



African Economic History Newsletter **Issue #56, November 2022**

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. For your bookshelf
 - b. In Press
 - c. Now in print
 - d. Working papers
3. The next generation

If you want to publicize your own research, events, seminars or organize a panel for an upcoming conference, please send a message to johanf@sun.ac.za 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

CALL FOR PAPERS

16th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network (AEHN) Future Africa, University of Pretoria, October 5-6, 2023

Theme: Agency in African Economic History: Networks, Capital and African development
Deadline for sending abstract: 15 March 2023

Hosting the conference on the continent, the theme revolves around agency in Africa and its past. Africa has been influenced by numerous forces that have shaped its economic development. These forces include pre-colonial exchanges and experiences, colonialism, unfair global practices, international economic and political dynamics, migration, and gender inequality among others. To investigate the progress made to address these historical challenges, two decades into the twentieth century, an interdisciplinary reflection is needed on the state of African economies. The AEHN meeting will provide an opportunity to revisit development by focusing on the role of African agencies. This includes questions on the role of networks, capital and access to markets.

The conference will be held at the newly designed and developed Future Africa Research Institute at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Future Africa aims “to inspire science excellence to transform Africa and the world.” This provides an ideal venue for economists, historians, economic historians, and political scientists to exchange ideas on African agencies and the past. A keynote will be held by Prof. Alois Mlambo (Emeritus Professor, University of Pretoria). The second keynote speaker will be confirmed.

Papers on all aspects of African economic history are welcome, but preference will be given to those that pertain to the conference theme. Abstracts no longer than 500 words should be submitted to aehn2023@gmail.com no later than 15 March 2023. Some bursaries will be available for graduate students and faculty from Africa. If applicable, please indicate the need for a bursary in your submission.

Host Committee:

Dr Carolyn Chisadza, Department of Economics, University of Pretoria

Prof Tinashe Nyamunda, Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria

Dr Christie Swanepoel, Department of Economics, University of the Western Cape



Faculty of Humanities

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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.

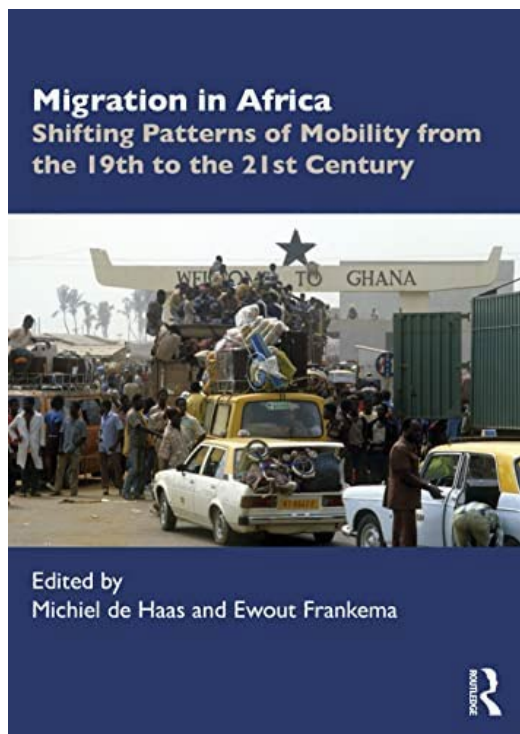
Maren Duvendack and Richard Palmer-Jones. [Colonial Legacies, Ethnicity and Fertility Decline in Kenya: What has Financial Inclusion got to do with it?](#) (20 October 2022)

How should we understand the relationship between the concurrent decline in fertility in Kenya and the spread of financial inclusion in the 2000s? We argue that this relationship may be rooted in the legacies of colonialism and regional and ethnic differences.



NEW RESEARCH IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

For your bookshelf



Michiel de Haas and Ewout Frankema (editors). Migration in Africa: Shifting Patterns of Mobility from the 19th to the 21st Century. Routledge.

