

CHAPTER

1

The Economic Anthropology of Africa

Jane I. Guyer

INTRODUCTION

The economic anthropology of Africa was founded on the European, nineteenth-century, social evolutionary theory of general stages of development, the “earlier” stages of which still co-existed on the African continent: hunting and gathering, pastoralism, shifting cultivation, settlements with intensive agriculture, merchant trade over long distances, and urban-based city states with craft-guilds. All these persisted within a world where industrial capitalism was advancing in Europe and the Americas. By the time that detailed ethnographic studies of particular societies and their economies were being undertaken in Africa, in the twentieth century, these “earlier stages” were seen as *types of economy*, adapted to specific ecologies and histories, rather than as phases in the *progressive stages* of a general human history. However, the concept of the early phases as “subsistence economies,” organized solely for the support of local communities for all their needs – from food to clothing to housing to support for social and ritual life – did persist into the typological phase of theory, and was occasionally invoked later for examining local economic histories, as attention to these processes intensified. Even in 1965, with its attention to *Markets in Africa*, a famous collection of eight case studies of, as the subtitle defines them, *Subsistence Economies in Transition*, edited by Bohannon and Dalton, draws on the older conceptual terms, such as provision of one’s own *subsistence* needs, with markets on the periphery of economic life. In the late colonial and immediate post-colonial period in the mid-twentieth

century, the dynamics of economic change began to be attended to as “development” within the new field of development economics, and became a subject in the revival of political economy, now that communities were functioning within new national economies. At the same time, anthropologists were devoting increasingly close attention to understanding local systems in their own terms, and in a comparative typology which might be applicable to, or pose provocative questions about, the world at large. While field research in the present became increasingly detailed, there was a parallel expansion of very detailed economic histories of Africa, especially those focused on the era of the Atlantic slave trade (from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries). These studies recuperated data on prices, currencies, traded goods, and widespread and long-lasting trade networks, all for inclusion in the study of African economies (Alpern 1995; Green 2016; Johnson 1970).

Thus, did the theory and method of study for African economies begin to configure multiple approaches and sources, changing through the twentieth century to move from a theory of sequential changes, through a typological approach to analysis of highly specific local and regional economies that would also be understood within their own ecologies, terms of knowledge and practices of the classic functions of production, distribution, and consumption. Attention to historical processes, from the distant past to the immediate present, returned in force during the period of de-colonization in the mid-century, which encouraged anthropologists to be increasingly attentive to works on political economy.

One theoretical innovation that allowed the works from all these approaches to meet on common ground was the opening up of intellectual space for neo-Marxist approaches, which necessarily brought material base, social structure, history, and power together in addressing *types*, *sequences*, and *processes* in economic life, over time. The typological, rather than evolutionary, perspective was re-launched in these new terms by Hindess and Hirst (1975) as *PreCapitalist Modes of Production*, in a framework that placed the relations, and forces (technologies), of production at the center of the conceptual scheme. The ownership of property, the supply of labor, and the distribution of the product defined the relations of production. The forces of production aligned with the old evolutionary categories. The earliest ethnographic work in Africa that drew on the same intellectual inspiration, with a historical approach to what was termed the articulation of modes of production, especially with capitalism, was by eminent French anthropologist Claude Meillassoux: first in his analysis of the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture in the Ivory Coast (1964), and then in a more general theoretical book, published in French in 1975 and translated into English in 1981 as *Maidens, Meat, and Money. Capitalism and the Domestic Community*. The first comparative work on Africa that used this framework was edited by Crummey and Stewart (1981), and was entitled *Modes of Production in Africa: The Precolonial Era*. Most of the contributions were made by historians whose work crossed the whole typology from particular cases of “herders and farmers” to slavery, fishing, and states. The ethnographic commitment to deepening the case study approach, while conserving the focus on relations and technologies of production and distribution, in historical process, was taken up and nuanced into an insistence on regional specificity and on the ways in which different modes of production were locally “articulated” with one another. One such study was contributed by South African anthropologist Archie Mafeje (1991). He had already addressed the “articulation

of modes of production” concept in a review article in 1981. In his study of the Central African lakes region, Mafeje argued that the relationship between politico-social formation and economy was always an outcome of regional history, rather than general processes of evolution or a general political-economic history. He argued for the importance of “detailed ethnographic knowledge (which) helps us to avoid mechanistic interpretations” and to be attentive to “the historical and ethnographic intricacies of African societies” (1991, p. 128, 129).

