



The Journal of African History
A Qualitative and quantitative analysis
2008-2012

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Introduction

The Journal of African History (JAH) is a tri-annual peer-reviewed academic journal which publishes articles and book reviews ranging widely over the African past from the late Stone Age to the present, through pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods.¹ *JAH* website states explicitly that the thematic range of *JAH* is very broad, covering social, economic, political, cultural, military and intellectual history. Recent articles have explored diverse themes including: labour and class, gender and sexuality, health and medicine, ethnicity and race, migration and diaspora, nationalism and state politics, religion and ritual, technology and the environment.² *JAH* publishes in English and French. It was established in 1960 and it is published by Cambridge University Press, UK.

The title and the website information give the view that *JAH* deals with the entire history of Africa from pre-colonial through to post-colonial. One can conclude also from the title and the information on the website that *JAH* is located at the cutting edge of scholarship on the social, cultural, economic, military, intellectual and political history of Africa as a whole. It could be said that *JAH* will fill a representational gap by providing an academic forum for serious scholarship, research and debate on women, labour and class, gender and sexuality, health and medicine, ethnicity and race, migration and diaspora, nationalism and state politics, religion and ritual, and technology and environment.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the past five years of the *Journal of African History* from 2008 to 2012. This period covers Volume 49 - 53, a total of 15 issues containing 327 research articles, book reviews, short notices, erratum and corrigendum. Nearly 350 authors from about 193 different institutions have helped contribute articles and reviews to the journal (*JAH*). This paper starts with brief background information on the *JAH* (rankings, editorial procedures, the aims and scope), and also analyses the journal more in depth.

The main research question of this paper is: *To what extent does JAH represent African history in terms of wide time period and broad themes in its content?* Basically, this paper aims to find out how *JAH* has met its aims and scope. This question will be answered in three parts. In the first part, the self-representation of the journal and its reputation is analyzed. The self-representation is based on information found on the website of the journal

¹ As stated on their website, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=AFH> (accessed 6th March, 2013)

² Website <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=AFH> (accessed 6th March, 2013)



and on the institutional background of the journal. The reputation of the journal is based on its position on ranking lists, citations, indexing and abstracting.

In the second part, the scope of the journal will be explored and elaborated on. It starts by highlighting the institutional background, gender and interests of the editorial and advisory editorial board. This information will be useful in understanding the choice of content of the journal. The background of authors of the articles published will be highlighted based on gender, location and institutional geographical location. This information will later be linked to some notes on what impact this may have on the content of the journal. Subsequently, I will analyse the ‘African’ content of articles, that is, the region most written about, the country in Africa discussed often and why. In doing this, the geographical areas covered by *JAH* will be analysed and the countries represented in the book reviews and articles will be revealed. To examine the trends of topics of *JAH*, the ‘trending topics’ between 2008 and 2012 will be discussed. Up to this point, I would have only outlined a general discussion *on JAH*, at a macro-level. Therefore, on the micro level I will discuss the topic ‘Death’ in detail and connect it to the foregoing conclusions on *JAH*.

The third part is the conclusion. In the conclusion the main research question: “To what extent does *JAH* represent African history in terms of wide time period and broad themes in its content?” will be answered using all the debates and analysis.

Background and Representation

The journal is an initiative of Roland Oliver and John D. Fage of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. SOAS is famous globally as a "leading centre for the study of a highly diverse range of subjects concerned with Asia, Africa and the Middle East."³ In this case our focus will be on Africa. In the 1974 editorial note, it was stated that the purpose of *JAH* is to find a journal that encompasses the whole African continent with an international circulation.⁴ In the same editorial note, it was stated that "the special value of the journal has been its comprehensive coverage of the whole range of African history".⁵ *JAH* started with two issues a year counting about 350 pages in total. Then to three issues a year constant at around 350 pages, then it expanded to 4 issues of about 430 pages. Currently, it has reverted to three issues with around 453 pages a year. The reason for returning to 3 issues could be attributed to the contraction of research in African history, as well as difficulty of the journal attracting sufficient material of acceptable quality.⁶ It is interesting to note that the number of pages have not decreased but increased even with the reduction of one issue. Each issue contains about 6 to 8 articles, an average of 15 book reviews and one-page short notices on books in a few issues.

Presentation of Content

The content of *JAH* for the five years under review has no editorial note but has pages for advertisement and author index but was not accessible to me. This is because I accessed it online and these details are not online. Efforts to get hardcopies of all five volumes proved difficult as the university library had no copies, whilst the time did not allow me to order these copies via the library because it could take several weeks. I therefore decided to focus on the data easily accessible through *JAH* website and online services. The following were easily distinguished: research articles, book reviews, short notices and erratum/ corrigendum.

³ SOAS website, <http://www.soas.ac.uk/about/> 21 April 2010. (accessed 29th March 2013)

⁴ See for further details, SOAS website, <http://www.soas.ac.uk/about/> 21 April 2010. (Accessed 29th March 2013).

Finding editorial note in the volumes understudy was not possible since recent years did not have editorial notes and that is why I used previous editorial notes.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ *JAH* (1986). Editorial Note. *The Journal of African History*, 27, pp 1-2.

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=2808832&fulltextType=ED&fileId=S0021853700029169> (accessed 1/04/2013)

Erratum and Corrigendum are lists of errors and their corrections issued shortly after the original text was published.⁷

The discussion in this paper will focus on the book reviews and research articles only. This is basically because they constitute the bulk of *JAH* and are very important to this study because they present new research (research articles) and present scrutiny as well as critique of existing research (book reviews). *JAH* does not always have special issues. Through an email conversation on 1st July, 2013 with one of the editors, Barbara Cooper, she explained that special issues emerge when a conference or workshop organizer has a set of papers from the conference that are thematically related. They tend to contact *JAH* when they are not interested in publishing an edited collection themselves. They ask whether the editors are interested and if the theme seems relevant to African History and have enough significance to possibly warrant a special issue the editors invite them to send in “only the very strongest of the papers.”

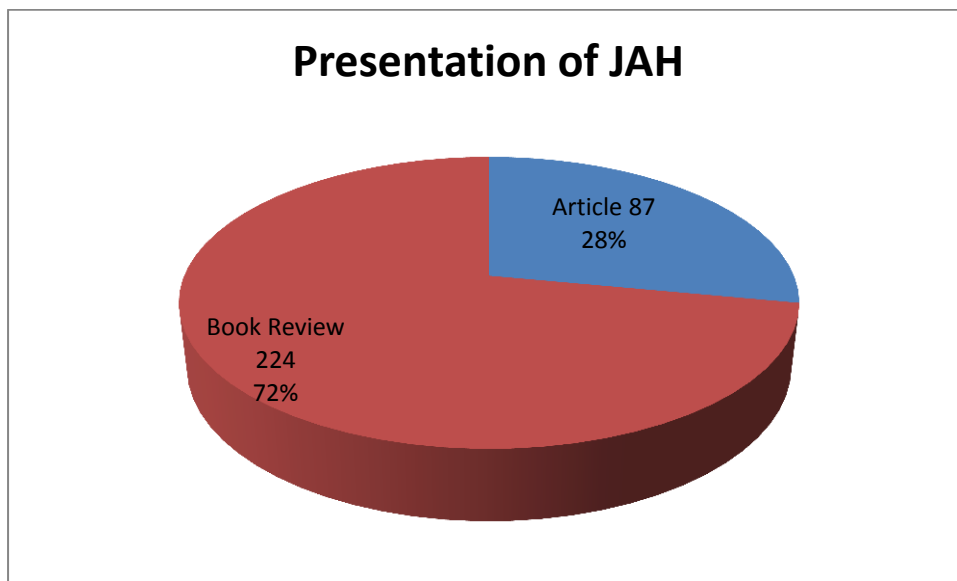


Figure 1: presentation of content of *JAH* in terms of topic and frequency from 2008 to 2012

From the table above, one can conclude that the bulk of *JAH*'s work from 2008 to 2012 is on book review. It constitutes 72% of its publication. A total of 224 out of 311 publications are book reviews. Research articles constitute 28%, that is, 87 of the 311 publications.

⁷ I maintained them just as the editors published it in *JAH*. Different editors could be the reason for using different words for the same thing.

Language

Manuscripts to *JAH* can be in English or French as stated on *JAH* website. Out of the 327 book reviews and research articles 7 (2%) are in French and 320 (98%) are in English. This would be later analysed in detail after the authors and geographical concentration of *JAH*'s work is analysed to make conclusions on the trend of *JAH*'s work.

