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# Introduction

## State enterprises in Africa: a postcolonial history

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The postcolonial economic politics of African states were dominated by development planning, aimed at overcoming deficiencies and to pave way for an economic take-off to come. While plenty is known about the planning processes in so far as the involvement of international donor organisations and the entangled history of development aid and foreign politics are concerned, our knowledge of domestic economies of African states during that period is still scarce.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the relevance of business records of both state and privately-owned enterprises, has been demonstrated in several historical and anthropological research works, such as Hannah Appel's investigation of the Equatorial Guinean Oil industry or the contributions in Sarah Stockwell's and Véronique Dimier's edited volume on business and development in postcolonial Africa.<sup>2</sup> Yet, state enterprises, while principally known as an important phenomenon of Africa's independent states, are still missing from the historical debate. Often created as devices to stimulate development on the one hand and to protect vital sectors from foreign profit interests on the other, their history presents, in our view, an entry point to a better understanding of the relationship between the economics of development planning, state-building processes and the transformation of societies within the newly in-

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel. The Road to Nongovernmentality*, Cambridge 2015; Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid. Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel 1800–2000*, Cambridge 2015; Marie Huber, *Developing Heritage – Developing Countries: Ethiopian Nation-Building and the Origins of UNESCO World Heritage 1960–1980*, Berlin 2020; Alden Young, *Transforming Sudan. Decolonization, Economic Development, and State Formation*, Cambridge 2018; Martin Remppe, *Entwicklung im Konflikt. Die EWG und der Senegal 1957–1975*, Wien 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah C. Appel, *Walls and White Elephants: Oil Extraction, Responsibility, and Infrastructural Violence in Equatorial Guinea*, in: *Ethnography* 4 (2012), 439–465; Véronique Dimier/Sarah Stockwell, *The Business of Development in Post-Colonial Africa*, Cham 2020.

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dependent African nation states. The experience of their workers and employees, in terms of labour history, is equally part of this debate.<sup>3</sup>

Given the importance of the public enterprise sector in postcolonial Africa between 1960 and 1980, and the integration of both skilled and unskilled labour in these companies, the widespread absence of discussion – historical and otherwise – is surprising; even the dimension of the sector has rarely been quantified in the literature. For the 70s, world bank reports show its considerable size in most countries as a share in gross domestic product in factor cost. Such numbers must be regarded with caution. Even so, they might have amounted to 37.8 per cent for Zambia (in 1979/80), to 19.9 per cent for Senegal (in 1974), to 10.4 per cent for Côte d'Ivoire (in 1979), and to 7.6 per cent for Sierra Leone (in 1979).<sup>4</sup> The importance of state firms in Senegal is an exceptional case, for which studies offer clearer detail: statistics set the number of salaried public-sector employees at 54,151 in 1979.<sup>5</sup> There can thus be little doubt that the importance of this sector was strong in the various African societies of the 70s; as Grietjie Verhoef argues in this special issue, the weight of state companies in sub-Saharan Africa even remained considerable in its alleged phase of fatal decline during the 90s in comparison with Asia and Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

However, the transdisciplinary discussion of state firms – in which historical research has practically not had any role, and which as a theme scarcely appears even in the principal overviews of Africa's postcolonial history<sup>7</sup> – has mainly centred on the experience of decline. Depending on the position of scholars (and economists) discussing these trajectories, the narrative of decline is presented as tragic or inevitable; mostly, the lack of viability of the sectors comes across as a given variable in economic studies, while those focusing on public-company employees denounce the negative effects of cutbacks and structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Even where employees of public firms lived through the experience of decline during the 80s, including a dramatic loss of purchase power, as is exemplified by the cataclysmic downturn in a state like Benin, the existing discussion remained long focused on

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3 Stefano Bellucci/Andreas Eckert (eds.), *General Labour History of Africa, Workers, Employers and Governments 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*, Rochester, NY 2019.

4 John Nellis, *Public Enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Washington D.C. 1986, 3–11.

5 Babacar Fall, *Le travail au Sénégal au XXe siècle*, Paris 2011, 263.

6 See also John Nellis, *What Next for African Enterprises?*, in: Laura Wallace (ed.), *Deepening Structural Reform in Africa. Lessons from East Asia*, Washington D.C. 1997, 89–112.

7 Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940. The past of the present*, Cambridge 2002; Paul Nugent, *Africa since Independence. A Comparative History*, London 2012.

the failed macroeconomic processes, as the outcome of an authoritarian regime.<sup>8</sup> The same observation can be made for Mozambique as another case of the failure and subsequent elimination of state companies.<sup>9</sup> This also means that the social experience of employees in such companies has largely continued to be obscured.

Senegal is an exception up to some point, being a postcolonial society on which scholars have provided a historical discussion on the history of public enterprises.<sup>10</sup> While these are worthy pioneer studies, they remain very schematic and superficial and do not engage with sources and trajectories. For practically all other postcolonial nation-state projects, the situation is still much worse.

As historians of African and global history<sup>11</sup>, studying the history of economic development and labour in the late and postcolonial period, we found ourselves confronted time and again with state-owned enterprises as organisational units. This kindled our interest in achieving a better understanding of the entrepreneurial and operational rationale of the actors and relations that were the subjects of our research. The following sections will provide an overview of the questions and key themes in a potential future research field of history on state-owned enterprises in (post-)colonial Africa, as well as highlighting the most pertinent problems one encounters in the archives and on the ground during the research process.

## From the modernisation drive of late colonialism to the expansion of state firms after independence

A key element of the modernisation strategy of the late colonial states was transforming labour relations and experiences of work for colonial subjects. Late colonialism between the end of the Second World War and independence had three major effects on African societies in this sense. First, colonial planners attempted to create «modern» sectors, which were frequently public sectors. In a logic of social engineering, these projects were also meant to separate a new elite com-

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**8** Philippe Noudjenoume, *La démocratie au Bénin 1988–1993. Bilan et perspectives*, Paris 1999; Richard Banégas, *La démocratie à pas de caméléon. Transition et imaginaires politique au Bénin*, Paris 2003.

