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Introduction

Every branch of the social sciences has some aspect of human behaviour upon which it focuses as an area of specialization. Whatever the area of focus, the behaviour involved is an integral part of daily human functioning, and therefore both the trained and the “naive” scientist have some experience or some idea, no matter how vague, of what each social science is supposed to deal with. This feeling of “familiarity” tends to make people take social science issues for granted. Anything taken for granted is predictably susceptible to more abuse than use. All over the world, psychology has suffered more abuse than any other social science, probably because of the “psycho” component in it. Choice of the title of this paper is, in part, informed by this problem. Properly understood, modern scientific psychology handles human behaviour 3-dimensionally: bio-medically; cognitively, and socio-culturally.

However, any relative comprehensive explanation of human behaviour must take account of the interactive influences from each of the three principal dimensions. The challenge inherent in the psychological analysis and explanation of human behaviour is met when these interacting influences are appreciated and unraveled. The unraveling or explanatory process is often a painstaking one, and, therein lies the probability of use or abuse by claimants to “knowledge” of human behaviour.
The Entry of Scientific Psychology into Nigeria.

Informal Entry

The earliest academic discipline to be established in Nigeria had to be education, first in teacher-training colleges, and, later in institutions of higher learning. Psychology thus made an informal entry into Nigeria through teacher-training institutions, since both the theory and practice of teaching and learning are founded on basic psychological principles. But only those few branches of psychology pertinent to the principles and practice of teaching and learning are usually taught in such institutions. This means that the vast majority of graduates of education are ipso facto exposed to limited knowledge of psychology as we know it today.

A second channel through which psychology made an informal entry into Nigeria was the sister discipline of psychiatry. Psychiatry is a branch of medicine, but has been defined as that field of study which comprises everything contributing to the recognition, elucidation, prevention and treatment of mental abnormalities (Anderson and Trethowan 1967). This implies that, ideally, psychiatry combines significant psychological content with medical knowledge for more effective medical treatment of mental malfunctions. Orthodox psychiatry came into Nigeria much earlier than psychology, at least with the return of indigenous psychiatrists from overseas training in the 1940s and ’50s. Later, departments of psychiatry/psychological medicine were to be established in medical schools in the older Nigerian universities.

Sociology also came into Nigeria before the 1960’s, and to the extent that aspects of psychology, especially social psychology, were found necessary in the curriculum for degrees in sociology, to that extent psychology also came in an informal way through sociology. It is imaginable that it was after this long period of using aspects of psychology as service courses in education psychiatry and sociology, that the need to establish formal and full fledged degree programs in psychology was felt.
Formal Entry

The first degree-awarding department of psychology in Nigeria was established in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as at late 1964. We say “as late” because by the year in question, some sister disciplines had been about a decade old in the country, to say nothing of the establishment of the discipline nearly a century earlier in Europe and America. Thereafter, new departments emerged at two to four-year intervals at the University of Lagos; the University of Ibadan; the University of Jos; Obafemi Awolowo University (then the University of Ife); Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti; Enugu State University of Science and Technology; Nnandi Azikiwe University, Akwa; Benue State University; and Imo State University, Owerri, where the department is about to produce its first set of psychology graduates. Some of the four newly approved private universities have proposed the establishment of departments of psychology. Judging from the location of the universities mentioned above, it is obvious that the spread of departments is uneven. In spite of the existence of over forty state and federal universities with almost the same number of social science faculties, degree-awarding departments of psychology are only ten in number. In terms of geo-politico-socio-cultural zones, the distribution of the ten departments includes four (4) in the South-East; four (4) in the South-West; and two in the Middle Belt. The North-East, North-West and South-South each have none. This is not for lack of universities in those areas but probably because of lack of awareness of the vital services which psychology can provide to the people and governments in terms of policy formulation, mental and social health-care and industrial development, to mention a few. The default is on the part of the authorities of the universities in such zones. Some of them have had proposals sent to them but have paid little heed to such prompting. A people or a government that cannot avail itself of psychological services in a fast changing world, is a deprived people/ government.
Between them, the first nine departments of psychology have produced about 10,000 first degree holders over the 35 years of the formal entry of psychology into Nigeria. A considerable number of diploma and higher degree holders have also been produced principally by the older departments. But considering the range of services that should be rendered in a country of 120 million people, the number of graduate psychologists is a drop in the ocean.

