

The Social Foundations of Research and the Need for Institutional Semantic Reforms

Introduction

A key take-home learning one could take from the research proposal below is, *a way of doing*, resulting from my experience as a researcher. It consists in calling into question the notoriously bottom-ranked position we occupy in terms of research and science. Science, let us not be mistaken, is also a market governed by power relations: it is therefore up to us, Africans, to propose new ways of thinking that will set us free. Science, through research, turns out to be the first issue of power in the world; it is the ‘knot of vipers’, the hotbed of local and global issues shaking up the world. The yoke of colonialism hardest to shake off is the one that prevails in scientific relationships, and which still has great resonance today in our interactions—as researchers—with Western research centres that dominate us and often shape our research practices.

The following proposal is broken down into two major parts: one dealing with ‘the social foundations’ composed of labour value¹, which is the bedrock of any society that seeks to offer utmost social and political invulnerability to its citizens, and another one dealing with ‘gestations, institutional and semantic reforms’ that empower it to ensure its own development and the management of its material, natural and human resources [the nucleus of these developments and these gestations revolve around the goals to be defined for labour and horizontal (debate, policy dialogue, communication) and top-down relationships (social class and domination relations regarding the appropriation of labour and its extensions, wealth, social power, etc.)]².

The following proposals, though succinct and to be furthered, fulfil two conditions: *Unemotional stigmatisation* (description of the priority research areas and their objects), but also the passion for Africa, i.e. *Commitment*.

Labour and employment

Today, labour and employment seem to be the area of utmost interest for economic, social and political actors. The ‘financial crisis’, with its spin-off effects

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on the labour market, especially for African societies, widely open to world economy today, is a possible starting point (among others, since the phenomena in question boil down to structural causes beyond the historical and specific context of the current global crisis) for social science reflections on the impact the global crisis has had on the African social fabric. Labour and employment are two categories that must be defined and delineated; thus the need to promote basic research. This work will be entrusted to senior researchers, and it must be circumscribed in terms that are associated with the specific and historical conditions of today’s Africa.

Labour: i.e. the work category as the basics of fundamental research on its value dimension (whether productive or unproductive labour), on the right of the citizen, the self-fulfilment and well-being, on the content of development, on the organizing and structuring meaning of economic and social development. The breakdown of labour, according to anthropological approaches is capable of bringing the working class back to its basic meanings and dusting off all the theoretical dross which have emerged as a result of the effect of marginal theories and ‘post-modernity’ approaches supportive of speculation and unproductive labour instead of productive work, and trust capital as opposed to physical capital.

Employment: i.e. the concrete and historical forms in which work is shaped today, and especially as designated by international companies, capitalist enterprises, its ongoing evolution. Today employment appears in multiple shapes as a result of new market values such as flexibility. Other ancillary and induced values are at play: the multitasking skills to be taught to prospective job seekers, professional bachelor degrees in all the training programmes and the education system at the

expense of basic research and education. A new landscape of education, training and culture is emerging, that of the international division in the functions of universities and educational institutions: on the one hand, students are close to laying the emphasis on reflective and cognitive functions globally, with a *focus*, as appropriate, on the specific features of each country, while on the other hand, other students are shifting their focus on the training programmes leading to basic functions and task supervision roles. Particular heed is paid to contract performance monitoring proposed to link up and match the demands of the labour market (with special emphasis placed on needs of companies) and education content. This training is jointly constructed by universities and companies, which emphasises professional and applied bachelor degrees to the detriment of basic bachelor degree education.

Alternative ways

Emerging alternative ways are steering clear of the mainstream trends underpinning various areas of social life. The dominating trends are governed by three values increasingly considered as intrinsic: the value of the Market, the value of the City, the value of the State and we could even add a fourth value: the value of Written Civilization (and/or now Digital Value, we might say).

These alternative ways, reabsorbing the said three or four dominant values today, consist of two components: reflection on the ‘community’ and reflection on ‘social exchange’ that dominating social sciences have distorted by introducing the phrase ‘Social Bond’ underpinned by an imperialist drive and affected by the *virus of positivist paradigm*.

The aims of basic and applied research are: solidarity-based economy, social economy, mutualism, the establishment of internal mutual-support groups (e.g. trade in goods or services, tontines), exchange among partners, within families or small groups, among neighbours (neighbouring countries, neighbouring tribes, communities governed by good neighbourly

relations), among aliens. The studies of these three levels of networking (parental, territorial, international) for the purpose of achieving economic reforms in African societies and also offering Africa the opportunities to create specific network-based entities anchored on its peculiarities can be best defined by anthropology and ethnology.

