Trust and social relations in African politics

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Trust and Social Relations in African Politics

Dominic Burbidge


Summary:

Africa is a place of low trust. This fact is significant for understanding the politics and economics of the region, whether for questions of national unity or economic coordination and growth. One of the central ways in which trust and social relations have come to be examined within the social sciences is through the notion of social capital, which is defined as the norms and networks that enable collective action. Use of the concept of social capital has mushroomed in popularity within academia since the 1980s, and has been used within African studies to interpret the developmental effects of social relations. It is important to review how researchers have been synthesising the study of African societies with the social capital approach and offer suggestions on how this can be better achieved. Specifically, there is contradiction between the view that social capital is useful for economic development and the view that social capital means a community can decide its own economic goals. Students of social capital in Africa must accept that the cultural and normative diversity of the continent necessitates appreciation of the diverse aims of social networks. This means a rejection both of modernist theories of development and post-modern reduction of human relations to forms of power exchange. Future research on trust and social capital in Africa must give weight to community articulations of motivations to trust, what activities count as communal, and what new economic cultures are being formed as a result of present communal varieties.

Keywords: trust, social capital, Africa, development, political economy, capabilities

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Dir biabere, ambesa yasir.

*Spider webs joined together could restrain a lion.*

—Ethiopian proverb

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Introduction

Africa is a place of low trust. In a meta-analysis of studies measuring trust levels through social science experiments, Johnson and Mislin find that Africa is the least trusting and least trustworthy region of the world. Indeed, many of the known governance problems in Africa are connected to low trust and

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divisive social relations, as when ethnic divisions threaten national political stability, or when lack of belief in the likely fairness of others leads to corruption. Examining the low level of trust in Africa, Nunn and Wantchekon review survey evidence on perceptions of trust, and compare these against the depth of penetration of the slave trade. They find that ‘individuals belonging to ethnic groups that were most exposed to the slave trades exhibit lower levels of trust in their relatives, neighbors, coethnics, and local government today.’ Across Africa the authors find stronger levels of trust the further away from the coast communities are (where the slave trade was often most intense), and note that this cannot be due to a general lack of capitalist penetration because populations outside Africa which experienced capitalism without a slave trade bear no such correlation. They reflect that the evidence is ‘consistent with the historical fact that by the end of the slave trade, it was not uncommon for individuals to be sold into slavery by neighbors, friends, and family members.’

The relevance of slavery for eroding social norms and trust in Africa is extreme. As Iliffe recounts in *A Modern History of Tanganyika*:

Although Arabs rarely raided for slaves in Tanganyika, their willingness to buy them was obviously the main stimulus to the trade. Some militarised African peoples raided their stateless neighbours systematically, especially in the south. More slaves were probably ordinary war-captives. Some were victims of localised brutality or social oppression. Most of those whose personal stories survive were kidnapped as children, for adult males were too prone to escape. Men also continued to sell their relatives or even themselves during famine. As the trade became increasingly pervasive, attitudes to life and freedom were brutalised. There are stories of men selling their wives for guns in Upare. By the 1890s the Doe were paying bridewealth in slaves and a traveller found the Chief of Ubungu playing the African board game, *bao*, with bullets for counters.

Prior to capitalist expansion through coastal trade, slavery in East Africa was ‘confined to the courts of powerful chiefs, where it was a relationship of dependence rather than chattel slavery.’ The movement from a contractual relationship between master and slave where protection was given to prisoners of war or men unable to pay their debts in return for servitude, to the buying and selling of slaves as commodities, was a crucial step in the role slavery was to play in demolishing norms of trust

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5 Ibid, p. 3249.
6 Ibid, p. 3222.
8 Ibid, p. 17.
between persons. From the 1860s, guns were provided by coastal traders so that regional big men could raid for slaves.\textsuperscript{9} In a part of the world where ‘[m]en measured out their lives in famines’,\textsuperscript{10} the vulnerable were too easily transformed into objects of exchange.

Even today in Eastern Africa there subsists the common Kiswahili greeting “hujambo?” (plural: “hamjambo?”), to which the positive reply is “sijambo” (plural: “hatujambo”). While the phrase is generally understood as equivalent to “how are you?” followed by “I am fine”, in fact the peculiar underlying grammar reveals a different history. Translated literally, “hujambo?” is “are you not passing?”, to which the reply, “sijambo”, is “I am not.” A possible origin for this unusual construction is that it was originally a question asking if someone is going into slavery, for which the good reply was therefore negative: I am not. As a historical reality that helps explain social mistrust in Africa, slavery was a defining experience: habits of practice for interdependent exchange were left deeply affected. Trust is dependent on the longue durée of social relations, but it is jolted significantly by tectonic collective experiences.\textsuperscript{11}

The aim of this article is to describe research into trust and social relations in Africa in order that the reader may come to respect its significance in his or her research too. One of the central ways in which trust and social relations are commonly being examined is through the notion of social capital, which can be defined as the norms and networks in a community that enable collective action. In their 1998 study of social capital in Africa, Widner and Mundt reflect that, ‘In Africa, local wisdom takes social capital seriously. The concepts and theories resonate with observations made by people on the ground.’\textsuperscript{12} So too will this article seek to take the notion of social capital seriously. Since Widner and Mundt’s publication there have been leaps and bounds made in the application of the concept to African experiences, in turn both endorsing and questioning its usefulness. Social capital is a concept that seeks to capture the \textit{why?} of strong communities and the \textit{how?} of relationship resources. Although the term dates back to John Dewey’s first use of it in the year 1900,\textsuperscript{13} it is Robert Putnam’s wedding of the concept with a Tocquevillian appreciation for participatory associational behaviour that ignited

