

Christian Velasco (Warwick)

'Economic subjects: Commercial banks and the Africanisation process in Colonial Kenya'

At the edge of the independence and during the first years of independent life, the financial institutions in colonial Kenya were considered by the African politicians as part of the colonial past as those had been, in their opinion, at the exclusively service of the white settlers. The perception had been echoed by the historiography specialised in African economic and financial history, who catalogued the financial institutions, private and public, as unimportant for the social and economic life of the colony. However, as recent investigations have demonstrated, the financial history in colonial Africa is more complex than the literature had assumed.

In that sense, this paper attempts to make a contribution on the understanding of the financial life in colonial Africa, showing how the relationship and the perception of the financial sector towards the Africans changed during the time of the colonial domination as a result of the economic projects applied to the colony, the changes in the perception about the role that the local population should have in the imaginary of the British and colonial authorities, and by the African agency, that demanded to have more participation in the formal financial systems as savers, borrowers and employees.

Taking the case of the main commercial banks in the Kenya colony, The National Bank of India, Barclays DCO and the Standard Bank of South Africa. This paper makes an analysis of the Africanisation process of these institutions focusing its attention in the perception of the authorities of the banks towards the local population as economic actors, their incentives, the business strategy and how the bank's authorities balanced the risk with the possible gains of an expansion in to the African market between 1945 until the Kenya independence (1964). In doing that, the paper makes a comparison between the possibilities, strategies and incentives of each institution to begin a process of African inclusion, in order to understand the performance of each bank and how their performance should be understood.

To achieve its objectives, the research is based on unexplored archival material from private and public depositories, in particular internal communications between the different manager's levels inside banks, reports for internal management and correspondence of bank's official with government authorities. The use of these sources, allows to comprehend the perception of the financial institutions to the Africans as potential users of the banks, as well as to prove one of the central hypothesises of the research: That the local management staff, played a crucial role pushing the commercial banks in the colony towards a more inclusive policy, helping the institutions to be more prepared to face an unexpected independence process.