

«ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES» RIGGS REVISITED

By

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It is nearly twenty years since F. RIGGS wrote, «Administration in Developing Countries – The Theory of Prismatic Society» (1), a book which has become somewhat of a classic and a basic text for students of public administration. This article will summarise and discuss RIGGS' ideas.

The book aims to understand the forces leading to administrative transformations from traditional, status-oriented bureaucracies to modern patterns of governmental organisation in which ideals of efficiency and effectiveness can become operating principles. For this purpose, RIGGS proposed a theoretical model consisting of two poles: 1) a fused system and 2) a diffracted system.

A *fused* system consists of relatively self-contained structures each of which performs a large number of functions. A fused society has very few roles. It ranks high on particularism and ascription.

A *diffracted* system is functionally specific, in that a structure performs a limited number of functions. The system is highly differentiated. A person may occupy many diverse and conflicting roles.

Between these two poles is a *prismatic* system which has characteristics of both the fused and the diffracted. For example, whereas in the fused system the family may perform a wide range of functions, including educational, economic, political, social and religious, by contrasts, in the prismatic system, the family may impinge fundamentally on the political party, civil service recruitment, market behaviour and religious sects; and in a diffracted system, family influence would be negligible in these spheres. The prismatic system is between agricultural and industrial, between rural and urban. Whereas in diffracted systems, politics and administration are quite substantially separated in institutional practice, in prismatic system, this separation is incomplete. In prismatic systems, people have abandoned the single fused role pattern but have not yet fully adapted to externally imposed multi-role diffraction. Thus a farmer may simultaneously believe in the effectiveness of both religious charms and modern insecticides or seeds. So there are frequent clashes between individuals having incompatible or conflicting inner-directed value systems and goals. The inner man is adjusting painfully to external modernising forces. Prismatic inner-directed man swings extravagantly between contradictory extremes. Prismatic man is irrational: he struggles against his rival even if there is no real clash of views. On the contrary, diffracted society has no problem in inducing its individuals to internalise its organisational goals and methods.

Diffracted systems are based on modern economics the essence of which is market-rationality, the relative pricing of inputs and outputs. Inputs include taxes and payments. Outputs are finished products, goods

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and services. The key to redistribution in diffracted systems is the making of payments to a common centre, followed by reallocation or spending from the centre. This process is basically the same in the United States of America and in the Soviet Union because of the major role of the state in both countries. In fused systems, by contrast, transactions are a social exchange of values, and economic behaviour is reciprocal and redistributive. But in prismatic systems, prices are determined by both market and non-market factors. There is price-indeterminacy. Fixed prices are not marked on goods for sale. The final sale price, after bargaining, will depend on the relative skill of both parties, their interpersonal relations, their power and status positions. The price of labour, including civil servants, tends to vary with its degree of influence, the power of its sponsor, as well as its skill or competence. Land prices are affected by religious, political and familial factors. Whereas time, in the fused system, is in no way given a price, in the diffracted model it is regarded as a productive factor subject to rational allocation. In prismatic society, lip-service only is paid to rational goals in use of time. Hence prismatic man is unable to forecast with any accuracy what future requirements will be. He cannot plan.

Whereas diffracted man has free access to the system and full protection of property and contract rights, prismatic man inhabits an insecure and violent world where he must buy his security by cultivating support of influential patrons. Having sold an order to the powerful, one then returns part of the purchase price to the agent. Thus the «kick-back» is typically prismatic.

In fused systems, because of the fusion of functions and social roles, social rewards are combined: the elite commands all three societal resources of political power, economic wealth and social prestige. Diffraction, however, has separated the social roles of the elite: political power is for political elites, prestige goes to religious leaders and intellectuals, administration is handled by officials with fixed tenure and salary, and economic roles are performed by businessmen enjoying economic wealth.

