

UNIT OF ZIMBABWEAN STUDIES

Department of Sociology, Rhodes University, South Africa

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Introducing the Unit

Associate Professor Kirk Helliker established a Unit of Zimbabwean Studies from the beginning of 2015, based in the Department of Sociology at Rhodes University, South Africa.

The main emphasis for the Unit is scholarly research and publications (including post-graduate work) about colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, but with a more specific focus on the contemporary political economy of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean studies have a rich, varied and deep history and have made a significant contribution to broader intellectual debates across the African continent.

Since the nation-wide land occupation movement and the subsequent fast track land reform programme (formulated and implemented by the Zimbabwean state from the year 2000), significant scholarly work has arisen around understanding and explaining the turbulent events which are taking place in present-day Zimbabwe. This scholarly work has led to very vibrant and illuminating debates amongst radical (and liberal) scholars, most notably exemplified in the works of,

leading Zimbabwean scholars, Sam Moyo and Brian Raftopoulos. Professor Helliker also has been directly involved in this vigorous scholarly debate.

The debates within Zimbabwean studies, though about the character specifically of the current political economy of Zimbabwe, raise and discuss broader theoretical questions pertinent to sociology and cognate disciplines about for instance the state, nationalism, citizenship, identity and political transformation, and such themes continue to resonate throughout Zimbabwean studies. The debate at times has been extremely polarised, with one group of scholars arguing that fast track land reform furthers the national democratic revolution in the country, and the other group claiming that it has – first and foremost – entailed undemocratic and authoritarian restructuring.

Additionally, though, the debates are not simply about the present, as they engage with differing interpretations of Zimbabwean history, including during the colonial period.

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At the same time, the scholarly controversies about the Zimbabwean political economy have resulted in a range of empirically-based localised studies and ethnographies on diverse themes, most notably through the work of post-graduate students based in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

This is not to suggest that all current work within Zimbabwean studies is in some way connected to the ongoing controversies, as excellent work continues to be produced by Zimbabwean scholars in some way untouched by the debates swirling around them.

The Unit locates itself primarily within the contemporary debates and controversies about land and democracy, but the thematic range of the Unit is very broad and inclusive. Additionally, the Unit seeks not only to produce solid empirically-based work on post-colonial (and colonial) Zimbabwe but to also offer cutting-edge theoretical work on a diverse range of historical and sociological themes which continue to emerge in and around Zimbabwean studies.

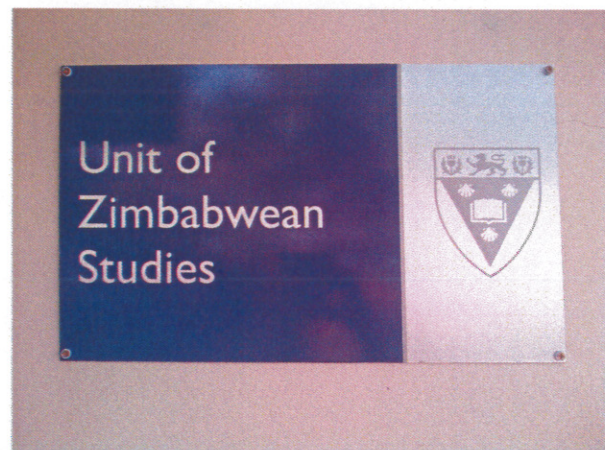
The Unit has the strong possibility of positioning Rhodes University as the premier university internationally (outside Zimbabwe) engaging in Zimbabwean research and studies within the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Professor Helliker's recent scholarly publications, as well as a list of his graduated and current PhD and Masters students, are available on the Department of Sociology's website under Professor Helliker's staff profile.

In addition to the Unit, but falling under the ambit of the Unit, is a Mellon Research Focus Area under the theme "Zimbabwean History and Society", which Professor Helliker was granted and which also began in 2015.

Under the Unit and the associated Research Focus Area, Professor Helliker plans to pursue the following over the next few years:

- Establishing and reinforcing linkages with scholarly centres in Zimbabwe, including universities and private research entities
- Producing high quality scholarly publications on an ongoing basis, including an edited book comprising chapters written by PhD students
- Developing a diverse PhD and Masters student profile
- Offering courses or components of courses on Zimbabwean studies at Honours level at the university where possible and appropriate
- Initiating a 'Rethinking Zimbabwe' Seminar Series, including presentations by PhD and MA students within the Unit
- Arranging for periodic visits of leading Zimbabwean scholars to Rhodes for purposes of presenting public talks on specific Zimbabwean issues
- Organising conferences and workshops on Zimbabwe at Rhodes.



Professor Helliker can be contacted at k.helliker@ru.ac.za for enquiries about the Unit and for possibilities of engaging with it as either an established scholar or as a PhD or Masters student.

Launch of the Unit

The Unit of Zimbabwean Studies was launched successfully during the week of May 11th 2015. Five launch events were held.

