

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology  
Department II

*Keith Hart*

**Jack Goody's Vision of World History and  
African Development Today**

*Goody Lecture 2011*



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

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## Jack Goody

Jack Goody was born near London in 1919. Formative experiences during the Second World War led him to switch from studies of literature to social anthropology. He undertook fieldwork in Northern Ghana during the last decade of British colonial rule and taught anthropology at Cambridge University alongside Meyer Fortes and Edmund Leach. Ghana remained important in Goody's work for some years after independence but, particularly after succeeding Fortes as William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology in 1972, he began to explore long-term historical contrasts between sub-Saharan African societies and those of Europe and Asia. Goody views the Old World as a unified entity since the urban revolution of the Bronze Age; numerous publications have highlighted developments in East Asia and criticised the eurocentric bias of Western historians and social theorists. His many books engage with productive systems, the transmission of property and class inequality in global history; with kinship, marriage and the "domestic domain"; with technologies of communication, especially writing, the transmission of myth and of knowledge generally; and with various realms of consumption, including cuisine and flowers. These fields are not approached in isolation but in their interconnections. Ethnographic insights are essential, but they are just one component of Goody's comparative, world-historical agenda. His best known works include *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962); *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (1971); *Production and Reproduction* (1976); *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977); *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983); *The Oriental, The Ancient and the Primitive* (1990); *The East in the West* (1996); *The Theft of History* (2006); *Renaissances: the one or the many?* (2010); *The Eurasian Miracle* (2010).

Goody's agenda, unique in contemporary anthropology, is one to which Department II at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology seeks to contribute. In an annual lecture series inaugurated in 2011, a distinguished scholar addresses pertinent themes for anthropology and related fields.

The first Goody lecture was given by Keith Hart on 1st June 2011.

*Keith Hart*

## **Jack Goody's Vision of World History and African Development Today\***

### *Part One Jack Goody's Vision*

In a short preface to *Production and Reproduction*, the first in his series of comparisons between Africa and Eurasia, Jack Goody (1976: ix–x) tells us that ethnography, the aspiration to write about another culture studied intensively through fieldwork, never defined his intellectual horizons. His subject has always been historical comparison and beyond that “the development of human culture”. He deliberately sets himself at odds with his greatest contemporary, Claude Lévi-Strauss, as being uninterested in binary opposition between the modern and the primitive. Rather he places himself as an actor in a historical period, coming of age in the Second World War, encountering the Eastern Mediterranean, escaping from a prison camp into the mountains of Abruzzo, entering Africa at the decisive moment of its anti-colonial revolution and in its epicentre, Ghana. With European empires collapsing everywhere, he rejects the eurocentric idea that the West is special, looking instead for forms of knowledge that are more truly universal, better suited to the new world society launched by the war.

As a former student of English literature, he knew something about medieval European society and culture. He wanted to connect a newly independent West Africa to the Islamic civilization he encountered briefly during the war. His subject is therefore the comparison of pre-industrial societies, past and

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\* I would like to thank Chris Hann for the chance to reflect here on the debt I owe to my teacher. I have covered some themes of this lecture more fully in Hart (2006a). The citations and footnotes provide a guide to my main sources for the intellectual history discussed in the first part, but they are less complete for my sketch of African development in the second. Padayachee (2010) is an up-to-date collection of essays on Africa's political economy.

present, an ethnographically informed juxtaposition of Africa, Europe and the Middle East. He stresses that this enquiry is an extension of his own personal experience, fuelled by social interaction and political engagement. The ultimate historical question is where human civilization is going, but the key lies in the similarity and divergence of regions with an agrarian past or present. Only a series of books could begin to address this question and this was the first of them. It is worth recalling its full title, *Production and Reproduction: a comparative study of the domestic domain*. The focus is on how human beings produce their livelihood within families and how this influences attempts to secure their future. But *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962) remains his key work. The three themes of the title – how we seek to transcend death materially and spiritually – come together in Goody’s preoccupation with writing itself, a project he launched with *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977).

The time from the Second World War until now has been extraordinary, a period when humanity formed world society as a single interactive network for the first time. This society is massively unequal and riddled with conflict, but now at last there is a universe of communications to give concrete expression to universal ideas. Future generations will want to study this emerging human society and they will look to us for antecedents; but they will be disappointed by the fragmented narrowness of our anthropological vision. For we have been slow to move beyond ethnography. Jack Goody, with Eric Wolf (1982) as his only serious contemporary rival, devised and carried out an anthropological project with a scale to match the world society being formed in his day. How does Goody’s project of historical comparison illuminate the world society emerging in our time? What is his vision of the development of human culture, past, present and future? My own answers are shaped by his, since he was my teacher, but I depart from him in some respects. Reproduction was always so.

World society has not been formed completely in our time nor does it lack antecedents; but think what the human condition was like in 1945 and what it is now. Something tremendous has happened in between. Humanity has been brought closer together in dramatic ways. We have difficulty imagining the processes involved, not least because of national consciousness. Anthropologists, in sticking with their ethnographic method, have not risen to the challenge of documenting this huge shift in civilization. Jack Goody could not settle for just “getting to know another culture”. In reaching for a more universal conception

of human history, he knew that he was an active participant in the making of a new world. But, even as he inserted himself into contemporary society, he chose to step back from the modern age. By focusing on pre-industrial societies in Europe, Asia and Africa, he left out any direct consideration of two centuries of machine revolution, the capitalist world economy, the New World in its entirety. But his topic is nevertheless “the development of human culture” and, as I hope to show today, his inquiries do reflect a consistent position on the social priorities of his own time.