In the prismatic situation, with rapid change toward social differentiation, the new integrative mechanism of money comes into full swing causing power to be traded for wealth, wealth for prestige and wealth again for power. Offering bribes is trading wealth for power. Taking bribes is trading power for wealth. Large-scale and endemic corruption in prismatic societies is thus a form of trade in societal rewards as the social roles of the elite become differentiated. All of diffracted man's spending is legally classifiable as either investment or consumption. But irrational prismatic man still clings to older, undifferentiated motives. His conspicuous consumption may be for his social prestige or to acquire religious merit or to buy political influence or to secure appointment of incompetent but strategic persons.

A fused man sees the world hierarchically and in predominantly sacred and supernatural terms. He copes with the environment by ritual. For him, nature is unpredictable and not subject to mechanical laws. A diffracted man has egalitarian assumptions about his world which is secular, and he seeks rational means to achieve goals.

Prismatic people have abandoned old values and have not fully adopted the new ones. They exist in a normless moral vacuum that allows unbridled cunning, cheating and bribery. The externally imposed laws, rules, theories and procedures do not provide tolerably faithful representations of actual social behaviour and do not serve as effective means of social control. Legislation and manipulation of the law often fail to achieve intended results.

In a diffracted society, the acquisition of property and wealth takes place according to rules and legal contract: property has status under which its possession and use are legitimised and safeguarded by public institutions. In a fused society, wealth is governed by status, by ascriptive criteria such as position, family, prestige, power, age, generation and sex. In prismatic society, the two are combined, urban centres taking the lead in contract regulation, and the rural areas lagging behind. Thus, there often is a two price system, one being the official, contractual price and the other the kickback price. Modern rates and rents overlap with traditional tributes, largess and gifts.

In diffracted societies, all members can participate in the dominant cultural forms because literacy, mass media and communications enable all citizens to be mobilised; whereas in a fused system, the people remain scattered in isolated small communities.

Diffracted politics works as an input-output: political processes include socialisation, articulation, aggregation of interests and communication: governmental outputs include the making of rules, their application and their adjudication. The structures of modern democratic differentiated government correspond neatly to this input-output scheme. Fused societies, however, do not: they lack communication between rulers and ruled, their people's minds are constricted and isolated, unable to comprehend events in the capital and hence quite incapable of formulating political demands. Although political and administrative functions of government can be performed in a fused system, the rule-making function cannot. In prismatic society, the law provides one policy but in practice a different policy prevails: there is much double talk. Law enforcement agencies increase rapidly but the agents are bribed by a public unable to articulate any affective demands or any coherent programme for change. There is a blockage in the input-output relationship. The widespread consensus necessary to enforce restriction is absent. Positive development requires that the powerful be restrained by rule of law so they cannot convert their power into wealth and that the wealthy be protected by the rule of law so that they need not buy protection.

An inverse relationship exists between administrative output and bureaucratic power: the more powerful officials become, the less effective they are as administrators. But in prismatic society bureaucratic spread over the hinterland is necessary for control over local power bases. Official political parties fail to exercise control over bureaucracies. Administration is politicised. Under exogenous pressures, the old fused bureaucracies are rationalised and, as they greatly expand, so they become a primary vehicle for elite recruitment. But some communities are excluded from these new channels of social and political mobility, from these avenues to wealth and power. Such excluded groups tend to become incubators of counter-elites and the nucleus of political parties.

Whereas both fused and diffracted systems are relatively democratic and egalitarian, in the prismatic system economic development brings a widening of the wealth gap and a tendency to totalitarianism. A prismatic society has disequilibrium or negative development. The specialised or diffracted institutions for wealth redistribution have been introduced by the *unavoidable* external pressures of marketisation and industrialisation and they do not yet work effectively. Real development consists of capital-formation through curtailment of consumption, increased productivity, changes in personal and social security and changes in wealth distribution. These are welfare values. In a prismatic society, with increasing marketisation, these values decline. This may be an inevitable stage in economic growth leading, later, to a higher stage – the welfare state.

Development requires the growth of a new middle class of indigenous industrial entrepreneurs capable of innovation and of combining capital-accumulation with managerial skills. To do this, a potential entrepreneur must first gain access to the upper class, the power-holding elite, for assistance. These power-holders, who include government officials, are themselves economically unproductive because they rely on the production of others in the form of tributes, dues and labour services to support their elite life-style. Their relation to an aspiring industrialist is often one of extortion. They treat him like a beggar or a tramp and they fear him as a threat power. Thus a comprador elite may deliberately stifle innovative indigenous entrepreneurship which should be the core of a development-oriented middle class.