Training Institute: Epistemology of social sciences

The concepts, theories (critical theory, etc.), schools (Chicago School, Frankfurt School, etc.), paradigms (functionalist, Marxist, etc.) and all the research protocols that surround the practice of researcher, including books and abstract data but also field practice (research process, survey procedures, methodologies, techniques) should be put in the spatio-temporal contexts of their production and examined in terms of criticism and evaluation, so as to exert a relationship of equality with research centres that operate on Western bases of established priorities under the pretext that the level of approach is international and universal. Describing the history of a theory, the conditions of its emergence, the purposes it serves, the procedural methods of field research or materials it values, the underlying meanings, the relativism the mark of which it bears, its punctual and specific character; all this, with the intention to determine the extent to which it is consistent or not with the realities of countries of the South, specifically Africa.

It is, for example, interesting to study the content of notions, categories and concepts widely used in the social sciences, such as 'formal' versus 'informal' (applied to the market for example), to analyze the normative content of concepts such as 'traditional' versus 'modern' (applied to sectors), 'civilized' versus 'primitive' (applied to societies), 'underdeveloped' versus 'developed', 'old' versus 'modern', 'conservative' versus 'liberal', 'terrorist' versus 'peaceful citizen', and many other pairs (but also process and procedures, implicit or explicit) marking out the researcher spirit that can be identified for inclusion in an educational program for young researchers in Africa.

Civil society and political society

Studies based on two concepts: civil society and political society, proved fruitful for countries of the South. They

have undoubtedly established a clear distinction between both societies and showed that for the southern hemisphere the civil society is often against the political society, in the anthropological dimensions of such concepts. Pierre Clastres studies (1974), or those of E. Evans-Pritchard (1968), can be read and put to use for an emancipatory interpretation of African societies against imported political categories, including the state (1992). It is not to stick only to Gramscian concepts, but they are a starting point for reflection to develop and update on such critical concepts to introduce reflection tools relevant in the areas of political dialogue, public debate and citizen management of society.

Development

Stigmatization of patterns, prediction, anticipation and sociological imagination (and more generally of social sciences)

Conventional social sciences are used to describing the relationship between societies in the North and those in the South in terms of gap to bridge and delay to catch up. Several criticisms have been made against this approach that conceals a linear conception of the development of societies. Obviously, this conception is simplistic: it reduces the specificities of southern countries to what is termed as the universal merit of northern societies, often treated as historical societies while those in the South are often seen as societies that are 'blocked', in formation, underdeveloped, 'backward' and 'primitive'.

The challenge of African societies is to perceive development issues not in terms of delay to catch up, with a gap to bridge, but in terms of anticipation and foresight. The salvation of Africa lies more in an attitude of detachment and disengagement with locomotives leading the world (industrialized countries), concomitant with an attitude of founding its own evolution mechanisms. This will only be possible if research on the chances of this detachment, in order to ensure autonomy of evolution, is conducted. This research will be firstly aimed at showing the current ways and patterns of the world evolution, in its dominant regions (the West in particular), with their sprawling expansion on the rest of the world. Secondly, it will be necessary

to conduct a prospective assessment with impact studies on the African continent (and comparison with similar regions, such as Latin America and Asia). Thirdly, we must anticipate evolution scenarios and alternative ways to such dominant patterns.

In the USA, there is an institute in Boston which is responsible for recording strategic developments in several areas, predicting, and if possible, advising US policymakers on the ways to follow in the sense of US interest. A similar body, the identity of which we will examine (institute, watchdog, etc.) should be considered. Areas may be those of biology, evolution of diseases and health issues, up to military policies, through the analysis of societies using the merits of social sciences.

Local Development

It is the content that will be, more than any other research area, the most technical possible, the least related to state policies, the most entrenched with people in their localism as well as their close relationships with lands and their fields; but also the most diverse in categories: age, or socio-professional stratification, search for economic niches and income-generating activities to meet their physiological and basic needs. In other words, conducting research that anchor development themes within civil society more than in political society.

Development is to be articulated here to include the pursuit of economic and therefore social autonomy of social groups. This starting point is called local development and contrasts with top-down development. This direction does not preclude development studies in terms of growth and positive increase of GDP and ratios of socio-collective equipment by inhabitant. CODESRIA research directions should be characterized by an articulation of economic development and social balance (or what was called in the 1960s 'social progress', a phrase which is not always fortunate because of the positivist content of the word 'progress').

