This Impact Case Study was produced by Dr. Crystal Tremblay in collaboration with the faculty lead(s) identified in the following case study. All twelve Impact Case Studies were included in Dr. Crystal Tremblay’s research project, Community-Engaged Research (CER) at the University of Victoria 2009—2015, that scanned the impact of UVic’s involvement with community-engaged research over a six-year period.

Dr. Tremblay’s research was supported by the Office of Community-University Engagement and the Office of the Vice-President Research. Learn more about this project at uvic.ca/ocue/research.
Rural Women's Strategies of Community Building, Self-Reliance, and Resistance: South Africa from Apartheid to the Social Grant

UN Sustainable Development Goals addressed by this project
1. no poverty
2. zero hunger
3. health & well-being
4. gender equality
5. clean water and sanitation
6. affordable and clean energy
7. good health and well-being
8. decent work & economic growth
9. industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities & communities
12. peaceful and inclusive societies
13. Ensure sustainable consumption & production patterns
14. life on land
15. protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems
16. promote peaceful & inclusive societies for sustainable development,

UVic's International Plan Goals addressed by this project
- International Development, Health and Education
- Science, technology and sustainability
- Arts, language, culture and history

A collaborative telling of the history of rural marginalisation, rural-urban linkages, and women's efforts to respond to the oppressions of apartheid and global neoliberalism in N'wamitwa, South Africa.

Faculty Lead: Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, History

Partners: Hleketani Community Garden, Valoyi Traditional Authority (VTA), and Xitsavi Youth Centre, South Africa. Haliburton Community Farm, Victoria

Project timeframe: 2012-2019


Website: http://womensfarm.org
About

Across the global South women -- especially older women -- are among the most marginalised members of society. My research explores a counter-narrative generated by older women farmers. Drawing on the self-confident life histories of farmers in N’wamitwa, South Africa, the research examines household microeconomies and collaborative activities that provide a political forum for women and offer some buffer against the pressures of the global economy and national policy failures. At the same time the research uses women's stories to shed light on the particular structures that continue to militate against women's empowerment.

The principal partner organisation for this research is Hlekpetani Community Garden, a grassroots community organisation in Jopi village, South Africa. I have broader community contacts with the Valoyi Traditional Authority (VTA), the traditional government in the communal territory where Jopi is located. I work closely with the Xitsavi Youth Centre, a project of the VTA, assisting them with grant writing. The UVic Colonial Legacies Field School in South Africa, which I designed and run, was closely connected with the Xitsavi Youth Centre and Hlekpetani Community Garden while in rural South Africa. In the Victoria area I have developed a partnership with Hallburton Community Farm, which helped with organisation of the 2015 Urban Food-Garden Tour -- a fundraiser and awareness raiser for local food sovereignty here and in the Global South. Funds raised by the food-garden tour (which took some 400 people into this region's backyard veggie gardens) were split by Hallburton Farm and Hlekpetani Garden. Funds to Hallburton purchased a summer's worth of vegetable boxes, which were delivered to low-income families connected to 1Up, the Single Parent Resource Centre -- a second local partnership. Although my research is based in South Africa, I am passionate about 'local' food sovereignty wherever 'local' may be.

Impact Summary

The women's farming project is locally conceived and managed; production, consumption, and distribution is local; women are empowered through work and community; soil and water resources are managed using agro-ecological methods that help to mitigate the intensifying effects of climate change; people marginalised by poverty and HIV/AIDS are supported with free, fresh produce.

Description of Research Partnership

Hlekpetani farmers' notions of the story they want to tell has altered the focus of my research. The story of their farm -- what I call 'the biography of a farm' approach -- is their idea. The idea to make a film about the farm was also theirs. My research collaborator and interpreter, Basani Ngobeni, is very well situated in the village (as a result of our research there -- she's from a nearby village) and completely indispensable to the research. Basani helps guide research questions, and confers at every turn with the women about the best focus or next activity. Yet these are mostly non-literate women, and only a couple speak English. They live in a community with no internet access.

Decisions about when research is carried out, how to fund it, and so forth are made by me (with consultation with Basani). I do the analysis of data, often guided by Basani's insights and Basani's ongoing consultations with the women. I do the writing and often discuss ideas and portions of the writing with Basani. Basani and - principally - the farmers make all decisions about how funds raised for the farm are deployed. Basani and I recently co-wrote a cookbook as a fundraiser.

Extent of community collaboration throughout the project cycle 81%
Motivations for starting the project

My main research interest has long been the historical construction and lived experience of poverty. Trained as an historian of Southern Africa and the British empire, I had been working on a project on late eighteenth-century Nova Scotia but was repeatedly stymied by a lack of sources that provided insight into the experiences of people who were poor. It was especially difficult to access the ‘voices’ of the marginalised groups of most interest to me – free people of African descent, women, and Indigenous people. On a 2011 sabbatical in South Africa (during which time, among other activities, I volunteered at a grassroots food-security project), I came to know the women of Hleketani Community Garden. By that time they had been growing food at their community farm for nearly twenty years. Here were women who by any indicators were very poor, but who had created a powerful community for themselves and provided crucial material support to the wider community. The two dozen Hleketani farmers agreed to work with me on a research project that I originally envisioned to be about rural women’s shifting relations to the state from apartheid to the present. It quickly became clear that what they really wanted to talk about and historicise is their farm. My research project has evolved into a ‘biography of a farm,’ a collaborative telling of the history of rural marginalisation, rural-urban migration, and women’s efforts to respond to the oppressions of apartheid and global neoliberalism.

Student role & Impact

12 UVic and one UBC students came to South Africa in 2014 on the Colonial Legacies Field School. Students were required to fundraise in advance for the many community groups that would be our hosts in the country. Community groups all received meaningful financial compensation for their hosting and participation in various activities with the students. Students spent a day in prenational election workshops with South African youth, volunteered their labour at the women’s farm and a youth farm, donated books to a school, donated to an urban housing organisation and other groups. We also created (short-term) local employment, employing a driver, security guard, interpreters, cooks, and room and board.

One student is now working as an intern for Global Affairs Canada; another is planning a Master's in international development studies.

"Through close personal interactions and group encounters, students gained valuable insights (most for the first time) into rural and urban challenges in the Global South. Many found the examination of colonial legacies and ongoing colonial relations in a distant setting brought into sharp focus the ongoing colonialism in Canada"
Outputs

- Refereed journal publications: 1+
- Refereed conference papers: 7+
- Books: in progress
- Non-refereed publications: multiple
- Multimedia products: multiple
- Press coverage: 20+
- Invited Presentations: 1
- Fully produced films or videos: active bloggs

Outcomes

- Student skills, knowledge, attributes towards capacity building
- Development of new courses/programs/curriculum
- Increased interdisciplinary linkages
- Student awards and honours
- Building community sector organization capacities
- Oral history interview skills; website design and maintenance; social media outreach; bibliographic research
- Colonial Legacies Field School in South Africa
- Student won JCURA award
- Assisting Hleketani farmers and Xitsavi Youth Project with grant applications
- Assisting Hleketani farmers to restore sustainable irrigation system

"Community-level projects like this have the potential to nourish communities, materially and emotionally, in a sustainable manner across the globe"

"Reviews from small community screenings of the 'Thinking Garden' around BC: 'This is a film for Africa – governments need to see this film’ - ‘Beautiful and inspiring’"

Key References
