



African Economic History Newsletter

Issue #64, November 2024

The AEHN newsletter brings you up to date with current news and forthcoming events in African Economic History.

In this last issue for 2024:

- I. Network updates
 - a. AEHN annual meeting
 - b. *Frontiers in African Economic History* blog
- II. News and announcements
 - a. Call for papers
 - b. Achievements in African economic history research
 - c. Opportunities
- III. New research in African economic history
 - a. For your bookshelf
 - b. Articles
 - c. Working papers
 - d. Reports

If you would like to publicise your research, achievements, events, seminars or a panel for an upcoming conference, please send an email to leone.walters@uct.ac.za and I will include your news in our quarterly round up.

Leoné Walters
on behalf of the African Economic History Network

Network updates

AEHN ANNUAL MEETING

The 18th Annual Meeting of the AEHN

30 - 31 October 2025



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
OF LESOTHO**

We are excited to announce the 18th annual meeting of the AEHN, scheduled for 30 - 31 October 2025, at the National University of Lesotho.

The Call for Papers will be launched in January 2025. Stay tuned for the call on our [website](#) and the February 2025 issue of the newsletter.

FRONTIERS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY BLOG

Firm profitability and forced wage labour in Portuguese Africa: Evidence from the Sena Sugar Estates

Sam Jones and Peter Gibbon

During the colonial period in Mozambique, forced wage labor (FWL) was used extensively to ensure a consistent supply of male workers to plantations and other industries. Using archival records from the Sena Sugar Estates, we estimate that coerced laborers earned about 40% less than their free-market counterparts; and while FWL reduced wages and boosted short-term profits in an accounting sense, it hindered long-term productivity gains.

Regulatory capture in the British Empire: The British South Africa Company and the redefinition of property rights in Southern Africa

Klas Rönnbäck and Kondwani Happy Ngoma

What role did corporations play in redefining property rights during colonisation? This article studies one of the most important and infamous companies in the British Empire, the British South Africa Company (BSAC). The article shows how this company exerted influence in the political processes and successfully got dubious claims to land and mineral rights in Southern Africa legitimized by the British Imperial Government.

African Time Travellers: What can we learn from 500 years of written accounts?

Edward Kerby, Alexander Moradi and Hanjo Odendaal

In this paper we study 500 years of African economic history using traveller accounts. Applying modern day computational linguistic techniques in combination with domain knowledge of African economic history, we analyse how first-hand accounts evolve across space and time. We illustrate how this database can be used, by showing how it sheds light on the effect of quinine adoption on European expansion in Africa, and how it allows us to trace the diffusion of New World crops in Africa, particularly maize.

Elite persistence in Sierra Leone: what can names tell us?

Rebecca Simson and Yannick Dupraz

Is elite persistence weaker in Africa than in other parts of the world? In the absence of linked intergenerational data we use name analysis to engage with this question. Using surnames associated with two historical elites in Sierra Leone, the Krio descendants of settlers and members of chiefly lineages, we measure elite persistence in politics, education and business since 1960 and discuss the social reproduction strategies of these two communities.

News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

International Conference ‘Old wealth uncovered’

2 – 3 June 2025

LUND UNIVERSITY

Organisers [Matteo Pompermaier \(Università degli Studi di Brescia\)](#) and [Martin Dackling \(Lund University\)](#) call for papers for the International Conference ‘Old wealth uncovered. Inequalities and intergenerational transfer in the long run (15th to 20th centuries)’, to be held at Lund University, 2-3 June 2025.

The central theme of this conference is ‘How did inheritance work?’. The conference emphasises a comparative dimension and a long-term perspective across different places and periods and intentionally leaves space for a wide perspective on the topic of inheritance, and encourages historians from diverse fields – such as history, economic history, gender history, legal history, sociology, etc. – to apply.

Those interested in joining us at the conference, are asked submit an abstract (300-500 words), along with affiliation and contact information by e-mail to both [Matteo Pompermaier](#) and [Martin Dackling](#) before 31 January 2025.

Call for Streams for the 27th Annual Conference of the Association of Heterodox Economics (AHE)

18 – 20 June 2025

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON
(WATERLOO CAMPUS)

We invite **submissions of streams** for the 27th Conference of the Association for Heterodox Economics, taking place on **June 18-20, 2025** at **King's College, London (Waterloo Campus)**, in London (UK). This is an event organised in collaboration with the [Department of International Development at King's College London](#).

The AHE conference seeks to support scholarship, activism, reflection, and debate on innovative and diverse heterodox and radical understandings of the global political economy. In the midst of multiple crises, including environmental breakdown, genocide, mental health crises, rise of authoritarianism, and crises of social reproduction, heterodox and radical approaches to economics and political economy are crucial for grappling with the challenges we face. We welcome submissions that challenge conventional economic paradigms, offer alternative frameworks for understanding and navigating these complex crises, and actively work towards radical social change.

What is a stream?

A stream is a session or series of sessions held at the conference organised on a specific theme. The stream coordinator will propose a theme for their stream and be responsible for selecting which papers and panels should be included in their stream from the regular call for papers (which may include roundtable and panel proposals too), organising the papers into sessions, and ensuring that there is a chair for each session. The [AHE Academic Officers](#) will be responsible for final decisions on paper selections, sending out acceptance letters, visa letters, and finalising the programme schedule.

The streams will typically involve one or more sessions that are based around 3-4 papers, optionally with a discussant(s). As stream coordinator, you may encourage your presenters to submit full papers in advance and/or agree on a post-conference publication plan, but this is optional. In the interest of encouraging discussions across theoretical traditions or schools of thought, we especially encourage streams organised by theme or topic rather than by discipline/theoretical tradition. However, streams organised by theoretical tradition will also be considered. We expect stream coordinators to especially encourage women, people of colour, early career scholars, and scholars based in the Global South when they advertise their stream for potential submitters. The AHE Conference Organising Committee may advise the stream coordinators on issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity.

To reiterate, the call for streams is not a call for a set of closed panels. Rather, it is a **call for themes to which others will submit abstracts during the Call for Papers**. However, we do encourage coordinators to give examples of papers they foresee will be included in their stream, if possible. Possible stream topics could include (but are certainly not limited to): Climate change, labour, money, finance, innovation, gender, race, economic development, economic and social policy, imperialism, economic history, history of economic thought, economics education, philosophy and methodology in economics. We encourage each stream proposal to list a minimum of two stream coordinators.

Timings

The Call for Streams is open until 29 Nov 2024. Decisions about stream proposals will be made by the AHE Conference Organising Committee and communicated to all proposing stream organisers by **9 December** in time for the opening of the call for papers in mid-December. The Call for Papers deadline will be **14 February 2025**. It will also be possible to submit individual panels and

roundtables to the CfP to be considered for stream coordinators. Once the CfP has closed, stream organisers will be contacted with the submissions to their stream. Thereafter, they will have three weeks to evaluate the submissions and communicate their recommendations to the AHE Conference Organising Committee. This schedule will allow us to send out acceptances to presenters by **early April 2025**.

