



CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

AN AFRICANIST PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

Ali A. Abdullahi, Ph.D. & Emmanuel M. Ajala, Ph.D.

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Department of Social Work, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

AFROCENTRIC SOCIAL THOUGHT: RETHINKING SOCIOLOGY IN AFRICA

Issah Moshood & Ali A. Abdullahi

In chapter one, the reader is introduced to classical sociologists as the 19th century *founding fathers* of Sociology. It is argued that most of these sociologists regarded the discipline as a positivist and universal science of society. However, the problem with this narrative is that it tends to undermine the applicability of Sociology in specific socio-cultural contexts (Burawayo, 2016), even though the socio-cultural and political situations of specific societies should determine the intellectual property or contents of Sociology (Go, 2016; Morris, 2015), hence, the need to deconstruct the universalistic basis of Sociology (Morris, 2017). In other words, it has become essential to introduce the notion of *particularism* to counter the dominance of the doctrine of *universalism* embedded in the positivist ideology (Steinberg, 2016). What this implies is that there is the need for the entrenchment of indigenous sociologies across different socio-cultural contexts (Adesina, 2002; Omobowale & Akanle, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to unravel the contending issues of deconstruction and synchronisation of Western sociological thoughts in order to fill the gaps in the global sociological space. This chapter presents an account of the hitherto neglected African social thought in modern sociological epistemology. It examines the birth of Sociology in selected African countries (South Africa and Nigeria) and sees the dominance of Sociology as a form of academic imperialism. It debates how Western ideas and thoughts dominate African sociological thoughts. More importantly, the chapter delves into specific African social thought and makes a case for indigenous social thoughts in contemporary mainstream Sociology.

Sociology as Imperialistic Occupation in Africa?

Academic imperialism suggests the domination of intellectual and epistemological basis of a particular discipline by Western thoughts and epistemologies. According to Bagele (2011), academic imperialism denotes unequal power relations between academics, where one group of academics dominates or controls the knowledge system of a particular discipline or sub-discipline or all

disciplines, as the case may be. In Africa, academic imperialism commenced during the colonial period and has stood the test of time. During the colonial era, the colonial power designed and implemented the knowledge contents of strategic disciplines in their colonial territories. For instance, the colonial powers used disciplines such as history, linguistics, geography, economics, sociology and anthropology to impose their worldviews and epistemologies on the colonised territories. Alatas (2003, p. 601) noted that academic imperialism is anchored on the "tutelage, conformity, secondary role of dominated intellectuals and scholars, rationalisation of the civilising mission, and the inferior talent scholars from the home country specialising in studies of the colony".

In the post-colonial period, academic imperialism has become an indirect instrument of knowledge production and control of the flow of information in the academic world. This is what Alatas (2003) referred to as "academic neo-colonialism" (p. 600). Specifically, in the third world countries a social science discipline like Sociology is mostly dominated by Western social thoughts. This is due to the integration of the Global South in the world's knowledge system, in which the West exercises the monopoly of knowledge production and control of information. Magubane (1973) noted that the social thoughts produced or controlled by Western social scientists were either consciously or unconsciously made in defense of or to further the economic and political interests of the West in the Global South. This made Mafeje (1994) argue that the knowledge contents of social science disciplines in general are inherently and fundamentally imperialistic.

Also, in the post-colonial era, Africa has been seen as a place where data is exported and theories imported (Adesina, 2006; Nyoka, 2013). According to Adesina (2006), the social sciences, in terms of knowledge production, Africa is seen as place where data is exported and theory imported. Nyoka (2013) puts this argument more succinctly when he argued that Western scholars engage in meta-theoretical and theoretical research while African scholars tend to engage in empirical research. This entails global intellectual division of labour in the social sciences (Nyoka, 2013). The argument of Nyoka (2013) is that African social scientists export empirical data to the West while Western scholars impose theories and methods on African scholars. Unfortunately, African scholars use these Western ideas to explain African social realities, without critiquing the supposed applicability of these theories and methods even though these theories and methods are theoretically and methodologically deficient to explain social

issues such as witchcraft and communal life in the African society. It is against this backdrop that Mafeje (1994 p. 210) argues that:

as African history unfolds, we must prepare ourselves for new intellectual tasks and not a mere repetition of what has been conceived elsewhere ... It is incumbent upon transcendent African intellectuals to develop new concepts and organisational forms for dealing more effectively with the emerging African reality.

Hountondji (1997 p. 36) also added that:

in order to de-marginalise Africa and the Third World, scholars in these areas ought to make conscious efforts towards a critical but resolute re-appropriation of their own political and cognitive heritage, a negation of the marginalisation of their endogenous knowledge and know-how.

