if the professions try to distance themselves from control by administration, they are then often accused of creating a professional mystique and an unjustifiable privileged position.

The professions are exposed to both accusations in both socialist and capitalistic countries. In capitalist countries, the professions may be unable to avoid being associated with elitism within an inegalitarian and hierarchical social system. Similarly, in socialist countries there are established elites with which the professions may be driven to associate themselves to extend their political influence and, thus, their independence.

Problems of detachment

Two policies have commonly been adapted to escape the accusations of elitism and to extend independence from political influence:
1. the standards of entry to the professions are modified to encourage more and a wider range of entrants;
2. the profession may intentionally seek to be involved in debates on policy and in decision-making.

In Africa, the medical profession has struggled to avoid diluting the standards of entry, though it is doubtful if it has anywhere succeeded as far as it would wish. Law, on the other hand, has almost traditionally become closely linked with the political and administrative establishment, often time-serving the political extremes of 'Left' and 'Right'.

The professions may become conservative pressure groups of the 'Left' or the 'Right', and their declarations of professional neutrality are no more than rationalisations, concealing their partisanship for an ideological position or their allegiance with a power-elite (Horowitz, 1965). Thus a close attachment to the government of the moment and a sensitivity to ideological whims, drives the social scientist further and further from being able to offer expert and independent advice. The politically unacceptable truth will not be told. The harmful consequences of policies will be concealed.

The predicament of the social sciences is, therefore, threefold: How can a balance be made between (1) a professional contribution to understanding and solving social problems, (2) professional integrity and a high standard of expertise and (3) the open accessibility of the skills and findings of the social sciences to all those concerned with them — both policy makers and those affected by those policies.

The balance between these three is unstable, but it may be less so if governments become more confident that detached, professional criticism does not necessarily conceal political ill-will or latent opposition.

Bitensky (1976) has analysed pessimistically the frequent failure of social scientists to apply their skills, arguing that the fundamental reason is that they are so nervous of political risks that they retreat into 'a state of aimless methodologism'. Cuff and Payne (1984) deal head-on with this nervousness. They assert boldly that there is no choice for social scientists who seek to do something about social problems. They cannot avoid operating 'as social reformers, as politicians, or as citizens'. But the political risks in Africa are great, not because of the power of government but because of its underlying weakness. There are double dangers for the social scientists: they have to put themselves at risk in the task of educating their masters and when they comment upon policy. Becker (1967) has warned social scientists that whatever they may do, or refrain from doing, a question that they must always pose to themselves is: 'Whose side are we on?' All social scientists favour some

groups and ideologies and disfavour others. They are more likely to gain and retain their independence by demonstrating their allegiance to a scientific approach to social problems, and if they refuse supinely to succumb to the pressures and constraints of government and administration. 'Whose side are we on?' In the long run it has to be the people who will still be in need of social sciences when the temporary government has gone. Social scientists have a duty to maintain, openly or covertly, the subversive and essentially political activity of providing sign-posts to the routes through the quicksands of political fears, bigotry and ideological euphoria.

Does the international recognition of a professional organisation protect its independence? Two conflicts can arise between the international professional network and national, political considerations.

Firstly, the internationally acceptable level of professional training and practice may be politically unacceptable: governments have insisted on the lowering of professional standards to raise the numbers of professionals. Professionals have, moreover, been forced to participate in ethically objectionable practices. Lawyers, for example, have drafted and administered unjust and repressive laws. Writers have lied persuasively for their governments. Social scientists have collaborated in the planning of mass-movements of population. Yet often social scientists have actively opposed tyranny, criticised governmental folly and inefficiency, and suggested notions of an alternative society. The last has not come from the direct and open collective decision of a profession, but from individual members or minority groups who are indirectly supported by the profession's collective — if sometimes tarnished — standards.

Secondly, professional associations have been tempted to seek political advantage by adopting ritualistic 'anti-expatriate', 'anti-white', 'anti-foreign' or 'ethnic' prejudices. Rational policies of recruitment, training, teaching and research are thus subordinated to the irrationalities of the current political ideology and prejudice.

