Explorations in Economic History 94 (2024) 101623

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Explorations in Economic History

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/eeh

Colonial legacies and wealth inequality in Kenya

Rebecca Simson

Department of History, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Wealth inequality
Kenya
Africa
Colonialism

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the evolution of Kenya's wealth distribution from the late 1950s to the present. Utilizing previously untapped probate and administration sources, it measures the share of Kenyans leaving estates at death, and maps how this wealth-owning strata has changed over time. It shows a growth in African estates after independence, and by the 1980s roughly 8 % of Kenyans left estates at death, largely a consequence of land titling and land reform. Meanwhile, European estates dwindled as settlers divested. Since the 1990s, Nairobi-based estate-holders are growing in share, reflecting the importance of urban property to the portfolios of the wealthy. Measures of top wealth shares suggest high wealth inequality in both the late colonial period and the present, but today's wealth inequality is driven by the uneven distribution of housing wealth, more so than by agricultural land. These findings illustrate how a variety of colonial legacies influenced wealth accumulation in postcolonial Kenya.

1. Introduction

Whether or not an African wealth-owning class was emerging in postcolonial Africa preoccupied many social scientists of the 1960s and 1970s and motivated a rich set of case studies on questions of wealth and inequality (Dumont, 1966; Fanon, 1963; Iliffe, 1983; Kitching, 1980; Leys, 1975; Lloyd, 1966; Swainson, 1977). These scholars viewed the distribution of wealth, more so than income, as key to understanding political outcomes in Africa's newly independent states, and questioned whether the limited indigenous ownership of wealth would perpetuate dependence on foreign capital or capitalists (Mkandawire, 2009). However, as few African countries, either today or in the past, produce data on the size or distribution of the private wealth stock, such debates always rested on rickety quantitative foundations. Furthermore, these studies typically ended their analysis in the 1970s, and few subsequent studies has sought to trace the changing distribution of wealth in African countries up to the present.

Can unconventional sources shed further light on wealth inequality in African countries since decolonisation? With a focus on Kenya, this article introduces a previously unutilized Kenyan source of data, notices of estates under probate or administration. It uses these notices to measure the share of the Kenyan population leaving estates at death and the characteristics of those estate-leavers, to give a picture of African wealth accumulation, and European divesture, between the late 1950s and the present. It complements this with a range of survey data from around 1960 and the 2010s that help to map the structure of Kenya's private wealth stock at these two points in time.

Many studies have linked wealth inequality in formerly colonized regions to colonial policies and institutions (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Angeles, 2007; Frankema, 2010). Using a narrow definition of wealth to mean assets that are privately owned and saleable, much of Africa's contemporary private wealth stock has its origins in the colonial era (for a discussion of wealth definitions, see Frankel, 1938, p. 4). Although pre-colonial property rights regimes existed over a variety of asset types, not least enslaved labourers

E-mail address: rebecca.simson@history.ox.ac.uk.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2024.101623
Received 10 January 2024; Received in revised form 12 June 2024; Accepted 5 September 2024
Available online 11 September 2024

(Frankema et al., 2023), Africa's wealth stock changed profoundly under colonial rule. Colonial-era investments in rail and road increased production for export and raised the value of well-positioned agricultural land and mineral deposits. New colonial capitals and other urban centres created or expanded markets for urban real-estate, and became sites for the establishment of firms, factories, and in a few cases, stock markets. Colonialism created a particularly deep imprint in settler colonies such as South Africa, Rhodesia and Kenya, where large land tracts were appropriated and apportioned to non-indigenous settlers, generating land scarcities that catalysed land and labour markets and created a demand for private land rights.

Such property rights were unequally bestowed. Individual land and property tenure was often granted only to Europeans or other non-indigenous settlers. In colonies and regions where African peasant farming predominated, much of the agricultural land remained in African hands, but typically under customary land tenure regimes that prevented owners from selling or mortgaging their land. Colonialism also vested considerable wealth in the state itself, by defining certain lands, forests, sub-soil minerals and infrastructure as property of the state.

An important academic debate at the time of independence, was whether and how decolonisation would change this distribution of wealth. Would assets remain largely in non-indigenous hands? Would African wealth accumulation be private or state-led, and how equally, or unequally, would this wealth come to be shared? Many contemporaries were pessimistic about the prospects for widely shared postcolonial prosperity. Successive studies have pointed to the continuities across the colonial and post-colonial periods, arguing that political elites across the continent assumed the roles and took a share in the resources of the departing Europeans, creating an economic elite with an interest in retaining the property rights regimes of the colonial period (Burton and Jennings, 2007; Dumont, 1966; Frankema et al., 2023; Van de Walle, 2009). In settler colonies, where large land tracts were already privately owned, the temptations to retain such a land regime proved particularly strong (Van de Walle, 2009).

Others have highlighted mixed colonial inequality legacies, at least in non-settler colonies, where communal land tenure systems put a damper on land consolidation and rural differentiation, and meant that the continent's land resources remained comparatively equally shared (discussed in: Milanovic, 2003; Mkandawire, 2002). Land ownership in Africa remains less concentrated than in Latin America, and on par with land inequality in many parts of Asia (Bauluz et al., 2020, p. 17; Lipton, 2009, Fig 7.2). Piecemeal evidence also suggests that a disproportionate share of Africa's wealth stock remains foreign owned, typically by multinational corporations, which may have dampened domestic wealth inequality (Manning and Drwenski, 2016, p. 219).

Kenya provides an interesting case study of these inequality legacies because it combines features of both a settler and peasant colony. Its settler population never exceeded 2 % of the colony's population and only about a fifth of arable land was under private European ownership by the late colonial period, leaving a considerable share of agricultural land under customary tenure. Nonetheless, even this comparatively slim settler presence had marked inequality consequences. On an income basis, Kenya was among the more unequal colonies, owing to large racial income divides and a labour regime that repressed African earnings (Atkinson, 2015; Hillbom et al., 2023), and colonial-era land inequality was high by African standards (Frankema, 2010, p. 427). Some have argued that this colonial inequality legacy has persisted into the present, and often loosely attribute blame to a regressive set of land reforms at independence (Burton and Jennings, 2007, p. 12; Van de Walle, 2009, p. 321). Recent back of the envelope top wealth share estimates suggest that contemporary wealth inequality is exceptionally high (Oxfam, 2017).

However, a closer reading of Kenya's history highlights multiple routes to wealth accumulation at the time of independence, not all with the same expected distributional outcomes. Touching by far the greatest number of households were the schemes that consolidated and assigned land titles to those with customary land tenure rights, thereby formalising the property rights of the majority of peasants, and on paper at least, making their land wealth tradable. In tandem, a government-led land reform programme was used to buy, subdivide and redistribute a share of European land holdings to landless households, albeit on loan terms. Relative to redistributive land reforms globally in the 20th century, however, Kenya's was of relatively modest scale.[1] Lastly, private sales of European, Asian and publicly-owned assets (land, urban property, firms, stocks), often aided by credit from state-owned banks, allowed Africans with access to capital and finance to buy both land and other assets. This was probably the most regressive of the wealth transfers of the independence era as it primarily benefitted a slim strata of formal sector employees and the politically connected, and remains the least well mapped.

This article uses probate and administration sources and survey data to map the growth of wealth-holders in Kenya and relate these trends to the narrative histories of Kenya's wealth transition. It shows, firstly, that African probated estates grew rapidly in the postcolonial period as property rights were formalised and inheritance laws reformed, and by the 1980s roughly 8 % of all Kenyans, but 13 % of all Kenyan men, left estates at death. European-owned estates, in contrast, fell sharply in absolute number, indicative of a marked divesture. The Asian community, meanwhile, retained its wealth footprint, and has remained highly overrepresented amongst leavers of estates. However, the numerically largest group of African wealth-holders were, and remain, those living in the former 'African reserves', and many are likely to be the heirs to ancestral land that was titled in the 1950s and 1960s. African wealth-holders in the formerly European farming regions have grown in number since independence, while the average agricultural holding has fallen in size relative to the colonial era, indicative of a decline in wealth concentration in these regions. Lastly, since the 1990s, Nairobi-based African wealth-owners are increasing in share, and their estates are comprised primarily by urban and peri-urban property. Estimates of the stock of wealth in property and financial assets suggests that Kenya's contemporary wealth stock is probably dominated by such non-agricultural wealth today, reflecting the rapid pace of urbanisation and the social changes this has catalysed (Lall et al., 2017).

The article also constructs rough estimates of wealth inequality for the year 1958 and 2015, which suggest that Kenya has

[1] See Albertus (2015, p.9) for a benchmark. Kenya's redistribute reforms involved less than 10 % of high potential agricultural land; in Latin America in the 20th century, more than 50 % of cultivatable land has changed hands through land reform.

historically been, and remains, a highly unequal society. However, agricultural land is in fact more equitably distributed than other forms of property, which suggests that it is newer forms of wealth, such as urban property and financial assets, that are the key drivers of wealth inequality. In some regards, Kenya is a forerunner in Africa, as its form of settler colonialism bequeathed a more radical reorganization of property rights in land than elsewhere on the continent, and a more economically developed urban and financial sector. This offers insights for other African countries on how wealth structures may unfold as land rights are increasingly formalised and urban centres continue to grow.

2. Historical background: settler colonialism in Kenya

Kenya's settler legacy is often described as an accident of history. In the aftermath of the partition of Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, colonial powers faced the challenge of making their newly acquired colonies economically self-sufficient, while minimizing outlays by the metropoles. Following the completion of the impulsively constructed Kenya-Uganda railway in 1901, which urgently required freight to cover its operating costs, the colonial authorities sought to outsource some of the colony's investment needs to private European wealth-holders through the offer of landholdings on generous terms and a labour regime favourable to farm-owners (Cain and Hopkins, 2016, Ch. 24). Given a highland climate hospitable to European settlement and farming practices, the British government sought to attract 'gentlemanly farmers' from across the British Empire to develop export-oriented industries that would raise the fiscal viability of the Kenyan state.

Land in what became known as the White Highlands, at its peak roughly 7.4 million acres of land, 5 % of Kenya's land area, but including a considerable share of the colony's high potential land and the regions best served by the railway, was gradually apportioned to settlers. The White Highlands comprised areas of both high and low agricultural potential; by the 1950s 18 % of the land was used for crop farming, and 75 % for extensive livestock rearing (East Africa Statistical Department, 1960). Some of this was land was auctioned by the colonial state, and some apportioned under post-war soldier settler schemes, typically to former officers (Duder, 1993). This land was ostensibly in areas without permanent African settlements, but in practice it included land that had historically been farmed or grazed by local communities (Morgan, 1963, p. 146).

But although agriculture formed the backbone of the colonial economy, landowners were always a small share of Kenya's stratified European community (Jackson, 2011, p. 345; Lonsdale, 2010, pp. 4-5). European farming households peaked at roughly 3,000 in the 1950s, and were always outnumbered by Europeans in urban areas, as Kenya, and Nairobi in particular, developed into a regional commercial hub with a growing industrial sector (Lonsdale, 2010, p. 5). After the Second World War, new European arrivals predominantly came to staff big firms, government and parastatals in the urban areas (Wrigley, 1965). The most productive agricultural ventures, moreover, were typically the large plantations rather than household farms, many owned by foreign corporations. Many of the family-owned farms were economically unsuccessful and throughout the colonial era farmers relied heavily on the colonial state to keep their farms viable, by circumscribing the rights of African farmers to keep the costs of labour low and subsidising freight costs and farming credit (Collier and Lal, 1986; Wrigley, 1965).

Outside of the White Highlands, the colonial authorities partitioned the areas of African settlement into a series of African Land Units, commonly referred to as the African reserves, each allocated to a separate ethnic group or amalgamation of smaller groups. The reserves were designed for traditional subsistence production, and combined comprised roughly 18 million acres of arable land (Kenya Colony and Protectorate, 1962, para. 2). In addition, along the Kenyan coast, Kenyan Arabs could hold freehold land tenure along a 10-mile strip, originally under the authority of the Sultanate of Zanzibar. Segregation in the growing urban areas mirrored that of the rural regions, with separate quarters for the country's different racial communities, and Africans were regarded as migrants without permanent urban property rights (Kimani, 1972, p. 117).