\textsuperscript{10} Iliffe, 1979, p. 13.
academic interest and spread its analytical use beyond study of industrial, urban relations.\textsuperscript{14} Under the additional influence of James Coleman,\textsuperscript{15} sociology and political science have employed social capital for appreciating the value of community, in turn spawning popular academic use of the term and inviting its use for the study of non-Western societies as well. How has a professedly non-denominational appreciation of the strength of community interacted with the study of Africa, and to what extent is this interaction of mutual benefit?

It is important to emphasise at the outset the extent to which the study of social capital in Africa is at an elementary stage. Popular use of the concept dates only from the end of the 1980s and has had a distinctly Western focus. Although social capital is now used as a general measure of levels of unity and cooperation, its Western-focused history means it is usually measured with reference to industrial and post-industrial forms of associational behaviour. While the Western concern is that economic advancement individuates people, and therefore threatens social solidarity and community values, the African concern is that a lack of economic advancement factionalises people, and therefore renders social solidarity and community values destructive. Given the literature’s emphasis hitherto on the dilemma of individuation resulting from industrialisation, the concept of social capital is not yet a prototype that can be easily transferred to the developing world, and there has only been the sparsest research on trust and social capital in African countries generally. Quantitative work has tended to focus on whether social capital can help complete structural measurements of the determinants of poverty, standards of living and taxation; this problem-centred orientation is only changing slowly through a more bottom-up perspective on defining goods in the developing world.\textsuperscript{16} Agent-centred approaches to development are yet to connect with the study of trust, and are still utilised in terms of enhancing a fight against poverty,\textsuperscript{17} for which the value of trust is only beginning to be established.\textsuperscript{18} This more materialist orientation, present for example in the World Bank’s (and

UK Department for International Development’s endorsement of social capital research, is dismissed by Fine as part of a ‘new phase of economics imperialism applied to the problems of development, emphasising market and institutional imperfections as the barrier to progress.’ The idea here is that social capital for development studies is the latest in a long line of fads that seek to depoliticise developmental interventions in Africa. For the moment, however, social capital literature has tended to focus on empirical research and has not proposed any model of comprehensive improvement through top-down intervention. Even among those who are certain social capital and trust matters, there is still no consensus on how one goes about increasing it. Those who study social capital have therefore largely managed to side-step ideological debate.

The best example of connecting social capital to levels of income in Africa is Narayan and Pritchett’s study of rural Tanzania. The authors associate larger village-level social capital endowments with higher levels of income, and explain how group activity is influential enough that by ‘increasing average membership by one-half group per household (or changing group characteristics to a similar degree) the estimates suggest that this would increase expected incomes by 20%-50%, which is an impressively large effect.’ Their path-breaking survey further suggests that social capital in rural Tanzania is ‘truly social’ because ‘there is an independent effect at the village level’ not observed in individual households. This is a beginning step in asking how much

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21 As Zuern explains, ‘Social capital clearly appeals to many development professionals because it offers a way to understand and measure social relations. [...] Any investigation of social capital on its own, isolated as if functioning in its own universe, is bound to lead to erroneous conclusions.’ Zuern, E. K., ‘Social Capital and Modernity’. Transformation, No. 53 (2003), pp. 69–75, p. 73.
trust works against poverty, though the external validity of the causal relationship remains hotly contested.

The reality of being at the early stages of studying trust and social capital in Africa is on the one hand because public policy connections between trust and development are still elementary and, on the other, because the nature of trust as associational and relational challenges the very endeavour of measuring development through individual-level variables in the first place. Examining present engagements between social capital and the study of Africa, this article makes observations on three core areas in order to chart the territory of where we are and make suggestions of the best next steps: 1) motivations to trust; 2) what social capital is; and 3) what social capital does.

1) Motivations to trust

There is a need first of all to develop understandings of the motivations that underlie the forming of trusting-trustworthy relationships. This is a debate that crosses many disciplinary boundaries, and so the discussion here will restrict itself to the literature on motivations to trust as applied to Africa. Within these parameters, and contrary to what one might expect, there has only been weak reference to pre-colonial and indigenous traditions that may be influencing social trust in Africa; these are scattered and have not yet formed a systematic link with social science conceptions of associational behaviour. Fred-Mensah provides one positive example in West Africa by interpreting the Ewe word nugormesese, meaning “understanding”. It represents a culture of mutual understanding and trust that developed particularly between the Buems—the indigenous members of the host community—and migrant farmers in the area. Even though the breach of this contract would normally attract only “intrinsic sanctions,” there are instances in which a violator can be subjected to a verbal reproach or even a material fine, normally in the form of a bottle or two of the local alcoholic beverage.25

