**RHI thesis topics**

**The ‘resource curse’ in Africa and/or Latin America**

Are natural resources, such as fossil fuels and minerals, a blessing or a curse for development? The relationship between resource extraction and economic development has been the subject of intense debates since the 1950s. Research shows that countries with an abundance of resources often underperform economically. The term ‘resource curse’ was coined by Richard Auty in 1993 to describe this phenomenon.

Many resource-rich countries not only rank as the poorest in the world, they moreover have lower levels of democracy, higher levels of inequality, and less developed public services such as education and health care. What are the reasons for, and exceptions to, these adverse outcomes? In both Africa and Latin America, resources – such as gold, silver, copper, iron ore, and petroleum – are abundant. Countries within these regions, however, show a mixed picture when it comes to the relationship between resources and development. This project analyses one or two case studies from Africa and/or Latin America to enable a better understanding of the mechanisms behind the ‘resource curse’.

Suggested literature: Richard Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies. The Resource Curse Thesis.* (London: Routledge, 1993).

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| Suggested courses | RHI-55306; RHI-51806 |
| Keywords | Resources; development; Africa; Latin America |
| Contact | Ewout Frankema |

**Two-level games and the ‘Scramble for Africa’ (1880-1918)**

In the decades leading up to the First World War, European colonizers carved up and imposed territorial control over (almost all of) Africa, creating the countries that exist until today. A key event was the Berlin Conference of 1884-95, where the territorial division of Africa was formalized. This scramble is often described as a negotiation between European states, but in fact local actors in Africa (local rulers as well as European traders and missionaries) and Europe (industrialists, workers, missionary societies, anti-slavery lobbyists) played a crucial role in how this division of territory played out. Robert Putnam’s two-level game framework (1988), can be used to understand this better. In this thesis project, you will use secondary literature and archives (based in London, Brussels or Aix-en-Provence) to analyse the role of such domestic actors in the Scramble, using a case study (for example a country: Congo, Nigeria or Uganda). You can also choose a different time period or issue to apply the two-level game framework.

Starting literature:

* Wesseling, H.L. *Divide and rule: the partition of Africa, 1880-1914* (London: Praeger, 1996).
* Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games." *International organization 42*, no. 3 (1988): 427-460.

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| Suggested courses | RHI-51806 |
| Keywords | Colonization; Africa; domestic actors; two-level game framework |
| Contact | Michiel de Haas |

**Coping with climate hazards in colonial Southeast Asia**

Why are some societies more susceptible to disaster than others? The number and intensity of climate hazards, as well as the severity of their impacts, have been unequally distributed across the globe, with formerly colonized countries in the Global South particularly affected. While most current research emphasizes societal factors as crucial determinants of vulnerability and resilience, we know little about how the economics and institutions of colonialism affected societies’ long-run abilities to cope with hazards.

This project examines economic and institutional determinants of disaster impacts and responses in parts of colonial Southeast Asia (c.1850-1950). This is an appropriate area to study because of its relatively high exposure to hazards and colonization by different colonial powers. The student may pick one or several cases studies, and will analyse data on annual climatic variations, their impacts, and economic and institutional intervening factors, by exploiting a range of primary and secondary sources.

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| Suggested courses | RHI-50806 |
| Keywords | Climate; disasters; resilience; inequality; Southeast Asia |
| Contact | Pim de Zwart |

**Do climate shocks cause migration? Harnessing historical evidence**

There is a lively debate in many academic disciplines, with a leading role for economics, on the effects of climate shocks and climate change on migration (see for a literature review, Cipolina, De Benedictis and Scibè (2021)). There is a lot of scaremongering in the media about large scale ‘climate migration’, especially from Africa to Europe. Empirical findings, however, are extremely mixed: climate shocks seem to cause some migration, but this is not always the case, and the effect is not very strong. Historical data can help us understand this relationship better. In this project, you will use a panel dataset with historical migration data from Rwanda and Burundi to Uganda (1920-1960), as well as qualitative data from colonial archives, to study the relationship between rainfall shocks, food prices and emigration on a district level. Other case studies may be explored as well (historical as well as more contemporary), as long as appropriate data can be found.

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| Suggested courses | RHI-54806 |
| Keywords | Migration; climate shocks; colonial history |
| Contact | Michiel de Haas |

**The economics of water scarcity**

Why do citizens have access to clean water in some countries, while others struggle to get this basic natural resource? How do institutions, politics and markets influence the provision (public or private) of water services? What is the impact of inequalities in access to clean water on societal outcomes, such as health, education or economic performance? Tackling these questions is critical to achieve an equitable, sustainable and prosperous society, a key goal of the international development agenda as stated in the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations.

This thesis project will deal with the ultimate reasons explaining the under provision of clean water, especially in relation to how markets and politics interact with the management of environmental resources. The student may study contemporary communities in developing countries that lack access to basic drinking services, or past societies that suffered the ills of water scarcity but that overcame this major obstacle during the 20th century.

