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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is one in which Africa would obviously have to confront its social developmental problems or further exacerbate it. If Africa is to take the first option, then the social sciences, particularly Sociology and Anthropology, would have to go beyond their present level of engagement with social issues as well as the social developmental process. The practitioners have to bring such an informed commitment to their activities within the disciplines to ensure that these disciplines take a position that would enhance their relevance in the contemporary African social milieu. Relying on personal reflections and published literature, this paper sets a preliminary agenda for sociology and anthropology in the coming years in Africa.
1. INTRODUCTION

The status of sociologist or anthropologist in society always comes with the potential or promise of positively transforming peoples lives. Most sociologists therefore hold the view that it is always worthwhile to attempt social engineering projects aimed at improving peoples lives and shaping society; though these attempts may not always succeed, sociological and anthropological knowledge being yet imperfect (Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2004).

The twenty first century is appearing to be a period of rapid social changes and increasing social problems. This tasks more the potential of the sociologist/anthropologist for positive transformation of the lives of people and challenges keenly the promise of sociology and anthropology as social science. There is perhaps no other place in the world where this challenge to the sociology and anthropology disciplines has become more acute than in Africa. This is partly because Africa’s social problems are mainly social developmental in nature, and therefore relate to social organization and inequality.

It is therefore obvious that the future of Africa cannot be decided one way or the other without determining the role(s) that the two key social science disciplines of sociology and anthropology shall be playing in the transformations or absence of it that shall be at the basis of forging a future for Africa. This paper therefore elects to set a transformative agenda for African, nay Nigerian sociologists and anthropologists, even if on a preliminary basis, to take the practical challenge of deploying their specialized knowledge toward the improvement of people’s lives in Africa. In developing this transformative agenda, the paper addresses the following questions: What sort of roles should the
sociologist/anthropologist play in the 21st century in Africa? What are some of the impediments to playing these roles if any? How does the sociologist/anthropologist get across these impediments? What are the tools available for the sociologist/anthropologist to execute their role(s) in society in contemporary times?

2. THE ROLE OF THE SOCIOLOGIST AND ANTHROPOLOGIST IN AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The question of what role the sociologist or anthropologist should be playing in 21st century Africa is one that at once leads us to contemplate some fundamental questions such as:

- whether the social scientist's role is purely that of a critical actor engaged in critical analysis to expose and heighten understanding of the problems of society and of a particular situation? Or is the social scientist's role also to engage in the processes towards practical solutions to problems and engendering change? Is the social scientist a mere theorizer, actor, or an actor-theorizer? (Arukwe, 2005a).

In deed if sociologists and anthropologists should make use of the very important sociological imagination, they would make themselves more relevant in society and be in a position to play more transformative roles.

To realize this objective, [they] have perforce to produce models for engineering salient values in society. But in doing their job how do [they] go about it? Do they just theorize on what is going on in the social system or do they get into the field and practically get involved in struggle and watch social phenomena unfold themselves? If they get into the field to take part in decisive action do they adopt
an engineering model, accepting as a given the goals and policies of those in power (a la Gouldner, 1965)? Do they become instruments in the hands of the powerful, telling those in power how to do what those in authority want to do, and therefore servants of power (Baritz, 1960)? Or do they endeavor to independently determine what becomes the agenda for change or reform? (Arukwe, 2005a).

Perhaps one of the strongest indicators as to the role(s) sociologists and anthropologists should be playing in current times is the orientation of the founding fathers of these disciplines. Some of the founding fathers like Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber all became involved in the struggle to positively engineer or transform their social systems at some point. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Nigerian or African sociologists and anthropologists (Arukwe, 2005b).

It would appear that African, and Nigerian sociologists and anthropologists in particular have neither been able to make themselves more relevant in the socio-economic developmental process nor have they been able to rise above the primordial divides of ethnic and religious prejudice to present themselves as a collective force that shall have pertinent effect. Not having such a collective effect, sociologists and anthropologists in Nigeria have easily been picked by the different political regimes to play roles that Baritz (1960) would have described as being at the service of power. Such social scientists who are picked to become servants of power often become compromised at the same time as denying their academic departments and faculties of seasoned intellectual manpower (Arukwe, 2005b).

Nevertheless, the role of the sociologist and anthropologist in the present era in Africa is one that rather than being streamlined and pigeon-holed into some traditional role(s) is actually made boundless by the tremendous
potentials of sociology and anthropology for engendering transformative positive change and improving people’s lives in society. Understanding these potentials would unleash great energies from African sociologists and anthropologists toward positive social changes in the social institution where they hold sway. To exercise these energies would equally require a great deal of the sociological imagination. But even the sociological imagination could be impeded.

