

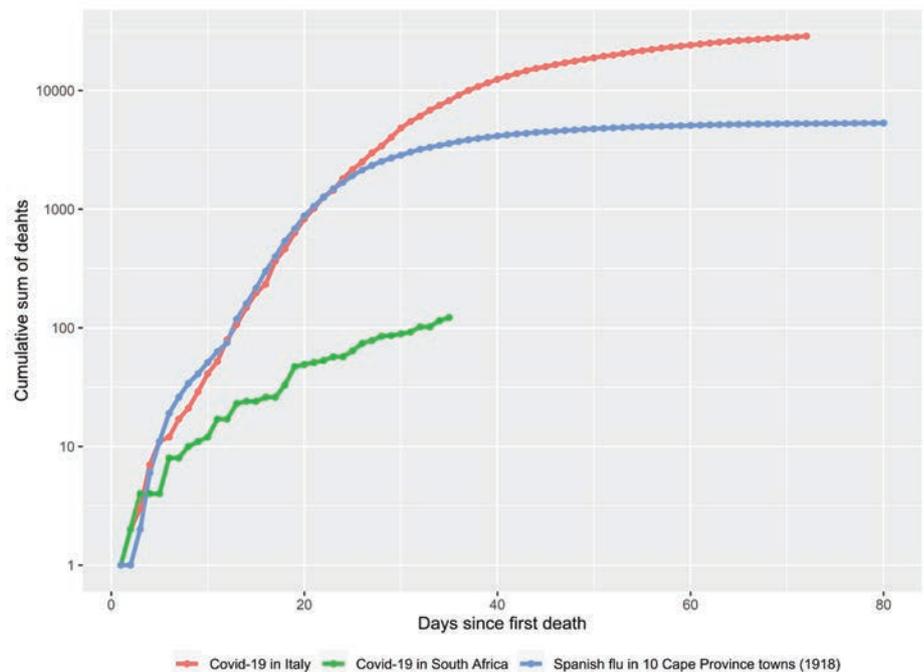
## Coronavirus highlights need to study past pandemics

The Covid-19 pandemic which emerged in Wuhan, China at the end of 2019, has had devastating effects across the globe. Not only have hundreds of thousands of people died, but economies have come to a halt, with millions out of work and income.

As soon as it became clear that the disease, much like earlier coronaviruses, would not be contained within Wuhan or China, the need to understand the likely effects of a global pandemic became apparent. While scientists turned to epidemiological models, it was, as Barry Eichengreen has argued, often the analogical reasoning that won the day: what can we learn from past events of a similar nature? Financial crises have limited use in the current crisis. Instead, the Spanish flu of 1918 was an immediate analogy for today's pandemic. Policy makers turned to economic historians to understand the likely causes and consequences.

LEAP contributed to these debates in South Africa. Approached by the Presidency, LEAP prepared a report based on newly transcribed death certificates of 6 Cape province towns. The report was submitted on 8 April. Since then, a team of transcribers has continued entering the information from thousands of death certificates available online. The results of this research is reported on page 3.

The Covid-19 pandemic, as tragic as it is, has not only renewed interest in economic history but has also created new research and teaching opportunities. At least two research papers are being prepared about the causes and consequences of the Spanish flu. LEAP now has a seminar series that anyone anywhere in the world can attend (see box). Classes have moved online, with opportunities to include more students beyond Stellenbosch in the future. If we learn one thing from 1918, it is that things will get better.



*'Never forget that the basis of our prosperity is technology and the science on which it is based. And our knowledge base today is vastly more resilient than before. Not only will this knowledge base not disappear after the current crisis, but it will actually provide some insurance against the next epidemic. Research will be refocused on molecular virology, computational genomics ... so that the next microbe to try something as this will be zapped even faster. We have been winning the war against microbes, but we are dealing with a stubborn and protean enemy.'*

– Joel Mokyr, March 2020

### LEAP seminar series moves online

The lockdown restrictions following the arrival of covid-19 in South Africa, forced LEAP to adapt to the 'new normal'. When classes resumed online on 20 March, all LEAP lectures were moved to the ZOOM virtual platform too.

