
Africa's Problem of Social Change, Dominant Social Paradigms and Key Values for Peace and Development

Afrika'nın Sosyal Değişim Sorunu, Egemen Sosyal Paradigmalar ve Barış ve Gelişim İçin Ana Değerler

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Abstract: This paper examines the issue of social order and social change understood as building the capacity for establishing mechanisms for the control and rectification of the physical and psychological realms of life and their consequences for national integration and human development in a developing society as Nigeria. A basic presumption of our study was that the human sciences largely can facilitate social change by over ridding the situation of imperiousness to change- anachronism, which cannot be easily disconnected from our turbulent multi-ethnicity and the real fact that much may have been left undone in the areas of reconciliation, tolerance, compassion for promoting a rectifiable socio-culturally well-ordered society. We propose ways of ensuring the stability of social roles and functions for conformity, rectitude and justice so as to attain the common good.

Keywords: Contemporary Africa, enduring development, social order, social change, peace.

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Introduction

The crisis of social order in most post-colonial nation states and societies in Africa is easily seen in the fundamental problem of designing, establishing and sustaining intellectual and institutional capacities for social change. As things stand, the problem becomes worrisome due to the inability to create and sustain rules and conventions that can guide human personal and social life to be more amenable to positive values of justice, peace, well-being and tolerance. Such positive attitudes and values among others are elusive today, given in the real context of rabid negative ethnicity, inept political and administrative leadership, perverted and archaic social structures and inefficient institutions, decadent human and physical infrastructures and ossified cultural attitudes and cosmologies.

From the above, we can easily agree that “change, or its absence, is a preoccupation of our societies, a subject of constant discussion” (Eboussi-Boulaga, 2000: 191). In fact, understanding the problem of change necessitates that we must not lose sight of the fact that “the dualism between facts and values makes it impossible to solve moral and political problems with science and technology alone” (Andersson, 1987: 193).

The issue then is: how do the human sciences in thinking about society, actually change society? What kind of intelligence or informed choices can we postulate or disseminate to facilitate change in a developing society? What kinds of changes do we wish to introduce and sustain in a developing society? How do we establish “values and social behavior” (Wilson, 1978: 26) which for that matter, ought to be “oriented more to the future structure of society?” (Johnson, 1960: 623). These questions simply put the survival of people, their practices and their institutions in perspective, thereby drawing attention to the issues social change and social ends. Basically, there seems to be a general African problem with establishing viable ideas, theories and praxis for progressive and sustainable social change.

In Africa, this short-fall is not a recent phenomenon. A foremost African writer, Kwasi Wiredu, points out that “a limitation of traditional culture is its authoritarian orientation manifested in the unquestioning obedience by people to the authorities of elders. Because traditional soci-



ety was essentially communitarian not much room could be made for deviant ideas or social practices. Little premium was placed on intellectual qualities such as curiosity or independence of thought” (Wiredu, in Oladipo, 1996: 47). This is how the issue of anachronism arises. Anachronism made sure that the wrong things were done almost persistently and with maximum inimical consequences. This tragic situation has been carried over into the contemporary society, which has also spawned its own contradictions and deficits. As Bahr (1983: 189) has rightly noted the problems of change in our developing society cannot be disconnected from “realities of a social, religious and historical nature, the spiritual values of societies, the historical heritage, the economic and social, legal systems, arts and languages, the cultural content” that have created an impetus for instability, retrogression and development deficits.

The problematic of social change can be reformulated in terms of the quest for ways of changing behavior. This demands an examination of the processes and ideas that trigger and sustain change at the level of values and patterns of behavior. Given the fact that “a social system may need to adapt its structure in order to survive” (Johnson, 1960: 625), we are interested in why, and how, such adaptations occur and the means of modifying them for the public good and well-being. This is important because social change itself can in fact be a social problem. Seen within the extant conceptual framework and methodological construct, we focus on what rules and norms can facilitate the task of creating changes in the interaction of roles and values in the society. Given the structural approach to society, there is a need to reconstruct the roles of values and the importance of man as both creator and object of changes. The pragmatic and prospective methods are grafted unto a structuralist-functionalist approach to focus on the question of change as a process of the alteration of structure “at the levels of social institutions, social attitudes and social values” (Otite & Ogiwo, 2003: 383).

