



African Economic History Newsletter

Issue #65 February 2025

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

In this first issue for 2025:

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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 CALL FOR PAPERS

18th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network

30 – 31 October 2025
National University of Lesotho, Roma
Lesotho

Theme: Disruptions and Resilience in African Economic Transformations

Submission deadline: 31 March 2025

The African Economic History Network (AEHN), in collaboration with the Departments of Historical Studies and Economics at the National University of Lesotho (NUL), invites submissions for its 2025 annual meeting. This year's theme, "Disruptions and Resilience in African Economic Transformations," seeks to interrogate the historical dynamics that have shaped Africa's economic trajectories, addressing both enduring legacies, pivotal disruptions and turning points. The conference will foster interdisciplinary dialogue and provide a platform for exploring and accounting for the continent's economic and social past through diverse lenses.

On 29 October, the day before the conference, the bicentennial celebrations of Lesotho's history will take place at the National University of Lesotho. Participants of the AEHN are also invited to join these special reflections on the country's 200 years of socio-economic history.

Submission Guidelines

Researchers are invited to submit their paper abstracts of max. 300 words by 31 March 2025 to: ahnlesotho@gmail.com, including the subject line: "AEHN Conference 2025 Abstract Submission". Papers from early-career researchers and PhD students are particularly encouraged. There is no attendance fee.

Submissions should include:

- Author name(s) and affiliation
- Title of the paper
- Abstract (max. 300 words) outlining the paper's contribution to the literature, methodology, and key findings/arguments
- Contact details (email)

Funding Opportunities

A limited number of travel and accommodation grants are available to support early-career researchers and scholars. Priority will be given to scholars based at African universities. If you wish to be considered for funding, please indicate this in your submission. For more information, please contact: ahnlesotho@gmail.com.

Sub-Themes

Submissions are welcome on topics related, but not limited, to the following:

- **Economic/Historical Development of Lesotho:** Bicentennial reflections and mapping a way forward.
- **Economic Resilience and Adaptation:** Historical responses to economic crises and external shocks.
- **Regional and Global Trade Systems:** Evolution of African trade networks and regional integration efforts
- **Colonial and Post-Colonial Economic Systems:** Unpacking the continuities and disruptions from the colonial period to independence.
- **Migration and Labor Markets:** Historical insights into population movements and labor systems.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Disruptions brought by technological advancements in Africa's economic history.
- **Environmental Economies:** Resource exploitation, sustainability, and climate impacts on economic systems.
- **Urbanization and Infrastructure:** Historical analysis of cities and economic hubs in African development.
- **Gendered Perspectives:** The role of women and gender dynamics in shaping economic transformations.
- **Policy Evolution:** Lessons from historical economic policies and their outcomes.
- **Africa and Globalization:** Historical engagement with global trade, finance, and institutions.

FRONTIERS IN AFRICAN 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 (Rebecca Simson, Jeanne Cilliers and Abel Gwaindepi) to discuss possible posts.

The Revival of African Economic History in the 21st Century: a Bibliometric Analysis **Felix Meier zu Selhausen, Kate Frederick and Dacil Juif**

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.

What about the widows? Widowhood and households in Cape Town 1938/1939 **Amy Rommelspacher**

Although there are usually more widows in the world than widowers, little is known about the economic impact of the death of a spouse in different historical contexts. This paper asks the question, what did the death of a spouse mean for women of different races living in Cape Town? A household survey from 1938/9 provides insights into the lived experiences of these widows just before World War II.

Forced to change: factor endowments, monopsony, and forced labour transitions in colonial Angola's diamond mines

Leo Dolan

Colonial concession companies like Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (Diamang) relied heavily on coercive labour systems to manage the high costs of operating in regions where labour was scarce and land abundant. Using economic modelling and archival evidence, this article explores how Diamang's dual labour system leveraged forced labour to sustain production. While these practices reduced labour expenses, they suppressed long-term worker welfare. Only in the 1960s did Diamang respond to external pressures and begin reforming its labour practices.

News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

AGRICLIOMETRICS VI

Quantitative Approaches to Rural, Agricultural and Environmental History

Economics Department, Universidad de Alcalá, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

18-19 May, 2026

The sixth AGRICLIOMETRICS conference is to be held in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, on 18-19 May, 2026. It will be organized at the Economics Department, Universidad de Alcalá, Spain, with the assistance of colleagues from the University of Zaragoza, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, New York University Abu Dhabi, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and Universidad de la República. It is supported by the Department of Economics, by the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism and by the University of Alcalá.

This conference aims to offer scholars working on quantitative rural, agricultural and natural resources history (and related issues) an opportunity to discuss their work in progress. We welcome papers on topics related to the use of quantitative techniques for the understanding of relevant problems in rural, agricultural and environmental history. Given the benefits arising from a cross-disciplinary dialogue, papers coming from different disciplines are particularly encouraged, especially from demographers, economists, sociologists, political scientists and historians. Papers by young scholars are especially welcome.

Anyone wishing to present a paper should send a 500 word abstract by no later than September 30th, 2025, to: miguel.martinr@uah.es. Decisions regarding acceptance will be sent out no later than November 30th, 2025. Final versions of the accepted papers are expected by no later than April 1st, 2026. They will be circulated to all participants prior to the meeting and published on the workshop website.

