

Tolani ASUNI, Friderun SCHOENBERG, Charles SWIFT — *Mental Health and Disease in Africa*. Ibadan, Owerri, Kaduna, Lagos, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1994, 330 p. (Sunshine House, 1, Emanuel Alayande Street, Oluyole Industrial Estate, PMB 5612, Ibadan, Nigeria). ISBN: 978-246-187-3.

When I looked through the back issues of this Journal I could not find a review of the first edition of the Textbook (Churchill Livingstone, 1975). I don't know of any other Textbook on African Psychiatry. These reasons already would make a review in this journal desirable.

There are individual textbooks in many countries. I am most familiar with German ones, and know some from the UK, from the USA, from Holland, from Scandinavian countries, and from France. Although, just as in other fields of medicine, there are no basic differences between mental disorders in different countries, the need of medical students and other health workers in training seems to require textbooks adjusted to the specific conditions in the respective countries, whereas problems connected with possible differences due to cultural factors are dealt with in journals and in other publications on Transcultural Psychiatry. This journal's title indicates specific characteristics of "*psychiatrie africaine*". Examples are easy to find. The first issue of the book was published in a series "Medicine in the Tropics". I gave the title *Psychiatrie in tropischen Landern* (psychiatry in tropical countries; Boroffka 1984) to a lecture hold in a series on Tropical Medicine for medical students and general practitioners in Berlin. German (1971) spoke of "psychiatry of poverty". These references, easily to be augmented, point to environmental factors causing or shaping mental disorders in Africa, mainly located within the tropics and mostly consisting of developing countries.

Why then are there no more psychiatric Textbooks from Africa ?

The development of psychiatry was and still is rather uneven in African countries. It has in general, though made remarkable progress since the pioneers in the field started or improved care and treatment facilities for psychiatric patients in their countries, influencing also the development in other African countries : Tigani el Mahi in the Sudan 1949 (1956), Forster in Ghana (1952), and, maybe most influential, Lambo in Nigeria (1955). Today, Nigeria, the country with the largest population of ail African countries, has, absolutely and also in relation to her population, the highest number of psychiatrists (estimated at more than 100), other workers in the mental health field (more than 1000 psychiatric nurses), nine Departments of Psychiatry in Medical Schools, and more than 30 additional psychiatric institutions for in- and out-patient treatment (Orija 1997). The need for a textbook for the several100 medical students, and many more trainees in other fields starting per year is undisputable.

After such a time gap of 19 years between the two issues of the book under review, with plenty of new research results in most facets of psychiatry, most probably, a new book would have been written in other parts of the world. Furthermore it is noteworthy that the revised edition has not been published by the same British publisher of the first edition. Both facts are explained most likely by economic factors. British and American Textbooks listed in the "Reading List" of the first edition are omitted in the new edition. This, probably, points also to the changed economic situation making the import of foreign textbooks difficult. So much the more the Nigerian publisher must be lauded for undertaking this enterprise. The somewhat modest quality of paper and get-up is only

fitting to the restrained economic situation and should not be criticized.

Considering all those facts, even an extended discussion for the revised edition seems justified.

As the writing of a new book did not seem possible at the present time, the authors decided to prepare a revised edition. Taking into account the adverse economic conditions, the audacity, the perseverance and the accomplishment of the two authors, increased by a third one, must be admired and acclaimed. In the new edition Tolani Asuni is listed as the first author, according to the alphabet. This seems correct also in regard of his contribution to the reissue. He was supported by a third, the authoress Friderun Schoenberg. She has been working in Africa for more than 30 years, the best part of it as a psychiatrist in Nigeria. She has co-authored two books (Staewen, Schoenberg 1970; 1982). A review of the recently published English version of the latter (Boroffka 1997) will appear shortly. Charles Swift, the senior author of the first edition, written whilst he served as Professor of Psychiatry in Dar-es-Salam/Tanzania and now back in the USA, has contributed again from his broad experience.

In the preface the authors state, "there is no radical change" in the revised edition, although criticisms of the first edition had been considered. The structure of the book then follows again mainly conventional lines. In the new book, extended by 73 pages, chapters on AIDS, vagrant psychotics, and psychiatric emergencies have been added as well as a number of instructive case histories. In the case histories and in some chapters, cultural factors are considered, especially the activities of traditional healers. Although Prince (1976) wrote in a review of the first edition (in another Journal), "the transcultural specialist will find... little that is new", he continued, "he will find a highly useful review and synthesis of much of the more recent African literature" (Prince 1976). The literature is supplemented by new publications from Africa up to 1991. Thus, the statement by Prince applies also to the new edition.

Although the adherent of "political correctness" may not like it, the authors have kept unaltered from the first edition (pp. 200-202) the subchapter on "Traditional Treatment" (pp 257-260). They describe in it not only beneficial therapeutic influences of the traditional healers, but point out also negative and harmful activities.

Looking through the chapters on types of disorders, the one on "Organic Disorders" comprises 15 pages. This seems to be very short considering that, according to the first sentence, organic disorders cause "40 per cent of all psychiatric patients in Africa". However, when reading the chapter carefully, it is evident that by intense compression, all necessary information is included. Similar statements can be made about the other chapters. Whatever one would and could expect from a textbook of this size and written for non-specialists can be found and is covered adequately.

Some readers from Western countries and familiar with the latest developments, will miss the inclusion of internationally recommended classifications DSM-IV (Frances *et al.* 1994) and ICD 10 (Dilling *et al.* 1991), both once more revised not too long ago. Regarding the development of modern classifications, "*difficile est satiram non scribere*" (Juvenal: not to write a satire is difficult). But this does not belong into a review of this volume.

However, reviewing a textbook written mainly for developing countries somehow the omission must be explained. Whoever has done psychiatric work in a developing country knows the amount of work required of the always scarce personal. Under such circumstances it would be Utopian to request the application of elaborate classifications, apparently having the tendency to become more and more laborious and, therefore, will require more and more labour and time of mental health workers.

The textbook will be of interest foremost to English speaking African countries, but also to those with other teaching languages, as nowadays English is a Lingua Franca in most of

Africa. Despite some limitations the book is highly recommended to workers in the mental health field of developing countries, especially, of course, in Africa as it is written for them. The book will be of use to medical students, to doctors, not specialized in psychiatry, and to other health workers having to cope with patients suffering from psychological problems and/or mental disorders.

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