



# Eurocentrism and the Contemporary Social Sciences

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## Abstract

The contemporary social sciences emerged in the West from the eighteenth century as new modes of technology and scientific research developed. There is no doubt that technological advances led to the triumph of empiricism over metaphysics. This was the basis for the transformation of the nomenclatures of natural philosophy and moral philosophy into natural science and moral science respectively. As the empiricist methodologies of the natural sciences became successful, the social sciences chose to emulate their techniques. Thus, the methodological claim was made that the social sciences and their division of labour compartmentalisation of the social world reflected that world in objectivist terms. But the fact that humans themselves were involved in describing and explaining the behaviours of other humans meant that a subjective element would be always be involved unless serious attempts were made for cognitive correctives and a self-conscious regard for consistent objectivity. While research in archaeology is relatively objective in its scientific findings, this is not the case with the other social sciences – especially anthropology and history. There has been an arbitrary Eurocentric creation and reification of theories and terms founded on whimsical and unsupported claims concerning the evolutionary status of *Homo sapiens Africanus*.

**Keywords:** Social sciences, Eurocentrism, archaeology, history, anthropology, political economy, economics, sociology, linguistics

## Résumé

Les sciences sociales contemporaines émergent en Occident à partir du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle au fur et à mesure que se développent de nouvelles technologies et de nouveaux modes de recherche scientifique. Il est indéniable que les progrès technologiques ont mené au triomphe de l'empirisme sur la métaphysique. C'est la base de la transformation des nomenclatures de la philosophie

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naturelle et de la philosophie morale dans les sciences naturelles et les sciences morales, respectivement. Le succès des méthodologies empiristes des sciences naturelles a poussé les sciences sociales à imiter leurs techniques. Ainsi, il a été affirmé méthodologiquement que les sciences sociales et le compartimentage du monde social de leur division du travail reflétaient ce monde en termes objectivistes. Mais les humains étant eux-mêmes impliqués dans la description et l'explication des comportements d'autres humains signifiait qu'un élément subjectif serait toujours présent, à moins de sérieuses tentatives de correctifs cognitifs et d'un respect conscient de l'objectivité cohérente. Si la recherche en archéologie est relativement objective dans ses découvertes scientifiques, ce n'est pas le cas dans les autres sciences sociales, en particulier l'anthropologie et l'histoire. Il y a une création et une réification eurocentriques arbitraires des théories et des termes fondées sur des affirmations fantaisistes et non étayées sur le statut évolutif de l'*homo sapiens africanus*.

**Mots-clés :** sciences sociales, eurocentrisme, archéologie, histoire, anthropologie, économie politique, économie, sociologie, linguistique

## Introduction

The contemporary social sciences that are taught in the West derive from the earlier attempts to describe human behaviour in descriptive and proto-scientific terms. In post-Renaissance times, there were just two approaches to knowledge: moral philosophy and natural philosophy. Later, the European Enlightenment, with its emphasis on secular knowledge, witnessed attempts to study human behaviour on the same basis that the natural world was being studied. Consider the pre-Enlightenment works of Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Descartes, Spinoza, and others in this regard. The European Enlightenment produced a set of scholarly works that set the foundations for the modern social or human sciences as they developed out of the philosophical works of researchers such as Kant, Buffon, D'Holbach, Diderot, Helvétius, and others. Later, scholars such as Darwin, Blumenbach, Mill, Hegel, Marx, Comte, and others of the French school such as Lévy-Bruhl, Lévi-Strauss, and Durkheim helped in the maturation of the European social sciences.

The development of the European natural and social sciences advanced *pari passu* with Western Europe's technological prowess that allowed its expansion into the Americas, Asia, and Africa. This technological prowess was also employed in the area of scientific research. Thus, over time, Western Europe became dominant not only in the natural sciences, but also in the human sciences. The result was that the social science paradigms dominant in Europe were transplanted to African scholarship centres at the time of the independence of Africa's new nations. This meant that, during the modern

era, the early historians of Africa were West Europeans hailing especially from Britain, France and Germany. The works of the Ancient Egyptian historian Manetho and other African historians such as Ibn Khaldun, Sadi, Kati, and others were more or less ignored. Similarly, scholars such as Plotinus, Zara Yakob, Ahmed Baba, and others are usually not included in the literature on the history of ideas.

The modern social sciences and their paradigms were simply transferred to Africa during the colonial era and expressed in the languages of the colonisers. Given the obvious imbalance of power in the colonial relationships, the European description of the history and sociology of Africa took on decidedly Eurocentric modes of expression. A special social science colonial lexicon was developed for just that purpose. For example, terms such as primitive, tribe, negro Africa, black Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, true negro, negroid but not negro, Hamite, tribal dancing, tribal warfare, savage, fetish, and so on were created specifically to describe African modes of being. For example, in the case of sociological appellations such as 'tribe', one might note that this term is never used to describe the people of Europe. Western sociologists never refer to, for example, 'the Gypsy tribe', 'the Jewish tribe', 'the Flemish tribe', or 'the Welsh tribe'.

