

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-46

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## INTRODUCTION BY GARETH AUSTIN, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Regular readers of H-Diplo will know A. G. Hopkins as the author of *American Empire: A Global History* (2018), which was the subject of Roundtable XX-33.<sup>1</sup> Many will also be familiar with Hopkins's edited volumes on the history of globalization, and with his field-changing co-authored work with Peter Cain, *British Imperialism* (originally 1993).<sup>2</sup> The book that made his name, however, was *An Economic History of West Africa* (1973). It was—and remains—a compelling and provocative synthesis and interpretation of a then new field,<sup>3</sup> which inspired scholars working on other parts of Africa and beyond, and which, by setting out hypotheses, and identifying myriad topics for new research, set much of the agenda for subsequent research on West Africa's economic past. Strangely, the book was not reviewed in French, which is so far the other main language of publication on West African history. But it was published in Egypt in an Arabic translation, albeit without the author's knowledge. Very widely accepted as a classic, *An Economic History of West Africa* is now reprinted in a new edition. The original text and bibliography are themselves untouched, the only differences being that the maps come out better, while unfortunately the pagination is different. I think Hopkins's decision not to start changing the original was absolutely justified: it was essentially an argument, a critical intervention, which deserves to be revisited as such. But the second edition does provide a much-awaited updating, in the form of a very important, 43-page new introduction. In this Hopkins first describes the contexts, personal, political, and historiographical, in which he wrote the book, and explains the most important of his authorial choices. He uses the rest of the new Introduction to discuss the book in relation to the literature that has appeared since 1973.<sup>4</sup>

The book is organised around the concept of the market, highlighting the volume and value of goods and services transacted, and the spatial and social extent of participation (48). The author emphasises that this was a 'pragmatic,' not an 'ideological' decision (5). Having seriously considered adopting a Marxist framework (6), or focussing on the history of technology,<sup>5</sup> Hopkins decided that the market provided the best means of combining comprehensiveness and coherence (48). His approach emphasised the interaction of market and non-market activities, and rejected teleology. Indeed, his final substantive chapter, covering 1930-1960, discusses setbacks to market participation, and tendencies towards the restriction of market activities.

For all its pragmatism, the choice of a market frame was a radical move which enabled and required Hopkins to confront what was then a very strong tendency in the literature, across disciplines, to assume that precolonial economies, and Africans' economic activities under colonial rule, were culturally constrained from economically optimizing behaviour, resulting in a stagnation from which only external compulsion began to deliver them. The most sophisticated and positive version of this story was the substantivism of Karl Polanyi, whose last (posthumous) book was about the eighteenth-

<sup>1</sup> <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XX-33.pdf>. The book is published by Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2015*, is now in a third edition (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2016); Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico 2002); Hopkins, *Global History: Interactions Between the Universal and the Global* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The advent of continuous professional research in West African history was signalled by the publication of K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885* (1956; new edition, with a foreword by Gareth Austin, published in Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> I discussed the first edition in the context of Hopkins's earlier and later work in West African (and African) economic history in Gareth Austin, "A. G. Hopkins, West Africa, and Economic History," in Toyin Falola and Emily Brownell, eds, *Africa, Empire and Globalization: Essays in Honor of A. G. Hopkins* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011): 51-80.

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins, "Rationality and Technology in African History," *Technology and Culture* 16:3 (1975): 462-465.

nineteenth century kingdom of Dahomey.<sup>6</sup> Though both modernization theory and substantivism were already under attack before 1973, Hopkins's book proved a turning-point: since then, the question has not been whether the economic behaviour of, say, nineteenth-century West Africans was less economically rational than those of people in any other region. The analytical problem of the interaction of cultural and economic elements in the decisions of entrepreneurs and other producers remains, but it is (usually) approached in ways that accept that market economics is an essential part of the scholar's toolkit.

The second chapter, "The domestic economy," developed the critique of the notion of the 'traditional' economy, but also introduced a second theme: that West African economies were characterised, during the precolonial and indeed colonial periods, by a relative abundance of land in relation to labour; but that this good news (from a Malthusian perspective) was offset by major natural constraints on the productive use of the land surplus, such as fragile soil fertility, endemic disease of large animals over the forest and much of the savanna zones, and an extremely unequal seasonal division of rainfall. Hopkins argues that low population densities limited demand, and that that this was a major long-term constraint on economic growth in the region. The land/labour ratio, and the natural constraints on productivity, also accounted for major characteristics of precolonial and indeed colonial West Africa (and tropical Africa generally) such as a lack of agricultural surpluses to facilitate state formation (leaving it possible, since it happened, but an uphill task). It also made sense that the elite counted their wealth in people rather than land. In this context, Hopkins introduced to the study of Africa's economic past the Nieboer-Domar theory about the conditions under which labour coercion is profitable for masters: when labour as well as capital are scarce, and land relatively abundant.<sup>7</sup> This was just one of a range of simple but heuristic economic models that are used in the book, always as tools of historical explanation rather than ends in themselves.

In principle, external trade could provide opportunities for economic development, including overcoming the small size of domestic markets in underpopulated and resource-constrained economies. But Hopkins's third chapter sets out why these opportunities were largely unavailable when the exports, both across the Sahara and the Atlantic, predominantly consisted of slaves. A fundamental reason for this was that, because captives may fight or flee, the commerce was monopolised by rulers and large merchants. The fourth chapter analysed the gradual and uneven post-1807 transition from the external slave trades to what contemporary abolitionists called 'legitimate commerce,' which primarily meant groundnuts (peanuts) from the savanna coasts of Senegambia, and palm oil (and then also palm kernels) from the forested 'Guinea coast' of West Africa.

The two sections of chapter 4 have shaped subsequent debates. In the first, Hopkins argues that the commercial transition permitted small producers and traders to enter the intercontinental trade, thereby reducing the market share of the commercial and political elites. In the second, Hopkins suggests that the decline in rulers' share in the export trade became a crisis when the economy of legitimate commerce was disrupted by an adverse shift in the terms of trade between West Africa and Europe. This led both West African states and European merchants to use extra-economic means to try to enlarge their shares of a shrinking trade: the former by raising tolls, for example, the latter by petitioning their home governments to seize territory in West Africa. Thus, Hopkins argues, a commercial crisis in West Africa contributed to the origins of the European partition of the region. Both of Hopkins's theses about 'legitimate commerce' stimulated controversy and further research. The most extensive debate was over the extent of the challenge to the old slave-trading elites, with Martin Lynn

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade: an Analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1900; rev. ed. 1910); Evsey D. Domar, "The causes of slavery or serfdom: a hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History* 30:1 (1970): 18-32.

and others showing (for example) that the large-scale Aro traders of the Niger Delta survived strongly the transition to palm-oil exporting, even if it remains true that small traders, and more so small producers, did break the old monopolies.<sup>8</sup>

Hopkins challenged the traditional assumption that European colonization marked the beginning of the modern economic history of West Africa, arguing that the characteristic structure of West African economies at the end of the colonial period—based on export agriculture in the hands of a multitude of relatively small producers—originated several decades before the ‘Scramble for Africa,’ with the transition to ‘legitimate commerce.’ His periodization is notably less Eurocentric than the usual one, in that it highlights the agency of African producers and traders, within African states (small or large).

Chapters 5 to 7 examine the colonial period, from the late nineteenth century to the independence of successive former colonies, including Nigeria and most of French West Africa in 1960. In chapter 5 Hopkins sets out a model of the colonial economy, based on the degree to which it was ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to influences from the international economy.

Chapter 6 explores ‘the completion of the open economy’, to 1929. Despite the doctrine that colonial governments needed to balance their budgets, relatively favourable world prices enabled colonial governments to invest in ports and railways. But economic expansion, based on an increasing comparative advantage in agriculture and mining, was led by African investments in export agriculture. Hopkins drew on the research of Polly Hill, Jan Hogendorn and other pioneer historians of the ‘cash-crop revolution’ to highlight the primacy of African decision-making in the rapid emergence of Ghana as the world’s leading producer of cocoa beans, and northern Nigeria as a major exporter of groundnuts.<sup>9</sup> Their success convinced the European rulers, particularly the British, that it was in their economic as well as political interest to keep West African lands under African ownership. This outcome profoundly influenced the course of capitalist development in the region.

Chapter 7, on the open economy ‘under strain,’ argues that the trend towards a more closed economy, pursuing industrialization through state intervention, actually began during the last three decades before 1960. Responding to deteriorating terms of trade, governments became more interventionist. The link between exports and investment weakened, with government expenditure on education and health rising after the Second World War. When agricultural and mineral exports resumed expansion in the 1950s, opportunities began to emerge for investment in manufacturing. Just as chapter 4 presents an argument about economic crises leading to political conflicts which culminated in the imposition of colonial rule, chapter 7 highlights the links between various African economic discontents and the emergence of powerful nationalist movements.

Hopkins ended his story with the decolonization of West Africa, a process which was still not quite complete at the time the first edition of the book was published.<sup>10</sup> In his review, Denis Cogneau explores some profound questions about post-independence economic development through the perspective of Hopkins’s account of the earlier history, about the persistence of extensive agriculture, and the issues of fiscal state-building and elite reproduction.

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<sup>8</sup> See, especially, Robin Law, ed., *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Hopkins responds briefly, outlining a revised account of the sub-regional variations, in his new introduction, 23-30).

<sup>9</sup> Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., with preface by Gareth Austin, Hamburg: LIT, 1997); R. Szeszeszewski, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891-1911* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); in 1973 Hopkins cited Hogendorn’s PhD dissertation, later revised and published as Jan S. Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut Exports: Origins and Early Development* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Portugal was still fighting to keep what is now Guinea Bissau.

Hopkins's very important new essay that introduces the second edition is summarised and discussed in the reviews in some detail. In his review, Patrick Manning also provides his own overview of developments in the study of West Africa's economic past between the two editions of *An Economic History of West Africa*. Both he and Hopkins emphasise successive theorists' interventions, methodological innovations, and the amount of substantive historical research done. Both also note, however, that there was a major slow-down in new research and publication in African economic history, beginning in the 1980s and ending in the early or mid-2000s, though they differ about the precise timing of the deceleration.

The most striking feature of the renaissance of the study of African economic history, evidenced in the publications of the last decade and a half, is the proliferation of systematic quantification, in forms which resume, broaden, and in some cases deepen, the already strong quantitative element in the research conducted in the 1960s-1980s.<sup>11</sup> The *Voyages* trans-Atlantic slave trade data base, constructed by David Eltis et al., spans these two generations of research.<sup>12</sup> The recent efforts have resulted in the construction of databases which are already in the public domain, on, among other things, West Africa's terms of trade with the Atlantic economy, and new estimates of population trends, nutritional standards, and real wages. A newcomer to the field, reading the second edition of *An Economic History of West Africa*, would be well advised to supplement it by looking at these quantitative studies and resources.<sup>13</sup> They revise many of the statistics mentioned in the 1973 edition of Hopkins's book, but, on the whole, as the new introduction implies, they lead to elaboration and debate rather than refutation of the main arguments put forward in it. Also complementing *An Economic History of West Africa* is further qualitative research, notably by Chibuikwe Uche on business history in colonial and de-colonizing Nigeria.<sup>14</sup>

I would add that, along with the various shifts of methodological and theoretical orientation, many of the research opportunities that Hopkins pointed to in 1973 were taken up. He himself notes that, at the time he was writing, the sources did not permit a dynamic view of the precolonial 'domestic economies.' The accumulation of case studies, facilitated by further work in making both qualitative and quantitative evidence available, has expanded the possibilities. My own attempt

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<sup>11</sup> Major examples included Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); David Eltis, "Welfare Trends among the Yoruba in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Anthropometric Evidence," *Journal of Economic History* 50:3 (1990): 521-540.

<sup>12</sup> Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Denis Cogneau and Léa Rouanet, "Living Conditions in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, 1925-1985: What do Survey Data on Height Stature tell us?," *Economic History of Developing Regions* 26:2 (2011): 55-82; Ewout Frankema and Marlous van Waijenburg, "Structural Impediments to African Growth? New Evidence from Real Wages in British Africa, 1880-1945," *Journal of Economic History* 72:4 (2012): 895-926; James Fenske, "Land Abundance and Economic Institutions: Egba Land and Slavery, 1830-1914," *Economic History Review* 65:2 (2012): 527-555; Joerg Baten and Bas van Leeuwen, "The Biological Standard of Living in Early Nineteenth-Century West Africa: New Anthropometric Evidence for Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso," *Economic History Review* 65:4 (2012): 1280-1302; Ewout Frankema and Morten Jerven, "Writing History Backwards or Sideways: Towards a Consensus on African Population, 1850-2010," *Economic History Review* 67:4 (2014): 907-931; Manning, "African Population, 1650-2000: Comparisons and Implications of New Estimates," in Emmanuel Akyeampong, Robert H. Bates, Nathan Nunn and James A. Robinson, eds, *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 131-150; Remi Jedwab and Alexander Moradi, "The Permanent Effects of Transportation Revolutions in Poor Countries: Evidence from Africa," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 98:2 (2016): 268-284; Ewout Frankema, Jeffrey Williamson, and Pieter Woltjer, "An Economic Rationale for the West African Scramble? The Commercial Transition and the Commodity Price Boom of 1835-1885," *Journal of Economic History* 78:1 (2018): 231-267. For reviews see Denis Cogneau and Yannick Dupraz, "Institutions historiques et développement économique en Afrique: une revue selective et critique de travaux récents," *Histoire & Mesure* 30:1 (2015): 103-134; Johan Fourie, "The Data Revolution in African Economic History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 47:2 (2016): 193-212. Some key databates are accessible via [www.aehnetwork.org/data-research/](http://www.aehnetwork.org/data-research/).

