
African Studies and the State of the Art

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Introduction

The study of Africa experienced tremendous expansion both in scope and depth during the past four decades. In England, the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies has been in existence since 1916, and in France, the 1940s pioneering work on Africa has been superseded by more advanced studies in the field we now call African Studies. Since the 1950s, US scholars have successfully continued their effort to study and understand Africa in a systematic way, using, to the extent possible, scientific methods. Likewise, the former Soviet Union and the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) established several programs on Africa (such as the well-known African Studies Institute at Uppsala, Sweden) and are devoting more resources to the study of the continent. Even the Japanese have added similar programs to some of their institutions of higher learning, as is the case of Kyoto University, which established the Center for African Studies in 1979, and Tokyo University with its Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, created as far back as 1964. In fact, the 1950s and 1960s, which the well-known anthropologist Aidan Southall has called "the golden age of Africa," were decades of excitement, novelty, and experimentation.

At that time, scholars, particularly American with strong input from Diaspora African Americans and continental Africans, were determined to correct the traditional disciplines' biases toward Africa and Africans and expend the focus of the existing human sciences. In the social sciences (e.g., history, political science, sociology, economics, geography, psychology, and anthropology), humanities (literature, religion, and philosophy), and fine arts (art, music, dance, and theatre) scholars burnt the midnight oil collecting data on Africa, restoring its history, dispelling myths, and providing an accurate picture of the continent and its people. Even the so-called "hard sciences" (physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, and statistics) felt the pressure to re-examine the role played by Africans and peoples of African descent in the discovery of new knowledge and the laws of the universe. Today, there at least 52 recognized African Studies departments and programs worldwide and 12 Title VI African Studies Centers in the United States,

namely, Boston University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of California at Berkeley, University of Florida, University of Illinois, Indiana University, Michigan State University, Ohio University, Ohio State University, University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University, University of Wisconsin, and Yale University, which provide excellent library resources, grant fellowships to scholars, administer K-12 school outreach programs, promote and teach African languages, and offer strong undergraduate and graduate programs to majors.

This chapter defines the field of African Studies, traces its evolution, examines the nature of its various disciplines, and weighs the impact it has had on our understanding of Africa. However, even though the field of African Studies has been recognized as a legitimate academic pursuit, it still faces many obstacles, including: lack of adequate resources; uneasiness on the part of African authorities to allow research of areas deemed sensitive; lack of coordination and collaboration between American and African institutions; epistemological disagreements; the relevance of scholars' current pursuits to Africa's current conditions; the impact of negative reporting by the electronic and print media; the persistent control of the field and the African Studies Association (ASA) by Western scholars; the role that continental African scholars should play; and its inter-disciplinary nature. The following discussion should provide the undergraduate student with a foundation for the understanding of the "state of the art" or the most updated current state of African Studies and the role played by the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts toward the acceptance of the field within the "academy" [community of scholars] and our knowledge of the African continent itself.

Major terms and concepts: African Studies, "academy," scholar, theoretical framework, ethnocentrism, canon, Eurocentric vs. Afrocentric perspective, causality, applied research, modernization, traditional, class, dependence, Marxism, objectivity, colonial and Pan-African models, equilibrium and conflict theory, structural-functionalism, behavioralism, bourgeois, cultural pluralism, charisma, the military.

Definition and Historical Evolution of African Studies

African Studies is a broad field or area of studies which combines several disciplines in the arts, the humanities, and the social-behavioral sciences for the sole purpose of studying and understanding Africa and its people from all facets—their origins, history, culture, experiences, achievements, contributions, aspirations, and even human and physical environment. A discipline is an organized body of knowledge accumulated over a period of time that has its own canons [rules, methodologies, and specific focus or parameters, e.g., history can only focus on human past and anthropology only on culture and not on culture and government, the latter being the focus of political science], and experts—teachers, writers, and researchers—who set the standards and pass on their knowledge to a generation of students, apprentices, followers, or disciples, hence the use of the word "discipline." Except in the physical sciences where accumulated knowl-

edge usually does not change but is constantly added, in the social sciences, the humanities, and fine arts, old as well as added knowledge can be altered, revised, or discarded altogether as new evidence is uncovered. The major subjects comprising the interdisciplinary field called African Studies are history, political science, anthropology, sociology, religion, literature, music, art, philosophy, geography, linguistics, archaeology, and economics. Africanists [specialists who are trained and experienced and conduct research and publish on Africa] attempt, to the best of their ability, to study the continent using scientific methodology or the rules of scientific inquiry by collecting data systematically, analyzing it [separating the relevant from the non-relevant data], interpreting it [giving it a meaning], and applying or using it in a variety of ways, a phase sometimes known as applied research.

The major questions these disciplines attempt to answer are: why, how, who, when, where, and what lessons. However, the field of African studies deals with human beings whose actions are often unpredictable and cannot be replicated, as, for example, a chemist replicates a compound mixture through repeated experiments in his laboratory. Because people can be actors with hidden motives and idiosyncrasies that are capable of escaping all scientific scrutiny, their motives or "causality" of behavior may be difficult to ascertain. Therefore, conclusions arrived at in the field of African studies cannot be as re-assuring and definitive as those of the natural or "hard" sciences such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, and zoology. Scientists can replicate their experiments over and over again and come up with laws and generalizations that can stand the test of time. In the social-behavioral sciences [those that deal with humans and their behavior], as well as in the humanities [which focus on the interpretation of ideas and emotions] and fine arts [which study and apply aesthetics or the concept of beauty], scholars deal mainly with reasonable theories and opinions, feelings and emotions, probabilities and hypotheses.

Since African Studies deal with Africa, the development of the continent of Africa and its place in world history determine by and large the content and focus of the disciplines involved. These disciplines in turn have the ability to influence and shape the continent's events and processes, particularly those related to the more relevant and appropriate school curriculum. Prior to the 1950s, Africa was not the object of a systematic focus of any traditional discipline, although some historians and anthropologists had already taken the initial steps in that direction. The emergence of the nation-states in Africa during the 1960s, or the decade of Africa's independence, and the subsequent role the continent played in the world community indirectly revolutionized the field of African Studies.

