



African Economic History Network Newsletter

Issue #68 November 2025

The AEHN newsletter keeps you informed about the latest news and upcoming 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 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

This year's AEHN Annual Meeting took place in Maseru, Lesotho – a beautiful location known as the “Kingdom in the Sky”, 30 – 31 October 2025. The event was hosted by the National University of Lesotho, with Godfrey Hove as local organiser, and held at the Central Bank's conference facilities. Around 80 participants attended, and the program featured 58 papers under the conference theme “Disruptions and Resilience in African Economic Transformations”.

This year set a new record for African participation, with 68% of paper presenters affiliated with African institutions. Sessions covered a wide range of topics and saw active engagement from the audience. Two keynote addresses were scheduled: one by Emmanuel Letete, the Governor of the Central Bank of Lesotho, and by Johan Fourie, delivered by Ed Kerby.

Beyond the academic program, the traditional Jay-Jay Okocha football match was held on the last night of the conference. Despite a dramatic thunderstorm that interrupted play, a winner was declared (under protest) – the team led by captain Ewout Frankema.

The next AEHN Annual Meeting will take place in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 23–24 October 2026. Please look out for the call for papers early next year.

Jutta Bolt



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) and Felix Meier zu Selhausen (f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl).

Empires of Grain: State Building and Market Integration in French West Africa, 1915-1950

Tom Westland

Markets for millet and rice in the Western Sudan became much more integrated over the course of the twentieth century. Drawing on a new dataset of prices from across French West African colonies, this paper documents that price dispersion as measured by the coefficient of variation roughly halved from 1915 to 1940. Estimates of route-specific freight prices suggest that much of the decline in price gaps can be attributed to falling transport costs due to the introduction of mechanized transport. A market-supportive legacy of precolonial state-building, and particularly the Islamist states of the Fulani jihads and the Wassulu Empire of Samory Touré is also evident in the price data.



News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

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).

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; CC: fouche.venter@econrsa.org

Uses and abuses of the Murdock Atlas in social science research Workshop

Monday 13th April 2026
Sir Arthur Lewis Building, SAL B07, LSE

The Ethnographic Atlas, drawn up by George Murdock in the 1950s and 1960s, is a widely used resource in economics, political science and even in evolutionary psychology. The Atlas tabulates a broad range of attributes for over 1200 pre-industrial societies across the entire globe, with notable granularity for Africa and North America in particular. For Africa, Murdock also drew up a map with ethnic homelands. Later scholars have matched the Atlas and the Map to create a spatial dataset which has sparked a large and influential recent literature.

In this literature, researchers have leveraged various aspects of the Atlas, each with their own empirical and conceptual challenges. One of the most influential uses of the Atlas involves the spatial matching of past 'ethnic characteristics' with outcomes today, for example to measure the lasting impact of pre-colonial states or gender norms. Others have specifically looked at the location of ethnic borders in Africa, for example to evaluate how they coincide with colonial borders.

As use of the Atlas has expanded, so has criticism of the data it contains. How reliable is the Atlas? Is the research that underpins it not well past its due date? And to what extent can potential weaknesses be overcome? Research outputs using the Atlas may cite these critiques, but rarely have the space to engage with questions of data quality in any significant depth. Our aim is to bring together scholars who have engaged with the Atlas in their research and are interested in an open, cross-disciplinary, and forward-looking conversation on the merits, limitations and pitfalls of using Murdock's Atlas in social science research.

To this aim we are organizing a 1-day workshop at the LSE in London on April 13, 2026. This workshop is timed to follow the Economic History Society conference. **We invite scholars working on any aspect of the Murdock Atlas as well as related datasets in comparative anthropology to participate. Potential topics include (but are not limited to):**

- Empirical work assessing the validity of aspects of Murdock's Atlas;
- In depth historical critique of Murdock's ethnographic work in the context of one or multiple specific societies;
- Efforts to improve upon or update the Murdock Atlas, such as adding new data, link to other sources or apply new statistical techniques;
- Replications of past research using the Murdock Atlas;
- Conceptual critiques of aspects of the Murdock Atlas.

After the workshop, we seek to compile a special issue in Economic History of Developing Regions bringing together 5 to 7 selected papers. Preferably, the authors of these papers have presented at the workshop, but we will also consider independent submissions of scholars who have not attended the workshop.

Please submit an abstract or indicate your interest in attending the workshop through this [form](#) by no later than 14 November 2025.

Organisers: Leigh Gardner, LSE, Michiel de Haas, Wageningen, and Tom Westland, Wageningen

Histories of African Economic Thought

Conference and call for papers

18-19 June 2026
University of Manchester

On 18–19 June 2026, the University of Manchester will host a conference on Histories of African Economic Thought. The conference aims to bring together scholars working on African economic thought (broadly conceived) across disciplines and on all eras and parts of the continent.

Possible themes include (but are not limited to):

- African epistemologies and discourses of value, inequality and crisis
- Gendered perspectives in African economic thought
- Economic concepts and categories in indigenous languages and systems of thought
- The political and social implications of economic thinking in Africa
- Colonial political economy
- History and sociology of economics in postcolonial Africa
- African economists and intellectuals on 'development'
- African socialism, Marxism, anarchism, dependency theory
- African economic thought from global and diasporic perspectives

Historiographical and methodological reflections on the opportunities and challenges of writing about African economic thought.

Papers privileging African voices, ideas, concepts and experiences will be given priority over those dealing primarily with how the rest of the world engaged with Africa.