3. IMPEDIMENTS TO THE DESIRED ROLE(S) OF THE SOCIOLOGIST/ANTHROPOLOGIST IN AFRICA

There are impediments to the playing of the desired role(s) for sociologists and anthropologists in Africa in the 21st century. Some of them are briefly discussed hereunder.

3.1 SELF CONCEPT OF SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS AS AN IMPEDIMENT

Self concept, according to Lahey (2004:480) is “our subjective perception of who we are and what we are like”. Like any other set of scientists, the sociologists and anthropologists have a set of cognitions and feelings towards themselves. Their self concept therefore represents an organized and consistent pattern of perceptions.

A related structural concept is that of the ideal self. The ideal self is the self concept that most individuals would most like to possess. According to Rogers (1951), the ideal self is, “the person I wish I were”. The ideal self is contrasted with the self-“the person I think I am”. Experience has shown that a greater number of practicing sociologists and anthropologists, including many who have risen quite high in the professions did not only come into these disciplines by accident but in most instances are yet to fully understand what the courses are all
about. As a result, some of them bring certain timidity to their practice of sociology and anthropology as somewhat inferior to other university disciplines. They would not let their children read them as university courses, and, not surprisingly, they cannot bring on the required enthusiasm and commitment to the practice of these disciplines because of the incongruity between their ideal selves and their selves (see Rogers, 1951). This incongruity in self concept therefore poses a big impediment to sociologists and anthropologists realizing their potentials in Africa.

3.2 SHYNESS FROM ENGAGING IN PUBLIC/NATIONAL DEBATES

The incongruity in the self concept of sociologists and anthropologists also manifest in their notorious inability to openly take part in national debates, recognized as representing the constituencies that their academic disciplines represent. This ensures that other professional and academics from sometimes the most unlikely disciplines not only have more fun with our national debates but also make sure that they project their academic disciplines to levels that would indeed have benefited sociology and anthropology better.

3.3 NON-ADVENTURESOMENESS AND SATISFACTION WITH SUBSISTING THEORETICAL FORMULATIONS

African sociologists and anthropologists in contemporary times are not as adventuresome as their Western World counterparts in instituting sociological and anthropological paradigms with which to reliably appraise reality. This has tended to create the scene that could easily be exploited for intellectual imperialism of Africa by the West in terms of a dominance of the minds of Africa’s best sociologists and anthropologists with atimes Western-specific
theoretical formulations. Thus even when such theoretical formulations do not appear to apply directly to the African, and indeed Nigerian environment, Nigerian sociologists and anthropologists are known to be smugly satisfied with subsisting theoretical formulations from Western scholars.

3.4 NATURE OF TEACHING TRAINEE SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS RECEIVE IN CLASS

With low and incongruous self concept by sociologists and anthropologists in this part of the world, a certain peasant orientation and shyness from engaging in national debates, and satisfaction with subsisting theoretical formulations even when such do not apply directly to the Nigerian social environment, it becomes easy to guess the kind of training that trainee sociologists and anthropologists often receive in class. These necessarily detract from the quality of training future professionals in these disciplines should receive. It is common for instance to see research methodology classes where the students are scarcely familiar with data gathering techniques such as questionnaire, interview and observation let alone being asked to do class projects based on these. This absence of emphasis on the practicalness of these courses even when teaching the practical aspects of it contributes in creating confusion for the would-be sociologists and anthropologists as well as incongruous self concepts for them.

3.5 IMAGE PROBLEM OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

With a general lack of assertiveness permeating the attitudes of sociologists and anthropologists in Africa, it very easily translates to the image problem, which is highly uncalled for, but, which sociology and anthropology
have as social science disciplines in this part of the world. This detracts from the dignity expected of these disciplines if they are to play their true roles.

3.6 SATISFACTION WITH PLAYING THE ROLE OF SERVANTS OF POWER

Rather than become bold and seize the initiative to create leadership and direction as well as determine for society what the agenda for change should be, many sociologists and anthropologists accept the goals and policies of the political regimes in Africa as given and proceed to work for these regimes adopting a kind of engineering model (Gouldner, 1965). These sociologists become instruments in the hands of those in power, and are therefore the servants of power (Dariotis, 1962). But the potentials of sociologists and anthropologists make them very capable of playing much higher roles than these. And the non-recognition of this potential for higher roles in itself constitutes a major impediment toward sociology and anthropology playing their desirable roles in Africa in the 21st century.

