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## Social Psychology in Black Africa: Discussing the Issues of Situationism and Pragmatism

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### **Abstract**

*This article is a reflection on the deployment of social psychology in black Africa. It is based on the observation that the theories, models and methodological tools of the discipline are, at the present time, a European invention and especially North American. Since the subject of social psychology is mental states, emotions and behaviors as influenced by the social environment, Situationism is the doctrine behind it. It is about the belief in the power of the situation. The promotion of an African social psychology must give itself the epistemological and methodological means to investigate emerging behaviors in African contexts. American pragmatism can serve as a source of inspiration in this matter. It advocates that the goal of science is to improve the living conditions of populations by providing solutions to social problems. This article advocates the development of an applied social psychology focusing on African realities and its primacy over fundamental laboratory social psychology. It is shown through few examples that empirical issues can clear the ground for the production of concepts, theories and methodological tools that help to identify behavior in African contexts.*

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**Keywords:** social psychology, statement of the problem, situationism, Black Africa, pragmatism

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### **Introduction**

The social and human sciences have universally the universality of human and social phenomena, and in particular the human and social particularities governed by the specificity of contexts. If the abundant scientific initiatives of Western research have established universal principles, it would be wrong for the African scientific community to try to challenge them simply to assert its originality and to mark its identity. In this sense, it is irrelevant that African scientific productions arise in systematic opposition. On the other hand, if from the achievements of scientific productions, the community of African researchers stands out by rigorous investigation of the particularities with which their environment and living environments are confronted, it gives itself the means to assert itself. We will try to demonstrate it in the field of social psychology, a discipline of social and human sciences that we have studied the best. A careful consideration for the development of psychology in the United States guides the reflection, especially since we see it as a source of inspiration for the promotion of a social psychology, not necessarily an African one, but which investigates efficiently local realities. To do this, we will start from the promotion of scientific psychology in the West, while focusing on the exception of the United States. Social psychology is presented through its object and its methods, interest is focused on Situationism, which is the doctrine of discipline. Through a small sample of studies carried out in a pragmatist approach, we try to show avenues towards a psychosocial theorization of African contexts. The implications of a desire to build knowledge relating to African realities will ultimately be addressed.

## **1. Institutionalization of Psychology: A Western Hegemony**

The institutionalization of psychology is one of the final stages which affirms the constitution of psychology as a science in its own right, through the creation of journals, learned societies, research and teaching of the discipline in the universities, the organization of conferences (Parot & Richelle 2004, p.156-198). Five countries are concerned by this movement of scientific consecration. These are France, Germany, Russia, England and the United States. In these different countries, the institutionalization of psychology takes place at the turning point of the 18th and 19th centuries, and corresponds to an identical aspiration which will lead to a homogenization of issues and "erase national specificities" (p.159). These specificities derive from political, philosophical and scientific situations which differ in each of the five countries. Everyone then recognizes that a theory is only valid if it is endowed with explanatory power and predictive power. Meanwhile, the Americans believe that a theory must certainly help to explain phenomena, to predict them if necessary, but there is no point in explaining and preventing if the theory does not have the power to improve the life conditions of populations.

The absence of state centralization, unlike France and England, leads the United States to the creation of autonomous universities and a permanent confrontation of ideas between academics, who often travel from one to the other, without that a true philosophical orthodoxy succeeds in imposing itself. This model is similar to that of German universities. It also happens that the philosophers, biologists, American doctors who created the first psychology laboratories all over the country learned the experimental approach in Leipzig, at Wundt, father of experimental psychology and founder of the first laboratory of the specialty. These trips to Europe will not influence the conviction of Americans in any way, although it does not resonate with Wundt. The sciences in general, and psychology in particular, must serve to solve practical problems especially problems such as those created by the increase in the demand for schooling, caused by the massive immigration of populations attracted by the economic successes of United States. It should be noted that it was philosophical pragmatism that dominated American academic thought towards the end of the 19th century. William James (1970) stresses on the fact that theories should be instruments of action. From this perspective, the truth is not transcendent, it is not independent of actions. Titchener will call the pragmatist position of James and Dewey functionalism (Parot & Richelle, 2004).

