

# Automotive Empire: Roads and Motor Vehicles in the Making of Interwar Africa

Andrew Denning, Assistant Professor of History, University of Kansas

In the post-World War I turn to “scientific,” technocratic colonialism in Africa, a variety of imperial powers turned to the creation of a sprawling, integrated road network to spark colonial development. A variety of stakeholders ranging from colonial administrators and European industrialists to African entrepreneurs and South Asian migrants supported road construction, believing that increasing the volume and speed of mobility in Africa would inevitably deliver development and progress. As a coherent system comprising human and envirotechnical elements, road infrastructure shaped the logic and practices of colonial administrations, transforming them into circulatory states that sought to use technological tools to reduce environmental and social frictions. Rather than a means to an end, road development became an end in itself in interwar Africa, reshaping environments, landscapes, and colonial cultures in the process. By pursuing the logic of a unified, coherent envirotechnical system in massive territories without access to required labor and equipment, the model of automotive empire produced fragmented territories, undermining stated goals of economic development and administrative efficiency. This project develops a trans-imperial perspective to examine commonalities and cooperative projects across empires, while also exploring the specific environmental and administrative contexts that made automotive empire a continental model with local variations.



**April 5, 2019**

**2:30-4:30 PM**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology**

**Building E51 – Room 095**

**Corner of Amherst and Wadsworth Street Cambridge, MA**

This event is part of the MIT Seminar on Environmental and Agricultural History sponsored by the History Faculty and the Program in Science, Technology and Society. For more information contact [kalopes@mit.edu](mailto:kalopes@mit.edu)