Reconfiguring Eurocentric Discourse and African Knowledge

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Introduction

From archaeological times to the present the world has had a long history in which a kind of telos of humankind has made itself evident. Humankind, as a species of the animal kingdom, has been variously described as 'the rational animal', or according to Aristotle as 'a political animal'. But, given the empirical history of humankind, one can also argue that this species can just as easily be described generically as 'the technological animal'. After all, given the evolutionary stasis – according to standard evolutionary biology – that humankind has arrived at over the last approximately one hundred and eighty thousand years, the great differences that are observable between human social arrangements, beliefs, and practices are to be attributed essentially to advances in human inquiry into the structures of the natural world, and its practical representations as forms of toolmaking commonly known as technological knowledge.

I argue that it is technological knowledge that serves as the main explanatory variable for the vagaries and paths of human history in time. It is this variable that explains the migratory movements of peoples over time, the wars and conflicts that arise, and the various aspects of cultural diffusion that accompany all such. It is in this regard that one could seek rational explanations for the expansion of Western Europe into the four corners of the globe over the last 500 years. This expansion would also include European expansion into the vast landmass now known as Africa.

It is the evident qualitative distinctions between forms of technologies and their accompanying cultures that best explain the irruption of the nations of Western Europe into Africa in particular. In its initial stages, the compass, the printing press, the cannon, and long-haul galleons afforded maximal technological advantage over the extant technologies of the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia. This differential was crucial for the European success in the settlements of the Americas and parts of Africa (Angola, Mozambique and the southern African Cape area). In its latter stages, it was the Gatling gun, weaponry such as artillery, and a more structured and complete world-view that facilitated an European technological dominance that was used to effect and justify cultural dominance with its embedded modes of knowing.

The technological knowledge that eventually facilitated the European conquest or control of most of Africa was seen by those who employed it as a kind of template for an overall claim to a general superiority in all spheres. Thus, European

technological advantage – promoted as a technological superiority – was extrapolated not only as a cultural advantage but also, crucially, as a qualitatively human superiority. The simple logic behind this extrapolation was that superior humans produce superior (more advanced) technologies and, by further inference, superior cultures with their embedded modes of knowing. The result of all this was that hierarchies of humankind were established according to which the various world populations were graded, not only in terms of the evolutionary worth of their cultures but also in terms of the evolutionary status of their bearers. It is in this connection that the modern idea of 'race' was developed to grade human groups along evolutionary lines and thereby to explain technological and cultural differentials.

One of the by-products of the European irruption into Africa was greater cultural diffusion. Thus, the traditional modes of knowing and acting among the various cultures of Africa were much affected by the diffused technologies and modes of knowing emanating from Europe. The most pervasive examples of these were European forms of religion and the modes of knowledge transmission extant in Europe at the time. Thus, the traditional metaphysical lives of Africans, as much as their traditional technological practices, were thrown into conflict with those of European origin. In this connection, the various versions of Christianity made much headway into Africa, disseminated as they were by European missionaries. The various languages of Western Europe also made their headway in the appropriate areas where economic interests and the need for financial accounting were necessary. This was the basis for the dissemination of Western modes of knowing in Africa – whether religious (metaphysical) or technological (empirical). But cultural dissemination just did not stop at that level. It impacted on most aspects of African life thereby creating diverse forms of psychological and intellectual conflict.

The general impact of Europe's one-sided cultural diffusion – the diffusion was not reciprocated, except later in areas such as art and music – into Africa was to impose forms of knowledge that were decidedly Euro-centred in material and normative terms. Consider for example the exogenous creation of the nation states of Africa without any evident input from the populations involved. Consider, too, the languages imposed on the colonised territories that were increasingly structured to include terms and meanings that were normatively devaluing of the life-worlds of the peoples involved. In brief, the colonial languages were structured and employed to establish as fact both the biological and cultural superiority of the coloniser. It is this assumption of general superiority that was used to justify the idea that indigenous technological practices and metaphysical beliefs be replaced by those of European origin.