Selected participants will be expected to pre-circulate their papers in advance. The papers discussed at the conference will then be published in a volume on Histories of African Economic Thought co-edited by Dr Gerardo Serra and Dr Paola Vargas Arana.

Travel funding, accommodation and meals will be offered to selected participants. Early-career scholars and scholars based in Africa will be given funding priority.

Those interested in applying should submit a long abstract (800 words, references excluded) and a CV (max. 4 pages) to the conference organisers:

Dr Gerardo Serra (gerardo.serra@manchester.ac.uk) and Dr Paola Vargas Arana (paola.vargasarana@manchester.ac.uk).

The deadline for submission is 16 November 2025.

Accepted participants will be notified by 19 December 2025. Full papers should be submitted and pre-circulated by 15 May 2026.

Celebrating 40 Years of Continuity and Change: A Call for Papers on the Future of Social and Economic History Special Issue

Liverpool University Press is pleased to share a special call for papers to mark 40 years of the journal *Continuity and Change*. The Editors invite submissions reflecting on the past and reimagining the future of social and economic history.

About the journal: *Continuity and Change* aims to define a field of historical sociology concerned with long-term continuities and discontinuities in the structures of past societies. Emphasis is upon studies whose agenda or methodology combines elements from traditional fields such as history, sociology, law, demography, economics or anthropology, or ranges freely between them. There is a strong commitment to comparative studies over a broad range of cultures and time spans.

Call for Papers

To celebrate the 40-year anniversary since the founding of the journal *Continuity and Change* (C&C), we are circulating a new call for papers. Providing a 'state of the field' overview, these articles are intended to highlight how social and economic history has developed in recent decades as well as proposing potential future directions. Papers can be on traditional topics, such as the household economy, or on still emerging areas of research, such as environmental history. Although developments in some of these fields might be geographically or chronologically specific, preference will be given to articles that range widely, tackling the chosen theme across periods and/or countries. We especially encourage proposals from geographies less represented in C&C over the last decade, such as Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

How to submit

Articles will be shorter than our usual length – no more than 5,000 words (notes not included) – and will be subject to peer review. **We are seeking initial expressions of interest from colleagues who wish to author one of these pieces, with a short overview of the potential scope of the proposed article (such as title and 200-word summary) to be sent to the Editors** (a.t.brown@durham.ac.uk; helenadasilva@fcsb.unl.pt; helder.carvalho@iisg.nl; mnagata58@gmail.com) by 20 December 2025.

We will then invite selected papers for full submission by 1 April 2026 for potential publication later that year.

Find out more about *Continuity and Change* [here](#).

Popular Support for Autocratic Regimes in Historical Perspective Conference

May 26–27, 2026
Toulouse School of Economics

We are excited to announce our conference on “Popular Support for Autocratic Regimes in Historical Perspective” to be held at the Toulouse School of Economics on May 26–27, 2026. We invite abstracts for papers that explore the popular support of authoritarian regimes in historical perspective.

The conference welcomes scholars in economics, political science, history, sociology, and related fields. Topics may include but are not limited to electoral and plebiscitary behavior, party enrollment, participation in mass organizations, regime collaboration and denunciation, economic and cultural mobilization; the roles of ideology, information and media, coercion, patronage, and social networks; methods for extracting attitudes and participation from biased or incomplete archival records; legacies of support after regime change.

The conference is organized under the umbrella of and with support from the DFG-ANR-funded project “Who Became a Nazi? A Structured Database of the Denazification Questionnaires from French and American Occupation Zones in Germany, 1945–1949” (DeNazDB).

Deadline for abstract submission: November 15, 2025.

Acceptance: no later than December 15, 2025.

Submissions should be emailed to Victor Gay (victor.gay@tse-fr.eu) and Jan Stuckatz (js.egb@cbs.dk)

Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the conference organization.

Please email us if you have any questions, and we are looking forward to your submissions.

Victor Gay, Toulouse School of Economics
Mikkel Dack, Rowan University
Selina Hofstetter, University of Zurich
Jan Stuckatz, Copenhagen Business School

OPPORTUNITIES

Postdoctoral Fellowships (x5) Economic History, Economic Growth

Stellenbosch University

Hosts: Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP) & Impumelelo Economic Growth Lab (BER), Stellenbosch University

Term: Three years • Start window: March–July 2026

Location: Stellenbosch, South Africa

LEAP and the Impumelelo Economic Growth Lab invite applications for up to five Postdoctoral Fellowships for outstanding early-career economists. We welcome proposals in economic history, economic growth and development, political economy, and policy-relevant applied research with clear implications for South Africa and the wider African continent.

About the hosts

- **Impumelelo Economic Growth Lab** focuses on generating policy-relevant research and building capacity to achieve economic success in South Africa. It is part of the Bureau of Economic Research (BER), founded in 1944.
- **LEAP is a centre within the Department of Economics.** It is dedicated to the quantitative study of African economic and social history, bringing together scholars and students to understand and explain the continent's long-run development.

Eligibility and profile

- A PhD in Economics (awarded, or all requirements completed by the start date) is required.
- A research focus on South Africa or Africa will be a strong advantage.
- Evidence of an active research agenda and the potential to publish in leading outlets.
- An interest in collaboration across LEAP and Impumelelo's networks, and in communicating findings to academic, policy and public audiences.

What we offer

- A vibrant research environment spanning economic history, growth and policy.
- Access to seminars, workshops and collaborative projects across LEAP, the BER and the Department of Economics.
- A three-year fellowship with an competitive stipend (tax-free under South African rules for postdoctoral fellowships).
- Stellenbosch University reserves the right not to make an appointment if suitable candidates do not apply.

