

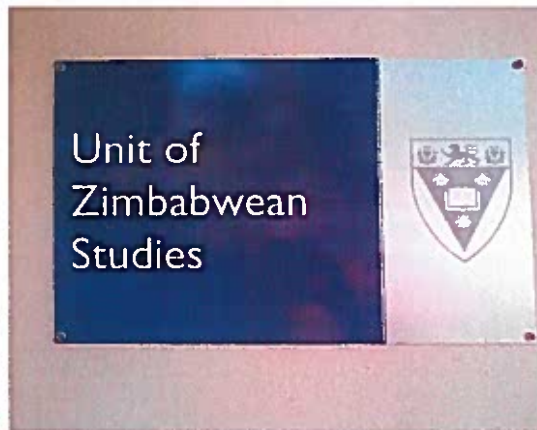
UNIT OF ZIMBABWEAN STUDIES

Department of Sociology, Rhodes University, South Africa

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Contents

Seminar Series	1
New Papers by the Unit's Director	2
Research Partnership with Civil Society in Zimbabwe	3
Research on Zimbabwe Institute on Southern Africa	4
PhD Profile	5
PhD Profile	6



Rethinking Zimbabwe Seminar Series

The Unit of Zimbabwean Studies is launching a **Rethinking Zimbabwe Seminar Series** from August 2015.

For 2015, there will be seven seminars, presented mainly by Rhodes University lecturers.

The seminar series kicks off in early August with a presentation by Professor Dan Wylie of the Department of English at Rhodes. The title of his seminar is: "Fiction and Zimbabwean land reform". The abstract for the seminar reads as follows:

"What can a novel possibly contribute to understandings of a socio-historical process such as Zimbabwe's post-2000 'fast track' land reform process? Sociological, economic and political studies of the situation are now numerous, offering a range of negative and positive assessments.

At the same time, a number of writers, mostly white, have written memoirs of what they have experienced as a violent 'land grab' (e.g. Cathy Buckle, Ben Freeth, Douglas Rogers), and some fictional representations. This paper broaches some of the troubled dynamics of two novels, Ian Holding's *Unfeeling* (2005) and Graham Lang's *Place of Birth* (2006). It suggests, primarily through the lens of landscape aesthetics, that fiction reveals the emotional lives of participants, which are a vital component of such situations and are usually elided by academic studies".

The next seminar is presented by Dr. Gwinyayi Dzinesa from the Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes. It is titled: "Swords into ploughshares? Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Zimbabwe and South Africa".

Other seminars include: Mr. Chris Kabwato, Department of Journalism and Media Studies (Rhodes) titled: "The emergence of youth protest music and arts as alternative media in Zimbabwe: A Gramscian analysis"; and Dr. Booker Magure, Fort Hare University: "Understanding the politics of frustration and the Movement for Democratic Change - Tsvangirai (MDC-T) 2014 split in Zimbabwe".

New Papers by the Director of the Unit

The Director of the Unit, Professor Kirk Helliker, has been undertaking research and writing about the land occupations in rural Zimbabwe. To date, this has involved the writing of two co-authored papers.

The first paper is titled “Autonomist Feminism, Commoning and Land Occupations in Zimbabwe” which was delivered at the Conference on “Women, Autonomism and the Formation of the Commons: Latin American and African Experiences” at the University of Puebla in Mexico held in March 2015.

A revised version of this paper is to appear as an article in an upcoming special addition of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. The special edition focuses on politics at a distance from the state. The article is written with Tarryn Alexander, a colleague in the Department of Sociology at Rhodes.

This article engages with autonomism and commoning from a feminist standpoint, and then uses the theoretical position adopted to shed new light on the land occupations in contemporary Zimbabwe. The particular form of autonomist theory discussed is that espoused by John Holloway. Though very sympathetic to his work, the article nevertheless argues that he does not sufficiently address gender, notably with specific reference to social reproduction and women. The notion of commons (and commoning) examined is consistent with Holloway’s autonomist framework and of particular relevance to the article’s argument is the lens into commoning provided by Silvia Federici. Nevertheless, unlike a noticeable tendency within these autonomist and commoning theories, the authors argue for a pronounced identitarian politics as grounded in localised concrete struggles undertaken by women as women. Thus, they privilege throughout the article the significance of women-based politics and the importance of women asserting and revaluing their identities as part of a possible project of transformation.

For the authors, struggling against and beyond what exists is invariably rooted in struggles within what exists (including identities).



The second paper is co-written with Dr. Sandra Bhatasara, who graduated with a PhD at Rhodes University earlier this year under Professor Helliker’s supervision. She is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe.

The title of the paper is: “A Commoning Perspective on the Fast Track Land Occupations in Shamva District, Zimbabwe”. It is to be presented at a workshop on “Class, Colonialism and the Commons: the case of Southern Africa” in the Department of History, Rhodes University on the 20th-21st August 2015. This workshop focuses on the work of Peter Linebaugh, who is visiting Rhodes University during the month of August.

