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# The revival of African economic history in the 21st century: A bibliometric analysis<sup>1</sup>

● KATHARINE FREDERICK

Utrecht University

k.r.frederick@uu.nl | ORCID: 0000-0001-8599-2624

● DÁCIL JUIF

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

djuif@clio.uc3m.es | ORCID: 0000-0003-2463-9549

● FELIX MEIER ZU SELHAUSEN

Utrecht University

f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl | ORCID: 0000-0001-8593-7983

## ABSTRACT

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

**KEYWORDS:** African economic history, bibliometric analysis, top journals in economic history, citational success, authorship.

**JEL CODES:** N01, N37, N77.

1 As an introduction to this Special Issue, *Comparative development in colonial Africa*, this article has not been submitted to external review. Nevertheless, it has been reviewed by the Editorial Board of RHI-IHR.

*Received: 23 August 2024 – Fecha de recepción: 23 agosto 2024*

*Accepted: 3 September 2024 – Fecha de aceptación: 3 septiembre 2024*

*Published online: 15 November 2024 – Publicado online: 15 noviembre 2024*

*Revista de Historia Industrial–Industrial History Review, vol. XXXIII, no. 92, November 2024. 11-48.*  
*ISSN: 1132-7200 (Print) – 2385-3247 (Online) | <https://doi.org/10.1344/rhihr.47560>*

## 1. Introduction

African economic history (AEH) has experienced exciting expansion in output, data collection, innovative quantitative methods, comparative scope, and inter-disciplinarity in the 21st century, which has positioned Africa in debates on global economic development. Ten years have passed since Austin and Broadberry (2014) proclaimed the “renaissance of African economic history” in their introductory comments in *The Economic History Review* in the first and hitherto only special issue on Africa to be published in a general economic history journal. In the same year, *Africa’s Development in Historical Perspective*, the first edited volume on AEH incorporating interdisciplinary authors, was published (Akyeampong et al. 2014). This marked the official reversal of AEH’s “recession”, which had been underway since the 1980s (Hopkins 2009). We commemorate the ten-year anniversary of these milestone publications with a second special issue dedicated to AEH and use this opportunity to reflect on the blossoming field’s scholarly developments over the past 25 years through a bibliometric analysis of the top five international economic history journals. Specifically, we provide evidence on the number of articles published and their impact, authorship, the coverage of topics, periods, regions, and analytical methods. We position these trends within a previous literature in scholarly developments in AEH, relate observations to the participation in AEH’s most important conference, and provide insights into AEH’s interdisciplinary character. This article is thus more than a purely bibliometric analysis; we reflect on the state of the art of the AEH discipline over a quarter of a century and suggest areas of potential expansion.

There are several reasons for the renewed interest in Africa’s economic past. First, Africa is at the centre of debates of global concern revolving around: (i) climate change’s disproportional impact on African economies and ecology in light of Africa’s tiny fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions (WMO 2023); (ii) Africa’s increasing weight in global population growth, projected to be home to 25 percent of the world’s population by mid-century (United Nations 2024); (iii) Africa’s growing share in global extreme poverty rates despite robust economic growth since the mid-1990s has generated ambiguous outlooks (World Bank 2024); (iv) African exports of its vast reserves of the world’s critical energy transition minerals (Frankema and Meier zu Selhausen 2024); and (v) heated public perception of African migration of aspirational young generations to Europe in light of lack of opportunity (De Haas and Frankema 2022). The rising role of Africa on the global stage provides ample scope to better understand and engage with the historical nature and origins of the continent’s present-day economic and demographic development.

Second, while the effects of the slave trades received much attention in earlier phases of the AEH renaissance (Inikori 1982; Eltis and Engerman 2000;

Nunn and Wantchekon 2011), European countries have become increasingly critical of the effects and legacies of their colonial rule in Africa (Mathys and van Beurden 2023), which has generated deeper interest in quantitative analyses of colonial governments' policies (and their persistent effects), including the fiscal burden on the local population (Huillery 2014; Frankema and van Waijenburg 2014; Cogneau et al. 2024), contributions to formal education (Frankema 2012; Jedwab, Meier zu Selhausen and Moradi 2021, 2022), the extent and nature of forced labour (Van Waijenburg 2018; Archibong and Obikili 2023), colonial medical campaigns on African health and lasting implications for trust in biomedicine (Lowe and Montero 2021), and investment into transport infrastructure (Jedwab, Kerby and Moradi 2017; Bertazzini 2022).

Third, after 25 years, the life-cycle of the field-defining Great Divergence debate — revolving around the question of why the Industrial Revolution arose first in Britain and not in China, India or Japan — has increasingly run into diminishing marginal returns. The economic renaissance of East Asia and China set in motion rapid economic divergence across the Global South in the second half of the 20th century. In light of Asia's and Africa's (future) economic and demographic weight, currently accounting for three-quarters of the global population and 60 percent of global GDP, research into the historical nature and origins of the divergence between African and Asian economic trajectories offers a timely and logical new window of global comparative investigation (Frankema 2024).

The surge in research on Africa's economic and social past has been underpinned by a quantitative “data revolution” (Fourie 2016; Cappelli, Benos and Goletsis 2023) in which the widespread lack of conventional (printed and written) sources has been overcome by the creative use of a wide range of new sources from both African and European archives that can be analysed using innovative quantitative methods. Additionally, the increased use of statistical software, the availability of digital photography, and the use of geographical software has provided new spatial layers to the analysis and visualization of African long-term development (e.g., transport infrastructure, Christian diffusion, cash crop agriculture). These new approaches can be categorized into two respective schools, which (i) reconstruct and analyse long-term development paths to fill gaps in our knowledge of Africa's past by exploring trends in real wages, skill premiums, human heights, taxation, inequality, and diffusion of Christianity, quinine and new world crops, etc. (e.g., Frankema and van Waijenburg 2012, 2023; Moradi, Austin and Baten 2013; Bolt and Gardner 2020; Jedwab, Meier zu Selhausen and Moradi 2021, 2022; Frankema, de Haas and van Waijenburg 2023; Cogneau et al. 2024; Hillbom et al. 2024; Kerby, Moradi and Odendaal 2024), and (ii) investigate the persistent effects of particular characteristics (e.g., geography, institutions or infrastruc-

ture) by identifying causal relationships between a variable in the past and an outcome today using sophisticated econometric techniques (Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001; Nunn and Wantchekon 2011; Alsan 2015; Jedwab and Moradi 2016; Depetris-Chauvin and Weil 2018).

Our rigorous bibliometric analysis of AEH publications between 2000 and 2024 confirms some of these features and trends and provides new insights into the recent evolution of the field. First, indeed, the past 25 years have seen an impressive expansion of research into Africa's economic past, as reflected in the relative number and impact of publications on the topic in the top five economic history journals. This trend is also reflected in the sharp increase in the number of participants at the annual conferences of the African Economic History Network<sup>2</sup> (which has doubled since 2014 and peaked in 2019). We also document the topic's popularity beyond the readership of general economic history journals, as reflected in the impact — in terms of Google Scholar citations — of AEH publications in prestigious economics and development journals, as well as in history journals.

The variety of topics, types of primary sources, and geographic areas covered in research published in the top five economic history journals has increased notably. Chiefly, while in the early 2000s most articles were focussed on the (mostly pre-colonial) slave trade and thus on Western Africa, research on the colonial period covering a wider range of institutional and growth-related topics has gained terrain in the past 15 years. There is also a divide between publication outlets in the methods used and research questions asked, whereby economics journals mostly publish “persistence studies”, while economic history journals — which have seen a rise in the use of econometric methods — still mostly publish “reconstructive” types of studies.

However, our analysis of publications also reveals that the revival of AEH has levelled off since 2014, with little further growth in volume, impact, geographical variety, number of authors publishing or integration of Africa-based scholars outside South Africa. There is scope for further research into under-explored geographic areas (former Portuguese, Italian and German colonies especially) and time periods, particularly in the postcolonial era (see also Simson 2020). Finally, although the proportion of female authors has more than doubled over the past 25 years, there is still a need to achieve greater gender equality in authorship. This special issue represents recent trends and also makes strides to fill some lacunae, with two articles on understudied former Portuguese colonies (Angola and Mozambique); a focus on the colonial pe-

2 The African Economic History Network (AEHN) was founded in 2011 to foster communication, collaboration and research as well as teaching amongst scholars studying African long-term development. It runs a working paper series, organizes an annual conference, publishes the open-access textbook *The History of African Development*, a bi-annual newsletter, and the academic blog *Frontiers in African Economic History*.

riod and colonial effects; the use of state and company archival sources to retrieve new quantitative data; and the geolocation of these data and spatial analyses using econometrics.

