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Can They Overcome the Opposition between Economic Universalism and Anthropological Relativism?

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Africanist Social Sciences Faced with the Test of Development Projects

Can They Overcome the Opposition between Economic Universalism and Anthropological Relativism?

The disciplines of economics and anthropology – especially of the Africanist variety – have generally been characterized by exclusion and partitioning. Historically, economics has tended to focus primarily on Western market and capitalist societies. In contrast, ethnology and anthropology study exotic, “primitive” societies.¹ The traditional conflict between anthropology and economics has therefore been influential in the methodological debate pitting holism and relativism against individualism and universalism, and even in the debate between supposedly holist and individualist societies.

On the one hand, economics mainly revolves around the questions of scarcity, the market, money, the accumulation of capital, and the industrialization of Western economies. Through decalcomania or disciplinary imperialism, it has sought to transpose its methods and interrogations to “developing” economies, particularly African economies. The Africanist sciences often see economics as formalist, reductionist, hypothetico-deductive, esoteric in its expression, and even marked by commercial alienation or an ideology that justifies capitalism and “Western” modernity.

On the other hand, Africanist works – particularly anthropological ones – have often sought to base their analyses on fieldwork, favoring particularism, specific cultures, and agents at the bottom of the value chain. They even attempt to represent exotic societies as a reversed image of Western societies, using binary oppositions such as giving versus onerous exchange, communities versus individuals, solidarity versus utilitarianism, and static, cold societies versus hot societies. From another perspective, “primitive” societies display affluence (Sahlins 1976) and efficiency in terms of their own ends. Many economists

1. See the debate between Herskowitz (1941) and Knight (1941).

see anthropology as characterized by field empiricism, induction, relativism, or even exoticism in the name of radical differentiation.

The development field has forced the two disciplines to meet. Economics has turned its attention to non-Western societies, and anthropology finds itself confronted with development projects. Nevertheless, the questions asked by the developmental social sciences, and the conducting of development projects, are not without risk of decalomania, mirror oppositions, or a teleological outlook. They force us to take into account the historicity of societies, their asymmetrical relationships, the dialectics between developers and the developed, and their participation in a single, international architecture and a globalized world.

Obviously, these methodological and practical oppositions have evolved along with the two disciplines, and there have been some reconciliations. Economic and anthropological explanations now appear complementary in the analysis of a hybrid and changing reality, composed of destructuring/restructuring, varyingly conflictual combinations with multiple reference points, contradictory representations, and interplay between dominant and dominated parties in an asymmetrical interaction. The methodological question is one of field/theory iteration and comparativism.

Fieldwork makes it possible to restore perspective and meaning to economic categories. It permits the diversity of institutions, structures, and trajectories to be taken into account. Conversely, economic studies allow us to understand the questions of resource allocation and scarcity management, how societies fit into a globalized economy, and the impact of development projects. These conflicts are particularly revealed by the implementation of development policies, with an interplay between parties that involves strategy, confrontation, multiple reference points, and contradictory projects.

This article examines the traditional opposition between economic and anthropological analyses, with a particular focus on the development issue. It then describes certain methodological and epistemological stakes in an economic anthropology of development, using the example of the cotton industry.

Development Economics and the Risks of Decalomania

The Field of Development Economics

It was long considered that “exotic” societies were not part of the field of economics. Development economics was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, in a context of reconstruction, decolonization, and the establishment of the United Nations institutions and development institutions. According to the pioneers of development economics, the discipline is based on three assumptions: the legitimacy of an economic analysis, the development goal of seeking structural change that is distinct from growth, and the field of underdeveloped (particularly African) economies. Each of these points constitutes a subject of debate.

The Debate about the Focus and Method of Economics

Economics is a partial explanation of a whole, based on a framework of coherence and rules of equivalence that allow for measurement. There are five different conceptions of economics, with varying degrees of generalization: the substantive meaning, as proposed by Polanyi (resources, needs, and satisfaction of human material needs); the formalist conception based on means meeting ends (economicizing); that of commercial exchange (money, markets, and onerous exchange); that of capitalism (profit, capital, and Polanyi's "fictitious commodities:" land and work); and the economic view, which refers to the meaning or common sense (as defined by Weber) that men attribute to their activities. Economics is a translation of the confrontation between the projects of people and stakeholders who have awareness and intentions regarding energy-consuming activities, based on representations and meanings. The modern economic order is characterized by freedom (bargaining), effectiveness (managerial leadership or authority), and collectiveness or rationalization (Billaudot 2006). According to Polanyi (1957), economics (an institutionalized process of interaction between man and his environment) is to varying degrees embodied in three forms: market transactions, redistribution, and reciprocity. These correspond to the three principles of symmetry, centrality, and equivalence. The economicizing principle is only valid when economic systems become autonomous.