In this Europe-Africa encounter, a dialectic was established in which the thesis of European irruption produced an antithesis of opposition from Africa. The result was a variegated synthesis. For example, take the case of Ghana which, at independence, rejected the imposed colonial name of Gold Coast, thereby revivifying the medieval African empire bearing the name. The same held for the Southern African nation of Zimbabwe that similarly rejected the name Rhodesia to replace it with a name that reflected the indigenous archaeological history of that region. This was a significant development in that Eurocentric ideology in the area of archaeology made the claim that the old stone structures of the Zimbabwe ruins could not have been developed by the indigenous peoples of the area. They were variously attributed to Persians or Arabs. The same applied to the art works of the pre-modern Benin culture of Nigeria. The various bronze and terra cotta works were deemed too sophisticated and realistic to be products of indigenous efforts. It is the African reactive antithesis to the prevailing Euro-centred thesis that eventually led to the problematising of the Eurocentric project itself.

One of the most significant forms of African reaction to the one-sided impositions from Europe was realised in the world of literature. The expansive nature and written form of the languages of Europe were used from the twilight of the colonial era to the dawn of formal independence to express the cultural and psychological ambiguities engendered by the Europe-Africa encounter. Novels such as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Ambiguous Adventure* (*L'Aventure ambigüe*) by Cheikh Hamidou Kane are internationally recognised for their portrayal especially of the African psychological response to the European presence in Africa engendered by the initial clash of cultures. One must also note in this regard the Negritude movement of which its major exponents were Césaire, Senghor and Damas. This reactive movement began in the last decades (1930-1960) before the formal independence of African nations and sought to enhance the African past in racial, cultural and moral terms. Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955, 2000) is a well known text in this regard. Senghor (1991) was also noted for his poetry in which he extolled the aesthetic allure of Africa's peoples and cultures.

In the social sciences, noteworthy responses were those of Samir Amin (*Eurocentrism*), C. A. Diop (*Nations negres et culture, L'Unité Culturelle de l'Afrique noire*, and *Civilization or Barbarism*), and the various works of Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*; *Black Skins, White Masks*, etc.). But even so, Euro-centred forms of control still struggle to manifest themselves in the area of the human imagination, thereby reflecting a continuing psychological need for the old Eurocentric colonial images. I refer here to the images portrayed in certain popular films with African themes produced for Western consumption. It is evident that the basis for the Eurocentric structuring of knowledge about Africa is a complex one, but a major consideration is that its foundations rely heavily on issues of economics. The point is that a diminished African status in terms of agency implicitly accords increased agencies to others in terms of access to and utilisation of African resources.

In this connection, the purpose of this paper is to examine epistemologically the various forms according to which orthodox Eurocentric knowledge is presented speciously as objective fact. It should be recognised in this regard that Eurocentric knowledge does not limit itself to just one area of knowledge, but as a paradigm or *Weltanschauung* according to which the world of the past and the present is viewed and understood. Thus there is a Eurocentric approach to structuring the facts of the empirical world whether in the natural or social sciences. In the natural sciences consider how the various universal theories are copyrighted with the names of their theorists, thereby conferring ownership. A proper critique of Eurocentric knowledge in its universalising mode with regard to Africa would provide us therefore with corrective mechanisms as to the proper nature of things.

First, there will be a condensed discussion of what constitutes knowledge in the empirical sciences. I will argue for a weak unity of science model – that is that it is possible to obtain genuine knowledge in both the natural and social spheres – but with the caveat that in the cases of the social sciences such is not easily forthcoming; given that human interests at all levels are involved. Thus, the epistemological goal would be to unpack Eurocentric knowledge in all its dimensions for its ideological content as a prelude to replacing it, where possible, with certifiably more objectivist knowledge. The counter-argument in favour of epistemological relativism cannot be supported, first, on the basis of its question-begging implications, and second, that to accept such a thesis would lead to an experiential world of epistemological anarchy. Although all empirical claims are subject to revision, there are those such as Newton's second law and Boyle's law that have been impervious to all falsificationist contravention. Or consider the anthropological claim that humankind began in what is now known as Africa.

