

**THE TEACHING AND RESEARCH OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY
IN AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

by

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1. Introduction

It is my intention to critically examine the teaching and research of industrial sociology in an African University based on my teaching and research experience of this subject at Makerere University for the last ten years. I intend to raise fundamental issues regarding the essence of and rationale for teaching and conducting research in industrial sociology in a country that is largely non-industrial. It is also my intention to describe the development, scope and status of industrial sociology in Uganda. An examination will also be made of the existing provisions for teaching and research in industrial sociology at Makerere University with a view to determining their adequacy or otherwise. I shall also discuss the claim of industrial sociology as a separate discipline, noting the relationship between industrial sociology and other social science disciplines.

Lastly, but most importantly, my paper will critically examine some of the assumptions underlying the concepts, methodology and intellectual models that we employ in teaching and research in

industrial sociology. To this end, a critique will be made of the established social science disciplines, (sociology included) indicating that these disciplines are to some extent, of foreign colonial origins and hence to a large degree irrelevant to our local reality and situation. I will argue that there is need to "decolonize" these social sciences in general and industrial sociology in particular. This may call for the development of an African intellectual tradition that stresses "home rule". It may also call for the development of indigeneous scholars and indigeneous orientation in research as well as addressing ourselves to the issue of national identity. Some of the problems that might emerge in this attempt to decolonize industrial sociology will be highlighted and possible solutions advanced.

11. Definition

Before embarking on the question of the essence of industrial sociology, I wish to point out that sociology in general and industrial sociology in particular has acquired some kind of magic charm especially to the lay and the uninitiated. Many

students when they come to university do register for sociology because it sounds an exciting subject. Others register for it thinking that it is one of those arts based subjects that require reading lots of Penguin paperbacks. Clearly many students have no idea what sociology is all about. This is so because unlike most arts and science based subjects which are exposed to the student at senior secondary level, sociology is one of those disciplines that in the Uganda education system, and I suspect in many other African national educational systems, is introduced at the university level. The problem that arises out of this situation is that all too frequently students who approach the subject with no prior background have difficulties in grasping its scope and complexity. A strong argument can therefore be made for the inclusion of sociology in the secondary school curricula.

Now back to the question of definition.

Immediately we begin thinking about the essence of the subject-matter of industrial sociology, it becomes obvious that we are dealing with a contentious issue. A sample of some of the commonly held definitions will serve to illustrate problems

inherent in any attempt to define and delineate the subject-matter of the sub-discipline of industrial sociology.

Miller and Form (1964) in their classic book on the subject, define industrial sociology as a branch of general sociology applied to certain subjects. To Miller and Form these certain subjects include the study of occupations and other social groups that affect work behaviour. They also include a study of the interrelationship between work behaviour of an individual and other aspects of social behaviour.

Two questions immediately arise out of the conceptualization of industrial sociology depicted above. First, if industrial sociology is a branch of general sociology, why should it merit being labelled a specialized discipline? Is it not possible to handle issues now handled by industrial sociology by general sociology? Secondly, if industrial sociology deals with the subjects mentioned above, are these subjects unique to industrial sociology? Are these subject not of interest to urban or rural sociology? Answers to these questions will be given in the forthcoming sections.

Parker and others (1977) believe that industrial sociology is concerned with the analysis of the relations between industry and other sub-systems of society for example education, the family and social stratification, indicating how these sub-systems affect industry and are in turn affected by industry. Again the question is, are these matters of exclusive concern to industrial sociology? Is it not the case that economic sociology, looking at production, exchange and consumption as it does, is also interested in these matters.

Clearly there are sharp disagreements on what constitutes industrial sociology. The boundaries of the sub-discipline are uncertain and there are real questions whether industrial sociology should become a legitimate subject of university instruction.

