



2026

VIII CONFERENZA BIENNALE ASAI

ACQUE D'AFRICA

FLUSSI, DESTINI E CONTESTI



ASAI

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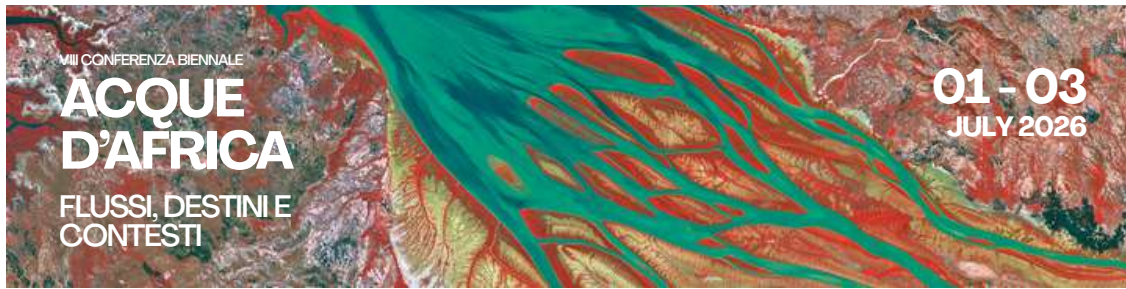


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WELCOME

FROM THE ASAI PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to all participants at the 8th Conference of the Association for African Studies in Italy (ASAI). The current year 2026 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of ASAI, an event worth celebrating and taking stock of the progress made as a scientific society in terms of academic initiatives, networking, and visibility. The programme, which includes twenty-nine panels and one hundred sixty-five participants, bears witness to the small but vibrant African Studies field in Italy. The keynote lectures by Jacqueline Goldin and Pierluigi Valsecchi, as well as side events (the screening of *River Nomads* by Lotte Pelckmans and book presentations), further enrich the Pavia event. A decisive contribution was made by the local organising team and the scientific committee. To all of you, I extend my heartfelt thanks. The theme of water chosen for this edition as a cross-cutting point of reflection—"Africa and Its Waters: Flows, Fates and Frameworks"—evokes the immense resources of the African continent, which boasts many of the world's largest rivers, as well as its integration into the Mediterranean, transatlantic, and Indian Ocean circuits. Talking about water means demonstrating sensitivity to the urgent issues of the present time (climate and environmental crises, disputed control of water reserves and infrastructures) and encouraging research that addresses national and international political agendas. Water is also a metaphor for a fluid era that we strive to navigate as best we can amid global disorder and the pressures of academic work. In conclusion, let my wishes set sail for the success of the ASAI Conference: may the event run smoothly, with a strong following wind.

ASAI PRESIDENT

DANIELA MELFA,
UNIVERSITÀ DI MESSINA

FROM THE CSPE DIRECTOR

Since its inception in 1959, the Centro Studi per i Popoli Extra-Europei "Cesare Bonacossa" has been dedicated to promoting the study and understanding of African and Asian societies. This commitment has taken many forms over time, including funding research projects, awarding prizes to distinguished scholars, and providing ongoing support for the study of African and Asian languages. These activities are complemented by a significant publishing output, including the revival of the journal *Africa*, which stands out as a particularly notable achievement. On the occasion of the 8th Conference of the Association for African Studies in Italy (ASAI), entitled "Acque d'Africa. Flussi, destini e contesti" / "Africa and Its Waters: Flows, Fates and Frameworks", we are pleased to have contributed to the organisation of this important academic event, which, for the second time in its history, is hosted by the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Pavia. Our aim remains to foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of African and Asian societies by promoting innovative approaches. We are confident that the papers presented will offer valuable insights into the complexity and richness of the African continent. We extend our best wishes to the speakers and participants, and hope that the Conference will provide an opportunity for rich and stimulating discussion.

CSPE DIRECTOR

MASSIMO ZACCARIA,
UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ACQUE D'AFRICA: FLUSSI, DESTINI E CONTESTI.

ASAI (Associazione per gli Studi Africani in Italia) organizza la sua VIII Conferenza biennale presso l'Università di Pavia. Il titolo della conferenza è "Acque d'Africa. Flussi, destini e contesti". L'obiettivo è riunire gli studiosi africanisti intorno a un tema che taglia trasversalmente questioni cruciali di carattere economico, politico, sociale e ambientale, tanto nei contesti africani del presente quanto in quelli del passato.

Come ogni altra risorsa naturale, l'acqua è sempre socialmente, politicamente e culturalmente mediata. Oltre alla sua necessità per la sopravvivenza umana, la sua importanza rinvia al ruolo svolto nella maggioranza delle attività economiche (pesca, agricoltura, allevamento, estrazione mineraria, ecc.) e come via di comunicazione e scambio commerciale. La mobilità interna è storicamente legata ai corsi d'acqua, come la tratta e le migrazioni verso l'esterno, alle traversate oceaniche e marittime. Una chiave analitica che ponga le acque al centro rimanda altresì alle infrastrutture e tecnologie volte alla loro gestione e distribuzione (pozzi, dighe, canali, tubature, ponti), alla produzione di energia (meccanica o elettrica), all'ineguale accesso a servizi (acqua corrente, acqua potabile), al water-grabbing e ai water-conflicts, e, ovviamente, a questioni legate al cambiamento climatico in molte regioni dell'Africa. La letteratura africanistica ha mostrato il ruolo centrale che la gestione delle acque (in tutte le loro forme) ha avuto e continua ad avere nel riconfigurare reti di scambio e forme di organizzazione politica, dinamiche di conflitto e ineguaglianze sociali, attività economiche e processi di accumulazione della ricchezza. Lo studio di queste idro-socialità consente di mettere in luce come l'acqua contribuisca a plasmare relazioni sociali, economiche e politiche, e come, allo stesso tempo, le azioni umane influenzino i cicli idrici, la distribuzione e la qualità dell'acqua.

L'acqua è inoltre una risorsa simbolica investita di molteplici significati in diversi sistemi religiosi dell'Africa. Particolarmente visibile come elemento rituale di molte società che vivono in ambienti fluviali, lacustri o marini, essa emerge con altrettanta forza anche laddove costituisca una risorsa scarsa. I rituali di invocazione della pioggia, le molteplici cerimonie volte ad ammansire divinità acquatiche, le abluzioni o i battesimi: tutti testimoniano di quanto questo elemento sia stato "buono da pensare" e sacralizzare. Lo studio dei valori simbolici e rituali dell'acqua può offrire una finestra privilegiata per l'analisi di lungo periodo della storia africana, per cogliere le plurali forme di relazione tra umani e non-umani e per interrogarsi sui legami tra rituali, processi di costruzione del sé e relazioni socio-ambientali. La natura ambigua delle acque (purificanti o contaminanti, necessarie o pericolose, controllabili o incontrollabili, eccessive o assenti) le rende un terreno privilegiato di elaborazione di immaginari, visioni del futuro e politiche di gestione degli spazi urbani e rurali.

Inoltre, teorie e concetti, quali liquid society (Bauman), social navigation (Vigh), liquid empire (Ross), liquid imperialism (Dawson), sea powers (Schmitt), utilizzano euristicamente la metafora dell'acqua, così come lo spatial turn e l'oceanic turn hanno introdotto configurazioni spaziali incentrate sull'elemento fluviale, lacustre o marino e molte lingue africane usano metafore "liquide" per leggere il mondo. Di acqua è piena anche la terminologia della ricerca, che si tratti di questioni metodologiche ("fonti", "fondi d'archivio", "scandagliare") o di espressioni figurate ("scorrere del tempo", "correnti di pensiero", "flussi", "marea umana", "ondata di protesta", "lavoro sommerso"). L'uso di queste espressioni consente spesso di cogliere la dinamicità delle società africane, i flussi di persone, idee e merci che hanno connesso storicamente le società africane al resto del mondo e i modi attraverso cui persone in ineguali posizioni di potere navigano i propri contesti sociali.

AFRICA AND ITS WATERS: FLOWS, FATES AND FRAMEWORKS.

ASAI (Associazione per gli Studi Africani in Italia, Association for African Studies in Italy) organises its 8th Conference at the University of Pavia. The Conference is titled “Africa and Its Waters: Flows, Fates and Frameworks” and it aims at gathering researchers on a theme that encompasses key issues in fields such as economy, politics, society, and the environment, in our times, like in the past.

Water, like any other natural resource, is socially, politically, and culturally mediated. In addition to being fundamental to human survival, water plays a role in most economic activities (fishing, agriculture, animal husbandry, mining), in commerce, and in communication more broadly intended. Internal mobility is historically connected to waterways, while oceanic and maritime crossings have defined external migrations, be they voluntary or forced. Placing waters at the centre provides an analytical key to study infrastructures and technologies involved in water management and distribution (wells, dams, channels, pipelines, bridges), as much as the production of energy (mechanical or electric), the unequal access to services (tap water, drinkable water), water-grabbing, water conflicts, and climate change and its consequences on various regions of Africa. Scientific literature has shown time and time again the central role that water management (in all its forms) has had and keeps having in organising networks of exchange, means of political organisation, conflict dynamics, social inequalities, economic activities, and wealth accumulation. The study of these hydro-socialities highlights water’s contribution to the shaping of social, economic, and political relations. It likewise proves how human actions directly influence water cycles and water quality.

Water is a symbolic resource, too. As such, water means much in various religious systems of Africa. Indeed, water constitutes a particularly visible ritual element not only in many societies living in riverine, lacustrine, or maritime environments, but also where it is materially scarce. Water has been an element “good to think” and sacralize, most notably in rain-invocation rituals, in ceremonies to appease aquatic deities, in ablutions, and in baptisms. Studying the ritual and symbolic meanings of water offers valuable insights into African history in the *longue durée*. It captures the manifold relations between humans and non-humans. It interrogates the linkages between those very rituals, the creation of the self, society, and the environment. Water’s ambiguous nature is manifest: waters can be purifying, or corrupting; necessary, or dangerous; under control or unchecked; absent, or overflowing. This complexity makes water a privileged theoretical ground to elaborate imaginaries, visions of the future, and policies for the management of rural and urban spaces.

Scholars such as Bauman (liquid society), Vigh (social navigation), Ross (liquid empire), Dawson (liquid imperialism), and Schmitt (sea powers) have found heuristic value in water metaphors, not unlike the “liquid” metaphors of many African languages. The “spatial” and “oceanic” turns have introduced spatial configuration centred on rivers, lakes, and seas, but more generally, academic jargon is imbued with water. Examples abound in methodology (“sources”, “archival fonds”, “untapped sources/archives”) and in figurative speech (“flow of time”, “currents of thought”, “fluxes”, “human tide”, “wave of protest”). These expressions often allow for the representation of the dynamism of African societies, the movement of people, goods, and ideas that have historically connected the continent to the rest of the world, and how people navigate social contexts and unequal positions of power.

LES EAUX D'AFRIQUE: FLUX, DESTINS ET CONTEXTES.

ASAI (Association pour les études africaines en Italie) organise sa VIII^e conférence biennale à l'Université de Pavie. Le titre de la conférence est « Les eaux d'Afrique. Flux, destins et contextes ». L'objectif est de réunir les chercheurs africanistes autour d'un thème transversal concernant des questions cruciales d'ordre économique, politique, social et environnemental, tant dans les contextes africains actuels que dans les contextes africains passés.

Comme toute autre ressource naturelle, l'eau est toujours gérée socialement, politiquement et culturellement. Outre sa nécessité pour la survie humaine, son importance renvoie au rôle qu'elle joue dans la plupart des activités économiques (pêche, agriculture, élevage, exploitation minière, etc.), ainsi qu'en tant que voie de communication et d'échange commercial. La mobilité interne est historiquement liée aux cours d'eau, tout comme les trajets et les migrations vers l'extérieur sont liés aux traversées océaniques et maritimes. Un discours analytique centré sur l'eau renvoie également aux infrastructures et aux technologies destinées à sa gestion et à sa distribution (puits, barrages, canaux, canalisations, ponts), à la production d'énergie (mécanique ou électrique), à l'accès inégal aux services (eau courante, eau potable), au water-grabbing (accaparement de l'eau) et aux water-conflicts (guerre de l'eau), et, bien sûr, aux questions liées au changement climatique dans de nombreuses régions d'Afrique. La littérature africaniste a montré le rôle central que la gestion de l'eau (sous toutes ses formes) a joué et continue de jouer dans la reconfiguration des réseaux d'échange et des formes d'organisation politique, des dynamiques de conflit et des inégalités sociales, des activités économiques et des processus d'accumulation de richesse. L'étude de ces hydro-socialités permet, d'un côté, de mettre en évidence comment l'eau contribue à façonner les relations sociales, économiques et politiques et, de l'autre côté, comment les actions humaines influencent les cycles hydrologiques, la distribution et la qualité de l'eau.

L'eau est également une ressource symbolique investie de multiples significations dans différents systèmes religieux africains. Particulièrement visible en tant qu'élément rituel dans de nombreuses sociétés vivant dans des environnements fluviaux, lacustres ou marins, elle émerge avec autant de force même là où elle constitue une ressource rare. Les rituels d'invocation de la pluie, les multiples cérémonies visant à apaiser les divinités aquatiques, les ablutions ou les baptêmes : tous témoignent de l'importance de cet élément, considéré en tant qu'objet « bon à penser » et à être sacralisé. L'étude des valeurs symboliques et rituelles de l'eau peut représenter un prisme privilégié pour l'analyse à long terme de l'histoire africaine, pour saisir les multiples formes de relation entre les humains et les non-humains et pour questionner les liens entre les rituels, les processus de construction du soi et les relations socio-environnementales. La nature ambiguë de l'eau (purifiante ou contaminante, nécessaire ou dangereuse, contrôlable ou incontrôlable, excessive ou absente) la rend un terrain privilégié pour l'élaboration d'imaginaires, de visions d'avenir et de politiques de gestion des espaces urbains et ruraux.