It should be noted in this context that in the case of Africa, the Eurocentric paradigm as an interpretive framework extends itself over three areas to offer a holistic view of the peoples of the continent. The foundational template to the three areas is that concerning the human evolutionary status of the peoples of Africa. It is the thesis propounded in this regard that serves as the basis for African archaeology and history, and ultimately the basis for the idea that Eurocentric agency in the areas of politics and economics is optimal for Africa.

Epistemology and the Foundations of Knowledge

Intellectual inquiry over the ages has had no other goal but to make claims about the world and to justify such claims implicitly by appeal to epistemological criteria. The problem with this though was that there were no uniform epistemological criteria. With the rise of empirical science, on account of its evident material payoffs in the diverse areas of technological application, it followed that its methodological rules of practice would be seen to be applicable to empirically observable human behaviour in the areas of the social sciences. This was the understood goal of positivism which rapidly became the preferred paradigm for the social (human) sciences. Despite ideological differences, both Comte and Marx argued on behalf of a positive social science. But Mannheim (1936), in his *Ideology and Utopia*, argued that if social scientific knowledge reflected class and sectional interests then any critically arrived-at form of such knowledge would automatically be relativistic, that is, not objectively valid. This epistemological scenario would eventually be extended to cover not only the social but also the natural sciences. This was the thesis implicitly argued by Thomas Kuhn (1962) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to which Karl Popper attempted a counter (1963) in *Conjectures and Refutations*. This general critique of epistemological foundationalism certainly duelled strongly with the traditional positivism of scientific research. Consider the extreme relativism argued for by Paul Feyerabend (*Against Method*, 1975), Barry Barnes (*Interests and the Growth of Knowledge*, 1974), and David Bloor (*Knowledge and Social Imagery*, 1976) in their various works known collectively as the Strong Programme in the Sociology of Knowledge.

The key point made by the theorists of the Strong Programme is that all scientific knowledge in its objectivist claims is compromised by the epistemological relativism embedded in its constituent theories. I argue otherwise that despite the fact that all knowledge exists in a social context, it is indeed possible to establish empirically certifiable knowledge. It is just that this requires much epistemological analysis. Thus an Africa-centred knowledge paradigm need not repeat the same errors and misrepresentations that have marred the constructions of knowledge about Africa by European theorists, often epistemologically compromised by the orthodox Eurocentric paradigm which arbitrarily ascribed a universal superiority to all European modes of knowing, simply on the basis of technological primacy. What follows, therefore, are critical analyses of structures of knowledge developed in the social sciences that are assumed to be conventionally factual but which when probed epistemologically are seen to be heavily compromised in terms of Eurocentric content and orientation. The decision to examine the social sciences in general rather than just a single one is based on the fact that the Eurocentric ideological paradigm, often under the colour of objectivity, presents itself pervasively in universalist terms across all disciplinary forms of knowledge.

Eurocentric Human Biology and Anthropology

The rise of modern science was accompanied by the classification of the constituents of the animal kingdom, including humans. The works of Linnaeus and Cuvier come to mind. In the case of humans, classifications were based purely on phenotype to which were assigned particular temperaments. With the advent of Darwinian theory the idea developed that humans could be classified not only according to phenotype and temperament but also to evolutionary status. The idea of 'race' as representing different human categories assumed a centrality in this instance. On account of the technological advantages of West European society, the Eurocentric thesis developed that ranked non-Europeans as biologically less evolved than Europeans. Hume, Kant and others argued in this direction. But the crucial implication of this thesis was that those human groups that were deemed biologically less evolved were subject to the Darwinian principle of evolution by 'natural selection'. The populations of Africa described by the patently non-scientific and Eurocentric term 'negro' were assumed not only to be biologically less evolved but also slated for extinction. Under this prevailing ideology, the Tasmanians and Australian indigenes were themselves subjected to much human rights abuse on the assumption that they were lesser human beings. The inhabitants of Africa were themselves subjected to similar strictures of Eurocentric evolutionary biology, particularly in the case of those transported to the Americas for forced slave labour and those later colonised and virtually enslaved on the African continent, especially in those areas marked out for European settlement such as Southern Africa.

