

# The African Political Scientist and Decision-Making

ANTHONY G. G. GINGYERA-PINYCWA\*

What should be the role of the African political scientist in public decision-making in the political system in which he lives? What has, in fact, been the role that he has played in this connection in recent years in Africa?

Let us start by looking at the task that the political scientist performs. Briefly, the political scientist seeks to explore and to analyse political phenomena. But what are political phenomena? They include at least two broad categories of things. They include, in the first place, the practices or acts of Governments. Secondly, they include the practices or acts of peoples—politicians and interest groups who aspire to enter into a Government or to influence it. They include, further, ideas and principles pertaining to the conduct of Governments, to the conduct of politicians, and to the management of society as a whole. Because the political scientist studies these things—behaviour or acts of Governments, behaviour or acts of politicians or interest groups, ideas and principles that underlie and should underlie such behaviour—he is, at least theoretically, in a position to influence the character of decision-making.

The political scientist is in a position to do this, in the first place, through his empirical study of the practical actions of Governments, of politicians, and of interest groups. Through such empirical studies he should be able to provide to the practitioners of politics, namely, to Governments, to politicians, and to interest groups, empirical findings that should go to make public decision-making, and political practice in general, more efficient and more relevant to the needs of the time. The point being made here is quite evident in the area of public administration which is the area of decision-making par excellence. Here, the discoveries a political scientist is likely to make as to how a particular bureaucracy operates, why it does not perform according to expectations, and so on, should be of considerable help to decision-makers that have anything to do with such a bureaucracy. But the same relationship between what the political scientist discovers and decision-making can exist in such other areas of study and of decision-making as foreign policy, comparative politics and so on. What we are saying here is that through his empirical findings in the various facets of

\* Head, Department of Political Science, Makerere University. This paper was presented to the East African Universities Social Sciences Council Conference held at Makerere in December 1974. An earlier version was delivered ad. lib. to the workshop for writers held in Nairobi in December 1972.

political science, the political scientist can or should help to make decision-making more enlightened.

The political scientist is concerned with analysing the existing ideas or principles that practitioners of politics follow or should follow. Where such ideas or principles are non-existent he may also suggest new ideas and principles that should be adopted in the conduct of public affairs. In either case, i.e., whether by elaborating existing ideas or principles or by suggesting new ones, the task of the political scientist is or should be related to decision-making in that it highlights and furnishes to the decision-maker those ideas and principles which make decision-making more morally satisfying. The point here is that decision-making does not rest on just fact or knowledge alone. It also rests on certain ideas, assumptions, and principles about how best to conduct or to organize public affairs. Because the task of the political scientist embraces the study, the elaboration, and suggestion for innovation of such ideas, assumptions, and principles on which decision-making sometimes rests, we are suggesting that his endeavours have or should have a close bearing upon public decision-making in this respect too.

Unfortunately, however, this hypothetical relationship between the endeavours of the political scientist and decision-making has not been that close in recent years in African public life. The rest of this article will argue out this contention by considering how the study of political science has been conducted in Africa by African political scientists.

Let us begin our argument by noting two trends that are easily distinguishable in present day political science as it is pursued in Africa and elsewhere. The first is the older trend of political philosophy or political thought. And the second is the much more recent trend of regarding political science as something that can be approached with the methodological techniques of the physical and biological sciences.<sup>1</sup> In the first the political scientist is engaged in the analysis and elaboration of political ideas, assumptions and principles; and it is here too that one would find him suggesting new ideas, assumptions and principles where none exist. In the second, the political scientist endeavours to explore and to gather facts about Government and practical political life.