Similar considerations apply to other social sciences such as economics/ political economy, political science, and linguistics. The structure of economics/ political economy as pedagogy in the universities and practised by the governments of Africa derive directly from the West's research efforts in its academies. During the Cold War, socialism, as state capitalism, was the preferred mode of economic expression for those African nations aligned with the Soviet Union. Those aligned with the West expressed support for capitalism, privatisation of public enterprises, and the market economy. Western neoclassical economics was the dominant pedagogy in African universities. Political science as taught in the African university and understood by Africa's governments was an acceptance *grosso modo* of the West's structuring of the world into the conflicting ideologies of socialism and democracy as defined in the West's academies of political science. The major ideological exceptions were the 'wars of liberation' and conflicts in the Portuguese colonial territories, South Africa, and Namibia. One-party state socialism as opposed to multiparty democracy was the preferred political mode of governance. But the key point here again is that most of the theoretical political science research of Africa was monopolised by researchers and theorists not based on the African continent. There are a few exceptions, for example the works of the late Claude Ake such as *Democracy and Development in Africa* (1995). Similar considerations apply to the area of linguistics, where the main research

efforts by Africans have been carried out by C. A. Diop (1977) and Theophile Obenga (1993), both of whom provided views on the origins and structure of Africa's languages that opposed those of Western linguists such as Meinhof (1912) and Greenberg (1966).

In sum, the modern social sciences in an African context developed according to subjectively Eurocentric modes of expression. This article seeks to analyse and unpack the modern social sciences as they operate in Africa. The areas it will discuss are archaeology, history, anthropology, political economy and economics, sociology, and linguistics. The goals are to show the evident lack of objective content and objective modes of analysis utilised by Western scholars of Africa, and to suggest that social science modes of expression should be as objective as possible.

### **Archaeology**

The virtue of empirical science is that its methods and experimental results are replicable. Phenomena to be tested must be isolated and examined as objectively as possible, and results recorded for future reference. In this regard, the orthodox theory concerning human origins is that humanity has its origins in Africa some 200,000 years ago after a series of evolutionary attempts by *hominins* that resulted in the ultimate success of *Homo sapiens*. Scientific analysis enters the picture by examining fossil remains and dating them by the relevant methods of physics, chemistry, and biology. The noteworthy and interesting issue here is that, although Africa is viewed as the geographical area where humankind originated, very few African researchers are engaged in anthropological research on the continent. Thus, the scientific nomenclature chosen to describe the scientific findings on the archaeology and anthropology of the continent were all proposed by researchers in the West. The situation is the same for DNA analysis of human archaeological remains. From *Ardipithecus ramidus* to the set of *Australopithecus* forms on to *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, and finally *Homo sapiens*, the classifications have all been of Western origin. The key question is: are archaeological classifications Eurocentric or not?

### **Anthropology**

Anthropology has assumed a great importance in the study of humankind. Even though the whole of humankind can be studied anthropologically, most of the studies are done at Euro-American universities. This means that findings necessarily come with a veneer of Eurocentricism. Little independent work on Africa's anthropology is carried out by African scholars themselves.

The standard classification is that there are three races and that they are distinguished by evident morphological traits such as osteological and skull structures, pigmentation, hair form, eye form, etc. The earliest race theorists were researchers such as Linnaeus (Sweden, 1707–1778) who in his *Systema Naturae* (1735, 1806) classified humankind into four types: *Homo Americanus*, *Homo Africanus*, *Homo Europaeus*, and *Homo Asiaticus*. There were no African inputs into any of these works, which probably explains why the depictions of *Homo Africanus* were quite unflattering. The term ‘race’ was later used by Buffon (1707–1788) to classify humans. The German Johann Blumenbach changed Linnaeus’s race classification from four races to five: Caucasian, Ethiopian, Malay, Mongolian, and American. This new classification was not principally based on geographical location, but rather on human physical structures. Blumenbach’s classification scheme was decidedly Eurocentric in his choice of the term ‘Caucasian’ after he found ‘the most perfect skull’ in the Caucasus mountains of Southern Russia. Clearly, Blumenbach’s claim that his found skull was ‘perfect’ was purely arbitrary, but it gained currency over the years so that ‘Caucasoid’ skulls were found on all continents. Obviously, this was a case of blatant Eurocentric vanity.

Given Europe’s technological ascendancy over all other continents, the idea of the biological superiority of *Homo Europaeus* over all the other geographical populations in the world went unchallenged. Skull shape, cranial capacity, facial angle, physiognomic structure, and even facial aesthetics were the criteria applied to ‘prove’ the biological superiority of *Homo Europaeus*. Other population groups that approximated the European morphology were given higher status. Africans were placed on the lowest rung, along with the Tasmanians and Australian Aborigines. This anthropological template buttressed by a racial biological argument was used to justify the enslavement of Africans in the Americas for purely economic reasons. The fictitious ‘curse of Ham’ of Western religious lore was thenceforth buttressed by the fictions of phrenological pseudoscience.

