

## **The African State and the Social Sciences: In Search of an Ideology and Institution for Development**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper interrogates the state and the social sciences which are two crucial necessities in driving development. And Africa lacks the two. The African society is so chaotic that the state is fraught with crises, occasioned by factional struggle for power, while the social sciences are begging for relevance. Consequently, the crises of African development are partly due to the fact that the state and the social sciences are in serious crisis (the state) and are not relevant (the social sciences). Thus, there is an urgent need for a redefinition of state – society relations (politics) and a critical examination of the present field of the social sciences, (ideology) for meaning and relevance, in Africa.*

**Keywords:** African state, Social Sciences, Ideology, Institution, Development

### **Introduction**

In contemporary studies, especially those that focus on African development, while the state is emphasized, as an institution that is critical to development, little is said about the centrality of the social sciences in the development process.

Although third world countries inherited the social sciences as a popular field of study, and as one of the legacies of colonialism, the expected influence or impact of the social sciences on third world social formations leave little to appreciate when an evaluation of the societies is done. In other words, the social sciences, which embody the scientific study of man in relation to his environment, have not been able to positively impact the lives of majority of the African people. Thus, the human condition is at very low ebb in Africa and in terms of human emancipation, Africans are today more tied to the western capitalist shackles than say 50 years ago.

In view of the foregoing, what then are the problems with the African state that account for the pitiable conditions of the African continent in view of the extensive nature of the social sciences as a field of study? It is against this background that this paper attempts to look at the African state, its understanding of the social sciences or the deployment of the social sciences for national development.

Consequently, the paper sets out to describe and explain the state but specifically the African state and the domain of the social sciences. After that, the paper explains the role of the state in national development. Finally, the paper ends by critically looking at the nature of the African state and the social sciences.

### ***The State and the Social Sciences***

History is replete with ideas about the state and as history has been interpreted in different ways so the ideas about the state had developed into diverse versions.

However, the movement of thoughts on the concept of state is from the Natural, Divine, Social Contract and Force theories.

However, for this occasion, we shall adopt the force theory of the state in our analysis of the state. And that is because the force theory of state does not assume that the state is the natural expression of the whole of an evolving society, or as a community chosen by God, or as an organized community based on contract but as the means by which a small number of people impose their will on a reluctant majority. With the force theory, the state ceases to be co-extensive with society and becomes more closely identified with what is called the dominant class. There are two dimensions to the force theory. One dimension holds that force has to be applied to maintain stability, while the other dimension holds that society is a battlefield between social classes and force is used by a dominant social class to hold other classes to submission (Goodwin, 1982)

What the force theory emphasizes is that, the state was not built on any contract, as claimed by the social contract theory, neither can it be an organic unity but it is built on force and usurpation because society is an imbroglio of class conflict of which the state's very existence is symptomatic (Goodwin, 1982).

Consequently, when the state is cohesive it means that the dominant class is united in its pursuit of implementing a class project and influencing the overall ideological development of the larger society. Thus, important decisions and public policy formulation, regarding development objectives are carried out by the state on behalf of the dominant class.

The state is therefore a complex of intuitions which includes the government, the bureaucracy and public corporation (Knuttila and Kubik, 2000), performing two critical functions viz accumulation and legitimation.

The contributions of the social sciences to national development cannot be over-emphasized. Just as the state conscious deployment and application of the knowledge of the social sciences is a *sin-qua-non* for societal progress. And this is precisely because the social sciences are concerned with the scientific study of man as a member of human society and seek to understand him not only as an individual member of a society but also in his interaction and relationship with the members of other groups (<http://socyberty.com>). But, what do social sciences generally mean?

The social science is a broad field of study concerning man and society. The field encompasses a wide range of fields or disciplines cutting across the social sciences and humanities. It is a set of disciplines that grew out of the seventeenth – century European enlightenment, when new ideas about religion, reason, humanity and society were merged into a fairly coherent worldview (UNESCO Publication, 2010). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the social sciences were made up of law, education, health, economy, politics, sociology, and art. Today, the social sciences cover the following fields of study, Anthropology, Archaeology, Communications, Criminology, Demography, Development Studies, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Industrial Relations, Political Science, Psychology, Public Administration, Sociology, International Studies, and Library Science. Thus, it is clear, from the above, that the social sciences are about man and his social environment and therefore our proper understanding of the social sciences become imperative in thinking and planning for the society.

