



AHRC-DFG PROJECT MIDWAY WORKSHOP
24-25 JULY 2023
KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE (THE AUDIT ROOM)

Where have the workers gone? Labour and work in Ghana, 1951-2010 is a three-year project jointly funded by the AHRC and the DFG. The research team comprises the two PIs, Gareth Austin (Cambridge) and Andreas Eckert (Humboldt), two senior Ghanaian consultants (co-investigators), Akua O. Britwum (University of Cape Coast) and Nana Yaw Spong (University of Ghana), a postdoctoral researcher, Igor Martins (Cambridge), and two doctoral researchers, Hedvig Lagercrantz and Felix Yao Amenorhu (both Humboldt).

The Cambridge workshop on 24-25 July 2023 was hosted by Gareth Austin (who also served as notetaker) and King's College, Cambridge. We met in the college's Audit Room, its walls decorated with an interesting selection of paintings chosen by John Maynard Keynes, a long-time fellow and bursar of King's.

The Workshop was intended to mark the approximate halfway point of the project. In practice, in a sense it was less than halfway, because the two doctoral researchers, and Igor Martins, began their employment by the project at the beginning of the European 2022-2023 academic year, so for them this was not even one year in. The workshop was no less productive for this. Each member of the research team presented their individual work to date: their aims, sources and methods, and their provisional conclusions. Feedback and suggestions were provided for the second half of the project, plus wider reflections on the significance of the findings for the contemporary labour history of Ghana and Africa. We were fortunate to have excellent,

detailed comments from two distinguished discussants, Dr Cyrelene Amoah-Boampong (University of Ghana) and Professor Paul Nugent (University of Edinburgh). Three Cambridge PhD students also attended, making valuable contributions to the conversation: Muhammed Alakitan (from Nigeria), Sakae Gustafson (Japan), and Reetika Subramanian (India).

Read on for the programme, followed by summaries of the papers and discussions, and a photograph of the opening session.

THE PROGRAMME

Discussants: Cyrelene Amoah-Boampong and Paul Nugent.

MONDAY 24th JULY

FIRST SESSION 9:50-12:30

Welcome and Introductions

1. Akua O. Britwum, 'Gendered labour: the production and reproduction nexus'
2. Andreas Eckert, 'Is a worker, who is not employed, still a worker? Unemployment in Ghana since the 1950s'

SECOND SESSION 13:15-15.45

3. Nana Yaw Boampong Spong, 'Evil Spirits and Union Leaders: a Nurses and Midwives' Perspective on Labor Union Struggles in Ghana, 1970s - 2010'
4. Igor Martins, 'Labour market integration and living standards in post-colonial Ghana'

THIRD SESSION 16:00-18:30

5. Felix Yao Amenorhu, 'Long-term changes in the rural agricultural labour market: An inquiry into the labour dynamics on rice farms in Northern Ghana'
6. Hedvig Lagercrantz, 'Linking Farmers and Workers' Grievances with Agricultural Development in Post-independence Ghana'

TUESDAY 25th JULY

FOURTH SESSION 9:15-11:15

7. Gareth Austin, 'Changing structure of employment in Ghana, 1951-2010'
- General discussion (start of)

FIFTH AND FINAL SESSION 11:30-13:00

Next steps in research

Preliminary planning of the Concluding workshop/conference in Accra

Publication plans

Paper 1

GENDERED LABOUR: PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION NEXUS

Akua O Britwum

Abstract: The paper contributes to the debate on the conceptual framing for exploring the totality of Ghanaian women's provisioning activities within the project period. The usual accounts adopt mainstream economic frames that separate women's reproductive and productive labour. Based on the assumption that only transactions that pass through the market contribute to the economy, non-waged work within the domestic sphere is rendered inferior, often not meeting the qualification to count as work. Feminists of various persuasions, Marxist feminists in particular, have contested this limited conceptualisation of national economies, stating that women's unpaid work is as essential as traded goods and services for generating individual and national wealth. These attempts span discussions on women's caring work subsistence production by rural and low-income communities to meet their consumption needs. Economic activities that make up the national informal economy and its linkages with the formal is one such exercise, and so is peasant farming and subsistence production.

