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South Africa's Long Walk to Economic Freedom: A Personal Journey

Prof Johan Fourie

ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
EYENZULULWAZI NGOQOQOSHO NOLAWULO
EKONOMIESE EN BESTUURSWETENSKAPPE

2022

Professorial Inaugural Lecture



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**South Africa's Long Walk to Economic Freedom:
A Personal Journey**

**Uhambo olude loMzantsi Afrika oluya Kwinkululeko yezoQoqosho:
Uhambo lomntu buqu**

**Suid-Afrika se Lang Pad na Ekonomiese Vryheid:
'n Persoonlike Reis**

Inaugural lecture delivered on 17 May 2022
Prof Johan Fourie
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
Stellenbosch University



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Biography of author

Johan Fourie is professor in the Department of Economics at Stellenbosch University where he teaches economic history to undergraduate and graduate students. Fourie joined the department in 2006 as Junior Lecturer. In 2012, he graduated with a PhD in Economic History at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, which won the 'Best Dissertation' prize in Early Modern History at the World Economic History Congress in Kyoto in 2015. He received the Ken Sokoloff fellowship during his PhD studies.

Since 2015, Fourie has been coordinating the Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP), an interdisciplinary research unit within the Department of Economics. LEAP currently hosts two large projects. Fourie is Principal Investigator (PI) for the Biography of an Uncharted People project (2018–2022), an Andrew W. Mellon funded project, and co-PI (with Erik Green) on the Cape of Good Hope Panel project (2021–2026), a Riksbankens Jubileumsfond funded project.

Fourie has published more than 80 research papers in leading economics and economic history journals, including the *Economic History Review*, *Explorations in Economic History* and *World Development*. His 2019 paper with Dieter von Fintel in the *Journal of Comparative Economics* received the Montias award in 2020. Fourie is a founding member of the African Economic History Network, a former editor of *Economic History of Developing Regions*, a former president of the Economic History Society of Southern Africa and in July 2022 will join the Executive Committee of the International Economic History Association.

South Africa's Long Walk to Economic Freedom: A Personal Journey

Prof Johan Fourie

Abstract

Through the history of my family, the Fouries, I tell a story of South Africa's economic development. From the arrival of Huguenot refugee Louis Fourie at the southern tip of Africa 333 years ago to the birth of my son Dawid Fourie in 2021, the Fouries shaped and were shaped by the economic, political and social changes of a country that took many wrong turns but, as I hope to show, also moved forward. Despite the gloomy outlook today, it is worth remembering that we live better lives than our ancestors could ever have imagined. But more work lies ahead to ensure that prosperity is shared by all.

Keywords:

Economic history, quantitative history, remarkable wealth, South Africa

South Africa's Long Walk to Economic Freedom: A Personal Journey

Johan Fourie, Inaugural lecture, Stellenbosch University, May 2022

Dawid Fourie arrived on 24 November 2021, a first-born son to Helanya and Johan Fourie. It was an inauspicious start. On that day, South African scientists reported a new variant of the Covid-19 virus, Omicron¹. The backlash was immediate. The world locked South Africa out, cancelling flights and bookings on the eve of what we had hoped would be a busy tourist summer. On top of this, the country was still reeling from the impact of violent protests in Kwazulu-Natal a few months earlier. Hope of a quick recovery had faded. The minus 7% growth in 2020 was South Africa's worst in a century². There was much to be pessimistic about.

And yet Dawid was born at a time which is, despite all the bad news, the best in history. Let us take just one measure of a good life: life expectancy. The average South African boy born in 2019, the most recent period for which I could find data, could expect to live to 61.5 years, or 65.7 years if fortunate enough to be born in the Western Cape³. A girl could expect to live about six years longer. This is much longer than our ancestors lived only a few generations ago. Averages, of course, mask large differences between South Africans. But the point remains for all subdivisions: across race, class, gender and geography, South Africans are living longer than at any time in the country's history.

Economic history gives us the benefit of the long-run view. It helps us ask the right questions. Instead of 'Why are we poor?', we ask the more historically accurate question: 'Why are we so remarkably rich?' or 'Why do we live so much longer than our ancestors?'

Asking these questions does not mean we have solved the dual economic problems of production and distribution and that we can now rest on our laurels. We have much still to do. Life expectancy in South Africa is at the low end of the global distribution. While women's average life expectancy in South Africa is 68 years, according to the World Bank, it is 78 in Morocco and Mexico, 80 in Argentina and Ecuador, and 84 in Portugal and Slovenia⁴. Clearly we can do better.

Aiming to do better does not mean that things will inevitably get better. South African men achieved a life expectancy of 60 years in 1990, but by 2005 the HIV/Aids epidemic had reduced it to 51. The recovery since then is due to the extraordinary success of antiretroviral drugs – advances in medicine being one of the reasons why our lives today are so much better than only one or two generations ago.

Despite many wrong turns in South Africa's long walk to economic freedom, we have undeniably moved forward. This progress is the consequence of two beliefs: that we should use our knowledge of nature, or what we might call science and technology, to make us more productive and so raise our standard of living. The second belief is that the benefits of this rising productivity should not be limited to an elite but shared by ordinary people.

We can see the results of the first belief throughout South African history, from learning to work iron, to adopting maize as a crop, to introducing new forms of money – all of which happened before the arrival of Europeans. New technologies were also adopted in the eighteenth century when Europeans settled the southern tip of the continent, creating a level of prosperity that was among the highest in the world at the time. And innovation continued during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, accelerating South Africa's walk towards economic freedom.

¹World Health Organization. [https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-\(b.1.1.529\)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern](https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-(b.1.1.529)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern). Accessed April 2022.

²Boshoff, W. H., & Fourie, J. (2020). The South African economy in the twentieth century. In *Business cycles and structural change in South Africa* (pp. 49-70). Springer, Cham.

³Bredenkamp, C., Burger, R., Jourdan, A., & Van Doorslaer, E. (2021). Changing Inequalities in Health-Adjusted Life Expectancy by Income and Race in South Africa. *Health Systems & Reform*, 7(2), e1909303.

But our progress has been hampered by one major failing. The sad truth is that the second belief, that increasing productivity should benefit all, has only very recently been embraced. Put differently, until 1994 the majority of South Africans were, at best, observers of South Africa's long walk. The good news is that many have now joined in. The bad news is that, for a variety of reasons, many are still only limping along.

To tell this story of South Africa's long walk to economic freedom, I have chosen to use the family history of the Fouries, of whom Dawid represents the 11th generation. It will indeed be a personal journey. I will draw on chapters from my book, *Our Long Walk to Economic Freedom*, which spells out many of the lessons economic historians have learned in studying the progress of humankind over the millennia⁵. And I will use the methods that my colleagues, my students and I use at the Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP), the research unit I coordinate in the Economics Department. The economist and the quantitative social science historian have the means to open up 'histories from below'. We want to answer the question: What gives ordinary people agency to build better lives, and what denies them the freedom to do so? But our ambition goes beyond simply answering the question: we want not only to describe the long walk to economic freedom but ultimately to advance it.

I was born in November 1982, another inauspicious year in this country's history. South Africa had a negative economic growth rate in both 1982 and 1983. Inflation was at 14.6%. Political tensions were on the rise: just visit the '1982 in South Africa' Wikipedia page and count the references to bombs. We moved to Paarl when I was a month old, which is where I spent the next 18 years. My father, Wynand Fourie, was a teacher first and then worked as a sales consultant for Clift Granite; my mother, Anneen Fourie, was a librarian at the Huguenot College in Wellington.

My mom and dad met when they were studying at Stellenbosch. Of the 125,000 students who completed their undergraduate degrees before 2010, they were among the almost 1,000 Fouries: around 0.7% of the total. My mother enrolled in 1975 and my father in 1976, the first year the undergraduate class at Stellenbosch had more than 2,000 students. They both graduated in 1978.

During the 1970s, student numbers were increasing rapidly at Stellenbosch and other universities. The reasons for this were economic, political and market-related. Firstly, the South African economy was shifting from agriculture, mining and manufacturing towards services. The GDP graph shows the sectoral shift over the past century, based on work I did with Wimpie Boshoff⁶. The decline in agriculture, from above 20% at the start of the century to below 5% at its end, is striking.

⁴World Bank Open Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/>. Accessed April 2022.

⁵Fourie, J. (2020). *Our long walk to economic freedom: Lessons from 100 000 years of human history*. Tafelberg, Cape Town

⁶Boshoff, W. H., & Fourie, J. (2020). The South African economy in the twentieth century. In *Business cycles and structural change in South Africa* (pp. 49-70). Springer, Cham. PhD student Timothy Ngalande is now expanding our analysis.

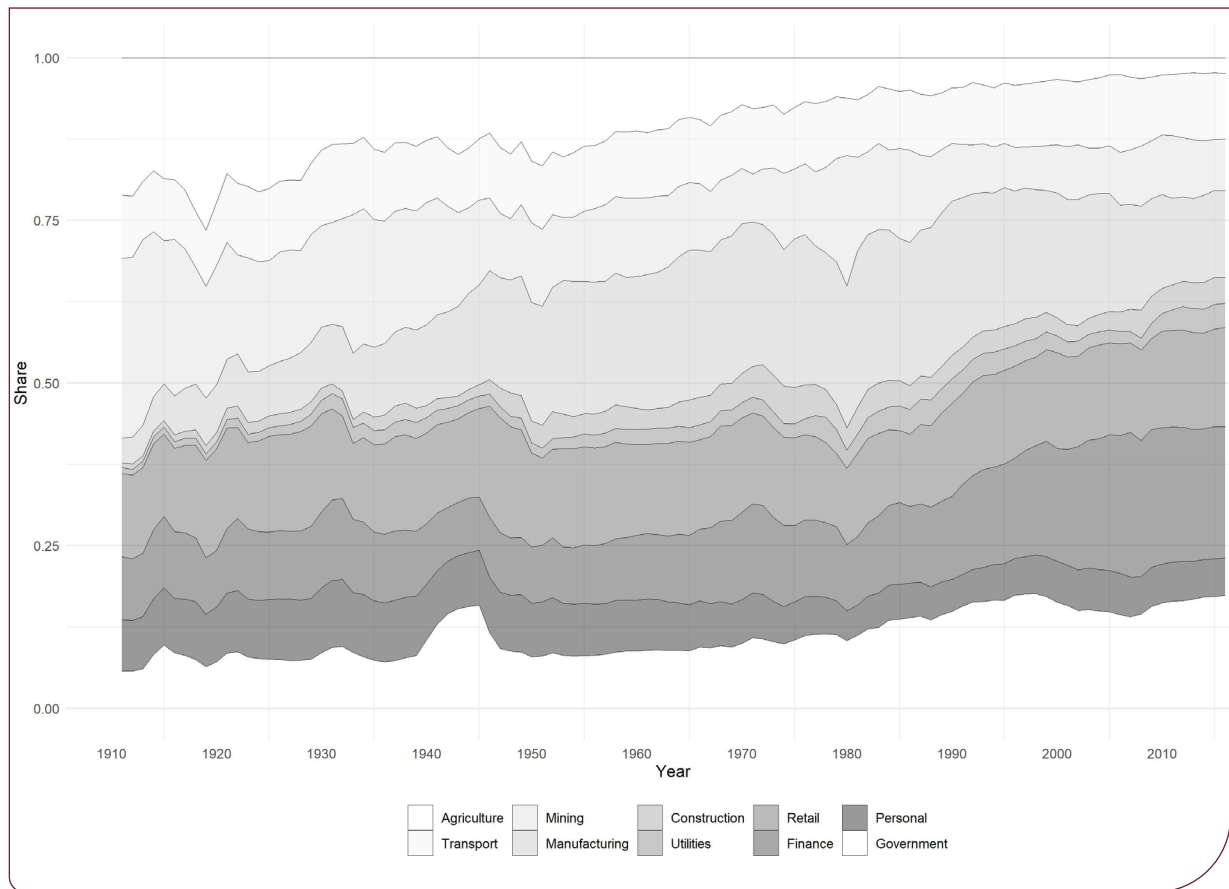


Figure 1: Breakdown of Gross Domestic Product, by sector, 1910–2010

Secondly, to appease white voters in its project of racial segregation, the National Party made universities relatively affordable. In a 2016 paper, Estian Calitz and I showed that tuition fees at Stellenbosch University as a percentage of average income per person fell from 67% in 1911 to 26% in 1977, the year that both my parents were studying. By 2015 it had increased to 44%.⁷ Today, the cost of higher education is on the increase, in South Africa and globally. One consequence is that fewer from the bottom of the income distribution will have this opportunity for upward mobility, as my parents did. We need to work harder at making university education more affordable.

