African Economic History Newsletter
Issue #46, May 2020

The AEHN newsletter brings you up to date with current and forthcoming events in African Economic History. It gives you a chance to publicise your new research and opportunities to the right audience.

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If you want to publicize your own research, events or organize a panel for an upcoming conference, please send a message to aehnetwork@gmail.com and I will include your news in our quarterly round up.

Best regards,

Johan Fourie
on behalf of the African Economic History Network
News and Announcements

Global pandemic causes disruption

The global covid-19 pandemic has huge implications for scholarship. Amidst all the challenges, there are opportunities. This month we announce a new virtual seminar series aimed at giving economic historians in developing countries an opportunity to expose their research to a global audience. The initiative, led by James Fenske at Warwick University, is supported by the Economic History Society of Southern Africa and the Economic History of Developing Regions.

The pandemic has also renewed interest in the causes and consequences of pandemics. The Spanish flu of 1918, in particular, has attracted much attention. In this newsletter, we review some of the latest research on the topic.

If you want to publicize your own research, events or organize a panel for an upcoming conference, please send a message to aehnetwork@gmail.com and I will include your news in our bi-monthly round up. The next issue will appear in early August.

Working Papers Series

If you have a paper you would like to submit for our consideration please send us an email. For questions regarding the WPS please contact Erik Green at Erik.Green@ekh.lu.se.

Frontiers in Economic History Blog

Frontiers in African Economic History – AEHN’s blog – diffuses research-based content and promotes discussion concerning the study of long-term African development. The blog provides authors a platform to disseminate easily accessible summaries (700 words) of their recently published research (articles, book chapters, book reviews, theses), publishes interviews with key scholars in the field, and discusses relevant developments. We welcome blog contributions and suggestions. Please contact the editors (Felix Meier zu Selhausen, Michiel de Haas and Kate Frederick) to discuss possible posts at: frontiers.aehn@gmail.com.


In an attempt to divide and marginalize the black population, the apartheid regime forcefully relocated some 3.5 million South Africans to rural homelands. This paper finds that people in former resettlement camps areas have higher levels of social capital and lower levels of crime.
Postponed:
Due to covid-19, the 15th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network has been postponed to 2021!
PANDEMICS IN HISTORY

Special issues on pandemics

World Development

Pandemics affect poverty, sustainability and development in ways that are unsuspected to obvious. The COVID-19 pandemic, like the 1918-19 and 1957 flu pandemics, will kill hundreds of thousands, has devastated national to household economies, and will present unprecedented shock to trajectories of development and sustainability for years. Inadequate testing and diagnoses, coupled with thoroughly flawed responses by governments and donors alike, mean that the true scale of its devastation will be known only retrospectively if at all.

This historical moment is as important for development as it is incredible - who would have imagined a global lockdown even three months ago?

World Development calls for contributions to a special issue on ‘Pandemics, COVID19, Sustainability and Development’ in an effort to bring the best thinking and research on the subject to our readers. We expect the issue to cover a broad range of topics. These include themes related to the emergence of pandemics, how they unfold, responses to the multifarious threats they pose, and the immediate to longer term effects as these concern households, societies, ecosystems, and nation states. We welcome papers that among other topics address questions about political and institutional preparedness and the role of expertise, to supply chains and intersectoral impacts, to testing, treatment, and vaccine development, to employment, recessions, and economic downturns, to agriculture industrial and service professions, to health, educational, and wellbeing outcomes. The themes mentioned here do not exhaust the myriad ways that pandemics affect development and sustainability outcomes. We view them as indicators of how pandemics and public health need far greater attention in contemporary thinking about development and sustainability.

More information is available here.

Investigaciones de Historia Económica/Economic History Research

Following the recent events and the particular interest aroused in academia, mass media, and the general public, Investigaciones de Historia Económica/Economic History Research invites submissions for a special issue on the topic "Epidemics in History." The editors believe in the relevance of the study on the effects of pandemics in the past in order to show how societies dealt with similar situations and the lessons that we can obtain in the present and the future. The special issue aims to include papers with a wide chronological and geographical coverage and a multidisciplinary approach with a special emphasis on the economic effects of pandemics in the past.

