

# CREATIVE METHODOLOGIES

Writing the stories  
of **working women**  
from popular  
classes in African  
urban milieux,  
1920 — 1970

*Conference Program*

**8 — 10 January 2024**

## LOCATION

Room 100, Ground floor,  
Centre des Colloques  
Campus Condorcet,  
Place du Front populaire,  
93322, Aubervilliers  
(Metro : Front Populaire)



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IMAF  
Institut des mondes africains  
UMR 8171 (CNRS) - UMR 243 (IRD)



Female cheese vendor, Shendi railway station, Sudan  
SAD A8/212, 1936 – W. Nicholls collection  
Courtesy of the Sudan Library, University of Durham, UK

**Zoom link for the three days:**

<https://cnrs.zoom.us/j/96456641290?pwd=b1NkWUtjWnRhV3FUclQwZS9hUDJmUT09>

(passcode: 1iM7zc)

## Day 1. Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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9:00 – 9:45 Welcome and presentation of the project

9:45 – 10:45 **Noor Nieftagodien**, University of Witwatersrand

*South Africa, Social History and the Recovery of Women's Experiences in History*

*Break*

11:00 – 12:00 **Mahassin Abdel Galil**, EHESS, Paris

*Sudanese Women's History through Biographies and Microhistory: Implicit Methodological Challenges*

12:00 – 13:00 **Akosua Darkwah**, University of Ghana

*The River of Life as an Interview Method*

*Lunch (IMAF, Bâtiment de recherches sud, 3rd floor, room n. 3.122)*

14:30 – 15:30 **Danielle Van den Heuvel**, University of Amsterdam

*What can the Early Modern do for You? Uncovering Ephemeral Activities on Everyday City Life using the Snapshot Method*

15:30 – 16:30 **Darren Newbury**, University of Brighton

*Historical Photographs and Photographic Histories: Methodological Reflections on Research in Photographic Archives of Africa*

*Break*

16:45 – 17:30 **Karin Pallaver**, University of Bologna

*ERC Research Project: Ayahs in Kenya: a Preliminary Exploration of Themes and Sources*

## Day 2. Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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9:00 – 10:00 **Felix Meier zu Selhausen**, Utrecht University

*Gender Inequality and urban Elite Formation: New Insights from Parish Registers in British Colonial Africa*

10:00 – 11:00 **Filipa Ribeiro da Silva**, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

*Searching for African Women's Urban Occupations in Colonial Censuses: Preliminary Reflections and Comparisons*

*Break*

11:15 – 12:15 **Tim Gibbs**, University of Paris Nanterre

*The Widows of Warwick Junction Pavement Markets (Durban, South Africa): Studying Commercial Networks in a Time of Crisis*

12:15 – 13:00 **Domenico Cristofaro**, University of Bologna

*ERC Research Project: Creative Mobilities: Introductory Thoughts on Migration, Infrastructure Development and Market Traders in Colonial Northern Ghana*

*Lunch (IMAF, Bâtiment de recherches sud, 3rd floor, room n. 3.122)*

14:30 – 15:30 **Salvatory Nyanto**, University of Dar es Salaam

*Women, Brewing and Urban Professionalism in Twentieth-Century Tabora, Western Tanzania, 1930-1970*

15:30 – 16:15 **Alma Simba**, EHESS, Paris

*PhD ERC Research Project: Women's Resistance and Informal Labour in Dar es Salaam, 1950-1985*

*Break*

16:30 – 17:15 **Daniel Worku Kebede**, EHESS, Paris

*PhD ERC Research Project: A History of Women in the Informal Sectors in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1886 -1991): the Case of Weavers and Potters*

17:15 – 18:00 **Juliet Tiwaah Adu Boahen**, EHESS, Paris

*PhD ERC Research Project: Wayside Female Dressmakers: A Historical Analysis of Cultural, Economic and Social Impacts of Dressmaking in the Gold Coast and Ghana, 1919-1970*

## Day 3. Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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9:00 – 10:00 **Emma Hunter**, University of Edinburgh