The shift to online platforms not only allows LEAP members to attend from

the comfort of their living rooms, but has also removed geographic constraints for both the audience as well as the speakers. In the first session, LEAP members from Australia, Nigeria, England and the United States could listen in. More information about the LEAP webinars is available on the LEAP website.

# *EHDR* now have virtual seminar series

Amidst all the anxiety of Covid-19, there are opportunities for innovation and renewal. One of the major concerns of scholars based in developing countries has always been access to the leading scholars and their ideas.

An initiative led by Warwick University's James Fenske, with support from the Economic History Society of Southern Africa, will remove these obstacles. A series of virtual seminars in economic history, presented by scholars based in developing countries, are scheduled until July.

The full schedule is available at [www.ehssa.org](http://www.ehssa.org). The seminars are open to anyone.



*The Biography of an Uncharted People project has not been able to meet as usual. All meetings have now moved online, to Slack or Zoom. Here, History Master's student Brittany Chalmers shares her thoughts while in lockdown.*

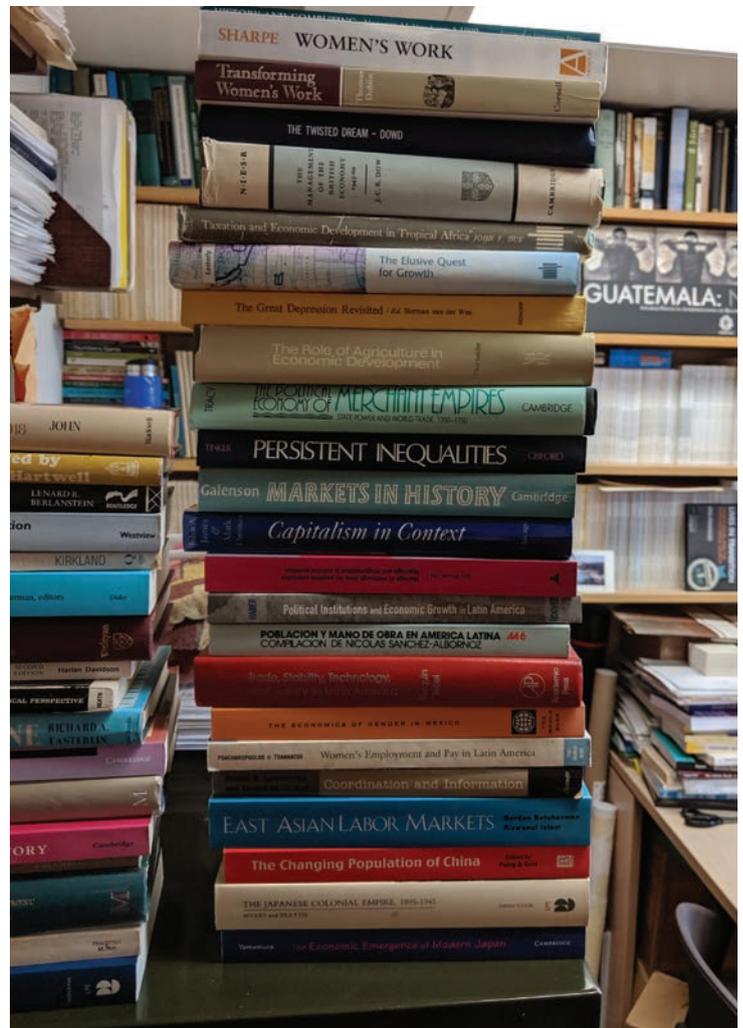
## Kris Inwood donates library to LEAP

Canadian economic historian, Kris Inwood, has generously donated his vast collection of economic history books to LEAP. The books arrived in Cape Town at the end of April, and will be brought to Stellenbosch once lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

Inwood is professor of Economics and History at Guelph University in Canada. He completed his PhD in 1984 at the University of Toronto and specialised initially in Canadian economic history before expanding his research field to include the former British colonies of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. His most recent work is on anthropometric history, using heights to measure past living standards, notably of people that are typically excluded from the official records. His collection of First and Second World War attestation forms of South African soldiers allowed Bokang Mpetla and Johan Fourie, both LEAP members, to co-author a paper on black living standards, published in the South African Journal of Science. Another paper using these records, co-authored by Johan Fourie and LEAP research associate Martine Mariotti, will appear in the July issue of Social Science History.

