

Programa de Historia Económica y Social  
Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de la República, Montevideo

Course

## **African Economic History**

March 2015

Teachers:

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### **Topic**

This intensive course will introduce students to major themes and topics of African economic development in a long-term historical perspective. The course offers an overview of developments in production and trade, including the slave trades; considers the formation and behaviour of states, and reflects on colonial institutions in comparative perspective. This will enable us to explore historical connections and take the historical perspective up to the recent, post-1995 revival of growth in the region. We will also occasionally pay attention to the comparisons and connections with Latin American economic history, including the role of trade specialization and colonial institutional legacies.

### **Learning outcomes**

After this course students should be able to critically reflect on the key differences and similarities of Africa's long-term economic trajectory with other regions in the global South, and Latin America in particular. They should have captured a basic knowledge of key themes such as the specifics of African demography, historical processes of state formation, the role of factor endowments in choice of technique, institutional design and colonial rule, and the basic features of the Atlantic slave trade. Students should also be able to situate current growth dynamics in a historical perspective and have developed some framework of reference to reflect on questions regarding the sustainability of current African growth.

### **Organization**

We will convene in six meetings of three hours twenty minutes each (see course program below). Each meeting will have a similar structure. We start with a lecture of ca. 60-70 minutes introducing the topic. After the break (20 minutes) we have a student-led discussion of two papers of ca. 60 minutes each with a threefold purpose: training

presentation skills, knowledge extension and engagement in academic debate. **We require each student to read the mandatory literature (articles and/or book chapters) in advance of the meeting!** During class we will randomly select a student to deliver 10 minutes of critical reflection on the paper and to put forward their own answer to the central question of the paper (i.e. where do you agree and where do you disagree, or have doubts about the views of the author(s)?). These reflections will serve as input for the plenary class discussion. Students will chair these sessions in rotation.

## Course Program

### **Monday 9 March: *African historical demography and systems of rural production***

To understand long-term trajectories of African economic development, students will require some introduction into the particular environmental constraints and conditions to human reproduction in Sub-Saharan Africa. The prevalence of severe tropical diseases (e.g. malaria, sleeping sickness), generally poor soils for intensive cultivation and high climatic variability, has had a significant impact on the systems of production that Africans have developed in the c. 200.000 years since the evolution of *homo sapiens* in the region. These environmental conditions, in turn, have shaped patterns of human settlement and induced factor endowment structures (labour scarcity, land abundance) that have conditioned a wide variety of rural production systems, social relations and state formation processes. Africa's low population densities were largely comparable to the New World before 1492, but endowment structures differed in several other respects, such as the incidence of tropical diseases, the presence of domesticated animals and the degree of concentration in human settlement.

In this first meeting we will review the particularities of African environments south of the Sahara and the different strategies of human and rural reproduction. We will explore the similarities and differences with other world regions. We will review theoretical views on the relationship between factor endowments and long-term African economic development and, from there, raise a number of important questions that we will address in the remainder of this course.

#### *Mandatory readings:*

- Gareth Austin (2008) "Resources, Techniques, and Strategies South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspective on African Economic Development History" *Economic History Review* 61: 587-624.
- Ewout Frankema (2015) "The Biogeographic Roots of World Inequality. Animals, Disease and Human Settlement Patterns in Africa and the Americas before 1492" *World Development* (early online view).

*Optional reading:*

- Joseph Inikori (2007) "Africa and the globalization process: Western Africa, 1450-1850", *Journal of Global History* 2(1): 63-86.

**Tuesday 10 March: African state formation and fiscal development**

One of the distinctive features of long-term African political and economic development south of the Sahara is the cursory nature of state formation processes. The map of African nation states today is still largely based on the borders that were drawn by European colonial powers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pre-colonial African states did exist, but they differed from pre-modern states on the Eurasian continent (and to some extent also in Central Mexico (e.g. Aztec empire) and the Andes (e.g. Inca empire) in at least three respects: 1) they did not produce extensive bureaucracies rooted in indigenous traditions of literacy and formalized law (note: Arabic scripture and Islamic law were adopted, and partly transformed by West African states, but they were not locally developed); 2) states were not underpinned by large standing armies engaging in campaigns of territorial conquest against competing states (raiding was the norm in African military tactics); and 3) they did not invest comparable amounts of energy and resources in the construction of large monumental architecture. These defining features all play a role in explaining why African states failed to produce long-term dynastic rule. The Ethiopian state is the single exception to all of these rules.

In this meeting we will review several explanations for 'African' trajectories of state formation. We will review the various 'strategies' pursued by African rulers to centralize state authority, by looking more deeply into the opportunities and constraints to pooling resources and financing public goods (e.g. defence, infrastructure, public services). We will review Herbst' thesis that processes of African state centralization were complicated by low population densities (and related thin revenue foundations) and ask to which extent European colonial powers faced comparable challenges of fiscal development as pre-colonial African rulers.