If we begin with political philosophy, through which the African political scientist should be influencing decision-making, the point pertinent for our argument concerns its contemporary decline as a viable academic pursuit. As it has been conceived, political philosophy is the quest for knowledge of the good life or of the good society. It is the quest for ideas, assumptions and principles that underlie the good society. Thus, to take a well known work in political philosophy, namely, Plato's *Republic*, we find in it Socrates addressing himself and directing the various people with whom he enters

1 See D. Easton, *The Political System* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), and L. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1959).

into a dialogue to the question of the good society or polity.<sup>2</sup> The quest ultimately leads to an answer in which the *good* society is one based on the ideas of justice, defined as a situation in which everyone—money-makers, warriors, and rulers — does only what he is best fitted for, and only that.

Sometimes, and, again, as reflected in Plato's *Republic*, this quest for the good life is extended to the unit of social life, namely, man. In such a case the philosophical quest becomes: what is the good order for man's psyche or soul or spiritual make-up? In the case of the *Republic*, for example, where the search for justice in the city is extended to the unit of the city as a society, namely, man, the answer is that the *good* or just arrangement of the soul is one which gives rise to health or wellbeing of the soul. Developing from the dialogue this condition is fulfilled if: (a) the higher qualities of man direct the lower qualities of man; and (b) each quality in man is geared to the job for which it is best fitted, and no more. Concretely, the good arrangement of the soul or psyche is one in which the superior virtue of reason is, like the superior philosopher-ruler in the city, in control of the lower ones with which it must co-exist. And this arrangement must be complemented by a condition in which all these qualities serve the purpose for which they are best suited, and no more.

Other notions often used in the field of political philosophy, besides *good* and *just*, but really deriving from assumptions about these two, are notions like *ought* and *why*. These are particularly important in philosophical treatments of the basis of political obligation or obedience in which the quest is for answers as to why one ought to obey or to behave in a manner prescribed by the State or Government.

Operating on these bases, political philosophy, along with philosophy in general, was, prior to modern times, considered by many to be superior to all other intellectual endeavours. For example, no less a man than Aristotle once described it as the "architectonic", i.e., most "authoritative" or "master" science.<sup>3</sup> The steps which led Aristotle to this conclusion are not really relevant to our discussion; what is relevant is the fact that for centuries thereafter political philosophy retained a highly respected place in the ranking of human learning.

However, as we said earlier, today, such intellectual endeavours are hardly regarded as constituting a fashionable pursuit for the scholar or student who styles himself a political scientist. What are the major reasons for this decline? One contributing factor appears to be that it is difficult to reach any universal agreement in political philosophy, because of the value judgements involved. The question of what regime is *best*, and of *why* one *ought* to obey the State, are largely matters in which value judgements play a

2 For an authoritative and in-depth dissection of Plato's *Republic* the reader is referred to Leo Strauss' contribution, "Plato," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963).

3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1094 a-b in The Standard Berlin Greek Text and Sections 1 and 2 in *The Great Books of the Western World* (Book 9), edition of the *Ethics*.

dominant role. Thus, the answer as to what are the true ends or final values a particular regime should aim for or as to why one ought to obey the State, depend to a large extent on who is seeking such answers. Accordingly, political philosophy leads itself into the sort of situation in which, say, Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, etc., come out with widely different answers, although they are tackling more or less the same fundamental question, the question of how best to organize human society. In modern times people have, by and large, become pessimistic about the utility of an exercise of this kind.

Within the social sciences this trend has been influenced by two major intellectual developments that began in the nineteenth century, and which we shall look at briefly to bring out more fully the current state of political philosophy. The first of these was the development known as *positivism*. Positivism is the philosophy of the denial of absolute truths, i.e., of the sort of truths that philosophers and political theorists were accustomed to search for. First founded by the Frenchman, Auguste Comte (known sometimes as the "Father of Sociology"), positivism was a glorification of science and scientific methods which the positivists hoped would sweep away the superstition which had surrounded man for years due to his dependence on induction.<sup>4</sup> As envisaged by Comte, positivism was to study human society through *observation, experiment, comparison* and through the *historical method*. In other words, right from its beginning, positivism disparaged any effort that talked about ultimate causes, the meaning of life, morality, etc., because these things were not observable, because they could not be experimented upon, because they could not be studied comparatively, and so on. In another and later variant of positivism, known as logical positivism, positivists also came to contend that the problems which exercised the minds of the great political thinkers of the past were spurious, resting on confusions of thought and the misuse of language. People of this persuasion held, or hold, that careful application of linguistic analysis would demolish the pretentious systems erected by the political philosophers.<sup>5</sup> Others maintained that political philosophy not only pretended to give us knowledge but also stood in the way of our achieving it.