The author takes forward the concept as forming a basis for social capital ties, and demonstrates how as an institutional framework it was able to facilitate an environment of trust. In similar recourse to

pre-colonial norms and customs, Kjaer evaluates the connection between levels of social trust and compliance with tax collection in Uganda, and posits that

the pre-colonial heritage may matter both indirectly through affecting the level of trust, and directly, through affecting the level of capacity. If a relatively centralised unit existed prior to colonialism, the development of social cohesion may have contributed to a higher degree of interpersonal trust as well as a higher level of legitimacy of the local state.26

This need to look at how political histories relate to local community norms and practices is also demonstrated in the work on trust in Africa by Nunn and Wantchekon who, as described earlier, trace differences in contemporary levels of perceived trust to degrees of exposure to the slave trade.27 A sustained strategy of linking pre-colonial and colonial era cultures of political organisation to levels of social trust can only add to these findings, and would help pave the way towards de-mystifying the influence of ethnic attachments for 21st century trust and social capital in Africa.

It currently remains a disjuncture within African studies as to whether discussion of ethnic identity as a causal variable is neo-colonial and discriminatory, or whether by the fact of its constant correlations it is simply unscientific to leave it out.28 In this way, there is need to systematise research into social networks to investigate the extent to which they may be acting as intermediaries for hidden ethnic traditions, as discovered by Lonsdale in his work on the Kikuyu in Kenya.29 New institutional economics has advanced how institutional change can be a process of evolutionary—rather than revolutionary—development. There is no reason why ethnicity, as a cultural institution, should not be analysed with reference to such path dependency. Underlying tensions within African studies between social constructivism and ethnic quantification might be ameliorated through capturing social capital at the level of ethnic groups. Such a research strategy could also help systematise the

27 Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011.
28 See, for example, the debate on whether to include ethnicity in Kenya’s 2009 census. BBC News, ‘Kenya defends tribal census figures’ (31/08/10). http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11149914 (accessed 24/06/13).
study of those extra-territorial networks which are, in the age of globalisation, economically dynamic and yet ethnic (such as the Somali diaspora).

A good example of linking anthropological appreciation of culture and ethnicity to motivations to trust can be seen in the work of Ensminger. Ensminger studies the Orma pastoralists of Kenya and notes that the difficulty of finding green areas for pasture, especially in times of drought, means that young men have to travel long distances with the cattle owned by elders, sometimes for months at a time. They return, even though they will be paid less than the value of the cattle they have been caring for without supervision. The economic set-up would be prohibitively costly without sufficient trust between the ‘patron’ and ‘client’. Ensminger reflects:

Patron-client relations represent an enigma for both the economist and the anthropologist. While they almost invariably involve considerable exchanges of goods and services, they do so in the context of a relationship based on strong moral sentiments couched in a language of paternalism and voluntarism. These exchanges do not look like market exchanges. This point has rendered them elusive to the economist and has often hindered the anthropologist by obscuring the degree to which they are fundamentally economic relationships.

2) What social capital is

At present the concept of social capital tends to capture overtly Western forms of associational behaviour before assessing its explanatory power for economic growth, political participation and cooperation in the provision of public goods. This is limited in evaluating social capital because, as in Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, it tends to lay stress on formal social connections such as ‘political parties, civic associations, churches, unions, and the like’, which may not be the mainstay of trustful social interactions in Africa. For example, in Knack and Keefer’s cross-country study of social capital (which does not include African countries), the authors measure the strength of civic cooperation norms through survey responses on whether participants felt each of the following could be justified:

a) “claiming benefits which you are not entitled to”

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b) “avoiding a fare on public transport”
c) “cheating on taxes if you have the chance”
d) “keeping money that you have found”
e) “failing to report damage you’ve done accidentally to a parked vehicle.”

While this may be a decent way of assessing civic cooperation elsewhere, the fact is that many citizens in rural Africa do not even have the option of acting civically according to these criteria. Putnam accepts social capital can be built through informal connections which each act as ‘a tiny investment in social capital.’ Their contribution may not be so tiny in areas of the world where most communal activity takes place in settings that cannot be considered so formalised. For example, in a study of household welfare in Eastern Uganda, Hu and Jones first find that organisational social capital has only a small effect on levels of welfare. When they then look at less institutionalised social networks from an ethnographic perspective, such as local peer groups, they find these to have a significant effect. In evaluating their finding, the authors deplore that policy-makers use “social capital” as an analytical framework only to the extent that it focuses on village organizations, which act as the vehicle for local level development work. A tentative suggestion would be that it is the persistence of less institutionalized relationships such as personalized politics, brokerage politics or extra-local networks that is a more important area of consideration for those concerned with promoting social and economic development. The tendency to look at organizational social capital while overlooking the resilience of informalized social relationships may explain why state-sponsored or development-sponsored programs find it difficult to alter patterns of welfare at the village level.

In comparative study of Uganda and Botswana, Widner and Mundt discuss what community-defined groups count towards social capital. One challenge in their research was whether to include drinking clubs: ‘[T]he organised drinking found in Uganda drew fewer complaints as a source of conflict than did the more individual consumption of alcohol in Botswana, but its pursuit in early morning hours as well as after work, and its considerable cost, draw into question the appropriateness of its inclusion.’ This seems more a clash of cultures, however, than a universalisable research strategy. Though difficult, putting ethnography first and briefly suspending one’s normative evaluations can generate better initial categorisation of what counts as social capital.