How to apply

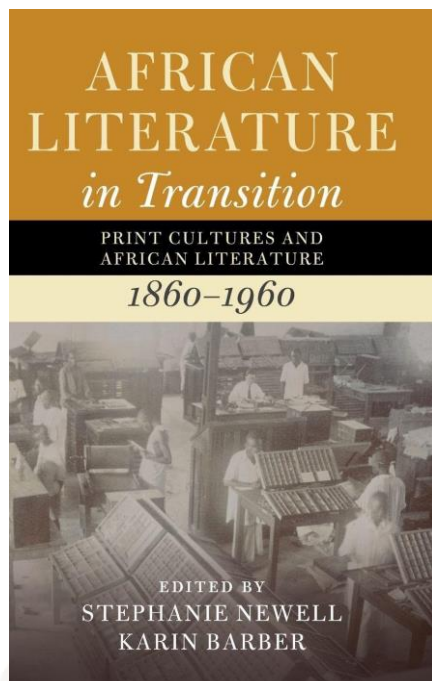
Please apply online via [EconJobMarket](https://econjobmarket.org) before **5 January 2026**.

Enquiries: For further information, contact Prof Johan Fourie at johanf@sun.ac.za.

New research in African economic history

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

African Literature in Transition: Print Cultures and African Literature, 1860–1960



Volume 3, Edited by Stephanie Newell and Karin Barber

This book offers a compelling vision of the dynamism of local printing presses across colonial Africa and the new textual forms they generated. It invites a reconceptualisation of African literature as a field by revealing the profusion of local, innovative textual production that surrounded and preceded canonical European-language literary traditions. Bringing together examples of print production in African, European and Arabic languages, it explores their interactions as well as their divergent audiences. It is grounded in the material world of local presses, printers, publishers, writers and readers, but also traces wider networks of exchange as some texts travelled to distant places. African print culture is an emerging field of great vitality, and contributors to this volume are among those who have inspired its development. This volume moves the subject forward onto new ground, and invites literary scholars, historians and anthropologists to contribute to the on-going collaborative effort to explore it.

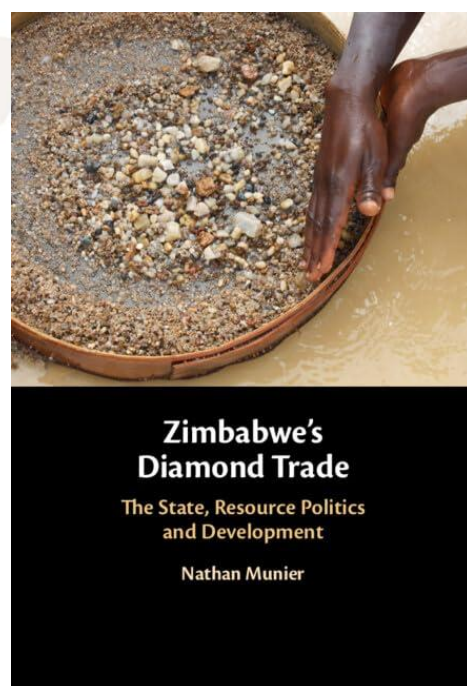
Zimbabwe's Diamond Trade: The State, Resource Politics and Development

Nathan Munier

What happens when states experience a rapid increase in resource wealth? This book examines the significant diamond find in eastern Zimbabwe in 2006, possibly the largest in over 100 years, and its influence on the institutional trajectory of the country. Nathan Munier examines how this rapid increase in resource production shaped the policies available to political actors, providing a fresh understanding of the perpetuation of ZANU-PF rule and the variation in the trajectory of institutions in Zimbabwe compared to other Southern African states. This study places Zimbabwe amongst the overall population of resource-wealthy countries such as such as Angola, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, especially those that experience a significant increase in production. In doing so, Munier contributes to the understanding of resource politics, political economy, and comparative African politics.

The Diamond Curse in Zimbabwe

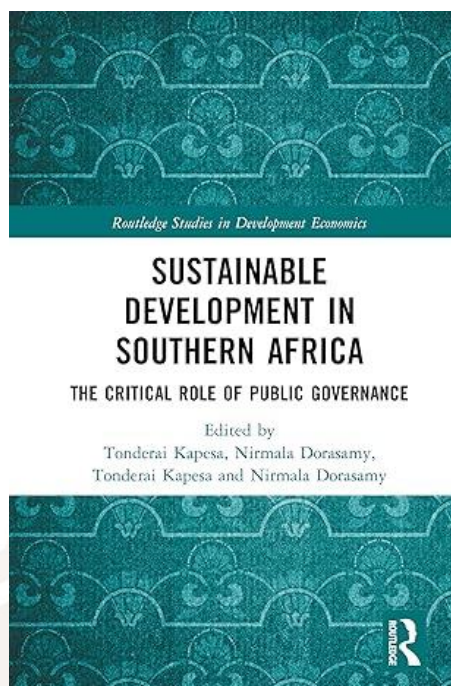
This chapter introduces the central puzzle of this study: why, in contrast to other states in Southern Africa, have Zimbabwean democratic institutions stagnated or even declined since



independence in 1980? To begin to answer this question, an overview of the resource sector in Zimbabwe, particularly the large diamond found in 2006, and the development of institutions since Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, is given. Furthermore, an institutional analysis, a brief overview of past studies, and a research design are outlined. In terms of case selection, Zimbabwe is placed in the overall population of cases when it comes to resource curse dynamics, and the concept of the “opaque” state is defined. Furthermore, Zimbabwe is defined in terms of democratization and state capacity, concepts that will be used throughout the study.