Alongside this European settler class benefitting from substantial state support grew another settler community of Indian origin. Indian traders had operated on the East African coast for centuries, but their numbers increased with the arrival of Indian labourers at the end of the 19th century to build the Kenyan railway (1895-1902), some of whom remained in Kenya and Uganda. In addition, many self-financed migrants came to settle in Kenya and established themselves as traders, skilled artisans and lower-level civil servants (Mangat, 1969). The Asian population outnumbered the European one and Asians came to occupy a middle tier in colonial Kenya's racial hierarchy between the African majority and European minority. The rapid expansion of trade in the subregion in the early 20th century and diversification into processing and manufacturing towards the end of the colonial period, owed much to the initiatives of Kenya's Asian investors (Mangat, 1969).

Consequently, Kenya was by design a colony of marked wealth inequality, where large land tracts and investments by Europeans were encouraged, and African land (in the reserves) was 'held in trust' by the state for the benefit of African people. Taking a contemporary definition of individually titled and saleable wealth, the main African-owned assets of significance prior to the late 1950s were cattle and other livestock. Land markets had begun to emerge on some of the African reserves by the 1930s, but its legal basis was uncertain (Amis, 1983, p. 147), and Africans only began to formally acquire urban property in the late 1950s (Kimani, 1972, p. 118).

Decolonisation in Kenya proceeded much faster than most observers in the 1950s had expected. In 1952 the Kenyan Emergency was declared, on account of the Mau Mau rebellion, fuelled by grievances over land and inequality. The Mau Mau rebels were predominantly Kikuyu, the dominant ethnic group in Central Province. Their reserve was circumscribed by the White Highlands and heavily exposed to the European settler presence. By the 1950s mounting population pressure had led to growing landlessness and social discontent, which escalated into an armed resurrection directed at settlers and wealthier Africans supportive of the colonial state. In its aftermath, Britain became less supportive of its settler communities, and preparations began for a negotiated transfer of power to Kenya's nationalist leaders. Starting in the late 1950s, the colonial government also began to consolidate plots of land on the African reserves and register them as individual freeholds, typically to the family-heads who previously held customary ownership rights (Harbeson, 1971, p. 234). Land registration started in the Kikuyu-dominated Central Province and neighbouring Eastern Province, and by 1960, 137,000 individual titles had been registered (Cone and Lipscomb, 1972, p. 110). This programme by design sought to reward loyalists that had supported the British against the Mau Mau, and empower a group of prosperous African farmers who, it was thought, would temper more radical demands for redistribution (Harbeson, 1971, p. 237). Land titling continued throughout the country from the 1960s and on, and consequently most of Kenya's agricultural land is today individually owned; in total, probably around 8 million acres of land were titled under such programmes.[2]

A major sticking point in the subsequent independence negotiations was how to handle the large European land-ownings across Kenya's highlands. This motivated a land redistribution scheme, the million-acre scheme (1960-63), financed with grants and loans chiefly from Britain, which were used to buy European mixed farms and provide grants for African to establish farms on this previously European land. This 'independence bargain' helped to solve the land-demands of Kenyans and facilitated the departure of those Europeans wishing to leave (Kanyinga, 2007; Wasserman, 1973). The land allocated for settlement schemes was typically suitable for crop cultivation, and in regions adjacent to an African reserve. About 80 % of the scheme was used for so-called high-density schemes. These smaller plots were allocated to applicants who were landless and unemployed, often workers on former European farms (Republic of Kenya, 1972, para 2.25). Roughly 20 % of the land was reserved for low density schemes, for wealthier 'yeoman farmers' local to the area, who could make a partial downpayment on the land purchase price (Republic of Kenya, 1972, para 2.26). By the late 1970s, 76,600 households had been settled on 1.4 million acres of land (Boone et al., 2021, p. 7).

In parallel, sale of large European farms was encouraged through private 'willing buyer-willing seller' arrangements, often facilitated by loans from the state-owned Land Bank. The passage of the 1967 Land Control Act which prohibited freehold ownership of agricultural land by non-citizens, piled further pressure on Europeans to sell. By using a market-based mechanism for resource allocation, such sales came to favour the nascent African middle class with access to credit by virtue of holding formal employment or preexisting asset ownership. These sales also heightened ethnic competition between Kikuyu and Kalenjin groups of buyers, who often competed for land purchases in the White Highlands (Kanyinga, 2009). There is also a well-documented case of egregiously regressive land apportionment, where farms bought for redistribution were given away to senior politicians (the so-called z-plot scandal) (Angelo, 2019, p. 190). Nonetheless, within this Africanised large farm sector, ownership was not as concentrated as the farm size statistics suggested, as purchases were typically by a co-operative, company or partnership (Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics, 1972). Some entrepreneurs formed land buying companies that bought and subdivided European farms into smaller land parcels for further sale (Boone et al., 2021; Kanyinga, 2009). Furthermore, a significant share of Kenya's most productive agricultural ventures remained in foreign hands through the 1960s, notably the capital-intensive plantation sector, often owned by multinational corporations rather than private colonial residents (Wasserman, 1973).

The European presence in Kenya declined during this period of land reform, with the population falling from a peak of 60,000 in 1959, to roughly 40,000 by the late 1960s, where it remained into the 2000s. However, the European colonial-era community probably fell more in size than this headline figure suggests, as a high rate of emigration was offset by immigration of a new European expatriates employed by foreign firms and organisations (see Appendix Table 4.1. for European migration figures). The Asian position in Kenya also grew more vulnerable. While the independence negotiations focused primarily on land, in 1967 the government enacted a set of policies designed to indigenise the private enterprise sector, by legislating that certain types of small-scale businesses (retail trade and certain services), could only be owned by citizens. This triggered a considerable emigration of Asians from Kenya, and the community roughly halved in size between 1962 and 1980. However, those departing were disproportionately salaried workers and small business owners, so that '[t]he victims of the 1967-68 pressures were "the poor Asians"', while the wealthier Asian strata faced less pressure (Cowen and MacWilliam, 1996, p. 118). The political climate for the Asian community improved in the late 1980s, as President Arap Moi opened the door to more Asian business development (Adam, 2015; Cowen and MacWilliam, 1996; Himbara, 1997).

As part of its strategy to indigenise the private sector, the Kenyan government also channelled credit to Africans to buy businesses of departing Asians, and some listed companies were required to make a proportion of their shares available for purchase by Kenyan citizens (Leys, 1972). In parallel, sales of public land and publicly-constructed urban housing facilitated African urban property ownership (Hake, 1977). Again, it was predominantly formal sector employees and business owners who benefitted.

The nature of this wealth transfer generated an academic exchange in the 1970s and 1980s, known as 'the Kenya Debate', which concerned the prospects for indigenous capitalist development in Africa (Harbeson and Holmquist, 2020). In a 1978 article, Colin Leys concluded optimistically that Kenya was seeing the rise of an indigenous capitalist class, predominantly from the most densely populated Kikuyu Central Province, where a process of increasing social differentiation and capital accumulation was well underway and was enabling a new capital-owning class to acquire financial wealth (Leys, 1978). Others countered that Kenya still remained highly reliant on foreign capital and non-indigenous minorities (Himbara, 1994; Kaplinsky, 1980). This debate fizzled out in the 1980s, as declining terms of trade and two decades of economic malaise shifted academic attention away from the economic elite and its dynamism, or lack thereof. Can a new set of sources shed more light on sources and distribution of postcolonial wealth, and how it then took shape into the 1980s and beyond?

[2] There is little data on the aggregate amount of land titled under these programmes. This estimate builds on total holdings in 1974 from the Integrated Rural Survey, subtracting some land under settlement schemes.

3. Introducing the Kenyan estate dataset

To study this wealth transfer, this article introduces a new source of data on estates under administration and probate in Kenya. Probate records have a long pedigree in the historical study of wealth inequality as they often constitute the only long-running, systematic source of data on individual-level wealth (Atkinson and Harrison, 1979; Bengtsson, 2014; Cummins, 2021; Jones, 1982). To the best of my knowledge, such sources have not previously been studied in Kenya.

However, prior to independence, Kenya's probate sources primarily recorded the estates of the colony's non-indigenous populations, itself a reflection of the limited extent to which Africans could hold formal title to property. Colonial Kenya's succession framework was a complex patchwork, with separate succession laws for each of the colony's different racial or religious communities: European, Islamic, Hindu and African (Ang'awa, 2011). However, with the exception of African estates, all others were subject to estate duty and held by the administrative requirements of the 1881 Probate and Administration Act. This act required the publication of a notice in the government gazette that announced the executor or administrator, before the courts would issue a grant of probate that allowed the executor to settle the estate. Thus by counting the total number of notices published in any given year, we can infer the number of probated estates.

What did such estates include? The European succession law was adopted from colonial India and modelled on the British system, and made a distinction based on domicile. For the non-domiciled, estates included only immovable property situated in Kenya (land, real estate, housing). For those domiciled in Kenya, in contrast, the estate also included the deceased's movable property (e.g. financial assets, annuities). The value of the estate was defined as the 'principal value' of all assets, excluding funeral expenses and debts.[3] The valuations were conducted by valuers approved by an Estate Duty Commission, with the power to scrutinize the valuations.

African inheritance laws differed by ethnic group, but usually divided the family land and cattle between all sons of the deceased, and the succession process was typically managed outside of the statutory legal system. By the 1960s however, as increasing numbers of African Kenyans held new forms of assets, as well as title deeds to land and houses, and it was unclear how customary procedure would interface with the bureaucratic requirements for formal transfers of titles to such assets (Republic of Kenya, 1968, para 56).

In part to solve such bureaucratic hurdles, in 1981 a new Law of Succession brought all of Kenya's communities under a single succession law.[4] Reforms to the succession framework had been on the legislative agenda since the late 1960s, and the new law was passed in 1972, but the law was contentious, and it took almost a decade from its passage to commencement. Although it commenced in 1981, the new law was also used to administer a large backlog of cases. Since 1981, over 30,000 estates from the 1950s-70s have also been filed through the statutory courts, presumably because there was no simple procedure for transferring title to land inherited under customary law prior to 1981.

The new law also abolished estate duties, and defined an estate in relationship to individualized property rights, as 'the property of which that person was legally competent freely to dispose during his lifetime, and in respect of which his interest has not been terminated by his death' (Law of Succession Act, Section 3.1). In practice, judging from a review of succession case court rulings, estates typically contain assets that are formally registered to an individual, such as titled land, real estate, commercial plots, share certificates or bank accounts.[5] Importantly for the analysis in this paper, the law continued to require the publication of a notice in the government gazette before the courts could grant probate or letters of administration.

This project builds on a combination of sources related to this succession framework. Firstly, I have constructed a dataset containing information from estate notices published in the government gazette between 1920-2020, which I use as a measure of the total number of probated estates (see Appendix 1 for details and examples of these notices). The notices include the name of the deceased, their place of residence and/or death, date of death, and the names of the administrators or executors and the court in which it was filed. These notices do not, however, report the value of the estate, but as a minority of the population leave any probated wealth, I treat these notices as a binary variable that allows us to study the characteristics of roughly the top 10 % of postcolonial wealth-holders.

Kenyan government gazettes are available online through google books and the Africa gazette project, dating back to the 1890s.[6] I collected and scraped notices from 80 % of all the gazettes published since 1920, for a total of 450,000 notices, skewed towards the recent period (Fig. 1a; Summary Statistics in Appendix Table 4.2.). Many of the estates are only filed years after the death of the estate-holder, and therefore, when plotted against year of death, the trend in number of estates is hump-shaped (Fig. 1b). I complement this with a further analysis of recent court rulings in disputed succession cases, that offer insights into the composition of probated estates. Furthermore, up until 1977 (before the abolition of estate duty), the Registrar-General published summary statistics of estates by value, which provides a measure of the total value of probated wealth.

To study the legacies of a racially stratified colonial order, this article extends the colonial concept of race into the present, and uses the names of the deceased given by the notices to assign a likely racial identity to the decedent (African, European and Asian) (Appendix 1 for details). The approach taken is broad-brushed rather than precise, but more careful validation of smaller subsamples

[3] 1926 Ordinance to Provide for Duties on Estates, Para 11 (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1926).

[4] With some caveats. From 1990, Muslims can use Islamic inheritance law instead of the LSA. In addition, the law exempts certain property (agricultural land and livestock) in 12 specified counties where such property is typically held communally. In theory though, such cases are still bound to the administrative provisions of the act.