Language	Number	Percentage
English	319	98%
French	8	2%
Total	327	100%

Figure 2: Table for language presentation of *JAH* from 2008 to 2012

Reputation: Citation, abstracting, indexing and ranking

Citation

The publisher of the journal keeps track of the most cited or downloaded articles. Online, one can find the top 10 most-read/downloaded articles of *JAH* for the previous 12 months. Most-read rankings are updated on a monthly basis. However, it does not mention any criteria on which these rankings are based. A closer look at the most downloaded articles for the month of March, 2013 showed that 6 out of 10 were from the years under review (2008-2012). On the top 10 most-cited articles for *JAH*, they are updated on a monthly basis and provided by CrossRef.⁸ None of the most cited articles is within the 2008-2012 period. The citation and most down-loaded article however did not provide enough information on the reputation of *JAH*.

Abstracting and indexing

The journal is abstracted and indexed in⁹:

- British Humanities Index
- Geographical Abstracts
- Current Contents

⁸ *JAH* website, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=AFH&tab=mostcited#tab> (accessed 3rd July, 2013)

⁹ *JAH* website, *Abstracting & Indexing Services* <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayMoreInfo?jid=AFH&type=is> (accessed 6th March, 2013)

- Social Sciences Citation Index
- Arts and Humanities Citation Index
- Scopus
- Historical Abstracts
- International Development
- America: History and Life
- Middle East: Abstracts and Index.
- Elsevier Science Bibliographic Database
- IBZ International Bibliography of Periodical Literature
- IBR International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences

Every journal included in these abstract and indexing services are highly ranked and has met the high standards of an objective evaluation process from highly independent scholars.¹⁰ This means that *JAH* delivers data that is accurate, meaningful and timely and it is a highly ranked journal.

Ranking

According to *Journal Citation Reports*, the *Journal of African History* has a 2011 impact factor of 0.382, ranking it 17th out of 55 journals in the category "History".¹¹ *JAH* could not be found on any other ranking list except *Journal Citation Reports*.

Editors and Editing Process of *JAH*

Editorial Board

The editorial board comprises the following distinguished professors and scholars since 2011

1. Barbara M. Cooper , Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA¹²,
2. Richard Reid ,School of Oriental and African Studies, UK
3. Cheikh A. Babou, University of Pennsylvania, USA

¹⁰ [International abstracting and indexing services](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajol/pages/view/GetIndexed) <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajol/pages/view/GetIndexed> (accessed 6th June, 2013)

¹¹ [SCImago journal ranking](http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?area=0&category=1202&country=all&year=2011&order=sjr&min=0&min_type=cd) 2011, http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?area=0&category=1202&country=all&year=2011&order=sjr&min=0&min_type=cd and [Journal Website, Impact factor](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayMoreInfo?jid=AFH&type=if), <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayMoreInfo?jid=AFH&type=if> (accessed 6th March, 2013)

¹² Special thanks to Barbara Cooper for giving me detailed information on developments in *JAH* through Email on the 1st of July, 2013. These views were her own opinion and do not represent that of all the editors of *JAH*.

4. Lynn M. Thomas , University of Washington, Seattle, USA

The editorial board reflects gender equality and the interest of these professors are wide covering different aspects of history. Barbara M. Cooper specializes on Religion, Africa, Gender and social issues.¹³ Richard Reid's main interest includes warfare and violence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; liberation struggle in the Horn of Africa; ethnicity, nation, violence and identity. Cheikh A. Babou's research focuses on mystical Islam in West Africa and Senegal and on the new African diaspora.¹⁴ Lynn M. Thomas states that her interest includes Africa, Comparative Colonialisms, Women and Gender.¹⁵ Three of the four editors are USA based with one UK based. This is important because it will help us understand how this reflects on the authors of *JAH* as well as the content of *JAH*. A closer look at the editorial board shows that only one of the board members (Cheikh A. Babou) was born in Africa but based in USA. Since this article analyses five years of *JAH*, it was noted that the current editorial board only started working in 2011 and therefore there is the need to look at how the former editorial board was constituted briefly.

The editorial board from 2008-2011 were

1. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, Harvard University, USA
2. Anne Mager, University of Cape Town, South Africa
3. Andreas Eckert, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany
4. Justin Willis, Durham University, UK

The former editorial board was diverse when it comes to geographical location of the members. One was based in USA, another based in South Africa, the other two were affiliated to UK and Germany based universities. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong based in USA was born in Africa (Ghana). This editorial board reflects more of the "Africaness" of the journal which aims to prove that there is an African history to tell, and in this editorial board two out of four of the board members are Africans. They play a major role in the journal as they are involved in the daily activities and choice of content for *JAH*. Three of these editorial board members belong to the advisory editorial board with the exception of Justin Willis.

¹³Barbara Cooper, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/area/idass/COOPER,Barbara.htm> (accessed 11th March, 2013)

¹⁴Cheikh A. Babou <http://www.history.upenn.edu/faculty/babou.shtml> (accessed 11th March, 2013)

¹⁵Lynn M. Thomas <https://depts.washington.edu/history/directory/index.php?facultyname=T-66> (accessed 11th March, 2013)

Advisory Editorial Board

To assist the editorial board there is an international advisory board composed of scholars located all over the world. The advisory Editorial Board is made up of twenty two professors and scholars of diverse background with different specializations supporting the activities and work of the editorial board. Seven of them are females whiles fifteen are males. There are ten of the advisors located in USA, four are UK based with two from South Africa, one each from Canada, Germany, France, Nigeria, Senegal and Switzerland but no two advisors came from the same university.

This highly USA oriented international editorial advisory board can be interpreted as a sign of the journal's difficulty to present itself worldwide though *JAH* is international. Below is a presentation of the continental location of the advisory editorial board.

Location	No.
North America	11
Europe	7
Africa	4
Total	22

The table above shows the continental location of the advisory board. 4 (18%) of the advisory board members are located in Africa, the continent the journal focuses on, and 7 (32%) are located in Europe where the institution of the journal is based. Half or 11 of the advisory editorial board are based in North America.

Editing Process

JAH is a peer reviewed journal. In order to facilitate anonymous peer review, manuscripts submitted for consideration do not bear the name of the author, nor have notes/acknowledgements that make the author's identity obvious.¹⁶ As book review editor, Barbara Cooper explained that books by most of the major publishing houses that have series related to Africa are sent to her. The publishers send them to her usually, although sometimes a book author will ask her to ask the publisher to send a copy. Most books, she noted, that the editors do accept for review provided they are really focused on Africa. She

¹⁶Ibid.

noted also that “once in a while we get something that I would call "popular" rather than scholarly and we don't review those.” The editors she added do not review fictional works or poetry. Cooper added that the editors review books on African migrants and the African diaspora if there appear to be a concrete link to the African continent. But the editors do not publish books on, for example, African-American history because there are other journals purposely for that work.¹⁷

Cooper explained in the email conversation that once she get a book she tries to find someone who can be objective to review the book but not someone who is, for example, an advisor or who has written a blurb for the book.¹⁸ Cooper acknowledged that it can take quite a lot of work through networking to find someone to review the book, and she certainly do reach out to scholars in Africa. African contributors have not been very significant as compared to North America and Europe. This will further be elaborated on in the section on Authors.

Works that are too narrowly focused, that seem to speak only to historians of the precise topic under discussion and will not interest the broader readership are often turned down, sometimes with an invitation to revise it and try again in light of broad audience. Anything that does not draw upon primary research, either primary sources or some kind of fieldwork, is turned down. Things that rely too narrowly on European language sources may be turned down if they are not making some new contribution. According to Cooper the Editors have a certain bias towards manuscripts that draw upon African language sources or at least from sources produced on the African continent and not simply by outsiders.¹⁹

Barbara Cooper added that *JAH* do have some pieces that are not submitted "in the blind" but that are written by invitation. These are generally what Cooper would call "review articles". Often they are assessments of the current scholarship in specific fields of broad interest to readers of *JAH*. The editors ask a well known scholar to write something for the journal. Sometimes several scholars with different vantage points are invited to submit so the editors can have an interesting set. Those also are subject to a lot of scrutiny and there is no guarantee that it will be printed or published in *JAH* if the editors think it is not strong enough.²⁰

¹⁷ Cooper Barbara, 2013, Email, 1 July, < bacooper@rci.rutgers.edu >

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Cooper Barbara, 2013, Email, 1 July, < bacooper@rci.rutgers.edu >

²⁰ Ibid.