A few years after his wartime sojourn in the Mediterranean, Jack Goody carried out research in West Africa, a region connected to the Mediterranean by Islamic civilization long before it was colonized by Europeans. On the basis of extensive fieldwork in Northwest Ghana during the decade before that country won independence from colonial rule, he soon established himself as a force in West African anthropology, first as an ethnographer and later as a historian (Hart 1985). Goody was impressed, however, by the similarities and differences between Africa, Europe and the Islamic world. It took him three decades to formalize the terms of comparison; but, when he did, it turned out as follows: Europe may be opposed to Asia as West to East, but the two should be seen as a single entity, Eurasia, opposed to Africa South of the Sahara. This model contrasts with the dominant imperialist stereotype which opposes the West to the Rest. Goody was anxious to avoid any hint of racial hierarchy. Yet he concluded that African societies were fundamentally different from the others in important ways and he wanted to explain why.

He started with kinship and marriage, the domestic relations through which people manage their own reproduction and participate in the wider society. In *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, he concluded that the key to variations in kinship organization lay in the transmission of property, the material link between generations constituted by patterns of inheritance and manifested in religious observances such as the ancestor cult. The book drew extensively on classical sources of British comparative jurisprudence; but Goody balked at making a systematic comparison of Africa and Europe then. In *Tradition, Technology and the State* (1971), he questioned the habit of transferring categories from European history to the study of pre-colonial states in Africa. Again his focus was on property forms. European feudalism was based on private property in land and this was absent from traditional West Africa. Why? Because land was

scarce in Western Europe, but not in Africa, where the scarce factor was people; and control over them was exercised through monopolies of the “means of destruction” (horses, guns etc.), not the means of production. Africa’s politics were both centralized and decentralized, the former acquiring manpower by force through carrying out slave raids on the latter (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). Shifting hoe agriculture was the norm, with the bulk of manual labour being performed by women. In both types of society they were hoarded as wives by polygamous older men and their children were recruited to exclusive descent groups. The key to major differences in social organization between Africa and Eurasia thus lay in the conditions of production and specifically in demography, in the ratio of people to the land.

*Production and Reproduction* takes off from this premise into a global survey of kinship, marriage and property transmission, using the data compiled by G.P. Murdock’s *Ethnographic Atlas* (1962–1980). Kin groups in the major societies of Eurasia frequently pass on property through both sexes, a process of “diverging devolution” (including bilateral inheritance and women’s dowry at marriage) that is virtually absent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where inheritance follows the line of one sex only.<sup>1</sup> Especially when women’s property includes the means of production, in agricultural societies land, attempts will be made to control these heiresses, banning premarital sex and arranging marriages for them, often within the same group and with a strong preference for monogamy. Direct inheritance by women is also associated with the isolation of the nuclear family in kinship terminology, where a distinction is drawn between one’s own parents and siblings and other relatives of the same generation, unlike in lineage systems. All of this reflects a class society. “Diverging devolution (especially dowry) [was] the main mechanism by which familial status was maintained in an economically differentiated society” (Goody 1976: 19). But

“Why should the African and Eurasian patterns be so different? I suggest that the scarcer productive resources become and the more intensively they are used, then the greater the tendency for the retention of these resources within the basic productive and reproductive unit, which in the large majority of cases is the nuclear family... Advanced agriculture, whether by plough or irrigation, permits an individual to produce much

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<sup>1</sup> See Hann (2008) for a fuller treatment of inheritance and property in Goody’s work.

more than he can consume....[T]he greater volume of production can maintain an elaborate division of labour and stratification based upon different styles of life. An important means of [this]... is marriage with persons of the same or higher qualifications.... Advanced agriculture [also] allows the expansion of population, another factor making for scarcity of land.” (Ibid: 20)

The agrarian economies of all the major Eurasian civilizations conformed to this pattern. They were organized through large states run by literate elites whose lifestyle embraced both the city and the countryside. This is Gordon Childe’s “urban revolution” in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago.<sup>2</sup> In these societies of the late Bronze Age

“(...) an elaborate bureaucracy, a complex division of labour [and] a stratified society based on ecclesiastical landlordism...[were] made possible by intensive agriculture and title to landed property was of supreme importance.” (Ibid: 24)

Africa South of the Sahara apparently missed out on these developments, even though North Africa was one of the first areas to adopt the new institutional package. Goody would never countenance the standard racist explanation for this, the cultural backwardness of black people. To low population density as one explanation he now adds the barrier posed to intensive agriculture by tropical soils. By starting from the relationship between types of property transmission and forms of kinship and marriage, he arrives at a new synthesis of the agricultural roots of civilization.