The social sciences make it possible for us to have a systematic explanation of the social world and also afford us the opportunity to know the significance of thinking in terms of processes and development (Ake, 1990). Social sciences also provide us with the knowledge and skills that are needed to identify, analyze and explain structures and changes in society as well as the fields of future society (UNESCO Publication. 2010). Our knowledge of the social world and man's understanding of his environment is further enhanced by the social sciences. And this is because the social sciences bring greater clarity to our understanding of how human populations interact with one another, and with the environment (UNESCO Publication, 2010).

Apart from the social sciences being primarily to advance our knowledge about man, his environment and development, it also produces scholars whose main focus is the management of human affairs. The social sciences should therefore equip us with the knowledge to enable us confront such problems like, HIV/AIDs, human trafficking and poverty. Even the idea of globalization which is driven by science and technology and also the capacity of each state to respond adequately to its challenges, are squarely located within the purview of the social sciences, because globalization is nothing but global market. Man is today faced by wars, hunger, and lack of potable water, human trafficking, refugee crisis and poverty. Ironically, man is now more coupled today more than anytime in human history and this has a lot of impact on man and his environment, because the impact of greater interaction across national boundaries leads to wider circulation of social problems which demands for more understanding of man himself. Thus, some issues that used to be accepted as local issues and analyzed at national levels have become global concerns (UNESCO Publication. 2001).

In other words, man's social problems and today's fast-changing global reality presents new challenges to social sciences which is why the social sciences should now direct our mind to a kind of intellectual revolution that will engender a fundamental change in our thinking about the future of human society and about the economy and politics in particular.

But the production of rigorous, relevant and pluralistic knowledge of the social sciences requires a long-term vision and a stable environment in order for such knowledge to promote national development and create a conducive environment that will make life meaningful to the people (UNESCO Publication, 2010). This is where the state comes in as a significant factor in national development process.

### ***The State and National Development***

The state has been identified as the main problem in Africa and that is why the African environment is characterized by chaos, violence and uncertainty as a result of blind and senseless struggles for power by factions of the dominant class, making the state irresponsible and lacking in ideological focus, to the extent that the state is unable to perform its primary role of protecting class interest and property. Such a primary function will ensure that accumulation remains possible and that there should be class "harmony" between the social classes in society because the state always pretends to be neutral in class conflict (Knuttila and Kubik 2000). Even at that, the state provides the wherewithal for development because the state must coordinate and articulate development efforts, in order for modern society to progress. Thus, development and its processes are shaped by four basic variables viz political (Ideology), economics, culture and social structure (Palmer, 1989). In addition, technology has become a significant factor in the context of modern industrial society. Development is therefore a special type of change which aims at the attainment of a specific goal.

Specifically, national development is a function of social, economic and political development (Gozie, 2009), and this occurs when there are changes in the above areas. For example, social change will be the alteration of existing production, distribution and (exchange) patterns and political change is any alteration of existing political relationships, processes or institutions (Palmer, 1989). In greater detail, social development is connected with the advancement in the mode of human interaction and relationships in society, i.e. an increase in society's welfare, not only in economic variables and objectives but also in social objectives and values for which society strives (Thirlwall 2008).

Economic development is about the advancement in the status or conditions of the society while political development is connected with the advancement for better governance in terms of improved and efficient state institutions (Gozie, 2009). That is why both economics and politics are two critical factors in the development process and are causally and reciprocally related. Why economic development provides the material basis for political development, political development provides the organizational structure for economic development (Carew, 1993). Thus, through the various disciplines, the contributions of the social sciences to national development are significant. Also, because the social sciences scientifically study man and society; they are concerned primarily with man's survival and development.

