
Peculiarities Of Social Change In Africa

By looking at concepts such as modernisation and urbanisation which arose from the Industrial Revolution, as well as racism, discrimination and the formation of class structures as studied and documented by Web Dubois, one will be able to conclude that these concepts which arose from European and North American sociology is useful to a large extent when studying social change in Africa, specifically looking at the Zambian Copperbelt and Soweto in South Africa.

We first need to define what sociology is and ask what it is, before we can further unpack the question and analyse how the concepts are useful when studying social change in Africa. The standard and common definition for what sociology is, is the study of society. This is a vague definition so I will be using a definition provided by Nicholas Abercrombie as well as Anthony Giddens to further define what sociology is.

Nicholas Abercrombie defines sociology as “The term has two stems — the Latin socius (companion) and the Greek logos (study of) - and literally means the study of the processes of companionship. In these terms, sociology may be defined as the study of the bases of social membership. More technically, sociology is the analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction, but no definition is entirely satisfactory because of the diversity of perspectives which is characteristic of the modern discipline.” (Abercrombie, Nicholas, 2004).

Anthony Giddens then goes on to define what sociology is by saying, “A social science having its main focus on the study of the social institutions brought into being by the industrial transformations of the past two or three centuries. It involves a historical, anthropological and a critical sensitivity.” (Giddens, Anthony, 1986).

We can clearly deduce now by the definitions listed above that sociology is more than just “the study of society”. Sociology is the study of society over notable periods of time where vital human advancements and vital world changes had taken places such as various revolutions with the most notable being the Industrial revolution. By looking at how the Industrial Revolution impacted and affected Britain at that time, we can compare some of the concepts that arose out it such as urbanisation and modernisation, to some of the social revolutions that took place in Africa, specifically the looking at the change on the Zambian Copperbelt which sparked a revolution in Zambia.

The origins of Sociology dates back to times of tremendous social change and transformation. The concept of Sociology could be seen as a result of two major evolutions which had occurred in Europe, The French revolution on 1789 and the Industrial Revolution. (Plummer, John Macionis and Ken, 2012, p. 17). Along with the revolutions came a few notable and social changing effects: a change in the means of labour with most labour now moving from manual labour towards factory based and machine operated labour , the idea of urbanisation as people now left their towns and countryside to seek employment in recently opened factories in the industrial cities, and the growth of a new economy based around capitalism (Plummer, John Macionis and Ken, 2012).

Although the revolutions in Europe brought a lot of positives and new ideas, it also had just as many negative side effects. The drastic change in the means of production left many unemployed and contributed towards extreme poverty. With the growth of capitalism and of factories in the industrial cities, many people flocked to the cities to now find employment. These people subsequently abandoned their homes in the villages and countryside for homes on the cities. Not everybody was able to secure a home in the city due to the limited housing available and this resulted in overpopulation in the cities with many left homeless. This opened the floodgates for a variety of different social issues such as spread of disease, pollution and crime to arise (Plummer, John Macionis and Ken, 2012). As a result of the growth of capitalism, different social classes began to form. Wealthy business owners, now began to exploit their workers in an effort to maximise their profits. To better understand the difference in race and class, we can shift our focus to North America and the work of Web DuBois to further help us understand the certain concepts of class, race and urbanisation.

A pioneer in studying sociology in North America is Web Du Bois. Du Bois was born in a racially-integrated and tolerant town in Massachusetts and attended an integrated school. He studied in Berlin and Harvard, where he was the first African-American to complete a PhD in 1895. He published many pieces and most of his work covered information and studies on the 'Negro' population in the city of Philadelphia. (Seekings, Jeremy, 2019)

Du Bois helps us understand the racial segregation between African-Americans and White Americans and mentality which African-Americans in the United States had during the early 20th century. He states in *The Colored World Within*, "The American Negro, therefore, is surrounded and conditioned by the concept which he has of white people and he is treated in accordance with the concept they have of him." (Du Bois, Web , 1940). This quote provides us with some insight as to the mentality African-Americans had stating that it's almost as if African-American are brainwashed into believing that all whites are bad people and whatever they hear in the church, school or at gatherings, have been indoctrinated into them and leads them to believing that it is the complete truth. It also states that they are treated by white Americans with discrimination, misconceptions and unjust practices which dates back to slavery.

Du Bois does also argue that the all the delinquent actions which African-Americans do, does have a remedial cause and relates that back to slavery. Slavery had put African-Americans in the financial and social situations for them years down the line to resort to crime and delinquency to escape the poverty-stricken life which was bestowed upon them as a result of nearly two centuries of slavery. He then also goes on to explain how it's indoctrinated into the brains of the African American population to think and believe that they are inferior to their white counterparts (Du Bois, Web , 1940).

