



GREEN COLLEGE INTERDISCIPLINARY SERIES

ENVIRONMENT, POWER AND JUSTICE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Students of southern Africa already understand that environmental divisions along class, race and gender lines originate in the economy, the state, and social norms. Building on and extending established narratives of historical environmental injustice in southern Africa, the lectures in this series discuss local experiences of unhealthy environments and inadequate resources to explore environmental disparities on a wide range of topics. They also seek to uncover alternative visions of justice.

ALL TALKS ARE AT GREEN COLLEGE IN THE COACH HOUSE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC WITHOUT CHARGE

TERM 2

JAMES MACHOBANE, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN LESOTHO, SOUTHERN AFRICA

Chris Conz, African History, Tufts University
Monday, February 10, 2020, 5:00 pm

This talk examines the life and work of James Machobane, a visionary farmer who in the 1950s sought environmental justice by promoting ecologically sustainable agriculture to improve food systems in Lesotho. Historical investigations of Machobane's motivations, innovations and objectives show the possibilities and problems of combatting, through agricultural reform, the systemic injustices created by dispossession, colonialism and the political-economy of migrant labour.

LOCUSTS AND POWER: ENVIRONMENTAL PHENOMENA, COLONIAL INJUSTICES AND VERNACULAR DISCOURSE IN EARLY COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1895-1935

Admire Mseba, Black Studies, and History, University of Missouri-Columbia
Monday, February 24, 2020, 5:00 pm

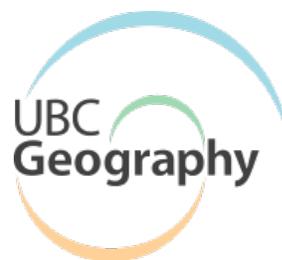
This talk will take the opportunity to think with locusts and droughts about vernacular discourses of power and colonial injustices. Indigenous inhabitants of early colonial Zimbabwe explained the appearance of locust swarms and droughts by reference to the actions of youth, farming men and women, chiefs, spirit mediums, European traders and colonial officials. Finding expression in the pronouncements of religious figures such as spirit mediums and messengers of the Mwari shrine, such discourses produced swift and repressive responses from the colonial state. These, Admire Mseba argues, reveal colonial officials' anxieties about African attitudes towards their power. These anxieties stemmed from the fact that colonial officials believed that African religious leaders had fomented the 1896-97 uprisings against British South Africa Company (BSAC) rule. Likewise, the responses of the state to locusts and droughts reveal the anxieties of colonial officials. Mseba further argue that Africans living under colonial rule imbued environmental phenomena with meaning to critique both the actions of their fellow Africans and colonial excesses. Vernacular discourse vested power in local behavior, not just in the colonial government. That is, power was understood to derive from cosmology and was often articulated through locally intelligible ideas of social transgression, gender, and generation. The vernacular discourses about the appearance of locust swarms and the occurrences of droughts, then, provide insights on how power was conceived among Africans as they came to terms with life under conditions of colonialism.

BLURRY LINES: RACE, BOTANY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Sarah Ives, School of Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences and Multicultural Studies, City College of San Francisco
Monday, March 16, 2020, 5:00 pm

While theories about the Anthropocene have helped scholars challenge firm distinctions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture have hardly been binary in discussions of race and indigeneity. Rather, connections between race and nature have rationalized political, social, and economic injustices. This paper analyzes these connections through two botanical commodities: South African rooibos and Australian eucalyptus. I address the complicated cultural politics that link people to place through the botanical world. Settler colonists not only conquered people and territory; they sought to transform geography fundamentally. Upending understandings of place had profound consequences for dispossession in the nineteenth century and continues to have profound consequences for social justice movements today. By historicizing distinctions and connections between the dichotomies of human and nonhuman, I explore the differential ways in which people are "included" in the human world or "relegated" to the nonhuman world. The blurry lines between human and nonhuman, I emphasize, are haunted by violent, racialized histories, as well as by shifting understandings of what comprises the natural environment in the context of unprecedented climate change. In a 'globalizing' world fraught with rejuvenated nationalism, violence against perceived others can be easily legitimized and blurry lines rendered intolerable.

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