Potential contributors can contact in advance with the invited editors of the special issue, Joana Maria Pujadas Mora (jpujades@ced.uab.es) and Carlos Santiago-Caballero (carlos.santiago@uc3m.es). Papers in English and Spanish are accepted. All contributions should be based on original research and will be subject to a peer-review process. The journal aims to publish a special issue in late 2020. Therefore, the deadline for submissions will be June 6, and all papers will be processed in a fast-track process. Potential contributions should be submitted to ihe@aehe.es, following the same procedure as described in the general guidelines for authors: https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/IHE/about/submissions.
Special resources on pandemics

The Long Run

Collective bibliography on Pandemics in History.

The Long View on Epidemics, Disease and Public Health, Part A.

The Long View on Epidemics, Disease and Public Health, Part B.

The Long View on Epidemics, Disease and Public Health, Part C.

Covid-19 in the developing world


COVID-19: What are the biggest concerns for the developing world?

COVID-19 in developing countries
NEW ABSTRACTS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Stop the presses!

Nathan Nunn. The historical roots of economic development.

Methodological innovations are enabling scientists to study how events in the distant past affect contemporary life. Nunn reviews recent research at the intersection of history, development, and culture that aims to understand the cultural evolution of economic development. The persistence of global inequality is used as a case study to demonstrate the interplay of these dynamics. Future areas of research and implications for policy are discussed.


Farai Nyika and Johan Fourie. Black Disenfranchisement in the Cape Colony, c. 1887-1909: Challenging the Numbers.

It is generally agreed that the Cape Colony’s disenfranchisement legislation did what it set out to do: it drastically reduced the number of blacks who were eligible to vote. However, we find that empirical support for this view is weak. We argue that disenfranchisement was not as effective as is claimed. We question the literature on black disenfranchisement in the late 19th-century Cape Colony. Using a surname-matching formula in combination with manual methods, we counted voters in the Cape Colony voters’ rolls between 1887 and 1909 and found that the number of blacks who lost the right to vote in 1887 is much smaller than the 30,000 that has been claimed. Our empirical evidence shows it to be around a tenth of that number. Conversely, the number of disenfranchised white and coloured voters is larger than expected. Ours is an important contribution, as no researcher to date has systematically gone through these voters’ rolls to provide empirical evidence to support or refute the claims about disenfranchisement. The lower than expected number of disenfranchised black voters may be due to their resistance to being stripped of the franchise. The larger than expected number of disenfranchised white and coloured voters may have been due to recession and white poverty.


David Bijsterbosch and Johan Fourie. Coffee, Slavery and a Tax Loophole: Explaining the Cape Colony’s Trading Boom, 1834–1841.

At the Cape of Good Hope between 1836 and 1841 there was a remarkable spike in imports and exports. Historians have assumed this was because the financial compensation slave-owners received when slavery was abolished in 1834 encouraged speculation. But our historical research on the imports and exports recorded in the Cape Colony’s blue books suggests another, more intriguing, reason: a tax loophole in the coffee trade which made it possible for producers outside the British Empire to avoid high tariffs for imports into Great Britain by going via the Cape. Coffee imports from places like Java and Rio de Janeiro increased substantially in 1839 because British slave-owning colonies’ production plummeted after forced apprenticeships for former slaves ended in 1838. In 1842, however, the British tax code for coffee was revised and consequently the loophole closed.

Now in print

Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou. Historical Legacies and African Development.

As Africa's role on the global stage is rising, so does the need to understand the shadow of history on the continent's economy and polity. We discuss recent works that shed light on Africa's colonial and precolonial legacies. The emerging corpus is remarkably interdisciplinary. Archives, ethnographic materials, georeferenced censuses, surveys, and satellite imagery are some of the sources often combined to test influential conjectures put forward in African historiography. Exploiting within-country variation and employing credible, albeit mostly local, identification techniques, this recent literature has uncovered strong evidence of historical continuity as well as instances of rupture in the evolution of the African economy. The exposition proceeds in reverse chronological order. Starting from the colonial period, which has been linked to almost all of Africa's postindependence maladies, we first review works that uncover the lasting legacies of colonial investments in infrastructure and human capital and quantify the role of various extractive institutions, such as indirect rule and oppression associated with concessionary agreements. Second, we discuss the long-lasting impact of the "Scramble for Africa," which led to ethnic partitioning and the creation of artificial modern states. Third, we cover studies on the multifaceted legacy of the slave trades. Fourth, we analyze the contemporary role of various precolonial, ethnic-specific, institutional, and social traits such as political centralization. We conclude by offering some thoughts on what we view as open questions.