The pertinence of these five explanations of economics varies according to the society they are applied to. All human societies engage in economic activities according to Polanyi's definition (substantial economy), and probably also according to the formalist definition (means meeting ends). However, the forms and meanings differ between societies. In many African societies, money is not a general equivalent, land is not alienable, and social relationships are personalized and local (in contrast to the anonymous relationships, contracts, and laws of the market order). However, it is predominantly the scarcity of essential goods and of money that guarantees the survival of the vast majority of populations, and not the abundance studied in rural exotic societies (Sahlins 1976).

The Debate on Evolutive and Inevolutive Historical Processes

The historical trajectories of societies vary widely, and some processes are reversible. Development is not the same as growth. It is simultaneously an objective and measurable process (via productivity, poverty, inequality, and ecological impact indicators), a normative process (a vehicle for desirable social objectives), and a project (executed by developmental agents). Its etymological meaning is "bringing out the latent possibilities," (Harper 2001-2009) or capabilities of beings and societies. It does not refer to the specific Western process, but to a range of trajectories. However, it is not applicable to the historical

trajectories of all societies. It takes into account both the endogenous dynamics of various societies and their type of inclusion in the international economy. Development can only happen in the long term, and there is great contrast between the trajectories of different societies. The time of globalization (competitiveness, openness, adaptation to new technological situations, and so forth) is not the time of economic development (in terms of establishing institutions, constructing markets, and sustainably increasing productivity), nor is it that of the sociohistorical trajectories of societies (building of states and nations, redefinition of borders, and external and internal legitimization of powers). Societies make their own modernity, combining their own historical times with the time of globalization.

In contrast, economic envelopment (or even involution) can be defined as the opposite process, embodied in the indexes of marginalization, productivity decline, vicious circles, and poverty traps. The study of underdevelopment, according to its original paradigms, refers either to a comparative delay or difference, or to a product of development. It therefore implies a historical deconstruction process, linked to the asymmetrical relationship between societies. This can lead either to a controlled development process, or to marginalization, impoverishment, and vulnerability.

The Specific Characteristics of Southern (particularly African) Economies

The third founding pillar of development economics is the “south” or Third World zone, long thought to be without history or economy. What we are dealing with here is clearly a Weberian ideal type. The structural characteristics are related to colonial history and the mode of insertion in the international division of labor, but also to low productivity, and to the incompleteness of markets (particularly land markets). The internal structural characteristics (dualism and disarticulation, poor market integration, limited physical and human capital, low productivity, demographic growth, and so forth) combine with external structural characteristics (colonial specialization, weight of natural resources, financial and technological dependency, extraversion, and poverty-causing growth via specialization in international value chains). Underdeveloped economies are disarticulated, extroverted, and characterized by high levels of poverty, insecurity, and vulnerability. As well as being extremely diverse, African societies must meet the demographic challenges brought by population growth, the proportion of young people, mobility, and urban expansion.

There are some shared traits, related to fragmented, heterogeneous, and divided economies, and to the diversity of institutional forms and coding rules. The dominant sociocultural and political characteristics are marginalization, violence, despotism, subordinate knowledge, and cultural hybridism. The popular rural and

urban economy is based on interrelationships with and subjection to the “modern” economy. Its agents participate in both the market and multiple networks of social relationship. In the absence of pensions insurance or social security, nonproducers are cared for by the communities to which they belong. Societies can be measured and compared using several gauges: per capita income in exchange rate or purchase power terms, financial or nonfinancial poverty indexes, demographic changes, the Gini index, and their ecological footprint. Africa’s fifty-three states are also characterized, to varying degrees, by major transformations related to urban isolation, the diversification of partners (in 2010, the south accounted for a third of Africa’s commercial relationships in Africa: more than Europe), access to new information and communication technologies, and advances in education and health. Natural capital is increasingly important. Despite the global crisis, annual economic growth in the decade following the year 2000 exceeded 5%. Urban and periurban markets intensified fast.

The market is different from capitalism. Money and goods are not anthropological invariants. Money is not primarily a rational instrument on which market exchanges are based, and is certainly not a way of ending bartering. It is a social link and a representation that involves trust, legitimacy, and power. It is a shared adherence to violence (Aglietta and Orléans 1995). In rural areas, money does not have liberating power over all goods, and generally not over production factors (land and work). Its circulation is limited to certain spheres, in which exchange value occupies the dominant position over use value. The market position of several African societies is still characterized by exchange of goods, relationship building, and incomplete markets (fictitious goods according to Polanyi [1957]). Commercial circuits are generally very efficient. The domination of market capital (corresponding to the optimization of capital by import-export trade and rents) predominates over a productive capital (which brings increased productivity). In contrast, in capitalism, production factors or productive forces become goods with private property rights. The economy is nevertheless becoming increasingly monetized, and property (a heritage characterized by a plurality of rights) is quickly becoming alienable.

