

# Hermeneutics of Ceteris Paribus in the African Context

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## Abstract

*This article has provided a philosophical discourse approach in deconstructing Ceteris Paribus (CP) as applied in contemporary Africa. The concept of CP, which affirm the notion of 'all things are equal' does not always hold true in the real world. The author has gone beyond the normal interpretation of the word shock, which is making it impossible for the CP concept to hold true in reality. The paper has unraveled critical discourses spanning corruption element as a key factor in the current state of Africa's economic malaise. It is therefore incumbent on African scholars and professionals to continue their strides in promoting critical hermeneutic space, pursued through empirical endeavours or otherwise in support of developing a philosophy that is based on pragmatism for the enhancement of economic methodology, focused on the continent's pathway of (sustained) economic development.*

**Keywords:** *hermeneutics; critical discourses; Ceteris Paribus (CP); African philosophy; corruption*

**JEL Classification:** *B41; B50*

## Introduction

Ceteris Paribus (CP) is a concept commonly used in the social sciences, and particularly in the Economic Science to imply '*all things being equal*'; '*a universal law, with an exception-less generalisation*'<sup>1</sup>, that has ignited heated debate in human reasoning, which thereby resulted in countless divide on philosophical views between pure scientists and that of human / social scientists. The universal interpretation of the CP law is based on its admissibility to exception of things happening, more so as a result of the influence of exogenous factors; such factors, as applied in philosophical economic studies can be associated with '*shocks*', for example, natural occurrences / disasters and changes in environmental and other circumstances surrounding human beings.

Pure scientific laws are built on the evidence of scientific experimentations, and not on some abstract behavioural disposition of human beings, or the masterminded act of human deceptive actions modelled on '*corruption*' as witnessed in developing economies, mostly experienced in

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<sup>1</sup> This according to Silva (2012), is based on a generally held view of the '*status quo*' of all things remaining perfectly stable in the real world.

the African continent (Jackson, 2016a). Despite this widely held views about the non-scientific approach of Economic Sciences as undermined by scholars in the pure scientific world, the *construct* of this paper is viewed as an intuitive journey in the pathway of advancing critical hermeneutic space (more so, critical interrogation) as a way of overcoming the emptiness left by the failures of epistemological theories to explain evolutionary development in science. It is therefore, the aim of this paper to present a critical hermeneutic space that focuses attention on a re-modelling of the CP concept to address the reality of endogenous events in the African continent.

## **Hermeneutics and its Application to African Philosophical Thoughts**

Hermeneutics is a methodology, closely associated with philosophical thoughts on the interpretation of texts (Abulad, 2007 and Jackson, 2016c); its origin stemmed from the need to interpret biblical scriptures, but contemporary Eurocentric writers like Gadamer (1998 translated) have also expanded its discourse beyond that of biblical exegesis. More recently, discourses pertaining to the concept of hermeneutics have generated thought provoking conversations amongst African scholars in a bid to advance critical reflection pertaining to the interpretation of the word '*shock*' as events unfold in the African continent, which are said to impact adversely on the prospect for sustainable growth.

Proponents of African Hermeneutic philosophy like Okere (1983) and Serequeberhan (1994), have focused their discursive interpretation on events happening in the African continent; a perceived move in the direction to champion critical discourses on issues pertaining to sustainable development in the continent. In the same token of African Hermeneutic Philosophy, some thoughts have emerged on various interpretive taxonomies as noted by Janz (b/d), originally excerpted in a work produced by Smet and Nkombe (1978) as stated thus:

*"'Ideological philosophy', or the reaction to theories and prejudices which, in the past, supported the slave trade and later justified colonization; 'traditional philosophy', or the reaction to the myth of the 'primitive mentality' of Africans which, through hermeneutical restoration, speaks of asserting the existence, solidity, and coherence of traditional African philosophies; 'Critical philosophy', or the reaction to and questions about theses or projects of the two preceding trends; and 'synthetic philosophy', or the assumption of preceding trends and the orientation of the data collected toward a hermeneutical, a functional philosophy or a search for new problematics".*

The construction of African philosophy has come under intense criticism from contemporary scholars – this include both African and Euro-centrist scholars (Janz, n/d and Owolabi, 1999), but its discourse is still championed through various routes, with momentum from contemporary scholars like Chimakonam (2014 and 2015), whose arguments have been based on critically held conversations and interpretations, geared towards challenging philosophical thoughts pertaining to Africa's pathway of development.