The conference will be *in-person only*.

Follow the [link](#) for more information.

The Financial History of (De)Colonisation in the 19th and 20th Centuries

16 - 17 May 2025

UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

In May 2025 we will host a workshop dedicated to exploring the financial dimensions of colonisation and decolonisation.

This event is the first of a series of workshops, organised by the University of Antwerp and University of Groningen, aiming at fostering a comprehensive dialogue on the diverse ways in which colonial economies have been structured, and how this ultimately influenced varying patterns of post-colonial growth. For this workshop, we are particularly interested in research that investigates the intricate interplay between imperialist policies, colonial institutions, and financial markets across the 19th and 20th centuries, including, but not limited to, the following themes:

- How did colonial powers organise, finance, and sustain their expansive operations across the globe? What were the financial returns on investments in colonies, and how were these returns distributed among investors, both within and between the metropole and the colonies?
- What roles did the institutions established during the colonial era in colonised territories play in shaping the trajectory of long-term economic development and inequality in post-colonial societies?
- What role did the financial system play in the global slave trade? Did specifically designed financial institutions and financial instruments lead to higher investments in slavery? How did finance impact the lives of slaves and their descendants?

We are looking for proposals on these or related topics from a financial history perspective. We encourage submissions of both descriptive studies and analytical papers, as we hope to bring together a wide range of perspectives that will enrich our understanding of these complex issues.

We invite scholars at all career stages and diverse backgrounds to participate in this workshop. If you are interested in contributing, please submit an abstract of 300 to 500 words, along with your affiliation and contact information, to fh.decolonisation@uantwerpen.be by 1 December 2024. Notification of acceptance will be sent by 20 December 2024. There will be no participation fee.

For further details about the workshop, feel free to reach out to us at the same email address, or directly contact one of the organisers: Amaury de Vicq, Maite de Sola, Marc Deloof or Oscar Gelderblom.

Public Health Interventions in the Long Run: Causes and Consequences

27 – 28 March 2025

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY

Keynote: Prof. Melissa Thomasson (Miami University/NBER)

We are writing to invite you to submit a paper proposal or to express your interest in attending the workshop “Public Health Interventions in the Long Run: Causes and Consequences”, which will take place on 27th and 28th March 2025 at Wageningen University.

The workshop aims to bring together leading researchers on the topic from various fields, such as economic history, economics, historical political economy, demography or public health history. We welcome submissions on any time period and geographic region.

Papers are being sought on topics including, but not necessarily limited to:

- The drivers of health infrastructure provision, including water supplies, sanitation, health care institutions, etcetera.
- The consequences of public health interventions on economic and demographic outcomes.
- The role of institutions and political economy in public spending.
- The connection between epidemics, public health and economic and demographic outcomes.

Application

You can apply by submitting the following via the CEPR website: a short CV (2 pages max.), a title, and a 500-word abstract. You may submit a full paper as well, but this is not mandatory. **The deadline for replies is 15 December 2024.** We cannot accept submissions received after this date. The organisers will notify prospective participants in December 2024 of their decision.

If you have questions about the event, you can contact Daniel Gallardo Albarrán (Wageningen University) at daniel.gallardoalbarran@wur.nl.

Authors who already have a CEPR HUB profile can upload their submission by:

1. Going to <https://hub.cepr.org/> and logging in
2. After you have logged in, go to <https://hub.cepr.org/event/4476>
3. Click on "Step 1: Apply"
4. Under "Apply to Attend" click "Yes"
5. Tick the boxes that apply to you
6. Tick "Would you like to submit a paper?", upload your paper and supply the requested information.
7. Click "Submit form" to make the submission.

Authors who do not have a CEPR HUB profile can upload their submission by:

1. Creating a new profile here <https://hub.cepr.org/user/register>
2. After you have logged in, go to <https://hub.cepr.org/event/4476>
3. Click on "Step 1: Apply"
4. Under "Apply to Attend" click "Yes"
5. Tick the boxes that apply to you
6. Tick "Would you like to submit a paper?", upload your paper and supply the requested information.
7. Click "Submit form" to make the submission.

Adaptability and Resilience in African Business History

July 2025

WORLD ECONOMIC HISTORY CONGRESS (WEHC)
LUND

Despite the continued resurgence in African economic history, business history has not enjoyed the popularity and recognition it deserves amongst scholars of commercial life in Africa. Recent contributions on entrepreneurship and business history in Africa have sought to address many of the conceptual and methodological challenges that comparative economic historians should attend to in their work. At an empirical level, African business history can only help to readdress the social dynamics of businesspeople and corporate organisations within a changing economic and political landscape. Business historians of Africa have increasingly moved away from dry corporate histories and have focused on investigating the underlying causes of commercial transformation in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Africa. These business histories provide invaluable insights into the economic factors and forces that many African societies are still responding to. More importantly, the recognition and application of recent business historiographies of Africa can help to close methodological and conceptual gaps between historians and economists.

The issue of African agency still remains central to the the critiques of Eurocentric business historiography. How did Africans respond and adapt to changing business environments? And perhaps even more crucially, how did the changing economic and social environment influence competition or mutualism between African businesspeople? The drivers of these changes were mostly human induced and many of the transformatory effects were not foreseen at the time. African economies have been affected by both endogenous and exogenous shocks such as Transatlantic slavery, colonialism, climate change, decolonization, wars, urbanization, migration, and structural adjustment policies. The ability to manage crisis (or even thrive) provides us with incredible insight into how Africans navigated considerable limitations and frequently turned them into commercial opportunities.

The objective of this panel is to promote different approaches to studying organisational, operational and regulatory responses to structural change in African business history. The double panel will serve as a forum to help us understand how African agency and capital confronted exogenous and endogenous shocks to the economy. We seek to explore African narratives and counter-narratives of business resilience and management. We invite papers on all aspects of adaptability and resilience in African business history. Although papers on colonial and expatriate business interests will also be considered, we would like to focus the panel on the agency of African businesspeople, organisations and institutions. Review articles and case studies are also welcome.

We are really looking forward to your original contributions on African business history. Please [send](#) a provisional paper title if you would like to participate. Deadline for submissions: 31 January 2025.

Organisers:

Mariusz Lukasiewicz (mariusz.lukasiewicz@uni-leipzig.de)

Dmitri van den Bersselaar (dmitri.van_den_bersselaar@uni-leipzig.de)

Grietjie Verhoef (gverhoef@uj.ac.za)

See the WEHC preliminary schedule [here](#).
Information about registration can be found [here](#).

