Emmanuel Akyeampong at STIAS

The Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS) annually hosts a diverse group of experts and early career researchers as part of their fellowship programme. Prof Emmanuel Akyeampong from the Center for African Studies at Harvard University has joined the 2021 first semester STIAS fellow cohort. Despite the traveling restrictions, prof Akyeampong arrived in January for his sabbatical. Apart from being a STIAS fellow, prof Akyeampong is a co-supervisor of one of the doctoral candidates from the Biography project, Nobungcwele Mbem.

Prof Akyeampong delivered his STIAS seminar on 13 May entitled ‘Early Independent Africa’s Abortive Attempt at Industrialization: The Case of Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah’. The seminar attracted a large online and in-person audience. He will also deliver the prestigious bi-annual Thys Visser Commemorative Lecture on Thursday, 27 May entitled ‘Pandemics, Commodity Markets and Recessions: Africa and the Corona Virus’.

Prof Akyeampong has several ongoing research projects. His visit to South Africa included a trip to the University of Fort Hare to visit the ANC archives. Prof Akyeampong is visiting South Africa with his wife, Ntuli, and daughter, Naledi. They will return to the US at the end of June.

HISTORIANS: Nobungcwele Mbem and Emmanuel Akyeampong

Biography team makes documentary

During the second half of 2020, members of the Biography of an Uncharted People project closed their spreadsheet and Word documents for a few days and instead starred in a documentary film created to reflect on the aims and ambitions of this Mellon-funded project. The film was released to the public in March 2021. Although the initial plan was to only produce a five-minute overview, director Philip du Plessis of Blindspot films was so intrigued by the stories of the interviewees that he decided to put together a documentary of half-an-hour. Each of the five themes of the project is discussed. Because of Covid-regulations, interviews were done online, with archival material and innovative design elements providing the visual components. When regulations relaxed, several students turned actors to provide additional visual material. The Biography documentary is available on Vimeo. See link below.

https://vimeo.com/488775601
To his already very long and impressive list of academic publications, Prof Johan Fourie, coordinator of LEAP, has now added his first book. Published by Tafelberg in April 2021, Johan’s book is entitled *Our Long Walk to Economic Freedom*. It is an engaging and fast-paced read which covers centuries of economic history in 34 chapters, each of which is based on rigorous research by Johan himself as well as local and international scholars.

The 34 chapters, plus introduction and conclusion, reveal the book’s origins in a 36-lecture series – the full semester economic history course, which Johan has taught in the Department of Economics at Stellenbosch University for more than a decade. But what prompted the move from preparing lectures to writing book chapters? Johan commented that when strict lockdown was implemented in South Africa in March 2020, he had to rethink how the course worked, and move it all online. It made sense to him that in writing material for the students to read each week, he should use that as the basis for something of a textbook. And in just about a year, that is exactly what he has achieved – the current Economics 281 class are using *Our Long Walk to Economic Freedom* as their class reader this semester.

Just as Johan’s lectures, and now the book, form the basis of vibrant discussion in the classroom, Johan hopes that it will also be the starting point of discussions in the public sphere as readers within and outside the university engage with the wide-ranging and thought-provoking topics. These include the Crusades, slavery, colonisation, African independence, and apartheid, as well as Stalinist Russia, China’s Great Leap Forward and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

What holds these wide-ranging topics together? Johan’s focus is to explain the incredible – and incredibly recent in historical terms – prosperity that we see around the world. And within this, to situate African economic history at the centre. At its core, the book is about people as historical actors, and in that it is optimistic about our opportunities to shape the future. *Our Long Walk to Economic Freedom* is an accessible introduction to global economic history and Johan will keep readers engaged with his pop culture references and the intriguing connections he makes between events, people and places.

As a starting point, he explains why he believes economic development is more like the popular board game Settlers of Catan, than it is like the best-selling boardgame Monopoly. But in all seriousness, the book has already received high praise from internationally-regarded scholars in the field of economic history.

Johan commented that he thoroughly enjoyed the process of writing *Our Long Walk*. So it sounds likely that this will not be his last monograph.
No less than five new additions were made to the Biography Project’s student pool this year, all with their own brand of ambition and skillsets. They are Munashe Chideya (PhD); Lauren Coetzee and Kere-editse Tsokodibane (Masters); and Christiaan Burger and Rafeeq James (Honours). We sat down to chat about some of their aspirations.