De surcroît, des théories et des concepts tels que la société liquide (Bauman), la navigation sociale (Vigh), l'empire liquide (Ross), l'impérialisme liquide (Dawson), les puissances maritimes (Schmitt) utilisent de manière heuristique la métaphore de l'eau, tout comme le tournant spatial et le tournant océanique ont introduit des configurations spatiales centrées sur l'élément fluvial, lacustre ou marin, et de nombreuses langues africaines utilisent des métaphores « liquides » pour interpréter le monde. La terminologie de la recherche est également imprégnée d'eau, qu'il s'agisse de questions méthodologiques (« sources », « fonds d'archives », « sonder ») ou d'expressions figuratives (« écoulement du temps », « courants de pensée », « flux », « marée humaine », « vague de protestation »). L'utilisation de ces expressions permet souvent de saisir le dynamisme des sociétés africaines, les flux de personnes, d'idées et de marchandises qui ont historiquement relié les sociétés africaines au reste du monde, et les façons dont des personnes occupant des positions de pouvoir inégales naviguent dans leurs propres contextes sociaux.

TIMETABLE

DAY ONE 01 JUL

9:00
Registration. **AULA MAGNA**

10:00 - 10:30
Opening Address. **AULA MAGNA**
Daniela Melfa, Massimo Zaccaria, Carola Ricci,
Uodelul Chelati Dirar.

10:30 - 12:00
Keynote Lecture
Pierluigi Valsecchi. **AULA MAGNA**

13:30 - 15:30
Session 1

Panel 2.1 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities.
Giovanni Battista Martino, Sara De Simone, Luca Raineri. **AULA E**
Panel 3 The Fluid Dimensions of Digital Media in Africa and the Diaspora. Giovanna Santanera, Alessandro Jedlowski.

AULA GIURIDICO
Panel 4.1 Liquid Urbanism. Re-Thinking African Cities through Water. Riccardo Ciavolella, Giacomo Pozzi. **AULA 4**

Panel 5.1 Governare l'acqua, attraversare l'impero: politiche idriche e agency subalterna nel Corno d'Africa (1855-1991).
Francesca Custodi, Andrea Cellai, Gianluca Bo, Gabriele Rizzi Bastiani. **AULA 6**

Panel 7 Liquid Frontiers. Exploring Historical Trajectories of Informal Cross-Border Trade Along Border Waterways.
Carolina Domina. **AULA A**

Panel 26.1 Everyday Water Stories: The Making of Waterways across Interconnected Maritime Worlds (19th-20th Centuries). Valentina Fusari. **AULA B**

Panel 33 Eau dans les sociétés traditionnelles africaines. Aspects juridiques et politiques. Séraphin Nene Bi Boti. **AULA C**

15:30 - 16:00
Coffee Break.
CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE

16:00 - 18:00
Session 2

Panel 2.2 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities.
Giovanni Battista Martino, Sara De Simone, Luca Raineri. **AULA E**

Panel 4.2 Liquid Urbanism. Re-Thinking African Cities through Water. Riccardo Ciavolella, Giacomo Pozzi. **AULA 4**

Panel 5.2 Governare l'acqua, attraversare l'impero: politiche idriche e agency subalterna nel Corno d'Africa (1855-1991). Francesca Custodi, Andrea Cellai, Gianluca Bo, Gabriele Rizzi Bastiani. **AULA 6**

Panel 8 Water, Diseases, and Health in African History.
Andrea Graf, Max Hufschmidt. **AULA A**

Panel 12 Historicizing the Water-Food-Energy Nexus in Africa. Davide Chinigo, Mario Zamponi. **AULA C**

Panel 26.2 Everyday Water Stories: The Making of Waterways across Interconnected Maritime Worlds (19th-20th Centuries). Valentina Fusari. **AULA B**

18:00 - 19:00

Book presentation. **The Gaboye of Somaliland. The Historical Process of Emancipation and Marginalisation.** Elia Vitturini, 2023. **AULA GRANDE**

21:00 - 22:30
Movie screening. **River Nomads.**
Eric Hahonou, Lotte Pelckmans.
COLLEGIO SPALLANZANI
Via Ugo Foscolo, 17, Pavia.

DAY TWO 02 JUL

08:30 - 10:30
Session 3

Panel 1.1 Sacred Waters: Religions, Ecologies and Transformation in African Contexts.

Alessandra Brivio, Alessandro Gusman. **AULA 4**

Panel 2.3 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities. Giovanni Battista Martino, Sara De Simone, Luca Raineri. **AULA E**

Panel 10 Acque e attività economiche: infrastrutture idriche, agricoltura e sviluppo nei contesti africani (secc. XIX-XX). Gian Luca Podestà, Luciano Maffi. **AULA A**

Panel 21 Parole attraversano gli oceani: pratiche e rappresentazioni condivise. Francesca Declich, Silvia Neposteri. **AULA B**

Panel 23 Infrastrutture dell'acqua, logistiche del potere: idro-socialità, estrattivismo e sovranità in Africa contemporanea. Erika Mattio. **AULA C**

Panel 31 Currents of Labour: African Trade Unionism, National Politics, and Transnational Flows. Daniela Melfa. **AULA 5**

10:30 - 11:00
Coffee Break.
CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE

11:00 - 13:00
Session 4

Panel 1.2 Sacred Waters: Religions, Ecologies and Transformation in African Contexts. Alessandra Brivio, Alessandro Gusman. **AULA 4**

Panel 14 Acque e plastiche d'Africa: mobilità, stagnazione e contaminazioni. Luca Rimoldi, Paola Schierano. **AULA C**

Panel 16 Water Infrastructure in the Anthropocene: Irrigation, Extraction and Power Struggles in Africa's Semi-Arid Lands. Giordano Marmone, Elisabeth Schubiger, Francesca di Matteo. **AULA 6**

Panel 17 Islands, Archipelagos and African Waters: Fluid Perspectives on Islandness, Sustainability and Gender. Martina Giuffrè, Osman Arrobio, Michele Maccari. **AULA A**

Panel 19 Social Fluidity in Stratified Societies.

Paolo Gaibazzi. **AULA 5**

Panel 20 New Intellectual Histories of West Africa.

Gerardo Serra. **AULA B**

14:00 - 17:00
ASAI Members Meeting.
Asai Scholarship for Best PhD Thesis.
Elections of the ASAI executive board.
AULA MAGNA

17:00 - 17:30
Coffee Break.
CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE

17:30 - 18:30
Book presentation. **Living through Crisis by Lake Chad: Violence, Labour and Resources.**
Alessio locchi, 2024.
AULA GRANDE

20:00
Conference Dinner.
HORTI. Lungo Ticino Sforza, 46, Pavia.

The department map is available here

DAY THREE 03 JUL

08:30 - 10:30
Session 5

Panel 11.1 The River Embodies the Border, the Border Embodies the River. Case Studies for an Epistemology of the African Border. Giulia Casentini, Antonio M. Morone. **AULA 4**

Panel 13 Bodies of Water as Analytical Framework for Contemporary African History. Elisa Prosperetti. **AULA A**

Panel 15.1 When Water Becomes Fuel: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Reconfiguration of H2O in African Energy Frontiers. Naoki Naito. **AULA E**

Panel 18 Le rotte dell'acqua: crisi climatica e risposte locali tra Sahel e Corno d'Africa. Lisa Borlotti, Valentina Geraci. **AULA C**

Panel 27 Through Mediterranean Waters: Beyond Eurocentric Narratives. Marta Scaglioni, Jacopo Anderlini. **AULA B**

Panel 29 Flow and Interruption in African Religious and Political Imaginaries. Rosa de Jorio, Daria Trentini. **AULA 5**

10:30 - 11:00
Coffee Break.
CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE

11:00 - 12:30
Keynote Lecture
Jacqueline Goldin. **AULA MAGNA**

14:00 - 16:00
Session 6

Panel 11.2 The River Embodies the Border, the Border Embodies the River. Case Studies for an Epistemology of the African Border. Giulia Casentini, Antonio M. Morone. **AULA 4**

Panel 15.2 When Water Becomes Fuel: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Reconfiguration of H2O in African Energy Frontiers. Naoki Naito. **AULA E**

Panel 22 Giustizia liquida: acque, diritti e relazioni giuridiche in prospettiva africana, internazionale e comparata. Agostina Latino. **AULA A**

Panel 28 Waterways and Their Artisanal Infrastructure: Knowledge and Skills in the Making of Vernacular Transport Systems. Peter Lambertz,

Valerie Hänsch. **AULA B**
Panel 30 Digitalizzare l'oltremare: acque di memoria e correnti di restituzione. Federica Colomo, Alessandro Volterra. **AULA C**

16:00 - 16:30
Coffee Break.
CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE

16:30 - 17:30
Book presentation. **An Anticolonial Development: Race, Schooling, and Emancipation in Twentieth-Century West Africa.** Elisa Prosperetti, 2026. **AULA GRANDE**

Find the detailed
schedule below

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY ONE

WEDNESDAY

01 JULY

9:00

Registration. **AULA MAGNA**

10:00 - 10:30

Opening Address. **AULA MAGNA**

Daniela Melfa (Università di Messina, ASAI President).

Massimo Zaccaria (Università di Pavia, Director of the Centro Studi Popoli Extraeuropei "Cesare Bonacossa").

Carola Ricci (Università di Pavia, Rector's Delegate for Africa and Cooperation).

Uoldelul Chelati Dirar (Università di Macerata, First ASAI President).

10:30 - 12:00

Keynote Lecture. L'eterno ritorno dei capi africani: riflessioni di storia e cultura politica.

Pierluigi Valsecchi (Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Pavia).

Introduced by **Daniela Melfa** (Università di Messina, ASAI President).

AULA MAGNA

13:30 - 15:30

Session 1

Panel 2.1 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities. AULA E

Convenors: Giovanni Battista Martino (Università di Trieste), Sara De Simone (Università di Trento), Luca Raineri (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna).

Chair: Federico Battera (Università di Trieste).

Discussant: Giovanni Battista Martino (Università di Trieste).

- Daisy Musyoka (Università per Stranieri di Perugia). Between Scarcity and Survival: Gendered Vulnerabilities and Water Governance under Climate Extremes in Displacement Contexts in Kenya.
- Emma Minja (The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, Tanzania). Contested Waters, Contested Futures: Hydrosocial Conflict and Governance in Tanzania's Rufiji Basin.
- Verónica Cecilio Chiundila Vico (Universidade de São Paulo), Roberto Paolo Vico (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte), Francisco Fransualdo de Azevedo (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte), Ricardo Ricci Uvinha (Universidade de São Paulo). Tourism Narratives and the Symbolic Construction of Water in Africa: a Study in Limpopo National Park, Mozambique.
- Luca Bussotti (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo). Mozambique 2000–2025: A Country Sinking. Local Institutions, International Partners, and Civil Society Facing a Disaster Waiting to Happen.

Panel 3 The Fluid Dimensions of Digital Media in Africa and the Diaspora. AULA GIURIDICO

Convenors: Giovanna Santanera (Università di Milano-Bicocca), Alessandro Jedlowski (Sciences Po Bordeaux).

- Cinzia Atzeni (Università di Cagliari). Flowing Aspirations: Visual Self-Representation and Digital Storytelling between Africa and Europe.
- Oladimeji Damilare Mujeeb (Université internationale de Rabat). Use of Digital Tools among Migrants on African Migration Routes: Case of Nigerians in Morocco.
- Nicholas Mugabi (Makerere University). Dynamics of Social Media in Migration Decision Making: From departure to thriving of African migrants in the UK.
- Alessandro Jedlowski (Sciences Po Bordeaux). Remediation as Distribution: Nigerian Film Circulation Across Media Formats.

Panel 4.1 Liquid Urbanism. Re-Thinking African Cities through Water. AULA 4

Convenors: Riccardo Ciavolella (CNRS, EHESS), Giacomo Pozzi (Università IULM).

- Ester Botta Somparé (CERFIG). Inégalités environnementales et accès à l'eau à Conakry.
- Divine Kwadjo Ametorgoh (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana). Peri-Urban Water as Liquid Urbanism: Rethinking African Urban Form and Governance from Kumasi.
- Felix Sängler (Universität Leipzig). Infrastructural Becoming and the (Un)Making of the Everyday in Urban Zanzibar.

Panel 5.1 Governare l'acqua, attraversare l'impero: politiche idriche e agency subalterna nel Corno d'Africa (1855-1991). AULA 6

Convenors: Francesca Custodi (Università di Pisa), Andrea Cellai (Università di Pisa), Gianluca Bo (Sapienza Università di Roma), Gabriele Rizzi Bastiani (Roma Tre, University of Warwick).

Chair: Francesca Custodi (Università di Pisa).

Discussant: Maria Stella Rognoni (Università di Firenze).