By the time Jack Goody became an anthropologist, colonial empire was rapidly being dismantled and racial discrimination of the sort practised in apartheid South Africa was becoming outlawed. Yet the intellectual legacy of imperialism still underpinned the anthropology of his day. So he chose to attack the lingering opposition of “modern” and “primitive” cultures by studying the chief activity of literate elites, of which he was himself a leading example – writing. Contrasted mentalities should be seen as an effect of different means

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<sup>2</sup> Childe was a prehistorian of Europe who produced a Marxist synthesis of the stages theory of human social evolution marked by three revolutions in production, the ‘neolithic’, ‘urban’ and ‘industrial’ (1942). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V.\\_Gordon\\_Childe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V._Gordon_Childe). Goody has written of his debt to Childe in Goody 2006b.

of communication. The most important of these are speech and writing, orality and literacy. Most African cultures are predominantly oral, whereas the ruling classes of Eurasian civilization have relied from the beginning on literate records. The year after *Production and Reproduction*, Goody published his most general assault on the habit of opposing us and them, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. This was a pointed repudiation of *La pensée sauvage* of Lévi-Strauss (1962), suggesting that the latter's lists linking 'hot' and 'cold' societies to other pairs, such as history and myth, science and magic, far from exemplifying universal reason, were a parochial by-product of mental habits induced by writing. This emerged in a specific time and place and became essential to the reproduction of Eurasian civilization, reducing the status of oral communication that still predominated in African cultures. Literacy is a key feature of the institutional complex that marked the urban revolution.

In *The East in the West* (1996) and numerous volumes since, Jack Goody sought to refute the claim, derived from the founders of modern social theory, that the West's economic ascendancy, driven by capitalism and its machine revolution, could be attributed to a unique type of rationality missing from the less fortunate societies of Asia.<sup>3</sup> Goody shows first that Europe's distinctiveness is in most cases either non-existent or has been exaggerated; and second that the rate of adoption of western industrial techniques by Japan, China and India has been faster than it took for the innovations of the Italian Renaissance to diffuse to Northwest Europe. He concludes that eurocentrism obscures Asia's current economic performance and potential, while misrepresenting western history. It makes more sense to see Eurasia as a single entity, at least since the Bronze Age, where the advantage of particular regions has been highly unstable. Africa, whose exceptional character remains unchallenged throughout the series, tends to drop out of Goody's focus at this point.

Jack Goody drew on Gordon Childe's materialist synthesis of the great revolutions that marked the history of human production and society. Childe got the basic framework from L.H. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) which some have seen as the origin of modern anthropology; this was made more widely accessible by Friedrich Engels as *The Origin of the Family, Private Property*

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<sup>3</sup> *The Eurasian Miracle* (Goody 2010) sums up this thesis, but the most important text in my view is *The Theft of History* (2006a) reviewed in Hart (2007).

*and the State* (1884). But they got it in turn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1754) could be said to be the source for an “anthropology of unequal society” whose leading protagonist for half a century has been Jack Goody (Hart 2006a, Hann and Hart 2011: 10–12).

In the last two centuries, the human population has increased seven times and the rate of growth of energy production has been double that of the population. Many human beings work less hard, eat better and live longer today as a result. Whereas about 97% of the world’s people lived in rural areas in 1800, today half of humanity lives in cities. This hectic disengagement from the soil as the chief object of work and source of life was made possible by harnessing inanimate energy sources to machines used as converters. Before 1800 almost all the energy at our disposal came from animals, plants and human beings themselves. The benefits of modern development have been distributed highly unequally, the prime beneficiaries being the pioneers of western imperialism. This made the world economy of a century ago uni-polar and highly divergent (that is, unequal); whereas today it is multi-polar and convergent as a result of the West’s relative decline and the rise of ‘emerging’ economies like China, India and Brazil.

Despite a constant barrage of propaganda telling us that we now live in a modern age of science and democracy, our dominant institutions are still those of agrarian civilization – territorial states, embattled cities, landed property, warfare, racism, bureaucratic administration, literacy, impersonal money, long-distance trade, work as a virtue, world religion and the family. This is because the rebellion of the middle classes against the old regime was co-opted by that synthesis of industrial capitalism and the nation-state that I call “national capitalism” and humanity’s emancipation from unequal society has been prevented as a result (Hart 2009). Consider the shape of world society today. A remote elite of white, middle-aged, middle-class men, “the men in suits”, rule masses who are predominantly poor, dark, female and young. The rich countries, which can no longer reproduce themselves, try to stem the inflow of migrants seeking economic improvement. Our world resembles nothing so much as the Old Regime in France before the revolution, when Rousseau wrote his *Second Discourse*.

Africa is the most poignant symbol of this unequal world. In 1950 Greater Europe (including Soviet Central Asia) had twice the numbers of Africa. Today Africa has a population double the size of Europe and Central Asia. By 2050 Africans will be a quarter of humanity and by the end of the century over a third.<sup>4</sup> Although Africa is still often represented as a land of starving peasants ravaged by war and AIDS, the new reality is burgeoning cities full of young people looking for something to do (Hart 2010). Africa largely missed out on the first and second stages of the machine revolution, but in places it is now ahead in some aspects of digitization.<sup>5</sup> Even so, development there today often consists of irrigation and ox-plough agriculture (Hart 1982). Africa has at last been going through Childe's urban revolution, erecting state bureaucracies and class society on the basis of surpluses extracted from the countryside. This is not without its contradictions.

