

# HEALTH MEDICINE and HEALING in AFRICA



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University of Wisconsin-Madison  
kodesh@wisc.edu  
office hours: Monday, 10-12 via [Zoom](#)

Meeting Time:  
Thursday, 10 am-12 pm

Mode of Instruction:  
Online only via Zoom

Canvas Course URL:  
<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/234430>

This graduate seminar will examine the historical and anthropological literature on health, medicine, and healing in Africa. We will explore the creative and shifting ways in which Africans have sought to compose healthy communities through the expansion of therapeutic repertoires, the adaptation of deeply rooted ideas and practices, and the adoption and transformation of new technologies. We will also examine the ways in which different historical perspectives inform and transform our understanding of more contemporary developments, such as the emergence of medical humanitarianism and the flourishing of health-related non-governmental organizations in the Global South. Finally, we will consider the possibilities and potential pitfalls of deeper engagement by scholars working in Africa with those working on medicine, science, and related topics in other parts of the world.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Develop a sophisticated understanding of the history and historiography of health, medicine, and healing in Africa
- Deepen abilities in the analysis of primary sources
- Hone academic writing skills
- Design and implement effective strategies for facilitating discussion in class

## Required Readings

We will read the following books (please note that several books are available in PDF format on Canvas). All required articles and book chapters are available on Canvas.

Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots: The Search for Healing Plants in Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Barbara Cooper, *Countless Blessings: A History of Childbirth and Reproduction in the Sahel*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.

Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. [Available in PDF format on Canvas]

John Janzen, *Health in a Fragile State: Science, Sorcery, and Spirit in the Lower Congo*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019. [Available in PDF format on Canvas]

Kwasi Konadu, *Our Own Way in this Part of the World: Biography of an African Community*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. [Available in PDF format on Canvas]

Guillaume Lachenal, *The Lomidine Files: The Untold Story of a Medical Disaster in Colonial Africa*. Translated by Noémi Tousignant. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. [Available in PDF format on Canvas]

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

## Assignments, Requirements, and Expectations

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, field trips, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus

1) Weekly discussions of the assigned readings are a crucial component of the seminar. You should come to class prepared to share your thoughts on the assigned readings and to actively participate in discussion. One student will be assigned to facilitate the discussion each week. This will involve three elements: First, the discussion leader will post three questions for us to consider during our class meeting. The discussion leader must post these questions by 8 p.m. on the day before our class. Second, the discussion leader will make a short (5-10 minutes maximum) presentation at the beginning of the class. Your presentation should be more than a summary of the readings - in fact, you should avoid summarizing the reading if possible - and focus instead on stimulating conversation, including about the primary source challenges when appropriate (see below). Third, the discussion leader will be responsible for facilitating and moderating discussion for the duration of the class. You are welcome to consult with me about your plans for leading discussion for your assigned weeks.

2) For weeks 4-6 you will complete a "Primary Source Challenge" prior to our class meeting. Please complete the reading for the week before you begin the challenge. These challenges will offer an opportunity to engage in the analysis of primary sources related to the course reading for the week. You will find instructions for each challenge on Canvas. Please come to class prepared to discuss these exercises during the week in which they are assigned.

3) Book reviews: Students will write two book reviews. These review should be between 1100 and 1200 words (the latter is the maximum count for single book reviews in *The American Historical Review*). For the first review, you will choose a book from weeks 2-8 of the course; you can choose a book from any week of the course for the second review. Rather than merely summarizing the book, your reviews should engage the text at hand by raising critical questions about the methods, theories, and conclusions put forward by its author(s). In other words, you should critically assess and analyze the contents of the book and discuss their significance. What contribution do you feel the book makes to the field, how does it do so, and by what methodology? What are the author's outstanding contributions? What are the shortfalls of the book? You are encouraged to consult the book review sections in *The American Historical Review*, *The Journal of African History*, *Current Anthropology*, and *American Anthropologist* for guidance. We will discuss further the details of the assignment in class.

Each review will be due prior to class during the week we discuss the book you have chosen to evaluate.