<sup>14</sup> Chibuikwe Ugochukwu Uche, "Foreign Banks, Africans, and Credit in Colonial Nigeria, c.1890-1912," *Economic History Review* 52:4 (1999): 669-691; Uche, "British Government, British Businesses, and the Indigenization Exercise in Post-independence Nigeria," *Business History Review* 86:4 (2012): 745-771.

to understand African economic development over several centuries in terms of the working through of a 'land-extensive path' of economic development, through which Africans' choices of productive technique and institution ultimately changed the resource ratios that they or their ancestors had encountered, is in part precisely a response to Hopkins's challenge to the field to move from 'structure and function' (the sub-title of his 'domestic economy' chapter) to process.<sup>15</sup> If that is a case of pursuing the land abundance, labour scarcity theme of the *An Economic History of West Africa* analysis, Hopkins himself took up the challenge left by his rejection of substantivism in favour of a modified formalism. In a neglected essay published in 1978, focussed on the African merchants who originated cocoa farming in Nigeria, he advanced a theoretical and methodological schema for integrating non-economic and economic motives in the analysis of entrepreneurs' decision-making, going beyond what is still the general impasse of economic versus culturalist approaches to this general issue.<sup>16</sup>

Turning to the reviews, an interesting point of translation should be mentioned. Denis Cogneau uses the term 'planters' (as in 'planters' economies') in the French sense, covering not only large-scale farms using hired or coerced labour (the English sense of 'plantations'), but also small-scale, part-family agricultural enterprises. This has the advantage of avoiding the assumption that export agriculture in West Africa was overwhelmingly a peasant activity. That assumption was forcefully challenged by the above-mentioned Polly Hill. She argued that the explosive growth of Ghanaian (and she might have added the Nigerian) cocoa-bean exports was primarily the work of larger 'capitalist' farmers. Hill's work continues to be cited, but not so often read, if one is to judge from the frequency with which recent publications recycle the myth she exposed more than half a century ago.<sup>17</sup>

This roundtable is a contribution to what Manning calls, in his review, the 'critical, trans-generational discourse' characteristic of a 'mature academic discipline.' Manning himself is the most senior of the reviewers, having written the very first review of the first edition of Hopkins's book, and he provides us with his own recollections of the early to mid-1970s, evidently a very creative period in the field. The other reviewers are, variously, early or mid-career. They write from a range of geographic, disciplinary and sub-disciplinary perspectives, including the economic history of Southern Africa (Victor Gwande), West African socio-economic history (Jennifer Hart, Susan Kunkel), development economics of Africa (Denis Cogneau), as well as African economic history (Morten Jerven, as well as Patrick Manning). It is a diverse and intriguing set of papers. I invite you to read on.

### Participants:

**Tony Hopkins** is Emeritus Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History at Cambridge and Emeritus Walter Prescott Webb Chair in History at the University of Texas in Austin. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of London, honorary doctorates from the Universities of Stirling and Birmingham, and is a Fellow of the British Academy. He has written extensively on African history, imperial history, and globalization. His publications include: *An Economic History of West*

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<sup>15</sup> Austin, "Resources, Techniques and Strategies South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspective on African Economic Development, 1500-2000," *Economic History Review* 61:3 (2008): 587-624; Austin, "Labour-Intensity and Manufacturing in West Africa, c.1450-c.2000," in Austin and K. Sugihara eds., *Labour-Intensive Industrialization in Global History* (London: Routledge, 2013), 201-230; Idem, "Africa and the Anthropocene," in Austin, ed., *Economic Development and Environmental History in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Asia and Africa* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 95-118.

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins, "Innovation in a Colonial Context: African Origins of the Nigerian Cocoa-Farming Industry, 1880-1920," in Clive Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., *The Imperial Impact* (London: Athlone Press for University of London, 1978), 83-96 (endnotes, 341-2).

<sup>17</sup> Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1963; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. LIT and James Currey with International African Institute: Hamburg and Oxford, 1997); Hill, "Ghanaian capitalist cocoa-farmers," in Hill, *Studies in Rural Capitalism in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 21-29.

*Africa* (Longman, 1973), *British Imperialism*, written with P. J. Cain (Longman, 1993; 3rd ed. 2016); *Globalization in World History* (W.W. Norton, 2001), *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton University Press, 2018); and numerous scholarly articles.

**Gareth Austin** is Professor of Economic History at Cambridge University. His publications include *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956* (University of Rochester Press, 2005) and (ed.) *Economic Development and Environmental History in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Asia and Africa* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). His work has appeared in many journals, including the *Economic History Review* and the *Journal of International Development*. Austin did his PhD at the University of Birmingham, supervised by Professor A. G. Hopkins. A former editor of the *Journal of African History*, his past employers include the University of Ghana, the London School of Economics, and the Graduate Institute, Geneva.

**Denis Cogneau** received his Ph.D. from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in 2001, and his Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches from Université Paris-1 Sorbonne in 2006. Since 1991, he has been a junior, now a senior research fellow at the French Research Institute for Sustainable Development (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, IRD). Since 2008, he is also a professor at Paris School of Economics (PSE) and in 2015 he was elected *directeur d'études* at EHESS on a chair "Economic Development and Inequality in the Longue Durée." He has published several articles in development economics and economic history, mostly on Africa as well as the book *L'Afrique des inégalités. Où conduit l'Histoire* (Presses de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure, 2007). He is now preparing a book on French colonization and decolonization.

**Victor Muchineripi Gwande** is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the International Studies Group, University of the Free State, South Africa. He is working towards his first monograph entitled "Interest Group Politics and the State: The Political Economy of Manufacturing in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1979," which examines both the actions of the industrialists, other economic interest groups and the state in pushing the trajectory of industrialization in colonial Zimbabwe. In addition to his monograph, Victor has embarked on a project in which he uses the case study of Anglo American Corporation to look at the histories of capitalism and to understand how monopoly capitalism shaped economic development of Zimbabwe and the broader Southern African region. His research interests are in business and economic history, Southern African history. He has published in regional and international journals.

**Jennifer Hart** is an Associate Professor of History at Wayne State University. She is the author of *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation* (publisher, date of publication), which was a 2017 finalist for the African Studies Association Book Prize. Her work explores the history of technology, mobility, and urban space in 20<sup>th</sup> century Ghana. Hart's work has been published in *Technology and Culture*, *International Review of Social History*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, and *African Economic History*. She is also an active public scholar, writing on her own blog, as well as *Africa is a Country* and *Clio and the Contemporary*.

**Morten Jerven** is Professor in Development Studies at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and Visiting Professor in Economic History at Lund University. He is an economic historian, with a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics (2009). He is the author of several books and articles on long term growth and development in Africa and on issues of statistical measurement. In 2013 he published his first book, *Poor Numbers: How We Are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do about It* (Cornell University Press). His second book, *Economic Growth and Measurement Reconsidered in Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, 1965-1995*, was published by Oxford University Press. His third book, *Africa. Why Economists Get it Wrong* was published in 2015. Jerven is currently work on linking studies on post-colonial economic development with the economic history of colonial Africa which is under contract with Cambridge University Press.

**Sarah Kunkel** is a labour historian working on Ghana with a special focus on socioeconomic conditions and the institutionalisation of labour. After spending several years in Ghana conducting fieldwork and teaching at universities, she is currently working on her project on state farms under Kwame Nkrumah.

**Patrick Manning** is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of World History, Emeritus, at the University of Pittsburgh, where he was founding director of the World History Center from 2008 to 2015. He served as President of the American Historical Association in 2016. Trained as an economic historian of Africa, focusing on Francophone West Africa, he turned also to study of slave trade, African population, the African diaspora, and global history of science. His most recent work, *A History of Humanity* (2020), extends his earlier studies to propose a theory of social evolution.

## REVIEW BY DENIS COGNEAU, PARIS SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS – IRD - EHESSE

It is a pleasure to comment on the second edition of the masterpiece of Antony Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*.

Let me start by saying how deeply impressed I am by the relevance of a book that was written 50 years ago. Its quality easily explains why a second edition was welcome, so that the very fact that I am here discussing it today already testifies to its topicality. It is not only that the book has been seminal and foundational for research that came after; it is also that its main messages have not been invalidated. Even in the detail, I could check that most of the basic facts about the former French colonies that I know best are correct. I am a bit too young to be able to accurately realize what the conditions of research in history were in the 1970s, but surely access to information was more difficult than in our digital times.

Even aside from its factual contents, and on more theoretical grounds, the book also provided a landmark on how to approach African economic history without being mesmerized by the apparent alterity or strangeness of African idiosyncrasies (at least to Western economists). It argued convincingly about the continuities between periods, in spite of the critical breaks brought about by the Atlantic slave trade, its abolition, the colonial conquests, and the two World Wars. The attention given to African agency, and to African societies or institutions from below offered a view of their evolution as being not solely determined from the outside. The emphasis put on the adaptive capacity of societies (including the so-called 'traditional' ones), on the universality of human (bounded) rationality, but also on the pervasiveness of markets and associated behaviors, was a great antidote against too substantivist or even primitivist views. The book illustrates that these axioms of continuity, agency, and universality provide a good framework for organizing and recounting the economic history of Africa in the long-run. On more ideological or ethical grounds, it forcefully fights against 'civilizational' or racial prejudice, and this is unfortunately still useful today. Since the mid-1970s, the disappointment provoked by the economic divergence of Africa has given room to the resurgence of such prejudices, and revisionist descriptions of African societies as unfit or opposed to economic development - if not to democracy - can still be heard.

This general assessment makes it clear that any criticism will look for features that have been relatively neglected in *An Economic History of West Africa*. And in particular, the knowledge of what has happened, or not happened, in West Africa since the mid-1970s pushes us to ask new questions about the historical past, and makes some aspects of West African political economy more salient than before. For sure, the book carried some optimism about the capacity of West African societies not only to adapt, but also to grow, industrialize, and finally 'catch-up' with other regions of the world in terms of material well-being. As of yet this has not happened. Even if history has not come to its end, both the development economist and the economic historian are bound to try to understand what did not work. While the book took part of its inspiration from the development economics of the time (those by Arthur Lewis, Hla Myint, and Gerald Helleiner), development economics of the present could also shed light on aspects that economic history might have missed or should investigate more thoroughly.<sup>18</sup>

*The Land-Surplus Hypothesis and Technology Adoption*

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955); Arthur Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965); Hla Myint, *The Economics of Developing Countries* (London: Hutchinson, 1964); Gerald K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture and Economic Growth in Nigeria* (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, 1966).

The land-surplus ‘hypothesis’ that *An Economic History of West Africa* puts forward stands as a fundamental explanation for many West African idiosyncrasies, even with the qualifications introduced later by Gareth Austin.<sup>19</sup> Land abundance has multiple decisive consequences on comparative advantage and trade specialization (by the Hecksher-Ohlin-Samuelson model), on factoral distribution (Stolper-Samuelson), on the characteristics of poverty as lack of access to labor rather than landlessness,<sup>20</sup> on family models and rules of inheritance<sup>21</sup>, and on the structures of states as fuzzy and decentralized constructions based on the control of labor or of trade rather than on territorial authority.<sup>22</sup> A long lasting pre-Malthusian or pre-Boserupian stage of extensive agriculture is also an essential component of the vent-for-surplus explanation for the expansion of export crops, under African initiative, from the legitimate commerce period to the late colonial period. Comparatively low initial population densities indeed seem to have characterized precolonial West Africa, even before the demographic drain of the slave trade that further reinforced labor scarcity. In this respect the region was perhaps similar to many areas of pre-Columbian America, with perhaps the Aztec and Inca empires standing as exceptions.

Two questions then quite naturally arise that are not entirely answered in *An Economic History of West Africa*. One question is about the origin of the land-surplus, another is about the long-term prospects of it.

In terms of origin, *An Economic History of West Africa* seems to favor an ecological explanation: soils are fragile or infertile, available cultivars have low yields, pathogens like the tsetse fly limit animal-led intensive agriculture (plough, manure). Yet technology diffusion and adoption might have a role here; the desertification of Sahara in 3000 BC might have prevented the innovations of the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia or the Mediterranean Basin to reach Sub-Saharan Africa, and/or the North-South orientation of the continent would have made it more difficult their adoption/adaptation to different latitudes.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, the plough is less useful for millet, sorghum, or even tubers than for wheat and barley; yet what of irrigated agriculture using the wheel, like norias? Perhaps a combination of ecological and technological factors provides a more convincing explanation. If we examine endogenous forces, a small initial ecological handicap determining a lower population density might trigger a demographic and technological divergence if population spurs innovation (e.g. Simon Kuznets, Julian Simon) and if agrarian innovations are adopted when population density makes intensification efficient (Ester Boserup), like in one model by Michael Kremer.<sup>24</sup> Institutional factors like absolutist and patrimonial precolonial states,<sup>25</sup> discouraging innovation or investment, or unable to solve coordination failures, might have been at play in some cases, but in the general case why would all African states have been unfit? (This would remain to be explained). African farmers have never been reluctant to innovate, if only in adopting American cultivars (cassava, maize, cocoa, coffee); yet they might have not found technical solutions that could significantly increase yields and (scarce) labor productivity at the same

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<sup>19</sup> Gareth Austin, “Resources, Techniques and Strategies South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspective on African Economic Development, 1500-2000,” *Economic History Review* 61:3 (2008): 587-624.

<sup>20</sup> John Iliffe, *The African Poor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction, A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World, Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) The argument of Diamond has been forcefully contradicted by James M. Blaut, “Environmentalism and Eurocentrism,” *Geographical Review* 89:3 (2010): 391-408.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Kremer, “Population Growth and Technological Change: One Million Years BC to 1990,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 108:3 (1993): 681-716.

<sup>25</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, “Why is Africa Poor?,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 25 (2010): 21-50.

time, and without increasing too much risk; intensification indeed means using more labor, and can be riskier (if rainfall does not come, inputs are lost). In any case, it seems that explaining the persistence of extensive agriculture involves a complex combination of ecological, technological, institutional, and pragmatic factors that might still matter today.

Development economists are still struggling to understand the barriers to technology adoption and intensification for the average farmer rather than for demonstration farms. As acknowledged by Hopkins for the period of legitimate commerce, the intermediate role and weight of large estates or plantations, whether expatriate or African, for launching new practices or new crops has still to be assessed. Likewise, as also mentioned by Hopkins, additional research is warranted to understand the failures of expatriate plantations or big agricultural projects like the colonial (and pharaonic) Office du Niger. This project aimed at turning one part of the Niger River into a new Nile, producing large amounts of cotton through the forced displacement of farmers and the use of conscript labor to build canals. Even more puzzling is the credited success of the postcolonial Office du Niger since the 1980s in present-day Mali at the same place (around the city of Segu), for producing rice instead of cotton (cotton also had some success but in another region, more southward, around the city of Sikasso).

*Intensification, Industrialization, and the Future of the 'Open Economy'*

In terms of long-term prospects, and aside from the latter examples, it seems that West African agriculture has remained extensive, long after the end of the colonial period. A graph in the World Development Report of 2008 on agriculture quite eloquently shows that from 1960 to 2005 cereal output in Africa grew out of more land being put under cultivation with little increase in yields, while Asia under the green revolution displayed exactly the opposite trend. Using Ghanaian household surveys covering two decades, from 1987 to 2005, I, together with two colleagues (Lara Tobin and Liam Wren-Lewis), found that while the total population doubled, the total amount of cultivated land also doubled, with no visible decrease in yields (in cash crops or food crops), suggesting that the extensive model of cultivation was still able to reproduce itself, as if the land constraint was not yet binding. But with high population growth, this model is nonetheless condemned, and intensification will probably necessitate strong public policies.<sup>26</sup> In many places, conflicts over land and water are multiplying, and even if (land scarce) Rwanda or (water scarce) Sudan are not in West Africa, today the Sahel is very much troubled by conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists that intertwine with Islamist terrorism. One can be optimistic given the capacity of African farmers to adapt and to adopt high yield varieties of yam, cassava, or cocoa; yet, in places where land is getting scarcer and scarcer, Malthusian catastrophes can also happen if states fail to provide roads, irrigation, health centers, electricity, credit and insurance. Climate change will make adaptation even more challenging in the Sahel but also in the forest area where some agronomic forecasts predict Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana will be unsuitable for cocoa in 50 years.

