



Wednesday Seminars

WINTERSEMESTER 2017/18

Joost Fontein

Political accidents and unfinished death in Zimbabwe

DIENSTAG 17.10.2017, 17.00, Seminarraum 3, Institut für Afrikawissenschaften, UniCampus, Hof 5, Spitalgasse 2



Joost Fontein is Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa, on a five year secondment from Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. His research explores the political and material imbrications of landscapes, things and human substances in

Zimbabwe, where he has done carried out several extended periods of ethnographic fieldwork since the late 1990s. His doctoral fieldwork in southern Zimbabwe (2000-2001) explored the politics of heritage and landscape around Great Zimbabwe National Monument. Winning the ASA UK Audrey Richards Prize in 2004 this was published as a monograph in 2006. His second monograph Remaking Mutirikwi: Landscape, Water and Belonging was published in 2015 and short-listed for the ASA USA Michael Herzkovits prize in 2016. He is completing another book entitled The Politics of the Dead & the Power of Uncertainty: Materiality, rumours and human remains in Post-2000 Zimbabwe which explores the affective presence and emotive materialities of human remains. He is a founding member of the Bones Collective research group, was editor of the Journal of Southern African Studies for six years (2008-2014), and co-founder and former editor of a new Africanist journal called Critical African Studies.

...kommende Termine

25.10.2017 *Wir sehen uns bei der:*

**Wiedereröffnung des
„Weltmuseums Wien“**

On 16th August 2011 Zimbabwe awoke to the news that retired General Solomon Mujuru, aka Rex Nhongo (his war alias) - former deputy commander of ZANLA and Zimbabwe's first black army commander, husband of the (then) Vice-President, Joyce Mujuru, and long-term confidante of President Mugabe, widely regarded as ZANU PF's 'kingmaker' - had died in a mysterious fire at his home on Alamein (or Ruzambo) farm, in Beatrice, 60 km south west of Harare. In this paper I have two purposes. Firstly I use Solomon Mujuru's death as way into a discussion of 'political accidents' in Zimbabwe's recent history, in order to explore the efficacies of rumours and the politics of uncertainty that I have argued elsewhere turns, in part, on the excessivity of human materials. The death of Mujuru is particularly useful because the controversies that surrounded it, and the various investigations and official inquest that followed, turned not only on the inconsistencies of different witness accounts, and the woeful incompetence of the police and the fire brigade's response, but also in a large part on the contested role of a state-appointed pathologist and the obscurities of Mujuru's burnt remains, which later provoked (unfulfilled) family demands that his remains be exhumed and re-examined. This illustrates how proliferating rumour and dissent can turn on the excessive indeterminacy of material substances, as much as on, or rather in entanglement with, contested narratives and representations. The two are of course intertwined. My second purpose, however, is to explore how the efficacies of rumours and uncertainties provoked by such 'political accidents' - which constitute a particular kind of death in Zimbabwe - relate to, illustrate, reinforce, and are in part dependent upon the broader (epistemological and ontological) uncertainties that can surround all death in Zimbabwe. This paper therefore makes a double movement of its own, focusing first on the specificities of a very particular kind of death in Zimbabwe and then adjusting focal resolution in order to explore what these particularities reveal about death in general, and especially about the entangled political, epistemological and ontological uncertainties which suggest that death is, in a sense, never finite, never complete, interminable, and potentially always in the (un/re)making.