[5] Based on reading of 50 rulings in contested succession cases. Interestingly, cattle are very rarely mentioned in these rulings, presumably because they are easily transferrable without court involvement.

[6] See google books, digitization was done in collaboration with the Kenya Law Project; and Gazettes Africa.

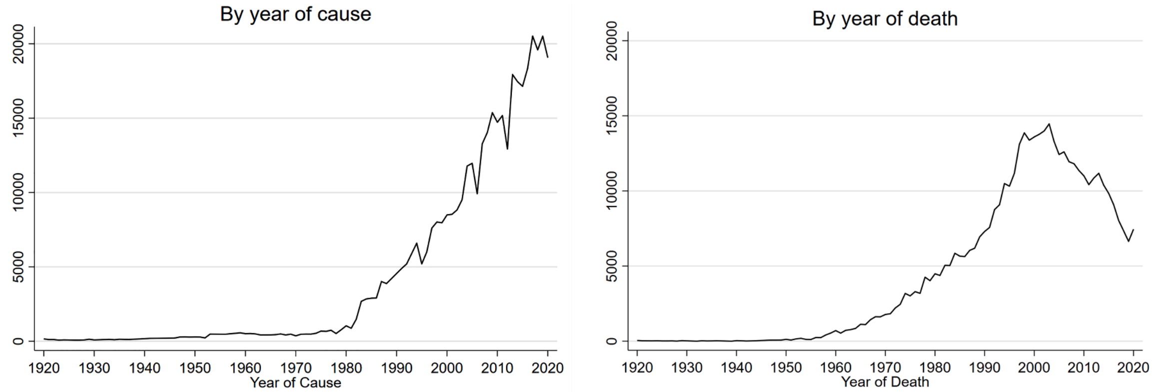

Fig. 1. Number of Succession Causes by Year.
Notes: Weighted to correct for missing gazettes and linear interpolation for three years of missing data. Year of death is imputed for notices where the year of death is not stated or illegible.
Source: Kenya estates dataset.

suggest that racial classification errors are unlikely to be driving the main results. Unlike in the colonial statistics however, I group Arabs with Africans rather than treating Arabs as a distinct community, and Goans are grouped with other Asians. The biggest classification challenge lay in distinguishing Indian Muslim names from Arab and Somali Muslim names, but the possible error this introduces is comparatively small (see robustness exercise in Appendix Figure 1.3).

3.1. Compliance with the law of succession

For this estate data to reflect wealth ownership in Kenya, we need to assume a reasonable rate of legal compliance. The advantage of probate and administration data, and one reason historians have made frequent use of it, is that heirs have incentives to comply with inheritance procedures, to gain title to inherited assets and ensure their fair share of the inheritance. This incentive grows stronger the larger the value of the estate and the more frequently traded the assets. Nevertheless, taking succession cases through the formal legal system is time consuming, cumbersome and costly, especially to poorer households. Furthermore, the intestate succession rules, which apply in most Kenyan successions, awards equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters, in conflict with son preference under customary laws. Consequently, far from all Kenyan inheritances are processed through the statutory courts. Studies from (mostly rural) communities in Kenya suggest that informal or customary inheritance proceedings are often a family's first port of call (Cooper, 2011, p. 6).

Nonetheless, the ratio of estates to death alone suggest that this legal framework has some force. The total number of estate cases filed each year has been rising steadily since the introduction of the Law of Succession in 1981, from roughly 1,000 in 1980 to 30,000 cases a year today. Relative to the population, 9 % of deceased adults (c.2000) left such a probated estate, albeit with marked gender discrepancies (14 % of men, but only 4 % of women) (Fig. 4). For comparison, in contemporary Britain the probate rate is 40 % (Cummins, 2021, Table 5, although the definition of probatable wealth also differs).

How do these estate ratios compare to other measure of the rate of asset ownership? By way of comparison, roughly 55 % of Kenyan households reported owning land, cattle or dwellings worth US$500 or more (2015).[7] The share of the population in possession of a formal title deeds to property, however, is lower. In 2021, roughly 13 % of Kenyans (aged 45-49) report holding a title deed to agricultural land; 10 % to their home; and 6 % to non-agricultural land (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023, Tables 15.5.1-4).[8] Thus the share of deceased leaving probated estates is in roughly the same order of magnitude as the share of adults in possession of formal title deeds to land or property. Consequently, amongst the wealthier strata of society, the compliance rate is probably quite high. A testament to elite usage of the succession system is the fact that many prominent politicians can be found among the deceased estate-holders (including former President Daniel Arap Moi, and opposition politician Oginga Odinga). The thousands of recent succession cases that remain in protracted court disputes is further evidence of the bite of de jure succession institutions.[9]

This paper rests on the assumption that the incentives to use the formal courts is strongly correlated with the size of the estate, so that the estates are representative of the upper echelon on Kenya's wealth-holders, or very roughly the top 10 % of the wealth distribution. In a sense, the statutory succession system provides a picture of the distribution of formally registered wealth, as a failure to comply with the law also means that said inherited assets are not accurately titled and legally not saleable. These measures are therefore also an indicator of the demand for legally recognized property rights.

7 Author's calculation using the 2015/16 Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey, see Table 5.
8 Author calculation from the DHS data for the oldest age group (45-49). Note though, that even in the absence of a title deed, the land may be formally registered to an individual in the land registry.
9 See http://kenyalaw.org for searchable database of case law.

3.2. Estimating mortality

To measure the share of decedents that leave estates (the *estate ratio*), the number of estate notices in any given year is normalized by total adult deaths. The United Nations produces national-level death statistics by gender and age band projected back to 1950, which are used for the African series (UNDESA, 2023). Reliable mortality data for the European and Asian sub-populations, however, are not available. Death statistics for the early colonial period are unreliable and the authorities believed that many deaths went unreported, and postcolonial sources do not provide racially disaggregated mortality data. Fig. 2 therefore build on modelled death estimates. In the European case, I assume the same mortality rates as in the United Kingdom for each age group, thus adjusting for the unusual age structure of the Kenyan settler population (see Appendix Figure 1.6 for a comparison with reported data). In the Asian case, I assume age-specific mortality rates similar to those in India. These estate ratios are thus subject to some risk of error, particularly from the 1970s and onwards when not only the mortality rate but also the age structure of the non-indigenous population is uncertain. Appendix 1 discusses the direction of possible biases and provides further details.

4. Results

4.1. Wealth inequality on the eve of independence

What can these sources reveal about the volume and sources of private wealth in colonial Kenya? Firstly, the colonial era schedules of probated wealth support the popular narrative, that Kenya's European community was one of considerable means. The ratio of estates to adult deaths hovered between 70–80 % in the early colonial era, and then fell to 60 % in the 1950s, probably on the account of an inflow of a more transient community of colonial residents working for the government or larger firms, who were less likely to domicile and buy property in Kenya (Fig. 2). Nonetheless, in the early 1950s the median estate value was roughly £1,000, thus the majority of Europeans in Kenya died owning notable asset wealth.[10] In contrast, in Britain the median decedent in this period died with wealth below the probate threshold of £100 (Cummins, 2021, Table 5). Europeans in Kenya were wealthier than Britons in Britain, by a considerable margin.[11] Kenya's Asian community in contrast, started with a lower share of estates to deaths than the European community, but saw this ratio rising over time, and it is today higher than for Kenya's Europeans, in both absolute terms, and in the share of decedents leaving estates (Fig. 2).

Using the structure of estates in combination with other wealth stock estimates, we can construct some simulations of wealth inequality at death circa 1958, before the European divesture began in earnest. For comparison, I include inequality measures for Great Britain in the same year, using the analogous British sources. The Kenyan Registrar-General's report gives the number and total value of estates by racial community, grouped by the net value of the estates (see Appendix Table 3.1). To measure the top 1 % wealth share using such grouped wealth data, I assign the mean value by bin to the number of estates in each bin, and impute an estimated value (£500) to the deceased with estates below the probate threshold. This residual category is estimated by subtracting the number of reported estates from total annual deaths.

Results are given in Table 1. If we consider the European population on its own, wealth inequality among Europeans in Kenya was higher than in Britain, with a top 1 % wealth share of 38 %, relative to 33 % in Britain, likely on account of a thick upper tail, driven by the disproportionate number of very wealthy individuals, rather than low median wealth. Similarly, the Asian wealth distribution was more unequal than in Great Britain, although officials also suspected considerable underreporting of Asian estates, which could be biasing the estimates upwards.

To estimate colony-wide wealth inequality, including the African population, I provide three alternative simulations (see Appendix 2 for details). These measures rest on several assumptions. First, I assume that no African wealth-holders were found in the top 1 %, so that we can treat the full stock of African wealth as falling solely within the bottom 99 %. In effect, this exercise compares the stock of African-owned wealth with the stock of European and Asian wealth. Second, to compare these African wealth per capita measures, to non-African wealth at death requires some assumptions about wealth accumulation over the lifecycle. As wealth typically increases with age, the average African decedent likely owned more wealth than the average person alive. I make the simple assumption that Africans at death owned 50 % more than mean adult wealth.[12]

In the first simulation, Model 1, I assume that the only wealth held by African Kenyans was cattle, and then roughly estimating the size of the stock and average value of a head of cattle from contemporary sources. In the second specification, Model 2, I also place a notional value on African-owned land. In the late 1950s, land titling programmes were in full swing. By 1960, most of the land in the Central Province had already been consolidated and titled to individual African owners. Over the course of the coming decades, most agricultural land in Kenya would come to be titled. There is no obvious way to value this land, given the limited land market activity in this period.[13] I take a rough estimate of the total acreage of land within the African reserves that would in time be titled (~8 million

[10] Comparing the distribution of estates by value and imputing non-probated estates based on the estimated mortality rate (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1953, Appendix XXX, p.32).

[11] Appendix Table 4.3. provides a full comparison of the distribution of estates by value in Britain and Kenya in 1958.

[12] This may be an underestimate. In Kenya today, the likelihood of owning land increases sharply with age, and is roughly twice the mean for the age group 45-49, according to the DHS (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023, Table 15.5.1-4).

[13] Even in 1974, enumerators found it hard to assess land values, in some areas, 'enumerators claimed that there was virtually no commonly agreed upon value for land that land transactions simply did not take place.' (Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics, 1977, p.43).

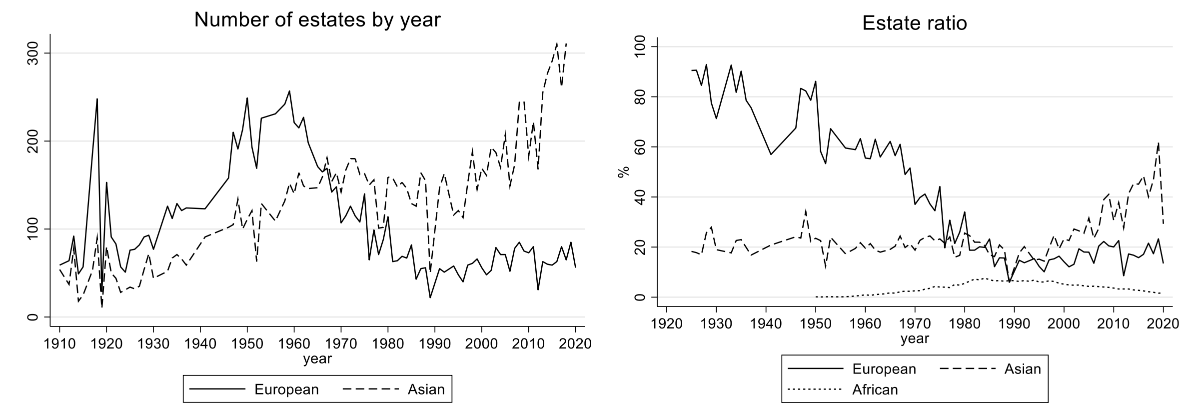

Fig. 2. European and Asian estates by year.
Notes: Number of estates weighted to correct for missing gazettes and linear interpolation for three years of missing data. Estate ratio constructed by dividing estates with deaths o20. Deaths modelled based on United Kingdom and Indian mortality rates, applied to Kenyan demographic structure given by censuses. Details given in Appendix 1.
Sources: Kenya estates dataset.

Table 1
Wealth inequality simulations, Kenya and Great Britain, 1958.