The scientific committee is integrated by: Francisco J. Beltrán Tapia (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Pablo Castro (Universidad de la República), Giovanni Federico (New York University Abu Dhabi), Eva Fernández (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Pablo Martinelli Lasheras (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Vicente Pinilla (Universidad de Zaragoza), Patrick Svensson (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) and Henry Willebald (Universidad de la República). All correspondence should be addressed to miguel.martinr@uah.es.

Threads of Empire: Modes, Materials and the Making of Textiles

Commodities of Empire Workshop, University of Glasgow
8 – 9 September 2025

The British Academy 'Commodities of Empire' Academy Research Project invites paper proposals for an international, two-day workshop on the theme: Threads of Empire: Modes, Materials & the Making of Textiles. The workshop will be hosted at the University of Glasgow (Scotland) on **8-9 September, 2025**. The deadline for submitting a paper abstract is **28th March 2025**. The lead organisers are Dr Jelmer Vos (Jelmer.Vos@glasgow.ac.uk), Dr Sally Tuckett (Sally.Tuckett@glasgow.ac.uk) and Dr Meha Priyadarshini (meha.priyadarshini@ed.ac.uk).

The significance of textiles as global and colonial commodities from c.1450-1850 is well established, with cotton and silk providing particularly cogent lenses through which to consider the movement of goods, fashion and technology, as well as means by which colonial connections and systems were initially established and evolved.

Threads of Empire is an international workshop where new and emerging research can examine how textiles built, supported and challenged empires. When thinking about textiles and empire the emphasis has often been on the role of the metropole as driver of trade, exchange and innovation. This workshop will shift the focus to the perspective of the colonised populations. What can the materials, making, movement and use of textiles *within*, *across* and *between* colonial systems add to our understanding of the wider role that textiles played from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Highlighting the inherently interdisciplinary nature of textiles and textile history, the workshop encourages proposals that explore textiles from a range of perspectives, including economic and social history, global history, colonial and post-colonial studies, cultural history, art history and conservation science.

Papers are invited on, but not limited to, the following themes:

- Materials (including fibres and dyestuffs) and materiality of textiles. Papers on fibres other than silk and cotton are especially welcome.
- Making textiles – technological innovations, craft and skill (e.g. processes such as dyeing and spinning, as well as crafts such as embroidery and lace-making).
- Communities of production (e.g. gender, formal and informal networks, social groups, such as castes, classes, diasporas, or religious communities).
- Fashion (broadly interpreted) and its meanings in colonial contexts.
- South to south connections, broadly defined.
- Textiles and the dynamics of agency or resistance.
- Impacts of colonialism on pre-colonial production, consumption and trade.

Proposals of 200 words max can be sent to: Jelmer.Vos@glasgow.ac.uk by 28 March 2025. Proposals should formulate a clear research question or problem, be clear about its aims, and its contribution to historiography. Please include a short biography (max 50 words). Full drafts of accepted papers (about 5,000 words) must be submitted by 31 July 2025.

Following the long-standing practice of Commodities of Empire workshops, papers will be grouped in thematic panels, pre-circulated to all workshop participants, and panel discussions will be opened by a chair or discussant. Paper-givers will then have the possibility to reply succinctly, and this will be followed by open discussion. Paper-givers will not deliver a formal presentation of their paper at the workshop because all papers will be pre-circulated and read by participants. Papers presented at the workshop may be considered for publication in the Commodities of Empire Working Papers series: <https://commoditiesofempire.org.uk/publications/working-papers/>.

We strongly encourage graduate students and other early career scholars to propose papers. Commodity of Empire workshops are self-funded, but some limited funding is available to cover travel and accommodation expenses, prioritizing early career scholars coming from the Global South, followed by scholars from the Global South more generally and early career scholars more generally. We also envisage the possibility of holding at least one panel in hybrid format to enable remote participation by speakers who may not be able to travel due to caring responsibilities, health issues, climate concerns, financial or other considerations.

Please contact Dr Jelmer Vos (Jelmer.Vos@glasgow.ac.uk) for questions.

Global Africa: Past, Present, and Future

Hybrid (Online and in-person)

April 24-26, 2025

Hosted by The University of Kansas's Center for Global and International Studies, Kansas African Studies Center, Department of African and African-American Studies.

The **Center for Global and International Studies, Kansas African Studies Center, and the Department of African and African-American Studies at the University of Kansas** invite submissions for its upcoming conference, **Global Africa: Past, Present, and Future**, an interdisciplinary gathering dedicated to exploring the diverse dimensions of Global African heritage and presence. This conference seeks to facilitate a dialogue that explores the multifaceted African perspectives on historical and contemporary global dynamics, with particular attention to the history and state of African diasporic communities, transnational networks, and imagined futures.

Themes

We welcome proposals addressing topics including, but not limited to:

- **Historical Movements and Networks:** African migrations, trade routes, and cultural exchanges.
- **Colonial Legacies:** The impact of colonialism on Africa's global relations and diasporas.
- **The Enslavement of Africans in the Americas and Its Aftermath:** How the current conditions of Afro descendants are tied to the enslavement during the colonial period.
- **Diasporic Identities:** Expressions of African culture and identity in the diaspora, especially but not limited to African religions and philosophies.
- **Cultural Production:** African and Afro-diasporic contributions to global literature, music, art, and cinema.
- **Global Economies:** Africa's role in contemporary geopolitics and international trade.
- **Global Languages:** e.g., Yoruba, Kiswahili, Arabic, and Wolof
- **Decolonial Futures:** Visions for postcolonial development, sustainability, and innovation.
- **Technologies and Digital Africa:** How technology reshapes African communities globally.
- **Resistance and Activism:** African and diasporic movements for equity and justice.