*Swahili Language Newspapers and the History of Urban Working Women in Mid-twentieth-century Tanzania*

10:00 – 11:00 **Elara Bertho**, Laboratoire Afriques dans le Monde, Bordeaux

*Can Literature Rescue History? Paradoxes in Subalterns' Voices (Guinea, 1970s)*

*Break*

11:15 – 12:15 **Heather Sharkey**, University of Pennsylvania

*'The Guide to Modern Cooking': Tracing the History of Sudanese Women's Domestic Labor Through a Home Economics Textbook*

12:15 – 13:00 **Mariam Sharif**, EHESS, Paris

*PhD Research Project: The History of Nursing: Education, Practices and Political Participation in Sudan from 1899-1970s*

*Lunch (IMAF, Bâtiment de recherches sud, 3rd floor, room n. 3.023)*

14:30 – 15:15 **Anne Hugon**, University of Paris 1

*ERC Research Project: Documenting the History of Birth Attendants versus Documenting the History of Registered Midwives in the Gold Coast/Ghana: some Preliminary Reflections on Sources*

15:15 – 16:00 **Pierre Guidi**, IRD, Paris and **Tirsit Sahledengle**, University of Addis Ababa

*ERC Research Project: Discourses 'From Within' versus Discourses 'About'? The Work of Ethiopian 'Traditional' Midwives in the Press and in their Own Testimonies (1970s)*

*Break*

16:15 – 17:00 **Elena Vezzadini**, Institut des Mondes Africains, Paris

*ERC Research Project: Only Shadows of Traces: Studying Hairdressers and Estheticians in Colonial and Early Post-Colonial Sudan*

## Abstracts

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**Juliet Tiwaah Adu Bohaen**, [maametiwaa200@gmail.com](mailto:maametiwaa200@gmail.com), EHES

*Wayside Female Dressmakers: A Historical Analysis of Cultural, Economic and Social Impacts of Dressmaking in the Gold Coast and Ghana, 1919-1970*

While dressmaking was one of the major economic activities both men and women engaged in for livelihood in pre-colonial Ghana, it turned out to be one of the popular urban female professions in colonial Ghana. Among other reasons, the male dominated colonial economy and the focus of missionary and British colonial education for girls in the Gold Coast on home making seemed to have posed dressmaking as feminine profession. Despite the type of training (formal and informal) many female dressmakers had, there existed different work ethos, subjectivities, marginalized societal perceptions and perceptions on female dressmakers. Relying heavily on oral history, archival data and other evidence-based materials, this proposal seeks to provide a historical account on how dressmaking became a popular female urban profession and how it has transformed and impacted women's lives in both colonial and post-colonial times. Taking into consideration colonialism, urbanization, technological advancement, the emergence of women movements and nationalism, this paper seeks to explore and provide a historical analysis of the general impacts, societal perceptions, system of pricing, work ethos and professionalism of female dressmakers from 1919 to 1970. This will help provide a historical study on the untold achievements of most urban female professions in the Gold Coast and provide a framework within which the contributions of women would be integrated into the economic history of Ghana.

**Domenico Cristofaro**, [domenico.cristofaro2@unibo.it](mailto:domenico.cristofaro2@unibo.it), University of Bologna

*Creative Mobilities: Introductory Thoughts on Migration, Infrastructure Development and Market Traders in Colonial Northern Ghana Abstract*

The history of migrations in Ghana is closely tied to the flows of male migrant laborers who, since the early decades of the twentieth century, moved from the north to work in the cocoa fields or gold mines in the south. These migrations were facilitated and supported by both the colonial state before independence and the post-colonial state after independence. However, many women also participated in these migrations, yet the literature

and primary sources are notably silent about them. This presentation aims to better contextualize the issue and propose some research perspectives to overcome this reticence. Specifically, the presentation will examine how infrastructural changes in mobility between the north and south of the country, as well as urbanization, influenced the success and careers of female traders from the North. Additionally, it will suggest research paths to explore how the professional ethics and networks developed by these women, in turn, influenced mobilities and the commercial growth of the northern regions of Ghana.