4) The final writing assignment for the course will be an essay in response to the following prompt. If necessary, I will work with students whose primary field of study lies outside African history to modify the question to suit their interests:

Over the last twenty years, historical and anthropological studies in the field of “health and healing” in African Studies have become increasingly interested in unpacking the history of medical research in Africa and examining the reach, effect, and historical lineages of “global health” interventions on the continent. To what extent do you think the emphasis on science, pharmaceuticals, and medical experimentation in this scholarship has resulted in a return to the older focus on biomedicine and the history of disease, and a move away from the study of popular or vernacular therapeutics and the social dimensions of health and illness? What is the relationship between this newer body of scholarship and the works produced from the late 1970s through the 1990s?

Your essay should offer a well-constructed analysis of not more than 2,500 words, making sure to support your analysis with specific examples drawn widely from the required readings for the course and relevant supplementary readings. This assignment is intended to simulate the experience of writing an essay for preliminary examinations.

Your essay will be due by noon on Thursday, May 6.

## Evaluation

40% discussion participation, including leadership of class discussion  
15% book review #1  
15% book review #2  
30% final essay

# Schedule of Class Meetings

## Week 1 (1/28): Introduction to Course

### Week 2 (2/4): What is Health, What is Healing? Defining a Field of Inquiry

#### Reading

Megan Vaughan, "Healing and Curing: Issues in the Social History and Anthropology of Medicine in Africa," *Social History of Medicine*, v. 7 (1994), pp. 283-295.

Arthur Kleinman, "What is specific to biomedicine?" In *Writing at the Margin: Discourse between Anthropology and Medicine*, 21-40. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.

Steven Feierman, "Explanation and uncertainty in the medical world of Ghaambo." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 74:317-344, 2000.

Helen Tilley, "Global Histories, Vernacular Science, and African Genealogies; or, Is the History of Science Ready for the World?" *Isis*, 101: 110-119, 2010.

#### Questions

By what criteria - explicit or implied - do the authors define health and assess therapeutic efficacy?

Are there distinct differences between what biomedicine and popular medicine in Africa have aimed to do?

How useful is it to construct the problem as a "clash" between types of medicine?

#### Supplemental Reading

Steven Feierman, "Struggles for control: the social roots of health and healing in modern Africa." *African Studies Review* 28 (2-3):73-147, 1985.

Steven Feierman and John Janzen, eds. *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science, Part I. From Tradition to Science," *Africa*, v. 37 (1967), pp. 50-71, and Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science, Part II. The "Closed" and "Open" Predicaments," *Africa*, v. 37, (1967), pp. 155-187.

Nancy Rose Hunt, "Health and healing." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, 378- 395. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

John Janzen and Edward Green, "Continuity, Change, and Challenge in African Medicine" in *Medicine Across Cultures* ed. by Helaine Selin and Hugh Shapiro (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 1-26.

Gwyn Prins, "But What Was the Disease? The Present State of Health and Healing in African Studies," *Past and Present*, 124: 159-179, 1989.

Susan Reynolds Whyte, "Anthropological approaches to African misfortune, from religion to medicine." In *Culture, Experience, and Pluralism: Essays on African Ideas of Illness and Healing*, edited by A. Jacobsen-Widding and D. Westerlund, 289-301. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989

## Week 3 (2/11): Healers, Healing, and Community

### Reading

Kwasi Konadu, *Our Own Way in this Part of the World: Biography of an African Community*

### Supplemental Reading

Malidoma Patrice Some, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*. Penguin Books, 1995



\*\* Reminder: Please attend [Kwasi Konadu's presentation at Africa at Noon](#) \*\*

OUR OWN WAY IN THE PART OF THE WORLD: BIOGRAPHY OF AN AFRICAN COMMUNITY, CULTURE, NATION

WHEN: February 10, 2021 @ 12:00 pm

The Africa at Noon seminar series will hold virtually this semester. All are welcome. Click [here](#) to join the event on Zoom. Please note that this is a webinar, and guests' videos will not be visible.