Submission Guidelines

We encourage panel and individual paper submissions from scholars, practitioners, and artists across disciplines, including history, sociology, political science, literature, art, media studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and more. Proposals should include:

- Title of the paper/panel
- Abstract (200-250 words)
- Author(s) name, affiliation (if any), and contact information
- A brief biography (100 words)

Submission Deadline: March 15
Notification of Acceptance: March 22

Conference Format

The conference will feature keynote lectures, online panel discussions, creative workshops, and networking opportunities. A select number of papers may be considered for publication in an edited volume or special journal issue after submission, expansion, and thorough revision.

Contact Information

For inquiries, please contact us. We look forward to your contributions to this important conversation.

Luciano Tosta, Director of Center for Global & International Studies; Associate Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese: lucianotosta@ku.edu

Glenn Adams, Director of Kansas African Studies Center; Professor, Department of Psychology: adamsg@ku.edu

Shawn Alexander, Professor and Chairperson; Department of African and African-American Studies; Director of the Langston Hughes Center: shawnalexander@ku.edu

Workshop on Disseminating Economic History

Stellenbosch, South Africa (in-person only)
8 – 9 May 2025

Keynote Speaker: Brad DeLong (Berkeley)

LEAP invites submissions for a workshop on making economic history more accessible and engaging for the public. The event will explore how historical economic insights can be effectively shared through data visualisation, digital storytelling, and platforms like blogs, newsletters, and podcasts. It will also examine how policymakers and politicians use historical knowledge to shape decisions and narratives and the emerging role of large language models (LLMs) in expanding access to historical analysis and transforming how research is communicated.

The workshop will bring together historians, economists, journalists, and content creators to share strategies for communicating historical research to broader audiences. Participants will explore successful case studies and discuss how to present rigorous research while navigating the demands of modern media and policy environments, with particular attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by LLMs in content creation and public discourse.

Submission Guidelines:

- Submit a 300-500 word abstract outlining your research interests and relevance to the workshop themes.
- Send abstracts to leap@sun.ac.za by 31 March 2025.

We welcome submissions from both established and early-career researchers and students. Limited travel funding may be available for selected presenters. Join us in Stellenbosch in May to discover how economic history can shape public understanding and inform contemporary debates.

Economic History Workshop in Gothenburg, Sweden

Department of Economy and Society, Unit for Economic History, University of
Gothenburg, Sweden
16 - 17 May 2025

Local organiser: Svante Prado; Bart van Holstejin; Giulia Martini; Raisa Rubio
Keynote speakers: Markus Lampe (University of Vienna); Jakob Molinder (Uppsala University)

The main aim of the Workshop is to gather young researchers in a friendly and non-imposing environment where they can present their research and receive constructive criticism from their peers and leading economic historians.

Another aim of the workshop is to demonstrate the breadth of Economic History as an academic discipline, so there is no theme to the workshop, and submissions are encouraged from any sub-field of economic and social history.

Early career scholars are warmly welcome to apply, but we particularly encourage presentations by PhD students and post-docs.

The Workshop strives to accommodate as many speakers as possible. The workshop is a two-day event, and accepted speakers are expected to participate on both days (not just on the day they present).

There will be no registration fee for this workshop. The organisers will offer lunch on both days, a workshop dinner, as well as refreshments during the workshop. The participants are responsible for the costs of hotel and travel arrangements themselves.

Prospective speakers should submit a max one-page abstract and a short CV to Raisa Rubio (raisa.rubio@gu.se) no later than March 15, 2025 and expect an email acknowledging receipt. Notification of acceptance will be given by March 31, 2025.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Congratulations to Mark Melles for obtaining his PhD in Economic History

Lund University School of Economics and Management, LUSEM

Transforming Foundations: Structural Change and Development Dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa (1960–2024).

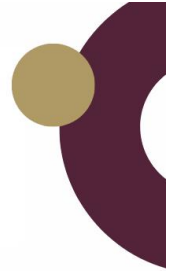
Sub-Saharan Africa stands at a critical juncture between repeating historical boom-and-bust cycles and achieving sustained economic prosperity. While recent growth has sparked hope, this book goes beyond growth to examine the structural changes that shaped the region's economies since independence. It reveals that today's growth is built on improved foundations compared to past growth spurts. The study underscores that neither outright optimism nor overwhelming pessimism is warranted; instead, it highlights the need for proactive and comprehensive efforts to harness these advancements. Without concerted action focusing on structural change, the region risks missing the opportunity to fully realise its potential.

SEMINAR SERIES



LEAP

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



LEAP SEMINAR SERIES 2025



Ross Matthijs

5 Feb



Jacob van Leeuwen

12 Feb



Aditi Singh

19 Feb



Anthony Bald

26 Feb



Malik Hussain

4 Mar



Nicholas Gachet

11 Mar



Allison Green

18 Mar



Jen Zhen Gu

8 Apr



Nick Fitzhenry

15 Apr



Youn Baek

22 Apr




Sarah Ferber

6 May



Chun Chee Kok

13 May

Anyone that wants to be added to the email list, is welcome to
send a mail to leap@sun.ac.za 





Arms Beads & Cloth

AFRICAN CONSUMERS
AND THE 19TH-CENTURY
GLOBAL ECONOMY

AFRICAN CONSUMERS AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: A NEW HISTORY

An online Seminar Series from February to June 2025 with world-renowned experts in the field of African studies and global history

The research team of "Arms, Beads and Cloth: African Consumers and the 19th-Century Global Economy" announces the launch of a seminar series that investigates the centrality of African societies and their material practices to global processes of production, exchange and consumption.