Of great importance in the social sciences is political science which central focus is power and the way power is utilized for meaningful national development. In other words, political science is the study of how man acquires, executes, distributes and manages power and authority in the state. And power, when utilized purposefully and meaningfully, i.e. reflecting the aspirations of the citizens, brings about national development in terms of visible changes in social, economic and political spheres of the society. Consequently, with a purposeful and efficient government, focusing on the needs of the citizens, there will be stability, economic progress, social cohesion and overall improvements in the living standards of the people (Gozie, 2009). There is, therefore, a link between politics and development and political science in particular, shapes the processes of development while it also shapes the challenges of ensuring greater equity and social justice (Hickey, 2009). No wonder Aristotle describes politics as the science of the good, the good being the meaningfulness of human life (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). To realize all this however, a lot of considerations must be given to the state as a critical factor in the development process.

In development discourse, the centrality of the state is beyond debate. And that is because the state, with its apparatus is a system of special organs and agencies, which are engaged in exercising power.

Thus, a major characteristic of the state is that it has power over every member of society and power to direct the movement of society on the path of history (Belov, 1991). Therefore, the state becomes a critical factor in terms of national development.

The functions of the state, in both liberal and radical interpretations are highly diverse. In the liberal state, such functions include rendering services for public good by providing general administration like social security, education and healthcare. Even today, the liberal state does not function outside the market but is instead intertwined with it. It appears like an autonomous player in the market, claiming to bear responsibility for serving the interests of society as a whole ( Rogov, 2008).

However, the state, to the radicals, functions, primarily to manage the economy and monitor labour and consumption and by that, the state does not promote the interest of an exploiting minority, unlike the liberal capitalist state that promotes the interest of the bourgeoisie class and also appropriates profits (Belov, 1986). In summary, the liberal state is an institution for managing the interests of the capitalist class, by protecting capital and pretending to be neutral in market relations, while the state, to the radicals, is an institution for directing national development and managing the economy.

Apart from the above broad classifications of state functions, in addition, quite a number of views have been expressed, all that are more or less variants of the above two classifications ( Koll, 2009; Lukaca, 1991; Rucker 2012).

The tasks embodied in the national development efforts are therefore defined, articulated and directed by the state. And, whether in liberal or radical thinking, the state is extremely crucial in the formulation and articulation of the strategies for national development. In addition, the harmonization of the social sciences needs to be done by the state in order for the state to achieve development objectives, because the various branches of the social sciences are involved in the process of driving national development programmes. This is so because national development is the gradual social, economic and political growth of a society so that it becomes more advanced and stronger (Gozie, 2009).

However, the mere existence of the state, as an institution for class rule does not in itself guarantees national development. There must also be the consciousness of a ruling class in terms of its understanding that it must predicate its activities on a defined and identified ideology, as a tool for navigation, to serve as the compass for socio-political and economic development. This is how the functions and activities of the state are used by the ruling class to promote national development.

A well coordinated development effort must therefore reflect a harmonious blend of critical reason, individual liberty and responsibility, showing a concern for social progress like advances in science and technology, industrialization and people democracy (Comeliau, 2002). Thus, development will address poverty, inequality and insecurity and banish the feelings of widespread frustration. How will development achieve all these?

First, development will create a society that will be capable of reflecting on itself, i.e. appraising and evaluating the dominant and prevailing value system that has emerged from the development effort and the meaning such value system gives to past, present and future of the society. Thus, people will become more confident because they will be able provide positive answers to such questions that relate to their everyday life and to their social organization (Comeliau, 2002).

Second, because development should also be anchored on equity, sustainability, production and empowerment, it will create positive energy in people that will make the people live long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to resources and social services needed for a decent standard of living and be able to participate in the life of the society (Wikipedia.org/human development). By this, human well-being becomes the epicenter of development, about the expansion of the choices people have, to live meaningful lives they value and which improves the human condition so that people will get the chance to lead full lives. It will also be a way of emancipating the people especially when the focus of development is the individual and its centrality as collective public values in human relations against private interests and values (Comeliau, 2002).

However, what is the nature of the state and the social sciences in Africa, the two factors needed for development efforts to bring about improvements in the society?