Prince Young Aboagye and Ellen Hillbom. Tax bargaining, fiscal contracts and fiscal capacity in Ghana: A long-term perspective.

Many Sub-Saharan African countries are unable to generate sufficient tax revenues for public purposes. While it is widely accepted that governments’ ability to tax is shaped by politics, the precise mechanisms through which this relationship takes place in practice remain elusive. Based on a historical analysis of four major tax reforms in Ghana from the 1850s to the late 1990s, this article captures the various ways in which taxpayers negotiate with the state in an attempt to limit the extent of taxation, especially in cases where state reciprocity falls short of what people expect. Our evidence suggests that, far from being a recent development, effective taxation in Ghana has long depended on the ability of the state to convince taxpayers that tax revenues will be used for the public benefit. A history of misappropriation of tax revenues, overt corruption, and profligacy diminished taxpayers’ support for governments’ tax efforts. More generally, the article points to the importance of understanding how tax bargaining works in practice and people’s perceptions of their governments over the long term to overcome resistance to tax reforms.


To facilitate an organized withdrawal from its African territories in the 1960s, the UK authorities undertook studies of the economic potential of each. What has been little studied is the nature and impacts of these exercises on subsequent policy. This paper looks at two such studies that examined ways existing ‘common markets’ in East and Central Africa could be retained after independence, and further developed. The institutions and structures governing the territories differed, one a
common market and the other a fuller federation, as did the bodies conducting the analysis, one an official commission requiring public recommendations, and the other an advisory group to a senior government minister. The paper offers insights as to the way economists viewed common markets at the time, how they sought to quantify their economic benefits, and the ways in which these benefits were distributed across member states. It also considers the types of economic policy recommendations that were made and the reaction of the British authorities and the colonial politicians to them.


In this article, we describe the record linkage procedure to create a panel from Cape Colony census returns, or opgaafrolle, for 1787–1828, a dataset of 42,354 household-level observations. Based on a subset of manually linked records, we first evaluate statistical models and deterministic algorithms to best identify and match households over time. By using household-level characteristics in the linking process and near-annual data, we are able to create high-quality links for 84% of the dataset. We compare basic analyses on the linked panel dataset to the original cross-sectional data, evaluate the feasibility of the strategy when linking to supplementary sources, and discuss the scalability of our approach to the full Cape panel.


This book engages in the long-standing debate on the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. Specifically, Rönnbäck and Broberg study the interaction between imperialist policies, colonial institutions and financial markets. Their primary method of analysis is examining micro- and macro-level data relating to a large sample of ventures operating in Africa and traded on the London Stock Exchange between 1869 and 1969. Their study shows that the relationship between capital and colonialism was highly complex. While return from investing in African colonies on average was not extraordinary, there were certainly many occasions when investors enjoyed high return due to various forms of exploitation. While there were actors with rational calculations and deliberate strategies, there was also an important element of chance in determining the return on investment – not least in the mining sector, which overall was the most important business for investment in African ventures during this period. This book finally also demonstrates that the different paths of decolonization in Africa had very diverse effects for investors.

The analysis of historical natural experiments has profoundly impacted economics research across fields. We trace the development and increasing application of the methodology, both from the perspective of economic historians and from the perspective of economists in other subdisciplines. We argue that the historical natural experiment represents a methodological bridge between economic history and other fields: historians are able to use the cutting edge identification strategies emphasized by applied microeconomists; economists across subfields are able to scour history for useful identifying variation; development and growth economists are able to trace the historical roots of contemporary outcomes. Differences in fields suggest differences in scholars' aims of studying historical natural experiments. We propose a taxonomy of three primary motives that reflect priorities in different fields: historians aim to understand causal processes within specific settings. Economists across fields aim to identify "clean" historical events (in whatever context) to test hypotheses of theoretical interest or estimate causal parameters. And, growth and development economists aim to identify past variation that can be causally linked to contemporary outcomes of interest. We summarize important contributions made by research in each category. Finally, we close with a brief discussion of challenges facing each category of work.