The seminar is sponsored by the Italian Ministry of University and Research, in the framework of the European Union - Next Generation EU, PRIN Call 2022 funding programme (ref. no.: 2022YE9NBH).



<https://armsbeadsandcloth.unipv.it/> prin2022abc@gmail.com

7 February 2025 at 4pm CET

Patrick Otim, Bates College

The History of Firearms among the Acholi of Uganda, 1850-2000

21 February 2025 at 4pm CET

Pierre Nicolò Sofia, University of Padua

From East Africa to Venice. How African consumers shaped Venetian glass bead production and trade in the 18th century

7 March 2025 at 4pm CET

Felix Brahm, Universität Münster

Merchandise of Power: European arms in pre-colonial and colonial Tanzania (1850 to 1919)

11 April 2025 at 4pm CET

Jeremy Prestholdt, University of California

Clothing empires: Indian Ocean Africa, Japanese cotton textiles, and colonial capitalism

30 April 2025 at 4pm CET

Giorgio Riello, European University Institute, Florence

Africa and the Eighteenth-century Diamond-shape Trade

9 May 2025 at 4pm CET

Jan-Bart Gewald, Leiden University

Arms and the Men: Firearms and Labour in the Context of the Diamond Fields of South Africa 1865 – 1900

23 May 2025 at 4pm CET

Kate Frederick, Utrecht University

(Post-)colonial threads: colonial-era demand patterns and the dynamics of early industrialization in East Africa

6 June 2025 at 4pm CET


Anne Ruderman, London School of Economics and Political Science

Venetian Beads for the Atlantic Slave Trade

27 June 2025 at 2pm CET

Kazuo Kobayashi, Waseda University

An umbrella model: Indian cotton textiles in the early modern Atlantic trade

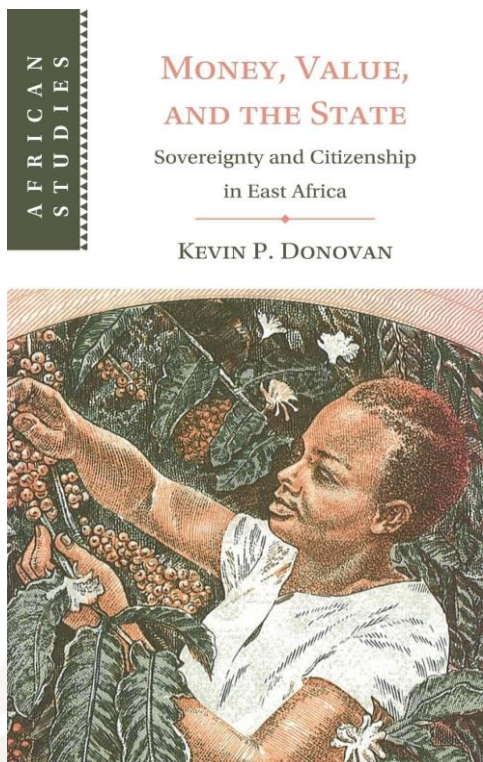
 <https://armsbeadsandcloth.unipv.it/>  prin2022abc@gmail.com

New research in African economic history

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

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

Kevin P. Donovan



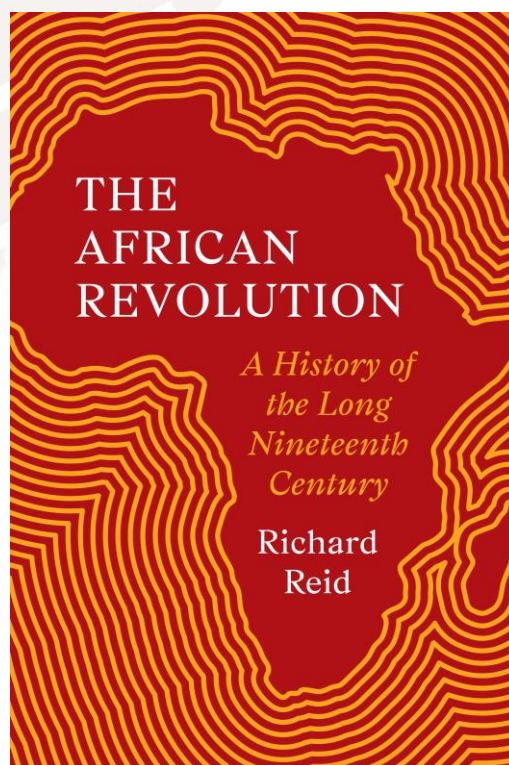
Decolonization in East Africa was more than a political event: it was a step towards economic self-determination. In this innovative book, historian and anthropologist Kevin Donovan analyses the contradictions of economic sovereignty and citizenship in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, placing money, credit, 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.

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.