Du Bois summarises the financial circumstances and class of African-Americans perfectly when he stated, "Above all, the Negro is poor: poor by heritage from two hundred and forty-four years of chattel slavery, by emancipation without land or capital and by seventy-five years of additional wage exploitation and crime peonage." (Du Bois, Web , 1940). Since slavery had come into existence, African-Americans had been discriminated against. There was always a significant wage gap between African-Americans and whites. Also, basic city services such as water, sewerage, schools and hospitalisation were always neglected (Du Bois, Web , 1940).

Du Bois on the other hand, described the class structure of the white Americans as majority of them being middle and upper class with a very few being lower class. He also goes on to say

that the reason they are in the upper and middle class is for various reasons such as them benefitting from slavery and migrating from the South to the North where there were more jobs readily available and reserved for them (Du Bois, Web , 1940). We can find the information and studies of Du Bois useful when comparing it to the rise of modernity and class structures in Africans countries, mainly in Zambia and South Africa.

In the late 1920s, Northern Rhodesia (now known as Zambia) underwent an immense industrial development as a result of large-scale copper mines being setup up which in effect, transformed the country (Ferguson, James, 1999). One could say this was similar to the Industrial revolution which took place in Britain as both resulted in an economic boom with it making Zambia then one of the richest and most promising African states.

Similarly, to the Industrial Revolution, modernisation and urbanisation took place at a rapid pace. Shortly after the establishment of the Copperbelt, mining towns were setup along it. This attracted European Colonists to settle and try and capitalise on the financial opportunity it brought, as well as attracting locals and natives in search of employment (Ferguson, James, 1999). Robert Bates made the claim that on the exact land and premises where the copper mines are built, if one looks back 50 years ago, the land just consisted of forests. But now stands multiple highly profitable mines, making Zambia one of the world's leading exporters of copper (Bates, Robert, 1976).

Zambia in 1969 had one of the highest GDP per capita in Africa and even a higher GDP than certain countries such as Brazil and Turkey at the time. (World Bank 1979, 126). However, somewhere along the lines, the "African Industrial revolution" had lost its footing which resulted in nearly two decades of economic decline. Thus, resulting in Zambia's GDP per capita drastically dropping (Ferguson, James, 1999). Many former Copperbelt workers were now left unemployed and forced to return "home". For many Zambians, the concept of migration, was a matter of leaving the city where there had previously been work and returning back home to their various villages. This process was coined "returned migration" (Ferguson, James, 1999, p. 82). On returning back "home", various workers class or social status would have changed. Previously employed workers who previously would've classed themselves as middle class would now class themselves as lower class. As a result of colonisation in Africa, white settlers were seen to be the "elite" in the eyes of Africans. This resulted in the formation of status and class groups amongst Africans as mentioned above (Magubane, Bernard, 1971). We can use the recurring concept of class as mentioned in Europe and North America to understand social change in Africa. By looking at the concept of class, we can find similarities between the class status of Zambians and Sowelans in South Africa.

A defining feature when discussing class amongst the locals in Soweto is that of affordability and this is defined as, the ability to consume and maintain a certain lifestyle. The main factor which determines which class you fit into is your financial circumstances, as one would expect (Mosa Phadi and Claire Ceruti, 2013). Based on various studies and surveys conducted by Mosa Phadi and Claire Ceruti, a four-class model availed itself when Sowelans were asked to identify which class they fit in. The classes which came up were: Lower, middle, upper and working class. (Mosa Phadi and Claire Ceruti, 2013)

The key feature of the lower class is deprivation and is linked to poverty. It can be summed up as, there are many things people in this class want to have, but cannot afford it. A recurring problem in this class is unemployment. The defining feature of the upper class is the word

'everything' which means that they have everything and have the ability to buy everything whenever they want. The middle class has the feature of affordability and can be described as 'neither rich nor poor'. Occupants of the middle class range from shack dwellers to successful businesswoman. The working class is defined as anybody who is employed and has debt that is possible only as a result from a normal salary. Majority of the people surveyed and interviewed classed themselves as either middle or working class. (Mosa Phadi and Claire Ceruti, 2013)

We can therefore conclude that it is in fact useful to use European and North American Sociology and the concepts that arose out of it, to better understand social change in Africa. The concept of urbanisation and modernisation applies to both Britain and Zambia with both nations experiencing tremendous amounts of change with many workers leaving the countryside's and villages to seek employment in cities. The concept of class as mention by Du Bois can be compared to how Sowetans now class themselves. The African-American population and the South African population both have a common trait of slavery and discrimination based on race, which had led them to being placed in such low-class status.

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