Date/Time: February 10, 2021 – 12pm CT (6pm UTC)

Speaker: Kwasi Konadu

### PRESENTATION DESCRIPTION

Drawing on his new book, *Our Own Way in This Part of the World: Biography of an African Community, Culture, and Nation*, Konadu's talk will use the story of healer and blacksmith Kofi Donko, and the interlaced evolution of his kin, community, and culture, to explore the critical themes of colonialism, nationalism and decolonization in Ghana and the wider world. Through an approach called communography, Konadu interweaves Donko's life and community with the history of Gold Coast/Ghana and broader patterns in world history.

Kwasi Konadu is John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Endowed Chair and Professor at Colgate University, where he teaches courses in African history and on worldwide African histories and cultures. A father and husband first and foremost, Konadu is also a healer who studied with his grandfather in Jamaica and then in Takyiman (central Ghana) as well as a publisher of scholarly books about African world histories and cultures through Diasporic Africa Press, Inc.

Website: [www.kwasikonadu.info](http://www.kwasikonadu.info)

Week 4 (2/18): Public Healing in the Longue Durée: The Case of the Great Lakes

Reading

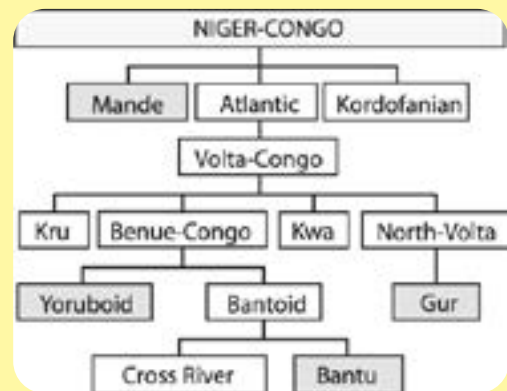
Steven Feierman, “Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories.” In *Beyond the Linguistic Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* ed. by Victoria E. and Lynn Hunt Bonnell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 182–216.

David Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing Between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” *American Historical Review*, 111, 5 (2006): 1403-1439.

Neil Kodesh, “Networks of Knowledge: Clanship and Collective Well-Being in Buganda.” *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 02 (2008): 197–216.

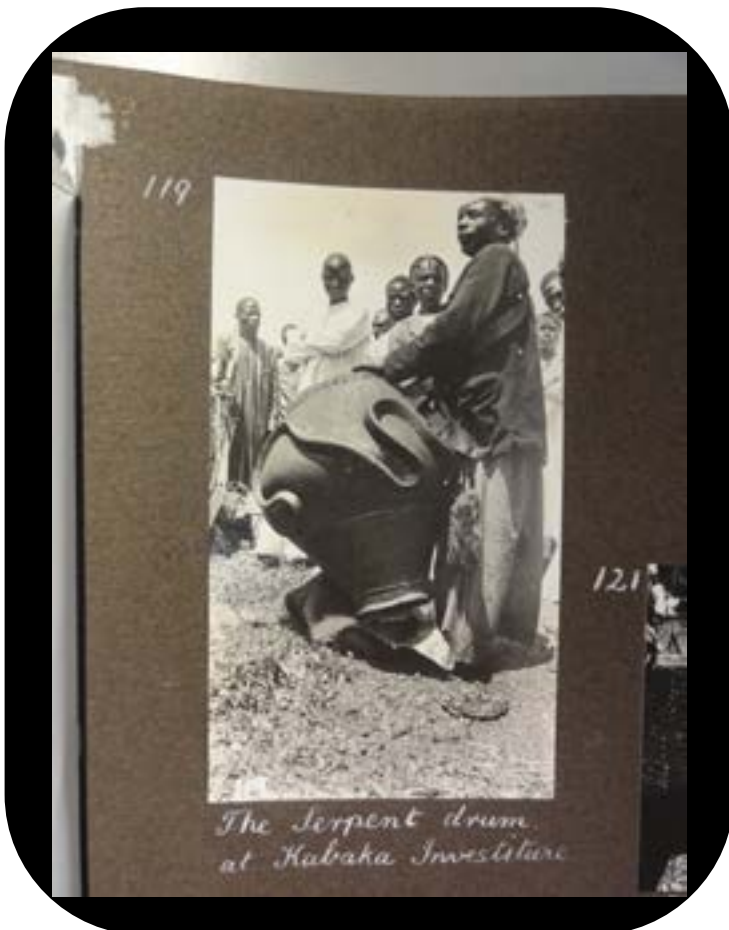
Primary Source Challenge

The primary source challenge for this week focuses on the use of comparative historical linguistics as a method for excavating histories of early Africa. See Canvas for more details.



