

History/DAAS 629
Bodies, Technologies and Nature(s) in Africa
Fall 2013 | Mondays 1-4 pm | 3347 Mason Hall

Professor Gabrielle Hecht

Office/hours: 2666 Haven Hall, Weds., 1.30-3 and by appointment
647-7937; hechtg@umich.edu (email is the best way to reach me)

Over the last two centuries, the African continent has been repeatedly portrayed as a continent without technology. These portrayals reflect the politics and cultures not only of colonial domination, but also of technology. This course challenges assertions about the absence of “technology” in “Africa,” exploring ways in which African histories have been shaped by and through technological activities and conceptions of nature. We will explore the nature and meaning of technological knowledge, particularly as that knowledge involves the manipulation of nature (e.g., through agriculture, land management, transportation, mining, etc.). We will pay special attention to technopolitical geographies, sometimes focusing on tightly circumscribed geographical regions, and other times situating localities in larger regional, national, continental, or global networks. We will discuss the ways in which technologies mediate, represent, or perform power (for example, by focusing on the instruments of mobility, manipulations of human bodies, or the deployment of expertise). We shall examine the role of technological infrastructures and technical experts in creating and sustaining networks, and also discuss what happened when those networks – or the technologies they involved, or the natural orders they organized – broke down. The course focuses mainly on the colonial and postcolonial periods. It proceeds thematically rather than chronologically.

Much new literature has emerged on these themes in recent years. Drawing primarily from the disciplines of history, anthropology, and geography, our reading list combines recent scholarship with some classic texts.

Course requirements

This is a discussion seminar. Its success depends on the commitment and involvement of all participants. Therefore, you are expected to arrive in class thoroughly prepared to participate actively in all discussions. Attendance is mandatory; absences should occur only in case of dire need and should be cleared in advance if at all possible.

Cold calling: to encourage full involvement and preparation, I will “cold call” several students during each class. This means that I will ask you a direct question on the readings; I will expect answers that demonstrate your knowledge of the material and your ability to draw interesting connections from them to other readings. This practice is not intended to single out or embarrass anyone. Instead, its goal is to help you prepare for class and to learn to think and talk “on your feet,” a crucial skill required by almost any profession. **You will be graded on both the regularity and the quality of your participation, including your responses to cold calls.**

Articles and book sections are available on Ctools, except for the following books, which you should endeavor to purchase:

- William C. Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Indiana, 2011).

- Jenna Burrell, *Invisible Users: Youth in the Internet Cafés of Urban Ghana* (MIT Press 2012)
- Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Duke University Press, 2008)
- Julie Livingston, *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic* (Duke University Press, 2012).
- Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (UC Press, 2002)
- Jan Shetler, *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present*

Writing assignments

- 1) **Weekly responses.** Every week – except when you’re doing assignments (2) or (3) described below – you must turn in a 500-600 word response to the required reading. On no account should you exceed 600 words. Rather than merely summarize the reading, you should engage with it analytically. **These responses should be carefully written and argued. Everyone must write a response paper for the September 16 meeting. After that, you may skip 1 essay response between September 23 and December 2.**
- 2) **Intellectual genealogies / leading class discussion.** Twice during the semester – possibly in partnership with another student – you will present an intellectual genealogy of the week’s reading and lead class discussion. Together with your partner, prepare:
 - (a) an annotated bibliography of 6-10 readings that outline the scholarly debates and historiographical themes framing the week’s readings. We will talk about how to approach this part of the assignment in class.
 - (b) a 1-page handout as an aid to class discussion. This handout should list what you consider to be the three or four most significant analytical points for the week’s reading, including both the main assignment and the background reading you did. The handout should also offer 2-3 questions designed to provoke class discussion. Write the handout in outline or bulleted form (rather than continuous prose). Do not exceed 1 page. At the beginning of that class session, presenters will spend no more than 20 minutes outlining the historiographical/theoretical background for the readings and elaborating on the discussion questions. All presenters should participate in the presentation.

Bring enough paper copies of your bibliography and the handout to distribute to all class members.

- 3) **Final project.** The final project will be a paper of around 3000-4000 words. The precise choice of topic and format will vary according to the background and needs of each student. Possibilities include a historiographical essay or literature review, a grant proposal, an analysis of current events, or whatever other format suits your professional training or needs. You must, however, receive my prior approval for the format you choose, and your paper must directly engage with themes and readings from the course.