To offer justificatory support for the existing theory of evolutionary gradation, Eurocentric ideology, under the guise of empirical science, resorted to the physical measurements of the crania and other physical aspects of the African phenotype. It was on this basis that the Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi were rated higher up the evolutionary scale than their Hutu kinsmen. A popular approach was the appeal to the pseudoscience of phrenol-

ogy to make the dubious claim that prognathism and nasal indices afforded proof of African evolutionary retardation.

But this argument was easily belied by the fact that the facial structures of East Asians approximated those of Africa, yet the thesis of evolutionary retardation was not applied in this instance. The biologist Stephen Gould in his text *The Mismeasure of Man* effectively pointed out that the data of a significant number of these supposed scientific studies on race and biology were manipulated (Gould 1981). One effective proof, however, to counter the Eurocentric claim of the evolutionary retardation of African populations was that colonised Africans easily learned to communicate in the languages of Europe coupled with the fact that there were noted instances of impressive intellectual abilities. Cases in point are the academic achievements of individuals such as philosopher Anthony Amo, who lectured at the German universities of Halle and Jena during the first half of the eighteenth century. The biographical account (1789) of Gustavus Vassa, once a victim of the Trans-Atlantic trade, is another noteworthy instance. Another proof of the problematic nature of the thesis of African evolutionary retardation is the fact that subjugated African populations refused to accept their status as biologically inferior beings. Frequent revolts both individually and in groups were the order of the day. The successful revolts in the Americas, such as those of Brazil and Haiti together with the colonial revolts in Africa, militated against this prevailing thesis. What is significant here is that African opposition to differential treatment according to some presumed evolutionary thesis actually advanced the argument of the unity of humankind in terms of human rights.

A further erosion of the conventional thesis occurred when scientific evidence demonstrated that humankind has its origins in East and Southern Africa some 160KYA to 200KYA and that migration from the continent took place only some 50KYA to 60KYA. Thus the time for evolutionary differentials, especially in the cognitive areas, was just too short to establish any meaningful differences. This theory has met with opposition on two levels. The OOA (Out of Africa) hypothesis is opposed by the Multiregional Hypothesis which claims that the three major human populations designated as African, European, and Asian evolved separately, not at the sapiens level but at that of Homo Erectus (Wolpoff, *Race and Human Evolution*, 1997). The other thesis forwarded by Klein (1989) is that homo sapiens, though anatomically modern since approximately 165KYA, evolved further at the cognitive level to become 'behaviourally modern' only some 40-50KYA, but not in Africa. This time period is seen to coincide with the already concluded migration of homo sapiens into other parts of the globe. The response to Klein proposed by McBrearty and Brooks (2000) was that the human transition to the cognitive status of 'behaviourally modern' already took place in Africa and was, therefore, social rather than biological. The purpose of both theories (Klein and Wolpoff) is to offer continuing support to the orthodox, but challenged Eurocentric model about the evolutionary stages of the world's geographically different populations. Yet, the OOA hypothesis still stands firm on the basis of continuing research (Stringer 1997). Here we have an instance of an Africa-centred knowledge being empirically confirmed.

The biological theories of human evolution first established in Eurocentric discourse to chart the course of human development were eventually used as the template on which modern physical and cultural anthropology was structured. The discipline of anthropology began, therefore, as the cultural and biological study of the non-European 'other'. This enterprise required above all a specialised vocabulary with its specific references. Non-European humans from Africa and pre-Columbian America were seen as inhabitants of the woods and forests, hence the coining of the terms 'savage' (from the Latin 'silva'), 'primitive' (signifying 'early stages of humanity'), 'tribe' (as opposed to 'people' or 'ethnic group', both terms reserved for the 'civilised' people of Europe). Thus, for example, warfare between different non-European groups was inevitably described as 'tribal warfare' between groups implicitly understood as 'uncivilized'.