The Birth of Sociology in Africa

Many already know about the history of Sociology in Europe and America but very few know about the historical exigencies of Sociology in Africa, despite the fact that Sociology has a long history in the continent. It must, however, be borne in mind that to trace the history of Sociology in Africa is a herculean task because the historical exigencies, circumstances and trajectories of Sociology differ from one African country to the other. The history of Sociology in this chapter is, therefore, limited to South Africa and Nigeria. The choice of the two countries is informed by i) the fact that both authors are South African and Nigerian trained sociologists (at Ph.D. level), respectively and ii) the fact that each of the two countries has one of the most functional and vibrant sociological associations in the continent - the South Africa Sociological Association (SASA) and the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association (NASA). Both associations have contributed very immensely to African sociological thoughts.

• Sociology in South Africa

Sociology has a very strong historical footing in South Africa. Like Sociology in Europe, the beginning of Sociology in South Africa was inspired by certain social problems such as poverty and destitution, exacerbated by wars, racism and Apartheid. Juber (2007) reported that Sociology was officially introduced to South African social scientists at the 1903 Congress of South African Association for the Advancement of Science (SAAAS). However, Sociology only became an academic discipline three decades later. The foremost departments of Sociology

in South Africa were established at the universities in Pretoria (1931), Stellenbosch (1932), Cape Town (1934), Witwatersrand, Potchefstroom, Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal) (1937) and Orange Free State (now University of Free State) (1939) (Juber, 2007).

One of the finest sociologists to discuss the history of Sociology in South Africa was Burawoy. Burawoy (2004) divided the development of Sociology in South Africa into four phases, spanning four historical epochs. He called the first phase the 'Policy Sociology' phase. According to him, the establishment of sociology in the 1930s was inspired by the urgent need to attend to 'poor white problems' (Webster, 2004), especially Whites displaced by the second South African war (Juber, 2007). At that time, Sociology was merged with Social Work and Social Administration in many of the universities. For instance, the first Department of Sociology at the University of Pretoria was named Department of Sociology and Social Work (Webster, 2004). Furthermore, according to Burawoy (2004), the second phase of Sociology began in the late 1950s and early 1960s when attempts were geared towards professionalising Sociology as a separate, independent field of study. Burawoy named this phase of Sociology the 'Professional Sociology' phase and was marked by the second generation of sociologists like S. B. Collier of the University of Stellenbosch (Webster, 2004). However, the professionalisation of Sociology was marred by racism (Burawoy, 2004) as the Apartheid system had hitherto racialised the structure of Sociology across the universities at the time leading to two distinct forms of Sociology: the 'Afrikaner Sociology' characterised by structural-functional approach meant to justify South Africa's Apartheid and 'Oppositional Sociology' which was structured along Marxist orientation in black-dominated universities to oppose Apartheid, thereby resulting in a balkanised sociological association until 1977 (Webster, 2004). The third phase of Sociology was called the 'Critical Sociology' phase. According to Webster (2004) this form of Sociology emerged in the late 1970s when a new generation of sociologists began to challenge the dominance of structural-functionalism in sociological associations. The last phase, the 'Public Sociology' phase, saw the emergence of a 'hybrid form of Sociology' marked by a cross disciplinary approach where Sociology formed an alliance with other disciplines such as history, philosophy and politics to find answers to pressing problems exacerbated by apartheid (Webster, 2004).

Although Burawoy's (2004) typology has been criticised, his analysis remains very useful in understanding the history of Sociology in South Africa (Webster, 2004). Today, South African Sociology has remained united, thereby making

waves in the socio-political landscapes of South Africa and beyond. Modern South African sociologists have enhanced our understanding of the workings of South African societies. They have improved our knowledge of race, class, ethnicity, poverty and power in contemporary South Africa. SASA organises conferences annually to discuss emerging social issues within the sociological paradigms and this has been widely acknowledged as significant contributions to *globalising Sociology*.

- **Sociology in Nigeria**

The history of Sociology in Nigeria is relatively nascent, unlike that of South Africa. The historical antecedents of Sociology in Nigeria contrasts sharply with the South African experience. It is not clear whether the establishment of Sociology as a field of study was precipitated by some emerging social problems or issues as was the case in South Africa, or whether it was the result of a 'bandwagon effect'. This notwithstanding, Sociology began as an academic discipline in Nigeria in the 1960s. However, where the first Department of Sociology was established remains controversial. Some are of the opinion that the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) had the first Department of Sociology. Others opposed this and argued that the first Department of Sociology in Nigeria was established at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This controversy lingered for so many years but seems to have dissipated. It is now in the public domain that while it is true that Sociology was offered as a course in the Department of Economics and Social Studies at the then University College, it was at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka that a full-fledged Department of Sociology and Anthropology was first established in the 1960s (Ogudipe & Edeawor, 2012). According to Ogudipe & Edeawor (2012), the University of Ibadan only followed suit when a sub-Department of Sociology was carved out from the Department of Economics and Social Studies to become a full-fledged department (Ogudipe & Edeawor, 2012).