The critical role of care work became strikingly evident during the COVID era, forcing a renewed interest in the domestic space and its connection to the national economy. Pre-COVID contestations of dualism or multiplicities of economic sectors by feminist scholars point to the interconnected modes of production that communities adopt to meet their survival needs. Using the social reproduction theory, as revealed in the work of Marxist feminists such as Luxton and Bezanson (2006), Ferguson and McNally (2015), Moore (2015), and Bhattacharya (2017) studies point out that women's non-market labour, that is, social reproduction activities are embedded in family, kinship and community, a fact often ignored by conventional literature. Social reproduction describes the totality of activities for the upkeep of all persons, irrespective of age. Such activities ensure the daily and intergenerational survival of persons and communities (Mohandesi & Teitelman 2017, p. 39). The social reproduction theory had already sharpened the conceptual tools for unravelling the connections between these economic spheres or sectors.

This study agrees with Bhattacharya (2017a) that women's productive and reproductive activities are interrelated and explored as such. The specific questions the paper shall attempt to unravel are the nature of kinship and community redistribution networks women have relied on over the years to perform their caring roles. The forms of networks that have emerged over the years to shape how women undertake their social reproduction roles become crucial for understanding the emergence of new actors in the delivery of care. A related curiosity is

forms of gender orders emerging as the systems for reproducing societies alter. What will be interrogated are the myriad of activities and players women are relying on to carry out their caring roles. The study will focus on women caught in commercial centres in the central region of Ghana, where rural land overtaken by rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation is pushing women into trading. Primary data gathering amongst mothers and childcare providers, state regulatory institutions. The study will explore multigenerational accounts of childcaring and mothering experiences amongst young women traders and their older relatives. The expectation is that findings will deepen insights into emerging forms of social reproduction and how they provide new sites for further exploitation of women's labour.

Discussion:

Cyrelene Amoah-Boampong (discussant): are there any differences between, e.g., Akan and Ewe households.

Paul Nugent (discussant): in Volta Region, men & women grow maize, but rice only grown by women. Difference between 'pooled income' and women's specific income – grow rice to get income they can keep. South Africa different: unlike Ghana, there are state pensions and other welfare payments, but unemployment is much higher. Suspects that most average households doing what they did in 1980s, but rapid emergence of middle class has led to smaller households, nursery schools, private education. Proliferation of private home help: not just cleaning house but making sure old people in house are ok. Middle class now doing well, but depending on cheap labour, often migrant from elsewhere. TV documentary 'Market Women of Kumasi' or similar title, a few years ago. Emphasis on young girls learning the business – now a problem because of education.

What about education?

Britwum replies: bringing in your own relatives as household help; good for the helper because from a poorer household. Patrilineal: northern patrilineal said to be very different from southern patrilineal.

Andreas Eckert: child labour debate?

Amoah-Boampong: today, legal risk if you use the labour of a minor without payment.

Gareth Austin: would be great to periodise the changes; also, how far changes stretched existing categories or constituted changes of categories.

Reetika Subramanian: from own doctoral research in India: marriage often part of labour relationship in Indian sugar cane plantations, because male migrant workers would be accompanied by wife, an unpaid support worker.

Nana Yaw Sapong: told the story of their son, when at elementary school, being given a questionnaire for Religious & Moral Education, which included 'Who does the cooking in your home?' He wrote 'dad', because that was what he observed (father likes cooking, mother pays the fees). The teacher crossed out his answer as wrong.

Paper 2

**IS A WORKER, WHO IS NOT EMPLOYED, STILL A WORKER?
UNEMPLOYMENT IN GHANA SINCE THE 1950S**

Andreas Eckert

Abstract: Unemployment is a concept that emerged in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century in the context of an increasingly close link between the regulation of work and national order. In colonial Africa, it was not until the 1930s, in the context of the Great Depression, that we find the first references to the topic and, associated with it, the question of which interventions in the world of work are appropriate and within what framework. Until today, “unemployment” in Africa (and in Ghana, for that matter) remains an elusive concept. This has to do with a lack of coherent statistical data as well as issues of definition. Against this backdrop, this paper addresses some of the key aspects of the history of unemployment in Ghana since the 1950s, such as the “verandah boys”, who during the 1950s represented potentially threatening young males in the cities, many of them unemployed or informally employed; the role of workers’ brigades in the Nkrumah era; data on unemployment provided by the first Ghanaian population census; the impact of structural adjustment programs, and, finally, the current problem of limited job opportunities.