Thirdly, by the 1970s white women were joining the labour market in large numbers. This echoed a global shift in the West during the twentieth century.⁸ PhD student Amy Rommelspacher has documented the rise of women doing clerical work in Cape Town from the 1930s onwards, and notably after 1950. The increasing involvement of women is visible in the enrolment figures at this university. Largely because of white women obtaining the franchise in 1930, and aided by opportunities for women during the Second World War, female undergraduate enrolment was relatively high, above 40% for most of the century. The female share accelerated

⁷Calitz, E., & Fourie, J. (2016). The historically high cost of tertiary education in South Africa. *Politikon*, 43(1), 149-154.

⁸Goldin, C. (2021). *Career and Family: Women's Century-Long Journey toward Equity*. Princeton University Press.

after 1994, as can be seen in the gender composition graph. The increase has been even greater for coloured and black women.

Women not only enrolled for university degrees in larger numbers, they were also better students. Undergraduate female students outperformed men most years after 1970. My dad claims that my mother did better than him in their History course because she used his notes, but women students' superiority seems to have been the rule rather than the exception.

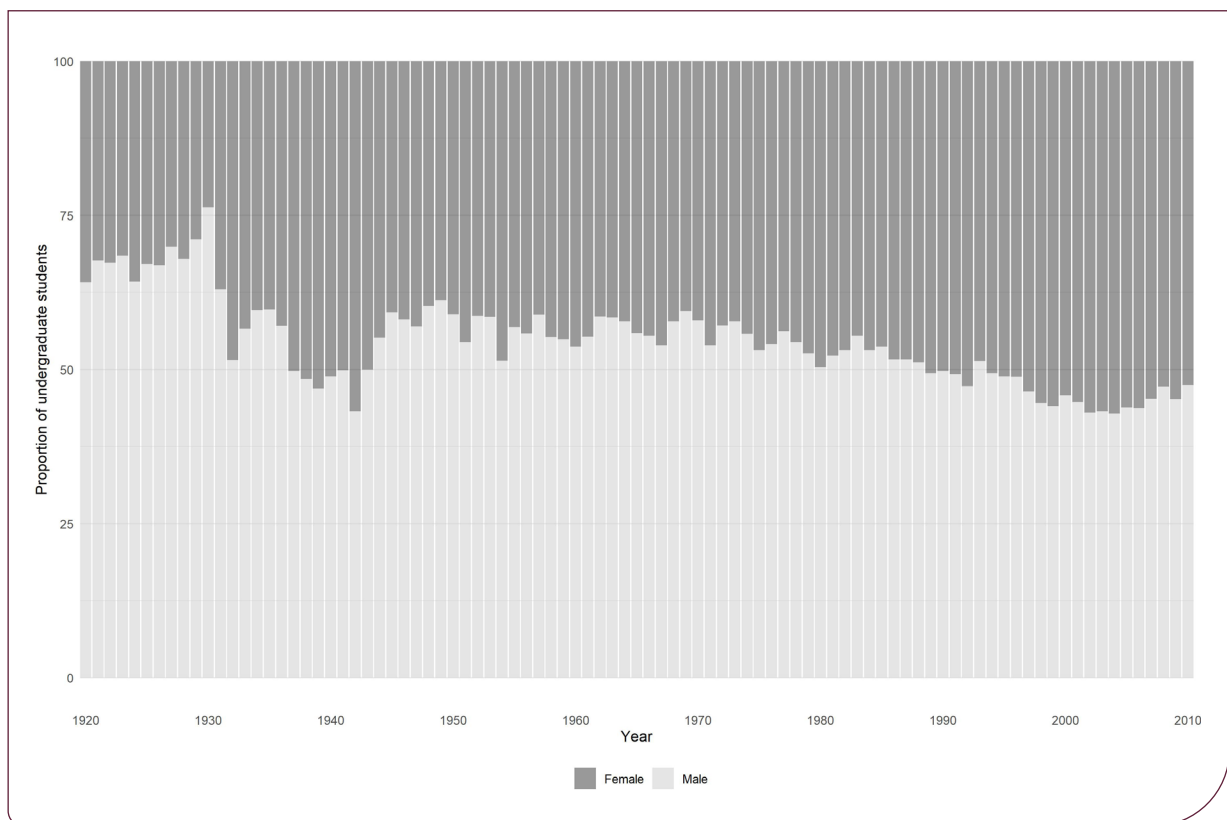


Figure 2: Gender composition of undergraduate students, Stellenbosch University, 1920–2010

In migrating from the farm to the city, my father followed a trend that was already evident from earlier in the century: white South Africans were urbanising rapidly. The map of changes in the white population density between the 1911 and 1936 censuses shows the depopulation of the rural Cape Province and Free State and the growth of the urban centres, notably the region that would later be called Gauteng. Black South Africans would follow the same trend a generation later, notably after the abolition of influx control in the 1980s.

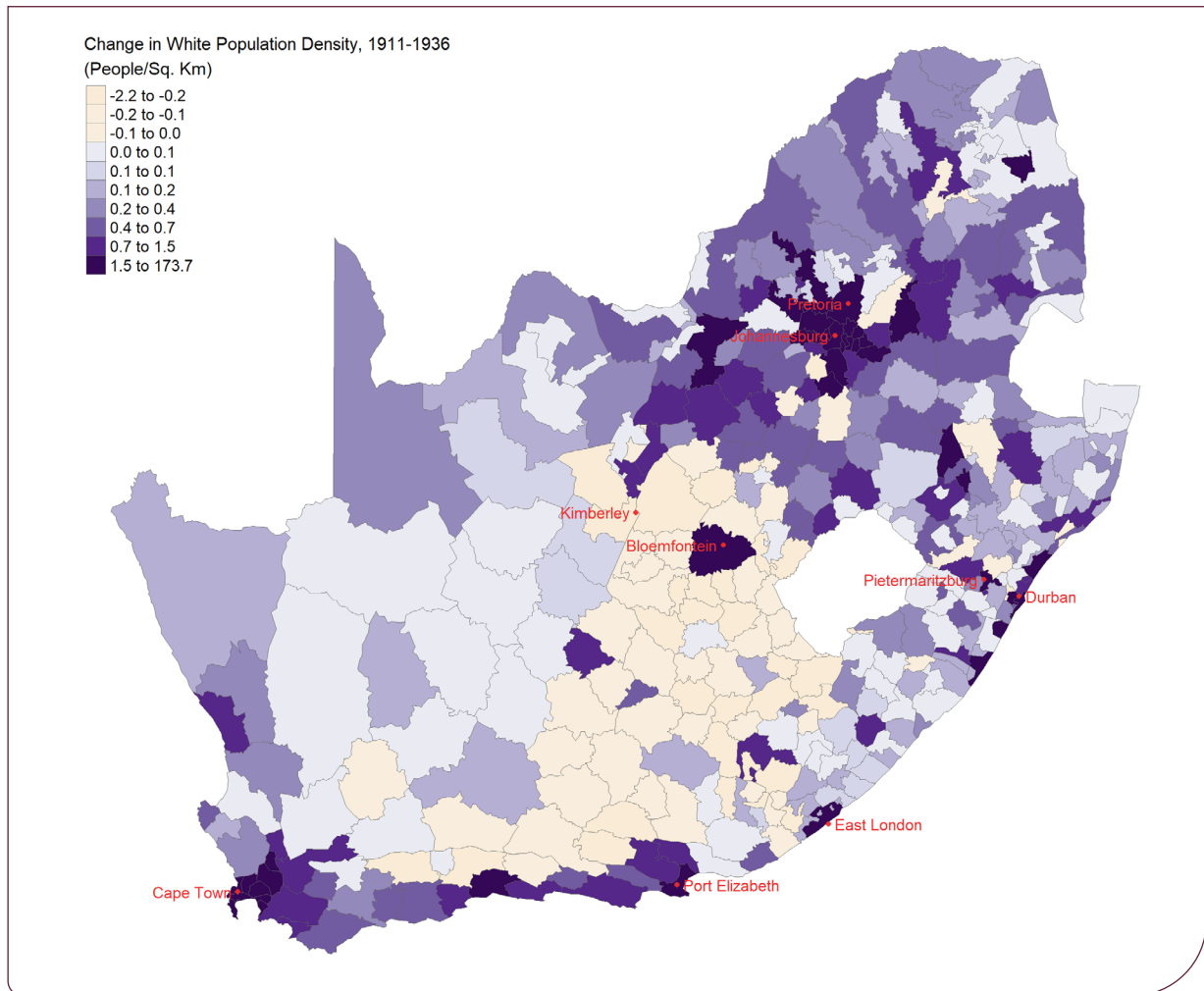


Figure 3: Map of changes in white population, 1911–1936

Both my parents came from a household where their mothers did not have formal labour market employment. My father grew up on an ostrich farm in Oudtshoorn, *Die Eiland*. His father, my grandfather Johannes Jacobus Fourie, was born in 1929 and died at the age of 80 in 2009. His wife, my grandmother Catherina Fourie (née Claassen) or, as I called her, Ouma Kate, was mainly occupied with raising seven children. Ouma Kate died last year at the age of 90, five days after her great-grandson Dawid was born.

Oupa Johan and Ouma Kate are both listed on the 1972 voters' roll, Oupa as *Boer* (farmer) and Ouma as *Huisvrou* (housewife). This voters' roll recorded about 2.1 million white South Africans. I count 15,640 Fouries, making them about 0.75% of the white population. Voters' rolls, I predict, will become one of the most important resources for future generations of South African economic and quantitative historians. Individual-level census records are increasingly used by economic historians worldwide to construct multigenerational longitudinal panels. Sadly, most of South Africa's have been lost or destroyed⁹. But our voters' rolls offer an alternative, providing the names, ages, addresses and occupations of all registered voters. While these only include the white population for much of the twentieth century, Cape Colony voters' rolls of the late nineteenth century,

⁹Helgertz, J., Price, J., Wellington, J., Thompson, K. J., Ruggles, S., & Fitch, C. A. (2022). A new strategy for linking US historical censuses: A case study for the IPUMS multigenerational longitudinal panel. *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 55(1), 12-29.

because of the non-racial franchise at the time, include a much more racially diverse population – at least as regards the men (women not having the vote in those days). I return to the Cape liberal franchise below.