Simply as a comparative history of pre-industrial civilizations, Jack Goody's contribution is enormous; but he has also been telling us something about the formation of contemporary world society. Like Bruno Latour (1993), he says that we have never been modern. Modern democracy is predicated on the abolition of the unequal society that ruled the Eurasian landmass for 5,000 years. Goody reminds us of the durable inequality of our world and suggests that its causes may be less tractable than we think. At the same time, the rise of China and India underlines his warning against European complacency. The world is now simultaneously more connected than ever and highly unequal. The reduction of national political controls over global markets in the last three decades has accelerated the gap between haves and have-nots everywhere, generating huge regional disparities in the process. Redress for this situation seems further away today than it did in 1945, when Jack Goody set out on his post-war journey.

Let me recap the core elements of Goody's framework. The key to understanding social forms lies in production and that means the uneven spread of machine production today. Civilization or human culture is largely a conse-

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<sup>4</sup> According to the latest projections of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>, Africa's population in 1950 was less than 0.25bn out of a world population of 2.5bn (under 10%); in 2000 it was 0.8bn (13% of 6.1bn); in 2050 it will be 2.2bn (24% of 9.3bn); and in 2100 3.6bn (35% of 10.1bn).

<sup>5</sup> Such as for example Kenya's pioneering experiment in mobile banking, the M-Pesa (Mas and Morawczynski 2009).

quence of the means of communication – once writing, now an array of mechanized forms, but always interacting with oral and written media. The site of social struggles is property. Are nation-states still an effective instrument for enforcing global contracts? Goody’s central focus on reproduction has never been more salient when the aging citizens of rich countries need to come to terms with the proliferating mass of young people out there. Kinship needs to be reinvented too. If human culture is to be rescued from the unequal society that results when agrarian civilization is strengthened by machines, Jack Goody’s anthropological vision offers one indispensable means of contemplating how.

*Part Two*  
*Africa Today: the challenge of development*<sup>6</sup>

I now turn to what has happened in Africa since Jack Goody first went there more than a half-century ago. He has never lost interest in the region of his original field research, but it has not figured prominently in his work since the early years of independence. The African continent is divided into three disparate regions – North, South and Middle (West, Central and East Africa); but a measure of convergence between them is now taking place. A preoccupation with Africa’s post-colonial failure to ‘develop’ – or to ‘take-off’ – has obscured what really happened there in the twentieth century. The rise of cities has been accompanied by the formation of weak and venal states, locked into dependency on foreign powers and leaving the urban masses largely to their own devices. The latter have generated spontaneous markets to meet their own needs and these have come to be understood as an “informal economy” (Hart 2006b, 2010).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hart (2010) is a fuller version of the arguments summarized here. The general question of African development is discussed in chapter 6 of Hann and Hart (2011). Hart and Padayachee (2010) review Africa’s development prospects from the perspective of the continent’s most powerful economy, South Africa. A long-delayed book, *The African Century* (Polity, forthcoming), explains why I believe that Africa’s economic future is brighter than many might imagine.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Neuwirth (2011) has published an engaging round-up of what he calls “the global rise of the informal economy”. I have some sympathy with his preference for a less negative term: he opts for “Système D”, an expression found in the French Caribbean and West Africa, which expresses something of the entrepreneurial inventiveness of the informal economy.

In order to make sense of the extraordinary transformation of what is after all a highly diverse continent, I distinguish between three broad types of social formation: “egalitarian societies” based on kinship; “agrarian civilization” in which urban elites control the mass of rural labour by means of the state and class power (Hart 2006a); and “national capitalism”, where markets and capital accumulation are regulated by central bureaucracies in the interest of citizens (Hart 2009). These oversimplified categories help me to indicate some broad historical trends. Africa south of the Sahara has a more complex history than is captured by this typology; but its dominant institutions before the modern period may be understood in terms of the classless type based on kinship institutions in the main. The second type, agrarian civilization, covered most of Europe, Asia and North Africa for the last few millennia. National capitalism has only taken root so far in South Africa, until recently for the benefit of whites only. Middle Africa has made a belated transition to the Old Regime of agrarian civilization in the course of the twentieth century, while Europe and North America, followed by Asia, embraced national capitalism. This brought North and Middle Africa closer together as pre-industrial class societies, while South Africa has drawn closer to the rest of Africa since the coming of majority rule.

Egypt and the Mediterranean littoral embraced agrarian civilization long ago. The rise of cities there was accompanied by the formation of states whose function was to supervise a new kind of class society, in which a narrow urban elite extracted agricultural surpluses from an increasingly servile rural labour force. Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Goody (1976), largely missed out on this urban revolution along with its agricultural technology, higher population density and unequal property relations. This is why traditional African forms of kinship and marriage are so distinctive and their societies were, relatively speaking, classless. Even where a measure of stratification existed, redistribution through kinship institutions prevented the emergence of classes with different styles of consumption.