Discussion:

Amoah-Boampong (discussant): can we/should we ‘decolonise’ the terminology?

Nugent (discussant): ‘unemployment’ and ‘employment’ all about forcing complex realities into over-simplified scheme; better to think of ‘access to money’

Nkrumah’s ideal of the Ghanaian worker as modern, formally employed.

GLSS/WB figures say 60% unemployment in South Africa, 3% in Ghana; the reality must be in between, but if you think in terms of access to money, 3% might be roughly right

Eckert: ‘unemployment’ relevant as an actor’s category.

Austin: surely unemployment statistics are in different universes depending on whether you are in a state in which there are unemployment benefits: in the West you identify yourself as unemployed because there is a financial incentive, whereas in Ghana you are counted as unemployed only by census enumerators or survey research. ‘Access to income’ a very helpful framework, within which wage labour fits in. Suspects the number of people listed as unemployed increases roughly when hired labour rises as share of the economically active population.

Sapong: : ‘galamsey’ is the term currently used for work you do besides your formal job.

Vocational training: during Acheampong era there were discussions of how to train youths

for occupations (very gendered, e.g. sewing for girls). Department of Social Welfare is not functioning as originally intended.

Eckert: general African point: even in the prosperous 1960s, according to Ferguson & Cooper, not all workers believed in the promise of benefits, so invested at home in the provinces.

Paper 3

**EVIL SPIRITS AND UNION LEADERS: A NURSES AND MIDWIVES' PERSPECTIVE ON LABOUR
UNION STRUGGLES IN GHANA, 1970s – 2010**

Nana Yaw Boampong Sapong

Abstract: In the midst of labor negotiations between representatives of government and union leadership of the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association (GRNMA), a high-ranking government official mentioned women, evil spirits, and union leaders in the same breath. The GRNMA at that time was led by a woman. This paper is a follow-up paper to the inception conference paper titled “Organised Labour in Ghana’s Postcolonial History,” which sought to give a panoramic view of change in the working lives of different categories of workers, the shifting role and importance of labour organization, and the state’s attempt to regulate workers. “Evil Spirits and Union Leaders,” uses an ethnographic approach to dig deeper into the quotidian lives of union leaders, especially the leadership of the GRNMA.

Discussion:

Amoah-Boampong (discussant): enlarged on gendered criticisms of union leaders.

Nugent (discussant): bargaining power? Strengthened slightly by exit option (can get jobs overseas)

GA: solidarity strikes? Secondary strikes legal? In Britain in 1960s-80s, ‘wildcat’ strikes model v model of rank & file repeatedly voting for new union leadership.

Subramanian: in India too, female union leaders get called witches.

Paper 4

Market Integration and the Development of Capitalism in Ghana, 1987–2005

Igor Martins

Abstract: The development of capitalism in Sub-Saharan Africa after decolonisation has been a topic of significant interest among economic historians. Among the many ways in which the development of an economic system can be observed, the integration of the labour market and price integration emerge as a significant tool that conveys notions of earnings, mobility, and inequality. This paper contributes to such an endeavour by analysing data on prices and earnings in postcolonial Ghana, particularly after the Structural Adjustment Programmes, to cast light on the development of Capitalism in one of the most successful economies of the continent.

Discussion:

Nugent (discussant) What about looking at proximity to borders? Major markets in northern Côte d' Ivoire and southern Burkina perhaps affecting Ghanaian prices. There is a study using NASA data, of changing road densities in Ghana: places that used to be isolated became very much integrated.

Hedvig Lagercrantz: have you talked to someone who helped collect the data? Hedvig recommends her own taxi driver, who did exactly this.

GA: Newspapers as source on market prices of food etc (cf Tom Westland article in *Economic History of Developing Regions*, for colonial period).

Briitwum: minimum wage calculations need price data, absolute and relative,. The TUC has a research unit: every year when TUC go to negotiate with government about minimum wages, they collect data. Ministry of Agriculture too. The time when GDP was rebased was also a time when data was collected.