Historicism also adversely affected the status of political philosophy. As used here, historicism stands for the assumption that

All ideas are historically conditioned, and therefore, that all ideas, both moral and casual, are purely relative. There can be no universal truths except perhaps the one truth that all ideas are a product of a historical period and cannot transcend it.<sup>6</sup>

The implication of an assumption of this kind for the endeavours political philosophers engage in is quite obvious. If all ideas are geographically and

4 For a concise treatment of positivism as conceived by Comte, see N. S. Timasheff, *Sociological Theory: Its Nature and Growth* (New York: Random House, 1957).

5 See, for example, T. D. Weldon, *The Vocabulary of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953).

6 Easton, *The Political System*, op. cit., p. 235. See also Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* op. cit., Chapter II.

historically conditioned, then whatever they may be, their value is just that much limited and no more. This is a serious challenge to traditional political philosophy in which, to quote Leo Strauss, "The political philosophers . . . attempted to answer the question of the best political order once and for all," and not just for one single given historical moment and condition.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the younger assumption of historicism has proven to be too strong for the much older assumption of traditional political philosophy.

These developments, among others, have tended to undermine considerably the popularity of political philosophy in our time. This, of course, is not the same as saying that political philosophy is no longer studied for in the form of the history of political philosophy, it still retains a place in college and university syllabuses in political science. Nor is it the same as saying that nobody speaks in defence of political philosophy. Indeed, there still remains a group of eminent scholars who consider political philosophy a possible and worthwhile intellectual undertaking. In fact, a recent book on the matter foresees a revival in the subject.<sup>8</sup> But despite these reservations, the general picture remains one of decline in the status of political philosophy as an intellectual area in which one can do original thinking on a serious level.

To return now to our African political scientist, it should be noted that this trend, which started in the West in Europe, and in America, has now reached Africa too, if only because of the close ties between African intellectual life and that of the West.

In my opinion, this is to be regretted, considering the phase of political development Africa has been going through since she regained her political independence. In the last ten years Africa has been passing through times which are similar to those which in earlier ages served to provoke profound reflections on the political conditions of man, reflections which, though not universally accepted had much to do with public decision-making in that they helped men and Governments to organize their affairs on more morally satisfying principles. But what are the features of these times that we are referring to, which should encourage political philosophy? These are features related to what some people have described as the "birth-pangs" of the new Africa. Sometimes they take the form of civil wars; groups fight each other within the same polity in competition for State power in the wake of imperial departure. Sometimes they take the form of a more limited, but no less brutal, violence as people are individually liquidated to ensure that a set of people whose claims are questionable remains in power. At other times they take such forms as corruption and nepotism which are not uncommon in present-day Africa. All of these, and many more not mentioned here, are features of a similar kind; they are all features indicative of political malaise in the body politics. Now these are not unique to Africa

7 Strauss, op. cit., p. 62.

8 Dante Germino, *Beyond Ideology: The Revival of Political Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), esp. Parts I and IV. The rest of this book is also worth looking at for its clear and articulate discussion of the positivist development and its impact on political philosophy.

or to the present day. But in other places which experienced them at earlier times, they gave rise to some of the most profound political reflections that have helped to shape the political course of man. As one scholar has remarked, "Troubled times encourage meditation."<sup>9</sup> Thus, to use the examples he cites to expand on this point, such major and well known works of political philosophy as Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* and several others, had their seminal force in the condition of political malaise surrounding them, and all are attempts to draw out the features of a better substitute political order for the existing one. As we have seen, contemporary Africa is rife with problems; it is rife with problems precisely similar to those which in earlier periods evoked such highbrow reflections as we have noted above. Thus, the continent is a potentially rich field for the political philosopher, if only the African political scientist would detach himself from the current scholarly trend that is adverse to political philosophy.