111. Industrial sociology and other social sciences

Often there is confusion between sociology and other social science disciplines. Sociology is one of the several ways of studying human behaviour. But, it is not the only one. Similarly, industrial sociology is not the only discipline that studies

the behaviour of work groups. It becomes difficult therefore, to draw the line where sociology ends and other social sciences begin. Indeed we may face problems and severe limitations if we attempt to study industrial phenomena in isolation.

I believe we should not worry unduly about demarcating the boundaries of industrial sociology from its nearest neighbours, history, anthropology, economics and political science. This is because the distinction between industrial sociology and these other social science subjects is likely to be tenuous. In any case as Reynaud (1961) has cautioned we may lose more than we gain by trying to pass cut and dried rules to distinguish industrial sociology from other social sciences. This what Reynaud (1961: 12) has to say on the issue:

Is there not a danger, in this attempt to differentiate, of losing one of the most valuable qualities of earlier studies: the collaboration and convergence of a number of disciplines which though disparate in their principles or methods of investigation, were at least united in their pre-occupation with the same subject.

Parker and others (1977) express similar sentiments when they point out that all behavioural

sciences and non-behavioural sciences are applicable to the study of industry and work organizations. Let me conclude this discussion of the relationship between industrial sociology and other social sciences by pointing out that industrial sociology differs from other social science disciplines not so much in the subject matter they are interested in but rather in the scope of its study. Industrial sociology is a generalizing and synthesising discipline which includes in its ambit other social sciences.

IV. Why teach industrial sociology?

Before we go very far with this paper I believe it is important to answer the question: why teach industrial sociology? Recently a colleague of mine wrote to me from Sweden wondering why I was wasting my time teaching industrial sociology in a country characterized by no industries to speak of; little manufacturing; little formal employment; low per capita income; manufacturing accounting for less than 10% of the gross national product and 90% of the population living on subsistence agriculture! It would appear that my friend from Sweden is not alone in having reservations about the wisdom of

teaching sociology in an African university, Reynaud (1961) has similar sentiments. Reynaud observes that industrial sociology developed in the United States and Europe to handle problems caused by the growth of unions, the reaction of workers to the industrial setting and the resulting conditions of industrial economy. Reynaud (1961: 13) asks:

.... When it comes to countries in the process of industrialization having few large enterprises and economies where industry is far from being the dominant factor, is the subject matter still the same? Are we still dealing with industrial sociology?

My reaction to the observations made above is that, yes, we can and we should teach industrial sociology in Eastern African universities because industrial sociology brings a unique perspective to the study of man at work. A perspective different from approaches by other social science disciplines. Additionally, there are several specific reasons why I believe that a study of industrial sociology in our region is a worthwhile endeavour. I now proceed to discuss some of these reasons.

Firstly, if we accept that industrial sociology is a branch of general sociology and that general

sociology is the scientific study of society, then we must accept that there is a role for a social science that looks at social relationships and interactions within the work situation. I should perhaps add that we are talking about all sorts of work situations be they in the home, office, store, market, army or church. This agrees with Miller and Form (1964) who argue that industrial sociology is not restricted to factories but applies to all work situations.

Secondly to argue that we should not teach industrial sociology in Eastern African universities because of our regions relative lack of industrialization is to miss the point. Industrialization by its very nature is not limited to one specific period. Europe in the 18th Century regarded itself as industrial although by today's standards it would be classified as rural. In a similar manner we can say that Africa is industrializing and therefore as industrial sociologists we can apply the tools of sociological analysis to study the emergent socio-economic structures and problems associated with this industrialization.

Thirdly, as sociologists we should be concerned to teach industrial sociology in realization of the fact that industrialization however small its scale of operation, causes the social order to break down and new social relations to emerge. For example in traditional African societies social relations were often personal, between kinsmen and between life-long intimates. These bonds of kinship were as much a matter of business - that of reciprocal economic advantage - as of affection, duty and respect. With the coming of industrialization this traditional social organization is disrupted. Increasingly economic relations are separated from the integrated social system, new individuals are placed in position of power and levels of aspiration are changed. I believe that a social science that tries to understand and interpret these important changes in the social structure is quite pertinent and ought to be encouraged.