Unit	Share of total wealth		
	Top 10 %	Top 1 %	African share
Great Britain	71 %	33 %	
Europeans in Kenya	75 %	38 %	
Asians in Kenya	76 %	49 %	
All groups in Kenya	-	67 %	28 %
Model 1: African wealth only in cattle			
All groups in Kenya	-	51 %	45 %
Model 2: African wealth in cattle and land, valued by acre			
All groups in Kenya	-	49 %	47 %
Model 3: Using 1974 mean wealth stock at 1958 prices			

Sources: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya (1959); Commissioners of HM Inland Revenue, 1959; European and Asian deaths modelled by author (Appendix 1); African deaths from UNDESA, 2023.
Notes: European and Asian estates below the £5000 threshold estimated by subtracting the number of estates from estimated deaths, and estate value of £500 imputed for non-reported estates. Model 1: Cattle stock estimated at 6.3 m, valued at £10/head. Model 2: African land estimated at 8 m acres, at £9/acre. Model 3: Uses in 1974 total wealth stock, divided by adult population, revalued in 1958 prices. Model 1-3 assume an adult population (o20) of 2.6 m and mean wealth of decedents to be 50 % higher than the mean for adults overall.

acres), and assume the same price per acre as that paid for European mixed farms under the million-acre scheme (£9/acre). The prices offered under the million-acre scheme were based on market-valuations, but considered, retrospectively, quite generous (Kanyinga, 2007). The settlement schemes were typically adjacent to African reserves on land viewed appropriate for small-holder production, and can thus be considered roughly comparable to land under peasant production (Republic of Kenya, 1972). Moreover, comparing this with land values given by the 1974/75 Integrated Rural Survey (adjusted for inflation), gives a roughly comparable price per acre.

Lastly, as an alternative approach and sense-check (Model 3), I use the average adult asset wealth estimated in the 1974 small-farm sector (roughly analogous to the farming households within the former reserves), valued in 1958 prices (Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics, 1977). This survey also placed a value on buildings, equipment and crops in store, in addition to land and livestock.

The results are sensitive to these ballpark estimations of African cattle and land wealth, but give a sense of magnitude. If we consider cattle as the only African formally owned wealth, Kenya was indeed an extremely unequal society in global and historical comparison, with a top 1 % wealth share of 67 %. For comparison, the top 1 % wealth share in the United Kingdom today is 21 %, and in South Africa, one of the world's most unequal countries, it is 55 % (World Inequality Lab, 2023). However, adding a notional value to African-held land, reduces the top 1 % wealth share to 51 %. This is still a high level of wealth inequality in contemporary perspective, but of the same order of magnitude as in South Africa or much of Latin America today. The last model assumes the same small-holder per capita wealth as in 1974 (in 1958 prices), which would lower the top 1 % share slightly, to 49 %.

This illustrates the ambiguities around definitions of wealth; how we think about land rights and conceptualise land values in contexts of limited market transactions for land, matters substantially to any measure of colonial wealth inequality in Kenya. Under all the wealth inequality scenarios considered, Kenya would be ranked among the most unequal countries in the world. Under a cattle-only wealth assumption, the top 1 % wealth share is well above contemporary wealth inequality in any country. However, if African-owned land were valued at roughly the same acreage price as European land, the top wealth share drops considerably, to a level of wealth inequality comparable to that of Latin America and Southern Africa today. This highlights a sometimes overlooked point in the literature on Kenya, that aggregate land wealth in the colonial African reserves was far from insubstantial.

4.2. Sources of colonial wealth

What were the assets included in the estates of this top 1 % of European and Asian wealth owners? The estate-holder's place of residence offers some clues. Fig. 3 show the distribution of wealth-holders by place of residence for Europeans and Asians respectively. In both communities, most decedents were resident in Nairobi or the Coast (predominantly Mombasa). These main metropolitan areas typically accounted for 60–70 % of all European estates, and 70–80 % of Asian estates, throughout the colonial era. Estate-holders based in the agricultural regions were always a minority of wealth-holders, and their share of estates peaked in the 1940s.

A Nairobi or Mombasa residence, however, does not preclude agricultural land ownership. In 1958 roughly 23 % of European-owned farms were managed by hired farm managers, which suggests a considerable share of absentee landlords (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1960, p. 34). To better gauge the occupations of these decedents, Table 2 matches names from the estate dataset with a database of European residents in East Africa, which includes information about occupations (Europeans in East Africa, 2023). I focus on deaths from the 1950s, and successfully match 420 records. Of these matched records, just below a third of decedents were farmers or farm-employees, more than a third were government employees or former military personnel, 20 % were professionals (lawyers, engineers etc.) or private sector employees, and 10 % were in business or commerce (traders, owners of companies etc.). This reinforces the point made by Wrigley (1965), that Kenya's resident European population was predominantly urban and oriented towards the public sector or large firms, by the time of independence.

Ballpark estimates of the wealth stock for different asset classes can shed further light to the importance of non-agricultural wealth. A back-of-the-envelope estimate of the value of European owned agricultural land, based on the acreage prices paid under the land transfer programmes, suggests that it was worth in the order of £70 million in the early 1960s (Appendix 3). In contrast, a survey of non-agricultural commercial assets placed fixed assets alone at £90 million in 1959, and a 1970 study estimated the value of private Nairobi property to be £46 million. Thus agricultural land was far from the only, and possibly not even the largest, privately owned asset stock in colonial Kenya. To understand shifts in postcolonial wealth inequality, we need to consider sources of wealth beyond agricultural land.

Kenya's European population divested rapidly after independence. Fig. 2 reveals a very rapid post-independence decline in the level of European-owned wealth and number of wealth holders from 1960 and onward, as Kenyan independence neared. Total European wealth-holders fell from 250 in 1959, to roughly 50 a year by the early 1980s. The share of European estates to deaths also declined sharply after independence, as the European community was increasingly comprised of transient expatriates, with less propensity to own property in Kenya.

The Asian community in contrast, saw only a modest decline in the absolute number of estates per year, and the share of estates to deaths increased after independence, although uncertainty around postcolonial mortality adds some possible error to the estate ratio measure. Nonetheless, this supports the argument by Cowen and MacWilliam (1996), that it was the disproportionately wealthier Asians who stayed in Kenya. Unlike the increasingly transient European expatriate community, the Asian community retained a strong economic presence after independence, with a growth in absolute terms in the number of estates left each year since the 1990s. Fig. 2b also contrasts the European and Asian estate ratio with that for African Kenyans, from 1950. The share of Africans leaving estates at death remains well below the European and Asian ratios, even in the postcolonial period, but the estate ratios were nonetheless converging between the 1950s and the 1980s.

4.3. The rise of African wealth ownership

Fig. 4 examines this African estate ratio in greater detail. From the late 1950s and on, the share of Africans leaving probated estates rose rapidly, suggesting that Africans were increasingly becoming owners of formally titled wealth, in land in particular. By the 1980s, roughly 8 % of African Kenyan decedents left probated estates, but with marked gender disparities, so the level for men alone was above 13 %, but only 3 % for women. The estate ratio has been relatively steady since the 1980s, suggesting that the share of Kenyan households owning land and property plateaued thereafter. This is not implausible. Once the titling of land was completed and the various mortgage and loan schemes that enabled Kenya's budding middle class to buy property reduced in size, opportunities for first-time buyers to enter the land and urban property markets have probably been quite constrained, judging by contemporary measures of access to mortgages (Ouma and Odongo, 2021).

After independence, the number of African estate-leavers quickly dwarfed the number of European and Asian ones, as illustrated in Fig. 5a. The African share of total estates rose from around 30 % of those estate-holders dying in the 1950s to over 95 % in the 2000s (Fig. 4a). The European and Asian share of estates hovered at around 1 % and 3 % respectively in the early 2000s, relative to population shares of 0.1 % and 0.2 %.

Kenya's economic activity is centred on Nairobi, the county of highest income and asset wealth in Kenya (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023, Table 2.6). How has the racial composition of Nairobi's wealth-holders changed? In Nairobi, the non-indigenous footprint is larger, with the Asian community accounting for around 10 % of these estates in the 2000s, and Europeans a further 2 % (Fig. 5b). But although non-indigenous minorities clearly retain an important foothold in Kenya (Adam, 2015), Africans overwhelmingly dominate among the Nairobi-based estate-holders too.

Lastly, as a proxy for those families with the greatest wealth and status, I consider the racial composition of those Nairobi-based estates handled by Kenya's older, colonial-era European-founded law firms, which remain among the country's most expensive and

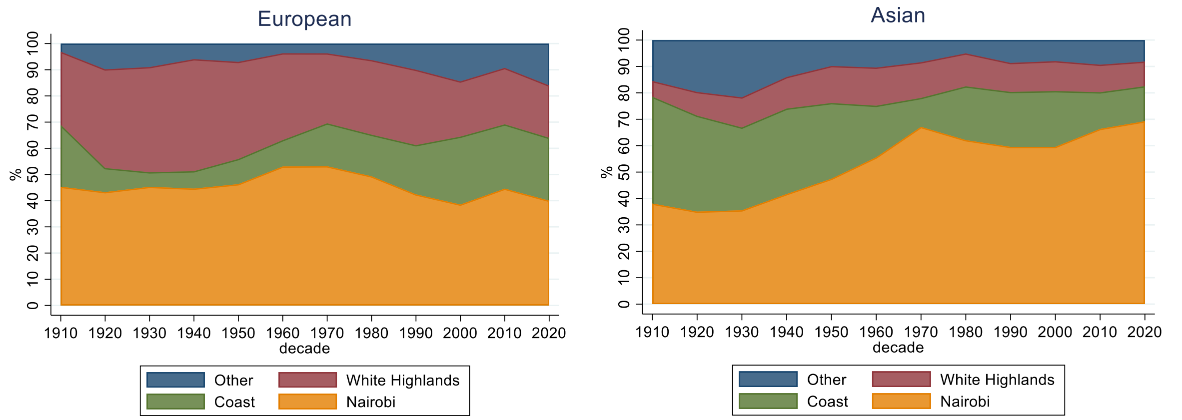

Fig. 3. European and Asian estates by geographic location.
Notes: White Highlands: Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, Nyandarua, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Laikipia, Machakos, Murang'a and Nyeri.
Sources: Kenya estates dataset.

Table 2
Professional activities of a sample of European decedents, 1950-59.

Sector of employment	Share	Number
Business/Corporate	10 %	42
Farmer or farm worker	30 %	124
Government or military	36 %	148
Mission employees	6 %	26
Professions or private employees	18 %	76

Sources: Kenya Estates Dataset and Europeans in East Africa Dataset.
Notes: 20 % of entries in estate dataset successfully matched with an entry in Europeans in East Africa. Sector of employment classified based on main occupation mentioned in descriptive narrative.

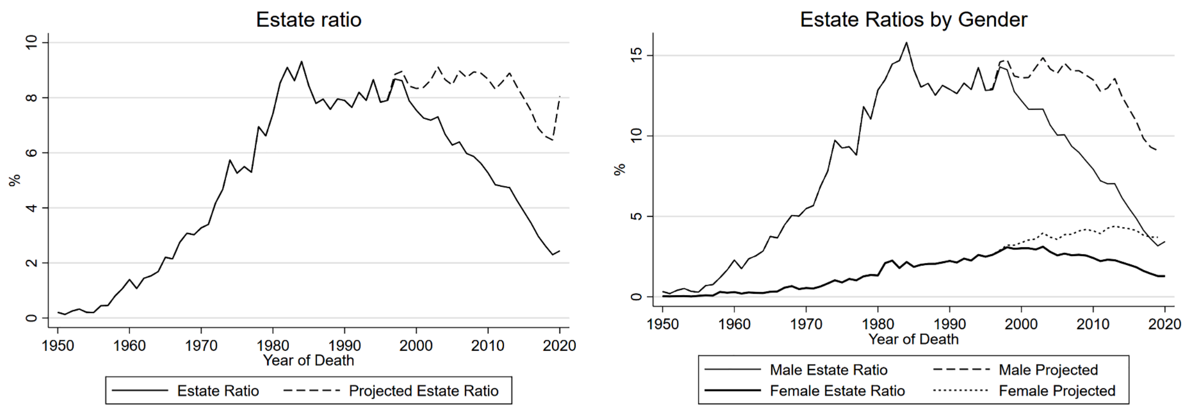

Fig. 4. African Estate to Adult Death Ratio, 1950-2020.
Notes: Number of estates weighted to correct for missing gazettes and linear interpolation for three years of missing data. Estate ratio constructed by dividing number of gazette notices by year of death, with estimated deaths for adults o20. Year of death imputed for notices where the year of death is not stated or illegible. Projected estate ratio assumes that for each year of gazette notices, the distribution in years since death remains constant, and imputes notice numbers in outer years.
Sources: Kenya estates dataset; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects.

prestigious firms ($n = 2{,}300$) (Fig. 5c). Here too, the African share has risen sharply to just under half by the 2010s. Clearly, the small non-indigenous community is concentrated at the wealth apex, but across the board, we see a clear progression towards Africanisation of wealth.