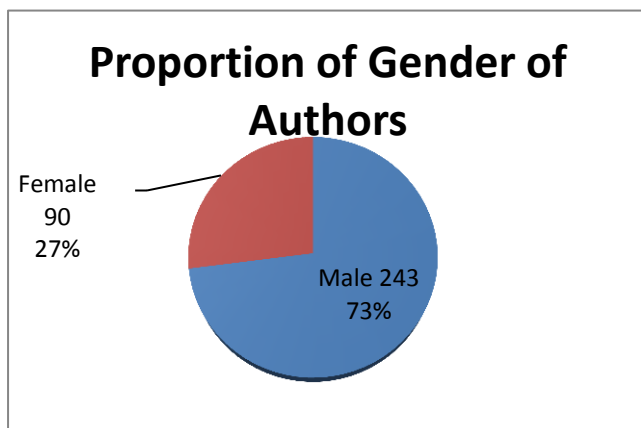
On Special Issues editing process, Cooper explained that the editors make no promise to publish the articles sent in by conference organisers together or singly until after they carefully have a look at them. Then the editors, and sometimes outside readers are invited by the editors to help assess the materials, to decide on;

- a. Whether each paper individually merits publication and
- b. Whether those that merit publication make sense as a set. Each instance is completely unique.

In conclusion, work submitted to JAH may be accepted, considered acceptable with revisions, or rejected. Once the article has been accepted publication follows within 9 months or less.²¹

Authors

The authors will be discussed and analysed in this section, focussing on the question of whether they deserve the international status they strive to achieve as well as the African scholars they strive to include in their work. In the 1990 editorial note, it was explicitly stated that *JAH* wanted the involvement of African scholars since they have to tell their part of the African history or in my words tell their own story. In total three hundred and thirty three authors have contributed to the Journal.²² Eight of the articles were co-authored.



Figures 3: Gender representation of Authors of the five volumes of *JAH* from 2008 to 2012

From the chart above, among the 333 authors were 243 men (73%) and 90 women (27%), which is quite a big difference.

²¹JAH (1986). Editorial Note. *The Journal of African History*, 27, pp 1-2.

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=2808832&fulltextType=ED&fileId=S0021853700029169> (accessed 1/04/2013)

²² 335 instead of 327 to total with the articles, book review, short notices, erratum and corrigendum because 8 of the works were co-authored.

Geographical background of the authors

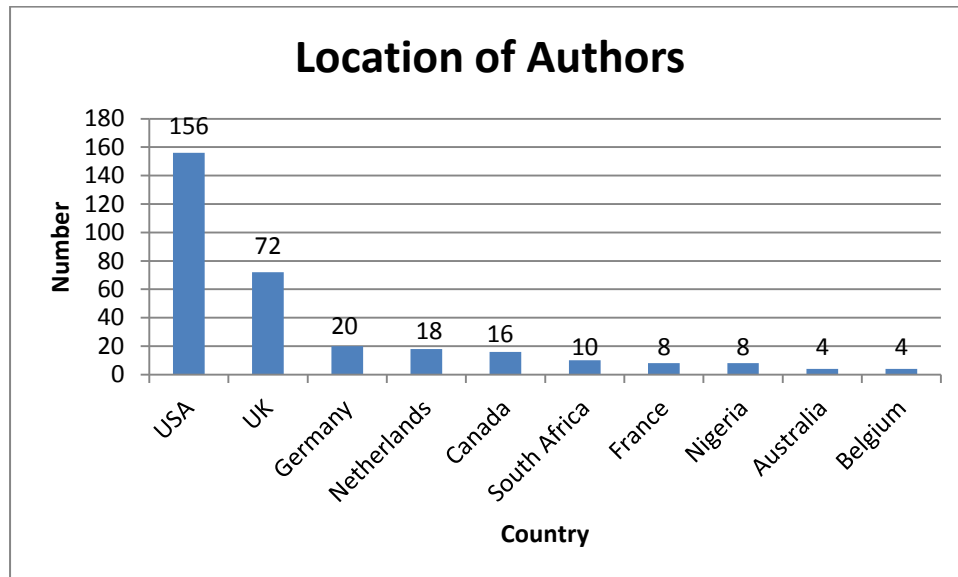
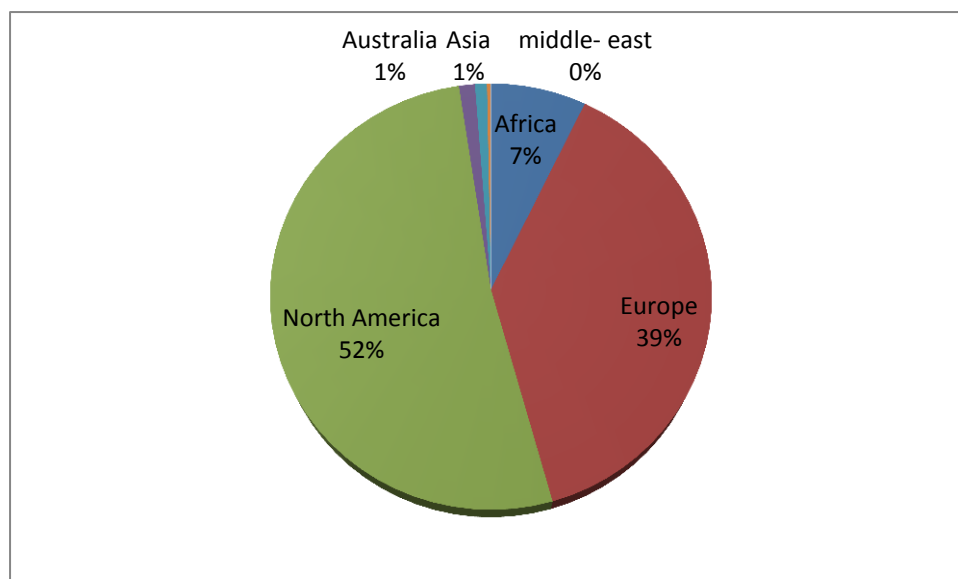


Figure 4: Bar chart representing the location or geographical base of the authors of the five volumes of JAH from 2008 to 2012

The geographical background of the authors is very diverse but USA dominance prevails as seen from the bar chart above. 156 (47%) of authors are located in the USA, 72 (21%) affiliated to a UK based university, 20 (6%) works for a university located in the Germany,



18 (5%) is affiliated to a Netherland based university, 16 (5%) are employed by a Canadian University, 10 (3%) are affiliated to a South African

University, which is the most dominant country from Africa. Due to the high number of country university affiliation, I will further group the author locations based on continent

where the authors are located. This will assist us to know the continents that contribute most to *JAH*.

From the above, the continental geographical locations of authors are given in detail. *JAH* is dominated by writers from North America and Europe. 7% of the writers are from Africa. This shows that the concern of the editors to include Africans in writing their own history is still problematic. North American writers dominate in the writing of African history with regards to *JAH* with 52%. Europe has 39% of the continental base of the authors of *JAH* from 2008-2012 while Asia and Australia contributed 1% each to the content of the journal. Reviewing *JAH* from 2008- 2012 it is seen that there are not nearly as many authors either who have come from the African continent or who are currently working (based) on the African continent, “which is a source of some frustration for the editors” said Cooper. She added that the editors review every manuscript that is sent to them, so part of the problem is that many students and scholars in Africa simply do not send their work in. Cooper noted that they get quite a few submissions from Ghana, Nigeria and once in a while from Kenya.

In my email conversation with Cooper, I asked her if she could explain why USA and UK dominates while African authors do not contribute much to *JAH*. She acknowledged that it is very difficult to find exact reasons for the trend but added that of late, there have been authors from the African continent. Some African authors are not based in Africa but they work in Europe, the US and sometimes as far afield as Australia. The huge numbers of scholars in the US and the UK who work on English-speaking Africa means that *JAH* end up having many articles written and books reviewed by scholars who either come from the US or the UK or who were trained there. Cooper added that she actually “accept reviews written in French, in fact I encourage them.” But often scholars who write in French or German or another major language want to publish in English, basically because it gives them a much bigger readership.

In relation to languages published by *JAH*, Barbara Cooper said that she would not be able to edit a piece in a language other than English or French, she would have to get someone outside the editorial board to help, and of course very few readers would be able to actually read it. For better or for worse, it seems that English is rapidly becoming the global lingua franca among academics. A research by Dankbaar (2012) made an observation that the use of English seems to enhance the prestige of ‘international’ journals and this could be

major reason for the dominance of English language in *JAH*.²³ However, this does not explain the dominance of UK and USA in publications of *JAH*, because Canada and Australia also are native English speaking countries.