**9** Mary Anne Pitcher, *Transforming Mozambique. The politics of privatization 1975–2000*, Cambridge 2002.

**10** Marc Bellitto, *Une histoire du Sénégal et de ses entreprises publiques*, Paris 2001.

**11** On the problem of bringing the two views into one research perspective, see Andrew Zimmerman, *Africa in Imperial and Transnational History. Multi-Sited Historiography and the Necessity of Theory*, in: *Journal of African History* 3 (2013), 331–340.

munity of «modern» African workers from their «tribal» and «traditional» past following a strategy that overlooked the important family ties and the connections skilled workers and employees retained to their regions of origin. A second effect of late colonialism was to give a boost to the role of trade unions. Legalised in the French and British colonies in Africa after the Second World War, unions were very influential, and their involvement in political mobilisation brought the new «workers' elites» in close contact to the nation-state project of African political elites (sometimes, union leaders were at the same time political party leaders). A third trend was especially relevant for rural labour. Regarding commercial agriculture, late colonial administrators imposed the creation of cooperatives on rural peasants; increased public budgets allowed for more personnel to train and to monitor these populations.<sup>12</sup> This sometimes led to the creation of larger structures, which preceded the later rural state enterprises.

The private capitalist sector, which included the big merchant firms and mining companies, did of course not disappear, but social and managerial change in the private sector remained in the shadow of the expansion of the public sector, the latter being at the heart of developmental optimism. New standards of salary and wage levels, family allowances, protection at the workplace, and generally improved labour conditions normally found their pioneering initiatives in those sectors under direct control of the late colonial state.

For some African workers and employees, social conditions strongly improved in the 50s, but this experience was mainly the privilege of yet a relatively small group. It was also a complicated, contradictory process, as Frederick Cooper has pointed out: social benefits as a principal goal of emancipation frequently collided with (proto-)nationalist mobilisation for political rights and eventually independence.<sup>13</sup> But the expansion of social improvements was a general trend nevertheless, and it was possible even without a late colonial commitment to political democratisation: in the more repressive contexts of British colonies in East and Central Africa, such as Kenya, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in the Belgian Congo, and in the Portuguese colonies, late colonialism also meant a considerable amount of social transformation and development initiatives. Modernisation in

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory Mann/Jane I. Guyer, *Imposing a guide on the indigene. The fifty-year experience of the Sociétés de Prévoyance in French West and Equatorial Africa*, in: Endre Stiansen/Jane I. Guyer (eds.), *Credit, Currencies, and Culture: African Financial Institutions in Historical Perspective*, Uppsala 1999, 124–151; Andrew Bowman, *Mass Production or Production by the Masses? Tractors, Cooperatives, and the Politics of Rural Development in Post-Independence Zambia*, in: *Journal of African History* 2 (2016), 201–221.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge 1996.

plantation sectors even in the Portuguese colonies of São Tomé e Príncipe and Angola, which came to be equipped with high-end machinery during the period in question, are symbolic for that process.<sup>14</sup>

A different angle on discussing late colonial development has been to look at planning and planners, as for huge development projects such as the Office du Niger in current-day Mali's inner delta of the Niger River, and the Volta River Dam Project in Ghana.<sup>15</sup> Studies have pointed out that projects tended to be oversized and ignored or misunderstood the needs of the workers and peasants. The latter partly identified with the modernisation drive that the large projects embodied, but they also became aware how much their own knowledge of suitable production processes was discarded. In the case of rural cooperatives in which late colonial planners enforced collective rural practices, those provoked criticism and resistance by peasants compelled to take part; the experience left bitter memories after independence.<sup>16</sup> However, while the analysis of late colonial processes, including development and modernisation, has strongly advanced, the picture is still quite incomplete. The social history of both firms and projects, and of workers, under late colonialism still remains to be written in most cases.

For postcolonial Africa, the history of the public sector, and certainly that of late colonial projects becoming public firms, is virtually unwritten. While the historical study even of the first post-independence years leaves much to be desired, the creation of state enterprise sectors is one of the most visible lacunae. This is especially remarkable because state firms were created in practically all the new nation-state contexts. So-called «Marxist-Leninist» regimes such as of Congo-Brazzaville from 1968 or of Benin from 1974, and certainly the former Portuguese colonies engaging in a Marxist-Leninist path after independence, such as for São Tomé e Príncipe from 1975, combined both the rhetoric and practice of nationalisation of production sectors and commercial activities. But regimes proposing African socialism of varying degrees without adhering to «Marxism-Leninism» were also open to the nationalisation of key companies, such as in Kwame

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14 Jeremy Ball, *Angola's Colossal Lie. Forced Labor on a Sugar Plantation 1913–1977*, Leiden 2015; Alexander Keese, *Forced labour in the «Gorgulho Years»: Understanding reform and repression in rural São Tomé e Príncipe, 1945–1953*, in: *Itinerario* 1 (2014), 103–124.

15 Monica M. van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development. African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger 1920–1960*, Portsmouth, NH 2002; Viviana d'Auria, *More than tropical? Modern housing, expatriate practitioners and the Volta River Project in decolonising Ghana*, in: Ruth Craggs/Claire Wintle (eds.), *Transnational productions and practices 1945–70*, Manchester 2016, 196–221.

16 Alexander Keese, *Just like in colonial times? Administrative practice and local reflections on «grassroots neocolonialism» in autonomous and postcolonial Dahomey 1958–1965*, in: *Journal of African History* 2 (2019), 257–275.

Nkrumah's Ghana between 1957 and 1966, and those nation-state projects tied to «economic liberalism» also had elements of expanding the state sector and nationalising key activities. Therefore, the phenomenon was essential under very different circumstances, and certainly needs historical interpretation. Its absence is a serious problem for the analysis of postcolonial Africa's economic and social history.