Another way out from the Malthusian trap would be industrialization, about which *An Economic History of West Africa* ends on an optimistic note, with the growth of consumer-goods manufacturing in the late colonial period, again with a significant contribution of African initiative. Yet, for the time being, it seems that labor-intensive export-oriented or import-substituting industries have not taken root, and that Africa, like Latin America, has rather deindustrialized, under trade liberalization.<sup>27</sup> Here again, the high cost of scarce labor may have strongly and for a long time limited the international competitiveness of these industries, confronted with the rise of giants like China, India, or Vietnam. But public infrastructure, in particular electricity, is also lagging behind, while private savings and capital remain scarce, and perhaps skilled labour is missing (or has migrated abroad). Despite the lack of industrialization, urbanization was sustained, cities being the places where export revenues are spent in domestic services and in imported goods. This was made possible, without too much of impoverishment, by a long-term increase in the volume exports of cash crops, oil or mines, and a sustained world demand for these commodities, from Western and later Asian countries. In the last two decades, the rush for oil or gold even started turning planters' economies like Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire into mineral exporters. Whether those

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Lipton, "Income from Work: The Food-Population-Resource Crisis in the 'Short Africa,'" *British Academy Review* 22 (2013): 34-38.

<sup>27</sup> Dani Rodrik, "An African Growth Miracle?," *Journal of African Economies* 27:1 (2018): 10-27.

trends will be sustained for long enough will likely depend very much on the developments in Asian economies. As argued by Hopkins in the new introduction (40), more detailed studies of long-term structural change would be welcome, but it seems on the whole that change was limited, despite significant progress on the fronts of education or health.

### *The Fiscal State*

In all respects, intensification or reindustrialization, but also the fertility transition, will most likely depend on strong public policies in infrastructure building, education, health, and family planning. In the three chapters (5 to 7) devoted to the colonial period, *An Economic History of West Africa* focuses on firms and producers and does not speak directly of the building of a fiscal state. My own analysis with Yannick Dupraz and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps, that Hopkins is kind enough to have cited in the new introduction, shows that in French West Africa the colonial state was able to extract a very sizeable fraction of income, from around 8% in 1925 (including forced labor) to 15% in 1955. In 2010, the revenue to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio was still at 15%. Between 1955 and 2010, the main variation of state resources came from booms and busts in commodity prices.<sup>28</sup> Understanding this lack of progress requires further historical analysis, as it hides a complex play of forces: the most regressive taxes from the colonial period were suppressed (capitation in particular), yet in many countries marketing boards and/or export taxes were used to carry on collecting taxes on smallholders producing cash crops. Other taxes that weighted more on expatriates or the formal economy were preserved but their collection technology was left unchanged despite the fact that it became less efficient in rapidly growing cities; today legal tax exemptions are widespread and the collection effort is weak, so that non-compliance and evasion rather come second.

Last, trade liberalization between 1985 and 1995 decreased state resources on average, as custom duties fell and were not entirely compensated by domestic taxation. Perhaps pork barrel democracy explains why no incumbent would prefer to invest in fiscal capacity and raise more taxes if the benefits are expected to be reaped by the opponent. Yet, why is it that tax systems were not strengthened by authoritarian governments that were inspired by socialism? The socialist governments of Benin and Guinea did even worse at collecting taxes, perhaps, as suggested in *An Economic History of West Africa*, because African socialism meant mostly the takeover of expatriate property rather than the more general aim at achieving equality. Analyzing the transformations of the postcolonial states requires looking at medium to large-size firms, which are a main source of domestic taxes as they pay the bulk of value-added tax (VAT) and of corporate tax, and withhold the income tax on wages (and sometimes also VAT from smaller firms). As noted in the new introduction, more business history, in particular of expatriate firms, would help here.

### *Income Concentration, Social Mobility and Elite Reproduction*

*An Economic History of West Africa* rightly argues that planters' economies do much better in income distribution than those of settlers or mining economies. The book also describes the slave trade as having mainly benefited tiny powerful elites. The transition to legitimate commerce and then to the colonial open economy created new opportunities and led to some social mobility, perhaps not so much for former slaves or persons of low caste, but for a middle class of planters and middlemen, including a few successful women. While this description certainly captures part of the truth, it must also be acknowledged that not much is known about the evolution of social mobility under colonialism. It is also likely that many of those who could seize these opportunities were chiefs or the sons of chiefs who cooperated with the colonial powers.

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<sup>28</sup>Denis Cogneau, Yannick Dupraz, and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps, "Fiscal Capacity and Dualism in Colonial States: The French Empire 1830-1962," PSE Working Paper N°2018-27. Our first comparative analysis of British colonies, also cited by Hopkins, suggests that the differences between French and British colonies were of second order, at least in West Africa: Denis Cogneau, Yannick Dupraz, and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps. "African States and Development in Historical Perspective: Colonial Public Finances in British and French West Africa," PSE Working Paper N°2018-29 (also argued in another cited reference by Ewout Frankema and Marlous van Waijenburg, "Metropolitan Blueprints of Colonial Taxation? Lessons from Fiscal Capacity Building in British and French Africa, 1880-1940," *Journal of African History* 55:3 (2014): 371-400. Perhaps the French colonial states were taxing more (in proportion of GDP) and also paying higher wages (this is something left for further investigation), so that at the end of the day service provision was not too different.

Aside from significant counterexamples, the 'kulak class' of specialized planters, the big African traders of exports or imports, and the few 'aristocratic' urban employees might have disproportionately come from precolonial dynasties. Chiefs' sons were in particular the first to be sent to school, to enter the colonial administration at middle-rank levels, and then were well-positioned to take hold of the state after independence. Even the political competition between radical urban elites and traditionalist rural elites might have involved two different factions of siblings, those whose main capital was Western education versus those whose main capital was land and trees.

Even if a focus on grassroots movements and on the economy from below has shown its potential in *An Economic History of West Africa*, asking the question of the long-term reproduction of political and economic elites would help us to understand the present. The postcolonial period also showed that elites, or even leaders, matter quite a lot; Ahmed Sékou Touré, first president of Guinea from 1958 to 1984, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, first president of Côte d'Ivoire from 1960 to 1993, or Jerry Rawlings, president and reformer of Ghana between 1981 and 2001 offer telling examples. Even if income inequality is lower in West Africa than in the Eastern and Southern parts of the continent, it is quite high and some countries also rank high in terms of capital flight (as a proportion of GDP or of domestic savings).<sup>29</sup> With formal democratization this high inequality level has made competitive political clientelism quite hegemonic. The wealth of the powerful looks for legitimacy in conspicuous redistribution (euergetism) or patronage; the poor agree to depend but also try to raise the bids. Here again, the 'universalist axiom' of *An Economic History of West Africa* provides a good reminder of the fact that corruption, clientelism, patronage, power, and prestige were and are also very much present in European societies. Nevertheless, deeper historical studies of elite formation, along class and ethnic lines, would certainly help us to understand better the genealogy of the present political economy.

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<sup>29</sup> Lucas Chancel, Denis Cogneau, Amory Gethin, and Alix Myczkowski, "How Large Are African Inequalities? Towards Distributional National Accounts in Africa, 1990-2017," World Inequality Database world WP n°2019/13; [https://wid.world/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WID\\_WORKING\\_PAPER\\_2019\\_13\\_Africa.pdf](https://wid.world/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WID_WORKING_PAPER_2019_13_Africa.pdf).

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 REVIEW BY VICTOR MUCHINERIPI GWANDE, UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
 

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When Antony G. Hopkins first published *An Economic History of West Africa* in 1973, the book was topical and revolutionised the discipline of economic history. I recall my undergraduate days at the Department of Economic History at the University of Zimbabwe. It was unfathomable to complete the Economic History of West Africa course without having read the book. Not doing so was a sure way to fail. The book also sparked a lot of debate about the role of the market in the economic development of Africa. Even more, it triggered more research into many subjects regarding African economic history. The historiography of African economic history emerged with scholars criticising Hopkins's treatment of the market in Africa, the emotive subject of the slave trade, and of course the seemingly 'Merrie Africa tone' of the book, especially his treatment of precolonial Africa.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, others celebrated the edition as a pioneering effort in an aspect of African studies that had curiously lagged behind the political history and anthropological research on West Africa.<sup>31</sup> With its publication, the discipline of African economic history shot up. This is how impactful the book was. Its reproduction in 2019 as a second edition is a very timely and welcome development for both students and the discipline of African economic history. It is timely because the book comes at a moment when the subject is on a rebound after decades of neglect if not decline.

Ranging from the precolonial era to independence, the book traces the economic trajectories and poverty dimensions in the former Francophone and Anglophone colonies of West Africa. With eight chapters, the book is knit together around the theme of the market, which Hopkins defines in three dimensions: "the volume and value of goods and services transacted, which determine the extent of the market in quantitative terms; geographical variations in exchange activity, which fix the extent of the market in spatial terms; and the number and social status of the parties engaged in exchange, which influence the composition of the goods and services traded" (48). All the chapters are linked to this theme of the growth of a market economy in West Africa. The book opens with a new introduction that succinctly summarises the chapters. But more importantly, in my view, is that new introduction in many ways responds to the various reviews and criticisms made against the arguments and analyses of the first edition. To be sure, Hopkins acknowledges the shortcomings of some of his earlier views and standpoints, but he also equally digs in on some of his arguments.

From a detailed and comprehensive historiographical engagement with Africa's economic past which opens the book, chapter 2 discusses the economic conditions and structure of the pre-colonial period in what he calls 'the domestic economy.' Hopkins argues that the market long existed despite the constraints posed by a sparse population. He also finds forces and numerous activities that endeavoured to expand the market. In so doing, Hopkins challenges the myth that pre-colonial West Africa was 'traditional,' static, inflexible, and typically a subsistence economy. He instead sees a West Africa that was already economically diversified, efficient, and 'modernised' before its contact with the industrial world. Hopkins still accepts, it seems, the controversial view that "in aggregate terms, there was [in West Africa] more land available than there was labour to cultivate it," (59). Emerging scholarship on pre-colonial Africa is challenging this idea of land-surplus economy. It instead suggests that land, in general, may have been plenty but certainly productive cultivable land was scarce and subject to stiff competition. This is evidenced, so the scholarship contends, by the fact that societies had to plough on rugged and sloppy terrains, making use of contour ridges.<sup>32</sup> If the land was surplus as described, the argument goes, then

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<sup>30</sup> See Polly Hill, "Problems with A.G. Hopkins' Economic History of West Africa," *African Economic History* 6 (1978): 127-133. See also the extensive reviews of the book by Martin Klein and George Dalton in *African Economic History* 1 (1976): 43-50 and 51-101, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> See variously, Ralph A. Austin, "Africans and the Market - An Economic History of West Africa. A. G. Hopkins," *African Studies Review* 17:1 (1974): 277-280. Paul Lovejoy's review of the book in *African Affairs* 73:291 (1974): 236-237, Phillip D. Curtin's Review in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7:3 (1974): 540-543.

<sup>32</sup> See Admire Mseba, "*Land, Power and Social Relations in Northeastern Zimbabwe from Precolonial Times to the 1950s*" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa, 2015).

people would not have needed to labour on flood plains and sloppy terrains. It is also, in my view, problematic to use interchangeably the terms ‘precolonial’ and ‘prehistoric’ times, the imperative to show periodization notwithstanding. One is tempted to ask whether there was no history before, as the term (pre)history seem to suggest the absence of history prior a certain time.

Chapter 3 examines West Africa’s external trade and puts the trans-Saharan and Atlantic Slave trade as the basis of that area’s participation in foreign long-distance trade and commercial relationships before the Industrial Revolution. Hopkins cleverly uses the otherwise ‘morally indefensible’ and perverse slave trade to demonstrate the makings of what we came to know as international trade in the nineteenth century. The underlying assumption in external trade was that it would lead to market expansion for West Africa. However, because both the trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trade (the basis of external trade) were concentrated in the hands of a few networks, and since slaves lacked the purchasing power, the market and economic activity did not expand. In Chapter 4, Hopkins expands on the discussion of the external commercial relationships of West Africa by adding the connection with the domestic economy. He describes this period as constituting “legitimate commerce” (173-185), which itself was the “economic basis of imperialism” (chapter 4). It was in this era of ‘legitimate commerce’ that West Africa experienced market expansion. He credits this expansion to the growth of the export economy, especially primary agricultural products of palm oil, groundnuts, and palm kernels. This market growth, he explains, was possible because the export economy was widely spread among small producers, and triggered the commercialisation of labour, and the development of railways and roads. Transport modernisation quickened the movement of goods (200-202). Because of the success enjoyed in the export economy, it created an economic basis for the partition and conquest of West Africa in the nineteenth century (216). This analysis, Hopkins says, flies in the face of interpretations which advance the argument that “imperialism was the product of political motives stemming from Europe” (173).

Using quantitative data and Dudley Seers’s concepts of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ economies<sup>33</sup>, chapter 5, the shortest in the book, assess the performance and the structural organisation of colonial economies between 1900 and 1960 and lays the base for the analyses in chapters 6 and 7. More importantly, this chapter is bolstered by the extensive use of primary material, especially statistics from the Board of Trade. Hopkins shows in chapter 6 that in the first 30 years of twentieth-century West Africa (1900-1930), its economy was an ‘open’ one, that is, heavily dependent on the export of a limited range of primary agricultural and mineral products in exchange for manufactured consumer goods from the industrial North, wherein foreign interests or expatriates dominated. In Chapter 7, Hopkins gives an “economic interpretation of the rise of the African nationalism” (345). He analyses the strains that afflicted the ‘open’ economy and the attendant modifications in the second half of colonial rule until independence. The reorganisation of the open economy as a response to the Great Depression and declining terms of trade in the 1930-45 period, which had led to “a serious downturn in real and anticipated living standards,” (347) as well as the postwar expansion and economic recovery thereof, which increased expectations, Hopkins observes, ignited the opposition to colonialism and ultimately consolidated African nationalism, which brought forth independence. After decolonisation, newly independent West African countries attempted, with limited success, to create ‘closed economies’ wherein exports remained dominated by products of the primary extractive sectors but with the local indigenous actors determining policy. Efforts at industrialisation notwithstanding, this overreliance on the export economy meant that independent West Africa remained immersed in the international market, thereby negating all the promises and expectations of the nationalist movement.

Hopkins has given us a succinct interpretation of the economic history of West Africa and the title ‘*An Economic History of West Africa*’ is apt and befitting. The biggest strength of the book is the clarity and coherence with which it is written. The language is accessible to both field specialists and the general reader. Even more, Hopkins demonstrates his wide reading of scholarship, as evidenced by a comprehensive bibliography of diversified literature ranging from anthropology, geography, history, and economics. His reference to research and studies produced in the French language is most impressive.