However, the position of the social science associations within an international system, sharing international values and a sense of the commonality of human, social problems, may demonstrate that the problems of society are solved by neither supporting the *status quo* nor by encouraging the revolutionary itch to build society *de novo*.

Africa needs the social sciences

It is arguable that the less-industrialised societies, as in Africa, have an even greater need of independent social scientists than in the more 'developed' societies. In rapidly changing Africa there are desperately urgent economic, political and social problems, that governments cannot even begin to solve without adequate statistics and policy analysis.

Consider some of the major social and psychological problems. Rural

communities are becoming more urbanised and depopulated, while the growing urban communities face problems of a magnitude unknown since the urban revolution in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Societies with political organisations that evolved in small-scale and localised communities are compelled to invent, reject and invent again new forms of political and social organisation competent to deal with large-scale economic and social problems. Small, fragments of polity have to devise means to adapt to national and continent wide polities. The problems of 'ethnic' and linquistic, religious and ideological conflict have no more been solved in Africa than in Europe, and their consequences are no less tragic. The emergence of wider bases for identity have yet to be solved. The growing alienation of individuals from groups, that arises from the depersonalisation of changes in economic, political and social organisations, is destroying Africa's strong collective ethos. Associated with alienation is the growth of 'learned helplessness' (Seligman, 1975): the conviction that one's efforts to control one's life are in vain. Africa has had too few experiences of success arising from its own efforts, and has learned a depressing sense of failure by the constant over-emphasis of the power of the West. The learned helplessness has been caused, in part, by the failure of education to encourage the cognitive skills that are required for a changing economy and society, and has been exacerbated by the persistence of authority relationships that inhibit youth and females and those of lower status from growing independent, expressing divergent and unorthodox opinions, and enjoying the exhilaration of having open minds in open societies. Political and social indoctrination is both common and suffocating.

Governments cannot, of course, be blamed for these problems. They can, perhaps legitimately be criticised for failing to maximise the discovery, education, training, and employment of the widest range of skills and talents of their population: women and men alike, and of all 'ethnic', linguistic and religious groups that compose societies. The constant threat of crisis and administrative breakdown that haunts many African states is largely the result of the failure of governments to provide opportunities for knowledge and skills to be acquired and applied, even where they oppose the current wisdom. Jaques (1955), in a study of the unconscious psychological origins of social rigidity, has shown how 'effective social change is likely to require analysis of the common anxieties and unconscious collusions underlying the social defences determining fantasy social relationships'. In particular, it is emotionally less anxiety-provoking to search for collective scape-goats to blame for social problems, than to trust social scientists to consider the realities on which problems are based, unacceptable as these often are. Administration tends to be nervously obsessed with detailed rules and procedures, rigid and oppressive, disinclined for self-analysis and self-appraisal, much less does it call upon the social sciences to assist in those necessary and anxiety-provoking, yet ultimately liberating, tasks.

There are two fundamental socio-political problems where the international community of social scientists could assist governments, without the latter admitting failure. Firstly, to anticipate and monitor the social and psychological tensions and conflicts that accompany the change and growth of organisations, cultures and values. Conversely, successful change might be monitored and the lessons learned from it shared with other communities. Secondly, to develop new and more effective forms of social and political participation and new organisations, to encourage the evolution of communities away from authoritarian structures and values and to direct them towards a respect for the individual and for minority, unpopular groups — a respect that few countemporary states display much concern about.

Conclusion

Even if these contributions of social science are rejected by administrations, there remain educational functions for the social sciences. They can encourage administrations to accept the relevance of the human aspects of those technological and administrative techniques that are known to direct and facilitate economic, social and political change. The social sciences may provide leadership in educating people at all levels of authority to respect the value of a 'Fourth Estate' of social scientists, free from political pressures and advocating rational ways of making sense of society, and liberating Africa rationally from ignorance, disease, poverty and conflict.

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