Some scholars have examined the generations of sociologists in Nigeria. According to Ogundipe and Edeawor (2012), the earliest and the first generation of sociologists in Nigeria comprised both expatriates and indigenes. Prominent among the expatriates were Professors Peter C. Lloyd and Ulf Himmelstrand, both of whom spent quality time at the University of Ibadan. These expatriates were said to have secured a mandate from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations to train and produce indigenous sociologists (Ogundipe & Edeawor, 2012). Through these initiatives, many indigenous sociologists were trained abroad and many later settled at the University of Ibadan (Ogundipe & Edeawor, 2012).

Since then, Department of Sociology at the University of Ibadan has consistently excelled and continues to produce some of the finest sociologists in Nigeria. It was through the first generation of sociologists that a blueprint of western sociology became widely established in Nigeria as an academic field of study (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). Virtually all public universities in Nigeria currently run Sociology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels today; from the south, west to the north.

Challenging the Western Social Thought

A plethora of Western instructional materials are inundated with historical antecedents of Sociology as a field of study that originated from Europe and America. The Macionis, the Giddens, the Shepherds, the Schaefer, the Ritzers and many others gave thrilling accounts of how the French and the Industrial revolutions inspired the development of Sociology as a response to the consequences of modernity. Many of these authors highlighted the socio-political consequences of the revolutions and their implications on the emergence of Sociology as a field of study: how crime, poverty and suicide among the urban poor became unacceptably high while political instability thrived as a result of the revolution. Auguste Comte is believed to have provided an intellectual touch to the new social order and invented Sociology as a discipline to unravel the mystery of the social disorganisation ravaging Europe and America. Since then Sociology has spread all over the world like a wild-fire, to the extent that Western sociological theories and concepts have been 'characterised by a distinct westernness concealed beneath a thin veneer of claims of universality' (Roy & Nilsen, 2016, p. 227) with a continuous push for a *globalised sociology*, even though the direction and the goals of a *globalised Sociology* is still beclouded by obscurity and uncertainty. Indeed, the waves of Sociology have swept through Africa as a result of which the intellectual landscape is dominated by Western Sociology, leading to what some refer to as *mental colonisation* (Oelofsen, 2015), leaving the African audience, particularly students, with no other option than to challenge this mental colonisation and demand for the contributions of African scholars to modern Sociology.

Fortunately, in recent times, the applicability of Western sociological concepts and theories to African realities, cultures and experience have been questioned. Some scholars are of the opinion that given the different historical experiences and social realities in Africa, adopting Western theories, concepts and methods to African realities is not only misleading, but also undermines the African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS). A good example is using only the

biomedical model or germ theory to explain the etiology of disease and illnesses in Africa. It is common knowledge in Africa that diseases and illnesses are explained not only in the context of germs but also superstitiously. For example, among the Yorubas of Nigeria, perceived causes of diseases are viewed from three main angles: natural, supernatural and mystical (Jegede, 2002; Amzat & Ransum, 2014; Abdullahi, 2015). Incidentally, these perceived causes of diseases and illnesses often determine illness behaviour or response and pathways to their management among these people (Amzat & Razum, 2016). Also important is how some Africans construe circumcision. In most African societies, the reason for male circumcision goes beyond biology to include some religious and socio-cultural colorations. Where, when, how and at what age circumcision take place usually depend on the cultural dictates of the people (Ntozini & Abdullahi, 2018). For example, *ulwaluko* (traditional male circumcision) among the Xhosa-speaking people in the Eastern Cape of South Africa is usually seen as a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood and takes place when those concerned are between 18 and 20 years of age (Ntozini & Abdullahi, 2018). The same scenario plays out among some indigenous East African people, especially in Kenya, the Massai people are a good example.

Also important is the African conception of 'family'. To indigenous Africans, family means more than just a cluster of people that are blood-related. Europe and America celebrate the nuclear family structure but in most African societies, family members go beyond being blood-related to include the extended family structure. Among indigenous South Africans, the extended family includes people who are not only related by blood but through *isiduko* ('clan name') (Nyoka, 2013). The same is obtainable in the Buganda Kingdom in Uganda. Nyoka (2013) emphasised that in most African societies, the concept of 'uncle', for example, on one's paternal side of the family is non-existent. My father's younger brother is not my 'uncle' but 'my father' or 'younger father' who can stand in for my biological father at any social gathering (e.g. my wedding) even though my biological father is still alive, hale and hearty. Should my biological father pass on, my 'younger father' (my 'uncle') automatically becomes 'my father' and is culturally expected to shoulder the responsibilities of a biological father. His failure to do this attracts condemnation from other members of the family. Furthermore, to safeguard the future of the children of my biological father and other social responsibilities, my 'younger father' may be encouraged to 'inherit' my mother. Where there are many 'uncles' my mother has the liberty to choose from the many uncles. Similar tradition exists in some other African communities

(Nyoka (2013). It must, however, be clarified that this type of tradition is also changing owing to westernisation and 'civilisation'.

