

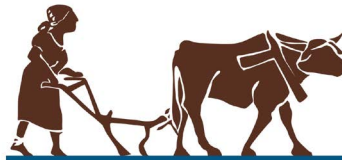
South African Research Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

Call for Applications:
Master's and Doctoral Scholarships
and Post-Doctoral Fellowships

Deadline: Friday 12 June 2020



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE



PLAAS

Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies



Background

Professor Ruth Hall holds the [South African Research Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies](#), which is funded by the National Research Foundation. The Chair is located at the [Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies](#) (PLAAS) at the [University of the Western Cape](#). This allows her to recruit, support and supervise Master's, doctoral and post-doctoral students.

Scholarships are available to join Professor Hall's programme. While the scholarships will cover fees and living expenses, the Chair also provides access to funds for other study-related costs, among others: equipment, fieldwork and conference attendance.

Applications are invited for the following, starting in 2020:

- Five scholarships for Masters (2 years if full-time)
- Four scholarships for Doctoral study (3 years if full-time, extendable to a 4th year)
- Two fellowships for Post-doctoral study (2 years)

A key criterion for selection of students will be the fit between their interests and abilities and the focus of the programme. They will be required to demonstrate the contribution of their proposed research project to the programme as a whole and specifically to one of the workstreams detailed below. Applicants should indicate in their concept note which of the workstreams they located their study within. This should be further confirmed and evident in their development of research project design, including the framing of research questions and objectives, choice of research methods, and selection of particular research sites.

Successful candidates will form a cohort of postgraduates who, while pursuing their own individual studies under Professor Hall's supervision, will be required to participate in joint activities such as research design, theory and methods workshops, and intensive reading groups.

Entry will be highly competitive, and those who are successful and enrol through this Research Chair will be expected to go beyond the basic requirements of the degrees for which they register. They will be encouraged and supported to work together to advance their careers by writing articles for popular media, attending academic conferences, and publishing either book chapters or journal articles.

As per NRF rules, preference is given to South African citizens or permanent residents. Preference will be given to women candidates.

To apply, send your full application package to Carla Henry at postgraduates@plaas.org.za. The application should consist of:

- an [online UWC application](#) for 2020 studies*,
- a brief concept note outlining the proposed research (two pages or less),
- your full CV,
- your academic transcripts,
- a South African Qualifications Authority certificate for those with foreign qualifications,
- a sample of your academic writing (e.g. a chapter from a Master's thesis),
- the names of three academic referees,
- a letter of motivation.

*Please ensure you select 2020, and select the appropriate programme under Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, PLAAS department.

Applicants are expected to indicate clearly in their concept notes within which one of the workstreams they locate their proposed study.

The closing date is close of business, 17.00 Central African Time, on Friday, 12 June 2020.

South African Research Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

This [five-year research programme](#) (2020-2024) will address dynamics of agrarian change and rural transformations in Africa. The central themes of the research programme will be questions of resource access, rights and governance; land use and production in smallholder agriculture and industrial and commercial agriculture; structural challenges to and changes in agro-food systems; the rural non-farm economy; accumulation dynamics and class formation; gender, generation and social differentiation; and the broader politics of land and agrarian reform.

Rationale

The Research Chair aims to develop a body of work that advances theoretical and empirical understandings of the political economy of agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on Southern Africa, and particularly South Africa. The broad field may be defined as Critical Agrarian Studies which, while a growing field of scholarly enquiry globally, is not widely evident yet in curricula and scholarly research in Africa. Drawing on Edelman and Wolford (2017), who map out the key features of this emerging discipline, the aim is to critically engage with dominant frameworks in development studies that are still underpinned by some of the presumptions of modernisation theory, which envisaged the conversion of smallholder and family farming into large-scale 'modern' capitalist and industrial agriculture.

These received wisdoms and intellectual orthodoxies remain remarkably resilient in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, and are reproduced in postgraduate studies and other scholarly work. Critical Agrarian Studies calls into question the underlying ideological and theoretical tenets underpinning such assumptions, locates them critically in a historical context of colonialism and post-coloniality, and provides the basis for alliances of scholars and activists to chart alternatives to this pathway of development. The research focus addresses knowledge gaps in Critical Agrarian Studies, including on dynamics of agrarian labour in the context of both land commodification and concentration, and redistributive land reforms. In these ways, I aim to use the Chair to contribute to building this field of enquiry within Africa, and to galvanise a new cohort of young African scholars who will investigate the political economy of agrarian change.



Objectives

1. To conduct rigorous field-based research on agrarian transformations underway in Africa, the political economy of redistributive land reforms, land commodification and concentration, and the agrarian question of labour, in order to produce theoretically informed and empirically grounded insights into complex and dynamic social realities in South Africa, Southern Africa and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.
2. To recruit, train, supervise, support and mentor a cohort of PhD and MPhil students and postdoctoral fellows, bringing together SARChI scholarship holders with others, with additional funding streams, and collaborating with other key scholars and institutions, to provide rigorous theoretical and methodological training, and to build the discipline of Critical Agrarian Studies on the African continent and contribute to the next generation of critical agrarian scholars.
3. To communicate the policy implications of research findings to policy makers, civil society organisations, social movements, the private sector and society at large, within a well-designed process of policy dialogue within South Africa, in other countries in Southern Africa, and in key international fora in Africa (African Union, UN Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, Pan African Parliament, and global fora such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organization).
4. To publish cutting-edge research in high-impact internationally-recognized and peer-reviewed academic journals and books, and thereby to contribute to international scholarship on questions of the political economy of agrarian change, land reform and agrarian labour.