On a practical level, the most obvious challenge to any research related to state enterprises starts with the lack of a standard definition. Currently, there is in no case a very well-developed conceptual framework for historical analysis to be found, and most studies suffer from too much reliance on source language. Most commonly, in older studies, either a narrow or broader definition is employed. The narrow definition includes entities that earn their revenue from sales, have a separate legal position, and are (majority) government-owned or controlled.<sup>17</sup> The broader definition includes the larger public sector, i. e. government-controlled organisations, including regulatory agencies and financial intermediaries.<sup>18</sup> The more recent literature, however, takes an even more pragmatic approach, acknowledging the difficulties in disentangling the ideas and language of politicians, managers, planners, and researchers across a variety of regions and periods.

## The potential of (post)colonial business histories as brokers between disciplines

The nascent field of (post)colonial business history argues for a widening of the methodological toolkit of traditional business history and focuses on the role of business and enterprise in late and postcolonial state-building and nationalism.<sup>19</sup>

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**17** Daniel Swanson/Teferra Wolde-Semait, *Africa's Public Enterprise Sector and Evidence of Reforms*, Washington D.C. 1989; John R. Nellis, *Public Enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Washington D.C. 1982.

**18** Mary M. Shirley, *Managing State-Owned Enterprises*, Washington D.C. 1983; Leroy P. Jones, *Public Enterprises in Less Developed Countries*, Cambridge 1982.

**19** Stephanie Decker, *Less than an Empire and More than British: Foreign Investor Competition in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1960s*, in: David Thackeray et al. (eds.), *Imagining Britain's Economic Future, c. 1800–1975. Trade, Consumerism, and Global Markets*, Cham 2018, 183–203; Mircea Raianu, *Tata: The Global Corporation That Built Indian Capitalism*, Cambridge 2021; Stefan Tetzlaff, *Revolution or Evolution? The Making of the Automobile Sector as a Key Industry in Mid-20th Century India*, in: Arve Hansen/Kenneth Bo Nielsen (eds.), *Cars, Automobility and Development in Asia. Wheels of Change*, London 2016.

On the one hand, several studies in the last years have engaged with the business aspect of decolonisation, and they have shown that the economic history of decolonisation as told through business history looks quite different and shows a pronounced process of elites connecting internationally, as private business actors were deeply enmeshed in state diplomacy and national economic concerns.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the political instrumentalization of corporations and entire branches of industry in the course of the decolonisation and nation-building process was a widely occurring phenomenon, as shown by studies such as Dmitri van den Bersselaar's history of imported Dutch gin in West Africa and the engagement of the Unilever-owned United Africa Company in Nigeria and Ghana, and Stephanie Decker's analysis of corporate strategies and the Africanization of its staff by Barclays Bank in Nigeria from 1945 onwards; or, finally, wider British business strategies for decolonisation in the Gold Coast, future Ghana, as studied by Sarah Stockwell.<sup>21</sup>

Much of the research has focused on the political control of state companies, their relationship to the political strength and weaknesses of a particular state, and accusations of corruption. However, while the relationship between state enterprise sectors and the new nation state has been asked, much of this research has not been interested in the history of the entities in question. Interdisciplinary research, in which historical perspectives are at best weak, has questioned the state firms' role in terms of issues of patronage, political control, and, especially, corruption. However, systematic discussion of corruption as a phenomenon in contemporary African societies, which is a booming field for sociologists and social anthropologists does not principally touch the phenomenon of state firms beyond the high political levels.<sup>22</sup> This perspective remains similar to work on profits drawn from national exports, as in the case of «cocoa rents» obtained by West African politicians.<sup>23</sup> A generation of older studies on the political economy

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**20** Vanessa Ogle, «Funk Money». *The End of Empires, The Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event*, in: *Past & Present* 1 (2020), 213–249; Shraddha Verma/Neveen Abdelrehim, *Oil Multinationals and Governments in Post-Colonial Transitions. Burmah Shell, the Burmah Oil Company and the Indian State 1947–70*, in: *Business History* 3 (2017), 342–361.

**21** Dmitri van den Bersselaar, *The King of Drinks. Schnapps Gin from Modernity to Tradition*, Leiden 2007; Stephanie Decker, *Decolonising Barclays Bank DCO? Corporate Africanisation in Nigeria, 1945–69*, in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3 (2005), 419–440; Sarah Stockwell, *The Business of Decolonization. British Business Strategies in the Gold Coast*, Oxford 2007.

**22** Giorgio Blundo/Olivier de Sardan, *Everyday corruption and the state. Citizens and public officials in Africa*, Cape Town 2006.

**23** Dwayne Woods, *Predatory elites, rents and cocoa: a comparative analysis of Ghana and Ivory Coast*, in: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 2 (2004), 224–241.

of state companies exists, in particular for the Zambian example, but these were only published up to the 80s.<sup>24</sup> Generally, and beyond the question of corruption and patronage, older studies on the political economy of post-independence societies (such as for Nigeria) are again not based on historical perspectives and do not discuss state firms from a historical perspective.<sup>25</sup>

Studies of state enterprises by business historians, on the other hand, conduct their analysis along the lines of success and failure, and fail to consider the complexity of the political economy of developing countries, where operations were not necessarily measured in clear-cut indicators such as performance or productivity alone. The categorisation of enterprises according to success or failure also leads to an overrepresentation of successful firms in studies, whereas unsuccessful firms, whose trajectory might as well yield important insights, are often left out.<sup>26</sup>

With this issue, we intend to strengthen both research areas – to establish state enterprises in postcolonial Africa as a subject for business historians as well as the focus on state enterprises. We believe that they complement each other in a fruitful way, and want to outline the shape of a future, interdisciplinary research field of a history of state-owned enterprises in Africa. Business histories, we suggest, can play a crucial role as brokers between disciplines in this field. We argue that business histories of state enterprises in postcolonial Africa can mitigate a problem that concerns the economic and social history of postcolonial Africa in general, that is the lack of good data or useful evidence. As several studies have pointed out in recent years, the quality of the available data for African economic history after 1950, is far from being suited to sound and stable results. On a closer look, much of the older data on the 60s period of growth, as experienced by many developing economies, is based largely on assumptions, rather than elaborate and good-quality statistical data.<sup>27</sup> However, in the growing field of African economic history, promising inroads have been made, showing

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**24** Ben Turok, *Control in the Parastatal Sector of Zambia*, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3 (1981), 421–445.