## **Hermeneutics of CP and its Critical Universality Discourse**

The universality of CP ideology on deliberation from a critical hermeneutic space can be applied contextually to the economic malaise of (destructive) human actions in Africa as a

whole; this could be variously explained in terms of the unstable political economy situation experienced in the continent, and also linked to discourses pertaining to the hermeneutics of 'intellectual prudence'<sup>2</sup> and corruption - an area considered to have remained 'under the carpet', on account of the hegemonic influences of those in authority to marginalise professionals like economists from executing an act of wisdom in their duty to society.

Postmodernism, epitomised as an era of scepticism or critical discourse on contextual-historically held views like Ceteris Paribus is worthwhile for the advancement of scholarly debate, more so in challenging the unchallenged CP notion. Such discourse(s) can be likened to Chimakonam's interrogatory philosophy (2014), in a bid to commence a philosophy that will help promote sustained pathway of development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Citizens and scholars in the continent should infuse their mindset on critical interrogation, in order to challenge the limited scope of the word 'shock' - a concept akin to CP as applied in the estimation of econometric models for example. African scholars have, for a long time being too complacent about the archaic usage of CP concept, which is mostly skewed towards influences pertaining to natural occurrences, when proposing reasons for the poor performance of economies in the continent, as opposed to being overt about the incomprehensible and unethical behaviours manifested some unscrupulous individuals. Such behaviours have been criticised intensely by scholars (Wraith and Simpkins, 2014; Okori, 2010). Hence, the negative connotation of semantic usage of words like 'underdeveloped, third-world, etc' when dealing with economies in SSA.

In leading the way forward, it is worthwhile for scholars to advance critically held interrogation like: 'how can Africans in the 21st century justify a backward delusion of masterminded act of underdevelopment in the continent?'. Many economies in the continent have lagged for too long when it comes to their global ranking and economic performances. Often, it is so easy for those in governance to attribute poor economic performance to influence of 'external shocks' (for example, changes in world market prices of commodities like crude oil), as opposed to coming clean about greed and corruptive behaviours manifested by the political clans to judiciously utilise public resources for the good of those whom they seek to serve. On critical reflection of this widely held view, human beings have a side in them that is capable of deciding between what is considered 'good or bad'. The imprudent action of individuals in authority to make financial gains at the expense of the masses is a root cause for the continued deteriorating state of economic decline witnessed in the continent as a whole.

Moving away from the more traditional economic discourse of CP concept, it is worthwhile for scholars from all professional background to commence its hermeneutic contextualization in a bid to pave the way for intellectual discourses on the continent's pathway of 'sustained development and growth'<sup>3</sup>. Contemporary scholar / proponent like Chimakonam (2015), through his 'interrogatory hermeneutic' doctrine has helped greatly in championing the way forward on the widely held view of African philosophy, as opposed to the more traditional Eurocentric discourse. Scholars should continue to advance scepticism on the Eurocentric

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<sup>2</sup> Intellectual prudence is a philosophical terms that is modelled on the ethics of human actions - more so, the human ability to manifest virtuousness when placed in position(s) of trust (Jackson, 2016b). The imprudent behaviour of mankind to manifest selfishness is the root cause of the almost collapsed state as seen in many of the economies found in the south of the African continent. Hence, the need for intellectual conversations to bring to the fore, critical discourses spanning *corruption* as an exception to the universally accepted CP law, which denote "all things being equal"- critical studies in the same direction have also been levied by scholars like Rol (2012, 38 –39) and Boulding (1970).

<sup>3</sup> This is an area of pertinent concern in the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for economic growth and development, as addressed in two studies produced by Jackson and Jabbie (2019 and forthcoming).

hegemony of the narrowly held view of the notion of 'externality', and on which CP ideology has been strongly modelled. The continuation of this narrowly held notion of the concept, when one considers the complexity of economies in Africa, is one of the root causes of stagnation experienced by economies in the continent, particularly those in the SSA region. This can also give rise to the imprudent behaviours manifested by unscrupulous citizens to continue their acts of connivance with corrupt international corporations to deprive the continent of her meaningful prospect for economic progression.

