African Economic History Network Newsletter

Issue #71 August 2026

The AEHN newsletter keeps you informed about the latest news and upcoming events in African economic history.

In this issue:

If you would like to publicise your research, achievements, seminars, events, or a panel for an upcoming conference, please email 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 19TH ANNUAL MEETING

University of Gothenburg
23-24 October 2026

The 19th Annual African Economic History Network (AEHN) Meeting, in collaboration with the Unit for Economic History at the University of Gothenburg, will be held at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, on 23-24 October 2026.

The programme is now available on the conference website: https://www.gu.se/en/economy-society/programme

For all practical information, including discounted accommodation rates for conference's participants, please visit the page: https://www.gu.se/en/economy-society/practical-information

Organising committee:

Klas Rönnbäck
Stefania Galli
Kondwani Happy Ngoma
Bezawit Abebe
Giulia Martini

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.

Space, Capital, and the Longue Durée of Old Calabar

Joseph Godlewski

The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra demonstrates that economic history is as much spatial as it is metric. Tracing five centuries of urban and architectural practice in coastal south-eastern Nigeria, the book shows how the built landscapes of Old Calabar recorded the region's deep integration into Atlantic and global commerce long before European colonization.

Rethinking Early Globalization: How Indigenous Peoples Shaped Colonial Economies at the Cape and Hudson Bay

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

The story of early modern globalization is usually told as one of European expansion, with Indigenous peoples cast as passive bystanders. Drawing on a reciprocal comparison of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape and the Hudson's Bay Company in subarctic Canada, we argue that the Khoe and the Cree were active architects of these trade systems – setting prices, controlling supply, and shaping the very ecologies on which European commerce depended.

Between settler colonialism, regionalisation and Africanisation: the making of the Nairobi Stock Exchange, 1954–1970

Mariusz Lukasiewicz

The expansion of the financial sector was an important dimension of decolonisation in East Africa. Yet the financial intermediaries through which capital circulated remained shaped by colonial hierarchies, regional commercial networks and unequal access to financial services. Examining the Nairobi Stock Exchange during its formative decades, a new article explores how securities trading became intertwined with the wider political and economic restructuring of Kenya during the late colonial and early postcolonial period.

AEHN WORKING PAPER SERIES

The AEHN welcomes submissions to our 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 were 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).

News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

FEN Economics Workshop 2026

The Economics of Social Conflict: Historical Insights and New Evidence

Universidad de Chile – Faculty of Economics and Business (FEN) – Department of Economics Santiago, Chile

November 26–27, 2026

Workshop overview

The Department of Economics at the Facultad de Economía y Negocios, Universidad de Chile, invites submissions to an international workshop on the economics of social conflict. The event will bring together researchers in economic history and political economy to present work on how social and armed conflicts originate, evolve, and affect long-term development.

The workshop will feature keynote lectures by Michela Giorcelli (UCLA), Andy Ferrara (University of Pittsburgh), and Roya Talibova (Harvard Kennedy School), alongside research papers selected through this call, presented in discussant-led sessions.

This workshop aims to foster dialogue across disciplines and methodologies, including historical analysis, causal inference, and quantitative evidence. It emphasizes the links between social disputes, institutional change, political power, and the economic consequences of conflict — and seeks to advance our understanding of how different forms of conflict emerge, how societies and institutions respond, and how these processes shape inequality, state formation, and economic development over the long run.

Topics of interest

We particularly encourage submissions on (but not limited to):

- Conflicts over labor rights, gender equality, racial and ethnic inclusion, and access to resources or political power
- Causes and consequences of wars, military institutions, and political violence
- Economic and demographic impacts of armed conflict
- Legacies of war on fertility, health, and migration
- The role of military service in shaping social mobility, identity, and citizenship
- Interaction between political institutions, conflict, and long-run development
- Strategic behavior of political elites under social pressures or wartime demands

Paper submission

We invite submissions of papers, including preliminary work, provided they are submitted in paper format.

To submit, please fill out the online form at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSemsPAIK0nQ_QhdNoiLxHG3oli-oVkK5oGdV4VPwwL_C8TURw/viewform

Key dates

Submission deadline: 30 August 2026

Notification of acceptance: 7 September 2026
Confirmation deadline: 30 September 2026
Workshop dates: 26–27 November 2026

Financial support

Limited financial support may be available for accepted paper presenters. Please indicate your need for financial support in the submission form.

More Information

Please visit our website https://few.fen.uchile.cl for more information.

We warmly welcome any questions about submissions or participation — please don't hesitate to reach out at few@fen.uchile.cl or directly to the organizers, Francisco Pino (fjpino@fen.uchile.cl) and Ariadna Jou (ajou@fen.uchile.cl).

2nd International Congress of CIEDEC

Economic Development in Historical Perspective: New Data, Methods and Evidence

Universidade Lusíada, Lisbon, Portugal

11-12 December 2026

CIEDEC — Centre for Research in Economics and Comparative Development, Universidade Lusíada, invites submissions for the 2nd International Congress of CIEDEC, to be held in Lisbon on 11-12 December 2026.

The Congress aims to bring together scholars working on economic history, comparative development, long-run growth, institutions, inequality, living standards, labour markets, market integration, historical datasets, quantitative methods, and new empirical evidence on economic development in historical perspective.

Submissions are welcome from established scholars, early-career researchers and doctoral students. We welcome full papers, working papers, work in progress and ongoing research projects.

The main event will include a keynote lecture by Leticia Arroyo Abad, CUNY - Queens College & Graduate Center, CEPR, and Groningen Growth and Development Centre, and a special lecture by Nuno Palma, University of Manchester, Arthur Lewis Lab for Comparative Development, and CEPR, on “How a Nation Was Born: Brazilian Economic Growth, 1574-1920”.

Key dates:

Opening of submissions: 30 June 2026
Submission deadline: 30 September 2026
Notification of acceptance: October 2026
Conference: 11-12 December 2026

Submissions of abstracts or papers may be made either by e-mail or through the online submission form.

Submission by e-mail: ciedec.2ndIC@edu.ulusiada.pt
Online submission form: https://eventos.lis.ulusiada.pt/2025-2026/2-international-congress-CIEDEC#anchor3
Further information: https://eventos.lis.ulusiada.pt/2025-2026/2-international-congress-CIEDEC

Association of Business Historians Conference 2027

‘Work, Leisure and Wellbeing’

The University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.