34 Putnam, 2000, p. 93.
36 Ibid, p. 18.
Problems with the very concept of social capital do not stop there. Dubé argues that social capital is difficult to apply to challenged social settings in Africa because it offers ‘little guidance on how to foster trust and positive community expectations in antagonistic situations that prove controversial, sensitive, and challenging to tackle’. Indeed, the lower levels of development in Africa seem at first sight to render the effectiveness of networks null—poverty and conflict are the problem, not people’s lack of neighbourliness. This is in line with “neo-Malthusian” perspectives that attribute conflict to growing competition over resources, assuming away agent capacity to organise and cooperate even in cases of scarcity.

Further in support of an exceptionalist criticism to researching social capital in Africa is the idea that in applying the concept one, in colonial fashion, ends up accusing customs, traditions and ethnicities to be causes for the continent’s underdevelopment, because socially exclusive rather than inclusive. This challenge need not hold sway, however, because there is no reason to assume a zero-sum relationship between the in-group bonding of social capital and its out-group bridging. So long as ethnography is put at the forefront of social capital studies, appreciation of how social networks enable human flourishing through widely varying forms of associational behaviour, such as the tribe, can only increase. Such attention may also help connect the more distant articulation of African communal values to theoretical debate on what brings about social coordination. There is no reason why, for example, African communalism cannot rival other varieties of capitalism. If networks

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39 Witsenburg and Adano demonstrate the simplicity of the argument by analysing data on rainfall and conflict in northern Kenya. They show that, surprisingly, low rainfall does not mean more conflict but less: ‘Especially during droughts, people are more inclined to cooperate and use wells together.’ Witsenburg, K. M. & Adano, W. R., ‘Of Rain and Raids: Violent Livestock Raiding in Northern Kenya’. Civil Wars, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2009), pp. 514-538, pp. 518, 520.
matter so much, social solidarity and reciprocity may be an African philosophy interesting to the rest of the world.43

As things stand, we are at the early stages of asking how the continent’s experiences can contribute to our understanding of social capital. This is, in part, due to the extremely diverse forms of social connection displayed across Africa. Woldemariam argues:

Developing a reliable and valid measurement of social capital, which takes into account contextual differences that exist among societies in different cultural traditions, levels of economic advancement, and types of political systems, remains an area that is largely uncharted in policy-oriented or explanatory studies.44

What would social capital inclusive of African informal networks look like? What would it include? Density of association with extended family would take a central place, as well as connected practices such as fundraising activities (harambee in Kenya), dowry negotiations, elder advice, storytelling and family festivities. Tribe-level group activities would also be included, for example meetings between elders (baraza la wazee in East Africa), ancestor worship, coming of age ceremonies, dance, music and advice groups. In terms of more urbanised group practices, social capital measurements would have to include informal credit unions, “merry-go-round” money pooling, professional associations in the informal sector (such as hawker groups or unions of public transport conductors), funeral associations, and regular followers of street preachers, to name but a few examples. These are networks that fit with the definition of social capital but are largely unexplored by the social capital literature. In Narayan and Pritchett’s study of rural Tanzania, the authors list the following voluntary associations to be the most popular, and use them in their proxy for social capital: 1) churches; 2) the main political party; 3) burial societies; 4) women’s groups; 5) Muslim groups; and 6) farmers’ groups.45 That seems a good starting point, especially if it includes the community-organising dimensions of Christianity and Islam.

In progressing the study of social capital in Africa, there is room for greater assessment of the comparative strength of social capital across the continent. Nevertheless, the cultural diversity and

44 Woldemariam, 2009, p. 296.
45 Narayan & Pritchett, 1999, p. 875. Chama cha Mapinduzi is the main political party, dominant in Tanzania since independence.
economic differences throughout Africa demand nuance in the quantitative tracking of social capital. In general, quantitative work on social capital does not exhaustively track all manifestations of associational behaviour but instead tends to collect statistics on one common manifestation, and then use this as a proxy for saying whether trust and social capital is on the increase or the decrease, or which countries have more social capital than others. Western indicators often focus on formal clubs citizens belong to as an initial comparative measure. An example of this is Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*—the title builds precisely on the idea that a good way of noticing the drop in social trust in America is in the way formal bowling clubs between friends have been on the decline. The extent to which any particular club or association can be an effective proxy for social capital is, of course, highly sensitive to other economic, social and political trends, not just trust levels. There are few bowling clubs in Africa, but that might not be for the same reasons. It is, in general, difficult to find a stable and easily identifiable proxy for associational activity in a part of the world with high preference for informal associations. One perhaps helpful proxy for associational behaviour in Africa is religious membership and participation (coincidentally an activity Tocqueville frequently emphasised). Figure 1 shows World Values Survey data on whether citizens of participating African countries feel religion to be important in their lives. As can be seen, religion is more important for each of the included African countries than the world sample average. Comparative study could, for example, measure across countries not just feelings of the importance of religion but frequency of church or mosque attendance, group practices at the end of prayer services, participation in church choirs and attendance at religious youth groups and scriptural study groups. Such a study would naturally include traditional African religions as well as group practices such as speaking in tongues or engaging in collective magical rituals.