Basic research on management of violence

The management of violence in society; sociology of crime: the mechanisms of sanction, punishment and repression through the criminal and repressive system of state apparatuses in particular (stu-

dies of legal and jurisprudential levels, at the level of institutions of stigmatization of the conflict or collection of materials of offence or crime, police, investigating magistrates, police investigation, etc.); sociogenesis (research on the social causes of the occurrence of violence in a criminal form, such as the low rate of social integration). The best known forms of crime are those that occur against property, people, and public goods. Forms of reconstruction of the social fabric are to be identified, in addition to the role played by the family community alongside civil society and political society: Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior in particular, *as restoration of order of values and standards*, and the subject of social consensus, which is also the crowning of the public debate. The target populations of such studies are at three levels of crime (*real* and actual, or *apparent* as reflected in police reports, and *legal* as seen through courts records, i.e. the one which has suffered a legal sanction). Other types of violence that will need attention are those of an *economic* type (infringing others people's property), those of a *sexual* nature; and those involving *physical integrity*.

Issues of the management of violence which is the responsibility any social group, restricted or extended, on tribal and clan scale or national and international scale, anticipate the forms of social and political systems. The social system understood as integration capacity of individuals and groups; while the political system is a set of institutions that regulate the outbreak of violence, its sociogenesis, through alternative mechanisms: dialogue, pluralism of expression, communication techniques, conflict mediation, the sublimation of violence by channeling it to the arts, creation and sound performance (games and sports). It is no more a matter of 'democracy' as it appeared historically in the West (from Athens to the Treaty of Maastricht), but rather of exploring the assumptions of the communicative power of African sociality groups across the continent and in various forms that must be identified and restored, beyond the distorting tradition - modernity pair.

Consequences

The first consequence is internal. It involves the highlighting of social mechanisms of management of violence and their effectiveness. The social system

would be examined in what it offers as alternative solutions to the violence generated by the social body: solutions residing in the geniuses of communication and mediation when violence occurs. The importance of this focus is to show the futility of state apparatuses in the field of management of violence once society takes care of it and finds full scope to intervene and mediate between the belligerents, on the basis of laws and regulations and also traditions and custom relating to conflict management. This is the first consequence.

The second consequence is external; it is at international level and allows comparison of the most diverse political systems by focusing on the futility of political systems based on the principles of democracy as it appeared historically. Criticism of 'democracy' deemed to be the 'least bad' system and the proposal of alternatives from African realities and possibilities of intellectual conversion, thanks to thinkers who reflect on alternative potentialities, through a wide range of solutions, and the contribution of southern countries to the development of a political system not dominated by historical democracy that is currently prevailing.

Conclusion

The basic content of this research lies in translation³ that consists in considering the general theme of justice as a priority over the theme of freedom, without excluding it though. Basic research that could follow (and often reinforce) the establishment of the system of Western domination over Southern countries, the work of northern thinkers especially, have focused on a centuries-old undertaking on the theme of freedom, considered as a supreme value, the top value, even supplanting, in most cases, the value of justice.

The translation which Southern countries are expected to operate to ensure a kind of *scientific coup* is their only way to emancipate themselves against today's domination. I believe that only a pan-African research body can handle such a basic research program. No African national institution can ensure it. It is, therefore, the priority area for CODESRIA. Priority, indeed through exclusion of another remedy, or priority in the negative sense, but also priority in the positive sense: these are the tasks required by the need for emancipation of African societies which are largely dominated today.

Notes

1. Western societies have grounded social values on two concurrent values: labour (which value is related to 'real economy') and speculation on labour (stock markets, transactions, business communities based on the financial component of the economy), so much so that the speculation value has superseded the labour value. By choosing to single out labour as nearly the most exclusive foundation of the social structure, we steer clear of European and Western societies and underscore the choice of African societies in this very respect. This is our theoretical bias.
2. Thus we establish our conception and methodology for the definition and development of a research programme in social sciences. The point is not about listing out research areas in a 'catalogue' format. For the sake of relevance, it is important to demonstrate consistency in the presentation of these areas and themes, and in so doing, by defining often covert guidelines and a roadmap that require a critical analysis to be unveiled. Since the ultimate goal of a research programme is primarily a vision, the beginnings of a social project, a scientific bias, i.e. based on the experience and knowledge, the researcher as an actor intervenes within the community to which they belong, viz. Africa. We draw on Jurgen Habermas' methodological approach to designing social science research. This is how our proposals are buttressed by a scientific tradition and bedrock. See J. Habermas, *Connaissance et intérêt* [Knowledge and Interest], Gallimard, 1976 (First Edition, 1968, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main), Jean René Admiral 'Le programme épistémologique de J.H. [J.H. Epistemological Programme] by J.H.' pp. 7-27.
3. In the Middle Ages, the translation of the relics of a saint, was a major event in the lives of urban and rural communities and was the starting or inflection point of a cult.

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