

# **HISTORY, ARCHIVES AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN AFRICA**

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## Part 1

# How History Matters For Development Policy: Long-term Perspectives

- ‘History matters’ claim established by institutional economists using long-term comparative statics, X-C regressions, & instrumental variables (Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson; Nunn, others)
- Problems with this stimulating approach raised in earlier work by historians & others (Bayly 2008; Austin 2008B, Hopkins 2009)
  - Compression of history; robustness problem;
  - Africa not a good fit for AJR’s diads
  - African agency made a big difference
  - Treatment of outliers: exceptions don’t ‘prove rule’

## Other Very Long-Term Perspectives

- Bayart's thesis of 'extraversion' of African elites (1989, 2000)
- Dynamic view of resource endowments & their interaction with human choices:
  - what implications of recent & incomplete transition from land abundance to land scarcity? (Austin 2008A, 2013 forthcoming)

## Five 'history lessons' from colonial and colonial/post-colonial periods

1. African economies **have** pre-1950/75 developmental histories (Arrighi, Ferguson)
2. Changes of context matter, e.g. re debate on efficiency of indigenous land tenure systems
3. Political history matters: Ivory Coast/Ghana contrast
4. Legacies of colonial states & indirect rule: were either 'strong'?
5. Economic cultures within SSA vary: e.g. witchcraft accusations
  - AND risks in relying on Western '**myths of origin**' (marxist or liberal): need for 'reciprocal comparison'

## Part 2. Researching Contemporary 'Development' History of Africa

- Starting in 1960 is not enough:
  - importance of spanning the formal constitutional divide (and a considerable literature does this)
- Seeing post-independence era historically means viewing it not as an aggregate or continuum
  - but rather recognising continuities and changes

# Post-Independence era as history: what we can learn from thinking about periodization

- Disaggregating the growth record of African economies: e.g. significance of the **alternation** of a period of expansion with one of stagnation/decline, or vice versa, in several countries since 1960
- Sequence: **distinguish** economic & political liberalization since 1980s
- Significance of Structural Adjustment for the argument about **rent-seeking** as cause of persistent poverty in Africa
- Nature of government that introduced SAP affects outcome
- Context: taking African leaders seriously

## **Part 3. Researching Contemporary 'Development' History of Africa**

**(B) With particular  
reference to the role  
of ARCHIVES**



# Range of sources

- Oral: high-level & grassroots
- Contemporary media & personal accounts: newspapers, periodicals, memoirs
- Official publications
- ARCHIVES: government, non-government (e.g. political movements, trade unions, religious organisations), NGOs, inter- or supra-governmental organizations



# Requirements for Effective use of Archives: cp situation of post-independence records in Africa

- Preservation & organization
  - War problem
  - Peace problem: neglect, **lack of culture of record-keeping (reflecting patrimonial rather than bureaucratic states?)**
  - Some positive points: Commonwealth initiative, partial improvements in Ghana since mid-1980s
- Access

## Finally: World Bank Group Archives in this context

- May at least partly fill some gaps in the information from national archives
- Specific importance of WB in the history of development in post-1945 SSA:
  - as an actor, as a source of policy advice & prescriptions, & as an influence on how development is measured
- Value of studying IOs as ‘spaces’, not just objects (Kott): an approach worth extending to WB