Given that Africa was the original home of humanity, and that the basic template for the world’s diverse physiognomic morphologies came from there, it would follow logically that certain physiognomic morphologies would approximate those of Europe and Eurasia. This was the basis for Eurocentric anthropology to claim that certain African physiognomic structures were ‘Caucasoid’. This was the case for the Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi, the so-called Hottentots of Southern Africa, some Hausa and Yoruba of West Africa, Sahel-dwelling Africans, and East Africans on the Horn of Africa. Seligman’s (1930) *Races of Africa* reinforced this Eurocentric anthropological argument. The Seligman thesis, also known as the Hamitic

hypothesis, claimed that any semblance of creative cultural or civilisational structures in Africa derived from Asian Hamites entering Africa during the primeval past to conquer and exercise dominion over Africa's indigenous populations. As a result of Seligman's work, Africa's populations were classified according to the Eurocentric paradigm as 'Caucasoid' Hamites, half-Hamites, quarter Hamites, etc.

The German colonisation of East Africa was accompanied by pseudo-scientific theories of race which sought justification by appeal to cephalometry, with its calliper-measured cephalic indices, further supported by the metrics of nasal and facial angles. It was this kind of Eurocentric vanity that led to German and later Belgian colonialists boosting Tutsi ethnic domination over the majority Hutus from 1894 to Rwanda's independence in 1962. The pseudoscientific content of the 'Hamitic hypothesis' assumed that the Tutsis were 'Caucasoid Hamites' destined to rule over the so-called 'Negroids' such as the Hutus and Twa. The consequences of the pseudo-anthropological Hamitic hypothesis were the civil war in Rwanda from 1990 to 1994.

The historical existence of Ancient Egypt, a very early civilisation lasting some 3,000 years on the African continent, was a seeming anomaly. German philosopher Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* argued that human history in its progress from East to West under the aegis of *Geist* touches Africa only at the point of Egypt, which, though on the continent of Africa, was more Oriental in spirit than African (Hegel 1837, 2001: 109–17). The same tendency to argue for the idea that Africa is incapable of civilisation was expressed by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau in his work *The Inequality of the Races*. He claimed that humankind consisted of 'three great and clearly marked types, the black, the yellow, and the white' (Gobineau 1853, 1966:205). Of these three human varieties, de Gobineau conjectured that the 'negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder' (Gobineau 1853, 1966:205). His basic premise is as follows:

Such is the lesson of history. It shows that all civilisations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species (Gobineau 1853, 1966:210).

This racial theory implicitly exists in the world today in the Americas as expressed in racial caste systems that stem from the legacy of the enslavement of the African. These systems provide more economic and social privilege for those descendants of slaves who increasingly approximate the European phenotype. A cultural and historical anomie afflicts the erstwhile ethnic African, now transmogrified into a race-defined artificial creation of Europe.

The ethnic African transplanted to the Americas has been maximally domesticated into the Eurocentric conquest cultures and is now a perpetual occupant of the lowest caste rung of those societies. His or her vision for the future is limited and without self-ascribed agency. The transplanted ethnic African envisions the future mainly in terms of the *bonne volonté* (goodwill) of the dominant settler classes of those Eurocentric societies.

Arnold Toynbee, the well-known twentieth century 'historian of civilisations', maintained in *A Study of History* (Toynbee 1934-1961) that none of the twenty-six civilisations he identified were African – despite having written extensively on Greek intellectual history which would have included the observation of Herodotus in *The Histories* (430 BC, 2004: p. 104) that the Ancient Egyptians were 'black-skinned and woolly haired'. As an eminent historian of Greek civilisation, did Toynbee read Aristotle's *Physiognomica* (300 BC, 1927) where it is written that 'too black a hue as in the case of Egyptians and Nubians marks a coward; similarly too white a hue as with women' (ch. 6, 812a-12)? Aristotle, in his *Problemata* (c. 300BC, 1927) also muses on the curliness of the hair of Egyptians and Nubians: 'why are Egyptians and Nubians bandy-legged? Is it because of the heat of their countries that bends their hair as heat bends planks of wood? After all, their hair is the curliest of all nations' (Aristotle, *Problemata*, c. 300BC, 1927, Vol. 7, Book 14, Paragraph 4). Apparently, Toynbee, a master scholar of Greek civilisation, was not aware of how the Greeks portrayed the Ancient Egyptians.

But the question always remained for Western scholars of how to explain the presence of such an impressive civilisation on the African continent. The easy *ad hoc* explanation was that the founders of Ancient Egypt were migrants from West Asia. For example, researchers like Petrie (1896) proposed the argument that Ancient Egypt was created by some dynastic race invading North East Africa from Asia to establish that civilisation. Similar tendentious genetic arguments have been proposed to explain the civilisation of Nubia by way of classifying Meroitic, the written language of Nubia, along with the Ancient Egyptian language as Afroasiatic (Rowan 2006). The creation of the fictitious language group labelled as Afroasiatic should be seen as just another intellectually Eurocentric ploy to attach Ancient Egypt and Ancient Nubia to West Asia.

The contentiousness concerning the African civilisation of Ancient Egypt continues, despite the comprehensive research carried out by C. A. Diop (1977). Suffice it to say that serious Eurocentric considerations are at play in maintaining the thesis that the civilisation of Ancient Egypt was essentially non-African in structure, despite being founded on the African continent. The problem again is that there are very few African researchers in this area,

and that the findings of the anti-Eurocentric research carried out by Diop and others have not been much disseminated in Africa's universities.