Wednesday, 16th to Friday, 18th June 2027

Business History’s central concern is the behaviour of firms, organisations, and entrepreneurs in their contexts and over time. This is inherently linked to the work that people do and how they do it. Although often viewed as the opposite of work, leisure has long been closely connected to business activity. The themes of work and leisure highlight the importance of health and wellbeing. As concepts of physical, mental, social, and environmental health have evolved, so too have the industries that support them (Donzé and Fernández Pérez, 2019). Examining these relationships provides valuable insights into the historical development of business, entrepreneurship, and the wider economy.

The theme of the ABH 2027 conference is ‘Work, Leisure and Wellbeing’. We invite scholars whose research engages with this theme to submit their work and welcome papers and panels exploring any aspect of business history.

Individual paper and session submissions

The programme committee will consider both individual papers and proposals for entire panels. Individual paper proposals should include a one-page abstract (up to 300 words), the presentation title, and a brief biographical note. Panel proposals should include a cover letter stating the panel title and rationale, the name of its contact person; one-page (300-word) abstracts and authors' CVs for each paper; and a list of preferred panel chairs and commentators with contact information. We encourage both developmental and more mature papers. **Please send your application to Dr. Tom Buckley at ABH@sussex.ac.uk by 29th January 2027.**

Poster submissions

The conference welcomes poster proposals from graduate students on all aspects of business history. Poster presenters will normally be in either the First or Second Year of their PhD and are ideal for students presenting work at the Tony Slaven Doctoral Workshop, allowing them to showcase their research to the wider conference audience. Please apply for the poster session and the Tony Slaven Workshop separately.

Poster application should include the title of your PhD project, an abstract (300 words) that explains the background to the poster; the questions addressed; the sources and methods employed; and likely conclusions, and a current CV. **Please send your applications to Dr Tom Buckley at ABH@sussex.ac.uk by 26th March 2027. A style guide will be circulated to selected poster presenters. Approved posters must be submitted to ABH@sussex.ac.uk by 1st June 2027.**

Tony Slaven Doctoral Workshop

The ABH will hold its fourteenth annual Tony Slaven Doctoral Workshop on Wednesday, 16th June 2027. This event immediately precedes the ABH Conference and will take place at the University of Sussex Business School. The Workshop adopts a broad definition of business history, welcoming students from fields including the history of management and organisations, international trade and investment, financial and economic history, agricultural history, non-profit organisations, government–industry relations, accounting history, social studies of technology, and the history of management and labour. We embrace students researching any era or region of history. Students at any stage of their doctoral studies are encouraged to apply.

Your application should be no more than 4 pages sent together in a single computer file:

1) a one-page CV;

2) one page stating the name(s) of the student's supervisor(s), the title of the theses (a proposed title is fine), the university and department where the student is registered and the date of commencement of thesis registration;
3) an abstract of the work to be presented.

You may ask questions and send your applications to the Workshop organiser Dr Ian Jones at ian.g.jones@sheffield.ac.uk by 26th March 2027. Please use the subject line 'Tony Slaven Workshop'.

Coleman Prize 2027

The ABH is pleased to announce that the 2027 Coleman Prize is open to PhD dissertations in Business History (broadly defined) having either a British subject or completed at a British university. All dissertations completed in the previous two calendar years (2025 and 2026) are eligible. In keeping with the ABH's broad understanding of business history, applications are strongly encouraged from candidates in economic history, social history, labour history, intellectual history, cultural history, environmental history, the history of science and technology, the history of medicine, or any other subfield.

To apply for the Coleman Prize, supervisors are encouraged to nominate recent PhDs. Self-nominations are also strongly welcomed. **Please send a PDF including the title of your PhD dissertation and a brief abstract (up to 2 double-spaced pages) to Dr Zane Jennings at zane.jennings@sas.ac.uk by 19th February 2027.**

The abstract should make clear the dissertation's contribution to business history. Longlisted candidates will be requested to submit electronic copies of their dissertations by 19th March 2027. Finalists will be notified by 7th May 2027. It is a condition of eligibility for the Prize that finalists will present their findings in person at the Association's annual conference. A full list of past winners can be found here: https://www.theabh.org/previous-winners

We look forward to receiving your applications and welcoming you in Sussex.
The ABH 2027 Conference Organising Committee

Call for papers for a Special Edition
Economic History of Developing Regions (EHDR)
Economic Shrinking in Development

Economic shrinking—defined as a year of negative per capita income growth—is a recurrent yet understudied feature of long-run economic development, both in the past and in the present. Economies differ in the frequency and severity of economic shrinking they experience, as well as in their ability to cope with it. While growth processes and structural transformation have been extensively examined, the causes, consequences, and governance of economic shrinking remain comparatively unexplored. The aim of this special issue is to place economic shrinking at the centre of inquiry, inviting fresh perspectives from economic history, development economics, political economy, and related fields.

We invite theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions that advance the understanding of economic shrinking and its role in broader development dynamics. Submissions may investigate shrinking from multiple perspectives, including: growth accounting, institutional change and policy responses, demographic pressures, technological capability and innovation, macroeconomic fragility, public finance constraints, external shocks, conflict, climate events, or long-term historical patterns. Comparative and cross- country approaches are welcome, as are studies that prioritise temporal depth and case study experiences. Papers examining how people and governments have responded to economic shrinking, especially in terms of their expectations, views on inequality, and well-being, are also welcome.

We encourage contributions that examine shrinking not only as a macroeconomic outcome but also as a social, institutional and political process. Papers may explore how societies absorb, adapt to, or transform through shrinking; how social capabilities evolve in the face of downturns; or how governance and policy strategies mitigate the frequency, duration, or depth of shrinking episodes. We also welcome methodological contributions, including approaches to measuring shrinking, identifying its regimes, or linking descriptive and causal analyses.

The special issue seeks contributions covering a wide range of geographic and historical contexts, with no restriction on time period or income level. The only restriction is that the contributions need to concern developing countries in the Global South (understood by the journal as countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia). Both cross-country and country-specific studies are of interest, as are North/South comparisons and analyses combining qualitative historical evidence with econometrics, archival work with quantitative reconstruction, or mixed-methods designs. We particularly encourage submissions from early career and female scholars, as well as researchers from developing countries.

For enquiries regarding suitability, scope, or fit with the special issue, please contact the guest editors.

Submission Instructions

Authors are invited to submit by 1st September 2026 an extended abstract of approximately 1500 words to the guest editors summarizing the research question, data, proposed methods for the analysis, and preliminary results (optional) in sufficient detail to warrant an evaluation. Each proposal will be reviewed for scientific merit and feasibility. Proposals will be selected on the basis of three criteria:

- **Relevance to the research project**
- **Strength of theoretical or empirical contribution, and**
- **Clarity of writing**

Around 10 proposals will be selected and provided with feedback from the editors, along with an invitation to submit full draft papers for a workshop scheduled for April 2027.