While LEAP is currently supporting the transcription of the 1972 voters' roll, the 1984 voters' roll is already complete. There I count 21,682 Fouries, an increase of 38% in just 12 years. Having reached voting age, my mom and dad are also included, listed as teacher and librarian. They must have been busy, because they failed to update their address. It is listed as Beacon Bay, East London, where I was born two years earlier, although we were living in Paarl at the time. Such errors should caution an overconfident interpretation of results: Big Data in history can come with big problems.

My mother grew up in Paarl, the daughter of Simon Poerstamper, a fitter and turner, and Elsa Carstens, a homemaker. I never met my grandfather – he died in 1981, a year before I was born. He had a limp from polio as a child, a disease that has almost entirely been eradicated thanks to the invention of the polio vaccine in the 1950s, as the graph from Our World in Data shows. Despite the limp, my grandfather was apparently a great dancer, a passion I share with him. He was also a great fitter and turner, as I was told by our former dean, Johann de Villiers, who, fresh out of university, worked as his junior at Bakke in Paarl. Sadly, that gene was not handed down to me.

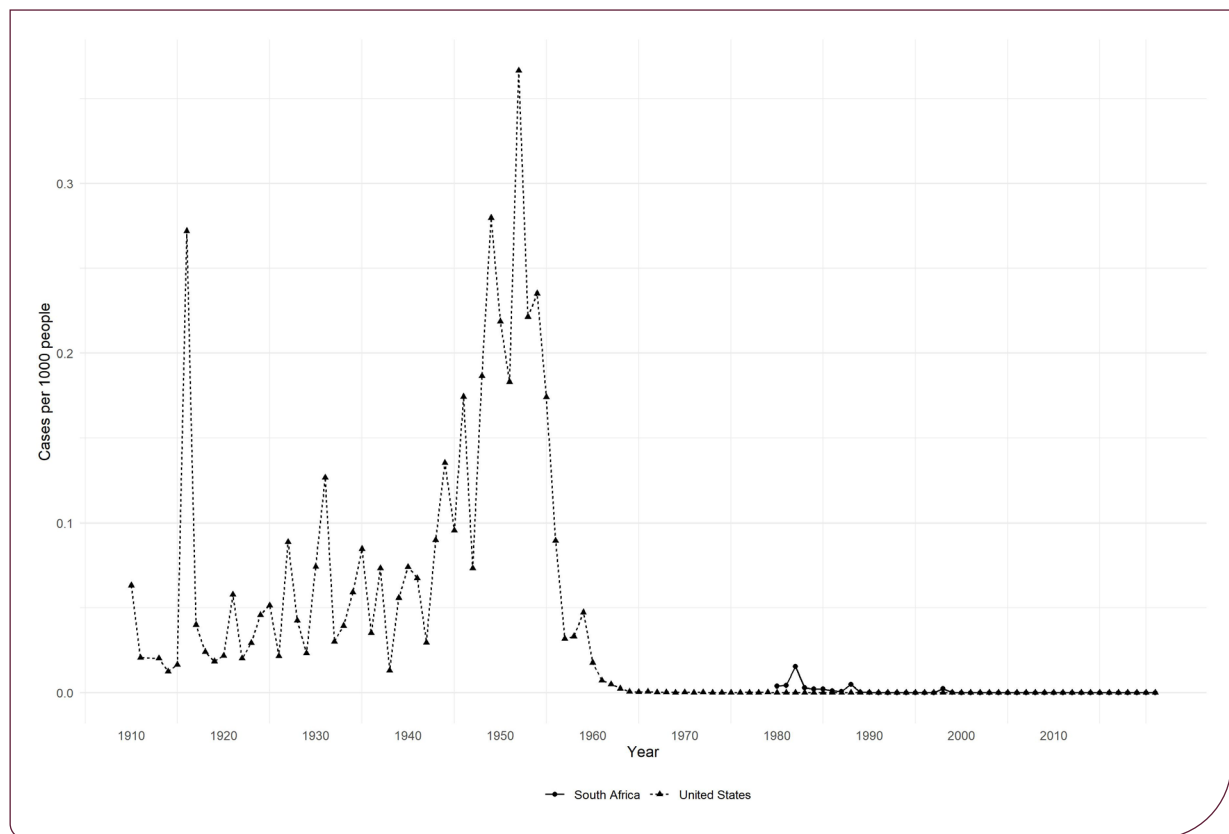


Figure 4: Polio cases per 1000 people in the United States and (since 1980) in South Africa, 1910-2021

Paarl is a town divided by the Berg River. On the western side is the predominantly white part of the town, and the coloured and, increasingly, black residents live on the eastern side. This was not always the case. During the 1950s and 1960s, thousands of coloured residents were forcibly removed from their homes and transferred to other neighbourhoods, often far from their jobs. The segregation introduced by the Groups Areas Act undeniably hurt their economic prospects. My mother's family had to move too; ironically, they were living in a part that became classified as 'coloured'. From what I understand, my grandfather drove to Pretoria to complain about the regulations, but alas without effect. I would have loved to discuss this history with him.

That coloured Paarl residents used to live on the western side of the river is evident from new data we are transcribing. For the past five years, a team of retired librarians and historians – including my mother – have been diligently transcribing the Paarl death notices. They reveal a town very different from the one I grew up in during the 1980s and 1990s. During my childhood there were no coloured residents in Bosch Street in northern Paarl where we lived. But when we analyse the death notices, we find that of the 227 deaths in Bosch Street between 1900 and 1930, 221 or 97% were coloured residents.¹⁰ What happened in Paarl was of course not unique: forced segregation happened across South Africa, from small villages to big cities. The repercussions of apartheid spatial planning are still apparent today.

We began transcribing the death notices in 2018 to investigate the effects of the Spanish flu a hundred years earlier. I could not have imagined that only two years later the world would experience another pandemic. Our research on the 2018 flu was suddenly in demand. We submitted a report to the Presidency in April 2020 and with Jonathan Jayes, then a masters student, and others, I published two papers showing how the flu exacerbated existing inequalities in the health care system, a finding that has relevance today¹¹. The graph of mortality rates of Paarl residents by race shows clearly that the flu disproportionately affected coloured residents.

¹⁰My thanks to Honours student Jan-Hendrik Pretorius for calculating these numbers.

¹¹Fourie, J., & Jayes, J. (2021). Health inequality and the 1918 influenza in South Africa. *World Development*, 141, 105407; de Kadt, D., Fourie, J., Greyling, J., Murard, E., & Norling, J. (2021). Correlates and Consequences of the 1918 Influenza in South Africa. *South African Journal of Economics*, 89(2), 173-195.

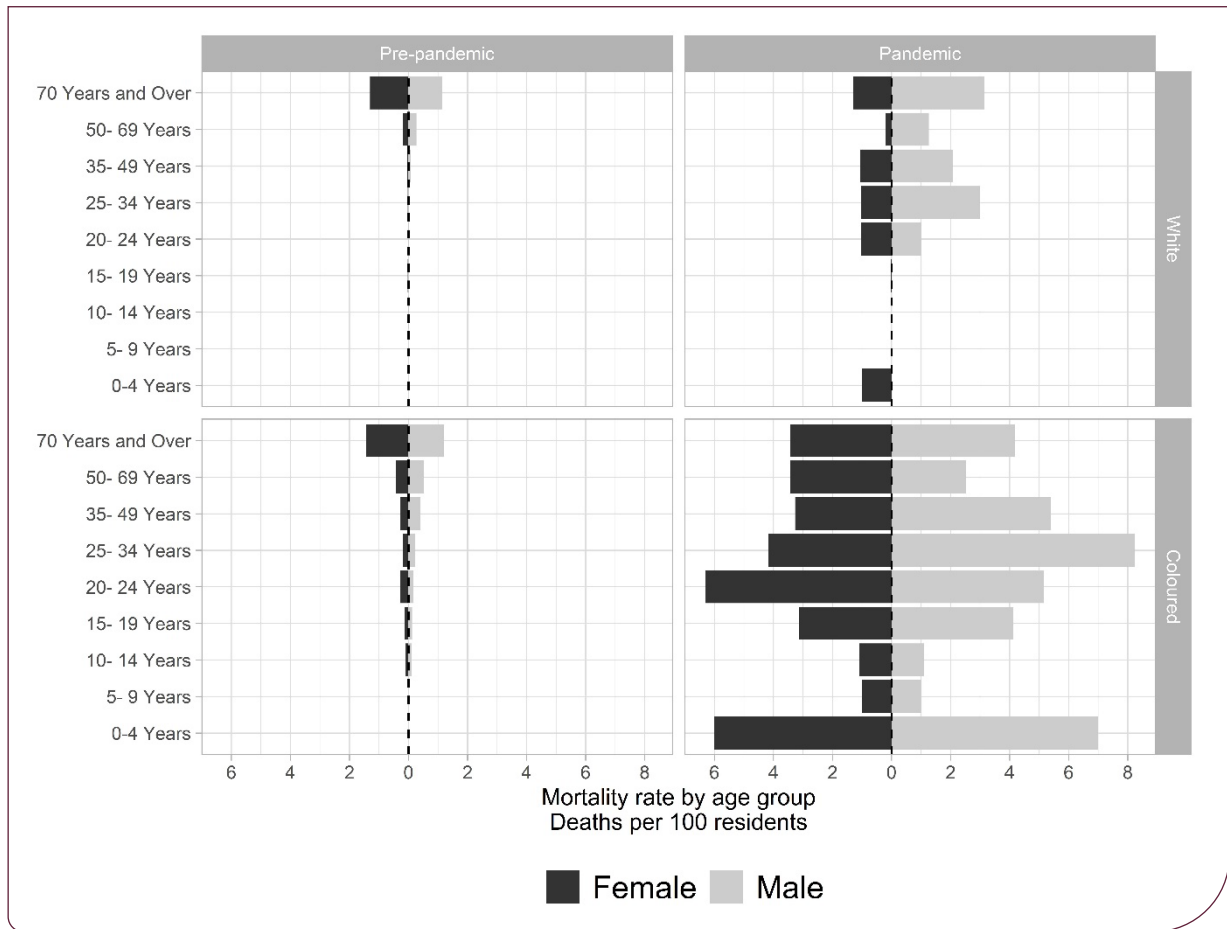


Figure 5: Mortality rate by race, age group, gender and pandemic period, Paarl, 1915–1920

That is not to say that death was not prevalent in all groups. As the graph for Oudtshoorn, where my great-grandfather lived, shows, many Fouries were also among the dead. David Hermanus, a distant relative, died at the age of 93 a few weeks before the Spanish flu arrived. Andries Jonathan Fourie would not live to a ripe old age. He died one month later, on the 15th of October, at the age of 56. His cause of death is registered as 'pneumonia'. The flu had arrived in Oudtshoorn.