Another common practice is witchcraft. Africans also have a strong belief in witchcraft. According to Okon (2012), witchcraft constitutes an important component of African epistemologies. Okon (2012) noted that spiritual protection against the threat of witchcraft has become an important aspect of socialisation in a typical African society or community. He further noted that witchcraft is important in the acculturation process because of its adverse consequences on social bonds. Witches are believed by many to have the metaphysical power to cause irredeemable breakdown of marriages, communal warfare and antagonism among siblings, families and communities (Okon, 2012). Essentially, the metaphysical and spiritual worldview of Africans account for the ontology and epistemology of witchcraft in Africa. Okon (2012) further stressed that Africans have a penchant not only for religiosity, but also for spiritual powers. This is evident in their unique and usual quest for the control and manipulation of cosmic metaphysical forces through prayers and other means. According to Mbiti (1969, p.197-198):

There is a mystical power which causes people to walk on fire, to lie on thorns or nails, to send curse or harm, including death, from a distance, to change into animals (lycanthropy), to spit on snakes and cause them to split open and die; power to stupefy thieves so that they can be caught red-handed; power to make inanimate objects turn into biologically living creatures.

It is not out of place to argue that Western sociological theories are not sufficient to make sense of these African social realities. For Europeans, these are mere superstitions while to Africans they are our realities because they define who we are.

Consequently, for some time now, a number of African social scientists have questioned the dominance of social sciences in Africa with limited success. In recent times, this matter is taking a new dimension as students themselves are beginning to agitate for academic decolonization. This is taking centre stage in academic discourses, especially in South Africa. The movement for decolonisation in South Africa is calling for a general overhaul of Eurocentric curricula and the development of indigenous curricula with *home-grown* theories and concepts that take cognisance of the peculiarities of African societies and cultures. The movement is premised upon the assumption that when intellectual

landscapes (places of learning) are decolonised, the shackles of colonisation would have been broken, as the mind and the mentality automatically become decolonised and free (Oelofsen, 2015). The movement for the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa known as #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF) climaxed in 2015 and 2016 when South African universities were engulfed by the flames of students' protests. One of the demands of the students was the development and implementation of a curriculum which critically centres on Africa. A curriculum that will address 'not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning' (Roy & Nilsen, 2016, p. 226). The purpose is to build 'a science of the humanities with the capability of objectively contextualising indigenous social relations and culture' (Omobowale & Akanle, 2017, p. 44).

There are many reasons attributed to the growing movement for academic decolonisation in Africa. The first is the fact that Western scholarship has systematically marginalised the indigenous knowledge system (IKS), thereby promoting academic laziness and dependency (Ake, 1982). The dominance of Eurocentric social sciences in particular is usually premised upon the mentality that 'there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and a civilisation independent of ... other societies and civilisations' (Wolf, 1982, p. 5). In the same vein, some scholars have expressed dismay over the failure of theories in the social sciences to unravel Africa's social puzzles, as Western theories of human emancipation and democracy have failed to provide a minimum level of freedom for the majority of Africans who live in squalor which worsens daily as the barbarism of capitalism escalates (Neocosmos, 2014).

It is important to note that the critique of the social sciences and, specifically, Sociology as an example of academic imperialism is not new. In India, there has been increasing agitation for Indian sociological thought (see Nagla, 2008). However, in most African universities, the social sciences, particularly, Sociology, are still deeply rooted in western philosophies and history, instead of African social thought. Sociology in Africa is still overwhelmingly dominated by western philosophies, ideologies, theories and concepts after a century of sociology in the continent (using the South African example) and despite the avalanche of evidence regarding the quality of African sociological thought. Therefore, in order to understand African reality better, there is the need for a serious debate around culture-specific sociological theories that would capture the nuances of typical African phenomena. One of the ways of achieving this is to use African social thoughts as raw-materials or the basis for constructing and reconstructing

African sociological theories and methods that would be applied in the analysis of African social phenomena and social problems. Some African sociologists have started this process of construction and reconstruction, but their voices are yet to be heard by other African scholars. It is, therefore, important to discuss the views of some of these great thinkers and philosophers.