The workshop will be held either online or on site at the University of Manchester, depending on available funding. Authors will then be invited to submit full papers to the journal's submission system by 1 June 2027. All submissions will undergo double-blind peer review in accordance with the journal's standards. The journal's editorial team will after peer review make all final decisions on special issue content. Publication is expected in Spring 2028.

Special Issue Editor(s)

Martin Andersson, University of Lund; martin.andersson@ekh.lu.se
Antonio Savoia, University of Manchester; antonio.savoia@manchester.ac.uk

Call for papers for a Special Edition
Economic History of Developing Regions (EHDR)
Business and Financial History of Colonialism

We invite submissions for a special issue of Economic History of Developing Regions on the Business and Financial History of Colonialism. The special issue examines how colonial and imperial systems mobilised capital, organised production and labour, generated returns, and distributed gains and costs within and between colonies and metropoles. We interpret these themes broadly. Contributions may for example examine banks, capital markets, firm performance, labour organization, or institutional change.

A key criterium for consideration for the special issue is that the research speaks to the economic/business history of colonial rule of countries in developing regions.

The issue is primarily focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and welcomes research from across the colonial world, including Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- colonial investment, capital flows, and the financing of expansion, administration, infrastructure, and extraction;
- banks, stock markets, investors, insurers, public finance, taxation, debt, and monetary regimes;
- colonial firms, concessionary companies, plantations, mining enterprises, and trading houses: their performance, profitability, productivity, and business strategies;
- the recruitment and management of labour;
- the distribution of colonial gains and costs across firms, investors, workers, taxpayers, consumers, colonies, and metropoles.

We welcome contributions from economic history, business history, financial history, and related fields, and are especially interested in quantitative and archival research. Both case studies and comparative papers are welcome. We particularly encourage submissions from early-career researchers and scholars working on underrepresented regions.

Abstracts of 400–600 words are due by 16 August 2026.

Submission Instructions

Authors should submit an abstract of 400–600 words, including their affiliation and contact information. Full paper submissions will be invited after review of the abstracts by the special issue editors. Proposals will be selected on the basis of three criteria: (i) relevance to the special issue, (ii) strength of theoretical or empirical contribution, and (iii) clarity of writing.
All full submissions will undergo double-blind peer review in accordance with the journal's standards.

The journal's editorial team will after peer review make all final decisions on special issue content. Publication is expected in 2028.

For enquiries regarding suitability, scope, or fit with the special issue, please contact the corresponding guest editor Amaury de Vicq.

Special Issue Editor(s)

Amaury de Vicq, University of Groningen;amaury.de.vicq@rug.nl
Jutta Bolt, University of Groningen; j.bolt@rug.nl
Oscar Gelderblom, University of Antwerp; Oscar.Gelderblom@uantwerpen.be

Read the Instructions for Authors on Economic History of Developing Regions
Submit an article to Economic History of Developing Regions

CALL FOR SESSIONS

World Economic History Congress 2028

Montevideo
24-28 July 2028

The International Economic History Association (IEHA) has opened the first Call for Sessions for the 2028 World Congress. The theme of the Congress is World Powers and Conflicts, but submissions are welcome on the economic and social histories of all places and periods. We especially encourage sessions that adopt a comparative perspective across countries or regions.

Sessions may be proposed by any member of the international economic history community, whatever their institutional affiliation or status, as well as by scholars in related disciplines.

The submission deadline is September 14, 2026. The selected sessions will be announced on December 18, 2026.

For more details about the call for sessions, go to: https://wehcmontevideo2028.org/call-for-sessions/

OPPORTUNITIES

Postdoctoral Fellowship Opportunities in Economic History

London School of Economics

Apply by September 2026

The Department of Economic History at LSE would be pleased to support suitable applications for the following postdoctoral fellowships:

The **British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship**: a three-year award made to outstanding early-career researchers in the humanities or social sciences. Applicants are expected to have completed their PhD viva between 1st April 2024 and 1st April 2027. More information is available here: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/postdoctoral-fellowships/

The deadline for applications is **30th September 2026.**

The **Marie Sklodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships**: two different types of fellowship are offered but, in both cases, applicants should have a PhD degree at time of deadline. Full information can be found here: https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/postdoctoral-fellowships

The deadline for applications is ***9th September 2026.***

Please check the eligibility criteria for each scheme and, if eligible, ***please contact Professor Leigh Gardner (L.A.Gardner@lse.ac.uk) to discuss your application.***

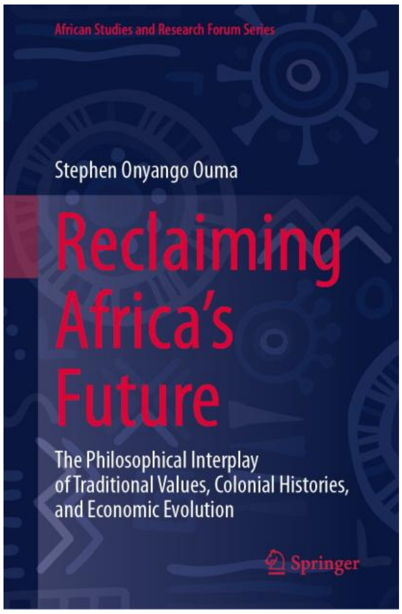
New research in African economic history

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Reclaiming Africa's Future

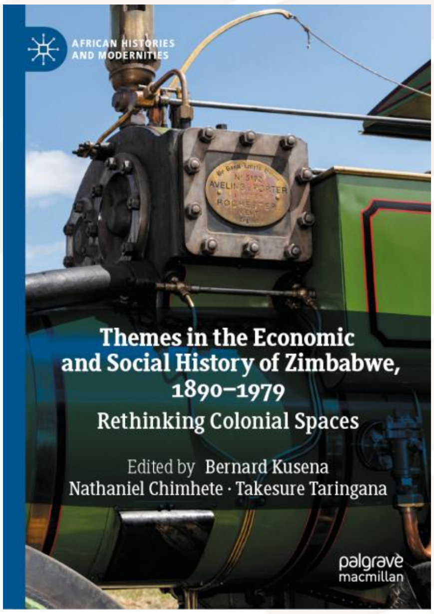
The Philosophical Interplay of Traditional Values, Colonial Histories, and Economic Evolution

Stephen Onyango Ouma



This monograph provides a transdisciplinary exploration of postcolonial African development and sovereignty. Situated in the broader context of Africa's post-independence condition, where colonialism's formal end gave way to neocolonial realities, the book argues that understanding this condition requires not only historical investigation but philosophical reorientation. Chapters span a wide analytical terrain; from colonial-era legal and political structures to the ongoing economic and digital colonization of the continent. By threading together discussions on corruption, religion, youth movements, gender, Pan-Africanism, and trade, the book constructs a holistic and intersectional narrative of Africa's unfinished liberation. The author builds on the works of Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Samir Amin, Walter Rodney, and Achille Mbembe, proposing that the path forward lies in epistemic sovereignty, cultural reclamation, economic delinking, and continental unity.