**25** Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons. Accumulation, mobility and class formation in an extended Yoruba community*, Berkeley 1985.

**26** Joseph Amankwah-Amoah, *Against All Odds! A Strategic Analysis of the Failures of Three State-Owned Firms*, in: Palitha Konara et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Multinationals from Emerging Economies. Achieving a New Balance*, London 2015, 115–132; Bill Freund, *The Keys to the Economic Kingdom: State Intervention and the Overcoming of Dependency in Africa before the Crisis of the 1970s*, in: *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 147 (2016), 44–60; Grietje Verhoef, *The History of Business in Africa. Complex Discontinuity to Emerging Markets*, Cham 2017.

**27** Morten Jerven, *Poor Numbers. How We Are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do About It*, Ithaca 2013.



that revisiting available data, as well as further procuring archival material to create new historical statistics can reap great results, especially concerning more specific questions such as sectoral growth, education, and trade.<sup>28</sup> Case studies of enterprises or specific sectors will help to identify and refine new relevant sources, produce important smaller datasets that can substantiate patchy large-scale ones and, most importantly, assess the provenance and quality of existing, original data stemming from surveys carried out from the 50s to the 70s.

Beyond this interdisciplinary potential that a future research field on state-owned enterprises in Africa holds, there are three key themes in the historiography of Africa and development that would benefit from insights coming from this field: problems related to the periodisation of the postcolonial period and the time after 1950 in Africa; the entangled history of economic development between Africa and Europe and the history of labour in Africa.

## Periods (and periodizations) of change: the state company experience and the new nations

Other than for postcolonial conditions, existing research on the public sectors in late colonial African societies is already comparably rich, although often concentrated on the connection between groups in that sector and the project of political emancipation in the 40s and 50s. French late colonialism is particularly in the focus of historical analysis of this type.<sup>29</sup> Some exceptional studies such as that by Lisa Lindsay on Nigerian railwaymen also offer a long-term perspective through the colonial period, and include issues such as the effect of work on family life and concepts of masculinity.<sup>30</sup>

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**28** Hanaan Marwah, *What Explains Slow Sub-Saharan African Growth? Revisiting Oil Boom-Era Investment and Productivity in Nigeria's National Accounts 1976–85*, in: *The Economic History Review* 4 (2014), 993–1011; Stephen Broadberry/Leigh Gardner, *Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa 1885–2008*, in: *Economic History Working Papers* (2019); Kai Koddenbrock et al., *Beyond Financialisation. The Need for a Longue Durée Understanding of Finance in Imperialism*, OSF Preprints, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/pjt7x> [last access 22.7.2022]; Fouad Makki, *Post-Colonial Africa and the World Economy. The Long Waves of Uneven Development*, in: *Journal of World-Systems Research* 1 (2015), 124–146.

**29** Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa. France's Successful Decolonization?*, Oxford 2002; Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation. Remaking France and French Africa 1945–1960*, Princeton 2014; Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society* (cf. n. 13).

**30** Lisa A. Lindsay, *Working with Gender. Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria*, Portsmouth 2003.

Moving from late colonial projects into development and economic planning, a new generation of historical studies has recently set new standards without entering much into the economic and social history of state enterprises in particular. The often spectacular infrastructure and industrialisation projects have frequently been at the heart of such discussion, with Kwame Nkrumah's symbolic projects in Ghana, such as the Akosombo Dam and the creation of the Tema Industrial Zone being model cases of analysis.<sup>31</sup> However, the social and economic history of dam projects also found discussion in other, more late colonial–authoritarian contexts, where white settler societies were partly involved: this is the case for the Kariba Dam in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia and Southern Rhodesia (future Zimbabwe), or the Cabora Bassa Dam in Mozambique.<sup>32</sup> Few studies have yet attempted to historically analyse wider economic and social change in new nation states through the developmentalist perspective, but Jeffrey Ahlman's discussion of Nkrumahist Ghana and Abou Bamba's analysis of Félix Houphouët-Boigny's Côte d'Ivoire are extraordinary examples of such a wider approach.<sup>33</sup> While many of the more recent studies are conscient of the need to analyse the experience of individuals, the sector of state enterprises has found very little interest so far.

Sociologists of labour and labour organisation were in the 60s and 70s aware of essential change in post-independence societies through the creation of a new group of public-enterprise employees, and this became for two decades a field of case studies and of theoretical-conceptual engagement.<sup>34</sup> However, as David Fashole Luke made clear in his 1984 study of Freetown port labourers as employees of a public company, the overall coverage of the phenomenon remains shallow as organisational study, and the identifications and positions of the

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31 Laura B. Johnson et al., *Where nothing was before: (re)producing population and place in Ghana's Volta River Project*, in: *Journal of Cultural Geography* 2 (2015), 195–213; Stephan F. Miescher, *Nkrumah's Baby: The Akosombo Dam and the Dream of Development in Ghana*, in: *Water History* 4 (2014), 341–366.

32 Allen Isaacman/Barbara Isaacman, *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development. Cahora Bassa and its Legacies in Mozambique 1965–2007*, Athens 2013; Julia Tischler, *Light and Power for a Multiracial Nation. The Kariba Dam Scheme in the Central African Federation*, Basingstoke 2013.

33 Jeffrey Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism. Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana*, Athens 2017; Abou Bamba, *African Miracle, African Mirage. Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast*, Athens 2016.