Sixteenth Conference of the European Historical Economics Society (EHES)

4 – 6 September 2025

UNIVERSITY OF HOHENHEIM

The sixteenth European Historical Economics Conference will be held at the University of Hohenheim from Thursday, September 4 to Saturday, September 6, 2025.

The programme committee, consisting of Jörg Baten (Tübingen), Mikołaj Malinowski (Groningen), Anna Missiaia (Gothenburg), Eric Schneider (LSE), and Sibylle Lehmann-Hasemeyer (Hohenheim) invites proposals for sessions and individual papers on any aspect of European and international economic history, covering a wide range of periods, countries and regions.

To ensure a diverse number of participants, each participant may present only one paper. In the case of co-authorships, participants can attend more than one session, provided that the additional papers are presented by co-authors.

Requirements:

- Proposals for papers must include an abstract of no more than 500 words, the institutional affiliation and email addresses of the authors, and the keywords for the period, country/region, and topic.
- Session proposals must include a brief statement of the session objectives and the abstracts (maximum 500 words each) of 3 to 5 papers.
- **The deadline for submissions is February 15. Notices of acceptance will be sent to the corresponding authors no later than April 2025.**
- Before submitting your paper for the conference, please renew your EHES membership (<https://academic.oup.com/ereh/subscribe?login=true>). Members receive discounted registration rates at the conference as well as copies of the EREH.

Submit via ehesconference.org.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY RESEARCH

Congratulations to The Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP)



LEAP was awarded the DVC: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies **Interdisciplinary/Group Award** at Stellenbosch University's Research Awards on 31 October.

This honour celebrates five years of LEAP's interdisciplinary research.

OPPORTUNITIES



LEAP
Laboratory for the
Economics of Africa's Past
Chair in Economics, History and Policy

Postdoctoral Position in Economics at LEAP, Department of Economics, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

The Chair in Economics, History and Policy within the Department of Economics at Stellenbosch University invites applications for a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship within the Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP). LEAP is a research centre dedicated to exploring Africa's economic past, combining deep empirical analysis with innovative, interdisciplinary methods. The fellowship provides an excellent opportunity for a recent PhD graduate in economics to conduct research using new, large historical databases with a strong foundation in econometric analysis.

Position Overview

The successful candidate will pursue an independent research agenda under the guidance of LEAP's senior scholars and collaborate on existing projects that examine the historical roots of modern development. Although we seek applicants with a primary interest in economic history, we encourage those with secondary interests in household finance, urban economics, health economics, or intergenerational mobility to apply to benefit from collaborative opportunities with other research centres in the Department and Faculty.

Qualifications

- PhD in Economics or closely related discipline, completed within the past five years
- Strong quantitative and econometric skills, with a demonstrated interest in economic history.
- Capacity to work independently to produce high-quality research publications.

Position Details

- Duration: 2 years (on condition of acceptable progress after the first year)
- Location: Stellenbosch, South Africa
- No teaching responsibilities
- Start date: Flexible, but ideally within six months of offer acceptance



Why join LEAP at Stellenbosch University?

As a postdoctoral researcher within LEAP, you will join a vibrant academic community located in the heart of South Africa's beautiful Western Cape. Stellenbosch University is one of Africa's leading research institutions, providing access to extensive academic resources and a collegial environment. LEAP fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and draws on historical data to address contemporary policy issues, making it an ideal destination for researchers looking to push the boundaries of economic research. Visit leap Stellenbosch.org.za for more information.

Application Deadline

Applications should include a cover letter, CV, job market paper, and letters for at least two academic references.

Applications are open until the position is filled or no later than 24 January 2025.

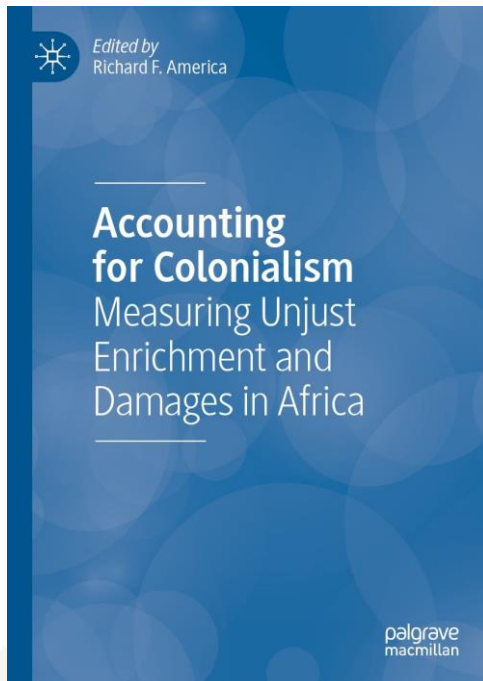
For additional information, please contact johanf@sun.ac.za. All applications must be submitted through econjobmarket.org.

New research in African economic history

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Accounting for Colonialism: Measuring Unjust Enrichment and Damages in Africa

Editor: Richard F. America



This book examines qualitatively and quantitatively the exploitation of Africa through six centuries of colonialism and imperialism. The contributions build on previous qualitative analyses. The chapters introduce new ways to measure some of the coerced income and wealth transfers to Europe and North America through systematic underpayments and overcharges. This wealth was wrongfully accumulated using many forms of their abuse of dominance.

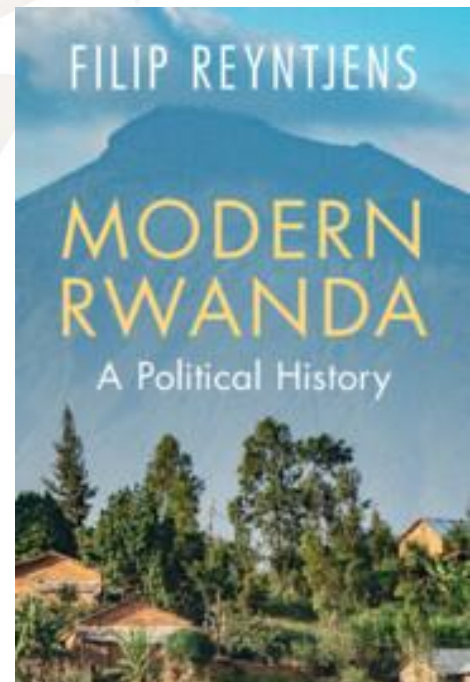
The book provides estimates that will be helpful to understanding the growing debate on "reparations." This also contributes to rethinking international development assistance policy. It helps establish a basis for improved estimates of the gains from past and current practices that worked against African economic, social, and political institutions and systems.

This edited volume showcases a variety of scholars with diverse perspectives and establishes, for the first time, the extent of wrongful benefits and damages from 600 years of international harm to the African continent.