For instance, we may ask the question: why has it been difficult in most parts of Africa, especially Nigeria, for people and governments to desire and devise better ways of doing things? How can we manage and overcome the conflicts and contradictions generated by beliefs and choices when “individuals and whole groups seem to prefer inadequate



beliefs that are inferior by standards of logic and empirical evidence” (Johnson, 1960: 644)? How can we produce effective social change in a society challenged by authoritarianism, anachronism and ossification of the desire and instruments of progress and advancement? To this effect, we bridge the gap between knowledge and praxis by connecting the clarification of ideas with the imperative of visionary and practicable solutions for social change in a developing society hindered by material, social and psychological obstructions. The concrete efforts at interfacing change at the local and global levels will therefore, impact on the unfinished business of reconciling the ideas and ideals and institutionalizing these.

Social Change and the Problem of Agency

Social change can be further explained in terms of the desire to do things differently (Kuhn, 1974: 428). But more than that, we are interested in better ways of doing things given the desire to create better ways of human social advancement. We, therefore, seek to appropriate the concept of ‘emergence’ or the coming into being of an innovative or novel higher level experience or system, which can lead to a discernible alteration of structure (Kuhn, 1974: 432-433). This task can be achieved through the tripartite strategies of combination, replication and independent emergence. The fact is that “we are living organisms in an environment in which our concern is to survive; and one of the most important survival mechanisms we have is knowledge” (Magee, 1987: 293).

This is definitely an ethical and phenomenological task that raises vital issues not only about the right and wrong ways of devising and achieving social change, but also the influences and processes involved in overturning or rectifying traditions. It is thus true that “the evaluation of social change requires reasoned ethical standards as well as factual research” (Macrae, 1968: 188). One key methodological construct that can help us to refine the idea of social change can be the utilitarian approach, which identifies the success or goodness of a principle or thing according to how it serves the greatest good or happiness of the greatest number. The point then is that social change can be defined, measured and even criticized by the utilitarian methodological construct that poses itself



both as an instrument of assessment and a guide to prior action.

The advantage of our re-appropriation and expropriation of this strategy is to reframe the visions and values of the utilitarian methodology, not just in terms of the instrumental measurement of the greatest good or happiness, but more significantly, in terms of the potential for the institutionalization of the new strategies of liberation and transformation. Above all, we are faced with the challenge of seeking new ways of providing justifications for our conceptual and practical choices of alternative ethical and epistemological ideas needed for the transformation of old, unviable ideas and structures.

This definitely insinuates our concern with clarifying the basic problem of changes in social behavior and especially, how these changes can be accomplished by modifying those very spiritual and material conditions such as the incentives that induce people and institutions to transform or ossify. We are thus compelled to examine the extant ideas of values, value-systems, power, justice, inequality, etc., that serve a foundational role in the susceptibility or resistance to change. We are also interested in the formulation and reformulation of the major concepts underlying social change in every generation especially, rights, institutions, "freedom, human dignity and democracy" (Brozen, 1952: 256).

The idea is to redefine social change as a man-centered commitment that puts our quest for values, value-systems and institutions, expressly in the service of promoting human dignity and ethical conscience. To this effect, social change has "deepest echo in human spirituality, which is also linked to the search for a new equilibrium and understanding" (Tighel, 2004: 129). We can ask: what material and spiritual conditions can facilitate the transition from what we are, what we have become and what we ought to be, at the level of persons, values and institutions? We are in need of studying change given the desire to either hasten it or reduce it or redirect it. In any case, the problematic of social change requires a review of the concepts and strategies for the reassessment of experiences in the society. How do we overcome the fact that experience places a ceiling on the capacity to generate ideas? How can our desire to change social experience be reconciled with what is changeable and unchangeable in human nature?