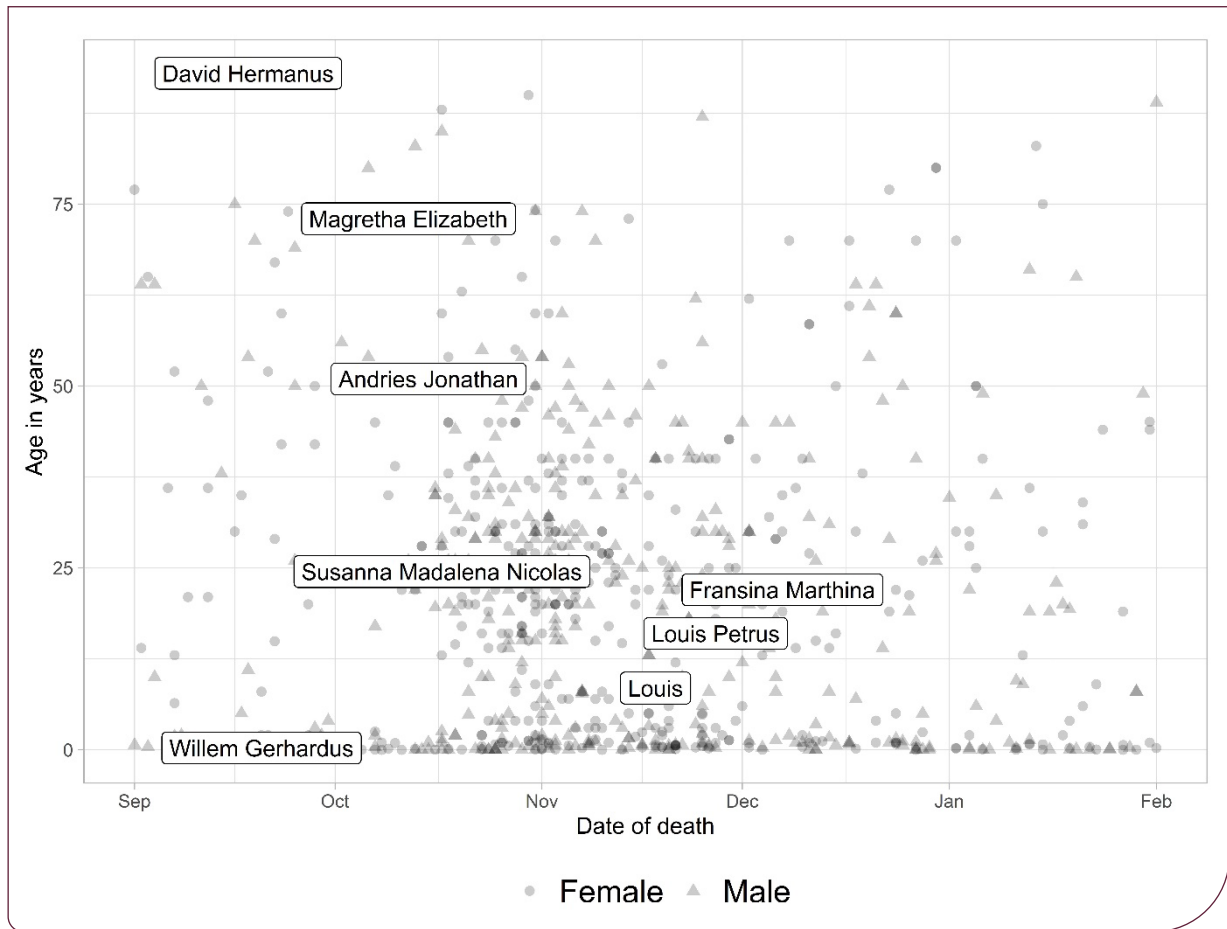


Figure 6: Deaths by age, gender and date, Oudtshoorn, September 1918 to February 1919

My great-grandfather Wynand Breytenbach Fourie, born in 1897, was fortunate to survive the Spanish flu at 21, an age when many of a similar age perished. Perhaps it helped that Oudtshoorn was a rather prosperous place at the time of his birth, the result of the global demand for ostrich feathers. It all started, as many things do, with the French Revolution – and Marie Antoinette's trendsetting ostrich-feathered hats. A century later, in the 1880s, these were all the rage. By the turn of the century, women of all classes were wearing hats adorned with the hugely popular and now affordable ostrich plumes.¹² Oudtshoorn did well out of the surge in demand: between 1870 and 1900 the wealth of the district increased three times faster than that of the Colony as a whole.

But Cape wealth was increasing not only as a result of ostrich feathers. Together with Edward Kerby, Anton Ehlers and Lloyd Maphosa (a former PhD student), I analysed the limited liability company records of the Colony at the turn of the twentieth century.¹³ Limited liability was introduced to make it easier to invest in private ventures. Rapid growth of private capital ensued, and Oudtshoorn was no exception. The photo shows a list of shareholders of the Oudtshoorn Recreation Ground Company Limited, registered in 1883. The property was ultimately sold to the Town Council in 1899, and wound up in 1900. Although most of the surnames suggest English and Jewish investors, one Fourie, Andries Jonathan, appears in the list. He owned 10 shares. I suspect this is the same Andries Jonathan who died during the Spanish flu.

¹²Stein, S. A. (2007). "Falling into Feathers": Jews and the Trans-Atlantic Ostrich Feather Trade. *The Journal of Modern History*, 79(4), 772-812, at 779

¹³Maphosa, L. M., Ehlers, A., Fourie, J., & Kerby, E. M. (2021). The growth and diversity of the Cape private capital market, 1892–1902. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 36(2), 149-174..

Names	Addresses	No. of Shares	Names	Addresses	No. of Shares
Edmeades Cecil	Oudtshoorn	1	Morris Alfred	Oudtshoorn	1
Field Louis	do	16	Muller Johan George	do	2
Filer	do	2	Nesbitt R S	do	1
Forrie Andrew Jonathan	do	10	Nel Eugen	do	1
Foster James Alexander	do	4	Newton James	do	1
Gill Alexander James	do	1	Newton William	do	1
Green George Thomas	do	1	Nurs Frederick William	do	24
Hadfield Alfred Steven	do	4	Oliver Bert Cornelis	do	1
Hadfield Alfred Steven	do	8	Paterson Robert Board	do	1
Hudson George Reginald	Almwal North	1	Gaff Cecil	do	1
Hillyard Percy	Oudtshoorn	1	Gaff Henry	do	1
James George	do	1	Guhl August Ferdinand	do	4
James Harold	do	1	Joseph John Thomas	do	4
Jamison George Gale	do	1	Rogers Archibald	do	4
Jones Reuben	do	1	Rogers George	do	2
Jong de W	do	2	Rogers James	do	1
Juba Henry Hubert	Cape Town	8	Roslyn Richard	do	1
Kekewich Edward	Kingsd	1	Ryan John Patrick	do	2
Keating John	Oudtshoorn	3	Schrenck Karl	do	16
Kemper Henry	do	8	Schoeman Johannes Hark	Nabla Hark	3
Kent William Sewell	do	1	Shoend Arthur Charles	Oudtshoorn	3
King John Reginald	do	3	Smiths Herbert Amson	do	2
Lea Robert	do	8	Smiths Timothy	do	2
Lee Robert Jr	do	1	Stockdale James	do	1
Lind Christian Michael	do	16	Stevens Thomas William	do	3
Mackinlay	Mosel Bay	4	Sticks A J	do	1
Mabane Loup	Oudtshoorn	2	Sullivan James	do	4
Machett Richard	do	1	Swimmer Louis Hendrik	do	4
Matfield Richard	do	4	Taylor William	do	8
Morgan Arthur	do	1	Vellier Stephen Douglas	do	8
Morkel Daniel Johannes	do	2	Vincent Charles	do	8

Figure 7: Shareholders of the Oudtshoorn Recreation Ground Company Limited, 1883

Oudtshoorn's boom came to an abrupt end in 1914. The war in Europe was not the only threat to the ostrich trade; the Model T Ford was gaining popularity, and who can keep a huge feathered hat on her head in an open motorcar? The ostrich feather industry collapsed, and with it Oudtshoorn's prospects. The lesson: technology disrupts – and almost always in unexpected ways.

My great-grandfather was 17 when war broke out. As far as I know, he did not enlist to fight in the Great War, but many other South Africans did. When soldiers enlisted, they completed an attestation form, which recorded all kinds of biographical information, including the recruit's height.

Economic historians have found creative ways to measure the living standards of past generations. We do not always have access to incomes or wealth, which are standardly used today to measure the wellbeing of society, so we have to find alternatives. Height has been found to be a reliable proxy. A person's height is 80% determined by their genes, but 20% by their environment. The better they are fed as infants, for example, the taller they are likely to grow. If we find that the average height of a society increased over time, we can attribute the increase to its children being better fed: in other words, the society was becoming more prosperous.

This is exactly what I and several co-authors have been doing over the past few years. In a project with Bokang Mpeta, my former student and colleague, and Kris Inwood, a Canadian colleague, we analysed the heights of white and black recruits in attestation forms for the South African War and the First and Second World Wars, as well as in several other datasets.¹⁴ The graph of heights of white and black South Africans shows that the difference was large at the start of the twentieth century and widened over the course of the century.

¹⁴Mpeta, B., Fourie, J., & Inwood, K. (2018). Black living standards in South Africa before democracy: New evidence from height. *South African Journal of Science*, 114(1-2), 1-8.

It is especially the first three decades of the twentieth century – the period of land expropriation and other discriminatory policies – that explains the divergence. Martine Mariotti, Kris Inwood and I recently investigated the heights of white South Africans from 1865 to 1920¹⁵. We found that before the country became widely industrialised, white South African males were some of the tallest in the world – a consequence of the high protein diet of the largely rural population. My great-grandfather was apparently one of them, being six foot seven, or 200 centimetres, tall. My father's recollection of him was that he wore a size 15 shoe. My great-grandfather's father did not fight in the South African War of 1899 to 1902, a war between the British Cape