At the same time as Mafeje was writing, the gains of cross-disciplinary work amongst historical, archeological, and ecological study in Africa were advancing, carried out by both Western and African scholars. Important examples are Glenn Davis Stone’s (1996) archeological and ecological study of the Kofyar in Central Nigeria and Elias Mandala’s (1990) political-economic history of a peasant economy in Malawi. The decolonization process and the growth of African scholarship added substantial empirical knowledge of the intricate expertise of specialists in work that had not usually been merged into the criteria for the classic Western typology. Metallurgy, textile production, building, transport (including riverboats and sea-faring vessels, which had been relatively unexplored until then), and other skills, had been practiced for centuries within variously organized productive systems. Eugenia Herbert (1984) wrote of metallurgy, currency, art, and religious symbolism in her study of the history of copper, *Red Gold of Africa*. From a continually enriched study of historical sources, we know that trade is very old in Africa: seeds, minerals, textiles, livestock, and many other items have been traded throughout history. Indeed, with its own metallurgy from a distant past, Africans were producing copper goods in the first millennium, and Africa may have been the main source of gold for European currency development, starting in the second millennium (Bovill 1958). The mutual enrichment of ethnography and local history thereby greatly expanded the knowledge of African pre-colonial economies and societies, taking them beyond being seen as completely classifiable into the old evolutionary or typological frameworks. This theme has been explored most recently, for a public audience, in the television series authored by scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., entitled *Wonders of the African World* (2001). He introduces the libraries of Timbuktu, the architecture of Great Zimbabwe, and many other products of African expertise and organization, which he sees as fundamental to what is understood as “civilization” itself.

The presence of economic and political interests from *outside* of Africa started early, on all the coasts: the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean, and from port to port along the coastlines. Many of the items used as currencies which were circulating within Africa, from the sixteenth century onwards, came from these trades: manillas from European foundries, cowry-shells from the Indian Ocean, and other items used by Europeans for the purchase of slaves (beads, textiles, iron, and many others, see Alpern 1995). In the old evolutionary or typological framework, this would have been defined as barter (goods for goods), which precedes monetization, as a single medium of exchange and measure of value. However, this was clearly its *own* form of quantified valuation in the era of the slave trade, and the imported currency-goods flooded the rising trade systems with multiple currencies, whose management became a theme throughout Africa’s economic history and local practices. This history and range of multiple currency management was explored in my book

Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa (Guyer 2004). Multiplicity is increasingly clear in the present-day markets for international currencies, related to expanding trade networks and the management of remittances. So, while anthropologists have focused most closely on local systems to be analyzed in their own terms, historians, archeologists, and others have increasingly enriched our attentiveness to these interconnections over time, and the importance of an exploitative European presence during the slave trade (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries), colonial rule (nineteenth to mid-twentieth century), and a continuing influence through post-colonial conditions with new national monies and international policies. As a result of this enriched knowledge, particularism (within a globalizing context) has taken the place of evolutionary and typological theory, without, however, completely abandoning the empirical learning that was generated under those theories and methods. The recent rise of informal urban economies, regional urban food supply systems, cross-border trade (which Janet MacGaffey (1991) addressed in such innovative ways for Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo)), and the worlds of digital media, cinema, and religion have all opened new spaces for localized economic anthropological study, and can inform, and be informed by, economic works on what are now termed “emergent economies” in Africa and many other parts of the world. Keith Hart’s early work on the informal economy in urban Ghana (1973), and his political-economic work on African agriculture (1982), still give momentum to his more broadly inclusive work on money.

African historians and anthropologists have been particularly important in reviving the localized histories of regional economies within all these larger contexts. The following scholars from Africa have written on these phases: Joseph Inikori (2002) on the economic life of the era of the West African slave trade; Clapperton Mavhunga (2014) and Elias Mandala (1990) on land dispossession and the people’s adjustment in Central Africa; Kojo Amanor (1999) on the many adaptations of Ghanaian producers to the vacillating conditions of cocoa production for the international market; Archie Mafeje (1991) on the rise of kingdoms; and there is a growing literature on mining, not only in the industrial mode (for gold and diamonds), as in South Africa with its history of enforced migrant labor, but in the artisanal mining and trading in such goods as “blood diamonds” in the present (Saunders and Nyamunda 2016). A key ingredient for the electronics industry is coltan, which is artisanally mined in Central Africa. Many of the contributors to Janet MacGaffey’s (1991) work on regional trade in Zaire, which includes smuggling, trades in stolen items, artisanal mining and money-changing, were African colleagues who had carried out the field research and written the papers. On the dynamics of the larger system of which all these are becoming a part, Samir Amin (2010) has been particularly attentive to Africa’s direction of change in relation to the growth of global capitalism.

