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.

In this issue:

1. Network News and Announcements
2. New Abstracts in African Economic History
   a. Now in print
   b. Working papers
3. Upcoming Events in African Economic History
   a. Opportunities in African economic history

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
CALL FOR PAPERS!

15th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network (AEHN)
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC), October 13-14, 2022

Deadline for sending abstracts: March 30, 2022


The conference theme is “Crossroads in African Economic History”. The Canary Islands being at a geographic crossroads between Africa, Europe and America has a long tradition for intercontinental exchange. In the frame of this conference, we hope it will become a place for encounters and exchanges of ideas, approaches (including international comparative approaches), methods and sources.

The conference will be held on 13-14 October 2022 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain. The plan is to organize the meeting on campus at ULPGC. Due to Covid-19 and the uncertain times we currently live in, we may have to decide to hold the meeting in a hybrid mode (online and in person). A final decision regarding the format will be made and communicated as soon as possible.

Papers on all aspects of African economic history are welcome, but preference will be given to those that pertain to the conference theme. Although the conference working language will be English, papers in French will also be accepted for some specific sessions. Abstracts no longer than 500 words should be submitted to aehn2022@ulpgc.es no later than 30 March 2022. Some bursaries will be available for graduate students and faculty from Africa. If applicable, please indicate the need for a bursary in your submission.

For further inquiries please contact daniel.castillohidalgo@ulpgc.es (co-Organizer)

Host Committee
Dr. Daniel Castillo Hidalgo, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
Dr. Dácil Juif, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Gran Canaria official tourism video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ud9ZUBjHC8
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.

Sara Lowes and Eduardo Montero. Historical Experiences and Demand for Health: The Legacy of Colonial Medical Campaigns in Central Africa (10 November 2021)

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the French colonial governments pursued medical campaigns in former French Equatorial Africa (present day Gabon, Chad, Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic) and Cameroon to treat and prevent sleeping sickness. These campaigns forced individuals to receive treatment or prophylaxis for sleeping sickness. We find that these campaigns led to mistrust in medicine, lower vaccination rates, and lower success of World Bank health projects.

Federico Tadei. Colonizer Identity and Trade in Africa: Were the British More Favourable to Free Trade? (1 November 2021)

What influenced the structure of export trade between Africa and Europe during the colonial period? Were the British more favorable to free trade than the French? New estimates of monopsonistic profit margins for colonial trading companies suggest the extent of free trade in colonial Africa was determined much more by local conditions - in particular, whether local producers were African farmers or European settlers and plantation companies - than by formal colonial trade policies (British vs. French).

Michiel de Haas. Reconstructing Income Inequality in a Colonial Cash Crop Economy: Five Social Tables for Uganda, 1925–1965 (22 September 2021)

Few doubt that colonialism generated new economic cleavages in African societies. Yet we know little about the extent of such economic inequality in different African colonies and across time. In this article, I measure income inequality in Uganda in five benchmark years between 1925 (mid-colonial period) and 1965 (just after independence). I find that overall income inequality was low compared to other African colonies, but sharp fault lines existed, especially along racial lines.

Get in touch!

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. The next issue will appear in February 2022.
NEW RESEARCH IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Now in print


This paper contributes to a growing literature on long-term trends and drivers of pre-industrial inequality by providing new stylized facts on the evolution of income inequality in Ghana from 1891 to 1960. Using newly constructed social tables, we estimate the Gini coefficient for seven consecutive decades at a time in which the adoption and expansion of cocoa cultivation transformed the Ghanaian economy. Income inequality was already high in 1891, prior to the spread of cocoa cultivation, and it remained stable for four decades. Following a small decline in the early 1930s, inequality increased, reaching its highest level at the end of the colonial era. The expansion of cocoa cultivation and increasing cocoa incomes contributed to persistent high inequality levels until the 1930s. By contrast, the increase in inequality from 1930 to 1960 was largely due to the rising incomes of government employees, skilled workers, and commercial workers.