This perception of knowledge immediately assigned science in the United States the priority role of promoting well-being. Improving living conditions presupposes being interested in concrete social issues that nationals face on a daily basis. Like a dogma, the general philosophy that underlies the quest for knowledge in a given environment can serve both as an end. The current state of Western scientific production is only the result of an evolution of research oriented towards a predefined purpose. This evolution builds its identity. It establishes laws with universal reach, no doubt, but also locally true theories, which do not hold a relevant reading grid for African social realities. Only a research purpose underpinned by a precise philosophy can lead Africa to the production of knowledge bearing the imprint of its identity. In this, a dynamic that is part of the long term is absolutely necessary, because it is driven by evolution. The American school founded on the absolute necessity of improving living conditions through research is a profitable source of inspiration for Africa. Such a philosophy and purpose can contribute to the construction of an identity for research in African social sciences in general, and in social psychology in particular.

## **2. Social psychology: object and method**

Social psychology is concerned with socially adapted human beings. These are people who do not suffer from personality destructuring mental illnesses as is the case, in the Western cultural context, people who are destined for mental health asylums. It is the individual and

his daily life that concerns the social psychologist. The discipline is concerned with psychological fact as it interacts with social contingencies; which is misleadingly said that it is a link between psychology and sociology. Social psychology does indeed deal with mental states, feelings (or emotions) and behaviors, like any psychology elsewhere, but as influenced by the social. Even if the formulations of its definition differ from one author to another, the fact remains that all agree on the essential: the study of social behavior (Allport, 1954; Baron & Byrne, 1984; Gergen & Gergen, 1984; Moscovici, 1984; Myers & Lamarche, 1992; Vallerand, 1994; Leyens & Yzerbyt, 1997; Beauvois, 1998).

Gordon Allport (1954, p. 5) argues, for example, that social psychology uses scientific means to try to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of individuals are influenced by other individuals, as these the latter do exist, whether they are imaginary, or whether their presence is simply implicit. The subject of social psychology assumes that individuals are influenced by the presence of others to do what they do and what they would not do in other circumstances. The "human presence" is at three distinct levels: real, imaginary and implicit. Real presence is a situation of physical co-presences of interacting individuals such as dancing with others on a track. The imaginary presence of others also influences individuals because they pay attention to their behavior and the reaction of others. When someone is late for an important meeting they want to attend, they don't experience it the same way as when they are ahead of the meeting start time. Imagination assumes that you are thinking about others and their reactions.

The implicit presence of others relates to the fact that beyond specific circumstances we are social beings, even when we are alone. In traffic, people sometimes obey traffic lights even if no one is watching them. Many objects in our environment have been shaped by humans and require both the interest and the presence of others. Clearly, the definition of social psychology indicates a cause (the real, imaginary, or implicit presence of other humans), a verb of action (to influence), and an effect or result (the thought, feeling, or behavior individuals).

The doctrine of social psychology is situationism: the behavior considered in this logic is always the result of the interaction between the individual and others whose presence can be physical or real, as well as imaginary or symbolic. Situationism is the scientific belief in the importance of the situation (Fiske, 2008, p. 15). Individuals tend to explain people's behaviors in terms of personality (Leyens, 1986). It's about continually giving individuals positive and negative personality traits when talking about them. Social psychology has the merit of showing that the social situation shapes the personality of individuals beyond their behavior alone. Social behavior is a response provided by a given individual placed in a particular social situation.

Social psychology identifies its object in four levels of analysis, which according to Doise (1982) correspond to four types of explanation: 1) the intra-individual level which concerns the processing of information according to naive or secular logic; 2) the inter-individual and situational level which corresponds to explanations based on interactions between individuals in a given situation; 3) the positional level which is the place occupied by the individual or group in the social order; and 4) the ideological level which assumes representations of the world and its social divisions, systems of values and beliefs, ideologies and collective norms.