There is also great contrast between the different historical dynamics and trajectories. Certain “emerging” economies are becoming positively integrated within globalization, while others are caught in poverty traps. The centers exert centrifugal or centripetal forces over the territories. This focusing requires interdependencies and international asymmetries to be taken into account, with the now-growing role of emerging economies in Asia, Latin America, and the oil-producing countries.

Clearly, development economics is the subject of fundamental debates between those who believe that concepts are universal and contexts are specific, and those economists who seek to build new concepts based on the particularities of societies.

The first group sees development economics as similar to growth economics on a macrolevel, and similar to decision-making based on asymmetrical

information on a microlevel. The modern theory of growth integrates externalities and returns to scale. It reasons in terms of imperfect competition, and takes into account institutional profiles. The micro theory takes into account the risk universes of imperfect information, leading to bounded rationalities. Rational choices with imperfect information can relate to methods of market or non-market coordination, and rules (the neoinstitutionalist approach). The reduction of transaction costs and risks is a decisive factor in these choices. Ordinary economists have taken into account the importance of networks (Granovetter 1985), social capital, and institutional arrangements as factors in efficiency and capability development.

The second group considers it important to begin with the stylized phenomena of underdevelopment, the structural and institutional particularities of societies, and their mode of insertion in the global economy. Historical institutionalisms, like regulation theory, challenge accumulation regimes and institutional forms, in the context of the nation-state leading to a plurality of development methods. In contrast, analyses of the international political economy begin with asymmetrical international relationships, to study how dependent, dominated, and peripheral economies follow specific underdevelopment trajectories.

Beyond these oppositions concerning development economics, there are limits to this top-down economic representation. Decalomania is the transposition of Western-made categories to African societies, or the comparison of societies using standardized indicators. Development economics has therefore encountered great criticism from other disciplines, which see it as reductionist, and as based on evolutionism, a Western prism, and a commercial or utilitarian view of behaviors.

Anthropology and the Critique of Development Economics

Anthropology and the Critique of Economics

Unlike former economic analyses, the anthropological process aims to identify the particular and the specific in the institutions of various societies: to open the black box of supposedly informal relationships and regulations. Fieldwork is localized and territorialized (bottom up). It seeks to take into account the representations and meanings of activities, focusing on the qualitative. Anthropology can basically be defined as “the rendering of interaction situations through stakeholder categories” (Baré 2001, 95). It is the science of the distant and predominantly rural locality.

Historically, ethnology and anthropology, created in Western societies, have sought to show how economists have a naïve anthropology, and an essentialist iconology and outlook. In some cases, they see the other as an inverse image of the self (the *Homo traditionnalis* Friday contrasts the *Homo*

economicus Robinson).² In other cases, they represent the other as behind in development terms. Classical economics and Marx return to Morgan's evolutionism, looking to Greece and Rome and distinguishing between savage, barbarian, and civilized states. Economists may also represent the other as without economy or rationality. According to "neoclassical economics" (Menger 1976), utilitarianism is specific to market societies alone. *Economizing attitudes* are based on the specific value structures of the market economy. The dominant principles are different in *backward*, (*zurückgeblieben*), uncivilized (*unzivilisiert*), or undeveloped (*unentwickelt*) nonmarket economies.

Paradoxically, this dichotomy between cold societies and hot societies, or traditional societies and modern societies, recurs widely in functionalist (Malinowski 1970) or structuralist (Lévi-Strauss 1958) social anthropology, which considers that anthropology concerns nonmarket societies. In cold societies, analyzed in an ahistorical and abstract fashion, kinship has an operational value comparable to that of market exchange in hot or entropic societies (Lévi-Strauss 1958). The aim is to reveal the syntax of societies and the significant relationships that give them meaning. Cultural relativism almost forbids comparison between societies. In an essentialist and ahistorical outlook, anthropology and economics are each given their own terrain. The works see "primitive, primary, exhaustive, other" societies as external to economics, institutional comparisons, and the development question.

Today, we are again in danger of creating a reversed image through the diametric oppositions and essentialist perspectives of antiutilitarian currents (Mauss 1923). In such perspectives, Africa is seen as the universe of solidarity and community, in contrast to utilitarianism and individualism. *Homo donator* is opposed to *Homo economicus*, and social bonds to material goods. This discourse of radical otherness is countered by an Afrocentric African discourse, characterized by closed identity and an ethnonationalist discourse that favors particularism and denies white men the right to construct a discourse on Africa. It seems that the battle for decolonization is fought on the field of categories and minds.