How and why did African households under colonial rule make the decision to educate their children or not, and how did this micro-level decision making affect the diffusion of education in colonial Ghana? This paper addresses these questions and shows that many households were reluctant to enrol their children in school because the costs of colonial education were prohibitive, and the benefits were limited. Unemployment of school leavers was a major social problem throughout the colonial era and returns to education did not justify investments in education. The demand for education was relatively high in areas where the demand for skilled labour was high, and from the late 1930s when there were growing pay-offs to colonial education. Overall, the paper points to the need to examine interactions between supply and demand factors in order to understand variations in human capital accumulation in sub-Saharan Africa.


The beginnings of the Portuguese Escudo Monetary Zone (EMZ) in 1961, to promote the economic integration of Portugal and its empire, coincide in time with Mundell’s seminal paper about optimum currency areas. If non-optimality was the cause of the EMZ’s demise, this would suggest that monetary unions are fragile achievements, with little prospect for survival. The EMZ turned out to be a short-lived experiment, with Angola and Mozambique building up large cumulative deficit positions offset by the sizeable cumulative surpluses of the mainland. A cobweb model using monthly observations for macroeconomic variables of these two territories describes a time divergent process.
caused by structural imbalances, as well as by the loan granting system. The EMZ was not an optimum currency area and was not sustainable in the long run. This is an historical experiment that is not without interest for the study of other monetary areas.


This paper discusses the marriage bar in Southern Rhodesia’s labour market. It extends the analysis of the marriage bar. Over and above restrictions to enter the labour market, white women in colonial Zimbabwe, over time, also faced restrictions in terms of their conditions of service once they had entered the market. Married women, for example, were not permitted into permanent employment and, therefore, did not enjoy the benefits associated with fixed establishment. Married white women also had limited opportunities for promotion. Various justifications were proffered to maintain this status quo. However, by and large, hegemonic patriarchies played an important role in entrenching the domestic ideology that fuelled the marriage bar in its various forms. As the paper demonstrates, the marriage bar did not go unchallenged and, in 1971, married women’s restrictions regarding permanent employment were lifted. Of course, these legalistic undertakings were not always immediately reflected in practice partly because perceptions about married white women as primarily mothers and wives lingered on.


In the West, women’s history arose amidst the women’s movements of the 1970s. In developing regions such as South Africa, however, the process was delayed and early interest in women was expressed by anthropologists and sociologists. In developing regions, researching, writing, and consuming history is a luxury. This puts more pressure on choosing what to research and write about. This essay focuses on the value of studying women’s history. While the subject is no longer neglected in South Africa, there are areas of women’s history that have been overlooked. Interdisciplinary methods and innovative use of source material could provide the opportunity to study hidden aspects of women’s lives that have been overlooked. These new approaches can challenge past assumptions and shed light on new questions.


Migration and its resultant remittance have become the two powerful forces of peasant transformation in Eritrea in the last decade. If the former is responsible for uprooting labor from land, the latter is a replacement value to what the labor would have produced from the land. Using qualitative data gathered through an ethnographic fieldwork in the peasant region, this article argues that these two forces—migration and remittance—have resulted in gradual divorce of peasants from their means of production, land, in ways that seemingly appear productive to the peasants, rural–
urban migration and a new form of relationship between peasants and state. In general, the outcome of the entire process is the emergence of quasi-peasant society which no more depends on land for survival because remittance has provided them alternative source. Therefore, migration and remittance in Eritrea have not only resulted in massive uprooting of labor from the land, but also heavily reconfigured the peasant mode of production.


Gregory Price and Warren Whatley. Did profitable slave trading enable the expansion of empire?: The Asiento de Negros, the South Sea Company and the financial revolution in Great Britain. Cliometrica.