On a critical note, conditions in the continent cannot easily satisfy the CP condition of '*all things being equal*' when most of the time, guns and destructive weaponries are being sold to factions as a ploy in keeping individual economies unstable, thereby making it possible for the continent's precious minerals and other naturally endowed resources to be auctioned in international markets, through disguised actions of the so-called '*multi-nationals*'. Let us for instance, reflect on the state of Boko Haram's interference in the northern part of Nigeria and equally, two decade of civil unrest suffered by the innocent in Sierra Leone. The highlighted examples shows how unethical dealings of machinated acts displayed by multi-nationals are utilised in rigging Africa's prospect of economic progress, while the west / developed economies continue to model their thoughts involving a simplistic notion of externalities / shocks (with planned aid-giving venture still directed at propping their own citizens in becoming gainfully employed in the continent). This is considered a form of rational hermeneutic discourse and more 'pluralistic in view of modern economics thinking'<sup>4</sup>, implying that the reality is not only based on the norm of the '*Ceteris paribus*'<sup>5</sup> condition, but should incorporate concept of shock(s) linked to '*corruption and multi-national disguised intervention*' in the political economy affairs of resource-rich African economies.

Critical interrogation approach in the deconstruction of CP concept, particularly in the context of Africa's economic progression is intuitively connected with corruption and many more. For a simple illustration, the application of economic modelling, which associate itself with shocks / exogenous components can be critically interrogated, not only attributable to the existence of natural phenomenon, but also on the reality of issues connected with '*corruption*', normally seen to be swept under the carpet when addressing philosophical thinking connected with CP concept as illustrated below (Jackson and Jabbie, forthcoming; Jackson. 2016b).

$$GDP_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 I_t + \alpha_2 MS_t + \alpha_3 ER_t + \mathcal{E}_t \quad (1)$$

where:

$GDP_t$  Gross Domestic Product

$\alpha_0$  is the intercept

$\alpha_1 I_t$  investment over a period of time

$\alpha_2 MS_t$  money supply

$\alpha_3 ER_t$  Exchange Rate

$\mathcal{E}_t$  error indicate shocks (exogenous) not accounted for in the endogenous variables.

One may be poised to be a devil's advocate by advancing critical thought provoking interpretation connected with the widely held view of the error term in the above equation, which is normally based on the '*ambiguous usage of shocks / exogenous concept*'. The

<sup>4</sup> This is in line with the modern doctrine of Pluralist Economics, which addresses a modern approach to the teachings of economics as championed by its proposers, for example Paul Krugman (2008) and many more. Critical interrogatory approach to CP doctrine is also a way of addressing modern thought processes around people's narrow view of the concept, which to-date is still limited to external influences as opposed to internal influences like corruption factor, which is considered a setback to progress around the African continent.

<sup>5</sup> Implying all things are equal.

interpretation of  $\mathcal{E}_t$ , can be thought of as an escape route for corrupt institutions or individuals to infuse their hegemony, through continuation of an illicit act of ravaging natural and financial wealth of economies, while the poor are left to live a state of squalor. Critical hermeneutic discourses on the error term ( $\mathcal{E}_t$ ) should seek to deconstruct concept of 'shocks,' with intuition extended to accommodate man-made inflicted irregularities like corruption and also, irrational behaviours manifested by economic actors like wholesalers and retailers. Schools of economic thoughts pertaining to the development of the African continent must endeavour to channel critical hermeneutic discourses modelled on the doctrine of postmodern economic methodology – such inquiry should incorporate 'corruption' factor pursued through experimental venture - an area greatly emphasised in Fielding (2000) and Tanzi's (1998) study.

According to Tanzi (1998: 560), discourse involving global corruption (though not directly focused on the African philosophy) was also strongly highlighted in an editorial published on December 31, 1995 in the 'Financial Times' magazine, which further led Tanzi (ibid) to reflect much more interrogatively on the concept, as highlighted in the under-mentioned excerpt statement:

*"The degree of attention now paid to corruption leads naturally to the question of why. Why so much attention now? Is it because there is more corruption than in the past? Or is it because more attention is being paid to a phenomenon that had always existed but had been largely, though not completely, ignored? The answer is not obvious, and there are no reliable statistics that would make possible a definitive answer".*

A study conducted by Croix and Delavallade (2013) also critically interrogated the intention behind the continuation of aid-giving to corrupt nations (empirically referred to as 'poorest economies'). On this note, one may think from a reasoned point of view that corruption as witnessed in the African continent should be categorised as exogenous on the computation of econometric modelling. Croix and Delavallade's (2013: 15) empirical studies have intuitively linked its overall impact to low productivity of poor nations, with outcomes showing 'aid and corruption being positively correlated at equilibrium' point.

Intuition spanning CP concept have a long way to go, in terms of the advancement of critical discourses relating to its scientific reality in the African continent, where the influence of unmentioned factor like corruption is making it difficult for the continent to experience deserved progress. The advancement of Popper's (1962) test of falsification is far from reality here, if one is to continue advancing critical scientific discourse(s) on CP concept in contextualisation to the Africa continent.