The Critical Historical Anthropology of Development

Several anthropological works nevertheless attempt to understand the sociopolitical dynamics at hand, compare institutional configurations, and take into account the violence of history. They do so by analyzing complex, ambiguous, and changing situations which invalidate any essentialist view of African people. According to political and historical anthropology, colonial situations, with their internal and external dynamics, are the result of the ongoing transformations

2. See Quesnay's Inca or Chinaman, Smith's hunter, James Mill's Indian, or Say's savage.

of so-called exotic societies. This invalidates any essentialist view of societies. Similarly, according to Althabe (1973), “traditions” such as possession dances are merely escapes into the imaginary world, in the face of postcolonial oppressions. These approaches are useful, because they historicize societies and employ a dynamic approach. However, they largely ignore the economic field and the ways in which African economies fit into the world economy.

Abortive Attempts at an Economic Anthropology Integrating Development

Economic anthropology can be divided according to Godelier’s (1974) three schools: the formalist school based on the universality of economic calculation, the substantive school based on an institutionalized process (Polanyi 1957), and the structural Marxist school. The latter (Terray 1969; Rey 1973; Meillassoux 1975) breaks with the Marxian evolutionist view. According to the Althusserian analysis in terms of the articulation of modes of production, the capitalist mode of production is ultimately decisive, but not dominant. The meaning of a single rule or institution (for example the dowry) differs according to the mode of production. The monetary dowry, paid by Malawi migrants employed in South African mines, is thus used to buy prestige goods such as cattle (sacrificed at festivals), which increase powers and multiply connections, to the deficit of goods. Employees within capitalist relationships are also juniors within lineage or domestic relationships, and they participate in the accumulation of prestige goods. Today, this critical approach to the dualism of development economics has been largely abandoned. The categories of modes of production put lineage, domestic, or tributary systems on an equal footing with global capitalism. Historical materialism ignores the meanings and value systems of actions, reducing them to mere ideologies.

Of the economic anthropology works integrating development, several attempt to connect the anthropological and economic approaches, to analyze African societies, and to establish development projects. In France, the analyses of sectors begun by the country’s society for economic and social development research (Société d’études de développement économique et social, or SEDES) use the effects approach. They have served as a basis for the methodology adopted by the assessments bureau of the ministry of cooperation (Claude Freud), with experts on secondment from research bureaus and organizations, such as G. Duruflé, J.-M. Funel, J. Richard, and P. Thenevin (Fabre, Duruflé and Young 1988). These assessments have associated stakeholder strategies with the technical and institutional constraints of development projects and structural adjustment policies. NGOs (IRAM) and the INSEE overseas scientific and technical research organization ORSTOM (under the initiative of Nicolai [1984], with researchers such as Couty and Gastellu) have sought to combine

the different approaches. The AMIRA³ group (Winter 2010) thus reframed the categories of national compatibility in light of anthropological categories. This made it possible to reconsider the household or productive unit category. Gastellu (1979) showed that units of consumption, production, distribution, and accumulation differ. Our fieldwork on small commercial production and the popular urban economy showed how the insertion of activities in market relationships could only be understood in relation to their dual insertion in family and social networks, and in dependency relationships with the so-called modern economy. Antananarivo's small producers are therefore inserted in the market, in terms of access to credit, purchased inputs, customer purchase power and its volatility, competition, and the need for money to repay lenders and buy what they require. However, they also have multiple kinds of relationships (professional, family, and social), and use social networks. Sometimes, they have accumulation logics in terms of land and cattle, in order to improve their social status in their home rural area. Highly unstable markets make production units reliant on social and family networks (apprentices, free family help, lending of adolescents, and former captives), and/or lead them to practice polyactivity, making them resilient and flexible (Hugon 1976).

These attempts, whatever their goals, have been abandoned for political and nonmethodological reasons, in favor of standardized approaches involving the informal sector, poverty indicators, and assessment of projects in terms of reference prices.

An Anthropology of Development Projects

The project anthropology applied to (or of) development has now largely moved away from the structural Marxist approach that focuses on precapitalist societies and their connection with the capitalist mode of production. In the works of Chauveau (1981-1982), J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (1995) and J.-F. Baré (2001), it has a political and organizational dimension, which studies the interaction between the developed and the developer, or the evaluator and the evaluated. It has integrated the contributions of transactional and strategic analyses, and even of neoinstitutionalism, the sociology of antistructuralists, and the works of Michel Foucault. It is in line with a new empirical and microfocused approach in Anglo-Saxon tradition (Ferguson 1990; Grillo and Rew 1985), but also draws on Bourdieu's field theory. It is a political microsociology of actions

3. This initially stood for *Amélioration des méthodes d'investigation en milieu rural africain* (Improvement of investigation methods in rural Africa). The meanings of the initials "I" and the "A" were later extended, to give *Amélioration des méthodes d'investigation en milieux informels et ruraux d'Afrique, Asie et Amérique latine* (Improvement of informal investigation methods in rural Africa, Asia and Latin America). AMIRA included participants from INSEE, ORSTOM, and the ministry of cooperation.