In social psychology, as in most disciplines of psychology for that matter, the emergence of cognitivism has been a revolution. Information processing now occupies a prominent place in the study of social behavior. The sociocognitive approach places significant importance on the informal or naive knowledge of the ordinary person. The premise behind this revolution is to indicate that the link between the stimulus (the situation) and the response (the behavior of individuals) is not direct. Rather, it is the perception of the situation that is closely related to the behavioral response.

As a research activity, social psychology is not a discursive discipline. It is part of the concert of sciences claiming to be part of the current positivist. The knowledge that she develops, mainly in the form of theories, is exclusively the result of empirical research. The methods in social psychology fall into five categories according to Aissani (2003). The experimental method represents the highest-level approach to establish scientific proof. As the requirements of laboratory manipulations are rigorous and difficult to achieve, non-experimental methods are also promoted. Among them are the quasi-experimental or pseudo-experimental methods which apply to studies of causal relations between two variables, unable to modify at will the conditions of the field of study (classroom, hypermarket, workshops in a company, etc.). Correlational methods aim to establish a relationship between at least two variables on the basis of statistical calculations. Observation methods are also used in social psychology to directly capture behaviors as they occur. Survey methods concern investigations that are interested in the beliefs, representations, opinions, motivations, plans, feelings of individuals, etc. The social psychologist can conduct a survey by interview, individual or group, or by questionnaire.

Measurement is an essential operation in social psychology. It is tricky, especially as an effort is made to measure subjective realities as objectively as possible. The interest in sociocognitive processes leads to soliciting so-called self-report or self-report measures. They are more widely used, since they allow a description by the subject of his own behavior.

### **3. Situationism applied to African contexts**

One of the often-voiced complaints of social psychology is its tendency to deal usually with trivialities and obvious realities at the expense of larger developmental issues (Fishbein, 1997; McGuire, 1997). The reaction to such criticisms has led to a distinction being made over time between fundamental social psychology, more geared towards establishing the general laws and principles of individual-society interactions, and applied social psychology, more focused on specific fields and specific societal phenomena (Moser 2006). It is also estimated that this need for social psychology to be interested in social problems is even greater in developing countries facing social changes that call for work of understanding and undeniable intervention (Bandawe, 2010). In the early 1980s, Omari (1983) argued that the practical contribution of psychology was a necessity in third world countries plagued by poverty, declining life expectancy and disease. The priority given to development issues by policies and a certain scientific philosophy offers an opportunity for social psychology to assert itself (Moghaddam, Bianchi, Daniels, Apter, Harré, 1999).

The history of social psychology in Africa is equated with the dynamics of colonization which did not favor the emergence of a psychology of the land that investigates local problems. On this subject, Akin-Ogundeji (1991) claims that psychology in Africa remained in its infancy confined to universities and academia, unable to take an interest in the multiple aspects of national development such as social mobility, family planning, youth issues, hygiene and sanitation, rural development, primary health care system, to name just a few. The author states that the enhancement of the experimental method which distinguished psychology from philosophy, making it a science in its own right, did not encourage recourse to psychology to improve the living conditions of populations. Faced with the complex social problems of African societies, psychology has remained silent, without applicability, without practical contribution; at least according to the author and at the time of his article. Some research paradigms imported from the West and applied as such have not proven to be appropriate and adequate for African realities. For Akin-Ogundeji (1991, p. 4), the changes taking place in Africa require new paradigms, new methods and new areas of specialization. Carr and MacLachlan (1993, 1998) indicate how social psychology has served Malawi usefully in promoting improvements in areas such as education and health. They report that

the inferiority status of psychology in developing countries has prompted researchers to make an epistemological assimilation consisting in replicating the work carried out in Western countries in Africa. African realities are therefore explored through the prism of Western psychology. Realities and evidence that are irrelevant in Western contexts are sometimes ignored or discredited. Nevertheless, Moghaddam, Bianchi, Daniels, Apter & Harré (1999) note that American psychology, from which many theoretical models are borrowed, is built on the socio-cultural norms of the middle class of the United States. African phenomena are then assessed without an appropriate theoretical background and the comparison with Western cultural contexts is not properly made.