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48 These are relevant for social capital insofar as the magical rituals are habitual group activities. This is not normally the case for *juju* in West Africa or *uchavei* in East Africa, which are better understood as spiritual services involving individual-level healing or spell casting.
Figure 1 How important religion is in one’s life\footnote{Data obtained from World Values Survey (2005), V9. http://www.wvsevstdb.com/wvs/WVSData.jsp (accessed 23/09/13). The 46 country average includes the nine displayed African countries and is calculated as an average citizen response, rather than average country score (N = 66,019). Excluded from this analysis are the responses ‘don’t know’, ‘no answer’ and ‘not applicable’.


Afrobarometer, Round 5 (2010-2012). http://www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com/ (accessed 02/10/13). Answers on how much one trusts neighbours were categorised in the survey as 0 = Not at all; 1 =}

With the right measurements of associational behaviour, there is much that can be learned about comparative development experiences between African countries and other countries around the world, in pursuit of the general question of the causal relationship between social trust and economic development. At present, the most robust comparative account of trust in Africa comes through Afrobarometer questions on citizen trust perceptions, with the World Bank developing its household-level survey tools to include social capital assessments as well\footnote{See Grootaert, C., Narayan, D., Jones, V. N. & Woolcock, M., ‘Measuring Social Capital: An Integrated Questionnaire’. World Bank Working Paper, No. 18 (2004).}. Figure 2 describes results from 23 African countries surveyed between 2010 and 2012 for the Afrobarometer, which asked the question: ‘How much do you trust each of the following types of people: Your neighbors?’ The lighter shades indicate higher average willingness to trust, and the darker shades lower average willingness.

Figure 2 Trust in neighbours, by country (2010-2012)\footnote{Afrobarometer, Round 5 (2010-2012). http://www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com/ (accessed 02/10/13). Answers on how much one trusts neighbours were categorised in the survey as 0 = Not at all; 1 =}
Just a little; 2 = Somewhat; and 3 = A lot. Respondents were also given the option, ‘Don’t know’, not included here. The averages displayed in the map come from a total of 38,276 participants and are standardised around a 10 point scale.
3) What social capital does

A third area of analysis is the assessment of what social capital does—the role it is playing for political, economic and social change in Africa. Progress on this research question has been hotly contested. Figure 3 compares trust perceptions in African countries against development indicators and shows that there is no immediately observable correlation between trust in others and GDP per capita or levels of poverty, discouraging the view that economic development in Africa leads seamlessly to willingness to trust, or vice-versa. Trust is a slow-moving variable, however, and it was never the claim that it works directly and independently to bring about growth. As an indirect cause or facilitator, there is nevertheless an interesting literature on social capital and Africa that seeks to explain the continent’s growth trajectory.

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**Figure 3** Trust in neighbours, GDP per capita and level of poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2010-2012 trust in neighbours, indexed score</th>
<th>2012 GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2005 international $)</th>
<th>2013 Multidimensional poverty index (range: 0 to 1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Burundi</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>0.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Malawi</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>0.334</td>
</tr>
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<td>3 Mali</td>
<td>7.80</td>
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<td>4 Burkina Faso</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>1,304</td>
<td>0.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Tanzania</td>
<td>7.23</td>
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<td>0.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mauritius</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>13,487</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Namibia</td>
<td>6.13</td>
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<td>8 Mozambique</td>
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<td>9 Kenya</td>
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<td>12 Algeria</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A number of articles have professed to help explain Africa’s economic difficulties through adding social capital as an explanatory variable. The need arose as the models for economic growth used elsewhere were unable to capture the extraordinarily poor average growth rates in Africa from the 1960s onwards. Indeed, simply inserting the geographical region of Africa as an independent variable into regressions improved the explanatory power of models significantly, showing how far the models fell short of providing genuine causal accounts for the continent’s economic stagnation. Explaining this “African dummy variable” was therefore a high research priority. It coincided somewhat accidentally in the late 1990s with popularity for the concept of social capital. Bringing these two themes together, Collier and Gunning argued that in Africa ‘the lack of openness to trade and the low level of social capital have had large, damaging effects on the growth rate.’ Although the authors did not provide much evaluation of social capital’s definition, they did make distinction between “civic” and “public” types. Public social capital consists ‘of the institutions of government that facilitate private activity, such as the courts.’ This is not social capital as understood by Putnam, and in fact Putnam cites increasing per capita figures for police, lawyers and judges in the United States since the 1970s as part of the portfolio of evidence for that country’s decline in social capital. Putnam quotes Galanter, who relates the popular sentiment: ‘Because lawyers are producers and vendors of impersonal “cool” trust, they are the beneficiaries of the decline of its low-cost rival, thick personal

trust.’ Knack and Keefer further observe that a country’s ‘one-percentage-point increase in law students [...] is associated with a decline in trust of more than one percentage point!’ This pits Putnam’s concept of social capital as, in fact, opposite Collier and Gunning’s. Despite the inconsistency, Putnam’s thinking can nevertheless be said to be along the lines of the author’s alternative category of “civic” social capital, considered as the economic benefits obtained from the building of trust, which lowers transaction costs, from the knowledge externalities of social networks, and from an enhanced capacity for collective action. Unfortunately, however, it is not this concept the authors identify as explaining the African dummy variable, leaving researchers with no empirical connection between Putnam’s social capital and its economic effects for African countries. The indicators used by Collier and Gunning to represent social capital are governance indicators: corruption, bureaucracy, enforceability, civil war, fractionalisation (ethno-linguistic), social development and inequality; they are described as ‘socio-political indicators’ in one of the article’s tables, but ‘social capital’ in the main text. Indeed, throughout the article the authors’ interest is not social capital but the effect of policy choices for growth rates. That their article is referred to as making such a bold social capital claim says more about the unprecedented enthusiasm in social capital research at that time than what their actual argument consists in.