**Great Lakes Bantu**

- A. East Nyanza
- B. Gungu
- C. Luhya
- D. Western Lakes
- E. West Nyanza
  - 1. Rutara
  - 2. North Nyanza
    - a. Luganda
    - b. South Kyoga
      - i. Lusoga
      - ii. East Kyoga
        - α. Lugwere
        - β. Rushana



## Week 5 (2/25): Missionaries and Medicine in Colonial Africa

### Reading

Megan Vaughan, "The Great Dispensary in the Sky: Mission Medicine," in *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 55-76.

Paul Landau, "Explaining Surgical Evangelism in Colonial Southern Africa: Teeth, Pain and Faith," *Journal of African History* 37:2 (1996), 261-281.

Luise White, "They Could Make their Victims Dull: Genders and Genres, Fantasies and Cures in Colonial Southern Uganda," *American Historical Review* 100:5 (1995), 1379-1402.

Walima T. Kalusa. "Language, Medical Auxiliaries, and the Re-interpretation of Missionary Medicine in Colonial Mwinilunga, Zambia, 1922-51." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 57-78.

### Supplemental Reading

John and Jean Comaroff, "The Medicine of God's Word," in J. and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier v. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 323-364.

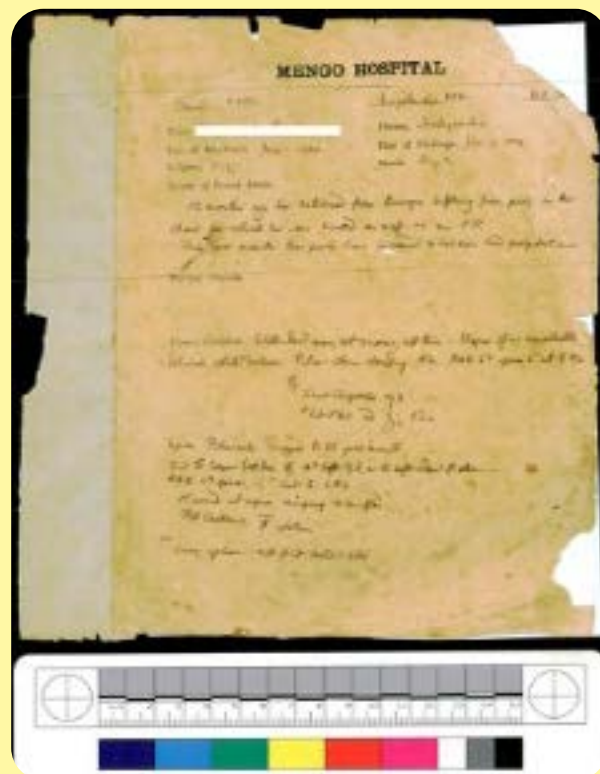
Jean Comaroff, "The diseased heart of Africa: medicine, colonialism, and the black body," in *Knowledge, Power and Practice: the Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*. ed. by S. Lindenbaum and M. Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 305-329.

Charles M. Good, *The Steamer Parish: The Rise And Fall Of Missionary Medicine On An African Frontier*. Vol. 244. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Kathleen Vongsathorn, "'First and foremost the evangelist'?" Mission and government priorities for the treatment of leprosy in Uganda, 1927-48." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2012): 544-560.

### Primary Source Challenge

The primary source challenge for this week focuses on the evaluation of case notes and other material from Mengo Hospital in Uganda for writing histories of medicine in early twentieth-century Africa. See Canvas for more details.