Social psychology has nevertheless been used in Malawi to solve practical and local problems, Carr (1996) enumerates five pillars on which it is deployed, two of which hold our attention. The first concerns updating old-fashioned theories about socio-political changes. The second concerns the refutation of psychosocial constructs which do not exactly reflect the local characteristics of the realities studied. The explanation of the disease, for example, appeals as much to Western models as to traditional explanatory systems that invoke mystical causes, because of the role of ancestors in the occurrence of the pathology (MacLachlan & Carr 1994; Carr, McAuliffe & MacLachlan 1998; Shaba, MacLachlan, Carr & Ager 1993).

North American and European psychologies have significantly influenced psychology in Africa; its emergence having been literally copied there. Several Anglophone African psychologists supported in the 1980s, no doubt because of a burst of pride, the thesis according to which the Africanization of psychology should be done by the production of an epistemology underpinned by scientific knowledge on African realities (Nobles, 1980; Bulhan, 1981, 1993; Dawes, 1985, 1986; Liddell & Kvalsvig, 1990; Nell, 1990; Foster, Nicholas & Dawes 1993; Nicholas 1993; Howitt & Owusu Bempah, 1994; Nsamenang & Dawes 1998). Following this logic, grasping African realities from external theories, valid in Western contexts, is sometimes inappropriate. This question is itself taken hostage by the great debate between the modernists (Smith, 1994) and the post-modernists (Gergen, 1994). For modernists, the ultimate goal of psychology as a science is the establishment of universal, ideologically neutral laws and principles. For the modernists, even if the mental contents and processes vary according to the cultural universes, the fact remains that the system of regulation of the psyche is the same for all the individuals, whatever the cultural universe (Shweder, 1991). From this perspective, intercultural psychology in Africa considers cultural differences as independent variables for studying universal psychological principles (Jahoda, 1982; Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 1990; Gauvain, 1995).

This essentialist approach to psychology has been strongly criticized in Africa because it is conceived by Western culture, even if Dawes (1998) maintains that these critiques have not, however, been able to question this current scientific achievements. The latter also invites himself to the debate on the Africanization of psychology by arguing that it is necessary to distinguish between the Africanization of psychology and the adequate exploitation of the theories of modern psychology within the framework of the investigation of phenomena rooted in the African context. The author believes that the development of African psychology must be based on both local and external knowledge systems. It cannot be established by ignoring conventional standards and the major scientific principles in force in its various sub-disciplines. This position of Dawes (1998) seems to be relevant in every way and directs our gaze towards the dialectic between fundamental research and applied research.

Basic social psychology is geared towards scientific knowledge through laboratory experimentation. Applied social psychology favors research focused on the individual in context and seeks to address societal problems (Moser, 2006). Basic social psychology is oriented towards theorizing for the sake of establishing general laws of the subject's

interaction with others. Fundamental knowledge often concerns functions more than operations. Fundamental social psychology resorts exclusively to the experimental method, a method which makes it possible to neutralize or isolate the variables in which the researcher is not interested. The related studies are conducted in laboratories, by definition artificial settings, which makes fundamental social psychology a discipline independent of the field insofar as only general processes can figure as an object of investigation. Moses (2006) argues that heuristic processes, implemented by fundamental social psychology, tend to exclude any thematic lasting.

The very functioning of basic social psychology, centered more on general processes, moves the discipline away from the problems of society. And, by not listening to society, we end up being out of step with regard to the issues likely to be of interest to society, and we are rightly led to ask the question of the applicability of what we produce. Indeed, this point of view imposes recourse to the notion of application when one wants to respond to a particular request (Moses, 2006).

Applied social psychology is concerned with the individual interacting with others in a given context different from the laboratory. The individual is a concern for the researcher as much as the terrain, context or situation that concerns him. All of them form an integral part of the analyzes carried out in fields as diverse as they are varied: work, organizations, education, interculturality, sport, environment, community, justice, religion, clinical, political, economic, close relationships, money, risk, etc. Problems of validity and generalization arise differently than in laboratory psychology.