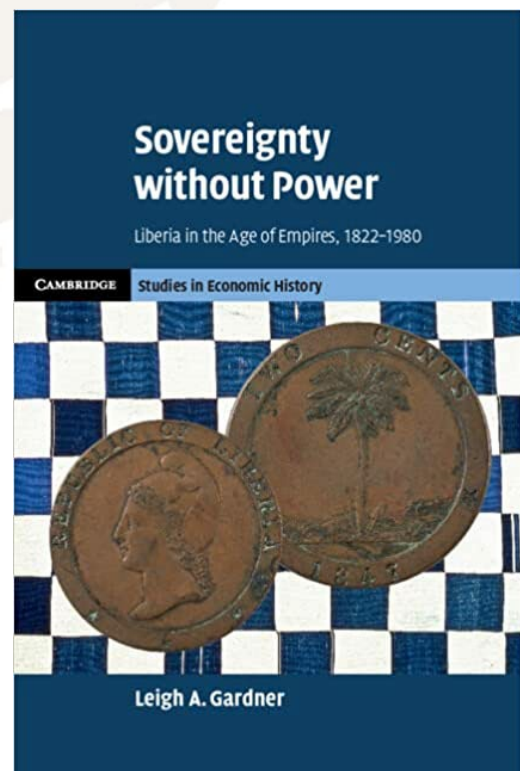
This book introduces readers to the age of intra-African migration, a period from the mid-19th century onward in which the center of gravity of African migration moved decisively inward. Most books tend to zoom in on Africa's external migration during the earlier intercontinental slave trades and the more recent outmigration to the Global North, but this book argues that migration within the continent has been far more central to the lives of Africans over the course of the last two centuries. The book demonstrates that only by taking a broad historical and continent-wide perspective can we understand the distinctions between the more immediate drivers of migration and deeper patterns of change over time.

Broad ranging in its temporal, spatial, and thematic coverage, this book provides students and researchers with the perfect introduction to age of intra-African migration.

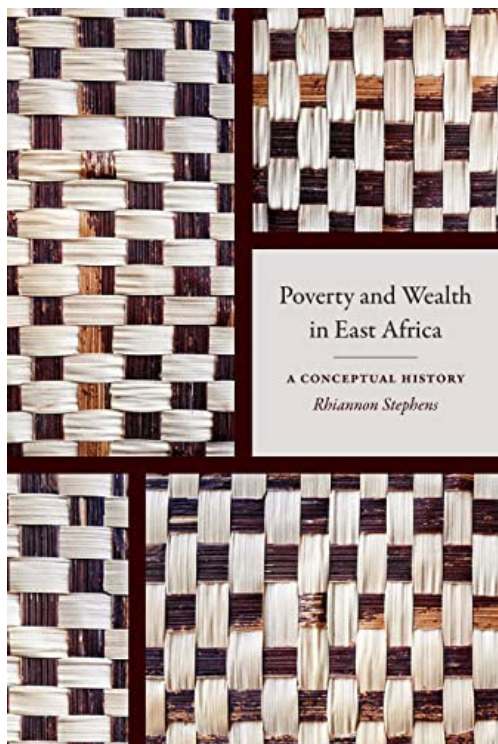
Leigh Gardner. Sovereignty without Power: Liberia in the Age of Empires, 1822–1980. Cambridge University Press.

What did independence mean during the age of empires? How did independent governments balance different interests when they made policies about trade, money and access to foreign capital? *Sovereignty without Power* tells the story of Liberia, one of the few African countries to maintain independence through the colonial period. Established in 1822 as a colony for freed slaves from the United States, Liberia's history illustrates how the government's efforts to exercise its economic sovereignty and engage with the global economy shaped Liberia's economic and political development over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Drawing together a wide range of archival sources, Leigh A. Gardner presents the first quantitative estimates of Liberia's economic performance and uses these to compare it to its colonized neighbors and other independent countries. Liberia's history anticipated challenges still faced by developing countries today, and offers a new perspective on the role of power and power relationships in shaping Africa's economic history.



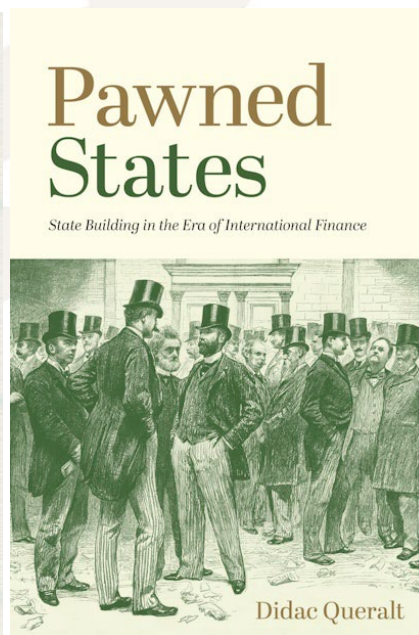
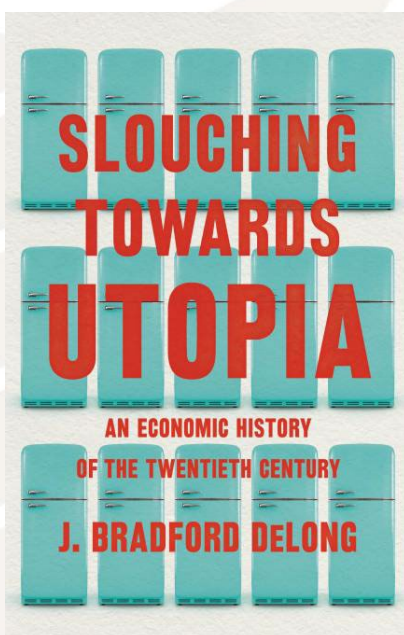
Rhiannon Stephens. Poverty and Wealth in East Africa: A Conceptual History.