Many scholars in Africa write in English and French, less frequently in Portuguese. The editors have occasionally gotten things in French, but the French language scholars do not tend to submit a lot. There are a lot of reasons for that such as;

- a. African History is not a big field in France, whereas it is a significant field in the US and the UK.
- b. African universities are all unique in terms of how many African historians they train.
- c. In many settings African history is not seen as a huge priority therefore other things that appear more practical are given more emphasis.²⁴

So there are a lot of different things that contribute to that pattern.

There are two other issues related to both the submission and the publication figures, Cooper explained to me. It seems that when scholars who write in French have trouble getting a manuscript published in *JAH* they signal to other French language scholars that *JAH* is not as good a place to send French manuscripts as other venues so it is hard to attract French manuscripts. Essay writing in English is not quite the same as it is in French. An essay in English takes a certain form so aside from the actual language, Cooper thinks there are stylistic and cultural issues that enter in. Also what strikes historians as important in one setting may not seem as important in another.

Another issue is that it sometimes takes a while for authors to understand that they need to enter into a much bigger conversation than they are used to addressing. That can be very difficult for scholars who do not have access to an adequate library or resources to travel to conferences. That is an enormous problem. The internet is a double edged sword making things better and worse at some point. It makes things better because people can have online access to academic work and worse because authors can publish directly online without making use of academic journals, but there is a long way to go. There is an increasing tendency for scholars to publish straight to the web. For instance work on Niger and really

²³ Dankbaar, Sabine, *The American Monopoly in International Relations and History. A Comparative Analysis of Leading Academic Journals*, Groningen 2012 [unpublished].p. 17

²⁴ Cooper Barbara, 2013, Email, 1 July, < bacooper@rci.rutgers.edu >

the most interesting work is posted directly to the LASDEL website.²⁵ That complicates life for the publishing industry and it will be interesting to see in 50 years where Journals may end up.

Barbara Cooper noted that *JAH* do actively try to attract Africans on the African continent to submit. She noted in the email that she was travelling to South Africa where she will be giving an extended workshop on publishing in *JAH* in hope of attracting some authors from the broader African continent. In fact, on the African continent Cooper sensed that more and more Africans are seeking higher education in either South Africa or Egypt, not simply the US, UK, Canada and France which is an interesting and promising development. *JAH* is actively protecting its reputation and international status and working extensively in involving several authors all over the world. The editors get almost no submissions from Latin America, which is troubling, noted Cooper since there are interesting diaspora connections that might be of real interest to *JAH*. Cooper stated that the editors do not get submissions from Japan too. But Japan does actually have African history as a field. So there are all kinds of strange gaps in getting worldwide authors for *JAH*. That the editors are actively working on.

The authors that contribute to *JAH* are from different and diverse academic institutions. *JAH* always state the institution from which these authors are working or based. In total for the years under review, authors of *JAH* come from 193 different academic institutions. The tables below shows the top ten Universities authors of *JAH* come from.²⁶ The institution with most contributors is SOAS, University of London, the founding institution of the journal with 13 Authors. University of Wisconsin, Madison comes next with a total of 8 authors. Columbia University follows with 7 authors. Michigan State University, University of Chicago, University of Cambridge and University of Toronto has six authors each working with these institutions. Stanford University, University of Birmingham and University of Leipzig has 5 authors each. A carefully look at the top ten Universities that contribute to *JAH* show that they all have African studies centres that focus on research on the African continent.

²⁵ Lasdel website available at <http://www.lasdel.net/> , this interesting observation was made by Barbara Cooper.

²⁶ The top ten Universities is based on institutions that had five or more authors.

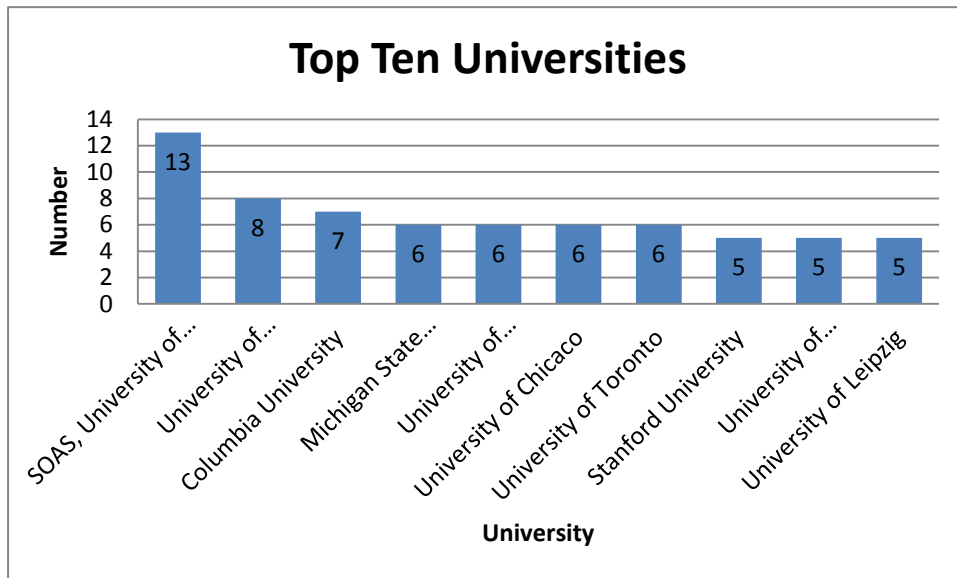


Figure 6: Bar Chart representing Top Ten University of Authors of JAH from 2008 to 2012

Most of the Authors that contribute to *JAH* only contribute one article or book review. From the chart below, 84% (228) of the authors have contributed to *JAH* only once, 12% (33) have written 2 articles each, 3% (7) have written 3 articles each to *JAH* while 1% (3) have contributed 4 articles each to *JAH*.

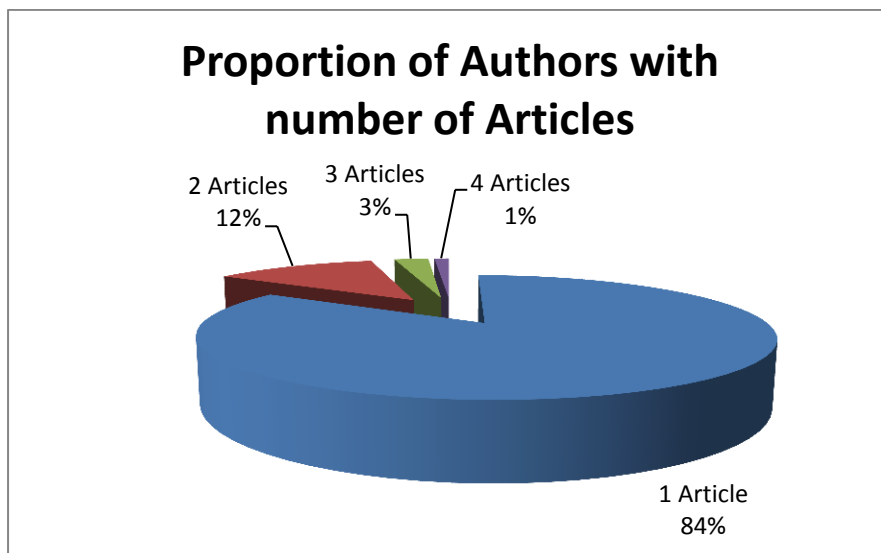


Figure 7: Pie Chart representing number of Articles of Authors of JAH from 2008 to 2012

Content

Time period

This section focuses on the time period mostly discussed in *JAH* whether colonial, pre colonial and post -colonial. *JAH* states explicitly on its website that “*JAH* publishes articles and book reviews ranging widely over the African past, from ancient times to the present. Historical approaches to all time periods are welcome.”²⁷ The time periods in this research are grouped under post-colonial, colonial, pre-colonial and general. It must be noted that there is no general time frame for colonial, pre-colonial and post-colonial periods for all African countries. So each country was treated different using its own political history. However, this was much simpler to use because the authors state it in their work/abstract or in the title the time frame used. There were few works that were difficult to group under these time periods because they span through pre-colonial through to post-colonial, I grouped these under category ‘General’. In some instances too, it was difficult to determine the time period. This was insignificant part of the work so I grouped them also under the category ‘General’.