The Uses of Psychology in Nigeria.

The uses to which psychology has been put in Nigeria can be roughly divided into profession-specific and non-profession-specific uses. Foremost among profession-specific uses of psychology is the training of psychologists most of whom teach in departments of psychology in our universities, and who are them selves equipped with higher degree in various branches of psychology. It is they who lay the foundation for the growth, development and expansion of both the discipline and the profession. They are in addition assessors and equality controllers of all other uses to which psychology is put. As indicated earlier in the mode of informal entry of psychology into Nigeria, psychological principles and practices have, for years, been used in training, teaching and learning in educational contexts by educational psychologists, and school and counselling psychologists. Another profession-specific use to which psychology has been put in Nigeria is in the mental health sector, where, as earlier mentioned, psychiatrists have combined medical and psychological knowledge to alleviate mental health problems. In this respect, one great advantage of the formal entry of psychology into Nigeria has been the training of professional clinical psychologists up to master’s degree level, at least. These are armed with full psychological expertise in the psychological in psychological assessment, diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation and care of persons with abnormal, sub-normal and other less
pronounced behavioral problems. They work with psychiatrists, giving the latter fuller psychological support in the mental health services. Because of the current scarcity of clinical psychologists, first degree holders in psychology are often called upon to help, especially in the deprived zones of the country listed earlier. Yet another profession-specific use of psychology is in the area of social services to the prisons and prisoners by correctional psychologists, to delinquents and destituents by social psychologists, etc. In this area, social work experts are sister professionals.

It should be mentioned that normally, less than ten percent of psychology graduated specialize at the master’s level or beyond. The vast majority go into other more general fields of endeavour like do graduates of many other disciplines. It is the services of this group that constitute what is termed non-profession-specific uses of psychology. Thus many psychology graduates are found in the civil service, in industrial organizations, public and private, in banks, in the armed forces and the police, immigration, drug law enforcement, self-employment, etc. It is possible that their knowledge of psychology is directly made use of in these areas, but the professional touch as such cannot be easily monitored. In 1981, a team of psychologists led by Uzoka, et al. (1981) produced a position paper titled “Nigerian Psychology and Public Policy” which encapsulates a lot more profession-specific and non-profession-specific areas. The paper aims at presenting for the information of the government, non-governmental agencies and other bodies and individuals in Nigeria, the extensive uses to which psychology can be put for socio-economic progress. The import of the paper is yet to be sufficiently appreciated eighteen years after it was published.
Abuses of Psychology in Nigeria.

As was observed at the beginning of this paper, psychology has been subjected to more abuses than other social science. The mental health aspect is undoubtedly the most abused. Bodily ailments are often more easily located, seen or felt than mental ailments. Since the dawn of self-awareness in modern man, the functioning of the mind has always seemed mysterious and a source of wonder, and its malfunctioning a source of fear and speculation. Until the advent of modern psychology and psychiatry, solutions to mental ailments were sought from the spirit world and through occult practices, since such ailments were considered to be the handy work of evil spirits. This approach has persisted in varying degrees in every culture around the world but more so in cultures, like the Nigerian/African ones, in which modern psychological/psychiatric treatment remains unknown, insufficiently available or exploited for monetary gains by quacks. As the stresses and strains of modern living produce more mental health problems and scientific institutional facilities for the victims become unavailable or difficult to come by, abuse of treatment processes and techniques become more prevalent. Of course, the attitudes and traditional beliefs of the people regarding the causes of mental illness often dictate the choice of source and means of treatment.