The remainder of this introduction proceeds as follows. We first chart the publication evolution and citation trends of articles focusing on Africa in the top five economic history journals (Section 2), then highlight the interdisciplinary character of AEH (Section 3) and explore developments in authorship and affiliation (Section 4), and outline changes in topics, methods, and sources as well as geographical and temporal coverage (Section 5), before finally illustrating how the articles presented in this special issue help fill existing lacunae in the field of AEH.

## 2. A bibliometric analysis of African economic history in economic history journals

### 2.1. *The evolution of African economic history*

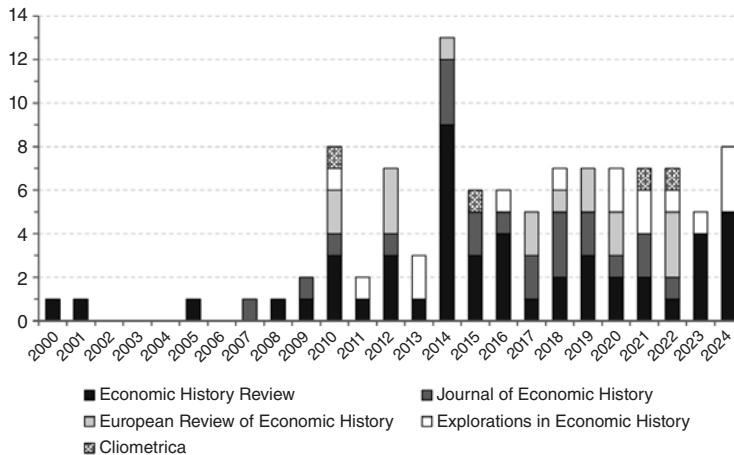
For our bibliometric analysis we have compiled a database of articles that focus on Africa, including both Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, that were published between 2000 and 2024<sup>3</sup> in one of the top five field journals in economic history (hereafter “the top five”), specifically the *Economic History Review* (*EHR*), *Journal of Economic History* (*JEH*), *Explorations in Economic History* (*EEH*), *European Review of Economic History* (*EREH*), and *Clio-metrica* (*Clio*), which consistently score highest in recent citation rankings (Di Vaio and Weisdorf 2010; Cioni, Federico and Vasta 2020).<sup>4</sup> We have selected those articles that focus on “Africa” after studying their titles, abstracts and, in unclear cases, content. For example, we ignored articles on the slave trade if they only touched upon the Americas or exclusively focused on the implications of the slave trade for European economies. We have omitted book reviews, but included research notes and replies if they provided substantial research. Authors’ names, gender and institutional affiliation at the time of publication are also included. Our database comprises 114 articles that focus on Africa’s economic and social past (of a total of 3,089 articles), which we classified by a number of features: topic, historical period, African geograph-

<sup>3</sup> We collected articles published from January 2000 up to September 2024, when this special issue went into production. Consequently, the 2024 data do not include publications from October to December 2024.

<sup>4</sup> We have specifically selected top *general interest* economic history journals to explore how AEH has fared in the broader field of economic history. Here, we thus do not include high-ranking economic history journals with a particular area focus (e.g., *Economic History of Developing Regions*), though we reflect on their significant contribution as outlets for AEH elsewhere in our analysis.

ical area, data source, unit of analysis, use of cliometric techniques (e.g., panel regressions or instrumental variables), authorship, institutional affiliation at the time of publication, year of publication as stated in the article, and their computed per annum citations from Google Scholar since the year of publication.

**FIGURE 1** • Number of articles on “Africa” in the top five economic history (EH) journals, 2000–2024



Note: The peak in 2014 is due to the special issue on AEH in the *Economic History Review*. For the current year 2024, we include two out of the annual four issues of the *Journal of Economic History* and three of *European Review of Economic History*; and all issues of *Explorations in Economic History*, *The Economic History Review* and *Cliometrica*.

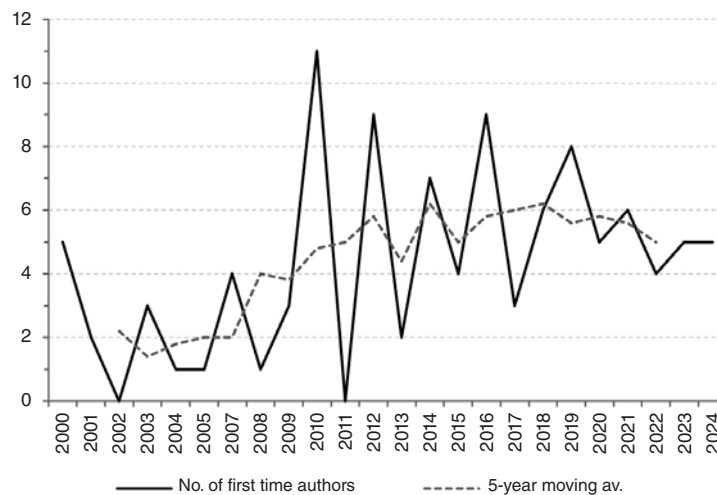
Figure 1 shows that before Hopkins (2009) “sounded a trumpet”, promoting the engagement of historians with the bold and fresh “new economic history of Africa” dominated by economists, on average only one Africa-related paper was published per year in the top five between 2000–2009, mostly focusing on the slave trades (seven out of 12 articles), which was one of the first topics in AEH that made use of large datasets and statistical analyses (Eltis 1977, 1987). In Hopkins’ (2009, p. 155) words, African “economic history [...] seems to have died, un lamented, from that most mortifying of scholarly ailments – neglect”. Economic historians of Africa heard his trumpet and followed its tune. After 2009, a revival in research on AEH rapidly unfolded, with publications on Africa rising to 6.8 articles per year in the top five. While this documents a “renaissance of African economic history” (Austin and Broadberry 2014), it is noteworthy that the renaissance has not been evenly spread across journals: the *Economic History Review* alone accounts for 43 percent of AEH articles, with at least one article on Africa each year since 2008, fol-

lowed by the *Journal of Economic History* taking a 25 percent share. More importantly, we observe that the growth in Africa-centred publications during the 2015–2024 decade has not expanded but plateaued at a new “production possibility frontier” of six to seven publications per year.

We may arrive at misleading conclusions regarding the growth of AEH if we only judge it from the extensive margin of volume of publications, if these articles are mostly produced repeatedly by the same cluster of scholars. To find out about the field’s expansion in participation — or “fresh blood” — in Figure 2 we perform a count of any (co)author in the year of their first publication. For example, regardless of author James Fenske having published five articles in the top five between 2012 and 2016, we only count his first article from 2012. It shows that scholarly participation mirrors AEH’s decisive growth after 2009 and post-2014 plateau illustrated above in Figure 1. This indicates that AEH generates and integrates new participants into the discipline, including PhDs, capable of publishing in top economic history journals.

Over the past quarter of a century, the top five have jointly expanded their total output by 58 percent, from 90 articles published in 2000 to 154 in 2023. The rise of AEH could thus just be a reflection of a general growth in economic history publications. To explore this possibility, Figure 3 plots the share of articles on “Africa” in the top five. We also counted and included the share of publications on “Asia” in Figure 3, excluding Russia and the Ottoman Empire, to compare AEH’s performance to broader trends in publications focusing on developing regions. The graph supports the relative expan-

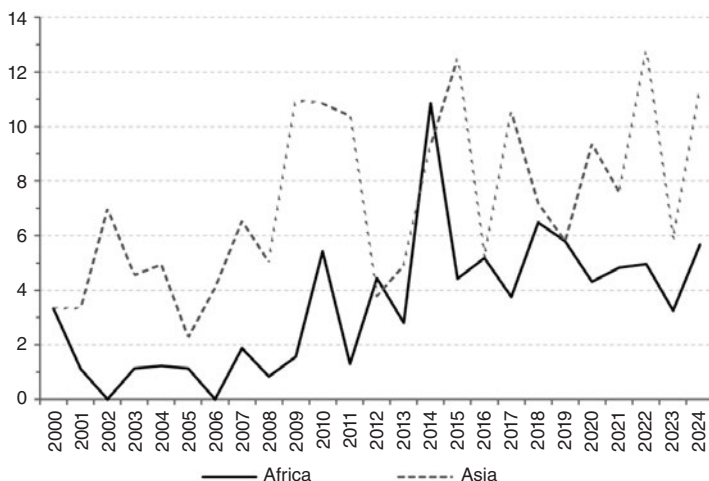
**FIGURE 2 •** Number of first-time authors publishing on Africa in top five EH journals, 2000–2024



Note: “First-time authors” counts (co)authors only for their first publication in the year of publication. Subsequent publications are discounted.

sion of AEH articles from a rock-bottom low of 1 percent in the first decade of the 21st century.<sup>5</sup> Despite this growth, Africa is clearly underrepresented in leading economic history research. The continent, home to 18 percent of the world’s population in 2024 (UN 2024), accounted on average for 0.5 percent of articles in 2000–2009 and close to 5 percent in 2010–2024. This is not an African phenomenon but also visible, though to a lesser degree, for East and South Asia (mostly China, India and Japan), which has seen an equally steep flight and makes up an average share of 9 percent of top five article publications over the same period.