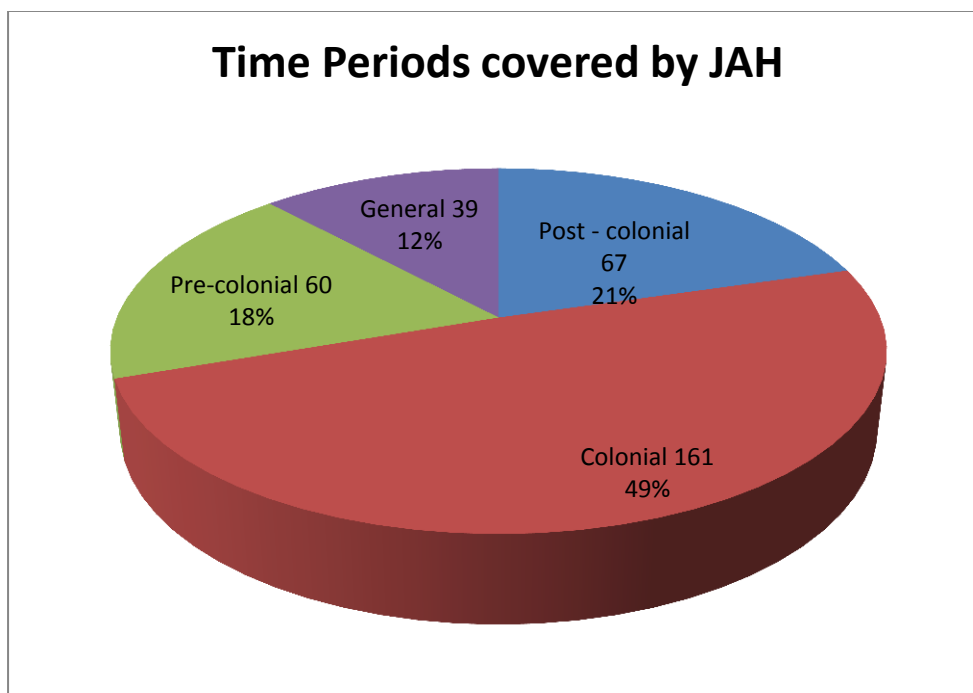


Figure 8: Pie chart representing time period mostly discussed by JAH

From the pie chart above, it can be concluded that almost half (49%) 161 of the work spans through the colonial period. Post –colonial period takes 67 (21%) of the articles and book reviews from 2008 to 2012, with pre-colonial period constituting 60 (18%) of the work,

²⁷ JAH website <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=AFH>, (accessed 1 April, 2013)

whilst the category ‘General’ constitutes 39 (12%) of the work of *JAH*. It was very difficult to find reasons for such a trend.

Regions discussed

In this section, the most discussed regions and African countries in the book reviews and research articles will be first analysed, to show what geographical regions of Africa are covered most in *JAH*. Ten of the countries most discussed are presented below in the chart.²⁸

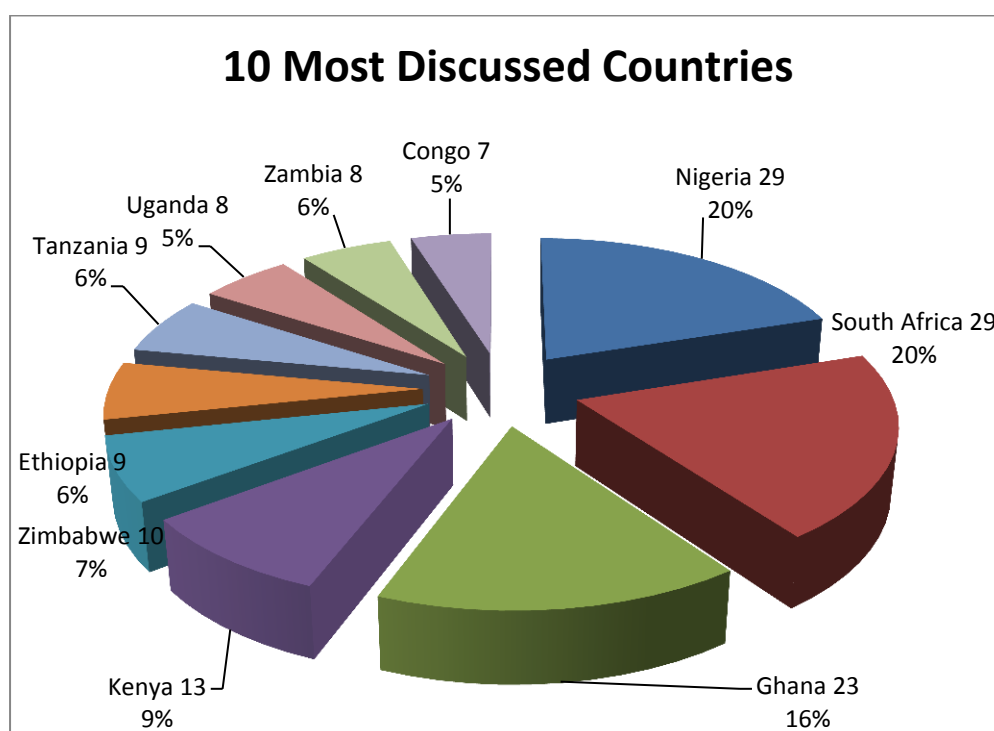


Figure 9: Pie chart representing top ten countries discussed in *JAH*

As the pie chart above shows, the major part of the articles are on South Africa 29 (20%) and Nigeria 29 (20%) each of the country’s most discussed. Ghana is discussed in 23 (16%) of the articles and book reviews. Kenya comes next with 13 (9%), Zimbabwe 10 (6%), Ethiopia and Tanzania 9 (6%) each, Uganda 8 (5%), Zambia 8 (5%) and Congo 7 (5%) follow in descending order. Here, one could link the dominance of South Africa to one of the editors coming from South Africa and the majority of the authors that came from Africa specifically came from South Africa. However, this will be a hasty conclusion since Nigeria has the same number of appearance with South Africa. In summary, one cannot easily find the reasons for the dominance of some countries over others.

²⁸ I chose to discuss ten most discussed countries because the list is on a high side and so I placed a limit on the ones discussed more than six times in the five volumes of *JAH* from 2008-2012.

To make the discussion simpler, the regional based discussion of the articles and books are needed.

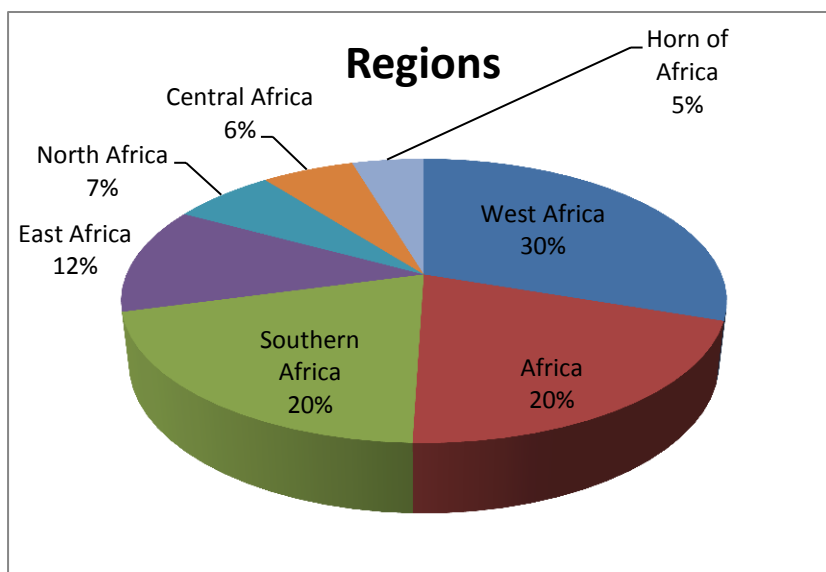
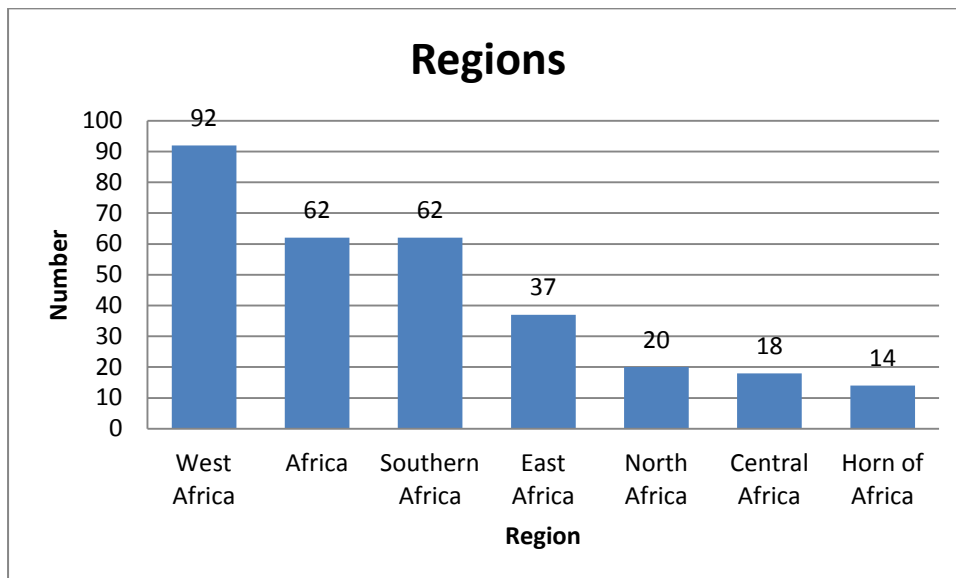