Fourthly, and arising directly from the discussion in the previous section, as sociologists we should be concerned to teach industrial sociology in recognition of the fact that the transition from the old social order to the new social order brought

about by industrialization, is accompanied by a conflict in ties and social values: Conflict between the factory system and the family system; conflict between orderly pattern of work and less disciplined work habits and so on. I believe it is the job of industrial sociology to equip students with the necessary theoretical concepts and relevant empirical illustrative experiences that will guide them in dealing with the above mentioned conflict situations and the problems that they give rise to, so that even if they cannot always have solutions to these problems and conflicts, at least they can understand them.

Lastly, I wish to opine that we need to teach industrial sociology even though our nations are largely agricultural simply because we live in an interdependent world. There is a linkage between the traditional and the modern sector. In other words I am arguing that rural/industrial sociology are not polar opposites but rather attempts to get a comprehensive view using different perspectives. By implication therefore, industrial sociology is as relevant a field of academic discourse as any other, and therefore those of us who teach it need not be too apologetic about it.

V. Problems of teaching industrial sociology

Having outlined the reasons why I think that teaching industrial sociology is a worthwhile field of academic endeavour, I now turn to highlight and examine the most important problems that face those of us who teach and research this discipline. I should hasten to add that many of the problems that I shall discuss are not Unique to industrial sociology. These problems confront anyone teaching sociology in Uganda at this material time. However, as will be seen later, some of these problems are peculiar to the sub-discipline of industrial sociology. The problems of teaching industrial sociology at Makerere, and I believe to a lesser or greater extent these problems obtain at many other African universities, fall into two broad categories. First, there are those problems that arise due to the inadquacy of the provisions and arrangment for effective teaching. Secondly, there are those problems related to the relevance or otherwise of what we teach, the books and journals that we use, the concepts that we employ, and the theoretical perspectives that we take.

At Makerere, industrial sociology is part of the general B.A. degree in sociology either as a single subject or sociology combined with another subject. Teaching is often done by means of formal lecturers. The main problem here is that the Department of Sociology is grossly understaffed so that students have to rely heavily on formal lecture room instructions without the benefit of small group teaching. This problem is often reflected in the mediocre performance by our students in the final year examinations. Most candidates have been criticised by the examiners, both internal and external, for answering questions based on stereotyped lecture notes. Few of our students demonstrate the ability to marshal theoretical arguments or present empirical evidence in a scholarstic way. It is my view that this shortcoming will be temporary. Now that the country has been liberated, it is hoped that some of our colleagues who had left Makerere for greener pasture elsewhere will return to rebuild the university. A University that was once the envy of scholars from the world over.

Teaching at Makerere has often been accused of fostering an "ivory tower" mentality. In the

case of industrial sociology this charge arises because often there is lack of contact between the department and the students on the one hand and the world of work and industry on the other hand. Due to financial constraints in the past, we have not been able to take our students for visits of observation in industrial and other work organizations; we have not managed to get them fieldwork placement; neither have we managed to get them to undertake research projects in industry. Yet it is my contention that students should complement their theoretical knowledge with practical work. It is only then that they will become more relevant to their local situation. By all means students and teachers of industrial sociology must study industrial and work related problems on the spot in their proper historical, economic and social settings. Again it is my ardent hope that with improved social and economic conditions in Uganda these problems will be matters of the past. Nevertheless, as of now it should be borne in mind that the cumulative problems of running an under-resourced department with inflation reducing salaries and purchasing power of members of staff, with chronic shortage of foreign exchange, has

meant inevitably that standards of teaching by members of academic staff and performance by students, have fallen.

I now turn to what I consider is an even more fundamental problem confronting anyone in our region who teaches or does research in industrial sociology. I refer to the problem of the relevance of industrial sociology to our local setting.

