

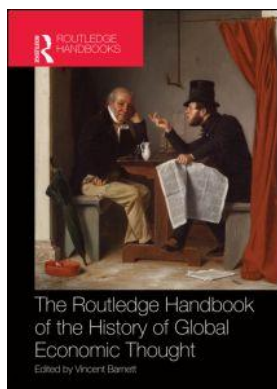
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Vincent Barnett

### **West Africa**

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# Part IV

## Africa

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## West Africa

*Gareth Austin and Gerardo Serra*

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Much has been written on economic values and attitudes in West Africa, from pre-colonial times to the present, as well as on the importance of Africa as a ‘testing ground’ and site of discovery in the history of economic theory and the social sciences (Collier, 1993; Rimmer, 2000; Sichone, 2003). Yet, West Africans’ contributions to economic thought have been neglected. This chapter offers, to the best of our knowledge, the first long-run historical overview. We understand ‘economic thought’ broadly, to include not only the analytic outlook associated with professional economists (who in West Africa emerged as a distinguishable group only in the terminal phase of colonial domination), but also expressions of what Joseph Schumpeter called ‘economic vision’, in which the understanding of economic reality is explicitly shaped by ‘pre-analytic’ moral or political considerations. It is worth noting, at the outset, that the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo have not been translated into West African languages, and their direct reception by West African writers appears to have been mainly by professional economists.

### **Economic culture and policies in the pre-colonial nineteenth century**

Considering that the supply of cultivable land was rarely a constraint on the expansion of production, the extent of the social and economic commitment to the market in fifteenth- to nineteenth-century West Africa was remarkably high. It went beyond absolute advantage, which was illustrated by the salt trade, from desert and coast sites to areas that could not produce it, to include comparative advantage and consumer taste, notably in cotton textiles. Over much of the region, ethnic-cum-religious diasporas, usually Muslim, organised trade across political and cultural boundaries. Judging from an 1881 dictionary, the Akan language, spoken in much of the forest zone of what is now Ghana, included words for a range of economic concepts, including *dwetiri*, ‘a capital or stock of money to begin trade with; a fund employed in business or any undertaking’ (Hill, 1963, 215, quoting Christaller, 1881).

Some scholars have emphasised a mercantilist tendency in late pre-colonial kingdoms. In the case of the Asante kingdom (centred in the northern part of the forest zone of what is now Ghana), Ivor Wilks went further, proposing parallels with the policies of the first president of

independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. One was a sustained attempt during the nineteenth century (before British occupation in 1896) to avert the growth of a private merchant class autonomous from the state. Another was the attempts of Asante rulers in the 1880s and early 1890s, facing British imperialism, to promote economic development through state intervention. Uniting both parallels was a third: a willingness to allow a major role to foreign enterprise, whether African Muslims or Europeans, rather than promote the indigenous private sector (Wilks, 1989, 684–6, 720–3). A revisionist analysis disputes the view of the Asante state as repressing domestic private enterprise, except briefly under Asantehene Mensa Bonsu, whose heavy taxation provoked the revolution that overthrew him in 1883 (Austin, 1996). Meanwhile the Sokoto Caliphate, the largest state of nineteenth-century West Africa, generally encouraged private enterprise, which flourished in textile production and long-distance trade, assisted by generally low taxes on these sectors, especially in the central emirates (Lovejoy, 2006).

In Asante, the achievement of self-made wealth was lauded with official celebrations and honours: on condition that the newly rich shared his wealth with the state (Wilks, 1993). In 1894, Asante exiles, in British territory, proclaimed an ideology of self-made wealth in two tracts, attacking the tax and death duties of the ‘thief Kings’ of Asante, and welcoming the prospect of unhindered *laissez-faire* following what they hoped would be the imposition of British control. They proclaimed ‘In this vast country, Gold alone is King. If any get that wealth he is King. We are all free aborigines of this country’ (quoted in Wilks, 1993, 180–1).

The evidence about attitudes to wealth in the animist cultures of the forest societies hardly suggests respect for the poor. But that position did not always go unchallenged, at least within West Africa as a whole. A notable example comes from the mainly Muslim societies of the interior savanna. Early in the colonial period, c.1923, al-Hājj ‘Umar of Kano (commercial centre of the former Sokoto Caliphate), Salaga and Kete-Krachi (in northern Ghana) wrote a long, powerful poem in Hausa, *Talauci* (‘Poverty’) (translated by I.A. Tahir, 1969: published in Goody, 1982: 194–203). With excruciating precision, ranging over sex, food and perceptions of wisdom and honesty, ‘Umar satirised the hypocrisy of elite and popular worship of wealth and contempt for poverty. Certain verses were even theologically provocative: ‘None but God loves the poor man./ He who created him in his dire condition’ (Goody, 1982, 198).

