



# African Economic History Newsletter

## Issue #67 August 2025

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

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If you would like to publicise your research, achievements, seminars, events or a panel for an upcoming conference, please send an email to [leone.walters@uct.ac.za](mailto: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

## 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. Please contact the editors (Rebecca Simson, Jeanne Cilliers and Michael Chanda Chiseni) to discuss possible posts.*

### **African Borders: Neither Random Nor Decided at the Berlin Conference**

**Jack Paine, Xiaoyan Qiu and Joan Ricart-Huguet**

We provide new spatial and historical data to overturn the common claims that (i) African borders were decided at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference and that (ii) African borders are as-if random. Instead, African borders resulted from a decades-long competitive process among Europeans that Africans also influenced. Most borders follow and reflect geographic and political realities, in particular, water bodies and the historical frontiers of African states.

## AEHN WORKING PAPER SERIES

*AEHN Working Papers in African Economic History are intended to disseminate research results to other scholars in order to encourage discussion and suggestions before journal publication. The papers have not undergone peer-review but published at the discretion of the Board of the AEHN. AEHN Working Papers are also available via RePEc/IDEAS. Potential working papers should be directly submitted to one of the editors: Leigh Gardner ([l.a.gardner@lse.ac.uk](mailto:l.a.gardner@lse.ac.uk)) and Felix Meier zu Selhausen ([f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl](mailto:f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl)).*

### **Long-Run Aid Effectiveness in Africa's Historical Borderlands: Evidence from the Christian Missionary Expansion**

**Alexandra L. Cermeño, Alessandra Quintigliano and Jacob Weisdorf**

The lands surrounding the historical homeland borders in Africa are notoriously linked to conflict and underdevelopment. With half of Africa currently living within 30 km of a homeland border, the borderlands are natural focal points for development aid. We assess the long-run effectiveness of aid in these regions, exploring one of the most widespread aid initiatives in Africa associated with colonial Christian missionary expansion. We examine how proximity to historical homeland borders conditions the positive link observed between colonial missionary activities and economic development today, captured by satellite night light. Based on a novel approach to measuring aid effectiveness, our spatial analyses establish that the outright aid effectiveness associated with missionary activities drops by 50% on average within 40 km from a homeland border and is statistically equal to zero within 15 km away compared to a plausibly neutral reference area.

### **The Political Economy of Maize in East Africa, 1900-2020: How cheap food turned expensive**

**Ewout Frankema, Michiel de Haas, Tanik Joshipura and Tom Westland**

When agrarian societies urbanize their governments face a policy dilemma: farmers seek fair prices, while urban workers and employers desire cheap food. Drawing on a new dataset of historical food prices in 146 markets, we explore the political economy of maize markets in East Africa (1900-2020). We show that from the 1940s onwards, maize prices soared from far below to well above world market levels. Instead of 'urban bias', we argue that prolonged evasion by late-colonial and early post-colonial governments of the socio-economic trade-offs inherent in the dilemma triggered the 1980s food crises and turned East African maize expensive.

# News and announcements

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Economic History in the Age of AI Workshop

Stellenbosch, South Africa  
3-4 November 2025

Recent advances in artificial intelligence and the increasing use of digital and ‘big’ data sources have dramatically expanded the empirical toolbox of economic historians. These techniques enable scholars to rigorously analyse vast textual archives, systematically quantify previously intangible historical concepts and robustly test hypotheses. Such methods are especially valuable in developing-country contexts, historically constrained by data scarcity and archival limitations.

This methodological renaissance in economic history has, moreover, important policy implications. AI-augmented historical research can improve our understanding of the long-term causes and consequences of financial crises, historical debates about inequality and wealth distribution, past pandemics, or the implications of technological disruptions, to give just a few examples.

Reflecting this dual emphasis on methodology and policy relevance, the workshop will feature keynotes from Caterina Chiopris (Columbia University) and Emily Aitken (UC San Diego). Chiopris’s research illustrates how increased connectivity through the railroad network in 19th-century Germany fostered specialised knowledge clusters, paradoxically limiting idea diffusion, a dynamic that echoes current debates on knowledge networks and specialisation in the digital age. Aitken, jointly appointed in the School of Global Policy and Strategy and the Halicioğlu Data Science Institute, explores how machine learning applied to large-scale digital traces can shape contemporary social protection policies in developing contexts, particularly Africa.

**We invite paper submissions for a research workshop from 3 to 4 November in Stellenbosch, South Africa addressing the intersection of economic history and AI methodologies. Submit completed papers or detailed abstracts to [leap@sun.ac.za](mailto:leap@sun.ac.za) by 31 August 2025. Notifications by 5 September 2025. Accepted presenters will receive accommodation. Non-presenting attendance is possible upon submission of a brief motivation.**

### Machine Learning and Big Data in Economic History Special Issue

**Deadline: December 2025**

We invite submissions for a special issue of the Economic History Yearbook on the application of machine learning and big data in economic history. Our focus is on papers that use large historical datasets – structured or unstructured – starting at around 10,000 observations. While not big data in the conventional sense, the construction of such datasets has become feasible in recent years, presenting new opportunities for the study of economic history. Yet, this data revolution also creates new analytical and methodological challenges making it essential to disseminate these new techniques.

We particularly welcome papers employing machine learning techniques to explore historical data, with a special emphasis on studies using Large Language Models (LLMs). However, other machine learning methods are also welcome. Contributions should critically assess their potential and limitations in economic history. However, the primary focus remains on empirical applications, rather than methodological or purely theoretical discussions.

**Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:**

- Machine learning approaches to historical text and numerical data
- The role of LLMs in the analysis of historical data
- Challenges and solutions in applying artificial intelligence (AI) to economic history
- Case studies demonstrating the empirical value of machine learning in economic history

**Roadmap:**

- **First drafts due: December 15, 2025**
- Authors' workshop: February 11/12, 2026 at the University of Hohenheim (we can cover accommodation and travel expenses)
- revised version April 15, 2026
- Final drafts due: June 1, 2026

We encourage submissions from researchers in economic history, economics, computer sciences, digital humanities, and related fields.

For inquiries and submissions, please contact: Felix Selgert ([fselgert@uni-bonn.de](mailto:fselgert@uni-bonn.de)).

## **The Cambridge Economic and Social History Workshop** **Michaelmas 2025 (Oct-Dec) programme**

The Cambridge Economic and Social History Workshop is seeking papers for its Michaelmas 2025 (Oct-Dec) programme. We invite graduate students to present both works in progress and completed projects on a range of social and economic topics, from any time period or geographic region. We encourage papers that employ either qualitative or quantitative methodology, and consider any aspect of the following:

- Urban economic history
- Social and economic policy
- Historical demography
- Political economy
- Labour movements
- Financial institutions
- Histories of poverty and welfare

The Economic and Social History Workshop offers a relaxed and friendly environment to present your research, potentially for the first time. Each speaker will have 20 minutes to present followed by half an hour question and answer sessions, which seeks to provide an informal and constructive atmosphere for discussion and feedback. We encourage postgraduate students, at any institution, particularly MPhil and first-year PhDs, to apply!

**To apply to present, please email a title and a short abstract (200-300 words) to Madeleine Miller ([mkm52@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mkm52@cam.ac.uk)) by 19 September 2025. Please indicate your preference for presenting either in-person or online.**

# What Can History Teach Us About Building Resilient Economies in the 21st Century?

Stellenbosch, South Africa

29 – 30 January, 2026

*Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA), in collaboration with the Economic History Society of South Africa (EHSSA), is pleased to announce a two-day conference bringing together academics, policymakers, and subject-matter experts to explore the critical role of economic history in informing economic policy.*

## Conference Theme

Economic history provides essential context for understanding today's economic challenges and designing informed public policy. This conference aims to equip economists, economic historians, and policymakers with historical insights and analytical tools to produce evidence-based policy and high-quality research in economic history. The programme will include keynote addresses, panel discussions, and academic paper presentations.

## Focus Areas

The conference will explore how historical data and events can help address contemporary economic issues. Economic history draws on a diverse set of methods—including instrumental variable analysis and shocks, network analysis, and institutional analysis—and lends itself to a wide range of policy-relevant research.

Examples of relevant topics include:

- Macroeconomic uncertainty during protectionist eras
- Trade, Globalisation, and Industrial Policy (e.g. lessons from industrial policy, trade protectionism, globalisation cycles and relevance on today's trade tensions)
- Crises, Recovery, and Policy Lessons (e.g. lessons from historical crises such as hyperinflation, global financial crisis, great recession and role of policies in current African economies)
- Financial markets, income sources, and household spending
- Development and Structural Change (e.g. voter participation and political choice, colonial legacies and economic institutions, land reform in economic history, historical urbanisation and infrastructure policy; women and labour in economic history)
- Long-term impacts of shocks (weather, viral/illness, war, others...) on society
- Inequality, Labour, and Social Policy (e.g. how historical inequality shaped fiscal policy responses; past labour market policies and unemployment/wages/productivity)

**Submissions on any topic in economic history with relevance to current policy are welcome.**

## Call for Papers

ERSA invites submissions of working papers that use historical analysis to inform current economic policy. Papers may be in draft form, but should include at least preliminary findings. Preference will be given to submissions that include explicit policy recommendations. The conference offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to receive feedback and refine their work.

- **Submission deadline: 27 November 2025**
- Notification of acceptance: 4 December 2025

[Submit Paper Here](#)

## Funding

ERSA will cover travel, two nights' accommodation, dinner, bed, and breakfast for accepted presenters.

## Contact

Organiser: Christie Swanepoel; Email: [cswanepoel@uwc.ac.za](mailto:cswanepoel@uwc.ac.za); CC: [fouche.venter@econrsa.org](mailto:fouche.venter@econrsa.org)

# 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.

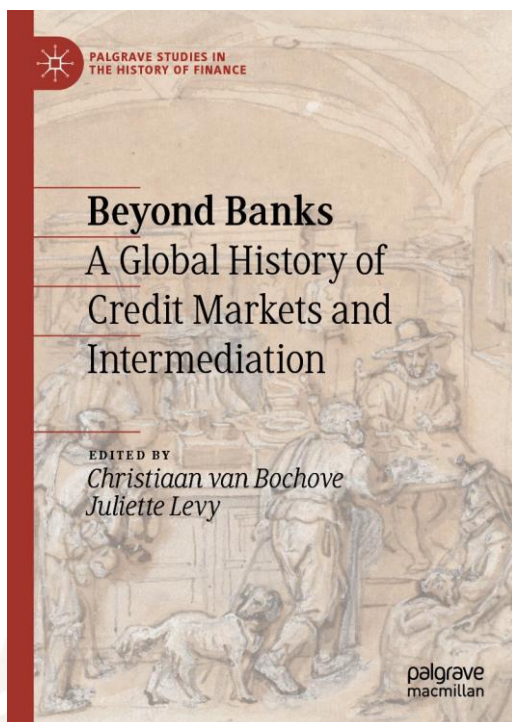
**Anyone wishing to present a paper should send a 500 word abstract by no later than September 30th, 2025, to: [miguel.martinr@uah.es](mailto:miguel.martinr@uah.es). Decisions regarding acceptance will be sent out no later than November 30th, 2025. Final versions of the accepted papers are expected by 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](mailto:miguel.martinr@uah.es).