**FIGURE 3 •** Share of articles on “Africa” and “Asia” in top five EH journals, 2000–2024 (in %)



Note: “Asia” excludes the Ottoman Empire and Russia. All research articles, comments and replies were counted as articles. See notes of Figure 1.

Taken together, Africa and Asia are currently home to more than three-quarters of the world’s population (Bolt and van Zanden 2024) yet have accounted for a scant average of only 14.3 percent of research published in the top five economic history outlets between 2014–2024. In light of the Global South’s increasing demographic and economic weight, deeper understandings of the historical nature and origins of the Global South’s comparative economic and demographic transitions appear pertinent (Frankema 2024). Yet, economic history remains dominated by Western-centred research agendas, heavily focused on Britain, continental Europe and North America. Although

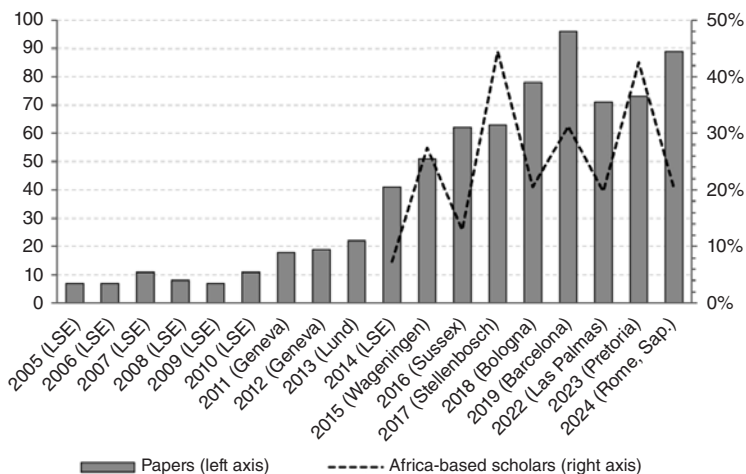
<sup>5</sup> The journal *African Economic History* has also expanded its output from one issue to two issues per year since 2017.



an upward trend has been evident since 2000, only 16 percent of articles in 2017 had a regional focus outside the West (Cioni, Federico and Vasta 2021; Fourie 2019). In their analysis of journal coverage of developing regions, Fourie and Gardner (2014) made it clear: “The internationalization of economic history is everywhere except in the publication outputs”. This picture has not been overhauled ten years later but its relative growth, largely driven by research on Asia, is encouraging. Identical to the absolute number of article publications (Figure 1), Figure 3 shows that also in relative terms AEH research has plateaued at 5 percent in the 2015-2024 decade. The future will tell whether Africa’s “renaissance” just took a pause. With research agendas in global economic history shifting from a quarter-century focus on the Great Divergence debate to increasing engagement with the South-South Divergence, as championed by Frankema (2024), research on Africa’s and Asia’s economic history are likely to further expand in the future.

Figure 4 shows the number of paper presentations at the Annual Meetings of the African Economic History Network (AEHN), which began as a workshop organized by Gareth Austin at the London School of Economics and the Graduate Institute in Geneva in 2005–2012. With the exception of a minor post-Covid decline in 2022/2023, the number of papers presented at the Annual Meetings of the AEHN has considerably surged since 2011, exceeding the more modest dynamics of AEH publications in the top five jour-

**FIGURE 4** • Number of papers presented at Annual Meetings of the African Economic History Network (AEHN), 2005–2024



Note: Paper presentations include keynote speeches. The Africa-based scholar share shows the percentage of papers (co-)authored by scholars based at African universities. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic no annual meetings took place in 2020 and 2021. The figure is based on conference programmes so may ignore short-notice drop-outs.

nals observed in Figure 1. In terms of the number of paper presentations, the year 2014 clearly marks a take-off, from 22 in 2013 to 40 papers in 2014, which subsequently doubled again to reach 82 papers on average during the last five meetings (2018–2024). Figure 4 also indicates that the share of papers presented by Africa-based scholars has steadily increased since 2014 (LSE), and peaked at the meetings held at Stellenbosch (44 percent) in 2017 and Pretoria (42 percent) in 2023, illustrating that organizing AEH conferences at African universities results in considerably more participation of scholars based on the continent. In 2025, the AEHN’s meeting will be held at the National University of Lesotho.

To sum up, the number of publications on AEH in the top five economic history journals has recently stagnated, plateauing at six to seven publications per year between 2015 and 2024. This stagnation is also reflected in the number of “new publishers”, i.e., those authors who publish for the first time on AEH. When compared to its share of the world’s population, which is trending upwards, the African continent is clearly underrepresented in leading economic history research. A slightly different picture is painted by the paper participations at the Annual Meetings of the AEHN, which peaked in 2019, and has showed signs of recovery following the Covid-related slump in conference participation. Thus, while AEH may be struggling to maintain its hard-won footing in the top five economic history journals, the field is blossoming.

## *2.2. Citational performance*

Citations provide a simple quantifiable measure for evaluating the impact of scholarly articles. Using Google Scholar, we have extracted the post-publication citations for all 114 articles focusing on “Africa” in the top five economic history journals compiled in Figure 1.<sup>6</sup> We computed average per annum citations for each article by dividing the number of total citations by the number of years an article has been published, discounting the year 2024 since it is not yet complete. As a caveat, this approach could introduce a bias favouring the more recent publications, if articles are typically cited more in the first years after publication. However, since we focus on the more recent past (25 years) and 89 percent of papers have been published during the even more recent 2010–2024 period, this appears less of a concern.

Figure 5 illustrates the average per annum citations of articles that appeared between 2000 and 2023, showing the average number of citations in

<sup>6</sup> For an Euclidean index ranking of economic history scholars that published 238 papers on “Africa” in 15 economic history journals and 25 leading economics journals during the period 1992–2017, see Fourie and Obikili (2024).

the year of an article's publication. The pattern of citation is particularly steep in 2008, driven by one extremely influential paper by Gareth Austin (2008a), but then follows a flat course. When focusing on the five-year moving average and discounting the year 2008, the trend becomes relatively flat and declining. When discounting the two years (2009 and 2011) in which fewer than three articles have been published (see Figure 1), between 2009–2023, the average number of citations is about five per article per year. This means that despite the revival of AEH over the first quarter of the 21st century, its influence has not dramatically increased proportional to its overall increase in number of papers.

**FIGURE 5 • Average per annum citations of top five EH journal articles, 2000–2023**



Note: The spike in 2008 is caused by one publication (Austin 2008a). Average per annum is derived from total citations in Google Scholar divided by the years since publication.

Table 1 highlights the 15 out of 114 most-cited articles in the top five economic history journals, all of which received more than 11 citations per annum. Such a ranking of annual average citations of course hides the fact that there have been highly influential papers that fetched more than the average 6.4 citations per year but do not qualify for the top 15 most impactful. Six out of the 15 articles were co-authored, which is just below the average 50–60 percent in economic history journals since 2010 (Cioni, Federico and Vasta 2020). The most cited paper per annum is Broadberry and Gardner (2022) in *Explorations in Economic History*, with 25 citations on average, in which they estimate annual GDP per capita for eight former British colonies for the period since 1885, raising new questions about the region's economic performance. The study with the largest number of total citations is Austin (2008a) with 346. In his landmark article in *The Economic History Review*, Austin explores

the drivers of long-term economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa and revises the factor endowment perspective on African economic development between 1500 and 2000.