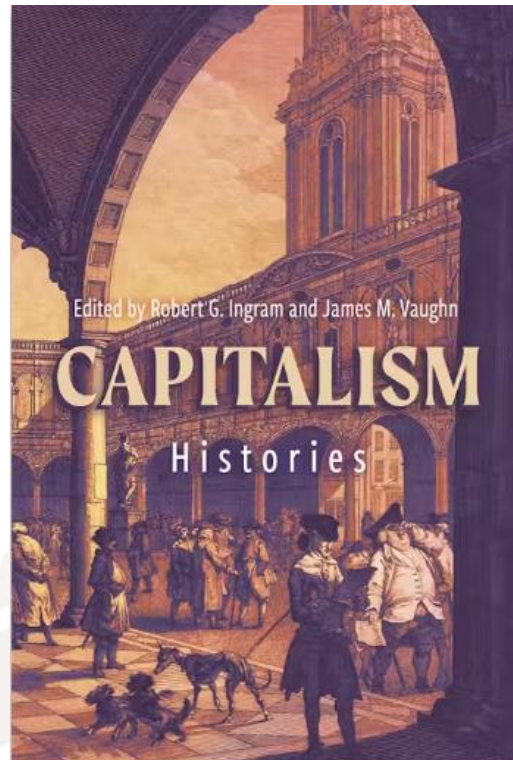
In this monumental work of history, Richard Reid paints a multifaceted portrait of a continent on the global stage. He describes how Africa witnessed the emergence of new economic and political dynamics that were underpinned by forms of violence and volatility not unlike those emanating from Europe. 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.

Capitalism in Africa: Two Histories, 1650s-1940s



Gareth Austin

in Capitalism: Histories

Edited by Robert G. Ingram and James M. Vaughn

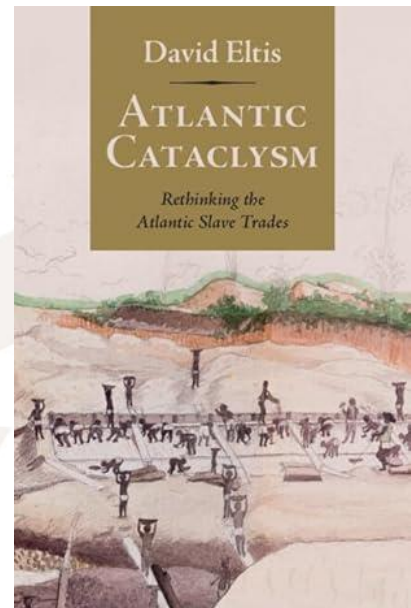
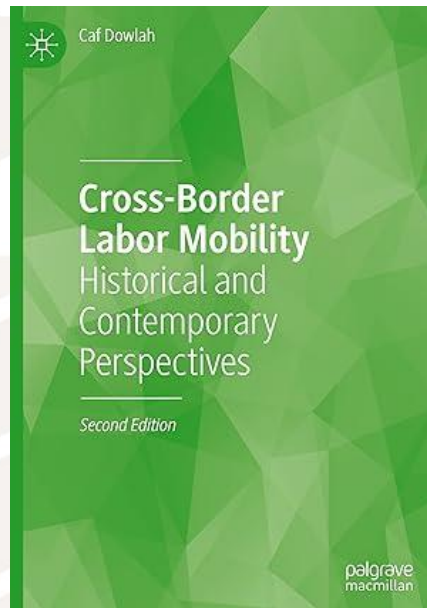
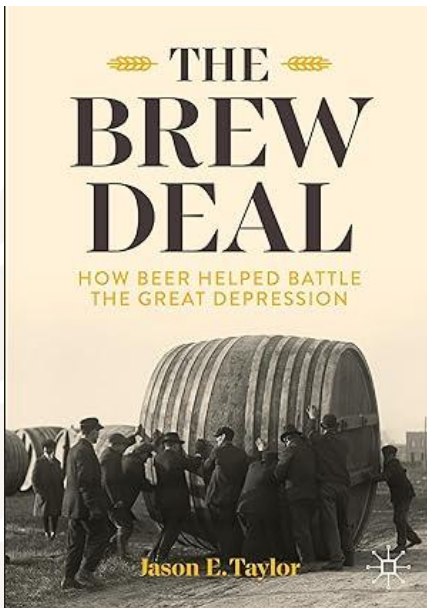
The economic historiography of Sub-Saharan Africa has focussed on why the sub-continent is relatively poor, despite episodes of economic growth. That question has often been framed as an inquiry into the nature of capitalism in Africa: was there too little or too much of it, or of the wrong sort? Capitalism was most explicitly and insistently on the research agendas of historians and social scientists in Africa in the 'long 1970s', the heyday of dependency theory, but interest has revived in recent years. Defining capitalism is difficult: is it a thing, or a set of related phenomena, the precise composition of which changes as 'it' shape-shifts through the modern centuries in various parts of the world? This essay considers capitalism as a set of phenomena united by the rubric of the extension and integration of markets. It is not necessarily the case that the more 'perfect' a market is, the more advanced a form of capitalism it represents.

Sub-Saharan Africa is often seen as the world region to which capitalism came last, and in which it found it most difficult to establish itself. It is worth recalling that Marx had two models of the origins of capitalism: an endogenous one, in which capitalism emerged from feudalism by a dialectical process driven by class struggle, and an exogenous one, in which capitalist institutions were imposed by the force of European empires in place of precapitalist institutions. I argue that, in practice, the introduction of capitalism from outside a) only worked because certain preconditions were already in place, b) became partly endogenized, in that the process of the evolution of capitalism within the region concerned acquired a logic of its own.