Proposals (consisting of a 1-page description of your topic, along with an annotated bibliography of 8-12 items) are due on Friday, October 18 by 9 am. **Please email these proposals as a Word attachment.** You will present your final project on the last day of class, December 9. Final papers are due December 16 by 3 pm.

Topics and Readings

September 9 Introduction

September 16 "Technology" and "Africa"

Austen, Ralph A., and Daniel Headrick. "The Role of Technology in the African past." *African Studies Review* 26, no. 3/4 (1983): 163-184.

Thornton, John. "Precolonial African industry and the Atlantic Trade, 1500-1800," and ensuing debate, especially Austen and Manning (browse through others), *African Economic History* 19 (1990): 1-54.

Kuklick, Henrika. "Contested Monuments: The Politics of Archaeology in Southern Africa," pp. 135-169 in George Stocking, ed., *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

Akrich, Madeleine. "The De-Description of Technical Objects," 205-224 in Bijker and Law, eds., *Shaping Technology/Building Society* (MIT, 1992).

Ferguson, James. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006), Introduction, chapter 1.

Hecht, Gabrielle. *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (MIT Press and Wits University Press, 2012), ch. 1.

September 23 Politics of Nature

Jan Shetler, *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present*, selections TBA.

Jane Carruthers, "Tracking in Game Trails: Looking Afresh at the Politics of Environmental History in South Africa," *Environmental History* 11 (October 2006): 804-829.

James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, "Desiccation and Domination: Science and Struggles over Environment and Development in Colonial Guinea," *Journal of African History*, 41 (2000), pp. 35-54.

Jane Carruthers, "Creating a National Park, 1910 to 1926," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1989): 188-216.

Roderick P. Neumann, "The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa," *Environmental History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan., 2002): 22-47.

Thaddeus Sunseri, "'Every African a Nationalist': Scientific Forestry and Forest Nationalism in Colonial Tanzania," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2007, 49(4): 883-913.

September 30 Bod(il)y Technologies

Luise White, "Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology, and Labor in East and Central Africa," *Representations* 43 (1993): 27-50.

Julie Livingston, "Insights from an African history of Disability," *Radical History Review* 94 (Winter 2006): 11-26.

Stacey Langwick, "Devils, Parasites and Fierce Needles: Healing and the Politics of Translation in Southeastern Tanzania," *Science, Technology and Human Values* 32(1): 88-117.

Lynn Thomas, "Skin Lighteners in South Africa: Transnational Commodities and Technologies of the Self." In Evelyn Nakano Glenn, ed., *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*. (Stanford University of Press, 2009): 188-209.

Babette Müller-Rockstroh, "Foetuses, Facts and Frictions: Insights from Ultrasound Research in Tanzania," in P. Wenzel Geissler and C. Molyneux, *Evidence, Ethos and Ethnography: the History and Anthropology of Medical Work in Africa* (Berghahn, 2011): 245-262.

Vinh-Kim Nguyen, "Trial Communities: HIV and Therapeutic Citizenship in West Africa," in P. Wenzel Geissler and C. Molyneux, *Evidence, Ethos and Ethnography: the History and Anthropology of Medical Work in Africa* (Berghahn, 2011): 429-444.

October 7 Infrastructures

Geneviève Bédoucha, "The Watch and the Waterclock," in *Technological Choices: Transformation in material cultures since the Neolithic*, ed. Pierre Lemonnier (London: Routledge, 1993), 77-107.

Allen Isaacman, "Displaced People, Displaced Energy, and Displaced Memories: the Case of Cahora Bassa, 1970-2004," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38, 2 (2005): 201-238.

Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Duke University Press, 2008): 1-48.

Libbie Freed, "Networks of (colonial) power: roads in French Central Africa after World War I." *History and Technology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 203-223.

William C. Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Indiana, 2011), Introduction + chs, 4, 5, 6 (pp. 1-21, 149-266).

Stephanie Rupp, "Ghana, China, and the Politics of Energy," *African Studies Review*, Volume 56, Number 1 (April 2013), pp. 103-130.

Fall Break

October 21 Media and Mediations

Marissa Moorman, "Airing the Politics of Nation: Radio in Angola, Past and Present," in D. Ligaga, D. Moyo, and L. Gunner, eds., *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*

Larkin, Brian. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Duke University Press, 2008, chs 2, 7 (48-72, 217-241)

Clapperton Mavhunga, "The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe's Cyber-Guerilla Warfare," *Journal of International Affairs* (Spring/Summer 2009), Vol. 62, No. 2: 159-173.