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<sup>33</sup> Dudley Seers, “The Stages of Economic Development of a Primary Producer in the Middle of the Twentieth Century,” *Economic Bulletin of Ghana* 7 (1963): 57-69.

Hopkins's extensive engagement with historiography emboldens his analysis in demystifying old myths, and in challenging and reinterpreting West Africa's economic past. It is regrettable, though, that Hopkins does not refer to much primary archival material (except in Chapter 6) in his legitimate and sustained challenge of the old views on the slave trade, imperialism, and international trade in West Africa. However, this seeming drawback is ameliorated by the fact that he continually reminds readers of the imperative to undertake new and further research on the aspects he raises. Aspiring and upcoming researchers of economic history have a starting point.

Meanwhile, in revisiting some of his old interpretations and analysis, one would have expected Hopkins to use the benefit of hindsight to address in greater detail two critical aspects in West Africa's economic history. In terms of industrialization, for instance, he shows that right from the precolonial period, West Africa always possessed the potential to industrialise. The base was there. Yet the region did not achieve industrial growth to the levels reached, for example, by Rhodesia, Kenya, and South Africa. Part of the explanation could be that the idea of an 'open' economy stifled industrialisation by promoting comparative advantage. But one wonders if that explanation suffices in understanding the slow pace of industrialisation in West Africa. It would have also been a very timely intervention if Hopkins had commented on the limits of 'the market' as a unit of analysis in examining the economic past of West Africa. One points out these aspects as a strength rather than a shortcoming. It serves as a confirmation of how impactful Hopkins's book remains in inspiring new areas of research in economic history. In this respect, this reprint of *An Economic History of West Africa* remains golden just as it was in its first edition.

REVIEW BY JENNIFER HART, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

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In the fifty years since its publication, Antony Hopkins's *An Economic History of West Africa* continues to set the agenda and shape the parameters of debate about the unfolding processes of economic exchange and development in the region and throughout the continent more broadly. In this ambitious text, Hopkins attempted to lay out a “reasonably full account of the history of West Africa” (44), drawing on an interdisciplinary set of methods from history and economics to understand how the region’s agriculture and internal trade responded to the shifting external influences and priorities of European imperial states. Driven by an interest in the history of capitalism and questions about persistent perceived underdevelopment in the region, Hopkins sought to understand the rules that governed the market in West Africa. Recognizing Africans as both rational economic agents and entrepreneurs—a position that was still under considerable debate when the book was published in 1973—Hopkins argues that regional economic development was defined by a surplus of land (and comparative shortage of labor) and unfavorable environmental conditions, which inhibited African efforts at economic growth and shaped responses to economic and technological change.

Given the wide range and scope of this text—stretching across a culturally varied and economically dynamic region, beginning in precolonial Africa (though, as Hopkins himself admits, earlier periods lacked sufficient empirical data to support convincing arguments about process)—a conventional review of the text seems daunting, particularly given the temporal distance at which we now sit from its original publication. Instead, I want to focus my attention on the new additions to the text and think about how this work has shaped the fields in which I engage in active research—the histories of entrepreneurialism, technology, and mobility.

Itself an important and helpful historiographical resource for scholars working in economic history and African history, the new introduction to this second addition provides important and helpful context that informed the writing of the book. Hopkins’s self-assessment seems largely even-handed and fair. Operating out of the British academy, Hopkins was part of an early cohort of historians who sought to define African history as a professional field of study separate from imperial history. But doing so raised new challenges. How do you write economic history for times and places where data is not readily available? How do you research and write history at a politically charged time? How do you reconcile the evidence you find from the past with political visions for the present and future? How can you fruitfully combine econometric techniques with ‘history from below,’ which provides critical indigenous perspectives? Is there a difference between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies (as modernization theory posits)? Hopkins argues that these questions drove his research and writing, shaping a book that was insistently disengaged with questions of politics or the state. He readily admits the limitations of his approach. Political and sociocultural factors shape markets in profound ways, and subsequent research has filled in many of those gaps in his own analysis. Likewise, the lack of research on precolonial economic history (and the paucity of evidence to inform econometric or historical analysis of market forces) led to an argument that, Hopkins admits, “described ‘function’ better than it did ‘process’” and “was more schematic than, ideally, it should have been” (8).

Despite its limitations, this landmark text has shaped debates about the history of West Africa, economic history, the history of capitalism, and the history of colonialism over the course of 50 years and, while this period of significant change in the research directions of African history has produced new challenges, opportunities, and arguments, it has also often reinforced Hopkins’s early speculations and assertions. In particular, Hopkins’s focus on Africans as rational economic agents had profound implications for the way that we understand how communities negotiated both local realities and global influences to create robust systems of connection and exchange across a broad region, even as their actions defied Western expectations and assumptions about rational economic choice and development. In explaining the absence of wheeled transport in West Africa, for example, Hopkins argues that it was not a lack of technical prowess or ingenuity that prevented Africans from using it. Rather, he argues, head-loading and other forms of transportation were rational responses to real environmental and economic conditions in the region. In the first edition of the book Hopkins was arguing against a form of colonial racism that equated technological difference with ‘underdevelopment.’ As many scholars who followed him have argued, these characterizations were not merely economic; imperialism grew alongside industrial capitalism, crafting a

vision of civilizational development that saw “machines as the measure of man”<sup>34</sup> and conveyed imperial power through technological expertise and infrastructure.<sup>35</sup> In highlighting the rationality of African technological choices, Hopkins turns this argument on its head and centers practices like headloading as ingenious adaptations to environmental and economic conditions, generating their own forms of physical, social, and economic infrastructure. It took more than a generation for African indigenous technological and mobility practices (rather than imperial histories of technology à la Daniel Headrick, Michael Adas, and others<sup>36</sup>) to be taken seriously by professional historians again, perhaps best exemplified in the work of Stephen Rockel, Clapperton Mavhunga, Laura Ann Twagira, Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, Kwasi Konadu, and many of the numerous scholars now writing on the history of African automobility.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas Hopkins’s discussion of technology engaged with colonial attitudes and assumptions about Africa, the broader arguments about the economic basis of imperialism sometimes feel overly abstract. As Hopkins himself admits, in focusing exclusively on economic history, he sometimes overlooked important forces of change that shaped economic development in the region. This is more than a mere choice of frame, however. By focusing on economic behaviors, systems, and markets, Hopkins often presents a history of the region in which economic development and economic change happen *to* people and in which extra-economic motivations and intentions rarely factor. While environmental conditions certainly did shape regional economic development, environment cannot fully account for the way such development unfolded. As subsequent scholarship has shown, social and cultural histories of political economy elucidate the structural conditions that may both reinforce or inhibit opportunities for economic growth.<sup>38</sup> Both Africans and Europeans participated in markets as rational economic agents, but the ways in which they engaged those markets and the results of their efforts in the colonial context were heavily circumscribed within unequal systems of power, manifested through regulation, infrastructure, and space. It would have been interesting to see Hopkins use the new introduction to engage with Walter Rodney’s *How Europe*

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2006); Clapperton Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014); Laura Ann Twagira, “Robot Farmers’ and Cosmopolitan Workers: Technological Masculinity and Agricultural Development in the French Soudan (Mali), 1945-68,” *Gender and History* 26: 3 (2014): 459-477; Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots: The Search for Healing Plants in Africa*; Kwasi Konadu, *Our Own Way in This Part of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Marcus Filippello, *The Nature of the Path: Reading a West African Road* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Joshua Grace, “Heroes of the Road: Race, Gender and the Politics of Mobility in Twentieth Century Tanzania,” *Africa* 83:3 (2013): 403-425.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth Century West Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017); Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, “I Will Not Eat Stone”: *A Women’s History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000).

*Underdeveloped Africa*, which was published in 1972, and which makes a very different argument about the history of economic development in colonial Africa.<sup>39</sup> But Rodney's arguments were almost certainly the kind of politically-inspired writing that Hopkins sought to avoid. Arguably contemporary debates about the history of economic development on the continent seek to reconcile (or balance the excesses of) these two perspectives: taking seriously the rationality of African markets and the actions of African economic agents while also recognizing the ways in which imperial governance shaped that economic system to be profoundly unequal on local, regional, and global levels.

These questions matter for both our understanding of the past and the present. Historians, Hopkins himself argues, can shape the future in concrete ways by challenging some of the fundamental assumptions (à la modernization) that informed development theory and policy at the time (6), and even though he bristled at the explicitly political nature of some historical approaches of the time, Hopkins clearly sees value in this form of engagement. These questions—What role should historians play in the public sphere? What can historical perspectives contribute to policy debates? What do historians bring to those policy conversations?—sit at the center of debates about the fate of the field. Too often critics have made overblown and inaccurate claims that historians have abandoned the public sphere. One only has to make a brief internet search to find the large numbers of op-eds, blogs, Twitter posts, documentaries, and popular history texts produced over the last ten years, not to mention the vibrant field of public history. The nature of public engagement may have changed, but historians and history are still very much present. But Hopkins, here, seems to be raising a different sort of question. Namely, how might interdisciplinary methodologies create new possibilities for historians to use their research to inform policy making. Rather than public history (or public-facing history), this might be more appropriately described as 'applied history.' And *this* question seems like a new and urgent one, both in thinking about how we educate our students and how we talk about the relevance of our field. In his brief introductory comments and throughout the original text, Hopkins seems to present a vision of (economic) history that does not merely contextualize the policy decisions of the present but that also actively shapes the details of that policy using historical evidence. In the midst of ongoing debates about the decolonization of African Studies, this sort of approach raises a new series of questions about ethics, authority, and history. With this new edition, Hopkins re-enters a debate that is simultaneously 50 years old and urgently new.

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1981 [1972]).

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 REVIEW BY MORTEN JERVEN, NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES
 

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The publication of a new edition of *An Economic History of West Africa* by Tony Hopkins is a long-awaited event. That it also comes with a long and well-considered introductory essay makes it worth the wait. Personally, I must confess I am a big fan, and thus this review is completely biased. When I first met Hopkins he was holding the Walter Prescott Webb Chair in History at The University of Texas at Austin, where he welcomed me as his academic grandson, on the account that I was supervised by Gareth Austin, who in turn had been supervised by Hopkins.

Thus, I am one of the many students who was introduced to African Economic History by first reading Hopkins's *An Economic History of West Africa*. Those who know him will also easily recognize the particular blend of brilliance and disarming self-deprecating humour that Hopkins always has on offer. For students coming to the field his explanation for the choice of the thesis topic is like a confession all students would like to make, but never dared to. Having received an award to study, according to his own words he "spent two months trying to decide which part of the Rest of the World should benefit from the combination of enthusiasm and ignorance I had to offer" (1).

He made a good choice, but most of all enacted it well. There is much comfort to gain and lessons to learn from his account of the years since the choice was made and until he eventually published *An Economic History of West Africa* that become such a seminal study. His doubts and challenges are useful to note, but most of all I find his approach to sorting out methodology—specifically choosing the tools or the models that best fit the sources or the evidence he had at hand. Any good history, and in particular economic history, is the outcome of the interplay between the explanatory model and the primary sources that are available.

In my mind *An Economic History of West Africa* stands, and particularly now that we have his own reflections on this choice, as an exquisite display of what can be gained from a deliberative, non-ideological eclectic approach. His new introduction also comments on the potential downsides of it—the danger of being misread as an advocate of ideology, when pragmatism has ruled in the study. Then, as ever, politics is at play, and choosing to explain a process of accumulation with reference to the market, as opposed to emphasising the forces of external dependency, might be read as a signal of choosing a camp. As he notes, his first encounters in the field left him "pondering the difference between what we want to see in the past, and what we find there, and how to manage the disparity when the two appeared to be misaligned." (4) *An Economic History of West Africa* and its new introduction, as I read it, is a brave defence of letting the evidence rule in itself, and a devotion to avoiding ideology or model to instruct how one fits the evidence.

A primary concern in *An Economic History of West Africa* that I feel is as relevant as ever is that of the importance, but also the downsides, of misconceived comparison. To approach any subject, but particularly that of Africa, as a subject of difference may be a grave mistake. I have often quoted from *An Economic History of West Africa*: "Comparing the natural resources and climates of different parts of the world in order to draw conclusions about whether they stimulated or retarded the economic progress of particular societies is a tempting but unprofitable exercise—rather like trying to decide if life is more difficult for penguins in the Antarctic or camels in the Sahara" (57).

I have taken a stronger version of that quotation as an inspiration in my own research. My concern has been not only the lack of reciprocity in the comparison of penguins and camels, but also that it is often the case that the rankings of the adequacy or rationale of adaptations are done in a fashion as if were the penguins who did the rankings of the choices made by camels.

The rise of a "New African Economic History" or simply a "Renaissance of African Economic History" has indeed been inspired by cross country comparisons,<sup>40</sup> where Africa stands in as the 'failed continent.' The danger has been not only that

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<sup>40</sup> A.G. Hopkins, "The New Economic History of Africa." *Journal of African History* 50:2 (2009): 155–77; Gareth Austin and Steven Broadberry, "Introduction: The Renaissance of African Economic History." *Economic History Review* 67:4 (2014): 893–906. Also

of degrading Africa as the place where things do not work, but reciprocally to uplift the North as where everything works, and sweep away the idiosyncrasies in the workings of societies in the so-called developed countries, and thereby be blinded by our particular historical vantage point.

“Accordingly, an understanding of Africa’s relative economic backwardness should be sought, not by measuring the continent towards an unrealised ideal, but by identifying specific constraints that limited, in my formulation, the extent of the market.” (7-8) Whatever the formulation, the general lesson is clear. The economic history of Africa needs to be studied in its own right.

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see the debate; James Fenske, “The Causal History of Africa: A Response to Hopkins,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 25:2 (2010b): 177–212; Morten Jerven, “A Clash of Disciplines? Economists and Historians Approaching the African Past,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 26:2 (2011a): 111–24; Hopkins, “Causes and Confusions in African History” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 26 (2): 107-110; Fenske, “The Causal History of Africa: Replies to Jerven and Hopkins,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 26:2 (2011): 125–131.

## REVIEW BY SARAH KUNKEL, UNIVERSITY OF BASEL

Anthony Hopkins's *An Economic History of West Africa* is a key work in African history and this year, 47 years after its first publication, a second edition has been released. To publish an edition after such a long period raises particular questions, one of the major ones being how much of the work should and can be changed and updated with the current state of research. After all, the field of African history has developed massively in the last 47 years. Hopkins states in the preface that he chose not to make drastic changes to the book; even words like "now" and phrases like "in the present" refer to the time of its initial publication in 1973, which is crucial for the reader to keep in mind (xiii). Instead of revising the chapters, Hopkins has included an additional and extensive introduction to this second edition, which reflects on the time span between both editions and points out the state and context of African history in both.