In the African context where research receives little funding, focusing more on basic research in social psychology would be as counterproductive as it is unrealistic, if of course it is judged on its ability to contribute to the resolution of concrete problems of societies. The psychosocial dynamic should then be deployed more from an applied science perspective which focuses on the empirical issues at the heart of development policies inherent in African realities. The interest in typically African situations is enough in itself to direct research towards particular contexts, which can be identified by the theories that will hold sway there, even if the need to build them gradually is essential. It should be noted that even in Western countries, the theoretical issues, which underlie laboratory work in social psychology, are themselves based on a topicality and a socio-cultural context questioned by the general public; the social psychologist goes to the laboratory simply to provide a response marked with the cachet and credit of his discipline.

It is therefore up to Africa to enhance and legitimize its social issues and to create the need, even the obligation for research to address them appropriately. This philosophy of research development has been dubbed pragmatism in other ways. It lies in the purpose assigned to scientific production, which is none other than the improvement of the living conditions of populations. The North American model appears as a source of inspiration, as an epistemological and ideological approach. She suggests identifying the African situations that are problematic as local specificities. She also suggests organizing the originality of the issues even by using the borrowed models, but it is important to adapt, reformulate, modify, question or exceed. Such an approach can lead to statements and propositions which serve as reading grids for African situations. Isolated work by African social psychologists is being carried out in this direction. A few issues can be mentioned here in order to show the full need to make an inventory of African issues calling for empirical investigations, theoretical and practical solutions as relevant as they are original and valid.

#### **4. Situationism and pragmatism of research in Africa**

Our concern for pragmatism dates back to a PhD thesis (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2012) which follows a trend that Barone, Maddux and Snyder (1997, p. VII) qualify as pragmatist

cognitive social psychology. Blanchard (2008) specifies that they locate the source of this current mainly among American authors like Herbert Mead (1863-1931), John Dewey (1859-1952) and William James (1842-1910), who were all influenced by the philosopher, logician and semiologist Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). The latter is also at the origin of a theory of meaning known as "pragmatism", presented during the 1870s.

The aforementioned thesis is based on the observation that the majority of theories developed by the social psychology of work and organizations, on the one hand, and educational and vocational guidance, on the other hand, are explanatory and predictive corpus of behaviors of the job seeker and worker in relation to the certain environment of the formal labor market. This also seems logical insofar as most of these theoretical developments are the result of laboratories in Western universities. It is in this logic that Robert Lent, Steven Brown and Gail Hackett (1994, 2000) help to generalize with resounding success the applications of the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (2003) in the field of guidance and career development, in link with the formal relationship to employment. The pragmatic nature of American positive psychology in relation to vocational guidance is not, as it stands, directly exploitable as a framework for reading the socio-cognitive mechanisms of the integration of graduates into the informal economy which undoubtedly dominates the labor market of the work of the countries of black Africa, in general, and that of Cameroon, in particular.

Markets are said to be imperfect in black African countries since the public, private, formal, informal and rural markets coexist. The employment crisis in these countries occurs in a context where the informal economy is emerging as the one that best responds to social demand. Socio-professional trajectories are not linear, as in developed countries where the graduate leaves the education system, which is formal by definition, to enter the equally formal labor market. The predictions of Western theoretical models only consider the characteristics of the perfect environment of the formal sector. These theories will therefore become unilateral and unsatisfactory when it comes to reading the atypical socio-professional trajectories of black African graduates who leave the formal education system to enter the informal sector for which their training did not prepare them.