Jenna Burrell, *Invisible Users: Youth in the Internet Cafés of Urban Ghana* (MIT Press 2012), chs. 1-5

October 28 Knowledge, Skill, Labor

Guy, Jeff & Motlatsi Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity, and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Jan. 1988).

Storey, William K. "Guns, Race, and Skill in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa," *Technology and Culture* 45 (4): 687-711.

Beck, Kirk. "The art of truck modding on the Nile (Sudan): An attempt to trace creativity." In Gewald, Jan Bart, Sabine Luning, and Klaas van Walraven, eds. *The Speed of Change: Motor Vehicles and People in Africa, 1890-2000* (Brill, 2009): 151-174.

White, Luise. "'Heading for the Gun': Skills and Sophistication in an African Guerilla War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51/2 (October 2009): 236-259.

Kathryn M. de Luna, "Hunting Reputations: Talent, Individuals, and Community in Precolonial South Central Africa," *Journal of African History*, 53 (2012), pp. 279-99.

Osborn, Emily. "Casting aluminum cooking pots: labour, migration, and artisan production in West Africa's informal sector, 1945-2005," *African Identities*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (August 2009): 373-386.

Amanda L. Logan and M. Dores Cruz, "Gendered Taskscapes: Food, Farming, and Craft Production in Banda, Ghana in the 18th-21st centuries," article manuscript, not for citation or circulation.

November 4 Medical Ontologies

Julie Livingston, *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic* (Duke University Press, 2012).

Stacey Langwick, "Articulate(d) Bodies: Traditional Medicine in a Tanzanian Hospital," *American Ethnologist* 35(3): 428-439.

Kusiak, Pauline. "'Tubab' technologies and 'African' ways of knowing: nationalist techno-politics in Senegal," *History and Technology* 26:3: 225-249.

November 11 Of Animals, Plants, and People

Jacob Tropp, "Dogs, Poison and the Meaning of Colonial Intervention in the Transkei, South Africa," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2002), pp. 451-472

Jacob Tropp, "The Python and the Crying Tree: Interpreting Tales of Environmental and Colonial Power in the Transkei," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2003), pp. 511- 532.

Karen Middleton, "Who Killed 'Malagasy Cactus'? Science, Environment and Colonialism in Southern Madagascar (1924-1930)," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 215-248.

Judith Carney, "African Rice in the Columbian Exchange," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2001), pp. 377-396.

James McCann, "Maize and Grace: History, Corn, and Africa's New Landscapes, 1500-1999," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., 2001): 246-272.

November 18 Industry, Disease, Waste

Watts, Michael "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity" in Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, eds., *Violent Environments* (Cornell, 2001).

Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (UC Press, 2002), Introduction, chs. 1.

Schumaker, Lyn. "Slimes and Death-Dealing Dambos: Water, Industry, and the Garden City on Zambia's Copperbelt," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34/4 (Dec. 2008): 823-840.

Jock McCulloch, "Counting the Cost: Gold Mining and Occupational Disease in Contemporary South Africa," *African Affairs*, 108/431, 221-240.

Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*, chs. 7 and 9

Jenna Burrell, *Invisible Users*, ch. 7.

November 25 Governance, Citizenship, Development

Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (UC Press, 2002), Introduction, chs. 3, 7.

Von Schnitzler, Antina. "Citizenship Pre-paid: Water, Calculability, and Techno-Politics in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34/4 (Dec. 2008): 899-917.

Stacey Langwick, "From Non-Aligned Medicines to Market-based Herbals: China's Relationship to the Shifting Politics of Traditional Medicine in Tanzania," *Medical Anthropology* 29(1): 1-29.

Lachenal, Guillaume. "The Intimate Rules of the French Coopération: Morality, Race, and the Postcolonial Division of Scientific Work at the Pasteur Institute of Cameroon," in P. Wenzel Geissler and C. Molyneux, *Evidence, Ethos and Ethnography: the History and Anthropology of Medical Work in Africa* (Berghahn, 2011).

Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, ch. 10.

December 2 Mobilities

Clapperton Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe*, excerpts from a book manuscript in progress

Joshua Grace, *Modernization Bubu: Cars, Roads, and the Politics of Development in Tanzania, 1870s to 1980s*, (dissertation, Department of History, Michigan State University, 2013), excerpts.

December 9 Final presentations

Final papers due Dec. 16, 3 pm.