## Pan-African and nationalist economic thought during the colonial era

In colonial West Africa, land remained overwhelmingly under African control and occupation. In the case of the large British colonies, Nigeria and what is now Ghana, this was to a great extent the result of African success in export agriculture, out-competing European planters in Ghana and rendering European plantations against the interest of colonial treasuries and British merchants. The effect was to permit greater opportunities for African enterprise in farming and trade than in the settler and plantation colonies characteristic of southern and central Africa. This context was a premise of the writings we discuss in this section. Given limited space, we concentrate here on three authors: Edward Wilmot Blyden (Liberia, 1832–1912), Winfried Tete-Ansah (Ghana, 1889–1941) and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria, 1904–96). Among these, Tete-Ansah published least, being primarily a businessman: and even his writing, though framed in general African terms, was geared to advertising his companies and encouraging investment in them. Blyden and especially Azikiwe were politicians as well as writers. Tete-Ansah’s concern was entirely with commerce; for the others, economic arguments were just part of broader visions. All of them had interesting ideas on the economic future of Africa. For all three, perhaps the fundamental issue was African destiny in a world dominated by the West. Was the best response

to assert and maintain the distinctiveness of African civilization, or to adopt Western methods in the hope of emulating Western material achievements? In this context, what should Africans expect from the African diaspora in the Americas: comradeship in difference, or partnership in playing the whites at their own game?

The West Indies-born Blyden landed in Liberia, from the USA, at the age of eighteen and became a politician in the African-American dominated republic, the only part of West Africa to escape European rule. A leading advocate of the return of African-Americans to Africa, his conception of African culture could hardly be more different from that of the Asante dissidents quoted above. In *African Life and Customs* (Blyden, 1908a) he characterised 'the African system' as 'socialistic and co-operative', based on 'collective ownership by the tribe of all the land and water' (Blyden, 1908a, extracted in Lynch, 1971, 167). He added 'The property laws of Africa in intention and in practice make for the widest distribution of wealth or well-being and work steadily against concentrating the wealth of a community, either of land or production in the hands of a comparatively small number of individuals' (Blyden, 1908a, extracted in Lynch, 1971, 170). Blyden, along with others among the westernized West African elite of the late nineteenth century, had called upon Britain to establish a protectorate over much of West Africa, as a means of stimulating Africans onto the world stage (Lynch, 1971, 315). Writing deep in the colonial era, Tete-Ansah gave much of the space in *Africa at Work* (Tete-Ansá, 1930), his only book, slim and self-published, to reproducing statements by liberal colonial officials. This was apparently in the hope of assuring African-American readers that West Africa was indeed making material progress. Like Blyden, he called upon diasporic Africans to come to the help of what he called 'the Race' as a whole: but not through socialism but by joint action for self-enrichment; by investing their capital in Africa, rather than necessarily coming to live there in large numbers (Tete-Ansá, 1930). For Blyden (whose position was described by Craufurd Goodwin (1967, 443) as 'the pinnacle of African institutionalism'), 'the political economy of the white man is not our political economy, his moral philosophy is not our moral philosophy; and far less is his theology; and wherever he has been successful in forcing these upon us there has been atrophy and death' (Blyden, 1908b, extracted in Lynch, 1971, 122). Blyden's struggle for an authentically African political economy, his appeal to (a version of) the pre-colonial past and his plea for Pan-Africanism anticipated important tendencies of the postcolonial era.

In contrast, Tete-Ansah seems not to have doubted that whites and blacks shared the same political economy. But, whereas the Asante exiles thought an absence of taxation would be sufficient for hard-working individuals to prosper, Tete-Ansah recognised the problem of European monopolies. He accused 'foreign corporations, mostly European' of 'attempting to monopolize the marketing by creating a vicious barrier between the producers and the consumers abroad through organized systems of banking and trading which practically deny those facilities required in an international exchange of commodities' (Tete-Ansá, 1930, 63). In colonial Ghana cocoa brokers and farmers thought so too, countering the formation of successive European cocoa-buying cartels with organised 'hold-ups' of their exports and boycotts of imports. Tete-Ansah's contribution was to make and act on the case for African adoption of European business forms, notably limited liability companies and banks (Hopkins, 1966). In contrast to Blyden, Tete-Ansah firmly believed that Western forms of economic organization should be adopted by Africans. European monopolists should be challenged by 'mutual organization' among Africans and, he earnestly hoped, African-Americans (Tete-Ansá, 1930, 63). He himself founded three limited liability companies, most notably the Industrial and Commercial Bank Limited, which he based in Nigeria. All, however, foundered sooner rather than later: the bank did so in 1930, the same year as his book appeared (Hopkins, 1966).