Paper 5

**Long-term changes in the rural agricultural labour market:
An inquiry into the labour dynamics on rice farms in Northern Ghana**

Felix Yao Amenorhu

Abstract: The investments by early post-independence governments in agriculture in Northern Ghana led to the creation of a rural agricultural labour market on Northern Ghana rice farms in

the 1970s. There is, however, little understanding of how this labour market has changed over time. This paper seeks to ascertain the long-term changes in size, gender and generation of the workforce employed on the rice farms between 1980 and 2017. Drawing on crop-farmer data from all the seven waves of the Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) and on literature review, the paper reveals a downtrend in the size of the workforce (both farmers and labourers) from the 1980s till the early 1990s. But then, by the late 1990s, the farmer population grew by 7.4%. In the 2000s, the farmer population experienced both downward and upward trends. Another finding is that from the 1980s to early 1990s, only household labour was used on the rice farms. From the late 1990s to the 2000s, however, rice farms employed both household and hired labour. With reference to gender, the proportion of female farmers has been extremely low although they grew in numbers after the early 1990s. The proportion of female hired labour grew faster to surpass the proportion of male hired labour from the late 1990s to the 2000s. Finally, with respect to generation, the proportion of youth rice farmers experienced an upward trend from the 1980s until the late 1990s and a downward trend until the 2000s. The aged population generally maintained an upward trend from the 1980s until the 2000s. The proportion of adult rice farmers has experienced both downward and upward trends, although they significantly outnumbered youth and aged farmers throughout the period under study. Extant literature attributes both the comparatively low size of female rice farmers and the surpassing proportion of female hired labourers to large gender gaps in land ownership and control in favour of men in Northern Ghana. The gradual decline in household labour and corresponding rise of hired labour are attributed to the increase in demand for youth schooling, which affected household farm labour availability. The study concludes that the lack of consistency in the growth of the workforce employed on rice farms in Northern Ghana results from incoherent policy and development initiatives of post-independence governments towards Northern Ghana, as well as from a drastic decline in state support and organised marketing for the domestic rice industry by the post-independence governments since the 1980s.

Discussion:

Nugent (discussant): ‘Tamale was a boom town at one point based on rice’; in the 1970s & even mid-1980s. Withdrawal of subsidies ‘a disaster’ for the rice. Van Hear’s thesis really good on rice, as is Shephard’s at Cambridge. A third unpublished thesis was by Adrian Antoine at SOAS, ‘maybe not quite so good.’

When Acheampong announced Operation Feed Yourself, for the first 2 years all the funding went to state corporations, and failed abysmally. Then decided to support commercial farming.

Also, World Bank projects on rice in North & Volta region. Paul found that the Department of Agriculture rice files were all taken by the WB project; Paul used them for the WB Volta

Region rice project; probably the files on the north were also with WB. Were they returned to the ministries or to the national archives?

Casamance rice production was destroyed by Asian rice imports; 'hollowed out'.

Austin: By definition, we all have a comparative advantage in something; and in this case, didn't it depend on state investment in irrigation and to subsidize tractors – which is fine, as with state intervention that made cotton cultivation at last a success in northern CdI and Burkina Faso.]

Recommend Paul Richards for comparison: many different ways of growing rice.

Rice a 'superior' crop on Ghanaian food market, as in India?

Britwum: There was a problem of people threshing rice on the floor, which deterred consumers.

Government policy before Kuffuor of helping finance small-scale rice production; this is said to be what 'killed *kwashiokor*'. But Kuffuor government ended that programme and lowered tariffs, hence imported rice proliferated.

Paper 6

Linking Farmers and Workers' Grievances with Agricultural Development in Post-independence Ghana

Hedvig Lagercrantz

Abstract: In 1959, Nkrumah adopted a socialist approach where farmers and workers were given a central role in the development of Ghana. The following regimes continued the approach to modernize the agricultural sector for development and to increase employment levels, which at times was not perceived well in regards to farmers and workers. State farms and enterprises were created to increase employment levels in rural areas, feed the growing population, modernize the agricultural sector and drive rapid industrialization. These aims were not met but instead rural life was increasingly unsettled. The majority of scholars have focussed on the institutional perspective of agricultural policies, but the link to workers' and farmers' agencies is not as common. There is a vast literature on how farmers and workers contested their conditions during the colonial era, but how these voices continued to be raised against the post-independence African governments has been covered only very partially. As a result, this article analyses how farmers' and workers' roles and grievances are linked to governmental policies in Ghana between 1960 and 1975. The sources used in this paper are comprised of national development plans and



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agricultural policy documents from the immediate post-independence period and farmers' and workers' complaints and petition letters from the national archive in the



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Western Region. This paper contents that the most common complaints and grievances from farmers and workers concerned the operations of the State Corporations. Farmers were deprived of farmland as a result of state land acquisitions for the establishment of State Farms and crops were destroyed in the process of clearing state-owned farmlands. Grievances of workers are evident from strikes where they protested against the lack of payment of wages, their housing situation, transportation issues, and unfair promotions.

