

AAPS, African Political Science and Globalisation: Which Way Forward?*

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Revisiting the AAPS Vision: The Question of Relevance

The Biennial Congress of AAPS has become, to put it figuratively, an important “rites of passage”, whose celebration is always and necessarily an opportunity to pay tribute to the founding members of AAPS, particularly for their vision and for the solid foundation they laid for constitutional succession and accommodation, through the deliberate design of a regionally-based organization and structure. This has not been without its weaknesses and imperfections but it has provided the constructive and progressive durability in which is captured the essential Pan-Africanist and Afrocentric mission and activist engagement which is called for by the inherent logic of their vision of AAPS.

As we face the onset of the next millennium, in a political era marked by neoliberal hegemony, parading itself as globalization, we need to take stock and raise the issue of relevance within this new economic and political context. This is why I have chosen, **AAPS, African Political Science & Globalization: Which Way Forward?** as the theme of this short address.

The Onset of the African Crisis

AAPS was founded at a time when political science and the other social sciences were emerging as departments in their own right in the organization of academic programmes in African universities. It was also a time when the bright hopes of African independence had begun to fritter away and fade, giving rise to the revolution of rising expectations, to anxiety, to gloom and to disappointment, as the fragility of the substructure of the postcolonial African state became manifest and as the institutions of the state began

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to drift, with constitutionalism or limited rule replaced by authoritarian and personal rule.

The political landscape at the time, together with the configuration of social forces in contention on the continent, was beclouded by the imperatives of the cold war and the wars of liberation in southern Africa. What ultimately came to be described as the African crisis was in retrospect the manifestation of the inexorable unfolding of historically deep-rooted contradictions set in motion by the nature of the continent's incorporation into the wider world system.

Paradigmatic Challenge to Mainstream Social Science

Mainstream western social science generally and political science in particular, had looked at African society and politics from methodological prisms and theoretical perspectives which were inadequate to grasp the dialectics of political processes and dysfunctionalities on the continent and which, in any case, were later forcefully challenged, and their inherent ideological structure and biases exposed by more radical, though no less Eurocentric paradigms in the form of Marxist political economy and the underdevelopment school.

This incipient crisis in the character and direction of the African state and in expatriate Africanist intellectual confrontations with it, provided the occasion and the challenge for the founding of AAPS. It is significant, from this point of view, that Dar es Salaam, which was very much at the core of this intellectual ferment on the continent, provided the incubative environment for the nurture of the idea and indeed for the emergence of AAPS.

The Character of African Political Science

It is within this historical context that the emergent AAPS' vision of a relevant African political science, of its founding members' understanding of the relationship between politics and science, in this case political science, must be viewed. A little bit must be said about this, if only to provide the intellectual or cultural history against which to situate the way forward for African political science.

In exploring this intellectual history, one must start from AAPS' characterization of political science in Africa. To do this, a number of salient factors must be taken into account. First, there is the diffuse and ambiguous nature of the subject in Francophone African universities, in the sense of its not being taught in specifically designated departments of political science. Its existence was peripherally located on the margins of law (public and administrative law, constitutional law and jurisprudence), history and philosophy and public administration, for example. Secondly, by the 1960s and early 1970s, political science had barely begun to emerge as a disciplinary

department in its own right in Angolophone African universities when AAPS was founded.

Third, there was the suspicious ambivalence or in many cases outright hostility of African governments to the discipline. They tended to view political science as irrelevant to the development process at best and, at worst, as posing a threat to them in virtue of its assumed subversive or revolutionary subject-matter. For these reasons, among others, AAPS, in defining its identity and the spread of its membership, had no choice but to view political science in a broad sociological sense as the study of society and of its variegate and intersecting institutions, including but not limited to the machinery of government. This enabled AAPS to open up its membership not only to academic political scientists but also to other social scientists, lawyers and historians.

In this way, and true to its Pan-Africanist, if continental outlook, AAPS was at its initial stages able to straddle the different intellectual traditions and paternity of political science in francophone, anglophone and Arab Africa. In other words, without losing the specificity of political science, as a discipline in its own right, AAPS in its early years was impelled to open its doors to non-political scientists and to take advantage of this "open door" policy in recruiting its membership and popularising its mission across different intellectual traditions on the continent.

Multidisciplinarity and Development

But this was not primarily a strategic ploy. More fundamentally, the centrality of politics, as the contestation or struggle over the control of state power and, therefore, over the allocative and distributive direction of state policies and of social surplus, dictated a multidisciplinary approach to development, an imperative underscored by the complex and multifaceted nature of the emergent crisis of the postcolonial African State.

