

## *Upcoming special issue of JSAS investigates Cape slavery*

The history of slavery at the Cape will feature prominently in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, which will publish a special issue on emancipation at the Cape next year. The special issue started out as the 'Bonds, Abodes and Banks' conference session at the European Social Science History Conference, which, like most other conferences in 2020, was cancelled.

So instead of meeting in the Netherlands, Robert Ross, LEAP PhD student Lisa Martin, Aaron Graham, Christie Swanepoel and LEAP post-doc Kate Ekama met online. Together, their papers show how the historiography of Cape slavery is changing in both focus and methods.

Using what some might consider dry historical sources – property records, mortgages, bank shareholder lists – these scholars investigate the impact of emancipation of the enslaved on the development of the Cape economy. These records are in fact a deep well of information on credit networks, mapping the choices the formerly enslaved made regarding housing, and the family ties between the men who started the first commercial banks in the Cape Colony. Many earlier studies have treated emancipation (1834 or 1838) as the ending or beginning of the story; by focussing on continuities



**MEETING PLACE:** *View of Strand street in Cape Town at the end of the eighteenth century by Jan Brandes. Source: Rijksmuseum.*

and discontinuities from the 1830s deeper into the nineteenth century, this new work allows us to better un-

derstand the legacies of slavery in the Cape economy. Look out for the five papers in JSAS in 2021.

## Women and work discussed in 2020 LEAP Lecture

The fifth LEAP Lecture was an online roundtable which wrapped up the "Women and Work in History and Economics" online conference on the 8th of October. The lecture provided an opportunity to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines to discuss different aspects of women and work in the past.

The participants, Alice Evans, Emmanuel Akyeampong, Jane Hum-

phries, Joyce Burnette and Ushehwe-du Kufakurinani, discussed a range of topics relating to women and work such as female labour force participation, the emergence of male breadwinner societies and the historiography of working women.

Humphries provided an overview of the differences in approaches utilized by Economists and Historians when researching women and work, while

Burnette outlined the importance of this field of study and argued that some approaches to measuring women's participation in the labour force need rethinking.

Kufakurinani and Evans provided reflections on working women in the history of Africa with Akyeampong explaining that entrepreneurship amongst women is especially high in developing countries.



**SOCIAL DISTANCING:** Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions have forced LEAP meetings online

## Studying courtship and sexuality ‘no easy undertaking’

Stellenbosch’s loss will be Cambridge’s gain as Laura Richardson moves abroad to pursue her PhD. Following her Master’s dissertation on pre-marital sexuality in Cape Town, for which she received a distinction, she hopes to further uncover aspects of love and sex in an investigation of the city’s working class families during an age of state-sponsored contraception rollouts. Her work will shine a light on sexuality in the apartheid era before the dawn of HIV/AIDS.

Laura was one of the first Master’s students recruited as part of the Biography of an Uncharted People project. Her dissertation investigated bridal pregnancy in Cape Town, by matching marriage and baptism records. The figure below shows the number of days between marriage and first birth in the more than 2000 records Laura investigated.

Although Laura admits she will miss the comforts of home, she is excited to immerse herself in a new environment. ‘Cambridge not only boasts one of the top history faculties in the world but is also a good fit for me as they are established in the fields of family and social history and have been a pioneering force in the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods within these fields.

‘I am really keen to work with Professor Simon Szreter, a demographic historian, whose work on the everyday nature of sex and intimacy in mid-twentieth-century Britain provided some of the inspiration for my

current project.’

Her research hopes to answer questions surrounding attitudes to sexuality as well as specific actions relating to courtship, sex, marriage and the regulation of reproduction, family planning and sexual liberation, with the hope of adding to a global understanding of sexual narratives. The task at hand, however, is not without its challenges.