- Andrea Cellai (Università di Pisa). Disciplinare le acque, monetizzare le campagne: stato, caffè e agency rurale in Etiopia.
- Paolo Borruso (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore). La persistenza della "geopolitica del mare": continuità e rotture nella strategia imperiale e post-imperiale dell'Etiopia.
- Andrea Pisacane (Università di Napoli L'Orientale). Tra idro-egemonia e razionalità collettiva: il caso della Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Etiopia).
- Carlo Contarini (Scuola Normale Superiore). Ethiopian Imperial Continuities: The Contemporaneity of the Quest for Sea Access and Its Narrative.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY ONE WEDNESDAY 01 JULY

13:30 - 15:30

Session 1

Panel 7 Liquid Frontiers. Exploring Historical Trajectories of Informal Cross-Border Trade Along Border Waterways. AULA A

Convenor: Carolina Domina (Università di Pavia).

- Carolina Domina (Università di Pavia). The Alcoholic Frontier: Analysing the Formation of the Assinie Border (Gold Coast/Côte d'Ivoire) through the Movement (Licit and Illicit) of Liquor, 1888/1893.
- Domenico Cristofaro (Università di Bologna). Trading in Water: Mobility, Markets, and Cross-Border Networks in Northern Ghana (1920–1950).
- Isabella Soi (Università di Cagliari). Of Water and Land: the Importance of the Uganda - Kenya Borderland.

Panel 26.1 Everyday Water Stories: The Making of Waterways across Interconnected Maritime Worlds (19th–20th Centuries).

AULA B

Convenor: Valentina Fusari (Università di Torino).

Chair: Karin Pallaver (Università di Bologna).

- Nicola Melis (Università di Cagliari). Negotiating Waterways, Inhabiting Waterstays: Intermediaries and Everyday Port Life in Late Ottoman Hodeida (1872–1914).
- Waleed Redhwan Derhem Al-Aghbari (Università di Pavia). Navi(gating) the Southern Red Sea through Sambouks, Ships, and Steamers: A Waterway for All?
- Massimo Zaccaria (Università di Pavia). Regie agenzie commerciali: l'Etiopia settentrionale e il mondo oltre il mare (1896–1928).
- Samuel Emaha Tsegai (Queen's University Canada). Can the Subaltern Map? Slaves, Labourers, and Peripatetic Guides and the Cartographic Becoming of Ethiopia.

Panel 33 Eau dans les sociétés traditionnelles africaines. Aspects juridiques et politiques. AULA C

Convenor: Séraphin Nene Bi Boti (Université Alassane Ouattara, Centre Africain d'Histoire du Droit des Institutions et des Idées Politiques).

- Monica Cardillo (Université de Nantes). Comment s'est-il construit un droit de l'eau en Afrique sur un malentendu historique?
- Alphonse Zozime Tamekamta (ENS Université de Yaoundé I), Elvire Lemogo Momo (Université de Yaoundé I). L'Eau comme Ressource Politique en Période Électorale dans la Ville de Yaoundé (Cameroun). Enjeux politiques versus enjeux sociaux?
- Séraphin Nene Bi Boti (Université Alassane Ouattara, Centre Africain d'Histoire du Droit des Institutions et des Idées Politiques). Le sceptre et le treillis normatif: essai sur la centralité des eaux dans le pacte communautaire africain précolonial.

15:30 - 16:00

Coffee Break. **CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE**

16:00 - 18:00

Session 2

Panel 2.2 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities. AULA E

Convenors: Giovanni Battista Martino (Università di Trieste), Sara De Simone (Università di Trento), Luca Raineri (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna).

Chair: Sara De Simone (Università di Trento).

Discussant: Luca Raineri (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna).

- Martha Populin (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna). National Laws, Local Governance: A Political Ecology of Pastoralists' Access to Water and Grazing Resources in Ghana.
- Maria Stella Rognoni (Università di Firenze), Mariachiara Boldrini (Università per Stranieri di Perugia). Politics of Scarcity: The Political Ecology of Hydro-Social Conflicts in Ewaso Ng'iro (Laikipia and Samburu, Kenya).
- Valerio Bini (Università di Milano), Alessio Iocchi (Università di Palermo). Water, Trees, Herders. Political Ecology of Socio-Environmental Projects in the Six Forages Reserve (Senegal).

Panel 4.2 Liquid Urbanism. Re-Thinking African Cities through Water. AULA 4

Convenors: Riccardo Ciavolella (CNRS, EHESS), Giacomo Pozzi (Università IULM).

- Simona Bianchi (University of Copenhagen). Re-Thinking Kumasi Through Women's Embodied Waterscapes.
- Valentine Opanga (Universität Bonn). Flows and Frictions: Liquid Urbanism and Vernacular River Care along the Nairobi River.
- Giacomo Pozzi (Università IULM). Castaways of Modernity: An Aquatic History of Atlantic Urbanism: The Case of Mindelo (Cape Verde).

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY ONE WEDNESDAY 01 JULY

16:00 - 18:00

Session 2

Panel 5.2 Governare l'acqua, attraversare l'impero: politiche idriche e agency subalterna nel Corno d'Africa (1855-1991). AULA 6

Convenors: Francesca Custodi (Università di Pisa), Andrea Cellai (Università di Pisa), Gianluca Bo (Sapienza Università di Roma), Gabriele Rizzi Bastiani (Roma Tre, University of Warwick).

Chair: Francesca Custodi (Università di Pisa).

Discussant: Uoldelul Chelati Dirar (Università di Macerata).

- Lucas Orlando Iannuzzi (ISMEO). L'acqua, allora, non era un bene comune.
- Arianna Boccamaello (Scuola Superiore Meridionale). "Ad ogni sorso più vicini": la storia della produzione della birra italiana Melotti, poi Birra Asmara, in Eritrea (1939-1991).
- Gianluca Bo (Università di Roma "La Sapienza"). La gestione delle risorse idriche nell'Etiopia fascista (1935-1941), tra disuguaglianze razziali e limiti del governo coloniale.

Panel 8 Water, Diseases, and Health in African History. AULA A

Convenors: Andrea Graf (Universität Basel), Max Hufschmidt (Universität Basel).

- Ettore Morelli (Università di Pavia). Smallpox Epidemics, Inoculation, and Containment in 18th-century Southern Africa: a Perspective from the Orange River and Kalahari Desert.
- Martina Biondi (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, University of Maryland). Environmental Sanitation, Medical Care, and Water Infrastructures: The Fight Against Malaria in (Post) Colonial Algeria.
- Max Hufschmidt (Universität Basel). Dams and Disease: A Large-scale Development Project in the Highlands of Lesotho and Its Effects on the Health of Highland Communities (1950s-2000s).
- Salvatore Speciale (Università di Messina). A New Invisible Enemy Travelling by Water: Cholera Propagation and Defence in 19th Century Mediterranean Africa.

Panel 12 Historicizing the Water-Food-Energy Nexus in Africa. AULA C

Convenors: Davide Chinigò (Università di Bologna), Mario Zamponi (Università di Bologna).

Chair: Davide Chinigò (Università di Bologna).

Discussant: Mario Zamponi (Università di Bologna).

- Alice Bellagamba (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Where the Line Ends, and the Power Begins: The OMVS, the OMVG, and the Layered Histories of Electrification in Southern Senegal.
- Pietro Fasola (Università di Firenze). Water, Power, and Postcolonial Sovereignty: Kwame Nkrumah, the Volta River Project, and the Political Making of Volta Lake (1957-1966).
- Valentina Acquafredda (Università di Foggia). *Beyond Three Meals a Day*: Food Politics and Agriculture. Transformations in Ethiopia.
- Santina Emanuela Raimondi (Università di Genova, Università di Messina). Environment and Development in the 1980s: Italy's and EEC's Development Cooperation in Ethiopia.

Panel 26.2 Everyday Water Stories: The Making of Waterways across Interconnected Maritime Worlds (19th-20th Centuries). AULA B

Convenor: Valentina Fusari (Università di Torino).

Chair: Karin Pallaver (Università di Bologna).

- Alessandro De Cola (Universität Wien), Giacomo Ghedini (Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico, Fondazione Bruno Kessler). Finding Habashi: Navigating Mixed Identities and Multiple Archives.
- Sara Zanotta (Università di Torino). Anchoring in a New Rud(Khāneh): Iranian-Arab Mixing and Mixedness in the Red Sea Region (19th and 20th Centuries).
- Adnen el Ghali (Università di Torino). Mixity, Mixedness, and Sociability in Aden during the Interwar Period (1918-1939).

18:00 - 19:00

Book presentation

The Gaboye of Somaliland: The Historical Process of Emancipation and Marginalisation.

Elia Vitturini (Università di Milano), 2023.

Presented by **Luca Ciabbari** (Università di Milano), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

21:00 - 22:30

Film screening. **River Nomads**, 42 min.

Eric Hahonou, Lotte Pelckmans.

COLLEGIO SPALLANZANI

Via Ugo Foscolo, 17, Pavia

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY TWO THURSDAY 02 JULY

08:30 - 10:30

Session 3

Panel 1.1 Sacred Waters: Religions, Ecologies and Transformation in African Contexts. AULA 4

Convenors: Alessandra Brivio (Università di Milano-Bicocca), Alessandro Gusman (Università di Torino).

Chair and Discussant: Alessandra Brivio (Università di Milano-Bicocca).

- Pierluigi Valsecchi (Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Pavia). Dwelling Over the Water in Symbiosis with the Gods: Nzulezo (Ghana), a Village on Stilts in Historical Perspective.
- Lisbety Mirabal Diaz (Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara). Omi as Threshold: Òsun, Yemoja, and the Linguistics of Sacred Water in Yoruba Cosmology.
- Pietro Repishti (Université Paris Cité). From Water You Come, and to Water You Shall Return: Materiality and Immateriality in an Urban Purification Ceremony in the Gulf of Guinea (19th Century).
- Claudia Stella Geremia (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia). From Aquatic Spirits to Catholic Saints: Water, Saint Martha, and Afro-Atlantic Religious Re-significations in the Canary Islands (16th–18th centuries).

Panel 2.3 Water Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: Hydro-Politics, Political Ecology, and Gendered Vulnerabilities. AULA E

Convenors: Giovanni Battista Martino (Università di Trieste), Sara De Simone (Università di Trento), Luca Raineri (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna).

Chair: Luca Raineri (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna).

Discussant: Sara De Simone (Università di Trento).

- Giorgio Musso (Roma Tre). Hydropolitics and Self-Determination in the Nile basin: the Case of the Jonglei canal in South Sudan.
- Cristiana Fiamingo (Università di Milano). The Political Ecology of Water Scarcity in South Africa: Conflicts, Governance, and Inequality from Colonialism to the Climate Crisis.
- Matteo Grilli (Università di Pisa). Promise of Development or Fears of Colonial (and Neo-Colonial) Exploitation? A History of the Opposition to the Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique (1968–1975).

Panel 10 Acque e attività economiche: infrastrutture idriche, agricoltura e sviluppo nei contesti africani (secc. XIX-XX). AULA A

Convenors: Gian Luca Podestà (Università di Parma), Luciano Maffi (Università di Parma).

Chair: Gian Luca Podestà (Università di Parma).

Discussant: Benedetta Maria Crivelli (Università di Parma).

- Luciano Maffi (Università di Parma). Competenze scientifiche e sviluppo agricolo. Acqua, colture ed economia nella Somalia coloniale.
- Gian Luca Podestà (Università di Parma). L'impero autarchico. Agricoltura e bonifiche in Somalia tra le due guerre mondiali.
- Maurizio Romano (Università Telematica Pegaso). Impresa pubblica italiana, risorse energetiche e sviluppo africano. Tecnologie offshore e impianti idroelettrici tra anni sessanta e ottanta.
- Manuel Vaquero Piñeiro (Università di Perugia). Ambiente naturale e allevamento nell'Africa orientale italiana. Una difficile coesistenza.
- Yasmina Yakoubi (CREAD), Ahmed Zakane (CREAD), Cherif Aoudjit (PNUD Algérie). Mutations socio-économiques des espaces ruraux: cas des zones steppiques de la Wilaya de Laghouat (Algérie).

Panel 21 Parole attraversano gli oceani: pratiche e rappresentazioni condivise. AULA B

Convenors: Francesca Declich (Università di Urbino Carlo Bo), Silvia Neposteri (Università di Milano).

- Jessica Falconi (Universidade de Lisboa). Tra Atlantico nero e Oceano Indiano: connessioni transoceaniche in "O outro pé da sereia" di Mia Couto.
- Francesca Declich (Università di Urbino Carlo Bo). Diffusione dell'islam e le donne nelle confraternite nell'Africa dell'Oceano Indiano.
- Marco Leotta (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Le culte d'Ifé et la "religion des Òrisha" entre le Golfe de Guinée et les Amériques. Pratiques et savoirs en mouvement dans les espaces transatlantiques contemporains.
- Cecilia Mignanti (Università di Pavia), Michael Karani (University of Dar es Salaam). The New Art of Writing on Clay-Dung Walls: Arusa Maasai Women's Emerging Literacy.
- Silvia Neposteri (Università di Milano). Lowing and Divining: Magical Animals Across the Indian Ocean Worlds and the Arabico-Malagasy Tradition (Southeastern Madagascar).

Panel 23 Infrastrutture dell'acqua, logistiche del potere: idro-socialità, estrattivismo e sovranità in Africa contemporanea. AULA C

Convenor: Erika Mattio (Universidad Complutense de Madrid).