In summary, over the past century, anthropology has been particularly rich in its appreciation of local innovations across this entire spectrum of history and geography, and increasingly so through its engagement with the scholarship on the broader political economies to which these systems belonged. The next sections offer examples:

- 1 An overview of the typology for African economic systems used for comparative purposes in the early years of African economic anthropology, with an introduction

to certain ethnographies viewed as classic, which offered rich descriptions in the people's own terms. This moves to a short historical allusion to the transactional systems of the more distant past, as that scholarship has expanded and offered understanding of on inventive change within African economic history.

- 2 The process of change under colonialism, forced and migrant labor in industry, specialized production for international markets, and land dispossession by outside interests: all these came to the fore in the studies of the later twentieth century, and in certain domains this became quite distinct from the old typology, while still learning from those empirical findings.
- 3 The growth in the study of urban informal economies and markets in the context of urban growth in the second half of the twentieth century, and the expanding field of research on the place of women in these economies and markets.
- 4 The most recent economic anthropological work which examines the two ends of the spectrum of viability: the poor and dispossessed, especially under conditions of very unstable currency exchange and valuation; and a growing engagement with the millennial economy as it emerges strongly in the digital industry, film-making, and rapidly expanding artisanal mining.

In conclusion to this introductory overview, the rich complexity of the economic anthropology of Africa can be profiled as a continuing frontier for study and understanding. Some practices from the past persist, such as marriage payments, and yet kinship and custom as the avenue to property are being undermined in places where land rights are moving into the commercial domain (Hammar 2014; Peters 1994; Shipton 2009). Some cultures in which craft associations managed training and market engagements in the past still have such organizations, now expanded into new niches in the diversifying "niche economies" (Guyer 1997) of the present, and helping members to adjust to the turbulences of current economic conditions: interrupted energy supply, fluctuating exchange rates, traffic problems, and political turbulence. It is in the context of such challenges and inventive needs, that the whole archive of past study, theoretical and empirical, becomes a resource on which to draw selectively, as best suits the time, place, and topic of interest or concern. As Pauline Peters (2013) draws on a historical and anthropological archive on the precise terms and practices with respect to land rights in Malawi over phases of political change, there are many topics for which a similar empirical archive, along with the archive on past big theory, may still offer angles of insight into complex "emergent" processes. Beyond the anthropological theories already outlined here, we would include work having the optimistic orientation of development economics and work taking the critical stance of dependency theory. Emmanuel Wallerstein (1974, 2017) wrote several books on Africa as he developed the core-periphery concept of post-colonial economic growth (see also Arrighi and Saul 1968, 1973).

The topic of the economic anthropology of Africa is increasingly rich and complex, as the globalization processes of the twenty-first century gain momentum. The archive in our libraries, in stores of written records, and in the "memory banks" (Hart 2000) of the people who have lived through the past decades, still offer signposts and pathways for exploration of the complex and emergent economic lives of the African people.

Typology of economic systems in Africa, terms used, and patterns of change

In the social evolutionary framework that lay at the foundation of anthropology in the nineteenth century, African societies fell into all the categories. The open deserts and deep forests were home to several hunter-gatherer societies, where there was no systematic domestication of either plants or animals. The increasingly rich archives on these economic lives over time are still of recuperable use, even if the categories are no longer ultimately authoritative. The following cases illuminate what was, and possibly still is, in many of the local “intricacies” that Mafeje (1991) invokes, an intellectual resource.

Hunter-gatherers Within the old evolutionary framework, it was assumed that early man had all been hunters and gatherers, which was graphically illustrated by their artwork, as in the cave paintings of Lascaux in France. Domestication of plants and animals was seen as a much later development. Ethnography found these economies to require mobility across the whole annual cycle, as the ecologies changed in their seasonal productivity. A classic ethnography of the !Kung San, of the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, was carried out by Richard Lee (1979), focusing on habitation and the annual cycle. A later work (Shostak, *Nisa!*, 2000) focused closely on the lives of the women, since they did most of the gathering, and the complementarity and sharing of tasks and products was crucial to understanding these as “economies.”