Azikiwe, too, was willing to criticise African economic practices in comparison to Western ones. He was especially harsh on what he described as the preference of African businessmen for working alone, rather than pooling financial resources. One-man businesses ‘will work out temporarily, but [a] time will come when that one man will face problems which require many heads to solve’ (Azikiwe, 1937/1968, 132). ‘Because of this’ single-handedness, and in contrast to European firms, ‘the average African business liquidates with the death of the owner’ (Azikiwe, 1937/1968, 133). Putting his words into practice, Azikiwe himself joined the Nigerian indigenous banking movement in the 1940s, buying what eventually became the African Continental Bank. In 1954 he formed the first elected regional government in Eastern Nigeria. Meanwhile the bank was struggling to meet stringent regulations imposed by the 1952 Banking Ordinance in Nigeria. Controversy arose when his government injected funds into the bank: though he had disclosed his interests and resigned from its management, he remained the major shareholder. Both his career and the bank survived, he becoming the first president of Nigeria (1963–66), while the bank was one of only three of the more than twenty indigenous banks founded in the colonial period in Nigeria to survive the early decades of independence.

### **Leaders at independence: Kwame Nkrumah and his contemporaries**

Between 1957 and 1960 most of West Africa moved from the periphery of European empires to sovereign statehood. Nationalist leaders who, during the struggle for decolonization, had learnt the importance of ideas as a weapon of political struggle (Falola, 2001, 27) were now actually responsible for the economic and social welfare of their populations as heads of state. Most of them shared a commitment to economic modernization, a usually hostile attitude towards indigenous business, and the assumption, quite common at the time – especially in Francophone writing (Hugon, 1993), but far from exclusively so – that the state had to play an active role in promoting economic development. Yet, given the ideological context of the Cold War, it is possible to draw a line between more ‘socialist’ and more ‘market oriented’ governments. Leading examples of the former were Kwame Nkrumah’s regime in Ghana, especially from 1961, Ahmed Sékou Touré’s in Guinea and Modibo Keita’s in Mali; while the latter approach was championed by Felix Houphouët-Boigny in Ivory Coast. An intermediate, if not openly ambiguous, position was occupied by Leopold Sedar Senghor’s Senegal. While Houphouët-Boigny (1905–93), who ruled Ivory Coast from independence in 1959 until 1990, thought that a qualified economic liberalism was the appropriate model for the development of his country, Senghor (1906–2001), a distinguished poet and intellectual, provided a highly original interpretation of African socialism: ‘the object of socialism is not the economy, as too many Marxists now believe, but concrete, living man, in his totality, body and soul’ (Senghor, 1964: 108). Senghor’s humanism, based on the concept of *Négritude*, was aimed principally at developing a distinctive African epistemology that could embody an alternative to both Western individualism and scientific rationalism. Though these themes recur in the work of postcolonial African philosophers, Senghor’s ideas never shaped significantly the thought of economists and economic reformers.

Ultimately it was Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72) who emerged from the first generation of postcolonial West African politicians as the most systematic and influential writer on economic matters, anticipating many insights that would characterise the work of radical African scholars in later decades. Nkrumah’s economic thought, which developed as a blend of socialism and Pan-Africanism, was largely based on Lenin’s theory of imperialism (Lenin, 1917/1947). Although Lenin referred to the Scramble for Africa, and noted that ‘capitalism’s transition to the phase of monopoly capitalism, to finance capital is bound up with the intensification of the

struggle for the partition of the world' (Lenin, 1917/1947, 131), his treatment of imperialism was mostly concerned with the concentration and spread of industrial and financial capital in the West. In contrast, Nkrumah identified in the Scramble for Africa and European colonization not only a necessary stage of the evolution of capitalism, but the prime cause of Africa's contemporary underdevelopment. In his view the gap between political independence and economic dependence (noted by Lenin, 1917/1947, 144–6), with reference to Argentina's and Portugal's reliance on British capital) was the main feature of the stage in the history of global capitalism experienced by post-colonial Africa, that of 'neo-colonialism'. The essence of neo-colonialism was that 'The State which is subjected to it is, in theory, independent . . . In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside' (Nkrumah, 1965/1970, ix). The 'subtle and varied' (Nkrumah, 1965/1970, 239) means through which neo-colonialist agents (including former colonial powers, international organizations and multinational corporations) imposed their will on African states included the manipulation of primary product prices in international markets, the use of high interest rates, multilateral aid, and such tools of cultural policy as evangelism and American cinema (Nkrumah, 1965/1970, 239–54).