Sustainable Development in Southern Africa: The Critical Role of Public Governance

Edited by Tonderai Kapesa and Nirmala Dorasamy



Southern Africa stands at a critical juncture, facing the urgent need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and align with the African Union's Agenda 2063. Simultaneously, the region is grappling with the challenges of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change. This book provides a comprehensive exploration of sustainable development challenges and opportunities in Southern Africa, emphasizing the crucial role of public governance.

It examines historical, economic, social, and environmental factors shaping the region's progress, with a focus on the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It delves into the evolution of public governance, from pre-colonial systems to modern innovations, and analyse the impact of colonial legacies, constitutional reforms, and administrative practices. The book explores how Southern African nations can leverage innovative governance approaches, including citizen engagement, data-driven decision making, collaborative partnerships, and robust anti-corruption measures, to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future and better public service delivery. It emphasizes the necessity of policy coherence, robust regulatory frameworks,

and regional cooperation to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.

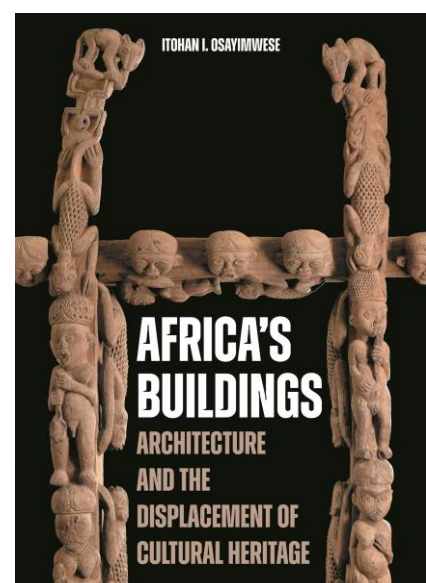
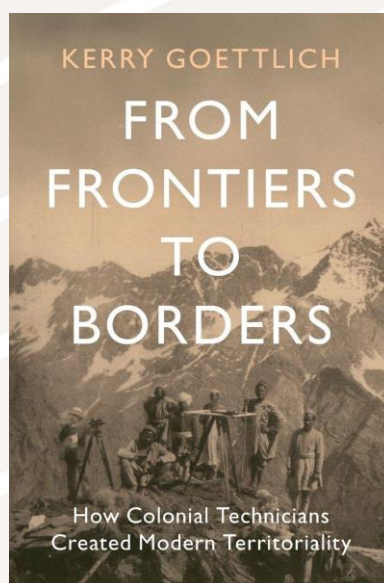
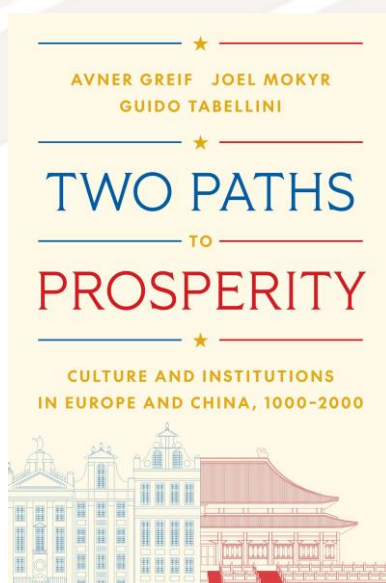
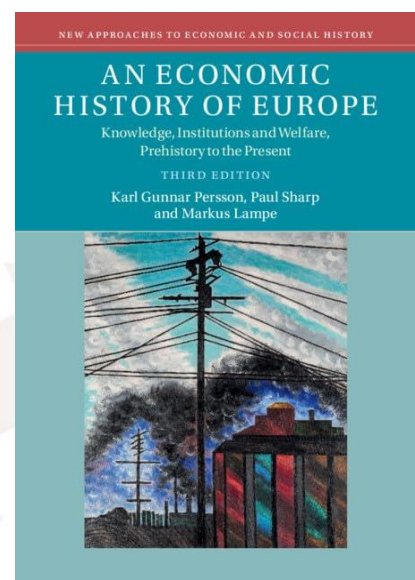
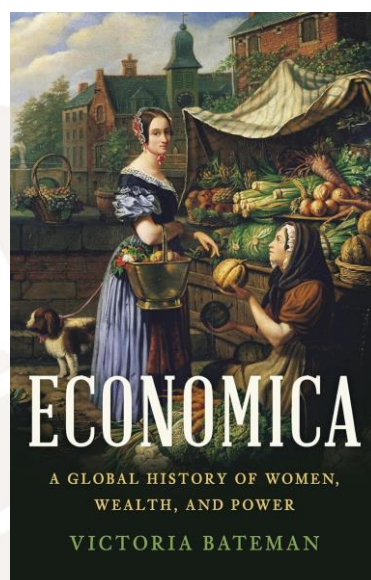
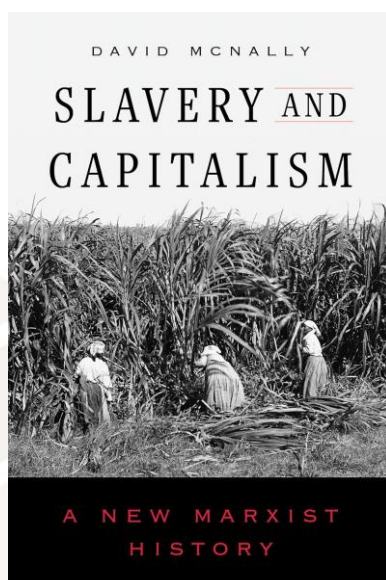
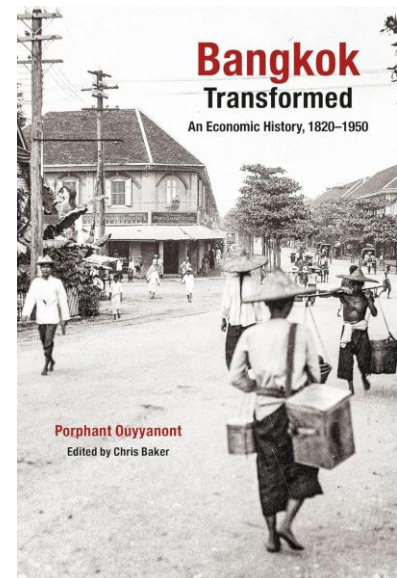
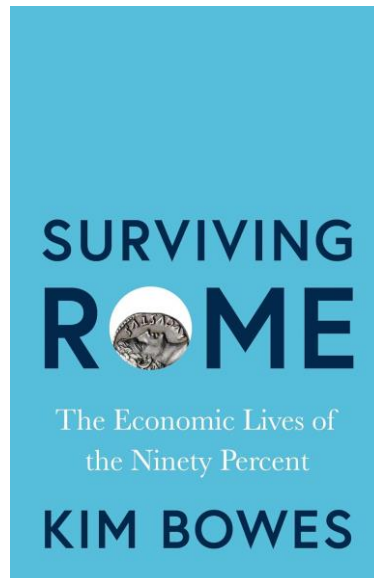
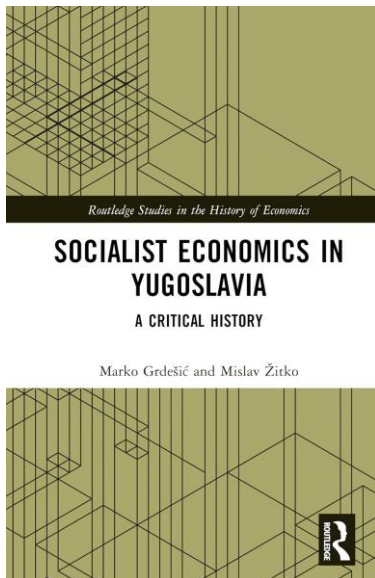
The book offers a roadmap for Southern African countries to strengthen public governance, empower citizens, and accelerate progress towards a more prosperous and resilient future. Finally, it provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, civil society, and international organizations to foster a resilient and equitable future for Southern Africa.