The theories of the social psychology of work as well as those of vocational guidance will be of real use in black Africa when they also integrate the issues relating to the behavior of the job seeker or worker in the uncertain environment of the informal sector. Cameroon's informal sector, to name but one, employs 90% of workers whose jobs are said to be urban self-employed (INS 2011). Clearly, the theories of social psychology of work and organizations would only be valid for understanding the situation of 10% of Cameroonian workers, although it is not established that the African organizational contexts are the same as those of Westerners. The psychology of informal work needs to be developed simply because the informal economy is dominant in African countries south of the Sahara. This context is undeniable. In a pragmatic way, the research would seek to find solutions or proposals contributing either to the increase of decent work in the informal sector, within the meaning of the ILO (Kanté, 2002), or to the progressive formalization of the production units of goods and services in this sector of the economy. It is also necessary to theorize the psychology of entrepreneurship in an African context (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2013, 2014). How do informal workers start small in the informal sector and end up years later, for some, at the top of financial empires in the formal market? How are careers built in the informal economy? How do people in this sector manage to earn a decent living while remaining there? Only African researchers working on questions of employability will be able to offer answers to such questions by forging concepts, theoretical models and methodological approaches not available in ready-made Western-made scientific tools.

Another illustration of pragmatism, among many possibilities, concerns the crucial question of homosexuality. She shows that the social issues around her are posed differently in Africa,

if we follow the news in Western countries promoting the human rights of sexual minorities. A Cameroonian social psychologist is studying the attitude of tolerance towards homosexuality by investigating the importance of attributing this minority sexual orientation to evil causes, due to membership in esoteric circles (Njengoué Ngamaleu 2016). This is an issue that Western work on the issue does not address even though it is an integral part of the news in Africa. Its psychosocial implications are nevertheless significant and even permeate international relations between countries of the North and those of the South.

Mechanisms relating to identity constructions, due to the conflict between traditional norms and those prescribed by modernity, are also major subjects in Africa. The traditional and modern values to which Africans adhere at the same time make their socio-cultural contexts more complex and generate adaptive behaviors worthy of interest. Family life and the development of couples in connection with the celebration of conjugal unions speak volumes. It should be noted that weddings are celebrated in several Cameroonian families in three moments articulated in time in an accumulation of legitimacy. It is then a question of marriage which is celebrated at the same time at the customary, civil and religious levels. A study carried out in Cameroon effectively questions the weight of each form of marriage, in terms of socio-cognitive valuation, which makes it possible to assess the impact of acculturation on African conjugal practices (Njengoué Ngamaleu 2015a). The conception of the family and the practices related to it suggest that intimate and marital relationships be studied by integrating anthropological realities that allow to predict with more validity the marital and family conflicts, the family well-being in general. The complex identity configurations, which result from the meshing of traditional norms and values with those of modernity, also direct attention to questions relating to gender, especially those of the emancipation of African women in a context completely different from western social environments. A study of social psychology still carried out in Cameroon (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2017a) shows that the modern African woman is building an identity which benefits both from certain traditional values (motherhood, dependence on men, household skills) and modern (higher education, employment, purchasing power). This acrobatic identity construction induces similar adjustments in men, which takes place following symbolic compromises whose evolution over time is questioned in the study.

In terms of urban traffic and road safety, the dilapidated state of the road network, the anarchic development of metropolitan areas, the isolation of new residential areas, the bankruptcy of public transport companies and the densification of the vehicle fleet pose social and environmental issues of concern to public authorities. Social psychology studies have looked into the phenomenon and have focused in particular on the atypical group psychology of mototaxi drivers (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2018a), the risk perception of the same users (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2018b), psychology of the risk of mototaxi customers (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2017b), and the psychology of urban traffic in the city of Yaoundé, a study focusing on the experiences of personal vehicle drivers (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2017c). All these studies make it possible to identify by anticipation a theoretical reading of African situations and contexts: uncertainty. African environments are uncertain insofar as individuals are confronted with an anomie consisting of dualist regulatory mechanisms, simply because formal standards, falling under positive law or written texts and laws, have a regulatory power weakened by informal practices and uses unwritten, but the predominant regulatory power. Individuals therefore deal with both the "should be" and the informal reality. They know that as things are formally prescribed, that is not how they actually work. In the case of urban traffic, for example, users accustomed to driving a car admit that driving in the city of Yaounde while making the effort to respect the highway code rather puts the user on the fringes of urban traffic. Rather, it obeys the informal norms agreed to by all, even if they are the subject of crime or contraventions. The uncertainty arises from the fact that the



self-determination of the individual, namely his capacity to self-direct, as well as his agency, or his personal power to act, do not come about only according to the prescriptions of the formal codes. In African contexts, the rate of informality of situations is sufficiently high and determines individuals to refer to informal norms and practices.