**TABLE 1** - Top 15 most-cited top five EH journal articles on Africa, 2000–2024

Articles	Journal	Cites	Cites p.a.	Geography
1 Broadberry & Gardner (2022)	EEH	52	26.0	British Africa
2 Dupraz (2019)	JEH	123	24.6	Cameroon
3 Frankema & van Waijenburg (2012)	JEH	279	23.3	British Africa
4 Frankema, Williamson & Woltjer (2018)	JEH	137	22.8	British West Africa
5 Van Waijenburg (2018)	JEH	132	22.0	French West Africa
6 Frankema (2012)	EREH	263	21.9	SSA
7 Austin (2008a)	EHR	346	21.6	SSA
8 Cogneau & Moradi (2014)	JEH	207	20.7	Togo
9 Cogneau, Dupraz & Mesplé-Somps (2021)	JEH	53	17.7	French West Africa
10 Frankema (2010)	EHR	217	15.5	Sierra Leone, Zambia
11 Frankema (2011)	EEH	198	15.3	British Africa
12 Frankema & Jerven (2014)	EHR	153	15.3	SSA
13 Huillery (2014)	JEH	144	14.4	French West Africa
14 Tadei (2020)	EREH	51	12.8	French West Africa
15 De Haas (2017)	EHR	83	11.9	Uganda

Note: Citations extracted from Google Scholar on 1 September 2024, excluding articles published in 2024. Citations per annum defined as: total citations/(year of publication – 2024). Key: *Journal of Economic History* (JEH), *Economic History Review* (EHR), *Explorations in Economic History* (EEH), *European Review of Economic History* (EREH).

Among the 15 most-cited articles per annum, Ewout Frankema features most prominently with six articles, followed by Denis Cogneau (2), Yannick Dupraz (2), and Marlous van Waijenburg (2). In terms of topics that attracted popular attention, all articles, except Austin (2008a), focus on the colonial era. For example, Ewout Frankema and Marlous van Waijenburg's (2012) award-winning article in the *Journal of Economic History* has significantly contributed to our understanding of Africa's development path by showing that urban unskilled real wages were well above subsistence levels in British colonial Africa, certainly in West African cities. Three articles take an all-Africa scope, while all remaining articles focus on countries or regions within British Africa (6) and French West Africa (6). While the majority of works reconstruct long-run measures of living standards, GDP, population growth, education, trade, taxation, etc., both Cogneau and Moradi (2014) and Dupraz (2019) exploit the natural experiment of colonial border division after Ger-

many's loss of its colonies during World War I to infer causality of differences in educational approaches by British and French colonial administrations.

Eight articles alone garnered more than 20 annual post-publication citations — four times the average citations of all 114 top five economic history publications on Africa. The lion's share of these most-cited articles appeared in the *Journal of Economic History* (7), followed by *Economic History Review* (4), *European Review of Economic History* (2), and *Explorations in Economic History* (2). Table 2 shows the average citations per journal for the period 2000–2023, indicating that articles published in the *Journal of Economic History* fetched almost twice as many citations as in the other top five journals.

**TABLE 2** • Average number of citations per annum by journal, 2000–2023

	No. of articles	Av. per annum citations
<i>Journal of Economic History</i>	28	8.9
<i>Explorations in Economic History</i>	13	6.2
<i>Economic History Review</i>	44	5.5
<i>European Review of Economic History</i>	17	5.3
<i>Cliometrica</i>	4	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>6.4</b>

### 3. Interdisciplinarity – African economic history is everywhere

Although a number of publications on Africa in the top five economic history journals have received widespread attention, Figures 1 and 3 have illustrated that the absolute and relative growth of AEH, as well as the relative impact of published articles (Figure 4), hit an early plateau already a decade ago, at least as far as the top five are concerned. Based on rejection statistics, Fourie (2019) has demonstrated that journal editors are not biased against papers on Africa's economic past, and papers focusing on Africa attract more (Google Scholar) citations than those on the Americas. At the same time, we have also seen a proliferation of AEH, as evidenced by the precipitous growth in participation at the Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network (Figure 3). We now explore where the growth in scholarship on the economic history of Africa is being manifested beyond general interest economic history journals.

History is inherently interdisciplinary, given that few academic disciplines in the humanities or social sciences exist fully isolated from the historical past. A narrow focus on the top five economic history journals misses the diversity

of interdisciplinary publication options enjoyed by African economic historians, who find their way increasingly into the field journals of economics, finance, development and, of course, history, among others (Fernández-de-Pinedo, La Parra-Perez and Muñoz 2023). This special issue on *Comparative development in colonial Africa* in the *Revista de Historia Industrial-Industrial History Review* (RHI-IHR) is one example of this widely diversified publication portfolio of African economic historians. Table 3 provides a glimpse of the widening array of options. While we do not offer the same rigorous analysis of journals outside the top five economic history journals, we nevertheless extracted the top ten most-cited papers per annum in a selection of the leading journals in (i) economics, (ii) development, and (iii) history published between 2009 and 2023 to provide some examples. We counted citations using Google Scholar until September 2024. While our previous selection of top five economic history journals (Table 1) and economics journals (Table 3, Panel A) do not reflect a preference for specific area studies, our selection of history and development journals includes a number of journals aimed specifically at Africa (e.g., *Journal of African History*, *Journal of African Economies*, *African Affairs*, *Economic History of Developing Regions*).

The nature of papers differs between the disciplines. Beginning with the field of economics, AEH is part of a recent stream of literature that searches for the historical roots of present-day development outcomes (persistence studies), which increasingly interacts with economics and focuses on causal interference (Fenske 2010; Nunn 2020).<sup>7</sup> Publishing in the leading economics journals yields considerably more citations than in mainstream economic history journals. It is noteworthy that with the exception of Jedwab, Meier zu Selhausen and Moradi (2022), all papers listed in Table 3 under “economics” can be classified as persistence studies that investigate the long-run effect or legacies of historical events in Africa’s past on present-day development outcomes, surveyed in Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2020) in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. This contrasts with the interest in history for its own sake by economic historians who conceptualize development “as an open-ended multifaceted process of change” (Frankema and van Waijenburg 2023, p. 43). These persistence studies have been criticized as a “compression of history” (Austin 2008b), and their statistical inference may produce a relatively narrow historical analysis after the identification of historical variation (Canto-

7 Since the groundbreaking Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001) article, economists have started to investigate the historical roots of current economic outcomes. This new approach is also applied to the African continent, where long-run effects of the slave trade (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011), disease ecology (Alsan 2015; Depetris-Chauvin and Weil 2018), Christian missionary presence (Becker and Meier zu Selhausen 2023), colonial ethnic partitioning (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016), medical campaigns (Lowe and Montero 2021) and railroad infrastructure (Jedwab, Kerby and Moradi 2017) are scrutinized.

**TABLE 3** - Top ten most-cited AEH articles in leading journals on economics, development and history, 2000–2024

#	Articles	Journal	Cites	Cites p.a.	Geography
<b>(A) Economics</b>					
1	Nunn & Wantchekon (2011)	QJE	2,735	210.4	SSA
2	Michalopoulos & Papaioannou (2013)	ECMA	1,538	139.8	SSA
3	Nunn & Puga (2012)	REStat	1,557	129.8	SSA
4	Nunn (2008)	AER	2,075	129.7	SSA
5	Ashraf & Galor (2013)	AER	1,122	102.0	SSA
6	Michalopoulos & Papaioannou (2016)	AER	751	93.9	SSA
7	Alesina, Hohmann, Michalopoulos & P. (2021)	ECMA	245	81.7	SSA
8	Michalopoulos & Papaioannou (2014)	QJE	779	77.9	SSA
9	Lowes & Montero (2021)	AER	231	77.0	SSA
10	Jedwab, Meier zu Selhausen & Moradi (2022)	JEG	135	67.5	Ghana, SSA
<b>(B) Development</b>					
1	Pritchett (2001)	WBER	2,724	118.4	SSA
2	Henderson, Storeygard & Deichman (2017)	JDE	435	62.1	SSA
3	Fenske (2015)	JDE	286	31.8	SSA
4	Baten, de Haas, Kempter & Meier zu S. (2021)	PDR	95	31.7	SSA
5	Austin (2008b)	JID	433	27.1	SSA
6	Roessler et al. (2022)	WD	47	23.5	SSA
7	Nunn (2007)	JDE	381	22.4	SSA
8	Gallego & Woodberry (2010)	JAЕ	279	19.9	SSA
9	André & Dupraz (2023)	JDE	18	18.0	Cameroon
10	Frankema & van Waijenburg (2018)	AA	107	17.8	Ghana, SSA
<b>(C) History</b>					
1	Nunn (2012)	EHDR	409	34.1	SSA
2	Acemoglu & Robinson (2010)	EHDR	453	32.4	SSA
3	Hopkins (2009)	JAH	254	16.9	SSA
4	Ezeoha, Okozeuzu, Onah & Uche (2022)	BHR	33	16.5	West Africa
5	Frankema & van Waijenburg (2014)	JAH	162	16.2	Br. & Fr. Africa
6	Dinecco, Fenske & Onorato (2019)	EHDR	76	15.2	SSA
7	Uche (2008)	JAH	188	11.8	Nigeria
8	Galli, Theodoridis & Rönnbäck (2023)	EHDR	11	11.0	SSA
9	Jedwab & Storeygard (2019)	EHDR	50	10.0	SSA
10	Fourie (2016)	JIH	78	9.8	SSA