The core of the chapter is a comparison of two contrasting 'stories' of the emergence of capitalism in Africa, as a way of identifying features that may help us make sense of the variety of other cases in this vast sub-continent. One is the most extreme case within Africa of settler colonialism, i.e. the appropriation of most of the land for European use: South Africa, starting with the Cape Colony. The other is the most extreme case of indigenous capitalism, manifested in the context of non-settler colonialism: West Africa, especially the Gold Coast and Nigeria, in which agricultural land remained under African ownership. The former history is specifically colonial, beginning with the Dutch East India Company. The latter began before or during the Atlantic slave trade and then in the important period of 'legitimate commerce' that followed it, before the European 'Scramble' of the late nineteenth century. In both cases, from the later seventeenth century onwards there was a major growth of market-oriented slave labour; succeeded later by a transition to wage labour.

I examine both processes in the context of the Nieboer-Domar problem as it manifested in Africa: that is, in a context where land was relatively abundant, and both labour and capital relatively scarce, there was no wage on which it was in the mutual interests of both prospective workers and prospective employers to agree. Thus the economic conditions made labour coercion profitable for users of labour (which is not in itself sufficient to explain why such coercion occurred, nor the forms which it took). The essay goes on to highlight the distinctive features of colonial capitalism in Africa, especially the propensity of capitalism to link to the household 'mode of production' and be subsidized by it. Here we see a crucial point of both similarity and difference between the settler and 'peasant-and-rural-capitalist' styles of capitalist development. In both cases the colonial states sought to avoid the full proletarianization of the African population, instead strongly preferring migrant labour systems. In South Africa, this worked to the disadvantage of African employees and their families, because they were deprived of the land rights necessary to sustain their bargaining power. In British West Africa, on the contrary, the retention of land rights in their home areas enabled migrant workers from the savannas to bargain successfully for successive improvements in earnings and working conditions. The chapter closes in the 1940s, which constituted a potential or actual break in the evolution of the migrant labor systems, with the shift to full apartheid in South Africa, and to state-led development policies in West Africa.

Other new books in economic history



ARTICLES

Living standards and forced labour: A comparative study of colonial Africa, 1918–74

The Economic History Review

Leo Dolan

Despite significant advances in the quantitative study of African history, the Portuguese colonial empire remains an underexplored topic. This paper provides the first quantitative assessment of worker living standards in Angola and Mozambique, contextualized within a broader comparison of colonial African empires. Using the barebones subsistence basket method to construct welfare ratios, as well as focusing specifically on the African mining sector, this research offers a comprehensive cross-temporal and cross-geographical analysis. Key findings reveal two major patterns: until 1960, welfare ratios in the Portuguese empire were notably lower than in other territories, with this disparity widening after the Second World War. However, starting in the 1960s, welfare ratios in Angola and Mozambique began to rapidly and consistently increase, closing the gap that had widened in the post-war period and achieving improvements in living standards within a few years that typically took decades to achieve elsewhere. The findings are then interpreted through an in-depth case study approach, demonstrating how the persistence of forced labour systems under the Portuguese Empire contributed to the consistently low living standards of workers. The unexpected abolition of these coercive systems in 1961 marked the beginning of rapid improvements in living standards, underscoring the critical role of institutional changes within history. This research enhances our understanding of the functioning of coercive labour markets as well as of Africa's diverse colonial experiences.

Firm profitability and forced wage labour in Portuguese Africa: Evidence from the Sena Sugar Estates, 1920–74

The Economic History Review

Sam Jones and Peter Gibbon

Forced wage labour (FWL) in colonial-era Portuguese Africa came to encompass a majority of working age men and persisted until the early 1960s. On the basis of reconstructed financial records from the Sena Sugar Estates in today's Mozambique, we estimate the long-run profitability of the firm. With this we associate rates of extraction from native labour, defined as the difference between actual levels of remuneration and those under counterfactual freer market conditions. We estimate that coercion suppressed workers' remuneration by about two-fifths, representing a significant cost saving to the firm. However, a production function analysis indicates that coercion also negatively affected productivity. Using these results, we calculate that the firm's profitability might have remained broadly robust without FWL. This suggests other factors, including fiscal imperatives and technological factors, likely contributed to the persistence of labour coercion in Mozambique.

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.

Trade costs and the integration of British West Africa in the global economy, c. 1840–1940

The Economic History Review

Federico Tadei, Nektarios Aslanidis and Oscar Martinez

Despite the essential role of trade for African economies, in the extensive literature on the historical evolution of international trade costs, Africa is still missing. In this article, we contribute to filling this gap by (1) providing the first estimates of British West Africa's trade costs with Britain c. 1840–1940 by computing relative price gaps in a representative sample of African export and European import prices, and (2) analysing the main determinants of trade costs trends, by regressing price gaps on measures of transport costs, market efficiency, and trade barriers. The results uncover a diverging pattern in African and global trade costs trends, which was not noticed in the previous literature. British West Africa experienced a reduction in its trade costs with Britain c. 1840–70, similar to the one we observe in other world areas, thanks to improvements in shipping technology and market efficiency. From the late 1870s, however, as colonial monopsonistic trading companies consolidated their control of African export markets, trade costs continued to decline in the rest of the world, but not in British West Africa. Consequently, from the late nineteenth century, trade for West Africa became relatively more expensive than for other world regions.

