Tony Hopkins shares fifty years of African economic history

Prof Anthony Hopkins of Cambridge University delivered the third annual LEAP Lecture on Wednesday, 3 October. This year’s lecture also formed part of the 100 lecture series of Stellenbosch University’s centennial celebrations.

After completing a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (1964), with a thesis entitled “An Economic History of Lagos, 1880–1914”, Hopkins read economic history at the universities of Birmingham, the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Cambridge University and the University of Texas at Austin.

Hopkins is known for his extensive work on the history of Africa, empires, and globalisation. He has been an editor of both the Journal of African History and the Economic History Review. His principal works include An Economic History of West Africa (1973), and, with Peter Cain, British Imperialism, 1688–2000 (1993). The latter won the Forkosch Prize awarded by the American Historical Association in 1995 and is considered to be one of the most influential interpretations of British imperial expansion advanced in the last half century. His most recent work, entitled American Empire: A Global History (2017), is a study of the United States written from the perspective of imperial history.

In this lecture, Hopkins returned to the topic on which he first worked: African economic history. His lecture summarised the different ideological approaches that have influenced the study of African economic history over the past fifty years. The full lecture is now available on the LEAP website.

Prof Hopkins is the third scholar to the deliver the LEAP Lecture. Marianne Wanamaker (University of Tennessee) and Emmanuel Akyeampong (Harvard University) presented the previous two LEAP Lectures.
At the frontiers of business history

Business history is witnessing a resurgence across the world. LEAP now has a dedicated business history research cluster committed to furthering the area of business history in Africa, with the intention of linking our research to the historical frontiers of the emerging world. Leaders, academics and the public are looking to gain insight from hindsight. As the global economy enters a new phase of uncertainty, we have to ask how the reflection of historical episodes can inform our current options. For example, scholarship from the Great Depression of the 1930s ensured that the same mistakes were not made during the recent 2008 financial crisis. With the rise in protectionism, we are now looking at how companies responded to trade wars in the 19th and 20th century.

However, business history has tended to examine individual cases of how businesses responded to episodic periods of technological innovation, crises or managerial theory. In Africa, as in the rest of the emerging world, business historians have therefore sought to merely explore these established debates by adding a new geographic setting. There has recently been a call from leading African economic scholars and business historians to engage with the alternative business history of emerging markets, and in doing so produce research at the frontier of the discipline. Moreover, a growing body of international economic scholarship has started creating large historical databases which systematically explore links between the incorporation of business and the broader macro context of economic change.

Taking up this challenge, the NRF-funded Frontier of Finance project has seen quantitative economic historians and business historians collaborate at LEAP. In the first of several projects, our team has digitised the Cape Joint Stock Archive, which, to our knowledge, is the largest of its kind in the emerging world.

The spread of the Joint Stock company to the Cape Colony in 1864, with its multiple shareholders, limited liability and professional managers ushered in a period of rapid growth, globalisation and innovation. By transcribing and curating the largest Joint Stock database in Africa, this project plots the development of early capitalism at the Cape Colony and its spread through Southern Africa.

The Cape was home to over 3000 limited liabilities companies operating in multiple sectors and geographical regions. The dataset provides a wealth of information about the formation of early companies, shareholders, articles of association, intellectual property, human capital formation and multinational globalisation during a period which experienced tremendous turbulence and change.

Linking probate, migration, tax and household records allows us to estimate the scale of capital ingenuity on the financial frontier of Southern Africa. Bringing together economists, historians, sociologists, genealogists and geographers, the project will systematically explore the links between early capitalism, businesses and the broader context of economic change in Southern Africa.

In the coming month, the Frontiers of Finance project will launch a new website. Keep an eye open for our working papers, data and newsletters.
‘The data revolution in African economic history’ was the theme for two Stellenbosch Alumni events held in New York and Boston during July. Prof Johan Fourie was the keynote speaker at both events. On 26 July, ING hosted the New York event, with more than 40 alumni and friends of the university in attendance. The second event, held at The Residence Inn Marriott in Boston on 30 July, attracted a larger crowd, now including several economic historians that were in Boston for the World Economic History Congress. The talks were part of the centennial celebration of Stellenbosch University in 2018.