The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action

Edited by Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen

Originally published in 1975, this volume reassesses the historical, political and social role of African workers and examines the extent to which a working class has formed and undertaken collective action in various parts of Africa. The book is based on primary historical sources or first-hand experiences. The contributors are linked by their belief in the legitimacy of action by organised workers to create a more just society.

Other new books in economic history



ARTICLES

Cross-Cultural Trade and the Slave Ship the Bonne Société: Baskets of Goods, Diverse Sellers, and Time Pressure on the African Coast

The Journal of Economic History
Amanda Gregg and Anne Ruderman

The eighteenth-century French slave ship the Bonne Société traded bundles of goods in exchange for slaves in Loango. We present detailed evidence from the ship's trading log that decomposes the goods in the bundle and identifies the European and African merchants selling captives to the ship. Prices steadily increased throughout the captain's stay in port, and the captain increased the bundle's price by adding more goods and adding high-priced goods. Sellers participated both as one-shot traders and as repeat traders. These results add a nuanced picture of how this destructive trade worked in practice.

Extraordinary African cities? Zipf's law and the emerging African system of cities

World Development
Camilo Gomez Osorio and Vlad Mykhnenko

This paper revisits the rank-size power law of urban hierarchies in Africa, with new analysis of the relationship between urban agglomeration, colonial legacies, and spatial economic inequalities. It explores urban patterns of spatial distribution of economic activity across Sub-Saharan Africa and finds evidence that Zipf's law holds for African cities. Based on population panel data from Africapolis for 34 countries over the period 1960–2015 – it finds that the rank-size rule relationship has strengthened over time, with the statistically significant parameters converging closer to -1 . The empirical evidence supports an inverted U-shaped relationship between the Zipf parameter and GDP per capita growth with different effects across groups of countries by colonial legacies (British versus French), income, and land size. These results are based on 2SLS and dynamic system GMM panel data quadratic estimations. The findings suggest an urban Kuznets bell-shaped curve, implying that economic growth may initially increase urban income inequalities, while reversing to reduce spatial income inequality with further GDP per capita growth. The African urban hierarchy – both nationally and region-wide – is evolving to the empirical regularities commonly observed elsewhere.