Although an ardent Pan-Africanist, Nkrumah's vision had little to do with the African-American diaspora discussed by Blyden, representing instead an attempt to achieve fuller political and economic integration on African soil for African benefit. According to Nkrumah, the most effective way for Africa to regain its economic and political freedom was the formation of a socialist African continental political union, which could plan its development 'centrally and scientifically through a pattern of economic integration' (Nkrumah, 1963/1970, 170). Meanwhile Nkrumah rejected the Tete-Ansah project of economic development led by African private enterprise. While he was willing to work with foreign companies bringing large-scale capital and industrial technology, his view of the economy had little place for indigenous capitalists (Nkrumah, 1961/1997). Following his overthrow in 1966, Nkrumah spent the last years of his life in exile, as honorary vice-president in Sékou Toure's Guinea. During these years his ideas showed a marked radicalization, adopting class struggle as a key analytical concept (Nkrumah, 1970/1999). Thus embracing more closely the tenets of orthodox Marxism, rather than his own version of 'African socialism', he now called for armed struggle against neo-colonialism.

## Development/professionalisation of economics in West Africa

Development economics emerged in the 1940s as a specialised branch of economic science studying growth, inequality, poverty and institutions in the economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Downplaying the neoclassical obsession with allocative efficiency, and appealing instead to the lessons of the great classical political economists on capital accumulation, technical progress and distribution in the long-run, by the time of West African independence the new sub-discipline had reached a consensus on several key points, such as the importance of capital formation as a growth engine, the need to adopt import substitution strategies and the general need for the state to plan development in order to promote industrialization. The fulfilment of these ambitious goals was thought to depend on the availability of technocratic experts who could analyse real economies and modify them according to human design: economics had come to increasingly resemble a form of social engineering. Regardless of their position on the socialism-capitalism continuum, the new African nations needed indigenous elites of academics and civil servants trained in economics and statistics. From the 1940s on, many influential economic ideas in West Africa came from professional economists.

The professionalisation of economics can be understood in an institutional constellation comprising universities, professional associations, academic journals and policy-making bodies.



The University College of the Gold Coast (later University of Ghana) established the first Department of Economics in West Africa in 1948, followed by the University College of Ibadan in 1957. Francophone colonies took longer to establish universities, as the tendency lingered for African students to complete their education in France. The creation of economics departments in West African universities led to the constitution of professional associations and the foundation of academic journals like *The Economic Bulletin of Ghana* (EBG) and *The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* (NJESS).

Admittedly, foreign economists continued to be important in West African policy-making. Perhaps most notably, W. Arthur Lewis served as Ghana's Chief Economic Advisor in 1957–8, and Nicholas Kaldor was the architect of Ghanaian fiscal reform in 1961. The striking adherence of economic policies implemented under Nkrumah between 1960 and 1966 to the prescriptions of the first generation of development economists led Tony Killick (2010) to define Ghana a case of 'development economics in action'. The preparation of the first development plan in independent Nigeria fell on the shoulders of Austrian Wolfgang Stolper. Meanwhile Mali and Guinea relied on the expertise of imported Marxists: the Egyptian Samir Amin and the Frenchman Jean Bernard in the case of Mali, and the Frenchman Charles Bettelheim in the case of Guinea. But West African economists were increasingly involved in the tasks of policy-making and nation-building, and started staffing what in the West African context were fairly recent institutions like central banks, planning commissions and statistical offices. For example, Sierra Leonean economist David Carney (b. 1925) authored in 1962 the first postcolonial development plan for his country. Jonathan Frimpong-Ansah (1930–99) started working in the Ghanaian Office of the Government Statistician and then served as Deputy Governor or Governor of the Bank of Ghana under four regimes until 1973.

In postcolonial Nigeria the advice of indigenous economists was increasingly sought by the government for issues as different as tax reform, wage and income policy, financial regulation, and land policy (Tomori, 1979, 44–9). The career of Nigerian Pius Okigbo (1924–2000) embodies the nexus of technical expertise and political skills which came to characterise many influential West African economists: the first African to receive a PhD from North-Western University, Okigbo became also the first Nigerian ambassador to the European Economic Community and, during the Nigerian civil war (1967–70), the first economic advisor to the short-lived Republic of Biafra, as well as chairman of the Federal Planning Committee of Nigeria, chairman of the UN Panel of Experts of the African Development Bank, and member of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (on the life and work of Okigbo, see Guyer and Denzer, 2005). Yet development policy was now also a supranational enterprise with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. The UN Economic Commission for Africa, created in 1958, became an important institutional platform used by West African economists to discuss and implement policies of economic integration. A striking example is Nigerian Adebayo Adedeji (b. 1930) who, after serving the Nigerian government for several years, became in 1975 the Executive Commissioner of the Commission. Another important example is the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, located in Dakar (Senegal), whose directors have included Senegalese Mamadou Toure (1964–7) and Gambian Jeggan Senghor (1990–9).