For AAPS, therefore, African political science, as opposed to political science in Africa, might as well be characterised as the political science, which in the circumstances would be equivalent to the social sciences. This fusion by AAPS of African political science with the other social sciences and with law and the humanities is, in my opinion, a child of the historical circumstance and the intellectual imperative which dictated the birth of AAPS.

This flexibility, which also enabled AAPS to open its doors to non-academic grassroots-based social activists, has created and continues to create identity problems for it, while enabling it to engage in fruitful co-operation and healthy, if sometimes fractious competition with continental or regional-based social science organizations.

But in terms of the relationship between politics and science, the AAPS' emphasis on multidisciplinarity, including transdisciplinarity, the unity of

all disciplines across the boundaries of established networks of closely related disciplines, was an important departure in the early 70s from the regnant notion that problems of African development were reducible to economic ones and the design of development plans, for which only economics and academic economists, especially development economists and econometricians and statisticians among them, could provide solutions.

This narrow and non-dialectical economic view of development, which assumed that the legal and political infrastructures of the African state were not problematic and were unrelated to the underlying material forces in state and society, had enabled economists to move closer to governments as advisers. In this way, the advantage and exciting possibilities of multidisciplinary and of transdisciplinarity or consilience, and particularly of teamwork across common or related disciplinary boundaries were missed, if not lost.

If AAPS emphasised multidisciplinary of, and in, the social science from its beginnings, it was an activist, critical and progressive multidisciplinary which, drawing on, while also trying to localise or indigenise Marxist political economy, in the manner advocated by Frantz Fanon, for example, was grounded in dialectical materialism as a tool for the reinterpretation of African politics and society. To underline the point: multidisciplinary so conceived means that the political or social sciences constitute a method of criticism and of teaching, of social investigation and research, whose ultimate objective is emancipatory social transformation.

All this might appear debatable, a simplification of a much more complex intellectual evolution. But, then, we simplify to illuminate a portion of what is always and necessarily a social reality. AAPS membership was at its inception and has always been a polygot of different and, sometimes, antagonistic intellectual tendencies. However, my concern here is simply to characterize, to give meaning to one tendency, albeit a dominant or mainstream one in AAPS since its inception, regarding the scope and understanding of what constitutes or should constitute African political science, given the African cultural experience, as opposed to political science as such, and of political science in Africa as an expatriate-driven intellectual activity.

Politics and Science

It is this sense of the juxtaposition and indeed confrontation of an African political science with political science as such, but more especially with political science in Africa that the vision and mission of AAPS' founding members come out in bold relief, providing an indication of their conception of the relationship between politics and science.

This conception views science as an instrument of politics, charting out the contours, the framework for and designing autonomously-grounded

self-development, seeking to remove and transcend the historically imposed limitations of inherited political structures and institutions, in effect acting as a social force for liberation and self-expression. On this view, the role of science is to be as much a reflection as a moulder, shaper of society, able to influence and provide it with an ideological basis and, arising from this, transformational laws.

The AAPS' mission essentially, even primarily grew out of, or perhaps should be located within a long tradition of critical African and Pan-Africanist intellectual thought, reflected in the writings of William duBois, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Cheik Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Amilcar Cabral, among others in opposition to colonial rule and imperialism, their presuppositions and their inherent logic of imposition and their denial of Africa's contribution to, and place within universality.

Science is part of the cultural superstructure of colonialism as a form of imperialist domination. AAPS' rejection of mainstream or orthodox western social science, represented by structural-functionalism, institutionalism and pluralism, in its application to Africa is part of the wider Afrocentric intellectual movement to disengage from this domination and to redefine and expand the methodological and substantive scope and breadth of science, properly understood.

Social Science and African Development

A major contribution of AAPS was to heighten consciousness among African social scientists of the need to redefine the role of (social) science in its application to Africa. The prevalent conception was of science as an agent or catalyst of development in Africa. But it was a development conceptualised as a particular type of change reflected in capitalist industrialization and the replication of institutions characteristic of western capitalist industrial societies. In this sense, African societies were expected to be "follower-societies", and the role of the social science was assumed, even defined to be that of facilitating this imitative or replicative process. It was this conception of the role of social science in its application to development that Claude Ake characterised as "social science as imperialism".

AAPS was in the forefront of the rejection of this form of intellectual imperialism in globalised social sciences. More importantly, AAPS posed unambiguously the imperative need for an alternative Afrocentric social science which was not an imitation or appendage of the dominant or mainstream western social science. The details and specificities of this rejection need not detain us here, other than to point out that its positive dimensions were grounded in a determination to tap on the paradigmatic shifts in globalised social sciences in the late 1960s and 1970s which saw and impelled

considerable changes and modifications in the epistemological and methodological preoccupations and directions of the social sciences.