This is how it has been shown that students potentially applying for administrative competitions giving direct access to the Cameroonian civil service are well aware that individual skills are exclusively guarantees of success, but in principle only, because they believe they also know that factors more informal, even illicit, in reality ensure success; they are: family ties with influential people; membership in influential networks; the purchasing power to monetize success (Njengoué Ngamaleu, 2015b). The secular logics of individuals are built on this normative duality and inspire a new cognitive social approach to consider multiple phenomena relating to African realities. This is about self-determination in the face of uncertainty. Thus, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, to name but these cases, do they have, in social representations and rationalizations of behavior, the same meaning given to them by the institutions in charge of their repression? To this end, it was interesting to study how the nursing staff of a health district in Yaoundé, Cameroon, resort to drugs known as the street for therapeutic purposes, despite the prohibition and awareness campaigns and of struggle undertaken by the corporation and the public authorities against the phenomenon (Njengoué Ngamaleu & Levodo, 2015). The dissuasive messages and warnings certainly prohibit the use of street drugs, but health workers seem to indicate that the uses and practices deny to the limit the dangerous nature suggested by the campaigns. In the informal circuit, there is both the good medicine and the bad and it is up to the "connoisseur" to distinguish them. And to this end, all claim to be connoisseurs, and good ones elsewhere.

Mefoh (2014) seems to have already subscribed to the same perspective as we did when he wrote an article on the challenges and prospects of psychology in Nigeria. He underlines that the contribution of psychology to development has been made in this English-speaking neighboring country of Cameroon through research and the training of skilled labor. As an academic discipline, psychology has been present in Nigeria since 1964. Despite the misrepresentations it has received (Anowi, 2004; Ojiji, 2011), it has ended up contributing significantly to the development of the nation. Banjo (1998) argues that the best way to promote psychology in Nigeria is to orient research towards concrete problems. By focusing on the resolution of conflicts between ethnic groups, psychology has helped facilitate decision-making and government action. UNHCR also used the services of psychologists in its attempt to facilitate the return of Nigerian refugees who fled the conflicts to Cameroon. Even in the defense of children's rights in the face of certain abuses and neglect, psychologists have played an important role (Eya, 2002). Some Nigerian psychologists have set up CRISA (Center for Research and Information on Substance Abuse) whose mission is to raise awareness of the problems associated with the abuse of substances and drugs. Nigerian psychologists have also developed tests to measure different aspects of human behavior such as intelligence, fit, motivation, personality, to name a few. They also noted that some Western tests pose validity problems among the Nigerian population. Eyo (1986), for example, adapted the "Herman's questionnaire measure of achievement motivation". Ebigbo & Izuora (1981) have standardized the "standardized the Draw-A-Person test". In terms of family therapy, Uzoka (1979, 2011) was able to show that the Western conception of the family and the dynamics resulting from it are not in line with the local culture.

These latter works cited are not directly related to social psychology, but they confirm, if it is still necessary, the fact that the interest in the problems aiming at the improvement of the living conditions allows the social sciences to make useful and original contributions, marked by the particularities of a given socio-cultural environment. If it is admitted that situationism is the doctrine of social psychology, then it goes without saying that beyond the universal

processes which govern human interactions, it should take into account the social environments, as many particularities as there are. Situationism makes social psychology a differential psychology of socio-cultural contexts. Theories and knowledge on African realities would take these realities into account while studying them objectively. To achieve this, the issues must be developed and oriented in such a perspective. As a research goal and philosophy, pragmatism would usefully serve as a breadcrumb trail, especially as it dictates that the goal of any scientific adventure should be the improvement of the living conditions of populations.