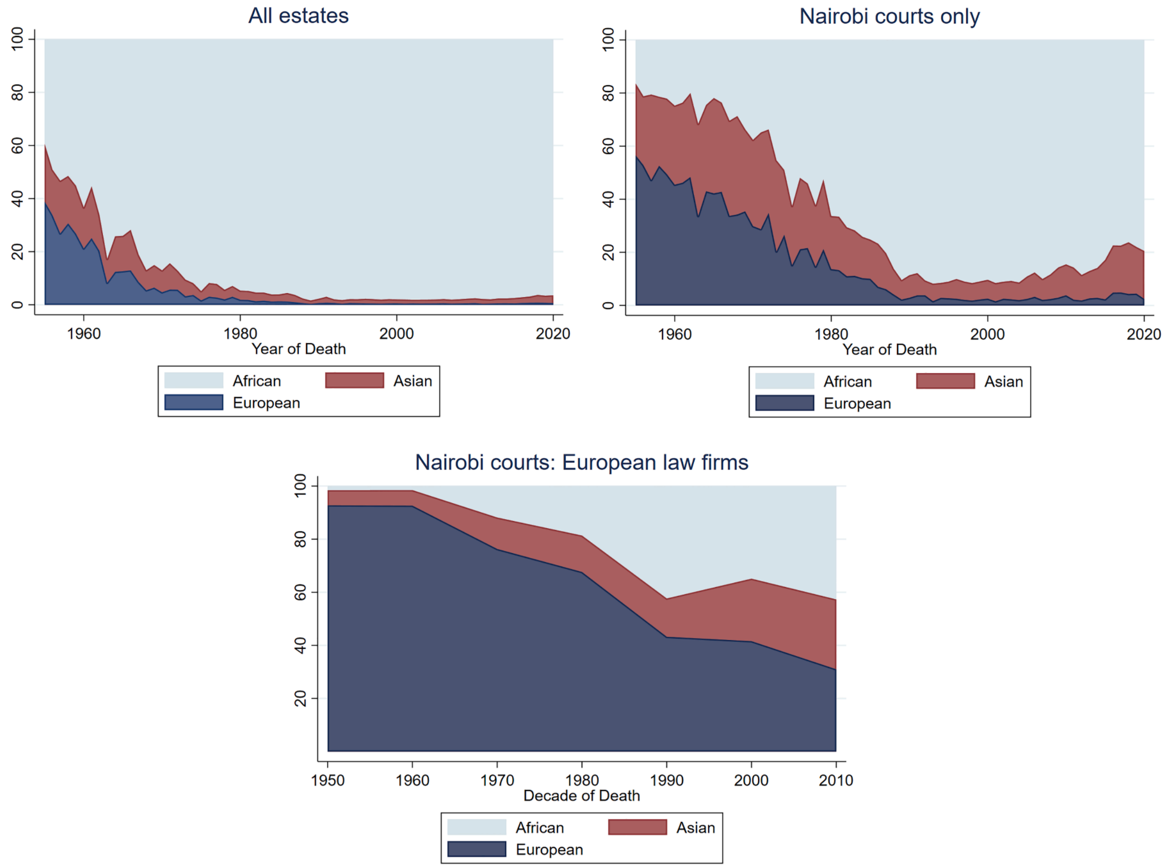

Fig. 5. Share of estates by race, 1955-2020.
Notes: In panel 3, law firms include: Archer & Wilcock, Daly & Figgis, Bryson Inamdar & Bowyer, Hamilton Harrison & Mathews, Kaplan & Stratton, Robson Harris & Co., Shapley & Barret, Walker Kontos.
Sources: Kenya estates dataset.

4.4. *The geography of wealth*

The geographic distribution of estates offers clues to the means of African wealth accumulation. The geographic distribution of estates in the 1950s-1980s highlight the importance of the Swynnerton Plan and successor land registration programmes to African wealth formalisation. Fig. 6a show the detailed locations of a sub-sample of African estates from deaths in the 1950s and 1960s where the place of residence could be specified to ‘location’ level or below (administrative level 3). It shows how early estate-leavers hugged the perimeter of the White Highlands (shaded area), reflecting the commercialisation and higher land values in the areas of the African reserves adjacent to ‘White’ Kenya. Over the following two decades (Fig. 6b), the number of estates in western Kenya also rose, and a larger smattering of estate-holders can be seen in the former European agricultural regions. Nonetheless, the populous and more commercialised Kikuyu and Meru regions – Kiambu, Murang’a, Kirinyaga and Meru in particular – continued to dominate in numerical terms.

In Fig. 7 the residence of the estate holders are classified into geographic clusters: the counties that fell predominantly in the White Highlands form one group, those counties predominantly in the Kikuyu, Meru or Embu reserves form a second group (collectively known as GEMA), those in the west of the country, also a population-dense region (the former Nyanza and Western provinces), form a third group, Nairobi is treated as a unit on its own, and a last residual group covers the rest of the country. Some of the most productive parts of the White Highlands were, however, the comparatively small tracts of agricultural land near Nairobi, in Kiambu and Murang’a, much of which today is peri-urban and within the borders of the Greater Nairobi Metropolitan Area, and in this analysis considered part of the GEMA region. These are also areas where much of the agricultural land remained under firm ownership. Nonetheless, some very lucrative investments were likely the land purchases by Africans in these peri-urban parts of the former White Highlands (these regions had very few settlement schemes).

As reflected in the heatmaps, starting in the 1950s, the share of estates from the former Kikuyu, Meru and Embu (GEMA) regions shot up, comprising almost 60 % of the estates of those dying in the early 1960s (Fig. 7a). These areas were the first where land was consolidated and titled, and also the areas with strong commercial agricultural potential due to both to land quality and proximity to infrastructure and markets. In the late 1960s, land registrations in the west of Kenya brought more formal wealth holdings, and

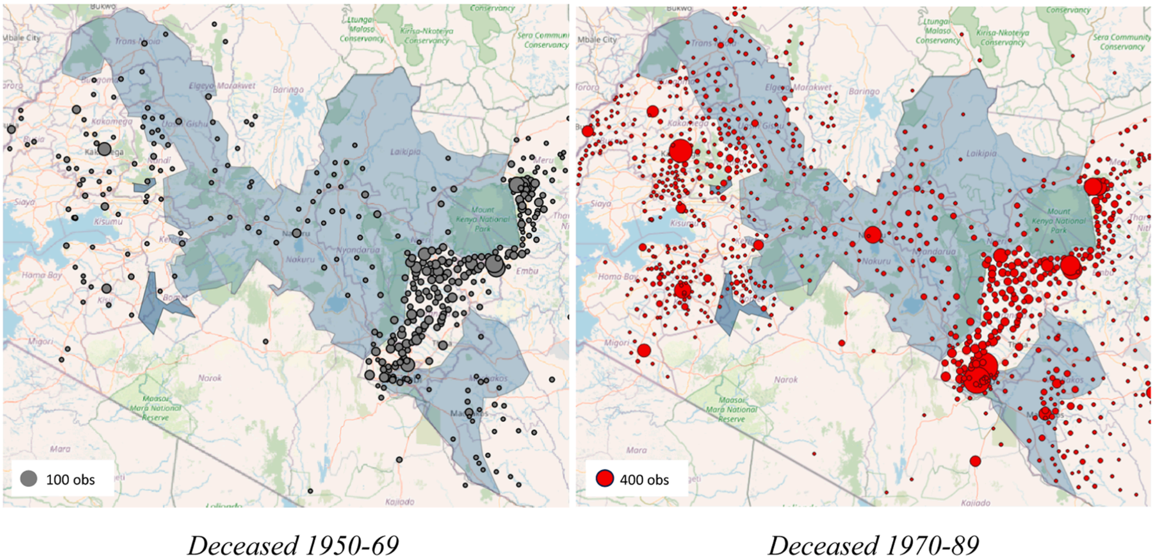

Fig. 6. African estates in central and western Kenya.
Note: Shaded area: approximate borders of former White Highlands. Estate counts at admin 4 boundaries (locations). Only includes estates where geographic location given to sub-county level (1950-60, $n = 2{,}931$; 1970-80, $n = 16{,}572$).
Sources: Kenya Estates Dataset. Base layer: OpenStreetMap; Admin 4 boundaries: OCHA Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa & Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics.

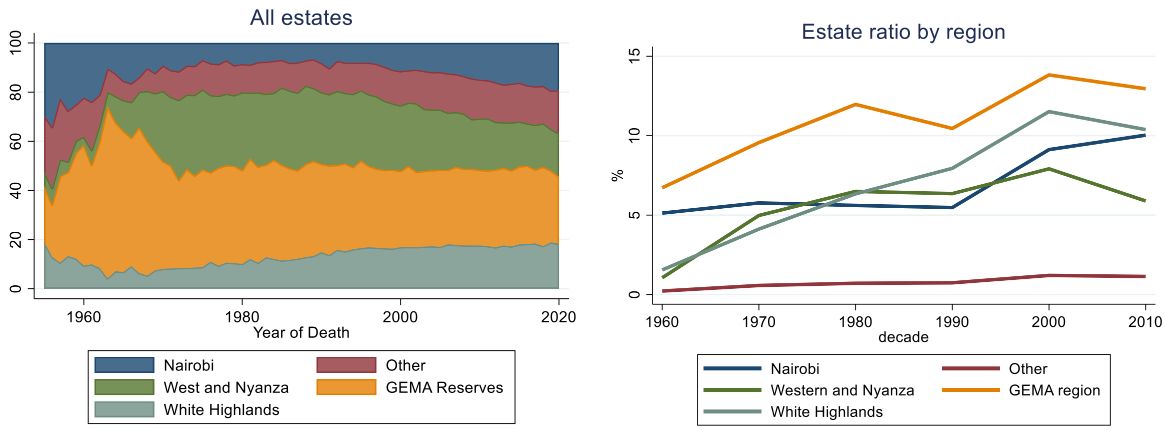

Fig. 7. Share of estates by geographic region, 1955-2020.
Notes: County coded as place of residence in the first instance, and place of death if residence is not given. GEMA Reserves defined as: Kiambu, Nyeri, Murang'a Kirinyaga, Meru, Embu and Tharaka-Nithi. White Highlands defined as: Machakos, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, Nyandarua, Elgeyo-Marakwet and Laikipia. Deaths estimated by assuming a constant adult mortality rate across counties, applied to the county-level adult population (o20) calculated from the 1969-2009 censuses, with linear interpolation between census years. Estate ratio adjusted upwards in outer years for causes yet to be filed.
Sources: Kenya Estates Dataset; Kenya Housing and Population Censuses, 1969-2009

subsequently estate cases, to Nyanza and the Western Province, thus reducing the GEMA share. The initial reduction in the Nairobi share reflects the falling share of European and Asian estates relative to African estates, and the fact that few Africans held wealth in Nairobi in the early independence years. The counties of the former White Highlands also rose in share of estates in the 1980s and 1990s, (most of these estates come from Nakuru, Uasin Gishu and Nyandarua), presumably as more Africans assumed land title to their land on settlement schemes or benefitted from the private purchases of European farms that continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

To what extent do these patterns simply reflect the distribution of the population? Fig. 7b gives the estate ratio by region. The GEMA region retained a significantly higher ratio of estates to deaths throughout the period, although the Nairobi and former White Highland regions have been converging with it. The other regions lag behind considerably, with a significantly lower share of deceased leaving probated estates.