A source of abuse allied to the trado-occultic one is in the application of "spiritual powers" for curative purposes. Most sincere adherents to modern religions, especially Christianity, certainly believe in divine intervention not only in mental health problems, but also in instances of economic, physical and social difficulties at individual and societal levels. But most people are also aware of the practice of spiritualism which is a potpourri of occultism, divine invocation, hypnotic suggestibility and crude chemothepereutics, all calculated to attract, retain and explore victims of mental illness and their relations for monetary gain and massaging the egos of the practitioners.
At the end of every year and the beginning of the next, para-psychologists have a field day prophesying doom. This set of abusers capitalizes on the fears, hopes and aspirations of gullible clients. Unfortunately, no one, not even the prophets themselves, dares to seek confirmation at year end. No one has been in a position to calculate what damage has been done to the affairs of the individuals who plan their lives on the basis of such prophesies. Star gazers are allied to para-psychologists. With the imminence of the dawn of the third millennium (the magic year 2000), humanity must brace itself up to the antics of para-psychologists and star gazers. In the final analysis, we find that there is no viable alternative to the scientific psychological principles of decision-making and problem-solving.

In the recent past, the Nigerian nation has been victim of a more subtle form of abuse of psychological processes, the effects of which have not yet started wearing off. One is referring here to the phenomenon of military dictatorship and the mass psychology of subservience to military dominance of people’s lives. During the decades of military dictatorship, a pernicious military mentality manifested in the expression “with immediate effect”, was internalized by Nigerians at all levels. In those decades, we saw validation in Nigeria of the famous social psychological experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram to test the “Perils of Obedience”, with the aim of explaining the abuse of psychological principles and processes in the hey days of Nazism and Fascism. In the words of Milgram:

"This is perhaps the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the internal resources needed to resist authority." (Milgram 1975 p.20).
The Milgram experiments caught the fancy of a Nigerian Professor of mathematics, Professor C.O.A. Sowunmi of the University of Ibadan and he summarized the experiments and their implications for Nigeria in the Guardian of Monday, February 8, 1988, p.9. It is an interesting reference article, which shows clearly that lessons are always readily available but never learned.

Also prominent among Nigerians throughout the years of military dictatorship was the propensity to appear socially desirable or acceptable to the powers that be. It is a propensity that manifests in sycophancy, which is a gross abuse of the psychological principle of reinforcement or reward. In this case, reward is not sought for food work done, but for the selfish interest of the sycophant who is prone to dump a fallen master for a new one because it “pays” to do so. A sycophant is a veritable psychological prostitute. The dictator and the sycophant feed on each other. The sycophant profits from massaging the dictator’s ego while the dictator, in obvious enjoyment of the fool’s paradise, lavishes rewards on the sycophant. A derivative of this form of abuse is propagation of normlessness. That is how bribery and corruption became accepted as Nigeria’s norms of behaviour. One who is unwilling or unable to bribe is “not a Nigerian”

Finally, the abuse that threatens academic standards and professional integrity for psychology and psychologists, is the type noticeable among people in sister disciplines. After taking a few service courses in psychology, such people claim to be psychologists and have no qualms about soliciting for the treating clients. Psychological “help” without in-depth knowledge of the discipline can ruin a client mentally and behaviourally, for life.

Prospects for the 21st Century

The observations made so far, particularly on the uses and abuses of psychology in Nigeria, show that psychology in Nigeria is known more in abuse than in use. In view of its critical role in human functioning, deliberate and conscious intervention must be
undertaken if the challenges of the 21st Century are to be met. The aim in this last leg of the discussion is to explain the psychological basis of these challenges in a number of key areas of national concern.

The most current area of national concern appears to be about democracy, having just emerged from the clutches of military dictatorship. The fate of every nation hangs on governance. Democratic governance holds the to Nigeria’s capability to weather the challenges of the 21st century. Our proposition, therefore, is that the root of democracy and its sustenance is psychological. In the first instance, psychology’s principal focus is on individuality. Democracy is about the management of individual differences expressed in differences in capabilities, opinions, performances, contributions, etc: A group or nation stands or falls depending on its ability to manage individual differences. Psychology emphasizes that the individual’s intrinsic value goes beyond being a number. It is also important to point out that families, groups and nations “make their own types of individual through the kind of values they transmit and inculcate, and that the prospects, for good or ill, of the family, group or nation, depend on the individuals they mould. It is, therefore, correct to say that nations are as good as the individual members they produce, and that nations deserve the kind of citizens (angels or devils) they have. The prospect for sustained democracy in 21st century Nigeria depends on respect for individuality and the inculcation of democratic values in all and sundry.