In 1711, British Parliament chartered the South Sea Company, a public–private corporation chartered to reduce the cost of government borrowing by swapping illiquid short-term government debt for tradeable shares of the South Sea Co. To attract subscribers, the government also awarded the South Sea Co. an international monopoly in the trade of African slaves to Spanish America—the Asiento de Negros. This paper considers the extent to which Asiento-related slave trading was profitable for South Sea Co. shareholders and beneficial to the British financial revolution between 1713 and 1743. First, we use historical financial data to estimate the parameters of a capital asset pricing model of excess returns for South Sea Co. shareholders. We find that the Asiento contract increased risk-adjusted excess returns on South Sea Co. stock between 18 and 24% per year. Second, we estimate profit margins in the South Sea Co. Asiento slave trade. These show a stark positive correlation with company share prices before and after the South Sea Bubble of 1720. Adding slave ship departures to the CAPM specifications confirms the direct contribution of slave trading to shareholder returns. We also find that the Asiento and Asiento-related slave trading increased central government fiscal surplus by 16%. This suggests that profitable slave trading by the South Sea Co. under the Asiento enhanced Great Britain’s fiscal capacity, which could be utilized to enhance a military capacity necessary for securing an empire.

Christian missions played an essential role for European colonial empires, often entering territories before European powers officially claimed control. While interactions between governmental and religious actors and their long-term consequences have been subject to earlier studies, little is known about the temporal dynamics of colonization. This paper uses new historical data (1792-1924) to explore the timing of Protestant mission entries on the African continent as well as their geographic distribution. It is found that the establishment of a colonial state through a European power more than tripled the number of missions entering a territory. This effect is largely limited to missions from the colonizer’s metropole. These national missions also became more likely to set up stations in more advantageous locations than their foreign counterparts. The findings attest to State-Church synergies in colonies and demonstrate the importance of national networks. These findings improve our understanding of how colonial empires expanded and have important implications for the study of colonial and missionary legacies of contemporary outcomes. Future research avenues are discussed.

We study whether present-day women political participation in sub-Saharan Africa can be linked to the temporary gender ratio imbalances caused by the transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, taking into account pre-existing gender norms influenced by kinship structures. Using individual-level data for 29 sub-Saharan African countries from the latest Afrobarometer surveys, ethnic region kinship and slave trade data, we find that a woman’s ethnic region exposure to the transatlantic slave trade is associated with an increase in her likelihood to vote, however, only in non-patrilineal ethnic regions. This effect is mitigated in patrilineal ethnic regions, where women have less decision-making power. This paper contributes to the literature on the contemporary sub-national effects of the slave trades and the historical causes of gender gaps in political participation.

How and why have colonial-era Christian missions brought about social change in the long run? This paper addresses this question by causally estimating average and heterogeneous effects of colonial-era Christian missions on schooling, fertility, and household wealth in Nigeria. Our identification strategy exploits discontinuities in mission stations around the borders of the Emirates of Northern Nigeria, where missionary activities were restricted by the colonial administration. We find that areas with greater historical missionary activities have higher levels of schooling, lower levels of fertility, and higher household wealth today. Consistent with the predictions of a simple model, the long-run effect of missions on current schooling is not found in areas with early access to government schools, and is larger for population subgroups—women and Muslims—that have historically suffered disadvantages in access to education. Importantly, we show that the restriction of missions from the Emirates of Northern Nigeria has led to a reversal of fortunes, wherein areas that were more prosperous and institutionally developed in the past are relatively poorer today.

The French slave ship the Bonne Société traded bundles of goods in exchange for slaves in the port of Loango in the late eighteenth century. This paper presents detailed evidence from the ship's trading log that decomposes the goods in the bundle and, uniquely, identifies the European and African merchants who sold captives to the boat. We examine the cross-cultural trade documented by this dataset and show that total prices increased throughout the trade, since the ship faced time pressure as soon as the first captive was aboard, and that the captain increased the price of the bundle by adding more goods and especially by adding high-price goods. We also show that sellers participated both as one-shot traders and as repeat traders, selling the ship captives at multiple points in the trade, and that sellers with honorifics indicating status positions did not appear to earn greater prices as observed in the trading log. The market we observe was neither purely based on barter nor based on goods as substitutes for currency. Our results thus add a nuanced picture of how a trade that destroyed the lives of millions of people worked “on the ground.”