In the case of Africa, anthropology as a research enterprise met with no opposition as its peoples were classified into 'tribes' with peculiar cultures that were doomed to be replaced by the superior ones of Europe. But in order to reinforce the antipodal idea of a natural superiority of the European over the African – and other non-Europeans – the sub-discipline of physical anthropology was developed. Thus based on phenotypical observation, most often founded on frivolous considerations of a dubious scientific nature, Africans were variously described as 'negroes', 'true negroes', 'negroid but not negro', 'Hamitic', 'Bantu' (often mistakenly used as a racial term), 'Semitic' (a linguistic term but often used erroneously as a racial term), 'bushmen', etc. The point here is that the racial categories employed to categorise Africans anthropologically were for the most part founded on criteria that were unscientific. First of all, the term 'negro' was the term casually used by Portuguese seamen to describe the people they met on the West African coast during the fifteenth century. The term itself was defined only in very broad terms referring principally to pigmentation. It was also later imported into the other languages of Europe, as in the case of English, and was used interchangeably with 'black'. We note parenthetically that in the sixteenth century the preferred terms for Africans in England, for example, were 'blackamoor' and 'tawnymoor' (see,for example, Shakespeare's *Othello*).

The scientifically dubious classification of Africa's populations into pseudo-racial types eventually became standardized in the anthropological literature. And in order to explain away what were seen as instances of 'civilisation' the term 'caucasoid' was also coined. This conceptual move was also coupled with a physical anthropology by gradation. African groups that did not fit the arbitrarily selected ideal-type criteria of the 'negro' and in the direction of the Eurocentric phenotypical ideal, and were deemed to have developed cultures of some note, were explained as having been influenced positively by 'caucasoid genetics'. This was the basis for the 'Hamitic hypothesis' expounded by G. Seligman in his classic Eurocentric text on African anthropology, *The Races of Africa* (1930). This was the age of the linguistic truncation of Africa into 'negro' and 'Hamito-Semitic' language families. General critiques of such classifications have led to the more objective classification of 'African languages' with the replacement of 'Hamito-Semitic' by the euphemistic term 'Afro-Asiatic'.

Scientific advances in the area of genetics have demonstrated that the indigenous populations of Africa are more inter-related than was claimed by the more simplistic theories of orthodox Eurocentric anthropology (Tishkoff 2009). Genetic studies of the populations of Africa demonstrate that two major haplogroups dominate the African continent: E1b1a and E1b1b. E1b1a is found mainly in West Africa and parts of Southern Africa, while E1b1b, with its origins in East Africa (Tanzania and the Horn of Africa) is dominant in East and North Africa. Thus, the current anthropological, archaeological, cultural, and political truncation of the African continent into 'black Africa' – now euphemistically referred to as 'sub-Saharan Africa' – and North Africa, described in Eurocentric discourse as part of 'the Middle East', is easily exposed as being founded on dubious cultural and anthropological assumptions.

African Archaeology and History Reconfigured

The research area of African archaeology has been a major area in which Eurocentric ideology exercised much academic influence over the years, but which has witnessed a number of challenges in recent times. Popular ideology had it that African tool technology had not progressed beyond the level of the Neolithic until more advanced metal technologies such as copper and iron were introduced from outside the continent. The most egregious example of such assertions concerns iron smelting and its usages. Research data now confirm the counter-thesis that not only was iron smelting in almost universal usage in Africa from 1000 BCE to 500CE, but also that its origins were mainly indigenous (Miller 1997).

But more important in the ongoing research debates is the assumption that the archaeology of Africa includes only the so-called 'sub-Saharan' areas. This is purely an instance of Eurocentric ideology.