**Akosua K. Darkwah**, [adarkwah@ug.edu.gh](mailto:adarkwah@ug.edu.gh), University of Ghana

*Beyond the Archive: The River of Life as an Interview Method*

In this presentation, I share the importance of arts-based research approaches for the humanities. Arts-based research draws on different art forms – dance, music, poetry, etc – in data generation, analysis, interpretation and representation. The river of life is one such arts-based research approach. It uses drawings to generate information about the lives of research participants. Although arts-based research is primarily used in performing arts spaces, I draw on my own work in the social sciences which uses the river of life approach to look at women's work as well as that of Denov and Shevell's use of the river of life approach in their work with young people born out of rape to illustrate the usefulness of the arts-based approach in general and the river of life approach in particular. As an autobiographical mapping tool, I demonstrate its utility especially for working on the life histories of creatives such as fashion designers, dancers and visual artists.

**Tim Gibbs**, [t.gibbs@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:t.gibbs@parisnanterre.fr), University of Paris Nanterre

*The Widows of Warwick Junction Pavement Markets (Durban, South Africa): Studying Commercial Networks in a Time of Crisis*

Some decades ago, as a young Development Studies MA student newly arrived in Durban, my class was taken to visit a groundbreaking project at the downtown transport hub at Warwick Junction. Here we saw how poor vulnerable female street traders who colonised the pavements as apartheid spatial segregation collapsed, had recently been provided municipal facilities by a progressive post-apartheid city-hall. As I soon realised, for the sorts of international policymakers who toured the Global South in search of examples of spatial justice, Durban



was a laboratory of attempts to produce a fairer ‘compact city’ out of the crisis of apartheid. This paper will ask what sorts of knowledge about South African street traders has been produced by this nexus of radical researchers, policy-makers and activists? And what are the lacunae of this research agenda – especially when South Africa is compared to the classic studies of West African city markets?

**Danielle van den Heuvel**, [D.W.A.G.vandenHeuvel@uva.nl](mailto:D.W.A.G.vandenHeuvel@uva.nl), University of Amsterdam

*What Can the Early Modern do for You? Uncovering Ephemeral Activities on Everyday City Life using the Snapshot Method*

This talk centres on the snapshot method developed by the research group The Freedom of the Streets to capture everyday activities in the streets of urban Eurasia in the premodern period. Faced with the challenge to collect and analyse evidence on early modern street life, the project drew on social, spatial and visual history methodologies to develop a new approach to the study of gendered spatial relations. It foregrounds incidental evidence drawn from highly diverse materials including witness depositions, diaries, prints and sketches enabling a comparative history of the gendering of space the cities of Amsterdam, Edo/Tokyo and Batavia/Jakarta.

**Anne Hugon**, [anne.hugon@wanadoo.fr](mailto:anne.hugon@wanadoo.fr), University of Paris 1

*Documenting the History of Birth Attendants versus Documenting the History of Registered Midwives in the Gold Coast/Ghana: some Preliminary Reflections on Sources*

Working on the history of licensed midwives in the Gold Coast proved reasonably easy thanks to the relative abundance of written sources, mostly from the Medical Department, which was the colonial equivalent of a Ministry of Health. These archives were kept at the PRAAD in Accra but also in various regional archive centres (seven of them altogether). I managed to complete this research on the history of Gold Coast/Ghanaian licensed midwives thanks to sources found in the press, in various centres in Britain and with interviews (about 20 with previous Ghanaian midwives and 30 with women who had given birth in the 1940s and 1950s). This experience proved fruitful for trying to imagine where to look for sources on unlicensed midwives. Because the latter did not go through colonial training institutions, they left scarce traces in the colonial papers. One must therefore be

imaginative to think of “alternative” sources, such as (again) the press, oral sources, and family memories – not neglecting however colonial sources, which may refer to them, albeit to condemn their practice.