AAPS' instrumentalist mission, in the midst of this intellectual tumult, was to bring an African agenda to bear on these paradigm shifts and to find appropriate concepts and tools for understanding, explaining and unscrambling African politics, society and development. But the AAPS' concern was also to do this by linking research with social action, theory with praxis, in such a way as to stipulate the conditions for democracy in Africa, arising out of the lived experiences of African peoples themselves. This explains AAPS' social activism and its principled opposition to anti-democratic forces and authoritarian regimes on the continent.

African Political Science and Globalization

In terms of the theme of this biennial conference of AAPS, Globalization, Democracy and Development, it is appropriate to pull together the various strands of my address so far and especially to indicate their pertinence to the biennial conference theme. Globalization is a mystifying metaphor for the New Age of Imperialism. Like the imperialisms that preceded it, and in the context of which AAPS was born, globalization involves the "transnationalization" not only of capital but also, and more surreptitiously, of its dominant cultural and social ideas from what Lewis Feuer has described as the "most advancing society" to "follower-societies", like ours.

The transnationalization of the social sciences must be seen in this context and the AAPS' foundation vision and mission, as I have tried to characterise them above, constitute an integral part of the radical and progressive African effort to confront and contain this critical cultural apparatus of imperialism. For AAPS, therefore, globalization, in whatever form it manifests itself, and preeminently because of its economic driving force and the social contradictions it generates, is inherently problematic for the prospects for democracy and development in Africa.

AAPS has posed and continues to pose the following questions: **Globalization for what and for whom? Democracy for what and for whom? Development for what and for whom?** I think our intellectual effort and output in the almost three decades since AAPS was founded have been preoccupied with addressing these questions, in different ways and with varying results.

At the heart of these questions are issues relating to the character of the African state and Africa's political economy, the nature of the world system and of African international relations, and how it has constrained and continues to constrain the terrain of choices open to African countries as they seek to democratise and develop. We have also been concerned with the configuration of social forces, especially ethnicity and religion, and (grass-

roots-based and grassroots-propelled) social movements in the African state and how this configuration has shaped or influenced the distributive and allocative functions of the state.

In all this, our focus has been on **macropolitics** to the neglect of **micropolitics and political theory and public policy analysis**. This is probably due to our fascination with the state and, especially the centre as our basic unit of analysis. Much of our work on macropolitics has, of course, and as is to be expected, been *disputatious, dividing us into different camps*, depending on our conceptual and methodological compasses and paradigms.

Yet much of this has also been illuminatingly rich and refreshing in bringing new perspectives and insights to bear on the nature of the following: class and class formation and how this is linked to the process of accumulation through control of and access to the state; the character of ethnic formations and their use by political entrepreneurs to advance their class interests; the impact of the external world and, especially of the international financial institutions and world trade regimes on our domestic political economies and social processes; issues of constitutionalism and the limiting structural and psychocultural constraints on democratisation; social (and liberation) movements and the continuing struggle to expand the democratic space; the economic and political dimensions of internal and cross-national wars; civil-military relations, and the *conditions for militarisation and demilitarisation*, and policy studies in the area of food security, to name a few of such areas where much that is illuminating, if provocatively so, has been done.

Much remains to be done to clear conceptual underbushes, to advance the methodological sophistication of our research and teaching effort and through all of these to make what I have called the political sciences truly global. This is the challenge of globalization, properly understood as a **universalizing or universalisational** process of reciprocity and mutuality in global social relations of production, democracy and development for Africa and for AAPS.

In what remains of this address, I shall focus more specifically, albeit briefly, on some of the issues I think AAPS and African political science should be preoccupied with as the dawn of the next millennium beckons us on to give concrete expression to our social relevance through our practical professional contribution, as intellectuals, to what is now clearly the timeless and enduring preeminent **human predicament**, the eternal struggle for democracy and collective self-development.

What is Globalization? Some Questions

First, we must seek to clarify what we understand by globalization? What is its basic character? Has it ushered in a New Age of Imperialism, and if so,

in what sense(s)? What are the different forms it assumes? How do we explain it – what has given rise to it and what are its likely trajectories? What forces shape and propel it? What is the role of the world financial markets and financial institutions, of multinational corporations and of their home countries in this respect? How are these forces organised to advance the cause of globalization?

What has been its impact on Africa – on social processes and production relations and on the domestic politics and foreign policies, including the international trade and external financial relations of the African state? What should be the African response to it – does it require new forms and new structures of inter-state relations and regional cooperation on the continent?

Above all, we need a theory of globalization which locates it within the current resurgence of neoliberalism as an ideology of capitalist development on a world scale. We cannot take it for granted that it is necessarily a positive force for African development. This is more so since globalization has deepened and reinforced existing asymmetries in Africa's relations with the industrialised world. We, therefore, need to examine closely the core market assumptions of neoliberalism and determine its relevance for Africa.