# New research in African economic history

## FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

### A Network Analysis of Credit Transactions at the Cape Colony During the Eighteenth Century



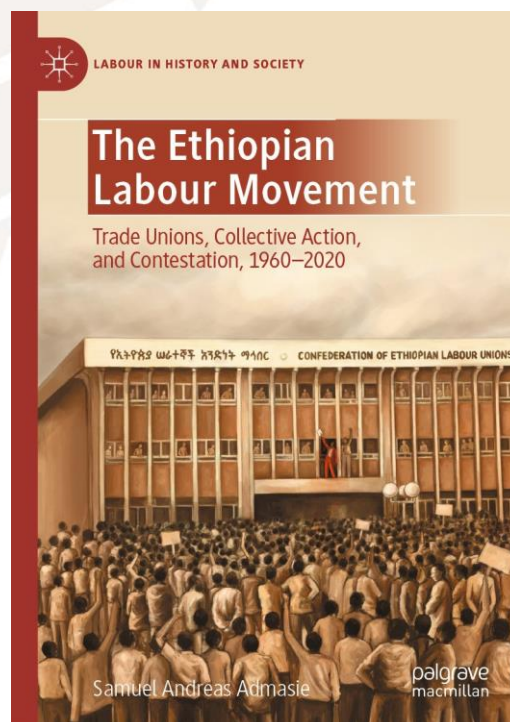
*Beyond Banks: A Global History of Credit Markets and Intermediation*  
**Christie Swanepoel**

This chapter examines the co-existence in the Cape Colony of peer-to-peer and intermediated credit transactions. During the eighteenth century, in response to more settlers migrating to the Colony, the credit market expanded. Initial settlers often relied on each other as sources of financial support, but they also turned to three main institutions: the Dutch East India Company, the Orphan Chamber, and the church. Additionally, notaries became key intermediaries in this early credit market to connect creditors and debtors in the network of transactions; and they often became wealthy, influential individuals. This chapter will explore how notaries served as market makers or match makers between individuals and institutions. The main source for this analysis is probate inventories recording credit transactions on an individual basis for the years 1700–1795.

### The Ethiopian Labour Movement: Trade Unions, Collective Action, and Contestation, 1960–2020

**Samuel Andreas Admasie**

This book offers a comprehensive history of the Ethiopian labour movement, exploring the impact of trade unions and workers' militancy from the 1960s onwards. The author analyses the sharp variation in the orientation and vicissitudes of the labour movement over time, and how these have affected labour conditions and wages. Drawing from new data gathered through extensive archival research in Ethiopia and abroad, this book is the first of its kind. It presents new datasets on strikes, unrest and wage levels, shedding light on how capitalist labour and industrial relations have developed in Ethiopia. Addressing a huge gap in the literature on African labour movements, this book makes a significant contribution to debates on trade unionism, workers' agency and wage determination in peripheral capitalist settings, and challenges existing assumptions through detailed investigation.



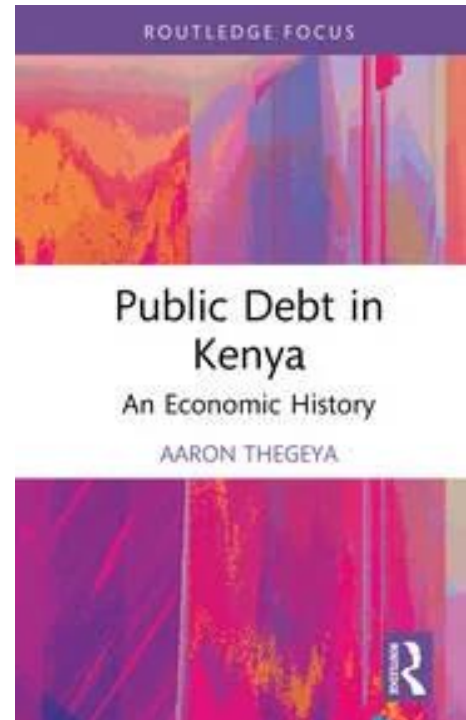
## Public Debt in Kenya: An Economic History