and development, in which the project is the central figure. Development is a term and a local category borne by one of the actors or interlocutors, but it is not a concept to be tested or refuted. It is a dialectical process between developers and the developed, and is therefore not subject to any normative definition. Olivier de Sardan (1995, 7) defines it as “the set of social processes initiated by proactive operations to transform a social environment, undertaken by institutions or agents outside of this environment, but who seek to mobilize it, and based on an attempt to transplant resources and/or techniques, and/or knowledge.” According to Le Meur (2008, 10), “like constructivism, development simultaneously produces a world and knowledge about it, according to a logic that greatly resembles the colonial logic.” The development project is an “arena in which stereotypical groups with resources, objectives, and visions of a differentiated world confront one another and negotiate” (Bako-Arifari and Le Meur 2001, 134). It is defined by a social space (field or arena), which is a site for confrontation, negotiation, or alliances between actors possessing unequal resources and motivated by specific interests, norms, and values. Faced with the technical package, and with the knowledge and powers of the dominant stakeholders (for example development experts), the “dominated” stakeholders base their action principles on strategy, diversion, and reinterpretation (Copans 2007, Ferguson 1990, Olivier de Sardan 1995). The main emphasis is on the actors, their practices, their representations, and their strategies or techniques for bypassing the rules. The existence of projects undertaken by developmental stakeholders and institutions makes a developmental anthropology possible. There is therefore a desire to break with a macro- and normative outlook in terms of modernization, and with a holist perception of an overall social phenomenon. In the words of Olivier de Sardan (1995, 17), “a science or anthropology of social change and development is simultaneously a political anthropology, a sociology of organizations, an economic anthropology, a sociology of networks, and an anthropology of representations and systems of meaning.”

This approach, which returns to local stakeholders and their techniques, has the advantage of avoiding a top-down and normative approach based on developmentalist projects led by states or developer-lenders. It plays a vital role concerning developmental institutions, by revealing the reasons for the failure of projects by developmentalist actors, and by showing the political centrality of a supposedly politically neutral economic project.⁴ It is less well adapted to understanding the endogenous processes of economic development that can be observed in Asian, Latin American, or African societies. It does less to analyze how hegemonic relationships lead norms to be internalized and the developed to modify their aspirations. It clearly aims to combine the local and global levels, while also bringing in the political level. Nevertheless, it has little to say about the economic regimes (of rent and accumulation) and political regimes (authoritarian or totalitarian) within which the agents implement their projects and strategies.

4. See in particular Ferguson’s pioneering work in Lesotho, Africa.

Towards an Economic Anthropology of Development?

The Foundations of an Economic Anthropology of Development

What, today, can be the underlying principles for reconstructing an economic anthropology of development? Such an ambitious project must operate on three levels.

At the local level, it must take into account the situated rationalities of stakeholders. Societies are built upon the distinction between inalienable heritages and alienable capitals, goods, and services. The former have a value, but no price. They are based on transmission and kinship. Consequently, human heritages, sacred objects, and prestige goods cannot be exchanged. The latter are commodities, goods, or services which can circulate through onerous exchange (as merchandise), either via domestic transactions or public offerings and counterofferings (therefore having no price). The commoditization characterized by the extension of inalienable heritages (desecration of the sacred, sale of heritages, and the patentability of living organisms) has little to do with the commoditization linked to the onerous nature of the circulation of goods and services. Instead, it is based on circulation, alliances, and exchange (Appadurai 1986; Warnier 2009). Societies are made up of social groups, classes, clans, ethnic groups, and lineages with asymmetric power relationships. Economic agents are situated and also have asymmetric powers. In localized relationships, there is asymmetry between the young and the old, men and women, and masters and dependents. In market relationships, there are more globalized and commercial asymmetries between capitalists and workers, landowners and rent payers, and corrupters and the corrupted. The actors are socially embedded; they fit into networks through power from social connections or “social capital” (Granovetter 1985). It is not only a question of multiple norms, values, and interests of endogenous and exogenous players, but also of the way in which socioeconomic dynamics lead to a change in points of reference, and ultimately to the internalization of those of the hegemonic actors. Stakeholders thus have multiple reference points and marks of identity.

On a global level, a question already posed by Lévi-Strauss is relevant: the question of globalization, standardization, instantaneous information, market expansion, commoditization, and the destruction that yields capitalist innovation. Societies can only be understood through combined analysis of their internal and external dynamics. Historically, the commodity logic came to Africa through long-distance trade and the slave trade, then through colonial control favoring financial taxes and commoditization. Today, it comes through globalization, driven by the dominant public and private stakeholders, who act within a universe of unequal power relationships. African economies are simultaneously peripheral, dependent, open, and integrated within globalization. For most stakeholders, global prices apply (foodstuffs and exported primary

produce). Historically, African societies are open and globalized, despite the fact that they are not globalist in many domains (Ki Zerbo 2003). The impact of the global financial crisis serves as a reminder that crises can spread through commercial, financial, and production channels, or through prices.