Back to the future: How economic history can gain more relevance by abandoning modernization thinking

The Economic History Review

Bas van Bavel

Economic history has built a solid scientific foundation over the past decades but runs a risk of becoming marginalized. This paper suggests various ways to enhance its academic and societal relevance. It proposes taking pressing societal issues as clear starting points and using history as a 'laboratory' to address them. To effectively do so, a sharper focus on the social and environmental contexts of economic development would be needed. This may be furthered by closer involvement in multidisciplinary teams, where economic historians would bring in the chronological dimension, making use of their historical skills. Relevance will also be increased by abandoning modernization thinking. This would encourage more openness to processes of contestation, reversal, and divergencies, and more fully using the research opportunities offered by periods further back in time and all across the globe, not because these are different from the 'modern', Western situation but because they are relevant as sources of knowledge in themselves – knowledge that may be vital in light of the grave challenges present societies are facing.

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](#))

“Child of Koevoet”: Counterinsurgency, Crisis, and the Rise of Private Security in South Africa

Comparative Studies in Society and History

Paul T. Clarke

Scholars of various backgrounds have noted how societies across the globe have come to rely on more and more policing and incarceration since the late 1970s. To date, however, detailed analyses of the causes and consequences of this “punitive turn” have been limited to the Global North, with the vast majority of studies focused on the expansion of states’ capacity for violence. This article offers a corrective to the global study of the punitive turn by tracing the rise of South Africa’s private security industry from its inception in the late apartheid period to its current position as one of the largest of its kind in the world. Using newspaper reports, archival material from the apartheid state’s security apparatus, and ethnographic interviews of former and current members of the security industry, it shows how counterinsurgency doctrine, civil war, and deindustrialization shaped South Africa’s punitive turn, precipitating a process where violence was devolved from the state to private actors, including local militias, vigilante groups, and private security firms. This process, it is argued, is far from anomalous, and should be seen as a paradigm for the way the post-1970s punitive turn has unfolded in the majority of the world.

Navigating Lingala: Linguistic Change, Political Power, and Everyday Authoritarianism in Congo-Zaire, 1965–97

The Journal of African History

Joshua Castillo

I argue that navigating Lingala represented a central part of many Zairians’ experiences of Mobutu’s regime (1965–97), causing linguistic change, shaping their relationships to state power, and influencing their experiences of the regime’s everyday authoritarianism. Mobutu’s regime imposed Lingala through informal language practices including political rallies, songs, and slogans, interactions with state agents, and Mobutu’s own practice of addressing audiences nation-wide in Lingala. Zairians navigated the regime’s imposition of Lingala in different, and often divergent ways along a spectrum from rejection and opposition to acquisition and embrace. Where some Zairians, especially Kiswahili speakers in the East, rejected Lingala and criticized the language — critiquing Mobutu’s authoritarian rule in the process — other Zairians, particularly people in the Kikongo and Ciluba national language zones adapted to Mobutu’s new linguistic dispensation by learning to speak and understand Lingala, improving their relationship with the state and facilitating life under Mobutu’s rule.

Age heaping based numeracy estimates in African regions, 1950–1999: New methodological advances and results

Economic History of Developing Regions

Sarah Ferber and Jörg Baten

During the post-colonial period, enrolment and years of schooling have increased substantially in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, this has been accompanied by a decline in the overall quality of education. As a result, it is important to focus on indicators such as numeracy and literacy, capturing the quality of education, rather than the input of schooling alone, to better understand educational attainment. Moreover, these skills have been associated, for example, to higher productivity and health. Numeracy, in particular, has been linked to sustained development. Therefore, measuring and understanding its development is a crucial first step to improve educational quality. Combining data from censuses and household surveys, we estimate numeracy at the subnational level for Sub-Saharan Africa employing the ABCC Index. Additionally, we carefully evaluate the suitability of the index and our data to capture basic numeracy – deeming it to be robust. We find mostly stagnating numeracy for the birth cohorts between 1950 and 1990, although some countries increased (for example, Ghana) and others declined. Moreover, we observe strong regional differences, with Southern Africa performing best and Western Africa worst.

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.

Disciplining Citizens and Commodities: Economic Crimes and Accusations in 1970s Uganda

The Journal of African History
Kevin P. Donovan

In 1975, the Ugandan state established an Economic Crimes Tribunal to investigate and penalize smuggling, hoarding, overcharging, and other commercial malfeasance. In the coming years, innumerable Ugandans were arrested and charged with contravening the state's economic regulations. Prior observers have seen this as another instance of a capricious state, but in this article, I demonstrate the popular investment in economic regulation. Ugandans demanded better stewardship of money and things because they were aghast at the ungovernable world of commodities. For one thing, the inaccessibility of so-called “essential commodities” — sugar and salt, preeminently — impeded ethical expectations surrounding social reproduction, hospitality, and masculine respectability. More troubling, essential commodities were not completely unavailable; rather, they were available on exclusionary and confusing terms. Relative deprivation was more upsetting than absolute scarcity because it offended a sense of consumptive entitlement. As a result, it was not only the state that accused citizens of economic crimes. There were widespread accusations in which allegation and denunciation circulated among neighbors, families, and bureaucrats in an urgent effort to discipline commodities and people.