Aaron Thegeya

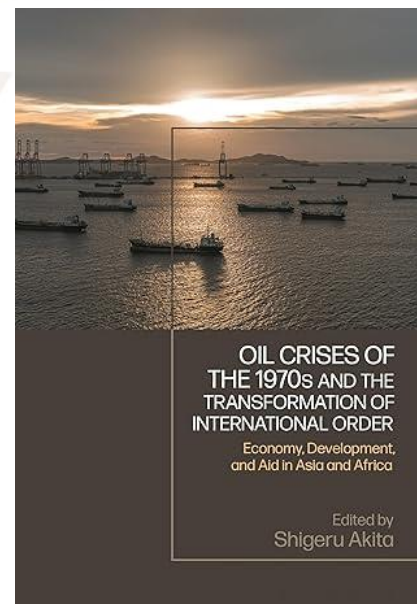
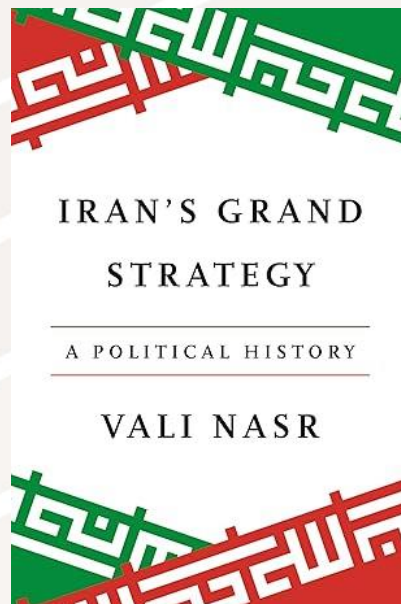
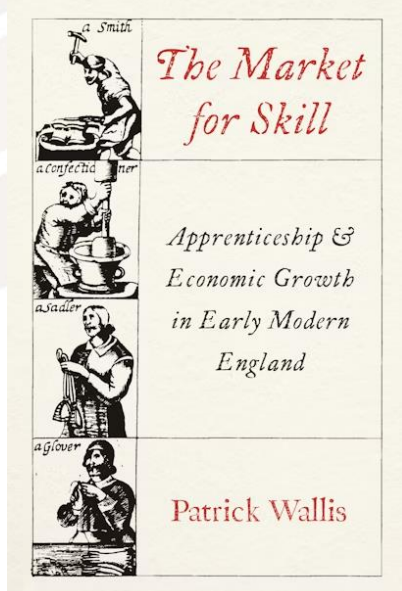
Public debt in developing economies has increased dramatically over the last 20 years, with debt repayment obligations putting the livelihoods of millions of individuals at risk and threatening to stall progress toward lowering poverty rates and achieving long-term development objectives across many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Debt fragility is a systemic issue that affects many countries spanning different continents, regardless of the idiosyncratic nature of each country's system of government and drivers of growth. Kenya is one of these fragile economies, currently classified as an economy at high risk of default.

This book gives a historical economic account of public debt in Kenya, dating back to the late 1800s. It describes the key episodes and events that resulted in the accumulation of debt and gives an intuitive understanding of the economic dynamics of debt during the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods in Kenya's history. Existing studies on Kenya's public debt are either not comprehensive, choosing to focus on a narrow period, or are technical empirical analyses, rendering them inaccessible to a large audience. By describing the dynamics of public debt in Kenya, the book increases familiarity with a topic that has important implications for Kenya, and which has occupied a central stage in Kenya's policy debates in the recent past.

History shows that contagion from economic crises is not unique and isolated to individual nations, thus the book is relevant not only for policy debates in Kenya, but also for other low-income and emerging economies within sub-Saharan Africa.



## Other new books in economic history



## ARTICLES

### The age of intra-African migration: shifting patterns of regional mobility between two global diasporas, 1850–1960

*Comparative Migration Studies*

**Michiel de Haas and Ewout Frankema**

Rising migration out of Africa is attracting great attention among scholars, policy makers and pundits. In terms of past African mobility, forced emigration through the slave trade, with its nefarious characteristics and long-lasting legacies, has also received much publicity. But what happened to African mobility in the long century between the demise of the trans-oceanic slave trades after 1850 and the gradual resurgence of African extra-continental migration since 1960? This paper adopts the concept of the “Age of Intra-African Migration” to analyze a distinct epoch of widespread and large-scale African mobility, characterized by a succession of overlapping transitions in continent-wide migration patterns. We identify five of these transitions and explain their drivers. Overall, we show that the inward shift of African migration patterns was a consequence of intensified state formation, the demise of the transoceanic slave trades, and export-oriented commercialization. These processes were in turn shaped by trade integration, industrialization and imperialism on a global scale. As such, the Age of Intra-African Migration did not signify a retreat of Africans from global migration altogether, but rather the growing importance of migration destinations across the continent itself. We contend that the ongoing globalization of African diasporas cannot be fully understood without accounting for the dynamics of regional mobility between 1850 and 1960, and that, contrary to popular belief, Africans today are not any more mobile than they were a century ago.

### Early modern globalization and the extent of indigenous agency: Trade, commodities and ecology

*The Economic History Review*

**Ann M. Carlos, Erik Green, Calumet Links and Angela Redish**

This paper examines the responses of Indigenous nations and European companies to new trading opportunities: the Cree nations with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the Khoe nations with the Dutch East India Company [Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC)]. This case study is important because of the disparate outcomes. Within a few decades the Cree standard of living had increased, while Khoe nations had lost cattle and land. Standard histories begin with the establishment of trading posts, but this elides the decades of prior intermittent contact which played an important role in the disparate outcomes in these two regions. The paper emphasizes the significance of Indigenous agency in trade.

### Notes on the Difficulty of Studying State Archives in Egypt

*Comparative Studies in Society and History*

**Chihab El Khachab**

This article describes how Egyptian state documents are scattered between governmental institutions, private collections, and the second-hand book and paper market. This scattering raises a practical question about the conditions under which official documents become discardable and commodifiable by bureaucrats, their families, and second-hand dealers. This scattering also raises a theoretical question about the nature of a state which takes uneven care in keeping a record of its own institutional past. After outlining the difficulties of access one faces in official archives in Egypt, the article fleshes out the sociological profile of different custodians of state paperwork—including families of bureaucrats, peddlers, and dealers—and the conditions under which state documents become commodified to this day. The overarching objective is not just to show the well-known limitations of national archives as a source of historical material, but also to show how actually existing “state archives” go well beyond the remit of official institutions, with notable consequences over our conception of the state.