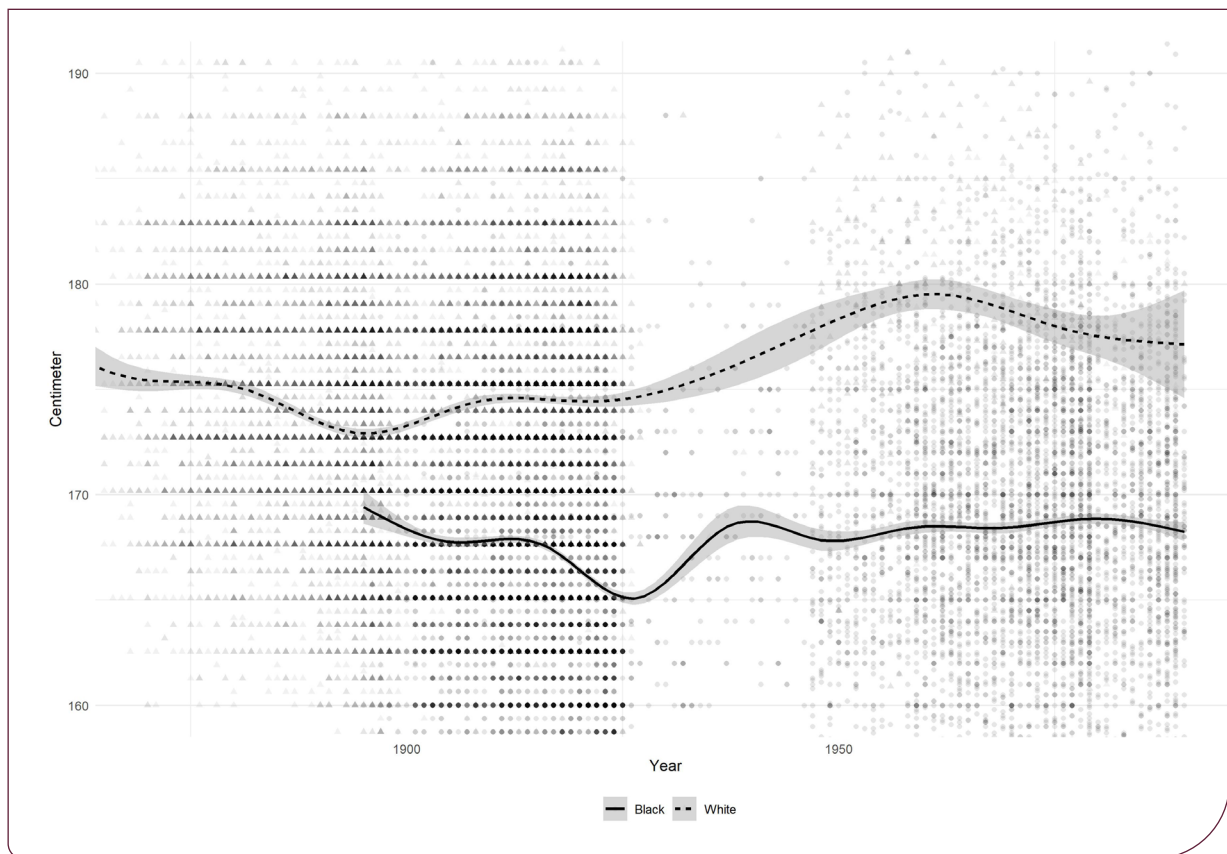


Figure 8: Heights of black and white men, 1870–1990

Colony and Natal on the one side and the Transvaal and Orange Free State Boer Republics on the other. But many other Fouries did. When the Boers' strategy shifted to guerrilla warfare, the British set up internment camps, also called concentration camps, for displaced Boers. The numbers in these camps grew quickly and the conditions deteriorated. We have astonishingly detailed information about the residents of these camps: a dataset compiled by Elizabeth van Heyningen lists more than 140,000 individuals.¹⁶ For about 90,000 of them I found information about the length of their stay. The average was 267 days, and 270 for the Fouries, who made up 1.2%. One of those who survived the camps was the grandmother of my father-in-law, Jasper Vlok. Johanna Helena Botha was interned on the 5th of March 1901 and released on the 14th of August 1902. She was in the camp for 528 days, almost double the average for all residents.

¹⁵Fourie, K., Inwood, K. and Mariotti, M. (2022). Living standards in settler South Africa, 1865-1920. Mimeo.

¹⁶Van Heyningen, E. (2010). A tool for modernisation? The Boer concentration camps of the South African War, 1900-1902. *South African Journal of Science*, 106(5), 1-10.

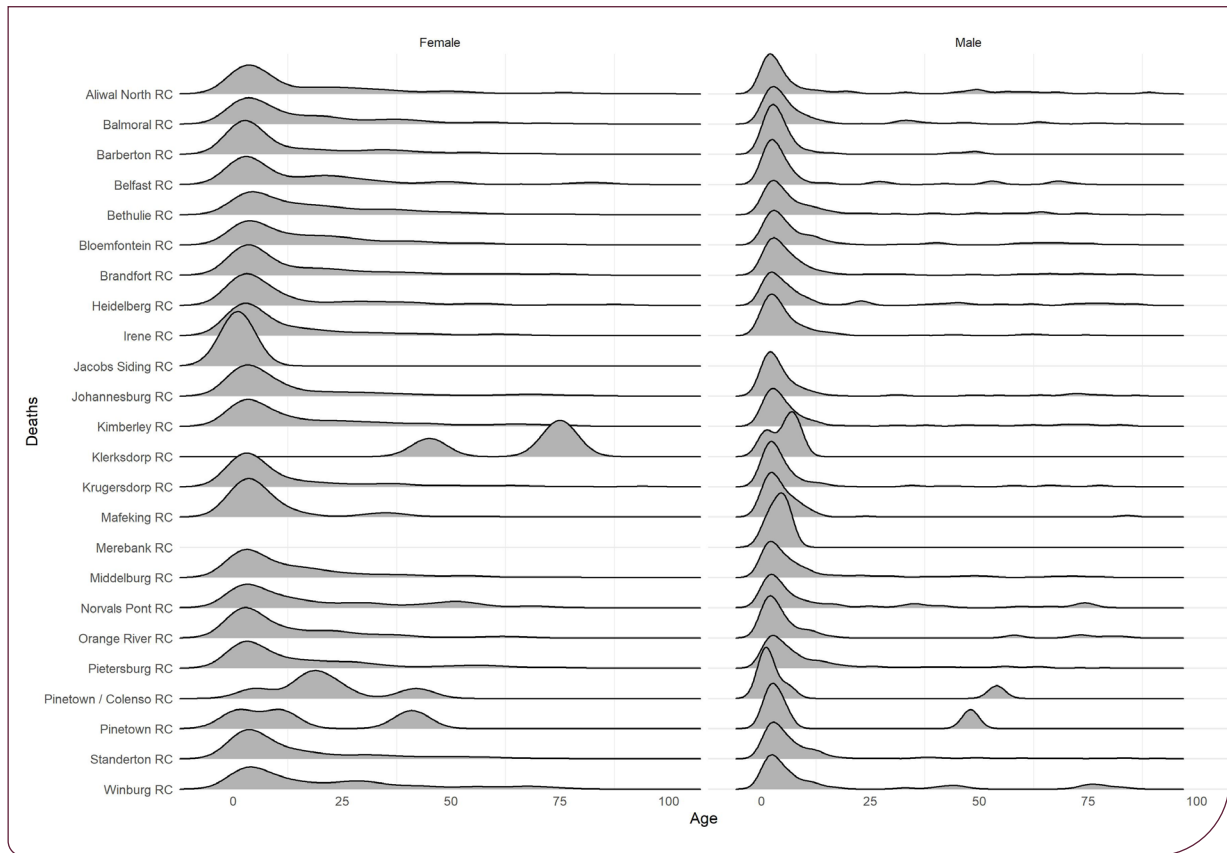


Figure 9: Ridge plot of deaths by age, gender and camp, 1899–1902

We also have accurate information about the number of deaths. Somewhere between 26,000 and 28,000 Boers or Boer sympathisers died in the camps. There were also camps for displaced black people, of whom an estimated 10,000 also died.

I have age information for 11,595 of the mostly white people who died in the camps. The graph shows the age distribution of the deaths, by camp and gender. It is clear that most of the deceased were children, although not exclusively so; in work I did with Sophia du Plessis, we found that at least 15% of deaths were women older than 18.¹⁷ I calculate that around 1.5% of the deaths were Fouries.

Many Cape Colony farmers sympathised with the plight of the Boers and decided to join them. These are known as the Cape rebels. Masters student Lauren Coetzee is now working on identifying the factors that explain who would join and why. The heatmap shows where most rebels from the Cape and other parts of South Africa came from. The dots show all the Fouries who joined. None of them came from Oudtshoorn.

The South African War was instrumental in shaping the unified South Africa in 1910. Although the Boers were defeated, the high cost of the war, together with the gold riches of the Transvaal, meant that the northern

¹⁷Du Plessis, S., & Fourie, J. (2016). " 'n Droewige laslap op die voos kombes van onreg": 'n Statistiese analise van konsentrasiekampbewoners. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 56(4-2), 1178-1199.

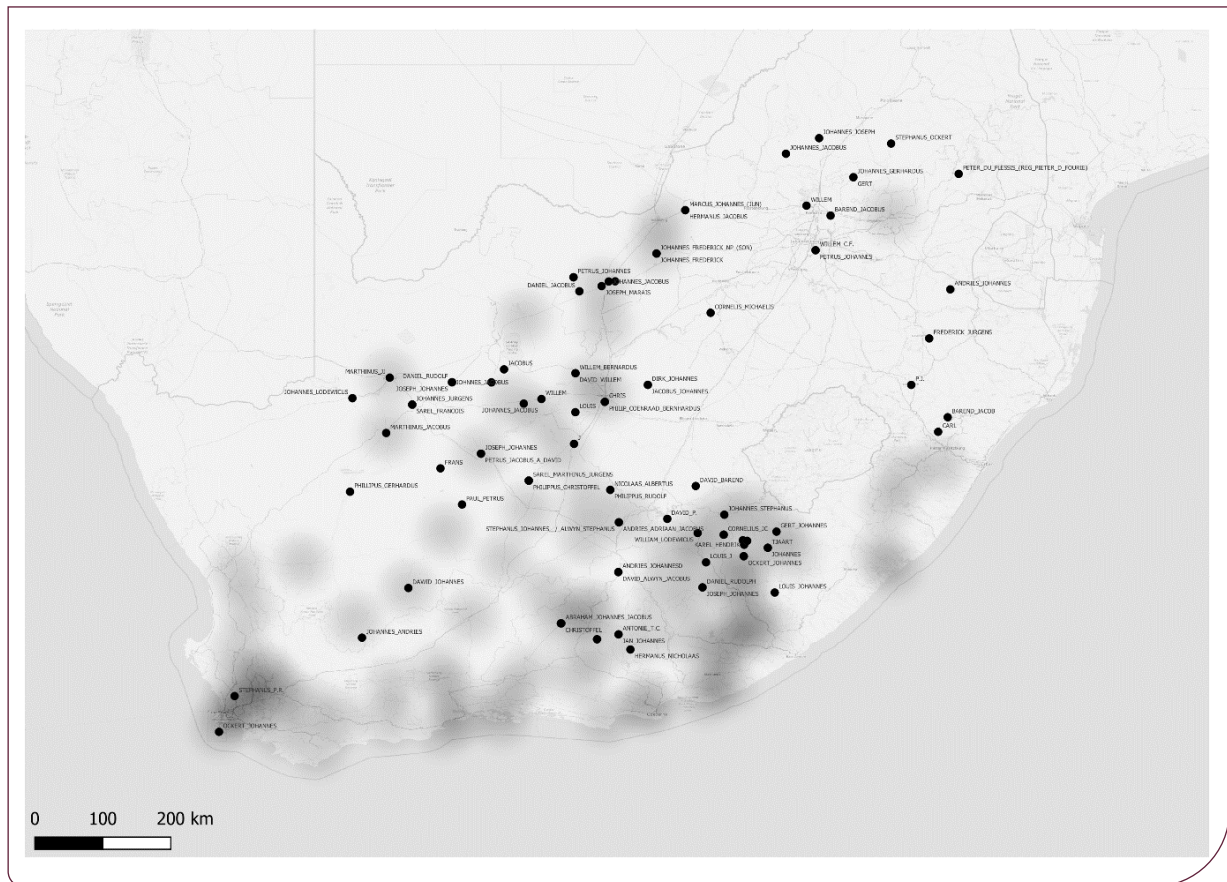


Figure 10: Heat map of all rebels. The dots are Fourie rebels.

whites were in a strong bargaining position and could veto any attempt to export the Cape's liberal franchise to the newly conquered territories. Many Cape politicians, both white and black, had hoped that victory would mean the franchise would be extended to black residents of the former Boer republics. The Cape had had a qualified liberal franchise at least since the establishment of representative government in 1853, meaning that all men could vote regardless of race, subject to certain income requirements.

By the 1880s, however, as more frontier districts with large numbers of black residents were annexed for the Colony, white voters became concerned about losing political power. Disenfranchisement legislation, most notably in the Glen Grey Act of 1894, increased the income requirement and introduced new qualifications, like literacy. Farai Nyika (a former PhD student) and I showed that despite these higher requirements the number of black voters increased substantially, as a consequence of successful campaigns by black political leaders.¹⁸ Investment in education also increased literacy substantially. Despite the pushback from white residents, the fruits of an industrialising economy were being distributed more widely.

But the expanding economic freedoms were dealt a death blow when the country became the Union of South Africa. As former PhD student Abel Gwaindepi has shown, there was another reason for the poor bargaining position of the liberal-minded Cape politicians after the War.¹⁹ The Colony had extremely high debt, a consequence of the large debt-funded investments in railways. The driving force behind the expansion of the

¹⁸Nyika, F., & Fourie, J. (2020). Black Disenfranchisement in the Cape Colony, c. 1887–1909: Challenging the Numbers. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(3), 455–469.