EXAMPLES OF AFRICAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

Scholars have defined social thought as a set of systematised and logically organised knowledge systems about how human society is structured and how it functions. Social thoughts mean ontological, epistemological and intellectual reflections about human society at both structural and agency levels. Thus, social thoughts could be referred to as the varying thoughts of scholars about social institutions, social phenomena, social behaviours and/or social problems. The implication of this definition is that there are as many social thoughts as there are different social-cultural contexts. Specifically, African social thoughts have to do with or relate to an indigenous knowledge system (IKS) which encompasses the structures and functions of African societies (Kasanda, 2015, p.31). These are found in oral literature, poems, fables, arts and music as well as belief systems (Rettova, 2013). Moreover, they are deeply ingrained and embedded in the everyday life and social experiences of Africans (Gyekye, 1987). According to Anyanwu, cited in Peters (1959), African social thought is concerned with the way in which African people make sense of their destiny and of the world they live.

Incidentally, for centuries, Africa has produced some of the most brilliant brains in the world. Although a number of these indigenous scholars have contributed very immensely to African social thought, very few teachers bequeath the teachings of these scholars to young Africans. Examples are the likes of Claude Ake of Nigeria, Fatimoh Meer of South Africa, Ali Mazrui of Kenya, Mafeje of South Africa, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie of Nigeria. With specific reference to Sociology, Ibn-Khaldun of Tunisia, Akinsola Akiwowo of Nigeria and Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi of South Africa have propounded social thoughts that are relevant to the social experiences of Africans. Their versions of African social thoughts contain modern and relevant sociological ideas. They also contain *home-grown* sociological theories, concepts and ideas that are relevant to an understanding of African realities. We devote this section to the contributions of these African social thinkers to modern Sociology.

- **Ibn-Khaldun**

In the past decade, there has been a debate around who the true founder of Sociology is. The widely-held belief based on foreign literature that Comte is the founding father of Sociology has been fiercely contested (Soyer & Gilbert, 2012). From this debate, it is becoming increasingly clear that Comte and other classical European sociologists may not have been the first to introduce Sociology as the study of the human society. A European scholar once said that prior to classical European sociologists, scholars in non-Western societies had been preoccupied with the scientific study of the society as far back as the 10th century (Ritzer, 2011). Ibn-Khaldun (1332-1406) is regarded as one of these scholars. Ibn-Khaldun was a Tunisian philosopher who envisioned the 'science of society' which he called *ilm al-'umran*. For him, the subject matter of *ilm-al-umran* should be an understanding of social relationships and why social change occurs in human societies (Ibn-Khaldun 1967: 38–39). Indeed, Ibn-Khaldun prided himself as the first to advocate a science of society. He narrated his sociological thoughts and many other thoughts in his book, the "Muqaddimah" or "Prolegomena". The sociological content of the *Muqaddimah* is divided into the principles of general sociology, the sociology of politics, urban sociology, sociology of economics and sociology of knowledge (Issawi & Leaman, 1998). Other specific contributions of Ibn-Khaldun to Sociology include the understanding of human nature, theory of race, theory of social change and conflicts with emphasis on the concept of *assabiyyah* (group solidarity), as well as a distinction between rural/primitive (*badawa*) and urban (*Hadara*) societies (Soyer & Gilbert, 2012). Like Comte and Durkheim, Ibn-Khaldun described the transformation of Arabian society from *Badawa* to *Hadara* and analysed this transition using Arabian historical exigencies (Alatas, 2006). More importantly, Ibn-Khaldun emphasised the role of science in understanding human society and relied on observation and historical methodology (Abdullahi & Salawu, 2012).

Although some fault-lines have been noted in Ibn-Khaldun's contributions to sociological thought, his works attracted the attention of many classical thinkers and many of them gave him some accolades. Sorokin, Zimmerman, and Galphin believed Ibn-Khaldun to be the "founder of Sociology" (Soyer & Gilbert, 2012). According to Rosenthal (1967. P. ix), the *Muqaddimah* is

rational in its approach, analytical in its method, encyclopaedic in detail; it represents an almost complete departure from traditional historiography, discarding conventional concepts and clichés and seeking, beyond the mere chronicle of events, an explanation of history.

Similarly, Arnold Toynbee, an English historian, asserted that the *Muqaddimah* was "...the greatest work of its kind ever created by any mind in any time and place (Hendricks, 2006, p.89). Ibn Khaldun's work remains a classic up till today.