The probate notices shed no light on changes in the size of the average estate. However, as land and housing constitute the main assets owned by rural estate-holders, changes in average holding size can shed partial light on estate size. Across the country, holdings have fallen in size as the population grew (National Land Commission and FAO, 2021). Table 3 compares mean and median holding size across a number of counties, for c.1960 and the present. The contemporary estimates are based on household survey data, which probably understate the number of large farms considerably, but nonetheless offer a rough order of magnitude (for discussion see: Jayne et al., 2016, Table 1). In Kiambu and Murang'a, two counties that fell predominantly within the Kikuyu reserve, the mean (African) holding reduced in size from roughly 5 acres to 1 acre between 1960 and 2015. In Nyanza, in the west of the country, the mean holding size fell from 9 to 1.5 acres in the same period. For the former White Highlands, we focus on two counties, Nakuru and Uasin Gishu, that fell entirely within the scheduled areas reserved for European farming. Here the mean European holding was close to a 1,500 acres in 1958, but, at least according to government survey data, had fallen to around two acres by 2015. While the 2015 survey probably underestimates average farm size by some margin,[14] it nonetheless points to a radical decline in holding sizes. Correspondingly, the absolute number of land owners in these two counties has risen from the hundreds to the hundreds of thousands. The growing number of residents of the former White Highlands leaving estates at death likely reflects this process of fragmentation, rather than consolidation, of wealth-holdings.

4.5. The urbanisation of African wealth

The main shift in the geographic distribution of estates in the last three decades has been the marked growth in the share of Nairobi-based decedents since the 1980s, which increased from 7 % in 1985, to 20 % by 2020. Relative to population, Nairobi's estate ratio is converging with the GEMA region ratio. Given the concentration of economic activity in Nairobi and rapid pace of urbanisation, this is not surprising, and there is strong reason to expect that the largest African estate-holders are today concentrated in the capital.

To explore this further, this section looks at court rulings in disputed succession cases. These cases will capture a sample of the largest estates, as fighting protracted inheritance disputes in court requires deep pockets. Court rulings in succession cases are available through Kenya Law, a state corporation, which provides a searchable database of Kenyan case law. I extracted succession case references from Kenya Law for causes filed between 1990 and 2022, and matched these against the estate dataset, successfully linking 1,030 records. Fig. 8 shows the distribution of such disputed cases by decade of death and place of residence of the estate-holder. This shows similar trends to the overall sample of estate notices, with the Nairobi-share of estates growing from the 1980s and onwards. By the 2010s Nairobi-based decedents comprised over 30 % of disputed succession cases.

Court rulings in contested succession cases offer a rare insight into the asset structure of estates, and the following builds on analysis of a sample of 50 cases from the High Court at Nairobi, to explicitly give insight into the portfolios of Kenya's urban-based wealth elite. Inheritances that result in protracted court proceedings are clearly a select few, typically involving larger estates with many heirs and several spouses (whether polygamous marriages or divorces and remarriages). Many of the cases had been under dispute for a decade or more. Where valuations of the estate were given, they ranged between US$300,000 and US$5 million (converted at prevailing exchange rate), suggesting that these estates would comfortably fall within the top 1 % of wealth-holders, if not the top 0.1 %.[15] This is a biased sample, but biased in our direction of interest, towards the largest estates.

Of these estates (Fig 9), the vast majority contained property in either Nairobi (54 %), the Great Nairobi Metropolitan regions bordering Nairobi (primarily in Kiambaa, Ruiru and Thika) (46 %), or both. Roughly 90 % of estates contained property in one of both of these regions. Some of these Nairobi border-regions fell within the colonial White Highlands, and some were historically agricultural, but today they are largely urbanised and have experienced faster land price appreciation than central Nairobi in recent decades (HassConsult, 2024). A sixth of estates (18 %) contained land in the prime areas of European settler farming, primarily Nakuru, Laikipia and Nyandarua. These are likely to be holdings purchased from European landowners since the 1960s, or obtained through land redistribution programmes. Just under a quarter contained land elsewhere in Kenya, some of which is presumably ancestral land on the former reserves, while 28 % contained financial assets, primarily share certificates.

Most of these assets, then, were likely purchased after independence, as land sales in Nairobi and the peri-urban areas around it took off. A 1971 study of Nairobi's property rolls showed very limited African land ownership in 1970s; by value, Africans owned only 2.7 % of Nairobi's land (Kimani, 1972). Urban land purchases were a postcolonial affair. Some many have been purchases from European and Asian sellers, but sales of public land and publicly constructed housing were likely the most common route.[16] In the 1960s and early 1970s, Nairobi's city council built thousands of middle-class homes for tenant purchase, many of which ended up in the hands of a relatively small number of larger landlords (Hake, 1977, p. 85). Public land was also subdivided into plots sold to individual applicants or developers (Hake, 1977, p. 97).

Who comprised this Nairobi-based, wealth-owning elite? Past research has stressed the importance of formal sector employment, particularly in the public sector, as a precondition for the bank loans (Leys, 1975). This access to credit allowed some to buy businesses or property, as well as invest in agriculture, whether on the family farm or land acquired from European sellers (Hake, 1977, pp. 74-75).

[14] In contrast, the Demographic and Health Survey estimates mean holding size of 3 acres in Uasin Gishu and 16 in Nakuru, but with internal inconsistencies in survey responses (author's calculation using DHS, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

[15] Note that the list of assets are not always complete, and sometimes only mentions those assets under dispute. This should bias the results further towards the assets of highest value.

[16] Based on a further analysis of the detailed location of owner-occupier Nairobi-residents using the 2009 census suggests that many own property in areas largely comprising of public land in the colonial period (Minnesota Population Center, 2020).

Table 3
Average agricultural holding size c.1960 and 2015.

Region	County/Province	c.1960		2015	
		Median	Mean	Median	Mean
Central	Kiambu	3*	5*	0.8	1.2
Central	Murang'a	3*	4*	0.8	1.0
Nyanza & Western	Nyanza	5*	9.3*	1.0	1.5
'White Highlands'	Nakuru	839**	1,487**	1.0	1.6
'White Highlands'	Uasin Gishu	1,193**	1,591**	1.0	2.5

Sources:
* Only African farms: Kenya African Agricultural Sample Survey 1960-61, Text Tables 12 and 14.
** Only European Farms 1958: Kenya European and Asian Agricultural Census 1958, Text Table 4. 2015: KIHBS 2015/16.

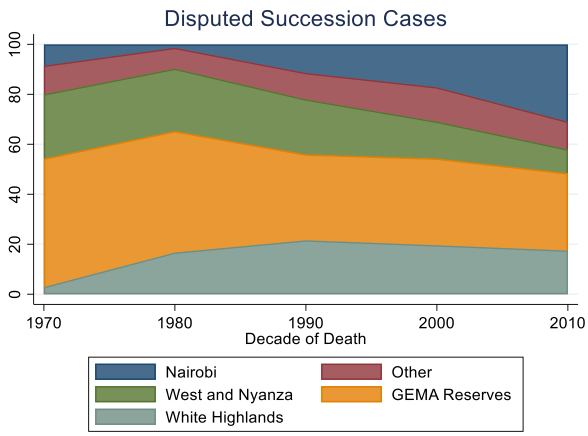

Fig. 8. Estates in succession disputes by region of residence
Notes: Dataset includes estates where estate dataset succession cause could be matched against a ruling in a disputed succession matter, for a total of 1,030 matches (match rate of 47 %).
Source: Kenya Estates Dataset.

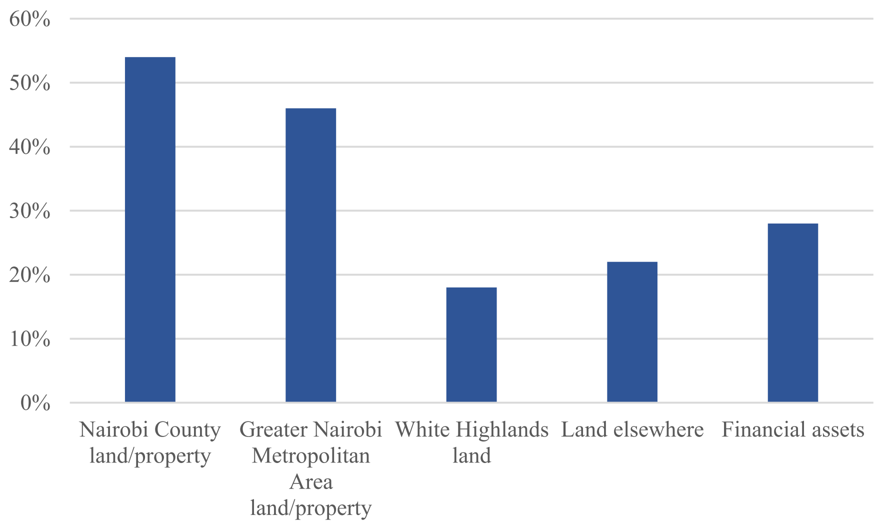

Fig. 9. Sample of estates subject to court rulings: share containing given asset type.
Notes: $n = 50$. Estates can contain more than one asset type and columns do not sum to 100 %. Greater Nairobi Metropolitan Area, *excludes* Nairobi County itself. Downloaded from http://kenyalaw.org/kl/. Land references extracted and coded to a county and subcounty using ChatGPT and google maps, and manually cross-checked. Each geographic location then manually checked against maps of Scheduled Area/White Highlands.

At the recommendation of the 1972 Ndegwa Commission on Civil Service Reform, the government lifted previous restrictions on civil servants owning businesses, which is thought to have led to considerable overlap between the business and civil service elites. However, this process of accumulation through the formal employment channel (itself strongly mediated by education, which shaped access to formal sector employment) was probably quite short-lived, as formal sector salaries collapsed in the 1980s (Simson, 2019). Political favouritism in the allocation of credit through state-owned banks in particular, but also in irregular sales of public land, is also a likely to have influenced the composition of the wealthy (Ndungu, 2004).

Given the rapid rate of urbanization in Kenya, and to Nairobi in particular, property price appreciation probably plays a considerable role in explaining current wealth holding patterns, much as it does around the world. Already in 1977, Andrew Hake argued that 'As with the earliest European and Indian immigrants, the ownership of property in Nairobi has been the express lift to prosperity' (Hake, 1977, p. 75) Mapping the means by which individuals came to acquire urban land and housing in the 1970s and thereafter is likely to explain a not insubstantial part of the story of the rise of an African 'top 1 %'.

4.6. *Wealth inequality in contemporary Kenya*

What are the consequences of this process of wealth accumulation in Kenya on contemporary wealth inequality? A recent household survey provides insights into the distribution of wealth of certain asset classes, and suggests that Kenya's level of wealth inequality today is indeed high. Table 5 draws on the 2015/16 Kenya Integrated Household Budget survey, which included an enumeration of agricultural plots by ownership type, size and estimated value, the estimated value of the household's residential home, and number and type of livestock. I construct measures of wealth inequality for each of these assets, as well as a combined measure of the three asset types.

Table 5 also gives estimates on the stock of private wealth that is missing from this inequality measure. Importantly, these wealth inequality measures exclude financial assets and land and property that is not owner-occupied, a not insubstantial share of the property stock by value. As these asset types are likely to be more unevenly distributed than agricultural land or owner-occupied dwellings, the measure given by the survey can be regarded as a lower-bound estimate. Even this lower-bound estimate, however, suggests that wealth inequality is high, with a top 1 % wealth share of 30 %, or gini of 0.82, for the aggregate asset wealth measure. By comparison, the gini of wealth inequality in the United Kingdom today is 0.75 while the top 1 % share is 21 %, while the gini in South Africa, one of the world's most unequal countries, is 0.96, and the top 1 % share is 55 % (World Inequality Lab, 2023).

However, as revealed by the asset-specific ginis, this high level of wealth inequality is driven by the uneven distribution of housing-wealth, more so than the uneven distribution of agricultural land. The gini of land inequality is 0.84, with a top 1 % share of 22 %, while the gini of owner-occupier housing wealth is considerably higher, with a gini of 0.92 and a top 1 % share of 56 %. Consequently, housing wealth dominates the top 1 %, while wealth in agricultural land defines the 70^{th}-99^{th} percentiles (Fig. 10a). Urban residents thus dominate the top 1 %, while rural residents form the majority of wealth-holders below the top 1 % (Fig. 10b).