His upcoming retirement forced him to shed several hundred books. He chose to donate it to LEAP as a way to encourage economic history in South Africa. 'You guys will make better use of them', he noted.

Once lockdown restrictions are relaxed and offices can be occupied again, the books will be indexed and preserved in the LEAP Lab. Special bookcases have been designed for this purpose. Students and visitors using the LEAP Lab will have access to them and be able to enjoy this incredible new resource.



# The 1918 Spanish flu in South Africa and digital history

On 28 September 1918 a train left Cape Town carrying soldiers returning home from the European trenches. Seven of them disembarked in Queenstown. It must have been wonderful to see family and friends and put the horrors of war behind them.

Little did they know that the most harrowing month lay ahead: Black October. Wills Bunu would have known some of these returning soldiers. He was 19 and lived in Cimezile, a district south of Queenstown where he and his extended family farmed.

Shortly after the soldiers returned, Bunu fell ill. So did his family. Two weeks later, on 10 October, the first of them, Nosamon Bunu, 25, an extended family member, died, one of five family members to do so in five days.

Helpless and deathly sick, Wills Bunu endured all this by himself. The most heartbreaking must have been when his 3-year old sister, Canyiwe, died on 24 October. Two days later, Wills Bunu died too.

For the past year a small group of researchers have transcribed these and other records as part of the Andrew Mellon Foundation-funded *Biography of an Uncharted People* project.

The goal has been to apply new statistical methods to large historical datasets, such as the death records the Bunu family's information was drawn from, to uncover stories of persons traditionally overlooked in other documentary evidence.

Digital history is by no means a new

field. Since the 1960s, historians have been aware of the advantages of applying quantitative methods in combination with qualitative analyses. This shift coincided with the increased use of computers in the 1960s and '70s.

However, a combination of overenthusiasm on the part of data scientists and a tendency for historians to shy away from statistical methods led to a decline in these sorts of analyses in the 1980s and 90s.

The subject of Economics began to concern itself more with mathematical underpinnings and left history behind while historians who had previously shown interest in statistical analysis began to question the objectivity of data and other forms of evidence.

This split, however, is beginning to heal. Although there are few South African historians who use digital methods of analysis, the Biography project is aiding in rekindling these flames from a South African perspective.

This is important for a number of reasons. Not only does it prepare students for a world filled with digital data but it allows modern historians to collaborate and join conversations with fellow academics the world over.

At a conference of the American Historical Association earlier this year, an entire day was dedicated to discussions surrounding digital history and the novel methods that can be used to extract meaning from statistical sources.

As historians there pointed out, digi-

tal approaches help to expand hypotheses about the past by testing data in new ways, thereby identifying entirely new facts that may otherwise not have come to light. We are broadening and deepening our understanding of the past.

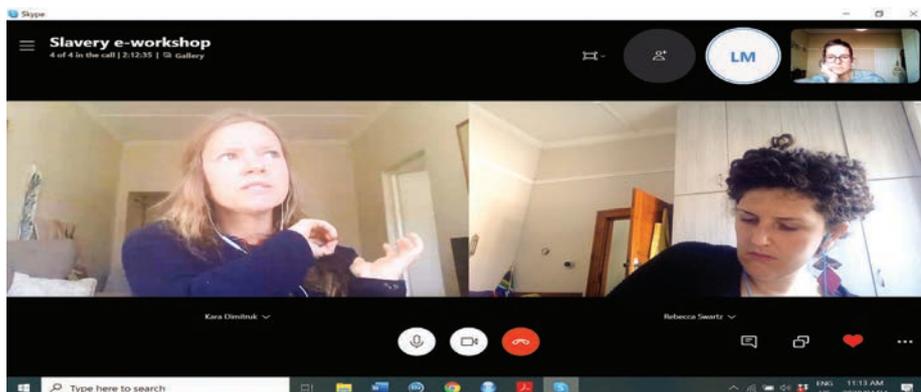
This, then, is what allowed the Bunu family's story to be unearthed, for instance. The transcription of their and thousands of other death notices gives us a glimpse into the lives of people that typically would not have been uncovered in the archives.