**Emma Hunter**, [emma.hunter@ed.ac.uk](mailto:emma.hunter@ed.ac.uk), University of Edinburgh

*Swahili Language Newspapers and the History of Urban Working Women in Mid-twentieth-century Tanzania*

This paper seeks to contribute to the workshop’s discussion of creative methodologies for writing the history of working women and their role in the making of colonial and post-colonial urban fabrics through a discussion of what we can learn about the lives and experiences of urban working women in Tanzania from Swahili-language newspapers, as well as the methodological challenges involved in using newspapers in this way. The paper focuses on two Swahili-language newspapers, the Chagga Council district newspaper Komkya, (later renamed Kusare) and the Catholic newspaper Kiongozi. Both of these newspapers had ‘Women’s Pages’, which served to foreground the new professional opportunities which women were seizing and the professional spaces which women were moving into in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, the wider newspaper and particularly the ‘letters to the editor’ pages were revealing of some of the tensions which these social, cultural and economic changes provoked.

**Darren Newbury**, [D.M.Newbury@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:D.M.Newbury@brighton.ac.uk), University of Brighton

*Historical Photographs and Photographic Histories: Methodological Reflections on Research in Photographic Archives of Africa*

Based on research in a range of photographic archives of Africa, those located on the continent as well as elsewhere, this presentation will reflect on methodological approaches to photographs as objects of research. In recent decades, the photographic image has become an important focus of attention for researchers outside of specialist studies of the medium, including across anthropology and social and cultural history. Moving beyond the treatment of photographs as objective historical documents or simple illustrations of events, this has led to a rich methodological debate around the photographic image. It has even been proposed that photography has changed the practice of history. The presentation will explore research strategies that have been brought to photographs, as images, as historical sources, and as relational objects, reflecting on the agency they embody, their enduring



presence, their mobilities, and the ways in which they can be re-activated in the present. It is argued that any engagement with photographs as history needs to understand the complex forms of production and circulation that underpin their existence and availability. To illustrate the discussion, the presentation will use photographs drawn primarily from two archival collections. The first, a collection of photographs by an individual photographer who worked in and around Cape Town in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The second, the substantial archive of the United States Information Agency (USIA), the public diplomacy arm of the US government, specifically photographs that formed part of the agency's engagement with Africa in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Noor Nieftagodien**, [Noor.Nieftagodien@wits.ac.za](mailto:Noor.Nieftagodien@wits.ac.za), University of the Witwatersrand

*Social History and the Recovery of Women's Experiences in History*

Social Historians in South Africa have since the 1970s made important contributions to uncovering hidden histories of subaltern group with the aim of challenging hegemonic narratives and to produce alternative histories. These 'histories from below' generally sought to centre the experiences of the black majority in a context of mounting struggles against white minority rule. It was recognised early on that gender would be critical in the project of creating new histories, and early interventions focused on the role of women in resistance, as trade unionists, community leaders and members of various liberation organisation. Drawing on this work and influenced by feminist scholarship, attention shifted to uncovering the everyday lives of women in various spheres, much of which were overlooked in earlier scholarship. In this presentation, I aim to examine some of the recent research on the quotidian experiences of women that have been undertaken in the History Workshop at Wits University and to reflect on methodological issues related to this work. The first example is a Public History project involving trade unions in which young members interviewed 'veterans' of the movement with the aim of engendering intergenerational conversations about the histories of women in building trade unions in different periods of the country's history. Secondly, an initiative by women who were among the early members of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s who have been concerned to produce their own histories, on their own terms, particularly to speak about their personal experiences that have hitherto been ignored or silenced in the scholarship of this movement. Thirdly, a project on the working lives of women in one part of Soweto explores the shifts in the feminisation of labour and how young women in the township are turning increasingly to the informal economy (especially small-scale businesses such as hairdressing and food outlets) to avoid the ravages of unemployment. Notwithstanding the precarity and hardships associated with these activities, they appear to

inculcate a degree of (limited) autonomy and pride. Methodologically, most of this work has been undergirded by oral histories, especially life history interviews, to record multiple facets of women's experiences. It is a means deliberately to underscore the entanglements between the personal and political, albeit not without challenges about how to record women's histories.