The motivations behind the land occupations, the form they took, and the role of the ruling party and the state in them, are hotly contested within the Zimbabwean literature but only a few studies (including the work by Wilbert Sadomba) have provided a nuanced account of specific land occupations. This is despite the fact that considerable literature exists about fast track restructuring as well as the availability of many farm-level studies particularly on A1 farms. In these latter studies, the occupations underpinning fast track are normally given only a cursory glance for historical context. The in-depth research in Shamva district (which began earlier this year and is ongoing) provides illuminating insights into the local dynamics of the occupations.

Civil Society Research Partnerships

The Unit of Zimbabwean Studies is currently pursuing the possibility of establishing research partnerships with civil society organisations in Zimbabwe, to the mutual benefit of the Unit and these organisations.

The concept note for this initiative reads in part as follows:

Universities are research-focused organisations which engage in knowledge production and dissemination. The products of knowledge generation and the forms of knowledge dissemination though are normally restricted to academic forums (for example, academic journals and conferences), and thus they do not reach a very wide audience in society.

Civil society organisations engage in programmatic work around questions of democracy and development. They are seen as learning organisations which engage in best practices in their ongoing programmatic work. While they regularly value the importance of research for underpinning their work, they often do not have sufficient research capacity.

It is important and indeed possible for universities and civil society organisations to form a research partnership which would be of mutual benefit to both and enhance their key societal roles.



The research partnership would increase the relevance of academic research for the work of civil society groups (including their policy work) in Zimbabwe and would build research capacity within civil society groups. In this way, civil society groups go beyond being merely sources of knowledge for academics but become knowledge producers in their own right. And the research methods and products of academic work become more attuned to societal priorities.

There is the possibility of retaining the traditional consultancy arrangement for civil society groups, as this may have value under certain circumstances. But the purpose of the partnership is to move far beyond this. The possibilities are many. For instance, there could be short-term partnerships on specific projects with particular civil society groups as well as longer-term and broader collaboration with a grouping of civil society organisations. Further, thesis topics and objectives of post-graduate students could be formulated with inputs from civil society groups without jeopardising the intellectual integrity of theses and also allowing consultancy-type reports to emerge from the thesis-based research. In addition, civil society organisations could be full partners with academics in being involved in each and every stage of a joint research process, from involvement in the very formulation of the research topic to the actual production and dissemination of a research report. And research methodology courses could be designed specifically for civil society organisations with their organisational and learning imperatives in mind. Ultimately, the overall aim of these and other possible ventures would be building civil society research capacity.

Any donors or civil society groups interested in this initiative can contact the Director (Prof Kirk Helliker) at k.helliker@ru.ac.za.

Zimbabwe Institute on Southern Africa – Research Project

The Unit, along with Professor Henning Melber who is affiliated to the University of the Free State, is pursuing a joint research project on the Zimbabwe Institute on Southern Africa. It is hoped that this will involve research undertaken by two PhD candidates, one supervised by Professor Henning and one by Professor Helliker.

Between 1987 and 1994 the Zimbabwe Institute on Southern Africa (ZISA) facilitated more than 50 meetings between the South African liberation movement – in particular the African National Congress (ANC) – and eminent persons from the white community in South Africa. The meetings were aimed at exploring the possibilities and venues of transition from Apartheid to democracy in South Africa.

The topics of the encounters ranged from constitution making to economic policies, human rights, transitional justice, conflict resolution and transition, security issues, minority rights, gender, art and culture, regional integration, sanctions and boycott, armed struggle, role of civil society in transition and others.

The size of the meetings varied from more than 100 delegates for example at the meeting between black and white women from South Africa to smaller working groups and task teams established in the bigger meetings as well as one-on-one meetings on specific confidential issues.

By nature the participants in the meetings were high profile persons from the South African liberation movement and from the white community in South Africa, including members of the business community, the security establishment, academia, civil society, political and faith based organisations, church

leaders and others.

ZISA strictly played the role of a facilitator, responding to requests from either side and it did not interfere in the meetings in any way. ZISA facilitated the participation from Government and civil society in Zimbabwe or any third party whenever requested by the parties involved in the discussion.

The main objective of the research is to provide a critical appraisal of the Zimbabwe Institute on Southern Africa (ZISA) in facilitating dialogue, conflict resolution and democratic transition.

This will be pursued in two ways. First of all, there will be a case-study approach, by analysing ZISA's contribution in-and-of-itself to the South African transition given the specificities of the South African situation. Secondly, there will be a comparative approach, by analysing two or three similar developments elsewhere in the SADC region. As one possible study, we are proposing an examination of a church-based NGO in Mozambique called Santo Egidio Community, which was instrumental in the negotiations that led to the 1992 Mozambican peace accord.