• **Akinsola Akiwowo**

Apart from Ibn-Khaldun, late Professor Akinsola Akiwowo is an example of a contemporary African sociologist who had equally attempted to promote African sociological thought. He attempted to localise or indigenise sociology using local content and languages. Apart from challenging the hegemony of Western sociology in Africa, he attempted to introduce some elements of local narratives, concepts, terms, histories, nuances, cultures, philosophies and African experiences into a Western-dominated Sociology but not without confrontations from fellow African scholars. Akinsola Akiwowo is believed to have added an African flavour to sociological lexicon which has been globally acknowledged. He is famously known for his sociology of knowledge (Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). Ademoyo (2009, p.16) considered Akiwowo's sociology of knowledge as a realistic interpretation of an ontological representation of human nature and society. He defended this assertion when he said that:

...a realist's interpretation of Akiwowo's account of human sociality, nature, and society shows two major conclusions. One, social actions in society are human actions. Human actions are not isolated atoms. Therefore, social actions are linked by the agency and subjectivity of the human which is imbued with values and his/her capacity of sociality. Two, a condition for the continuous existence of a society is that such society has goals. The evidence for this is simple: we see it. This view of society differs from the traditional view of purposiveness in society ... These two conclusions show Akiwowo's theoretical distance from positivism.

Sociologists have consistently argued that every society strives to achieve some level of peace, tranquility and social order. For scholars like Akiwowo, social order in African communities is dependent on the African communal system. He argued that among Africans, communal living is sacrosanct and every member of the community is expected to comply with normative standards for peaceful co-existence. Conformity is usually demonstrated by imbibing and exhibiting the socially approved values and norms of the community (Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). This usually takes place through the process of socialisation. Any attempt to default or deviate from normative standards and laws portends danger to the entire community. To avoid disorder and anomie, therefore, an individual who deviates from normative standards is labelled a bad person (*omo buruku*) and

punished (*ifiyajeniyan*) while the one who upholds normative standards is a good person (*omo luabi*) and is positively rewarded (Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). The society has institutionalised rewards and punishments for offenders ranging from fines and being ostracised to capital punishment.

Another seminal contribution of Akiwowo was the sociology of the dead. To Akiwowo and many African thinkers, death does not mean the end of life. It is just a transition to another world (world of the dead). Indeed, the dead maintains spirito-social connections with the living. In other words, there are mutual social exchanges between the dead and the living. According to Adesina (2002, p.107):

death is not the termination of existence, only another state of existence! It is in this context that one understands the pervasive 'role' and reference to ancestors in traditional Yoruba discourse and daily life. The ancestors are considered as ever present but in a parallel place of existence, of a kind, with capacity to affect what happens in the plane of the living.

The notion of the ancestors is not peculiar to the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria. It is just African. Among the Bantu, death is not the end of life. It is believed that the present life is a preparation for the after-life. The Bantu strongly believed in re-incarnation. To these people, it is believed that a dead person can come back to life in the form of another person or any living creature, such as tree or an animal. According to Tempels (cited in Mbaegbu, 2015, p. 225), "... when Bantu speak of the dead who return and are reborn, we must not regard them as speaking of metempsychosis in the classical sense that we give to this word". This implies that the Bantu people strongly believe in reincarnation; that is, a dead person can actually come back to life in the form of a human, an animal or a tree.

Akiwowo's courage in deviating from dogmatism has been widely applauded at local and international levels. Some scholars see it as a wake-up call to advance the decolonisation agenda as young and old African scholars continue to advance Akiwowo's theory in global sociological discourses (Abdullahi & Salawu, 2012; Adesina, 2002; Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). Adesina (2002, p.91) sees Akiwowo as an African intellectual who responded to the need for context-specific and "locally sensitive production of knowledge". Akiwowo attempted to dislodge the epistemic framework imposed on us by Western scholars. According to Adesina (2002), Akiwowo used the ontological assumptions and premises of the oracular narratives of *Odu Ifa*, to unearth the epistemic potentials

of IKS in gaining an understanding of the nature of sociality and human beings. Akiwowo is seen as one of those intellectuals who sought to reclaim the social sciences from the dominance and control of Western scholars for Africa. He critically engaged what Femi Adesina termed 'received paradigm' from the West, and intellectually justified the inherent inadequacy of these 'received paradigms' in understanding the complexities and intricacies of the African socio-cultural systems. Adesina (2002) commented that Akiwowo did excellently well at engaging the narratives of local ontological discourses to challenge the dominant Western paradigms in Africa. Akiwowo was among the few African sociological thinkers that creatively challenged the idea of 'single world' and 'single Sociology'.