**Salvatory S. Nyanto**, [ssnyanto@gmail.com](mailto:ssnyanto@gmail.com), University of Dar es Salaam

*Women, Brewing and Urban Professionalism in Twentieth-Century Tabora, Western Tanzania, 1930-1970*

Studies about women and slavery in Africa have attracted voluminous scholarly attention. Nevertheless, attempts into which women used brewing to forge an independent profession in the urban setting has been limited. This paper centers on oral and documentary sources to show how women used brewing as an alternative path to escape their socio-economic predicaments including the shackles of slavery. Not only was brewing “a highly profitable undertaking” for women but it also made them become the “elite among the servile.” In 1963, in response to legal and tax requisites, women formed an Association of African Women Brewers (Umoja wa Wanawake Wapika Pombe) with its headquarters in Tabora which augmented their work as “urban professionals” because it spearheaded and coordinated the demands of women across the western province. In the end, the formation of an association of women's brewers consolidated the public sphere and opened a possibility for women to explore opportunities beyond what the colonial state could offer.

**Karin Pallaver**, [karin.pallaver@unibo.it](mailto:karin.pallaver@unibo.it), University of Bologna

*Ayabs in Kenya: a Preliminary Exploration of Themes and Sources*

The use of the term *ayah* (from the Portuguese *aia*, meaning mother, tutor, in Hindi and Urdu *āyā*) became in use in the Indian Ocean world since the arrival of Europeans to refer to Indian women who took care of European children. In India, *ayabs* became the backbone of childcare, the “intimate others” in Anglo-Indian homes. Several works have focused on the history of *ayabs* in India and Great Britain, but little is known about their history in other parts of the British empire, especially in East Africa. This is quite surprising, considering the relevant presence of Indian migrants in Kenya and the crucial role that Indian nannies had in childcare for European settlers. During the colonial period, an increasing number of African women were also recruited as domestic workers and called

ayahs. Being that domestic work was largely a male occupation, childcare work was one of the few opportunities of paid employment for African women in urban areas. They were mainly of Ganda, Nandi and Kikuyu origin and their presence (and activism) was testified by the fact that ayahs were among the few working women contributing to labor organizing that started in Kenya during WWII. This paper is a preliminary exploration of the sources available to study the history of ayahs in Kenya from 1919 to 1970 and especially 1) their number; 2) the wages they earned; 3) their origin; 4) their relationship with each other and with their employers; 5) the ways in which they organized their working time and their family/personal relations; 6) their participation to labor associations.

**Filipa Ribeiro da Silva**, [filipa.ribeirodasilva@iisg.nl](mailto:filipa.ribeirodasilva@iisg.nl), International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

*Searching for African Women's Urban Occupations in Colonial Censuses: Preliminary Reflections and Comparisons*

In this presentation I will address the following questions: i) how can we use colonial censuses to study women's urban occupations? ii) what are possible alternative sources to complement or replace colonial censuses? and iii) how can we classify urban occupations? To tackle these lines of enquiry, I will discuss the potential and limitation of European colonial censuses for the study of urban occupations of African women, from the late nineteenth to the last quarter of the twentieth century. In addition, I will be looking into some alternative source to complement information on colonial censuses, or to fill gaps in periods when censuses were not carried out by colonial authorities or by African governments after independence. To close my talk, I will also discuss some of the most used systems of occupational classification, pointing how their strengths and weaknesses. While doing so, I will pay special attention to their application to examining gender variations in occupational structures over time and classification of female urban occupations. Most of the data that I will be presenting and discussing will be drawn from Portuguese colonial censuses done over the twentieth century given my previous experience with source materials from various territories formerly under Portugal's rule. However, comparisons with other colonial censuses and other source materials will be done whenever possible.