Certain empirically provable scientific facts cited by, among others, Stringer (2003), and referred to as the OOA/RAO (Out of Africa/Recent Africa Origin) model, say that humankind began, and that all population clines derive from, Africa. DNA analysis has also shown that the important African y-haplogroups of E as E1b1b and R1b are also found in Europe and elsewhere. The same principle is at work for mtDNA: U6 as U6a, L1b and H. Their densest concentrations are found in the Sahel and further north. The noted Eurocentric error here is that when haplogroups found in Africa are also found in Europe and elsewhere, the largely unanimous assumption by Western researchers is that there must have been some 'back migration' into Africa. There was indeed some back migration, but this is relatively recent, with invasions from West Asia into North Africa from the Hyksos, Syria, Persia, Phoenicia, Greece, Rome, Arabia, Turkey, France, Italy, and Britain. The key point to note here is that the classic civilisations of Ancient Egypt and Nubia were indigenously founded African civilisations created by African populations who founded civilisations along the banks of the Nile in a South-North direction.

## History

Until recently, Eurocentric anthropological arguments have also served as a basis for interpretations of African history. However, it must be admitted that African historians have done much to refute the Eurocentric interpretations of African history that became current, *pari passu* with the anthropological arguments. The German philosopher Hegel is well-known for his negative ruminations on African history, specifically by arguing that the movement of world history as made manifest by *Geist* left Africa untouched (Hegel 1837, 2001). This suggests that there is no African history in the sense of a rationality that motivates human history. Similar arguments have been made by the British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper in *The Past and the Present* (1969). For him, Africa entered world history only when it was penetrated by outside forces during the colonial era. In *A Study of History*, (Toynbee 1934–1961), this influential British historian noted that none of the world's noted civilisations were African.

African historians have attempted to rectify matters by studying the history of Africa more objectively. The eight-volume *UNESCO General History of Africa* (1981–1993) is a notable contribution in this regard, and the eight-volume *Cambridge History of Africa* is a clear attempt to place the history of Africa in proper perspective. Even so, Africa has a serious lack of adequate infrastructures such as publishing houses and journals

that are able to accommodate the growing need for an African history that rectifies the Eurocentric view that has been in place since the colonial era. C. A. Diop and others have argued for the history of Ancient Egypt to be included as an integral part of the history of Africa. The colonially inspired Eurocentric distinction between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa has been challenged.

Another shortcoming is not seriously broaching the idea of the history of Africa as something which extends beyond the confines of the continent of Africa. The forced migrations of the people of West Africa into the Americas, for example, is an important part of African history, but this is yet to be fully recognised. In general, the descendants of those who were captured and transported to the Americas to be used as forced labour inputs crucial for the development of commercial capitalism of the triangular trade between Western Europe, West Africa and the Americas have some idea of their historical past. However, the artificial Eurocentric construction of their history has created great cultural alienation for many.

The victims of the Atlantic slave trade endured a maximal reduction of their sense of human agency. As a result, they suffer from their own history having been denied or truncated, and this may explain their anomie. One important point to note here is that, in the writing of the history of Africa, the Eurocentric model is still dominant, even for African historians. According to the Eurocentric model of African history, the contours of African history are restricted to the geographical boundaries of what is called 'sub-Saharan Africa', and the histories of the Africans exiled to Brazil, Haiti and other places are disregarded. This is also true for the African people exiled to places like Iraq, Turkey, and India.

These two considerations probably explain the deliberate political path of China in contemporary times. The subconscious historical memory of China as an impressive and long-lasting civilisation, the Cathay Middle Kingdom, would no doubt be shared with China's populations as they strive to eclipse all other nations on the technological front. Such a sensate drive for advancement based on an impressive history is missing in contemporary Africa.

## **Political Economy and Economics**

Much has been written on the political economy and economics of Africa, but again most of the research has been of Euro-American origin and published in Euro-American publishing houses. Economic activity in Africa ranging from barter to trans- and extra-continental trade has been taking place over millennia. This fact has not always been recognised by the economic historians of Africa, especially those of Euro-American provenance. The

medieval African empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhay engaged in extensive intra-continental trade into North Africa and West Africa, but this has not been fully explored by Africa's economic historians, with the exceptions of Joseph Ki-Zerbo, and J. F. A Ajayi and Michael Crowder.

Modern economics began in the seventeenth century and culminated with the path-breaking work of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). This text set the foundations for the role of money under the rubric of what later was described as 'free market capitalism'. Smith's core thesis was that the optimal way to obtain economic progress and growth is a free market with minimal government intervention. Smith was also anti-mercantilism, because he believed that free markets over an as expansive a space as possible yielded the best possible outcomes. Following Smith's magnum opus, British political economy continued to grow in stature with works by David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus. There were also notable inputs from other political economists such as J. B. Say who argued that the market economy would attain equilibrium with the full utilisation of all resources. In other words,  $\sum D_i = \sum S_i$  for all economic periods.

However, the growing militancy of workers in the new industrialising societies meant that wages as a factor of production could not be just reduced so that full employment could be realised. The actual facts were that demand was not always equal to supply in terms of the logic of the developing capitalist economies. At this point Marx stepped in and offered explanations in *Das Kapital*. His solution was for workers under capitalism to seize power and establish socialist societies as prelude to communist ones. But the key issue here was what exact role the workers would play in the post-capitalist society. Would they control society directly, or would communist parties rule on their behalf? History would prove that workers in the post-capitalist societies yielded power to the communist parties, as was the case in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, etc. Lenin's argument was that statist political economy was the optimal way to confront the expansive capitalist economies of the West.