As this year’s only PhD incumbent and almost certainly the last one the project will take onboard, Munashe Chideya hopes to grab the opportunity with both hands. Having graduated with his MA in Economic History from the University of Cape Town in 2017, he will put his knowledge and enthusiasm to work as he delves into the world of private joint-stock companies and the role of government employees as investors where he hopes to uncover the long-term relationships between the two.

Although no stranger to the project, Lauren Coetzee now steps into her first year as a Masters candidate. She will be studying the effects of disenfranchisement legislation in a post-South African war climate, with a focus on the unintentional ramifications of policy changes in the Cape Colony. She was attracted to the ethos of the Biography project right off the bat, allowing her the opportunity, as she puts it, to give a voice and significance to the previously silenced.

Her co-Masters incumbent, Kere-editse Tsokodibane, is a University of Pretoria alumni, having previously worked on a biographical history of former president F.W. de Klerk for her honours year. Her research interests lie in South African historiography but more especially in the voices of African communities. She will be working in the Frontiers of Finance theme, researching black-owned limited companies at the turn of the 20th century.

Both Christiaan Burger and Rafeeq James make the leap from undergraduate to postgraduate student life for the first time. Christiaan will be investigating the Opgaafrolle, where he hopes to uncover the implementation and execution of systems in these important sources. Rafeeq, who also holds a coaching qualification CAF D licence and serves as an analyst for the Maties football squad, will hope to put his analytic skills to the test as he turns his attention to franchise legislation in the late 19th century and the curtailment of African participation through disqualifications.

We welcome our new students and look forward to their outputs in the months to come.

BIOGRAPHY BAND: Practicing safe social distancing, the old and new Biography members met for breakfast
The LEAP seminar series, now fully on Zoom, attracts a large international audience every Wednesday. The theme for the first semester is ‘Global Economic History for Africa’, with scholars from more than ten countries presenting their latest research. On 14 April, Leticia Arroyo Abad (City University of New York) presented her work on the 1918 Spanish flu in the United States.

LEAP scholars publish new paper on property rights in Boer republics

LEAP scholars Kara Dimitruk, Sophia du Plessis and Stan du Plessis published a new paper in the prestigious Journal of Institutional Economics this month. The paper, entitled ‘De jure property rights and state capacity: evidence from land specification in the Boer Republics’ examine the development of de jure property rights to land by assessing how accurately governments recorded borders of property. The authors use surveys of farm parcels from two historical states, the Republic of the Orange Free State (OFS) and the South African Republic (ZAR), which are in modern-day South Africa, and employ a descriptive analysis to infer how accurately maps represent parcels of property. They argue that differences in state administrative capacity explains differences in map accuracy and therefore the provision of de jure property rights to land.

The authors find that maps of farms in the ZAR, which had lower administrative capacity, tend to be less accurate than maps of farms in the OFS. Comparisons with military maps compiled under a different administration provide evidence that the costs incurred from previous administrations can limit future attempts to accurately record property. The analysis shows how state administrative capacity can facilitate (or hinder) the provision of property rights to land.

The paper is available on the website of the Department of Economics.

On 4 March, Masters student Jonathan Jayes presented his paper (with Johan Fourie) on the 1918 Spanish flu at the Lund University development lunch seminar. Jonathan is currently on a student exchange at Lund University in Sweden, but the event was held on Zoom. The paper, which analyses more than 40,000 death notices from the Cape Colony for the years 1915-1920, has since been published by World Development. It is also available as a working paper in the Department of Economics.
Jonathan Schoots off to Stellenbosch

In February, Kate Ekama, Johan Fourie, Lisa Martin and Hans Heese published a new slave emancipation dataset in the journal Explo-
rations in Economic History. More than 36,000 formerly enslaved are recorded. The dataset forms part of the Bi-
ography theme ‘Capitalising on Emancipation’. The graphs offer a glimpse into the new research findings.

Kara Dimitruk to Swarthmore

Kara Dimitruk, postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Economics and Biography of an Uncharted People project, will be starting as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Economics Department at Swarthmore College in August 2021. Swarthmore is a private liberal arts college in Philadelphia (USA).

Kara was a postdoc from July 2018 when she joined the Department of Economics after completing her PhD at the University of California Irvine. Aside from work on the property rights in the Boer republics (see page 4) and her ongoing work on British parliamentary petitions, Kara focused her attention on labour coercion in the Cape Colony during the second half of the nineteenth century. For her research, she transcribed several datasets, including petitions to the Cape parliament. Her first paper on this topic will soon be available as a working paper.