Modern Rwanda: A Political History

Filip Reyntjens

Rwanda has been the subject of much research following the genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group in 1994. Moving beyond recent histories which examine Rwanda's past predominantly through the lens of this tragic event, Filip Reyntjens utilises a *longue durée* framework to provide new insights into historical developments over the last hundred and fifty years. Tracking the foundations of modern Rwanda from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, this study offers the first comprehensive examination of both the political continuities and ruptures which have shaped the country. Reyntjens examines the 19th century precolonial polity, colonisation from the end of the 19th century; the revolution of 1959-1961 followed by independence in 1962; and the 1994 genocide followed by the seizure of power by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Across these periods of dramatic transition this study demonstrates the role of both political constancy and change, allowing readers to reshape their understanding of Rwanda's political history.



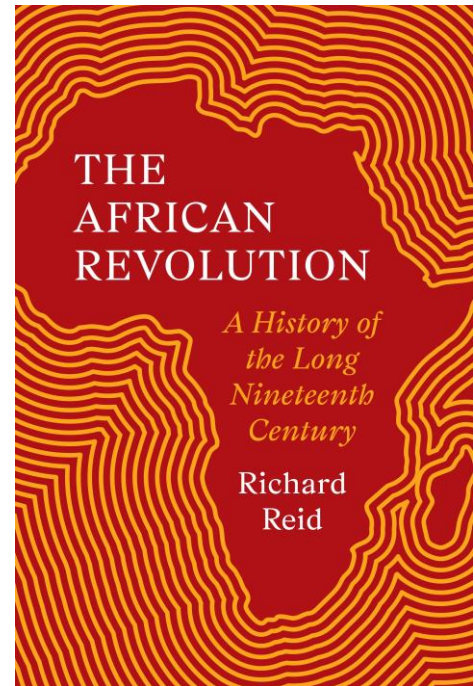
The African Revolution: A History of the Long Nineteenth Century

Richard Reid

Africa's long nineteenth century was a time of revolutionary ferment and cultural innovation for the continent's states, societies, and economies. Yet the period preceding what became known as "the Scramble for Africa" by European powers in the decades leading up to World War I has long been neglected in favor of a Western narrative of colonial rule. The African Revolution demonstrates that "the Scramble" and the resulting imperial order were as much the culmination of African revolutionary dynamics as they were of European expansionism.

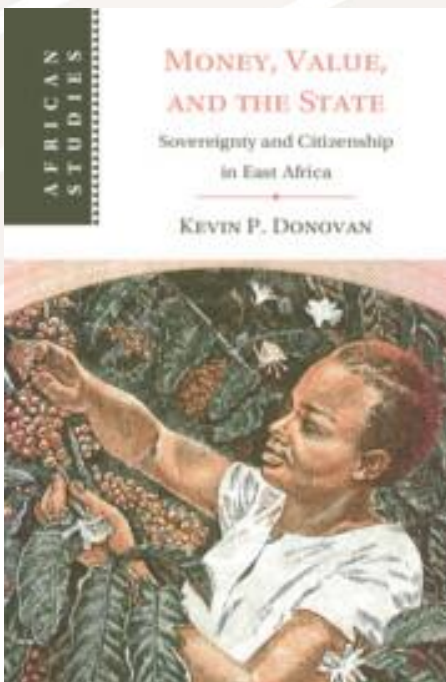
In this monumental work of history, Richard Reid paints a multifaceted portrait of a continent on the global stage. He describes how Africa witnessed the emergence of new economic and political dynamics that were underpinned by forms of violence and volatility not unlike those emanating from Europe. Reid uses a stretch of road in what is now Tanzania—one of the nineteenth century's most vibrant commercial highways—as an entry point into this revolutionary epoch, weaving a broader story around characters and events on the road. He integrates the African experience with new insights into the deeper currents in European societies before and after conquest, and he shows how the Africans themselves created opportunities for European expansion.

Challenging the portrayal of Africa's transformative nineteenth century as a mere prelude to European colonialism, *The African Revolution* reveals how this turbulent yet hugely creative era for Africans intersected with global intrusions to shape the modern age.



Money, Value, and the State: Sovereignty and Citizenship in East Africa

Kevin P. Donovan



Decolonization in East Africa was more than a political event: it was a step towards economic self-determination. In this innovative book, historian and anthropologist Kevin Donovan analyses the contradictions of economic sovereignty and citizenship in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, placing money, credit, and smuggling at the center of the region's shifting fortunes. Using detailed archival and ethnographic research undertaken across the region, Donovan reframes twentieth century statecraft and argues that self-determination was, at most, partially fulfilled, with state monetary infrastructures doing as much to produce divisions and inequality as they did to produce nations. A range of dissident practices, including smuggling and counterfeiting, arose as people produced value on their own terms. Weaving together discussions of currency controls, bank nationalizations and coffee smuggling with wider conceptual interventions, *Money, Value and the State* traces the struggles between bankers, bureaucrats, farmers and smugglers that shaped East Africa's postcolonial political economy.

New from Princeton

Capitalism in the Colonies

African Merchants in Lagos, 1851–1931

A. G. Hopkins

An account that challenges the conventional views of African merchants under colonialism, examining the emergence and changing fortunes of indigenous entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria

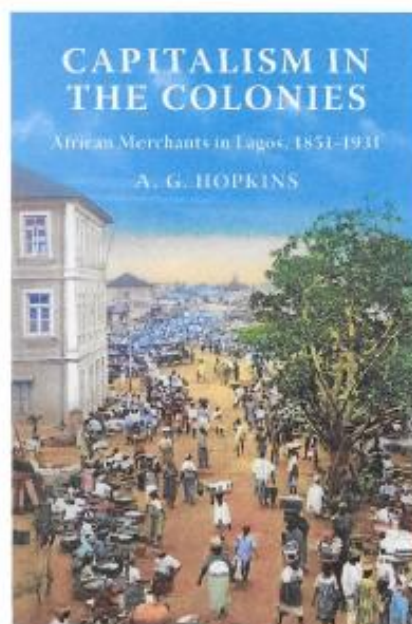
In *Capitalism in the Colonies*, A. G. Hopkins provides the first substantial assessment of the fortunes of African entrepreneurs under colonial rule. Examining the lives and careers of 100 merchants in Lagos, Nigeria, between 1850 and 1931, Hopkins challenges conventional views of the contribution made by indigenous entrepreneurs to the long-run economic development of Nigeria. He argues that African merchants in Lagos not only survived, but were also responsible for key innovations in trade, construction, farming, and finance that are essential for understanding the development of Nigeria's economy.

The book is based on a large, representative sample and covers a time span that traces mercantile fortunes over two and three generations. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Hopkins shows that indigenous entrepreneurs were far more adventurous than expatriate firms. African merchants in Lagos pioneered motor vehicles, sewing machines, publishing, tanneries, and new types of internal trade. They founded the construction industry that built Lagos into a major port city, moved inland to start the cocoa-farming industry, and developed the finance sector that is still vital to Nigeria's economy. They also took the lead in changing single-owned businesses into limited liability companies, creating freehold property rights and promoting wage labour. In short, Hopkins argues, they were the capitalists who introduced the institutions of capitalism into Nigeria. The story of African merchants in Nigeria reminds us, he writes, that economic structures have no life of their own until they are animated by the actions of creative individuals.

