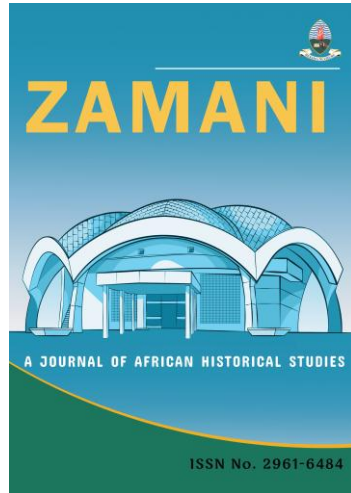


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Book Review: Ali Meghji, *Decolonising Sociology: An Introduction*.

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Book Review

Ali Meghji, *Decolonizing sociology: An introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021. Pp.202 ISBN: 9781509541959.

Decolonizing Sociology is one of the few works in sociology that makes critical assessment of the discipline. It is a kind of self-critique within the discipline that aims to reveal epistemic setbacks that have existed for decades. To arrive to the point, Meghji, has situated his thesis along decolonial sociology, which interrogates dominant sociological theories in the context of imperialism. By so doing, he makes three main arguments as follows; first, what is called sociology is colonial in nature as it is based on the ideas of the Western thinkers namely Marx, Durkheim and Weber which emerged and institutionalized during the rise of global colonialism, imperialism and empires. This kind of sociology, considers the West as center of modernization and civilization and the rest of the world including Africa as underdeveloped, uncivilized and primitive. Second, Meghji argues, this canonical sociology is taken as universally applicable, and the only legitimate sociology in the world including the formerly colonized parts of Africa. It legitimizes bifurcation and orientalist traditions; thus, eurocentrism becomes superior over all world civilizations. Third, to bring about epistemic justice then, sociologists must embrace decolonial sociology which among other things, it acknowledges, respects and gives equal right to multiple knowledge systems in the world. Decolonial sociology in this manner means situating the field of sociology in its historical context so as to reveal its destructive character and at the same time allowing formal space for alternative social thoughts.

In this book, Meghji joins hand with other scholars in the global South, who consistently argues for recognition, consideration and more broadly, the 'intellectual space' of knowledge created in this region. These include the writings of Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind*; Shari'ati, *What is to be done*; Oelofsen, *Decolonisation of the African Mind and Intellectual Landscape*; and Mbembe, *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*. Meghji acknowledges these efforts and goes forward to analyze epistemic impediments that faces the

discipline of sociology in the global South and how to bring epistemic justice in the field.

Meghji starts his analysis in Chapter One where he provides details on how imperialism and colonial episteme shaped classical and contemporary sociology. Among other things, imperialism and colonialism produces 'knowledge standpoints'; which dominates a certain field in academics by providing ways of knowing, theories, methods, rules and ethics. In this manner, colonialism produced what Meghji calls the 'Eurocentric standpoint' (p39-44) which is characterized by two principles; orientalism and bifurcation. In sociology this thinking is revealed by all classical sociologists, namely Marx, Durkheim and Weber as they regarded all societies move from primitive to modernity, thus, European capitalism became the main reference of social evolution. These theories have three main limitations caused by historical inaccuracies; firstly, they were not well informed about the development of other societies like China and India which were fairly developed in trade, textiles and cotton weaving industries than the West. The second limitation is to separate Western development from accumulation and plundering of resources from the colonies. The third limitation is concerning the view that, European capitalism through imperialism and colonialism will develop the rest of the world to a status similar to European modern societies. Thus, both classical and contemporary sociology did not see the destructive nature of imperialism.