It appears, however, that it is not easy to reverse that trend. At least in the sense we have traditionally understood it, it is unlikely that any serious philosophical writing will be undertaken on the political condition of Africa.<sup>10</sup> But if this is the case, an important opportunity for the African political scientist to influence decision-making will be missed.

When we come to the second trend within political science, namely, that which lays emphasis on rigorous scientific methods, we encounter two sub-trends. The first seeks to accumulate data through empirical observation, while the second seeks to distil political theory out of such data. In both respects Africa has been, and should continue to be, a very fertile ground for the political scientist. As a continent, Africa is, in the political respect, as in others, still largely understudied. Raw materials to be studied scientifically and to be used as bases for theory building or theory verification exist, therefore, in plenty.

This promising prospect for the new style of political science is, however, marred by a number of hostile factors. The first pertains to the unit that is so much at the centre of political science as a social science. This unit is man, or people, if we may take him in the collective form in

9 R. Aron, *Peace and War* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 1.

10 In the earlier version of this paper that was presented to the writers' workshop in Nairobi in 1972, I argued that one way to overcome this problem was to make increasing use of such media as drama, poetry and the novel, pointing out that these, by the nature of their style, can avoid that directness and presumption of political philosophy by which a value is chosen by a thinker and put forward as a universal remedy the too-often abstract character of political philosophy, as well as its outmodedness. Apart from that, we must recognize that the situation is not hopeless because opportunities still exist for the African political scientist to have a say in the ideas, assumptions and principles of public life by way of commentaries in the course of teaching or studying the history of political philosophy. Further, through empirical work a political scientist may still address himself to such ideas, assumptions and objectives.

which the social scientist is interested. A considerable degree of unwillingness to be studied characterizes the attitude of people in Africa towards the political scientist's work, and that is the first problem facing the political scientist who adheres to the second trend within political science at the moment.

At least two explanations seem to be responsible for this fact. The first has to do with the nature of practical African politics in the years after independence. Although virtually every African State embarked upon its independence with politico-constitutional arrangements designed to reflect the liberal spirit of political life in the metropolitan country that colonized it, a new trend very soon set in. This was a trend towards authoritarianism, or centralization of power as it is sometimes called. Such checks on central power as existed were removed. Such independent pockets of power as existed, for example, through the federal device or through strong local governments, were removed. Political parties opposed to the ruling party were removed. And, private associations, too, were, in large measure, brought under the umbrella of the ruling political party. This process towards greater authoritarianism or centralism was never universally welcome within a given territory, and, therefore, it generally gave rise to resistance. The reaction of the ruling party was to create intelligence systems to spy upon and to punish dissidents and bring them into line. But, as people became more and more aware of such intelligence systems, they became oversensitive too. For safety they tended to avoid being questioned or interviewed on anything smacking of politics. And yet, without questions or interviews the political scientist, like any social scientist, is very badly disarmed. Questions and interviews provide him with some of the best channels for probing human behaviour scientifically. As we have said, at the moment, they are problematic channels due to people's fear that they might put themselves into the hands of political detectives if they risk subjecting themselves to interviews.

Apart from fear, the political scientist who aspires to write in the new and more rigorously scientific style faces yet another problem. This is a problem we shall describe as that of cultural *non-appreciation* of the importance of research ventures undertaken by the political scientist. By and large, the contemporary African world sees politics as something to be practised by the politicians. The realization that the practice of politicians and Governments could be carried out more efficiently or more morally if they were informed by findings emanating from research has a very limited span. This limited realization underlies the puzzle one commonly encounters in society as to what political science studies, as well as the low incentive one encounters in the general populace to co-operate with the political researcher.