- Amarilli Varesio (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Estrattivismo energetico, accesso disomogeneo e proprietà amorali dell'acqua tra gli Acholi, in Uganda.
- Giamaica Roberta Mannara (Missione Etnologica Italiana in Ghana). Idro-politiche estrattive e percezioni dell'acqua nel Ghana occidentale.
- Nico Covan (Sciences Po Bordeaux). Producing Power without Delivery: Water Infrastructure, Energy Constraints, and Political Legitimacy in Ethiopia.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY TWO **THURSDAY** **02 JULY**

08:30 - 10:30

Session 3

Panel 31 Currents of Labour: African Trade Unionism, National Politics, and Transnational Flows. AULA 5

Convenor: Daniela Melfa (Università di Messina).

Discussant: Stefano Bellucci (IISH Amsterdam, Universiteit Leiden).

- Andreas Admasie (IISH Amsterdam). The Labour Movement in Imperial and Revolutionary Ethiopia: Ascent and High Tide.
- Walter Gam Nkwi (Universiteit Leiden). Annihilation of Trade Unions in Cameroon: The Domestic Servants Union of Nigeria and Cameroons (DSUNC), 1949-1972.
- Rubbin C. T. Danquah (Università di Pavia). The Politics of Worker Unity: State Corporatism, Labour Dissent, and the Ghana Trades Union Congress, 1957-1971.
- Silvia Cirillo (Università di Urbino Carlo Bo). Domestic Work, Gender, and Trade Union Participation in Contemporary Tanzania: Continuities and Ruptures across Colonial and Postcolonial Dynamics.
- Stefano Bellucci (IISH Amsterdam, Universiteit Leiden). Pan-African and International African Trade Unionism: Representation or Class Struggle?

10:30 - 11:00

Coffee Break. **CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE**

11:00 - 13:00

Session 4

Panel 1.2 Sacred Waters: Religions, Ecologies and Transformation in African Contexts. AULA 4

Convenors: Alessandra Brivio (Università di Milano-Bicocca), Alessandro Gusman (Università di Torino).

- Cyprian Nanji (University of Buea). The Spirituality of Water in South-West Cameroon: Coastal Rituals, Taboos and Environmental Ethics.
- Erika Grasso (Università di Torino), Hassan Kochore (Independent researcher). Sacred Flows: Water, Ritual Topography and Adaptation in Gabra and Borana Pastoralism.
- Marco Fomasaro (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Navigating New Waters: Transformations in Human-Environment Relations under Uncertainty in Southern Benin.
- Federica Toldo (Università di Udine). From Kyanda's point of view.
- Guido Nicolas Zingari (Università di Torino). The Challenge of Water Management between Sacred Springs, Development Policies, and Environmental Crisis: The Case of Kongwa District, Central Tanzania.

Panel 14 Acque e plastiche d'Africa: mobilità, stagnazione e contaminazioni. AULA C

Convenors: Luca Rimoldi (Università di Milano-Bicocca), Paola Schierano (Università di Milano).

- Abdoulaye Somparé (IRD, CERFIG, Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry). Les pratiques et les enjeux de l'économie politique de la gestion des ordures dans les quartiers littoraux de Conakry.
- Luca Rimoldi (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Valore e circolazione della plastica nella discarica di Mbeubeuss (Dakar).
- Paola Schierano (Università di Milano). Mayotte e il "diluvio" di plastica. Crisi idrica e gestione insostenibile dei rifiuti in un dipartimento francese d'oltremare.

Panel 16 Water Infrastructure in the Anthropocene: Irrigation, Extraction and Power Struggles in Africa's Semi-Arid Lands. AULA 6

Convenors: Giordano Marmone (Université de Strasbourg), Elisabeth Schubiger (Université de Fribourg), Francesca di Matteo (IFRA Nairobi).

- Arthur Bostvironnois (Université Lumière Lyon 2, UMR EVS, IRG). Pipelines, Springs and Irrigation Frontiers: Water Infrastructure, Land Control and Hybrid Authority in Kenya's Amboseli Rangelands.
- Elisabeth Schubiger (Université de Fribourg). Governing the Liquid Commons: Fluid Dispossessions in Northern Kenya.
- Francesca di Matteo (IFRA Nairobi). The Building of a Water Pipeline between International Norms and Local Land Politics.
- Gregory Akall (DLCI Kenya). Irrigation, Power, and Pastoralist Futures in Turkana, Kenya.
- Faida Mnzolizoli Zachari (University of Dodoma). Balancing Livelihood Gains and Groundwater Sustainability: The Rise of Irrigation in Semi-Arid Kongwa, Tanzania.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY TWO THURSDAY 02 JULY

11:00 - 13:00

Session 4

Panel 17 Islands, Archipelagos and African Waters: Fluid Perspectives on Islandness, Sustainability and Gender. AULA A

Convenors: Martina Giuffrè (Università di Parma), Osman Arrobbio (Università di Parma), Michele Maccari (Università di Parma).

- Scott Dunleavy (University of Cambridge). Centrality of the Sea: Subsistence, Identity and Society in the Bazaruto Archipelago.
- Martina Giuffrè (Università di Parma), Michele Maccari (Università di Parma). Islands at the Crossroads: Gender, Community Practices, and Sustainable Tourism in Cabo Verde.
- Fernando Medina (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), Paula Chirino (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), Lidia Romero (Department of Geography, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria). Islandness, Water Scarcity and Education for Resilience: Droughts, Heatwaves and Risk Management in Gran Canaria (African-Atlantic Context).
- Christina Sasajiannis (THROUGH WATERS Project). Islandness as a Fluid Space: Water, Art and Processes of Inclusion in a Mediterranean Archipelagic Context.
- Wendy del Pino Ojeda Naranjo (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), Lidia Esther Romero Martín (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria). Island Agricultural Terraces as a Tourist Resource: Mapping of Agritourism Suitability and Policy Review in La Gomera (Canary Islands).

Panel 19 Social Fluidity in Stratified Societies. AULA 5

Convenor: Paolo Gaibazzi (Università di Bologna).

- Matilde Moro (Università di Siena). Liquid Metaphors: Genealogies and Limits of the Notion of "Fluidity" in the Field of Gender and Sexuality in Abidjan.
- Marco Gardini (Università di Pavia). The Hidden Dam of Status Distinctions: a View from the Highlands of Madagascar.
- Pietro Fornasetti (Institut des Mondes Africains). Immanent Authority: How Chieftaincy Navigates the State in the Western Sahel (Centre-Est, Burkina Faso).

Panel 20 New Intellectual Histories of West Africa. AULA B

Chair and Convenor: Gerardo Serra (University of Manchester).

Discussant: Domenico Cristofaro (Università di Bologna), Elisa Prosperetti (Nanyang Technological University Singapore).

- Noble Kofi Nazzah (University of Manchester). Towards the Overlapping Magisteria: Modern Medicine and African Herbalism in Postcolonial Ghana, 1958–present.
- Josephine Nevill (University of Manchester). Utopian Economics and Regional Thinking: A Gambian Trade Unionist's Plan for a West African Social Insurance Scheme.
- Gerardo Serra (University of Manchester). A Playful Worldmaking: Language Games and Student Magazines in Postcolonial Ghana.

14:00 - 17:00

ASAI Members Meeting.
Asai Scholarship for Best PhD Thesis.
Elections of the ASAI executive board.

AULA MAGNA

17:00 - 17:30

Coffee Break. **CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE**

17:30 - 18:30

Book presentation

Living through Crisis by Lake Chad: Violence, Labour and Resources.

Alessio Iocchi (Università di Palermo), 2024.

Presented by **Luca Puddu** (Università di Palermo), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

20:00

Conference Dinner.

Horti. Lungo Ticino Sforza, 46, Pavia.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY THREE

FRIDAY
03 JULY

08:30 - 10:30

Session 5

Panel 11.1 The River Embodies the Border, the Border Embodies the River. Case Studies for an Epistemology of the African Border.

AULA 4

Convenors: Giulia Casentini (Università di Roma Tor Vergata), Antonio M. Morone (Università di Pavia).

Discussant: Ettore Morelli (Università di Pavia).

- Aurora Massa (Università di Perugia). Flowing Borders: Water, Mobility, and Belonging along the Mereb River.
- Aron Andemichael Habtezion (independent researcher, Kampala, Uganda), Merhawi Yemane (independent researcher, Kampala, Uganda). Mereb River and Its Prospective Role from Centre of Contention to Cooperation.
- Antonio M. Morone (Università di Pavia). Lakkus River Border in the Spanish–French Protectorate of Morocco: A Postcolonial Reading.

Panel 13 Bodies of Water as Analytical Framework for Contemporary African History. AULA A

Convenor: Elisa Prosperetti (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore).

- Elisa Prosperetti (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore). Reading Decolonization as a Black Atlantic Emancipation.
- Caterina Scalvedi (Freie Universität Berlin). Pedagogies Coast to Coast: the Mediterranean Trajectories of Educational Discourses and Practices in Italian Libya.
- Carlotta Marchi (University of Oxford). Making the Desert Legible: Water, Knowledge, and State Power in Libya's Sahara (1950's).
- Assita Kone NefeRâ (University of London). Pensare l'idropolitica Africana: L'Acqua come Quadro Analitico per il Rinascimento Africano.
- Arianna Lissoni (University of the Witwatersrand). Flows of Solidarity: Theorizing Reggio–Emilia–South African Cooperation from the Struggle Against Apartheid to the Present.

Panel 15.1 When Water Becomes Fuel: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Reconfiguration of H2O in African Energy Frontiers. AULA E

Convenor: Naoki Naito (Tokushima University).

Discussant: Marco Gardini (Università di Pavia).

- Naoki Naito (Tokushima University). Governing Heat: Geothermal Energy Development and the Reconfiguration of Space in Kenya's Rift Valley.
- Churchill Otieno Saoko (University of Agriculture and Technology Jomo Kenyatta). Balancing Water Demand and Energy Needs: Assessing the Water–Energy Nexus in Hydrogen Production.
- Maho Kitao (Kyoto University). Patchwork Governance in Renewable Energy Frontiers: Community Liaison Officers and the Reconfiguration of Development Aid in Northern Kenya.
- Nobuko Nishizaki (Professional College of Arts and Tourism). Distant Mega–Hydropower, Nearby Biomass: Energy Governance and Gender in Ethiopia.

Panel 27 Through Mediterranean Waters: Beyond Eurocentric Narratives. AULA B

Convenors: Marta Scaglioni (Università di Milano–Bicocca), Jacopo Anderlini (Università di Parma).

Discussant: Gabriele Montalbano (Università di Bologna).

- Stefano Barone (University of Central Lancashire). The Mediterranean through Hargra Music: Scene Articulations, Symbolic Labour, and Migrant Heritage.
- Francesca Goletti (University of Central Lancashire). Thin Islands, Thick Borders? An Archipelago Amid the Tides of the Mediterranean.
- Lucia Martines (Università di Genova, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia). From Venice and Tunis to EU Borders: Mobility and International Relations in the Mediterranean.
- Massimiliano Fantò (Università di Milano–Bicocca). Infrastructural Afterlives: Suez, Lessepsian Migrations, and the Blue Crab in the Mediterranean.
- Luca Tedeschi (Université Montpellier Paul Valéry). Beyond Colonial Marginalization? The Young Tunisians' Mediterranean Projection.

Panel 18 Le rotte dell'acqua: crisi climatica e risposte locali tra Sahel e Corno d'Africa. AULA C

Convenors: Lisa Borlotti (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS), Valentina Geraci (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS).

- Marco D'Amato (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS), Maria Grazia Saccà (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS). Lake Boye restoration tra locale e globale: governance comunitaria dell'acqua tra Green Legacy e Piano Mattei.
- Marisa Cocchiario (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS). Il bacino del lago Chad. Governance partecipativa adattiva.
- Valentina Geraci (Centro Studi AMIstaDeS APS). Acqua, cooperazione internazionale e mediazioni diasporiche Italia–Senegal. Tra architettura normativa e pratiche territoriali.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY THREE

FRIDAY
03 JULY

08:30 - 10:30

Session 5

Panel 29 Flow and Interruption in African Religious and Political Imaginaries. Discussant: Nancy Rose Hunt (University of Florida).

AULA 5

Convenors: Rosa de Jorio (University of North Florida) and Daria Trentini (Drake University).

- Daria Trentini (Drake University). Histories in Flow: Onowa and the Politics of Disappearance in Mozambique.
- Monica Cecilia Labonia (Université du Sine Saloum El-Hâdj Ibrahima Niass), Mamadou Lamine Sane (Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar). Le puits comme matrice de pouvoir: fondation, légitimation et crise dans les sociétés soninké et manding (VIIIe–XIXe siècles).
- Rosa de Jorio (University of North Florida). Watering the State: Water, Power, and Political Imagination in Mali.
- Daniela Ricci (Université de Nanterre). Water, Temporalities, and Cinematic Imaginaries in Akomfrah and Mambéty.
- Luca Pes (Università di Trento), Ibrahima Poudiougou (Norwegian University of Life Sciences). Gold Dredging in Bancoumana (Mali): Water, Political Authority, and Extraction.

10:30 - 11:00

Coffee Break. **CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE**

11:00 - 12:30

Keynote Lecture. Diamonds on the Soles of our Feet: Science at the River's Edge: Whose Knowledge Counts?