Merging African history, political theory, cultural studies, and global economics to provide a holistic critique and vision of Africa's postcolonial condition and potential, this volume will be of interest to students and scholars of African studies, philosophy, postcolonial studies, development studies, sociology, and global studies, practitioners in African Union institutions, NGOs, and think tanks, as well as anyone generally interested in African liberation discourse.



Themes in the Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890-1979

Rethinking Colonial Spaces

Bernard Kusena, Nathaniel Chimhete, Takesure Taringana

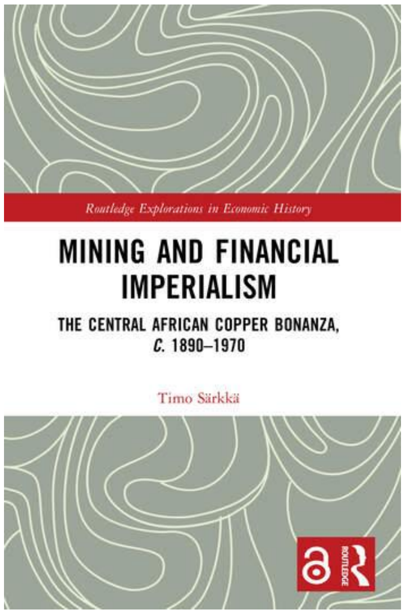
This book captures Zimbabwe's economic and social history with a focus on the various colonial categories as they interacted and unfolded. It analyses the complex histories of colonialism by illustrating the points of intersection in and interaction of the various aspects of colonialism. Chapters within the book demonstrate how various aspects of colonial society — environmental, ideological, and economic — related to each other.

This book departs from earlier similar publications in how various themes or elements in society were interwoven. Existing titles in this area tend to isolate a single theme, such as environmental or women's history, from other categories. In reality, colonial spaces, however, did not exist in isolation. The social, economic, political, ideological and environmental factors, for instance, were intricately interconnected. The book includes topics such as health infrastructure and urbanization in Southern Rhodesia, encounters between plastic manufacturing industries and the Customs Union, the development and maintenance of Rhodesia's road infrastructure, livestock diseases, the conversion of indigenous lands into wildlife sanctuaries, and the brutalization of workers.

Mining and Financial Imperialism

The Central African Copper Bonanza, c. 1890–1970

Timo Särkkä



Mining finance houses were substantial public corporations with access to money markets in the City of London, the world's leading capital market for mining. These institutions became dominant at the inception of colonial rule and, in varying forms, remained so throughout the twentieth century.

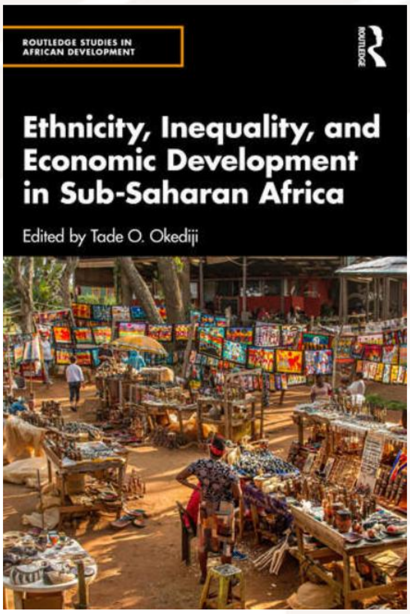
Drawing on a rich corpus of primary sources, this book analyses the Western colonial origins of the mining industry and its post-colonial legacies in the Central African Copperbelt. It provides insights into the operations of the global business of mining: in particular, how these processes took place, why they were considered desirable by various interest groups, and the impact that these processes continue to have on physical and human environments in parts of the world where they took place. It also turns its gaze to the City of London looking at who the financiers were and the nature of the power which they wielded. A long-term perspective on mining finance reveals that thus far the colonial governments have been the main focus in the history of imperialism in Central Africa, with little focus in many instances on the mining finance houses which have outlived them.

The book is a significant contribution to the economic, financial and business history of mining and extractive industries, Central Africa, the City of London and early forms of financial capitalism.

Ethnicity, Inequality, and Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Tade O. Okediji

This book uses a multidisciplinary approach to explore the links between ethnicity, inequality, and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.



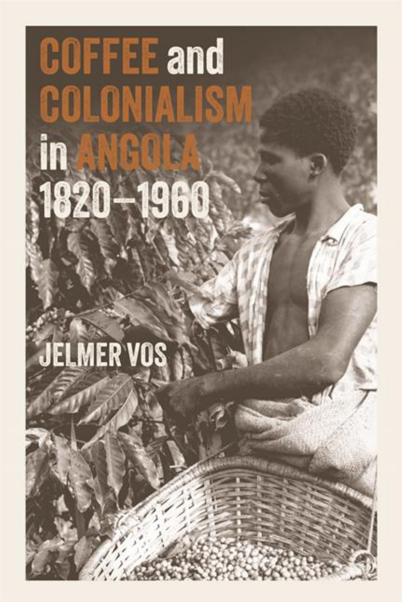
This book shows how ethnic identity influences all aspects of life in African societies, defining access to political institutions and economic resources, resulting in horizontal or structural inequalities. It demonstrates that ethnicity operates both directly and indirectly through political and economic institutions in which the dynamics of ethnic engagement serve as a basis for resource allocation. Drawing on a blend of micro and macro perspectives, this book assesses the economic, cultural, legal, and sociological connections among ethnicity, inequality, and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. Chapters provide a critical framework that grounds ethnic fragmentation as a central agency of underdevelopment and principally focus on three key areas:

- The origins and dynamics of ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa
- Socioeconomic inequality in sub-Saharan Africa and its link to ethnic identity
- The relationship between governance networks and ethnic identity

A distinctive contribution to development literature, this book will be of interest to students and scholars of economics, development studies, geography, anthropology, political science, sociology, and African studies.