Industrial sociology at Makerere very much conforms to the norms of established social science disciplines as taught for example at Harvard or London. There is need therefore to ask how far this meets our national goals and aspirations. On reflection it is clear to me that much of what we teach in industrial sociology, the concepts we use and the models we employ are foreign, in fact they are largely American or West European. This should not be too surprising because most of the books we use in industrial sociology, for example Miller and Form (1964), Schneider (1969), Parker and others (1977), Caplow (1964), Fox (1980), Hill (1982), Brown and Harrisson (1983), are written by either Americans

or Britons. The same situation obtains when one looks at the journals that are commonly used in industrial sociology.

I am conscious of the fact that knowledge creation is a cumulative process. We as scholars in the East African region cannot therefore completely ignore what our colleagues in the developed world have done. My plea is that we should be critical regarding what we read from the developed world. Surely, if we are to become relevant there is need on our part to understand and explain the underlying theory of industrial sociology even though it may be borrowed from Western books so as to better reflect on our own curricula which must be redefined to meet our specific needs. In other words, we must move away from an attitude of mind which accepts rather blindly that whatever we read in Western oriented books must be the truth and nothing but the whole truth.

If we accept without question whatever we read in Western derived textbooks then we accept the realities of our conditions as defined by outsiders and this often happens to be inaccurate.

For example in industrial sociology we read that one of the problems facing Africa's attempts to industrialize is the lack of qualified technical personnel. But few of these books if any tell us that there is such a phenomenon as "brain drain" and that in some measure the industries of Europe are being maintained by migrant labour from Africa and third world regions.

In light of what I have stated above it is not surprising that many of our students have a real struggle relating this American and British derived industrial sociology to the contemporary Ugandan situation. They have problems relating to this type of sociology because Western industrial sociology is not rooted in the African socio-historical situation but rather that of Europe and America beginning with the industrial revolution. This is a socio-historical situation characterized by the emergence of large scale industries with complex relations between management and workers and rooted in the ideological philosophies of capitalistic modes of production. There are therefore, real questions in my mind as to how relevant this kind of sociology is when transported to

non-western nation like Uganda. I wish to argue that to a large extent it is irrelevant. It is irrelevant because to accept it without challenge is to fail to appreciate the influence of the social context which clearly points to the inevitability of variation in content.

Furthermore, it is my contention that industrial sociology borrowed from abroad is inappropriate to our local situation because of its biased choice of the topics and themes covered. Issues that are of crucial importance to the developing countries are often ignored or treated as marginal. Let me illustrate with two examples, namely the role of colonialism in the process of industrialization in our region and the problems of adaptation of rural African workers into the modern labour markets.

Few books, if any, in Western industrial sociology bother to discuss the role of colonialism and its effects on the development or lack of development of industrialization in Africa. Yet I believe that it is impossible to understand and put Africa's lack of industrialization in

proper perspective unless we appreciate the crucial role that was played and continues to be played by colonialism and imperialism. The fact of the matter is that colonialism deliberately undermined and underdeveloped African industrialization. This point is ably articulated by Rodney (1972). Rodney furthermore clearly demonstrates that not only did colonialism hinder African industrial development but that Europe was developed by the same process that underdeveloped Africa. This process has often been characterized by a situation whereby Africa has served as a source of raw materials for European industries and as a market for finished European goods. In such a situation, is there any wonder that there are literally no industries to speak of in our region?

Let me conclude this aspect of the discussion by pointing out that it is my considered opinion that the issue of colonialism and imperialism and their impact on industrialization in Africa is a fundamental one. It must be tackled by African industrial sociology, especially when one notes that few Western derived textbooks in industrial sociology discuss this question. I believe it is

our task as African sociologists to raise this matter and to point to ways in which African countries may break out of the colonial capitalistic stranglehold.