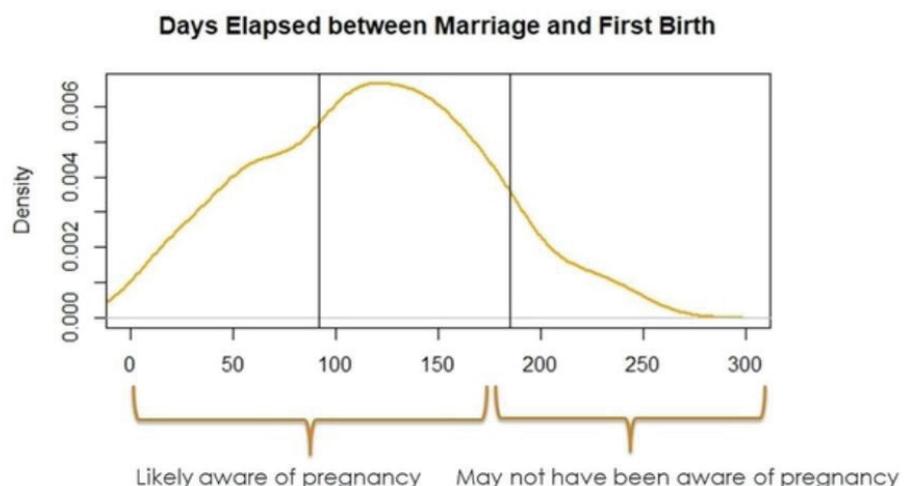
‘I am under no illusions that this is going to be an easy undertaking. Finding informants, bridging cultural divides and getting people to talk about what is obviously a sensitive set of topics is going to be difficult. I will have to be careful to ensure that my sample is not a select minority prepared to talk openly about sex.

‘Another concern is the subjective and retrospective nature of oral history accounts. While there is much to learn about people’s personal inter-

pretations of the past, it is important to keep in mind that they are just that: interpretations. In this context, contradictions, inconsistencies and silences become as notable as the facts themselves.

‘I think that South African universities have much to offer and I will miss the context-specific knowledge and sensitivity to South African issues that they provide, but I am also looking forward to experiencing a new academic culture, learning new methods and expanding my intellectual horizons. I feel that studying abroad will benefit my research,’ she says.

Laura anticipates language and cultural barriers in her upcoming research but is improving her own capacities as well as recruiting research assistants who can help to conduct interviews and translate and interpret responses – anyone interested can contact her on [ljr55@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ljr55@cam.ac.uk)



# ‘It’s human nature to overcome rather than be overcome’

The Covid-19 crisis is affecting the way that we work and interact at LEAP. Many researchers and students have had to halt their projects or re-design them significantly. Undeniably, this year’s unexpected pressures and constraints have caused big changes in our personal and work patterns. Yet, these circumstances can also encourage us to re-imagine our way of doing things as we are pushed to engage with our topics in a creative manner. Master’s student Brittany Chalmers spoke with a few LEAP team members to find out how they have been navigating their research in 2020.

PhD candidate Karl Bergemann notes that this season has been surprisingly positive. “My time in isolation was not that bad. Although I am a social being, I quite like time to myself. Research-wise, historians spend a lot of time with primary sources, be it at the archives or in the library. Fortunately, I was able to track sources online through the SUN library portals and once I had digital copies, life became a bit easier.”

Honours student Lauren Coetzee shared her experience of “meeting” with more people while in isolation. She said, “I have been in contact with several academics as online meetings are now becoming more of a norm - what an honour!”

Many researchers and students have struggled to adjust to the world of online seminars and meetings but of course, we are adaptable creatures.

Come 2021, meeting in person may suddenly feel strange as we long for our Zoom attire of slippers and track-suit pants again!

Lisa-Cheree Martin, a PhD candidate, shared how she has been adapting to life in lockdown. “I have not been able to stick to working hours very well, which I think is an issue for everyone. A day can go very well or very poorly. You either work all day, all night or not at all! Now that restrictions are lifting I am considering working in coffee shops or coming to campus every once in a while.”

PhD candidate Amy Rommelspacher spoke about the heightened need for a sense of community in both an academic and personal capacity. “The biggest change was making more of an effort to interact with people online. In the first stages of lockdown, I was postponing socialising to when we were allowed to do it in person again, but I soon realised that community is a necessity.”

This pandemic is leading us all to think about how we do things. Our problems often create unexpected opportunities and we should take time to pause and reflect on what research will look like in the future. For many of us, 2020 has been what Karl Bergemann calls “a space for reflection and peeling away the layers to find what really matters and what is truly important. We get by with what we have and make the best of bad situations - it’s human nature to overcome rather than be overcome.”

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## *Slavery and coerced labour on research agenda*

There has been a lot going on in the field of slavery studies in the last few months. During June and September postdoc Kate Ekama took part in online discussions and a workshop on slavery and coercive labour regimes in Asia.