The value of financial wealth in Kenya is harder to estimate. Corporate income tax in 2022/23 amounted to US$2.2bn (including from foreign corporations) (Republic of Kenya, 2022). This implies declared corporate incomes of US$6-7.5bn, and corporate wealth of US$120-150bn, assuming a 5 % return on capital, although much of this is likely to be foreign-owned. The analysis of asset structures from large estates (Fig. 9), suggests that only a minority of wealthy households own shares in listed or private companies; such financial wealth is likely to be very unequally distributed.

The absence of estimates of wealth stocks and incomplete household measures of wealth make it difficult to construct wealth inequality measures for Kenya that are directly comparable with those of other countries. Nonetheless, this partial picture, based on select assets, suggests that wealth inequality in contemporary Kenya would place it towards the top of the global rankings. However, financial wealth and property account for a sizable share of the country's wealth stock, and are likely to be a lot more unequally distributed than agricultural land.

5. Conclusion

Using a purpose-constructed dataset of estates under probate and administration, this article provides a fresh perspective on the Africanisation of wealth in Kenya since the late colonial period. It shows that since the 1980s, roughly 13 % of African Kenyan men, and 3 % of women, leave formal wealth of some significance at death, pointing to the emergence of a sizable African wealth-owning social strata. In numerical terms, African wealth-holders quickly came to outnumber the settler community after independence. Europeans leaving estates in Kenya fell rapidly in number after independence, while the Asian footprint grew larger in absolute terms, and the Asian community thus remains highly overrepresented in the wealth elite.

The geographic patterns of wealth-ownership speak to the origins of African wealth-holding. Still today, most estates are left by residents in areas of African peasant production during colonial rule, and are likely comprised of land holdings titled under the Swynnerton plan and its successor programmes. These land-holdings are typically modest, with a median holding size of around 1 acre in 2015, and consequently relatively widely shared. The share of estates left by residents in the former White Highlands increased in the 1980s and 1990s, presumably as beneficiaries of land redistribution gained title to plots on settlement schemes, and wealthier households bought holdings on formerly European farms. However, this land transfer was accompanied by a dramatic decline in holding size, suggestive of a decline in (landed) wealth concentration, at least relative to the colonial period. Since the 1990s, the growth in Nairobi-based estates has been marked, and probably reflects the growing importance of urban sources of wealth top households at the top of the wealth distribution. Contemporary survey sources give high estimates of wealth inequality, but housing property, more so than agricultural land, is driving these inequality measures.

Table 5
Household wealth inequality and wealth stock by asset type, 2015/16.

Year of obs	Asset type	Value of total asset stock	# households	Mean (per household)	Median (per household)	Top 10 % share	Top 1 % share	Gini
2015/16	Land, dwelling and cattle ('total')	Ksh.7,832bn (US$77bn)	11.4 m	KSh.680,000 (US$6,670)	KSh.101,200 (US$984)	0.69	0.30	0.82
2015/16	Agricultural land*	KSh.3,907bn (US$38bn)	11.4 m	KSh.342,342 (US$3,350)	KSh.0 (US$0)	0.72	0.22	0.84
2015/16	Agricultural land - land-owners only		4.6 m (40 %)	Ksh.800,664 (US$7,850)		0.50	0.14	0.64
2015/16	Cattle	Ksh.357bn (US$3.4bn)	11.4 m	KSh.31,300 (US$307)	KSh.0 (US$0)	0.67	0.25	0.83
2015/16	Dwellings (owner-occupier)	Ksh.3,568bn (US$35bn)	11.4 m	KSh.313,000 (US$3,100)	KSh.15,000 (US$146)	0.88	0.56	0.92
2015/16	Dwellings (rentals)**	Ksh.2,836bn (US$29bn)						
2023	Stock exchange***	Ksh.1,652bn (US$11bn)						
2023	Companies (private and public)****	~Ksh.21,028bn (~US$140bn)						

Sources: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020 (*Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey, 2015/16*); Republic of Kenya, 2022 (*2022/2023 Estimates of Revenue, Grants and Loans*); Nairobi Securities Exchange, Market Statistics, https://www.nse.co.ke/dataservices/market-statistics/.
Notes:
* Assumes that the value of land rented-out (which is not apportioned to the owners in the household survey), is distributed proportionately to land wealth among the top 10 % of land owners (14 % of total land).
** Calculated from rent, assuming the rental:property value is the same for owner-occupier and rental properties.
*** Considerable share foreign-owned.
**** Capitalisation method, assuming taxable income represents 5 % return on assets.

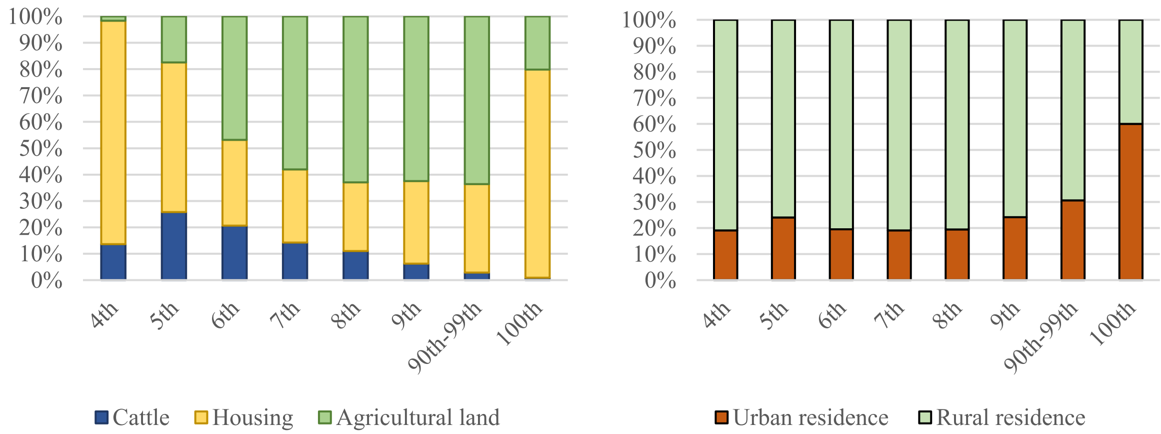

Fig. 10. Asset composition and residence by wealth decile and top percentile, 2015.
Source: Author calculations using KIHBS 2015/16.

These trends point to multiple colonial legacies, with different distributional outcomes. Late colonial land reforms promoted the formalisation of land rights on peasant holdings, instituted a progressive redistribution of some formerly European-held land, and encouraged a regressive redistribution of land through private sales and political appropriation. The aggregate impact of these policies on land inequality is not obvious. Contemporary land inequality may be higher than is socially desirable, but whether or not Kenyan land inequality is exceptionally high is unclear; existing estimates of land ginis suggest similar levels of inequality as in peasant colonies such as Ghana and Tanzania (Jayne et al., 2014, note 22; World Bank, 2009, Table 3.14). Another consequence of Kenya's settler legacy was the growth of a considerable non-agricultural wealth stock, very little of which was African-owned on the eve of independence. Arguably this larger stock of financial wealth and urban real estate created greater opportunities for postcolonial enrichment than in other postcolonial societies.

The Kenyan case also provides a perspective on how wealth structures evolve, in the face of a major, but ultimately negotiated political rupture. In his longue durée history of inequality, Walter Scheidel's argued that meaningful redistribution of income or wealth only happen in response to major catastrophes such as wars, state collapse and revolutions (Scheidel, 2017). Over the course of the 20th century, land reforms have been undertaken across the world; Albertus (2015) counts 74 countries with major land reform since 1900.[17] The most extensive land reforms, and the largest land inequality reductions, typically followed violent revolution and civil war, and were usually undertaken by autocratic regimes, such as those of the Soviet Union, China or Cambodia (Albertus, 2015; Scheidel, 2017). Negotiated land reforms where land owners were compensated for land loss, such as that in Kenya, as well as in Latin America countries like Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica, have usually had a more modest overall effect on land inequality (Albertus, 2015, p. 140). Such perspectives suggests that Kenya's negotiated transfer of power at independence could only have had a muted effect on inequality.

However, in the Kenyan case, a focus on land reform overlooks the importance of peasant land to the total agricultural land stock, which meant that land was never as unequally owned as in South Africa or Latin America (Lipton, 2009, Table 7.2). Furthermore, the very rapid land fragmentation in the former European farming areas after independence, a result of subdivision of large farms and high rates of population growth and inheritance laws that typically split farms among many heirs, complicates this picture, and suggests that the land distribution has been far from static since 1960.

Kenya's inequality narrative is intimately tied up with agricultural land, the historically most important productive resource, and the catalyst for Kenya's special breed of settler colonialism. Popular demand for redistribution and concerns about land inequality and land corruption motivated a set of progressive clauses in the 2010 Constitution and 2012 Land Law, albeit beset with implementation challenges (Boone et al., 2019). In 2015 a bill was introduced to set both maximum and minimum land holding sizes, although it has yet to pass. The benefits of further land reform notwithstanding, it is notable that rural land, far more so than urban property or financial assets, has dominated the inequality discourse on wealth.[18] It is tempting to speculate that assets traditionally held by Africans has faced greater public scrutiny and pressures for redistribution, relative to assets that only came into existence in the colonial era and in which Africans shared little prior to the 1960s, such as urban property, stocks and bonds, which have probably passed into a smaller number of hands under less public scrutiny.

This article points to the need for more data collection and research on such topics. To better understand the nature of wealth inequality in Kenya, and most likely in other African contexts too, there is a need for estimates of the stocks and ownership structure of financial assets and real estate. Studies from Western countries have emphasised the importance of house price appreciation for the narrowing of wealth inequality overall in the second half of the 20th century, by enriching a 'patrimonial middle class' of homeowners (Piketty, 2014, p. 260). How similar dynamics have played out in rapidly urbanising African contexts where property prices have also appreciated strongly, but where the structure of home ownership is more concentrated, have hardly been studied.[19] While the rate of home ownership in Kenya are high in the rural areas, property in urban areas, where prices are highest, are not. Of the households living in the stock of higher quality housing in Kenya, most of which is located in Nairobi, only 19 % own their dwellings.[20] The mortgage market remains underdeveloped and inaccessible to most (Ouma and Odongo, 2021).

Another under-explored topic that these sources can contribute to, is how inheritances processes themselves shape wealth accumulation. Although they are a select sample, the cases in court attest to the difficulties of transferring wealth across generations in Kenya, particularly where heirs are large in number. Furthermore, the marked gender imbalance in the people leaving estates in Kenya, suggests that inherited wealth may not (yet) be the most important determinant of the contemporary wealth structure (Simson, 2024). Given the continent's rapid population growth which will likely continue to drive up the prices of land, coupled with a marked socioeconomic fertility gradient which means that wealthier parents have fewer heirs than poor ones, inheritance of wealth may play an increasingly important role in shaping the future distribution of wealth in Kenya.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Rebecca Simson: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT in the extraction and classification of relevant textual information in court rulings (for construction of Fig. 9). The author then reviewed and edited these classifications and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

[17] The study includes 19 Latin American country, and 55 cases of land redistribution beyond Latin America, although it excludes negotiated land transfers, such as the Kenyan case.

[18] A 2009 World Bank study on inequality and poverty in Kenya, for instance, makes no mention at all of urban real estate or financial assets (World Bank, 2009).

[19] For a discussion of urban housing in Africa, see Collier and Venables (2014), a recent World Bank population discusses capital and land prices in African cities, but does not directly address inequality (Lall et al., 2017).

[20] Calculated from 2009 Kenya Housing and Population Census (Minnesota Population Center, 2020). High quality housing defined as dwellings with indoor plumbing and electricity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for advice and guidance or feedback on drafts of this paper: Anushka Sehmi, Dominique Burbidge, Hon. Mary Ang'awa, Joan Mukoya, Denis Cogneau, Neil Cummins, Awa Ambra Seck, Daniel Waldenström, John Lonsdale, A. G. Hopkins, Gareth Austin, Ewout Frankema, participants at the EES Special Issue Workshop on Wealth and Income Inequality, the Cambridge African Economic History seminar, as well as the two anonymous reviewers and editor, Ralf Meisenzahl. I am also grateful to the Kenyan Bureau of Statistics for making survey and census data available to researchers, and to Christine Nicolls for use of the EEA database.