Coffee and Colonialism in Angola, 1820-1960

Jelmer Vos



New perspective on Angolan colonial and labour history, which explores how cultivation of coffee, the country's most significant export, shaped one of the oldest commercial frontiers in sub-Saharan Africa.

After the Second World War, Angola became one of the world's largest coffee producers, supplying robusta beans that formed the backbone of popular blends and soluble products consumed by millions worldwide. But each cup of coffee made with Angolan robustas carried with it a legacy of land expropriation and coerced labour. Coffee and Colonialism delves into the systematic exploitation of black workers on white settler plantations in Angola, where labour practices often evoked memories of slavery.

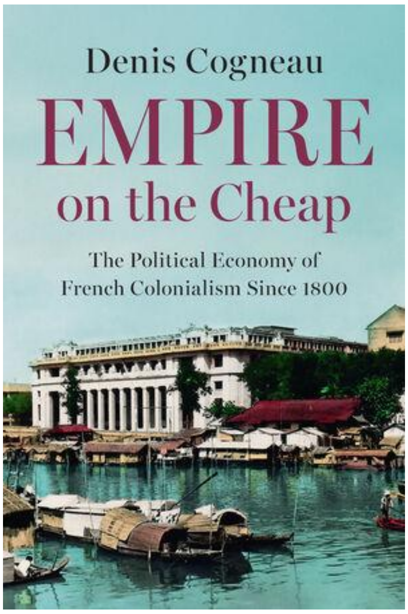
This book traces the origins of Angola's coffee trade to the early nineteenth century, examining how the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade gave rise to a new export-driven economy. As global demand for coffee surged, Portuguese colonizers transformed a thriving peasant economy into a settler-dominated system that, while highly productive, was profoundly exploitative and inefficient. Drawing upon extensive archival research, this work provides a compelling analysis of the intersections between colonialism, labour, property, and global trade, uncovering the political economy underpinning one of Africa's most enduring commodity frontiers.

Empire on the Cheap: The Political Economy of French Colonialism Since 1800

Denis Cogneau

Translated by David Broder

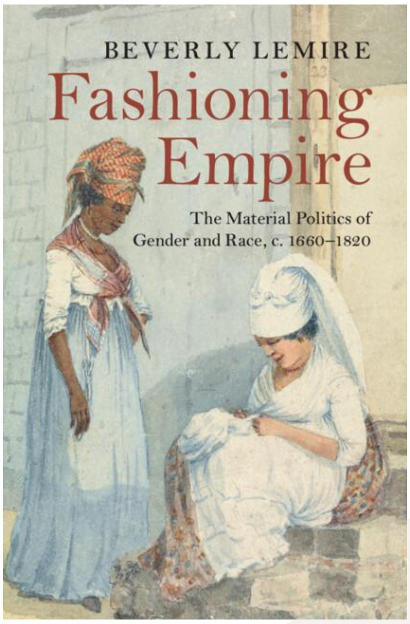
In the nineteenth century, France embarked on the colonization of whole swathes of Africa and Asia. What drove this policy, and what methods did it use to establish and enforce French domination? What disruptive effects did this have on the colonized societies, and what did it mean for their economic and social development? Today, can we say they have been completely decolonized? Empire on the Cheap offers new answers to these ever-controversial questions.

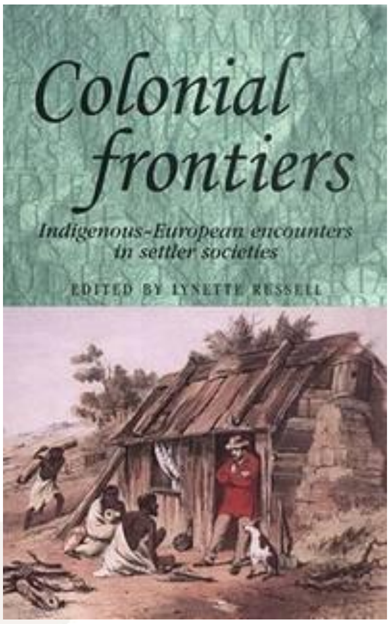


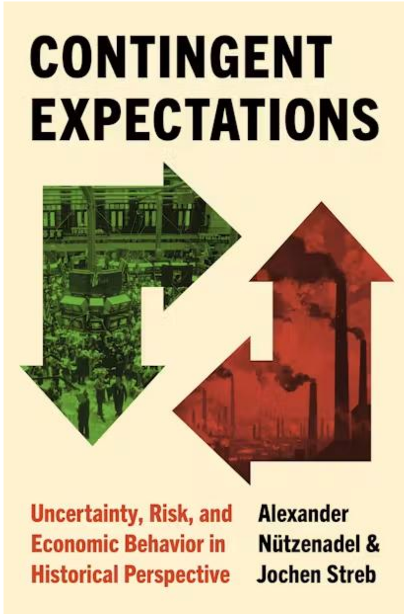
Drawing on extensive archival work and statistical analysis, Denis Cogneau offers a richly detailed description of the colonial states and how they functioned, with a particular focus on issues of taxation, military recruitment, capital flows and inequalities. He shows that the Empire cost France little until the wars of independence following World War II, and that capital from France did not trickle down to the colonies. The French Republic proclaimed its 'civilizing mission', but its rule did not lead to the development of the occupied countries, and instead established violent colonial regimes with ambiguous and sometimes conflicting goals. Such regimes mainly benefited a small minority of French colonists and capitalists. Yet, even after winning independence, nationalist elites in the former colonies most often maintained an authoritarian and deeply unequal state order.

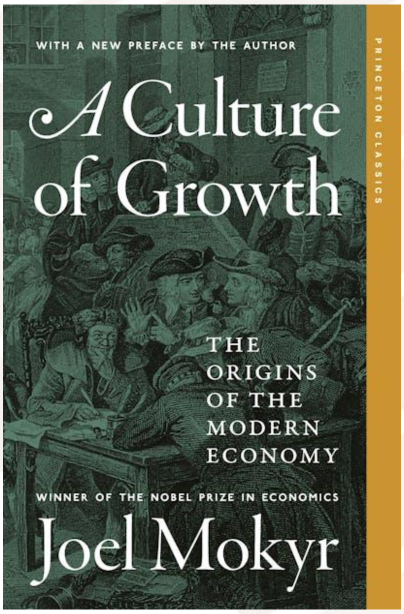
Examining both the evolution of the colonized societies and what has become of them after independence, Cogneau makes a major contribution to our understanding of imperialism, past and present.