Hunter-gatherer life in the forests of Central Africa became somewhat familiar to Europeans first of all through old literary works, such as Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* (2005[1899]), and became classic in anthropology first of all through the fieldwork of Colin Turnbull (1965) among the Mbuti in the Ituri forest region (Grinker 1994). The pygmies co-existed with other peoples of the forest, who had added crop farming around their settlements to the hunting and gathering that they continued to practice. The particular ways in which each group adapted to its own complexly rich ecology, over the centuries, became a topic of discussion between anthropology and history. The central figure in the long-term historical study of Equatorial Africa, Jan Vansina (1990), engaged with Turnbull’s proposition that the Mbuti “lived in a single biotope, and hence that the habitat played no role in the existence of two social types of Mbuti communities: net hunters and archers.” However, he notes that the people’s modes of producing livelihoods, for example by developing certain, and varied, farming techniques for the forest, had altered the population density distributions over the centuries in what he calls “a host of habitats” (1990, p. 41). With an ecologically-specific focus, the studies show that hunter-gatherers also lived from the rivers in Equatorial Africa, where fishing was a kind of hunting, unlike the hunter-gatherers of the deserts.

All hunter-gatherer social organization was found to be focused in small groups, living as neighbors and speaking a common language, who moved across familiar landscapes according to season, rather than living in long-term settlements with ownership regimes that were organized by authorities based on one principle or another: kinship seniority or political primacy. Pastoralism was found to comprise larger settlements and ongoing social structures.

Pastoralists

Pastoralism depends on domestication, primarily of animals but also of cereals for human consumption. Pastoral populations are classically seasonal migrants across landscapes whose natural productivity as pastureland, and with water sources, supports the herds. They often have two settlements: one close to water for cultivation with pastureland, and the other focused primarily on broad pastures. There are pastoral economies across the whole region between the Sahara Desert and the coastal and equatorial forests – Sudan in the east, and the Sahel in the west – and in the pasturelands of Botswana in the south (Peters 1994).

Evans-Pritchard wrote the first detailed ethnographic study of the *Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions* of a pastoral society, the Nuer of the Sudan, published in 1940, from fieldwork amongst what he depicts in his Preface as “this brave and gentle people” (1940, p. viii). Interestingly, we were not yet working on economic life in quantitative mode, and this is not a commercial system. The first half of the book is devoted to the ways in which cattle and people live together in what he calls symbiosis: in ecological zones, in time and in spatial movement. His account gives detailed attention to the pragmatics of tethering, milking, herding, and generally drawing on the “wisdom” that domestication demands. The second half of the book describes social organization, particularly based on segmentary patrilineal kinship rather than on any form of hierarchical governance. He refers to this as “ordered anarchy” (p. 181), where “rights, privileges, and obligations are determined by kinship” (p. 183). This is a closely focused empirical study of how kinship as lineal descent, as distinct from the hunter-gatherer small networked groups, manages property that passes through social transactions (such as bridewealth, and other social payments, including sacrifice) and inheritance from one generation to the next. Evans-Pritchard argues strongly in favor of such detailed descriptions of livelihood and political organization, rather than depending entirely on old and generalized terms from general evolutionary theory, which he calls “crude concepts, tribe, clan, age-set, etc” (1940, p. 266).

The ethnographic work (in English) on the pastoral economies of the Sahel, such as the Fulani, comes later, and informs the historical and anthropological work on the rise of states across the whole region, where the Hausa-Fulani founded Northern Nigerian city states on the trade routes across the region. On the continuing growth of pastoralism, Paul Riesman wrote of *Freedom in Fulani Social Life* (1974 in French, 1977 in English). Again, the emphasis was on kinship and the management of seasonal migration, with herds. It is striking for this region that African state development is founded on the combination of skilled economies based, in places, around the combination of pastoral skills, agriculture (as in the Niger River basin), the advance of Islam (as for Timbuktu), and trans-Sahara trade. One anthropological-historical study of such an urban political economy is the classic work by Jamaican-born anthropologist M.G. Smith (1978) on *The Affairs of Daura*, which was followed in 1997 by his book on centuries of the history of the city of Kano, both being cities in Northern Nigeria. The complexity of West African pastoralism derives from its longer experience with regional dynamics that included stronger linkages into trade, other production methods and the advance of trade and religion, than the pastoralism of East Africa.