- **Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi**

Another iconic African social thinker was Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi. He was born on 1st December, 1875, in Gqumashashe village in Tyhume Valley, very close to Alice in the present-day Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. He was born during the period when colonial influence was taking a heavy toll on the Ama-Xhosa tribe (one of the dominant ethnic groups in South Africa), cultural worldviews and knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997). Mqhayi started attending a local school when he was 7 years old. Before reaching 10 years old, his father took him to Centane to live with his uncle (Nzanzana who was the headsman of his community) having lost his mother when he was 2 years old. He was said to have spent 6 years in Centane. Mqhayi recounted that the six years he spent in Centane left indelible imprints on his sojourn for knowledge. He stated that "in those six years, I learned much respecting Xhosa life, including the refinements of Xhosa language ... If I had not been at Kentani for those six years, it seems to me as if I would not have been any help to my nation ... it was the means of getting an insight into the national life of my people" (Mqhayi, 1976, p. 20). Despite the fact that his stay in Centane influenced his thinking significantly, he still wanted to continue his education, perhaps because he thought that it was through education that he could develop the basic skills required in the regeneration and defense of African worldviews and cultural identity. During this time, his father had moved, temporarily, to Grahamstown, also in today's Eastern Cape. His dream of pursuing further education eventually came through when his father sent his sister to bring him to Lovedale to further his education, following the death of his uncle in Centane.

Mqhayi was one of the prolific African writers of the early 20th century. He was one of the great contributors to Southern Bantu literature. According to Jordan (1973, p.105), "Mqhayi's 'contributions to Southern Bantu literature is easily the

largest and most valuable that has hitherto been made by any single writer". Additionally, he also contributed immensely to Southern African poetry, in particular, and African poetry in general. For his immense contributions to poetry, he was given the honorary title of "*Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele*" (the poet of the whole nation) (Jordan, 21973). This denotes that his literary influence extended beyond the *ama-Xhosa* people of South Africa. Apart from this honour, he won many accolades from his contemporaries. In fact, many of his contemporaries often referred to him as the 'Shakespeare of Africa'. Some people also called him Africa's poet laureate. Mqhayi intellectually engaged complex and pluralised social forces that were at play in South Africa during the colonial epoch. He used his cultural conscientisation and philosophical acumen to generate knowledge about these social forces and their implications on the lived experiences of those who were greatly affected by it. A closer look at his contributions towards understanding these complexities in South Africa revealed his ontological, epistemological and methodological groundings (Schoots, 2014).

Mqhayi was influenced by the experiences of segregation, apartheid and colonialism in South Africa. He raised so many social questions and generated so many answers in respect of his experiences of the White domination and hegemony in South Africa. It is also noteworthy to emphasise that Mqhayi was significantly influenced by intellectuals like Tiyo Soga (1829-1871), who came before him. Mqhayi was not so much regarded as a sociological thinker; he was often seen and considered as a literary icon that was committed to fighting for the African cultural identity of the *Xhosa*-speaking people of the Eastern Cape of South Africa. These notwithstanding, Mqhayi is still regarded as a sociological thinker for his seminal contributions to Sociology, especially in the area of methodology.

One fundamental area where Mqhayi recorded a strong point was in the area of sociological imagination. Indeed, some emerging African thinkers like Schoots (2014), argue that his contribution to sociological imagination preceded the work of C. Wright Mills, who was regarded as the original initiator of the concept. Essentially, the contributions of Mqhayi to sociological imagination may not be understood, or even appreciated without first discussing the central arguments of C. Wright Mills.

C. Wright Mill (1959, p.11) was an American sociologist who was credited with the development of sociological imagination. Mills developed sociological imagination when the American society was enveloped by large scale social

change which he saw as dehumanising, confusing and alienating to most Americans. Thus, he saw that it was his duty, as a sociologist, to intervene in this crisis in the interest of his society. According to him,

what they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality ... that may be called the sociological imagination.

Like Mills, Mqhayi's sociological imagination was a response to recurrent social crises among the *ama-Xhosa* and other African people. He utilised biographical and historical tools to come up with more coherent and appropriate theoretical frames that could be used to understand complex, chaotic and ambiguous issues and problems at broader, historical and personal levels (Schoots, 2014, p.47-48). Most black communities in South Africa during the colonial period were replete with massive and "chaotic ambiguities of a newly appearing social world", ushered in or driven by the colonial hegemony in South Africa (Schoots, 2014, p.47). He was able to demonstrate the mastery of historical and biographical narration in such a way that the listeners or audience (*ama-Xhosa*) were able to 'make sense' of ongoing social changes and how their personal problems resulted from the changes.

Mqhayi was able to interpret what was happening in the *ama-Xhosa* community as well as ways of responding to the sweeping changes brought about by colonialism. Apparently, Mqhayi's work is grounded in the *Xhosa* worldview. He adapted *ama-Xhosa* metaphors and 'common sense' knowledge to reconstruct the *Xhosa* worldview in order for them to fit appropriately into the social realities of his time. This enabled him to interpret new experiences generated by colonialism. His ability to use taken for granted concepts in the *Xhosa* indigenous knowledge system enabled him to allow those who had lived in the 'old world' to make sense of the 'new world' and to find their place in it. Thus, he was devoted to history and biography in his sociological inquiry. He used these tools excellently to analyse how individual actions and choices are defined and influenced by the broader and complex historical and social forces that are happening or occurring within the larger society. This aptly related to the claim made by Mills that "neither the life of an individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both" (Mills, 1959, p.9). Using sociological imagination, Mqhayi argued that the socio-political challenges bedevilling the

ama-Xhosa community could be analysed within the broader context of colonial experience.