Alternative use of social capital as an explanatory variable for Africa’s slow average growth rate has come through Temple’s application of an index on ‘social capability’ to growth regressions. Although the article is entitled Initial Conditions, Social Capital and Growth in Africa, the author admits it to be a ‘perhaps heroic assumption’ that the index used captures aspects of social capital. As pointed out clearly by Jerven, the study is deeply problematic in two respects. The first is that, as is common

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59 Collier & Gunning, 1999, p. 65.
60 Ibid, p. 67.
in many studies of growth in Africa, the average growth rate spanning, approximately, the years 1960 to 1990 is taken as the dependent variable, despite the fact that the continent’s GDP per capita growth saw both upward and downward trends within this period (see figure 4). This is an unhelpful research design, therefore, because insensitive to the causes for within-period fluctuations. An initial stock of social capital is asked to explain the average growth rate for all future time periods, as if a single event.

**Figure 4** GDP per capita in Africa, 1960-2000 (constant 1995 US$)

Second, the index used to explore social capital’s independent effects is both an inaccurate representation of social capital and analytically indistinguishable from other variables used to model economic causes for growth. Temple’s analysis rests on using an index on social capability developed by Adelman and Morris in the 1960s. The ‘formidable advantage’ of the index is that ‘since it was constructed in the early 1960s, its values are uncontaminated by knowledge of subsequent growth performance. Hence it is very useful in examining whether the origins of Africa’s slow growth might partly be traced to the nature of its social arrangements.’ The index pools data for developing countries according to ten indicators:

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- Size of the traditional agricultural sector
- Extent of dualism [coexistence of market exchange with subsistent production]
- Extent of urbanisation
- Character of basic social organisation
- Importance of indigenous middle class
- Extent of social mobility
- Extent of literacy
- Extent of mass communications
- Crude fertility rate
- Degree of modernisation of outlook

Of the ten, only two can be described as bearing some connection to the concept of social capital as understood in the social sciences: character of basic social organisation and degree of modernisation of outlook. For the first of these, Adelman and Morris explain:

Historically, the characteristic transformation associated with industrialization and urbanization has been from a traditional society in which a multifunctional tribal, clan, or extended family unit dominated all realms of individual decision-making into a society in which the dominant kinship unit was the “conjugal” or nuclear family with its much more restricted area of authority.

If this is an indicator of social capability then it is, in fact, an opposite to social capital. An essential feature of social science discussions has been how “bonding” and “bridging” social capital develops one’s social network, and that personal connections help foster the norms and informational networks underlying economic exchange. In Adelman and Morris’ understanding of the character of basic social organisation we have instead the view that smaller networks are more suited to economic modernisation than larger ones. Are ethnic-based networks to be considered a form of social capital or an affront to basic social organisation? When Collier and Gunning take ethno-linguistic fractionalisation as a proxy for social capital, they are suggesting that greater homogeneity in ethnicity and language indicates greater social capital. That implies the more there are of one’s tribe, the better. Adelman and Morris, however (through Temple and Johnson), see social capability as greater the smaller one’s group is. This disagreement must be addressed before quantitative work on

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69 Adelman & Morris, 1967, p. 27.

social capital’s effects in Africa can be taken forward. Synthesis could be achieved by, for example, arguing that ethnic categorisation at times acts as an exclusionary, “dark” social capital, depending on the socio-political context, but otherwise expands one’s network of opportunities and support.71 This requires, however, that qualitative political evaluations accompany statistical measurements,72 not just that the size of an ethnic group is modelled as having a quadratic effect on social cohesion (small and very large groups good; medium competing groups bad).73 Trust games deployed comparatively between Kenya and Tanzania demonstrate that the political context helps frame how citizens generate expectations of each other’s trustworthiness, in both inter-ethnic and coethnic circumstances.74 For these reasons, it is highly counter-productive to assume greater individuation is indicative of more social capital without first assessing the degree of the network’s political inclusivity or exclusivity.

Adelman and Morris’ second indicator that is non-economic and may have some connection to social capital theory is ‘modernisation of outlook’, described as ‘the creation of attitudes favorable to change and innovation’.75 Where this has a link to social capital is in drawing attention to ‘the individual’s sense of participation in the sociocultural and political life of his nation as the key mental trait of the citizens of modern societies.’76 As Temple and Johnson describe it, assessment of modernisation of outlook includes ‘social and political participation, and so might be thought of as a cross-country index of social capital.’77 Something similar is implied in parts of Putnam’s work, with emphasis being made in his study of Italy on how ‘civic regions have grown faster than regions with fewer associations and more hierarchy, controlling for their level of development in 1970.’78 Figures

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73 For explanation of the possible quadratic effect of ethnic diversity, see Temple, 1998, p. 317. Collier and Gunning agree that the political dimension is key. As they explain, ‘the negative growth effect of ethnic diversity only applies in societies lacking political rights. In countries with dictatorships, ethnic diversity reduces the growth rate by 3 percent per annum. Conversely, in countries with full democratic rights diversity has no detrimental effect.’ Collier & Gunning, 1999, p. 67.
75 Adelman & Morris, 1967, p. 49.
76 Ibid.
5 and 6 describe Adelman and Morris’ categorisation of African countries in their 1967 publication, according to modernisation of outlook.