John Maynard Keynes was the foremost theorist regarding how to deal with the regular instabilities of capitalism. Keynes's arguments served as the foundations for the modern welfare state where government serves as a supervisor of the market economy through its central bank ministrations, and provides relief for citizens affected by its periodic depressions. Universal taxation of workers and businesses directs funds back into the economy to cover education and health costs. This is the case for Europe and its overseas states such as Canada and Australia. The United States has shown itself to be more market-oriented in respect of such considerations. There

is much ongoing political debate concerning the abilities and limitations of the market.

There has not been much input from African scholars who have preferred to follow the Keynesian mixed economy model in recent times. During the Cold War, there was much consideration as to whether Soviet or Maoist models of economic expression were preferable to the mixed economy models of the West. Ghana's socialist model, in which the state assumed a monopoly role for developmental purposes, did secure much progress, but the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 put an end to that experiment. The economic model that Nkrumah touted for Africa was not just a state economic monopoly for rapid development, but also the political unification of Africa as the basis for its economic unification. This idea is mapped out in clear terms in his text *Africa Must Unite*. As he put it:

An African Common Market, devoted uniquely to African interests, would more efficaciously promote the true requirements of the African states. Such an African Market presupposes a common policy for overseas trade as well as for inter-African trade, and must preserve our right to trade freely anywhere (Nkrumah 1963:162).

In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* was an attempt to implement 'African socialism' on the grounds that traditional African village society was 'socialistic'. Senegal's first president Leopold Senghor also argued for African socialism as being most representative of post-independence African society. However, in all the intellectual debates concerning the optimal economic systems for Africa, only Samir Amin persistently theorised and researched this topic. One might also mention Arthur Lewis for his development theories and his work with Ghana in this regard.

The result is that the West has maintained a firm control over the economic lives of Africa's peoples. This is evidenced by the inordinate power that the Eurocentric Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exercise over the nations of Africa. The Eurocentric rule concerning both organisations is that the head of the World Bank must be a European, and that of the IMF must be an American. These post-World War economic institutions ensured the dominance of the economies of Europe and North America with the political fiat that the dominant and international exchangeable currencies would be the major currencies of Europe (now the euro) and the United States dollar as the world's reserve currency. Eurocentric economic dominance was also guaranteed by the rules of trade and tariffs all geared to Euro-America's advantage. The World Trade Organization founded in 1995 to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade had very little African input.

In practice, the result of such Western dominance over Africa's economies is that African labour is rendered very unproductive on account of the constant devaluation of Africa's currencies. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and the naira:dollar exchange rate is about 380:1. The South African rand:dollar exchange rate is about 17:1, which is the best in Africa. Certain currencies trade at over 1,000 units to a single dollar. These currency machinations all derive from the economic myth that currency devaluations are necessary to boost exports. In effect, the ongoing strangulation of Africa's currencies constitute a seemingly insurmountable impediment to intra-Africa trade because repaying loans to the IMF, the World Bank and international creditors requires earning the so-called hard currencies. But such currencies can only be earned by exporting to hard currency areas such as Euro-America and Japan. The solution to this impasse would be the creation of more robust regional currencies. However, such potential solutions are not much explored by African researchers in monetary economics at the government and university level.

The ongoing result of Africa's nations relying on the IMF and World Bank for guidance on economic development is these nations perennially remaining on Level Four of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) annual national human development metrics. Africa's governments and their economic planners seem totally uncreative in matters concerning economic development. They are all victims of neocolonialism and economic dependence. An objective assessment of the situation is that Africa's governments have accepted the market economy *diktats* of the IMF, the World Bank and the West's international credit agencies.

What is required is the rethinking of what economics should mean in terms of human sustenance and development progress. The goals of economic activity have always been about creating the conditions for human sustenance throughout human history. Yet, despite centuries of technological change, the conditions necessary for basic survival have been abused by the market economy founded on the principles of individual gain which are viewed as optimal behaviour by market economics theorists. Humans have always been social animals living in groups according to what is possible given available land and resources, viable labour, and available capital. The modalities of these interactions have usually been determined by what have been called 'social contracts', formal or informal. The key issue here has always been the rights and obligations of individuals and groups, which have always been a political matter. Politics has always shaped economic behaviour, which means that genuine economics has always been political economy.

The economic conditions in Africa require serious attention to address the dire conditions that exist on the continent. The structure of the market economy model must therefore be examined from the standpoint of political economy. Do individuals have rights to shelter and employment? Market economy theorists say no, but say rights to property must be protected. Another issue is the wage issue. Do individuals have 'minimum wage rights'? The point here is that Africa's rank imitation of the market economy model in all its dimensions has not been good for the continent's economies. Scandinavia's economies are 'mixed economies' that display a mixture of market economics and a well-supported welfare base, especially in the areas of education, health, and welfare security, to mitigate the ongoing risks of instability in the capitalist market economy. The fundamental question of economics has always been how to combine land and resources, human labour, and capital so that the distribution of the products of these three factors of production can be equitable. This question has been vigorously debated in the context of religion and secular ideologies from the earliest of times. The four economic ideologies offered in modern times have been the pure market economy, the mixed economy, socialism, and communism – accompanied by discussions about individual and group rights and freedoms.