For a long time, Africa was said to have no history and to have contributed nothing to mankind. For example, while Arnold Toynbee, one of the most influential British historians, held the view that Africans had "not contributed positively to any civilization," Oxford University Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, another British historian, called the African past "nothing but the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes." This belief was prevalent in Europe prior to the twentieth century and was reinforced by misguided nineteenth century social Darwinists who, applying the evolutionary theory of the "survival of the fittest," saw Africans as belonging to an inferior race, one that was destined to extinction. While, on one hand, as Festus Ohaegbulam notes in his *Towards an Understanding of the African Experience from Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*

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(1990), German philosopher George Hegel declared that Africa did not constitute part of the history of the world, on the other, such American “scientists” as John Burgess, William Sumner, and Josiah Strong carried out studies designed to prove the inferiority of the black race.

Even though, at times, Western denial of a worthy African past was done unconsciously, it was often a deliberate act to justify and maintain European subjugation of the continent and its people. Europeans claimed that Africans should be enslaved and colonized in order to be saved from extinction and rescued from their own barbaric ways of life. Civilizing Africa was, as the English poet Rudyard Kipling put it, the “white man’s burden.” As Ohaegbulam further reminds us, British geographer James McQueen expressed more clearly the issue of white superiority when he once wrote that “if we [the British] really wish to do good in Africa, we must teach her savage sons that white men are their superiors.” As inferior people, therefore, Africans had nothing to show but so much to learn. Similar writings and pronouncements by prominent Western scholars were commonplace prior to the 1960s.

Festus Ohaegbulam identifies several reasons why Africa was excluded from the academic community. Some of these reasons are summarized below. One was the narrow European definition of history which recognized only written records as sources of knowledge of man’s past. Since Africa, except for Egypt, Ethiopia, Nubia, and some early states, such as Mali, had mostly non-literate [with no writing system] languages, its people were excluded from historical consideration. In fact, while Egyptian civilization, prior to the works of scholars such as Anta Cheik Diop of Senegal, was considered to be non-African, the Ethiopian and the Nubian civilizations were attributed to Arabs and fair-skinned outsiders. Two other factors that kept the continent outside the “academy” were the impact of the early missionaries who looked down upon African culture—its music, languages, arts, religion(s), and customs—and the overall inability of the Africans to shape their own destiny as a result of the Atlantic slave trade that began during the fifteenth century and the subsequent European colonial occupation of the continent from the 1880s to the 1960s–1970s.

However, African independence, the changing pattern of world relationships, the student movement of the 1960s in the United States, which, among other things, demanded the establishment of African American and African Studies programs and the creation of autonomous African universities staffed by African scholars had the effect of restoring credit to Africa’s pristine contributions to world civilizations, particularly in the fields of art and music. No longer, therefore, did one have to prove that Africa had a history. The acceptance of oral tradition as a valid source of historical knowledge, accomplished through the efforts of scholars such as Jan Vansina (a Belgian historian who worked in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo), the availability of new written documents, the effort of such archaeologists as Louis Leakey, who worked in Kenya during the 1950s and 1960s, and that of linguists, particularly German, and the involvement of continental African scholars facilitated the development of the field of African Studies.

For the first time, historians read with interest Greco-Roman references to Africa and marvelled at the descriptions of African kingdoms by a number of Arab and non-Arab travelers and scholars, as summarized by Joseph Ki-Zerbo’s *Histoire de l’Afrique noire* (1972). Among others, Ki-Zerbo cites the following chroniclers: Al Masoudi (of Baghdad, dead ca. 956), who traveled to Iran, India,

and Indonesia, and included in his memoirs two chapters on Africa; Ibn Hawkal (also of Baghdad), author and traveler, who wrote about Africa in 976; Al Bakri, from Cordova (1040–1094), who wrote on ancient Ghana; Al Idris (1099–1164), of Ceuta, Morocco, geographer-traveller, and student at Cordova, who described Africa and Spain in his writings; Aboulfeda (1273–1331), scholar, born in Damascus, who devoted some of his work to the Sudanic states; Al Omari (known as Ibn Fadl Allah), also from Damascus, advisor to sultans in Cairo and Damascus, and author of an encyclopaedia, who described Africa, and made special references to the kingdom of Mali; Ibn Battuta (1303–1377), from Tangier, who travelled to China, the Middle East, East Africa (down to Zanzibar), and West Africa where he was a guest of the emperor of Mali, and left insightful references to the ancient kingdoms of West and East Africa; and Ibn Khaldoun (1332–1406), of Tunis, secretary, minister, ambassador, courtier, traveller, mercenary, and once prisoner, who visited North Africa and Spain and, in 1382, wrote a universal history that describes the Berbers of North Africa.

Ki-Zerbo also enlightens the students of African history about the works of Hassan (*alias* John Leo the African) (1463–1554), born in Granada (Spain) and student at Fez, who left interesting comments about the continent. In fact, Hassan crossed the Sudan around 1507, visited Cairo and Mecca, was captured by pirates and eventually taken to Pope Leo X, who baptized him under the name of Johannes Leo de Medicis. Subsequently, he became a professor at the University of Bologna, Italy, and later returned to Tunisia only to reconvert to Islam. While in Rome, in 1526, he wrote about the continent of Africa and its wonders. In 1520, Mohamad Kate, historian from Timbuktu (ancient Mali), advisor to King Askia Mohamad, wrote of Songhay and the Moroccan invasion in his *Tarikh el-Fettac* (*Chronicle of the Searcher*). Finally, “Moor” Es Sadi (or Abderhamane) wrote of the continent in his *Tarikh es-Sudan* (*Chronicle of Black Lands*) around 1655. Ki-Zerbo further points out that the uncovering of several sources (both from the Middle Ages and the modern era) at the Vatican, from private European collections, monasteries, and other institutions have allowed interested scholars to piece together the missing links of the African past.