Towards monetary autonomy in the French Union? The 1949 reform in French Somaliland and the façade of sovereignty

Economic History of Developing Regions
Moustapha Aman

This article examines the 1949 monetary reform in French Somaliland, when the French government replaced the colonial franc with a currency board pegged to the US dollar – breaking with the franc zone but without granting autonomy. Triggered by the collapse of the French franc and distrust of a colonial currency ill suited to regional trade, the reform imposed external stability through a top-down mechanism lacking legitimacy. Drawing on unpublished archives from the French Ministry of Finance (SAEF) and using the Mundell-Fleming trilemma as an analytical lens, the article shows how French authorities prioritized exchange rate stability and capital mobility over monetary autonomy. Far from a step towards sovereignty, the reform reaffirmed imperial interests under the façade of technical modernization. Three concerns motivated this decision: the discrediting of the colonial franc, Ethiopia's demand for settlement mechanisms, and France's strategic imperative to maintain a foothold in the Horn of Africa. The resulting arrangement created 'stability without sovereignty', a structured dependency that was monetary (via a rigid dollar peg), institutional (under French Treasury oversight), and commercial (through interdependence with Ethiopia). The 1949 reform thus exemplifies how a currency board transformed colonial dependence into a tool of economic and geopolitical engineering, prefiguring postcolonial monetary logics.

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.

Violent conflicts and learning outcomes: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

World Development
Mhamed Ben Salah and Kritika Saxena

This study assesses the impact of violent conflicts on learning outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa using data on standardized test scores and conflict events from ten countries. Our findings demonstrate that exposure to violent conflict events experienced since birth significantly reduces pupils' proficiency in reading and mathematics. The timing of exposure and the nature of conflict events influence the extent of these effects. Violent conflicts, particularly those causing higher casualties and infrastructure destruction, experienced during early childhood prior to primary school entrance, and to a lesser extent during schooling, significantly hamper learning. These adverse effects remain consistent across pupils' socio-economic backgrounds, indicating that conflicts do not exacerbate existing disparities in learning outcomes. Moreover, conflicts affect female enrollment, though their precise impact on the gender gap in learning outcomes is less clear. Our analysis reveals that damaged school infrastructure and territorial development serve as primary conduits through which conflicts disrupt learning. This research sheds light on the multifaceted impact of violent conflicts on education and highlights the need to address both immediate and long-term consequences for human capital development in conflict-affected regions.

Competition and payments to African chiefs on the Gold Coast during the slave trade, 1679–1704

The Economic History Review
Jose Rowell Corpuz

The Royal African Company of England's royal privileges and monopoly to trade in West Africa became uncertain after the Glorious Revolution in 1688. This uncertainty led to increased competition from other English merchants and improved the bargaining position of African chiefs in West Africa. Documenting the Company's payments to African chiefs on the seventeenth-century Gold Coast, I find that payments to African chiefs increased after 1688, particularly to those whose cooperation was most important in deterring other merchants from competing with the Company. Head chiefs (e.g. kings, queens, princes) received the lion's share of payments, especially European cloth – the most expensive type of cloth in the Company records at the time.

The main global cultural differences today evolved from environment-related historical agricultural patterns

World Development

Michael Minkov, Plamen Akaliyski and Anneli Kaasa

Decades of research have demonstrated that many cultural differences between modern nations are associated with a single dimension of culture, called “individualism-collectivism” (IDV-COLL) or various other terms (including Schwartz’s “embeddedness”), contrasting Northwestern Europe plus the English-speaking countries with countries at low geographic latitudes. IDV cultures are characterized by greater individual freedom (especially reproductive and religious), rule of law, and human rights than COLL ones. Despite a partial worldwide shift toward IDV, these country differences are relatively stable. Previous research explains them as a function of differences in wealth, climate, pathogen prevalence, Western Church policies, and more. We test a new theory: prevalent types of agriculture 100 years ago and earlier still explain IDV-COLL differences. We analyze two strongly correlated IDV-COLL versions, by Minkov-Kaasa and by Schwartz, as well as a new measure of objective COLL-IDV for 84 nations, consisting of household size, gender inequality, LGBT rights, and rule of law. We also use the Minkov-Kaasa IDV-COLL index for the 50 US states. For all national IDV-COLL/COLL-IDV measures, across the whole country sample, and across 35 culturally independent nations (thus avoiding autocorrelation), historically prevalent dairy farming is associated with IDV, whereas nomadic herding and shifting cultivation are associated with COLL. Across 48 US states, historically prevalent dairy farming predicts IDV, plantations predict COLL. Agriculture always produces the strongest direct effects. The effects of the other predictors are inconsistent, with the seeming exception of wealth. Yet, some environmental predictors have a distal effect on IDV-COLL, mostly through the mediation of agricultural types.

“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.

Women’s rights and the gender migration gap

World Development

Jerg Gutmann, Léa Marchal and Betül Simsek

This is the first global study of how institutionally entrenched gender discrimination affects the gender migration gap using data on 158 origin and 37 destination countries over the period 1961–2019. We estimate a gravity equation derived from a RUM model of migration that accounts for migrants’ gender. Instrumental variable estimates indicate that increasing gender equality in economic or political rights generally deepens the gap, i.e., it reduces female emigration relative to that of men. Studying heterogeneity across income levels, we find that higher-income countries drive this average effect. In contrast, increased gender equality in rights reduces the gender migration gap in lower-income countries by facilitating female emigration.

Developmental Dictatorship in East Asia as Model for Africa? The Era Park Chung-hee in South Korea (1963–1979) in Comparison to the Era Paul Kagame in Rwanda (2000–Today)

South African Journal of Economics
Ralph Wrobel

Rwanda is among the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, often discussed in the context of a 'development state'. This paper examines whether Rwanda can be classified as a 'developmental dictatorship', a term closely associated with South Korea. It compares Rwanda's development under Paul Kagame (2000–2024) with South Korea's under Park Chung-hee (1963–1979). Although both countries share similarities in their developmental preconditions and the motivations of their leaders, their policies differ significantly. Park Chung-hee focused on industrialization through Five-Year Plans, whereas Kagame emphasizes creating favourable business conditions. Consequently, South Korea has achieved significant wealth, whereas Rwanda remains a Less Developed Country, though both exemplify successful 'developmental dictatorships'.