Theoretical and methodological approach

The theoretical approach employed will be heterodox, drawing on Marxist traditions and using concepts of capital accumulation and social reproduction but also embracing elements of sustainable livelihoods analysis and other approaches within development studies and related disciplines. Socio-legal studies are also welcome. The research will be multi-scalar in character. Empirical research, combining varied qualitative methods including ethnographies, participatory action research, life histories and quantitative methods in the form of household surveys, will be rooted in specific field sites. Analysis of findings will be located within an understanding of the national political economy of the country or countries in which studies are conducted, but also linked to regional dynamics and to the global debates about the future of rural populations and the future of food and farming.



Workstream 1:

The political economy of redistributive land reforms

Redistributive land reforms are underway in highly unequal societies such as Africa's former settler colonies that underwent substantial land dispossession and which remain marked by agrarian dualism. The research will draw from the international literature on state- versus market-based land reforms, and generate new empirical research and international comparative research collaborations in order to theorise the politics of policy-making, implementation and outcomes of land redistribution, with attention to contestations over the class agenda and trajectories of agrarian change. The original contributions will be a gendered political economy analysis, and theoretical contributions on land reforms in the context of agro-food system change and multiple crises in the global economy in the 21st century.

Workstream 2:

Land commodification and land governance under statutory, private and customary tenure

Privatisation of state and customary lands in Africa has been prompted both by 'land grabs' or corporate large-scale land investments, and by dynamics of social differentiation and accumulation. Enclosure and concentration, the growth of medium-scale farmers and 'commercialisation' are underway. These trends have been associated with the rise of agribusiness capital but also the growing influence of finance capital in African agriculture, linked to transformations in land rights, land use and production; livelihoods, migration and the non-farm economy; local economic linkages; and changes to the agro-food system. These pathways of change are in part due to the instability of petty commodity production and the vulnerability of small-scale producers in corporate value chains, often via contract farming.



Workstream 3:

Agrarian question of labour, crises of social reproduction and fragmented 'classes of labour'

The production of new surplus populations arises from social differentiation, land dispossession, farm evictions and agricultural commercialisation. We will examine what happens to those excluded from existing or new emerging modes of accumulation. Using Issa Shivji's (2017) notion of 'working people', the research will address the agrarian question of labour, social reproduction and livelihoods. It will explore counter-currents to the prevalent directions of agrarian change, including cooperative ownership and production, alternatives to large-scale industrial monocropping and its ecological implications, and political struggles by social movements, farmer organisations and others, challenging the constraints of national and global development pathways under neoliberal capitalism.

Research questions

The following overarching questions are posed within this programme, and each postgraduate study is expected to address one or more of them in detail and elaborate them in a much more focused way. All three workstreams are to contribute towards answering them.

1. What agrarian transformations are underway in the African countryside, and how are we to understand these historically and in a global context?
2. What are the dynamics of land redistribution, privatisation, commodification and concentration and how do these connect with changes in agro-food systems?
3. What patterns of social differentiation and accumulation are evident, with what outcomes for class formation, race and identity, gender and generational relations?
4. What are the outcomes for forms of agrarian labour and social reproduction?
5. How are state-society relations shaping and in turn shaped by rural politics and agrarian transformations?

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the admission requirements for doctoral candidates?

A: A Master's degree in any relevant discipline.

Q: Must the holders of scholarships register at the University of the Western Cape?

A: Yes, all students will be registered through the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at UWC.

Q: Must students and post-doctoral fellows be already registered before applying for a scholarship?

A: No, applicants are not required to be registered students. Registration at UWC will follow after the award of a scholarship.

Q: Must successful applicants be based in Cape Town?

A: No, students and post-doctoral fellows can be based elsewhere than in Cape Town, but must be prepared to spend several weeks a year at UWC for purposes of supervision and training. This could amount to as much as 8 weeks.



Q: Must research take place in field sites located within South Africa?

A: Some research sites can be located outside of South Africa, if they are within sub-Saharan Africa and if the research topic aligns well with the thrust of the overall research programme.

Q: Must students register for full-time study?

A: PhD students can register for full-time or part-time study, but this will determine the value of the scholarship.

Q: Which costs will be covered by the Research Chair, and not from the scholarships?

A: The following costs will be covered directly by the Research Chair: research equipment (laptops and voice recorders); some fieldwork costs; travel to Cape Town and accommodation, for training workshops in social theory and research methods; and selected conference attendance.

Q: Can only South Africans apply?

A: A small proportion of the scholarships and fellowships offered through the Research Chair can be offered to non-South African citizens, who are welcome to apply.