In all of this, the fundamental problem remains: how can the post-colonial nations of Africa free themselves from the subaltern economic positions they hold vis-à-vis the West and the developed nations of East Asia? C. A. Diop and Samir Amin are the only African scholars who have offered potential solutions. However, Diop's *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (1987) has not been much debated in the African context. The late Samir Amin has written extensively from a Marxist standpoint on 'dependency theory' and the unequal relationship between the Global South and the industrialised West, but he has not been extensively studied by Africa's academic economists either. Amin's text *Unequal Development* (1977) is an example of his critical work concerning the neocolonial economic status of Africa's post-colonial nation states as subordinate appendages to the West.

The economic destiny of Africa is now being determined by acclaimed Western economists such as Paul Collier, Erik Reinart, Jeffery Sachs, Ha-Joon Chang, and Thomas Piketty. A noted critic of the generally patronising approach to the economics of Africa has been William Easterly in his book *White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done so Much Ill and Little Good* (2006). Works from the West such as *Why Nations Fail* (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012) and *Guns, Germs, and*

*Steel* (Diamond 1997) have elicited few reactions from African scholars. Diamond's 'geography' hypothesis is founded on Eurocentric assumptions and is properly understood as being overly simplistic. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that 'inclusive' institutions are necessary conditions for political and economic development and 'extractive' institutions have been the major impediments to economic development for the nations of the South.

It is incumbent on Africa's economists to rethink economics and devise an appropriate approach that maximises equity, efficiency, and democratic freedoms. There must certainly be solutions to the problems that breed a persistent underdevelopment in Africa – the flight of trained human capital, financial capital flight, and the unending and humiliating flight of labour capital to Euro-America by any means possible. Other key problems that contribute to Africa's intractable underdevelopment problem are rent-seeking corruption and unsatisfactory attempts at human capital development.

Contemporary economics seems to have adopted a gratuitous emphasis on mathematical expression in its attempts to be viewed as some species of natural science or engineering. This can be seen in, for example, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* by the British economist Lionel Robbins (1932). However, this approach is problematic because ultimate explanation, which is the goal of empirical science, cannot be met in economics. The measurement of utility cannot reliably capture human sensate experiences. Despite attempts to resolve this issue by appealing to behavioural economics and neuroeconomics, an empirical economics basis for human decision making remains elusive. Ultimate explanation yields predictability, which has not been achieved either in microeconomics or in macroeconomics. At the microeconomic level, a plethora of equations garlanded with Lagrange multipliers and bordered Hessians would surprise the average consumer on a shopping trip as a description of his or her behaviour. Similar criticisms can be applied to macroeconomic theory. In spite of massive amounts of quantitative research, no economist predicted the global financial crisis of 2008.

More fundamental questions about the structure of the economic landscape should attract the attention of Africa's economists. First order questions include the valuation of currencies, why some currencies are convertible and others not, and the *diktat* that the dollar should be the world's reserve currency. Currency is simply a convenient medium for the exchange of goods and services produced by human labour conjoined with

capital in the form of some kind of technology. Yet the valuation of products deriving from similar labour inputs differs greatly. In his text *How Rich Countries Got Rich and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor*, Erik Reinert (2007) asks: 'Why is the real wage of a bus driver in Frankfurt sixteen times higher than the real wage of an equally efficient bus driver in Nigeria, as the World Bank recently calculated?'

Reinert's explanation is that persistent underdevelopment in the Third World is due to an uncritical acceptance of Ricardo's theory of free market comparative advantage. Putting this theory into practice would mean that countries whose main production and exports were agricultural goods would be doomed to remain at a low level in perpetuity. He argues, '... there are other and much better arguments for free trade than Ricardo's comparative advantage, and ... the theory of comparative advantage actually may lock poor countries into a poverty trap, into primitivation: specializing in being poor' (Reinert 2007:304).

The question that arises is how those countries that developed in the technological sense did it. First, there must be a national sense of purpose, as was the case in Germany and China. Germany developed technologically and was able to compete successfully with Britain and France because it adopted autarky (economic self-sufficiency), as recommended by the German economist Friedrich List. After its 1948 revolution, China embarked on an autarkic economic programme that resulted in its contemporary economic success. Japan's Meiji Revolution, which had economic and technological development as its goal, also practised a form of autarky that made it the dominant economic power in East Asia in the early twentieth century. While South Korea's goal was also technological and economic development, it is somewhat different in that it received many capital inputs from the United States in order to stave off China and the Soviet Union.

Can the development growth paths of the aforementioned countries be emulated in Africa? This would be possible if: the declared motivation was for a type of development based on unified political and economic regional structures; that use very few convertible intracontinental currencies; and that have a 1:1 exchange rate with currencies such as the dollar and the euro. One obstacle to this is governments which display unquestioned acceptance of the West's structures and theories of economic decision making. Another is the continuing false consciousness that has metastasised into the colonial Eurocentric concepts of 'Francophone', 'Anglophone', and 'Lusophone' Africa.