Settled farmers in shifting cultivation mode

Agriculture has a long history in Africa, with the development of many cereals (sorghum, maize, and rice), root crops (yams, taro, cassava), and oil-seed production (groundnuts, palm-kernels, and a very nutritious melon-seed named *egusi* in the Yoruba language in Western Nigeria). The methods in many places were by what is termed shifting cultivation, meaning that the land from which the crops have been harvested is allowed to revert to a long fallow period of natural regrowth until it is reopened for cultivation. This method was assumed, in evolutionary theory, to precede the greater sophistication and seed development required by intensive land use, where the fallow period was much shorter and sometimes managed through crop rotations. This sequence may be the case in certain environments, but African ecologies have lent themselves to both modes of cultivation. On the social organizational theme, all agriculturalists develop more permanent settlements than hunter-gatherers and pastoralists. Members of communities collaborate over the land claims accorded to individuals or families, and create space for storage of the harvest, the processing of crops, and marketing for regional trade.

The classic ethnographic description of a society based on shifting cultivation is Paul Bohannan's (1954) *Tiv Farm and Settlement*, complemented by his work on customary legal practices in *Justice and Judgment among the Tiv* (1968), and "spheres of exchange" within these communities and across their broader trade networks. The Tiv inhabit the central plateau of Nigeria, where land is plentiful. Bohannan produced maps of land ownership and use, descriptions of settlements, accounts of work and crop rotations, and was very attentive to the customary legal frameworks within which land was allocated and disputes settled. These frameworks were more intricate and subjected to mediating authorities than is the case in the pastoral and hunter-gatherer economies.

Bohannan is particularly referred to now, many years later, for his analysis of spheres of exchange (1955), that is, the separate domains of classes of commodities that are exchanged only against one another. His account shows how qualitative differences amongst traded goods are defined and managed in a community that is run neither through a clear hierarchy of wealth nor through an open and constantly responsive market. Certain goods exchange only against one another within a single "sphere," which then creates and reinforces particular networks, both local and regional, with their own conventions of valuation. For the Tiv, some of these were quite long-distance, linking the southern regions of Nigeria to the north of the country.

Farmers and intensive cultivation Intensive cultivation is defined as farming with almost continuous land use and sophisticated combinations of methods, crops, and labor application. The most recognized intensive crop is wet rice, grown in areas where water control is part of the agricultural technical repertoire, and grain collection, storage, and selection for seed is particularly skilled. West Africa has had wet rice cultivation in areas close to the coast for centuries. Indeed, it has been argued that rice cultivation was imported to the southern states of America through the slave trade. South Carolina and New Orleans benefited particularly from the import of already-existing African skills, as shown in Judith Carney's (2001) book entitled *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Detailed study of rice-production in the present century, in Casamance, Senegal, has been undertaken by

Olga Linares (1992), and geographer-anthropologist Paul Richards has worked closely on rice cultivation elsewhere in West Africa, and on what he terms the *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* (1985) through which seed development, intensification, and rising productivity was achieved long before there were seeds brought in from Western science, and indeed alongside it into the present. Richards refers to this as “People’s science: a Green Revolution from within?” (1985, p. 143).

Comparison of subsistence-based economies: ecology, history, culture Rather than seeing these developments as evolutionary stages, or as classifiable types, all of the more recent local anthropological work places the inventiveness of people’s combinations of production methods within the context of local ecologies and regional economic histories, where different complexities of production, exchange, and value provided the impetus for invention and the passing of skills from one context to another. This developed long before the colonial period and the import of Western authorities with respect to money, markets, and economic law. A vivid and detailed example of the description of combinations of means of making a living, maps of ecology and charts of production and exchange, and the terms of coexistence of neighbors with somewhat different cultures although participating in a common political realm, is provided by Mary Douglas, in her description of the Lele and the Bushong, of the Congo (her first economic work on the Lele was published in 1963). Her attentiveness to cultural framing is exemplary of the increasing nuancing of ethnography to particularism, as distinct from macro-theory and classification. She wrote: “By following up the interactions of these choices (of new techniques), one upon another, we can see how the highly idiosyncratic Lele culture is related to a certain low level of production” (Douglas 1962, p. 232).

The early ethnography did recognize particularism to some degree, but the development of close attention to historical and archeological sources, and to current context, expanded our appreciation of processes of growth and change, long before the colonial demands for certain kinds of specialization, especially for goods destined for international markets.