In a way, Hopkins treats this second edition partly as a source, as he gives the reader the background of his research, why he decided to focus on African studies in the first place instead of Latin American or Asian studies, and how he evolved from a naïve researcher in a politically charged place to going beyond academic advice to explore new approaches in his research (2-5). From the beginning Hopkins informs the reader that this edition is a product of its time: the time in which African history started to move away from imperial history (8). Yet, *An Economic History of West Africa* was somewhat in the middle: old concepts were approached with new perspectives. Hopkins states that the market as key concept of the book is approached by 'history from below.' This perspective of African traders and merchants, was rather new for African economic history in the period of first publication. Despite this, Hopkins faced criticism from dependency theorists and Marxists that his work followed Modernisation theory, which emphasised that development could only be achieved through western values and methods (5-8).

Hopkins uses the introduction to the second edition to evaluate the shortcomings of his own research. One example is the focus on precolonial states in relation to economic development. Whereas he states that one pitfall was limiting himself to the economic perspective and not looking at political and cultural impacts, he also points out that research on the boundaries, scopes, and relations of and between precolonial states was not as developed in the 1960s as it is today (12-13). Another field that has not received much attention since the first edition is the study of African middlemen and merchants, particularly their fortunes, during the colonial period. Hopkins points out that his "[...] generalisations may have survived less because they are persuasive than because they have been overlooked" (35).

The lengthy introduction of this edition is followed by a short chapter of eight pages that was the introductory chapter of the first edition. After these two introductions, the book is divided into six chapters analysing the West African market economy from the precolonial period up to 1960.

Chapter two looks at the domestic economy of West Africa: natural and human resources, production, and distribution, of which caravan trades are a particular focus. The chapter has a major focus on the precolonial period, but does not strictly adhere to it. Hopkins argues that for most scholars, "[...] the domestic economy was a subsistence economy, which was uniform, unchanging and therefore uninteresting" (52). Hopkins criticises the Eurocentric perspective on African history again with regard to labour:

"Allegations about the inefficiency of the traditional labour force are the product not only of an inadequate appreciation of the historical evidence relating to Africa, but also of an exaggerated sense of the superiority and modernity of labour organisation in Europe" (66).

Hopkins argues that after employers had the choice between slaves or waged labour, the British and French colonial administrations of West Africa resorted to forced labour despite their commitment to the abolition of slavery (69-70). To perceive the latter as a paradox is anachronistic though, and we now have to compare notions of forced labour of the colonial period, the 1960s, and today: many practices of forced labour in the colonial period would be defined as modern slavery today. However, during that time there was not only a legal but also a moral distinction. For the British colonial powers,

forced labour in public works was regarded as the people's owed contribution for the civilisation they were being provided with in the form of roads.<sup>41</sup>

Chapter three looks at the external trade through the Sahara or across the Atlantic, and focuses predominantly on the slave trade. It looks at routes, traders, and economic significance. Chapter four focuses on the transition from the slave trade to legitimate commerce and starts by looking at palm oil. Despite claiming to go beyond imperial history in the second chapter (which was the introduction of the first edition), this chapter seems rather to include the African perspective into imperial history. A further and more recent reading on the topics of chapters three and four is the edited volume *Commercial Agriculture, the Slave Trade & Slavery in Atlantic Africa*, which engages with the shift from the slave trade to legitimate commerce with a special focus on agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

Chapter five is a comparatively short chapter on the economic model of colonialism. Hopkins points out that the first fifteen years of colonial rule were spent on “pacifying recalcitrant peoples” (218). Of course, conflicts between West African populations were the result of slave raids for the Atlantic slave trade. So, whereas the European powers benefited from feuds to make profits through the slave trade, these feuds were an impediment to a colonial economy that tried to exploit all ethnic groups more or less equally. Again, the chapter focuses more on the development of the economy for the colonial powers, or the import trade between West Africa and the European colonial powers, than on the domestic economy and trade.

The colonial economy is further analysed in Chapter six, “Completing the Open Economy.” The chapter begins by looking at the history of colonial taxation in West Africa. Colonies were supposed to be self-sufficient; after all, the purpose of colonies was to make, not lose, money for European powers. In recent years the topic of taxation has been explored further, highlighting the differences between various taxes and whether they actually did increase colonial revenue, or were imposed for different political purposes.<sup>43</sup> Another focus of the chapter is the question as to why, in the period between 1880 and 1920, Africans could not enter the market as merchants or businessmen to the extent that Europeans did (256). The only sector that was difficult for Europeans to penetrate was agriculture, cocoa production in the Gold Coast being the prime example of an impenetrable sector for Europeans (269-272).

Chapter seven analyses the years from 1930 to 1960, with an emphasis on the domestic economy (297). From a contemporary perspective, it is slightly odd to read that “it was not until the 1950s that economists discovered the existence of internal trade [...]” (297). Today, a more apt wording would probably be that economists acknowledged or began to be more interested in internal trade only at that time. The academic analysis of Africa and African history was predominantly done outside of Africa for most of the twentieth century, and it seems that economic history in particular followed the interest of colonial powers. The chapter also focuses on Africans becoming more present in the export market, which was previously dominated by Europeans, and concludes with a discussion of the advent of planned industrialisation in West Africa.

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Kunkel, “Forced Labour, Roads, and Chiefs: The Implementation of the ILO Forced Labour Convention in the Gold Coast,” *International Review of Social History* 63:3 (2018): 449-475; <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000524>.

<sup>42</sup> Robin Law, Suzanne Schwarz, and Silke Strickrodt, eds., *Commercial Agriculture, the Slave Trade & Slavery in Atlantic Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Ewout Frankema, “Colonial Taxation and Government Spending in British Africa, 1880-1940: Maximizing Revenue or Minimizing Effort?,” *Explorations in Economic History* 48: 1 (2011): 136-149 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2010.10.002>; Leigh A. Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kunkel, “Taxation Without Resistance: Native Treasuries in the Northern Territories,” *Ghana Studies* 22:1 (2019): 114-145, DOI:10.1353/ghs.2019.0005.

Although Hopkins argues that this book focused more on the local perspective, the analysis does not live up to what would today be expected in terms of offering the perspective of the West African population; this is a product of the time it was first published. The book focuses mostly on European-controlled export markets, and how Europeans and Africans were represented on that market, or controlled it. Since the book was first published, there have been more studies done on West African economies and markets, whether domestic or West African trade. Furthermore, some of these studies go beyond the economic perspective and do analyse social and cultural aspects.<sup>44</sup> The focus on business history and African entrepreneurs is also a new topic in African history, as Hopkins points out in the new introduction (39). Recent years have seen some exciting publications on this topic, such as Jennifer Hart's *Ghana on the Go*, which analyses how motor transportation in Ghana was developed by local actors and how motorised transportation impacted domestic trade.<sup>45</sup>

For students of African studies and history, this book not only delivers crucial insights into the history of West Africa, but also its historiography and how it has been politically and culturally shaped. Hopkins mentions the assumptions of economic historians that most of Africa's economy was self-subsistence and that there was no internal trade (297). This assumption in itself seems rather peculiar from today's perspective, as a simple trip to a local market should have offered visual proof of domestic trade. What sticks out though is the notion of what is significant enough to be historically analysed, and microhistory has changed this notion for history in general. The absence of data on domestic trade in colonial archives does not mean that there was no trade of economic significance, and that this trade cannot be analysed from a myriad of perspectives. Historians today do not rely solely on archival documents for research, and this shift has paved the way for the writing of new histories. Bianca Murillo's *Market Encounters* is one example of these new approaches. She gives an insightful analysis of consumer markets focusing on the personal experience of consumers, traders, and entrepreneurs, and which powers these actors had.<sup>46</sup>

Labour is a minor focus of the analysis in the book. Hopkins does talk about migratory labour for agriculture and notes that, at least during his period of analysis, no urban labour force emerged as it did in other African regions, as migrant labourers always had access to land. This access to land also meant that not only was there no urban labour force, there was also no a labour force large enough, and European economies constantly faced shortages (275; 281). Yet, it was not only labour shortage that was a problem; there was also a high labour turnover. Colonial powers were not able to create a permanent labour force that was dependent on waged labour. However, the absence of a permanent urban labour force has to be understood in the distinct context of West Africa and from the workers' perspective. Its absence does not mean that the rural migratory labour force did not commit to waged labour or become dependent on it. In the Gold Coast an industrial labour force was needed. Labourers from rural areas would repeatedly migrate to industrial areas or live there for a longer period of time. Historical research, for example by Jeff Crisp, Carola Lentz, and Cassandra Mark-Thiessen, has analysed the development of this industrial (migratory) labour force from a socioeconomic perspective.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example: Ntewusu S. Aniegye, "Settling in and Holding on: A Socio-Historical Study of Northern Traders and Transporters in Accra's Tudu: 1908-2008" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Leiden, 2012); Ayodeji Olukoju, "Fishing, Migrations and Inter-Group Relations in the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Coast of West Africa) In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Itinerario* 24:1 (2000): 69-85, DOI:10.1017/S0165115300008688; Raymond E. Dumett, "Tropical Forests and West African Enterprise: The Early History of the Ghana Timber Trade," *African Economic History* 29 (2001): 79-116, DOI:10.2307/3601708; Philip J. Shea, "Big Is Sometimes Best: The Sokoto Caliphate and Economic Advantages of Size in the Textile Industry," *African Economic History* 34 (2006): 5-21, DOI:10.2307/25427024.

<sup>45</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners Struggles, 1870-1980* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Carola Lentz and Veit Erlmann, "A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival Among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 29:113 (1989): 69-111; Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian*

Forced labour was a crucial feature of colonial economies, and much research has been done on it in West Africa since the publication of the first edition, especially in recent years. Historians engage with the role forced labour played in the economy, the socioeconomic conditions, and the hidden strategy of using forced labour to further explore the exploitation of local populations through colonial administrations.<sup>48</sup>

This edition is still a key reference for African history, and is crucial for the economic history of West Africa. Yet, it has shortcomings in terms of perspectives that are symptomatic of the time in which it was written. Throughout the book, socioeconomic conditions of traders, workers, and local populations are touched upon, but not scrutinised in more depth. For students of African studies, the new introduction will give the most insights. Hopkins delivers a historiographical contextualisation of this edition that is crucial for students to understand not only his work, but also the historiography of West Africa and West Africans. Hopkins conducted his research when the decolonisation of African nations was taking place. This second edition appeared in a period in which the discussion evolves around decolonisation in a broader sense: the decolonisation of academia and African studies. This development is reflected in historiography. For the decolonisation of African studies, the analysis has to move beyond the bias in archives and seek to explore the agency of the local populations that lived the experience.

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*Miners Struggles, 1870-1980* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital: Mechanized Gold Mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879-1909* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Keese, "Forced Labour in the "Gorgulho Years": Understanding Reform and Repression in Rural São Tomé E Príncipe, 1945-1953," *Itinerario* 38:1 (2014): 103-124, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115314000072>; Romain Tiquet, *Travail Forcé Et Mobilisation De La Main-D'œuvre Au Sénégal: Années 1920-1960* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019); Kunkel, "Forced Labour, Roads, and Chiefs"; Marlous van Waijenburg, "Financing the African Colonial State: The Revenue Imperative and Forced Labor," *The Journal of Economic History* 78:1 (2018): 40-80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050718000049>.

## REVIEW BY PATRICK MANNING, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

At last, the academic study of African economic history is thriving. Researchers on several continents are exploring issues in African economic life at multiple scales, in sharply varying time frames and through multiple lenses. Scholars in African economic history maintain contact with economic historians of other regions and with scholars in other disciplines. Leading participants in the field look forward with enthusiasm, having proclaimed “The New Economic History of Africa” in 2009 and “The Renaissance of African Economic History” in 2014.<sup>49</sup>

Yet Antony G. Hopkins, the author of the first of these forward-looking essays, has now donned a different hat, in order to ask that we look back in historiographic time. The second edition of his classic *An Economic History of West Africa* is divided into two parts. Most basically, it presents the original 1973 text in order to remind us of the baseline that it provided for the field. A new introduction of 43 pages performs at least three main functions: it restates the book’s original argument; it reviews the research since 1973 on the book’s four main topics; and it provides comments on both the book’s original formulation and the research agenda of today.<sup>50</sup>

The 1973 publication of *An Economic History of West Africa* was exciting for the small band of economic historians of Africa—especially so for me, as I was able to write the first print review of the book. Michael Mason, editor of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, arranged its rapid publication. My review included a long summary of the book’s argument and shorter comment on the debates it engaged; it argued that the book marked a turning point in studies of African economic history. I concluded, “Economic historians should no longer have to feel that Africa is exceptional, and Africanists should no longer have to perform their work in ignorance of basic elements of economic history.”<sup>51</sup>

I touch here on three sets of retrospective comments: those by Hopkins in the Introduction to the new edition of *An Economic History of West Africa*, his 2019 article on fifty years of African economic history, and my 2016 chapter on a parallel topic.<sup>52</sup> Overall, I trace two trajectories, interpretive and historiographical, but focusing on historiography. The academic analysis of African economic history arose two generations ago, beginning 1960, with a third generation now opening, to extend from 2020 to 2050. As I argue, the ups and downs of academic study left the field with a complex and problematic historiographical trajectory. Some current scholars may find it tempting simply to leave aside the earlier studies in African economic history, arguing that they fall short of today’s standards. On the other hand, one could devote energy to appropriating the heritage of earlier study, arguing that a critical, trans-generational discourse will strengthen current and future research. The current H-Diplo discussion of the new edition of *An Economic History of West Africa* is a step in the latter direction. At best, we may be experiencing a rite of passage by which African economic history transforms itself from a

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<sup>49</sup> A. G. Hopkins, “The New Economic History of Africa,” *Journal of African History* 50 (2009): 155-177; Gareth Austin and Stephen Broadberry, “The Renaissance of African Economic History,” *Economic History Review* 67, 4 (2014): 893-906.

<sup>50</sup> The four main topics, following chapters of the book, are the domestic economy in precolonial times, external trade in the same period, imperialism in the nineteenth century, and three chapters on the colonial era.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Manning, review of *An Economic History of West Africa*, in *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines* 8, 1 (1974): 177-79; reprinted in *African Economic History Review* 1, 1 (1974): 12-14.

<sup>52</sup> A. G. Hopkins, “Fifty Years of African Economic History,” *Economic History of Developing Regions* 34, 1 (2019): 1-15; Patrick Manning, “African Encounters with Global Narratives,” in Pat Hudson and Francesco Boldizzini, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History* (London: Routledge, 2016), 409-428. See also a review of historical writing on the African continent, including some on economic history: Patrick Manning and Jamie Miller, “Historical Writing in Postcolonial Africa: The Institutional Context,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019): 191-216.

*nascent* field of study—the new discipline on the block—into a *mature* field that sustains a multi-generational academic discourse.