## Political Science

As is the case with the other social sciences, political science is heavily structured on Eurocentric assumptions. In the immediate post-independence period, the new governments of Africa accepted the kinds of political systems already set in place by the colonials. Existing governing structures were superseded by the systems of government set in place by the French, British, Portuguese, and Spanish colonists. In some areas, one-party Soviet-type political structures were set in place, the result of Soviet influence in conflicts and struggles for independence. Fledgling governments in Ghana, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Sudan and Namibia introduced political structures based on the one-party state as a result of having received military assistance from the Soviet Union, the Soviet bloc, and China.

With the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, African attempts to emulate Soviet-style political structures were no longer seen as viable. Western-style democracies were henceforth seen as the best model under the watchful eye of Euro-America with the World Bank and the IMF as the ultimate enforcers. A number of models were tested in Africa, ranging from parliamentary systems to an American-style presidential system of government. The model that seems most popular is the run-off or second-round style model in which, if no presidential candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes cast in the first round, the two candidates with most votes stand in a second round of voting. Many African elections are marred by massive corruption and violence. There has been minimal African intellectual input on the best form of political system in the African context because Western political science theory is still being taught in Africa's universities.

The Berlin Conference of 1884 and 1885 was a Eurocentric imposition on Africa that resulted in the division of the continent into colonial states and formal colonial spheres of European interests. Only Liberia and Ethiopia avoided the structured Euro-colonial configuration that remains intact some fifty years after colonisation ended. Macro-state colonial configurations such as French West Africa, French Sudan, and the East African conglomerate of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda arose for strictly economic reasons. The vast Congo was deemed a personal possession of Belgian King Leopold II. The methods of production combined with inordinate demand for rubber resulted in the tragic loss of eight million lives in the Congo.

Another macro-colonial configuration was dividing up the African continent into 'Negro Africa' and 'North Africa'. When the European term 'negro' fell into disrepute, the region was named 'black Africa'. This term

replaced by the transparently euphemistic 'Sub-Saharan Africa'. North Africa remains consistently hived off from the rest of Africa only to be conjoined with the 'Middle East' as a Eurocentric political configuration referred to as MENA (Middle East and North Africa). (The terms 'Middle East', 'Near East', and 'Far East' are all British colonial geographical terms.) Africa's political scientists have not challenged this one-sided postcolonial imposition, founded on spurious racial and geopolitical considerations.

By accepting the artificial nation-state boundaries drawn at the Berlin Conference that created the nationalities of modern-day Africa, contemporary Africa has accepted the pseudo-nationalist conflicts that continue to arise. Colonial incongruities have produced a jigsaw puzzle of truncated African states with many tiny, non-viable states.

African political scientists have not questioned the viability of the post-colonial African state in a geopolitical world operating on the sub rosa principles of Realpolitik. They have not seriously discussed questions concerning regional groupings, free movement of peoples, nationality and ethnic issues, all in the context of creating a post-colonial Africa. Nor have they discussed the important question of how exactly the African state should be optimally configured. Underlying all these thorny issues is how African political theorists should deal with the problems of dislocation and damage caused by the ongoing conflicts between adherents of the imported and culturally diffused religions of Christianity and Islam. The result of this subordination of the African psyche has been significant psychic alienation.

In the case of Christianity, its earliest presence in Africa was in Ethiopia and Egypt in the form of Coptic Christianity, but this early version of Christianity has been ignored by the rest of Africa, whose populations prefer the versions of Christianity from Western Europe. While there are other versions of Christianity such as Russian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox, there is as yet no African Orthodox denomination. Much of Africa's Christian religious fealty is to European headquarters in the Vatican City and Canterbury.

The same holds true for Islam which holds great sway on the African continent, even though the spiritual home of that religion is located in Saudi Arabia. Again, the psychic costs are a very noticeable psychic alienation.

The point is that the religion plays such an important role in the lives of the people of Africa that it necessarily plays an important role in politics. It is therefore incumbent on Africa's political theorists to examine this issue critically, in conjunction with other social scientists.

## Linguistics

The study and classification of the languages of Africa has been the monopoly of Western linguists in the modern colonial and post-colonial era. The only notable exceptions were the analyses of C. A. Diop (1977) and Theophile Obenga (1993) who argued for close relationships between all the languages of Africa, including the language of the Ancient Egyptians. The colonial paradigm concerning the languages of Africa closely followed the pseudo-racial model set up to classify African humanity in the Eurocentric hierarchy of races. The orthodox Eurocentric and colonial model held that there were 'negro languages' spoken by those inhabitants whose languages did not seem to have extra-continental linguistic affiliations. Then there were African languages deemed as Hamitic (those of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Nubia). There were two considerations here: Ancient Egypt and Ancient Nubia were viewed by European scholars as impressive civilizations that antedated those of Europe.

Given the view of African cultures held at the inception of the study of Africa's classical civilisations, the languages of Africa were classified according to prevailing race theories. The implicit rule was that the more developed an African culture or civilisation was seen to be, the less African it was considered to be. Thus the languages of Ancient Egypt and Nubia were considered to be Hamitic (from the Biblical Ham) sharing roots with Semitic (from the Biblical Shem). The assumption here was that the Hamitic languages had full or partial origins in Asia, not Africa. This model for the languages of Africa all tied in with Seligman's (1930, 1957) Hamitic hypothesis that Africa was incapable of producing *sui generis* independent civilisations.