*Mandatory readings:*

- Jeffrey Herbst (2000) "The challenge of state-building in Africa", Chapter 1 in *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, pp. 11-31.

- Robin Law (1978) "Slaves, trade, and taxes: the material basis of political power in nineteenth-century West Africa" *Research in Economic Anthropology* 1: 37-52.

*Optional reading:*

- Ewout Frankema and Marlous van Waijenburg (2014) "Metropolitan Blueprints of Colonial Taxation? Lessons from Fiscal Capacity Building in British and French Africa, c. 1880-1940" *Journal of African History* 55: 371-400

### **Thursday 12 March: The Atlantic slave trade**

Slavery has deep historical roots in African societies, and it was practiced long before the onset of the Atlantic slave trade. The prevalence of slavery in Africa is generally understood by historians as a response to the particular structure of factor endowments (low man-land ratio's) that promoted the control over people rather than land. Domestic slavery and the trade in slaves were sides of the same coin. Hence, the Atlantic slave trade was one of several long-distance trades that evolved in the course of time, next to the Trans-Saharan trades into North Africa, the Red Sea trade, and the trade into the wider Indian Ocean area. The Atlantic slave trade was exceptional, however, in terms of its intensity and its specific 'business model' (plantation-driven, mediated by Europeans). In fact, the Atlantic slave trade involved the forced migration of ca. 12 million people from Sub-Saharan Africa to various (sub)-tropical parts of North and South America, between c. 1450 and 1850, leaving deep local imprints on demographic, social, economic, political and cultural developments at both sides of the Atlantic. One of the key questions is why Europeans and Africans invested so much energy in the forced movement of labourers from one tropical region to another to produce commodities such as sugar, cotton and tobacco that could be grown equally well in Africa.

In this meeting we will review the major 'stylized facts' of the Atlantic slave trade. We will pay special attention to the (economic) motivations of European and African slave traders to engage in this trade. We also discuss how these motivations may have changed over time and how the slave trade met increasing opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by the so-called 'abolitionist' movement. We discuss how scholars have differently perceived the long-term economic consequences of the slave trade and use the assignment (see below) to reflect on the contribution that (economic) historians can collectively make to major public debates on social inequality, racism and the legacies of European imperialism.

#### *Mandatory readings:*

- Herbert Klein (1990) "Economic aspects of the eighteenth-century Atlantic slave trade", in James Tracey (ed.) *The rise of merchant empires: Long-distance trade in the early modern world, 1350-1750*, pp. 287-310
- Joseph Inikori (2003) "The struggle against the transatlantic slave trade: the role of the state", in S. Diouf (ed.) *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies*, pp. 170-98.
- E. W. Evans and David Richardson (1995) "Hunting for rents: the economics of slaving in pre-colonial Africa" *Economic History Review* 48: 665-86.

#### *Assignment:*

- Check-out this website: <http://www.slavevoyages.org> . Download and skim through David Eltis et al. (2008 + updates), *Voyages: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. Write down in max. 1 A4 page three to five 'stylized facts' of the Atlantic slave trade that you can derive from a rudimentary analysis of this dataset.

### **Monday 16 March: The long 19th century: from slave trade to commodity trade**

The nineteenth century was an era of profound contradictions in African economic history. The campaign against the Atlantic slave trade scored an ultimately decisive success in 1807, with the British abolition law, but slave exports from Angola to Brazil actually rose for a while afterwards, and the Trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trades are thought to have reached their all-time peaks later in the century. Within Africa, the use of slave labour (mostly comprising captives from other African societies) expanded greatly, especially in West Africa and parts of East Africa, primarily to facilitate the expansion of commodity production. However, Hopkins argued that, for West Africa at least, the commercial transition from exporting slaves to exporting palm oil and peanuts marked the beginning of the “modern” period in economic history, because it entailed the entry of small producers into direct production for overseas markets, for the first time. That pattern continued, on a much larger scale, with the “cash-crop revolution” of the early colonial period: African peasants and small capitalists growing a variety of crops for European and North American markets. Hopkins’ critics have insisted that the continuities from the era of unchallenged slave exporting were stronger than the innovations.

We will review the debate about continuity and change; examine the political economy of the growth of slavery within African societies; and ask whether (as Hopkins also argued) the transition to “legitimate” (non-slave) commerce undermined existing mercantile and political elites, precipitating instability which in turn led European merchants to demand imperial annexations from their governments. The discussion will focus on West Africa, but we will briefly explore the interactions of violence and increased trade, followed by colonial annexation, which also characterized other regions of the continent – but in different forms.