The author presents a discussion on 'Southern standpoint' (p66) by introducing two paradigms, namely, indigenous and autonomous. By refuting the notion that sociology was only developed in Europe and America, Meghji contends that development of sociology the West went together with the development of sociology in the global South. The latter rejects universality of Western sociology and invented a critical paradigm known as indigenous or autonomous sociology. Meghji sees the danger of embracing Western sociology. The canon propagates intellectual imperialism which follow the primitive accumulation tendency in which data are exported from Africa and other parts of global South, then journals and books are sold in the global South for consumption (p75). In this process the whole political economy of knowledge is shaped inherently to benefit the global north through various methods including university rankings, journals, academic publishers, research funds, and citations. All these produces what Meghji calls 'the captive mind' (p76). The captive mind

process highlights on the way the global political economy of knowledge production is characterized by a relationship of southern dependence on the North. He highlights six forms of intellectual dependency which includes: dependency on concepts and theories; dependency in the media of publications; dependency for technology; dependency on funds for research; publications and teaching materials; dependency in education; and dependency in terms of brain drain for seeking recognition and respect from North.

It is from this background where Meghji see the importance of having a critical “southern” based approach which will resist this intellectual imperialism in general and captive mind in particular. This will help scholars in the global South to better explain the phenomena in their contexts rather than relying on western theories. Citing an example of the concept “agency” (p85) Meghji has shown how it conveys different meanings in the African context; while individualism is celebrated in the bourgeois culture, it becomes irrelevant in the African context where life is organized basing on *ajumose* and *iwa* notions (p86). Thus, indigenous and autonomous sociologies provide a good opportunity to challenge the intellectual imperialism and value social thoughts of the scholars in the global South. Meghji extend his discussion on alternative approaches in Chapter Three where he advances that decolonial sociology does not need to embrace individual theories of Marxism, Weberian or Durkheimian. He calls for ‘multiple sociologies’ or ‘Pluriversality’, which involves a horizontal dialogue between sociologies that ‘relate to one another as equals’ (p99). This stems from the view that for an appropriate and a critical version, sociology needs to embrace multiple sociologies by using different concepts from different theoretical orientations to make a complete analysis of a certain situation.

Meghji then uses ‘Decolonial Marxism’ (p100) as an example of combining Marxism and social thoughts from the global South on explaining social realities. This kind of sociology looks on how the colonized and enslaved masses became a class apart from the European proletariat and how now the European proletariat has joined with the bourgeoisie to exploit this group. Fanon’s extension of Marx’s alienation is one of the examples cited under decolonial Marxism. According to Meghji, apart from the four types of alienation mentioned by Marx, in the colonial context, one becomes alienated from their species being in a virtue of being considered

as sub-species – they are seen as objects rather than a normal person. Similar examples from Du Bois and Shari’at have been mentioned in this book. All these sociologists from the global South have tried to contextualize Marxism in different ways. This is called “thinking with Marx and against Marx” (p103). In this manner, Meghji argues sociologist need to remove ontological and epistemological borders and look for ‘already existing connections’ that have been destroyed and silenced. For example, Meghji calls for reconnecting Bourdieu’s and Foucault’s sociologies with African realities where the material conditions of their conception rests. Both Bourdieu and Foucault used information from their researches in northern Africa to develop their theories though Africa is silenced in their final works. Revealing these connections enables sociologist to achieve epistemic justice thus, makes sociology a relevant discipline.

Meghji concludes his work by highlighting the relevance of using decolonial sociology vis-à-vis the traditional sociology. He emphasizes on the basic premise of the sociology of knowledge on the relationship between a social formation, social relations of production and knowledge. In the process, Meghji argues that Western sociology lacks critical tools of analysis for the benefits of all human beings due to the social conditions that produced it. Humanity as conceived in the West, does not include all races in the world; to be specific, the global South like Africa is totally sidelined (p135). Using climate crisis as an example, Meghji shows how Western sociology is unreliable. Due to its limitations in the concept of humanity, it allows disarticulation between nature and humanity; nature is treated as a physical thing that can be easily manipulated, controlled and exploited for capitalist development (p139). In this way then, Western sociology is obsessed with modernity without connecting [it] to nature and the negative consequences it brings to the global South. Thus, for a better analysis and understanding of issues, sociology should embrace the decolonial sociology thesis which is more critical and brings about epistemic justice.

About the reviewer:

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