The records don't just highlight the lives of individuals but allow us to identify trends that not only teach us about historical periods but also provide important lessons that can be used to tackle modern-day problems.

The Spanish Flu is a prime example. We are now analysing more than 30 000 death records to identify why the flu affected some more than others. This sort of information can be immensely valuable. If analysed correctly, it allows us contribute to discussions today about the types of responses government should enact against Covid-19.

Wills Bunu and his family members' deaths should not be in vain. As we transcribe more of these towns' records and find more qualitative evidence that complements the data, we'll begin to create a greater understanding of which preventative methods proved most fruitful. This information could prove to be very useful in these trying times.

## Workshop on slavery and forced labour moves online



Rebecca Swartz, Kara Dimitruk, Lisa Martin and Kate Ekama met on skype for the Slavery and Forced Labour e-workshop. Their connected research projects focus on the ending of slavery in the 1830s, mixed understandings of apprenticeship after emancipation, and the increase in coercion over the following years in the context of free wage labour. 'Meeting online was a great antidote to physical distancing', said Ekama afterward.

## Laura goes to Leiden

Masters student Laura Richardson is currently registered for a course on digital humanities with Leiden University. Laura was attracted to Leiden because ‘universities in the Netherlands are at the forefront of the ‘digital turn’, developing new and innovative ways to mine the histories of the masses using individual-level data’. As she learns new skills, her driving force behind pursuing an advanced degree in history is the immense potential the past has in informing contemporary policy debates.

She thinks that as a student of history, one should combine computational methods with conventional methods such as oral history, with the former revealing trends and the latter providing in-depth contextualisation for those trends. For instance, there is potential in her research to use network analysis and agent-based modelling in the analysis of courtship and fertility.

Laura is looking forward to starting a PhD later this year, focusing on the history of courtship and family planning in Cape Town. In the meantime, she is missing buying cheese from Leiden’s weekly market.

## Fourie presents at Chicago and PSE



**PRESENTING:** *Despite Paris being shutdown for protests, Fourie could still present a paper at the Paris School of Economics*

From mid-October to early January, Johan Fourie, associate professor at Stellenbosch and coordinator of LEAP, visited two of the world’s leading economics departments, the University of Chicago and the Paris School of Economics (PSE).

The trip began with a visit to Barcelona to attend the African Economic History Network meetings, where Fourie presented two papers. In early November, he was a guest of James Robinson at the Becker-Friedman Institute in Chicago. While there, he also attended the Social Science His-

tory Congress, presenting a paper on ‘Big Data in Colonial History’. After Chicago, he spent two weeks in Leuven, Belgium as coordinator of the Stellenbosch/Leuven Think Tank. From Leuven he went to Paris, for a three-week sabbatical at the PSE. In Paris he presented three papers, including a talk to Stellenbosch alumni.

The trip to Paris ended with a short trip back across the Atlantic, for the American Historical Association meetings in New York. There he was a panelist on a session about ‘Digital history methods in African History’.

## Amy attends EHS training course

While the icy November weather kept the streets of Manchester deserted, a group of academics whiled the time away sharing ideas as they gathered for the annual Economic History Society’s Residential Training Course.

LEAP’s Amy Rommelspacher was among 12 PhD students and 5 staff discussants attending the sessions. She presented a paper on the lives of domestic workers at the Cape in the late 1930s.

‘The course was a fantastic time of feedback and getting to know fellow PhD students at a similar stage of re-

search. Each student had a chance to present a paper and receive feedback from student and staff discussants. I presented a paper ‘Domestic workers and who they worked for: Cape Town in 1938-9’. There were also sessions run by the staff on methodology, the academic job market and getting published,’ she said.

The main highlight of the trip for Amy was getting to stay in the hotel with her fellow academics, where they were able to engage socially as well as share more ideas on their work and university life.

‘The students represented a range of

nationalities and fields of study and there were three papers, including mine, on Africa. One of the other papers on Africa was presented by Pablo Fernández Cebrián, who is also part of the LEAP network.’

‘I had lots of good discussions about my work and helpful chats outside of the session times with the great researchers in attendance.’