About the Author:

A. G. Hopkins is Emeritus Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History at the University of Cambridge and an Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. He is the author of *An Economic History of West Africa*, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton), *Africa, Empire, and World Disorder: Historical Essays*, and (with P. J. Cain) *British Imperialism, 1688–2016*.

 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS



September 2024

9780691258843

Hardcover £42.00 | \$49.95

576 pages | 6.13 x 9.25 in.

30 b/w illustrations. 3 maps

ebook available

“Capitalism in the Colonies is a tremendously rich account of how African merchants in Lagos adapted to and shaped the processes of economic and political change in the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It brings together an astonishing array of primary sources—some rarely or perhaps even never used—to examine the shift to ‘legitimate commerce’ and the process of colonial expansion from the perspective of the African commercial class which made both of these changes possible. A remarkable contribution.” — Leigh Gardner, *London School of Economics*

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press.princeton.edu.

Offer available until 30 November 2024.

Postage and packaging costs will be added at point of purchase.

Africonomics: A History of Western Ignorance

Bronwen Everill

'A wry, rollicking, and provocative history' Michael Taylor, author of *The Interest*

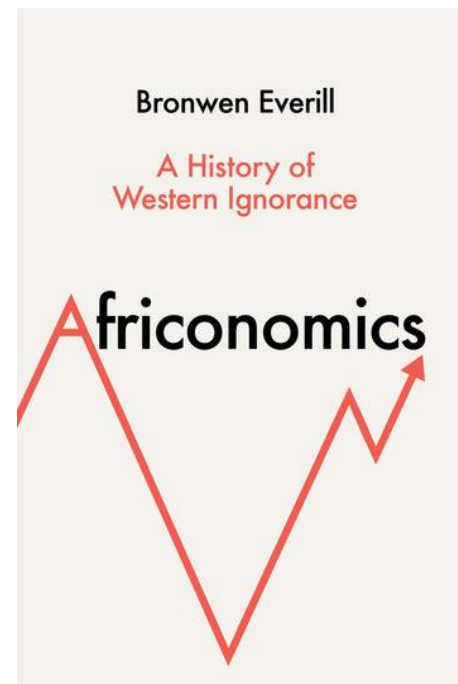
'A thought-provoking analysis of Africa's relationship with economic imperialism' Astrid Madimba and Chinny Ukata, authors of *It's A Continent*

We need to think differently about African economics.

For centuries, Westerners have tried to 'fix' African economies. From the abolition of slavery onwards, missionaries, philanthropists, development economists and NGOs have arrived on the continent, full of good intentions and bad ideas. Their experiments have invariably gone awry, to the great surprise of all involved.

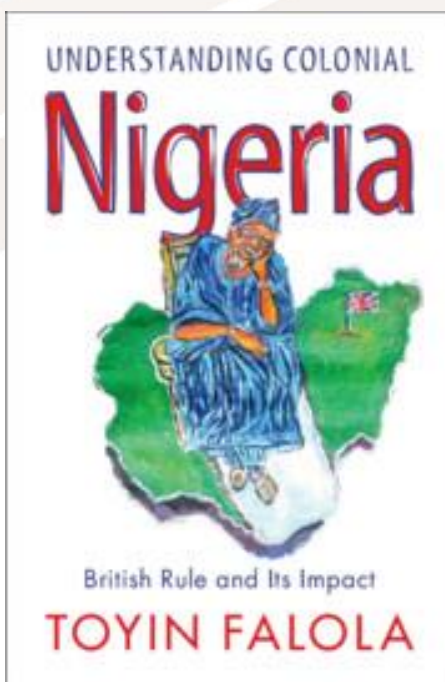
In this short, bold story of Western economic thought about Africa, historian Bronwen Everill argues that these interventions fail because they start from a misguided premise: that African economies just need to be more like the West. Ignoring Africa's own traditions of economic thought, Europeans and Americans assumed a set of universal economic laws that they thought could be applied anywhere. They enforced specifically Western ideas about growth, wealth, debt, unemployment, inflation, women's work and more, and used Western metrics to find African countries wanting.

The West does not know better than African nations how an economy should be run. By laying bare the myths and realities of our tangled economic history, *Africonomics* moves from Western ignorance to African knowledge.



Understanding Colonial Nigeria: British Rule and Its Impact

Toyin Falola



In this landmark new history, Toyin Falola analyses the impact of Britain's colonization of Nigeria from the late nineteenth century to 1960, when the country regained independence. Falola covers major events in depth, from the initial conquest and denial of Indigenous sovereignty, to the emergence and functioning of the colonial state, and later nationalist movements, offering fascinating insights into labour and trade relations, regionalism and nationalism, and Nigeria's role during the First and Second World Wars. *Understanding Colonial Nigeria* assesses the economic, political, social, and cultural changes that culminated in the emergence of a coalition of diverse groups agitating for the end of colonial rule from the 1940s – from labor coalitions and politicians to youth groups and market women. From the country's borders and state structure, to the present conflicts, Falola powerfully reflects on the lasting consequences of British intervention in the affairs of Nigerian states and communities.

ARTICLES

The multivocality of the nation: political imagination and transformation in the emergence of African Nationalism

Theory and Society
Jonathan Schoots

At key moments in history, political understanding and action are irrevocably transformed. What makes such moments of transformation possible? This article examines the emergence of African nationalism in South Africa, following the multivocal appeal to African nationhood made by proto-nationalist leaders and intellectuals. In doing so I examine how new political imagination can reconfigure the structure of political relations and create powerful new possibilities for political organizing and action. African proto-nationalist leaders were 'intermediary intellectuals' who used African nationhood to speak to three different political logics of their key audiences: a 'progressive nationhood' to their white colonial audience, a 'unifying nationhood' to their missionary-educated African audience, and a 'traditional nationhood' to their rural African audience. African nationhood thus had a multivocal appeal which allowed proto-nationalist leaders to bring otherwise divided audiences to support a common political project. By bridging these divided communities, proto-nationalist leaders were able to combine resources and strategies from once separated domains into novel forms of political power. Transformation in political understanding was thus a critical enabler of innovation in organization and action because it built a political project where new connections between African and colonial worlds were made politically 'thinkable'. Speaking to the scholarship on political repertoires and the sociology of anti-colonial intellectuals, this study has broader implications for the role political ideas play in political transformation.