The regional linkages, patterns of economic change and the rise of cities in pre-colonial Africa

The case studies carried out with ethnographic methods in the twentieth century can all be placed into a dynamic regional historical framework, as attention moves from typologies of economy, especially in the evolutionary framework with its implicitly pejorative designation of Africa as “primitive,” towards the processual dynamics of change and growth by time and place. From historical sources, we have work on metallurgy: ironworking for tools, copper mining and smelting for art and monies, and gold-mining largely for trade into the Mediterranean world. Museums devoted to Central Africa, such as the Royal African Museum in Tervuren, in Belgium, contain impressive collections of boats for navigation on the River Congo, and a wide range of metal objects for monetary and decorative use (Guyer 2010). Textile-making, building techniques, and other skills that promoted urban growth along trade routes, also long predate the Western presence. The particular Western presence that introduced new elements into African trade, particularly currencies, was the slave trade,

from the seventeenth century onwards. The complexity of pricing and paying was intricate, and the scholarship on how it worked in different places, and how the currencies spread through the continent, is still expanding beyond the classics such as Hogendorn and Johnson's (1986) book on *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, and Ben Naanen (1993) on manillas, which were produced largely in Birmingham, England, for the trade. Both of these topics are still expanding areas for research, as cowry-shell use becomes a wider and deeper question for research. Manillas remained in circulation in Eastern Nigeria until the British colonial government withdrew them in 1948, in a process closely documented by African scholars. Scholar of the history of money and circulation, Akinobu Kuroda (2007), has researched the circulation of the Maria-Theresa thaler, an Austrian currency, in the whole eastern Sahara-North Africa area. Multiple currencies were in circulation, some made in Africa and some imported through trade with outsiders.

As these artisanal skills and commercial infrastructures were fostered, the organization of economic life became socially creative. Guilds of specialist artisans were founded in North and West Africa, with their systems for training and quality control. Marketplaces developed for local and regional trade in many places, all with their own authorities and customary practices (Bohannon and Dalton 1965), including numbering and calculation that crossed linguistic and ethnic frontiers (see Zaslavsky 1973). Cities developed, with their own political economies, whose histories and economic organization have been documented particularly deeply by African scholars: Kwame Arhin (1967) writing on the Ashanti kingdom of Ghana, from 1700 onwards, and Toyin Falola (1984) on Ibadan from the nineteenth century. Another non-Western scholar, Elias Saad (1983), wrote on Timbuktu, from the development of Muslim communities there as early as 1400.

African scholars have been particularly creative in their collecting of historical sources on the political economy of pre-colonial states in West Africa, largely due to their ability to work with oral history, local archives in their own languages, and the variety of specialists who may be able to outline the history and practices of their own domains of life. A key example is Toyin Falola's (1984) study of Ibadan, from 1830 to 1900, before it became a center of administration under British colonial rule. He lists about 30 products that were brought into the city along trade routes of varying range and distance, along with the tolls paid in cowries, and some in British currency. Falola is creatively critical of the European theory that all "progress" derives from following a path of "modernization."

"The market was not peripheral to the economy...There were numerous local and long distance traders...The economy was monetized...There were 'banking' institutions and credit facilities to reduce the problems of saving and borrowing money" (1984, p. 202). Indeed, his very strong argument goes against simply dropping standard categories onto Africa from theoretical frameworks from outside, especially with evolutionary implications about "backwardness," which he sees as "grossly misleading" (p. 202) and leading eventually to assimilating "exploitation" implicitly under the rubric of "modernization" and "development." He insists on the importance of sovereignty being located within Africa, which he sees developing regional and local economic life strongly in the pre-colonial period in a manner to which this life should return rather than searching to duplicate the steps of evolution or development mapped by the West.

This complex interchange amongst politics and economies developing their own histories within their own ecologies, was the Africa that came under colonial rule from the late nineteenth century, then was subjected to the demands of colonialists about production in trade that would serve their own interests. The development of commercial crops, such as cocoa, for export, and precious mineral mining, as gold and diamonds in South Africa and copper in Central Africa, and the dispossession of the African populations from land taken up by agricultural businesses, all created new conditions that became subjects for ethnographic research particularly in the mid-twentieth century, when the over-arching framework was no longer one of evolutionary stages, or types of economy, but of what was called, in implicitly positive terms “development,” or in critical terms as “exploitation.” In the next section, we visit classic works that trace out African economies mainly undertaken in the early post-colonial period, post-1960, but tracing out the processes of change, paying deep attention to how local populations were brought into national colonial governance, and how they could adapt their own practices to the new context.