While West Africa provided the setting for much influential research in development (classic works include Bauer (1954) on trade and marketing boards, Hill (1963) on cocoa farmers and indigenous capitalism in Ghana, and Hart's (1973) notion of the 'informal economy') West African economists in the 1960s attached primary importance to empirical work rather than the construction of theoretical models. In his 1962 presidential address to the Nigerian Economic Society, J. Amadi-Edina (1962, 3) urged Nigerian economists to 'Spend little time in theorizing

... [and] engage more in fact finding ... spend less time in abstractions, more in observation, less time in analysis and model making'. Indeed, many articles published in *EBG* and *NJESS* in the 1960s tackled problems of specific economic and social statistics, provided new estimates, and presented suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of planning machinery (see for example Aboyade, 1965 on Nigeria and Omaboe, 1963 on Ghana). The collection of economic data was not simply an intellectual exercise: better data were considered vital to successful development planning. Despite their diversity, development plans shared a pivotal political significance in the eyes of African policymakers as representations of national sovereignty and rationality.

Despite its apparent lack of theoretical ambition, the collection of useful and reliable information about African economies required in many cases a partial re-conceptualization of the categories adopted in industrialized countries. Thus one of the main contributions of West African economists in the 1960s was to provide a more solid basis for policy by their work at the intersection of local realities and imported templates. An important part of this task was assessing the limits of existing information, and introducing more useful distinctions and more realistic assumptions in the conceptual frameworks inherited from colonial regimes or the new international organizations. Okigbo, for example, under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Economic Development, published in 1962 a lengthy study of Nigerian national accounts which, drawing on a large number of government sources and introducing useful conceptual distinctions, marked an improvement over Prest and Stewart's (1953) 'colonial' study of Nigerian national income in 1950–1 (Okigbo, 1962).

This empirical focus does not imply that economists were not questioning once again the utility of 'Western' doctrines for economic analysis and policy in West Africa. In his presidential address to the Economic Society of Ghana, J.H. Mensah, a LSE-trained Ghanaian economist and the main author of the seven-year plan intended to transform Ghana into a socialist economy under Nkrumah (and which was abruptly abandoned following the 1966 coup), discussed the relevance of Marxian economics for Ghana's development. Mensah noted that Marxism emerged as a system of thought to explain economic evolution in the West, and argued that the notion of class struggle was useless in the African context because a 'country like Ghana cannot afford the luxury of not utilising some of its available trained manpower' (Mensah, 1965, 15). Thus socialist thought 'ought to move from the concept of class conflict and increasingly emphasise the concept of nation building through the joint efforts of all citizens' (*ibid.*). Certainly the relationships between rulers and African top planners were often far from simple. Mensah, who was accused by Nkrumah of lacking ideological purity and invited to put his commitment to socialism into writing (Tignor, 2006, 185), was also imprisoned from 1975 until 1978 by the military government of I.K. Acheampong, while Okigbo was jailed for eighteen months for his role in the secessionist project of the Republic of Biafra. Yet, the work of the first generation of West African economists could not be easily disentangled from the tasks of nation-building and modernization which, regardless of ideological differences, loomed large and accounted for most economic research.

On the other hand, professionalisation and research in post-colonial West African economics were accompanied by the development of 'local' intellectual traditions. In the case of Nigeria, for example, the so-called 'Ibadan School' from the 1960s through the 1980s developed a distinctive approach to public finance. Given the vast size of Nigeria and the fierce struggles over the federal structure and the distribution of public revenues, it is not surprising that economic research was shaped significantly by problems of taxation and redistribution among different levels of government. While holding different beliefs on many important issues, the Ibadan school was united by the extensive use of calculation and statistical evidence to construct new tools

and operational concepts to understand and improve the complex reality of Nigerian fiscal machinery (Adebayo, 1990, 245–6).