Figure 10 and 11: Bar and pie chart representing the regions in Africa discussed in JAH of the five volumes from 2008 to 2012

As the charts above show, the regional focus of the journal is clearly seen. The major part of the articles is about West Africa 100 (29%) with Southern Africa and continental research (Africa) 62 (20%) each. “Continental research” here means that it contains multi-regional research (research cutting across all of Africa as a continent or several of the regions in Africa), the next most published region discussed in JAH is East Africa 37 (12%), North Africa follows with 20 (7%), Central Africa 18 (6%) and Horn of Africa 14 (5%) being the least discussed. This finding corresponds with research done by Dankbaar (2012) that JAH

focuses much on West and Southern Africa.²⁹ There is difficulty in finding reasons for the dominance of West and Southern African history in the work of *JAH* from 2008-2012. This regional imbalance could be attributed to the difficulty with trying to focus on the whole of Africa. This is because people across the African continent are remarkably diverse; they belong to fifty five different countries, thousands of ethnic groupings, speak variety of languages and practice a wide range of cultural, economic and religious activities. This fact makes it very difficult to generalise the history of Africa and understandably, that contributes to the regional imbalances in *JAH* even as the editors want to publish history that encompasses the whole of the African continent.

Subjects

The regions and countries alone do not give the detail of what *JAH* is exactly about. Therefore, subjects often discussed in *JAH* will be elaborated on. In line with the objectives of this research, it was important to examine the broad range of topics identified by the journal's mission, scope, and aim to see if there was any preference to any particular scholarly area or topic. To accomplish this, I catalogued the keywords associated with each paper and later performed various analyses on these data to group them under broad themes. Keyword data were selected as a representation of the research topic, sometimes the articles' authors keywords were sometimes different from some of the keywords I selected and used for this study. Classifying the key words proved very difficult due to the several numbers of keywords involved.

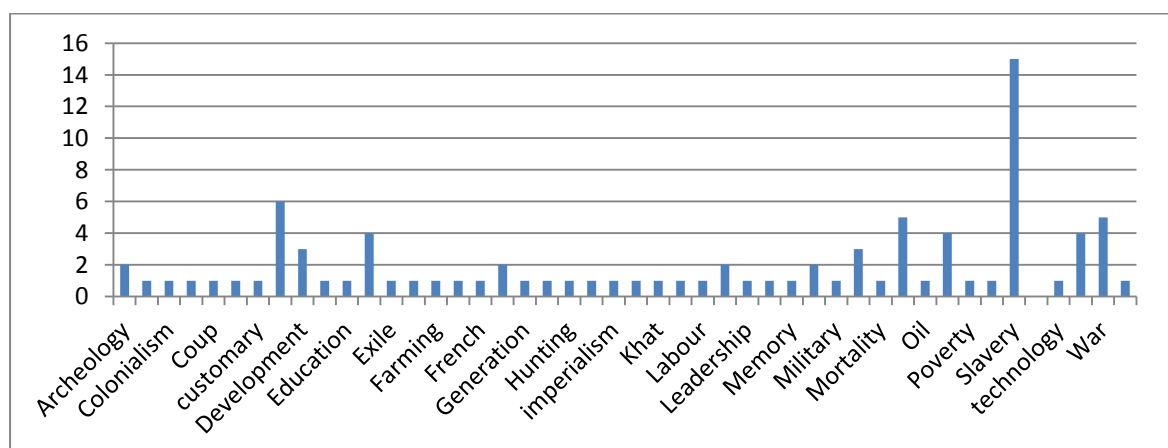


Figure 12: Graph representing some often discussed Key terms in *JAH* of the five volumes of *JAH* from 2008 to 2012

²⁹ Dankbaar, Sabine, *The American Monopoly in International Relations and History. A Comparative Analysis of Leading Academic Journals*, Groningen 2012 [unpublished]. P. 14

The table above shows the major key terms used and these are for articles only and do not include book reviews. Book reviews are not included because the focus is on the research articles written and their key terms.³⁰ These were not easily classified and grouped given that there are so many keywords.

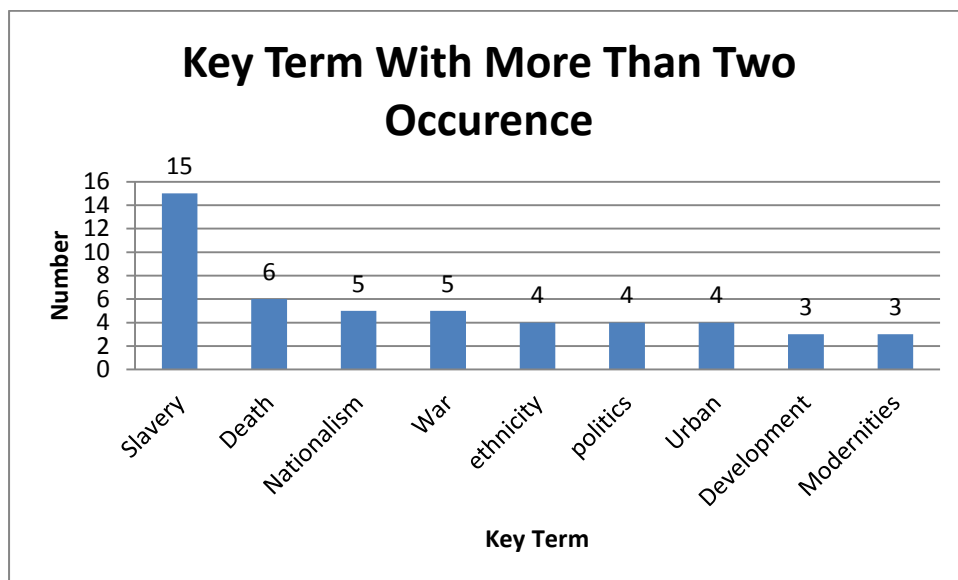


Figure 13: Pie chart representing some often discussed Key terms in JAH of the five volumes of JAH from 2008 to 2012.

The key issue often discussed in the research articles is Slavery which constitutes 17% (15), followed by Death 7%, which will be analysed in-depth later. Nationalism, ethnicity, war and politics are often discussed in the research articles. The key terms are uncountable and could not be easily discussed and analysed. Examining the key terms at first glance, it is difficult to identify any discernable trends. Part of this may be caused by the wide fluctuations in key word selection by authors, but is more likely caused by the broad focus of the journal and the extent to which it can publish on a particular topic without creating a bias towards one area of African history. Nevertheless, there are some broad themes that can be observed in the research topics, abstracts or book reviews. So I decided to group the articles and book reviews into broad themes using information provided on the website including some other themes.³¹ These broad thematic groups are social, economic, socio-economic, legal, military, science and technology, religion, political, cultural, and intellectual history.

³⁰ It becomes very complex to add key terms of Book reviews because abstracts are not included and details of the book are not fully given as it is just a review.

³¹ It covers broad thematic range covering social, economic, political, cultural, and intellectual history <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=AFH> (accessed 31st March, 2013)

These broad themes are distinct from, but related to, the other broad themes of history, which make it necessary for me to explain how these articles and book reviews in *JAH* were grouped under these broad themes. Some of the themes were clearly distinguished in the articles, book reviews, short notices and the abstracts or titles whilst others were identified by me. I try to explain how I made the distinction and groupings below.