Figure 5  Degree of ‘modernisation of outlook’ of African countries (1967 assessment)\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} According to the ratings given by Adelman & Morris, 1967, pp. 50-1.
**Figure 6** 'Modernisation of outlook' rating by country (1967 assessment), compared with income and poverty levels\(^80\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Modernisation of outlook rating (A+ to C- scale)</th>
<th>GDP per capita change 1967—2012 (constant 2005 US$)</th>
<th>2013 Multi-dimensional poverty index (range: 0 to 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>+1,560</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-82</td>
<td>0.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>+330</td>
<td>0.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>+606</td>
<td>0.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>+1,540</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>+234</td>
<td>0.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-241</td>
<td>0.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>B−</td>
<td>-204</td>
<td>0.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>+1,641</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>+387</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>+139</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>+320</td>
<td>0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>+116</td>
<td>0.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>+2,676</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-355</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-187</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
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<td>+78</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-282</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
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<td>-4</td>
<td>0.439</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An immediate concern with the modernisation of outlook dataset is how such categorisations were arrived at. Essentially, they are the result of gathered expert opinion at the time of publication. As mentioned, Temple argues the unique advantage of the dataset to be that it was formulated in the 1960s, before the resulting growth levels became apparent. Historians could nevertheless be asked to

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\(^{80}\) Ibid. GDP per capita figures obtained from World Bank, 2013. Multidimensional poverty index obtained from Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2013.
verify these assessments and suggest revisions, if primed sufficiently on how “outlook” is a strictly social and not economic factor, and so long as they were clear that the task is to assess the outlook of these countries at that time and not now. The main reason one would hesitate in doing that, however, is that many historians would simply reject at the outset the assumed spectrum of backward—modern that the assessment entails. Indeed, here is where we find a fundamental contention at play that is of interest to all studies of social capital going forward. Within growth regressions, researchers seek to integrate social capital into a theory of economic efficiency or development and so beg the question on what development is. Adelman and Morris see modernisation of outlook as conducive to industrialisation and the same focus on development as industrialisation is present in Collier, who explores whether Africa ‘missed the boat’ because globalisation forces are now working against the continent. There is a single type of development they have in mind, which they are wondering social capital might help produce. Parallel to this, however, recent arguments grounded in social capital and Amartya Sen’s capability approach make increasingly explicit how community-defined ends are sociological features supportive of norms and network formation. Much of Sen’s theoretical approach consists in demonstrating the fallibility of utilitarian logic for economic theory. His alternative is to lay stress on persons’ self-defined goods, and this culminates in his work Development as Freedom. Links have begun to be drawn between capabilities and social capital approaches, and this is possible because contemporary social capital authors such as Putnam exhibit a key difference in their approach as compared to their forefathers Tocqueville, Weber and Tawney: they leave the final point of progress undefined. As Putnam makes clear in his definition:

81 This point is conceded to some extent by Temple, 1998, p. 324.
By “social capital,” I mean features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Whether or not their shared goals are praiseworthy is, of course, entirely another matter.87

Sen’s agreement with this approach is clear in his attachment to an underlying Aristotelian philosophy, interested in life as an active pursuit of the good for which knowledge of the good is a deliberative pursuit, not easy to prescribe or define a priori.88 Sen rejects the modernistic framework maintained by authors such as Adelman and Morris and opens debate on the interaction between community-defined goods and economic coordination. Such interpretations of community goods demand that African studies “catch up” with the way other disciplines are finding room for citizen-level normative deliberation and network formation. The approach ditches both modernisation theories and the post-modern view that interpretations of the good are a means toward power domination. It is not a call for rejecting economic growth as a dependent variable so much as deepening our understanding of the way in which community-level social norms and networks facilitate economic coordination.

Conclusion

Perhaps because of the original choice of wording, social scientists often see social capital as a single factor of production which one has either more or less of, quantitatively.89 However, if congruence in what counts as trustworthiness is a necessary condition for decisions to trust, the moral, cultural or identity-based interpretations of trustworthiness matter enormously.90 For example, mutual agreement in a Protestant work ethic, as described in Weber’s seminal work,91 is likely to have different macro implications in the long term compared with mutual agreement in Japanese feudal

88 Sen, 1999, p. 73.
91 Weber, 1930.
values, as described in Fukuyama’s book Trust.\footnote{Fukuyama, F., \textit{Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity} (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 151. Note, however, that Fukuyama considers the United States and Japan to constitute similar cases of high-trust societies with similar macroeconomic implications.}