In *Poverty and Wealth in East Africa* Rhiannon Stephens offers a conceptual history of how people living in eastern Uganda have sustained and changed their ways of thinking about wealth and poverty over the past two thousand years. This history serves as a powerful reminder that colonialism and capitalism did not introduce economic thought to this region and demonstrates that even in contexts of relative material equality between households, people invested intellectual energy in creating new ways to talk about the poor and the rich.

Stephens uses an interdisciplinary approach to write this history for societies without written records before the nineteenth century. She reconstructs the words people spoke in different eras using the methods of comparative historical linguistics, overlaid with evidence from archaeology, climate science, oral traditions, and ethnography. Demonstrating the dynamism of people's thinking about poverty and wealth in East Africa long before colonial conquest, Stephens challenges much of the received wisdom about the nature and existence of economic and social inequality in the region's deeper past.

Other new books in economic history



Now in print

Jonathan Hersh and Hans-Joachim Voth. [Sweet diversity: Colonial goods and the welfare gains from global trade after 1492.](#) **Explorations in Economic History.**

When did overseas trade start to matter for living standards? Traditional real-wage indices suggest that living standards in Europe stagnated before 1800. In this paper, we argue that welfare may have actually risen substantially, but surreptitiously, because of an influx of new goods. Colonial “luxuries” such as tea, coffee, and sugar became highly coveted. Together with more simple household staples such as potatoes and tomatoes, overseas goods transformed European diets after the discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope. They became household items in many countries by the end of the 18th century. We apply two standard methods to calculate broad orders of magnitude of the resulting welfare gains. While they cannot be assessed precisely, gains from greater variety may well have been big enough to boost European real incomes by 10% or more (depending on the assumptions used).

Omar Karlsson and Martin Dribe. [Maternal height and child health and schooling in sub-Saharan Africa: Decomposition and heterogeneity.](#) **Social Science & Medicine.**

Maternal height is associated with mortality and anthropometry in low-and-middle-income countries. This paper explored residual associations and potential underlying mechanisms linking maternal height to several child outcomes using regression models with neighborhood and half-sibling fixed effects and Gelbach decomposition on 108 Demographic and Health Surveys from 37 sub-Saharan African countries. When adjusting for time of birth, twinning, sex, and survey, a single z-score (6.5 cm) increase in mother's height was associated with a 22% reduction in the average deficit in height-for-age among children under five (according to the WHO 2006 growth standard), 16% lower neonatal mortality (age <1 month), 10% lower postneonatal mortality (age 1–11 months), 11% lower child mortality (age 12–59 months), and 2% increase in school attendance among 7–16-year-olds. Adjusting further for maternal education, household living standards, maternal fertility and birth related factors, and neighborhood reduced the coefficients for maternal height by 22% for child height-for-age, 26% for neonatal mortality, 46% for postneonatal mortality, 56% for child mortality, and 90% for school attendance. The decomposition showed that adjusting for neighborhood had a substantial impact on the association of maternal height with all outcomes, especially child mortality. Adjusting for unobserved father and household factors also had a particularly large impact on the association with child mortality. The robustness of the relationship with neonatal mortality suggests that pregnancy and perinatal factors are an important link between maternal height and child outcomes. Adult living standards and socioeconomic and related behavioral factors likely play a small role. Genetics may also play a large role in linking maternal height and child height-for-age, especially for educated mothers, whose height was presumably impacted less by early life adversity.

Dozie Okoye. [Historical Christian missions and African societies today: Perspectives from economic history.](#) **Economic History of Developing Regions.**

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Working Papers

Jutta Bolt, Leigh Gardner, Jennifer Kohler, Jack Paine and James Robinson. [African Political Institutions and the Impact of Colonialism.](#)

Conventional wisdom proposes deep historical roots for authoritarianism in Africa: either colonial “decentralized despotism” or enduring structural features. We present a new theoretical perspective. Africans sought autonomous local communities, which constrained precolonial rulers. Colonizers largely left constrained institutions in place given budget limitations. Innovation, where it occurred, typically scaled up councils rather than invented despotic chiefs. To test these implications, we compiled two original datasets that measure precolonial institutions and British colonial administrations around 1950 in 463 local government units. Although colonial institutions were authoritarian at the national level, most Native Authorities were constrained by some type of council and many local institutions lacked a singular ruler entirely. The form of Native Authority institutions and the composition of councils are strongly correlated with precolonial institutional forms. The persistence of institutional constraints at the local level suggests alternative channels through which colonial rule fostered postcolonial authoritarian regimes.