Epistemological Concerns with Social Change

The structuralist-functionalist method, which is reinforced by the pragmatic- prospective approach focuses on the question of change construed as a process of the alteration of structure. To this effect, social change is to be seen as ‘change in the structure of the social system’ (Johnson, 1960: 626). Thus, the quest for structural change or change in social structure can be anchored on the redefinition of values, social roles and social interactions. The advantage of the pragmatic interventionist method of study is to maximize the futuristic prospective approach, which seeks to enhance that progressively essential quality, that is so often lacking nowadays, which is “the ability to foresee the future with clarity” and “create alternative images of the future that will serve the process of decision-making in the present” (Cournand 1982: 32). However, the prospective method, can only assure lucidity at the conceptual and policy implementation levels, if it is founded on some cherished values, namely, the tolerance of, and openness to new ideas and the sharpening of the tools of human creative imagination. The benefits of the prospective method occasion the crucial emphasis on the task of social responsibility as a fundamental norm. This is easily seen in the quest for upholding the ethics of research. In short, the prospective method encourages the extension of the boundaries of knowledge.

A pragmatic and interventionist approach to social change, insists that the researcher must be involved in social reconstruction. She must show concern about the ideas, patterns and events operating in the society. This pragmatic perspective denies any form of indifference to the possibilities of reconstructing the social order. We cannot afford to have a society “in which the members are entirely indifferent to each other” (Gupta, 1985: 313). It will seem that part of the reasons for the problems of social change as seen in the inability to rectify the inefficiency of institutions in most parts of post-colonial Africa, can be the apathy, ignorance and nonchalance on the parts of those who ought to intervene conceptually and practically. This raises questions about the idea of participation in public affairs. There is thus a need to employ the prospective method to pursuing social change in order to bring about a new way of looking at things.



Especially, we place the pragmatic and prospective methodology within the framework of an established task of education, construed in its widest possible sense that aims at creating the processes that can “bring about change in human dispositions with a minimum of waste” (Dewey, 1974: 121). In this view, we are interested in utilizing the advantages of classical pragmatism in terms of the connections that can be drawn between belief, meaning, action and inquiry. We are interested in eliciting the “habit” of social institutions and social values. This calls for an enquiry into the interfaces of the actual and possible functions of specific social principles of action and behavior. The pragmatic approach to social change examines the meanings that institutions and values have for us, and their rules of operation within a certain predisposition, or habit of action. This, in the view of the traditional pragmatic framework, is an attempt to connect behavior and experience in order to “strengthen the foundations of our knowledge [and] to strengthen the foundations of our actions” (Magee, 1987: 284). This approach justifies our quest for a better theory or construct for dealing with reality, when old ones become defective or irrelevant. Our method sees the human being as an actor, a player who creates and who gives purpose to institutions through dynamic activity to ensure well-being and progress.

Values and the Normative Basis of Human Progress

The over-all aim is to examine the options for social order and social change in a developing postcolonial society that is currently plagued by a problem of anachronism and ossification of unviable institutions and values for individual and collective progress. The study engages and appropriates critical methodological inputs from the human sciences vocations for liberation, transformation and rectification. This pursues the fundamental problem of order and change, which is seen in the dynamics of the concept of value, understood either as something that we consider desirable, important or interesting. These things that can be considered valuable, whatever they are, must be subjected to valuation or estimation as to why they should be considered valuable. This will not only be defined in terms of a process of intrinsic or instrumental valuation, but also, will be seen in terms of appreciating the consequences of accepting these values. We are also interested in studying the mechanisms of value crea-



tion and institutionalization. Dubos (1970: 36) is thus right to maintain that “normative planning is not concerned with forecasting a future that is inevitable, but rather with ‘constructing’ or ‘inventing’ desirable futures”.