What this arbitrary truncation of the continent in terms of its archaeological history does is to reinforce pseudo-racial Eurocentric notions concerning the concepts of race and 'civilisation'. The archaeological history of Ancient Egypt and Kush (Nubia) has been deemed to be so impressive that Eurocentric archaeology – given its unquestioning subscription to orthodox Eurocentric ideology on Africa – does not include these research areas in the matrix of African archaeology. The standard thesis of early Egyptologists such as Breasted (1905) was that the archaeological structures and relatively advanced level of the civilization of Ancient Egypt was due to some 'dynastic race' that invaded Egypt from West Asia and brought with it the ingredients of civilisation. But objectively derived scientific knowledge has shown that the archaeology of Ancient Egypt, Nubia, Axum, and so on are all properly designated as sites for African anthropological research (Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 1981). One recalls in this regard similar considerations applied in the appraisals of the Benin, Ife, and Nok archaeologies of West Africa, and the Zimbabwe stone structures of Southern Africa. More generally, the same principle applies to other aspects of Africa's archaeology such as its architecture and urban structures. The empirical fact is that the pre-colonial architecture of Africa is much more varied than is normally claimed. In the urban areas of the coastal regions – East Africa especially – and the savannah regions of West Africa the pre-colonial architecture is quite varied as in towns such as Kano, Mopti, Timbuktoo, Ibadan, etc. Of course, the underlying *a priori* assumption at work here is the notion that the cognitive resources of Africa's populations were not sufficiently adequate to create the basic elements of 'civilisation'.

All this leads up to the issue of African history which has been wrestled over contentiously in some quarters. The history of Africa has been a central research area where Eurocentric thought held sway for many years. The standard Eurocentric thesis was that human rationality was not at play in past events on the African continent. There were certainly historical events that took place on the continent but they were seen as unstructured and not susceptible to explanation in terms of behavioural cause and effect. An early prototypical statement in this regard is that of Hegel's. In his *Philosophy of History* (1826, 1858) Hegel maximally discounts the idea of rational history as applicable to that of Africa. Hegel's conception of world history is one according to which 'universal spirit' (*Geist*) moves from the East to the West imbuing civilisations with a rational historical destiny, the telos of which is increasing human freedom at each temporal juncture. But for Hegel this rational dialectical movement completely bypasses Africa, except for Ancient Egypt which he described as a puzzling paradox. Hegel's view of an ahistorical Africa was supported by European historians throughout the colonial era. The basic assumption was that the history of Africa did not really begin until the encounter between Africa and Europe. The dates in question were from the fifteenth century onwards. The argument advanced in support of this was that a necessary condition for historical movement and explanation is that events be understood as resulting from rational and purposive behaviour. And that they be recorded by the written word and stored for posterity. British historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper (1969), for example, advanced just this thesis with respect to African history.

One post-colonial counter-argument has been that history as oral literature should be recognised. Regardless of the merits of this argument, it is a fact that there was written history in parts of Africa and there was historical movement in terms of cause and effect. Reference is made here to the histories of the medieval African nations of Ghana, Mali and Songhay. One recognises here historical works such as *Tariq es-Soudan* by Mahmoud Kati and *Tariq al-Fettach* by Abderrahman Sadi. In fact, it was Kati who described so movingly the fall of Songhay at the Battle of Tondibi in 1591 at the hands of Moroccan mercenaries. It is also a fact that written historical records concerning Ghana, Mali and Songhay exist in old family libraries in Mali. There are also extensive written records of the history of Northern Nigeria concerning the Hausa peoples. Thus, it was the force of strict empirical fact that led to the falsification of the old Eurocentric model of African history. This is the explanation for the revisions that well known joint historians of Africa such as Oliver and Fage (1963) had to undertake in more recent editions of their long-standing histories of Africa. In sum, on the definitive refutation of the old Eurocentric model of African history we also note Cheikh Anta Diop's *L'Afrique noire precoloniale* and *L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire*. UNESCO and Cambridge University Press many-volume publications also demonstrate that the argument that African history was unstructured and that it suffered from not

being written can be easily refuted. We have also had some well structured histories of West Africa by Jacob Ajayi and Michael Crowder (1972) and Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972). Further developments too have been the linking of the post-fifteenth century history of West Africa with that of the trans-Atlantic truck in humans and the peopling of Southern Africa in post-archaeological times.

The Eurocentric Paradigm: Contemporary Politics and Economics

The Eurocentric intellectual paradigm regarding Africa is not just limited to areas such as archaeology, history and anthropology, it extends to other important research areas such as political science and political economy. This is so because the idea of Africa as expounded by Eurocentrism extends to all areas of knowledge. In this final section, I propose to examine the structures of certain aspects of political science and economics to determine how they have configured discourse on contemporary Africa. Again, the influence of Eurocentrism is such that its impositions on the African world in terms of political and economic theory have been thoroughly reified and usually taken for fact in orthodox discourse.