The Disciplines and the “State of the Art” in African Studies

History, the “queen” of the social sciences (or the humanities, according to some) has been more responsible for the restoration of the African past than any other discipline. With its rigorous methodology of data collection using every available primary and secondary source (government documents, diaries, memoirs, books, newspapers, oral traditions, witnesses or contemporary actors, fossils, pictorial data, artifacts, etc.) from archives, libraries, excavations, and corroborative materials from other disciplines, the Africanist [Africa-trained] historian, insisting on objectivity, has pioneered the systematic understanding of Africa and provided a foundation for other social sciences and the humanities to utilize their methodologies and thus reach a more comprehensive understanding of the continent and its people.

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The historiography of the colonial period treated Africa primarily as an extension of Europe, using European concepts and a Eurocentric point of view. The new Africanist historians brought Africans center-stage, treating them as the primary focus of their work. African scholars, such as Kenneth Onwuka Dike and J.F. Ade Ajayi at Ibadan University, Nigeria, Abu Boahen at Legon, Ghana, Bethwell Ogot at Makerere University, Uganda, Joseph Ki-Zerbo at Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), and Engelbert Mveng at Yaounde University, Cameroon, were among the trailblazers of this development. In the words of Abiola Irele, once Professor of French at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (now at Harvard), "It was inevitable that the most significant development should have taken place within the discipline of history. This was the most convenient terrain for taking on the colonizer, so to speak: for repudiating the colonial thesis that Africa had no history before the coming of the white man, that nowhere had the black race displayed an initiative for creating a framework of life and expression with any real human value or significance."

In the United States and England, the critical methodologies of historians such as Jan Vansina, Philip Curtin, the late Basil Davidson, the late Walter Rodney, Rene Pelissier, and many others contributed to the credibility of Africanist history as a legitimate social science with Africa as its focus. Eventually, as a result, Africanist historians came to dominate the field of African Studies and the African Studies Association (ASA). The accomplishment of historians is evidenced by the monumental eight volumes of the *Cambridge History of Africa* edited by J.D. Fage and the completed eight volumes of the *General History of Africa* commissioned by UNESCO, a project that involved some of the best known scholars, including Ajayi, Boahen, Ogot, Ki-Zerbo, and Davidson.

However, pioneering Africanist historians have been criticized by a younger generation of Africans and "radical" scholars who insist that the discipline is too conservative and irrelevant to solving Africa's current problems, partly because it still utilizes a Eurocentric rather than an Afri- or Afro-centric approach to the study of the continent. They point out, for example, that most of the focus has been the history of Europe in Africa, narratives about African kings and chiefs, of wars and empires, of great men and their deeds, of nationalists and trade union leaders, and perhaps of some oppressed segment of society simply to vindicate the past, rather than the account of the masses or the internal dynamics and workings of African societies. Historians are further accused of undertaking "micro-histories" rather than "macro-studies" of the African past, thus rarely presenting a larger picture of the continent as European historians have successfully done regarding their continent. Marxist Africanist historians insist, for example, that a class analysis of Africa must be an intrinsic part of the study of African history.

On methodology, the neo-historians [the new breed of historians, who wish to revise traditional history] argue that the claim of objectivity leads the Africanist historian to nothing, or, as historians A. Temu and B. Swai of the Dar-es-Salaam School, Tanzania, put it in their *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique* (1981), reduces history to a *cul-de-sac*, never venturing "beyond a timid empiricism" [description of facts without analysis or vision of the world]. They point out that ideology and methodology cannot be separated because the mere choice of a specific focus betrays the historian's predisposition, values, and partisanship, thus shattering the claim of objectivity. Temu and Swai sarcastically conclude that the historian's objectivity has been the "objectivity of a eunuch" [that of a cas-

trated man who brags about his sexual escapades]. The claim of the universal applicability of their theories and conclusions (i.e., that generalizations about European history necessarily apply to African history as well) has likewise come under attack. Western academics have, in fact, unwittingly tended to generalize about all societies and cultures using ethnocentric standards, which have often distorted the reality of the world under study. This was clear, for example, when political scientists, sociologists, and economists misapplied to Africa the universality of the modernization theory (to be discussed later in this chapter) during the 1960s.

In the United States, some scholars have coined the term Africology or Afrocolony in an attempt to stress the point that Africa is both the object and the subject of inquiry and to distance themselves from the shortcomings and biases of traditional scholarship. Note: The expressions "traditional disciplines" or "traditional scholarship" refer to the disciplines that have been long established and accepted by the "academy," such as history, political science, anthropology, Western music, and Western literature. Non-traditional disciplines would include African studies, African American studies, Women's studies, Jewish Studies, history of science, and art history. It is also interesting to point out that a couple of decades ago some historians toyed with a new popular but shallow methodology called "quantification." This quantitative analysis or statistical analysis in the social sciences was supposed to add a scientific flavor to their work, one that would strengthen their generalizations and allow prediction of human behavior. The attempt has virtually failed because it raised more questions than it provided answers. History or other social sciences are not precise sciences and cannot, therefore, predict human behavior. Thus, most historians have now distanced themselves from this tempting but problematic methodology, which, interestingly, continues to attract political scientists and economists. Along the same lines, the so-called Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam schools of Africanist historians, of which the late Walter Rodney was the major exponent, further complain that present historiography is dominated by Western historians who continue to misinterpret Africa. Temu and Swai go on to make the interesting point that, even though Leopold von Ranke, the father of modern historiography, advocated objectivity and a dispassionate approach to the study of the past, he himself glorified his Prussian state, and that Lord Ashley, renowned British historian, extolled the virtues of the British empire in which, as we all know, Africans were exploited and treated as sub-humans. Therefore, many new African scholars demand a combination of objectivity, to the extent that it is possible to be objective, and ideology (the latter meaning a "revolutionary consciousness," to use Lansine Kaba's expression)—to make history and other disciplines more relevant to Africa's needs.

Anthropology or the study of culture, first in the form of ethnography [study of technologically less advanced societies or what ethnographers used to call "primitive societies"], began studying Africa before history did. However, the anthropological methodology has encountered the ire of even the most fair-minded Africanists both on the continent and in the West. The first ethnographers, who worked during the 1920s through the 1940s, did their research in collaboration with the colonial administrators whose aim was to understand the African cultures they encountered and facilitate colonization. Some of the ethnographers themselves were colonial administrators who visited their areas of authority and, in their free time, interviewed a few Africans about their most exotic customs and produced sensational monographs. A good example of the latter was Felix Eboue,

black-Antillian and governor-general of former French Equatorial Africa (1941–1944), who left several ethnographic treatises on Oubangui-Chari (present Central African Republic). His observations constitute interesting reading because of the unique practices he describes, but are of little scientific value.