The critical task of axiological correction precipitates a challenge to all reasonable expectations. Thus pursuing social change is the work of promoting and sustaining excellence through the application of the creative imagination of the human mind. The driving power of all change is the mind of man. The human mind is the initiator and vector of creativity in the scientific and also social realms. The human mind seeks multifarious contact with things in reality in order to fashion phenomenal and useable order out of noumenal chaos or abstract entities. Specifically, the search for change makes sense when we realize that “human character, emotion and intelligence can in fact be transformed consciously by human actions into experiences different from what they are now. Indeed, the “creative imagination is necessary in order to solve ethical and political problems. Ethics and politics are attempts to create what ought to be” (Andersson, 1987: 198). Thus, the task before us is a normative one that boldly defines and aggressively upholds the rules and conventions of rectitude in thought and action. In a significant sense, our conceptual and practical engagement with social change is an existential challenge. In its most practical sense, “it means a collective and if possible non-violent removal of dehumanizing social conditions - poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, ethnic, religious, sexist, and other forms of discrimination” (Parsons, 1975: 250). It is a call for “behavior imbued with a sense of responsibility both towards oneself and the external world” (Kung, 1992: 82). The truth is that we must transform the current situation in which many of the social institutions or civil agencies for change seem to have run out of creative ideas that can enhance vibrancy and preoccupation in core national and social activities for development.

We pose the fundamental question of: what are now the conditions for social progress and human development? This question has become urgent and crucial due to the changing nature of spectral and consequential sociopolitical instability and economic conflicts that have compromised individual and collective survival. The volatility and turbulence



engendered by complexities have been worsened by the recent mutations in the manipulation of politics, marginality and the exclusion of others from power. This tendency has directed the human ethical conscience away from civility and order. The theory of social change is the quest for the re-engineering of the basic problem of the aesthetics of control in the physical and psychological realms of life by examining the roles of values and the rules of excellence in all facets of socio-economic life. The quest for social change is a devotion to a new way of looking at realities and thence to seek different interpretations of their meanings and consequences. The minimum pre-conditions of such a task must, however, remain the unapologetic commitment to core human and humane values that will evoke innovative thought-patterns and progressive views of ideas and actions. Such values will advertently bring about a new vision and mission of liberation and transformation in Africa. This task, will however, be based not just on an identification and clarification of these values, but more importantly, on the devising and development of the structures and institutions that can facilitate such a change. This change itself must either be seen in terms of the normative or ideal standard of things or more practically in terms of what can we do to transform existing structures on ground.

Social Order and Social Change

Inevitably, the phenomenological basis of our work of interrogating social change lies in the irrevocable desire and capability to repudiate existing epistemologies and schemes of comprehension and thus execute a transition from the old to the new. Phenomenology is possible by the interrogation or total repudiation of existing traditions and schemes or by a process of the partial reconstruction of the bounds of reality by the devising of new combination of the categories or existent in the social ontology or cosmology of a group. The search for social change receives its certification, in so far as we are in need of an epistemology that can assure emancipation and rectification. This may well call for a tripartite reconstruction of a system of values, education and control that can impact positively on society. Due to the necessity of knowledge and the study of the theory of knowledge, we must determine in a conscious and systematic manner the linkages between knowledge and action and



whether in fact the knowledge that we need is in our custody in either of two senses. The former refers to whether the epistemology is available and accessible to us, while the latter refers to whether we have reposed in us the potentiality or faculty of even acquiring and deploying that epistemology. Taken together, these two different questions crystallize into one question; what we can do with the knowledge that is now potentially and actually available to us.

Therefore, we may ask, what kind of alternative approaches and strategies can facilitate the process of social liberation, transformation and rectification for effective and applicable social change in an African environment? This is the more significant because the earlier strategies of change via modernization do not seem to have been sustainable. Whereas, western science came into the general African space, with the optimism that these problems would be overtaken and subdued shortly, evidence, however suggests that this has not conclusively been the case. Rather, the truth is that natural and man-made forces such as catabolic ethnicity, endemic poverty, aggravated insecurity and violence, cultural intolerance, ossified prejudices and perverted human nature have joined in the undermining of various types of social mechanisms for establishing good governance and viable community. These manipulative factors have truncated many of the core scientific/ technological productions, especially in transport, medicine, agriculture and telecommunications in a developing society.