On Tuesday May 12th, a seminar on “Factionalism and Zimbabwean Politics” was presented by Professor Enocent Msindo from the Department of History at Rhodes University.

An overflowing crowd of about 100 people listened to Professor Msindo give a seminar on factionalism within the ruling party in Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF. In the seminar, he argued the following:

Robert Mugabe is a product and beneficiary of the politics of factionalism within the broader nationalist movement and in his own party before and after independence. Because Mugabe rose to power within the context of factional power struggles in ZANU, his leadership has been sustained chiefly by an incessant tendency to generate and manipulate factions so as to weaken internal dissent in ZANU-PF and government.

On the following night, Wednesday May 13th, Professor Brian Raftopoulos gave a public talk to about eighty people on “From Rhodes(ia) to Zimbabwe: RhodesMustFall?”. Professor Raftopoulos is a leading Zimbabwean historian and public intellectual and is currently the Director of Research and Advocacy in the Solidarity Peace Trust, Cape Town, an NGO dealing with human rights issues in Zimbabwe.

In his talk, Professor Raftopoulos referred to the importance of historical memory in Zimbabwe and noted that the Rhodes statue in the centre of Harare was taken down and placed in the national archives soon after independence. At the University of Cape Town, under the RhodesMustFall campaign, a Rhodes statue was also recently removed. Professor Raftopoulos though strongly emphasised the importance of remembering and contextualising historical memory and not erasing and eradicating it.

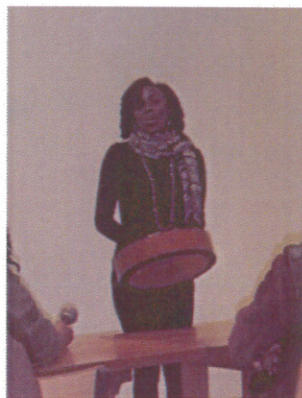


Photo: Hope Masike at Official Launch



Photo: Dancing at Official Launch

On Thursday 14th, the Unit was officially launched by the Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, in front of over 100 people including many Zimbabwean students.

The Unit’s Director, Professor Kirk Helliker, introduced the unit, its current activities and its future plans after which Hope Masike (a Zimbabwean mbira artist) sang a Zimbabwean song while playing mbira. Dr Mabizela then declared the unit officially opened. Those present stayed around to listen to Zimbabwean music while enjoying a meal of sadza and nyama and sampling Chibuku beer.



Photo: Sadza served at the Official Launch

The unit’s launch week was blessed by the presence of Hope Masike. On Thursday, before the official launch, Hope Masike gave a seminar entitled “Women and their songs: in conversation with Hope and Dessa” (Dessa is an American rapper and poet). And, then to end the week’s activities, Hope (with a backup band made of local musicians) gave an inspiring concert on Friday night at a local hotel. Three of the local musicians are from Rhodes University, including Dr Luis Gimenez who is a postdoctoral fellow in the Unit of Zimbabwean Studies. About 200 people enjoyed listening and dancing to Hope’s music.

Photo Credits: Pepsy Chivhere and Ntombovuyo Ngaphu

'Repatriating' Zimbabwean Music

In April this year, Professor Helliker (the Director of the Unit) and Dr Luis Gimenez (a postdoctoral fellow in the Unit) spent some time in Zimbabwe, including visiting the large number of PhD students supervised by Professor Helliker. Most of these students lecture at Zimbabwean universities.

During this time, they were also involved in the 'repatriation' of Zimbabwean music recordings from the International Library of African Music (ILAM) at Rhodes and discussing possible projects emanating out of this musical archive. This is a massive archive involving thousands of recordings of Zimbabwean music from the 1930s to the 1970s. The Unit is grateful to the Director of ILAM (Prof Diane Thram) for agreeing to this 'repatriation'.

The Zimbabwean music was given to the following institutions: Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in Masvingo, Midlands State University (MSU) in Gweru, and University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and Zimbabwe College of Music (ZCM) both in Harare. The repatriation of the Zimbabwean recordings found at *Sound of Africa Series* at ILAM was materialised in the form of a digital return of twenty-one CDs and the two books of the *Sound of Africa Series* with the field-notes from each song. The receiving institutions were overwhelmed by the digital return of the Zimbabwean music.

The digital return has transcended the idea of simply returning the archive as it seeks to begin a dialogue with and between Zimbabwean scholars. This dialogue attempts to give voice to Zimbabwean students and lecturers in examining the music found in the Zimbabwean recordings from ILAM. Further, this repatriation and dialogue should be an example to follow more broadly.

As a result, music can be examined and explained from different angles providing a richer understanding of different forms of Zimbabwean (and by extension other African) music.