An interrogatory discourse as postulated by its founding father (Jonathan O. Chimakonam, see references 2014 and 2015) needs to be firm-up in moving the continent to a phase of sustained developmental progress. As mentioned, critical discourses connected with CP concept can be utilised in deconstructing deeper understanding of the economic reality of African economic development. This may also qualify for an in-depth study spanning the deconstruction of exogenous concept pertaining to corruption, which is thought to be a hindrance in satisfying the semantically held notion of 'all things being equal'. Africa is still faced with problems associated with the psychological downplay of Eurocentric thoughts, while the hegemony of western intervention in the political landscape of the continent is still prevalent. Africa is naturally endowed; the unstable political economy environment and prevalence of corruption is making it hard for progress to be made in the direction of economic prosperity (See Kallon, 2003; Obuah, 2010). African academics (both in the mainland continent and the diaspora) must endeavour to engage critically in deconstructing postmodern CP ideology. Hermeneutic discourses must be focused on critical issues endemic to the continent - that which is preventing CP condition from being adequately satisfied.

African philosophical thoughts involving CP concept should be deconstructed and in which case, professionals in different disciplines will need to address issues of particular concerns affecting progress in the continent. Transparency in African politics is very key to the continent's pathway of sustained development. The dictate of western economics is predominating Africa's economic affairs, and which is making it easy for the language of external shock(s), connected with natural disasters to dominate the semantics of CP concept. Africa is still a primary producer of natural wealth / raw materials, and there is a lack of critical hermeneutic discourse spanning the continent's focus in addressing transparency of transactions in the continent. Economies must endeavour to create an environment that is resilient to external influences, and this require prudent behaviour of citizens placed in position of trust to make sure resources are utilised for the good of all. Strong economic structures should be set up to facilitate transparency and accountability, connected with revenue mobilisation as a way of helping individual economies to forge development in the direction of establishing tertiary industries to facilitate increased productivity. While at the same time, efforts must be made to reduce the continent's susceptibility to the acclaimed semantics of external shocks, normally attributable to factors like natural disasters and persistent turbulence in the global market.

Hermeneutic philosophy surrounding CP discourse will need to focus attention on the historic structure and reasons behind failed states in the continent; such processes must endeavour to address critical issues like exogenous factors, such as naturally occurring incidences like weather conditions, market failures and more importantly, internal occurrences akin to corruption in key sectors (see Jackson and Jabbie, 2019; Kallon, 2003).

Critical hermeneutic discourses on CP ideology should be treated as a form of (social) scientific methodology to knowledge acquisition, despite not pursued in the same way as perceived in natural / physical sciences – such methodology can take the form of mixed trajectory, for example '*experimental and critical interrogation*'; the former (experimental) seem to have gained credence in modern economic inquiries (see Bolton, 2011). Given the under-developed state of the continent, it is very important that serious thought processes are given to the manner in which professionals are engaging themselves in the interpretation of issues facing the continent. It is normally easy for professionals to cast blame on colonial dominance in the continent, but one would rather refrain from upholding such view(s), given the fact that Africa is capable of featuring highly qualified individuals / professionals to manage affairs in the continent.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has geared itself towards the utilisation of the concept of critical hermeneutic space in promoting pluralistic and pragmatic discussion of economic methodology as expressed by Gala et al (2012). It is therefore assumed that the core of pragmatism, and much more the acceptance of different methods of scientific research, particularly that which is geared towards the application of critical hermeneutics should be the rule of practice for economists to unravel transparent governance and management in the African continent. In order to be forward thinking, scholars and practitioners in the continent needs to embrace an epistemological thinking that is open to the utilisation of varied methods - in this case, critical hermeneutics that searches for the best understanding of realities happening in the continent, for example, unearthing corruption, considered as a hidden concept on the exogenous phenomenon of *ceteris paribus*. There is still a long way to go in the pathway of professionals' ability to reflect critically, particularly with regard to occurrences affecting the continent's prospect for sustained growth - this is not to say that those in governance are incompetent to lead the continent's pathway of development.

On a final note, and as emphasised by Rorty (1994: 356), “hermeneutics is not ‘another way of knowing’ - it is better seen as another way of coping” (also excerpted in Gala et al, 2012: 12)”. In this vein, the utilisation of critical hermeneutic space in the direction of interrogatory conversation, is considered useful here to help address problems associated with greed on the part of people to act prudently (see Jackson, forthcoming and 2016d; Chimakonam, 2014), more so, that which is geared towards ensuring wealth capacity of resource-rich economies are utilised in the best way in support of the continent’s sustained pathway of development and growth.

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