The above merely highlights some of RIGGS' major thoughts. Because of the book's length – some 470 pages – it is impossible to cover its whole range and depth.

Theoretical models, says RIGGS, «are intrinsically neither true nor false... they reveal significant relationships among empirical data». (2) A model is not something to be found in the real world, he says, but, «it can serve a heuristic purpose by helping us to describe real world situations» (3). But if theory is not in the real world, where is it situated? RIGGS would not deny that theory is in his own mind; and that his mind is situated in the real world. So theoretical models *are* in the real world. Moreover, RIGGS' mind is not his alone. It is the output of particular intellectual and ideological inputs from the «real world». So if RIGGS is trying to serve a heuristic purpose, we have to be fully aware of the world-view that he holds, in order to be free to accept, reject or modify it.

He assures us that he has no wish to claim that either the fused model or the diffracted model is better or worse. «Who is to judge the moral worth or aesthetic value of these diverse social orders?» (4) But even if he does not want to allow his theory to be infused with his view of a better world, he strongly inclines to the diffracted model as the *inevitable* direction in which the world is moving, even if he sometimes doubts its «betterness». There is no objective, value-free social science.

Central to RIGGS's thinking is his correct view that studying elite behaviour helps us to understand the causes of underdevelopment. Societies

everywhere are divided into, on one hand, an economic base – the productive forces – and on the other hand, a superstructure of productive relations – «ideas, habits, customs, behaviour... philosophical, legal, religious, political, artistic... and the institutions through which they function» (5). The «right» combination of base and superstructure is the key to development. Contemporary development thinking is divided into two opposed schools: (i) those who believe that development is concerned with resolving the fundamental contradiction between relations of production and productive forces and (ii) those who assume that all the trouble is with the backward productive forces.

RIGGS belongs to the second school of thought. Virtually nowhere in his book does he refer to the economic base, the producing majority of the population, except as isolated, ignorant and remotely scattered villagers in the rural hinterland who have not yet been fully mobilised from their backwardness into political participation. In contrast, the elite and its structural-functional changes attract all RIGGS's energy and enthusiasm, they form the very core of prismatic theory. Those with power, wealth and social prestige are to raise up the masses from their primordial slumber, from their fatalistic unresponsiveness to prices and wages. Accordingly, it is the elites alone who can initiate «development» because they are closest to its source, which is outside the developing countries.

RIGGS defines «development» in terms of industrialisation and increased government strength: «traditional societies can be identified by the presence of elites who are determined to industrialise their economies and strengthen their government machinery. Whenever elites are found who give the primary stimulus for basic social transformation within their society... they are probably subject to compelling external pressures» (6). I am tempted to substitute «secondary» for «primary», since the stimulus obviously originates elsewhere. To the above factors, RIGGS adds increased per capita income as another index of development: «In the theory of economic development, we can use such indices as level of per capita income or... ROSTOW's 'Stages of Economic Growth – A Non-Communist Manifesto', ... it does give the economist a set of models which can direct his research to significant variables» (7). Specifically, «development is defined in terms of increasing interdependence, marketisation and extension of the money and price system... A society may develop but per capita wealth may decline at the same time, while inequity and insecurity increase... Social welfare, morality... and meaning of life... may be undermined» (8). When changes are undesired, it is negative development. But it is still development. Since the fused has all but disappeared, we are left with only the diffracted to choose if we want a better system, unless we want to keep that wretched halfway house, prismatic society. In effect, there is no choice at all.