Note: Citations extracted from Google Scholar on 1 September 2024, excluding articles published in 2024. Citations per annum defined as: total citations/(year of publication – 2024). The selected leading journals in **Economics** (10) include: *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (QJE), *American Economic Review* (AER), *Econometrica* (ECMA), *Journal of Political Economy* (JPE), *Review of Economic Studies* (REStud), *Review of Economics and Statistics* (REStat), *Economic Journal* (EJ), *Journal of Economic Growth* (JEG), *Journal of Economic Literature* (JEL), *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* (AEJ); **Development** (10): *Journal of Development Economics* (JDE), *World Development* (WD), *Journal of Development Studies* (JDS), *Journal of International Development* (JID), *Journal of African Economies* (JAE), *African Affairs* (AA), *Population and Development Review* (PDR), *Economic Development & Cultural Change* (EDCC), *Development and Change* (DC), *World Bank Economic Review* (WBER); **History** (10): *Journal of African History* (JAH), *Past & Present* (PP), *Journal of Global History* (JGH), *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (JIH), *Economic History of Developing Regions* (EHDR), *Third World Quarterly* (TWQ), *Business History* (BH), *Business History Review* (BHR), *African Economic History* (AEH), *History in Africa* (HA).

ni and Yuchtman 2021, p. 233; Cioni, Federico and Vasta 2022).

On average, the top ten AEH articles published in an economics journal (Panel A) are cited six times (114 citations per annum) more than the top 15 economic history papers shown in Table 1. Nathan Nunn, who appears in three of the five most-cited works, is cumulatively the most impactful author of the “new economic history of Africa”, followed by Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou, who feature four times among the top ten. AEH papers in the top ten Development journals (Panel B) generated on average 37 citations per annum, which is only one third the number accrued by economics publications but still twice as many citations on average than the 15 most-cited articles published in the top five economic history journals (Table 2). Four of the top ten cited papers in the field of Development were published in the *Journal of Development Economics*. Compared with economics and development, the top ten History publications (Panel C) focusing on Africa’s economic past attracted on average the lowest citation score (15 per annum); meanwhile, this figure is close to the citation average for the 15 most-cited articles in the top five economic history journals.

Half of the top ten most-cited papers in history journals appeared in *Economic History of Developing Regions* (EHDR), and three in the *Journal of African History*. Of the top ten history articles, seven attracted as many citations as those featured among the top 15 most-cited economic history journal articles (Table 1). This, jointly with the fact that *EHDR* has published as many Africa-focused papers as the top five general interest economic history journals together during the past decade (6.4 per annum), highlights the important role of journals that focus on developing countries in diffusing AEH research. During 2020–2023, the 33 papers focusing on Africa published in the *EHDR* attracted on average 2.3 citations per year, compared to 5.9 average citations drawn by the 25 articles in the top five economic history journals.

#### 4. Who writes African economic history?

AEH has been on the rise, but where is it being written and by whom? To identify the major academic hubs of the revival of AEH research, we explore developments in the location, institutional affiliation and gender of authors publishing Africa-related papers in the top five economic history journals.

In general, African scholars have been largely absent from the rise of publications on Africa’s past in the top five. Table 4 shows that among all (co)authors, only 14 percent were Africa-based in the recent 2016–2024 period, up from 0 percent in the period 2000–2007 but down from 18 percent in 2008–2015. This exceptionally low share becomes even sharper when compared



with scholarship focusing on other world regions. For example, from 1998–2018, 86 percent of articles written on the economic history of the Americas were authored by scholars based in the region, 76 percent of articles focusing on Europe were written by European-based authors (Fourie 2019, based on the top-four ranked economic history journals). A lower share of articles (40 percent) on Asian-Pacific economic history were produced by Asia-Pacific-based authors (Fourie 2019), but this still far exceeds the Africa-based share of scholars writing on AEH. This trend is mirrored in the most cited articles in Tables 1 and 3, with the only African contribution coming from South African Johan Fourie (2016). Encouraging is the growth of female authorship that has gradually increased over the last quarter of a century.

**TABLE 4** • Number of (co)authors per top five EH publication and share of female and Africa-based scholars, 2000–2024

	No. of authors per publication				Total authors	% Female share	% Africa-based share
	1	2	3	4			
2000–2007	2	3	4	–	20	10.0	0.0
2008–2015	26	11	5	1	67	16.4	17.9
2016–2024	27	25	7	2	108	27.8	13.0

Moreover, the “Africa-based share” should be called the “South Africa-based share”, because *all* Africa-based authors who published in the top five economic history journals were affiliated with South African universities, the vast majority with Stellenbosch. This is documented in Table 5, which ranks the institutional affiliations of authors publishing Africa-related articles in the top five economic history journals between 2000 and 2024. Based on these data, the “renaissance” of AEH appears to not yet have crossed South Africa’s Limpopo River or Kalahari Desert. Research activity on the continent’s economic history has remained relatively confined to the dynamic centre of Stellenbosch and, in particular, its Laboratory for the Economics of Africa’s Past (LEAP), established within the Department of Economics in 2015. While Stellenbosch University ranks number one, closely followed by the London School of Economics and Wageningen University, in total number of publications, it is also the *only* African university among the 15 most productive institutions in the field of AEH. The remaining four Africa-based institutions represented in our database are also all South African: The University of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Port Elizabeth), and the Cape Town-based Economic Research South Africa. The dissolution of the University of Zimbabwe’s Department of Economic History in 2020 at the height of its student enrolment — the only functional stand-alone de-

partment in Africa dedicated to the training of economic historians according to Kufakurinani (2022) — even further limited economic history centres beyond South Africa.

**TABLE 5** • *Top 15 institutional affiliations by number of publications, 2000–2024*

	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Articles</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>% Articles</b>
1	Stellenbosch University*	12	10	10.5
2	London School of Economics	11	6	9.6
3	Wageningen University	11	5	9.6
4	Lund University	9	8	7.9
5	University of Gothenburg	7	4	6.1
6	University of Barcelona	6	4	5.3
7	University of Oxford	6	2	5.3
8	University of Sussex	5	3	4.4
	Utrecht University	5	3	4.4
10	Tübingen University	5	3	4.4
11	Harvard University**	4	4	3.5
	Geneva Graduate Institute	4	4	3.5
13	University of Michigan**	4	2	3.5
	Middlebury College**	4	2	3.5
15	Paris School of Economics	3	5	2.6

*Note:* The university affiliation of each (co)author was counted as stated in the article. Most universities are located in Europe, except indicated as: \* Africa-based; \*\* US-based. Authors indicate the number of first-time authors.

What explains the limited participation of African scholars in the surge of AEH publications? A number of articles point to intellectual market segmentation that has prevented broader African participation in the rise of AEH (Austin 2015; Fourie 2016; Green and Nyambara 2015). Explanations include resource constraints — i.e., less institutional funding at many African universities compared with their counterparts in Western Europe, North America and South Africa — and brain drain, as African top economic historians are drawn by career prospects outside Africa. Other explanations focus on differing intellectual and methodological priorities. For example, Austin (2015) highlights the prevalent assumption among economists in Africa that historical analysis has little to contribute to designing policy interventions aiming to promote present-day development. Research into contemporary economic development has indeed traditionally taken an ahistorical research approach that rarely linked historical factors to present-day development outcomes. However, as illustrated by the rise of economic history articles in economics journals (Panel C in Table 3), the 21st century has seen a rapidly growing

literature that attempts to explain contemporary comparative development through a historical perspective (Nunn 2020). This new insistence by economic historians that the study of Africa's past can inform our understanding of the causes of present-day poverty appears not to have (yet) visibly altered the intellectual priorities of African economics departments. An exception to this rule is the African School of Economics (operating in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Zanzibar), founded in Abomey Calavi (Benin) in 2014 by US-trained economist Leonard Wantchekon.

Meanwhile, Green and Nyambara (2015) argue that the absence of African scholars (outside of South Africa) in top-ranked economic history journals does not mean that little economic history research is taking place at African universities. Instead, they point to a vibrant research community that approaches economic history from a different methodological stance than is prioritized by the increasingly quantitative-focused top five economic history journals. Africa-based economic historians therefore often gear their work less toward cliometric-oriented journals in economic history and instead focus on area studies journals that value traditional historical methods, such as the *Journal of African History*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* and *African Economic History*, and *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Scholars in Africa, and elsewhere for that matter, who wish to publish in the top five economic history journals thus need to engage with quantitative methods.