Income Mobility before Industrialization: Evidence from South Africa's Cape Colony

Social Science History
Johan Fourie, Erik Green, Auke Rijpma and Dieter von Fintel

Attempts to measure social mobility before the twentieth century are frequently hampered by limited data. In this paper, we use a new source – annual, matched tax censuses over more than 70 years – to calculate intragenerational income mobility within a preindustrial, settler society, the Dutch and British Cape Colony at the southern tip of Africa. Our unique source allows us to measure income mobility along several dimensions, helping to disentangle reasons for the high levels of persistence we find.

Explaining the transition from forced to free labour in colonial Angola's diamond mines

Industrial History Review
Leo Dolan

This paper examines the evolution of coercive labour institutions in Portuguese Africa through a detailed case study of Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (Diamang), one of the region's most significant colonial enterprises. Utilising a theoretical economic model, the study delves into the persistence of these extractive practices and their eventual transformation into more inclusive, market-driven systems. By charting Diamang's historical trajectory, the paper explores how this deeply entrenched system transitioned from coercive labour to a free-market system, catalysed by significant socio-political changes such as the abrupt independence of neighbouring countries, domestic unrest and international pressures. The model provides new insights into the historical dominance of coercive labour institutions and reveals how external shocks can precipitate rapid institutional change. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of colonial labour market dynamics and highlights the evolving nature of extractive practices within economic history, with specific reference to the understudied case of the Portuguese colonial empire.

Imperialism of jackals and lions. The fiscal-military state in Portuguese Africa in the British and French African mirror, c. 1850–1940

Industrial History Review

Kleoniki Alexopoulou and Ewout Frankema

We adopt the metaphor of the “jackal” and the “lion” to explore whether variation in geo-political power of metropolises affected fiscal and military capacity building in colonial Africa. Zooming in on Portuguese Africa, we hypothesize that indigenous taxpayers in Angola and Mozambique were forced to invest more in order, security and their own subjugation, as Portugal lacked the wealth, the scale economies, the imperial cross-subsidies and the means of credible deterrence underpinning British and French imperial security policies. We show that military and police force expenditures extracted larger proportions of the colonial budget in Portuguese Africa. The Portuguese African army was also relatively large, relied extensively on forced labour recruitment and remained poorly equipped. While Britain and France supported African colonial armies with substantial metropolitan and imperial subsidies, and Britain also kept far fewer troops on African soil, the conditions of “jackal imperialism” placed greater burdens on long-term colonial state finances.

Spatial inequality in living standards and the urban premium in late colonial French West Africa

Industrial History Review

Tom Westland

Were colonial capitals islands of relative prosperity in West Africa, or did incomes in smaller cities keep up with income levels in major cities like Dakar? Though recent work has shown that by the 1950s real wages for unskilled workers in the major cities of West Africa were relatively high by developing world standards, less is known about income levels in the smaller urban settlements of the region. Using nominal wages and retail prices, this paper estimates welfare ratios in 49 urban centres in French colonial Dahomey, Niger, Soudan français, Haute-Volta and Guinée française for the dry season of 1948. It shows that there was considerable variation in nominal wages, real wages, and the price level across the territory of French West Africa. Coastal towns generally had higher real wages than the hinterland, though coastal Guinea was relatively poor. Real incomes tended to be higher in areas connected to a colonial railway and in areas with higher land productivity. There was an appreciable urban premium, with higher real wages in towns with larger populations.

The Origins of Formal Educational and Gender Inequality in Zambia, 1924-1990

Industrial History Review

Michael Chanda Chiseni and Jutta Bolt

This paper examines the origins of formal education in colonial Zambia and its long-term consequences for educational attainment and gender inequality. Combining novel panel data on the location of missionary stations and mission school enrolment by gender and missionary society from 1924 to 1953 with contemporary data from the 1990 Zambian census, we analyze the long-term effects of missionary education. Our results are threefold. First, we document that despite substantial schooling expansion after the mid-1930s, overall enrolment remained low and uneven between the sexes at the end of the colonial period. Although Protestant missions provided more equal gender access than Catholic schools, this was insufficient to close the overall gender inequality in education by the end of the colonial period. Second, we find that historical missionary presence is associated with higher educational attainment post-independence. We document that the impact of early mission density on educational outcomes was smaller for early cohorts compared to the more substantial effects of later mission density on later cohorts, with no significant difference between Protestant and Catholic mission activity. Third, we find that the difference in years of education between males and females has narrowed post-independence, most prominently in areas with historically more mission activity.

The Revival of African Economic History in the 21st Century: A Bibliometric Analysis

Industrial History Review

Katharine Frederick, Dácil Juif and Felix Meier zu Selhausen

Ten years have passed since the publication of the last special issue on African economic history proclaiming the “renaissance” of the field. We carry out a bibliometric analysis of 114 articles written by 104 distinct authors and published in the leading five economic history journals from 2000 to 2024. We derive an updated outline of the key features of the evolution of African economic history in terms of quantity and impact of publications, research topics, historical period, African geographical area, type of sources and data, analytical methods and author characteristics (affiliation and gender). The field has seen an impressive expansion in publication output and impact – also outside the main economic history outlets – as well as in conference participation, variety of research topics and innovation in the use of sources. However, immediately after the publication of the special issue in 2014, this revival plateaued in terms of absolute and relative publications as well as their citational performance. Authors based at African institutions and female authors remain underrepresented; former Belgian, German, Italian and Portuguese colonies, as well as the postcolonial period remain understudied.

Trade, Slavery, and State Coercion of Labor: Egypt during the First Globalization Era

The Journal of Economic History

Mohamed Saleh

I investigate the effects of trade on labor coercion under the dual-coercive institutions of slavery and state coercion. Employing novel data from Egypt, I document that the cotton boom in 1861–1865 increased both imported slaveholdings of the rural middle class and state coercion of local workers by the elite. As state coercion reduced wage employment, it reinforced the demand for slaves among the rural middle class. While the abolition of slavery in 1877 increased wages, it did not affect state coercion or wage employment. I discuss the political effects of the abolition as a potential explanation for these findings.

“The barbarism of the [U.S.] South, while destroying itself, [appeared] in the providence of God to be working out the regeneration of Egypt.”

North American Review 98, no. 203 (1864, p. 483), quoted in Earle (1926)

What happened to the workshop of West Africa? Resilience and decline of handicraft textiles in colonial northern Nigeria, 1911–52

The Economic History Review

Emiliano Travieso and Tom Westland

The Sokoto Caliphate of northern Nigeria was the workshop of West Africa in the pre-colonial nineteenth century, producing famous blue-black cloth that reached many markets south of the Sahara as well as across it. Under British colonial rule this large handicraft textile industry was faced with the winds of foreign competition. We rely on a newly digitized set of colonial district reports to measure the impact of trade on northern Nigerian textile manufacturing and find that (contrary to British expectations) areas closer to railway stations were less likely to experience industrial decline. We argue that the resilience of local textiles relied on the low opportunity cost of dry-season labour. Analysing a piece of tax microdata, we show that a low opportunity cost of labour outside of the rainy season was associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in textile by-employment. Seasonal changes in relative factor prices were a trap as well as a refuge. Part-time employment limited specialization and technological innovation, and can help to explain why northern Nigerian textiles eventually declined. Thus, beyond our particular case study, these results contribute to our understanding of the role of seasonality in determining the structure and pace of development of tropical economies.