RIGGS regards fusion as having performed largely defensive or law and order functions, in contrast to the prismatic and diffracted systems which increasingly care for public welfare: «From its largely ceremonial and defensive role in the traditional society, the government begins to provide a wide range of activities calculated to support the public welfare,

defend the society against foreign attack and promote further economic development. A system of development administration arises out of a regime of security administration» (9). The myth that traditional government had a «largely ceremonial and defensive role» has been severely attacked by historians who point out that «the political state in Africa and elsewhere was a consequence of the development of the productive forces, but the state, in turn, also conditioned the rate at which the economy advanced, because the two are dialectically interrelated» (10). Many examples are available: in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in Western Suddan, the state was active in iron mining and smelting. In the «mixed economy» of fifteenth century Zimbabwe, gold, copper and brick industries, geology and hydrology developed under state auspices. In fact, the rise of states in pre-colonial Africa was integrally related to technological development, to improvements in agricultural and industrial productivity. The supremacy of the state in building the cities, organising economic institutions acting as the largest buyer was likewise stressed by Ibn KHALDUN around the year 1400 (11). This is certainly much more than the supposed «defensive and ceremonial role» RIGGS attributes to the pre-colonial state.

Pre-colonial government, in his view, lacked «machinery for transmitting communication between the ruled and the rulers... the vast majority were not brought into the communications net... the mind remains constricted and isolated, unable to comprehend... events in the capital... and quite incapable of formulating political demands...» (12). The metaphor of the «net is significant. Fishermen use nets to catch and «constrict» fish. One wonders whether «constriction» is more diffracted than fused! Unshaken in the blind obedience of the subjects, RIGGS continues: Even in the great Chinese and Egyptian Kingdoms «the ruler... issues imperial commands to be heard and obeyed... Officials... are not carrying out the will of the people » (13).

Whilst agreeing that communication was slow in the fused system, I would suggest that word-of-mouth or talking-drum or smoke messages may have been just as effective as diffracted mass-communication in maintaining the stable status quo. Moreover, the assumed inability of fused people to «formulate political demands» suggests a submissiveness to authority unsupported by historical evidence: rulers *were* overthrown, political systems *were* revolutionised, as a result of formulated political demands.

RIGGS' prismatic model displays a quite unhealthy obsession with domination and control as inevitable preconditions for development. This obsession with law, order and stability is inconsistent with his own view that «security administration» yields to «development administration» in the prismatic model. He accurately describes the process by which Europe and America forcibly incorporated weaker countries by colonising or annexing them. «Let us try to visualise», he says, «some of the changes which occur as traditional societies confront the threat of industrial power.. The impact may be viewed in purely military terms... superior organisation and weapons cannot be effectively resisted by bows and arrows... Hence a threatened country feels it necessary to adopt modern weapons and military organisation. This... is expensive... and it entails... purchase. It is

easier to purchase than to manufacture, but either alternative requires social and economic changes... The society must earn foreign exchange... If the economy can find something it already produces for domestic use — rice, for example, or luxury goods — it may be able to buy defense materials» (14). At this point, the reader may be asking against whom the defense materials are supposed to be used since the country has already been invaded by the enemy and the enemy is now supplying defence materials which the country is supposed to use against invaders! But RIGGS supplies an answer: «Military threat usually arises not as a frontal attack on the central regime but a peripheral attack on a frontier zone» (15). Our brother has now become our enemy! Under the umbrella of weapons supplied by the imperialist power, the weaker country's fused system is forcibly diffracted or opened up to the modernising invasion. The beneficiaries are the elites, but gradually «development» benefits are supposed to trickle down to the masses as the «governmental structure is reoriented in terms of constitutional ideas, the rights and obligations of citizen and public servants, the roles of offices and official positions, of legislatures and politicians...» (16)

RIGGS is here accurately describing a classical process which has, with slight local variations, been the technique of both European and American imperialism since the Berlin Conference of 1884. Before he started the book, he tells us, «I had previously been fully absorbed in the study of international relations and American foreign policy» (17). He thus writes with intimate «inside» knowledge of imperialism, a word he scrupulously avoids, because he takes it for granted as the inevitable spread of superior culture. «Importation of arms into the developing countries increases at a rate of 10 % per annum, over twice the average annual rate of growth of domestic output... 80 % of U.S. exports of major weapons to the Third World have gone to countries bordering of the Soviet Union and China... Until 1954, all U.S. arms to Third World countries were free of charge and since then 50 % have been free and a further 25 % subsidised or sold on easy terms under what the Americans call their 'aid' programmes» (18). The above may explain why RIGGS thinks that «military threat usually arises... as a peripheral attack on a frontier zone».