These early anthropologists, mostly British and French (Americans entered the field only after 1945), concentrated their attention on the culture of small African social units—which they called “tribes.” In most cases, they presented a picture of timeless, static small societies, characterizing their values, to paraphrase Kaba, “as savage or at best as exotic curiosities.” It is true, however, that despite their ethnocentric assumptions, the new “social scientists” tended to sympathize with the ethnic groups they studied, and demanded their preservation rather than their elimination by what they called the “superior” European culture.

Thus, although they contributed to our knowledge of some African societies, the first ethnographers, who claimed to be using a scientific approach, were no more than, to use the words of Southall (a former President of the African Studies Association), the “handmaiden of colonialism.” No wonder Kaba notes with scorn that “the collusion between this sort of scholarship [that of anthropologists] and the colonial doctrine culminated in the rise of the ‘tribal’ image of African societies among Westerners...” While they popularized the scientific method of field work and participant-observation [meaning a method whereby researchers observe and participate in the culture they are studying] and sometimes criticized the colonial status quo, anthropologists were seen, up to the 1950s, as allies of colonialism. Their critics charged that they denigrated African cultures and engaged in micro- rather than macro- studies of African societies, while displaying no concern whatsoever for history. Furthermore, as defenders of minority cultures, they showed no regard for the concept of the nation in a culturally divided continent for the simple purpose of preserving exotic “ethnic distinctiveness.” In other words, they were fascinated by small societies they characterized as “primitive” and tended to generalize their findings and apply them to the whole continent of Africa. One result of such ethnocentric scholarly arrogance is the strong criticism directed against the works of such well-known anthropologists as E. Evans-Pritchard, who wrote on the Nuer Sudan in 1935. Thus, the claim of objectivity on the part of the early anthropologists has been questioned and characterized, as one African scholar put it, as “another name for Western ethnocentrism and monopoly of the right to interpret other cultures of the world...,” and as a subtle way of infusing their “moral values, unrecognized prejudices, covert racism, vested interests and, indeed, political economy upon theory.”

In fact, there continues to be concern among continental African anthropologists and others that the damage done by European and some American anthropologists is beyond repair. According to Maxwell Owusu, three conditions must be fulfilled before Western anthropologists are totally accepted in Africa: 1) they must have a mastery of the language of the society they study; 2) they ought to show readiness and commitment to letting African scholars do the necessary and basic research, which requires in-depth cultural knowledge; and 3) they should be willing to engage in a critical and open intellectual dialogue with their African counterparts and abandon their alleged “arrogance.” As expected, of course, the younger generation of anthropologists are aware of the errors of their predecessors and are much more careful in their study of and conclusions about African

societies. Many of them have, for example, abandoned the use of the term "tribe" for "ethnic group," society, or people; brideprice for bridewealth; paganism or heathenism for African traditional religion; and huts for homes (or houses). Overall, however, notwithstanding the errors of the past, the works of anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits, founder of the Center for African Studies at Northwestern University in the early 1950s, as well as those of African American sociologists, including E. Franklin Frazier, have contributed to the reintegration of anthropologists as credible social scientists in the field of African Studies. Their influence can be measured by the fact that, from 1957 to 2005, more than eight presidents of the African Studies Association have been anthropologists. In fact, anthropologist, Melville Herskovits, sometimes known as the "Dean of African Studies" in the United States, was the first president.

Just as with the earlier anthropologists, the first sociologists [those who study "the origin, organization, institutions, and development and evolution of human society"] have been highly criticized by continental African scholars. In fact, the first sociologists were undistinguishable from the ethnographers criticized above. Properly trained and unbiased sociologists did not enter the African field until 1945 and expanded their work in Africa only following independence during the 1960s. Thereafter, their major concern was to disengage themselves from anthropology and abandon the tendency to focus their attention on "scientific exoticism" [looking "scientifically" at unimportant and farfetched cultural issues], as was popular among the ethnographers. As Jean Copans writes, sociology was not just "a new specialization, it constituted a complete break on several counts; empirically, as it was taking into consideration the real history of the African peoples; in scale, as it moved on from village to national social groups (from 'mini' to 'maxi');" and theoretically, as it did not ignore the reality of colonialism on the continent.

However, just like other social scientists immediately following independence, sociologists saw Africa as a fertile ground for the testing of their theories on modernization, social change, and development, and assumed that African societies would follow the same developmental pattern as European societies. They were, in essence, evolutionaries who used the European theoretical framework to explain Africa's "transition from feudalism to capitalism" and from a traditional lifestyle to a modern (European) lifestyle. As a result, African (and African American) scholars have seriously questioned the methodologies and assumptions of modern sociologists, casting doubt upon their claim of scientific objectivism [in this case, non-biased treatment of black people] and rejecting one of their major theoretical frameworks, namely, that which looks at black societies through the prism of the white middle class family.

It is understandable, therefore, that a well-known African scholar, O. Onoge, of Nigeria, would echo loudly what many critics feel—that is, insofar as Africa is concerned, sociologists, including Lucy Mair, whom he calls "the Dean of applied functionalism," have demonstrated "amnesia [purposeful ignorance] of the colonial period," bias, and reactionary tendencies. In fact, like many Africans, Onoge still maintains that the "history of African sociology has few redeeming features. In the main [he adds], it is perverse and counter-revolutionary from an African standpoint." Temu and Swai, already mentioned in this chapter, scorn the discipline when they note sarcastically that sociology "...soars into empty abstraction" [meaning that it is too abstract and irrelevant for Africa].

On another level, two female Kenyan sociologists, Diane Kayongo-Male and Philista Onyango in *The Sociology of the African Family* (1984), cast doubt on many research activities undertaken by sociologists in Africa, particularly in reference to the African family. They point out that over-reliance on the survey method [which uses questionnaires and interviews] has been a major problem and that the interviews are usually not private, are conducted by people who are alien to the culture and the language, and that the final product is usually replete with translation misrepresentations. They urge that scholars "place highest reliability on family studies coming from indigenous researchers" and "read clearly to find out exactly how the study was carried out before we jump to unwarranted conclusions about African family life." The criticism, however, seems to have transformed the discipline for the better, making sociology one of the most vibrant and relevant disciplines in African Studies today.