Of equal concern, is the fact that few Western derived industrial sociology textbooks, if any, discuss critically the matter of the movement of African labour force from rural areas and their entry into urban labour markets. In the Uganda case, the few authors that discuss this issue for example Gutkind and Elkan (1957) or Sofer and Sofer (1955), tend to view this question through colonial cultural binoculars. They typically present the African industrial worker as a "target worker". The implication being that the rural African worker goes to work in an urban industrial setting because he has a number of specific obligations to fulfill at home. That he uses the money earned to meet these specific obligations, for example paying bridewealth for a wife, buying a bicycle or a radio, paying graduated tax or building a house. Additionally, it is implied that since the African worker has these specific needs the employer is justified in paying him a salary that he knows him to require. In any case, it is argued that the African worker

African does not wish to live in urban areas; he cannot easily own a house in towns; he cannot rear his children as he would in the rural areas; and therefore he prefers the security of his tribal village to the turmoil of urban life.

My immediate reaction is that these views are nothing but personal prejudices of colonial administrators and academicians based on popularly held common sense ideas, anecdotal evidence and hearsay but not on sociological explanation. I am supported in taking this position by Mabugane (1968) who argues that these common sense ideas about the African response to industrial employment raise controversial issues some of which are misrepresented and are contrary to the true facts of the African situation. It is not explained for example that most industries were imposed on the African and Compulsion was used to force Africans to work in these industries. That the African resisted working in these industries is therefore a response to this enforced labour rather than an inherent dislike for industrial work. It is also not explained that colonial political interests made it impossible for the migrant workers to find a real home in the urban

industrial setting. We could go on and on, but the point I am making is that it is important in African industrial sociology to understand the problems of adaptation of rural workers to industrial work in light of our local social, cultural and historical situation. The analysis of these problems by colonial academicians and administrators is to a large extent biased and ethnocentric and must be viewed with some element of suspicion.

Up to this point, our discussion regarding the problems of teaching industrial sociology in the universities in our region lead to one important conclusion. In Africa much of what passes for sociology in general and industrial sociology in particular is to a significant degree colonial and ethnocentric. There is an urgent need therefore, to "decolonize" it. Let me venture to make two suggestions as to how this might be done.

Firsly, I strongly feel that we African scholars of sociology should develop a distinctively indigenous African approach to the study of sociology in general and industrial sociology in particular. This calls for the development of unique national

intellectual traditions along the lines of what has been termed "home rule" in India. It suggests a fundamental change of attitude by African scholars. We must get away from an attitude that anything Western or foreign is necessarily superior to what is obtaining locally. Our approach should be one that stresses self-reliance and a balanced integrated national development process especially in matters of industrialization.

Secondly, I wish to suggest that African industrial sociology can benefit much by inclusion in its ambit more of anthropological material, especially that which critically looks at the pre-colonial and colonial situation. I believe this kind of knowledge is important because it will enable us to understand the factors and forces that have constrained the industrialization process in our region.

The suggestions made above have implications for curriculum and syllabi in industrial sociology. They point to a need to modify the syllabus and curriculum of instructions in our universities to suit local conditions. This can be done for example by paying more emphasis on the analysis of

pre-colonial and colonial experiences and their impact on the current industrialization process in Africa. However, I am aware of the problems involved whenever an attempt is made to introduce new curricula or modify old ones. Some of these problems have been discussed by Newbry and Martin (1972) who have shown that once curricula has been institutionalized they become conservative, and far removed from the realities of the situation in which society finds itself. All the same these inherent problems of curriculum development should not deter us from trying to change our curriculum to make it more appropriate to our local conditions.

VI. Problems of research and publications

Having outlined what I consider the most important problems of teaching industrial sociology in East African universities, I now wish to discuss problems related to research and publications in the sub-discipline. Let me state straight away that I am of the view that research and publications should be an integral part of any university education worthy of its name. Sadly, over the years

this aspect of our work has been neglected and eroded until now when we have a situation where very little research is going on at Makerere. Yet surely as academicians we should be concerned to conduct research in our disciplines not only to add to the existing stock of knowledge but more importantly in recognition of the fact that teaching that is not backed by empirical research becomes mere theory and breeds the "ivory tower" mentality that I mentioned earlier.