34 David L. Lindauer et al., *Government Wage Policy in Africa: Some Findings and Policy Issues*, in: *World Bank Research Observer* 1 (1988), 1–25.

workers themselves have not attracted much interest in the literature.<sup>35</sup> Research engagement virtually stopped in the second half of the 80s, and Luke's observations hold true even more than 35 years after. At the height of the debate, in the 70s and the first half of the 80s, sociologists focused on older, conceptual questions – reminiscent of certain worries as formulated by colonial agents in the late colonial period – as they discussed the possible emergence of a «labour aristocracy» of «westernised» skilled workers, as an artificial and socially uprooted group created through colonial and development influences, and perpetuated through the choice of the state company as model after independence. The most active discussions remained theoretical.<sup>36</sup> Many of these older sociological, or sometimes social anthropological, studies showed little interest for a historical fundament; Adrian Pearce's study is a case in the point.<sup>37</sup> Rare were those sociological studies admitting longer processes of change within the period, and the discussion of Ghanaian industry workers in an emergent «class» framework stands out as an exception to that mainstream, as it gave ample room to their changing social attitudes.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, and contrary in principle to economists' interest in the state company sector's decline, new research also tackles the issue of individuals' memory of their work in these companies, often as a positive experience. The decline of state companies at the end of the Cold War, and their process of being dismantled in the wake of IMF pressures, has indeed left bitter memories. As for Mali, oral evidence shows how workers appreciated their role and privileges, but also claimed responsibility for the construction of the nation, while criticising the new, unprotected environments after the destruction of the state company sector (partly, as in the Malian case, by the takeover of former state firms by Chinese investors).<sup>39</sup>

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35 David Fashole Luke, *Labour and Parastatal Politics in Sierra Leone. A Study of African Working-Class Ambivalence*, Washington D.C. 1984.

36 Keith Hinchliffe, *Labour Aristocracy – a Northern Nigerian Case Study*, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1 (1974), 57–67; Richard Jeffries, *The Labour Aristocracy? Ghana Case Study*, in: *Review of African Political Economy* 3 (1975), 59–70; Jane L. Parpart, *The «Labor Aristocracy» Debate in Africa. The Copperbelt Case, 1924–1967*, in: *African Economic History* 13 (1984), 171–191; Peter Waterman, *The «Labour Aristocracy» in Africa: Introduction to a Debate*, in: *Development and Change* 3 (1975), 57–74.

37 Adrian J. Peace, *Choice, class and conflict: a study of southern Nigerian factory workers*, Atlantic Highlands 1979.

38 Margaret Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker. Industrial Man in Africa*, Cambridge 1972; see also Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana. The Railwaymen of Sekondi*, Cambridge 1978.

39 Françoise Bourdarias, *Constructions de l'expérience salariale au Mali*, in: *Revue Tiers Monde* 2 (2014), 71–87.

## Towards an Entangled History of Development between Africa and Europe

From the 50s onwards, policymakers in developing countries had fully committed to a project of economic and social modernisation, aimed at increasing the numbers of individuals in industrialised or administrative wage labour. The improvement of living conditions through employment following vocational and bureaucratic training schemes was a key experience for the social mobilisation and political emancipation which unleashed their power in the context of decolonisation during the 50s and 60s, and in the social and political revolutionary movements during the 60s and 70s.<sup>40</sup> The building-up of state enterprises was fundamentally linked to more general economic hopes and predictions and has to be understood as set within larger ideas and concepts, a perspective that is missing in existing economic studies and the history of development. In many states, development projects were informed by a top-down regional planning approach that emerged from the epistemology of US American modernisation theory or from a socialist theory and agenda.<sup>41</sup>

For contemporaries of the 60s, the public company was perhaps not so much a uniquely African option, but it represented an element of the idea of «planning» and the post-war trend towards a growing public sector in industrialised countries. Since state-owned enterprises often had heightened exposure to political dynamics and strategies, and since they offered the possibility to anticipate and plan development by relying on proximity to policymaking, they provide a very good case to examine the influence of political modernisation on the organisation and operations of economic and entrepreneurial activities. From today's viewpoint, these optimistic expectations are in sharp contrast to the narrative of decline that dominated the realm of state-owned enterprises in Africa from the 70s onwards. Investigating state-owned enterprises can shed light on the construc-

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**40** Frederick Cooper, *Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept*, in: Frederick Cooper/Randall Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences. Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, Berkeley 1997, 64–92; Alexander Keese, *Living with Ambiguity. Integrating an African Elite in French and Portuguese Africa 1930–61*, Stuttgart 2007; Daniel Tödt, *Elitenbildung und Dekolonisierung. Die Évolués in Belgisch-Kongo 1944–1960*, Göttingen 2018; Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia. The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960–1974*, Woodbridge 2014.

**41** Eric Burton, *In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus. Tansania und die globale Entwicklungssarbeit der beiden deutschen Staaten 1961–1990*, Berlin 2021; Corrie Decker/Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa. A History*, Cambridge 2020; Andrea Franc, *Von der Makroökonomie zum Kleinbauern. Die Wandlung der Idee eines gerechten Nord-Süd-Handels in der schweizerischen Dritte-Welt-Bewegung (1964–1984)*, Berlin 2020.

tion of this narrative. Unearthing an all-encompassing history of entrepreneurial and economic activities that surrounded state-owned enterprises, including the perspective of employees and local actors might help to substantiate ideas such as the «Africa works» paradigm, which allows to see processes in postcolonial Africa as widely efficient, if only in a particular sense.<sup>42</sup>

By centering on the enterprise and entrepreneurial activities, it is also possible to link these historical discourses on development and nation-building to a material, technical and spatial history of globalisation. At the centre of several recent studies in global economic history are economic spaces that are created not first and foremost through official regulations, frameworks, and agreements, but through a network of financial and commodity flows, as well as a circulation of ideas. They furthermore indicate that decolonisation prompted spatial shifts in the global economic system.<sup>43</sup> Tracing the visible and less visible layers of transport routes and networks sheds light on how new complex and chaotic spaces and spheres are formed in the rapidly globalising economy, and new historiographies of globalisation and capitalism take account of the relevance of logistics and infrastructure.<sup>44</sup>

In their seminal study of the beginnings of the European Community at a time when European countries still had colonies, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson argued that the idea of «Eurafrica», which originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to the formation of a political, economic, and ideological sphere that only came into being from the 50s onwards.<sup>45</sup> As Steffen Dörre has shown for the Federal Republic of Germany, industrial development, foreign trade policies and investment between Africa and Europe, and business patterns were defined by continuities and familiarities that date back to the pre-war colonial period.<sup>46</sup> Over the past 20 years, the deconstruction of Eurocentric paradigms in the history of modernity, as theorised by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ozay Mehmet, Walter Mignolo, and others has

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42 Patrick Chabal/Jean-Pascal Daloz (eds.), *Africa Works. Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford 1999.