Political scientists, who study government and the decision-making process, were the last ones to enter the field of African Studies for reasons not too difficult to ascertain and, when they did, they entered in full force. In Africa, the colonial administration (1885–1960) was weary of political scientists because they inevitably would have found too many unacceptable features within the governing system. Furthermore, because political education in the schools was forbidden, African political scientists were almost non-existent on the continent during the colonial era. Just prior to and following independence, however, political scientists, particularly Americans, were welcomed and even invited by the new African leaders as advisors, professors, and human resources. Some of the best known names include James Coleman and Carl Rosberg (Nigeria), Henry Bienen (Tanzania), Martin Kilson (Sierra Leone), Aristide Zolberg (Côte d'Ivoire), and Dennis Austin (Ghana). This first wave of political scientists was ebullient about the future of Africa: they enthusiastically talked and wrote of the process of modernization. They viewed Africa's problems of instability, centralization, ethnic and elite competition for resources, political repression, and competing power politics as temporary stages and as the pains of growth, so to speak, in the process toward democratization (the maintenance of multi-party states and the institutionalization of free elections), rapid industrialization, equitable distribution of national resources, an end to intense ethnic loyalties, social mobility, the weakening of obstructive traditional values, urbanization, expansion of literacy, elimination of diseases, and improved infrastructure (new roads, schools, health centers, and communication networks).

Unfortunately, as Naomi Chazan et al. noted in *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (1988), "the modernization theory focused on internal factors to explain political processes in Africa" and underestimated the agrarian nature of African societies, the entrenchment of the bureaucracy and the impact of external factors, such as neo-colonialism, the external debt, and the unfair international trade system. It also showed clear ethnocentric arrogance in its patterning of African realities after Western values. A number of others, however, looked at the various competing cultures on the continent and foresaw the potential for serious political conflict. Unlike the modernization theorists, this group of political scientists emphasized ethnic differences or "tribalism," to use their preferred terminology at the time, group interests, and aspiring leaders, all vying to acquire for themselves and their "cronies" the state's scarce resources. Overall, the themes political scientists dealt with in general, up to the 1970s, were African nationalist

leaders, parties, elections, constitutions, ideologies, political instability, African "charismatic" [articulate nationalist] leaders, ethnicity, and intra-African relations. Unfortunately, their initial euphoria was shattered in 1963 when the first military coup in Sub-Saharan Africa resulted in the assassination of President Sylvanus Olympio of Togo. Several other military coups followed, including one that puzzled nationalists and pan-Africanists alike: The overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, by the army in 1966. Prior to 1966, most political scientists had viewed the army as a modernizing force, disciplined and cohesive, and as a professional corps trained at such best military academies as Sandhurst (England) and St. Cyr (France), ready to defend the modern state rather than topple or overthrow it.

As a result of the shock, many political scientists began to revise their theoretical frameworks. In the tradition of Samuel Huntington, they began looking at the "stress and structural weaknesses" of African institutions which, in their view, showed extreme "fragility, systemic flaws, and low levels of political culture—which act[ed] as a sort of magnet to pull the armed forces into the power and legitimacy vacuum." Huntington had postulated that, in the developing world, "the most important causes of military intervention in politics...[were] not military but political and reflect[ed] not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of society." In other words, the army's behavior simply reflected how inadequate African societies were, with weak and corrupt governments, functioning primarily on the basis of ethnic loyalties, selfishness, and abuses of citizens' rights. More recent political scientists, however, Samuel Decalo being a good example, have discredited both theories, and have instead focused their attention on the internal organization of the army itself, namely, its weaknesses and rivalries which are often based on ethnicity, age, rank, education, personal ambition, and nepotism. These social scientists have pointed to the inefficient performance of the military as they replace a civilian government, making a mockery of their announced objectives of ending ethnic conflict and corruption and improving the economy.

As in other disciplines, political scientists have been criticized for distorting African realities to fit their own personal theoretical framework, explaining African realities through complicated and exotic terms and concepts such as "clientelism, dependence, machine politics, corporativism, modernization, cultural pluralism," and so on. In their midst, there has been a conflict between "bourgeois and non-bourgeois" political scientists, the terms bourgeois and bourgeoisie being negatively used by African Marxists and neo-Marxists to characterize most American scholars and their colleagues on the African continent. Barongo once wrote that "bourgeois African political scientists have turned political science into an instrument of class domination and exploitation." He advised them to focus more on the issues of class exploitation and poverty as causes of dependence, the dominant role of the elite, excessive exercise of power, destabilization, and the colonially-inherited political institutions and practices that have corrupted many African leaders.

The reader might wish to know that there are other divisions within the political science "academy," a topic that is suited only for more advanced students. Yet, for the sake of completeness and for the benefit of the instructor, we will briefly note them here. There are the traditionalists who use a descriptive quasi-historical approach to the study of politics and focus mainly on diplomacy, formal institu-

tions, and legal systems such as constitutions, states, and parties. They dominated the discipline prior to 1945. This breed of political scientists tended to doubt the validity of scientific methods as applied to human behavior, and, although they carefully studied and observed political behavior, they did not attempt to predict it, as they had no faith in statistical probabilities. Very few traditionalists exist today.

As a result of the changes in world politics in the aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945), however, a new breed of political scientists, less Eurocentric, emerged in reaction to the traditionalist model, namely, the behavioralists, who focused on the concept of the nation-state, calling for the use of scientific methods and theory-building to explain and even predict political behavior. (Patrick McGowan represents the major revisionist in the discipline.) Accordingly, behavioralists attempted to use data quantification (statistics) and measurements (numbers) to predict political behavior and test their "empirical hypotheses." They too are on their way out as relevant political scientists. The structural-functionalists ridicule the claims of (social) "scientific" approaches that produce "scientific" results. Instead, they look at international political systems rather than at individual nation-states and use a comparative approach to politics through a focus on such features as legislatures and leaders' roles and assessing how these function. (Immanuel Wallerstein is a proponent of this theory on Africa, and most Marxists and neo-Marxists fall within this category of thinkers.)