But even if neither of the preceding problems existed, there would still be a formidable problem affecting the political scholar and writer himself. This is the fear on his own part which now appears to be so characteristic a feature not only of political scholarship but of social science scholarship

as a whole. This is a problem that arises from what has at times been termed the *primacy of politics* in Africa. In Africa the opinion appears to prevail that politics is the key to all else. As a result, politics is regarded as a matter of life or death. Commitment to power or to those in power comes to assume, in consequence, fanatical proportions. Opinions must be in favour or else they must be suppressed, however inhumanly. This becomes the general guideline of those who possess, or who support the possessors of, the instruments of State power. Under circumstances of this kind, contrary or conflicting opinions, which we must interpret widely to mean facts as well, can hardly come out. On the one hand they are suppressed by those with power, and, on the other, they may be repressed or doctored by the scholar in the interest of his own security.

Some disturbing consequences of this particular problem are easily observable in contemporary African political science. The first is silence on the part of the scholars. A small anecdote will help to elaborate this point. The time was during Obote's rule in Uganda, and the occasion a beer party. A fierce argument developed between a scholar disaffected with the Obote regime and another favourably disposed towards it. As the argument was concerned with some malpractices of the regime, the latter fired his most powerful volley by enquiring why his critical anti-regime colleague did not put such 'objective' critical views in writing so that the wider audience could also read them. His colleague replied with another question: "Do you want me to go into the University?" the "University" being Luzira Prison where political detainees were usually held.

Another disturbing consequence is the rise of what we might term compliant political science. This is the kind of political science which, to the extent that it touches governmental practices, is composed of writings supporting or rationalizing Government practices and policies. Because Governments are run by humans who, like all others, can err, the political scientist who takes up the posture of an explainer or a rationalizer of governmental policies and practices severely compromises his chances of performing in accordance with the rubrics of the new empiricist political science. A further consequence is that even where there is critical analysis, the criticism is only from what one might describe as a *position of safety*—a position from which the estimated risks are low. This is why some of the most serious-minded appraisals of African political life and phenomena have come from expatriate scholars. They know that, if necessary, they can always jump from the country analysed into the safety of their own countries. Excellent critical analyses of this kind include Aristide Zolberg's *Creating Political Order*,<sup>11</sup> and Henry Bienen's lonely scepticism on the effectiveness

11 A. R. Zolberg's, *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1966) is a critical survey of the post-independence West African political scene that arrives at some irreverent conclusions about Government and political parties in West Africa, some of which have been vindicated by the turn of events there. I am not saying that Zolberg arrived at these conclusions because he felt safe. Such a consideration may well have never occurred to him. My point is, rather, that as a non-national of the

of TANU in his *Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development*.<sup>12</sup>

Akin to the above position is the habit of African political scientists of undertaking critical political analyses, but not of their own countries. In this instance the scholar understands that it is risky to analyse his own country, and turns to neighbouring or other African countries instead. Thus, if you are a Kenyan, you may more easily find yourself making critical jabs at Tanzania, at Uganda, Nigeria, etc., rather than at your own country.<sup>13</sup>

Yet another important consequence of the two factors of fear and cultural non-appreciation is the growth of a political science based on secondary sources. Here a scholar wants to make a substantive submission of fact. He does it, and although no field research has been done, he feels that if he can cite a newspaper confirmation, his task as a scientific analyst is thereby accomplished. The result is, of course, something that can hardly be regarded as scientific, because apart from their notoriety for blow-up sensationalism, newspaper reports are not always based on first hand observation.

