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Ellen Hillbom · Erik Green

An Economic History of Development in sub-Saharan Africa

Economic Transformations and Political
Changes

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Foreword

This book project started in a restaurant in Stockholm one autumn evening 2007. Our motivation was the lack of good literature on Africa's economic and social history in Swedish that our students could read. The first Swedish edition was published in 2010 and met with some success. Although the Swedish market for a textbook of this type is limited, we felt that we had achieved our goals. We had filled a gap and provided an original contribution. And it turned out that the book was not only used for teaching at universities. There was a large community of amateur Africanists, aid workers, politicians and business people who also wanted to learn about the continent and to read something more digestible than academic work published in English.

Years went by and eventually we agreed with our Swedish publishing house that it was time for an update of the book and in 2018 we published a second edition. Meanwhile, we had also raised our level of ambition and realised that we had a contribution to make to the international market. Despite the vast literature on Africa in English, a basic and holistic textbook such as ours seemed to be missing. We signed a contract with Palgrave Macmillan, took advantage of the updates we had made in the Swedish second edition, hired a translator and the rest, as they say, is history.

As was the case with the original publication, this book is primarily intended as a textbook to be used by undergraduate students, but we hope that it can also be valuable to a broader audience. The experience of reaching outside the strict academic world has been very rewarding for us and we believe that there is a public interested in learning more about Africa—its history as well as its contemporary development challenges and opportunities. As economic historians we, of course, adhere to the old slogan that “history matters” and we are often surprised over how much is written about Africa that lacks a proper understanding of the long-term processes of change and development trends.

We have strived to combine staying away from an academic jargon that can be excluding, while at the same time incorporate the lessons learned from the latest research within the field of African economic history and African studies. We hope that the book is both accessible and informative. In the literature, Africa is often lumped together and simplified to a single story. Instead, we show diversity and discuss variation. Much of what is written is done so from a Eurocentric

perspective as if Africans' history did not start until the arrival of the Europeans and they have stayed without agency ever since. Our ambition is to emphasise Africans' perspectives.

Despite our best effort, it has been impossible for us to deal equally with all areas and aspects of Africa's history. Along the way, choices have been made and while we have worked on widening our scope as much as possible, we also fall back on knowledge that we have accumulated through our own research over the years. At the end of the day, there are more examples from so-called "British Africa" than countries with other colonial legacies, especially from our own research on Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. There is also a greater reliance on established economic history research, which is a field dominated by researchers from outside the continent itself than on internationally less well-known African scholars and writers. For this weakness, we take full responsibility and promise to continue reading and learning more about this fascinating region from a greater variety of sources.

As with any book project, we have not managed without the support from others. We would like to thank our publishing house in Sweden, Studentlitteratur, for their cooperation and assistance, especially Eric Rhen and Titti Meden. At Palgrave Macmillan, we have received support and comments from Kent Deng, Laura Pacey and Clara Heathcock. We are also indebted for the feedback from an anonymous reviewer. Last but not least, based on Sture Balgårds originals, Niklas Hillbom created a new layout of the maps and he generously let us use photos from his private collection.

Lund, Sweden
January 2019

Ellen Hillbom
Erik Green

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