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| Suggested courses | RHI-10806; ENP-23806 |
| Keywords | Water scarcity; institutions; politics; natural resources |
| Contact | Daniel Gallardo Albarrán |

**Climate change and food production in the long-run**

The world population is expected to increase to 11 billion by the end of the century. With many more mouths to feed, and changing dietary patterns across the world, agricultural production levels need to increase as well. However, at the same time the impacts of climate change – sea level rise, higher temperatures, drought – threaten to increase food security especially in low- and middle-income countries. What can we learn from history when it comes to climate change adaptation in food production? This project either (1) analyses historical trends in climate change and food production, or (2) studies one or two societies in the recent or more distant past which have tried to reduce vulnerability to drought, sea level rise, insect outbreaks or other adverse effects of climate change. What factors encourage or hamper the ability to successfully adapt to climate change?

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| Suggested courses | FPH-21306; RHI-50806 |
| Keywords | Climate change, food production, history |
| Contact | Ewout Frankema |

**Causes and consequences of famines in history**

Famines have occurred regularly throughout world history. For the period from the 1860s until 2016, it has been estimated that as a result of episodes of extreme hunger about 128 million people died across the world (Our world in data, 2017). Famines may result from natural causes, as was for example the case for the Chinese famine of 1907 in which heavy rains led to extensive flooding causing the deaths of an estimated 25 million people. Other famines, such as the Holodomor (which means “to kill by starvation”) of 1932-1933, which killed millions of Ukrainians living under the Soviet regime, were man-made.

In modern history, however, the presence of famines has diminished significantly. Smaller regions of the world are now at risk of famines, and famines have become less deadly. Still, even in recent history natural disasters as well as wars and totalitarianism have led to mass starvation. This project analyses the causes and consequences of famines in history. The student may analyse one or several case studies, based on both qualitative and quantitative sources.

Source: Our world in data. (2017). Famines. <https://ourworldindata.org/famines>

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| Suggested courses | FPH-21306 |
| Keywords | Famine; causes; consequences; history |
| Contact | Ingrid de Zwarte |

**Slave trades, mortality and the environment**

The Atlantic slave trade has had a profound impact on African development. There is a large body of literature analysing the mechanisms behind the slave trade from the African continent, paying attention to – amongst others – socioeconomic and political factors. Recent research suggests that also environmental factors played a role (Fenske & Kala, 2014). Climate seems to have had an influence on the number of slaves that were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean. More slaves were captures and transported in colder years, as mortality was lower and agricultural yields were higher. Warmer temperatures, in contrast, increased the costs of capturing and feeding slaves. In this thesis project the student will follow-up on this research by analysing the relationship between slave trade and the environment. How have geographic characteristics and environmental shocks impacted on mortality and slave trades?

Starting literature: J. Fenske & N. Kala (2014). Climate and the slave trade. <https://cde.williams.edu/files/2014/10/FenskeKalaClimateAug2014.pdf>

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| Suggested courses | RHI-51806 |
| Keywords | Slave trade; mortality; environment; history |
| Contact | Ewout Frankema |

**Health inequality in the long run**

Health inequalities are one of the most important challenges of our time, as recognized by Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Rates of sickness and mortality vary widely across the globe both between and within countries. Why? And what makes these inequalities so persistent? Part of the answer to these questions has to do with past developments that have long-run effects and influences current-day outcomes. Indeed, investments in efficient health care systems and sanitary infrastructures (among others) take years to be completed and be of benefit to the broader population. Also, households with high socioeconomic status transmit higher relative levels of health to future generations than households with lower socioeconomic status.

This thesis will deal with the reasons explaining the persistence of health inequalities in the long-run within and between countries, by analysing how environmental factors (e.g. access to health infrastructures) and individual characteristics (e.g. parental education) influence health outcomes. The student is expected to consider these mechanisms for an individual country or set of countries taking a long-term perspective, when the presence of such mechanisms become clearly visible.

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| Suggested courses | RHI-10806 |
| Keywords | Health inequality; health infrastructures; socioeconomic status |
| Contact | Daniel Gallardo Albarrán |

**Structural change in Africa – a data analysis**

As countries develop, the share of agriculture in the labour force tends to drop, while average incomes in agriculture go up. There are, however, many varieties and even exceptions to this general pattern of structural change. Key policies, such as reducing poverty and improving food/nutrition security, depend crucially on adequate knowledge about economies’ changing structure, and in particular the size and incomes of the agricultural sector. Country-level statistics on structural change are compiled and disseminated by the ILO, the United Nations and the World Bank. But are such data of sufficient quality to inform research and policy? In some instances this is certainly not the case. According to ILO’s ‘modelled estimates’ of sectoral employment, for example, Burkina Faso underwent massive structural change between 1995 and 2015, with the share of its labor force in agriculture dropping from 90 to 30 percent. Meanwhile Burkina Faso’s government reported agricultural labour share of 81 percent in 2010. In this thesis project, you will conduct a more systematic evaluation of the accuracy of widely used international databases on structural change. Your study will focus on Africa, where sectoral data are arguably of most questionable quality but also of greatest importance, given current challenges of food insecurity and rural poverty. You will use a range of sources to compare and corroborate agricultural labour shares, including census data, made available through the IPUMS international project, as well as DHS surveys. You may also dive into statistics produced by national governments. The research will require good knowledge of Stata or R, which are required to handle large census and survey datasets. Within the project, you have plenty of space to develop your own questions and approaches.

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| Suggested courses | RHI51806; RHI30806 |
| Keywords | Structural change; Africa; data analysis |
| Contact | Michiel de Haas |