Social interactions and contract enforcement in the postcolonial Arab world. Evidence from the industrial elite of Morocco, 1956–1982

Economic History of Developing Regions
Romain Ferrali and Javier Mejia

This paper examines the role of social interactions in contract enforcement within the postcolonial Arab world, with a specific focus on Morocco. Through extensive interviews with members of the industrial elite during the import-substituting industrialization (ISI) period, we uncover a significant risk of contractual breaches. Despite this risk, there was a reluctance to use social connections to penalize those who breached contracts. Legal recourse was also rarely pursued. Instead, business leaders leaned on their social networks to assess potential partners and resolve disputes through bilateral channels. This reliance on social ties was facilitated by the close-knit and compact nature of the business community. In the post-ISI era, characterized by a larger and more diverse industrial elite, there was a noticeable increase in contractual disputes, accompanied by a shift towards more aggressive resolution methods. We present a theoretical model that elucidates how these dynamics naturally emerge from an environment where economic and social interactions are intertwined.

Colonial legacies and wealth inequality in Kenya

Explorations in Economic History
Rebecca Simson

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

Feeding African cities: Hinterland suitability and urban growth in twentieth-century Sub-Saharan Africa

Economic History of Developing Regions
Tanik Joshipura

Historically, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)'s cities largely relied on their immediate hinterlands for food provisioning. However, rapid urban growth in the past century has posed unique challenges for how food is provisioned. This paper explores the relationship between the food production suitability of urban hinterlands, and their population growth over the twentieth century. Using a newly constructed urban population dataset, I empirically identify that hinterland suitability was important for urban growth until the 1960s. However, since then, the suitability–growth relationship has weakened. I explore this weakening relationship to understand whether it was a regional phenomenon, and whether it was driven by newly formed cities or a change in urbanization incentives. The suitability–growth relationship weakens even after controlling for various employment-, income- and mortality-related drivers of twentieth-century urban growth in SSA. My results indicate that the means of urban food provisioning in SSA changed. Since the 1960s, hinterland food provisioning in cities was increasingly replaced by a growing reliance on intercontinental food imports. Low global food prices, reduced shipping costs, rural unemployment, and a shift from pro-rural to pro-urban policies incentivized cities to rely on intercontinental food imports and grow past their historical constraints.

Is economic growth less welfare enhancing in Africa? Evidence from the last forty years

World Development

Haoyu Wu, Aziz Atamanov, Tom Bundervoet and Pierella Paci

On current trends, the future of global poverty reduction will be determined by Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Yet, poverty reduction has been relatively slow on the continent, even during periods of strong economic growth. The empirical literature has argued that this is due to the lower growth elasticity of poverty in SSA compared to other regions. This paper contributes to this debate by i) using an up-to-date and expanded sample of 575 successive and comparable growth spells between 1981 and 2021 and 2) unpacking the factors that contribute to the lower growth elasticity of poverty in SSA. First, the analysis confirms previous findings that economic growth (which we measure by growth in GDP per capita) has consistently been less poverty-reducing in SSA, even after controlling for initial differences in poverty, income levels, and inequality (and changes therein). Second, we find that the lower growth elasticity is due to a significantly lower passthrough between growth in GDP per capita and growth in household income or consumption as measured from surveys. GDP growth is particularly ineffective in improving the incomes of the poorest households, whose consumption expenditures in SSA are independent of economic growth, in contrast to low-income households elsewhere. Third, examining the factors that mediate the passthrough between GDP growth and household welfare, we find that limited provision of basic education services and basic infrastructure and the slow process of structural transformation inhibit the passthrough between economic growth and household welfare, as do dependence on natural resources and occurrence of violent conflicts. Overall, variables that strengthen (weaken) the effect of aggregate economic growth on household welfare are scarcer (more abundant) in SSA, which partly explains the weaker effect of economic growth on household welfare.

Hegemony by Adaptation: Decolonizing Ghana's Construction Industry

Comparative Studies in Society and History

Łukasz Stanek

This paper discusses competing visions of the decolonization of Ghana's economy during the first decade of the country's independence from Britain (1957–1966), and the agency and horizon of choice available to the Ghanaian decision-makers in charge of implementing these visions. It focuses on Ghana's construction industry, both as an important part of the national economy and as a condition for Ghana's broader social and economic development in the context of colonial-era path-dependencies and Cold War competition. By taking the vantage point of mid-level administrators and professionals, the paper shows how they negotiated British and Soviet technological offers of construction materials, machinery, and design. In response to Soviet claims about the adaptability of their construction resources to Ghana's local conditions, the practice of adaptation became for Ghanaian architects and administrators an opportunity to reflect on the needs, means, and objectives of Ghana's construction industry, and on broader visions of Ghana's economic and social development. Beyond the specific focus on the construction industry, this paper conceptualizes the centrality of adaptation in enforcing technological hegemony during the period of decolonization, and discusses African agency beyond the registers of extraction and resistance that have dominated scholarship on the global Cold War.

Between Economic Nationalism and Liberalization: Ideas of Development and the Neoliberal Moment in Mobutu's Congo, 1965–74

The Journal of African History

Peter Vale

In January 1967, under the infamous military head Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, the Democratic Republic of Congo nationalized its mining industry based on anticolonial rhetoric of “economic sovereignty.” Only two years later, the same Mobutu government welcomed foreign companies and investors with open arms to the inaugural Foire Internationale de Kinshasa. Even at this crucial postcolonial moment when ideas of economic independence and self-sufficiency had become so highly valued,

an attachment to — even affinity towards — foreign capital persisted throughout Congolese politics. This article explores the political and intellectual tensions that arose from the postcolonial utilization of foreign capital for state consolidation and synthesizes these contradictions into a broader understanding of early development approaches in Mobutu's Congo. In contrast to those who have framed the Congolese leader's ideology as a rearticulation of colonial logics or the authoritarian whims of an individual, I argue that these early notions of Mobutist development should be understood as a kind of “worldmaking,” emerging from an anticolonial ideology that asserted Congo's economic sovereignty while simultaneously inserting itself into the global streams of finance. By tracing the Mobutu government's fluctuating relationship to foreign finance, this research offers a longer history of the “neoliberal moment” in Congo — one in which the intellectual underpinnings for liberalization had percolated in Congolese nationalist politics for several decades.