The articles published in the *NJESS* in the 1970s and early 1980s reveal that the Ibadan school were part of a broader tendency in West African economics to increasingly employ quantitative methods. While West African economists in the 1960s were discussing the quality of official statistics, in the following decades ‘numbers’ were increasingly accepted and used in a number of articles using tools derived from econometric analysis and linear programming. In the *NJESS* the proportion of articles using statistical methods increased from 25 per cent in 1962–70 to 42 per cent in 1971–6. Similarly, papers using mathematical methods increased from 17 per cent in the 1960s to 35 per cent in 1971–6 (calculations based on Adamu, 1979, 86). It is possible that West Africans’ progressive embrace of quantitative analysis was related to the worsening conditions experienced by many local universities. Indeed from the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s, ‘migration’ became the context of much African academic writing in the social sciences (Falola, 2001, 287). In particular, an increasing number of scholars migrated to the United States. Apparently the first multi-probit model published in *NJESS* was from a PhD thesis submitted by the author at Cornell University (Falusi, 1974, 3).

### **Intellectual change from Left and Right, 1970s/early 1980s**

The 1970s and early 1980s marked a difficult phase in the economic and political history of much of West Africa: statist policies did not bring the expected transformation, and by the late 1970s most of West Africa – Ivory Coast was a spectacular exception – was facing stagnant or negative growth. Meanwhile many West African countries were plagued by military coups. This situation led to a divide in development thinking, with the strengthening of Marxist-inspired scholarship and dependency theories on one hand, and the rise of a new free market consensus, based on neoclassical economics, on the other hand. While they differed on both diagnosis and cure, radical political economy and free market economics shared, in stark contrast with much research published in the 1960s, a deep sense of pessimism about the capacity of African nation-states to promote economic development. These positions also shared an adherence to what Albert Hirschman (1981, 3, 14–19) called ‘the mono-economics claim’: namely that, in contrast with many accounts from the 1950s and 1960s, there was one body of economic theory (whether neoclassical or Marxist) that had universal applicability, and thus did not require significant modifications before it could be applied to developing countries.

The disappointments of ‘statist’ development policies were felt on both sides of the political spectrum. On the left, ‘dependency theory’ arrived on African campuses mainly in the form of Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), followed by the numerous publications of the Senegal-based Egyptian writer Samir Amin (for example Amin, 1973). Following broadly in the tradition of Andre Gunder Frank and other Latin American ‘dependentistas’, Rodney and Amin argued, with particular reference to Africa, that the development of the West and the ‘underdevelopment of the Rest’ were necessarily the same historical process, which continued today in the form of neo-colonialism. In their view, the socialism of early-independence governments had been too limited to make the decisive break with the world capitalist system that Africa needed.

These ideas found a strong echo in the work of West African political economists. The work of West African neo-Marxists was deeply entrenched in a dependency reading of history: imperialism, the notion at the centre of their approach, could not be understood as an abstract category, but only in its historical evolution (Onimode, 1982). Consequently, the failure of

postcolonial African states to modernise was explained by the inheritance of the 'extractive features' characterising colonial economies, which in turn had been shaped by the expansion of capitalist production in the industrializing world (Ake, 1981, 88–9).

Furthermore, unlike the first generation of development economists, as well as African socialists like Nkrumah (up to 1966), Marxist writers of the 1970s and 1980s rejected many of the claims made about the 'exceptionalism' of developing countries: Nigerian Bade Onimode (1944–2001), for example, claimed that 'Class struggles have been an integral part of the process of economic development in Nigeria since the pre-capitalist era. Though the social classes are embryonic relative to the classical ones of Western Europe and North America', their development was 'clearly visible with respect to the usual criteria of Marxist class analysis' (Onimode, 1978, 507). To think otherwise meant to introduce 'bourgeois distortions' reflecting 'the unscientific methodology of imperialist social science' (*ibid.*). The acknowledgement of the global and historical nature of African underdevelopment called in turn for a radical solution: 'structural disengagement from the international capitalist system' (Onimode, 1982, 240).

Nearly a decade after Dependency theory, neoclassical economics emphatically reasserted itself in Africa through the 'policy door'. In Africa the 'counter-revolution in development theory and policy' (Toye, 1987) is usually dated to 1981, when the World Bank published *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*, better known as the Berg Report. The report stated that the main cause of the political and economic crisis was the inconsiderate action of postcolonial governments. Protectionist policies, overvalued currencies, price and capital controls, and excessive state intervention in all aspects of social and economic life was what had turned ordinary price fluctuations into an economic tragedy. The solution was straightforward: the adoption of 'Structural Adjustment Policies' (SAPs hereafter), which replaced administrative allocation of resources with the price mechanisms through abolishing price controls, floating the currency, and cutting public expenditure. The overarching slogan was 'getting the prices right'.

