

Research Colloquium North American History

A lecture by Dr. Aidan Erasmus (University of the Western Cape): “Chicago in the Bush: Sense, Technology, and the Anti-colonial Intellectual”

Monday October 28th , 6pm-8pm, Room 201



“Dr. Aidan Erasmus is based in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of the Western Cape. His research is interested in the comparative global histories of race, technology, and sense since the early 19th century from the perspective of Africa, with a special focus on sound. He has presented and published on topics relating to sound, technology, music, and memory, and organized workshops and conferences on these and other related areas of inquiry.”

Abstract: Setting forth from the title of an unpublished and now lost manuscript by the South African anticolonial intellectual Solomon T. Plaatje, and through a close reading of a photograph taken Plaatje in the Belgian Congo in 1931, this talk tracks how an encounter between sense, technology, and race that reached a peak at the turn of the century might offer a rerouting of how we think global anticolonial intellectual practice and knowledge production. Plaatje embodies a crossroads – partly through his intellectual practice and partly through his scholarly reception at which to reconsider global black anticolonial and intellectual life against the backdrop of the rise in sensory media and transductive modalities in the twentieth century. While Plaatje is often read in scholarly debate through the scripts of ambivalence and complicity, this talk suggests that his practice with transductive sensory media of the time makes clear a response to a growing discourse around the senses, technology, and discourses of race that would ultimately coalesce into forms of apartheid. Attending to Plaatje – and perhaps the broader groundswell of anticolonial thought of his milieu – from this vantage point is to begin to produce an image of how anticolonialism intersected with sense and technology, as well as render its image of a world to come.

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