43 Sven Beckert, *American Danger. United States Empire, Eurafrica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism 1870–1950*, in: *The American Historical Review* 4 (2017), 1137–1170; Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists. The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge 2020.

44 Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula*, London 2020; Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air. Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, Cambridge 2013.

45 Peo Hansen/Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica. The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, London 2014.

46 Steffen Dörre, *Wirtschaftswunder global. Die Geschichte der Überseemärkte in der frühen Bundesrepublik*, Stuttgart 2019.

shaped research and literature in many fields.<sup>47</sup> In parallel, important Marxist and heterodox economic traditions have evolved their macroeconomic arguments, seminal works such as Walter Rodney's «How Europe underdeveloped Africa» or Samir Amin's «Impérialisme et sous-développement en Afrique» analysed how the extractive, continuous structures of colonialism shaped global economic relations to the detriment of African economies until the present day, resulting in an ever more dependent and unequal situation for developing countries.<sup>48</sup> The history of state-owned enterprises in Africa and their many entanglements with US, European, Soviet, Chinese and Japanese post-war industrialisation efforts brings a much needed change of perspective to the mainstream economic history of the Global North, one that centres on the impact of decolonisation in both North and South. And, most importantly, one that foregrounds microeconomic processes, bridging the gap to the big debates of the recent past among economists, surrounding the role of economic institutions as investigated by Daron Acemoglu et al, or the renewed interest in industrialisation politics and the developmental state, as promoted by Thandika Mkandawire.<sup>49</sup> The history of state enterprises should be motivated by illuminating the events and the people on the shopfloors and in the board rooms of development politics.

## Being an employee in a postcolonial African state company

In older sociological literature interested in state company employees (and focusing on certain examples, such as Ghana and Zambia), employees were often described as «new industrial men» and as having a new «class consciousness». This idea has been partly deconstructed for the late colonial period. An entirely new identification for such employees was mainly late colonial fantasy, as the employees retained the link with their families living in rural areas. Yet, new professional identifications were sustained by work in public sectors eventually

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<sup>47</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000; Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World. The Eurocentricity of Economic Development Theories*, London 2002; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Samir Amin, *Impérialisme et sous-développement en Afrique*, Paris 1988; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. With a Postscript by A.M. Babu*, Washington D.C. 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Daron Acemoglu/James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail. The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, London 2012; Thandika Mkandawire, *Thinking about Developmental States in Africa*, in: *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 3 (2001), 289–314.

becoming state firms.<sup>50</sup> While employees in these sectors have been identified in their complex roles of unionisation and nationalist activities, and sometimes as groups that the new nation states sought to integrate and potentially to neutralise, we still know little about material contexts beyond macroeconomic observations.<sup>51</sup> It is well-known that some of the new governments had initial economic success, offering high wages and salaries in the public sector, including newly created state firms; Côte d'Ivoire under Félix Houphouët-Boigny as president is a kind of model case, given the relative prosperity of its export agriculture under late colonialism, sustained by a commodities boom in the first decade after independence.<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere, early cuts were made to the wage structure in the public sector. While they seem to have concerned numerous individuals, it remains to be examined to what extent they affected the material life and perceptions of new state firm employees.

Public company employees became in theory powerful agents of the new nation-state project, but they also introduced changes in consumption and local living conditions into their wider (family) networks.<sup>53</sup> Such connections have been demonstrated in developments as early as 1948, when the massive railway strike over French West Africa was possible thanks to the engagement of relatives of the striking public sector workers through providing material contributions and especially food.<sup>54</sup> Forty years later, in 1989/90, the employees of the public company Société Sucrière de Savè in Benin, who were laid off during the decline of Benin's public sector, were particularly concerned about the effects on their families living in the villages of the region.<sup>55</sup> Access to education within or close to rural state companies might also be an issue of change, and eventually a source of

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50 Joseph M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert. Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, Athens 2007.

51 Sédi-Anne Boukaka et al., *Poverty and inequality in Francophone Africa, 1960s–2010s*, in: *Economic History of Developing Regions* 1 (2021), 1–29.

52 Elisa Prosperetti, *The Hidden History of the West African Wager. Or, How Comparison with Ghana Made Côte d'Ivoire*, in: *History in Africa* (2018), 29–57.

53 See the classic Bonnie Campbell, *Social Change and Class Formation in a French West African State*, in: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 2 (1974), 285–306; Robert D. Tice, *Administrative Structure, Ethnicity, and Nation-Building in the Ivory Coast*, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2 (1974), 211–229.

54 Frederick Cooper: «Our Strike». *Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947–48 Railway Strike in French West Africa*, in: *Journal of African History* 1 (1996), 81–118.

55 Alexander Keese, *A social history of parastatal employees in Southern Benin, 1989–1990. Contesting decline and unemployment during «Africa's second democratization»*, in: *International Labour and Working Class History* (2020), 77–98.

generational conflicts.<sup>56</sup> Connections between the employees and their wider networks are thus a principal issue, and they include generational relations beyond the current, conceptual view.<sup>57</sup>

Employment in public companies and the nation-state projects seem to be two sides of the same medal. In the late colonial period, public employees had been strongly politicised along with peasants in rural cooperatives. Through the expansion of state company sectors after independence, their employees became a principal target of national propaganda. They were to take part in the building of the nation, and therefore to eventually renounce their private goals.<sup>58</sup> The employees' experience was thereby also propelled into the realm of group tensions and violence. As state companies sometimes had branches in various parts of a country's territory and recruited skilled staff from neighbouring African states, this led in some cases to regionalist and xenophobic positions amongst the employees.<sup>59</sup> The link to exclusion and violence against foreigners, as can be identified in the West and Central African cases of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo-Brazzaville and São Tomé e Príncipe, is highly instructive.<sup>60</sup>