3.7 ABSENCE OF A STRATEGIC PRACTICAL AND ASSERTIVE ATTITUDE TO SOCIAL ISSUES

It is still surprising that the centers for applied and advanced social science research, etc., in Nigeria for instance are not being run by sociologists and anthropologists. Other practitioners whose disciplines form just aspects of sociology and anthropology hold away in those places that the government tends to respect so much. This tends to further reinforce the peasant orientation of sociologists and anthropologists and their absence from some of those strategic centers from where they could practically influence social changes in the society.
4. TRANSCENDING THE IMPEDIMENTS

In order to transcend these impediments and ensure that sociologists play their desired roles in the socio-economic and political transformation of Africa that is so critically needed this century, sociologists and anthropologists need to ensure a number of things. In the first place, they must address the issue of the incongruous self-concept that sociologists and anthropologists have come to acquire with regard to their disciplines over the years. This is because their incongruous self-concept appears to be at the basis of most other impediments that they may experience towards playing their role(s).

If the ideal self and self of every sociologist and anthropologist in Africa is brought in harmony, it would form a firm basis for tackling the other identified impediments. This means that a firm handle would have been provided for dealing with the shy orientation, of the naïve training of trainees, the absence of African attempts to formulate theories that anticipate the African social milieu, the satisfaction with being servants of power, the image/dignity problem and the absence of strategic practical approach to social issues. If these are taken care of, then sociologists and anthropologists could then focus on the tools available for them to play their ‘role’ in contemporary Africa.
5. **KEY TOOLS FOR THE SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN EXECUTING THEIR ROLE**

5.1 **Sociological Imagination**

According to Mills (1997),

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that frame-work the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means, the personal meanness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles, and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

Since C. Wright Mills, Sociologist have come to regard the sociological imagination as very important if sociologists and indeed anthropologists are to control the risks found in contemporary societies as well as fulfill their promise, which is the potential for improving the lives of human beings.

5.2 **Methodological Sophistication**

As the disciplines of sociology and anthropology grow more complex, the imperative of methodological sophistication to enable them fulfill their promise become more apparent. Hence methodological sophistication and pluralism should be amongst the tools the sociologist/anthropologist requires to play his/her role. Thus, methodological triangulation, methodological...
complementarity are all strategies in the kit of the sociological/anthropological researcher.

5.3 Scienticism: Value Relevance, Freedom and Neutrality

To play their role properly, sociologists and anthropologists should still keep their practices as scientific as possible. Hence, though values are recognized as relevant in the part they play in the determination of research topics, sociologists and anthropologists should still strive after objectivity in the research process as much as possible. In the sense of Weber (1949), sociologists and anthropologists should make value neutrality and freedom their key tools in playing their role.

5.4 Sociological and Anthropological Theorizing

Though no amount of theory can hope to explain everything or account for the endless possibilities of data, yet if some tenable view of reality is to be achieved with sociology and anthropology, then practitioners in these disciplines cannot just afford not to keep theorizing. Therefore theorizing is considered a key tool available for the sociologist/anthropologist to execute his/her role in society. Unfortunately, African sociologists and anthropologists have not been showing up in this vital area. They are rather apparently content with adopting all sorts of social theoretical formulations from outside, including those that scarcely anticipate social reality in the African milieu.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Any realistic determination of the role of the sociologist/anthropologist of 21st century Africa would show that there are certain luxuries that the practitioners of these social science disciplines cannot afford. These include the indifference to or aloofness from the social developmental process that has unfortunately been associated with sociology and anthropology in Africa in the present time. Unlike Western European social scientists of 18th and 19th centuries the sociologists and anthropologists of 21st century Africa would appear to be abandoning their unwritten contract with their society. But if the orientation of the founders of these social science disciplines from 18th and 19th century Western Europe are anything to go by, then sociologist and anthropologists in Africa today should be not only actor-theorizers but should be able to determine the agenda for transformative social change in their environments. Thus their role (s) must not only be positive and transformative but it must essentially be social developmental. This agenda is based on the imperatives of the African situation in contemporary times.

However, having determined that some impediments, mainly of a socio- psychological nature, are mitigating against sociology’s and anthropology’s capabilities in Africa at the moment, this paper has done a little expose on these impediments. Some of these socio-psychological impediments approximate social problems in the sense of possessing an objective condition and a subjective definition (Feller & Myers, 1941a; 1941b). The paper has therefore established that a transcending of these impediments would serve as a beginning for sociology and anthropology to fulfill their logical agenda of social transformation in Nigeria particularly and Africa in general.

The key tools available for the sociologist and anthropologist to actualize this agenda have been identified as the sociological imagination, methodological sophistication, scientism, and sociological and anthropological theorizing. If these tools are appropriately applied, they would enable the sociologist /anthropologists remain proactive and maintain a pertinent relevance in contemporary Africa. Sociologists and anthropologists would therefore be in a position to engineer salient values in contemporary Africa with such versatility that would prove very rewarding for them in the needed social developmental adventure that they owe African society to embark on.
REFERENCES