For their part, a few West African economists produced works that resonated with a free market vision. Within Ghana, the intellectual case for general economic liberalization was hardly made in public at the time that the self-described 'revolutionary' government of J.J. Rawlings, confronted with a steadily falling GDP, reversed course by embarking on the progressive abandonment of price controls and the adoption of Structural Adjustment. The policy changes began to be implemented in 1983. A rare exception to the absence of a public argument for economic liberalization in advance of the event was the appearance in the early 1980s of occasional, usually anonymous, articles criticising aspects of the price and quantity controls in a small-circulation journal, *The Legon Observer*. This was published within the University of Ghana, many of whose scholars at the time were more associated with the Left.

Meanwhile a Ghanaian expatriate in North America, James Ahiakpor (b. 1945), an economist who had received his education in Ghana as well as Canada, was developing a scorching critique of dependency theories (Ahiakpor, 1985, 1986). If underdevelopment was in the interests of the West, queried Ahiakpor, why had foreign investment in Ghana been shrinking as the economy declined, whereas in Ivory Coast it was the other way around (Ahiakpor, 1986)? Ahiakpor claimed that the appeal of dependency theories to politicians in developing countries was partly because it did 'not require an understanding of neoclassical economic analysis', whose logic appeared counterintuitive, but was ultimately correct (Ahiakpor, 1985, 538). Neoclassical economics had less political appeal because it left 'the impression that development is a slow process, requiring difficult choices' (*ibid.*). Before Rawlings' about-turn, state-led development policies in Ghana, consistent with Dependency theory, had included currency overvaluation, price and capital

controls and protectionism which ‘severely reduced the incentives for production, savings, investment, and increased productivity’ (Ahiakpor, 1985, 549). Another Ghanaian, Frimpong-Ansah (1991), incorporating ideas from rational-choice institutionalist political economy, presented the dismal performance of postcolonial Ghana as the cumulative outcome of policy decisions to satisfy the unproductive urban constituencies (bureaucracy, trade unions and the army) that, it hoped, would guarantee their political survival: as it did, until 1983 at least.

## Against and beyond Structural Adjustment

Resistance to free market economics at the policy level was expressed in 1980, on what proved to be the eve of Structural Adjustment, in the ideas and suggestions contained in the Organization of African Unity (OAU)’s *Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa 1980–2000*. The Lagos plan, arguably ‘the first continent-wide effort by Africans to forge a comprehensive unified approach to the economic development of their continent’ (Asante, 1991, 60), largely reflected a development strategy designed by Nigerian economist Adebayo Adedeji. Although the Lagos Plan of Action echoed some of the radicals’ concerns about the impact of neo-colonialist forces in holding back Africa’s development (OAU, 1981/1982, 3), Adedeji was not a revolutionary calling for disentanglement from the capitalist world system, or advocating the formation of a socialist continental political union. Instead, rather like Raúl Prebisch when he was Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America in 1950–63, Adedeji was expressing his scepticism about the benefits that developing countries could obtain by placing overwhelming emphasis on market mechanisms and engaging in free trade following the doctrine of comparative advantage (Asante, 1991, 51–5). The key pillars of the comprehensive strategy contained in the document, ranging from agriculture to environmental policy, were self-reliance in food and agricultural production, coordination through economic planning, the building of a stronger industrial base at both national and supra-national level, and the creation of an African common market (OAU, 1981/1982).

Despite the unanimous political support of African leaders, the Lagos Plan of Action was never implemented, with virtually the whole of West Africa agreeing over the following few years to adopt SAPs. The conflict between the World Bank’s SAPs and OAU’s Lagos Plan, and the former’s victory, was a crucial confrontation of two developmental paradigms in the political arena, and a reminder of the extent to which the fate of economic doctrines is dependent on the institutional arrangements and power structures supporting them.

Reactions to SAPs and the neoclassical principles which underpinned them have inspired yet another stream of literature written by West African political economists. In contrast with the grand-unified historical narratives advanced by Marxist scholars, as well as the ‘one policy fits all’ approach advanced by the World Bank in the 1980s, economists like Nigerian Charles Soludo (b. 1960) stood up against what they saw as harmful reductionism. Indeed, claiming that economic development ‘is quintessentially a political process’ (Mkandawire and Soludo, 2003, 15), Soludo and the Malawian economist Thandika Mkandawire, argued that reform should have addressed ‘a broad range of fundamentals: macro-economic stabilization fundamentals; proactive, supplyside (production) fundamentals; and sociopolitical [sic] fundamentals’ (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999, 94). The work of these authors needs to be understood within the broader experience of the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research In Africa (CODESRIA), founded in 1973. Through a wide range of educational and research activities (exemplified by their journal *Africa Development*), CODESRIA has tried to give voice to African scholars to countervail the dominance of institutions like the World Bank in matters of social science and development policy.