### ***The State and Social Sciences in Africa***

Smith (2009) draws a framework for the analysis of the third world states and identified four descriptions, viz, as a kind of parasite, an epiphenomenon, as an instrument of class domination and as a factor of cohesion. Others have also described the African state (Alavi, 1979; Goulbourn; 1979, Ake 1986; Osaghae, 2005; Nzongola-Ntalaja 1999; Beall and Hassim, 2005). We shall however look at the way Alavi and Ake have described the post – colonial state because the root of the crisis is in colonialism and its manifestations started immediately after independence.

To Alavi, the origin of the post- colonial state is rooted in the metropolitan countries. The post-colonial state, having been used to muzzle the classes in the colonies, became overdeveloped. Indeed, the entire superstructure in the colonies became overdeveloped in relation to the rest of the society ( Alavi 1979) But to Ake, the level of state formation in Africa is very low, to the extent that it can be argued that the state has not emerged. Consequently, in Africa, political competition is intense and normless, and as a result, the political class becomes too preoccupied with politics, i.e. with securing power and does not function as the capitalist or ruling class. Thus, the state in Africa remains at a low level of the primitive accumulation with massive intervention of force. Hence, the state is unable to mediate the struggle between classes and the struggle within the dominant class (Ake, 1985).

And that is because the dominant class broke into factions during the period of nationalist movement and the various factions are still struggling among themselves for the control of state power, with the various factions employing any means for that purpose. Thus, the dominant class is not cohesive and also lacks the needed ideology to evolve a ruling class and be in control of the state. As a result, whenever a faction is in power, it will resort to the use of state machinery to harass, intimidate and sometimes eliminate oppositions.

From the above the state is automatically weak, arising from the ensued fragmentation of the dominant class which results in chaos that inhibits the institutionalization of hegemonic order, the order that should create the guiding values for the society. Therefore, because the state is weak and the dominant class fragmented, they cannot institute hegemonic process which will be the way the dominant class will maintain a dominant culture through the use of social institutions to formalize power. Hence, the African society is crisis ridden making the state violent, irrational and intolerant of opposition, while African leaders follow no procedure and they become lawless. In addition, the weakness of the state in Africa creates a problem of its inability to implement a class project. Consequently, peaceful co-existence between the state and society does not exist nor does it have any meaning to the governing class and therefore, African leaders do not understand any other language except force.

Therefore, if the African state is fraught with crisis, occasioned by the irrational and blind struggle for power by the dominant class and therefore not united enough to make it realize its essence, the pursuit of accumulation and legitimation, and the enthronement of hegemonic order, the nature of the social sciences in Africa also leaves very little to be desired. Under normal circumstances, the knowledge of the different areas of the social sciences ought to be harnessed by a state that is well focused i.e. in pursuit of class project by being in control and operating public policy organizations. But the African state does not have the peace or the rational ideology to come up with any meaningful development effort that will reflect the knowledge of the different areas of the social sciences.

The social sciences, to start with, refer generally to all those disciplines which analyze society, culture, economy, politics and human behavior and which believe that society can be studied in a standardized and objective manner, with scholarly rules and methods. But these core features of the social sciences create a unique problematique for the field and which result in some crises that question the universalisation of social sciences and its globalised interpretation (understanding) in different regions.

It has been argued that knowledge arises out of embodiment in society and postmodernism, as epistemology, believes that social sciences cannot serve as “a mirror of (all) society” ( Yapa, 1996). Also, the social sciences and society bear a codependent and necessary symbiotic relationship to each other. This relation of society to social sciences occurs as both object and subject. In other words, the social scientist (object) is meaningful only if he has some bearing to the society (subject). For example, how can an African social scientist recommend import-substitution as a strategy for economic development, when he/she ought to know the dangers posed to national development, using the neo-liberal policy and the theory of comparative advantage, in a predominantly poor, illiterate, rural and backward society, where the majority of the people live subsistence life?

So, in the first place, the nature of a particular field of the discipline in the social sciences is extremely crucial when being considered as knowledge factor for a development programme.

