

## "Born Dying:" Cultural Futures, Social Space, and the Reproductive Economy in Southern African AIDS Narratives

### Presenter

- Samuel (Sam) Pizelo, Senior, English Mary Gates Scholar, UW Honors Program Scholar

### Mentor

- Eva Cherniavsky, English

### Session

- [Session 2A: Outbreak! Reimagining Death and Life, Disease and Health](#)
- 171 MGH
- 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

The HIV epidemic in Southern Africa is one of the most persistent threats to global well-being, representing over twenty-five percent of global AIDS infections. As such, an increasing emphasis has been placed on developing cures or vaccines and deploying treatments for HIV. This global effort has been stymied at every turn by resource shortages, opportunistic infections and cultural and political barriers. But as South African poet Roshila Nair remarks: "we are beginning to learn / how to make everything / out of nothing again." My research reads an anthology of poems and short stories titled "Nobody Ever Said AIDS" and attempts to uncover a space of possibility for representing HIV, which is a prerequisite to fighting it, or at the very least living with it. I use the work of Homi Bhabha, Julia Kristeva, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others to show how culture represents itself through place (inhabited space) and imagined futures. I also read comparative surveys of historical and contemporary migrant mine laborers to suggest that neocolonial ideology has foreclosed a space for imagining a future in such precarity. I hope to suggest that questions of representing, fighting, and living with HIV are also always questions of culture, and that therefore developing a cultural imaginary of and response to HIV is essential to the longer-term human objective of "becoming with" HIV as a species. This cultural imaginary includes not only semiotic resources (that is, language with multiple possible meanings), but also the capacity to understand futures, and to transform spatial locales into inhabitable place.