Jacqueline Goldin (Extra-ordinary Associate Professor of Anthropology and Water Sciences, Centre of UNESCO Chair in Groundwater Earth Sciences, University of the Western Cape, and Director Ecolink).

Introduced by **Marco Gardini** (Università di Pavia).

AULA MAGNA

14:00 - 16:00

Session 6

Panel 11.2 The River Embodies the Border, the Border Embodies the River. Case Studies for an Epistemology of the African Border.

AULA 4

Convenors: Giulia Casentini (Università di Roma Tor Vergata), Antonio M. Morone (Università di Pavia).

Discussant: Ettore Morelli (Università di Pavia).

- Anastasia Lorito (Sapienza Università di Roma). Fluid Border: The Role of Customary Chiefs along the Congo River.
- Andrea Ceriana Mayneri (CNRS, IMAF). "The Prophets That Come from the River": Prophetism, Messianism, and Anti-Colonialism along the Banks of the Ubangi (Congo/Ubangi-Shari, 1937–1951).
- Giulia Casentini (Università di Roma Tor Vergata). Bordering Practices: Colonial Impositions and Contemporary Claims on the Oti River (Ghana–Togo Border).

Panel 15.2 When Water Becomes Fuel: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Reconfiguration of H2O in African Energy Frontiers. AULA E

Convenor: Naoki Naito (Tokushima University).

Discussant: Marco Gardini (Università di Pavia).

- Yohei Miyauchi (Takushoku University). The Post-Apartheid Techno-Politics and Ecological Modernisation of Green Hydrogen in South Africa.
- Kana Miyamoto (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). Haunted Harbour: Hydrogen Development and Genocide Memory on Namibia's Southern Coast.
- Junko Maruyama (Tsuda University). When the Sun Makes Water: Solar Infrastructure and Social Relations among the San in Central Kalahari.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY THREE

FRIDAY
03 JULY

14:00 - 16:00

Session 6

Panel 22 Giustizia liquida: acque, diritti e relazioni giuridiche in prospettiva africana, internazionale e comparata. AULA A

Convenor: Agostina Latino (Università di Camerino).

Chair: Agostina Latino (Università di Camerino).

- Sabrina Praduroux (Università di Torino). L'acqua nel prisma dei diritti collettivi.
- Agostina Latino (Università di Camerino). Acqua contesa, pace possibile: il diritto internazionale nei bacini africani.
- M. Cristina Rulli (Politecnico Milano). Agricoltura limitata dall'acqua in Africa: sensibilità ai cambiamenti ambientali globali degli investimenti in terreni agricoli.
- Carla Maria Gulotta (Università di Milano-Bicocca). Flussi di investimenti sostenibili per promuovere il diritto all'acqua in Africa.

Panel 28 Waterways and Their Artisanal Infrastructure: Knowledge and Skills in the Making of Vernacular Transport Systems. AULA B

Convenors: Peter Lambertz (Université Libre de Bruxelles, MOBEKA), Valerie Hänsch (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München).

- Paul Sprute (Universiteit Gent, Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung). Bridging a History of Riverine and Maritime Transport: How the Kru Navigate the Implications of Shifting Transport Regimes between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.
- Simon Marijsse (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement Montpellier). Riverine Mobilities and Mobile Machines: Underwater Mining in Eastern DR Congo.
- Peter Lambertz (Université Libre de Bruxelles, MOBEKA). More than Makeshift: How Baleinières and their Artisanal Infrastructure Reconfigure Congo's Inland Waterways.
- Valerie Hänsch (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München). The Re-appropriation of the Dammed River Nile: Boat-building and the Creation of New Water Ways along the Fourth Nile Cataract, Sudan.

Panel 30 Digitalizzare l'oltremare: acque di memoria e correnti di restituzione. AULA C

Convenors: Federica Colomo (Roma Tre), Alessandro Volterra (Roma Tre).

Discussant: Valentina Fusari (Università di Torino).

- Federica Colomo (Roma Tre), Alessandro Volterra (Roma Tre). Idrografie della memoria coloniale: il caso dell'Archivio Somalia e degli ascari eritrei.
- Lorenzo Declich (ISMEO). Le collezioni fotografiche del colonialismo italiano (1861-1960), una sperimentazione digitale di citizen science.
- Tiziana Pasciuto (Università di Torino). Devozioni sommerse: la digitalizzazione degli ex voto coloniali tra visibilità frammentata e flussi di memoria.
- Filippo Petrucci (Università di Genova). Condividere per raccontare un passato scomparso: tre archivi parigini legati al mondo ebraico nordafricano.

16:00 - 16:30

Coffee Break. **CORTILE DELLE MAGNOLIE**

16:30 - 17:30

Book presentation

An Anticolonial Development: Race, Schooling, and Emancipation in Twentieth-Century West Africa,

Elisa Prosperetti (Nanyang Technological University Singapore), 2026.

Presented by **Gerardo Serra** (University of Manchester), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

KEYNOTE LECTURE

L'ETERNO RITORNO DEI CAPI AFRICANI: RIFLESSIONI DI STORIA E CULTURA POLITICA

Pierluigi Valsecchi

Scuola Superiore Meridionale di Napoli, Università di Pavia.

Introduced by **Daniela Melfa** (Università di Messina, ASAI President).

ABSTRACT

La connessione acqua-terra, indagata sotto aspetti molteplici da questa VIII Conferenza ASAI, chiama in causa le storie del rapporto attuale e storico fra società africane, spazio e politica, convocando al tavolo di discussione le cosiddette autorità consuetudinarie o tradizionali. Questa definizione generica copre una serie estremamente variegata di istituti presenti in un gran numero di paesi, in diversi gradi di radicamento, riconoscimento e rilevanza, oltre che di continuità più o meno diretta con le istituzioni politiche precedenti l'occupazione europea e ridefinite nel quadro coloniale.

Depotenziata e spesso marginalizzata dai processi di decolonizzazione e indipendenza, a lungo si è ritenuto che, nonostante i suoi fallimenti e le sue crisi, lo stato post-coloniale sarebbe stato in grado, in tempi ragionevoli, di porre fine al ruolo di queste "reliquie" di un passato premoderno, sostituendo le competenze dei capi nel governo locale e rendendone progressivamente obsoleto il prestigio e il rilievo sociale, complici le oggettive trasformazioni socio-economiche e culturali che hanno interessato le società del continente nel corso del passato settantennio.

Ma così non è stato, almeno fino ad oggi. Anzi, le "autorità tradizionali" sono emerse fra le voci rilevanti nel contesto dei processi di democratizzazione degli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, inaugurando quella che è stata definita una vera e propria "rinascita". Se la definizione stessa della categoria di "autorità consuetudinarie" presuppone una dimensione dicotomica di "tradizione" rispetto a un contesto di "modernità" politico-istituzionale, dobbiamo osservare che oggi i capi tradizionali rappresentano in molti paesi un fenomeno estremamente rilevante nel discorso della modernità africana, rurale come urbana, con tutte le implicazioni e contraddizioni che tale constatazione comporta. Basti considerare a questo proposito il rapporto se non altro ambiguo fra, da un lato, uguaglianza di diritti sostanziali in contesti di democrazia formale e, dall'altro, asserzioni di sovranità privilegiata sulla base di diritti ancestrali fondati su "sangue" e ereditarietà.

Anziché stupirsi della "resilienza" delle autorità tradizionali, è piuttosto necessario interrogarsi sulla loro natura e posizione peculiare nel contesto della storia e della cultura politica di ogni singola società in questione. Ciò è necessario per valutare la reale portata e il significato del linguaggio delle autorità tradizionali nelle dinamiche di potere e nelle 'costituzioni sostanziali' di molti paesi africani. E ciò condurrà probabilmente a constatare che il segreto dell'eccezionale capacità di sopravvivenza delle "autorità consuetudinarie" nel corso del secolo passato, fronteggiando con successo sfide radicali di diverso tipo, è consistito appunto nella loro abilità nell'interpretare ed esprimere le dinamiche della propria comunità di riferimento, cambiando né più né meno quanto questa cambia, ma rimanendo sé stesse, in una dimensione di interazione costante con lo stato e nello stesso tempo di alterità sostanziale.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

THE ETERNAL RETURN OF AFRICAN CHIEFS: REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Pierluigi Valsecchi

Scuola Superiore Meridionale di Napoli, Università di Pavia.

Introduced by **Daniela Melfa** (Università di Messina, ASAI President).

ABSTRACT

The connection between water and land, explored from a wide variety of perspectives at this 8th ASAI Conference, brings into focus current and historical relationships between society, space, and politics, calling Chiefship to the fore. The broad definition "customary authorities" (or "traditional authorities") covers an extremely diverse range of institutions found in a large number of countries, varying in their degree of establishment, recognition, and significance, as well as in their more or less direct continuity with the political institutions that predated European occupation and were redefined within the colonial framework.

The "customary authorities" emerged from the processes of decolonisation and independence in a weakened and marginalised state. It was long assumed that, despite its failures and crises, the post-colonial state would be able to end the role of these 'relics' of a pre-modern past within a reasonable timeframe by replacing the chiefs' powers in local government. Meanwhile, the more general process of societal and cultural change would render their prestige and social standing obsolete.

However, this has not been the case until now. Indeed, traditional authorities resurfaced as significant voices in the context of the democratisation processes of the 1990s, ushering in what has been described as a veritable "renaissance". While the very definition of the category of 'traditional authorities' presupposes a dichotomy between 'tradition' and 'modernity', today, in many countries, traditional leaders play a significant role in the discourse of African modernity, both rural and urban, with all the implications and contradictions that this entails. In this regard, one need only consider the ambiguous relationship between substantive equality of rights in contexts of formal democracy and claims of privileged sovereignty based on ancestral rights grounded in blood and heredity.

Rather than being surprised by the "resilience" of traditional authorities, their nature and unique position must be examined within the context of each society's history and political culture. This is crucial for understanding the true scope and significance of traditional authorities' language in the dynamics of power and the 'material constitutions' of many African countries. This will likely lead to the realisation that the secret of the exceptional survival capacity of "customary authorities" over the past century — successfully facing radical challenges of various kinds — has been their ability to interpret and express the dynamics of their own communities. They have changed no more and no less than the communities themselves, whilst remaining true to themselves in a dimension of constant interaction with the state and, at the same time, substantial otherness.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

DIAMONDS ON THE SOLES OF OUR FEET. SCIENCE AT THE RIVER'S EDGE: WHOSE KNOWLEDGE COUNTS?

Jacqueline Goldin

Extra-ordinary Associate Professor of Anthropology and Water Sciences, Centre of UNESCO Chair in Groundwater Earth Sciences, University of the Western Cape and Director Ecolink.

Introduced by **Marco Gardini** (Università di Pavia).

ABSTRACT

When Koyo Kouoh, curator of the Venice Biennale 2026, speaks of art as a "polyphonous assembly... convening and communing in convivial collectivity," she is describing something far broader than aesthetics. She is describing a fundamental repositioning of who holds knowledge, who produces meaning, and whose experience counts as evidence. This keynote takes that same provocation and carries it to the rivers of Kenya - and from there, to a wider argument about science, democracy, and the urgent, unfinished project of decolonising knowledge itself. At 7 a.m. in Narok County, Kenya, young farmers, teachers, and students gather beside a stream with test kits in their hands. They dip, they shake, they record. In this quiet act, something profound is happening: knowledge is being made by the people it is about. Not extracted from them. Not administered to them. Made by them. This is citizen science - but to call it only a scientific method is to miss what it truly is: a philosophy of belonging, and a form of social justice. Across Africa, water is both a lifeline and a fault line. Access to clean water tracks almost perfectly onto existing maps of inequality - maps drawn, in no small part, by colonial administrations that valued extraction over stewardship, and outside expertise over local knowledge. Those maps have not disappeared. They persist in the architecture of research institutions, in funding flows, in the language of academic publishing, and in the assumption - still stubbornly present - that valid knowledge travels from the Global North southward, and not the reverse. The decisions shaping water access across Kenya are still routinely made far from the communities affected. In the absence of local monitoring infrastructure, vast data deserts form - territories where pollution goes unmeasured, contamination accumulates unseen, and communities have no numbers with which to demand accountability. Without data, there is no leverage. Without leverage, there is no justice. Citizen science changes this equation. But this keynote argues that its significance reaches well beyond water quality. When we shift from data about people to data by people, we are not simply improving the accuracy of environmental monitoring. We are making an epistemological claim: that knowledge is not the sole property of institutions, laboratories, and credentialed experts. We are insisting that people who live by rivers understand something about those rivers that no satellite or government sensor can capture. We are recognising that the production of knowledge is itself a political act - and that democratising it is a form of liberation. To decolonise knowledge is not merely to add African voices to existing frameworks. It is to question which frameworks count, who designed them, and in whose interests they operate.

