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, the deployment of expertise, and of course violence). 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. Readings draw primarily from the disciplines of history, anthropology, and geography.

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 and to participate actively in all discussions.

The following books are available for purchase at Shaman Drum and on reserve at the library.

- Burke, Timothy. *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*.
- Vaughn, Meghan & Henrietta Moore, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990*.
- McCann, James C. *Maize and Grace: Africa’s Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000*.

Essays and book sections are in the course packet, available on Ctools. **NOTE: some readings take a very long time to download, so you might consider doing your downloading in advance, while doing other tasks, and at off-peak hours.** Please be sure to bring required readings to class, for reference during discussion.

Most recommended readings are on reserve (but not all are, so double-check well in advance).

**Writing assignments**

1) **Weekly responses.** Every week - except when you're doing assignments (2) or (3) as 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.

2) **Empirical explorations.** Our double sessions on “Territory” (February 19th) and “Resource Violence” (March 25th) address issues that centrally engage the analytics of the course, but which have relatively little scholarship directly problematizing technology. For those sessions, we will do a limited amount of common readings. You will use these as a springboard for pursuing your own case study. Your choice of case should of course pertain directly to that session’s theme (though it need not cover the same empirical ground as the common readings). Strive for a combination of secondary and (if possible) easily accessible primary sources in researching your topic. The resulting paper should explore the case in terms of the themes and analytics of the course.

We will discuss readings and case-studies in combination during the second week of each of those sessions. The paper should be 2000-3000 words. You should also prepare a 1-page handout on your topic, bringing enough copies for all class members.

3) **Recommended reading and leading class discussion.** Twice during the semester, you will partner with another student, select items from the recommended reading list to read and present to the rest of the class, and lead class discussion.

   a) Prepare a 700-800 word paper on a book from the “recommended reading” list. In addition to analyzing the reading in terms of the course’s themes, this paper should situate the reading in its scholarly context. In doing so, you should consult at least two academic reviews of your selected book.

   b) Before the beginning of class, meet with the other student presenting on readings and together prepare 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 recommended reading you did. The handout should also offer 2-3 questions designed to provoke interesting, wide-ranging general class discussion; the questions should focus on how concepts, theories, or historiographical frames from the readings (rather than points of information). Write the handout in outline or bulleted form (rather than continuous prose). Do not exceed 1 page.

   c) At the beginning of that class session, presenters will spend no more than 15 minutes explaining how the recommended reading related to the common reading, and elaborating discussion questions. All presenters should participate in the presentation.

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

**NOTE: you may propose alternative selections to the recommended readings, subject to my approval.** Alternatives should be proposed by email 2 weeks before the session; proposals should include a brief explanation of why the alternative is suitable for the course and that particular session.
4) **Final project.** Your final project will be a paper of around 3000 words (10-12 pp). The precise choice of topic and format is up to you. You may choose to write this as a literature review, a grant proposal, an analysis of current events, or whatever other format might suit your professional training need. Whatever you choose, you must directly engage with some of the themes, theories and methods covered by the course.

Final papers, along with a brief presentation, are due on the last day of class. You should discuss both format and topic with me at least 6 weeks before the due date.

**Topics and Readings**

**January 8  Introduction**

Course introduction.

4 pm: Presentation by Jonathan Hyslop, University of the Witwatersrand. “Rethinking South African Labour History in Trans-National Perspective.”

**January 15  Imagining “Technology,” Imagining “Africa”**

Goody, Jack. Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa. Skim ch. 1, read the rest.


**Completely optional (we mostly won’t discuss), but useful as guides:**


**Recommended:**


Kriger, Colleen E. Pride of Men. Ironworking in 19th century West Central Africa (Heinemann 1999)

Goody, Jack. The Domestication of the Savage Mind.

January 22   Technological Things


Recommended:
Eglash, Ron. African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design (Rutgers, 1999).


Bulliet, Richard. The Camel and the Wheel.

Coombes, Annie E. Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination (Yale, 1994).

January 29   Nature(s) in Technological Labor


Recommended:


Moodie, T. Dunbar with Vivienne Ndatshe, Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration (California, 1994).


February 5  History through Land, Land through History

Dovers, Stephen, Ruth Edgecombe & Bill Guest. South Africa’s Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons (Ohio & David Philip, 2002):
- William Beinart, “Environmental origins of the Pondoland revolt.”
- Gregory Maddox, “‘Degradation narratives’ and ‘population time bombs’: Myths and realities about African environments.”

William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor, Social History and African Environments (James Currey, Ohio, David Philip, 2003):
- JoAnn McGregor, “Living with the River: Landscape and Memory in the Zambezi Valley, Northwest Zimbabwe.”


Recommended:


February 12  Ecologies in Knowledge and Practice

Vaughn, Meghan & Henrietta Moore, Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990.

Recommended:
Melissa Leach and James Fairhead, Misreading the African Landscape (1996)

Osumaka Likaka, Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire (1997)

Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana: C. 1850 to Recent Times (2001)

Audrey Richards, Land, Labour, and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe (1939, but read the new edition w/ foreword by Henrietta Moore).

February 19 & March 4 Territory

(February 26: winter break)


ASSIGNMENT: Empirical exploration

March 11 Statecraft and its experts, from colonialism to independence


Recommended:


March 18  Development and its experts, from colonialism to independence


Scott, James C. Seeing Like a State (Yale, 1998), ch. 7.

Recommended:


March 25 & April 1  Resource Violence

Selections from Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, eds., Violent Environments (Cornell, 2001):
  - Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, “Violent Environments”
  - Paul Richards, “Are ‘Forest’ Wars in Africa Resource Conflicts? The Case of Sierra Leone
  - Michael Watts, “Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity”

Selections from Monthly Review (NOT on Ctools site; best read directly online at http://www.monthlyreview.org/)

ASSIGNMENT: Empirical exploration
April 8  Transnational Nature(s)


Recommended:


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April 15  Final papers due, with presentations