We are fortunate to have Tony Hopkins to guide us through this retrospective discussion on African economic history.<sup>53</sup> Hopkins got an early start, adopting African economic history as his field of study in 1960, rapidly producing numerous key contributions, and reviewing the field every now and then in his firm, gentle, and witty style.<sup>54</sup> If retrospective discussion can become institutionalized—with a focus both on reviewing alternative interpretations and critiquing the academic trajectory of scholarship in African economic history—the field can become more fully parallel to the economic-historical literatures of industrial regions, in which academic discourse encompasses contributions from various times and perspectives as an engine driving research.<sup>55</sup>

I begin with a précis of the 2019 essay in which Hopkins traces the shifting paradigms that have affected African economic historiography. The essay, “Fifty years of African Economic History,” elegantly summarizes the successive discourses of African economic historians and their close associates.<sup>56</sup> Hopkins confirms the contributions of five perspectives that have influenced African economic historiography: modernization, dependency, Marxism, Annales, and postmodernism. His narrative traces successive transitions among these paradigms from a perspective within the field.

He begins with a concise summary of the dualistic and ahistorical theory of modernization, in which elites were to guide the traditional masses; Hopkins observes that the conflict of the Vietnam war caused the theory to founder. Space then opened for the spread of the dependency thesis, emphasizing inter-regional economic connections, as articulated by Andre Gunder Frank.<sup>57</sup> In Walter Rodney’s restatement of dependency for Africa, Hopkins argues that the thesis struck a blow against bourgeois nationalist historians of Africa, but also undercut African agency.<sup>58</sup> Marxism, which was also experiencing an expansion during the social conflicts of the sixties, occupied the intellectual space gradually ceded by dependency. Marxism

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<sup>53</sup> See also the extensive review in Gareth Austin, “A. G. Hopkins, West Africa, and Economic History,” in Toyin Falola and Emily Brownell, eds., *Africa, Empire, and Globalization: Essays in Honor of A. G. Hopkins* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011): 51-80.

<sup>54</sup> For example, A. G. Hopkins, “Clio-antics: A Horoscope for African Economic History,” in Christopher Fyfe, ed., *African Studies Since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson*, 31-48 (London: Longman, 1976); Hopkins, “African Economic History: The First Twenty-Five Years,” *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 157-63. The latter is a review essay centering on Ralph Austen, *African Economic History* (London: James Currey, 1987).

<sup>55</sup> The forthcoming, two-volume *Cambridge Economic History of the Modern World* sets a standard for economic-historical analysis, historiographical review, and regional comparison and linkage, including Africa.

<sup>56</sup> A. G. Hopkins, “Fifty Years of African Economic History.”

<sup>57</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

<sup>58</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Kingston, Jamaica: Bogle-L’Ouverture Press, 1972). African theories of underdevelopment, applied especially in East Africa, were developed especially by sociologists, including E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa; the Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939* (New York: Nok Publications, 1973); Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: the Political Economy of Neocolonialism, 1964-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); and Gavin N. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie 1905-1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

brought attention to production, African agency, labor, and history from below—yet also brought unwieldy complexity in the modes of production.

As the Marxian framework encountered limits, the *Annales* framework—having gained strength among Francophone scholars—appeared to bring analytical advantages. It gave less attention to social class yet gave more attention to demography, climate, disease, and to the position of women in society. In yet another area of French intellectual innovation, postmodernism gained wide attention in the 1980s. It provided a way to sustain radical views in an era of conservative triumphalism. Interrogation of texts boosted cultural history but gave no support to economic history. Postmodernism identified and expressed hostility to essentialism, but its critical edge brought no practical program for social change.

Postmodernism, in turn, gave way in the early twenty-first century as the material impact of the external world became unmistakable, as with the 11 September 2001 destruction of the twin towers and the financial crisis of 2008-2009. Under these circumstances, work in African economic history expanded, addressing such issues as the reversal of fortune thesis from economists, and attention to colonial documents that made possible the study of heights, wages, and probate documents. Overall, Hopkins's survey provides a reminder of the endless evolution of social thought and of the multiple lenses through which African economic life may reasonably be viewed.

Hopkins's introduction to the second edition of *An Economic History of West Africa* is organized quite differently. It reviews the principal economic-historical topics of his 1973 work, viewing each through the lens of his original argument, the subsequent advance in the literature, and his current comment on both of these. Hopkins's discussion gave roughly parallel attention to the topics of precolonial external trade, economic imperialism, and to two chapters on the open economy of the colonial era. More concisely, he addressed the topics of precolonial domestic economy and his model of colonialism.

On the domestic economy (chapter 2), Hopkins affirms that his critique of modernization theory has been validated. He also restates his view of historical West Africa as a land-surplus economy, recognizing that debates continue (twentieth-century population growth brings nuances to this discussion).<sup>59</sup> He had emphasized the environmental disadvantages in West Africa, including poor resources in soils and waterways, disease mortality, and variable rain. Overall, he reaffirms that labor, not land, was in short supply and the environment was limiting, so that market expansion was limited, while capital investment was in labor (slaves) rather than land. Yet the precolonial domestic economy has not subsequently received the attention it deserves, and I think that the framework should be expanded. That is, rather than an all-purpose domestic economy, scholars might do well to distinguish among local-level production and consumption, local exchange, regional exchange, and state economic activity, tracing inter-sectoral interactions. Attention to inter-sectoral dynamics will make it more difficult to get away with generic summaries of an overall domestic economy.

In precolonial external trade (chapter 3), I agree with Hopkins that much valuable research has been conducted since 1973, notably on slave exports and increasingly on African imports. The issues of enslavement within Africa and its demographic impact, along with the size and impact of West African states, will benefit from further study. As he argues, the reversal-of-fortune thesis is eliciting valuable research, though the thesis itself is flawed.

The economic basis of imperialism (chapter 4) has been one of the most thoroughly-discussed issues, validating much of the original argument of Hopkins—that the approach of informal influence failed to meet the needs of Europeans in West Africa, thus leading to imperial advance. Hopkins shows that important nuances have been added to his argument on the causal factors underlying European conquest. Studies of various West African regions, by scholars from various perspectives,

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<sup>59</sup> In contrast to Hopkins's 1973 argument for land surplus in precolonial West Africa, in 1974 view on Henry Gemery and Jan Hogendorn argued for West African labor surplus in their model of Atlantic slave trade. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, "The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Tentative Economic Model," *Journal of African History* 15 (1974): 233-246.

continue to clarify the interplay of African and imperial agency and the balance of economic and political factors. This is an arena of sophisticated if not yet conclusive analysis in African economic history.

For the colonial era, Hopkins emphasizes that he articulated a macroeconomic model of colonialism (chapter 5). In this “open economy,” colonial economies “were exposed to market forces transmitted by the international economy, ... [adding] a dynamic element to the otherwise-static analysis” by exploring the effects of overseas trade (30). Hopkins expresses surprise that “this model has aroused little discussion.” Alternative models, as Hopkins notes, could include domestic accumulation, fiscal policy, and levels of GDP. In contrast, Hopkins’s application of the open-economy framework (chapter 6) generated substantial discussion and documentation. Studies have traced the details of official policy, African innovations under colonialism, and the vent-for-surplus of available land, with monographic studies of exports of cocoa, groundnuts, and palm products from various West African regions.<sup>60</sup>

The concluding pages (36-42) confirm that Hopkins’s introduction as a whole provides an unusual and valuable model for historiographical review. He reminds us of the construction of his chapter on the open economy from 1930 to 1960 (chapter 7). The chapter is a valuable narrative, linking peak export volume, depression, war, export recovery, colonial reform, and independence. Hopkins skillfully traced events to 1960, emphasizing the structural economic changes of the late colonial era, but did not offer a forceful interpretation. Succeeding scholars have filled in many details but have neither reinterpreted the era 1930–1960 nor linked it effectively to postcolonial economic history. Why do these interpretive problems persist? Among the obstacles to analysis of postwar economies are the disjunctures and gaps in administrative records from the 1950s through the 1980s, the absence of serious construction of retrospective national accounts for African nations, and the neoliberal outlooks that actively discouraged analysis of African domestic economies or the processes of colonialism and decolonization.

I turn now to my own commentary on the trajectory of studies in African economic history, relying mainly on my 2016 chapter.<sup>61</sup> I begin on a personal note: I met Tony Hopkins in 1966, having traveled to Birmingham to meet him during my dissertation research in Paris. The longest time I spent with him was in 1974, at the African Economic History Workshop, a two-month gathering of eight young scholars with Ph.D.s in African economic history, in Madison, that was supported by the Ford Foundation and led by Philip Curtin and Marvin P. Miracle. The participants had received research and travel funding for the summer of 1973.<sup>62</sup> In advance of the workshop, Jean Hay and I had launched a mini-journal, *African Economic History Review*, which published four issues in 1974 and 1975, through the University of Wisconsin African Studies program.<sup>63</sup> The initial network in African economic history, launched with dissertation study in the 1960s, was now formalized.

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<sup>60</sup> See Hopkins’s comments and detailed citations: Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 31-36.

<sup>61</sup> Manning, “African Encounters.”

<sup>62</sup> Full-time participants included Babatunde Agiri (University of Lagos), Sara Berry (Indiana University), Philip Curtin (University of Wisconsin), Margaret Jean Hay (Wellesley College), A. G. Hopkins (Birmingham University), Allen Howard (Rutgers University), Paul Lovejoy (York University), Patrick Manning (Cañada College), Marvin Miracle (University of Wisconsin), and Abdul Sheriff (University of Dar es Salaam). Allen Howard, “Report on the Summer Workshop,” *African Economic History Review* 1:2 (1974): 1-6.

<sup>63</sup> *African Economic History Review* (AEHR): Margaret Jean Hay, editor; Patrick Manning, review editor. Included among the articles, research reports, and book reviews is A. G. Hopkins, “On Importing Andre Gunder Frank into Africa,” *African Economic History Review* 2, 1 (1975):13-21. As Curtin left Wisconsin for Johns Hopkins University, Jan Vansina took leadership in African Studies at

Work in adjoining fields had laid the ground for economic historians, so that members of this network, schooled or practiced in economic history, shared a multidisciplinary outlook.<sup>64</sup> Economic anthropology arose in the 1950s through the work of Melville J. Herskovits and Polly Hill, followed by work of agricultural economists such as W. O. Jones, Ester Boserup, and René Dumont. Economists publishing books in African economic history during the 1960s included Osendé Afana, Robert Baldwin, and Gerald Helleiner—followed in the 1970s by Samir Amin and Jan Hogendorn.<sup>65</sup>

Monographs in African economic history appeared in the 1970s: by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch on the concessionary regime in French Congo, John Latham on precolonial Calabar, Sara Berry on cocoa in colonial Nigeria, Curtin on precolonial Senegambia, and J. Forbes Munro on Africa's international trade.<sup>66</sup> Institutional change advanced on several fronts. On the African continent, the Association of African Historians was formed in Dakar (1972); and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) was formed in Dakar (1973), under the leadership of Samir Amin, 1973.<sup>67</sup> In Europe, the *Review of African Political Economy* was founded in 1974, with contributions mostly in sociology, anthropology, economics, but including some history, along with excellent bibliography collected by Chris Allen.

For an indication of the high level of publication on African economic life during the 1970s, see the numerous citations in Frederick Cooper's 1981 review essay—yet the rate of publication rate had fallen sharply by the time his essay appeared.<sup>68</sup> By the end of the 1970s, Tony Hopkins had taken on virtually all of the 14 Ph.D. students he was to mentor in African economic history: Gareth Austin began his doctoral work with Hopkins in 1978, completing in 1984. A few more

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Wisconsin and a new journal, *African Economic History*, replaced AEHR. The four issues of AEHR are available online, posted at the beginning of the JSTOR files for the succeeding journal, *African Economic History*.

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch articulated the impulse to move from disciplinary training to multidisciplinary scholarly practice. See her "Changes in African Historical Studies in France," in Christopher Fyfe, ed., *African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson* (London: Longman, 1976), 202-3, and "Recherches sur un mode de production africain," *La Pensée* no. 144 (1969). At the 1969 African Studies Association meeting in Montreal, a session on African economic history included economist Samir Amin, sociologist Giovanni Arrighi, and myself, an economic historian.

<sup>65</sup> Osendé Afana, *L'Économie de l'Ouest africain* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1964); Robert E. Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth: A Study of Northern Rhodesia, 1920-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Gerald K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government, and Economic Growth in Nigeria* (Homewood: R. D. Irwin, 1966); Samir Amin *Neocolonialism in West Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Jan S. Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut Exports: Origins and Early Development* (Zaria and Ibadan: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1978).

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Le Congo au temps des grands compagnies concessionnaires, 1898-1930* (Paris: Mouton, 1972); A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600-1891 The Impact of the International Economy upon a Traditional Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Sara S. Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy 1800-1960* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976).

<sup>67</sup> Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), [www.codesria.org](http://www.codesria.org). For an overview of historical writing in Africa since 1950, including some economic history, see Patrick Manning and Jamie Miller, "Historical Writing in Postcolonial Africa: The Institutional Context." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019): 191-216.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," *African Studies Review* 24 (1981): 1-86.

monographs appeared: by Paul Lovejoy in 1980, Stephen Baier in 1980, Bill Freund in 1981.<sup>69</sup> With few exceptions, that was it.<sup>70</sup>

A retrospective view makes clear that the crash came in 1980-1981, with a resulting rejection of African economic history, an end to graduate study, and dispersal of its scholars. This was by no means an internal collapse, but a suppression of research by external influences. The World Bank's structural adjustment programs had begun in the 1970s, along with the debt crisis that began in 1973. Elliott Berg's 1981 manifesto called for an end to public investment in Africa.<sup>71</sup> Especially from this juncture, economic development scholars and policy-makers lost all interest in Africa for the years before 1960. Their outlook reveals the negative side of W.A. Lewis's conception of "unlimited supplies of labor"—African workers and peasants brought only raw labor, not a history, to the project of national development. A debate of potential importance was left unexplored—that between visions of African labor surplus (as seen by Lewis and by Gemery and Hogendorn) and labor shortage (as seen by Hopkins).<sup>72</sup>

Scholars who were active in African economic history moved to other research projects, many of them at exactly this juncture: Hopkins moved to empire and globalization; Curtin to world history; Coquery-Vidrovitch to African social and women's history; Cooper to African social and political history; Manning to African demographic history and world history; Amin and Arrighi had earlier moved to global political economy. Of all the monographs, my 1982 volume on Dahomey 1640-1960 was the one that fit most closely with the standards of economic history in the North Atlantic. It included data and analysis on production, consumption, exchange, money, population, labor, and state policy; it applied neoclassical framing in short-term analysis and a multidisciplinary linkage to modes of production for the long term.<sup>73</sup> The work received a cordial review in *The Economic Historical Review* from Marion Johnson and was then buried; it has not been seen since.<sup>74</sup>

Some studies in African economic history did appear later in the 1980s: a second monograph from Sara Berry, a volume on cowrie currency by Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, and Ralph Austen's concise overview of African economic history.<sup>75</sup> Also during this era, *African Economic History* appeared as an annual volume. Nevertheless, while edited by well-

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<sup>69</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade, 1700-1900* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press); Stephen Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Bill Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981).