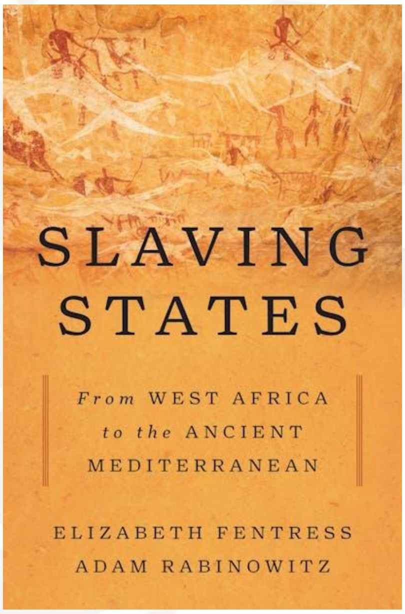
Other new books in economic history

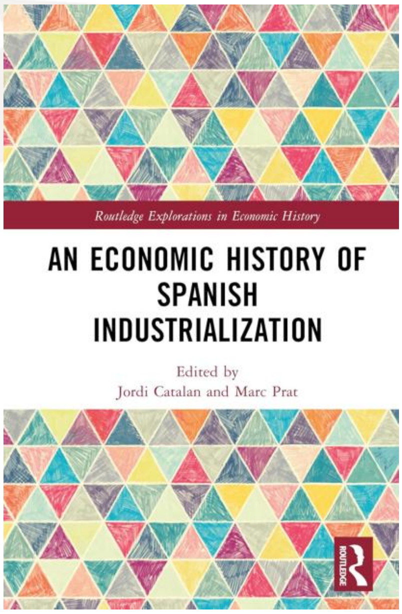












ARTICLES

Catalan capital in the timber trade of Spanish Guinea

Revista De Historia Industrial — Industrial History Review

Jordi Sant Gisbert and Eduard Gargallo

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of historical relations between Catalonia and Spanish Guinea, mostly with regard to the economy, and focusing on the production and export of cocoa. This paper wishes to show how Catalan companies and financial institutions were also fundamental to the expansion of another key economic sector: timber exploitation. A number of Catalan companies were awarded large forestry concessions in Rio Muni and, together with other Basque-funded companies, became the main exporters of colonial timber. These companies (and their subsidiaries) not only extracted timber from the colony but also expanded in the metropolis, where they established sawmills and timber-processing factories. This paper explores the evolution of these companies' activities as well as their internal organization and financial and business links.

Did the Cold War produce development clusters in Africa?

Journal of Development Economics

Paul Castañeda Dower, Gunes Gokmen, Michel Le Breton and Shlomo Weber

We examine the lasting impact of Cold War alignment on African development. To overcome the empirical challenge of ambiguous and interdependent international alliances during the Cold War, we introduce a non-cooperative game of social interactions. Using pre-determined, country-level characteristics to construct payoffs, we identify a unique two-bloc equilibrium partition of the continent. We then assign bloc alignments based on how the partition predicts UN voting patterns. Our empirical results indicate no income differences today between the Western and the Eastern blocs. However, their development paths reflect Cold War ideologies: Western-aligned African countries have greater inequality, financial development, and democracy, but lesser infrastructure, compared to Eastern-aligned ones.

Prices and living standards: evidence from Cape Colony auction rolls

Cliometrica

Leoné Walters, Jonathan Schoots and Johan Fourie

We construct an annual price index for the Cape Colony, 1718–1812, from more than 200,000 transactions recorded in estate-auction rolls. These records allow us to compute Laspeyres indices for a broad set of goods, including productive assets (livestock, equipment, and enslaved persons) and household durables (major, minor, and luxury items). By moving beyond subsistence baskets, we capture both the cost of acquiring inputs used to generate income and the cost of furnishing a household in a pre-industrial, highly regulated settler economy where wage data are sparse or distorted. We show that auction-derived price movements align with independent proxies for economic conditions—such as ship traffic, pacht prices, consumer prices, and GDP per capita—and that household durables became cheaper relative to productive assets over the long run. These patterns suggest that auction prices provide a useful complementary lens on living standards in colonial contexts where conventional real wage series are unavailable or institutionally constrained.

The depth and breadth of capitalism at the Cape

The Economic History Review

Edward Kerby and Lloyd Melusi Maphosa

Limited liability company legislation was introduced to the Cape Colony in 1861. An amendment in 1892 led to wider adoption, expanding and diversifying the capital market. Using novel data from the Cape Joint Stock Archive between 1892 and 1902, this paper examines who invested, where capital flowed, and how these patterns shaped firm outcomes across Southern Africa. We show the geographic breadth of the capital market, revealing how shareholders and company operations were dispersed far beyond the Cape. The depth measures shareholders' occupational diversity using Historical International Standard Classifications of Occupations (HISCO) and paid-up capital. We find investor participation varied systematically by occupation, industry, and location. These preferences influenced firm survival and spatial organization. Shareholders invested at considerable distances from company operations or registered offices, facilitating early forms of managerial separation. Paid-up capital, a proxy for shareholder depth, was associated with survival, with smaller firms exhibiting shorter lifespans. Formation and failure were closely tied to both local and external economic shocks, underscoring the integration of the Cape economy into wider business cycles. Finally, the Cape illustrates how early commercial law and the organization of private capital may have shaped longer-run regional economic structures.

Levels of Legibility: Roles and the Flow of State Information in French Morocco

Social Science History

Benjamin Kaplow

How do state actors interpret and share information? Theories of the state have long recognized the role of legibility – the modes and practices by which states render society and nature knowable through intervention and information collection – in constructing and maintaining state power. Yet, research has only begun to explore the processes by which information is created and diffused within state administrations. Drawing upon theories of agency relations in states, this article explores how administrators' communicative practices shape knowledge and legibility. Through examining memos, legislative studies, and draft legislation for decrees recognizing water rights in the French Protectorate in Morocco, I identify a set of common patterns in the construction of bureaucratic information as it moves from street-level administrators to central officials. In analyzing these patterns, I demonstrate how administrators' obligations and their understandings of the state's political projects determined not only how French officials collected information, but what they communicated to others. As information moved across administrative levels, officials iteratively changed information. Joining critiques and extensions of legibility theory that emphasize the role of non-state actors in the construction of state knowledge, I argue that we must also attend to intra-state dynamics. In tracing communication and information, I demonstrate that information is iteratively constructed by state agents according to their administrative position and transformed by its particular bureaucratic routes. Modeling legibility and the development of state knowledge requires attending to administrators' agency, their relationships with each other, and their understanding of the state's goals.