Colonial africa and its local economies

Ethnographic and close historical works on African economies from the period of colonial rule were richly attentive to exactly how local peoples interfaced with the different colonial political economies. In some places, for some products, the small farmers rose rapidly into the colonial produce markets. Our classics on this process are on the expansion of cocoa production in Ghana and Nigeria. Cocoa was brought in from South America at the end of the nineteenth century, and became a central crop for the cultivators living within the humid forested regions of West Africa, not far from the coastline. Cocoa is a tree crop, so not falling into the older food-farming patterns of production. Orchards are permanent, so not managed through fallow, intercropping, and continual cultivation. The two classic empirical works on this history, and the farmer’s own practices, are Polly Hill’s (1963) *The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana* and Sara Berry’s (1975) *Cocoa, Custom, and Socio-economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria*. Both works trace how “cocoa and custom” worked together in the new regional economy, as land claims and forms of labor recruitment were adapted to a commercial crop.

Dispossession of land by colonial projects was described in depth for areas where there were expanding settler economies, such as Kenya, with its tea plantations. Central Africa was particularly subject to colonial dispossession and to the invention of a version of land law that allowed the rights of the original population to be defined in completely different legal terms than the freehold tenure of European ownership. The closest ethnography of this process was undertaken by Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder (1971), in particularly detailed field research amongst the Gwembe Tonga populations in what was then Rhodesia, to describe their productive economy in the Zambezi River floodplain, and then to follow their displacement from their homelands for the building of dams on the River. Colson followed the lives of the Tonga over several decades as they adapted to the areas where they were resettled, and Lisa Cliggett (2005) has taken up yet another generation of study of these displaced populations.

Dispossession and forced migration into the growing industrial mining sector in Southern Africa has been particularly closely described in ethnographic detail by Colin

Murray, in several papers, and a book entitled *Families Divided* (1981), where he draws attention to the ways in which earnings were distributed among family members, for different purposes. The intersection of kinship and an expanding colonial-capitalist presence led to greater attention to women's work. Certain early ethnographies described women's work in production and trade in the food supply sector, particularly Audrey Richards's (1939) classic work *Land, Labour and Diet among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia*. Women's place in local markets and food supply systems became increasingly important where men's labor was syphoned off into the internationally-traded commodities. These processes have been documented by Gracia Clark on women's trade in Ghana (2010), Claire Robertson on the history of both men and women's trade in Kenya (1997), and by Keith Hart in West Africa (1982).

More recently, the study of dispossession has taken up a new momentum in the twenty-first century, as land is taken for agricultural-industrial purposes, and certain anthropologists have followed this closely, especially with respect to the legal frameworks (Hammar 2014; Peters 2013). African historical and scientific scholars, such as Elias Mandala (1990) and Clapperton Mavhunga (2014) focus on this process to identify the loss of specific resource management skills that the African populations had developed over the long past. These scholars all track the indigenous, colonial, post-colonial, and present-day legal terms for ownership of land and productive resources. As a result of the increasing formalization of property, labor, and money after national independence and in the globalizing economy of the present century, the past work on urban and peri-urban self-employment in occupations that are not directly attached to production from the land has expanded under the general title of "the informal sector."

The informal sector, women's work and the emergence of new technologies

While the old ethnographies included attention to regional markets and traders, the idea that this domain of self-employment should be designated as "the informal sector" is relatively recent, as formalization reached more deeply into social and economic life. The informal sector depicts occupations and productive activities that fall under very limited regulatory control from the, now independent, states. Much of this expansion, which accounts for a large domain of income-generation in certain areas, especially in West Africa where it has a long history, falls into the domain of urban provisioning: food, clothing, charcoal for energy, and many other commodities needed by growing cities, as described for four major cities (Kano (northern Nigeria), Yaounde (central Cameroon), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Salisbury/Harare (Rhodesia/Zimbabwe)) in the edited volume on the history of urban food supply (Guyer 1987). From the local production vantage-point of Western Nigeria, I referred to their own system as a "niche economy" (Guyer 1997), where producers created new products, but were organized, at least in part, along the lines of traditional familial production and association-based manufacture and transport, all of which co-existed under conditions brought forward from past experience.