One evident example of the political structuring of the African world is that concerning the geopolitical compartmentalisation of the physically continuous African continent into sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East-North Africa (MENA). The basis for this distinction is explained by this paper's analysis of Eurocentric anthropology in terms of its racial classification of the peoples of Africa into diverse racial groups such as 'negroes', 'Hamites', 'Semites', 'Bantus', and the like. Thus the idea of 'negro Africa' was concocted with its interchangeable cognate 'black Africa'. The Northern part of Africa was thus excised from the rest of Africa and linked with West Asia under the rubric of the so-called 'Middle East'. African political theorists, of course, had no say in these configurations. The result is that over time such configurations became embedded in linguistic and official discourse.

Yet the facts are that the indigenous peoples of Africa have always lived in all parts of Africa and, as a result, all peoples living north of the equator share certain cultural and linguistic characteristics. On this basis, the fact is that the Sahara desert has never been a barrier to trade, communication and travel for the peoples of Africa. Eurocentric orthodoxy argues for just the opposite. The point made here is amply supported by the genetic analysis of the peoples of North Africa and neighbouring parts of the continent. The haplogroup E1b1b is found extensively not only in North Africa but also in East and Saharan Africa. On the other hand the dominant haplogroup for West Asia is J which, when found in Africa, derives from settlers arriving during the period of Islamic expansion. Yet again, the political analysis of populations based on the dubious concept of race is hardly illuminating for scientific discourse. It is on the basis of objective analysis, therefore, that the Pan-African concept of a single geographical unit known as Africa is more rational than the arbitrary impositions of Eurocentric geopolitical theory. Institutions such as the now defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its successor the African Union (AU), both created by African initiative, bear this out.

One other important area in which Eurocentric thought has been dominant yet needs to be challenged is that concerning the post-colonial political institutions of Africa. In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, one key argument in Western political discourse was that democratic institutions were a necessary requirement for African development. But there are form and content issues involved here. It is assumed in orthodox Western political discourse that 'free and fair elections' are to be seen as sufficient to confer democratic credentials on some particular nation. But the fact is that mere elections are not adequate for genuine democracy. The 'rule of the people' as the term democracy signifies is not at all to be inferred from the holding of 'free and fair' elections. This, of course, is not to imply that less than transparent voting exercises afford a preferable option. What is required is that theoretical consideration be granted to possible new forms of political arrangements. The presidential system of government adopted by most African governments has shown itself to be unviable just on practical grounds. There is always the risk of violence – provoked by the politicians themselves who operate on principles of sheer opportunism as they appeal to the concepts of ethnicity and regionalism – and the risk also of voting irregularities in nations where technological levels and literacy rates are low. There is certainly room for novel ways of establishing principles according to which Africa's populations could exercise their democratic prerogatives. The point being made here is that there are all kinds of electoral permutations that could be explored for optimality and efficiency according to particular contexts. One might consider in this regard variants of the parliamentary system. And more importantly, government could be structured in such a way that state power be reduced to a minimum with most power accruing to the populace by way of preset welfare considerations. For example, education and human welfare portions could be set constitutionally at 30 percent and 60 percent respectively. These are issues that Eurocentric political discourse, so dominant in the African academic arena, hardly ever countenances. In this connection, it should be noted that the vast literature on African political structures, though developed in the West, exercises a pervasive influence on African political discourse. Similar considerations apply to African economic life which is normally conjoined in real terms with African political discourse. A discussion on this issue follows.