Photo: Dr Luis Gimenez playing music with students and lecturers at Great Zimbabwe University

During the visit, a number of possible projects and forms of collaboration with the Zimbabwean institutions were raised and investigated. These include: an edited book (including Prof Thram) based on the repatriation of ILAM's music to Zimbabwe; music workshops at the institutions about the ILAM archive, to be given by Dr Gimenez; the revitalisation by Hope Masike (a leading Zimbabwean mbira artist) of ILAM's recordings; two or three joint articles written by Luis Gimenez and music scholars in Zimbabwe; the revitalization of *njari* music by teaching the instrument at Rhodes University; and the study of Zimbabwean music in relation to fast track land reform from 2001 to 2015, with the direct involvement of Professor Helliker.

PhD Students

Each edition of the newspaper will detail the work of one or two current or past PhD students.

In this edition, the work of **Dr Manawe Chiweshe** is highlighted. Dr Chiweshe graduated with his PhD from the Department of Sociology in 2012. His PhD was on: Farm level institutions in emergent communities in post fast track Zimbabwe: case of Mazowe District.



The abstract for his thesis reads as follows:
The thesis seeks to understand how emerging communities borne out of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe have been able to ensure social cohesion and social service provision using farm level institutions. The Fast Track Programme brought together people from diverse backgrounds into new communities in the former commercial farming areas. The formation of new communities meant that, often, there were 'stranger households' living next to each other. Since 2000, these people have been involved in various processes aimed at turning clusters of homesteads into functioning communities through farm level institutions. Fast track land reform precipitated economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe characterised by a rapidly devaluating Zimbabwean dollar, enormous inflation and high unemployment figures. This economic crisis has impacted heavily on new farmers who find it increasingly difficult to afford inputs and access loans. They have formed social networks in response to these

challenges, taking the form of farm level institutions such as farm committees, irrigation committees and health committees.

The study uses case studies from small-scale 'A1 farmers' in Mazowe District which is in Mashonaland Central Province. It employs qualitative methodologies to enable a nuanced understanding of associational life in the new communities. Through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, narratives, key informant interviews and institutional mapping the study outlines the formation, taxonomy, activities, roles, internal dynamics and social organisation of farm level institutions. The study also uses secondary data collected in 2007-08 by the Centre for Rural Development in the newly resettled areas in Mazowe.

The major finding of the study is that farmers are organising in novel ways at grassroots levels to meet everyday challenges. These institutional forms however are internally weak, lacking leadership with a clear vision and they appear as if they are transitory in nature. They remain marginalised from national and global processes and isolated from critical connections to policy makers at all levels; thus A1 farmers remain voiceless and unable to have their interests addressed. Farm level institutions are at the forefront of the microeconomics of survival among these rural farmers. They are survivalist in nature and form, and this requires a major shift in focus if they are to be involved in developmental work. The institutions remain fragmented and compete amongst themselves for services from government without uniting as A1 farmers with similar interests and challenges.

Dr Chiweshe has published extensively since graduation and is currently a lecturer at a university in Bindura, Zimbabwe.

Advisory Board Members

Professor Sam Moyo is a leading Zimbabwean and African-wide agrarian scholar. He is founder member and Executive Director of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS), Zimbabwe, and has a PhD in Rural Development and Environmental Management from the University of Northumbria, United Kingdom. Prof Moyo has led and managed a wide range of policy research, university and civil society organisations in Africa over the last 30 years. He has worked on numerous policy research papers and publications concerning a variety of agrarian issues facing Zimbabwe, the SADC region and Africa. These studies included high-level contacts with – and advice provided to – African Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and leaders of various United Nations agencies.



Dr Tendai Murisa joined TrustAfrica in December 2009 to coordinate its efforts to build an effective advocacy movement for sustainable and equitable agricultural development in Africa. He was named Executive Director by TrustAfrica's Board of Trustees in July 2014. Dr.

Murisa has a Master's degree in development studies from Leeds University in the UK; and a doctorate in sociology from Rhodes University. He has eight years of experience at the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Harare, where he developed policy dialogues and training programmes aimed at improving pro-poor land and agrarian policies in Africa.



Dr Sunungurai Chingarande has a Master of Science degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology and a PhD in Sociology. She is an academic who worked for the University of Zimbabwe from 1998-2014. She is currently the Pro-Vice Chancellor for the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University. She sits on the editorial board of the Zimbabwe Research Council. She is a consultant in the area of Gender and Women Empowerment. She assisted in the compilation of data and report for the Gender Situation Analysis of Key Sectors in Zimbabwe for the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development in 2012.



Professor Brian Raftopoulos is a leading Zimbabwean scholar and activist. Formally a Professor of Development Studies at the University of Zimbabwe from 1990-2006, he moved to Cape Town at the end of March 2006 and since 2007 has been the Director of Research and Advocacy in the Solidarity Peace Trust, an NGO dealing with human rights issues in Zimbabwe. He has published widely on Zimbabwean history, labour history, historiography, and politics. Raftopoulos was also Mellon Senior Research Mentor at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape from 2009-2013. He is a founder member of the National Constitutional Assembly in 1998, and the first Chair of a broad civic coalition called the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition from 2001-2003.