¹⁹Gwaindepi, A., & Fourie, J. (2020). Public Sector Growth in the British Cape Colony: Evidence From New Data on Expenditure and Foreign Debt, 1830–1910. *South African Journal of Economics*, 88(3), 341–367.

railways was Cecil John Rhodes. His company De Beers benefited from this, because it lowered transport costs to the Kimberley mines, allowing mine owners to pay less for inputs and wages. But they paid little in taxes, which could have helped fund the railway expansion.

There is no doubt that the railways, as elsewhere in the world, boosted the economic transformation of the South African interior. Alfonso Herranz-Loncán and I calculated that a quarter of GDP growth between 1860 and 1909 could be explained by the arrival of the railways.²⁰ But money had to be found to pay for this rapid expansion of infrastructure, and it was ultimately the Transvaal gold mines after unification that enabled the Cape to settle its debt. The cost was the loss of the black franchise.

The railways are an example of how a new technology can create economic prosperity. But it is also an example of how a political system that only serves a small part of a population can allow a political elite to capture the rents of the new technology, to the detriment of many, and widen inequality. It is clear that political and economic freedoms go hand-in-hand.

My great-great-grandfather David Hermanus Petrus Fourie was born in 1870, at the start of South Africa's mineral revolution. Diamonds had just been discovered and all sorts of people were flocking to Kimberley in search of riches. Kara Dimitruk (a former LEAP postdoctoral student) has shown that this sudden demand for labour on the mines had a surprising impact in the Cape Colony: farmers suddenly had to find a way to keep their labourers on the farm. Farm owners had two options: the carrot or the stick. They could pay higher wages. This is what one would expect in a competitive economy in a democratic society. But the Cape farmers had political power and they used it to push for more severe coercive legislation – with harsher punishments for labourers who absconded.

David Hermanus Petrus's father, David Hermanus Fourie, was born in 1822, when the Cape was still a slave economy. Slavery was abolished when he was 12 years old, although the former slaves still had to work for another four years as 'apprentices'. On 1 December 1838, the almost 40,000 people who had been enslaved at the Cape could finally take their first step towards economic freedom.

David Hermanus was too young to have been an independent farmer at the time of emancipation, but his father, Stephanus Johannes Fourie, born in 1798, was 40 when slavery was abolished. It seems very likely that he had slaves working on his farm. How would I find out?

In 2010, the historian Hans Heese began to build a database of all the slaves recorded in the slave valuation rolls for the Cape Colony. These rolls were compiled after the Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833 by the British Parliament, declaring that slaves in most parts of the British Empire had to be freed. There was an important condition, however. All slave owners had to be compensated for the loss of what was then considered their property.

Lists of all the former slaves were drawn up, together with their occupation, origin, age, gender and value, as well as details of their owners. The total value of all the slaves in the Colony amounted to more than 3 million pounds. But after compensation had been allocated the Cape received only 1.247 million pounds. Many slave owners therefore received far less than they expected.

Combining the slave valuation rolls with the compensation payments enabled Kate Ekama, Lisa Martin, Hans Heese and me to build the Slave Emancipation Dataset.²¹ This dataset will make it possible for us to study the financial underpinnings of slavery in the Colony. We have already found, for example, that the emancipation shifted economic power from the countryside to the city. In Cape Town, many of the merchants who acted as

²⁰Herranz-Loncán, A., & Fourie, J. (2018). "For the public benefit"? Railways in the British Cape Colony. *European Review of Economic History*, 22(1), 73-100.

²¹Ekama, K., Fourie, J., Heese, H., & Martin, L. C. (2021). When Cape slavery ended: Introducing a new slave emancipation dataset. *Explorations in Economic History*, 81, 101390.

intermediaries between London and the Cape, to enable the former owners to get their compensation money, established thriving banks and insurance companies. Others invested in housing, as Kate Ekama and Robert Ross have shown in new work, becoming landlords to those who were formerly enslaved.²²

Surprisingly, I could not find Stephanus Johannes Fourie in our Slave Emancipation Dataset. But I suspect that was because he was not a very successful farmer. He farmed just outside Oudtshoorn, in the district called Volmoed (meaning 'hopeful'). His farm is shown on this map of the 5,503 farms of the Cape Colony in 1850. The black dots are Fourie-owned farms. There were 37 of them, or about 0.7% of the total.

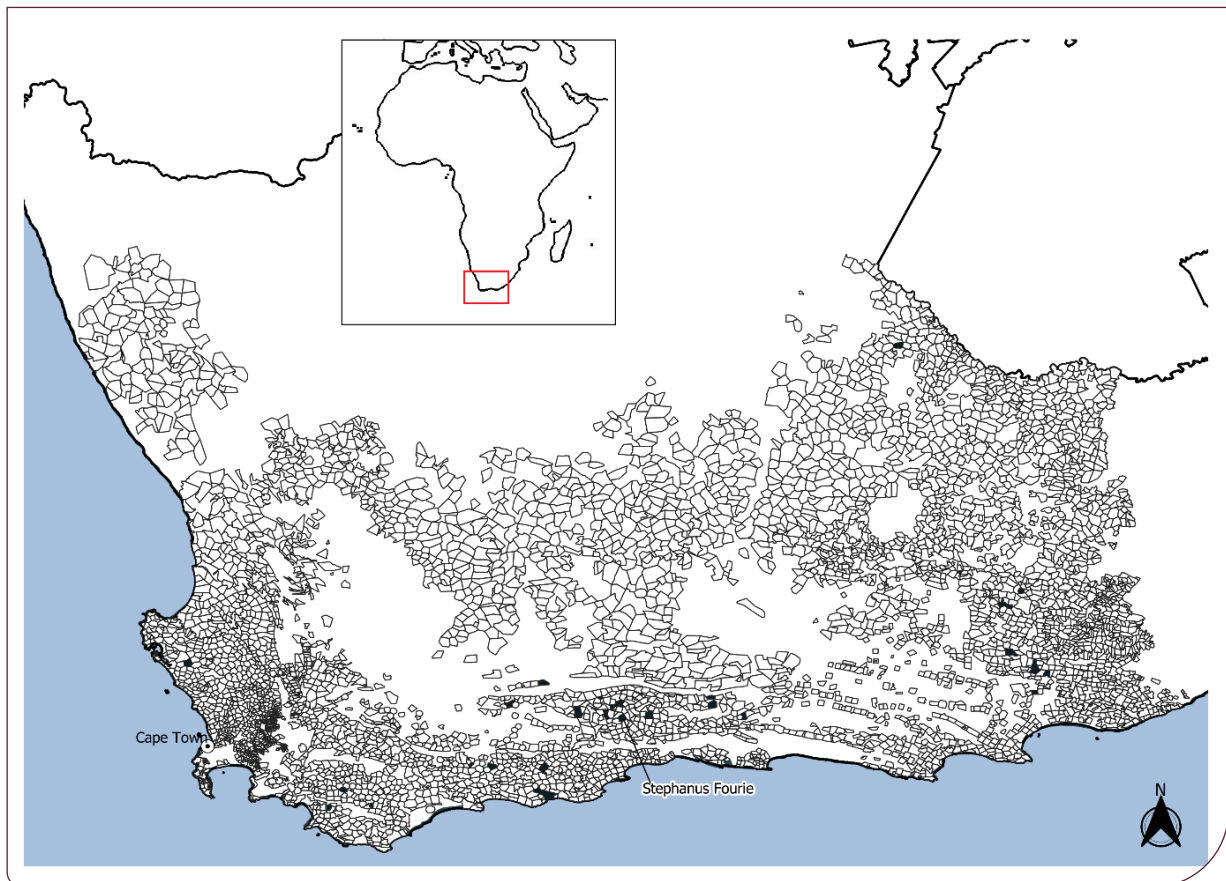


Figure 11: All the Cape Colony farms in 1850

I did, however, find Stephanus Johannes's father, another David Hermanus Fourie. He owned seven slaves. They were Mey, Frans, Albertus, Mawira, Adam, Damon and Regina, six men and one woman. The oldest was 33, the youngest 13. The violin plot shows the distribution of ages of all slaves in the George district. The higher number of men above 30 reflects the higher demand for men in the slave trade, a trade that was outlawed by the Slave Trade Act of 1807, almost 30 years earlier.

It is unclear what happened to David Hermanus's seven slaves after emancipation. PhD student Lisa Martin is currently investigating the factors that would have motivated a former slave to move to Cape Town or to one of the many mission stations that had begun to dot the landscape. It is, however, very likely that after gaining their freedom they remained on the farm as labourers, as many did.

²²Ekama, K. & Ross, R. (2022). From mortgage holders to slum landlords: Compensated emancipation and the building of Cape Town in the 1830s-1840s. Mimeo.

Although they were valued at a total of 907 pounds, David Hermanus received only 260 pounds, or 43% of their total value. It is perhaps no surprise that his son, though living in the 'hopeful' district of Volmoed, called his farm *Armoed* (meaning 'poverty').

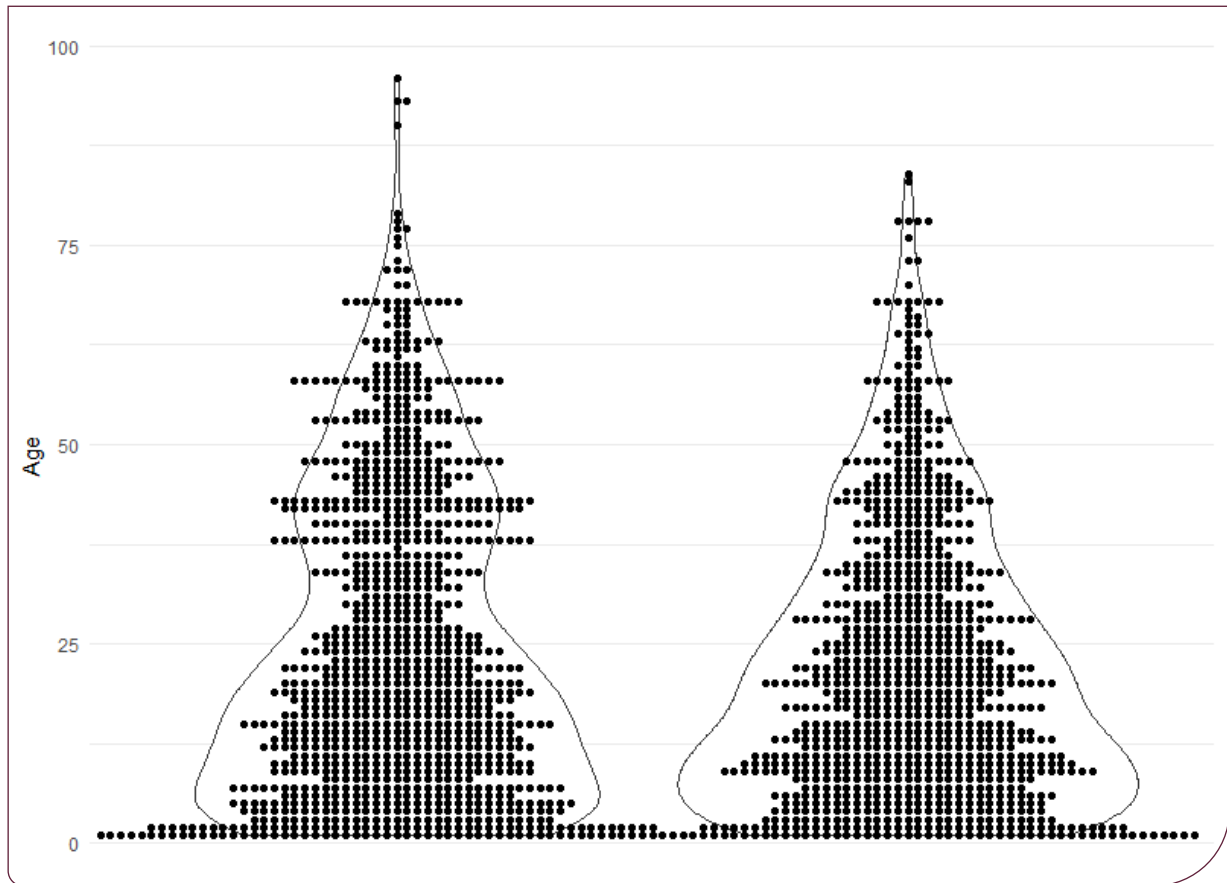


Figure 12: Violin plot of all slaves listed in the Slave Emancipation Dataset for the George district, by age and gender

David Hermanus Fourie, my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, was the fifth son of Stephanus Fourie. Stephanus was born in 1734, married Helena Geertruy Lategan at the age of 21, and died at the age of 90 in 1825, having lived long enough to see the birth of his great-grandchild in 1822. During his lifetime he saw great changes. The Cape Colony grew from a fledgling settlement around Cape Town to a vast territory reaching to the Gariep River in the north and the Fish River in the east.