Employees of state companies were also tied to the nation-state projects through the interests of the ruling party, intensified in a context of expanding one-party regimes in the 60s.<sup>61</sup> Under «Marxist-Leninist» regimes, such as in most of the former Portuguese colonies or Congo-Brazzaville, public companies had councils for the defence of the revolution to represent party interests. Other regimes, while being authoritarian, did not formalise the links between the dom-

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**56** Eric Lanoué, *Politique, religion et fait scolaire en Afrique de l'ouest. Le cas des écoles catholiques de Côte d'Ivoire (1945–1992)*, in: *Historical Studies in Education* 1 (2005), 29–54; Rachel Kantowitz, *Catholic Schools as «a Nation in Miniature»*. *Catholic Civism in Senegal and Benin 1960–1970s*, in: *Journal of African History* 2 (2018), 221–239.

**57** Laurence C. Becker, *The Collapse of the Family Farm in West Africa? Evidence from Mali*, in: *The Geographical Journal* 3 (1990), 313–322; Lauren Morris MacLean, *Empire of the Young. The Legacies of State Agricultural Policy on Local Capitalism and Social Support Network in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3 (2004), 469–496.

**58** Priya Lal, *Self-Reliance and the State. The Multiple Meaning of Development in Early Post-Colonial Tanzania*, in: *Africa* 2 (2012), 212–234.

**59** Daouda Gary-Tounkara, *Migrants soudanais/maliens et conscience ivoirienne. Les étrangers en Côte d'Ivoire (1903–1980)*, Paris 2008.

**60** Lauren Honig, *Immigrant Political Economies and Exclusionary Policy in Africa*, in: *Comparative Politics* 4 (2016), 517–537; Margaret Peil, *The Expulsion of West African Aliens*, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2 (1971), 205–229; Beth Elise Whitaker, *Playing the immigration card: the politics of exclusion in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana*, in: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 3 (2015), 274–293.

**61** See also Linda J. Beck, *Brokering Democracy in Africa. The rise of clientelist democracy in Senegal*, New York 2008.



inant party and public company employees. Even in these cases, however, employees were regularly admonished to support the regime, and their spokespeople could find patronage and obtain private material gains.<sup>62</sup>

Disintegration of public enterprises and the lay-off of their employees, were common at the end of the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> The intervention of external donors (notably the IMF and in part the World Bank), and the fall of authoritarian regimes from 1989/90 onwards, destroyed the employees' sense of protection and relative well-being.<sup>64</sup> Company committees started to petition early on against cuts in public employees' living standards, and their initiatives might be an important path to understanding the importance of working in a state company.<sup>65</sup>

Questions of gender and women's history as related to employees on state farms require much more attention; they have to-date been insufficiently considered, although Kathleen Sheldon's essential study of female workers at the labour sites and in political engagement in the years after independence in Beira, Mozambique, demonstrates what the potential standards of that research could be.<sup>66</sup> In this special issue, Sarah Kunkel follows these possibilities. This also connects to recent studies discussing the role of women in the African nation-state projects: these have shown, for example in the Ghanaian and Ivorian contexts, that «the new woman» was an imaginary part of the new nation. Having gone beyond the realm of nation-state propaganda, historians have also discussed the new opportunities and obstacles for women in fields like marriage and family roles, or their participation in youth and sports activities.<sup>67</sup> Now advances should be made in interpreting the careers and possibilities of women in public firms, in unions,

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**62** David A. Chappell, *The Nation as Frontier. Ethnicity and Clientelism in Ivorian History*, in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 4 (1989), 671–696; Richard C. Crook, *Patrimonialism, Administrative Effectiveness and Economic Development in Côte d'Ivoire*, in: *African Affairs* 351 (1989), 205–228.

**63** This was also conditioned by the end of Eastern bloc support for «Socialist» African regimes, see Thad Dunning, *Conditioning the Effects of Aid. Cold War Politics, Donor Credibility, and Democracy in Africa*, in: *International Organization* 2 (2004), 409–423.

**64** Stephen Brown/Paul Kaiser, *Democratisations in Africa: Attempts, hindrances and prospects*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 6 (2007), 1131–1149; Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future. West Africa after the Cold War*, London 2010; Larry Jay Diamond/Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *Democratization in Africa. Progress and Retreat*, Baltimore 2010.

**65** Keese, *Parastatal employees* (cf. n. 55), 8f.

**66** Kathleen Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain. A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique*, Portsmouth 2002.

**67** Louise Barré, *Des femmes «évoluées» pour une nouvelle Nation (Côte d'Ivoire, 1964)*, in: *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 2 (2018), 373–398; Claire Nicolas, *From Handball Courts to Ministries: The Cousins in Côte d'Ivoire*, in: Georgia Cervin/Claire Nicolas (eds.), *Histories of Women's Work in Global Sport. A Man's World?*, Basingstoke 2019, 217–244.

associations, and political units linked to these companies, including an analysis of their changing positions as the result of their work, and their experience of new state norms. In this sense, it is important to endorse Sheldon's appeal: it is crucial to restore the importance of female experience in the history of the initial decades of post-independence societies first, to allow for more systematic gendered perspectives in subsequent steps.

## On the ground: how to research the history of state enterprises

The most important categories of sources for the history of state enterprises in postcolonial Africa are political, technical, or scientific reports and studies (published and unpublished); archival records such as correspondence and documentation; periodicals (such as national newspapers or magazines); trade journals and specialized press. Yet the biggest challenge for researching this economic and business history is to locate and access the relevant source material. Business records were not regularly archived with a long-term perspective, they were neglected or even discarded during the period of structural adjustment programmes, privatisation, or after closing the firm or its bankruptcy.<sup>68</sup> National and regional press reporting on trade or industries was usually considered redundant in the institutional context and not collected in public libraries. The post-independence series of national archives in many countries of the Global South are in a bad state of maintenance and unpredictable in terms of whether access will be possible at the time of enquiry and whether they contain any relevant material. Even the archives of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, for example, are not yet open to researchers, because of a lack of funding to classify the records. In the field of global history, however, and in particular in the field of African history, many projects have successfully proven that mobilizing dispersed archival sources brings forth fruitful results and reveal the deeply rooted nature of global connections, sometimes in unexpected places.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, sometimes the pessimistic claims regarding the lack of access to postcolonial archives are not sustained by

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**68** Dmitri van den Bersselaar, *Business Records as Sources for African History*, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.237> [last access 22.7.2022]; Stephanie Decker, *The Silence of the Archives. Business History, Post-Colonialism and Archival Ethnography*, in: *Management & Organizational History* 2 (2013), 155–173.