Discussion:

Nugent welcomed the focus on the West, which is even more neglected in the historiography than the North. Strongly recommended asking chiefs about their own archives (he found great stuff in chiefs' archives during his own PhD research).

There was a general discussion of the sensitivities involved in asking for Cocobod data, with Amenorhu noting that international criticism, for example allegations about child labour, had probably contributed to this. Amoah-Boampong also raised the sensitivities involved in asking on the ground about galamsey mining on former cocoa farms.

Paper 7

**OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURES IN GHANA, 1951-2010:
STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION?**

Gareth Austin

Abstract: This paper introduces the aims, primary sources, and approach of my sub-project within the broad AHRC-DFG project. So far, I have focussed on the population censuses, which contain a limited amount of information of the structure of occupations as of 1958, and a lot more data on the half-century beginning in 1960. In this paper I present some of the headline figures from the censuses, notably about the distribution of employment between different sectors of the economy. The results confirm the stagnation of the share of manufacturing (and extraction) in employment. But they also show certain fundamental structural changes: a virtual tripling of the urban share of the population, and a marked shift of labour from agriculture to services. Clearly, if economic development is all about industrialisation, the conclusion about the extent of structural transformation achieved since independence must be very negative. But I suggest that, just as Ghanaians were on average

much better off in income per head, education and public health by 2010 than they had been in 1957, the diversification of the services sector and the achievement of economies of agglomeration, both by means of urbanisation, are positive changes whose significance is often underestimated. Further, analysing the census data on occupations highlights the major discontinuity in Ghanaian economic progress that was the period 1975-83: the 1984 census gives a range of indications of retrogression compared to trends established by 1970, and which reasserted themselves during 1983-2010. In short, the post-colonial period is actually more than one period in Ghanaian economic and labour history.

Discussion:

Nugent (discussant) observed that density maps show the extension of the road network facilitating widespread urbanization, which (as an OECD report noted last week) is not confined to big cities. Urbanization is particularly fast in border areas, such as the northeast. Nugent also discussed apprenticeships, which the school system has tried to encourage. But in the Volta Region, at least, people are now said increasingly to skip apprenticeship by going direct from school into jobs (for example, school leavers tend to be at an advantage over older people in computer design in the garments industry).

Other matters raised included the question of hired labour in food farming (**Lagercrantz**); the rise in both living costs and the cost of skilled artisanal labour in Accra, for example in the construction industry (**Sapong**); and the issue of whether oil booms favour or hinder manufacturing, and whether African countries can industrialize despite the advent of Artificial Intelligence that might undermine human capital as a competitive advantage in the world economy (**Muhammed Alakitan**).

Britwum referred to the comparative literature on urbanization without industrialization: a widespread phenomenon in the Global South, manifested in Ghana in the proliferation of churches and funeral homes. She noted, however, that university students are making soap, packaging it in different ways, and selling it online.

Eckert raised the question of how the growth in education is affecting the structure of employment, and remarked that the policy ideal now seems to be not the dedicated worker but the entrepreneur.

NEXT STEPS

Each of the project workers outlined their research plans for the rest of the year and beyond. Expectations of authors: each chapter should reflect on periodisation, including before and after Structural Adjustment, and reflect on sources and data; most chapters should include actors' reflections.

We also discussed logistical as well as intellectual aspects of the Concluding Conference in Accra, which will be a bigger affair, aimed at attracting a wide range of colleagues in related fields.

Finally, we discussed requirements for publication, and how the costs of open access can be met.



The opening session: from left to right, Felix Yao Amenorhu, Igor Martins, Gareth Austin, Paul Nugent, Akua Britwum, Andreas Eckert, Nana Yaw Sapon, Cyrelene Amoah-Boampong, Hedvig Lagercrantz, Sakae Gustafson.