WORKING PAPERS

Cliometrics of Growth

Claude Diebolt and Faustine Perrin

This chapter lays the theoretical foundations of long-run economic growth. After providing an overview of the three fundamental regimes that have characterized the process of development over the course of human history on the basis of the seminal work of Galor and Weil (2000), we review existing theories offering explanations of the different stages of development. In particular, we examine the predictions and underlying mechanisms of the traditional theories of economic growth and the theories of demographic transitions. We then show the relevance of the Unified Growth Theory to explain and capture the underlying mechanisms of the development process. Finally, we highlight the importance of integrating a gendered perspective in the study of long-run economic growth.

Inherited wealth in post-apartheid South Africa: new perspectives from probate records

Rebecca Simson and Mina Mahmoudzadeh

This chapter uses a novel data source – probate records – to develop an original account of the scale of the racial wealth divide in South Africa and its geographic dimensions. The results provide a sobering perspective on the scale of the racial wealth divide 30 years after the end of Apartheid. We estimate that 45% of White South African adults own inheritable wealth of at least R.250,000, compared to 3% of Black, 9% of Coloured, and 23% of Asian South Africans, and these gaps have narrowed only modestly between 2009 and 2019. We compare these results to estimates from survey data and discuss the nature of the probate source biases and interpretation. We also show that Black South Africans leaving estates are primarily dwellers in former Apartheid-era townships, and to a lesser extent, Homelands, with 42% resident in townships and 17% in Homelands at death, suggesting that this Black formal wealth-owning upper-middle class are predominantly the owners of assets acquired during the Apartheid-era. This points to the limited extent to which South Africa's Black upper and middle classes have bought into the historically White-owned asset stock. It also suggests that, much as in other parts of the world, the wealth distribution beyond the apex owes much to the structure of home ownership and geographically uneven house price appreciation.

From empire to aid: Analysing persistence of colonial legacies in foreign aid to Africa

Swetha Ramachandran

For decades now, Western development agencies and donors have been castigated for their colonial biases in providing aid to Africa. It is well established that donors provide considerably more foreign aid to their former colonies relative to other countries in the region. However, what happens over time to the influence of the former-colonizer-turned-donor within the aid recipient countries? Does their influence become stronger over time due to early and significant contributions, or does it decline with

the emergence of other contemporary donors? Additionally, do these colonial legacies evolve differently depending on who the former colonial power was? Using a statistical analysis of the OECD Creditor Reporting System database, I show that the persistence of colonial legacies in aid, measured through donor concentration, is declining over time across all aid recipient countries. However, the pace of decline varies: former French African colonies, while more concentrated at any given time, see this concentration decrease faster compared with former British African colonies. These trends are influenced by the growing number of donors, France's morphing *Françafrique* policy, and the ongoing influence of former colonizers through military and trade avenues. By drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, this research attempts to empirically measure persistence of colonial legacies across Africa and help inform policy strategies for reforming aid practices by understanding the broader trends.

MiningLeaks: Water Pollution and Child Mortality in Africa

Mélanie Gittard* and Irène Hu

In the midst of Africa's mining boom, communities downstream from industrial mines face increased exposure to toxic waste. Yet, the effects of induced water pollution on the local population's health have not been quantified at the continental scale of Africa, due to data limitation and non-random exposure. This paper investigates this question using a new quasi-experimental design and a novel dataset detailing the location and opening dates of all known industrial mines, obtained through intensive manual data collection. We combine geo-coded information on 2,016 industrial mines with health outcomes from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from 1986 to 2018 in 26 African countries. Through a staggered difference-in-difference strategy, we compare villages downstream and upstream of mines before and after their opening and find a 25% increase in 24-month mortality rates downstream. The effect is mainly observed among children who were no longer breastfed, confirming that water pollution drives the results. Our analysis rules out other mechanisms like fertility changes, access to facilities, in-migration, conflicts and income effects. The impact intensifies during mine operation and high international mineral prices, is higher in densely mined regions, and fades out with distance. From a public policy perspective, this paper underscores the significant local costs of mine openings on the environment and the health of the surrounding populations.

Impacts of repetitive droughts and the key role of experience : evidence from Nigeria

Mélanie Gittard

Western African Sahel faced severe droughts in the 1980s, affecting agricultural production and food security. In recent decades, farmers have faced uncertainty in the timing and amount of rainy seasons and are confronted with erratic rainfall with high interannual variations. Can the experience of past dry events reduce the vulnerability of households to short-term rainfall shocks? In this paper, I match three waves of panel household surveys focusing on agriculture in Nigeria (GHS, from 2010-2016) and high temporal resolution precipitation data set from the Climate Hazard Center (CHIRPS). I show evidence of the extreme importance of the long-dry period of the 1980s and identify more recent droughts in 2013/2015, which are in line with a change in the characteristics of the rainfall trends. Through a two-way-fixed effect strategy, I exploit the spatial variation of the exposition to the 2015 drought. First, I look at the short-term effects of being hit by a drought on agricultural production and food security indicators. I show that being hit by a drought decreases yields by 14%, and decreases the food diversity of households by around 1%. Second, I look at the impacts' heterogeneity according to the plot's experience, using the timing of the year of acquisition of the plot. I compare short-term droughts' effects on households that acquired their first plot before the 1980s dry period to those that acquired it after. Results suggest that acquiring the land before 1985 attenuates the harmful effects of a climate shock, as these particular households have only a 3% reduction in their yields due to the 2015 drought. This is especially the case when households were severely hit in the 1980s. This result might suggest that having a long-lasting experience under extreme dry events on cultivated land reduces vulnerability to rainfall variability.

REPORTS

An Analysis of Migration Governance Frameworks in Kenya

Michael Mutava

This report is the latest addition to the **Migration Governance Reform in Africa Program (MIGRA)**.

Key Insights from the Kenya Study:

Michael Mutava's study on Kenya highlights the country's migration governance frameworks, meticulously structured to provide detailed insights into several critical areas:

Historical and Policy Evolution: The report begins by tracing the historical development of migration policies in Kenya, from pre-colonial times through colonial and post-colonial periods, highlighting how these historical contexts have shaped contemporary governance frameworks.

Current Migration Dynamics: The study examines present-day migration patterns in Kenya, analysing their socio-economic impacts and discussing their alignment with regional commitments such as the East African Community (EAC) protocols and other international agreements.

Policy Implementation and Gaps: A critical evaluation of the implementation of key legislative measures, such as the Immigration Act of 2011 and the Refugees Act of 2021, reveals significant gaps. Mutava, an NSI research fellow, identifies areas where policy implementation falls short and provides a detailed assessment of these deficiencies.

Strategic Recommendations: Concluding with targeted recommendations, the report aims to enhance migration governance to better leverage migration for national and regional development. Recommendations include improving inter-agency coordination, strengthening the legal framework, and adopting best practices from other regions.