Mqhayi also contributed to sociological methods. According to Mqhayi, people could make sense of what is happening around them through the use of historical and biographical methods. He therefore, excellently and creatively enunciated the fundamentality of historical methods in coming to terms with the historical experiences of black South Africans. According to him, the historical method enables Africans in the post-colonial era to look back to the pre-colonial era for their 'real' cultural identity and worldview. The pre-colonial identity could be used as the basis for countering and resisting the imposition and spread of imperial identity and worldviews. Edward Said referred to this approach as 'nativism', which means "to fight against the distortions inflicted on your identity in this way is to return to a pre-imperial period to locate a 'pure' native culture" (Edward, 1994, p.332 cited in Schoots, 2014, p.1).

Nevertheless, it seems that Mqhayi did not agree with the whole idea of 'nativism' as well. His non-acceptance is reflected in his efforts at mingling or blending British culture with Xhosa culture, which he called "cultural pluralism". According to Schoots (2014, p.39), Mqhayi's cultural pluralism clearly shows that he did not intend a return to the disruptively affected pre-colonial past. Rather, he tried to innovatively negotiate his 'present' by combining both Xhosa and Western worldviews. Perhaps, this approach to society made him distinct from other African social philosophers that came before him (Schoots, 2014). He argued that through the historical method, this blending of 'old and new ways of life' is not unachievable.

Empirically, Mqhayi copiously adopted historical methods in his sociological investigations and analysis. For instance, he investigated the history of *Xhosaland*, and educated people about their past. He published histories of events and notable individuals in prominent black newspapers. He vehemently criticised missionary or colonial education for promoting British agenda in African countries while downgrading Africa's cultural heritage. Africans were only taught about adventures and conquests of the British; they were not taught their histories which were relevant to their social existence. So, Mqhayi felt that he could use his historical method to remind blacks of their old world as well as defend African culture and worldview. In one of his articles, Mqhayi (2009, p.28) writes:

these educated people set up none but cowards for emulation, because their fathers did not narrate any history to them, and in those training schools and colleges they are taught a sequence of history, but in fact their education has entirely duped them, because in all our training schools the history of only one nation is studied, the English; they are the only people with intelligence, prudence, knowledge, they alone have national heroes, they have never been defeated by any other nation on earth; they claim as theirs even those things that clearly did not originate with them, and in this way they indoctrinate nations who do not appreciate that their awe of the English is exaggerated, that their respect for them is excessive. This is why a fool runs wild when he discovers them to be empty vessels, recalling all the years he honoured them where no honour was due (Mqhayi 2009, p.28).

CONCLUSION

Sociology has a very long history in Africa. In some African societies, sociology became established as a field of study more than a century ago. However, after a century of sociology in the continent, Western type of sociology continues to dominate the intellectual landscapes across the continent, thereby promoting academic laxity and academic colonialism. There are limited indigenous textbooks to advance African social thought and this has created a lacuna in knowledge production and dissemination. Modern African sociologists are not helping matters since the majority of them have remained passive and dogmatic. Thus, they have continuously relied on western concepts and theories to describe African realities, despite the differences in history and experience. This chapter examines an African perspective to Sociology. It is argued that a number of indigenous African scholars made significant contributions to Sociology in their attempt to Africanise, indigenise or decolonise Sociology. Although decolonisation or Africanisation of Sociology means different things to different people, it generally seeks to deconstruct dominant Eurocentric forms of intellectual production by acknowledging the epistemologies and ontologies of knowledge in the *Global South*. The chapter discusses and provides empirical examples of African social thoughts based on the works of Ibn-Khaldun, Akiwowo and Mqhayi. These three great scholars are believed to have contributed very profoundly to African social thought and modern sociologists deserve to know and appreciate and discuss their contributions within the larger global sociological space and discourse. They constructed and reconstructed their sociological theories and methods using indigenous social thoughts as the basis of their theoretical and methodological stand. The contributions of these African social thinkers to African social thought is particularly relevant at a time

when *global Sociology* is increasingly faced with the intellectual agitation for the need to incorporate southern sociological thought and epistemologies for a more inclusive Sociology as a scientific discipline. This is also important as the wave and movement for academic decolonisation filter through the intellectual landscape in the continent.

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