Drawing on multi-year work in South Africa and Kenya on participatory water monitoring, this keynote traces how community members became co-investigators, how locally gathered data entered policy conversations previously closed to them, and how the act of measurement itself transformed the relationship between citizens and the state. These are not simply heartwarming stories of empowerment. They are evidence of a structural shift - one in which scientific authority is redistributed, in which Africa's communities move from the margins of knowledge production to its centre, and in which social justice and scientific rigour are revealed to be not competing values, but deeply interdependent ones. The stakes extend beyond the continent. In an era of cascading global crises - ecological, democratic, epistemic - the question of who produces knowledge, and for whom, has never been more urgent. The dominant model of expertise, concentrated in a small number of institutions and nations, is failing. Not because the scientists within it lack skill, but because the challenges we face are too vast, too local, too entangled with lived human experience to be solved by expertise alone. Citizen science is not a supplement to that model. It is an alternative architecture for knowing - one built on solidarity rather than hierarchy, on presence rather than distance. The title of this keynote borrows from Paul Simon's luminous image - diamonds on the soles of your feet, the riches you carry without knowing it. Across Africa, millions of people walk daily along rivers, through fields, between communities, carrying an observational wealth that colonial and post-colonial science has consistently failed to recognise or harvest. This keynote is an argument for changing that: for building the infrastructures to receive that knowledge, and for creating the political and institutional conditions in which it can reshape the world. This is not a talk about citizen science as a tool. It is a talk about who science is for - and about what becomes possible when the answer finally changes.

COLLATERAL EVENTS

BOOK PRESENTATIONS

DAY ONE

01 JULY, WEDNESDAY

18:00 - 19:00

The Gaboye of Somaliland. The Historical Process of Emancipation and Marginalisation.

Elia Vitturini (Università di Milano), 2023.

Presented by **Luca Ciabarri** (Università di Milano), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

DAY TWO

02 JULY, THURSDAY

17:30 - 18:30

Living through Crisis by Lake Chad: Violence, Labour and Resources.

Alessio Iocchi (Università di Palermo), 2024.

Presented by **Luca Puddu** (Università di Palermo), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

DAY THREE

03 JULY, FRIDAY

16:30 - 17:30

An Anticolonial Development: Race, Schooling, and Emancipation in Twentieth-Century West Africa.

Elisa Prosperetti (Nanyang Technological University Singapore), 2026.

Presented by **Gerardo Serra** (University of Manchester), **Ettore Morelli** (Università di Pavia).

AULA GRANDE

MOVIE SCREENING

[WATCH THE TRAILER](#)

DAY ONE

01 JULY, WEDNESDAY

21:00 - 22:30

River Nomads – Eric Hahonou, Lotte Pelckmans

42 min, Spormedia productions.

This movie documents internal African migrations and follows a group of about 200 (semi-)nomadic fishermen in their yearly seasonal/circular migration towards their fishing grounds in Mali and Niger. Amongst the many fishermen that inhabit the riverbanks and islands scattered along the 4200 kilometres of the Niger River, the Kebbawa stand out for their peculiar transnational nomadic lifestyle. The central question is why they are giving up this lifestyle, and the answers point towards multiple factors ranging from illiteracy to corruption, overfishing, shifts in religion and climate change.

COLLEGIO SPALLANZANI

[VIEW LOCATION DETAILS HERE](#)

CONFERENCE DINNER

Horti is a 35,000 sqm park that the Almo Collegio Borromeo in Pavia has reclaimed as a public space where natural habitats, contemporary art, cultural reflection, ethical commitment, equity, and social inclusion intertwine. Once dedicated to cultivation for the college students, this area is now a place of sociality, creativity, and the weaving of knowledge, rooted in the belief that beauty possesses a redeeming and pedagogical power.

HORTI

[VIEW LOCATION DETAILS HERE](#)



PANELS OVERVIEW

BELOW IS THE SUMMARY OF THE PANELS AND PAPERS
ACCEPTED FOR THE 2026 CONFERENCE

PANEL 1

SACRED WATERS: RELIGIONS, ECOLOGIES, AND TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

Convenors

Alessandra Brivio – alessandra.brivio1@unimib.it
 Università di Milano-Bicocca

Alessandro Gusman – alessandro.gusman@unito.it
 Università di Torino

Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

The dynamics in the domain of beliefs and religious practices in Africa reveal the persistence of deeply ingrained concepts and perceptions of sacredness and its manifestations, as well as historically consolidated modes of interaction between the sacred, human presence, and the aquatic environment. Water is undifferentiated, shapeless, and thus it embodies potentiality and transformation; it is a transitory form that refers to the idea of birth, death, and becoming. Therefore, it has an unlimited capacity to be loaded with metaphors and to express ambivalence and ambiguity, simultaneously connecting and dividing, purifying and contaminating, nurturing and destroying. This panel invites reflections on the religious, symbolic, and practical meanings of water in Africa through historical and anthropological perspectives. It aims to explore the ways in which human communities negotiate, reinterpret, and ritualize their relationship with water, in contexts where environmental transformations, scarcity, and pollution challenge both material survival and cosmological balance. The convenors welcome anthropology and history papers addressing: transformations, adaptations and forms of resistance in the religious sphere emerging as reactions to the decline and atrophy undergone by the country's ecosystems; cases of symbiotic relationships between human presence and the environment which can help assessing the extent territory actively contributes to shaping the ritual dimension; the purificatory role of water in ritual practices, including ablutions, initiation rites, and healing ceremonies, where water mediates between human and divine realms; the use and re-signification of water in Pentecostal movements, where it becomes a medium of spiritual renewal, exorcism, and divine power.



PAPERS

DWELLING OVER THE WATER IN SYMBIOSIS WITH THE GODS: NZULEZO (GHANA), A VILLAGE ON STILTS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Pierluigi Valsecchi – pierluigi.valsecchi@unipv.it
Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Pavia

ABSTRACT

The Nzema historical (“traditional”) religious landscape was – and to a remarkable extent is still – dominated by the invisible entities and forces generated by the water power cradle formed by the Ankobra, Amanzule, Tano rivers, and the lagoons of south-east Côte d’Ivoire. The geographical center of Nzema is especially associated with the Amanzule river and lake, the seat of a deity (bozonle) of female gender, guarded and served by the lake-dwelling inhabitants of Nzulezo, recognized by tradition and history as the creators of a network of permanently navigable waterways ensuring the transportation of people and goods between the forest interior and the coast. The symbiotic relationship the riverine, lake, and littoral communities developed with the Amanzule water system/deity underlay all phases of this area’s involvement in the gold production, the Atlantic trade, the systematic exploitation of forest resources from the late 19th century, and, more recently, the establishment of a modest tourist industry in connection with measures of environmental conservation. While strict ritual interdictions are still regulating the relationship between the human presence and the Amanzule water system/deity, accelerated transformation of the agricultural landscape, unplanned urbanization, mining, and growth of the oil and gas industry are bringing about dramatic changes throughout the Nzema region.

PAPERS

FROM KYANDA'S POINT OF VIEW

Federica Toldo – federica.toldo@gmail.com
Università di Udine

ABSTRACT

What is Kyanda on the coast of the Angolan capital Luanda, and more specifically for its indigenous Axiluanda people involved in the fishing industry? In a largely Portuguese-speaking urban context, indigenous fishermen continue to use Kimbundu to communicate their world. In this regime of permanent translation or "controlled misinterpretation," the term *sereia*, Portuguese for mermaid, coexists with the Kimbundu *kyanda*. Mostly pronounced in the singular, the two terms actually refer to creatures (plural) of both sexes that reside in the sea (but tend to visit the shoreline) or that generally live in pools of water or coastal thickets. This aquatic and coastal localization of the yanda, however, is not exclusive. There are also "land mermaids." The yanda are therefore—in the words of Angolan anthropologist Virgílio Coelho—*geni loci*. I believe that, to understand Kyanda, linguistic and symbolic analysis is not enough. We must see it in action and interaction. Axiluanda fishermen make (or traditionally made) ritual offerings to Kyanda and the sea. These reveal a precise logic of dependence on the cult of family spirits. That *geni loci* depend on ancestors is not new in Africa. More problematic is understanding whether Kyanda is a sort of singular divinity or a supernatural species. Certainly, sea yanda, like fish, are characterized by mobility. Experienced by Axiluanda fishermen in its intrinsic kineticism, Kyanda is first and foremost an event. In the lives of individuals, apparitions and sensory impressions are yanda experiences. Special births can be ascribed to a kyanda. Kyanda's effects are also the violent marine storms called *kalema*. It is from this perspective that Kyanda reveals its historicity, not at all insensitive to the major ecological issues of the Anthropocene. My presentation will touch on the various aspects of this figure and the logic of their coexistence: generic divinity, reactive historical agent, figure of conjugality, supernatural species.

PAPERS

FROM WATER YOU COME, AND TO WATER YOU SHALL RETURN: MATERIALITY AND IMMATERIALITY IN AN URBAN PURIFICATION CEREMONY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA (19TH CENTURY)

Pietro Repishti – pietro.repishti01@universitadipavia.it
Université Paris Cité

ABSTRACT

Avowiwlé, literally “arrestation of evil spirits,” was an ancient purification ceremony performed in Porto-Novo during the nineteenth century, and probably even earlier. It was organized by the principal vodun priests, at the request of the king, “in order to expel all the malicious spirits wandering through the kingdom, obstructing its prosperity and giving rise to deadly epidemics.” (Akindélé, Aguessy 1953). For several days, vodun adepts chased these invisible entities through every public and private corner of the city: entering houses, overturning cooking pots, and upending market stalls. The population tolerates this necessary disorder until the hunt is declared over. At dawn on the following day, the main market square is filled with a myriad of small wooden statuettes. They are the spirits, now visible, that have been captured during the hunt. With force, these statuettes are wrapped in a bamboo mat and loaded into a pirogue. It falls to the Wla, an ethnic group from Grand-Popo, believed to hold power over water, to dispose of the statuettes by sinking them as far as possible into the lagoon so that they can never return. This paper explores the religious dimension associated with water, seen both as an element of purification and as a space where spirits are believed to dwell. It also examines the passage from the immateriality of these malevolent spirits to their materialization as wooden statuettes, and their subsequent return to immateriality, marked by their sinking into the lagoon.

PAPERS

THE SPIRITUALITY OF WATER IN SOUTH-WEST CAMEROON: COASTAL RITUALS, TABOOS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Cyprian Nanji – nanji.cyprian@ubuea.cm
University of Buea

ABSTRACT

Water occupies a central place in the spiritual, moral, and ecological worlds of coastal communities in the South West Region of Cameroon. This paper examines the spirituality of water among the Balondo, Bakolle, Isangele, Wovea, and Isubu peoples, focusing on how the sea, rivers, streams, and coastal waters are understood as sacred and socially regulated spaces. Rather than being perceived merely as natural resources, water bodies are conceived as living domains inhabited by spiritual beings, ancestors, and animal doubles, through which relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment are negotiated. Drawing on ethnographic perspectives, oral traditions, and existing anthropological literature, the study analyses ritual and symbolic practices connected to water. Among the Balondo, water is used for the pouring of libations as a medium of communication with ancestors and aquatic spirits. Across these coastal communities, water rituals are also performed to ensure abundance in fishing activities, particularly to increase fish production in rivers and streams, highlighting the close relationship between spirituality and subsistence economies. The paper further examines indigenous laws and taboos governing water use and aquatic spaces. Practices such as washing used dishes along riverbanks were prohibited because they were believed to harm crocodiles and sea turtles, regarded as important totems and animal doubles of spiritually powerful individuals. The paper argues that these restrictions functioned not only as spiritual regulations but also as effective forms of environmental protection, safeguarding water quality and aquatic life. By situating these practices within broader African hydro-social relations, the study highlights the relevance of indigenous water ethics to contemporary debates on sustainability and environmental governance.

PAPERS

NAVIGATING NEW WATERS: TRANSFORMATIONS IN HUMAN - ENVIRONMENT RELATIONS UNDER UNCERTAINTY IN SOUTHERN BENIN

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Università di Milano-Bicocca

ABSTRACT

Across southern Benin, recent years have been marked by delayed rainy seasons, prolonged droughts, and sudden flooding events that deeply affect lacustrine environments. While most scientific literature in the region frames these transformations primarily in environmental, economic, or infrastructural terms, this paper focuses on a less explored dimension: the symbolic, cosmological, and relational implications of changing waters, and the ways communities negotiate with other-than-human entities. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2023 and 2024 in Adjohoun – a municipality historically built along the meanders of the Ouémé river—the paper examines how rain and river waters, embedded within a shared epistemological and ontological system, are becoming increasingly difficult to interpret, negotiate, and situate. In this critical moment, new explanatory registers—including narratives associated with climate change—are beginning to circulate. Nonetheless, rather than superficially signalling a loss of belief or a straightforward replacement of ritual explanations by scientific discourse, this research pushes the analysis further by focusing on transformations affecting four pivotal dimensions of water-related practices and understandings: relational configurations, localization, negotiability, and intentionality. The analysis suggests that the misalignment across these four dimensions has yet to be resolved by the emerging explanatory frameworks. Instead, they contribute to rendering water increasingly opaque, uncoordinated, and no longer attributable to identifiable agencies. In this context, water does not simply “fail” to arrive; it ceases to respond coherently to the relations that once regulated its presence. The paper aims to lay the groundwork for an approach that provincializes the concept of climate change by situating it alongside locally grounded cosmological and relational perspectives, and to contribute to anthropological debates on waterworlds, environmental anthropology, and practices of meaning-making in contemporary West Africa.