And what advice does she have for anyone considering the course for themselves?

‘If you are an Economic or Social Historian in the second year or later of your PhD – apply!’



# ‘Important to contribute to the real world’

Postdocs **Young-ook Jang** and **Elie Murard** have been in Stellenbosch for almost two years. Master’s student **Lesego Mabapa** spoke to them about Covid-19, economic history and their time in Stellenbosch.

**Q: Given that you are both economic historians, what are your thoughts about Covid-19?**

*Young:* The worldwide lockdown and travel restrictions due to Covid-19 are indeed unprecedented. The serious contraction in mobility would affect production, trade and ultimately the living standards of people. What is remaining uncertain is how long these restrictions would last. Given that the trend of deglobalisation is not new – it was observed through the rise of isolationist nationalism, e.g. Brexit, Trump Wall, US-China trade war – it is likely that the limiting of travel and migration would be sustained for the time being.

*Elie:* I am saddened to see how many of my co-citizens in France and Italy have reacted to the announcement of the national lockdown; many have fled the big cities to find ‘refuge’ in their spacious vacation homes where they could enjoy gardening and walking in nature. By doing so, they contributed to the spreading of the epidemic to more remote areas of the country, potentially less equipped with health care resources. This is a perfect example of the negative externalities that migration can generate in a context of global pandemics.

**Q: How do we bridge the gap between academia and society, particularly regarding research dissemination?**

*Young:* Intellectual satisfaction itself can be a motivation for decent research and good for the mental health of researchers, but I think it is more important to contribute to the decision-making of the real world. This can be done through newspaper columns, social media postings, and policy reports. I am proud of LEAPs recent activities, trying to have a voice during the pandemic.

*Elie:* Researchers are often tempted to withdraw in their own protected academic bubble. There are different platforms that summarize research papers and their main results in a non-technical way, in order to make them more accessible for larger audience and policy makers. For ex-

ample, I recently contributed to a column (which can be accessed here <https://voxeu.org/article/immigration-and-preferences-redistribution-europe>) and I presented my research in Copenhagen at the conference on Forced Displacement 2020. The VoxEU is a policy portal set up to promote “research-based policy analysis and commentary by leading economists” and the conference was organized by the UN Refugee Agency.

**Q: What are you currently working on?**

*Young:* I am currently working on several different topics, namely inter-marriage patterns in 20th Century Cape Town, Spanish flu in South Africa, and the effect of ethnic diversity on conflict in the Soviet Union. I am mostly focusing on the ethnic and race relations in different societies and their impact on various outcomes. I try to reveal how changes in interethnic or interracial interactions would affect other dimensions of the society, e.g. class mobility, migration or social unrest. This, I think, should have implications on the understanding of the society in the era of globalisation, where the population is becoming more and more mixed ethnically or racially. My research also sheds light on the mechanism through which the above-mentioned globalisation backlash, restriction on trade and migration, rise of nationalism, has come back.

*Elie:* I am currently working on a few projects. One project examines inter-generational effects of the internment camps during the 1900 Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. Despite the rec-

ognized importance of this tragic episode here is no quantitative analysis of the impacts of the camps. I have another project with Prof. H. Rapoport and Prof. A. Alesina in which we examine how immigration affects natives’ attitudes towards redistribution and the implications for welfare state in Europe. Finally, I have a project with my friend and co-author Seyhun Sakalli that explores the long-term impact of the 1923 forced resettlement of 1.2 million Greek-Orthodox citizens of Turkey to Greece in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish war. We hope to publish that soon.

**Q: What are your plans for the future?**

*Young:* I am leaving South Africa this summer to Korea. I will begin a new job as a research fellow in a government-led think tank. This is where



**SUNNY WEATHER:** *Young-ook and his son, Joon*

I feel my concern for the real world would flourish, and I am looking forward to it. I am sure my experience in LEAP and South Africa, in general, will be very helpful for my career.

*Elie:* To make LEAP a successful and internationally recognized research center. Of course, it won’t happen in a day but in multiple small steps. One of these steps is to produce quality policy-relevant research that is of interest to a broader audience. Another step is to publish well and disseminate this research successfully.