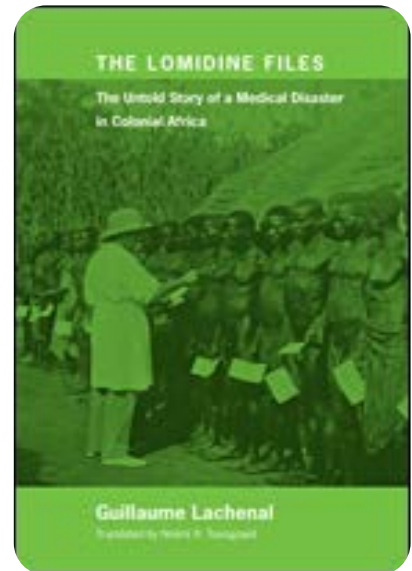
## Week 6 (3/4): Infectious Diseases, Medical Research, and Social Change in Colonial Africa

### Reading

Guillaume Lachenal, *The Lomidine Files: The Untold Story of a Medical Disaster in Colonial Africa*

Mari K. Webel, "Mapping the Infected Landscape: Sleeping Sickness Prevention and the African Production of Colonial Knowledge in the Early Twentieth Century." *Environmental History* 20, no. 4 (2015).

Melissa Graboyes, "Fines, orders, fear... and consent? Medical research in East Africa, C. 1950s." *Developing world bioethics* 10, no. 1 (2010): 34-41.



### Supplementary Reading

Myron Echenberg, *Black Death, White Medicine: Bubonic Plague and the Politics of Public Health in Colonial Senegal, 1914-1945* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002)

P.W. Geissler and C.S. Molyneux (eds), *Evidence, Ethos and Experiment: The Anthropology and History of Medical Research in Africa*. Berghahn, 2011.

Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950*, pp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Randall Packard, "Industrialization, Rural Poverty, and Tuberculosis in South Africa, 1850-1950," in Steven Feierman and John Janzen, eds., *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 104-130.

Randall Packard, "The Invention of the 'Tropical Worker': Medical Research and the Quest for Central African Labor on the South African Gold Mines, 1903-36," *Journal of African History*, v. 34 (1993), pp. 271-292.

### Primary Source Challenge

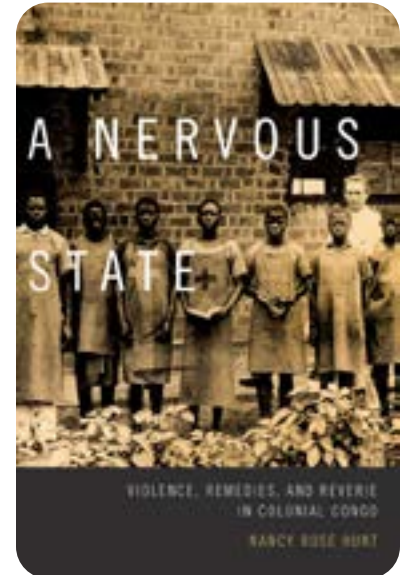
The primary source challenge for this week focuses on archival material related to research on yellow fever undertaken in western Uganda in the mid-twentieth century. See Canvas for more details.



## Week 7 (3/11): A Nervous State in Colonial Congo

### Reading

Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*



### Supplementary Reading

Franz Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” In Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* translated by Richard Philcox, pp. 120-184. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

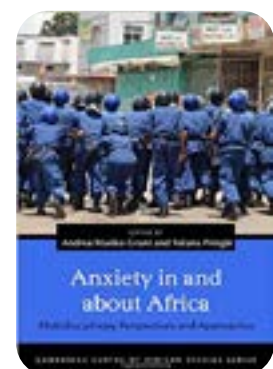
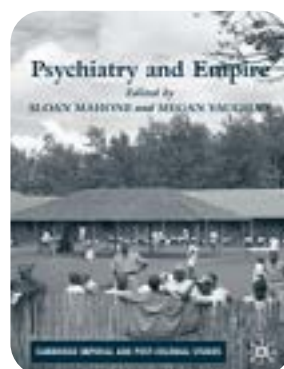
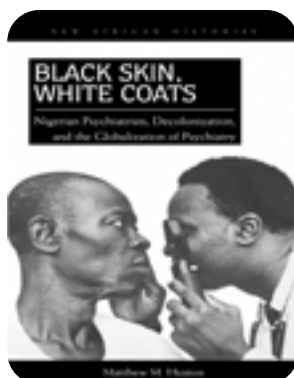
Andrea Mariko Grant and Yolana Pringle, eds. *Anxiety in and about Africa: Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Approaches*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020.