Datasets

Europeans in East Africa Database, https://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/, downloaded with creator permission, 2023.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. *Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey, 2015/16* [KEN-KNBS-KIHBS-2015-2016-v01], Retrieved 2020.

Minnesota Population Center, *Kenya Housing and Population Censuses, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999 and 2009,* Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International: Version 7.3 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, Retrieved 2020.

Office for National Statistics (ONS), *UK population estimates 1838 to 2018* (licensed under the Open Government Licence), Retrieved 2022.

Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Death rate by age group in England and Wales*, https://visual.ons.gov.uk/causes-of-death-over-100-years/, Retrieved 2022.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division, World Population Prospects, https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Mortality/, Retrieved 2023.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.eeh.2024.101623.

References

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., Robinson, J.A., 2001. The colonial origins of comparative development: an empirical investigation. Am. Econ. Rev. 91 (5), 1369–1401.
Adam, M., 2015. Indian Africa: Minorities of Indian-Pakistani Origin in Eastern Africa. Mkuki na Nyota, Nairobi.
Albertus, M., 2015. Autocracy and Redistribution: The Politics of Land Reform. Cambridge University Press.
Amis, P.H., 1983. A Shanty Town of Tenants: The Commercialization Of Unauthorized Housing in Nairobi 1960-1980. University of Kent, United Kingdom. PhD Thesis.
Ang'awa, M.A., 2011. Procedure in the Law of Succession in Kenya. LawAfrica.
Angeles, L., 2007. Income inequality and colonialism. Eur. Econ. Rev. 51 (5), 1155–1176.
Angelo, A., 2019. Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta Years. Cambridge University Press.
Atkinson, A.B., Harrison, A.J., 1979. The analysis of trends over time in the distribution of personal wealth in Britain. Annales l'inséé 33/34, 89. https://doi.org/10.2307/20075322.
Atkinson, A.B., 2015. Top incomes in East Africa before and after independence. WID world Working Paper Series no.2015/2.
Bauluz, L., Govind, Y., & Novokmet, F. (2020). *Global land inequality* (WID.World Working Paper, Issue.
Bengtsson, E., 2014. Labour's share in twentieth-century Sweden: a reinterpretation. Scand. Econ. History Rev. 62 (3), 290–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/03585522.2014.932837.
Boone, C., Dyzenhaus, A., Manji, A., Gateri, C.W., Ouma, S., Owino, J.K., Gargule, A., Klopp, J.M., 2019. Land law reform in Kenya: devolution, veto players, and the limits of an institutional fix. Afr. Affairs 118 (471), 215–237.
Boone, C., Lukalo, F., Joireman, S.F., 2021. Promised Land: Settlement Schemes in Kenya, 1962 to 2016. Political Geogr. 89, 102393. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102393. June.
Burton, A., Jennings, M., 2007. Introduction: the Emperor's new clothes? Continuities in governance in late colonial and early postcolonial East Africa. Int. J. Afr. Historic. Stud. 40 (1), 1–25.
Cain, P.J., Hopkins, A.G., 2016. British Imperialism 1688-2015, 3rd edition. Routledge.
Collier, P., Lal, D., 1986. Labour and Poverty in Kenya, 1900-1980. Clarendon Press.
Collier, P., Venables, A.J., 2014. Housing and urbanization in Africa: Unleashing a formal market process. In: World Bank policy research working paper 6871.
Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1953. Registrar-General Annual Report 1952. Government Printer, Nairobi.
Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1959. Registrar-General Annual Report 1958. Government Printer, Nairobi.
Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1960. *Kenya European and Asian Agricultural Census 1958: An Economic Analysis*.
Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1926. 1926 ordinance to provide for duties on estates. The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. Government Printer, Nairobi.
Commissioners of HM Inland Revenue, 1959. One Hundred and First Report of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Inland Revenue for the Year Ended 31st March 1958. London.
Cone, L.W., Lipscomb, J.F., 1972. The History of Kenya Agriculture.
Cooper, E., 2011. Challenges and opportunities in inheritance rights in Kenya. Chronic Poverty Research Centre Inheritance Series Policy Note.
Cowen, M., MacWilliam, S., 1996. Indigenous Capital in Kenya: the 'Indian' Dimension of Debate. Interkont Books, Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki.
Cummins, N., 2021. Where is the middle class? Evidence from 60 million English death and probate records, 1892–1992. J. Econ. History 81 (2), 359–404. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050721000164.
Duder, C.J., 1993. Men of the officer class ': the participants in the 1919 soldier settlement scheme in Kenya. Afr. Aff. 92 (366), 69–87.
Dumont, R., 1966. False Start in Africa. Praeger Publishers, New York.
Europeans in East Africa, 2023. Europeans in East Africa Database. https://www.europeansineastafrica.co.uk/.

Fanon, F., 1963. The Wretched of the Earth. Grove Weidenfeld, New York.
Frankel, S.H., 1938. Capital Investment in Africa: Its Course and Effects. Oxford University Press.
Frankema, E., Haas, M.D., Waijenburg, M.V., 2023. Inequality regimes in Africa from pre-colonial times to the present. *Afr. Aff.* (VI) 1–38.
Frankema, E., 2010. The colonial roots of land inequality: geography, factor endowments, or institutions? Econ. History Rev. 63 (2), 418–451.
Hake, A., 1977. African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City. Sussex University Press.
Harbeson, J.W., Holmquist, F., 2020. The lessons and legacies of the "Kenya debate". The Oxford Handbook of Kenyan Politics, pp. 450–464. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198815693.013.32.
Harbeson, J.W., 1971. Land reforms and politics in Kenya, 1954-70. J. Modern Afr. Stud. 9 (2), 231–251.
HassConsult, 2024. The Hass Property Index: Land Price Index Quarter One Report 2024. https://www.hassconsult.com/_files/ugd/4a7193_21d808cac72a4df6a2bfcc9f8ca649d7.pdf. Accessed May 2024.
Hillbom, E., Bolt, J., de Haas, M., Tadei, F., 2023. Income inequality and export-oriented commercialization in colonial Africa: Evidence from six countries. Econ. History Rev.
Himbara, D., 1994. The failed africanization of commerce and industry in Kenya. World Dev. 22 (3), 469–482.
Himbara, D., 1997. The 'Asian question' in East Africa: The continuing controversy on the role of Indian capitalists in accumulation and development in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Afr. Stud. 56 (1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020189708707857.
Iliffe, J., 1983. The Emergency of African Capitalism. MacMillan.
Jackson, W., 2011. White man's country: Kenya colony and the making of a myth. J. Eastern Afr. Stud. 5 (2), 344–368. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2011.571393.
Jayne, T.S., Chapoto, A., Sitko, N., Nkonde, C., Muyanga, M., Chamberlin, J., 2014. Is the scramble for land in Africa foreclosing a smallholder agricultural expansion strategy? J. Int. Aff. 67 (2), 35–53.
Jayne, T., Chamberlin, J., Traub, L., Sitko, N., Muyanga, M., Yeboah, F., Nkonde, C., Anseeuw, W., Chapoto, A., Kachule, R., 2016. Africa's changing farmland ownership: the rise of medium-scale farms. Agricul. Econ. 47, 197–214.
Jones, A.H., 1982. Estimating wealth of the living from a probate sample. J. Interdiscip. Hist. 13 (2), 273–300.
Kanyinga, K., 2007. Kenya experience in Land Reform: the 'million-acre settment scheme'. Land redistribution in Africa: towards a common vision. World Bank, Washington D.C.
Kanyinga, K., 2009. The legacy of the white highlands: Land rights, ethnicity and the post-2007 election violence in Kenya. J. Contemp. Afr. Stud. 27 (3), 325–344.
Kaplinsky, R., 1980. Capitalist accumulation in the periphery—the Kenyan case re-examined. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 7 (17), 83–105.
Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics, 1972. An Economic Survey of the African Owned Large Farms in Trans Nzoia, 1967/68 –1970/71. .
Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics, 1977. Integrated Rural Survey 1974/75: Basic Report.
Kenya Colony and Protectorate, 1962. Kenya African Agricultural Sample Census, 1960/61, Part 1.
Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022, I.
Kimani, S.M., 1972. The structure of land ownership in Nairobi. J. East. Afr. Res. Dev. 2 (2), 101–124.
Kitching, G., 1980. Class and Economic Change in Kenya: the Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie. Yale University Press.
Lall, S. V., Henderson, J. V., & Venables, A. J., 2017. Africa's Cities: Opening Doors to the World.African Regional Studies Program, World Bank, Washington, D.C. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/854221490781543956/Africas-cities-opening-doors-to-the-world. Accessed May 2024.
Leys, C., 1975. Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism. University of California Press.
Leys, C., 1978. Capital Accumulation, Class Formation and Dependency: The Significance of the Kenyan Case. The Socialist Register, pp. 241–266.
Lipton, M., 2009. Land Reform in Developing Countries: Property Rights and Property Wrongs. Routledge.
Lloyd, P.C., 1966. The New Elite of Tropical Africa. International Africa Institute.
Lonsdale, J., 2010. Kenya: Home County and African Frontier. In: Bickers, R. (Ed.), Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas. Oxford Academic.
Mangat, J.S., 1969. A History of the Asians in East Africa, ca. 1886 to 1945. Oxford University Press.
Manning, P., Drwenski, M., 2016. The differences of inequality in Africa. In: Hudson, P., Tribe, K. (Eds.), The Contradictions of Capital in the Twenty-First Century: The Piketty Opportunity. Agenda Publishing.
Milanovic, B., 2003. Is Inequality in Africa Really Different?. World Bank, Washington, DC. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/17906.
Mkandawire, T., 2002. The Terrible Toll of Post-colonial rebel movements in africa: towards an explanation of the violence against the peasantry. J. Modern Afr. Stud. 40 (2), 181–215.
Mkandawire, T., 2009. From the national question to the social question. Transf.: Crit. Perspect. South. Afr. 69 (1), 130–160.
Morgan, W.T.W., 1963. The 'White Highlands' of Kenya. Geogr. J. 129 (2), 140–155.
National Land Commission, & FAO, 2021. Effects of Land Fragmentation on Land Use and Food Security.
Ndungu, N., 2004. Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal or Irregular Allocation of Public Land. Main Report and Annexes Volume I & II.
Ouma, B.O., Odongo, M., 2021. Mortgage financing constraints and housing sector development in Kenya. Int. J. Econ. Commerce Manag. 9 (4), 148–163.
Oxfam, 2017. Taxing for a More Equal Kenya. https://kenya.oxfam.org/latest/publications/taxing-more-equal-kenya. Accessed May 2024.
Piketty, T., 2014. Capital in the Twenty-First Century. Belknap Press.
Republic of Kenya, 1968. Report of the Commission on the Law of Succession. Government Printer, Nairobi.
Republic of Kenya, 1972. An Economic Appraisal of the Settlement Schemes 1964/65-1967/68. Ministry of Finance and Economic Policy. Government Printer, Nairobi.
Republic of Kenya. (2022). 2022/2023 Estimates of Revenue, Grants and Loans of the Government of Kenya for the Year Ending 30th June, 2023. Nairobi.
Scheidel, W., 2017. The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century. Princeton University Press.
Simson, R., 2019. Africa's clientelist budget policies revisited: public expenditure and employment in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Econ. History Rev. 72 (4), 1960–2010. https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12820.
Simson, R.. Is Kenya's gender wealth gap narrowing? New insights from probate records, *Socio-Economic Review*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwae051.
Swainson, N., 1977. The rise of a national bourgeoisie in Kenya. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 4 (8), 39–55.
Van de Walle, N., 2009. The Institutional origins of inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. Annual Rev. Political Sci. 12, 307–327. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.063006.092318.
Wasserman, G., 1973. Continuity and counter-insurgency: the role of land reform in decolonizing Kenya, 1962–70. Can. J. Afr. Stud. 7 (1).
World Bank, 2009. Kenya Poverty and Inequality Assessment: Executive Summary and Synthesis Report. World Bank, Washington D.C. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/425611468089394594/Kenya-Poverty-and-inequality-assessment-executive-summary-and-synthesis-report.
World Inequality Lab, 2023. World Inequality Database. wid.world.
Wrigley, C. C. (1965). Kenya: The patterns of economic life, 1902-1945. In V. Harlow, E. M. Chilver, A. Smith, & M. Perham (Eds.), *History of East Africa* Vol. 2. Oxford University Press.