**69** Jean Allman, *Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing*, in: *American Historical Review* 1 (2013), 104–129;

sufficient attempts to actually do the research. Therefore, «African postcolonial archival pessimism» is certainly a phenomenon that needs to be avoided.<sup>70</sup> The comparably few existing attempts to actually find and interpret post-independence files in the more complicated (including district-level) African archives have demonstrated how pathbreaking such research can be.<sup>71</sup>

Another important element of research on the social history of state enterprises are potential field interviews. It would namely be crucial to identify individuals who worked in the context of state enterprises and national planning commissions. Many are still alive and available for interviews – which in the case of leading figures can at least often be conducted via video call these days – but rapid action is necessary, especially regarding the earlier years of our timeframe.

## The case studies in this issue

The case studies in this issue are indicative of the potential and the disparity of the subject matter of state-owned enterprises in postcolonial Africa, and bring together examples from different countries and regions, periods, and sectors, as well as representing the broad range between business history and labour history.

To understand state enterprises in postcolonial Africa and analyse their business methods, their relationship to the government and the actors involved, one must look beyond the firms and into the situation of capital markets and financial institutions in the newly independent nation states. Mariusz Lukaszewicz's contribution provides insights from the history of the Lagos Stock Exchange between 1957 and 1967. In lieu of private capital, state-owned enterprises functioned as institutional investors on the stock exchange, bridging a period of social and political change in a time of drastically undercapitalised and under-financialised post-colonial national economies. This underlines the important finding that the other contributions in this issue make from the viewpoint of individual enterprises: state-owned enterprises take more than one role for state-led development. They

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Omnia El Shakry, «History without Documents». *The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East*, in: *American Historical Review* 3 (2015), 920–934.

70 Nana Osei-Opare, «If you trouble a hungry snake, you will force it to bite you». *Rethinking post-colonial African archival pessimism, worker discontent, and petition writing in Ghana 1957–66*, in: *Journal of African History* 1 (2021), 59–78.

71 Alexander Keese/Brice I. Owabira, *Rescuing, interpreting – and (eventually) digitising regional postcolonial archives. Endangered archives and research in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo*, in: *History in Africa* (2020), 143–165.

are not just relevant in their productive capacities but are important institutional laboratories in the processes of formation and transformation underway.

As Sarah Kunkel's contribution on state farms in Nkrumah's Ghana shows, it is crucial to study the agricultural sector in more depth, and to understand the massive social transformation that modernisation policies brought about. As farmers turned into employees on state farms, state enterprises became important sites for forging new relations between the state and society, and to implement economic planning on the ground. These agricultural state enterprises demonstrate perhaps most clearly that beyond the question of state control of business activities, the fields of socio-economic change and labour are key to understanding African postcolonial economies and businesses. The rural perspective illuminates the relevance of state enterprises and the state's economic activity for the fast-paced, top-down nation-building process underway in postcolonial African countries. More importantly, it allows a factoring in of the agency of individuals when analysing outcomes, an aspect that also substantiates a business history perspective on African state enterprises.

The fact that in many cases, bureaucratic overhead, corruption, and rent-seeking permeated operations in state-owned enterprises from the 60s onwards, prompted a widespread decrease of state involvement in African countries. Grietjie Verhoef describes the difficult transition from state-led, planned economies to liberalised markets and privatised industrial, transport and service sectors. As enterprises were still struggling with access to capital, technology, skilled labour and expert knowledge (especially as far as management was concerned), the state re-entered the market as a facilitator for private enterprises and as an entrepreneur in strategic industries. Also, in many developing countries the paradigm of statism and centralised political control remained strong, as the privatisation and structural adjustment programmes of the late 70s and 80s did not bring about the expected economic growth, increase in investments or the necessary changes in terms of accountability and transparency. The outcome eventually was a new generation of state-owned enterprises, that show a similarly strong performance and functioned as catalysts and sites for necessary reforms of national economies in globalised markets, as was the case for some examples of the 60s. Using the Algerian oil company Sonatrach, Verhoef demonstrates that this new generation brought hopes for a renewed introduction of developmental policies which engage with and benefit from global market competition, in effect helping to shape up the quality of local production and service, to create state revenue and benefits for the wider population at the same time.

In some cases, strong ideological and political goals for a state-owned enterprise were not the reason for its failure, but even responsible for its success, especially in highly politically charged industries such as the aviation industry.

Marie Huber's contribution looks at two airlines, the national Ethiopian Airlines, and the multinational Air Afrique. State control was not only an integral part of the operations of both airlines, as air transport required international and bilateral agreements on the state level. The state also protected the enterprises from too heavy an outside control, as national interests in aerial sovereignty overlapped with business interests, of building up aircraft fleets as well as facilities for overhaul and maintenance. These were important factors to navigate growth in a highly competitive and volatile market at a time of rapidly evolving technology. Furthermore, the case of these two airlines sheds some light on the role of state enterprises in African states after 1950, serving as spaces for negotiating national and regional interests and relations in the new international order that was emerging with the onset of decolonisation and the Global Cold War.

These four contributions can only serve as examples for wider trends and potentialities, and as an introduction into a field that is in the process of further systematic expansion and subject to heightened attention. They demonstrate that for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, differences and contingency are more relevant than commonalities and a narrowly model-based approach. Nonetheless, they also show that future research on African business history and state-owned enterprises in Africa holds much promise of broader relevance.

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