At an intermediary level, development projects are clearly related to a confrontation between systems of representation and conflicts between stakeholder objectives. They can be analyzed in terms of value chains, and production and consumption processes. It is possible to evaluate results using total-factor productivity, the Gini index, ecological impact, multiplier effects, and sectoral interdependency. Empirical moderation and disproof tests can also be used. It is also important to make links between the institutions, rules, stakes, and resources that underlie arrangements (“a set of rules and behaviors which govern the actions and relationships between agents”) and the institutional systems brought about by power relationships. Institutions can be defined in terms of efficiency in reducing transaction costs, or in terms of uncertainty. They are also the result of social relationships, conflicts, and compromises. They can be defined as “a collective action of constraint or liberation, and an extension of individual action.” A historical institutionalist approach should study the conflicts, battles, and counterpowers. It should analyze why, in a given context, there are many institutions, and why certain institutions are dominant. Institutions are not only collective practices, but also cognitive and moral frameworks, in which individual thoughts develop. But which are the important institutions? Which rhythms and sequences of institutional transformation follow observable trajectories?

The Methodological and Epistemological Challenges: The Cotton-Sector Example

We will illustrate this methodological process using the example of cotton sectors in Africa. This increased complexity requires a combination of three approaches: the micro- or local approach starting with the actors, their situated rationalities and their strategies, the global approach of the international political economics which studies the stakeholders’ market powers and the impact of unfair and imperfect competition, and the mesoeconomic approach in terms of power flows and relationships involving large public organizations and international private organizations. We will then move on to a closer examination, in which we will associate the social structures and the stakeholder strategies through institutional mediations, distinguishing the collective phenomena (values, norms, and institutions), the actions, the motives, and their operating methods.

On a microlevel, researchers encounter only ambivalent categories and stakeholder practices, which are both integrated in the market and involved in multiple social relationship networks. Particularly in the urban environment, there is greater individuation of behaviors (Marie 1999), and a relative emancipation

of the young from social and cultural reference points. Stakeholder logics are situated and complex. It is necessary to go beyond the methodological individualism/holism debate, the subjectivity of rational individuals, and the effects of structures without activity or stakeholder intentionality. Holindividualism⁵ is a middle ground between the actor and the system, or between behaviors and structures (Nicolai 1984). The institutions play a mediating role. The complex logic requires a combination of constructivism (C, based on socialized interactions with nature and culture), subjectivism (S, not independent from the individual); and phenomenology (P, operating within representations of reality) (Le Moigne 1995). A person is a socialized being possessing reason, power, morality, and responsibility, and acting under the eyes of the other. Stakeholders possess asymmetrical information and power, and act within a context of risk or uncertainty. For most rural Africans, trade-offs between liquidity or reversibility and uncertainty lead to routine behaviors. These behaviors are more than just short-term innovations aiming to minimize risk, and favoring polyactivity and extensiveness. The tight constraints that prevent a utilitarian vision come together with individualized strategies, particularly exit-option ones.

It is therefore necessary to take into account the plurality of stakeholders involved in the cotton sector (from direct producers, to collectors, distributors, transporters, industrialists, and exporters), as well as the fact that certain stakeholders act beyond the boundaries of the sector. It is necessary to identify the multiple objective stakeholder motives within the sector: maximizing profits, minimizing risks, food security, and solidarity. Within individual sectors, multiple actors (not just farming communities) are involved. Their situations differ in terms of power, information, and objectives. In order to understand these cotton-farming behaviors, it is necessary to analyze family structures, multiple property rights, and social statuses. Thus, cotton appears as a commercial or even exogenous crop, within a structured social system. However, it is also a commodity with a role in food security via associated revenues and products; stakeholders respond to price fluctuations through income effects, or through positive elasticity of the supply (and sometimes, as in Mali, by striking if prices are too low). They choose between extensive farming, which reduces risk and allows reversibility of production (option value), and intensive farming, which requires a stable environment and increased certainty. Thus, cotton farmers within a family-agriculture context engage in pluriactivity and generally prioritize food security. They work within social systems that are characterized by social stratifications and within representation systems that deviate from *homo economicus*.

At the other end of the spectrum is the upstream sector, governed by logics of product globalization and competition (price and quality), by the stakes of subsidies, state policies, and change policies, and by the market powers of the dominant actors. International markets are therefore overreactive, because

5. Holindividualism aims to combine the holism of collective structures and determinants with the individualism of behaviors and strategies.

of fluctuations in exported surplus, imports by major consumer countries like China, speculative stockpiling, and investment of the private or public pension funds of emerging countries. Heeding the signals of global markets can only lead to optimum investment if these prices express scarcity and are not manipulated. It cannot be considered that global prices balance supply and demand in the long term, giving producers the signs of a positive specialization. These arguments are not supported by analyses of political economics taking into account the power relationships between public and private powers at international level. With varying degrees of filtering, global prices determine internal prices for price takers.