Stephanus was the 20th child of Louis Fourie, the first Fourie to arrive in South Africa. Louis settled on the farm *De Slangerivier* in 1699, close to today's Wellington. Linton Park Wines, the new name of the farm, still makes a Louis Fourie Reserve Range. Surprisingly, none of Louis Fourie's nine surviving sons wanted to inherit the farm at his death in 1750. All had moved into the interior, beyond the first mountain ranges that separate the Cape Peninsula from the drier interior. Stephanus probably moved to the Klein Karoo at age 16, soon after the death of his father. He settled in the Gamka district, where his ancestors are still farming more than ten generations later.

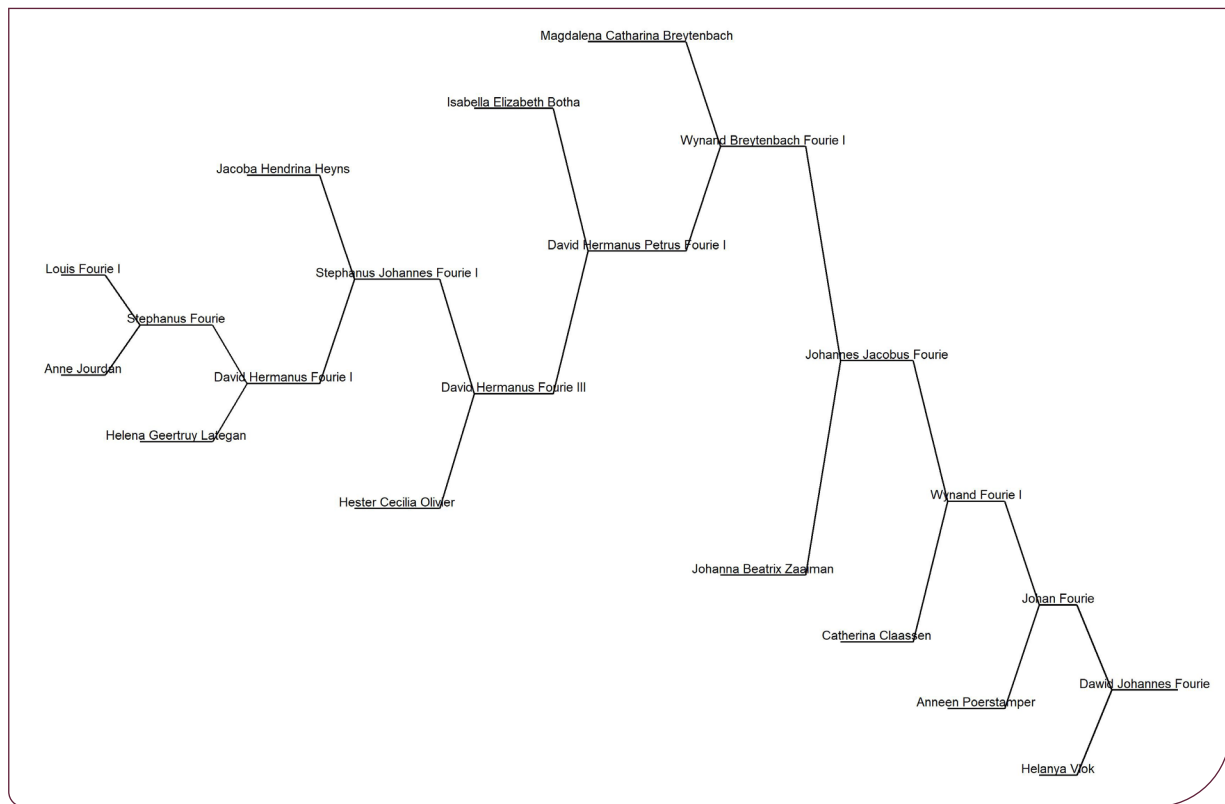


Figure 13: Genealogy tree of 11 generations of Fourie, from Louis Fourie to Dawid Johannes Fourie

Louis Fourie and the other Europeans who arrived in Table Bay did not find the Cape an empty land. The winter rainfall area of the Western and Southern Cape was inhabited by the indigenous Khoesan. One of their clans, the Gorinhaikona, lived in the shadow of Table Mountain. Its leader, Autshumao, was soon appointed by the Dutch East India Company as translator. He sent his twelve year old niece Krotoa to work in the household of Jan van Riebeeck, the first commander of the Cape station under Company rule.

In 1664, Krotoa married Pieter van Meerhof, a Dutch surgeon, becoming the first Khoesan to marry according to Christian custom. They had three children. After her husband's death, she suffered a personal decline and was ultimately banished to Robben Island, where she died in 1673. This was not the end of her legacy though. Her daughter, Pieternella, married Daniel Zaaijman, the Company gardener. Today, all South Africans with the surname Saayman can trace their ancestry to Krotoa. And because my great-grandfather married a Zaaiman, I too, am a distant descendant.

The story of why the Europeans decided to settle the Cape is familiar to most of us. The Dutch East India Company, established in 1602 to exploit the lucrative trade in spices between the East Indies and Europe, needed a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope to supply passing ships with fresh water, wood and meat, and the vegetables that were vital to ward off scurvy. The first Company officials arrived in 1652 to establish a fort. They soon ran out of supplies, and within five years had released nine Company servants to become *vrije burghers* – free settlers. Despite the word 'free', there was little economic freedom: the settlers were forced

to sell all their produce to the Company stores in Cape Town and banned from engaging in manufacturing or trading with the passing ships. They were also banned from trading with the Khoesan, despite the eagerness on both sides to do so.

Because of these restrictions, the Cape was generally seen as an economic backwater, a place of slow growth and subsistence living²³. In fact, the latest Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy, published in 2021, subscribes to the view that wealthy farmers and merchants only emerged after Dutch rule ended, in 1795.²⁴ Historians, whether Afrikaner nationalists or English liberals, have had their own reasons for wanting to believe an origin story of Afrikaner poverty.²⁵ But were those settler farmers, like Stephanus and his eight brothers, really so very poor?

This is the question that attracted me to economic history. When in 2007 Wimpie Boshoff and I found a dataset of ships that arrived in Table Bay, we decided to see how this traffic affected the annual output of wheat, wine and meat on Cape farms.²⁶ We submitted our paper to a conference in Portugal. In our conference slot only four people showed up – the four presenters. It was awkward and at a meeting for economists afterwards I raised the point that in future it might be better if papers were grouped according to their method rather than the geographical location of their topic. A Dutch scholar, Jan Luiten van Zanden, came up to me afterwards and asked me to send him the paper. A few months later he invited me to Utrecht for a visit. There he asked me whether I'd consider doing a PhD in Economic History. I knew very little about economic history, but his offer was too generous to decline, so I said yes. In academia, as in life, serendipity plays a large role. My advice is to take as much advantage of it as possible.

I delved into the probate inventories of settler farmers in the Dutch Cape Colony, stored in the Cape archives. To my surprise, in comparison with other settler societies and even in comparison with some of the richest countries in the eighteenth century, like England and Holland, Cape farmers were remarkably rich.²⁷ I confirmed this when I compared my findings with the tax censuses collected by the Dutch East India Company. Cape settler farmers owned, on average, 55 head of cattle and about 350 sheep. They also owned 10 chairs, 4 books and 5 paintings. By way of comparison, Helanya and I certainly did not own 10 chairs and 5 paintings in our apartment at the time – and those were averages. These were clearly not subsistence farmers.

The probates also recorded credits and debts. Christie Swanepoel, a former PhD student and now a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape, investigated the extent and purpose of the extensive informal credit network. She found that most of the loans were used not for consumables but to invest, often in acquiring slaves.²⁸ Another former PhD student and now colleague Calumet Links calculated that slaves and Khoesan were not labour substitutes on farms.²⁹ They were complementary inputs into the production process, which suggests that the acquisition of slaves served another purpose – as collateral on loans. The point of all these findings is that the Cape settler farmers were not living from hand to mouth.

Yet we should also not equate their better-than-expected living standards to the fortunate lives we live today. There are many reasons why we live far more comfortable lives than our ancestors. I mentioned at the start that life expectancy today for men born in the Western Cape is above 65 years. Jeanne Cilliers (a former PhD student) and I calculated that the median lifespan of settler men at the Cape during the eighteenth century was 40 years.³⁰ This was similar to the lifespan of men in other societies before the late nineteenth-century advances in medical science, nutrition and sanitation.

I wanted to know not only how affluent these settlers were but why. What made some excel and others fall behind? This is the fundamental question of economic history: why is it that some are rich and others not – or not yet?

²³Feinstein, C. H. (2005). *An economic history of South Africa: Conquest, discrimination, and development*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁴Schirmer, S. (2021). The Economic History of South Africa before 1948. *The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy*, 1000, 26-46, at 31.

²⁵Fourie, J. (2014). Subverting the standard view of the Cape economy: Robert Ross's cliometric contribution and the work it inspired. *Magnifying Perspectives: Contributions to History, a Festschrift for Robert Ross*, ASC Occasional Publication, 26, 261-273.

²⁶Boshoff, W. H., & Fourie, J. (2010). The significance of the Cape trade route to economic activity in the Cape Colony: a medium-term business cycle analysis. *European Review of Economic History*, 14(3), 469-503.

The tax censuses seemed to me to have the most potential to answer that question. They were huge, and there were hundreds of them. Surely this data could be put to some use, if only I could find a partner with deep pockets. Fortunately, in the early 2010s, I received an email from a guitar-playing Swedish socialist, Erik Green. He told me he wanted to work on the archival records of Transvaal farms but I soon convinced him that Cape farms were a better bet. The Transvaal records are scanty, as Kara Dimitruk, Sophia du Plessis and Stan du Plessis have shown.³¹ By contrast, the Cape tax censuses, or *opgaafrolle*, offered immense possibilities. So we began a collaboration that has flourished. In September 2020 we received the extraordinary news that our Cape of Hope Good Hope Panel project would be funded by the Swedish Riksbanken, becoming the biggest humanities and social science project in Swedish history.³² We are now well on our way to transcribing all the Cape tax censuses, which will, we hope, be the world's largest intra-generational and multi-generational panel dataset.