Richard Keller, “Madness and Colonization: Psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800-1962,” *Journal of Social History* 35 (2): 295-326, 2001.

Matthew H. Heaton, *Black Skin, White Coats: Nigerian Psychiatrists, Decolonization, and the Globalization of Psychiatry*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013.

Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (eds), *Psychiatry and Empire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Nana Osei Quarshie, “Contracted intimacies: Psychiatric nursing conspiracies in the Gold Coast.” *Politique africaine* 1 (2020): 91-110.

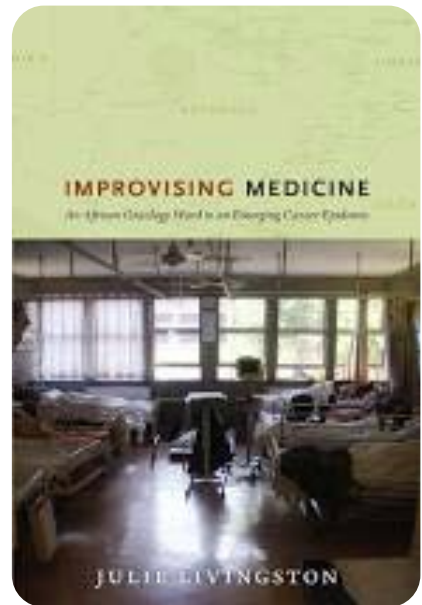


Week 8 (3/18): Global Biomedicine at the Limits

Reading

Julie Livingston, *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic*

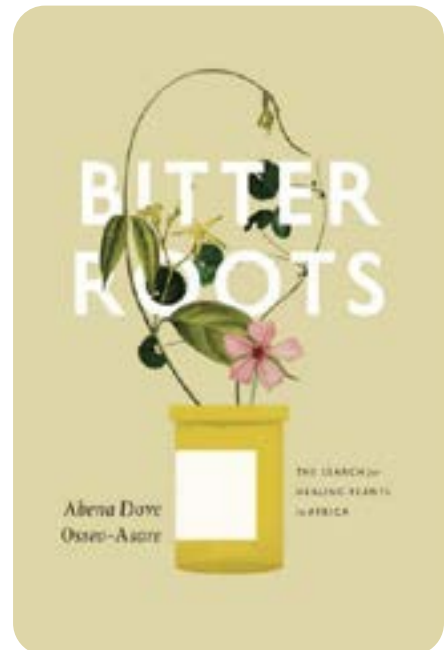
Noémi Tousignant, *Edges of Exposure: Toxicology and the Problem of Exposure in Postcolonial Senegal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)