The project aims to investigate overlaps between coercive regimes, how they functioned, and how they were transformed over time.

Also in September, Ekama participated in a conference on the connec-

tions between coerced labour and capitalism in the British Empire.

Similar themes were taken up during the October Roundtable on business history and slavery organised by the Business History Collective, which dealt with ordinary people’s indirect involvement in slavery in Jamaica; calculating the extent to which UK universities have benefitted from slave wealth; and the connection between US bankruptcy law and slavery in Louisiana.



**OFFICE WORK:** *Lloyd Maphosa*

## *Lloyd studies Cape capital markets*

PhD student Lloyd Maphosa analyses the impact of the Cape Company Act of 1892 on the development of joint stock companies at the Cape up to 1902. Using company records from the Cape Limited Company Archives, his findings show that there was rapid company formation in the colony after the Company Act. These companies operated in various sectors of the economy, were diverse in size, and had an average lifespan of 10 years.

This study also provided new insight into the evolution of capitalism at the Cape. For instance, the proliferation of joint stock companies improved the distribution of incomes which in turn augmented the savings capacity of the population.

The result was the growth of the capital market and, for the first time, participation of the working-class in the capital markets. In the latter years of his study, this group of investors included women and African investors. This illustrated the changing nature of capitalism at the Cape because this group of people was excluded from most economic activities due to restrictive social and economic institutions.

Having submitted his dissertation early in October, he says that it has been an absolute privilege to be part of LEAP. ‘As someone who has always wanted to study economic history, being part of this community helped me achieve my goals and created many opportunities for me.

‘I am delighted to share that I have been offered a postdoc position at the University of Cape Town starting in January 2021.’

## ‘Always keep the bigger picture in mind’

There is sometimes a fine line between the excitement of new research possibilities and the fear of being overwhelmed by the mass of work it will encompass. But Cailin McRae seems to tread that line with a fair bit of aplomb.

With her Master’s in the bank, and with a distinction to boot, she is relishing the opportunity of delving into more research work as she decides where her future aspirations lie.

‘While some might find the idea of spending hours in the archive mind-numbing, it brings me true joy to research in the most ‘old-school’ way possible. Watching some of the material I have digitised come to life in others’ work is fascinating and working with members of the Biography project while working on my own thesis allowed me to engage with a team as well as other scholarly heavyweights. This allowed me to develop the skills I use in my work today.’

Cailin’s Master’s uncovered the intricacies of the life of Emmie du Toit, a prominent figure in Cape politics in the 1930s and 40s, who, as she puts it, ‘subverted the nar-

rative of a passive female force behind seemingly male-driven agendas’. She has her sights set on eventually completing a PhD, possibly through further research outputs stemming from her Master’s work.

‘I am hoping to move abroad next year and following other interests for the time being before coming back to pursue my PhD. I’ve uncovered a number of potential avenues for further research. I currently work as an independent freelance researcher and the diverse groups of projects I am currently work-

ing on is fantastic, ranging from historical land claims to European explorers in Africa before 1900. No two days are ever the same and this makes for interesting processes of digging up new documents,’ she says.

And what advice does she have for those treading similar academic waters?

‘Always keep the bigger picture in mind. Trust your sources and what they are telling you, healthy pinches of salt included.

Trust your own capabilities and the idea that your final work will be making an important contribution to a broader body of work.’



**POLITICIAN:** *Emmie du Toit*

## Using big data in colonial history

On 5 October, LEAP together with scholars from the University of Adelaide, the University of Minnesota, Chulalongkorn University and the University of Strasbourg held an online workshop to discuss the challenges that researchers in developing countries face in using large historical datasets.

The workshop was sponsored by the AC21 consortium. Convenor Kara Dimitruk says that, despite having to balance multiple time zones, the workshop stimulated new ideas and will certainly lead to closer future collaboration between researchers based in developing countries.

## Seminar series a big success

The Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown measures forced the LEAP seminar series to move online in April. The second semester’s seminar series was held entirely online. The timeslot was also moved to 16:00 on a Wednesday to accommodate speakers from the west coast of the United States.

The seminar series, which included 13 speakers, began on 29 July with a talk by Melanie Xue (NYU Abu Dhabi) and concluded with Marianne Mariotti (ANU) on 28 October. Around 20 to 30 participants logged in for each seminar. PhD student Nobungwele Mbem did an excellent job of marketing and organising the seminars.