As we have seen, the contrast between egalitarian societies built on kinship and unequal societies based on state power and class division goes back to L.H. Morgan (1877) and before him to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1754). It cannot be applied unambiguously to Africa and Eurasia before the modern age, even if we try to isolate Black Africa from its Northern and Southern extremities. Africa’s urban history is complex (Freund 2007). The Atlantic and Indian Ocean

slave trades generated coastal urban enclaves in both West and East Africa. The medieval civilization of the West African Sahel was a significant part of the Islamic world. Of the Yoruba agro-cities, Ibadan's population had reached 200,000 by the onset of colonial rule. Even so, large swathes of Middle Africa entered the modern era with a minimal urban population and their dominant institutions owed a lot more to kinship than to class differences. Indigenous states were common in the early modern period, often emerging in response to European imperial expansion. The grip of agrarian civilization on modern world society is still strong, since national capitalism everywhere incorporated elements of the Old Regime.

Of course, inequality was not wholly absent from traditional African societies. Engels made much of the historical subordination of women, first in tribal societies of farmers and herders, later in pre-industrial states and finally in capitalist societies. Marxists and feminists (e.g. Meillassoux 1981) extended this analysis to the conflict between African males of different age, with polygamous elders commanding young men's labour through control of access to marriageable women who were in their turn condemned to do most of the work without effective political representation. Gender and generation differences are of immense importance in African societies.

In 1900, less than 2% of Africans lived in cities. By 2000, a population explosion saw the urban share rise to almost half, compressing into one century what took much longer elsewhere. Since Africa's population is still growing at 2.5% per annum, so too is its relative size in the world, if not yet its purchasing power (around 2% of the world economy according to the World Bank 2010). This urban revolution does not just consist in the unprecedented proliferation of cities, but also in the installation of the whole package of pre-industrial class society: states, new urban elites, intensification of agriculture and a political economy based on the extraction of rural surpluses. African development must build on independent nation-states whose economic base is pre-industrial agriculture (Hart 1982).

The anti-colonial revolution unleashed extravagant hopes for the transformation of an unequal world. These have not yet been realized for most Africans. But the model of development they were expected to adopt was "national capitalism". Development in this sense never had a chance to take root in Af-

rica. For the first half of the twentieth century, African peoples were shackled by colonial empire and in the second, their new nations struggled to keep afloat in a world economy organized by and for the major powers, then engaged in the Cold War. Yet in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, two-thirds of the world's ten fastest-growing economies have been and are expected to be African.<sup>8</sup> Africa's new national leaders thought they were building modern economies, but in reality they were erecting fragile states whose economic base was the same backward agriculture as before (Hart 1982). This weakness inexorably led them to exchange the democratic legitimacy of the independence struggle for dependence on foreign powers. These ruling elites first relied on revenues from agricultural exports, then on loans contracted under dubious circumstances, finally on the financial monopoly that came from being licensed to supervise their country's relations with global capitalism. But this bonanza was switched off in the 1980s, when foreign capital felt that it could dispense with the mediation of local state powers and concentrated on collecting debts from them. Many governments were made bankrupt and some collapsed into civil war.

Concentration of political power at the centre led to the dominance of primate cities, as economic demand became synonymous with the expenditures of a presidential kleptocracy. The growth of cities should normally lead to enhanced rural-urban exchange, as farmers supply food to city-dwellers and in turn buy the latter's manufactures and services.<sup>9</sup> But this progressive division of labour was stifled at birth in post-colonial Africa by the dumping of cheap subsidized food from North America and Europe and of cheap manufactures from Asia. For "structural adjustment" meant that African national economies had no protection from the strong winds of world trade. A peasantry subjected to violence and political extraction was forced to choose between stagnation at home and migration to the main cities or abroad. Somehow the cities survived on the basis of markets that emerged spontaneously to recycle the money concentrated at the top and to meet the population's needs. These markets are the key to understanding the economic potential of Africa's urban revolution.

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<sup>8</sup> According to *The Economist* (6th January 2011), Africa had six of the top ten fastest-growing economies in 2001-2010 and is expected to have seven in 2011-2015. The latter consist of Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia and Nigeria in that order; the other three are China, India and Vietnam.

<sup>9</sup> Sir James Steuart (1767) makes this argument and I drew on it in Hart (1982: 160).

Africa's urban informal economy (Hart 2010) everywhere supplies food, housing and transport; education, health and other basic services; mining, manufactures and engineering; and trade at every level, including transnational commerce and foreign exchange. But its scope varies. In West/Central Africa, where white settlement was minimal, the cities were substantially an indigenous creation and their markets were always unregulated. Foreign middlemen like the Lebanese flourished outside colonial administrative controls. The great ports of the Atlantic seaboard enjoy a degree of mercantile freedom that underwrites their contribution to Africa's commercial growth. Today Angolan women jump on planes heading for London, Paris, Dubai and Rio, where they stock up on luxury goods for resale in the streets of Luanda. In Southern Africa, cities were built by a white settler class who imposed strict controls on the movement of the indigenous population. South Africa's informal economy today is hedged in by rules designed to promote modern industry. Elsewhere, in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Kenya, the state has long played a more controlling role than would be considered normal today in Lagos or Dakar.