In pre-colonial times the economic systems in Africa were of a very varied nature, but they were mainly of two or three interlocking types. African economic life was of the pastoral, agricultural or feudal type – with much overlap within the same linguistic communities. These three forms were often complemented with different levels of market trading often restricted to meeting places in towns and cities (for example, Kano in Northern Nigeria, Ibadan, Timbuktu, Khartoum, etc.). These economic systems were of purely sociological origins and owed nothing to essentialist considerations. There is nothing natural about the traditional political economy of Africa as is implicitly intimated in some orthodox circles. Thus, the economic solution for Africa would not be a return to such pre-colonial forms.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and China's dilution of Maoist economics in favour of market capitalism has lent much ideological support to a triumphant economic liberalism, at least until the recent world economic recession. But even so, the dominant economic paradigm of neoclassical economics, although chal-

lenged, is not seriously being threatened because alternative theories of economics are not being vigorously promoted. In fact, the only economic theory that offered any real challenge to the market capitalism of the West was Marxist socialism. The socialist argument was that the there was nothing intrinsic in human nature that suggested that human behaviour was motivated only by individual gain. This was the argument promoted first by early socialists such as Saint-Simon and Robert Owen, then later by theorists such as Marx. But the foundational principle of modern market economics was provided by none other than Adam Smith (1776, 1991) who argued in *The Wealth of Nations* that the source of economic activity and progress was a 'certain propensity in human nature ... to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another' (1991:19). According to Smith, this behavioural trait was unique to humans and was prompted not by benevolence but by self-interest. This human trait was certainly quite different from what prevailed in pre-capitalist times. The pre-capitalist subsistence economy was not based on the maximisation of self-interest but rather on communal reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi 1944, 2001). Polanyi writes that in cases where there is some catastrophe, 'interests are again threatened collectively, not individually' (Polanyi 2001:48). The key point here is that in non-market societies individual economic interests are hardly countenanced; it is the group's economic interests as a single unit that determine economic life (Polanyi 2001:48).

This model of economic behaviour is quite clearly the opposite of what modern-day neoclassical economics argues. The central thesis of neoclassical economics is that rational economic behaviour requires that humans as economic agents always seek to maximise their expected utility according to the rules of pure self-interest. The telos of human economic decision-making is pure efficiency with minimal considerations afforded to issues of equity. This is the basis for the construction of 'rational economic man' – that homunculus of human decision-making. It is this kind of decision-making that serves as the basis for what neoclassical economists call positive or scientific economics. Issues of equity are relegated to what is called normative economics, the evaluative branch of neoclassical theory. It is on this basis that Eurocentric economic theory in the guise of neoclassical economics imposes itself by way of institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

The generic term used to describe this kind of economic practice is 'market capitalism' which was initially challenged by Marxist theory, then by Leninism and Maoism. The general basis for the critique of market capitalism was that it was a pernicious economic system that transformed humans into the wage slaves of capital and robotic consumers of commodities. It was also seen as a relentless exploiter of African labour and resources from the days of the trans-Atlantic truck in humans to the charnel house of King Leopold's Congo. It was for these reasons that the idea of African socialism was developed as advocated by African intellectuals and political leaders such as Senghor of Senegal and Nyerere of Tanzania. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana also embraced socialism but the more orthodox variety. The point of all this is to make the argument that African economists would be remiss to passively embrace the ideas of neoclassical economics and its practice of economic neoliberalism as they seek solutions for Africa's economic problems.

One point of departure would be to recognize that economics as the proper husbanding of scarce resources should be pursued with the general goal of collective human welfare, as was the case with pre-capitalist economies, as amply demonstrated by Karl Polanyi (1944). In this regard a critical approach to the discipline of economics would be to view the presently dominant neoclassical economics and its anti-humanist prescriptions and practices as a form of Eurocentric social science. Thus, it is obvious that the key social scientific areas of political science and economics with regard to Africa largely reflect ideas, concepts and orientations developed and propagated in the West according to the dictates of Eurocentric ideology.

Conclusion

In the above, I have attempted to show that there are valid epistemological grounds for the critique of the cognitive impositions that a technologically dominant Europe imposed on the world, including Africa from the sixteenth century onwards. But a critique of such impositions showed that they were of dubious ontological content. At the cognitive level such Eurocentric impositions have become the normal discourse of the diverse forms of knowledge found in all research areas, especially those of the social sciences. It is in this regard that I have examined the different modes of knowledge as they have been ideologically configured to satisfy the dictates of Eurocentric discourse on Africa. But more than that, I have offered alternative analyses, statements and correctives. This should constitute the basis for the development of models of Africa-centred knowledge.

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