The international cotton sector is one of imperfect competition. Global exchanges are almost 90% controlled by trading companies (sixteen multinational groups), in a context of asymmetrical information compared to producer countries. Cotton sales have long been regulated by international agreements. Until June 2005, Multifibre Arrangements and textile agreements regulated textile products and clothing, using per-country and per-product quotas. The cotton sector reveals international inequalities. The million Sahelian cotton farmers cultivate two to three hectares and are paid less than a dollar per day. They are in competition with the twenty-five thousand American cotton farmers (eight thousand of whom receive 90% of the four million dollars of subsidies) with a thousand hectares, but producing at 50% higher costs.

At an intermediary level, the mesosystem or sector allows us to connect the micro- and international levels, to understand the structure and workings of a field, to identify the space in which actors implement their strategies, to see where activities are optimized and powers expressed, to perceive institutional arrangements, and to relate structures to strategies. The mesosystem (Hugon 2005, 87) is

a structured set of goods transformations by stakeholder operations, of coordination methods (market prices, agreements, contracts, rules, and regulations), and of regulation methods (domestic, commercial, capitalist, and administrative). The implementation of strategies by the stakeholders (firms, public bodies, farming communities, and state authorities) in charge of the operations is characterized by regulation of the chain's operations. This is managed through negotiation between several stakeholders, or by a single stakeholder in a position of hegemony.

Analysis of the sector thus makes it particularly operational for African societies characterized not only by market failures, but also by failures to constitute markets (due to land production, work, or credit factors), and by states and rules failures.

Cotton sectors bring together agents who are connected by a set of hierarchical rules and contractual relationships that allow for collective cognitive systems. The operators establish rules and contracts, particularly concerning the distribution of value added within the sector. Certain operators play a leading role. The principal questions are: Do the sector's dynamics come from upstream

or downstream? Where are the bottlenecks? What are the strategic nodes and the optimization sites? Sectors can be studied in terms of efficiency, capacity to reduce transaction costs, or rules of play. From a functionalist and utilitarian perspective, institutions are the result of efficiency-based choices. They are decisive in the allocation of resources.

The organization into sectors, controlled by cotton companies, came close to a putting-out system, using subcontracts with associated transactions. The cotton companies in a position of monopoly combined prefinancing, access to inputs, safe markets, information, and knowledge creation. In such a situation, the home producer receives inputs, the product sale is guaranteed, and the differential between the price of seed cotton and the price of inputs includes the cost of credit. Consequently, in the past, the cotton sectors were centrally coordinated by the national state corporation and the French Democratic Confederation of Labor (Confédération française démocratique du travail, or CFDT). This management method corresponded to an institutional compromise between producers with guaranteed and stable revenues, the beneficiary state in terms of tax revenue and foreign exchange, the different stakeholders in the sector, and the dominant cotton company possessing a monopoly. This system was in accordance with the incomplete markets and the uncertain environment. However, it was protected from competition from newcomers, and relatively detached from global prices, leading to periodic deficits supplemented by French state financial aid.

The numerous institutional reforms attempted to open the sector to international competition, favor the competition objective, accept price signals from the global market, and privatize and disassemble the segments of the sector. The institutional compromises were replaced by contractual arrangements, leading (with the instability of global markets) to a highly unstable situation. The coordination methods became commercial and contractual, with limited or even negative effects in French-speaking Africa. The contractual relationships of near integration between producers, traders, and industrialists are particularly justified given that the products are perishable and costly to store, that the value per unit of weight and volume is high, that farming is annual, that the product is processed, that industrialists have fixed costs and need to regulate supply, and that the quality label is a decisive competitive factor.

In several Sahelian countries, the mesoeconomy is widely identified with the macroeconomy, because of the importance of cotton in GDP, and its contribution to agents' revenues, budgetary revenues, and foreign exchange. It is thought that the lives of twenty million people in western and central Africa depend on cotton. A producer feeds ten people with an average life expectancy of forty-eight years, and a literacy rate of 25%. The impact of global price volatility on producers aggravates income instability in the most general case of positive elasticity of supply in relation to prices. It can either increase saving where income is permanent, or more often reduce it, via ratchet effects on consumption. Given that food security is prioritized, price instability favors

extensive processes that allow decision reversibility. At the macroeconomic level, the rise in cotton prices and incomes leads to a rise in prices of products protected from the global market (nonexchangeables), to the deficit of other products that are open to international competition (exchangeables). This reduces economic competitiveness. Conversely, ratchet effects and irreversibility can occur in cases of depression. Consequently, the stabilization of prices reduces the volatility of export earnings. It therefore allows the disturbances and asymmetrical counterdisturbances to be neutralized, and the effects of difficult conditions to be minimized.