Postcolonial sensitivities saw to it that the old Hamito-Semitic language grouping was replaced with the label 'Afroasiatic languages', again determined by Eurocentric language scholars. But logical analysis would lead to the very plausible hypothesis that all the Afroasiatic languages originated in Africa, given the anthropological fact that humankind originated in Africa and later migrated to other parts of the globe. Both Hamitic and Semitic had origins in East Africa. The plausibility of this hypothesis is supported by the research of Christopher Ehret (1995) which refutes the orthodox Eurocentric thesis that Afroasiatic languages have their origins in the West Asian Levant.

There was also evidence of this in Joseph Greenberg's *The Languages of Africa* (1963). But from a strictly logical point of view, it would seem that all the languages of West Asia are derivatives of African languages, given that

humanity itself has its origins in Africa. In this regard, it would be more accurate to classify all the Afroasiatic languages of Africa, with the exception of Arabic, as African languages. Arabic is the only so-called Afroasiatic language that could be properly labelled as Afroasiatic.

The idea of Afroasiatic languages derives from the fallacious Eurocentric kind of reasoning that ushered in the Hamitic hypothesis founded on spurious correspondences between phenotype and language. Carl Meinhof, Felix von Luschan and others were involved in framing African languages according to the Hamitic hypothesis in the sense that African ethnic groups that were described as Hamitic were assumed to speak Hamitic languages as distinct from Bantu or 'Negritic' languages (Pugach 2012). The pseudo-racial basis for this thesis was that the important written languages of Africa such as Ancient Egyptian and Meroitic – which antedated Greek and Latin, the founding written languages of Europe – were not of African origin, but had roots in Asia and migrated into Africa as the so-called Hamitic languages.

The argument that that the so-called Afroasiatic languages derive from 'return to Africa migrants' from West Asia is less tenable than the reverse, which is that the African migrants who crossed over into West Asia carried their languages with them. Such languages were then partially adopted by previous migrants into the areas such as the Arabian Peninsula. This would be the explanation for the proto-Semitic foundations of languages such as Arabic. The reverse migrations from West Asia into Africa are well documented historically, and are fairly recent.

The earliest invasions were from across the Sinai Peninsula into Ancient Egypt, namely the Hyksos invasion of 1650 BC, the Persian invasion of 550 BC, and the Syrian invasions during the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The last Egyptian dynasty was the Nubian 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty that lasted from 744 to 656 BC. These invasions set precedents for later invasions by Ancient Greece (Alexandrian Greece), Imperial Rome, Islamic Arabia, then finally by colonial France and Britain. The point being made here is that the 'back tracking' from Asia into North Africa was relatively recent – approximately 4,000 years ago. The Semitic language of Arabic only entered North Africa some 2,500 years ago.

Logical analysis offers a plausible resolution to this linguistic issue. According to archaeological research, humans evolved to the level of *Homo sapiens* some 160,000 to 200,000 years ago in Eastern-Southern Africa. It is also claimed that the most successful egress from Africa occurred some 70,000 years ago. Thus, the sole habitat for *Homo sapiens* for 65 per cent of its existence was in Africa. This suggests that all human languages have their *urheimat* somewhere on the African continent. Of course, over time,

original languages split into dialects then into distinct languages that are mutually incomprehensible. This is the basis for the classification of languages into linguistic groupings. But the key point is this: languages that are geographically proximate and share proto-linguistic origins, as in the case of East African *proto-Asiatic*, would most probably have their *urheimat* in Africa itself, given that Africa was the archeological and anthropological origin of humanity.

## **Conclusion**

The social sciences serve as the platform according to which human behaviour in all its dimensions is studied. Since the social sciences are also classified as sciences, their self-ascribed goal is to emulate the methodologies of the natural sciences as much as possible. That goal would be to describe phenomena in the most objective ways possible, explain empirically observable phenomena according to general or statistical laws, then, if required, offer recommendations for managing those phenomena.

Neutrality and experimental modes of replication are the preconditions for objectivity in research methods, and objective research eventually leads to disinterested consensus among researchers in the field. However, the serious epistemological problematic of 'value-laden human interest' is present in social science research. This is not to say that objective social science research is indeed possible, it is only to say that caveats are in order when some particular social science phenomenon is being researched.

During the colonial era, the social science research on Africa was undermined by blatant value judgments that assumed the biological inferiority of the generic populations of Africa. The epistemological error here was that the social science research on Africa's populations, from archaeology to linguistics, was assumed to be value-free and objective, even though the basic assumptions were patently based on value judgments. This article points out that most of the social science research on Africa from Western scholars is not much more than a species of Eurocentric vanity.

It is incumbent, therefore, on African scholars to offer corrective research that is more objective, value-neutral, and epistemologically robust. The social sciences are generally researched on the basis that objective findings serve as the template for optimising social conditions for the studied populations. The task is not an easy one, given the iron grip of culture which in many cases has fused with the corrupting amoralities of post-colonial culture.

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