### **5. Towards a social psychology of African realities**

Serge Moscovici, a leading figure in French social psychology, was, and still is, presented by journalists as a sociologist, and not as a social psychologist. Joule (2006) thinks that this fact is symptomatic of the general public's ignorance of social psychology: "in the end everything happens as if social psychology, as a body of constituted knowledge, does not belong to our scientific landscape and cultural ". The author demonstrates that social psychology is a discipline likely to be of interest to the public and policy makers. He answers a few fundamental questions: 1) Is it because this discipline is less scientific than the others? 2) Is it because it allows fewer applications than the other disciplines? 3) Is it because it can lead to immoral applications? 4) Is it then because it is more austere, or more difficult to disseminate, than other scientific disciplines? 5) Why then does social psychology not get the social recognition it deserves?

Essentially, we agree with Joules (2006) that social psychology is a scientific discipline which produces, in standardized situations, reproducible and theorizable effects, by referring to methodological requirements and valid experimental paradigms. It suffices to refer to the numerous publications of works of applied social psychology to see that the discipline deals with major societal issues, be it prevention and public health, education, professional and social reintegration, the environment and energy management, citizenship, human relations and management in the field of work and organizations. The applications of social psychology are no more immoral than in other disciplines of the pure and social sciences. Likewise, her knowledge is not difficult to disseminate, especially as she deals with the themes that people face on a daily basis.

Psychosocial knowledge, like all scientific knowledge, does not necessarily validate common sense knowledge. Joules (2006) believes that social psychology deals with questions to which great journalists and channel managers already have ready answers. Journalists in France may show a reluctance towards social psychology, seeing their idea of their role as "opinion leader" undermined. As a suggestion, Joules (2006) assumes that while it is obviously up to social psychologists to bring to the attention of the public the advances in knowledge in "social psychology", it is also their responsibility to work for the recognition of their discipline among decision-makers and actors in the sphere socioeconomic. This recognition obviously involves recognition of the specificity of psycho-social knowledge. But it is also and above all - we are convinced - the recognition of its social utility.

The ambition to make oneself known and to serve the causes of development and improvement of the living conditions of populations is a noble mission assigned to social psychology, both in the West and in Africa. Regarding the latter, it must begin by taking a serious concern while identifying the social issues relating to the socio-political, cultural and economic reality. Once the priority social problems have been identified, they should be conceptualized into psychosocial problems using the theoretical tools and paradigms developed by fundamental social psychology. The human and budgetary resources allocated to research being limited, if not derisory, it goes without saying that they would be better exploited in an orientation of applied social psychology, if the objective remains the

Africanization of the discipline. It appears to us more as an investigation of African situations than as an African philosophy of social psychology. The exploration of local realities will necessarily be done through the identification of phenomena and variables not taken into account by Western studies, the elaboration of conceptual and operational definitions, as well as the identification of the limits of Western theories to serve as exhaustive reading grids of African situations. The methodological implication is also to be considered as appropriate. Standardized measurement tools such as there are several in social psychology must fail to be re-developed, adapted to African contexts. Exploratory and qualitative studies will help in this effect. They are all indicated when knowledge about the phenomena is incomplete and insufficient.

### Conclusion

This work is a reflection on the promotion of a useful social psychology capable of contributing effectively to improving the living conditions of African populations. This is not a philosophy of African social psychology but an applied social psychology which investigates typically African situations. The article purposely reminds us that the doctrine of social psychology is situationism, that is, the belief in the importance of the situation in terms of significantly influencing human behavior. Situationism by definition poses the hypothesis of a variability of behavior according to different contexts. Pragmatism is a philosophy and a vision of scientific research capable of inspiring a unique dynamic in social psychology in Africa. As applied social psychology has shown its ability to offer solutions to social problems, it could also contribute to the study of African situations. Such an approach implies specific orientations, however, on the concepts, theories and methodological tools. Since African situations are a priori different from those in Western countries, rigorously investigating them would clear the ground for building valid psychosocial knowledge on African psychic realities.

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