Obviously, these current problems are not going to lead to the ultimate demise of empirical political science. The intense emotions that now surround politics in Africa and give rise to so much fear for the unit being studied, as well as for the student studying it, and the factor of cultural non-appreciation may lose their present strength as independent Africa over time plants its roots more firmly in the ground.<sup>14</sup>

We started this paper by raising two questions. What should be the role of the African political scientist in decision-making? And, what has in fact been the role that he has played in this connection in recent years? We have now reached a point where we can summarize our answers. To start with the first one, we have shown that, given the nature of his professional task, the efforts of the political scientist should have a close bearing on decision-making in public affairs. If we may use a metaphor, the endeavours of the political scientist should shed light to dispel the darkness of ignorance in the area of public decision-making. Such light emanates from that knowledge about governmental and public behaviour which the political scientist makes available to decision-makers through his empirical studies. It should

countries he studied, he was free from the real inhibitions that nationals usually suffer from. The brief history of African independence has made it only too clear what the consequences of carefree research by nationals can be.

- 12 Henry Bienen, *Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). The caveat about inhibitions in footnote 11 above applies here too.
- 13 For example, Ali Mazrui, the well known Kenyan political scientist has been attacked recently, for allegedly behaving in this manner, writing critically about almost every African country except his own Kenya. See Ali Mazrui, "Africa, My Conscience and I," in *Transition* 46 (Oct./Dec. 1974), in which Mazrui defends himself against this attack.
- 14 As in the area of political philosophy, I suggested in the earlier version of the paper that drama, poetry and the novel could help to overcome this problem to a certain extent.

also emanate from that knowledge which he makes available to decision-makers about the ideas, assumptions and principles that underlie or should underlie public life.

However, we have sadly discovered that in practice this potential has not been exploited adequately either by the African political scientist or by the political system within which he lives. The circumstances have been such that they have not encouraged him to furnish that empirical knowledge that should provide the light to dispel ignorance over public decision-making. As to ideas, assumptions and principles pertaining to public life, the African political scientist, though living in a situation like those which in earlier times helped to lift men to lofty heights of philosophical reflection on the condition of their political existence, has followed too readily the trend that started in the West and which disparages original work in political philosophy. Thereby, he has deprived himself of an important opportunity to influence public decision-making.

## The Zambian Foreign Service 1964-1972

BENEDICT V. MTSHALI\*

This article discusses how a new State handles the many issues involved in its relations with other States which may be more experienced and more powerful. Zambia is fortunate in having at its disposal financial resources with which to solve some of the problems which arise from the legacy of underdevelopment and from an attempt by the new State to come to terms with an international order whose values and procedures may conflict with its aspirations.

However clearly formulated the principles on which a foreign policy rests may be, and however well-endowed a State may be in material resources, the effectiveness of the resultant policy ultimately depends on the calibre of the personnel which is charged with its daily implementation and, indirectly, with its formulation.<sup>1</sup> This article will examine the Zambian Foreign service in terms of its structure, the educational and social background of its manpower, and their conditions of service and professional training; for these constitute important indicators of the quality of the Foreign Service and of its potential role in foreign policy.

At this stage it is important to point out that the African States, like others, tend to follow one of two approaches in appointing members of the Foreign Service, especially Heads of Missions and their deputies: they make political or career appointments. The advantage of the former is that the appointee is trusted by and loyal to the Head of Government. He can thus be expected to take the initiative without fear of being reproved by the careerists for adventurism or lack of caution. Moreover, he can pursue a foreign policy in strict conformity with the Government line. However, serious disadvantages attach to political appointments. The appointees may not be professionally equipped with the result that they may prove ineffective through incompetence. Secondly, such people may be difficult to discipline because they may have their own domestic sources of political support. Finally, political appointments at the level of Head of Mission may discourage recruits from entering the Foreign Service because of limited prospects of rising to the top. Yet it must be remembered that career appointments have

\* Associate Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. From 1967-1973 Dr. Mtshali was a Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Zambia.

<sup>1</sup> K. J. Holsti stresses this role of diplomats as policy-makers because they provide "a large portion of the information upon which policy is based". But, as he correctly points out, a diplomat's influence in this respect depends on a number of factors. Cf. *International Politics, A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 222-223.