**LEAP IN NY:** Prof Johan Fourie presented two guest lectures in New York and Boston at SU Alumni events

Between 30 July and 3 August, several LEAP faculty and students presented research papers at the World Economic History Congress in Boston, USA. Associate professors Johan Fourie and Dieter von Fintel and PhD student Calumet Links presented several research papers, including one co-authored paper on the Khoesan and coercion. Igor Martins, a PhD student at Lund University who visited LEAP for several months in 2018, presented a paper co-authored with Johan Fourie and Jeanne Cilliers on slaveholder reparations. Newly appointed postdoc Kara Dimitruk presented a poster about her work on political connections in the English parliament. Research associates Katherine Eriksson, Leigh Gardner and Erik Green, former PhD students Jeanne Cilliers and Christie Swanepoel and extraordinary professor Jan Luiten van Zanden also presented papers.

**LEAP at World Economic History Congress**

Farai Nyika, PhD student in Economics, attended the Economic History Association meeting in Montreal, Canada in September 2018. He presented a poster on ‘District Councils and Transkeian education outcomes, 1895-1910’. The conference theme was Shocks and Disasters in Economic History.
I am a historical demographer with a passion for population research in Sub-Saharan Africa. I obtained my Ph.D. in economics from Stellenbosch University in 2016 and I currently work as a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Economic History at Lund University. My research focuses on the interplay between population dynamics and socio-economic development in settler societies. My expertise is in historical data transcription, management, linkage, and analysis. This has most recently included the digitization of the South African Genealogical Registers, which formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation: A Demographic History of Settler South Africa.

In a new paper co-authored with Martine Mariotti, we build on this work by introducing the South African Families Database. This paper is the first in what we hope will be a series of papers that deal with questions about fertility and the fertility transition from the point of view of settler South Africa as a representative of settler society. We introduce genealogical registers as a new source for South African historical demographers, discuss its reliability for use on questions regarding historical fertility, introduce a first estimation of settler parity as well as determine the timing of the white fertility transition. Our work enabled us to join the discussion on comparative fertility transitions in the nineteenth century.

We track women’s own childbearing through their birth histories allowing us to estimate average total children born to each cohort and to look at cohort fertility behavior by age. We provide the first comprehensive analysis of women’s cohort fertility in settler South Africa between 1700 and 1900. We find parity rates of approximately seven children per woman until a decline begins with women born in the 1850s. Both average parity and the timing of the transition are similar to other settler societies suggesting that although the sample suffers from selection it does not bias the parity estimates. In addition to our independent research on the South African settler demographic transition, I work in a joint Lund/Stellenbosch University project entitled: The Cape of Good Hope Panel: Quantitative studies of long-term growth, inequality and labour coercion in a developing region. In order to fully capture changes over time in the characteristics and composition of the Cape population of the early nineteenth century, multiple individual-level sources are required. But piecing together a population that was subject to continuous natural increases and immigration, coupled with continuous decreases through death and out-migration, is fraught with difficulties not least of which is reconciling often scant and heterogeneous source documents.

The first task was the development of an automated record linkage strategy to identify and link households across the opga afrolen. A pilot record linkage design was applied to the Graaff-Reinet opga afrolen, as this was the first district to be transcribed and made available in full.

In a new paper, myself, together with Auke Ripma and Johan Fourie evaluate a number of statistical models and deterministic algorithms to best identify and match households over time. After establishing the best approach based on a subset of manually linked records, we describe how we use this model to create a panel from Cape Colony census returns for 1787–1828, a dataset of 42 354 observations spread over 35 years.

The next step was to connect the complete linked panel for Graaff-Reinet to the South African Families database. The probabilistic record linkage strategy that was used to identify and match households over time to build the Graaff-Reinet panel was applied to identify and match heads of households across these two sources with a match rate of between 40 and 60 percent annually. This has, in turn, enabled the exploration of some aspects of pre-industrial household composition in a frontier region. The findings are published in a new paper co-authored with Erik Green entitled ‘The Land–Labour Hypothesis in a Settler Economy: Wealth, Labour and Household Composition on the South African Frontier’.

We show that the number of children present in farming households increased with frontier closure, while the presence of non-family labourers decreased over time. We explain this by, in contrast with the frontier literature, acknowledging that the demand for family labour was not a function of its marginal productivity and that farmers reacted differently to diminishing land availability depending on their wealth.