## Week 9 (3/25): Science, Healing Plants, and Bioprospecting

### Reading

Abena Dove Osseo-Asara, *Bitter Roots: The Search for Healing Plants in Africa*



### Supplemental Reading

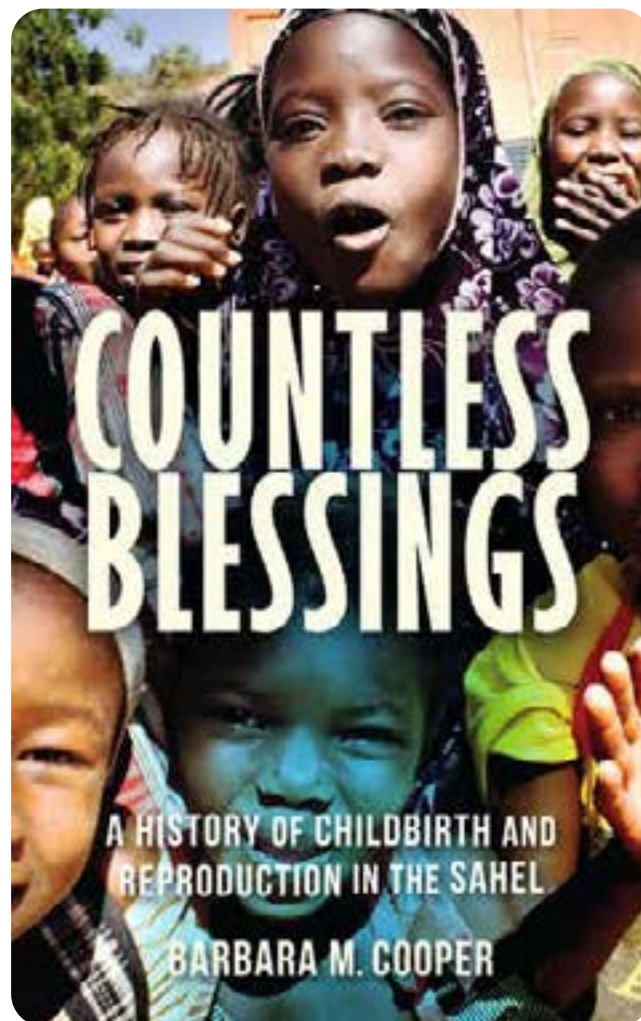
Stacey Langwick, "Healers and Scientists: The Epistemological Politics of Research about Medicinal Plants in Tanzania, or 'Moving Away from Traditional Medicine,'" in *Evidence, Ethics, and Ethnography* ed. by Wenzel Geissler (Berghan Books, 2011), pp. 263-95



Week 10 (4/1): No class

Reading

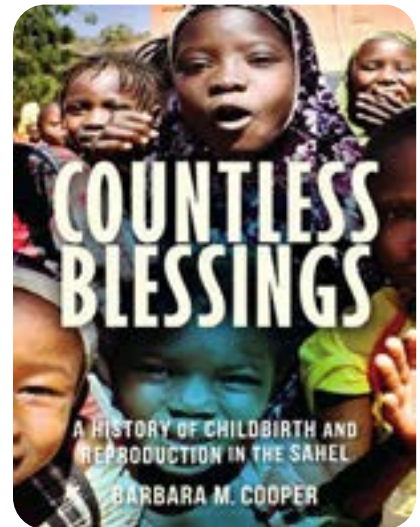
Begin reading Barbara Cooper, *Countless Blessings: A History of Childbirth and Reproduction in the Sahel*



## Week 11 (4/8): Childbirth, Gender, and Reproduction in the Sahel

### Reading

Barbara Cooper, *Countless Blessings: A History of Childbirth and Reproduction in the Sahel*



### Supplemental Reading

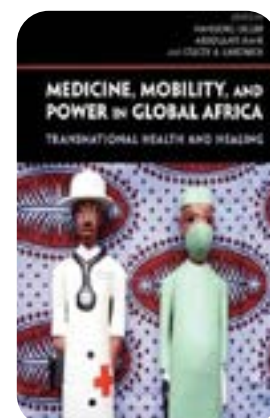
Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999)

Nancy Rose Hunt, "Le Béb  en Brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21,3 (1988), pp.401-432.

Summers, Carol. "Intimate colonialism: The imperial production of reproduction in Uganda, 1907-1925." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 4 (1991): 787-807.

Lynn Thomas, "Imperial Concerns and 'Women's Affairs': State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicate Abortion in Meru, Kenya, c. 1910-1950." *Journal of African History* 39 (1998): 121-45.

Stacey Langwick, "The Choreography of Global Subjection: The Traditional Birth Attendant in Contemporary Configurations of World Health," in *Medicine, Mobility, and Power in Global Africa. Transnational Health and Healing* ed. by Hansj rg Dilger, Abdoulaye Kane & Stacey A. Langwick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 31-59.