Ethnicity has been a threat to the unity of Nigeria since the amalgamation in 1914. Psychology has been in the forefront in studying what might be called, “the anatomy of ethnicity.” It provides reasons why people prefer ethnic cocoons. For instance, Eyo (1995) relates ethnicity to distorted interpersonal and intergroup perceptions, and regards misperception as the bane of Nigerian politics. Ethnicity has been central to the failure of demo-
cracy in Nigeria in the past and it is an issue that must be tackled from its psychological root if the nation must remain united through the 21st century. In this respect, it is important to note that nations around the world are evolving - whether through peaceful democratic means or through conflict - into mega nations rather than mini, fractionalized nations. The trend in Europe, the Americas and Asia, needs to be studied. Africa cannot do otherwise and hope effectively in the third millennium.

Discrimination can be regarded as the offspring of ethnicity. Over the centuries, women have been among the greatest victims of discrimination world-wide. The 20th century is closing with strong emphasis on gender equality. The 21st century is likely to see the attainment of full gender equality. Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, have cultures which are among the most oppressive in the world regarding the rights of women, whether it be the victimization of widows, denial of property rights or neglect of the training and education the girl child. In its study of human capabilities and characteristics, e.g. intelligence, performance and achievement in various fields of endeavour, psychology has found that the curve is as normal among men as it is among women. Stereotyping is as dangerous as it is unscientific. Individual differences need to be recognized, respected and used for the benefit of humanity. Biological functions are complementary. Biological superiority is a myth. The 21st century is likely to be a more prosperous and peaceful one if women are allowed full involvement in the running of affairs.

Psychology has developed means of assessing and identifying individual potentials. In a context of technological backwardness, psychology can help to stimulate the evolution and promotion of a technological culture (see Eyo 1995). In the same way, it has been pointed out that creativity and self-reliance are nurtured using psychological principles. They cannot be imposed
by government fiat or vaunted in policy statements as has been the case over the years in Nigeria. Technology can only be successfully transferred when the disposition to accept it has been created culturally and psychologically. Entrepreneurial activities flourish where creativity and a technological culture are well estranged. In these matters, Nigeria has not prepared the groundwork for competiveness in the 21st century.

The world is experiencing an explosion in information technology. Sadly, Nigeria has remained in the backwoods of information technology even at the level of its ivory towers. To protect its people against psychological exploitation by better informed nations, and to keep pace with the rest of the world, Nigeria must embark on crash programmes of training and orientation.

In the health sector, the 21st century must be marked with opportunities for psychology to contribute by: helping to promote community and primary mental health for the normal and the abnormal in the population, as well as organizing custodial services for the sub-normal and the destitute. Setting up a psychologically based programme for the prevention of alcoholism and drug abuse/addiction and providing fruitful and humane intervention and treatment methods; and contributing to the solution of problems of environmental degradation and changing the attitudinal basis of insanitary environments with the attendant mental and social health consequences.

In the social sector, psychological know-how must be exploited in: finding the overt and covert causes of tribal, border, religious and ethnic conflicts around the country and providing approaches to conflict resolution. Significant researches have been carried out in these respects in the Nigerian context (e.g. see Ojiji 1998); providing forensic psychological services and contributing to law enforcement issues; and making use of sports psychology with its multi-dimensional input for the improvement of sports performance at individual and team levels.
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to make it known that in spite of its 35 years of formal existence in Nigeria, psychology has not been sufficiently understood and used effectively for the solution of Nigeria’s multifarious problems that range from socio-political to health, industrial, technological, individual and group, in nature. Instead, psychology and psychological principles and processes have been marked by abuses that retard progress. There is no advanced country today that does not capitalize on the contributions of psychology for the understanding and solution of national and international issues. In the 21st century, Nigeria should not be found wanting in this respect because the price of being found wanting may be too high.

References