Lack of empirical research by local scholars has other implications for teaching. Because we have not been rigorous in carrying out research on our local situation, little or no Ugandan material is available for teaching purposes. The scarce material that is available more often than not was done in the early sixties by ex-patriate scholars whose perception of our reality was conditioned by their colonial roots. In this regard, in the field of industrial sociology the studies by Southall (1957), Sofer (1955) and Gutkind (1957), while containing some useful material are clearly inadequate for explaining current issues of national development especially regarding problems of industrialization. It cannot be over-emphasized

that if we are to become relevant to our local situation, then we as local scholars should carry out research so that we may produce a body of documented studies pertaining to our region.

I am aware that while most of us agree that research is necessary, few seem to realise that good research costs money and in many universities in our region money is very scarce. Increasingly therefore, research in our region is being funded by external agencies like Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, IDRC of Canada and CREDU of France. I wish to argue that this development has seriously hampered the evolvment of indigenous research in our region. This is because most of these external funding agencies have their own priority areas of research interests, dictated by their own national and strategic considerations. These priority areas do not necessarily coincide with local priorities. I have observed for example that these days many external donors are willing to give generous funds for research in population studies and womens studies but they are very reluctant to fund research that fall in the field of industrial sociology.

Clearly this kind of situation is unacceptable and must change. This change can be brought about if more local resources are made available for indigenous research.

If we conduct and fund our own research then we are in a position to select and define what problems we consider important. This will in turn enable us to analyse and interpret research results in terms of our local realities and not necessarily what is understood or accepted by the international community. However, let me hasten to add that I am not saying that in East Africa we should confine ourselves to issues of local concern only. As members of our international community of scholars we have an obligation to raise our local problems to the international level. I believe we can do this by selecting given problems using known literature and critiquing how this literature fits or does not fit our situation. In other words, although elsewhere in this paper I advocated for intellectual "home rule", we must also accept that we live in an interdependent world and hence the need for a comparative approach. I believe it is possible to reconcile our national interests with our international obligations.

VII. The future of industrial sociology

As I come to the end of my paper, let me make a few remarks about the future of industrial sociology in the Eastern African universities. I believe I have demonstrated that industrial sociology is a viable subject for university instruction. I have shown that it faces serious problems especially in terms of its relevance to our local reality. To my mind if we are to make industrial sociology more relevant to the African conditions, then the teaching curricula must be changed to include some of the following topics which are often given scanty treatment in traditional Western sociology textbooks: a critique of industrialization using recent advances in the theory of modes of production; alternatives to capitalistic modes of industrialization; alternative technology; small scale technology; cottage industries; the role of imperialism; exploitation; the role of multi-national corporations and the role of the public sector in the industrialization process.

In the matter of research, if we are to advance frontiers of knowledge in African industrial sociology,

then we must begin a vigorous exchange of research results and experiences. My colleague Akiiki Mujaju (1985) has even argued that we must go further and develop our own regional or sub-regional journals to publicise our research findings because serious academic interaction in the region is in jeopardy without these. I concur with him entirely.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that there are serious problems in teaching and researching industrial sociology in a developing country. I believe that what is required to overcome these problems is to introduce to the students what is common to all industrial sociology while pointing out what differentiates industrial sociology in an African University from industrial sociology in a university in a developed country. I have also indicated that in teaching industrial sociology in our region we suffer from lack of relevant books and other reading material. What is available is often European or American which most of

us find irrelevant to a large extent. I have argued that in this matter we should carry out our own research and produce our own books and monographs so as to supplement or even replace external literature. I have argued in this paper that it is imperative that universities in our region mount a vigorous exchange programme among themselves on all aspects of university education including research materials, publications, student and staff exchange.

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