Kara is keen to continue her research on the Cape Colony and will remain affiliated to LEAP. She will also teach economics and economic history courses at Swarthmore.

Jonathan Schoots off to Stellenbosch

In July, Jonathan Schoots will join the Biography project as a postdoctoral fellow. Jonathan is currently finishing his PhD in Sociology at the University of Chicago. His PhD topic is ‘Novelty, Networks, and the Rise of African Nationalism: African Inter-
mediary Intelligentsia and the Mak-
ing of Political Innovation in Colonial South Africa’.

Jonathan, a native of Cape Town and former UCT student, will head up the Democracy and Disenfranchisement group when he joins LEAP.
Why slavery ended (and, perhaps, why not)

Lauren Coetzee spoke to postdoc Kate Ekama about mortgage records, what history reveals and her future research projects.

Why the system of enslavement persisted for so long in the British Empire – and why it ended in the 1830s – remains one of the most important questions in economic history. So, too, the question about how the institutions of slavery persisted after emancipation. These are some of the questions Kate Ekama, postdoctoral student in the History department and member of the Biography of an Uncharted People project, are grappling with.

Having completed her undergraduate and honours degrees in History at Leiden University, followed by her PhD. She then joined the Biography of an Uncharted People project in January 2019.

Kate remarks that the freedom she has to pursue things that she is interested in through the Biography Project has allowed her to continue researching her passions and doing what she loves.

Kate’s passion is clearly paying off as she has been making waves in the world of academia with her research into Cape slavery and emancipation. Not only has she recently published an introduction to a new dataset in Explorations in Economic History, but she is due to be featured in the special edition of the Journal of Southern African Studies this year too. Originally planned as a conference paper for a panel organised with Robert Ross which was later cancelled, Kate has used the pandemic and online world to her advantage, writing and publishing multiple papers, with several other projects underway too.

Using the mortgage records, Kate has demonstrated the importance of slaves as collateral on loans, an important credit source for slave owners at the time. Not only does this shed light on the financial advantage of owning slaves and how this usage continued during the apprenticeship period, but this research delves into the effects of compensation on a deeper level. Building on from her research conducted in 2020 on the historiography of slave-owning societies and manumission, Kate has continued this work in her later research.

The impacts and implications for the enslaved and formally enslaved branches into a broader discussion on labour and property rights, something incredibly topical still today. With the Bondsmen article, finding a way into a topic in a new manner allowed Kate to draw her multiple interests together, demonstrating a continuity between slavery and the apprenticeship period which had followed. Apprentices remained in use to secure loans, showing the continuity of their treatment. The form of compensation, and the impact of these payments, was a new lens into Kate’s work on slavery. History has again revealed to be more nuanced and challenging than what was initially thought. The long-term impact of these decisions, problem-solving the possible sources that could be used to answer these questions, and thinking about their impact on property rights, demonstrates just how significant this topic remains.

Additionally, Kate has built on from her research into slavery in Sri Lanka, turning the prospects of a cancelled conference into another exciting venture by salvaging it as an upcoming book project wherein she will be both an editor and contributor, demonstrating the role and effect of coerced labour in Ceylon under the VOC period of occupation.

Interestingly, there are several parallels between her research on slavery in the Cape and in Sri Lanka, especially on coercion, bondage, and labour, playing an important role in documenting the Dutch role in slavery internationally through her research. Kate remarks that being on the editing side of the process has been an exciting change of scenery too, collaborating and coordinating something to truly be proud of.

As a postdoctoral researcher at Stellenbosch, Kate has not only been productive in terms of research output, but also as lecturer for second-year students in the History department, as well as a supervisor.

Some exciting ventures are still on the horizon. Kate is currently working on the Sri Lanka Book Project, as well as additional articles following on from her JSAS article on the Bondsmen. This is composed of several collected chapters from various authors who were involved in another cancelled conference on coerced labour in Asia. In her role as editor, Kate has again demonstrated her tenacity and salvaged a book project from various cancelled projects.

Kate has also been invited to speak at a Business Seminar Series in June on her work on Thompson Watson and Co. Working in different mediums, for various audiences and different types of genres is one of the newest challenges occupying Kate’s time, including her Sunday Times article, highlighting the intrigues surrounding her research.

POSTDOC: Kate Ekama