The participation of women in trade was considerable in many places in the past, and in the mid-to-late twentieth century, and into the present, it has expanded and become increasingly far-reaching and broad-based. Gracia Clark (2010) has written in rich detail of the lives of seven market women whose trade is based in the market in Kumasi, in central Ghana. The Introduction explains the method of interview, and each chapter includes the woman's own voice: her commodity, her sales, her story of trade and life. The chapter headings track the peoples's and the interviewer's concepts: An Adventurer on the Road; A Quiet Saver: A Good Citizen: A Market Daughter; A Shrewd Dealer; An International Observer: A Grateful Sister. And the conclusion, entitled Little by Little privileges the appreciation of idiosyncrasy, and the intersections of lives and careers, as a method, rather than thinking in terms of cumulative samples. Claire Robertson (1997) takes a somewhat comparable approach to specificity, with additional attention to commodity, ethnicity, and political history, to her study of the women traders in Nairobi.

Over a period of 20 years, Kate Meagher has studied the plight of youth with respect to income, first in East Africa, and their place in the ever-expanding informal sector. An early paper title indicates the way forward on this topic: "Crisis, Informalization and the Urban Informal Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa" (1995). Her paper titles on Nigeria convey the problematics on which she concentrates: "Social capital, social liabilities, and political capital: social networks and informal manufacturing in Nigeria" (2006); "Manufacturing Disorder: Liberalization, Informal Enterprise and Economic 'Ungovernance' in African Small Firm Clusters" (2007). Her new ethnography of urban, informal sector manufacture, was carried out in Eastern Nigeria: on clothing, shoes and other items, whose production and trade now employ large numbers of otherwise unemployed youth.

As globalization brings foreign commodities into the Nigerian market, the place of domestic production becomes squeezed, and fluctuating exchange rates in the management of money become difficult for the common people to manage. Indeed, the currency market is now an economic domain of its own, as people and commodities migrate across borders, including for the sale of the artisanally-mined gemstones of Central Africa. There is new, and growing research, by both Africa and Western scholars, on these markets. Tinashe Nyamunda (2016) writes on the currencies in the Southern African gemstone trade. Max Bolt (2015) studies the international migrant labor on South African farms.

This expansion and increasing complexity of the informal sector is a deep topic for anthropological study of actual practices, which again engages with historians, but then increasingly with political-economic thinking, such as Deborah Brautigam's (2009) work on the expansion of the Chinese presence in Africa: in land ownership and production, construction, their own informal sector operations (including gold-mining in Ghana) and imports of Chinese products. The anthropologist-reader pauses over all the organizational and economic questions: How were the contracts made and between whom? How were they paid for? Which currency was used and through which method of payment, barter, cash (which kind?)? Were bank accounts used, and if, so, under whose name? The networks of informality at all levels, in the era termed *globalization*, become a topic for another innovative phase of the inter-disciplinarity that grew up in the economic anthropology of Africa in the mid-to-late twentieth century.

GUIDEPOSTS TO THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

From its beginnings in Africa, economic anthropology has become increasingly devoted to understanding the intricacies of particular systems, in the people's own terms and with reference not only to larger theoretical frameworks but also to regional history. African scholars have contributed in priceless ways to this conversation, especially as ongoing processes of change, in an ever-shifting global economy, come to the center of attention rather than a macro-stage theory of "economic growth." African scholars have encouraged Western scholars to (i) look back into the skills of the past, as they have been either destroyed from the outside or recuperated from within, and (ii) appreciate in detail the ongoing inventiveness within African economies, especially, now, in the informal sector that defines its activities outside of the bureaucratic control of the state. In this context, the practice of ethnographic method is crucial. In its early stages, it did frame enquiry in terms of some macro-categories that derived from evolutionary theory, such as "hunting and gathering," but the method was always attentive to local particularity and to the skills that people had developed, in long and inventive histories. One historical account exemplifies this method is Eugenia Herbert's (1984) detailed account of copper production and smithing in precolonial Africa, where it was the product of deep technical skill and used as a medium of exchange, medium of art, medium of power and locus for the development of a "language of materials."

With this as an example, we can turn the same detailed attention to all the economic activities of the people: technical skill, management of collaboration, deployment in action, sophistication in language and understanding and continuing frontiers of invention. By reconnecting to the intricacies of knowledge and organization, ethnographic method can illuminate how the African people manage creative economic life as conditions shift, rather than as one evolutionary phase, or type of economy, replaces another. We can still draw on those works, but as archival sources rather than maps for pathways of new research.

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