## Week 12 (4/15): What Changes – And Doesn't – In The Age Of Global Health

### Reading

Randall Packard, *A History of Global Health: Interventions into the Lives of Other People* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), Part 7.

Didier Fassin, "That obscure object of global health," in *Medical Anthropology at the Intersections*, 2012: 95-115.

Johanna Crane, "Unequal 'partners': AIDS, academia, and the rise of global health," *Behemoth*, 2010.

P. Wenzel Geissler, "Public secrets in public health: knowing not to know while making scientific knowledge," *American Ethnologist* 40,1 (2013): 13-34.

Wendland, Claire L. "Moral maps and medical imaginaries: clinical tourism at Malawi's college of medicine." *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 1 (2012): 108-122.

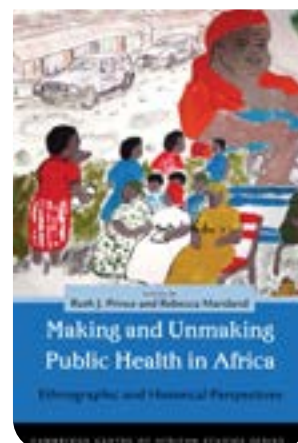
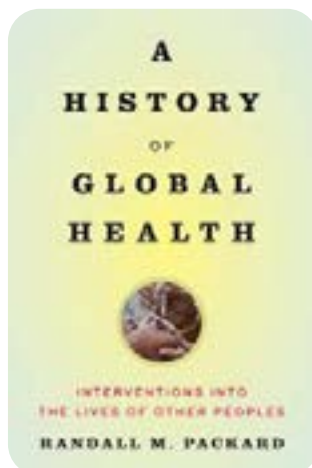
### Supplemental Reading

Theodore M. Brown, Marcos Cueto, and Elizabeth Fee, "The World Health Organization and the Transition from 'International' to 'Global' Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 1 (January 2006), 62-72

Tamara Giles-Vernick and James Webb (eds.) , *Global Health in Africa: Historical Perspectives on Disease Control* (Ohio University Press, 2013).

Melissa Parker and Tim Allen. "De-politicizing parasites: reflections on attempts to control the control of neglected tropical diseases." *Medical anthropology* 33, no. 3 (2014): 223-239.

Ruth J. Prince, "Situating Health and the Public in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives," in *Making and Unmaking Public Health in Africa: Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives* ed. by Ruth J. Prince and Rebecca Marsland (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), 1-51.



Week 13 (4/22): The Uganda Cancer Institute and Medical Humanities in East Africa:  
A Conversation with Marissa Mika

Reading

Selections from Marissa Mika's forthcoming book on the history of the Uganda Cancer Institute



**Uganda Cancer Institute**

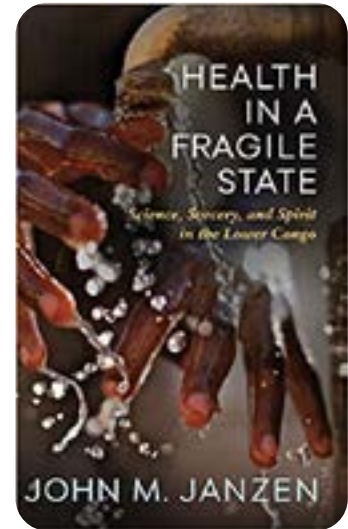




Week 14 (4/29): A Fragile State in Postcolonial Congo

Reading

John Janzen, *Health in a Fragile State: Science, Sorcery, and Spirit in the Lower Congo*



### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

Knowing how or when to cite can be confusing; if you are having trouble, rather than living in fear of inadvertent plagiarism please come discuss it with me during office hours. You may also find the following link helpful: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>

### COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

UW-Madison now uses an online course evaluation survey tool, AEFIS. In most instances, you will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester when your course evaluation is available. You will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID where you can complete the evaluation and submit it, anonymously. Your participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

### ACADEMIC CALENDAR & RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

See: <https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/#religious-observances>

### DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

### ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.