Although, Szent-Gyorgyi (1970: 37) has put it that “the essential point about the scientific method is that it meets problems as problems and searches for the best solution, irrespective of prejudices and chauvinism.” This may be true, but yet, the current problematic of social change must be situated against the back-drop of the need for us to negotiate with the axiological, cultural and ethical factors that often do affect scientific or social change in a developing society. We should note for instance, that “spectacular technological development is doing little, if anything, to put an end to racism and other forms of discrimination” (Banjo, 2001: 6).

Thus, the prevailing crisis of social order and the imperative of change can be addressed through the reconceptualization of the spiritual



and material conditions of our existence in a developing society. This task necessitates the 'humanizing' of the distinctly human scientific disciplines and the multi-disciplinary interfacing of these for securing our ways of life. The point can easily be made that some of the most materially wealthy and developed societies of the world may not be the most peaceful, humane, just societies. These societies are themselves, bedeviled by crises of all kinds human relations problems; atavism, apathy, antipathy, racism, xenophobia, violence, consumerism, corruption, crime drugs and other vices, that raise questions about how human beings ought to conduct themselves and what values they should uphold for well-being and progress. It is not an over-statement to say that the situation is even more difficult in a developing society. If this is true we must clarify the ramifications of the postulation that "man is the engine of development and the level and range of development in any society depends on the level of development of the human beings in that society" (Ogude, 2001: 16-17). To do this, we cannot forget the truth that social change has been so difficult not just because people and structures are seemingly impervious to consequential and deep transformation, but also that "new methods often involve harder work, the need for which is not fully understood" (Mair, 1960: 450).

The task of social change is thus to elevate processes and results of human activity in its entirety. To achieve this goal, there is thus a need for a higher level of human values, and expectations. Given the problems described above, we can safely ask the question whether we have fully understood and appropriated the powers and "the task of all the human sciences, including the social sciences, namely, to understand human life and the human mind in their varied manifestations" (Lessnoff, 1988: 790)? The truth is that the human sciences have become increasingly important in the age of global and regional crisis and the rise of multifarious institutional frameworks that seek to bring under control some of the most subversive and intriguing forces that have confronted man in the last century. We need to create an impetus for the human sciences to contribute to the solution of the problems of knowledge, social control, and other aspects of cultural, political and economic life that inhibit humanity so as to "need forums where people can constructively discuss what



could be done and a social order where responsible decisions can be implemented” (More & al., 2013: 54).

The crisis of social change and its implications for social order and transformation in a developing society cannot be disconnected from a fundamental problem that “monistic and absolutistic perspectives have become so much the substance of the colleges and universities of today that this almost total emphasis on so-called scientific, subject focused education results in graduates whose views are necessarily fragmented, whose backgrounds are necessarily technological, and whose minds are untrained in speculation and problem solving” (Merrill, 1980: 336). The human sciences focus on the restructuring of the socio-cultural life of the people, the education and moderation of the human mind and moral and legal control of the citizen conduct. These tasks strike at the heart of the problem of social change understood as the quest for order and institutional rectification through the phenomenological liberation of the “deepest echo in human spirituality linked to the need to search for a new equilibrium and understanding” (Tighe, 2004: 129).

This view stresses the role of human agents and institutional mechanisms in change. More importantly, it stresses the concern for proper human character formation, which underscores the need for morality and attitudes that define a secure environment. Secular social organization and participation in such a community involves expectations about the behavior of one’s fellows and appreciation of those qualities of behavior, which facilitate that organization. Thus quest for the common good and total structural integrity and efficiency of things is the irrefutable province of social change. The critical problematic of social change must be seen from two related sides. First, is the capacity to create instruments and patterns of change, and second, is the capacity to adapt to change. Taken together, the human sciences attempt to meet these goals by developing and offering training and knowledge that allow us to “question, organise ideas, think logically and problem-solve” (Oluikpe, 1994: 16).