## Putting indigenous culture and institutions to work

The mere contraposition of Marxism and free market economics hides the existence of other alternatives to free market economics, and (as we saw with the Ibadan School), the emergence of local traditions in post-colonial economics. The role of 'traditional' African culture in shaping economic behaviour fostered heated debates among Western social scientists in the decades following independence, but remained largely outside the work of most West African economists. In contrast with some early economic historiography which saw indigenous institutions as assisting economic development (Hill, 1963), West African economists shared with former colonial masters, nationalist leaders and Cold War partners the assumption, partly derived from modernization theory, that pre-colonial knowledge and institutions mostly represented an obstacle to economic progress.

Yet the perceived failure of imported development models, whether capitalist or socialist, has occasionally led West African economists to seek an authentically 'African' way to diagnose and cure the continent's economic and political malaise. Given the imposition of colonialism from Europe, it is not surprising that the source for the authentic voice of Africa had to be identified in the pre-colonial past, interpretations of which vary. Sometimes this implied a rediscovery of ethnicity: Okigbo stated that, given their distinctive values such as 'work ethic, enterprise, innovativeness in times of adversity . . . a dedication to fair competition and merit' there was 'ample room for the Igbo to bring to bear on the solution of Nigerian economic and political problems some unique contribution' (Okigbo, 1986/1993, 143). Far from being the 'modernizing' social engineers envisaged in the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists were, by virtue of their training, the best qualified to 'identify the decline in elemental values' (Okigbo, 1981/1987, 14) and correct it for the good of society at large.

A later contribution on the role of indigenous knowledge and institutions comes from the Ghanaian economist George Ayittey (b. 1945), who, like Ahiakpor, was trained partly at the University of Ghana and partly in Canada. Unlike many West African economists, Ayittey criticized SAPs from a free market perspective, maintaining that most SAPs amounted to 'reorganizing a bankrupt company and placing it – together with a massive infusion of capital – in the hands of the same incompetent managers who ruined it' (Ayittey, 1991, n.p.). Ayittey largely explains the failure of statist policies implemented from the 1960s on as the consequence of a perverse adoption of values which do not fit African indigenous tradition. In his view, in line more with the rhetoric of the Asante exiles of 1894 than with Blyden's diasporic nostalgia, pre-colonial institutions were the highest expression of an individualistic economy, where means of production were privately owned, the 'profit motive was present in most market transactions' and 'Free enterprise and free trade were the rule' (Ayittey, 2005, 350). The lessons of free-market pre-colonial Africa are not only limited to economic institutions, but could be extended to the political domain. In striking contrast with the postcolonial African experience, dominated by tyrants, generals and presidents for life, in Ayittey's account pre-colonial Africa offered examples of democratic institutions, where chiefs and elders could be 'destooled' by their subjects. The appeal to pre-colonial values does not conflict with support for Pan-African co-operation: an alliance of Pan-Africanism and indigenous wisdom, in contrast with Nkrumah's centralised socialist model, for instance, would lead to the adoption of a confederal system with a higher degree of decentralization of power (Ayittey, 2010, 100).

## Conclusion

The quest for economic development, itself a historically complex notion, emerges from this overview as the core of the intellectual endeavours of West African economic thinkers in the

long run. While this is to some extent true for most parts of the world, in the West African context the search for economic development was pursued in a distinctive fashion: as part of a struggle to define the identity of Africa vis-à-vis the West (affirming, denying or at least delimiting difference), as the expression of a will to expand the political boundaries imposed by circumstances under the ever-changing label of Pan-Africanism, and as an attempt to come to terms with the legacies of history. The past seems simultaneously to offer valid explanations for today's underdevelopment and recipes for the future: part of the differences among West African visions of the economic future are grounded in contrasting interpretations of pre-colonial history.

On the other hand the evolution of West African economic thought should be understood also as part of a global history: specifically, as another encounter in the intellectual and political battle over the proper roles of the state and the market. In West Africa, as elsewhere, economic analysis detached itself (or rather, some economists sought to detach it) from the surrounding moral and political issues, developing into a 'science' increasingly dominated by the practices of formal modelling and statistical testing. Yet, much further research is required in order to write a genuinely global history of economic thought, in which West Africa is more than a laboratory, no matter how 'living' (Tilley, 2011), for the West.

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