Africans Championed Free Trade: Violence, Sovereignty, and Competition in the Era of Atlantic Slave Trade

The Journal of African History
Ana Lucia Araujo

This article examines the central role of West Central Africa in the development of a global capitalist economy during the eighteenth century. Using a rich and overlooked set of records in English, Portuguese, and French, the article explains that rulers and brokers on the Loango coast championed ideas and practices of free trade and free markets from the rise of the Atlantic slave trade through at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The article shows that European slave traders opposed a free market by fiercely competing to obtain full control of the trade in African captives along the Atlantic Africa. In contrast, the West Central African states of Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango, located north of the Congo River, fully embraced free trade and free markets during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.

The history that moves us: Colonial duration, era of occupation, and migration

Economic History of Developing Regions
Edward Kosack and Kristina Sargent

Colonialism has important effects for former colonies, and despite the long colonial history between Europe and Africa, the nuances of the impacts of that history are relatively understudied. The current treatment of colonial ties as a binary relationship is incomplete and misleading because of this long and varied history. Using data for African migration from 1960 to 2000, we find that the longer the colonial relationship, the more likely a person will be to migrate to a European colonizer. This influence only appears once colonization length passes around 66 years. Additionally, the era of original colonization influences movement: places colonized during the 'Scramble for Africa' see less migration than those colonized before or after. Colonialism was much more complicated than existing work allows and warrants a more in-depth study of these relationships and their persistent impacts.

Decolonizing Archival Narratives: Exploring Digital Bias in the Catalogs of Portuguese-Colonized African Territories

The Journal of African History
Agata Bloch, Guillem Martos Oms and Clodomir Santana

This study discusses the intersection between Black/African Digital Humanities, and computational methods, including natural language processing (NLP) and generative artificial intelligence (AI). We have structured the narrative around four critical themes: biases in colonial archives; postcolonial digitization; linguistic and representational inequalities in Lusophone digital content; and technical limitations of AI models when applied to the archival records from Portuguese-colonized African territories (1640–1822). Through three case studies relating to the Africana Collection at the Arquivo

Histórico Ultramarino, the Dembos Collection, and Sebestyén's Caculo Cangola Collection, we demonstrate the infrastructural biases inherent in contemporary computational tools. This begins with the systematic underrepresentation of African archives in global digitization efforts and ends with biased AI models that have not been trained on African historical corpora.

Women's Livelihood and Status Struggles in Tabora after the End of Slavery, 1920s–60

The Journal of African History

Felicitas Becker and Salvatory Nyanto

This paper examines the life trajectories, social contexts and living conditions of women of uncertain status in post-slavery, colonial-era Tabora, with a focus on those involved in the production and consumption of beer. It thereby searches insights into the aftermath of slavery in this region, particularly for women. It reflects on the persistent social unease surrounding slavery and its aftermath, and on the way it shapes and limits sources, arguing that a focus on post-slavery is nevertheless productive. Set in context, brewers' life stories provide a vivid illustration of a competitive urban environment, the chances for self-emancipation that it offered, and the concomitant challenges and dangers. They thereby also enable fresh insight into the social history of alcohol and of urban women in colonial Africa. We find evidence of more successful brewing careers than existing studies would predict, but also of very stark vulnerability and persistent quests for safety in family networks. This spread of outcomes highlights the contingent nature of emancipation and the endlessly varied ways in which social constraints and personal motivations combined in individual lives.

Colonialism, Governance, and Fisheries: Perspectives from Lake Malawi

The Journal of African History

Milo Gough, Bryson Nkhoma, Elias Chirwa, David Wilson, Charles Knapp, Tracy Morse and Wapulumuka Mulwafu

This piece explores the parallel development of two fisheries management regimes in mid-twentieth-century Lake Malawi: one imposed by the British colonial government over the lake and the other by Senior Chief Mkanjira focused on Mbenji Island. The parallel development of these regimes provides opportunity for close analysis of how fisheries management centred on different knowledge and practices led to distinctive legacies of governance legitimacy and efficacy. Given the increasing recognition that Indigenous knowledge is crucial to the future sustainability of fisheries globally, we contend that it is imperative to recognise the ways in which colonial pasts have embedded knowledge hierarchies and exclusionary decision-making processes within national fisheries governance regimes that continue to obstruct capacities to bring different knowledges, practices, and management approaches together effectively and appropriately.

WORKING PAPERS

On the Persistence of Persistence: Lessons from Long-term Trends in African Institutions

Marvin Suesse and Morten Jerven

An influential strand of literature within economics and economic history called ‘persistence studies’ argues that low material living standards in African countries today were determined by institutional choices made in the past. However, the lack of consistent annual data on GDP per capita or institutional variables has meant that this literature has been largely silent as to whether their proposed relationships hold throughout the period it studies. This has made persistence studies vulnerable to criticisms of making leaps of faith or contributing to a ‘compression of history’. Here, we draw on a data set of tax revenues for African polities for the period 1900-2015, with which we proxy the institutional capacity of a state. We then test whether some of the most influential determinants stressed in the persistence literature exert a consistent effect on our measure of institutions. Our findings suggest that the effect of population density and colonizer identity on institutions is not persistent. We find mixed results for precolonial centralization and ethnic fractionalization, while results for slave exports and settler mortality are more in accordance with theory. Overall, our results support the view that historical persistence should be measured, not simply assumed.