**Tirsit Sahledengil**, [trsiluv@gmail.com](mailto:trsiluv@gmail.com), Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University

**Pierre Guidi**, [pierre.guidi@ird.fr](mailto:pierre.guidi@ird.fr), Université Paris Cité, IRD, Ceped

*Writing an Ethiopian Midwife Biography in Crossing Private Archives and Interviews*

This presentation will first present private archives given by the family of an Ethiopian midwife, who practiced from the 1960s to the early 2000s, and whose biography we want to write from the perspective of popular history. Her daughters, who gave us an interview, kept several archives as photographs, training material, working tools, personal work notebooks, and old press articles about her life and work. We will then present the main milestones in her biography, from her training by her own mother in the 1960s to the end of her career more than 40 years later. Many questions come to mind: What has been her role, which went far beyond her work as a midwife and health-carer, in the life and organization of the community? How did she view her social responsibilities? Was she involved in midwifery networks or associations? What were their functions? Who controlled these associations and how did they structure the profession? How her work evolved during a period when the state, women's welfare associations and international agencies became increasingly involved in training and monitoring the work of the midwives? In May 2024, we hope to continue our discussions with her family (her daughters and her sister), and then visit her neighborhood to ask the community about her life and social roles. In the meantime, we will show to community members the archive documents kept by the family and ask them to comment on it. The final aim of this presentation is to propose and gather from you incentives for a creative methodology and writing.

**Felix Meier zu Selhausen**, [f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl](mailto:f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl), Utrecht University

*Gender Inequality and Urban Elite Formation: New Insights from Parish Registers in British colonial Africa*

Using educational and occupational statistics derived from 30,000 marriage registers obtained from six major cities in British colonial Africa, we show how early colonial mission education helped African men access formal labour. Women were relegated to informal and homemaking activities instead, even if mission schooling facilitated their social mobility via marriage. The early-colonial rise in gender inequality was followed by a remarkable decline herein after World War II helped by the Africanization and feminization of the civil service alongside Western women's liberalization movement. This process was relatively faster in West Africa where women's pre-colonial economic independence contested colonial ideals of domestic virtue.

**Mariam Sharif**, [mariamfive@gmail.com](mailto:mariamfive@gmail.com), EHESS

*The history of nursing: education, practices, work and political participation in Sudan from 1899-1970s*

Medical sociology and anthropology have made much use of grounded theory, which derives its concepts from direct observation of practices, as everyday work is full of routine and small variations. The historical study of professional work confronts thus with complications, as many everyday practices are rarely documented. This is even more the case with women's work, which has long been neglected, and especially with professions that have long been considered to be peripheral. In this sense, a history of nursing is an extraordinary challenge, most of all in a context where historiography is still limited and/or very focused on limited issues, such as Sudanese historiography. The few major works on medical history that exist, for instance, have little to say about other than medical doctors and laboratory science. There are, however, important reasons to study women's labor in general and medical work in particular, for both colonial and postcolonial history. The professional education and related behavior of women was not only one of the central elements of the British 'civilizing mission' but continued to be an important issue in both gender and labor politics after independence. At the same time, while there are some iconic female figures in the history of the independence movement, as well as the early parliaments, their overall role and contribution as intellectual and activist personalities as well as sustainers of everyday life is strongly underrepresented. A focus on nursing can contribute much to challenge these gaps. Since both men and women were educated and working as nurses, the details of gendering professions can be traced well. Looking closely at involved institutions, such as the nursing college in Khartoum, allows differentiated analysis how and which students were accepted in terms of belonging, socio-economic status, and gender. This can be related to the general infrastructure, educational and development politics of the colonial postcolonial states, e.g. vis-à-vis missionary schools and Arabicization; this also implies look at the geographical distribution of medical care and the underlying rationale. An even greater level of detail can be achieved by an additional biographical study of biographies of nurses who represent different level of education, practices and generation. A closer look at nursing as professional status and social role needs to discuss precolonial, colonial and postcolonial notions of care for the sick, the wider meaning of the Arabic term *mumarrīḍ*. This concerns not only the introduction of biomedical norms of professional identity, in relation to previous forms of knowledge and practice. This looks also at the hierarchies they come with (medical doctor, medical assistants, nurses, midwives), both in salary structure and prestige as well as in society's acceptance or suspicions. There is a chance here to discuss questions of gender, race, belonging, and labor together. But there is also an important aspect of political participation. Nurses, as part of a new, British- educated stratum in society, formed part of transformations in the way political participation was understood and undertaken. This is not only regarding the development towards unions, where both the nurses' union and individual nurses as influential members in other unions are to be considered. The role both can play and have played in politics was beyond the reform of working conditions or other labor rights; it extended to political action towards changing the

government or regime. But this historical role remains merely indicated from anecdotal evidence that needs deeper study and analysis.