Social change in a developing post-colonial society is currently plagued by a problem of anachronism and ossification. The fundamental problem of order and change is seen in the dynamics of the concept of value, understood either as something that we consider desirable, im-



portant or interesting. These things that can be considered valuable, whatever they are, must be subjected to valuation or estimation as why they should be considered valuable. This will not only be defined in terms of a process of intrinsic or instrumental valuation, but also, will be seen in terms of appreciating the consequences of accepting these values. We are also interested in studying the mechanisms of value creation and institutionalization. Dubos (1970: 36) is thus right to maintain that “normative planning is not concerned with forecasting a future that is inevitable, but rather with “constructing” or “inventing” desirable futures.” This is the axiological and phenomenological driving force behind our study of this problematic. This theoretical and conceptual framework, is singularly and significantly that thing which is at the heart of social change and social order. This is especially so in a developing society defined by increased scarcity owing to poor human and material resources, lack of infrastructures and fundamental challenges arising from a macabre interplay of cosmological, genealogical and foreign accretions.

Conclusion

The issue of social order and social change focused our attention on the control and rectification in the physical and psychological realms of life and the hydra-headed consequences of these for national integration and human development in a developing society. A basic presumption of our study was that the human sciences largely “hold the key to social change” (Mathur, 1975: 395). This study moved beyond mere lip-service to this belief, rather, it sought mechanisms for clarifying and installing such changes. To this effect, we identified the situation of imperviousness to change, which could not be disconnected from our turbulent and convoluted multi-ethnicity and the real fact that much was left to be done in the areas of reconciliation, tolerance, and compassion for promoting a rectifiable socio-culturally well-ordered society. The urge for social integration and human rectification triggers a confrontation with, and overcoming of core ideological and economic obstructions that have ensured the occlusion and instability of roles and functions for conformity, rectitude and justice. Seen alternately, we reviewed the contexts of responsibility, integrity and order for the social or common good.



The indispensability of increasing the intensity of the investigation of fundamental issues around human involvement was seen in the quest for genuine community, appreciation of culture, leadership, social development, personal growth and active citizenship. Indeed, the concerns about society and the desire to better it compelled providing innovative strategies for meeting future challenges in the economic, ethical, cultural and social realms, in ways that were no longer a matter of chance. The central concern of the humanities has remained to build a society in which people can live according to better and higher principles. We focused specially on an African situation that was in need of total human and material development, and which in fact, currently faces a crisis of social order, social vision, social purpose and national reconciliation. The human sciences faced with the challenge of clarifying the interface between the scientific-technological outlook, highlighted demands of moral responsibility and the concerns of human development.

The central concern remained to build a society in which people can live according to moral principles – knowing right from wrong, harmonizing interests peacefully, recognizing others as ends and autonomous beings deserving of respect. It is thus clear that social change was nothing other than the crucial change in social norms, rules, conventions and values that will guide personal and social life for empowerment in a developing society; the progression from what is, to what ought to be, where what ought to be now becomes what is, in a dialectical process.

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Öz: Bu yazıda, en eski felsefe disiplini ve bilimlerin kraliçesi olan metafizik konusunda, onun aklın sınırları içerisinde niçin anlaşılabilir olduğu hakkında Kant'ın çözümlerinin kavramsal zemini üzerinde durulacaktır. Kant'a göre, metafiziksel yargılar, kendilerini mantıksal diye ifade ederek gerçekliğin bilgisini verdikleri savını dile getirirler. Yine de bu durum, yanılsama mantığından başka bir şey değildir. Metafizikle mantık arasındaki ilişkinin gerçek değil de kavramsal yapıya sahip olması, onun bir yanılsamadan oluştuğunu ifade eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kant, metafizik, eleştiri, önsel, sonsal, yargı, akıl, bilgi.