We study the long-term impacts of Cameroon's colonial history and its interplay with postcolonial institutions. We exploit both the arbitrary division of the German Colony of Kamerun between France and Britain after World War I and the 1961 reunification of British Southern Cameroons and the French-speaking RÃƒÂ©publique du Cameroun. Comparing individuals from the same ethnic homeland but living on either side of the British-French border within Cameroon, we find that individuals on the British side had higher educational attainment before the reunification, but that this initial advantage was partially erased by post-reunification governance. Despite achieving higher educational attainment overall, individuals on the British side have worse employment outcomes and roughly similar infant mortality rates. We provide further evidence of the interaction between colonial origins and postcolonial institutions by analyzing how the outcomes of individuals in former Southern Cameroons differ from their hypothetical outcomes, had they instead opted to join Nigeria in the 1961 plebiscite. We find that they have lower educational attainment, higher infant mortality rates, and worse employment outcomes relative to their co-ethnics living on the Nigerian side of the border between former Southern Cameroons and Nigeria.


This brief presents a factual and retrospective analysis of the relationships between urbanisation and demography in North Africa and West Africa. It shows that the process of demographic transition is now fully underway in this region. North of the Sahara the new demographic equilibrium features a birth rate higher than expected, according to theoretical model predictions, resulting in continuous population growth. Over 70% of the population now lives in cities, a number that is expected to continue to rise in the coming decades. South of the Sahara all countries have seen death rates plummet, followed by a decrease in birth rates. The gap between the change in the two variables has contributed to spectacular natural growth in the space of a few decades. This growth is occurring in parallel with a redistribution of populations to urban areas, which are now home to close to one of every two inhabitants. West African urbanisation is likely to accelerate the social, economic and political changes that favour the demographic transition. One of the main challenges facing the region is the question of how to reduce the regional variations seen in fertility rates between the continent’s urban and rural areas.

Could initial – colonial and early post-colonial – conditions explain episodes of systemic crisis in banking systems today? We exploit differences in ethnic concentration of initial ownership and management structure of Nigerian banks established during the colonial era to examine banking crisis and vulnerability of the financial system in contemporary Nigeria. Although banking institutions emerged from or were a reaction to British colonial banking structure, they pursued different practices with respect to ownership and management structure. To measure these initial conditions, we use historical data from the Nigerian banking system to construct an index of diversity in the initial ownership and management structure of each bank, where more diversity corresponds to a lower concentration of insiders, including family members, tribal affiliates, and political partners. We collected data from the “Blue Books”, British colonial banking records from 1887 to 1940, data on indigenous banks established during the colonial period from 1929 to 1960, and data on banks from 1960 to 2016. These data allow us to track the first Nigerian families, ethnic groups, and their associates who were part of the formation of the formal banking institutions in the country. We also collect individual and aggregate bank data from 2001 to 2016 collected from bank balance sheets, financial statements, annual reports, statistical bulletins, banking supervision reports, and other reports of the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation. Our estimates suggest that lower levels of diversity are associated with higher levels of risk for a bank. That is, lack of initial diversity in ownership and management of Nigerian banks may have played a role in the performance and fragility of the Nigerian banking system that lent itself to systemic crisis. Our findings are consistent with the broader recent literature that shows higher profit and stronger performance of more diverse firms relative to less diverse firms due to, for example, diversity-driven innovation and product development.


At independence in 1975, the Frelimo government took over public administration from the colonial system and started to transform it. The public financial management (PFM) system was adapted to the central planning and management of the economy in line with nationalist and Marxist-Leninist thinking. Collapse followed in the mid-1980s, amidst the Cold War and the liberalization of the economy.


For forty or so years, from the 1930s to the mid-1970s, Desmond Hobart Houghton was one of South Africa’s most prominent economists, based throughout his academic career at Rhodes University. He belonged to the liberal school of economists who believed in the free market and modernization theory, being particularly influenced by W. Rostow’s stages of growth model which he applied to South Africa. The rural economy, migrant labor and regional development, with a particular focus on the Eastern Cape, were his major research interests. He authored a standard text on the South African economy. This article charts his career and thinking.