African nation-states have learned the hard way that they are not free to choose their own forms of political economy. When the world was divided by the Cold War, state ownership of production and control of distribution seemed to offer the best chance of defending the national interest against colonial and neo-colonial predators. From the 80s, the mania for privatization led to ownership being ceded to corporations. Structural adjustment forced governments to abandon public services, lay off many workers and allow the free circulation of money. In the Congo, Angola, Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, failed states and civil wars encouraged informal mining and trade, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of warlords and their followers. The restoration of peace restored limited bureaucratic controls over distribution. The situation is highly dynamic and variable.

Tax collection in Africa never attained the regularity it has long achieved in Eurasia; governments still rely on whatever resources they can extract from mineral royalties and the import-export trade. The new urban classes control and live off these revenues, usually under a patrimonial regime propped up by foreign powers (Mbeki 2009). This constitutes an Old Regime ripe for liberal revolution and the Arab Spring that began earlier this year in North Africa carries great significance for the continent as a whole. The new states and class

structures of Africa's urban revolution are entangled in kinship systems that remain indispensable to the informal economy as a means of social organization (Bayart 2009). The middle classes pass off exploitation of cheap domestic labour as an egalitarian model of African kinship; while "family business" has never lost favour and child labour is still acceptable. Formal bureaucracy, on the other hand, is hostile to kinship, where it is normally viewed as corruption. In the absence of a welfare state, Africans must rely on kinship to see them through the life cycle of birth, marriage, childrearing, old age and death; and this reinforces the power of rural elders in the face of emigration by the youth and women, since access to ancestral land remains for many the main source of their long-term security.

The prospect of rapid economic improvement soon in Africa seems counter-intuitive, especially given Africa's symbolic role as the negation of "white" superiority.<sup>10</sup> Black people have played this role for centuries as the stigmatized underclass of an unequal world society organized along racial lines; and never more than now, when American and European dominance is being undermined by a shift in the balance of economic power to countries like China, India, Brazil, Russia and, within its own region, South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Rather than face up to a decline in their economic fortunes, the whites prefer to dwell on the misfortunes of black people and on Africa's apparently terminal exclusion from modern prosperity. Failed politicians and aging rock stars announce their mission to "save" Africa from its presumed ills. The Western media represent Africa as the benighted battleground of the four horsemen of the apocalypse: conquest, war, famine and death. It all goes to reassure a decadent West that at least some people are a lot worse off than themselves.

It is a curious fact that China occupied a similar slot in western consciousness not long ago. In the 1920s and 1930s, Americans and Europeans often spoke of the Chinese the way they do of Africa today. China was then crippled by the violence of warlords, its peasants mired in the worst poverty imaginable.

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<sup>10</sup> In the last couple of years there has been a spate of literature boosting Africa's economic prospects. This is built partly on the minerals boom, partly on population growth, partly on belated recognition that Africa has a growing share of world consumption. For an upbeat, even breezy, version of this story, see Severino and Ray (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Known as the BRICS, although the South African economy has nothing like the dynamism of China, India and Brazil; and, at around 50 million, its population is much smaller than the others. See Hart and Padayachee (2010) on the case for greater integration of South Africa into the African region.

Today the country is spoken of as the likely successor to the United States as world leader, while its manufactures make inroads into western dominance on a scale far greater than Japan's ever did. This profound shift in economic power from West to East does not guarantee Africa's escape from the shackles of world inequality, but it does mean that structures of Atlantic dominance which once seemed inevitable are perceptibly on the move; and that should make it easier to envisage change. We are entering a phase of new economic possibility, as well as altered patterns of power in world society. Africa's advantage in the current global economic crisis is its weak attachment to the status quo. Africans have less to lose; and the old Stalinist "law of unequal development" reminds us that, under such circumstances, winners and losers may easily change places.

The classical liberal revolutions were sustained by three ideas: that freedom and economic progress require increased movement of people, goods and money in the *market*; that the political framework most compatible with this is *democracy*, putting power in the hands of the people; and that social progress depends on *science*, the drive to know objectively how things work that leads to enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> For over a century now an anti-liberal tendency has disparaged this great movement of emancipation as a form of oppression and exploitation in disguise; and, in common with many social revolutions, this is partially true. Africa today must escape soon from forms of political economy that owe a lot to the legacy of slavery, colonialism and apartheid; but conditions there can no longer be attributed solely to these ancient causes. It is possible that the example of the classical liberal revolutions, reinforced by endogenous developments in economy, technology, religion and the arts, could offer fresh solutions for African underdevelopment. These would have to be built on the conditions and energies generated by the urban revolution of the twentieth century (Hart 2010).