Interestingly enough, however, following in the footsteps of Samir Amin, once Director of the *Institut pour le Developpement Economique et Progres* in Dakar, Senegal, many political scientists are now fascinated by a variety of frameworks focusing on political economy [the interface between politics and the economy], which is popular at the schools of Dar-es-Salaam and Ibadan. Political economy attempts to use the scientific tools of economics and stresses the point that politics are dictated by economic considerations and vice-versa. In this group, one finds the political science activists, Marxists, and proponents of the dependency and underdevelopment theorists. The dependence model views Africa (the *periphery*, the margin or the exploited end of the relationship) as a victim of international capitalism (the *core*, or the center that decides about and benefits from the dependence relationship), and claim that the African masses are exploited by a small African elite—the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie—that renders Africa dependent and underdeveloped. This theory is certainly pessimistic, as it portrays African societies and states as inexorably trapped by a worldwide capitalist conspiracy which controls information and knowledge, technology, wealth, and the economic market. Immanuel Wallerstein (according to Chazan et al.) holds this theory, which also implies that the progress of one nation necessarily "impedes" the progress of other nations.

Although the dependency theory sheds light on the roots of underdevelopment, on social inequalities and economic structures, it falls short as it focuses primarily on factors external to Africa, makes Africans passive receptors rather than actors, neglects the issues of ethnicity, race, and nationalism and provides a totally materialistic perspective of African societies, disregarding the spiritual and intellectual side of life. The statist school, as classified by Chazan et al., on the other hand, which seems to be popular among African scholars as advanced by well-known Africanists such as Carl Rosberg and Robert Jackson, emerged during the 1970s. The statist (a word derived from the word state) emphasizes the state as "the

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motor force behind social and economic occurrences in Africa," and focuses, therefore, on the autonomy of the state apparatus, on leadership styles, and patron-client relationships. It concludes that the post-colonial state does have the power to mobilize and transform resources but that it has not done so for the benefit of the masses. It blames African leaders for most failures, accuses them of abusing their power for personal gains, and makes them responsible for the continent's chronic international debt. Again, to borrow from Chazan et al., the statist theory, while drawing attention to African "internal dynamics [i.e., the state itself]," confuses the concept of state and government. States remain but governments come and go easily. In addition, it provides no understanding of the relations between state and society or between state and classes, and exaggerates the degree of power of the leaders.

A theory related to the statist model is one expanded by Robert Bates, known as the political choice theory, which sees the state as autonomous or, as Bates put it, asserts "the independent status and determining power of politics." Bates goes on to say in *Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa* (1983) that states have their own objectives:

They want taxes and revenues and intervene in their economic environments to secure them. Politicians want power. And they use the instruments of the state to secure and retain it by manipulating the economy to political advantage. In Africa, political elites have rendered economic markets instruments of political organization.

Whereas the statist approach has been fundamentally negative on the nature and intentions of African states as it portrays them as inexorably linked to the imperfect nature of the leadership, Bates's theory seems to straddle the middle ground, stressing the enormous but not absolute power and autonomy of the state, which has been used to enhance leaders' political gains to the detriment and misery of the masses. Contrary to the dependency theory, the political choice theory sees economic development not as simply related but as subordinate to internal politics. Bates claims that "the political is not merely reducible to the economic; rather, it stands apart from it and can act upon it, often in a manner that is costly in economic terms."

One of the most recent versions of the political choice perspective has been advanced by Naomi Chazan, Robert Mortimer, John Raveland, and Donald Rothchild. They look at the state in Africa as maintaining some degree of autonomy and at political leaders as being able to mobilize resources, the economy, and society to achieve certain goals but also as constrained by historical legacies, demographic pressures, cultural ecology, ideological divisions, and international factors. Thus, while this perception focuses on past errors, its proponents say, it "uncovers components of ongoing processes and elucidates future opportunities and constraints." Unlike the statist theory, the political choice model further posits that a study of politics in Africa should focus on state-society relationships rather than on state-economic relationships or simply on the state itself.

To recapitulate, here is a brief summary of the preceding theories as applied to Africa. 1) The *traditionalists* used historical narrative to study politics and did not believe in the so-called social "scientific" method nor did they attempt to explain "scientifically" current and predict future political behavior in Africa; 2) The *behavioralists* focused on the functioning of the new nation-states in Africa and, un-

like the traditionalists, had faith in using numbers and statistics to explain and predict political behaviour; 3) The *structural-functionalists* study the structures and functions of political institutions, disregard the claim of "scientism" and compare nation-states in order to make more realistic generalizations; 4) The *Marxists* focus on the role of social classes and the resulting exploitation, as well as on the relationship between politics and the economy, and claim that an equitable economic system would solve all societal ills; 5) The proponents of the *political economy statist school* focus attention on the strong power of the African state and its political leaders, who thus determine the direction of the economy, and blame the African leadership for the problems the continent experiences, especially in the economic sector; 6) Bates' *political choice theory*, like the preceding theory, capitalizes on the power and autonomy of the state in Africa, making the economy subservient to politics and the state, and blames the African leadership for the continent's economic mess, a result of their unwise choices; 7) Chazan's (et al.'s) type of *political choice theory* differs from Bate's in that, although recognizing the power of the state, points to the various challenges and constraints the leadership faces, including the various colonial legacies, personal ideologies, cultural traditions, and the inequalities of the international market system.

The new emphases and approaches in the discipline will perhaps make political scientists less vulnerable to criticism from continental African scholars and others in the academy. In fact, Barongo, a major critic, gives some credit to the scholars in the discipline when he observes that, "Ladd's and Lipset's survey of the profession clearly shows that American political scientists in general stand politically to the right of sociologists but well to the left of the general population."