Leander Heldring. The origins of violence in Rwanda.

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Abel Brodeur, Marie Christelle Mabeu and Roland Pongou. Ancestral Norms, Legal Origins, and Female Empowerment.

A large literature documents persistent impacts of formal historical institutions. However, very little is known about how these institutions interact with ancestral traditions to determine long-term economic and social outcomes. This paper addresses this question by studying the persistent effect of legal origins on female economic empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa, and how ancestral cultural norms of gender roles may attenuate or exacerbate this effect. Taking advantage of the arbitrary division of
ancient ethnic homelands across countries with different legal origins, we directly compare women among the same ethnic group living in civil law countries and common law countries. We find that, on average, women in common law countries are significantly more educated, are more likely to work in the professional sector, and are less likely to marry at young age. However, these effects are either absent or significantly lower in settings where ancestral cultural norms do not promote women’s rights and empowerment. In particular, we find little effect in bride price societies, patrilocal societies, and societies where women were not involved in agriculture in the past. Our findings imply that to be optimal, the design of formal institutions should account for ancestral traditions.


Andrew Phiri. Beyond the chains: Slavery and Africa’s wealth gap with the world.

Slave trades represent one of the most controversial historical events experienced over the last millennium and many researchers are in consensus of the legacy of slavery being one of the deepest underlying factors behind Africa’s current state of underdevelopment. This study seeks to quantify the effects which slave exports exerted on per capita GDP differences between 49 Africa and the rest of the world during the period of 2000-2018. Our findings unanimously point to a statistically significantly inverse relationship between slave exports and income differences hence supporting the intuition of slavery being a fundamentally deep root of developmental differences between Africa and the rest of the world. Our results are robust to adjusted measures of slave exports; inclusion of additional control variables; colonial dummy effects well as to the exclusion of outliers.

UPCOMING EVENTS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Workshops and conferences

All workshops and conferences before October have been cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic.

The 15th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network has been postponed to 2021.

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Call for papers: ‘Business, financial and economic history of South Africa’.
Special issue of Economic History of Developing Regions
Stellenbosch, 6 October 2020

On 30 June 2021, the South African Reserve Bank will be 100 years old. The SARB was established in terms of the Currency and Banking Act, 1920 (Act No. 31 of 1920) in Parliament. This came into being after a Gold Conference was held in October 1919.

The South African Reserve Bank was only the fourth central bank established outside the United Kingdom and Europe, the others being the United States, Japan and Java. Throughout the twentieth century it played an important role – as it continues to do – in maintaining financial stability in South Africa and wider southern Africa region.

The idea is to recognise the Bank's historic role with a special issue of Economic History of Developing Regions. The emphasis will be on the business, financial and economic context within which the bank operated, and of South African economic history more broadly.

This is a Call for Papers to be published as a special issue of Economic History of Developing Regions, a journal published by Taylor & Francis on behalf of the Economic History Society of Southern Africa. The issue will appear in June 2021.

A workshop where papers will be discussed is planned for Tuesday, 6 October 2020 in Stellenbosch, South Africa. We realise that there is much uncertainty as to how the year will unfold. If having a conference together in Stellenbosch will not be possible, we will move the event online. An extended abstract must be sent to Prof Johan Fourie at johanf@sun.ac.za by 1 June 2020 to be considered for inclusion in the special issue. Full drafts of papers must be sent by 2 September 2020 for inclusion in the workshop. All workshop accommodation will be covered by the conference organisers.

Call for papers: Women and their work: Approaches in History and Economics
Stellenbosch, 7 October 2020

The “Women and their Work” conference is an interdisciplinary meeting of historians and economists focussed on the theme of women and their work in the study of the past. Its purpose is to explore the need for, and challenges associated with, this topic. While the subject is an undeniably important aspect of historical research, its study has been marked by different and sometimes conflicting approaches. This conference therefore aims to: affirm the value of researching women and their work, provide an opportunity to explore the potential of different approaches and investigate the value that these approaches could add to each other. The proceedings of the conference will culminate in a special issue.