The first approach would provide an intensive and nuanced understanding of ZISA with regard to facilitating dialogue, conflict resolution and democratic transition with specific reference to South Africa. The second approach, by identifying similarities and differences between ZISA and other cases, would provide a more solid basis for examining the strengths and weaknesses of ZISA's contribution.

The overall research objective will be framed analytically in terms of theories about NGOs, dialogue facilitation, conflict resolution and democratic transition.

PhD Graduate

Each edition of the newsletter will detail the work of one or two current or past PhD students. In this edition, two PhD graduates are profiled.

Dr Loveness Makonese graduated with her PhD from the Department of Sociology in 2013. Her PhD was on: “Coping with HIV and AIDS in marginal communities: a case study of Chivanhu settlement in Nemanwa, Masvingo, Zimbabwe”. Dr Makonese currently works for the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in Harare.



The abstract for her thesis reads as follows:

This thesis seeks to understand and analyse HIV and AIDS and rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe with particular reference to an isolated and marginalised informal settlement called Chivanhu in Masvingo Province. The focus is specifically on questions around HIV susceptibility, AIDS vulnerability and household resilience.

In this regard, it is important to recognise that HIV and AIDS cannot be lumped together as one medical or social condition. Rather, there is a progression from HIV infection to AIDS-related chronic illnesses to possible death, and livelihood strategies often alter along this HIV

and AIDS time-line.

Zimbabwe for over a decade now has gone through a series of economic and political crises which have impacted detrimentally on both urban and rural livelihoods, even for those households which are not directly affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. With the economy in free-fall, households have had to pursue a range of livelihood strategies in order to sustain themselves. These socio-economic conditions have in many ways facilitated susceptibility to HIV infection and vulnerability to AIDS. Many studies have examined this in relation to well-entrenched and stable communities in rural Zimbabwe.

But the livelihood dynamics for such communities are significantly different to more unstable and informal settlements like Chivanhu, as thesis seeks to show.

At the same time, the thesis offers a longitudinal study which is able to map the changes to the livelihoods of infected and affected households in Chivanhu. Though recognising the debilitating effects of the pandemic on these households, it also raises questions about the possible resilience of certain households despite great adversity.

In doing so, it goes beyond the individual and household levels of analysis to consider the role of clusters (or groups of households) in responding to the impacts of HIV and AIDS. In this regard, particular emphasis is placed on gender and orphanhood.

In the end, the thesis offers a nuanced analysis of the everyday complexities and challenges for affected households in a marginalised and informal rural community in Zimbabwe and thereby makes a contribution to re-theorising HIV and AIDS and rural livelihoods more broadly.

PhD Graduate

Dr Sandra Bhatasara graduated with her PhD from the Department of Sociology in 2015. Her PhD was on: “Understanding climate variability and livelihoods adaptation in rural Zimbabwe: a case of Charewa, Mutoko”. Dr Bhatasara currently lectures in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe.



The abstract for her thesis reads as follows:

Rural farmers in Zimbabwe have been grappling with various changes and challenges occurring in the country since the early 1990s. Amongst these, climate variability has emerged as one significant aspect. It has introduced new challenges for these farmers who are already facing various difficulties in maintaining their insecure livelihoods. Yet, current adaptation theories and inquiries have failed to sufficiently account for and analyse the capacity of these farmers to adequately respond to changing climatic conditions. In this respect, a number of studies have been heavily embedded in deterministic concepts that regard rural farmers as passive victims who play only a minor part in decisions and actions that affect their own livelihoods and well-being. Similarly, although some studies have acknowledged farmers' capacity to adapt and build elements of resilience, they have not adequately shown how farmers interpret changes in climate and the structures, processes and conditions

underpinning adaptation. Following that, my study uses a case study of a rural community in a semi-arid region of Mutoko district in eastern Zimbabwe and Margaret Archer's sociological theory to understand and analyse how farmers problematise climate variability and respond to it. The study utilises a qualitative approach to divulge the subtleties on how rural people interpret processes of change and adapt to such changes.

The thesis found that farmers are encountering increasingly unpredictable and unreliable rainfall patterns as well as shifting temperature conditions which are inducing labyrinthian livelihoods conundrums. However, these climatic shifts are not being experienced in a discrete manner hence farmers are also discontented with the obtaining socio-economic circumstances in the country. Simultaneously, whilst farmers in large part conceived changes in rainfall and temperature to be caused by natural shifts in climate, they also ascribed them to cultural and religious facets. Importantly, the thesis reveals considerable resourcefulness by farmers in the face of nascent changes in climate variability. Farmers have therefore constructed versatile coping and adaptive strategies. What is crucial to mention here is that climatic and non-climatic challenges are negotiated concurrently. Therein, farmers are adapting to climate variability and at the same time navigating difficult socio-economic landscapes. All the same, the process of adaptation is ostensibly not straightforward but complex. As it evolves, farmers find themselves facing numerous constraining structures and processes. Nonetheless, farmers in this study are able to circumvent the constraints presented to them and at the same time activate the corresponding enabling structures, processes and conditions.