Geographers have been the least controversial in the field of African studies. Even during the colonial period, geographers had established several associations which sent trained and quasi-trained "scientists" to the continent to survey the terrain for the benefit of diplomats and the army, and for other scientists interested in Africa. As expected, their activity increased following independence. For a number of developmental reasons, African governments undertook surveys of different regions of their countries. In general, geographers tend to be less hindered than political scientists or sociologists in their analysis of African affairs. One reason, as pointed out by critics, is that, at least in their earlier period, they concentrated on apolitical physical geography and paid little attention to cultural and demographic geography. Most geographers, including the greatest pioneer, the late William Hance, have escaped criticism.

Linguists have been less conspicuous in African Studies circles but have played a vital role in the analysis of cultural origins, and, along with literature experts, such as Ruth Finnegan, have shed light on African societies, on the possible influences these exerted upon each other, on migratory movements, and on geographical and demographic distribution patterns. Since the 1850s, German missionaries and linguists (such as Westermann and Homburger) and lovers of oral literature, collected African folklore, proverbs, riddles, and stories, some of which were later accepted as valid historical sources. A similar role has been played by musicologists who have strengthened the history of Africa by showing cultural and material contact (through musical instruments, for example) even prior to the 1884-85 partition of the continent. This is exemplified by as works by musicologist Percival Kirby have done in Southern Africa. In other words, one could establish the nature of contact between two cultures or peoples by studying their musical in-

struments or songs and discover, through similarities, whether or not the two borrowed from each other. If yes, then their history may be linked. These humanists and artists have helped restore the worth and dignity of African traditions and cultural manifestations, often denigrated and neglected during the colonial era. During the post-colonial period, musicologists and ethnomusicologists have pleaded with the African elite and their leaders to preserve their rich but potentially vanishing traditions.

The study of African art has also been a significant component of African Studies. Since 1905, when a mask from the Fang people of Gabon was taken to Europe and its stylistic freedom eventually inspired such artists as Pablo Picasso and Andre Matisse, African art, particularly sculpture, through the recent works of scholars such as Frank Willett and William Fagg, has been gaining acceptance from the academic community. Therefore, earlier ethnography-art specialists, including P. German (on Cameroon, 1910), Gunter Pressman (on Fang of Gabon, 1913), and J. Van Wing (on the former Belgian Congo, 1921–1938), paved the way for the new artists to establish once and for all the fact that art and music are the two most important contributions of Africa to world civilizations.

According to Daniel Biebuyck, however, African art specialists still have a long way to go. Their achievements in the discipline still “lag in range, scope, depth, and comprehensiveness, and...impact on the other academic fields of study.” Biebuyck outlines several approaches and themes that need to be explored, including more focus on the neglected areas such as the former Spanish, French, and Portuguese-speaking colonies in Africa; individual African artists; socioeconomic and legal aspects of art; the acquisition of artifacts through purchase and inheritance; labor and acquisition of the primary materials of art and payment of services; taxonomy of materials; and the system of ownership or temporary control and guardianship of an artist's creative possessions. Biebuyck also complains that there is much confusion and uncertainty among the experts themselves regarding the scope and the definition of basic terminology such as art, craft, artistic, material culture, and aesthetics.

The study of African religion by scholars such as John Mbiti, George Parrinder, and Aylard Shorter (in *African Theology*, 1975) has had two effects. The first has been the restoration of Africa's religion(s) to almost the same level of respectability and acceptance as other religions of the world, as a system that attempts to cope with human existence, understand the cosmos, and explain the relationship between humans and the supernatural. These authors have thus attempted to dispel the stereotypes and myths attributed to African religion by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries who viewed it as nothing more than a series of superstitious beliefs associated with ancestors' “worship” (rather than veneration), with human sacrifice, the drum, and polytheistic practices. The second effect has been to sharpen the similarities of African religion (e.g., belief in one creator of the universe), and differences (e.g., absence of elaborate physical buildings for worship as in the West, of proselytizers or ambulant preachers who strive to convert others and travel from one locality to another, and weekly predictable days of worship) between African religion(s) and Christianity or Islam. African philosophy, on the other hand, is the latest of the disciplines in African Studies. Catholic priest, Placide Temples (who worked in former Zaire and wrote *Bantu Philosophy*, 1945), and John Mbiti, himself an African philosopher and theologian, are known for their pioneering works in this discipline. Again, their studies

have refuted claims that Africans are unable to develop or understand complex philosophical systems and that their thought patterns resemble those of a Western child with whom one must talk in symbols and examples. In fact, proponents of these claims attempted to prove the validity of their position by pointing to the round (rather than rectangular) shapes of African homes and the "crooked" or curvilinear rather than straight nature of their paths and traditional walkways. They were trying to make the point that Africans think in a circular fashion.

Notwithstanding the importance of economic development in Africa, economists have been the late-comers into the field of African Studies. Just as the sociologists, however, Africanist economists, during the 1950s and early 1960s, also assumed that African societies would follow the same developmental stages as Western societies. They, therefore, attempted to apply the theoretical models fitting European societies. Essentially, early economists used the traditional vs. the modern framework or the economic stages theory advanced by W. W. Rostow. Rostow identified at least five stages through which all societies are expected to go, and postulated that, once conditions such as enough capital, entrepreneurship spirit, needed skills, existence of foreign exchange [i.e., American dollars, British pounds, and French francs], and sound management practices were present, African economies would advance the same way those of the West did centuries ago.

This unrealistic framework has been replaced by the international-structuralist model, which views the developing world, especially Africa, as helplessly dependent on the capitalist world due to unfair and unequal economic and power relationships. Proponents of the theory see the world as made up of two societies and two economies: the capitalist and the less-developed world and the "haves" and "have-nots" within the developing countries themselves. As social scientists, these economists have tended to focus on policies designed to eradicate poverty and provide employment for all. As Michael Todaro notes, there are two sub-models or versions of the theory, both attempting to explain the reasons for underdevelopment. The first is the neo-colonial dependence sub-model which focuses on the unequal relationships between the Western economies (the core or center) and the developing nations (the periphery or margin). Todaro claims that "landlords, entrepreneurs, merchants, salaried public officials, trade union leaders, etc." in the developing world simply perpetuate the conditions of dependence, as they serve as *compradors* (*buyers*) of the former, with no power or initiative of their own. The second submodel, which Todaro calls the "false paradigm" model, claims that underdevelopment has been caused and perpetuated by the ill advice of the Western institutions (the UN, UNESCO, the IMF, the World Bank, and others) and their experts, who distort African realities to serve their own economic purposes and test their assumptions and theories on development. Scholars who advance this submodel also hasten to add that, because the training of most of the Third World experts takes place in the West, the cycle of underdevelopment and dependence will continue as the indigenous experts return home simply to apply their irrelevant and distorted theories and end up defending the status quo of the elites. (Both submodels have been advanced by neo-Marxists.) As expected, many African scholars from the continent tend to look with suspicion at these developmental theories. Wang Metuge, for example, characterizes both political scientists and economists as pseudo-scientists who, to gain "scientific credibility," have lately inundated their journals with statistics, expressed in "econometrics" and "politometrics."