The African Economic History Network (AEHN),<sup>8</sup> founded in 2011 with the goal of fostering communication, research and teaching on African long-term development, promotes the participation of African scholars in the international growth of the field through various initiatives. For example, the location of the Annual Meeting of the AEHN has started to rotate between European and African universities (e.g., Stellenbosch 2017, Pretoria 2023), and meeting organizers often offer travel bursaries to support Africa-based scholars' participation, which has steadily increased over the years (see Figure 4). Indeed, participation remains heavily tied to the location of meetings. The share of African scholars more than doubled from 20 percent in 2022, when the conference was hosted by the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, to 42 percent in 2023 when it was based at the University of Pretoria, but participation of African scholars is projected to decline again to 20 percent at the upcoming 2024 annual meeting in Rome.

The AEHN also seeks to make the field more accessible to future scholars through the ongoing development of an open-access textbook, *The History of African Development*, a free online resource comprising 20 chapters in both English and French, aimed at introducing a new generation of students

8 Website: <https://www.aehnetwork.org/>.

to cutting edge research in the economic history of Africa (Frankema et al. 2023).<sup>9</sup> The book is used by lecturers at numerous African universities, and of the 12,000 visits to the textbook's website in 2023, the majority (37 percent) originated from the African continent, notably from Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya. In recent years, numerous scholars from the AEHN have provided guest lectures based on the textbook at the African School of Economics in Benin.

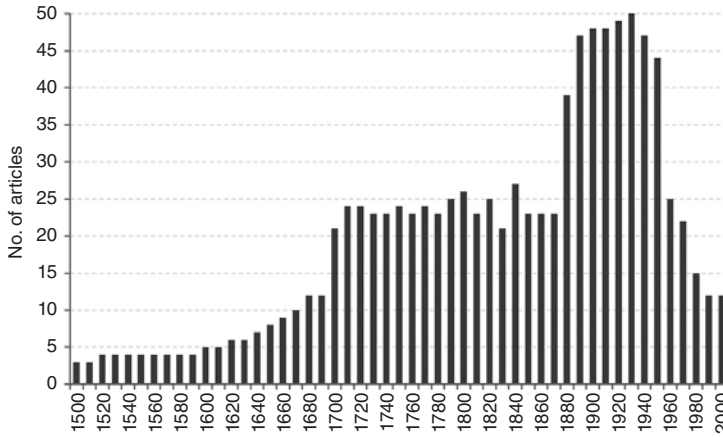
The renaissance and revival of AEH has also included a notable gender dimension, as illustrated in Table 4. The share of female authors in AEH remained low during the 2000–2015 period, coming close to the 15–20 percent average female author representation in the top five economic history journals during the 2010–2017 period (Cioni, Federico and Vasta 2020). However, during the past eight years the field has shown gradual signs of increasing participation by female scholars, with female authors representing just over one quarter of publications on Africa in the top five. The growth of female representation at the AEHN's Annual Meetings has been even more significant, though a gender discrepancy remains. At both AEHN meetings held at the University of Barcelona in 2019 and the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in 2022, 32 percent of the authors of papers presented were female. At the AEHN meeting in 2023 hosted by the University of Pretoria, this share grew to 37 percent. Finally, Table 4 also indicates that co-authoring among African economic historians has become more common. While 40 percent of papers were written by more than one scholar in 2008–2015, this share increased to close to 60 percent during the most recent 2016–2024 period.

## **5. Topics, sources, methods, geography and historical coverage in the AEH renaissance**

We now turn to the content of the renaissance of AEH, exploring shifting trends in the periodization, geographic focus, and sources and methodologies applied to studying Africa's past over the last quarter century. As our analysis reveals, a number of lacunae remain in the field, some of which are addressed by articles in this special issue.

Figure 6 charts the temporal coverage of all articles on Africa published in the top five economic history journals from 2000–2024. The data reveal that even though c. 60 percent of papers focus on the pre-1880 period, there is a clear bias toward research on the colonial period. Compared to the 1700–1870s era, there are twice the number of papers focusing on the 1880s–1950s,

9 The textbook is freely accessible: <https://www.aehnetwork.org/textbook/>

**FIGURE 6 • Historical coverage of top five EH articles, 2000–2024**

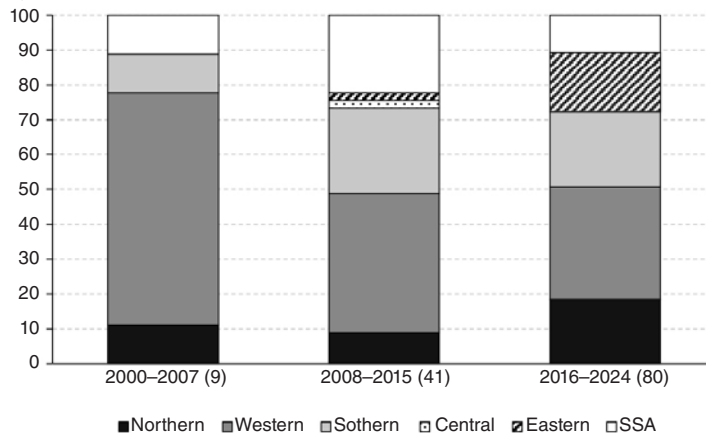
Note: Based on 113 papers focusing on “Africa.” One paper was dropped that focused on the pre-1500 period for illustration purposes.

when colonization was in full swing across the continent. Of those 64 papers on the colonial era, almost all of them focus on British and French Africa, with the exception of five articles that focus on Italian Libya, Belgian Congo, German Togo and Cameroon, as well as independent Liberia. Portuguese Africa, in contrast, is entirely neglected. The periods surrounding the colonial era remain less explored. Studies on the pre-colonial era (c. 1500–1799) are relatively few and lean heavily toward research on the slave trade. The continent’s post-colonial past likewise remains comparatively underexplored in the top five economic history publications. Are the post-1960s simply not “historical” enough for economic historians, or are the longitudinal inconsistencies of post-colonial sources to blame? According to Simson (2020), the decay and fragmentation in the publication of African economic statistics post-independence has hampered the breadth of quantitative analysis, such as connecting developments in the colonial with the post-colonial era. Simson (2020) surveys several untapped sources on Africa’s post-colonial economic history, including backward projection techniques of present-day household censuses (Bossuroy and Cogneau 2013; De Haas and Frankema 2018; Baten et al. 2021) and the use of probate records from post-independence Kenya to estimate (gender) wealth inequality (Simson 2024a; Simson 2024b). The recent call to extend the Great Divergence research agenda to study the nature and origins of a new process of economic divergence within the Global South post-1950s, specifically between Asian and African economies, presents a timely future comparative research agenda (Frankema 2024).

Figure 7 charts the 114 publications in the top five economic history journals by their African geographical focus for three periods from 2000–2024,

showing that geographical focus has shifted from research overwhelmingly centred on Western Africa (2000–2015), driven by studies on the transatlantic slave trade, to greater inclusion of works on Southern Africa (2008–2015), and eventually Eastern Africa (2016–2024). While variation in this respect has risen, the regional illustration masks the fact that each region has a dominant country. Egypt occupies 14/16 articles on North Africa, while South Africa makes up 22/27 studies on Southern Africa, Ghana and Nigeria jointly comprise 14/45 studies on Western Africa, and Uganda accounts for 7/13 studies on Eastern Africa. Together, these five countries make up half of all geographical areas of interest of those papers with a country focus (i.e., excluding the 17 all-Africa papers). In other words, there is significant scope for expanding economic history research into less studied African geographies. For example, while British and French African territories dominate among all colonial-era studies, there is barely any research on former Belgian Congo (1), as well as German (2), Italian (1), Portuguese (0), and Spanish (0) colonies, independent Liberia (2), nor mostly-independent Ethiopia (0). In particular, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia, two of the four most populated African countries, barely feature among top five economic history publications over the past quarter of a century.

**FIGURE 7** • Share of top five EH journal publications by African region, 2000–2024 (in %)



Note: African countries allocated according to the United Nations geoscheme. Numbers in brackets indicate number of articles in each period. An article can include more than one African region.

The topics explored by scholars have also become more varied over time, as illustrated in Figure 8, which lists major topics by publication period. The majority of papers published in the top five economic history journals in the 2000–2007 period focused on the slave trade, which was among the first

topics in AEH that made use of large datasets and statistical analyses (Eltis 1977, 1987). While the slave trade has retained pride of place due to a second surge in the 2016–2024 period, the range of topics has grown considerably since 2008, with a rise first in papers focussed on taxation and finance as well as transport, trade, health, education and economic growth, among others (2008–2015), followed by a recent surge in research on inequality, culture, labour and agriculture, and other topics more recently (2016–2024).