**Heather Sharkey**, [hsharkey@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:hsharkey@sas.upenn.edu), University of Pennsylvania

*“The Guide to Modern Cooking”: Tracing the History of Sudanese Women’s Labor through a Home Economics Textbook*

How and where can we trace the history of “working women” – and of women working – when sources seem limited or lacking? I address this question for Sudanese history by considering one Arabic book which offers insights into female labor within households. Called *Dalil al-tahi al-hadith*, or “The Guide to Modern Cooking,” this volume was a textbook and cookbook, which the Sudanese government published in 1973. Its authors, Madina Babikr al-Ghali and Nafisa Khalil Jabbara, included abundant recipes, not only for food but also for household cleaning products. They covered diet, nutrition, and exercise, too, and set out “advice for arranging the home.” Their intended readers were young women studying college-level home economics. Fifty years ago, this book – a cheap black-and-white edition with cartoon-style illustrations – would have circulated widely in Sudanese classrooms. But today, “The Guide to Modern Cooking” is rare. WorldCat, which is the union catalogue for tens of thousands of libraries around the world, registers only one copy anywhere – at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Now recognizing the singularity of this book, the Library of Congress refuses to lend it through the American “Inter-Library Loan” system, so that researchers can only read it in situ. The rarity of “The Guide to Modern Cooking” serves as a metaphor for the often-invisible and hard-to-reach history of women. Historians agree that cookbooks have been highly “gendered” texts, associated with female domestic food preparation and undervalued as scholarly texts. These assumptions explain why few academic institutions have consistently collected and catalogued cookbooks, and why an Arabic book like this one may have become ephemeral. I will argue that “The Guide to Modern Cooking” built on British and Egyptian colonial legacies in the field of Sudanese female education and labor going back to the 1920s, ‘30s, and ‘40s and that it has many lessons to impart. It reveals attitudes towards domesticity and beauty and emphasizes the importance of Sudanese women as guardians of familial health and hygiene. It yields information about food and cuisine as well as technology and material culture (for example, in the form of refrigerators and kitchen stoves). It also offers insights into the history of nationalism and class dynamics. When it appeared in 1973 (during the lull between the first and second Sudanese civil wars), opportunities for female secondary and higher education were expanding. Against this context, the book appealed to members of Sudan’s aspirational Muslim middle classes. These young women wanted to be wise and refined; modern yet respectful of traditions (for example, by observing Ramadan fasts). At the same time, they expected to



lead lives that would entail significant day-to-day work in the form of preparing food, washing clothes, supervising children, and more. In short, I will argue, by creatively using a textbook and cookbook like this one, we can make visible the history of women and their labor.

**Alma Simba**, [almasimb@gmail.com](mailto:almasimb@gmail.com), EHESS

*Women's Resistance and Informal Labour in Dar es Salaam, 1950-1985*

This project explores street vending performed by women in the urban centre of Dar es Salaam from 1950-1985. The project takes street vending as a multi-faceted “informal” profession ranging from selling food to city dwellers to selling vegetables and wares on the roadside. The project will analyse the perception of the colonial state on urban women’s labour in relation to early conceptualisations about the city planning of Dar es Salaam and its growth in the post WWII era. It will delve into how the archive - as a product of the colonial state - has upheld assumptions of women’s labour. The work seeks to offer alternatives to studies on women’s labor through photographs, oral histories, personal testimony, and art forms. The silences of the archive are not limited to the colonial period but to the independence and post-colonial period too. Official documents on the types of labour women do, and how they contributed to the independence movement, will also be explored in this project. The work argues that street vending was - and remains - a profession to which women made a livelihood for themselves, resisted colonial barriers, subverted orders and conceptualisations of city structures and performed agency. The work believes that women’s history requires a feminist, de-colonial, materialist approach in which archives can be used to offer statist insights on women’s labour and its treatment throughout history while also adopting a subversive approach where women and their personal agency is centred.