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What, then, seems to somewhat unify the scholars from so many persuasions and disciplines in African Studies? Ohaegbulam, referred to earlier, identifies four interdisciplinary models that are implicit in many of the intellectual constructs advanced by Africanists, which are summarized below: the traditional, the colonial, the Marxist, and the pan-African models. Ohaegbulam notes that the traditional model has been proposed by some as the most appropriate for the understanding of Africa and the black experience. Proponents of the model claim that a return to "the source," such as Egypt, to African traditions, to early civilizations, and to Africa's pristine state is a *conditio sine qua non* for any study of black people. One of the weaknesses of the model is that it ignores the fact that Africa is no longer purely traditional: the old and the new either live side by side or have managed to merge.

The colonial model tends to emphasize the colonial period (1885–1960) and its everlasting impact on all African institutions, without, in any way, justifying colonialism. Its proponents maintain that Africa would not be what it is today without the misfortune of colonial domination. They tend to see Africa and African-America, for that matter, as colonies of the West: Africans under neo-colonialism [a new type of colonial domination following Africa's independence during the 1960s and 1970s] and dependence, and black Americans under domestic colonialism, with both people still experiencing "political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural subjugation." One of the problems of this model is that it tends to overlook the African traditional past and its lasting impact. It also looks at the continent from a negative perspective, portraying Africans as struggling helplessly to free themselves from Western colonial and neo-colonial domination and the evil and sinister intentions of the white man.

The Marxist model, increasingly popular during the 1970s, when it was energized by the establishment of the now-defunct "revolutionary" Marxist governments in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Ethiopia, posits that the only way to understand accurately the African experience on the continent and in the Diaspora is to "scientifically" analyze the class phenomenon, which is based on the control, ownership, and management of the means of production (property, business, land, equipment, factories, mineral resources). Marxists, or the followers of Karl Marx's philosophy, hold that the major social problems are caused by class differences, which pit the poor against the rich, hence their use of the expression *class struggle*. For Marxists, while the spiritual world does not exist and religion is the *opium* of the people, our actions are fundamentally and primarily motivated by economic considerations, even though we are often not aware of it. Interestingly, Marxists and neo-Marxists [scholars who wish to revise Marxism in light of the fall of socialism and its economic system, as is the case in the former Soviet Union] hold that racism is based on economic factors and that it can be eliminated if social classes are done away with. Thus, according to them, once the economic issue is resolved, race will simply wither away. Such an assertion is certainly problematic as the concept of class in Marxist terms may not be applicable to Africa. Roxborough notes, for example, that "classes in Africa are more complex, and... usually weaker. They are frequently incomplete in the sense that the dominant class, or one fraction of the dominant class, is absent." Rural "classes," are much more important in developing societies than in Europe or America. Furthermore, to believe that racism will vanish when economic conditions become equitable is tantamount to living a utopia or in an unreal world.

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The pan-African model, on the other hand, focuses on the commonalities of experiences of black people—slavery, colonialism, racism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, and desire for unity—and on one naturally unifying factor: skin color. The proponents of the model, invoking the ideals and goals of the early pan-Africanist movement led by W. E. B. DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, Marcus Garvey, and later, by Malcom X and the late Reverend Leon Sullivan, hold that pan-Africanism not only explains the black experience but also provides solutions to black peoples' problems. However, as Ohaegbulam observes, the pan-Africanist framework tends to gloss over or even write off major differences among black people on the continent and in the Diaspora. For example, language, religious beliefs, and even the experience and perception of slavery and freedom are dissimilar in Africa, in the African American community, in the Caribbean, and Latin American countries, such as Brazil. Notwithstanding the shortcomings, however, the pan-Africanist model is a useful comparative teaching tool.

The African Studies Association

The study of Africa acquired enhanced status from the creation of the African Studies Association (ASA) in 1957. The first meeting that led to the establishment of the association took place at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City under the auspices of the Carnegie Corporation (which provided \$6,500 to underwrite the proceedings). The corporation was represented by its President, Dr. Alan Pifer, and some 35 scholars from several disciplines, particularly anthropology, history, and sociology, that met and decided to form the association whose objective would be to collect data and expand knowledge about Africa and its people. In addition, the ASA would stimulate and promote research "in ways appropriate to a scholarly organization" and facilitate communication among interested scholars.

However, some members, particularly African, Caribbean, and African American scholars, came to believe that the ASA should play the role of an active advocate of African causes as well as that of a promoter of knowledge. Likewise, these same scholars began to resent the fact that the association was dominated by white, Anglo male scholars, whose research agendas seemed to them totally irrelevant to Africa's needs. They accused the association's leadership of continuing to play the condescending role of "liberal mediators" and secular "missionaries" of Africa, while collaborating with government agencies such as the State Department, Defense Department, Central Intelligence Agency, and the African American Institute (headquartered in New York). They wished to see the ASA play a major role on critical issues and problems relevant to Africa, such as the liberation of the whole of Southern Africa, especially South Africa, economic development, the strengthening of democratic institutions, health promotion, literacy expansion, and combating the threat posed by military rule on the continent.

These differences burst out in the open in the 1969 ASA meeting in Montreal when, according to Immanuel Wallerstein, a group of black American scholars "seized the platform and put forward a series of demands" they had voiced two years earlier through their splinter African Heritage Studies Association. As a result, the association became much more sensitive to the views and feelings of minority scholars. Yet, very few African Americans have remained members of the