Thus a major function of modernisation theories is to strengthen the coercive power of the state which they actually defined in terms of force: «The political system is that system of interactions... which performs the function of integration and adaptation... by means of employment of more or less legitimate physical force» (19). Politics, in their view, concerns how the U.S.A. will maintain and enhance its power to regulate behaviour in its numerous fledgling client-states. «Enforcement of compliance is the *raison d'être* of the political system» (20). Thus, what they call theory is ideology and propaganda for «manipulating the world, not for understanding it» (21). How, then, can RIGGS claim that «power in a diffracted model is quite restricted in scope»? (22) His use of the word «power», in the narrow sense of a constitutionally defined separate role for professional politicians, diverts our attention from a more widely accepted meaning such as «production of intended effects» (23). RIGGS tries to

show that markets allocate scarce resources according to their superior technical efficiency. But «political economics tries to show that markets distribute income according to relative power» (24). Differentiation of the policy places real limits on the potential power of the productive base. Modernisation of the prismatic type removes the locus of control and innovation away from the client state whose sovereignty is a fragile illusion. The U.S.A., in its role as world policeman, encourages repressive regimes and parasitic elites in brutal violation of human rights in order that the modernising goals of industrialisation, economic growth and rising per capita income may be achieved.

Convinced, RIGGS believes that a country is developing as long as it remains in the U.S. sphere of influence. While he has been writing, one third of the world's people, China, were experiencing the most profound revolutionary development in recent world history, without U.S. «aid». No reference is made to China.

Prismatic societies, we are told, are typically unstable and violent. Coups d'état are supposed to be the order of the day. Strengthening their governments through the right mix of coercion and persuasion is a central problem of modernisation. Instability is caused by poor countries trying to become rich: «It is not the absence of modernity but the effort to achieve it which produces domestic violence and instability» (25). This picture of endemic unrest is not convincing. The percentage of all poor countries' heads of states who have remained in power for over ten years is remarkably high. The trend is toward stagnation rather than stability. When there is destabilisation, it is deliberately fostered by the U.S. to prevent liberation movements from removing long-servicing despots. In prismatic societies, rhetorical nationalism masks an eagerness to act as heavily armed puppets of the imperialist powers, the very powers so enthusiastically engaged in exploiting their human and material resources.

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RESUME

Dans cet article l'auteur se propose de reconsidérer les principes sur lesquels RIGGS a construit sa théorie qui voulait expliquer le processus de transformation des systèmes administratifs dans les pays en développement. Pour lui, deux systèmes fondamentaux caractérisent les systèmes administratifs : les systèmes d'amalgame et les systèmes de diffraction. Le système d'amalgame contient des structures suffisamment indépendantes les unes des autres, chacune pouvant assurer un nombre assez important de fonctions. Quant au système de diffraction il est fondamentalement spécifique dans la mesure où une structure n'assure qu'un nombre limité de fonctions. Ainsi une personne peut dans un tel système jouer des rôles divers et souvent opposés. Entre ces deux systèmes se trouve un système intermédiaire dit prismatique qui contient les caractéristiques des deux systèmes décrits plus haut. Sur la base de ce classement des systèmes administratifs, RIGGS étudie le rapport homme / systèmes administratifs sous les différents aspects de sa vie sociale. Après cette première partie qui résume l'essentiel de la théorie de RIGGS, l'auteur aborde dans la deuxième partie une brève discussion de cette théorie. Il y note certains principes dangereux dont l'application aux systèmes administratifs des pays en développement ne ferait que les maintenir davantage sous la dépendance des pays développés car si les sociétés prismatiques qui constituent la majeure partie des pays en développement sont fondamentalement instables et violentes, cette instabilité et cette violence sont moins le fait de leur caractère prismatique que du désir des grandes puissances comme les USA de perpétuer leur domination et leur exploitation sur ces sociétés.