PAPERS

SACRED FLOWS: WATER, RITUAL TOPOGRAPHY AND ADAPTATION IN GABRA AND BORANA PASTORALISM

Erika Grasso – erika.grasso@unito.it

Università di Torino

Hassan Kochore – kochorehassan@gmail.com

Independent researcher

ABSTRACT

In northern Kenya, water is not only a scarce resource but a socially and ritually regulated element that shapes pastoral life in multiple ways. Among the Gabra and Borana communities, access to water sources is embedded in cosmological understandings, seasonal rhythms, and systems of authority that connect ecology, spirituality, and everyday decision-making. Based on ethnographic research carried out among Gabra and Borana communities in Marsabit county, this paper examines how water sources—from seasonal rainfall to Borana singing wells—operate as both ecological necessities and ritualized social spaces. Among the Gabra, rainfall, drought, and environmental change are interpreted through a ritual calendar and an emic understanding of time that guide mobility, herd management, and collective choices. Among the Borana, singing wells are not only hydraulic systems in arid landscapes but also places where cooperation is enacted, hierarchies are negotiated, and knowledge is transmitted across generations. Placing these cases in dialogue, the analysis reveals how sacred waters serve as pivotal nodes in a dynamic ritual topography—a culturally inscribed landscape where physical features (wells, grazing zones, sacred sites) encode spiritual meanings, social order, and authority, as conceptualized in anthropological studies of Gabra and Borana pastoralism. Far from static traditions, these ritual relations to water form part of adaptive, ongoing processes through which pastoral communities confront scarcity, mediate conflicts, and reinterpret environmental transformations. By examining water through its intertwined religious and ecological dimensions, this paper illuminates how contemporary northern Kenyan pastoralists actively live with, debate, and reshape change within a cosmology that binds people, livestock, land, and the divine in resilient, meaningful ways.

PAPERS

OMI AS THRESHOLD: ÒṢUN, YEMỌJA, AND THE LINGUISTICS OF SACRED WATER IN YORUBA COSMOVISION

Lisbety Mirabal Diaz – lisbety.mirabaldiaz@phd.unich.it
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ABSTRACT

In Yoruba cosmivision, water is central to creation and becoming primordial, transformative, and generative, yet also ambivalent, able to connect and divide, purifying and endangering. The Yoruba word *omi* (“water”) offers a privileged entry point into this worldview because it circulates across everyday language and specialized ritual registers, where it is repeatedly mobilized to name, activate, and regulate sacred efficacy. Closely intertwined with this semantic and ritual density are river and sea-associated orishas such as Òṣun and Yemọja, whose devotional figures crystallize distinct moral, affective, and cosmological orientations to sacred waters. This paper proposes a linguistically informed study of Yoruba tradition through the analysis of ritual practice and a set of standardized corpora (including òríkì praise poetry, prayer formulae, Ifá-oriented expressions, invocatory sequences, and ritual instructions associated with washing, bathing, offerings, initiation, and healing. Across these textual and performative domains, *omi* emerges not simply as a lexical item with referential meaning, but as a ritual keyword whose pragmatic force is produced through formulaic repetition, vocatives, epithets, and metapragmatic norms of speaking to water and to the orishas. The corpora show how Òṣun and Yemọja function as complementary semiotic models of sacred water: Òṣun is patterned through sweetness, attraction, fertility, and relational repair; Yemọja through depth, protection, motherhood, and encompassing force. These patterned associations shape the speech acts through which transformation is enacted and interpreted, moving from impurity to alignment, illness to healing, and novice status to initiated belonging. Overall, the paper argues that, in African Cosmologies, anthropological interpretation is strengthened by linguistic analysis: ritual meanings become more legible when attention is paid to how key terms like *omi* organize authority, stance, and efficacy with lived religious practice.

PAPERS

THE CHALLENGE OF WATER MANAGEMENT BETWEEN SACRED SPRINGS, DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: THE CASE OF KONGWA DISTRICT, CENTRAL TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

In 1969, Paul Rigby wrote that for the Gogo, the predominant ethnic group in the Kongwa context of central Tanzania, the problem of obtaining sufficient water for humans and livestock, as well as enough rain for crops—noting that rainmaking is the primary function of Gogo ritual leaders—is a constant issue. Most development interventions concerning this district today focus on water resource management, describing an unprecedented emergency in terms of access for both domestic and agricultural use, attributed to a combination of climate disruption and a lack of infrastructure or management skills. However, from the accounts of inhabitants, especially the elders, a very different version emerges regarding both the genealogy of environmental crises—deeply linked to the socio-political and economic upheavals introduced first by colonialism and then by the post-independence "villagization" policies guided by Julius Nyerere's socialist vision—and the relationship to the scarcity and sacredness of these resources. The intimate link between sacredness and scarcity, as evidenced by Rigby's observations, boasts a long history that characterizes populations historically inhabiting a marginal economic environment. This environment is defined by irregular, unevenly distributed rainfall and periodic droughts. Historically and culturally, pre-colonial Gogo societies—much like the Karimojong in Uganda, Turkana in Kenya, or Nuer in Sudan and South Sudan—found forms of adaptation to this profound environmental precariousness through ritual protection and spatial mobility, addressing what often translates into an acute scarcity of water resources. Based on ethnographic research conducted between 2018 and 2019, this contribution seeks to examine how the rhetorics and policies of development (colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary) come into tension with local populations' relationship to uncertainty, scarcity, and the sacredness of water, often replacing them with technical and emergency-driven practices and representations.

PAPERS

FROM AQUATIC SPIRITS TO CATHOLIC SAINTS: WATER, SAINT MARTHA, AND AFRO-ATLANTIC RELIGIOUS RE-SIGNIFICATIONS IN THE CANARY ISLANDS (16TH–18TH CENTURIES)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the religious, symbolic, and ritual meanings of water in the Canary Islands between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, focusing on the Afro-Atlantic re-signification of Saint Martha within the spiritual practices of enslaved and afro-descendant women. As a strategic node of the early modern Atlantic world, the Canary Islands functioned as a contact zone where African cosmologies, Iberian Catholicism, and local environmental conditions intersected, producing hybrid religious forms deeply embedded in aquatic imaginaries. Drawing on inquisition records, parish documentation, and material culture, the paper analyses how water operated simultaneously as a purifying, mediating, and ambivalent element within healing rituals, divinatory practices, and devotional acts associated with Saint Martha. Far from being a passive catholic saint, Santa Marta emerges in these sources as a liminal and powerful figure, increasingly connected to the management of invisible forces, emotional bonds, bodily afflictions, and interpersonal conflicts—features that resonate with African aquatic spirits and water-centered cosmologies. In dialogue with anthropological scholarship on aquatic entities such as Mami Wata, the paper advances the hypothesis that the cult of Saint Martha in the Canary Islands absorbed and rearticulated elements of African water-related epistemologies, particularly those linked to femininity, danger, seduction, and transformation. Within this framework, water—whether seawater, wells, or ritual liquids—became a privileged medium through which spiritual power circulated, identities were reconfigured, and cosmological knowledge was preserved under conditions of coercion, surveillance, and environmental vulnerability. By situating Saint Martha within a broader Afro-Atlantic sacred ecology of water, the paper highlights the central role of enslaved women in negotiating religious meanings and ritual practices across the Atlantic. It contributes to current debates on sacred waters, religious adaptation, and the persistence of African cosmologies in early modern Atlantic societies, offering a historically grounded perspective on the entanglement of belief, environment, and power.

PANEL 2

WATER CONFLICTS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: HYDRO-POLITICS, POLITICAL ECOLOGY, AND GENDERED VULNERABILITIES

Convenors

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

Eastern Africa is increasingly shaped by the politics of water—its scarcity, uneven distribution, and strategic value. Across the region, rivers, lakes, aquifers, and coastal zones are not only ecological systems but arenas in which states, communities, and non-state actors negotiate authority, identity, and survival. This panel explores how water and water-related infrastructures intersect with intra- and inter-state conflict dynamics, patterns of governance, and gendered forms of vulnerability from an interdisciplinary perspective drawing on political science, anthropology, geography, and development studies. Intra-state conflicts in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Mozambique reveal how competition over water access, fishing rights, pastureland, and irrigation networks deepens local grievances, fuels militarization, and reshapes community relations. At the same time, inter-state tensions—from the Nile Basin disputes to maritime boundary conflicts in the Western Indian Ocean—underscore the geopolitical centrality of water in regional power projection, state consolidation, and transnational resource management. These processes are embedded in broader transformations, including climate variability, demographic pressures, and the growing role of external actors in financing dams, ports, and hydropower infrastructures. The panel also foregrounds the gendered implications of hydro-political change: women and girls often bear the social costs of resource scarcity, displacement, and infrastructural collapse, while simultaneously acting as key agents in local adaptation, peacebuilding, and community water governance. By combining empirical case studies with conceptual reflections on hydro-sociality, environmental security, and political ecology, the panel aims to illuminate how water functions both as a driver of instability and as a potential site for cooperation and socio-political transformation. We invite contributions that analyse these dynamics through historical, ethnographic, political, or mixed-method approaches and that help reassess Eastern Africa's waters as contested yet generative spaces within broader African and global processes.

PAPERS

WATER, TREES, HERDERS. POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS IN THE SIX FORAGES RESERVE (SENEGAL)

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ABSTRACT

The contested governance of territory between nomadic pastoralists and state authorities stands as one of the most enduring debates in the political ecology of the Sahel. This contribution engages with this literature through the case study of the Six Forages sylvo-pastoral reserve in northern Senegal – a site that functions as a symbolic microcosm of the tensions between Peul pastoral territorialities, Senegalese state control strategies, and the cascading effects of successive international socio-environmental interventions. The very establishment of the protected area reveals the deep entanglement between water resource governance and sedentarization policies: the reserve was constituted around six permanent water points, each anchoring a sedentary settlement and binding pastoral mobility to hydraulic infrastructure. Subsequent cycles of territorialization – consistently marked by heavy state interventionism – have been grafted onto this infrastructural matrix, progressively reinforcing it. Tracing the recent history of the reserve, the article examines three overlapping intervention regimes: the German development cooperation program on agro-sylvo-pastoral zones in the late twentieth century; the first implementation phase of the Great Green Wall project (2007–2020); and its current phase, the Programme Intégrateur de la Grande Muraille Verte (PIGMV, 2021–). Each of these initiatives has mobilized distinct yet structurally related rhetorical repertoires – developmentalist in earlier phases, climate-oriented more recently – while reproducing comparable logics of territorial control. Drawing on political ecology scholarship and mobilizing data collected during two rounds of fieldwork, the article critically interrogates the complex articulation between international programs, state strategies, and local socio-ecological dynamics, foregrounding existing power asymmetries, implementation failures, and local communities' practices of territorial re-appropriation.

PAPERS

MOZAMBIQUE 2000-2025: A COUNTRY SINKING. LOCAL INSTITUTIONS, INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY FACING A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

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ABSTRACT

Until now, the year 2000 had been the worst in terms of the intensity and violence of flooding in Mozambique. However, after a few years of relative calm, since 2019, a series of cyclones has once again hit the country, which is one of the most exposed in the world to extreme natural events. Idai, Kenneth, and other cyclones, culminating in the floods of 2025-2026 that submerged much of southern Mozambique, have not, however, helped the country to manage these recurring emergencies, which have now become a normal part of life that must be dealt with in a structural manner. Starting from a perspective of political sociology and risk management, this paper aims to briefly review the ways in which Mozambican institutions and international partners have addressed these ongoing climate emergencies, usually with almost no involvement of local communities or the municipalities affected by the events. Even the approval of new legislation on the matter in 2020 did not change the situation, as demonstrated by the government's inertia in dealing with the floods of 2025-2026, especially given the executive's low legitimacy due to the electoral fraud that, in 2024, brought the current president, Daniel Chapo, to occupy the highest public office in the country.

PAPERS

BETWEEN SCARCITY AND SURVIVAL: GENDERED VULNERABILITIES AND WATER GOVERNANCE UNDER CLIMATE EXTREMES IN DISPLACEMENT CONTEXTS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Eastern Africa is particularly exposed to climate change, experiencing severe floods, prolonged droughts, and other environmental shocks that profoundly affect ecological systems such as rivers, lakes and aquifers. Within these contexts, water systems are increasingly embedded in hydro-political contestations, where scarcity, access and uneven distribution transform water into a strategic resource and central arena where states, communities and non-state actors negotiate power, identity and survival mechanisms. These variabilities intensify the existing socio-economic and political inequalities, especially in regions like rural and refugee settlements, which are characterised by fragile infrastructure and limited governance capacity. In Kenya, women and girls are disproportionately exposed to climate-related risks due to their central roles in resource-dependent activities such as water collection, household labour, energy management, and small-scale agriculture. Yet, they often face structural constraints, including limited access to land ownership rights, resources, and marginal participation in political and household decision-making processes. These factors directly shape their capacity for survival, resilience and adaptation. Drawing on feminist political ecology (fpe), this paper examines gendered vulnerabilities and power dynamics in water governance within displacement contexts in eastern Africa, with a focus on Kakuma refugee camp in north-western Kenya. Kakuma is situated in an arid and semi-arid region characterised by chronic water scarcity, where climate extremes intersect with resource scarcity and infrastructural precarity, exacerbating vulnerabilities for both refugees and host communities. Whereas refugee women primarily access water through boreholes and communal taps managed by humanitarian agencies, they have developed informal coping strategies such as walking long distances to fetch water from nearby seasonal rivers, shallow wells and borrowing from host communities, exposing them to violence, conflicts, and health risks. Although women are primary managers of water resources, their agency and leadership in sustaining livelihoods are largely overlooked in policy and governance. This paper aims to address this gap.

