

## [The Coloniality of Infrastructure. Eurafrican Legacies](#)

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Type:

Conference

Date:

January 12, 2021 to January 15, 2021

Location:

Switzerland

Subject Fields:

African History / Studies, Urban History / Studies, Geography, European History / Studies, Art, Art History & Visual Studies

When Eurafrica emerged in the 1920s as an intellectual and political project to connect Europe with Africa, its goal was to ensure European colonial dominance in a changing world. Key to the proposed continental merger was infrastructure—not surprising at a time when railways, ports, camps, and other large-scale building projects were facilitating the extraction and movement of things for Europe while curtailing the freedom and mobility of Africans on an unprecedented scale. Recent scholarship has emphasized the centrality of Eurafrica and the type of colonialism it mustered in the history of European integration, from the EU's founding intellectuals to its Cold-War-era realization. But continental infrastructure also played a role in African struggles for independence. Highways, ports, and dams became tools of state-building and even mobilized hopes of Panafrican integration and international solidarity. In practice, however, large-scale infrastructure required technical and financial aid which further entrenched Africa's asymmetrical relationship to the Global North.

Today, as Africa enters a new age of development increasingly dominated by China, and the EU is in fundamental crisis, is it still possible to speak of a Eurafrican present? From the physical imprint of cities and the configuration of intercontinental airline routes, infrastructure testifies to the enduring legacies of Eurafrica. Infrastructure shapes territories and governs the mobilities within and across them, but also serves to immobilize and externalize bodies and things. The European infrastructure of the Mediterranean border regime, in which African migrants are systematically being detained or left to die, recalls colonial-era policies that valued life and dictated death along racial lines. At the same time, European aid focused on infrastructural development in Africa is increasingly targeted to counter such unwanted migration—without touching the global extraction economies that have roots in European colonial rule and continue to shape African cities and territories today. Because of these specters of Eurafrica, the EU seems structurally incapable to come to terms with its colonial past. This conference proposes to explore historical continuities in Africa's relationship with Europe through the lens of infrastructure. What are the infrastructural histories that bind the unequal destinies of people together across continents, and how do these legacies shape contemporary lifeworlds and international relations? How does infrastructural violence shape international relations between Africa and Europe, and how is the legacy of Eurafrica manifested in the spaces of everyday life? To answer these questions, the conference invites scholars from urban studies, history, political science, postcolonial theory, architecture, border and migration studies, and allied fields. We invite contributions that develop new perspectives of our geopolitical and interconnected urban present through its infrastructural pasts. Such studies of material and aesthetics relationships between Africa and Europe can focus on questions of lifeworlds, urban transformation, migration, territory, citizenship, development, or related themes. We are particularly interested in studies that can reveal the differential entanglements between people and places, and locate alternative forms of infrastructure, imaginaries of belonging, ongoing struggles for decolonization, and practices of world-making that decenter colonial ways of seeing, feeling, and knowing.

Keynote Speakers: Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui (Cornell University), Sarah Nuttall (University of the

Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa), Achille Mbembe (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa).

Scientific Committee: Peo Hansen (Linköping University, Sweden), Edgar Pieterse (University of Cape Town), Muriam Haleh Davis (University of California Santa Cruz), Samia Henni (Cornell University), Charles Heller (Forensic Oceanography, Geneva), Anne-Isabelle Richard (University of Leiden), Bilgin Ayata (University of Basel, Sociology), Julia Tischler (University of Basel, Centre for African Studies), Lorena Rizzo (University of Basel, Centre for African Studies), Madeleine Herren-Oesch (University of Basel, European Global Studies)

The conference is organized by Urban Studies, Department of Social Science at the University of Basel, in collaboration with Sociology, the Centre for African Studies, and the Institute for European Global Studies, as well as the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town.

Contact Info:

The conference will be held ONLINE

12-15 January 2021

15:00-20:00 UTC +2

Those interested in participating and following “The Coloniality of Infrastructure” conference are kindly asked to send a short e-mail to:

[carla.cruz@stud.unibas.ch](mailto:carla.cruz@stud.unibas.ch)

A zoom-link to the conference will be circulated shortly before the beginning of the conference.

Contact Email:

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URL:

<https://colonialityofinfrastructure.com>