Neoliberalism, Globalization and African Politics

In its application to the study of African politics, neoliberalism finds expression in what has been called the new political economy or rational choice theory. Its importance has been primarily based on its analysis of the institutional weaknesses that have contributed to the poor performance of the postcolonial African state. It attributes the cause of this poor performance to the primacy accorded social needs over individual choice and hypothesizes that enhanced economic performance and hence development were best guaranteed by allowing unfettered play to market forces and correspondingly reducing the scope of state interventionism.

The convergence of globalization and neoliberalism requires, in other words, a redefinition or reconceptualization of our notion of the state. Do we require a new theory of sovereignty and of citizenship? And if so, does this not call for a new concept of the African state? Is there also need to reorganise and restructure the state in the face of pressures and processes generated by globalization, and indeed along the minimalist directions advanced by neoliberalism? What would be the implications of such a redefinition and reorganization for inter-state relations and for regional cooperation in Africa?

As for neoliberalism, is it general theory of political development or is it simply another eurocentric attempt to project and universalise or globalise the developmental experience of the west? What theoretically grounded

counter-arguments are available against the pressures mounted on African countries to pull back the state and restructure their political economies, through the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, economic liberalisation and civil service reforms? What is the relationship between the current structure of the world system and contemporary globalization?

How does it affect the possibilities for restructuring the world order to ensure income redistribution and equity in the allocation and use of the resources of the world? Indeed, is globalization a useful analytic tool for posing questions of national and global income redistribution and allocative equity?

This is only a limited shopping list of the questions we must pose in exploring and analysing the impact of globalization on the African state. We must pose these questions because of the strong ideological push to sell globalization as an objective, inexorably positive force for world development. We must confront and discuss it with the same critical and iconoclastic dialectical methodology we used to x-ray the ideology of developmentalism as a form of western domination. Globalization might well be another form of the diffusionist thesis which denies the possibilities for autonomous selfdevelopment in Africa by viewing African societies as follower-societies, with no choice but to imitate the developmental path of the industrialised world.

The Limitations of Neoliberalism

By placing emphasis on the allocative efficiency of market forces and their unfettered play, neoliberalism deliberately overlooks market imperfections and the significant role that the state must necessarily play through macroeconomic policies and political regulation, especially when the so-called market policies conflict with social goals that must remain the responsibility of the state and of the African state in particular, given the reality of underdevelopment. To advocate the minimalist state in Africa, without addressing the issue of market imperfections on a global scale, is to expose Africa to the vagaries of the world market and make it vulnerable to external manipulation.

The institutional weaknesses and failure of the African state which neoliberalism has identified are due as much to its overextended stretch as to its vulnerability to the market imperfections of the world system. Policy must be addressed towards removing those imperfections and reforming the world system.

Secondly, and with respect to globalization and democracy in Africa, there is need to focus more critically on neoliberalism's and rational choice assumptions on democracy. My argument has always been that neoliberal-

ism has conflated the problem of democracy in Africa with that of liberal democracy and its institutions. It has failed to address the design and political problem that ethnicity, in the form of the assertion of ethnic group rights in a situation of competitive electoral politics, poses for the simple majoritarian principle of "winners-take-all" in liberal democracy, a principle whose adoption in many African countries has tended to turn competitive electoral politics into virtual warfare in which the objective is to annihilate one's political enemies.

If we are to address the problem that ethnicity continues to pose for democracy in Africa, and which the simple majoritarian principle poses for healthy competitive electoral politics we must look for other models of democracy, with in-built consociational principles to protect ethnic (minority) interests and rights, than liberal democratic ones. There is also need to go beyond the focus of neoliberalism on internal or domestic market distortions that stifle individual electoral choices, important as such a focus is, to an analysis of how the externally-driven distortions arising out of the imperfections of the world system affect and constrain the prospects for democracy in Africa.

Which Way Forward?

In conclusion, the way forward for African political science and for AAPS is to strengthen and consolidate the tradition of critical Afrocentric social science and intellectual activism which the founding members envisioned almost thirty years ago. We must continue to combine our role as intellectuals in the two Gramscian senses of traditional and organic or public intellectuals. This is a paternity we must hold on to firmly and which we must neither alienate nor compromise.

I have indicated the nature of the challenge of globalization, democracy and development for African political science in the context of this paternity. It remains for me to end this presidential address to reemphasise the need, in our work, for multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity and in doing so, to indicate some lacuna in our current approach to our vocation.

To move forward and to advance the cause of a globalized political science, properly understood, and more importantly to assist in the task of autocentered development in Africa through the adaptation of Africa's indigenous institutions to the problems of governance, we must utilise the methodological tools of political anthropology and micropolitical studies and the theoretical insights of social psychology, African philosophy and African political philosophy in our vocation as African political scientists.