## **“A One-Woman Expedition to Get to Know Tanzanian Women”: State Socialist Women’s Travelogues about Africa in the 1960s–80s**

*Journal of World History*  
**Réka Krizmanics**

From the 1960s onward, global interconnectedness intensified, including the cooperation among women’s movements across political divides. By analyzing travelogues of Hungarian women’s journeys to Africa, the article seeks to discover how they positioned themselves in the course of their cross-cultural encounters and how they chose to narrate and frame their experiences. I compare the way in which these women approached and described gendered and racialized subjects and phenomena in order to link this to socialist internationalism as the supposedly dominant set of ideas underlying their travels. Thus, the article engages with state socialist women’s gaze in these travelogues and shows where the gender of the travelogue writers had a particularly significant impact on the emerging prose. Following these interests, the article seeks to establish a link between socialist internationalism and women’s solidarities.

## **From missing brothers to educated sisters: The effects of victimization during the Rwandan genocide**

*World Development*  
**Thomas Gautier**

How do civil conflicts affect female empowerment? I study the effects of household-level victimization during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda on the human capital of surviving children. Identification stems from differential mortality rates by age groups and sex. I construct a Bartik-style instrument for household-level victimization based on whether the siblings of a child are likely to be targeted during the genocide due to their demographic characteristics. Victimization leads to a large increase in schooling, especially for surviving girls relative to surviving boys. Victimization mostly takes the form of losing male siblings. These results can be explained by the impact of relief programs and by increased parental investments in the human capital of surviving children following the loss of a child. This paper underscores the role of education in empowering female survivors, highlighting that rapid reconstruction of educational infrastructure and targeted scholarship programs were essential in fostering female educational gains and mitigating the long-term impacts of victimization.

## **A social network analysis of family and community conflicts in post-civil war Mozambique**

*World Development*  
**Victor Igreja, Francisco Aparecido Rodrigues and Alexandre Santos Cristino**

The existing literature on post-civil war processes has inadequately addressed the diversity of challenges of social reconstruction and community development arising from the fragmentation of cultural practices informing the creation and maintenance of family and social networks, and a variety of locally specific risks impacting the lives of survivors and subsequent generations. This paper addresses this gap by empirically investigating how unresolved legacies of Mozambique’s civil war (1976–1992) have fueled a network of local problems in the Gorongosa district. We used network analysis of cases presented in community courts over a decade (2002–2012) to reveal the existence of entrenched disputes involving spouses, divorce cases, domestic violence incidents, financial debts, accusations of wartime violations, and a range of adverse wellbeing outcomes. The conflicts and relationship dynamics vary in intensity over time but remain closely linked to civil war-induced risks, such as disrupted practices of premature marriages and interpersonal mistrust. Taking together these results reinforce the need to address disrupted patterns of family relations, lingering accusations of wartime violations, and to enhance the capacity of local community institutions and courts as part of social reconstruction efforts and development goals.

## Historical shocks and community-based enterprises: the slave trades, family dynamics, and social entrepreneurship in Africa

*Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*  
**Ikenna Uzuegbunam, Dharm Kapletia and Afam Ituma**

This study investigates how exposure to traumatic historical shocks shapes the emergence of community-based enterprises across geographic regions in Africa. Leveraging a family embeddedness theoretical lens in the context of the traumatic background of the historic African slave trades, we theorize that the extent of slave exports is adversely related to cohesion and trust in family institutions in the affected regions, thereby reducing the likelihood of community-based enterprises in the modern era. Nevertheless, we also conjecture that this legacy of social structure disintegration and mistrust created by historical trauma from the slave trades can be relieved through contemporary family embeddedness in entrepreneurial activity. Empirically, we test these hypotheses by merging slave export data from 500 years of the African slave trades with data on 4,685 modern social enterprises across 49 African countries. The results corroborate the main hypothesis and show that the effect of slave exports on the likelihood of community-based enterprises is contingent on family funding and female involvement in social enterprises. These findings highlight the central role of familial dynamics in the link between historical trauma and modern entrepreneurial strategy.

## A political economy analysis of changes and continuities in Iran–Africa trade relations: a case of South–South dependency?

*Review of Social Economy*  
**Eric Lob and Hakan Yilmazkuday**

This paper provides a political economy analysis of the bilateral trade relations and patterns of exchange that existed between Iran and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from 1962 to 2021. The paper contributes to the growing literature on Iran–Africa relations by empirically delineating not just the changes, but also the continuities between Iran and its African trading partners before and after the Iranian Revolution. It also adds nuance to the broader scholarship on South–South cooperation by showing the disparity between the rhetoric of South–South solidarity and reciprocity between Iran and SSA, on one side, and their low and fluctuating trade volumes, on the other. These volumes resulted from historical inertia or path dependency and structural factors, including trade complementarities and geopolitical conditions, more than demographic, cultural, or religious realities. They were also shaped by the agency and decision-making of Iranian and African leaders and officials regarding the extent to which they economically engaged with each other.