**Elena Vezzadini**, [elena.vezzadini@cnr.fr](mailto:elena.vezzadini@cnr.fr), CNRS

*Only Shadows of Traces: Studying Hairdressers and Estheticians in Colonial and Early Post-Colonial Sudan*

The existing literature on service professions that we could broadly define as “beauty specialists” (*mashattat* – or hairdressers, henna lady or *hennanat*, and so on) in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sudan is scarce, yet it powerfully shows the peculiarities of these professions, especially when compared to other categories of male and female labourers. The absence of the notion of a fixed price for a certain service, the importance of affective work for maintaining a secure income, and the social embeddedness of these professions have pushed one scholar to define

them as “cultural brokers” (Keynon 1991: 57). “Beauty specialists” seem absent from any type of official archives - including photographic records, as these women worked behind the gates of theirs or others’ home, thus the few scholars working on them have largely relied on oral accounts.

But from April 2023, a deadly conflict broke out in Sudan, and it is still ongoing. For the coming years it is likely that it will be impossible to travel to Sudan, not to mention the amount of loss, suffering and displacement that renders ethically difficult the interviewing process. If many among the Sudanese middle class have been able to move to Egypt or to other Gulf states, professionals from popular classes and/or their descendants cannot be easily located outside Sudan.

This presentation will reflect on what to do. Clearly in this situation, the history of beauty professions can be grasped only through their shadows in sources: for instance, we find traces of fabulous hairdressing in 19<sup>th</sup> century travelers’ literature; there are hints of the role of *mashattat* in marriages and other ceremonies in fleeting passages in historical newspapers; and, of course, accounts of wealthy clients... Perhaps the impossibility of collecting oral accounts and the silence of archives has at least the merit of pushing the historian to ‘intensive’ forms of creative methodologies. The aim here is to think together at various possible ‘shadows’ in sources, with the hope that by accumulating hints, we may end deciphering silhouettes that are not completely unfathomable.

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*A History of Women in the Informal Sectors in Addis Ababa from 1886 to 1991: The Case of Weavers and Potters*

In the historiography of Ethiopia, women have received little attention. This lack of attention to women is a significant oversight, even compared with other African countries. The few existing studies on women are mainly focused on popular and notable women rather than ordinary women. Such ordinary women who engaged in weaving, pottery, and other informal economic activities had a significant contribution to the socio-economic growth of Addis Ababa from the early foundation period. Despite their major contribution in the socio-economic sector, they retained the bottom ladder in the social hierarchy. Gradually, social marginalization was followed by spatial segregation, leading to the creation of different pockets of residential places in Addis Ababa like *Shama* and *Shakla Safar*, the weavers and potters quarters, respectively. While marginalization was common to both sexes, the situation for women was quite different. They must bear the burden both in the public and domestic spheres. As a result, this research proposal is motivated to examine the complex and interwoven experiences that women endured in the capital as a result of their sex, employment, and identity. In addition, the study focuses on national policies

and programs in an effort to change the situation of this social classless society and to end societal marginalization over time. The proposed study intends to shed light on urban women workers in the informal sector, with a focus on potters and weavers in Addis Ababa from its foundation in 1886 to the fall of the *Derg* regime in 1991. Methodologically, it aims to depict more stories and experiences of regular women in a bottom-up approach and present women's history from a women's perspective by weaving oral sources together with different threads of other valuable written sources. To fill the theoretical gap, the study will follow an interdisciplinary approach to utilize the findings, insights, theories, hypotheses, and other analytical tools generated by scholars from other disciplines to reconstruct an inclusive women's history from below.