Mapping Agricultural Change in Eastern Africa: A Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Approach to Early Imperial Sources, 1857–76

History in Africa

Philip Gooding

This article uses digital Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to visualize changing crop choice over time in nineteenth-century equatorial eastern Africa. It maps the locations of crops mentioned in early imperial sources, using contemporary cartographic representations of the region as a base. This enables a novel visualization of changing agricultural potential and vulnerability to climate variability over time. The maps contextualize the growth of commercial and political centers, a series of famines during years and seasons of below average rainfall, and the well-known environmental challenges of the early colonial period.

The Western Sahara Fiasco of 1899: Thwarted Colonial Aspirations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the African Continent

History in Africa

János Besenyő and Adam Mayer

Spain in 1898–99 intended to lease "its" West African colony, Rio de Oro, today's Western Sahara, to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This article presents new archival evidence in order to show why this initiative was thwarted. The authors conclude that the Austro-Hungarian Empire failed to acquire colonies in Western Sahara and elsewhere due to the lack of appropriate means, opportunities, and also the internal Hungarian resistance; coupled with the risk averse nature of local entrepreneurial circles and the state apparatus.

The New Economics of Cape Slavery

South African Journal of Economics
Johan Fourie

In this survey, I argue that the Cape Colony has become one of the most useful settings for studying the economics of unfree labour. The Cape offers a distinctive combination: a slavery regime linking the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds, an urban and agrarian economy, overlapping labour regimes and archives rich enough for linked micro-data. Recent work treats slavery as both a labour and an asset regime, reads the Cape against Atlantic plantation economies to separate slavery-as-capital from plantation scale and recovers enslaved people's agency as evidence on outside options. The paper sets out five research priorities.

Gender inequality in urban British Africa: Evidence from Anglican marriage registers

The Economic History Review
Felix Meier zu Selhausen and Jacob Weisdorf

We examine the colonial origins and evolution of gender inequality in mission schooling and formal labour force participation across six cities in British colonial Africa, using marriage register data for some 30,000 Anglican brides and grooms well-positioned to benefit from colonial educational and employment opportunities. The spouses' signature literacy and occupational statistics reveal growing gender gaps during the early colonial period, both in access to mission schools and formal work. The gender gap in formal work was much more extensive than that in schooling, peaking in the 1930s but then rapidly declining again, helped by the Africanisation and feminisation of the British colonial public service towards decolonization. Women's alternatives to formal labour differed markedly across urban British Africa, with the majority of West African brides engaging in informal income-generating activities, in contrast to their East African peers, who were primarily devoted to homemaking. We attribute these regional differences to women's greater economic agency in precolonial West Africa, which persisted despite the Victorian gender ideals promoted by missionaries.

Rethinking the Political Order in the KwaZulu-Natal Region in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: Fluidity, Mobility, and Flexibility

History in Africa
Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright

The history of the KwaZulu-Natal region in the period under study has mostly been written round the evolution of a series of polities seen as more or less firmly bounded territorial "states." This approach goes hand in hand with readings of recorded oral source materials as "oral traditions." In this article, we reread the materials not simply as relayed historical accounts but as evidence of past discursive practices geared towards the navigation of change. This allows us to argue that a fundamental feature of the political order at this time was a degree of mobility and political flexibility that earlier studies hardly engage with.

Belgian financial elites and destructive entrepreneurship in King Leopold's Congo free state

The Economic History Review
Marc Deloof

This study investigates the role of financial elites in the Congo Free State (CFS). An analysis of director interlocks between firms operating in the CFS and Belgian banks listed on the Brussels Stock Exchange (BSE) reveals that the Belgian financial establishment was a crucial contributor to large, capital-intensive CFS ventures from the start, contradicting the idea that business in the CFS was driven by a few rogue financiers. Whilst the number of CFS firms was small and their economic importance was limited, almost all the large financial firms, including the Société Générale de Belgique, had two or more CFS firm directors on their board. Financial firms were much more involved in large CFS ventures than in other similar Belgian firms operating abroad.

Bridging New Divides: Ethnic Linkages and Trade in Africa

South African Journal of Economics

Conrad Copeland

This paper studies the effects of ethnic linkages on trade between countries within Africa. I construct a digitised and geo-referenced dataset of historical ethnic territories for pre-colonial Africa. The empirical strategy exploits the role of historical ethnic territories in shaping the current distribution of ethnic groups across countries to estimate the impact of potential ethnic networks on modern trade flows with an instrumental variable framework. The impact of ethnic links is quite strong, with trade increasing by nearly two-thirds between countries that share a common ethnic group. Non-linearities in the results support the effect being driven by a few ethnic groups creating powerful links between countries despite often being minority groups.

Leaving the “Fourth Shore”: The effect of Italian farmers’ expulsions from post-colonial Libya, 1930–2005

Explorations in Economic History

Mattia Cosma Bertazzini

Numerous Italian farms were established in colonial Libya during the 1920s and 30s, but Italian settlers were expelled in two steps: from Cyrenaica (East) in 1942, and from Tripolitania (West) in 1970. I study the consequences of these expulsions and, through their lenses, of the presence of Italian skilled farmers on the agricultural sector of 20th century Libya. Leveraging newly assembled district-level data on agricultural production, I estimate two separate triple differences that combine unaffected Italian districts and Libyan ones to build a credible counterfactual. The removal of Italian farmers led, in both cases, to a relative reduction in the level of commercialization and a return to the production of traditional field crops. The abandonment of particular farming practices, such as irrigated commercial crops, explains this pattern.

From renaissance to relevance: Towards an applied African economic history

Economic History of Developing Regions

Johan Fourie

African economic history has experienced a renaissance over the past two decades. We now know more about Africa’s past, and we can speak with greater confidence about how historical forces still shape life today. But the use of history for comparisons to guide policy debates has lagged behind. In this paper I distinguish two policy-relevant roles for economic history. The first is explanatory, tracing how historical events continue to shape present-day development. The second is analogical, using contextualized historical comparisons to broaden what policymakers can responsibly contemplate when evidence is incomplete. Globally, incentives for economic historians still tilt towards explanation, even though African policymakers and businesses often ask first for comparisons. I review two strands of the renaissance – empirical reconstruction and the persistence turn. I set out a five-stage protocol for analogical reasoning and apply it to an African policy debate. I then explain why analogical work remains too rare, especially from Africa-based scholars, and argue that recent advances in computation, communication and teaching curricula make a more applied, policy-facing turn timely.