**FIGURE 8** - *Number of articles by topic in top five economic history journals, 2000–2024*

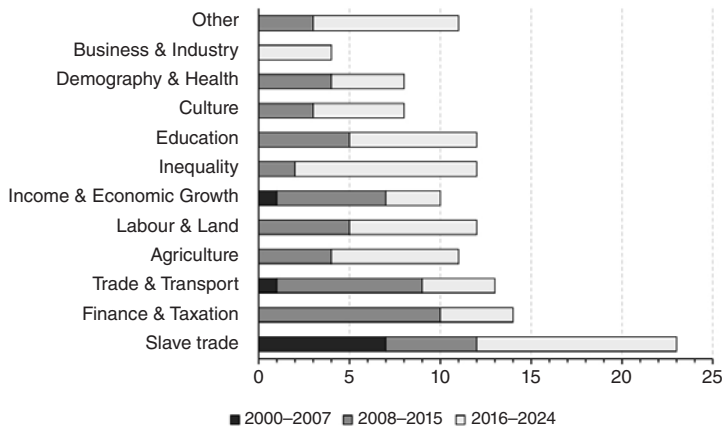


Table 6 indicates that the majority of studies' unit of inquiry was on the country/colony-level (40 percent), followed by an individual-level analytical focus (17 percent), within-country regional/district/province-level (11 percent), and slave-voyage-level (8 percent). The unit of analysis is determined by the scholarly question asked but also ultimately depends on the historical source available in African and Western archives. Here, sources on the individual-level (in particular, on African women),<sup>10</sup> sex-disaggregated, household, farm, village or firm-level data are comparatively less represented or available in the historical archives.

The revival of AEH — and the growth in the range of topics explored — is closely linked to its own data revolution, in which scholars have collected multifaceted sources and applied rigorous innovative quantitative methods (Fourie 2016). The work by Kerby, Moradi and Odendaal (2024), using 2,500 hand-written European traveller accounts and maps over 1000 years combined with

<sup>10</sup> We counted only four papers that use female individual data contained in the top five economic history journals (Meier zu Selhausen and Weisdorf 2016; De Haas and Frankema 2018; Cilliers and Mariotti 2019; Cilliers, Mariotti and Martins 2024).

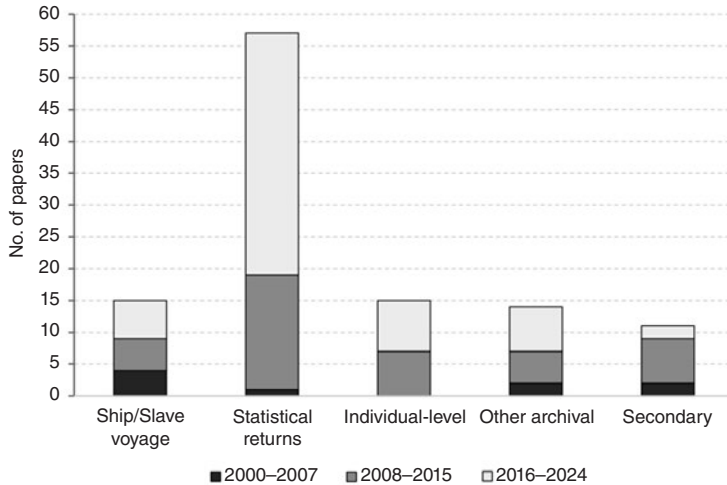
**TABLE 6** - *Unit of analysis in top five journal articles, in order of prevalence, 2000–2024*

<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<b>N</b>
Country/Colony	46
Individual	19
District/Region/Province	12
Voyage/Slave ship	9
Village/County/Municipality/Town	5
Household	3
Court case	3
Religious group	2
Farm	2
Firm	2
Other	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>

computational linguistic techniques to shed new light on pre-colonial African history across space and time, is a great example of recent data innovation. Although a wide array of data has been used, prominent sources can be clustered into five major types: (i) merchant shipping and slave voyage accounts (e.g., the Trans-Atlantic Slave Database); (ii) country, district and village data from annual colonial statistical returns (e.g., *Blue Book*), censuses and surveys; (iii) individual-level data from court records, probate and tax inventories, genealogical data, military recruitment or mission churches (e.g., marriage/burial registers); (iv) other archival data comprising letters, diaries, traveller accounts, company records, consular reports, ethnographic literature (e.g., *Murdock atlas*, etc.), and (v) secondary literature. Figure 9 illustrates the development of sources used among top five economic history research focusing on Africa over three periods. While the majority of articles relied on merchant ship and slave voyage datasets during 2000–2007, since 2008 annual colonial statistical returns, censuses and surveys have become the most commonly used sources that represent more than half of total sources. New sources from African archives providing insights on the micro-level have been collected, along with other innovative archival sources, over the 2008–2024 period.

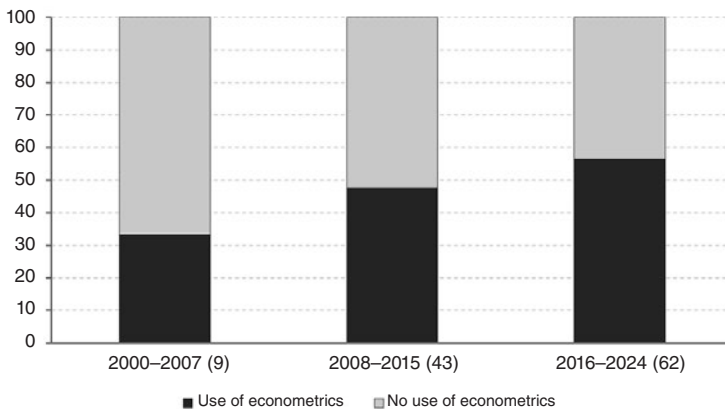


**FIGURE 9** ▪ *Type of data sources used in top five EH journals, 2000–2024*



The proliferation of sources has been accompanied by growth in the array and complexity of analytical methods applied to studying Africa’s past. Indeed, Figure 10 shows that while just over 30 percent of the nine Africa-related articles published in top five economic history journals between 2000–2007 used econometric techniques, more than half of the 56 articles published in the 2016–2024 period utilized quantitative methods, indicative of the growing link between economic history, economics and development studies discussed above.

**FIGURE 10** ▪ *Use of econometrics in Africa articles in top five EH publications, 2000–2024 (in %)*



## 6. Conclusion and summary of special issue articles

This introduction has summarized the key features and trends in published research on AEH over the past 25 years. It documents the expansion of the field in terms of publications and citations in the top five economic history journals and other outlets, as well as the increased diversity in sources, methodologies, geographical focus, topics, and time periods studied. Despite the optimistic proclamation of a revival in AEH in 2014, analysis of publications in the top five economics history journals suggests that this resurgence quickly reached a plateau, with no further growth in the quantity, impact, or diversity of publications. But beyond general interest economic history journals, the field has found new footing in other disciplinary outlets, particularly in the fields of development and economics, and AEH researchers have explored new territory — geographically, temporally and methodologically. Still, there is much room for the field to grow. Researchers affiliated with African institutions, particularly outside of South Africa, remain underrepresented, although there is a recent trend of African scholars based outside the continent contributing to the field (one author of this special issue being a case in point). Furthermore, while the share of female published authors and women's participation at the Annual Meeting of the AEHN has significantly increased, the majority of scholarship in AEH is authored by European men. In terms of geographic areas and historical periods, Portuguese, Belgian, Italian, Spanish and German colonies (as well as mostly independent Ethiopia), and the postcolonial era are understudied.

The four articles published in this special issue on *Comparative development in colonial Africa* feature recent trends observed in the new revival of AEH and also help fill lacunae in the field. As with most of the reviewed recent research, all four papers focus on the colonial period (and one partly on the persistent effects into postcolonial times). On the other hand, this special issue has a relatively wide geographic coverage, with two articles (Dolan 2024 and Alexopoulou and Frankema 2024) shedding light on the understudied economic history of Portuguese colonial Africa, making comparative reference not only to British and French colonies but also to similarly underrepresented Belgian Africa. All research papers make use of data gathered in hitherto untapped archival sources, including colonial state and missionary records, as well as private mining company reports. We conclude our analysis of developments in AEH over the last quarter century by summarizing their respective contributions to the field.

Chiseni and Bolt's (2024) article illustrates the increasing scholarship on the historical role and legacy of Christian missions (see Jedwab, Meier zu Selhausen and Moradi 2022; Okoye 2022). It also exemplifies the methodological shift towards fine-grained longitudinal spatial analyses, leveraging existing datasets and geolocating new historical data (such as mission stations),

along with the use of individual-level data for more recent periods. The research connects historical data to present-day outcomes and attempts to decompress history by providing snapshots of mission locations at different points in time during the colonial period.