What was the capacity of European colonial states? How fiscally extractive were they? What was their capacity to provide public goods and services? And did this change in the “developmentalist” era of colonialism? To answer these questions, we use archival sources to build a new dataset on colonial states of the second French colonial empire (1830-1962). French colonial states extracted a substantial amount of revenue, but they were under-administered because public expenditure entailed high wage costs. These costs remained a strong constraint in the “developmentalist” era of colonialism, despite a dramatic increase in fiscal capacity and large overseas subsidies.


The Gambella Region is one of the marginalised and most conflict-ridden regions in Ethiopia. Recently, violent clashes between the two largest ethnic groups in the region - the host communities, the Anywaa, and the South Sudanese Nuer refugees - have reignited the debate on refugee integration in the region. In fact, the roots of the Anywaa-Nuer conflict can be traced back to the imperial regime of Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century. In the early 1960s however, the arrival and spontaneous integration of Nuer refugees was peaceful and relations between both ethnic groups were harmonious. During this time, refugee management was organised locally. Against this background, the focus of the present paper is to understand the nature, context and evolution of the long-standing conflict between the Anywaa and refugees from the Nuer ethnic group in the Gambella Region. Beyond that, the paper explores the Anywaa-Nuer conflict within the context of the political power dynamics of the last two decades. Thereby, the paper reveals that the disputes between the Anywaa and the Nuer have taken on a new dimension since the early 1990s.

Sara Salem. Fanon in the postcolonial Mediterranean: sovereignty and agency in neoliberal Egypt. LSE Online Documents.

In this essay I revisit Fanon’s theory on the emergence of a postcolonial elite in the Global South, and suggest that his argument around the dynamics of imperial transformation following the end of formal colonial rule can shed light on the postcolonial era, in particular the period of neoliberalization that began in the 1970s to which foreign capital such as European Union (EU) capital has been central. I use the concept of amnesia to highlight some of these changes, focusing on two forms: the amnesia of radical critique and the amnesia of empire, arguing that they allow for questions of economic dependency, sovereignty, agency and resistance to come to the fore, highlighting both change and continuity. In particular, Fanon’s work allows for an exploration of both forms of amnesia, through his emphasis on a dependent bourgeoisie as well as the ways in which global political economic structures condition postcolonial agency.
OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Assistant Professor, LSE

Department of Economic History

The salary scale starts at £56,814 per annum and the salary scale can be found on the LSE Website.

The Department of Economic History is inviting applications for a career-track Assistant Professorship to further enhance its strengths in research and teaching.

Outstanding candidates from all areas of economic history are encouraged to apply. We are particularly interested in candidates with research interests in financial history, broadly defined, who could contribute to teaching on our MSc in Financial History, which launches in September 2022.

You will have completed a PhD, or be close to obtaining a PhD, in Economic History, History, Economics, or another closely related field by the start date of the position.

You will have a track record of internationally excellent publications in the field, or be able to demonstrate the potential for publishing research of that quality. You will also have a clear, well developed and viable strategy for your future research that has the potential to result in world-leading publications. You should have excellent written and oral communication skills and the ability to place your specialist work within a broader social science context. You must be committed to working as part of a team and have the ability to teach Economic History at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels and foster a positive learning environment.

The other criteria that will be used when shortlisting for this post can be found on the person specification, which is attached to this vacancy on the LSE’s online recruitment system.

In addition to a competitive salary the benefits that come with this job include an occupational pension scheme, a research incentive scheme with personal reward options, generous research leave (sabbatical) entitlement, a collegial faculty environment and excellent support, training and development opportunities.

For further information about the post, please see the how to apply document, job description and the person specification.

If you have any technical queries with applying on the online system, please use the “contact us” links at the bottom of the LSE Jobs page. Should you have any queries about the role, please email Jennie Stayner: j.c.stayner@lse.ac.uk. The closing date for receipt of applications is 15 December 2021 (23.59 UK time). We are unable to accept any late applications.