Colonialism on the Cheap: The French Empire 1830–1962

The Journal of Economic History

Denis Cogneau,Yannick Dupraz, Elise Huillery and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps

How much did France pay for its colonial empire? Did colonies benefit from large transfers from French taxpayers and private investors, or were they, on the contrary, drained of their capital? This paper uses novel budgetary, private investment, and loan data to compute monetary flows between

France and the colonies between 1833 and 1962. Public expenditure spent by France on the empire represented only 1.3 percent of its GDP, of which four-fifths was for the military. Trade balance deficits of French colonies were not counterbalanced by large public or private capital transfers from France to the colonies, but by military expenditure from the metropole. Overall, large sums of money were flowing from the colonies to the metropole, a “drain” representing a couple of percentage points of colonial GDP, making French colonies comparable to British India in the twentieth century.

State Driven Agrarian Development in the Contested Borderlands of Northwestern Ethiopia: The Experience of the Humera State Farm Project, 1975–91

The Journal of African History

Alemayehu Erkihun Engida

Drawing on an extensive examination of primary sources, this paper considers the persistent tensions between state-led development and local agencies in Humera—a northwestern Ethiopian borderland—during the Derg regime. It explores how developmental projects in the contested borderlands have been shaped more by ideological showcase than by the pursuit of an efficient production system. As part of its agrarian reform, the Derg nationalized private commercial farmlands in Setit Humera and converted them into state farms. Employing peasant militia labor, a centralized administrative approach, and overlooking unique local conditions, the Derg launched the Humera State Farm not only for economic objectives but also to assert state authority in a politically contested frontier region. Despite substantial political attention, the state farm sparked multifaceted tensions and proved ineffective. Its final collapse in 1990 was ultimately driven by geopolitical conflict, as the farm became entangled in regional struggles involving the Tigray People’s Liberation Front and Sudan’s proxy actions against the Derg.

WORKING PAPERS

The Dynamics of Religious Conversion: Theory and Evidence

Akwasi Ampofo, Umair Khalil, Laura Panza and Francisco Silva

We develop a theoretical model of religious conversion in which potential adherents face changing payoff structures, spiritual or instrumental, triggered by the arrival of a new religious movement, the conversion of monarchs, or other shocks that alter the relative returns to conversion. Coupled with non-linear private returns in the share of co-religionists and intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs, our model yields multiple, stable steady-states in the community’s religious composition. We use this model to rationalize the spread of Islam in West Africa post-1500. The Atlantic slave trade altered payoffs in favor of Islam because Muslim rulers offered a de facto protection from enslavement, but only to their co-religionists. This created strong incentives for conversion among non-Muslims in regions exposed to slave raiding. Using newly compiled historical data alongside contemporary survey-based measures of Islamic presence, we show that communities under Islamic rule during 1500-1900 and exposed to Atlantic slavery exhibit persistently higher Muslim presence both after the end of slavery and today.

Africa as a Success Story: Political Organization in Pre-Colonial Africa

Soeren Henn and James A. Robinson

We provide an overview of the explanations for the relative lack of state formation historically in Africa. In doing so we systematically document for the first time the extent to which Africa was politically decentralized, calculating that in 1880 there were probably 45,000 independent polities which were rarely organized on ethnic lines. At most 2% of these could be classified as states. We advance a new argument for this extreme political decentralization positing that African societies were deliberately organized to stop centralization emerging. In this they were successful. We point out some key aspects of African societies that helped them to manage this equilibrium. We also emphasize how the organization of the economy was subservient to these political goals.

Industrialization and energy demand: implications for climate change mitigation

Gregor Semieniuk

Industrialization is key for economic development but how it interacts with climate change mitigation is insufficiently understood. However, this relationship is important for scenarios of climate change mitigation, such as reviewed by the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), that seek to show pathways for simultaneous economic development and mitigation in the coming decades. This paper examines the hypothesis that industrialization tends to go hand in hand with a rising energy intensity of GDP (energy/GDP). Analysis of 16 development successes in the 19th, 20th and 21st century shows that all relied on structural change toward manufacturing almost universally accompanied by a growing energy intensity of GDP for decades. In contrast, all scenarios in the most recent assessment report by the IPCC project historically unprecedented, fast GDP growth for the (least industrialized and affluent) Africa region out to 2050, but with a fast-falling energy intensity, at odds with any historical development experience. The underlying models arrive at these implausible growth trajectories by relying on an assumption of automatic income convergence of low-income to high-income countries, without explaining how it is achieved or conditioning energy demand. If economic growth is indeed going to be as successful as projected, climate models may be underestimating the future demand for energy in developing countries and the effort it takes to decarbonize. Or conversely, if the projected reduction in energy use is in fact materializing, then much lower GDP growth rates are likely.

Development Interventions in Africa's Historical Borderlands: Evidence from Colonial Missions

Alexandra L. Cermeño, Alessandra Quintigliano and Jacob Weisdorf

Africa's historical borderlands are persistently associated with low levels of economic development. This paper examines how these regions respond to development interventions, asking how much the long-run development advantage associated with colonial Christian missions attenuates near the borders. Combining georeferenced data on 3,365 pioneering mission stations with high-resolution satellite night-time luminosity data, we show that the positive association between proximity to missionary activity and contemporary economic development weakens sharply near the borders. This result is robust across a wide range of specifications and is corroborated by evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys on household wealth and human capital.

A Practitioner's Guide to Using Large Language Models and Generative AI in Economic History

Andreas Ferrara

Large language models (LLMs) are lowering the entry barriers to working with exciting data sources that used to require strong data science skills, such as handwritten ledgers, text, images, or sound recordings. This guide provides an introduction for researchers who are new to LLMs. It sets out a step-by-step workflow for turning a research idea into working code and data, and describes the four main ways of interacting with an LLM: the chat window, editor-integrated assistants, agentic coding tools, and the API. It then works through the decisions a practitioner meets in sequence, beginning with whether an LLM is the right tool and whether the data are allowed to be sent to one, then how to select models, write prompts, manage context limits, and control costs, and finally how to validate, reproduce, document, and correct LLM-generated measures in regression settings. A review of recent research shows how these tools already extract, link, harmonize, and classify historical data at scale. Four worked examples with replication files illustrate the use of LLMs. They classify emotions in paintings, link census records without names, measure newspaper salience and sentiment around the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and score the emotional delivery of Franklin D. Roosevelt's wartime speeches. The guide also condenses the workflow, the best-practice recommendations, and the preparation of replication packages into summary tables and checklists to aid applied economists.