## From the Great Divergence to South–South Divergence: New comparative horizons in global economic history

*Journal of Economic Surveys*  
**Ewout Frankema**

The Great Divergence debate has been the leading conversation in economic history for the past 25 years. This review article explores new comparative horizons in global economic history. I argue that questions of South–South Divergence form a logical and timely extension to the Great Divergence research agenda. Asia's economic renaissance did not only put an end to a century-spanning process of widening global income disparities, it also set a new process of divergence within the global south in motion. Deeper understandings of the historical nature and origins of this transition are pertinent in light of the increasing demographic and economic weight of the global south. South–south comparisons also offer an opportunity to counter the dominance of western-centered and north–south perspectives and incentivize the development of new approaches and theories that go beyond mainstream concepts designed by development economists and political scientists. I argue that these novel approaches will have to grapple with the opportunities and constraints to “late” development being shaped by the quadruple challenge of vast technology gaps, limited state autonomy, global competition, and rapidly closing land and resource frontiers.

### **Economic ideas and state policies in Benin, c. 1440–1897**

**Idahosa Osagie Ojo**

This paper analyses economic ideas in Benin from c. 1440 to 1897 and how they shaped state economic policies that guided the day-to-day economic activities of the people. The existing literature on the economic history of Benin Kingdom in particular and Nigerian societies in general focuses on trade, agriculture, and industries, without any systematic enquiry into the ideas underpinning them. The resultant paucity of historiography on economic ideas and how they evolved into state economic policies is a dual lacuna in the economic history of precolonial Nigeria. The study shows that economic thought played a significant role in steering the practical and enforceable laws that guided everyday economic activities and contributed to the material success of the people and their Kingdom. Moreover, it is shown that these economic ideas underwent significant changes during the period of study. These vicissitudes are more noticeable between the periods of magnificence that followed Oba Ewuare (1440–1473) the Great's accomplishments, and the civil wars, crises, and decline at the eve of British conquest.

### **The food economy of colonial Igalaland, 1900–1960**

**Ugbede Joseph Ineke**

This article reconstructs the neglected history of agricultural production, marketing, and distribution in colonial Igalaland (central Nigeria). The history of the colonial economy of Igalaland from the period of the formal introduction of colonial rule in 1900 until 1960, when Nigeria became an independent nation, can best be understood as a moment of intersection between colonial structures, social change, and human agency. The history of the food economy in Igalaland is crucial to understanding the enduring legacy of colonial exaction and economic structures and their role in shaping a trajectory of exploitation and resilience. This aspect of the Igala economic history has yet to receive the critical scrutiny it deserves, constituting a major gap in the historiography of the region. This article fills this gap by relying extensively on archival documents from the Nigerian National Archives located in Kaduna and Ibadan, as well as secondary sources and semi-structured interviews. It will argue that, despite the negative consequences of colonial rule in Igalaland from 1900 to 1929 and 1930 to 1945, the period from 1945 to 1960 benefited the colonial administration, middlemen, and farmers while increasing economic inequality and creating systemic vulnerabilities.

### **From marginalization to tokenism: The political economy of industrialization in Gombe, North East Nigeria, 1963–2013**

**Misbahu Saidu**

At independence, most African countries viewed development as synonymous with industrialization. With the enactment of the Aid to Pioneer Industries Ordinance in 1952, industrialization became a major development objective in Nigeria. However, the history of industrial policy in the north-east is understudied, and the literature on Nigerian industrial policy in general underplays political factors in the conception and implementation of industrial projects. This inhibits understanding of how non-economic factors led to industrial decline. This paper fills the gap using oral interviews and government publications within the purview of political economy. The results show that political factors are critical in understanding industrial development as evident in how the relocation of industries from Gombe to Bauchi beginning in 1976 partly informed the movement that led to the creation of Gombe State in 1996. However, successive administrations in the new state of Gombe largely failed to accord industrialization its rightful place, instead using proposed industrial projects to woo the electorate. This paper observes a trend in Gombe industrialization where claims of marginalization have shifted to the tokenism of rhetoric and minimum compliance with standards - a trend, this paper argues, is more the result of political factors than often-cited economic variables.

## Market associations and the political economy of exclusion: A gender analysis of two markets in Plateau State, 1976–2022

Patience Mamie Kolade

The study analyses the contributions and challenges women face in the Jos Plateau marketplaces. Since the colonial period, indigenous women traders have contributed to market activities. Despite the long history of women in this space, gender power dynamics remain prominent. Women generally occupy the lower level of the market chain of command, mostly as petty traders, and they are excluded from positions of market administration and middlemanship. Drawing on feminist scholarship, and based on extensive fieldwork and interviews, the study focuses on two markets in Plateau State – Mangu and Mai katako – both major markets in maize, vegetable, and potato. The study reconstructs the intricate ways in which market associations have been converted into exclusive ‘men’s clubs’, and how the traders’ associations have perpetuated gender inequality.

## WORKING PAPERS

### Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa: the Role of Inheritance

Sébastien Fontenay, Paula E. Gobbi and Marc Goni

Fertility in sub-Saharan Africa is the highest in the world. We showcase a driver of this exceptionally high fertility which has been largely overlooked by demographers and economists: inheritance customs. We develop a theory of inheritance under subsistence agriculture, where households face economic incentives to limit fertility to avoid dividing land into inefficiently small parcels. Consequently, fertility is higher where inheritance is transmitted to a single heir (impartible) than where it is divided equally among all children (partible). We test this prediction by linking deep-rooted inheritance customs for more than 800 ethnic groups with modern demographic surveys covering 24 countries. Exploiting ancestral borders in a spatial Regression Discontinuity Design, we show that belonging to an ethnic group with impartible inheritance increases fertility by around one child per woman and that fertility differences are larger in lands subject to indivisibilities than in lands suited for cultivating labor-intensive crops.