Thus, how African are the disciplines of the social sciences? Are they devoid of identity problem, described by Jinadu (2004) as a replicative outpost of globalised field? Or are they adjunct of the same fields as obtained in advanced and or ex-colonial masters' knowledge industry? Today, the major text books in the field of social sciences are foreign authored and most of the African social scientists are either trained in western institutions or have to go there to hone their skills.

Also, to what extent are the social sciences, in Africa, relevant to the African society, economy and politics? How can we explain the dominance of IMF and World Bank polices in African development strategies? Even in terms of language and concepts African social science is still dependent on the social science of the Western world. African social scientists in higher institutions are still required to publish their works in western social sciences journals with the consequences of aligning the ideas of African scholars to those of the west. And as argued by Ake (1979) scholarship is an important tool the west (imperialism) uses in controlling third world perceptions of their world and eventually their behaviour. Also, power, according to (Yapa, (2004) is deeply implicated in the production and the use of social science knowledge. In Africa, the power for the production of social sciences knowledge resides in the West and the dominant class that ought to use the state to liberate the African society from the firm grip of western imperialism is in crisis of factional struggle for state power and does not have the peace and capacity to articulate a paradigm for change.

Tragically, Ake (1979) noted that we cannot overcome our underdevelopment and dependence unless we try to understand the imperialist character of western social science and to exercise the attitudes of mind which it includes. Here in lies the tragedy of Africa because the two critical factors needed to construct meaningful, progressive and positive development strategies, to enhance the human conditions and the emancipation of the African people, i.e. the state and the social sciences are either in serious crisis (the state) or are not relevant (social sciences).

### **Conclusion**

As earlier noted, the state, with the relevant and adequate knowledge of the social sciences is a crucial factor for society's development objectives. But how successful a state is able to drive meaningful development efforts is a function of the capacity to implement its policies. And capacity is affected by such factors like ability to control the state territory, availability of human, material and financial resources, the organizational instruments available to the state, the efficiency of the state's institutions and most importantly the cohesiveness of the ruling class in terms of consistent ideology (Smith, 2009). Thus, why the state is the institution to engineer and implement development objectives, the social sciences serve as the fountain of knowledge (ideology) on which development strategies are based.

However, in Africa, the fragmentation of the dominant class prevents a ruling class to emerge, and the absence of a ruling class now creates a problem of lack of dominant class ideology. Thus, lack of dominant class ideology is also responsible for the absence of a coherent body of ideas and principles that ought to guide and serve as frameworks for African countries' political and economic policies.

Though capitalism was the legacy of the departing colonial powers, socialism, capitalism, Marxism – Leninism as modes of production and plural democracy, multiparty democracy, one- party democracy, zero- party democracy have all been experimented with. Thus, the African society is a field for ideological experimentation (Schraeder, 2004) Unfortunately, the resulting condition of flux makes the African state artificial because it does not stand for a particular class but for a faction that is transient in power and which is also allied to and controlled by foreign ideas. Consequently, values are ammonic and policies inconsistent, because policy implementation is wobbled as those who are in power do not possess the right and proper orientation. Thus, a society is produced that is characterized by uncertainty, poverty, corruption, superstition, fake religious beliefs and brigandage in power and authority.

Worse still, globalization, as a capitalist liberal ideology is transforming the world using technology that is far from the reach of Africa and creating an illusion of collective satisfaction in Africans because Africans can now fly to any part of the world within hours or communicate with anybody anywhere in the world. But with critical reflections, Africa's current status should be a source of gloom, unease and profound disarray. Africa wants to catch up with the 'Jones' without realizing that the 'Robinsons' have gone far. Africa is today under severe threats of famine, major epidemics, wars, interethnic genocide; not to talk of extreme social tensions arising from chronic unemployment, inequality, socio- economic exclusion and marginalization ( Comelgau, 2002).

And all these are the result of not having states that are cohesive, united, strong and foresighted to restructure the African economy and bring about meaningful and relevant development for the people. Perhaps the starting point in Africa should be a reconstruction/redefinition of state (politics) society (people) relations and a critical examination of the field of the social sciences for meaning and relevance.

N/B. This paper is an abridged and modified version of a contributed chapter to a book.

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