The results, while illuminating for our understanding of wealth differences in settler family and labour relations, revealed a number of unanswered questions relating to the accumulation and intergenerational transmission of wealth amongst different settler groups. We set out to investigate these and other questions in future work.
The postgraduate Economic History class of 2018 convened in early May for an essay presentation day. They were, from back left to right, prof. Johan Fourie, Regina Dworschak, Nina Muhlebach, Anja Metz, Jannes Reddig, Sechaba Mokobane, Clement Tiley, Ntsane Moliko, Onesmo Mackenzie, Martin Mwale, Jason Lord, Ruusa Nandago, Vera Neasebaur, Anna-Katharina Jacobs, Camila Haux, Karen Makhwatha, Grace Bridgman and Beaurel Visser. Four students were absent.

Kara Dimitruk joined LEAP in July as postdoc after earning her PhD in Economics from the University of California, Irvine. She was born and raised in California, but, prior to completing her PhD, she received her BA in International Political Economy from Fordham University in New York City and has experience working in the non-profit sector in Portland, Oregon. Kara’s primary research interests are on the political economy and economic effects of property rights change and public goods provision. Her work in economic history is grounded in creating new datasets and using a variety of econometric and historical methods to shed light on these issues.

Bologna hosts AEHN2018

Last year, Stellenbosch hosted the annual African Economic History Network meetings. This year the meetings were held in Bologna. Karin Pallaver (History) was the host organiser.

Several LEAP researchers presented their work, including Jeanne Cilliers (former PhD student), Dieter von Fintel, Lloyd Maphosa (PhD, History), Fran Marco Gracia (Postdoc, History), Beaurel Visser (Masters, History), Leigh Gardner (Research associate), and Chanda Chiseni (former Masters student).
Calumet Links, PhD student in LEAP, will join the Economics department as Lecturer in 2019. We wanted to know more about his plans for the future...

LEAP research is up there with the best of them. I met some really inspiring people and made some valuable contacts. I also received very useful comments on my research.

After completing your Masters, you worked for the government and then in the private sector. Tell us about this journey, and why you returned to academia?

When I finished my Masters in 2011, I went to work for the Northern Cape Department of Sport, Arts and Culture as Deputy Director for Supply Chain Management. This was obviously a strange career choice for an economist, but it was one of the areas in government that generally needs the most skilled labour. I felt like I needed to do my part. I spent 3 years working for government and learnt many valuable general skills.

I then went on to work for NKC African Economics as a Macroeconomist. NKC played a major part in developing my writing skills and was an excellent re-introduction into the world of Economics.

However, I was always involved in teaching students at UNISA (University of South Africa) and felt that I needed to move back in to the academic sphere of work. My work experience obviously gave me added advantages. I also felt that I needed to find a field of research that married my expertise in economics and my passion for the past.

Of all the different sub-fields of Economics, why Economic History?

I have been an avid lover of historical literature, especially French and American history and so the choice was easy to marry my love for historical study in general with Economics (the field within which I work). It’s truly a blessing being able to make a career of it.

What don’t we know yet in Economic History that we should know more about?

Well this is always a tough question to answer and I am grateful that I can give this answer in writing. To give one example, there is quite a substantial gap in the Economic History literature on indigenous African and Asian household formation. This has a significant impact on how we conceptualise inequality measures, intra-household bargaining power, the impact of social networks, etc. These are fantastic questions that can be answered through studying Economic History.

You’ve built up an excellent relationship with Lund University and will soon visit them again for a few months. How have these international partners contributed to what we do at LEAP?

Yes, I have had the privilege of working with the Economic History group at Lund, but also my exposure to international conferences in Europe, the UK and the US have enabled me to build networks with young academics in the field of Economic History and other related fields of study. I trust that these networks will come in handy throughout my future career. Lund is also one of the largest and most well-known economic history departments in the world so working in close proximity to and with Lund affiliated students and academics have had a positive impact on the quality and pace of my research.

In October you made a big step in your career by accepting a position in the Economics department. Congratulations! What are your aspirations for Economic History at Stellenbosch?

Yes, it will be a tremendous privilege to work at Stellenbosch. I see LEAP establishing itself as the pre-eminent Economic History research engine in Africa as a whole. I see us training more Economic Historians that will promote the study of the field of African Economic History at other South African and African universities.

I hope to see LEAP grow further, possibly establishing a research chair in Economic History. I also hope to see LEAP researchers employ more novel research tools, like machine-learning algorithms. If we want to be globally competitive, we need to be innovative in both our research questions and methods.