<sup>70</sup> My 1987 review essay assumed that research in African economic history would continue – failing to acknowledge that it had already virtually halted years before. Manning, "The Prospects for African Economic History: Is Today Included in the Long Run?" *African Studies Review* 30 (1987), 49-62.

<sup>71</sup> World Bank [authored by Elliott J. Berg], *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: an Agenda for Action* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1981).

<sup>72</sup> W. A. Lewis, "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour," *The Manchester School* 22, 2 (1954): 139-191; Gemery and Hogendorn, "The Atlantic Slave Trade."

<sup>73</sup> Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>74</sup> Marion Johnson, review of Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth*, in *Economic History Review* 36 (1983): 318.

<sup>75</sup> Sara S. Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jan S. Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge:

established historians of Africa, the journal was an eclectic Africanist journal, ranging widely but with no sustained discourse on economic historical issues and no relation to the field of economic history in other regions. The second generation of African economic history opened quietly in about 1990; it took until roughly 2005 for it to begin building in strength. One outstanding volume of the 1990s was Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's economic history of nineteenth century Africa, which began with analysis of production, working by stages to commerce and state activity.<sup>76</sup> The volume's publication by CODESRIA suggested that this continental social-science organization was able to support economic-historical studies as well. In addition, Gareth Austin, appointed in economic history at LSE, steadily expanded his studies on the economy of Ghana during the 1990s.<sup>77</sup>

Influences from outside African studies began to provide indirect and, eventually, direct support for African economic history. The work of Andre Gunder Frank (1998) and especially Kenneth Pomeranz (2000) brought attention to economic comparison of China and Europe in the eighteenth century.<sup>78</sup> The initial result was a bipolar debate that excluded Africa even more from consideration. Yet with the 2003 grant from the Leverhulme Foundation to Patrick O'Brien, LSE became the base of a five-year program of international conferences in global economic history.<sup>79</sup> Studies of Africa, while by no means central, were welcome in this expanding context. In the same era, the reversal of fortune framework, as articulated by Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, and others, soon led to explicit comparison of African wealth and poverty between eighteenth and twentieth centuries—Hopkins and Austin have each commented in detail on the impact of this initiative.<sup>80</sup> Thus it was that annual meetings on African economic history began taking place at LSE from 2005. An internal dynamic to sustain African economic history had again arisen, and further bases of study expanded to Geneva, Lund, Wageningen and elsewhere.<sup>81</sup>

Hopkins has provided a model for reflection, reviewing two trajectories at once: the course of economic history in Africa and the trajectory of its historiography. African economic history is now a field of demonstrable importance, for early times and recent times, for the continent itself and for understanding of the world economy. Relations with scholars in global economic history and even other fields of economics have improved. Study of economic history by scholars on the African continent is progressing: it is my hope that African economic historians will persist in building closer collaboration with

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Cambridge University Press, 1986); Ralph A. Austen, *African Economic History: Internal Development and External Dependency* (London: James Currey, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *A Modern Economic History of Africa. Vol. 1, The Nineteenth Century* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Austin, "The Emergence of Capitalist Relations in South Asante Cocoa Farming, c. 1916-33," *Journal of African History* 28 (1987): 259-79; Austin, "No Elders Were Present': Commoners and Private Ownership in Asante, 1807-96," *Journal of African History* 37 (1996): 1-30.

<sup>78</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Global Economic History Network, [www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Research/Global](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Research/Global) Economic History Network (GEHN).

<sup>80</sup> Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, "Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (2002): 1231-94.

<sup>81</sup> For details on conferences, see African Economic History Network ([www.aehnetwork.org](http://www.aehnetwork.org)). Also in 2005, A. I. Asiwaju of Nigeria was delegated by the Association of African Historians to lead the initial African session at the International Committee for Historical Sciences (CISH) conference in Sydney; his presentation urged historians of Africa to emphasize comparison among continental regions in their research.

CODESRIA.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the historic deficiency of research-focused investment persists. Researchers lack digitized documents, retrospective GDP estimates, detailed series on domestic and international trade, and estimates on historical demography.<sup>83</sup> In the interpretive subfields of African economic history, the precolonial domestic economy and twentieth-century structural change strike me as the two most important areas of further study.

A further concern is that the scholarship and institutions in African economic history, which are now stronger than ever, may not be strong enough. The fate of the founding generation of African economic history shows that a good start by promising scholars was not enough to overcome the obstacles that disabled the field for two or three decades. This is why I emphasize consideration of the generation to come. The thirty years to come may bring new crises, disrupting African life as well as the study of Africa. Potential crises of population, ecological degradation, and refugee flows could generate international conflict and discrimination, in other power centers, against Africans and African studies. Once Nigeria passes the United States to become the third most populous nation, when it reaches 400 million inhabitants just before 2050, new conflicts may arise in continental and overseas relations.

In my opinion, Tony Hopkins's new edition has provided an exemplary review of the trajectory of historiography along with clear views of the course of African economic life as it has been understood over the past two academic generations. Yet it is not enough for scholars to keep a copy of this revised edition of *An Economic History of West Africa* on the shelf—all will do better by continuing discussion with earlier scholars in planning agendas for the research to come. Periodic scholarly review of the neglect and discrimination that Africa underwent in earlier times—and the effects of these phenomena on African life and on Africanist scholarship—may be considered one part of our planning for future studies in African economic history. In contrast, studies conducted from the 1960s to the 1990s, while they were performed with limited resources, may contain insights of great value for addressing future moments of difficulty.

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<sup>82</sup> "The History of African Development," [www.aehnwork.org/textbook](http://www.aehnwork.org/textbook).

<sup>83</sup> The absence of research and consensus on estimates of African historical populations, along with the shortage of estimates for historical GDP, greatly weaken the understanding of African economic history and especially the possibility of comparing African patterns with those of other regions. For some of my own efforts on historical demography, see Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Manning, "African Population: Projections, 1850-1960," in Karl Ittmann, Dennis D. Cordell, and Gregory H. Maddox, eds., *The Demographics of Empire: The Colonial Order and the Creation of Knowledge*, 245-75 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); and Manning, "African Population, 1650-2000: Comparisons and Implications of New Estimates," in Emmanuel Akyeampong, Robert H. Bates, Nathan Nunn, and James A. Robinson, eds., *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective*, 131-50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

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 RESPONSE BY A.G. HOPKINS, PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 

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New editions of academic books are rarely reviewed, so it was an exceptional privilege to find that the second edition of my *Economic History of West Africa* had been chosen to be the subject of one of H-Diplo's notable Roundtables.<sup>84</sup> Before other authors demand an enquiry, I should add that H-Diplo could not have reviewed the first edition, even if it had decided to do so, because my book was published in 1973, well before the internet and computers transformed communications. In those type-writing days, the phrase 'going on-line' had still to be invented and the 'data revolution', which is now transforming much of modern African history, lay beyond the imagination of even the most far-seeing futurologists.<sup>85</sup> These considerations do not in themselves justify a place for my antique study in H-Diplo. That is a matter to be determined by estimates of the value of the book today, some 50 years after it was being written. The main purpose of the Roundtable, as I see it, is precisely to arrive at such an assessment, thereby allowing today's scholars to see how the subject has developed and to identify promising areas for new research.

All six contributors have treated my book generously, perhaps even indulgently, though I would not want this remark to be read as a complaint. Indeed, I am grateful to have escaped both the axe and the rapier, which critics wield, when it suits them, with the special enthusiasm that comes from combining duty with pleasure. I am particularly glad to have avoided the fate of the luckless author whose long and lifeless text prompted the satirist, Ambrose Bierce, to submit what is surely the best one-line review ever written: "the covers of this book are too far apart."<sup>86</sup> On the contrary, the contributors have devoted time to my work and have made some wide-ranging and astute comments on it. These indications that my efforts have been treated seriously are all that an author can reasonably hope for.

I shall begin and end with Patrick Manning's commentary because he is one of the few historians to have been both a participant and an observer of the subject almost from the outset and his own publications have been signposts for everyone in the field for many decades. Moreover, we share a conviction that familiarity with historiography is essential if we are to understand how and why African economic history, and African studies generally, have evolved during the last half century. This statement might strike some readers as being self-evident and hence redundant. Experience of different universities over the years, however, suggests that it is possible for postgraduates to embark on historical research without having a clear idea of how the subject has reached the point at which they encounter it. Economists, who have entered the field in increasing numbers in recent years, are inclined to hold the positivist assumption that there is little point in investing time in studying the scholarship of the past because it is self-evident that the latest knowledge is superior to what went before,

Historical studies, however, do not follow a linear trajectory. Perspectives on the past rise and fall in popularity. Research that is regarded as being original today may have been anticipated by the work of previous and sometimes distant scholars. Novelties may be found in techniques and evidence and in the context that separates one generation from another, but key insights may already have been formulated. It is for this reason that truly great contributions, whether as different as those of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, remain relevant, despite their advanced age. Unless newcomers accept that they have precursors, they may fail to learn from the mistakes, as well as the achievements, of the past and make claims to originality that are unjustified. Put another way, an awareness of historiography alerts us to the danger of confusing what we happen to know with knowledge.

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<sup>84</sup> I would like to take this opportunity to thank Eve Serch and her team at Routledge for taking on the second edition and producing it to such high standards, including greatly improved maps, an enlarged index, and the particular delight of yesteryear—citations at the bottom of the page. Page references given here are to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of *An Economic History of West Africa*.

<sup>85</sup> Johan Fourie, "The Data Revolution in African Economic History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 48 (Autumn, 2016): 193-212.

<sup>86</sup> The quotation is commonly attributed to Bierce, and it certainly reflects his style, but the source remains uncertain.

Each generation enters the subject when a favoured approach and its attendant priorities are in favour, whether it be the dependency thesis, Marxism, postmodernism, globalisation, or half a dozen other possibilities. The temptation is to pile in with everyone else to take advantage of what seems to be both novel and immediately relevant to the needs of the time—their time. Time, however, as historians surely know, moves on. The mood changes, relevance shifts its focus, truth, once apparently assured, slips through the fingers. The dissertation that was crisp and fresh becomes limp and stale; the academic job, seemingly in hand, drifts out of reach. Why these moods come and go is a question that has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> What matters in the present context is that, by acquiring a grasp of historiography, newcomers to the field can take out insurance against becoming dated before their time and, more importantly, begin to develop their own independence and individuality.

Manning's survey of the development of the subject begins with the boom in research, which ran from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, identifies the hiatus that followed, and places the origin of the current revival of interest in the 1990s. I am in broad agreement with his chronology but I would extend the time the subject fell out of favour by another decade to the turn of the new century. Of course, some excellent research was undertaken during the 1990s by individuals who found themselves working in an area that had become unfashionable. Despite their efforts, however, the history of economic backwardness and development ceased to be on the agenda. On the contrary, in the 1990s the rise of postmodernism shifted the attention of a new generation of researchers away from material forces and the study of historical structures in the long run and towards literary representations of Africa and its people. Newcomers could be forgiven for supposing that the problem of poverty had either been solved or had become, for some unstated reason, irrelevant. Consequently, the generation of research students that entered the field after the turn of the century is likely to have started with only a limited knowledge of the development of the subject since its beginnings, unless they were fortunate to encounter a teacher who made historiography a priority. Manning's concluding plea for the continuity of the subject, given the likely challenges Africa faces in the future (on which see Denis Cogneau's thoughtful remarks), makes the case for understanding how we got 'from there to here' admirably.

I deal with Sarah Kunkel's commentary next because her full and careful summary of my book is likely to be helpful to non-specialist readers, though her generosity in this regard has limited the space she has for her own comments. Her general observation that much more work has been completed in the fifty years since I was preparing my *Economic History of West Africa* is, of course, correct. I acknowledged the point at some length in my new 'Introduction,' though I am grateful to Kunkel and other commentators for helpfully supplementing the citations I gave there.

Beyond this acknowledgement, there are some differences between us that illustrate either the considerable generation gap or the divergent perspectives of author and reader—or both. Kunkel notes that it is 'slightly odd' and 'rather peculiar' to read of the simplicities that accompanied beliefs about Africa in the 1960s. That, however, is how it was or at least how I understood it to be, I think uncontroversially, at the time. Yesterday's conventional wisdom reveals its limits with the passage of the years; today's firm beliefs continue to guide us until they too are subjected to the scrutiny of a new generation. I do, however, question some of Kunkel's assessments. It was not my intention to suggest that entrepreneurship is a new subject in African history—the two words 'Polly Hill' are sufficient to quell that thought - but rather one that deserves a higher place on the research agenda. Similarly, the claim that "historians of today do not only rely on archival documents" greatly understates, however unintentionally, the commitment of the first generation of historians of Africa to fieldwork, local archives, and oral traditions, and testimony.

More importantly, I feel obliged to dissent from the statement that "labour is a minor focus" of my analysis. On the contrary, it is a central consideration, beginning with the key argument about the land-labour ratio, continuing with

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<sup>87</sup> See for example, Patrick Manning and Jamie Miller, "Historical Writing in Postcolonial Africa: The Institutional Context," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019): 191-216. For my own thoughts, see A.G. Hopkins, "Africa's Age of Improvement," *History in Africa* 7 (1980): 141-60; Hopkins, "Of Africa and Golden Joys," *Genève-Afrique* 23:1 (1985): 25-38; Hopkins, "Fifty Years of African Economic History," *Economic History of Developing Regions* 34 (March 2019): 1-15.

discussions of internal slavery and the external slave trades, entering the analysis of changing factor proportions in the nineteenth century, and appearing in assessments of the vent-for-surplus thesis, the decline of internal slavery, and migration to rural and urban centres of demand during the colonial period. Kunkel's main concern, as I read it, is less with these general considerations than with the limited space I gave to wage labour and forced labour under colonial rule, which are her special research interests.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, every writer who attempts to produce a synthesis on a large subject suffers from the inability to allot sufficient space to detailed research on diverse topics, but this is a misfortune that has no remedy.

Jennifer Hart provides a balanced account of my book, which she relates to her own interest in African entrepreneurship and the development of motor transport on the Gold Coast.<sup>89</sup> She makes three interesting general comments. The first concerns the long-standing issue of rationality. The term can be used in several different ways to refer, for example, to connecting ends and means in a logical manner or, more specifically, to profit-maximising behaviour. Hart observes, correctly, that my analysis gave only limited attention to the social, cultural, and other considerations that also enter decision-making. The question of scale is relevant here. My analysis was pitched at a macro level and dealt with the long run. Its main purpose was to show that economic behaviour was rational in the sense that decision-makers matched ends and means in a cost-effective manner and in doing so demonstrated that they were alert to profit-making opportunities. There were of course various constraints on the choices they made, some of them stemming, as Hart suggests, from the environment, colonial and otherwise. However, while it is both possible and necessary to amplify motivation in particular cases where evidence is available, it is another matter to formulate an argument that would incorporate a mix of motives and still be applicable to the whole of West Africa throughout the precolonial and the colonial periods.