Fertility responses to short-term economic stress: Price volatility and wealth shocks in a pre-transitional settler colony

Explorations in Economic History

Jeanne Cilliers, Martine Mariotti and Igor Martins

This paper examines the effects of short-term economic stress, captured by general price volatility and a negative wealth shock on short-run fertility behavior in the rural pre-transitional society of the Cape Colony. First, we link complete birth histories of settler women from the South African Families database to consumer price index data to examine the effect of price volatility on conceptions. Next, we link the same birth histories to slave owner and slave emancipation data to examine the effect of a negative wealth shock on conception. Upon slave emancipation in 1834, former slave owners received on average only between 40 and 50 % of the market value of their slaves as compensation, resulting in a substantial reduction in their wealth. Relying on event history models that look simultaneously at stopping and spacing, we do not find strong evidence in support of fertility control in response to general price volatility. We do find greater variance in birth interval lengths for former

slaveholding households during and immediately after emancipation, suggesting that a negative wealth shock is associated with increased fertility limitation through postponement in this context.

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.

WORKING PAPERS

Enforcing Colonial Rule: Blood Tax and Head Tax in French West Africa

Denis Cogneau and Zhexion Mo

We examine the enforcement of two pillars of colonial rule in French West Africa, military conscription and head tax collection, using novel district-level data from 1919 to 1949. Colonial states are often characterized as either omnipotent Leviathans or administration on the cheap. Our findings reveal their notable coerciveness in achieving key objectives. Military recruitment targets were consistently met, even amid individual avoidance and poor health conditions, by drawing on a pool of eligible fit young men. Tax compliance was similarly high, with approximately 80% of the liable population meeting obligations. Spikes in head tax rates significantly increased tax-related protests, likely prompting caution among colonial administrators. The tax burden was adjusted according to perceived district affluence, and tax moderation was applied in times of crisis. However, local shocks such as droughts or cash crop price collapses were largely ignored. These results underscore the capacity of colonial states to enforce their authority despite limited policy responsiveness, offering new insights into the political economy of colonial governance.

Roots of Cultural Diversity

Oded Galor, Marc Klemp and Daniel C. Wainstock

This study reveals the pivotal impact of the prehistoric out-of-Africa migration on global variation in the degree of cultural diversity within ethnic and national populations. Drawing on novel diversity measures—encompassing folkloric and musical traditions among indigenous ethnic groups, as well as norms, values, and attitudes in modern societies—an intriguing pattern emerges: societies whose ancestors migrated farther from humanity's cradle in Africa exhibit lower cultural diversity. These striking findings underscore: (i) the profound role of cultural dynamics in shaping the enduring effects of the out-of-Africa migration on social cohesion, innovativeness, and living standards; (ii) the origins of persistent global variations in cultural expressions within an increasingly interconnected world; and (iii) the roots of variations in societal adaptability to evolving economic and technological landscapes.

Africa's Slave Trade and its Long-term Impact on Militarism and Institutions

Joshy Easaw and Yang Sun

Recent studies show that significant historical events, particularly the slave trade, had an impact on contemporary African economies. The transmission mechanisms, however, are not well established. The purpose of the present paper is to consider two such transmission mechanisms, notably militarism and economic institutions. The present paper explores the impact of the historical slave trade, or exports, on institutions in two ways. Firstly, its impact on contemporary militarism as a political institution and, secondly, its impact on economic institutions, in particular property rights enforcement. The analysis uniquely shows the causal link between an important aspect of the historical slave trade, notably the import of military arms, and current African institutions. Finally, we also show that contemporary militarism, especially in the affected African economies, has a direct impact on their incomes.

For a Consciencism of Accounting Research on the African Continent: A Review of the International Literature

Serge Agbodjo and Konan Anderson Seny Kan

Accounting research on the African continent is well present in the international accounting literature. It is part of the field of accounting research on emerging countries, however, is not in the dominant streams of accounting research, and therefore not very visible. This study aims to understand the state of accounting knowledge on the African continent through a systematic analysis of 326 research articles published in 38 international accounting journals over a period of 43 years (1980-2022). Our results show that accounting research on Africa represents only 1.2% of studies published in international academic accounting journals over the period 1980- 2022. The results also detail the accounting domains, methodological and theoretical approaches of the international accounting literature in African countries. Furthermore, our results provide an understanding of the forms of theorisation that structure African accounting knowledge in international literature, which are the theorisation of the political and historical connection on the one hand, and the theorisation of the epistemic connection, on the other hand. Additionally, this study proposes, in the light of consciencism, a discussion of positive, transformative, accounting actions, in resistance to negative accounting actions of subjugation. Finally, a research program made of eight (8) avenues for future research that address various gaps in the literature is proposed.

The Long-Run Effects of South Africa's Forced Resettlements on Employment Outcomes

Alexia Lochmann, Nidhi Rao and Martin A. Rossi

Can South Africa's segregation policies explain, at least partially, its current poor employment outcomes? To explore this question, we study the long-term impact of the forced resettlement of around 3.5 million black South Africans from their communities to the so-called "homelands" or "Bantustans", between 1960 and 1991. Specifically, we look at places that lost population due to the resettlements. Our empirical strategy exploits the variability in the magnitude of resettlements across places. Two main findings. First, the magnitude of outgoing internal migrations was largest for districts close to former homelands. Second, districts close to former homelands have higher rates of non-employed population in 2011. Together the evidence suggests that districts that experienced racial segregation policies most intensely, as measured by outgoing forced resettlements, have worse current employment outcomes.