Papers on any aspect related to the topic can be submitted. Preference will be given to full paper submissions. All submissions should reach Amy Rommelspacher (amyrom@sun.ac.za) by 1 June 2020.
XIX World Economic History Congress  
Paris, 25 – 30 July 2021

The 19th World Congress in Paris will be held in Paris on July 25-30 2021. The Congress will address “resources” as one of the central challenges of the contemporary world. The Congress will consider sessions on all the categories of resources, that is natural, material, immaterial and human (work and skill): water, air, energy, food products, raw materials, labour, capital, patents etc. The panel will address the discovery, management and limitation of these resources, the impact their use has on territorial and social organizations as well as their significances in individuals’ eyes up for the world community at large.

The Congress will host approximately 140 sessions, divided daily into four 90-minute sessions. The selection of proposals will be operated by the IEHA Scientific Committee / Executive Committee. Researchers and university scholars from all countries, working in economic history and related disciplines, regardless of their status or affiliation institutional, are eligible to apply. In addition, the organizers of the 19th World Congress aim at helping participants from emerging countries and to do so.

The organizing committee welcomes a large set of approaches in economic history including social history, urban and rural history, history or economics of finance, sciences and technologies, gender history, cultural history, etc. – and crossovers with other disciplinary fields, including demography, environment, anthropology, sociology, socio-psychology etc. It also invites panels about methods in economic history, history of economic thought or economic theory, as well as innovative discussion of new sets of data and archives, or public communication of new (or renewed) results in economic history.

For more information visit: http://www.wehc2021.org/
Seminars and talks

Economic History of Developing Regions Virtual Seminar

We are pleased to announce a virtual economic history seminar series focused on scholars from developing countries. Recent events have given us an opportunity to overcome transportation costs and give scholars whose voices are seldom heard the opportunity to reach a global audience. The schedule, including speakers, titles, times, and Zoom links, is here:


Upcoming speakers include Cong Liu, Luz Marina Arias, Carolyn Chisadza, and Chimnmay Tumbe. Seminars will consist of a 20 minute presentation, followed by 20 minutes of questions. This is a collaborative effort with the editors of Economic History of Developing Regions and the Economic History Society of Southern Africa.

If you would like to be on our email list, if there are potential speakers you wish to recommend to us, or if you would like to be considered as a speaker, please email James Fenske.

LEAP Webinar

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the LEAP Seminar Series have moved online. The benefit is that it is now accessible to anyone. Webinars are Wednesdays at 13:00 (South Africa).

Upcoming speakers include Karl Bergemann (13 May), Sédi-Anne Boukaka (20 May), Leigh Gardner (27 May), Nobungcwele Mbem (3 June), Yajna Govind (10 June), James Fenske (17 June) and Marianne Wanamaker (24 June).

If you would like to join in, please send an email to Nobungcwele Mbem.
OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Postdoc: University of Leipzig

Faculty of History, Art and Oriental Studies, Institute of African Studies

Duties:

- acquisition of an additional academic qualification (Habilitation or "second book");
- teaching of 4 hours per week during teaching term according to Saxony’s Regulations for Higher Education Institutions (DAVOHS) at undergraduate (B.A.) and graduate (M.A.) levels in the study programs of the Institute of African Studies in the section “Society, Politics and Economy”, in particular in the area of „economy“. Teaching takes place in German (B.A.-level) and in English (M.A.-level);
- supervision of B.A. and M.A. theses;
- independent research, including the design and implementation of research projects and the publication of results;
- substantial contribution to academic self-management and administration.

Essential criteria:

- completed university education and an PhD of above-average quality in the field of African Studies, preferably in Social Anthropology, Sociology or Geography;
- extensive knowledge of, and experience in the use of, theories and methods in the social sciences;
- ample experience of field research in an African country; and
- excellent communication, cooperation and organisational skills.

Additional criteria:

- proficiency in one or more of the following areas: Development Theories and Development Cooperation, Gender;
- publications in international peer-reviewed journals; and
- experience applying for third-party funding.

Applications are accepted until 15 June 2020.

All applications should make reference to the file number 84/2020 and include relevant documentation (including list of publications and presentation of research priorities) and be directed to:

Universität Leipzig
Fakultät für Geschichte, Kunst- und Orientwissenschaften
Frau Dekanin Professor Dr. Rose Marie Beck
Schillerstrasse 6
04109 Leipzig
Germany