Social history in this paper focuses on the experiences of ordinary³² people in the past, gender relations, slavery and ethnic issues that focuses on relationship of people within the society under discussion in *JAH*. Political history is the narrative and analysis of political events, political ideas, political movements, and political leaders. Intellectual history here focuses on how ideas were developed as well as theories in history and philosophy. Economic history in this paper focuses on the economies and economic phenomena in the past such as capital gains and labour related issues. History of religion in this context has to do with written record of human religious experiences and ideas, and religious personalities.

Cultural history refers to discussions that are about customs and art. Armed conflicts and military organizations as well as military powers and dominant military systems are placed under the category ‘Military’. Under, the category “legal” are issues dealing with law and how, when and why law has evolved. Issues concerning the understanding of the natural world (science) and ability to skillfully control and alter it (technology) and how they have changed over the centuries are placed under the category “history of ‘Science and Technology’”. “Agricultural” category is about cultivation of plants and livestock. “Socio-economic history” combines both economic and social issues that cannot be easily placed under the category ‘economic’ or ‘social’ history.

³² The use of ordinary here is just to distinguish it from political figures; political leaders or religious heads is placed under the broad theme of politics and religion respectively.

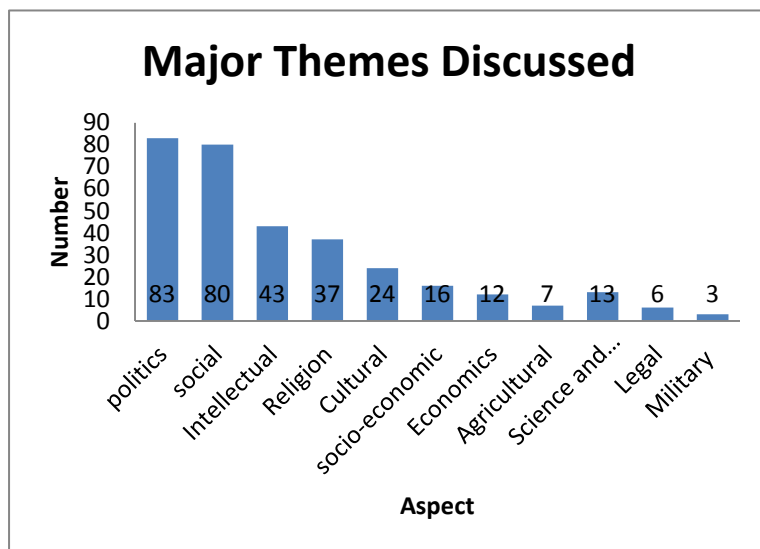
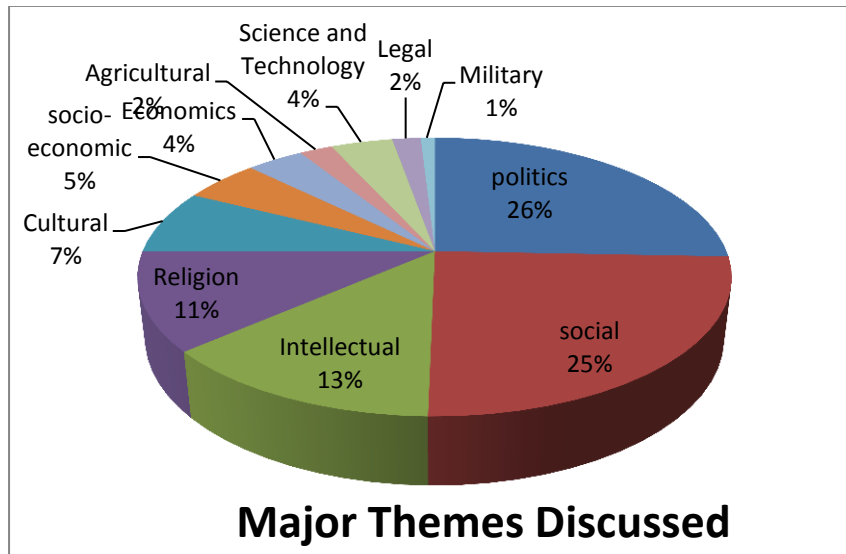


Figure 14 and 15: Pie and Bar chart representing some often discussed themes of the five volumes of JAH from 2008 to 2012

The above pie chart and table shows that political themes dominate most with a frequency of 83 (26%) often the political history discussion surrounds issues such as colonial confrontation between indigenes and colonial rulers leading to political independence of the African countries under discussion.³³ In some cases where political leaders are discussed, it is often about the political leaders who helped gained independence like Nyerere of Tanzania³⁴ or

³³ Diaspora intellectuals and the end of colonial rule and the political history of late-colonial Malawi, African intermediaries in early colonial Nigeria 2010, vol 51. a pioneering account of African-based political movements 2009, vol 50. African agency within the colonial order in Lesotho, 2009, vol 49

³⁴ Tanzanian, Nyerere loyalist and Ismaili and Kwame Nkrumah as Africa's 'black star', to never shed blood (Félix Houphouët-Boigny) vol 49, issue 2.

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Cote D'Ivoire. Sometimes, political developments of post-colonial Africa after they gained independence are discussed. With the category of Social history 80 (25%), the discussion are often about slave raiding, slavery, slave trade, ethnicity and urban history. Discussion on intellectual history, 43 (13%) focuses on collection of historical sources (ethnography, archaeology) and theories (memory, past and presentism, continuity and change). Science and Technology 13 (4%) discuss issues such as medicine, eugenics, and preservation of the environment. Religion constitutes 37 (11%) of the discussions of *JAH* for the five years. Religious issues dominating the discussions are Islam, Christianity and few times Deities. The traditional African religion is least discussed, while other minor religious groups are not discussed at all. Cultural history 24 (7%) deals with popular African culture and art. Socio- economic history constitutes 16 (5%) discussion on social issues that make Africans poor or rich. On Economic history 12 (4%) discusses issues such as labour, oil and economic exploitation. Under the category agriculture 7 (2%) some of the articles discussed include hunting, conservation and farming. The category legal 6 (2%) is basically about law. Military history 3 (1%) focuses on military issues.³⁵

This trend in *JAH* with political history dominating cannot be explained easily. However it is important to note that the diverse interest of the editorial board reflects in the content of *JAH*. It is very important to also note that the publications are not limited to the fields of interest of the editors.

Discussion: giving a broader perspective on *JAH*'s identity

Until now, *JAH* has been explored from a rather distanced level in terms of the analysis and debates. Hence, an in-depth and broader study of one debate is necessary in order to conclude by trying to connect this in-depth debate to the former conclusions and analysis on *JAH*.

The 49 volume, issue three, 2008 *JAH* published several articles on the theme "Death". This theme has been one of the major topics in *JAH* and it is of interest to me because my research interest is in cultural history. Therefore I would focus mostly on the cultural aspects and changes in death management practices in Africa. Death management

³⁵ Since they are only three I outline them here-the Ethiopian revolution through the prism of military history (vol 51, 2010), Colonial troops in the German colonies (vol 51, 2010) and major themes in the military history of Africa (vol. 49 , 2008)

practices in this context means all aspects related to death and burial of a deceased. However, the social, economic, political and religious aspects and influences on death management in Africa will also be discussed. This would help in understanding in-depth how *JAH*'s aims and scope are reflected in its content.

Most African cultures embody ideas about death (good and bad) as well as customs and rituals that either promote or decry some of the cultures that surround all kinds of death. Culture generally also provides a mechanism for transmitting and appreciating the meanings and essence of death and mortuary practices. In addition, culture can also facilitate or sanction death through its enabling traditions and agencies, including religion and some acts of violence, such as sacrifice or warfare. Conversely, death and after-death processes are windows through which African culture can be appraised or appreciated.

The primary question I want to answer is “what are the shifts in African approaches and management of death, and how far are these shifts related to changing circumstances, to the influence of the major religions in Africa and to major economic changes?” In so doing, these findings will also help answer the main research question of this paper: To what extent does *JAH* represent African history in terms of wide time period and broad themes in its content?

““Death” and “Africa” are words which, unfortunately, seem often to be twinned together.”³⁶ Some Western media coverage on Africa often shows Africa as the continent of death: epidemic diseases, famine, war, violence, and poverty. This is not a recent development and could be traced as far back as possible, for instance during the slave trade period abolitionist called for saving the continent from darkness and death.³⁷

Generalizing the causes and customs surrounding death in Africa is a very difficult task. This is because people across the African continent are remarkably diverse: they belong to fifty five different countries, thousands of ethnic groupings, speak variety of languages and practice a wide range of cultural activities. In Africa, the living and the dead all constitute the social world. African societies have a complex and elaborate rituals in the management of death.