The universalism of economic categories is related to the globalization of financial markets and products, and the immediacy and standardization of information, but also to the need to manage scarce resources and meet the aspirations arising from the asymmetrical relationship with industrial societies. The agents also increasingly aspire to universal goods in terms of freedom and access to resources. Simultaneously, there is a strengthening of identity markers, and an increase in the particularism of religious and cultural reference points (linked to vulnerabilities, frustrations, or exclusions). This creates ambivalence on the part of actors who “have their feet on the palaver tree and their head in the Internet.” The local approach favored by anthropology only makes sense in relation to a more global political economy. The “modern” economy and institutions work in symbiosis with powers whose legitimacy goes far back in history. They most often follow a rent logic. The reality is hybrid and evulative, made up of destruction and restructuring, combinations with varying degrees of incompatibility, multiple reference points, conflict between evaluation systems, and the interplay of dominant and dominated stakeholders within an uncertain environment.

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APPENDIX
THE INSTITUTIONS OF DIFFERENT SOCIETIES

Human societies are characterized by certain universal institutions related to language, technology, demographic reproduction, the meaning given to life and death, the expression of power relationships, the management of conflicts and war, and the role of individuals in the social hierarchy. These include family, political, religious, and military authority, educational establishments and producers of symbols, or institutions that manage human relationships to nature. All societies have their own definition of the included and the excluded. However, the hierarchy between domestic, political, economic, symbolic, and natural orders varies between societies. The combinations between commodity, public, and community referents differ. Similarly, concepts of time, man's relationship to nature (anthropocentric or ecocentric), and meanings are not uniform. To varying degrees, human societies combine identity reference points and personalized relationships at local level, citizenship ties within the boundaries of nation-states, and contractual relationships involving individuals or transnational organizations. In Africa, the first stratum is dominant. The most predominant among the particular institutional traits of African societies is the low formalization of regulation systems (personalization versus detachment, nonlegal framework). It haunts the forms of the state (from authoritarian regimes to weak regimes or states), and of institutions (Hugon 2009b, Ould Aoudia and Meisel 2007).

THE FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE DOMINANT ORDERS
IN DIFFERENT SOCIETIES

Orders	Universal institutions	Role	Western modernity	Rent states	Segmental societies
Domestic	Families	Socialization, intergenerational demographic reproduction	Household, economic unit of exchange and heritage	Households, slaves or captives	Lineage, extended family, domestic prisoners
Politics	Instituted authorities	Violence legitimated by the vote; security, order, war	Nation-state, citizenship, democracy, human rights	Strong state, arbitrary, military, religious, rent regimes	Clans, ethnic groups, castes, factions
Economy	Units of production, distribution and consumption	Production, distribution, and consumption of riches	Capital, private property, commoditization, financialization	Money, market. Allocations/redistributions, contribution, rent	Personalized transactions, long-distance trade
Symbolic	Educational, religious, and cultural institutions	Meaning, language, communication, culture	Individual freedoms, effectiveness, forward projection, new ICT	Religious, God, glory of the prince	Sanctification, ancestors, reproduction, "animism" (orality and rurality)
Nature	Institutions related to man's relationship with nature	Reproduction of ecosystems, control of nature	Nature <i>res nullius</i> , anthropocentric, private property rights, commoditization	State property. Access to resources by conquest	Ecocentric, rules of reproduction, various appropriation methods

ABSTRACT

Economics and anthropology as Africanist social sciences have undergone a separate evolution. – Economics is mainly interested in capitalism and Western societies and mobilize universalist concepts. Ethnology or anthropology on the other hand study more traditional, “primitive” or exotic societies. However the two meet and confront each other when they study development. Firstly, this article recalls the historical oppositions between the economic and the anthropological points of view. Secondly, it presents some of the methodological and epistemological stakes of economic development anthropology. Lastly, this paper illustrates this debate by examining the case of chain value within the overall economic process of cotton production and exchange.

RÉSUMÉ

Les disciplines économiques et anthropologiques, notamment africanistes, ont été généralement caractérisées par des exclusions et des cloisonnements. – L'économie s'intéresse principalement aux sociétés marchandes et capitalistes occidentales et mobilise des catégories à vocation universelle alors que l'ethnologie ou l'anthropologie prennent pour champ les sociétés « primitives » exotiques ou premières, et privilégient les catégories et représentations des acteurs. Le champ du développement a été un lieu de rencontre obligé des deux disciplines. L'économie a cherché à aborder les sociétés non occidentales et l'anthropologie a été confrontée aux projets de développement. Cet article rappelle les oppositions historiques entre les éclairages économiques et anthropologiques avant de présenter certains enjeux méthodologiques et épistémologiques d'une anthropologie économique du développement en l'illustrant par la filière coton.

Keywords/*Mots-clés* : anthropology, development, economy, involution, chain value, market, meso system, globalization, rationality/*anthropologie, développement, économie, enveloppement, filière, marché, mésosystème, mondialisation, rationalité.*