The 1992-93 EMS Crisis and the South: Lessons from the Franc Zone System and the 1994 CFA Franc Devaluation

Rodrigue Dossou-Cadja

The January 11, 1994, CFA franc devaluation stands as the most significant macroeconomic reform in nearly a century of the Franc Zone system, particularly following the political independences of former African French colonies in the 1960s. Whilst conventional narratives attribute it to fiscal excesses in major economies like Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, newly uncovered archival data from the Banque de France, the Bank of England, the Bundesbank (the latter two sourced from Eichengreen and Naef, 2022), and the IMF challenge this view. Instead, I reinstate the devaluation within a much broader common African-European experience: the 1992–93 European Monetary System (EMS) crisis. Evidence unveils its critical role in shoring up the French franc's credibility amidst the crisis and suggests a new ‘democratic Franc Zone's Transition Committee’ within the Banque de France/Eurosystem for future governance.

Fertilizer subsidies in Malawi: From past to present

Todd Benson, Joachim De Weerd, Jan Duchoslav and Winford Masanjala

Malawi has been at the center of the debate on agricultural input subsidies in Africa ever since it significantly expanded its fertilizer subsidy program about two decades ago. When it did so, Malawi was a trailblazer, receiving international attention for seemingly leveraging the subsidy program to move the country from a situation characterized by food deficits and widespread hunger to crop production surpluses. In this paper we trace the history of Malawi's subsidy program over the past 70 years, describing how the country arrived at that watershed moment earlier this century and how the subsidy program has developed since. We show how donor support for the program has wavered and how external pressure to remove the subsidy has repeatedly been unsuccessful. We also demonstrate how over the years the program's total fiscal burden has fluctuated significantly. However, we find that since the expansion of the subsidy program in 2004, the fiscal costs of the program have shown little correlation with the maize harvest that same agricultural season. We show that the subsidy program has succeeded in raising awareness about the value of the fertilizer for increased crop productivity. However, despite its continued prominence in the country's agricultural policy, most Malawian smallholder do not manage to grow sufficient maize to feed their households throughout the year, and every year millions depend on food assistance during the worst months of the lean season.

Ancient Technological Diffusion and Comparative Development: The Case of Pottery

Marcello D'Amato and Francesco Flaviano Russo

We explore the long-term economic and institutional consequences of an early exposure to a fundamental technological innovation in human history, pottery. Using a data set on radiocarbon-dated pottery discoveries, we show that regions that were exposed to pottery earlier have been subsequently characterized by higher historical population density and by an earlier development of complex political organizations. These results hold after controlling for the timing of the Neolithic transition, bio-geographic variables, and migratory distance from East Africa. We argue that the dual role of pottery, both as a cooking and fermentation tool that improved nutritional efficiency and as a storage technology that enabled surplus management, shifted Malthusian constraints and contributed to the emergence of social stratification, institutional complexity, and early state formation.

From Kin to Creed: Missions and the Reconfiguration of Social and Moral Order in Colonial Congo

Augustin Bergeron

This paper studies how colonial religious institutions reshaped traditional social structures in Africa. Focusing on the Congo, I examine the long-term effects of Christian missions that sought to replace kin-based authority with European-Christian notions of social and moral order. I combine newly digitized data on historical mission locations with an original survey of 975 respondents, measuring attitudes toward family and coethnics, social network composition, referral behavior in a job experiment, and moral values. To address concerns about endogenous mission placement, I construct two counterfactuals: missions that were initially established but later abandoned, and simulated locations that were historically suitable but never selected. I find that exposure to missions persistently reduced bias toward kin and coethnics and weakened the role of kinship ties in networks and referrals. It also eroded communal moral values, such as loyalty to one's group and deference to authority, without a corresponding rise in universal moral principles. Instead, these shifts reflect a redirection of identity and moral obligation from kinship and ethnicity toward religious affiliation. Historical records on mission personnel and infrastructure point to religious instruction and education as key transmission channels. Together, the findings suggest that colonial religious institutions profoundly reshaped the social and moral organization of colonized societies.

Climate Change, Conflict, and the Risk of Economic Collapse in Africa

Joel Ferguson, Marshall Burke, Edward Miguel and Solomon M. Hsiang

Is human-caused climate change likely to trigger enduring economic decline in modern societies? We study whether changes in violent conflict and economic growth caused by warming could interact to degrade economic opportunities and trap African countries in poverty. We provide evidence of an emerging high-conflict and low-growth "poverty trap" equilibrium in Africa and describe theoretically how such an equilibrium could result from warming. We then combine historical data on temperature, growth, and conflict with projections from a large ensemble of global climate models to evaluate the risk that warming and subsequent conflict could push African economies into a regime of sustained negative economic growth. We find that the risk of such "economic collapse" is material in a moderate-to-high emissions scenario. We estimate that in Africa, a current "high" emissions trajectory (RCP 7.0) may increase the incidence of conflict 5.1 percentage points (95% CI 0.2-13.0) and increase the share of countries with net negative GDP growth this century by 12.2 percentage points (95% CI 2.0-27.5). We calculate that roughly 82% of this additional conflict risk and 14% of projected GDP losses are due to the interacting effects between these two outcomes, underscoring the importance of accounting for their indirect effects and feedbacks. Our findings suggest an unprecedented scale of emissions mitigation, economic policy innovation or institutional investment that would be required to contain the risk of catastrophic human impacts from climate change in many African countries.