At this point, Hart's argument takes an unexpected turn. I anticipated that she would extend her reasoning to include, if only in principle, precolonial states, social structures, and value systems, thus complementing her remarks on colonial rule. Instead, she suggests that it would have been interesting to know how I would engage with Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which appeared shortly before my own book. The connection here, I surmise, is that Rodney argued that European interests were active in underdeveloping Africa long before the colonial period. Rodney was a very fine scholar.<sup>90</sup> His critical account of the imperial record had the merit of introducing the subject to a new generation of post-colonial readers and remains the most influential example of the application of the dependency thesis to Africa. My own engagement with Rodney was primarily through a discussion of the dependency thesis, which was highly influential in the 1970s.<sup>91</sup> A central problem with the thesis, as with Rodney's book, was the absence of a systematic analysis of the internal constraints on development, whether major or minor. For all its merits, his book did not enlarge our understanding of this central aspect of African history.

Finally, Hart raises the question of the part historians should play in the public sphere. This is a complex issue that can be treated here only in summary fashion. But it is worth remarking that Africa has always occupied a special place in the minds of foreign observers, who have often been inclined to treat the continent as a laboratory for testing their preferred views of the world. One familiar example begins with the assumption that is probably now held by a majority of informed Westerners, namely that colonialism was both morally indefensible and economically disadvantageous. The assumption

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Sarah Kunkel, "Forced Labor, Roads, and Chiefs: The Implementation of the ILO Forced Labor Convention in the Gold Coast," *International Review of Social History* 63 (2018): 449-476.

<sup>89</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> See especially Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), which exemplifies the commitment of the first generation of historians of Africa to writing African history.

<sup>91</sup> Hopkins, "Clio-antics: A Horoscope for African Economic History," in Christopher Fyfe, ed., *African Studies since 1945: Tribute to Basil Davidson* (London: Longman, 1976): 31-48.

then produces a hypothesis, which is tested against empirical evidence before the conclusion is reached. The procedure is conventional. The danger, however, lies in failing to distinguish between the philosophical (or ideological) starting point and the proposition that needs to be tested independently of it. If the two are run together, there is a risk of collecting evidence that supports the hypothesis and bypasses uncongenial material that might question or even refute it. A standard illustration used by philosophers is the hypothesis that all swans are white. The proposition is demonstrated, not by counting endless numbers of white swans, as might be supposed, but by failing to find any swans of another colour. Consequently, one black swan is enough to disconfirm the hypothesis.

In the case of Africa, we are particularly tempted to see in the past what we would like to find there. To take one small example, it seemed self-evident to me that superior Western manufactures would have eliminated African crafts and I drafted a summary paragraph or two accordingly. For some reason, now forgotten, I found it advisable to check the evidence again and discovered that the survival rate was much higher than I had assumed (302-305). This leaves us with the dilemma that political correctness and historical accuracy do not always fit together. The political activist may choose an interpretation that advances his cause; the historian is obliged to cling to the integrity of his findings.

I must thank Victor Gwande for his very generous remarks, though I now feel some responsibility for those students who failed their examination because they had not read my *Economic History*. Perhaps the covers were ‘too far apart’ after all. I am also grateful to him for identifying two large issues that are of prime importance, not just for my book but for the subject as a whole.

The first issue concerns the historic land-labour ratio. Gwande observes that “emerging scholarship on pre-colonial Africa” is now challenging the “idea of a land-surplus economy.” If future research overturns the assumption, much, perhaps most, of my interpretation will collapse and with it associated arguments regarding the origins of slavery and the size and structure of African states. Instead, we will have a picture of pre-colonial Africa that brings it closer to that of many other (though by no means all) pre-industrial societies. Gwande supports his comment by citing a Ph.D. dissertation on north-east Zimbabwe.<sup>92</sup> I myself gave examples of intensive cultivation in West Africa; more recently, Mats Widgren has assembled systematic evidence that identifies additional areas where this was the case (8-10). Limits of space prevent the citation of evidence favouring the notion of a land-surplus economy. In summary, however, my reading of the research currently available is that it is beginning to fill out previously incomplete (and in my case over-generalised) evidence and is delivering a more nuanced understanding of pre-colonial economies, but so far has qualified rather than discredited the basic proposition.<sup>93</sup> I note that Cogneau takes the same view.

Gwande then raises the perennially controversial question of the slow pace of industrialisation in tropical Africa. His summary of my position is not quite as I would have put it myself. It is one thing to demonstrate that pre-colonial West Africa had markets, crafts, currencies, towns, and eager entrepreneurs but another to suggest that “the region always possessed the potential to industrialise.” Other continents had similar or more promising endowments without industrialising. Self-evidently, the explanation needs to strike a balance between internal and introduced influences. Regarding colonial policy, which Gwande refers to specifically, the record varied not only between British and French Africa but also through time and is not easily generalised. It is worth noting, though, that the historical evidence indicates that agricultural exports have often been the first step towards import-substituting and export-processing industries. This may not have been the case of West Africa, but the contrary argument needs to be specified and other constraints discounted if an alternative is to be persuasive. I argued that the size of the market combined with government orthodoxy were inhibiting factors, especially during the 1930s. It was the post-war boom in primary produce prices, combined with a shift in official

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<sup>92</sup> Gwande’s own research is also on Zimbabwe. See his article with Ian Phimister, “Industry and Settler Colonialism: Southern Rhodesia Before and after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence,” *African Economic History* 45 (2017): 85-112.

<sup>93</sup> Gareth Austin, “Resources, Techniques and Strategies in Africa South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspective on African Economic Development,” *Economic History Review* 61 (August 2008): 587-624.

thinking, that encouraged modern manufacturing before political independence was achieved. It is possible that different policies might have led to an earlier start, but again this is a hypothetical proposition that requires careful specification.

I read Morten Jerven's admission that he is a 'fan' of my book with considerable relief because he is a noted sharp-shooter who is invariably on target.<sup>94</sup> His further admission that the review would be "completely biased" in what, for me, turns out to be the right direction confirmed my feeling that I had received a commendation in excess of my merits. I faced an acute dilemma: should the excess be accepted or returned? The contest between self-indulgence and honesty that followed ended speedily and decisively. This was a gift horse that had to be received gracefully and patted with affection. Drawing on my abundant reserves of sophistry, I also managed to convince myself that good fortune on this occasion was fully justified because it could be regarded as overdue compensation for previous judgements that were biased in the other direction.

Nevertheless, Jerven's review gives me an opportunity to draw attention to the 'new' economic history Africa, of which he is one of the most prominent exponents. Specialists have written a good deal about this subject but others who have been adventurous enough to read the contributions to this Roundtable may not be aware that the study of Africa's economic history has received fresh impetus in recent years.<sup>95</sup> Historians have returned to material considerations, structures, comparisons and long-run developments, and have overcome, or forgotten, the doubts they held in the 1990s about whether there was any reality beyond textual representations of it. A new wave of economists has carried innovative ideas and techniques into the continent, while also accepting that history has an important role in understanding the continent's development dilemmas. What has been called the 'data revolution,' the ability of computer programmes to process quantitative evidence speedily, has opened lines of research that were thought previously to be inaccessible or not thought about at all.<sup>96</sup> The junction between economists and historians is imperfect and doubtless will remain so. Nevertheless, the diversity of the endeavour as well as its potential has attracted a fresh generation of young researchers and made African economic history one of the most creative branches of the subject anywhere.

It is appropriate to conclude with Cogneau's thoughtful contribution, which brings the subject up to date by discussing post-colonial Africa and adds valuably to my own study, which halted in 1960. Before doing so, however, I must express my appreciation of his opening remark about the French colonies. When I began writing my manuscript, I was conscious of looking at West Africa predominantly from a British viewpoint. I made a considerable effort to correct the bias and was especially glad to have publicised several pioneering studies, such as those by Jean-Jacques Poquin and Huguette Durand, which were neglected, even in France.<sup>97</sup> I was never sure about the adequacy of my efforts because my book was not reviewed in France and for many years was rarely mentioned by French scholars. Accordingly, I am particularly glad to know that my efforts have passed Cogneau's general test, though I have no doubt that many gaps remain, and a number of misconceptions are still embedded in the text. Now that newcomers to African economic history include well-trained French scholars (who are also familiar with the literature in English), we can be confident that the gaps will be filled, and the misconceptions

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<sup>94</sup> See, among numerous publications, Morten Jerven, *Poor Numbers. How We are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do about It* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); *Africa: Why Economists Get It Wrong* (London: Zed Press, 2015).

<sup>95</sup> For two of several possible introductions see Gareth Austin, "The 'Reversal of Fortune' Thesis and the Compression of History: Perspectives from African and Comparative History," *Journal of International Development* 20 (November, 2008):1-32; Hopkins, "The New Economic History of Africa," *Journal of African History* 50:2 (2009): 155-177.

<sup>96</sup> Fourie, "The Data Revolution."

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Jacques Poquin, *Les relations économiques extérieures des pays d'Afrique noire et de l'Union française, 1925-1955* (Paris: Armand Colin, Paris, 1957); Huguette Durand, *Essai sur la conjoncture de l'Afrique noire* (Daloz: Paris, 1957).

corrected. Cogneau's forthcoming study of French colonisation and decolonisation is one such example that is sure to be a major contribution, both empirically and analytically.<sup>98</sup>

Cogneau then turns to several of the very big issues affecting development today, beginning with the land-surplus hypothesis, which he accepts as being, in general, valid. As he remarks, the barriers to intensification and improved technology continue to puzzle development specialists, as they do historians. Cogneau refers to my own tentative explanation of the phenomenon, which I saw primarily in terms of a hostile environment, and wonders whether this is adequate to account for the limited levels of technology that prevailed in sub-Saharan Africa. My aim was not to impose a form of geographical determinism but rather to suggest that conditions in tropical Africa were not such as to encourage cumulative incremental advances but required a big leap, which did not occur until outside agencies introduced modern technology. Population growth, which has acted elsewhere as a spur to technological innovation, appears either not to have been operative or to have been insufficient to have modified prevailing technological conditions. It is also generally agreed that the external slave trades reinforced these tendencies, though they did not cause them. Yet, as Cogneau points out, we cannot be sure that population pressure alone would have been sufficient to have generated the required degree of technological innovation. Not every stimulus produces the desired response.

Indeed, Cogneau cites evidence showing that, despite rapid population growth during the second half of the twentieth century, extensive cultivation is still prevalent in many parts of Africa. At the same time, conflicts are beginning to appear in locations where resources of land and water are scarce. If this trend continues, increasing population will eventually require an agricultural or industrial revolution to avert a Malthusian crisis. In Cogneau's judgement, which is surely correct, either solution requires governments to take a central role as facilitators, providing infrastructure, credit, and technical assistance. And this is without considering the looming complexities of climate change.

This reflection leads Cogneau to consider the part played by colonial states in the development of their territories. In a preliminary comparison, he shows that colonial administrations were efficient tax-gatherers, though this does not imply that revenues were spent effectively on development projects. Many independent governments, especially since the 1980s, have been less effective in raising revenue from taxes, and have often spent foreign loans in unproductive ways. Trade liberalisation was supposed to put more money in the pockets of producers, who were also major consumers. To the extent that this happened, however, it did nothing to enhance the ability of governments to fund the public services that are vital to development.

In pondering the link between colonial and post-colonial states, Cogneau speculates that colonial rule may have reinforced the power of chiefs and associated "big men," who were able to take control of the state at independence and use its resources to embed their privileged positions. "Booty capitalism," as it is known in the Philippines, has produced the "politics of patrimonial plunder," which in turn has entrenched persistent income inequality.<sup>99</sup> This line of enquiry returns us to the argument advanced in *An Economic History of West Africa* that the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a historic shift from large to small scale production. The trend continued under colonial rule, though there was progressive differentiation among 'ordinary households,' as successful farmers and traders invested in larger enterprises. We also know that chiefs remained important as tax agents and suppliers of labour, and even strengthened their position during the difficult years of the 1930s. What we do not know at present is where the balance of power between these groups lay. Thanks to Cogneau's speculation, we now have a fruitful research project that should appeal to historians and development specialists alike.

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<sup>98</sup> Meanwhile, readers can consult his valuable overview of some of the broad themes currently being discussed: Denis Cogneau, "Histoire économique de l'Afrique: renaissance ou trompe-l'oeil?," *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 71 (2016): 879-96.

<sup>99</sup> See Paul D. Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), and the further references given in my *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 611-12.

I shall end by referring to Manning's opening statement about the importance of historiographical knowledge. As readers will have seen, I have applied some of his remarks to the Comments made on my book, but it is appropriate to close by joining our knowledge of the research record to the present, which Cogneau has brought us to. My general impression, which is shared by others, is that today's research students are mainly interested in the twentieth century and colonial rule, though with extensions into the post-colonial era. The contributors to this Roundtable exemplify this trend.<sup>100</sup> Fresh and important research is adding significantly to our understanding and may well change some of the inherited interpretations of the period.

Nevertheless, something of key importance is missing: the pre-colonial period. Pioneers of African history lament their lack of successors.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, it may be worth reminding the present generation of researchers that the principal motive behind the creation of African studies was precisely the need to reach beyond imperial history and to view the continent from perspectives other than those of foreign rulers. Yet, if the scholars we are now producing are primarily specialists on colonial rule, how is research on pre-colonial Africa, the longest period of African history, to be nurtured? And if pre-colonial history loses representation and vitality, our understanding of the colonial period itself will be greatly attenuated.

I have suggested that historiographical trends have been corrected and sometimes self-corrected. If this is the case, over-concentration on the colonial period may lead to diminishing returns. The time may come when departments consider reassigning some positions to restore the balance. Accordingly, it may suit some new researchers to reposition themselves before the event. When applicants for posts in African history are almost exclusively specialists on the twentieth century, an expert on the pre-colonial period will have considerable rarity value. Short of a brain-transplant, it often helps to think contra-cyclically.

It remains for me to express my gratitude to Gareth Austin for taking the time to write an Introduction to the Roundtable. His participation is particularly appropriate because his own work demonstrates the value of exploring the relationship between the economies of pre-colonial and colonial Africa and their relevance to current development issues.

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<sup>100</sup> Patrick Manning provides an exception that adds weight to my generalisation because he is one of the first generation of researchers and has contributed to both pre-colonial and colonial history.

<sup>101</sup> I can report here (with his permission) a conversation I had with John Thornton, one of the outstanding specialists on pre-colonial history, in Boston in 2018, in which he expressed his dismay and despair at the absence of successors.