We all know that power is distributed very unequally in our world and any new liberal movement would soon run up against entrenched privilege. In fact, world society today resembles quite closely the Old Regime of agrarian civilization, as in eighteenth century England and France, with isolated elites enjoy-

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<sup>12</sup> Goody's successor as head of Cambridge University's social anthropology department, Ernest Gellner, wrote *Plough, Sword and Book* (1988) in which the triad of market, democracy and science are inherently related as the modern replacements for the symbols of economic, political and intellectual technology of agrarian civilization that make up the title.

ing a lifestyle wildly beyond the reach of masses who have almost nothing. It is not just in post-colonial Africa where the institutions of agrarian civilization rule today. Since the millennium, the United States (and not only the US), whose own liberal revolution once overcame the Old Regime of King George and the East India Company, has regressed to a form of rentier capitalism where income from politically secured property has replaced the profits of production as the main source of wealth.<sup>13</sup>

It has long been acknowledged that the rise of capitalism in Europe drew heavily on religion as one of its motors. Max Weber (1921) insisted that an economic revolution of this scope could only take root on the back of a much broader cultural revolution. What might be the cultural grounds for Africa's informal economy to evolve into a more dynamic engine of urban commerce? Whatever happens next must build on what has already been put in place. The basis for Africa's future economic growth has to be the cultural production of its cities and not rural extraction or the reactionary hope of reproducing capitalism's industrial phase. This in turn rests on:

1. The energy of youth and women
2. The religious revival
3. The explosion of the modern arts
4. The digital revolution in communications
5. The new African diaspora

What follows is a brief sketch of a book-length argument.

1. African societies, traditional and modern, have been dominated by older men. Women have benefited less from the opportunities men have had and are less tied to their burdens. In many cases they have been quicker to exploit the commercial freedoms of the neoliberal international economy. Even when men and boys have plunged whole countries into civil war, thereby removing state guarantees from economic life, an informal economy resting on women's trade has often kept open basic supply lines. The social reality of Africa's cities is a

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<sup>13</sup> "A type of capitalism where profit takes the form of *property income* (interest, intellectual property rights, rents, dividends, fees or capital gains) (...). The beneficiaries monopolize access to physical assets, financial assets and technologies (...). Often the term is used with the connotation of parasitism or a decadent form of capitalism." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rentier\\_capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rentier_capitalism).

young population without enough to do and a growing generation gap. The energies of youth must be harnessed more effectively and the chances of doing so are greater if the focus of economic development is on something that interests them, like popular culture.

2. The religious revival in Africa, both Christian and Muslim, is a matter of immense significance for the forms of economic development. This is in many cases founded on young people's rejection of the social models and political options offered by their parents' generation. Fundamentalist and less extreme varieties of religion make a different kind of connection to world society than that offered by the nation-state, based on the assumption of American dominance or resistance to it. They help to fill the moral void of contemporary politics and often offer well-trying recipes for creative economic organization, e.g. the Mourides of Senegal (O'Brien 1971, Copans 1988). Christian churches are usually organized and supported by women, even if their leadership is often male.

3. In all the talk of poverty, war and AIDS, the Western media rarely report the extraordinary vitality of the modern arts in post-colonial Africa: novels, films, music, theatre, painting, sculpture, dance and their applications in commercial design. There has been an artistic explosion in the last half-century, drawing on traditional sources, but also responding to the complexity of the contemporary world. One example in the last decade is the 'Africa Remix' exhibition that toured Europe and Japan, a hundred installations from Johannesburg to Cairo, showing the modernity of contemporary African art (Elliot and Njami 2005). The African novel, along with comparable regions like India, leads the world (Irele 2009). I shall come back to the creativity of the film industry in a moment.

4. Africa largely missed the first two phases of the machine revolution, based on the steam engine and electricity; but the third phase, the digital revolution in communications whose most tangible product is the internet, the network of networks, offers Africans very different conditions of participation that they already show signs of taking up avidly. In origin a means of communication for scientists and the military, the internet is now primarily a global marketplace with very unusual characteristics. Like the informal economy, it goes largely unregulated; but this market freedom is harnessed to the most advanced technologies of our era. The internet has also generated new conditions

for managing networks spanning home and abroad by radically shortening the time and space dimensions of communication and exchange at distance. The extraordinarily rapid adoption of mobile phones (Aker and Mbiti 2010) has made Africa a crucible for global innovations, such as the first multi-country network and use of phones for banking purposes in East Africa. Nor should we neglect the role of television as a transnational means of widening perceptions of community.

5. In the last half-century a new African diaspora has emerged, based unlike that formed by Atlantic slavery on economic migration to America, Europe and nowadays Asia. These migrants are usually known away from home by their national identity, but many of them by-pass the national level when maintaining close relationships with their specific region of origin. They are often highly educated, with experience of the corporate business world, while retaining links to relatives living and working in the informal economy at home. One consequence of neoliberal reforms has been that transnational exchange is now much easier than it was, drawing at once on indigenous knowledge of local conditions and the expertise acquired by migrants and their families in the West. Remittances from abroad are of immense importance everywhere, and they are bound to play a major role in Africa's economic future (Gupta et al 2007).

To speak of economic growth in the future begs the question of what Africa's new urban populations could produce. So far, African countries have relied on exporting raw materials, when they could. Minerals clearly have a promising future owing to scarce supplies and rising demand; but the world market for food and other agricultural products is skewed. Conventionally, when seeking to diversify away from raw materials, African governments have aspired to develop manufacturing exports, but here they face intense competition from Asia. African countries must argue collectively in the councils of world trade for some protection from international dumping, so that their farmers and infant industries might at least get a chance to supply their own populations first. But the world market for services is booming and perhaps greater opportunities for supplying national, regional and global markets exist there.