At its broadest, this is an appeal to bring culture back into explaining political, economic and social outcomes. Economic results may involve consolidations of group character that lie outside what is possible in theories of coalescing modernisation. If, as Fukuyama affirms, culture is ‘inherited ethical habit’\footnote{Ibid, p. 34 (emphasis omitted).} and if congruence in norms and perceptions is instrumental for social coordination and trust, culture matters as a \textit{permanent feature} of economic exchange, even according to the logic of neoclassical economics and rational choice theory. Under this lens, African economies are not just economies in Africa. They are about Africans in economies. This is not a return to culturalism or primordialism as a linear determinant of society, but a view of culture as a communicative channel for ordering preference rankings and achieving the coordination necessary to overcome social dilemmas. As Fred-Mensah notes—albeit somewhat technocratically—in an article published by the World Bank:

\begin{quote}
In what way can African countries best redesign their philosophical and institutional environments in order to create workable means of social control? The question directs attention to the need for governments to imaginatively integrate the relevant aspects of their norms of trust with those of the people’s indigenous ones as a means of dealing with the exigencies of the modern situations. The potentially innovative character of this proposal [of indigenous bases to social capital] lies in its promise of blending the structures and processes of the two systems of social control, which will bridge the perceived gaps between the philosophical underpinnings of the two systems.\footnote{Fred-Mensah, 2005, p. 3.}
\end{quote}

This is, indeed, where politics begins and economics finishes: interpreting the social and cultural complexity of group action as a normative ordering of actors with otherwise diverse interests.\footnote{Philp, for example, takes politics to be ‘a process that plays a central role in the identification of such goals that simultaneously makes them concrete and normative for others.’ Philp, M., \textit{Political Conduct} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 2.}

How could such appreciation for the divergent macro effects of inherited ethical habits be better explored in Africa? Whereas Fukuyama considers the approach of merit to comparative study of country-level outcomes, in Africa it could also seek to explain local differences within countries, helping capture heterogeneous developments in local political institutions, or the descent towards corruption or neopatrimonialism when cacophonous traditions obstruct community-based moral articulations.\footnote{See Burbidge, 2015.} For example, the move to political decentralisation in Africa (such as in Kenya’s 2010
constitution, or Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution) presents an unprecedented opportunity for examining how new institutions may be embraced differently by peoples of different social histories. Putnam began his work on social capital through study of almost the same phenomenon—a review of devolution across Italy and the divergent political performance that resulted.\textsuperscript{97} In general, the centrifugal forces in contemporary Africa, caused by both inefficiencies in state welfare provision during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and a developmentalist agenda which sees participatory decision-making as valuable in itself,\textsuperscript{98} could be fruitfully explored in its institutional trajectory through reference to local associational habits and norms.\textsuperscript{99} Van Acker attempts this very manoeuvre with discussion of socially organised property relations ("kalinzi") in the Kivus of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.\textsuperscript{100} Ostrom promotes the agenda by deploring the frequent assumption that local collective action is not possible without formal, top-down institutions:

\begin{quote}
We have misunderstood the rich network of mutual desires and benefits that common-property institutions have generated in much of the world. Recommendations to destroy these institutions are based on an assumption that the capacity to transfer ownership was the most important right in the bundle of rights potentially involved in the ownership of any resources. Recent studies of the evolution of indigenous land-right systems in Africa have challenged our analytical assumptions substantially. Investments in new institutions, as well as new infrastructures, need to be based on knowledge that takes into account the multiple incentives that are generated by institutions, as they interact with social norms and the physical world in any particular setting.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Perhaps a stimulating counter-argument can be found against free trade by stating that, regardless of any indirect economic benefits to competitiveness, exposure to global cultural forces blurs the local formation of common concepts of trustworthiness, in turn ruining the very systems of trust that undergird capitalist development.\textsuperscript{102} There is growing criticism of development work that removes local habits and norms in the process of providing assistance, with Narayan and Pritchett suggesting

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{97} Putnam, 1993.
\textsuperscript{102} As Ostrom reflects in reference to social capital’s constitution, ‘Common understanding is easily eroded if large numbers of people are concerned or if a large proportion of participants change rapidly—unless substantial efforts are devoted to transmission of the common understandings, monitoring behavior in conformance with common understandings, and sanctioning behavior not in conformance with the common understanding.’ Ostrom, 2000, p. 179.
\end{flushright}
that ‘[w]ith the present state of knowledge, “do no harm” is probably the best guide.’

The caution is needed not because international institutions are so mighty, but because social trust is so fragile.

Regardless of particular public policy implications, research into trust and social capital indicates increasingly broad consensus on the value of local normative conceptions and social networks. There is an urgent need for further research at the meso-level of African societies, interpreting the links between social capital, trust, culture and social virtues. We need to re-evaluate our understanding of social norms, asking exactly what common values hold persuasion in economically constrained scenarios and the extent to which these, though often accumulated in the pursuit of specific goals, act as normative underpinnings to economic exchange generally. This is the realm for a new aretology which explores the relevance of trust and social capital for cooperative performance, interprets their breadths of applicability and negotiates their differences between cultures. It is not an argument against rational choice theories of individual behaviour but a research design that incorporates rational choice appreciation for economically constrained, scarce resource environments into a broader and more holistic account of social life. In this pursuit Africa stands as an absolute equal: the modernisation thesis is qualified in favour of bottom-up accounts of social coordination.

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