The next seminar series will begin in February 2021.

**SEMINAR ZOOMING:** *Sédi-Anne Boukaka (Rome Tor Vergata) and Nobungwele Mbem*





# 'The blindside no one could have foreseen'

*PhD student Karl Bergemann talks to postdoc Kara Dimitruk about life in Stellenbosch, her research and dealing with Covid-19.*

After completing her PhD at the University of California (Irvine), American Kara Dimitruk has spent the last two years immersing herself in Stellenbosch culture, right down to sampling the vintages on offer. But her main focus has been on unearthing some of the economic and political factors influencing labour law development in South Africa in the nineteenth century. Having recently also joined the *Biography of an Uncharted People* project as a post-doctoral researcher, she plans to make even more in-roads whilst simultaneously scanning horizons for the next chapter in her life.

'Being at Stellenbosch has been a great experience. One of my favourite parts has been interacting with a community of local and international scholars, from undergrad economic history, honours, MA and PhD students to fellow postdocs and senior researchers in economics and history. People are kind, welcoming and keen to support research.

'Since starting at Stellenbosch, I've been working on two main projects on the political and legal development of southern Africa in the nineteenth century. The first is on the British Cape Colony. I started by studying the economic and political factors that led constituents to pressure the government for more coercive labour laws under parliamentary government. The paper uses a new data series on constituents' petitions from the Votes & Proceedings of the House of Assembly and economic data from the Blue Books. Kelsey Lemon (MA, History) and I have been working on summarizing and classifying the petitions. I think the series will be useful for scholars interested in this period.

'I am expanding on this work to study the provision of property rights and security on the eastern frontier, the development of political parties and their influence on policy-making, and the development of municipal public finance institutions.

'The second project is with Sophia du Plessis and Stan du Plessis. We compare the evolution of the specification of property rights in the Boer

Republics (Orange Free State and South African Republic or Transvaal). Paige Smith (MA, History) has been incredibly helpful with digitizing and geo-rectifying surveys of farm parcels,' she said.

In any academic undertaking, challenges are to be expected. However, 2020 was the academic blindside no one could have foreseen. With lockdowns in force around the world and access to material encumbered by restrictions at every turn, researchers have been forced to dig deep this year and find new ways to interact with sources, other researchers and with the academic diaspora in general. In essence, it has been a space of reflection but also of tenacity.

'Working under lockdown conditions has not been easy. I've missed the daily in-person connections with people before and after seminars or during the week. Some days it is hard to be motivated and to concentrate. But technology has been useful for regularly and creatively connecting with friends and family. I've also been e-meeting with the Democracy & Disenfranchisement group and other PhD and Masters' students. They are a lively group and keep me on my toes.

'To get a balance and break from the video technology of choice, I've also dusted off some old hobbies of mine that got placed on the shelf during gradschool.

'To be honest, it's hard to separate setbacks as not related to the pandemic. The major setbacks I've experienced this year have come from limited access to sources from the library or the archives, which is a direct result of the pandemic. Thankfully, I've had some help from librarians across the

world. Otherwise, just normal "setbacks" that come with historical data: going back to sources and collecting new series, finding and fixing errors.'

In an era of Big Data, why does Dimitruk think getting a PhD in Economics is important, and why would she recommend Stellenbosch as an institution to further one's academic aspirations?

'Getting a PhD is about becoming a critical thinker and furthering our knowledge about fundamental questions through the research process. In this day and age, you can open up any newspaper (or site) and likely feel overwhelmed. Hopefully a PhD in Economics provides a type of training and toolbox that would enable a person to study questions that are important to them and work with other people (PhD in Economics or otherwise)

to solve problems for the benefit of society – whether that be in academics, the private sector, government, or non-profits.

'At Stellenbosch, you'll have the opportunity to make the best of it for what fits your goals. You'll find a supportive research community and the space to develop your own research agenda, collaborate in co-authored papers,

work with younger students, and use and collect untapped data sources for economic history.

'The application process is what's immediately next for me. I'll be applying to jobs over the next few months. I want to stay in academe and continue my work in economic history. The reality is that it is not going to be easy, given the pandemic and current economic recession in most countries. I'm being open-minded about the opportunities that arise. I'm curious to see how it works out.'



**POSTDOC:** Kara Dimitruk