### Female Genital Cutting and the Slave Trade

Lucia Corno, Eliana La Ferrara and Alessandra Voena

This paper investigates the historical origins of female genital cutting (FGC). We test the historical hypothesis that FGC is associated with the Red Sea route of the African slave trade, where women were typically sold as concubines in the Middle East and infibulation was used as a means to preserve virginity. Using individual-level data from 28 African countries combined with historical records of Red Sea slave shipments from 1400 to 1900, we find that women from ethnic groups whose ancestors experienced greater exposure to the Red Sea slave trade are more likely to undergo infibulation or circumcision today. They are also more inclined to support the continuation of this practice. Our findings are robust to instrumenting Red Sea slave exports with the distance to the nearest port used for this route. We also leverage a dataset on oral traditions (Folklore) to show that greater exposure to the Red Sea slave trade correlates with a stronger association between infibulation and the cultural values of chastity and purity, which may have facilitated the diffusion of infibulation among local populations.

### Decolonization, Legitimacy and Fiscal Capacity: Event Study Evidence from Africa

Dhammika Dharmapala and Marvin Suesse

A vast literature across several academic disciplines studies the impact of colonial rule, but less attention has been paid to the consequences of decolonization. This paper uses a recently-constructed dataset on the fiscal history of African countries from 1900 to 2015 to analyze the impact of decolonization on fiscal capacity (defined as revenue from taxes that are relatively difficult to collect and that require more administrative infrastructure). The analysis adopts a staggered difference-in-difference approach, implemented using a stacked event study. It finds no discernible pre-trends prior to decolonization, and a substantial increase in fiscal capacity starting about 5-6 years after decolonization. This result – which implies substantial state-building activity in postcolonial Africa – is robust to tests for a variety of alternative explanations, the use of alternative control groups, and the use of generalized synthetic control methods. We also show that this effect is not explained by democratization or improved public goods provision. Our conceptual framework instead posits that post-colonial states were able to increase tax revenues from hard-to-collect sources because their higher degree of legitimacy improved citizens' tax morale. We offer historical evidence that is consistent with this channel. Our finding – that colonial rulers invested less in fiscal capacity than did post-independence governments – sheds new light on the consequences of colonial rule, and on the determinants of variation in governments' fiscal capacity.

## **Social Protection and Coloniality: Learning from the Past and Present**

### *Tanzania Case Study*

**Roosa Lambin and Winnie C. Muangi**

Tanzania has made notable progress in expanding its social protection system, yet the influence of colonial governance models, entrenched donor dependency and limited population coverage of existing provisions remain significant. This case study critically explores the historical and contemporary processes of social protection policymaking in Mainland Tanzania, drawing on qualitative interviews and documentary analysis. Colonial legacies continue to shape Tanzania's economic structure and institutional frameworks. Extractive colonial economies prioritised cash crops and mining, embedding a dependency that persists today and limits fiscal space for domestic investment in social protection. The British administration introduced formal governance and social protection institutions that remain pertinent today, but they continue to largely exclude the informal sector and rural populations, despite recent efforts to introduce social insurance schemes for informal sector workers (e.g. National Informal Sector Scheme, NISS). Postcolonial dynamics also play a defining role. Tanzania's early Ujamaa socialist model under President Julius Nyerere fostered broad welfare ambitions, many of which were later dismantled under neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s. Since then, global policy agendas and actors have heavily influenced domestic policymaking. Donor-driven programmes dominate key areas such as cash transfers (e.g. the World Bank-supported and targeted productive Social Safety Net programme), and development partners use various policy transfer mechanisms to shape domestic policies and programmes. The scarcity of domestic resources significantly hinders the pursuit of universalist social protection investments. Despite this, the role of domestic actors remains pivotal. Nyerere's legacy continues to inspire social policy thinking, and civil society and political elites actively shape - and sometimes contest - social protection arrangements. At the same time, limited implementation capacity and corruption undermine effectiveness of social protection delivery, particularly in rural regions. The study identifies pathways forward: strengthening domestic financing through better taxation and value-chain participation; enhancing government leadership and coordination; integrating informal, community-based social protection mechanisms; and promoting regionally driven, South-South cooperation. These shifts require reimagining social protection, rooting it in Tanzania's socio-cultural and economic fabric to build a more inclusive and resilient system.

## **Seeds of prejudice: The impact of British colonization on attitudes towards sexual minorities**

**Alexsandros Cavgias and Cristian Navarro**

This paper provides the first causal test of the widely debated hypothesis that British colonial institutions promoted sexual prejudice—defined as negative attitudes toward sexual minorities—in postcolonial societies. We document five main findings. First, after accounting for differences in contemporary economic development, OLS estimates from a cross-country sample of former European colonies reveal that former British colonies exhibit higher sexual prejudice than those of other European powers. Second, Geo-RDD estimates show that former British colonies have significantly greater sexual prejudice than former Portuguese colonies in Southern and Eastern Africa, where local norms did not systematically condemn same-sex relations. Third, Geo-RDD estimates indicate that former British and French colonies display similar levels of sexual prejudice in Western Africa, where a higher share of the population adheres to religious norms condemning same-sex acts. Fourth, additional evidence from areas in South America and Southeast Asia not characterized by homophobic social norms before colonization reinforces the external validity of our findings from Southeastern Africa. Finally, mechanisms analysis suggests that the persistence of sodomy laws fully accounts for the negative association between British colonial origin and contemporary sexual prejudice across countries. Overall, our results indicate that British colonial origin notably increased sexual prejudice in societies with social norms different from the penal codes imposed by colonizers.