There was a time when most services were performed personally on the spot; but today, as a result of the digital revolution in communications, they increasingly link producers and consumers at distance. The fastest-growing

sector of world trade is the production of culture: entertainment, education, media, software and a wide range of information services (Hart and Padayachee 2010). The future of the human economy (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010), once certain material requirements are satisfied, lies in the infinite scope for us to do things for each other – like singing songs or telling stories – that need not take a tangible form. The largest global television audiences are for sporting events like the World Cup or the Olympic Games. The United States' three leading exports are now movies, music and software; this is why they have sponsored an intellectual property treaty (TRIPs) that seeks to shore up the profits of corporations whose products can be reproduced digitally at almost no cost. The central conflict in contemporary capitalism is between this attempt to privatize the cultural commons and widespread popular resistance to it (Hart 2005). Any move to enter this market will be confronted by transnational corporations and the governments which support them. Nevertheless, there is a lot more to play for here and the terrain is not as rigidly mapped out as in agriculture and manufactures. It is also one where Africans are exceptionally well-placed to compete because of the proven preference of global audiences for their music and plastic arts.

Did you know that the world's second largest producer of movies, after Hollywood and before Bollywood, is Lagos in Nigeria or 'Nollywood' (Hugo et al 2009, Saul and Austen 2010)? Most of their movies cost no more than a few thousand dollars, a pattern reminiscent of Hollywood when W.G. Griffith was king. American popular culture is still that country's most successful export. There is no reason why it couldn't be for Africans too. The Mourides, a Sufist order founded almost a century ago, constitute an informal state within the state of Senegal. Their international trading operations are capable of influencing national economies, as when they recently shifted shoe supplies to the USA from Italy to China. Pioneering communications enterprises in Kenya and Ghana are beginning to be noticed for their exciting ability to tailor modern technologies to local demand. As I noted, mobile phone banking there now leads the world.

## *Conclusions*

According to Jack Goody (most recently, 2010), the relative standing of Eurasia's regions has fluctuated over 5,000 years, with Western Europe (and its North American offshoots) enjoying some advantage since the Renaissance, especially since the industrial revolution. He utterly rejects any claim that Asia was ever structurally inferior. In most respects, Asian civilizations were well ahead of Europe for much of history. The speed with which they have adopted modern capitalism points to a fundamental similarity that helps us to understand the reversal in economic dominance that is underway now.

Goody set out to deconstruct the racist binaries that organize so much thinking about anthropology and world history. He thinks too much has been made of the industrial revolution as a decisive break in history; that modern capitalism may not be so radically different from its predecessors; and that attempts to associate recent history exclusively with the achievements of the West are deluded. This leads him to assert that many of the cultural features taken to be distinctive of particular regions (notably Europe) may be found elsewhere, often in quite well-developed forms. So, rather than classify whole societies according to the presumed presence and absence of cultural traits, it is better to consider how institutional patterns vary in emphasis and combination. Then the grounds for racial superiority are undermined and economic development is seen less readily as a series of radical breaks. He is right to insist that the legacy of agrarian civilization is still strong in our world and that older forms of capitalism (merchant and financial) have not been swept aside by factory production. But we must still try to understand the economic revolution we are living through, if only to head off global disaster. Marx (1867) and Weber (1921) have more uses in this respect than as mere cheerleaders for Western hegemony.

Jack Goody rarely makes it explicit that his whole approach is an attack on cultural anthropology. Like Morgan (1877) and Childe (1942) before him, he explains cultural difference by technological change. The intensification of agriculture (the plough and irrigation) and new means of communication (writing) underpin the unequal class structure of agrarian civilization and explain the cultural differences between Eurasia and Africa. So Western supremacists are

not only mistaken in assuming Europe's uniqueness, but they are idealists who fail to grasp the material conditions underlying the differences they celebrate. This leaves two gaping holes in Goody's understanding of modern world history. I have not been able here (but see Hart 2007) to engage with the first of these, his relative neglect of the machine revolution that has transformed the world in just two centuries. The other is the place of contemporary Africa in his scheme.

Jack Goody's time spent as an ethnographer in Northern Ghana provided the original ground for his extended foray into world-historical comparison. The problem is that "Africa" forms a binary contrast with Eurasia in his work and the lifestyle of the stateless hoe-farmers he knew stands as its symbol. If Asia is more complex than Western stereotypes allow, so too is Africa which has just been through a demographic explosion. "Africa" seems to have lately become for Goody a static abstraction used to support his assault on Western disparagement of Asia. This stands in contrast with his early recognition of and support for the anti-colonial revolution in Ghana. The United States and Europe could soon be replaced as the engines of world society by countries such as China, India and Brazil who were not long ago subject to cultural condescension, the premises of which Goody has undercut. Modern ethnographers too have criticized Western complacency, but their examples have generally been taken out of the context of world history. Jack Goody has excavated a new anthropological vision of our world that is bound to become even more salient as the present century unfolds. His anthropological legacy will last, even if the contemporary rise of Africa is not prefigured in his writing on the continent. I have tried to show today that Goody's extension of the tradition that I call "the anthropology of unequal society" is indispensable to understanding what really happened in Africa during the twentieth century and may happen there in the twenty-first.

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IMPRESSUM:

© Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology  
P.O. Box 11 03 51  
D-06017 Halle/Saale  
Germany

Printed by IMPRESS Druckerei, Halle/Saale