Sara Lowes. [Culture in Historical Political Economy.](#)

Culture – the set of socially transmitted values and beliefs held by individuals – has important implications for a wide variety of economic outcomes. Both the causes and consequences of culture have been the subject of work in Historical Political Economy. I first outline several theories on the origins, evolution, and transmission of culture. I then discuss various strategies for measuring culture. Finally, I review recent research in HPE that explores the origins of variation in culture and the economic consequences of culture.

Laura Radatz and Joerg Baten. [Measuring multidimensional inequality and conflict in Africa and in a global comparison.](#)

We construct a multidimensional inequality index covering 193 countries worldwide with a specific focus on Africa. For a substantial and unprecedented number of countries, we can trace the long-term evolution of inequality over 200 years, from 1810 to 2010. The inequality index includes not only post-tax income inequality but also health and land inequalities. We observe that the risk of civil war increases consistently with high levels of within-country inequality. By applying an instrumental variable approach, we discover that the impact of multidimensional inequality on civil war is most likely causal. This finding is not only relevant for unstable low- and middle-income countries like Chad or South Sudan but also has implications for high-income countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, for which we predict an increased likelihood of civil war.

Etienne Le Rossignol, Sara Lowes and Eduardo Montero. [On the Origins and Consequences of Communal Property Rights.](#)

Economists tend to emphasize the importance of private property rights over land. However, across societies and historically, communal property rights have been more common, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. We test the hypothesis that longer fallowing requirements – the time needed to leave land uncultivated to restore fertility – led to a higher prevalence of communal property rights. Longer fallowing requirements may lead to communal property rights because land that must remain fallow for longer periods is less valuable and benefits more from communal insurance and protection. We construct an ecological measure of the fallow length for the most suitable staple crop across grid cells based on soil type, temperature, and climate. We find that places where land needs to be fallowed for longer periods are more likely to have communal property

rights. We then examine the implications for the success of land titling policies. We find that longer following requirements are associated with less successful land titling projects. Our results highlight the origins of varied property rights structures and how property rights interact with development programs.

Johannes Haushofer, Sara Lowes, Abednego Musau, David Ndeti, Nathan Nunn, Moritz Poll, Nancy Qian. [Stress, ethnicity, and prosocial behavior.](#)

While observational evidence suggests that people behave more prosocially towards members of their own ethnic group, many laboratory studies fail to find this effect. One possible explanation is that coethnic preference only emerges during times of stress. To test this hypothesis, we pharmacologically increase levels of the stress hormone cortisol, after which participants complete laboratory experiments with coethnics and noncoethnics. We find mixed evidence that increased cortisol decreases prosocial behavior. Coethnic preferences do not vary with cortisol. However, in contrast to previous studies, we find strong and robust evidence of coethnic preference.

Maika Schmidt and Alexander Moradi. [Community effects of electrification: Evidence from Burkina Faso's grid extension.](#)

Using true and pseudo panel data of localities and households, we study the effects of Burkina Faso's large scale electricity grid expansion 2008-2017. We show that the timing of electrification was driven by engineering constraints and thus largely exogenous. We investigate the effects of electrification using a staggered difference-in-differences (DiD) approach, where not-yet treated communities serve as the control group. Despite low uptake of electricity at the household level, we find strong positive effects on luminosity at the community level. In terms of public goods provision, we find an increase in infant vaccination rates, electrified schools and drinking water provision. At the household level, we find increases in the ownership of electric appliances as well as an increase in bank patronage. Importantly, effects spill over to households that do not have an electricity connection.

Edward Kerby, Alexander Moradi and Hanjo Odendaal. [African Time Travellers: What can we learn from 500 years of written accounts?](#)

In this paper we study 500 years of African economic history using traveller accounts. We systematically collected 2,464 unique documents, of which 855 pass language and rigorous data quality requirements. Our final corpus of texts contains more than 230,000 pages. Analysing such a corpus is an insurmountable task for traditional historians and would probably take a lifetime's work. Applying modern day computational linguistic techniques such as a structural topic model approach (STM) in combination with domain knowledge of African economic history, we analyse how first hand accounts (topics) evolve across space, time and traveller occupations. Apart from obvious accounts of climate, geography and zoology, we find topics around imperialism, diplomacy, conflict, trade/commerce, health/medicine, evangelization and many more topics of interest to scholarship. We find that some topics follow notable epochs defined by underlying relevance and that travellers' occupational backgrounds influence the narratives in their writing. Many topics exhibit good temporal and spatial coverage, and a large variation in occupational backgrounds adding different perspectives to a topic. This makes the large body of written accounts a promising source to systemically shed new light on some of Africa's precolonial past.