In most African societies the rituals surrounding death could help place the dead as ancestors instead of vengeful ghost.³⁸ Although death is an undesired event, it is believed to

³⁶ Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan (2008). Death and dying in the history of Africa since 1800, *The Journal of African History*. Vol 49, Issue 3 p. 349

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*. p. 342

be the beginning of the deceased's deeper relationship with creation. Africans generally believe that anyone who dies must be given proper death rites. If it is not done, the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to live in a right way after death and therefore a danger to those who are still alive. It is also believed that giving the dead a befitting funeral or burial rite helps to protect the living from sudden death.

Death rituals have changed from pre-colonial period to colonial period up till present. Colonial period brought some changes to death rituals as missionaries and colonial authorities influenced such rituals and rites.³⁹ Lee and Vaughan (2008) noted that in the post-colonial period, the growth of networks (national and international) and the speed of telecommunications have also influenced death rituals in Africa.⁴⁰

Social status of a person determines the kind of customs that would be performed during the death. In most cases the political and economic status of an individual plays a role in African death management and rituals related to death. The higher the social position of the deceased, the more complex and expensive the death rite. Vaughan (2008) observes that the mortuary rituals for chiefs, especially paramount chiefs are unique, complex, lengthy and very different from other citizens.⁴¹ Vaughan (2008) states that in many ways the chiefs and kings "are kept divine" even after death. In most cases human sacrifices followed the death of the king so that these people serve the king in the life after death.⁴² However, these sacrifices of the living for the dead have ceased. Vaughan (2008) notes that the last human sacrifice associated with the burial of chitimukulu took place in 1911.^{43 44}

The death of children is regarded as an evil occurrence and because of this many African families give special names to their children to stop the reoccurrence of untimely death.⁴⁵ Due to this, death rites for children are not elaborate and are very simple. Simple death rites, Africans believed tells death that he is unwanted in such situations and it stays away from little children. This contradicts totally with the death of a king, is that to mean that the death of the king or chief is wanted and tolerated? This surely leaves room for an open and elaborate debate on death rites and customs in Africa. The death of an unfaithful wife or

³⁹ Megan Vaughan (2008). 'Divine kings': sex, death and anthropology in inter-war East/Central Africa. *The Journal of African History*, vol 49, issue 3, p 391

⁴⁰ Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan (2008). Death and dying in the history of Africa since 1800, *The Journal of African History*. Vol 49, Issue 3 p357.

⁴¹ Vaughan, idem.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Chitimukulu is the paramount chief of Bemba people.

⁴⁴ Vaughan, idem

⁴⁵ Shayne Doyle (2008), the child of death: personal names and parental attitude towards mortality in Bunyoro, Western Uganda, 1900-2005, *The Journal of African History*, vol 49, issue 3.

deviants in general warranted a special kind of death rituals because the person has died *incentu* meaning the person died in sin and was not forgiven.⁴⁶

Religious impact on death management rites in Africa cannot be overlooked. Christian and Muslim converts and adherents always have a befitting elaborate funeral that shows their religious beliefs.

In recent times, economic status of a person also determines the kind of customs that may follow his death. Death management has also become a commercial business for some people in Africa. As a way of ensuring that one can have a dignified funeral there are insurance policy on funeral.⁴⁷ Some carpenters market their coffins via internet. There are township based funeral homes that offer families wide range funeral products and services.⁴⁸

Despite great cultural differences in death rites and rituals, the final death rites represent a response to a universal situation (death). In the enormous variety and changes in death management practices, each funeral rite affords the comfort of the tradition and culture of the people. The continuity and changes that extends across cultures and religious groups indicates that African death rites, customs and rituals are not only to provide solace for the living, but to assure that attention and honour are respectfully, ethnically, religiously and appropriately given to the dead.

How does this debate relate to the scope and aims of *JAH*? From the discussion above, it is clear that “death” as a debate in *JAH* ranges widely over the African past, from pre-colonial, through colonial and postcolonial periods. The debate also covers the broad thematic range of *JAH* such as social, economic, political and cultural history. Death is a phenomenon that needs deeper understanding and documentation, pre-colonial death rites are least discussed. Doyle (2008) observed that traditional sources tell us little about how Africans perceive death in the past.⁴⁹ Death is a subject that affects the whole of Africa and this debate alone cannot be used to counter the regional imbalances of *JAH*. Moreover, the issue of death management has a lot more discussions yet to be explored from different perspectives, as it can be approached from different time period and themes such as politics, cultural, legal, economics and social history.

⁴⁶Megan Vaughan (2008). ‘Divine kings’: sex, death and anthropology in inter-war East/Central Africa. *The Journal of African History*, vol 49, issue 3, p 393

⁴⁷ Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan (2008). Death and dying in the history of Africa since 1800, *The Journal of African History*. Vol 49, Issue 3 p357.

⁴⁸ These services include in-house embalming, refrigerated transport of the deceased and portable green lawns and flowers to transform dusty cemeteries to comfortable resting place for the deceased.

⁴⁹ Shayne Doyle (2008), the child of death: personal names and parental attitude towards mortality in Bunyoro, Western Uganda, 1900-2005, *The Journal of African History*, vol 49, issue 3.



Conclusions

Analysing *JAH* from 2008-2012 have brought out several findings and these findings answer the main research question of this paper: To what extent does *JAH* represent African history in terms of wide time period and broad themes in its content?

In summary, the scope of *JAH* is very broad covering all aspects of history such as social, economic, socio-economic, legal, military, science and technology, religion, political, cultural, and intellectual history. The time period *JAH* covers is equally broad, ranging from Stone Age period to present. The aim of *JAH* to cover broad themes of African history has been partly achieved but political history of Africa dominates in the articles and book reviews published, but also other fields of history such as social, economic, socio-economic, legal, military, science and technology, religion, cultural, and intellectual history are represented. The aim of *JAH* to present African history from Stone Age to present has been very problematic as colonial period dominates much of the work published in *JAH*, yet pre-colonial, post-colonial period as well as time period that spans through stone age period to present are also discussed.

The aim of presenting *JAH* as a journal that encompasses the whole of Africa is not very present in the content of *JAH*. The editorial board and the international advisory board are both dominated by North American and European board members specifically USA and UK based. This same trend reflects in the authors of the various articles and reviews. Regarding the authors, 91% are from universities or institutes based in North America and Europe. One may question whether it is not rather an American, or at least Western, view on Africa that is published by *JAH*. The fact that most articles and book reviews in *JAH* have been written by North Americans and Europeans, does not show stereotypes in presenting African history in anyway. The editors carefully choose manuscripts that draw upon African language sources or at least from sources produced on the African continent. Anything that contains all sorts of interesting material but has no argument is turned down by the editors; this goes a long way to help avoid biases and stereotypes in writing African history. Concurrently, although it is not very often the case, there is the need for angles different from the Western perspective, especially the African perspective in the writing and documenting of African history. The striking minority of African contributors is a troubling fact after over fifty three years of *JAH*'s existence as noted in 1990 editorial note and Barbara Cooper. *JAH* was established to show that there is an African history to tell therefore the editors find it frustrating that a lot of Africans do not tell their own story. The editors are actively working



on involving people all over the world to contribute to *JAH* not only of Africa but also Asia, Australia and Latin America.

Also, when taking into account the regions in Africa *JAH* covers, it is observed that *JAH* does not meet its aim of presenting history that encompasses the whole of African continent, as the major part of the articles and reviews contains West and Southern Africa research, with Nigeria and South Africa as countries with their history dominating in *JAH*. The regional imbalances in presenting the history of Africa are very challenging and pose a difficulty for *JAH* in achieving its aims.

In conclusion, *JAH* strives to achieve its own set aims in covering wide scope and time period of African history but has not been able to achieve it fully in the years under review (2008-2012). However, it is also evident that separately defining, covering and delimiting all the broad themes, regions and time periods in African history are difficult and complex. Despite these difficulties in achieving all of *JAH*'s scope and aims, it is fair to say that, reading the content of *JAH*, one appreciates how rich and diverse the field of African history is. Overall, *JAH* is a very useful journal that is not just meant to celebrate and debate on the richness of African history but to critically reflect upon it and also broaden the debate on African history.

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