What can we learn so far? American economic historian Frank Garmon and I compared Cape farmers with their American compatriots.³³ We found that the Cape farmers earned higher incomes and had more assets. This challenges the claims by leading economic historians that colonial America was a world leader in income per capita. In ongoing work with several colleagues and students, I am investigating issues like income mobility, inequality, network creation and intergenerational wealth transfer.

On one of our earlier projects, colleague Dieter von Fintel and I found that one subgroup of Cape farmers were particularly productive: the Huguenots who had fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.³⁴ Most of them crossed the border to German territories, or went to Holland, England or the Americas, but about 150 found their way to the southern tip of Africa. We found that these refugees were good at making one thing that is still a cornerstone of the Stellenbosch economy: wine. In recent work, masters student Tiaan de Swardt has replicated our study, now based on the expanded Cape of Good Hope Panel. He found that the Huguenot advantage persisted for two to three generations after their arrival, meaning that they kept their wine-making skills well within the family. Louis, the first Fourie in South Africa, does not appear to have been as successful in this endeavour as his Huguenot compatriots, judging by his farm output. I asked Tiaan to compare the Fourie farmers with the other Huguenots. They seem to have been less productive.

In future the transcribed tax censuses will allow us to map the individual life-course of each of the thousands of Cape settlers, just as I have done for the first 18 years that Louis Fourie appears in the records. The technical difficulties of matching these individuals across time will be severe. The graph of Louis Fourie's children, slaves and agricultural assets for those 18 years shows that his name was spelled differently in each of the first 13 tax censuses he appeared in, from Louwis Floru, to Louis Flory, to Ludovicus Florius, to Louis Fourie. But if we can rise to the challenge, the opportunities are immense.³⁵ Here we observe Louis increasing the size of his household over time, despite the deaths of several of his children, and his first wife, Susanna Cordier, in 1713. By 1718 he had remarried, this time to Anne Jourdan, with whom he went on to have another 12 children.

We have not yet transcribed the tax censuses of the 1720s and 1730s, but the transcriptions continue from 1739. Louis now had more children – his 20th child, my direct ancestor Stephanus Fourie, was born in 1734 – but he was not materially much better off. He had a few more vines but far fewer cattle. At the end of his life, in 1750, four slaves were working on the farm, roughly the average for all settlers over the eighteenth century.

²⁷Fourie, J. (2013). The remarkable wealth of the Dutch Cape Colony: measurements from eighteenth-century probate inventories 1. The Economic History Review, 66(2), 419–448.

²⁸Fourie, J., & Swanepoel, C. (2018). 'Impending ruin' or 'remarkable wealth'? The role of private credit markets in the 18th-century Cape Colony. Journal of Southern African Studies, 44(1), 7–25.

²⁹Links, C., Fourie, J., & Green, E. (2020). The substitutability of slaves: Evidence from the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony. Economic History of Developing Regions, 35(2), 98–122.

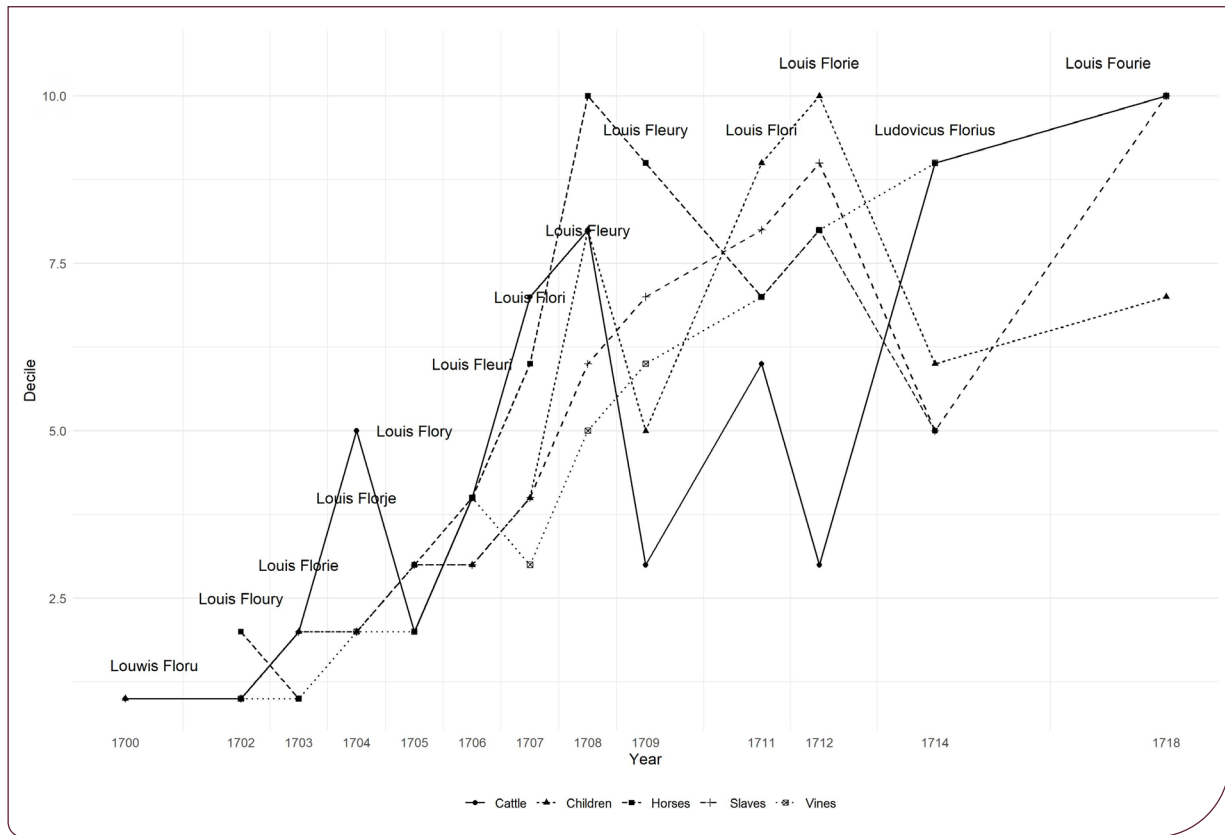


Figure 14: Louis Fourie's children, slaves and agricultural assets, by decile, 1700–1718

Although Louis is recorded in the census for the first time only in 1700, he had arrived 12 years earlier, on 12 May 1688, aboard the *Borsenburg*.³⁶ With him were his friend Pierre Lombard and Pierre's wife, Marie Couteau. The three of them were part of a small group of Huguenot refugees who had escaped from Livron, a town in the southern French province of Dauphiné, hiking more than 1,400 kilometres to find refuge in the Walloon Church of Amsterdam. Louis was around 18 years old, an illiterate farm labourer, escaping the Catholic dragoons who were persecuting the Protestant Huguenots. Louis met Pierre and Marie on the way to Amsterdam. We know this from the records that survive of their receiving assistance along the way. Because Louis was illiterate, his name was recorded by others in a variety of ways. The photo shows the entry in the Walloon Church records for 21 December 1687. Just below the entry for Pierre Lombard and his wife, it says: *Louis Faurite pour la Cap* – 'Louis Fourie on his way to the Cape'. At the Cape, after repeated re-spellings, Faurite became simply Fourie.

³⁰Cilliers, J., & Fourie, J. (2012). New estimates of settler life span and other demographic trends in South Africa, 1652-1948. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 27(2), 61-86.

³¹Dimitruk, K., Du Plessis, S., & Du Plessis, S. (2021). De jure property rights and state capacity: evidence from land specification in the Boer Republics. *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 17(5), 764-780.

³²Fourie, J., & Green, E. (2018). Building the Cape of Good Hope Panel. *The History of the Family*, 23(3), 493-502.

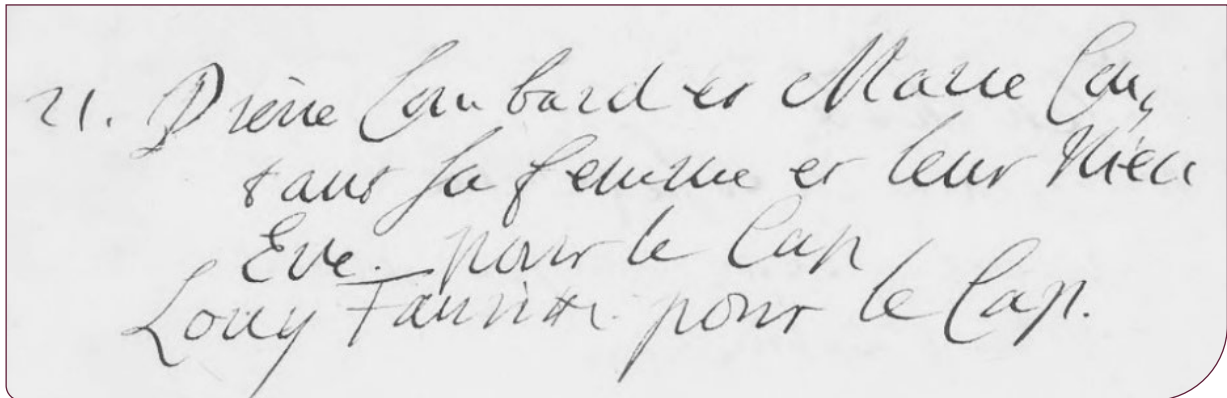


Figure 15: The entry in the Amsterdam Walloon Church for Louis Faurite (Fourie)

Louis Fourie's long walk to economic freedom – from farm labourer persecuted for his religion to Cape farmer with 99 grandchildren – is testament to his ingenuity and spirit. But it is also testament to the support he received from the society he entered as a migrant. Louis probably first found a job as a farmhand. Then in 1699 he had the opportunity to acquire a freehold farm with secure property rights. The Company offered loans to newly arrived settlers, and I find, in a new project where we are transcribing the cashbooks of the Dutch Reformed Church, that the church also gave sizeable loans. Several Huguenots received a loan and, although I find no evidence, it is likely that Louis Fourie did too.

The things that make people more productive are scientific and technological innovation, an entrepreneurial spirit, and the cultural norms, values and institutions that foster them. The way we spread the returns is by making education available to all, ensuring that women can participate on an equal footing, opening access to credit and financial markets, protecting democracy and the rule of law, curbing legislation and regulations that inhibit free choice, and giving ordinary people a social safety net so they will be empowered to take risks.

But the first step in our long walk to economic freedom is to know that, despite the hardships we face every day, and our concerns about the future, we live much better lives than our ancestors. Economic historians help us learn from the past so we can build an even more prosperous future – for Dawid Fourie and the generations to come.

³³ Fourie, J., & Garmon, F. (2022). The settlers' fortunes: Comparing tax censuses in the Cape Colony and early American Republic. Mimeo.

³⁴ Fourie, J., & Von Fintel, D. (2014). Settler skills and colonial development: the Huguenot wine-makers in eighteenth-century Dutch South Africa. *The Economic History Review*, 67(4), 932-963.

³⁵ We have made some progress. See Rijpma, A., Cilliers, J., & Fourie, J. (2020). Record linkage in the Cape of Good Hope Panel. *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 53(2), 112-129.

³⁶ Fourie, O. (2021). Faurite to Fourie: What's in a name? *Huguenot Bulletin*, 58, 60-70.