Focusing on a case study of Zambia, the authors utilize various primary sources, including colonial Blue Books, annual educational reports, and census reports, to trace the expansion of mission schools, enrolment by gender, and education expenditure from 1924 to 1953. Their findings indicate that the expansion of mission schools did not begin until the mid-1930s. They also document significant gender disparities in schooling during the study period and present evidence of a Kuznets curve in the female-to-male enrolment ratio, aligning with recent research on gender inequality in education across sub-Saharan Africa (Baten et al. 2021). Additionally, the study reveals that Protestant mission schools exhibited lower gender inequality in enrolment compared to Catholic missions.

The authors estimate the relationship between the location of colonial mission schools and the years of schooling attained by individuals recorded in the 1990 census of Zambia. Individual-level data on African women during the colonial era is generally sparse (Meier zu Selhausen 2014; Meier zu Selhausen and Weisdorf 2016; Cilliers, Mariotti and Martins 2024), for which the birth cohort approach offers itself as an intriguing method to trace back male and female educational attainment to their respective birth locations. Their case-study suggests persistent effects of early mission schools, with the strongest associations found for the latest mission mappings. Furthermore, Protestant missions are shown to have a slightly larger effect on educational attainment than Catholic missions.

Westland's (2024) article significantly contributes to the expanding body of literature on real wages in Africa by employing the welfare ratio method first introduced by Allen (2001) and adapted for an urban sub-Saharan African context by Frankema and van Waijenburg (2012). The study focuses on French West Africa, examining whether colonial capitals functioned as enclaves of relative prosperity or if smaller cities maintained comparable real incomes. It thereby enhances our understanding of living standards beyond the capital cities — or a few other large cities — in colonial Africa.

Utilizing extensive new data on nominal wages of male domestic servants and retail prices from the national archives of Senegal, Westland (2024) estimates welfare ratios for around 50 urban centres across French colonial Dahomey, Niger, Soudan Français, Haute-Volta, and Guinée Française during 1948. The results reveal significant disparities in nominal wages, real wages, and price levels throughout French West Africa, pointing at imperfect regional market integration for foodstuffs and other items of consumption, as well as differences in worker productivity.

Generally, coastal towns, being more commercialized, exhibited higher real wages compared to hinterland areas (although coastal Guinea was relatively impoverished). Regions connected to colonial railways and areas with greater land productivity also displayed on average higher real incomes. An urban premium is evident, with larger towns displaying higher nominal and real wages compared to smaller settlements.

Utilizing the metaphor of “jackals” and “lions”, Alexopoulou and Frankema (2024) place the identity of the colonizer in relief, comparing fiscal-military capacity in the colonies of a “weak” metropolitan power (Portugal) to stronger powers (Britain and France) that had larger global empires, more resources at their disposal, and considerable geo-political presence. Their focus on Portuguese Africa breaks the mould of existing comparative studies on modes of governance in colonial Africa, which centre on comparing various features of French and British rule.

The authors compare several dimensions of the “fiscal-military nexus” in Portuguese, British and French colonies, including recruitment practices, the size of the colonial army, means of financing the military (i.e., metropolitan transfers and colonial taxation), and deployment patterns within and between colonies and empires. They find that the larger empires of Britain and France provided economies of scale and scope — i.e., pooling of military resources across the empire — to more effectively control territories, thus lowering the cost of maintaining order. Moreover, both Britain and France had vast resources to draw from to subsidize colonial militaries, either from the metropole itself or by redistributing from other parts of the empire. The Portuguese empire, in contrast, was both smaller and poorer, and much of the colonial budget was consequently devoted to financing its less efficient colonial militaries, leaving little for welfare services. Tentative comparison suggests that the Belgian Congo shared similar military-fiscal features. This article also invites further research to uncover possible links between military-fiscal characteristics and the prevalence of forced labour.

Like Alexopoulou and Frankema (2024), Dolan (2024) puts Portuguese colonial Africa centre stage while making comparative reference to other colonial powers, including Belgium. He zooms in on a single enterprise — the *Companhia de Diamantes de Angola* (Diamang) — in Portuguese Angola to explain why the use of forced labour by firms persisted for considerably longer in Portuguese Africa relative to British, French and Belgian colonies. In a nod to business history — an underexplored facet of the economic history of Africa — his use of company mining records offers nuanced insights into the shifting relationship between capitalist enterprises and the colonial government as well as company strategies vis-à-vis labour. By applying economic modelling to explain historical developments, this article explores interdisciplinary connections between economics and African history.

Dolan (2024) first traces the relatively early decline of forced labour in private enterprises in British, French and Belgian Africa before developing a series of models to explain its persistence in the Angolan mining industry. He takes a novel approach, combining economic theory with qualitative sources (colonial reports and company correspondences) to help explain why the use of forced labour remained attractive for company management within the institutional and economic context of Angola. He then applies similar methods to explain the rapid-fire decline of forced labour in Angola in the decades before independence.

He argues that a series of developments related to independence movements in Africa dramatically altered the economic landscape by the early 1960s, reducing the profitability of forced labour in Angola. Diamang consequently quickly shifted toward offering (much) higher wages to attract voluntary labour, illustrating that changing contexts can alter persistent coercive labour systems.

### **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully thank the editors Gabriele Cappelli and Ramon Ramon-Muñoz as well as Johan Fourie, Michiel de Haas, Alexander Moradi, Maanik Nath and John Tang for their constructive comments.

### **Author contribution statement**

Katharine Frederick: framework, methodology, dataset, investigation, writing. Dácil Juif: framework, methodology, dataset, investigation, writing. Felix Meier zu Selhausen: framework, methodology, software and code, formal analysis dataset, investigation, visualization, writing.

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## ***El renaixement de la història econòmica africana al segle XXI: una anàlisi bibliomètrica***

### RESUM

Han passat deu anys des de la publicació del darrer número especial sobre història econòmica africana, en què es proclamava el «renaixement» d'aquest camp. En aquest treball fem una anàlisi bibliomètrica de 114 articles escrits per 104 autors diferents i publicats a les cinc principals revistes d'història econòmica entre els anys 2000 i 2024. Obtenim una panoràmica actualitzada de les característiques clau de l'evolució de la història econòmica africana en termes de quantitat i impacte de les publicacions, temes de recerca, període històric, àrea geogràfica africana, tipus de fonts i dades, mètodes analítics i característiques dels autors (afiliació i gènere). Aquest camp ha experimentat una expansió impressionant quant a la quantitat i l'impacte de les publicacions —també fora dels principals mitjans generals d'història econòmica—, la participació en conferències, la varietat de temes de recerca i la innovació en l'ús de les fonts. Tanmateix, immediatament després de la publicació del número especial l'any 2014, el creixement s'estancà tant pel que fa al nombre absolut i relatiu de publicacions com a la quantitat de citacions. Els autors amb seu en institucions africanes, i també les autores, continuen estant infrarepresentats, i les antigues colònies belgues, alemanyes, italianes i portugueses, així com el període postcolonial, estan poc estudiats.

PARAULES CLAU: història econòmica africana, anàlisi bibliomètrica, principals revistes d'història econòmica, èxit de citació, autoria.

CODIS JEL: N01, N37, N77.



## ***El renacimiento de la historia económica africana en el siglo XXI: un análisis bibliométrico***

### RESUMEN

Han pasado diez años desde la publicación del último número especial sobre historia económica africana, en el que se proclamaba el «renacimiento» de este campo. En el presente trabajo realizamos un análisis bibliométrico de 114 artículos, escritos por 104 autores distintos y publicados en las cinco principales revistas de historia económica entre 2000 y 2024. Con él, obtenemos una panorámica actualizada de las características clave de la evolución de la historia económica africana en términos de cantidad e impacto de las publicaciones, temas de investigación, periodo histórico, área geográfica africana, tipo de fuentes y datos, métodos analíticos y características de los autores (afiliación y género). Este campo ha experimentado una impresionante expansión en cuanto a la cantidad y al impacto de las publicaciones —también fuera de los principales medios generales de historia económica—, la participación en conferencias, la variedad de temas de investigación y la innovación en el uso de las fuentes. Sin embargo, inmediatamente después de la publicación del número especial en 2014, el crecimiento se estancó en relación con el número de publicaciones, en términos absolutos y relativos, y a la cantidad de citaciones. Los autores con sede en instituciones africanas, así como las autoras,

siguen estando infrarrepresentados, y las antiguas colonias belgas, alemanas, italianas y portuguesas, junto con el periodo poscolonial, se mantienen poco estudiados.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** historia económica africana, análisis bibliométrico, principales revistas de historia económica, éxito de citación, autoría.

**CÓDIGOS JEL:** N01, N37, N77.