#### *Mandatory readings:*

- A. G. Hopkins (1973) “The economic basis of imperialism”, Chapter 4 in *An Economic History of West Africa*, pp. 124-166.
- EITHER: Robin Law (1995) “Introduction” in R. Law (ed.) *From Slave Trade to “Legitimate” commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, pp. 1-31.
- OR: Robin Law (1993) “The historiography of the commercial transition in nineteenth-century West Africa”, in Toyin Falola (ed.), *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, pp. 91-115.

#### *Optional reading:*

- Joseph Inikori (2009) “The economic impact of the 1807 British abolition of the transatlantic slave trade”, in Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (eds) *The Changing Worlds of Atlantic Africa: Essays in Honor of Robin Law*, pp. 163-82.

## **Tuesday 17 March: Colonial economies and institutions**

Compared to Latin America, in particular, the colonial period in most of Africa was late and brief: from sometime within 1879-1903 to about 1960. Yet it is often held to have been a decisive influence on African economic development, negatively and/or positively. We ask whether colonial states were simply extractive; in what senses they were “strong” or “weak”; whether they promoted or retarded the emergence of capitalist institutions such as wage labour and land markets; whether they promoted or obstructed the deeper integration of African economies in world markets; and how far colonial “indirect rule” was the source of post-colonial ethnic divisions. Crucially, we need to discuss the causes and effects of the different types of Europe rule in Africa: the significance of the distinction between “settler”, “concession” and “peasant” economies for African welfare, factor markets, and the (modest) growth of modern manufacturing. Most fundamentally of all, we need to consider the interaction of colonial governments, foreign capital, and African producers, tax-payers and chiefs: the economic history of the colonial period was not made by Europeans alone.

### *Mandatory readings:*

- Gareth Austin, ‘The economics of colonialism’, in Célestin Monga and Justin Lin (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics*, Oxford University Press. Published online October 2014, print version to follow in January 2015.
- Ewout Frankema, ‘Colonial taxation and government spending in British Africa, 1880-1940: Maximizing revenue or minimizing effort?’, *Explorations in Economic History* 45 (2011), pp. 136-49.

### *Optional reading:*

- EITHER: Giovanni Arrighi, ‘Labour supplies in historical perspective: a study of the proletarianization of the African peasantry in Rhodesia’, *Journal of Development Studies* 3 (1970), pp. 197-234; reprinted in Arrighi and J. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (1973).
- OR: R. Bates, ‘The demand for revolution: the agrarian origins of Mau Mau’, in his *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: the political economy of agrarian development in Kenya* (1989; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 2005), pp. 11-44, 157-63.

## **Thursday 19 March: Post-colonial growth, crisis and revival**

Most African countries became independent around 1960. Since then there have been, broadly, two eras of economic policy: state-led development, including programs of import-substitution industrialization, until the 1980s, when they were replaced by economic liberalization, which has continued to the present. Meanwhile, we can distinguish three broad periods in economic performance: slow growth per capita until 1973-75; stagnation (in some countries, decline) overall until c.1995; and general growth, averaging nearly 2 % per head per year in real terms, up to now. Please note,

however, that these generalizations mask major differences between individual countries – which may provide a clue to the causal relationships involved.

Questions include: what can we say about the relationship between policy regime and growth performance in post-colonial Africa? How does the growth and then stagnation of the apartheid economy, followed by the fall of the regime in 1994, fit into the overall picture? How has post-colonial development been influenced (in form and content) by historical legacies, economic and political? Why have states in Africa not been more ‘developmental’? What does the continuing transition in factor endowments, towards land scarcity coupled with higher human capital, mean for economic growth and patterns of inequality? What insight can we draw from African and comparative economic history about the prospects for converting the current growth, based on exporting primary commodities, into an African industrial revolution?

*Mandatory readings:*

- Frederick Cooper, ‘Development and disappointment’ in: *Africa Since 1940* (2002), 91-132.
- B. Ndulu and S. O’Connell, ‘Policy plus: African growth performance, 1960-2000’, in B. Ndulu, S. O’Connell, R.H. Bates, P. Collier & C. Soludo (eds), *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa 1960-2000* (2008), vol. I, 3-75.

*Optional reading:*

- EITHER: Morten Jerven, ‘The quest for the African dummy: explaining African post-colonial economic performance revisited’, *Journal of International Development*, 23:2 (2011), 288-307.
- OR: N. Nattrass, ‘Controversies about capitalism and apartheid in South Africa: an economic perspective’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17 (1991), pp. 654-77
- OR: Thandika Mkandawire, ‘Thinking about developmental states in Africa’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25:3 (2001), pp. 289-313.