Sossou Simplicie Adjisse. [The Legacy of the Transatlantic and Indian Ocean Slave Trades on Contemporary Intent to Migrate in Africa.](#)

Using recent individual-level data combined with historical ethnicity-level data on the transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, I find a positive and statistically significant relationship between the slave exports and the intent to migrate observed among Africans today. I investigate using various controls

and recent econometrics methods from several angles and conclude that this relationship is causal. Second, the mechanism behind these results is a combination of poverty and mistrust on the one hand, and “survival skills” and place disconnect on the other, all culturally induced by the slave exports, working in opposite directions to generate the selection into the intended migration through education. This sorting process leads the more productive, educated, and trusting Africans to be more willing to migrate while the less effective, less educated, and less trusting have a higher will to stay behind. These findings imply a brain drain cycle harmful to the development of the origins but beneficial to the destination countries of the intended migration. Moreover, these findings shed light on the cyclical machine behind the poor economic performance among African countries pointed out by Nunn (2008).

Mohammed Iddrisu Kambala. [Colonial Origins of Comparative Development in Ghana.](#)

A striking feature about Ghana’s development landscape is the stark development disparity between a relatively developed South and a trailing North. Explanations for the disparity have often been hinged on differences in geography and past colonial experience. In this study, I provide an empirical justification to the historical hypothesis that the dynamics of colonial rule contributed significantly to the development divergence between the North and the South. I exploit the asymmetric regional distribution of past colonial public investments in education, health and infrastructure to show that the dynamics of colonial rule explain a significant portion of the development disparity between the two regions. I also survey compelling historical anecdotes to show that prior to the colonial project the North was a relatively prosperous region.

Karine Marazyan. [Documenting Inter-personal Conflicts in Senegal during the First Quarter the 20th Century using Dispute Registries from native courts.](#)

In the early 20th century, new litigation bodies, the so-called ‘native courts’, were created and managed by the French colonial administration to regulate relations between native people. The monitoring of court activity has generated high-frequency litigation data. Such data provide a unique opportunity to document interpersonal conflict in a context of colonial rule that is undergoing rapid transformation. This paper has three objectives: (i) describe the institutional framework allowing for the emergence of the data on which this research is based –Les États Récapitulatifs–; (ii) detail our method to compile time series of disputes arbitrated by native courts; (iii) describe certain trends in the dynamics of disputes arbitrated by native courts. We conclude by discussing how this database could be used to better understand the economic and political roots of interpersonal conflict.

Seminar series

Please remember to send us updates of seminar series in African economic history.

University of Cambridge African economic history seminar series

Lent Term 2023

Time: five Tuesdays, 17:00-18:30

Venue: Audit Room, King's College (4 meetings)

Or online (1 meeting)

(Please note that, for now at least, the meetings are not hybrid)

Convenors: Gareth Austin and Bronwen Everill

24 January

Mariusz Lucasiewicz (Liepzig)

'The History and Politics of Capital Markets in Post-independence Africa: Comparative Insights from Nigeria and Kenya'

7 February

Igor Martins (Cambridge)

'Raising Capital to Raise Crops: Slave Emancipation and Agricultural Output in the Cape Colony'

21 February

Prince Young Aboagye (Lund)

'Rural Capitalism and Income Inequality in Colonial Africa: Trends and Transitions'

7 March Joint meeting with History & Economics Seminar

Karin Pallaver (Bologna)

'A Web of Entanglements: Following East African Cowries across Land and Oceans (18th-19th Century)'

14 March: Zoom*

Tinashe Nyamunda (Pretoria)

'Money, Imperial Sterling, and Colonial Economy-Building'

*The Zoom link for the 14 March meeting will be sent to everyone on the seminar mailing list. To subscribe, wherever you are in the world, please visit <https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/event-series/african-economic-history>. Whether online or in person, where possible, the speaker provides a paper in advance, which will be sent to those committing themselves to attending.

In memoriam

Jennifer Kohler

The AEH network shares the sad news that Jennifer Kohler, PhD student in African economic history at the London School of Economics (with supervisors Leigh Gardner and Neil Cummins), died on 3 November. We are devastated by the loss of such a talented scholar.