## Looking Backward: Long-Term Religious Service Attendance in 66 Countries

Robert J. Barro, Edgard Dewitte, and Laurence Iannaccone

The attendance rate at religious services is an important variable for the sociology and economics of religion, but long-term and global data are scarce. Retrospective questions from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) allow the construction of rates of religious-service attendance back as far as the 1920s in 66 countries, half from the “Global South.” A number of checks support the reliability of the retrospective information. One exercise demonstrates the consistency between retrospective and contemporaneous survey data when the two overlap. Another procedure shows that the retrospective values are similar when generated from individual ISSP surveys for 1991, 1998, 2008, and 2018; that is, there is no clear dependence of memory on the number of years of recall. The new data document a century-long “Great Religious Divergence” between North and South. We use the data to carry out event studies for effects on religious-service attendance of two major events. Vatican II, in 1962-1965, triggered a decline in worldwide Catholic attendance relative to that in other denominations. In contrast, the endings of Communism in the early 1990s did not systematically affect religious-service attendance. Finally, in a large sample, religious service attendance responds positively to wars and depressions.

## Women in Mining: A global study of the past two centuries

Dácil Juif and Katharina Mühlhoff

The economic history of mining has largely overlooked the role of women, reflecting both the male dominance of the sector and the invisibility of women’s labour in historical sources. This chapter explores women’s roles in mining over the past two centuries, focusing on the Global South—particularly Africa—and includes a case study of copper mining in Rio Tinto, Spain, using company records. While mineral extraction was reserved for men, women played key supporting roles, especially in the 20th-century Global South, though this rarely translated into improved conditions or career opportunities. Within Africa, regional differences were stark: for instance, Angolan diamond mines increased female employment in the 1950s, while women were absent from company payrolls in the Central African Copperbelt. In Rio Tinto, most employed women were widows in vulnerable positions, suggesting that their work served as a form of social insurance rather than a step toward economic inclusion. These patterns highlight the need for further research using company records to better understand the influence of policy, culture, and industry structure on women’s roles in mining.

## Dear brothers and sisters: Pope's speeches and the dynamics of conflict in Africa

Mathieu Couttenier, Sophie Hatte, Lucile Laugurette and Tommaso Sonno

Public speeches by leaders can serve as a cost-effective tool for fostering peace, yet their effectiveness remains uncertain, particularly in divided societies experiencing violent conflict. This paper examines the impact of the Catholic Pope’s peace-promoting speeches on conflict dynamics in Africa. To investigate this, we construct a novel dataset covering all papal speeches explicitly addressing violent conflict events in Africa between 1997 and 2022. Using event-study methods, we find that papal speeches reduce overall conflict by 23% on average. However, these effects vary significantly depending on the Pope delivering the speech. While Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis’s speeches are associated with substantial reductions in conflict, Pope Benedict XVI’s speeches show no significant overall effect but are linked to increased battles and religious violence. We further explore four mechanisms driving these heterogeneous effects. First, the impact of papal speeches is significantly stronger in areas with a Catholic presence, where violence drops by up to 69%. Second, the effectiveness of a speech depends on the bishops’ ideological alignment with the Pope’s vision, with speeches delivered by a Pope who appointed the current bishop being 17% more effective. Third, political leaders play a crucial role in amplifying the Pope’s message, as violence significantly declines in birth regions of national leaders. Finally, the response of armed groups varies depending on their religious affiliation and prior history of violence.

## The Persistence of Female Political Power in Africa

Siwan Anderson, Sophia du Plessis, Sahar Parsa and James A. Robinson

Research on female political representation has tended to overlook the traditional role of women as leaders across many societies. Our study aims to address this gap by investigating the enduring influence of historical female political leadership on contemporary formal political representation in Africa. We test for this persistence by compiling two original datasets: one detailing female political leadership in precolonial societies and another on current female representation in local elections. Our findings indicate that ethnic groups historically allowing women in leadership roles in politics do tend to have a higher proportion of elected female representatives in today's formal local political institutions. We also observe that institutional, rather than economic, factors significantly shape the traditional political influence of women. Moreover, in accordance with historical accounts, we uncover evidence of a reversal of female political power due to institutional changes enforced by colonial powers.

## Jihad over Centuries

Masahiro Kubo and Shunsuke Tsuda

This paper examines the origins of Islamist insurgencies, commonly referred to as jihad, through the lens of past prosperity, decline, and cultural revival in West Africa. Core inland cities along the trans-Saharan caravan routes, which flourished under Islamic states until the 1800s, are well predicted by ancient water access. These cities became peripheral following the gradual shrinking of water bodies and European colonization. Employing an instrumental variable strategy, we show that these historically prosperous but now deserted cities have become contemporary hotspots of jihadist violence. We argue that military power asymmetries between Islamic states and colonizers during historical jihad shaped the persistence of jihadist ideology as a legacy of colonization, fueling today's resurgence. This mechanism is supported by individual-level surveys examining extreme religious ideologies, extensive qualitative evidence, and a dynamic model of conflict. Moreover, the concentration of jihadist violence in areas that experienced reversals of fortune mirrors a global pattern.