PAPERS

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF WATER SCARCITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: CONFLICTS, GOVERNANCE, AND INEQUALITY FROM COLONIALISM TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a historical political ecology of water conflicts in South Africa, interpreting contemporary water crises not as simple consequences of climate change, but as the outcome of a long genealogy of politically produced scarcity. From the late eighteenth century, during the colonial expansion towards eastern South Africa, water progressively became a strategic infrastructure for imperial territorialization, agricultural and mining expansion, and state-building. The construction of dams, canals, and irrigation schemes accompanied the dispossession of African populations and the reconfiguration of regimes of access to land and resources (Beinart 2003; Jacobs 2003; Swyngedouw 2004; Fiamingo 2018). During the twentieth century, and particularly under apartheid, hydraulic engineering consolidated a development model based on the concentration of water in white, industrial, and mining districts, producing a deeply racialized hydro-social geography functional to South Africa's mineral-energy complex. Large inter-basin transfer schemes and territorial planning policies reinforced a highly centralized and competitive water regime between urban, agricultural, and industrial users, in which water operated as a key device of social control and economic accumulation (Bond 2000; McDonald and Ruiters 2005; Turton and Henwood 2002). In the post-apartheid period, despite the adoption of an advanced legal framework inspired by the principle of equitable access, water governance continues to reproduce deep socio-spatial inequalities. The prolonged drought that affected the Western Cape between 2015 and 2018 (and beyond) not only threatened urban water security, but also severely impacted agricultural production - particularly wheat and irrigated crops - undermining farm incomes, commercial agriculture, and regional food security (Theron et al. 2021; Nxumalo et al. 2022; Mpakairi et al. 2024). Recent studies show how climate variability and agricultural water use affect crop water productivity, revealing the tight interconnections between water scarcity, agricultural adaptation, and the vulnerability of regional food systems (Mpakairi et al. 2024). Through a political ecology lens, the paper argues that water scarcity in South Africa is best understood as the outcome of historically sedimented power relations rather than as the result of natural or climatic variables alone (Harris et al. 2018; Robins 2019; Ziervogel 2019; Fiamingo 2020).

PAPERS

PROMISE OF DEVELOPMENT OR FEARS OF COLONIAL (AND NEO-COLONIAL) EXPLOITATION?: A HISTORY OF THE OPPOSITION TO THE CAHORA BASSA DAM IN MOZAMBIQUE (1968-1975)

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ABSTRACT

From its inception, the construction of the Cahora Bassa dam in Mozambique (1968-1975) was seen by the Portuguese authorities as one last attempt to modernise Mozambique in the service of the empire and the whole “white axis” in southern Africa, and to resist the advance of Mozambique’s liberation forces and the spread of communism. The dam was linked to a huge development project along the Zambezi valley and promised to improve the lives of Africans, employing Portugal’s typical paternalistic rhetoric. However, most of the energy was planned to be sold to South Africa, demonstrating Portugal’s primary interest in cashing out precious funds for the war rather than developing Mozambique’s economy. Also, and crucially, the area of Tete, where the Cahora Bassa dam was built, was one of the hottest zones of the liberation wars in both Mozambique and Rhodesia. Rumours spread about a plan to settle one million Portuguese settlers around the planned man-made lake to create a barrier against the advance of liberation forces. International capitals from Western countries were involved in the dam’s construction, leading to fears among Mozambican nationalists that “neocolonial” plans were already set in motion in the event of Portugal’s defeat in the war, making the project a source of exploitation rather than development. Frelimo’s freedom fighters were then fighting on two fronts: preventing Portugal from continuing its colonial plans and preventing Mozambique from being exploited and plundered even before its independence from Lisbon. Cahora Bassa itself was a paradox: a colossal project to exploit the Mozambican soil and population, or a promise of a prosperous future for liberated Mozambique? An international campaign against the dam’s construction was organised worldwide. This paper will briefly describe the rationale for the dam’s construction and then explore in detail the opposition to it, focusing on the West and Italy in particular. A brief but significant mention will be made to the involvement of one of Italy’s leading Africanists of the 20th century: Giampaolo Calchi Novati.

PAPERS

NATIONAL LAWS, LOCAL GOVERNANCE: A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF PASTORALISTS' ACCESS TO WATER AND GRAZING RESOURCES IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The rights of access and use of natural resources by nomadic pastoralists in West Africa are the subject of heated debate both internationally and within individual countries. Particularly in the coastal countries of the region, a narrative prevails suggesting that conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have multiplied in recent years and that the only solution would be the reduction, if not the cessation, of pastoral mobility through the creation of ranches and reserves, and the prohibition of transboundary transhumance. This narrative is, however, highly problematic, both because there is no evidence of a recent increase in conflict and because the role of pastoral mobility in the productive and sustainable use of water and grazing resources is now beyond doubt. From this perspective, Ghana presents an interesting empirical case. Despite having signed the ECOWAS protocol on transboundary transhumance (1998), the country has never adopted a comprehensive regulatory framework for governing pastoralists' access to pastures and water resources. This regulatory vacuum is likely due to several factors related to the prerogatives of traditional chiefs, the marginalization of pastoralists, and a public discourse unfavorable to the Fulbe community. Within the country, these factors converge under the influence of local dynamics, giving rise to a multiplicity of more or less conflictual situations ranging from the total exclusion of pastoralists from resource access to a timid participation in local governance. This contribution is based on primary data collected in the capital of Ghana, Accra, and in several regions in the north of the country, using a multiscale and multidisciplinary methodological approach that articulates political science, discourse analysis, and political anthropology. Such an empirical framework allows for the exploration of the local dimension of access and use of water and grazing resources, reconnecting it to the national level of Ghanaian political and institutional dynamics. The analysis, therefore, helps reveal the inherently political nature of ecological issues and contributes to a broader reflection on the political ecology of conflicts in West Africa.

PAPERS

CONTESTED WATERS, CONTESTED FUTURES: HYDRO-SOCIAL CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE IN TANZANIA'S RUFJI BASIN

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how large-scale water infrastructure reshapes hydro-social conflict and governance, through a case study of the Rufiji basin. Drawing on archival research and oral histories from communities upstream and downstream, the article traces the negotiation, regulation, and securitisation of competing water uses, including hydropower, irrigation, conservation, and pastoralism, which are shaped by transnational financing, conservation regimes, and security discourses. The Rufiji case reveals two interlinked dynamics. Firstly, disputes over access to water and land lead to internal conflict, as local grievances result in institutional exclusion, coercive conservation practices, and episodic displacement, generating intra-state conflict, particularly in contexts of expanding state authority over strategic river basins. Secondly, national infrastructural priorities reframe water as a strategic asset, thereby reshaping governance regimes, enforcement practices, and everyday livelihoods in ways that unevenly distribute risk, security, and citizenship. These processes are deeply gendered: women disproportionately bear the social and material costs of water scarcity, displacement, and livelihood disruption, while simultaneously acting as key agents in local water management, adaptation, and conflict mediation. By situating the Rufiji basin within broader debates on hydro-social relations, political ecology, and environmental security, the article argues that dams and associated infrastructure function as both drivers of instability and potential sites for negotiated cooperation. The Rufiji experience demonstrates how water governance in Tanzania reflects wider patterns shaping contested waters and contested futures across eastern Africa.

PAPERS

HYDROPOLITICS AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE NILE BASIN: THE CASE OF THE JONGLEI CANAL IN SOUTH SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

The Jonglei canal project was conceived by British engineers in the early twentieth century as part of a broader integrated water management plan for the Nile. This work would have allowed for the channeling of the white Nile's flow, which dissipates into the Sudd—one of the world's largest wetlands—in this lowland region of southern Sudan. Due to evaporation, approximately 50% of the river's discharge is lost; therefore, channeling the swamp water would have significantly increased the water available downstream in northern Sudan and Egypt. At the same time, however, draining the Sudd would have radically altered the Jonglei ecosystem, with unpredictable consequences for the livelihoods of local communities such as the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk. The Khartoum government began excavating the canal in 1978, making it the most prominent symbol of the persistent extractive logic underlying the economic policies implemented by the central government in collaboration with large Western corporations. It is no coincidence that John Garang, future leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), chose the Jonglei canal as the subject of his doctoral thesis in the United States. Less than a year after its founding in May 1984, the SPLM/A attacked the construction site, forcing the French company Compagnie de Construction Internationale (CCI) to halt work. This military operation, which included the kidnapping of several French and German CCI employees, was also the means through which Garang forced European governments to confront the SPLM/A's agenda and demands for the first time. The events of the Jonglei canal, which this paper aims to reconstruct through a variety of archival, journalistic, and oral sources, demonstrate once again how water resources are a key material and symbolic stake in the claims for self-determination by local peoples and communities who reject exploitation logics based solely on the principle of maximum efficiency or the compromises of "hydro-diplomacy."

PAPERS

POLITICS OF SCARCITY: THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF HYDRO-SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN EWASO NG'IRO (LAIKIPIA AND SAMBURU, KENYA)

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ABSTRACT

The contribution aims to analyze the conflicts related to the access and use of water in the Ewaso Ng'iro basin, in the counties of Laikipia and Samburu (Kenya), understood as the outcome of both ecological and political processes. Through a political ecology approach, the research explores how increasing climate variability in the semi-arid areas of north-central Kenya combines with transformations in resource governance regimes, generating new forms of inequality and competition for water. The analysis focuses on two interconnected aspects. On the one hand, it examines how land privatization, the expansion of conservancies, and the intervention of non-state actors – private entities and NGOs – influence access to natural resources, redefining territoriality and usage rights. On the other hand, it observes how local communities adapt their mobility and water supply strategies to respond to climate stress and the reorganization of territorial power. The contribution ultimately seeks to demonstrate that water scarcity is not a natural given, but rather the result of socio-ecological dynamics that configure the areas of Laikipia and Samburu as emblematic spaces of water politics in contemporary Africa.

PAPERS

TOURISM NARRATIVES AND THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF WATER IN AFRICA: A STUDY IN LIMPOPO NATIONAL PARK, MOZAMBIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism narratives associated with Limpopo National Park in Mozambique play a central role in the symbolic construction of water as a strategic resource, a landscape element, and an economic asset within the broader context of transboundary conservation in Africa. This study critically examines how tourism and conservation narratives produce specific representations of water and how these representations become articulated with human resettlement policies and the economic interests tied to tourism and nature conservation. At its core, the research seeks to understand how such discourses contribute to the depoliticization of conflicts surrounding access to land and water, effectively shifting the terms of debate away from historical and political factors and toward a technical and environmental rationality. The research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in the analysis of institutional documents, including the park's management plan, its tourism and conservation strategies, and promotional materials, complemented by empirical fieldwork and dialogue with institutional actors and community leaders. The findings reveal that, in alignment with conservation and tourism interests, human resettlement has become one of the central pillars of park planning. It emerges not as an explicitly political act but as a technical instrument of territorial management, justified through the language of biodiversity protection, the mitigation of human-wildlife conflict, and the facilitation of tourism investments and private concessions, while being quietly underpinned by neo-Malthusian logics. This framing naturalizes the exclusion of local communities, obscures underlying power relations, and deepens socio-environmental vulnerabilities. The study concludes that such narratives participate in broader processes of reterritorialization that fundamentally reconfigure access to water resources by severing them from the historical practices of use, management, and social meaning attributed to them by local populations. In doing so, they produce new forms of dependence and reshape socio-environmental relations in ways that serve the interests of conservation and capital while marginalizing those who have long inhabited and shaped these landscapes.

PANEL 3

THE FLUID DIMENSIONS OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

Convenors

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Language of the panel
English

ABSTRACT

Digital media have frequently been analyzed through aquatic metaphors. One "surfs" the internet, and online communication generates global "flows" of images and texts. These flows, in turn, can "fluidify" both physical barriers and imagined communities (or, following Meyer [2009], aesthetic formations). Once deterritorialized, these communities can contract and expand, bypassing frontiers and borders, adopting the characteristics of a network (cf. Bernal 2014; Jedlowski and Smith 2025). Simultaneously, practices associated with the use of mobile phones and social media have also been interpreted through aquatic imagery. With specific reference to mobile phone usage in Mozambique and the African diaspora (Archambault 2013; Santanera 2024), the concept of social navigation, proposed by Vigh(2006, 2009), has been employed. This concept captures how media practices intersect the life trajectories of young Africans who, operating in particularly unstable and deprived environments, not only survive but also succeed in charting a course for their lives, moving beyond the impasse of the present. Finally, another dimension that – from a different perspective – connects digital media to the aquatic world concerns the online circulation of water-related images. These include representations of deities like Mami Wata, whose digital remediation highlights the goddess's continuous capacity for reinvention and hybridization, and renderings and photographs of infrastructure (for example, dams, bridges, ports) through which political power legitimizes itself and penetrates society via the viewers' sensory involvement. In this panel, we welcome paper proposals that – based on ethnographic cases – will both deepen and question the "liquid" dimensions, in the various possible forms, of digital media in Africa and the African diaspora.



PAPERS

FLOWING ASPIRATIONS: VISUAL SELF-REPRESENTATION AND DIGITAL STORYTELLING BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to explore the production and circulation of images on social media as practices through which aspirations, achievements, and future projects are staged and performed. Drawing on the concepts of networked identity work and social navigation, the study highlights how the images produced by young people with migrant backgrounds do not merely document the present; rather, they visualize and enact imagined futures, including professional careers, upward mobility, consumption, public recognition, and civic engagement. The contribution stems from a broader research project based on an internet-related ethnography and semi-structured interviews conducted with young people with migrant backgrounds in Italy. Through the words of one research participant, the paper illustrates how digitally narrating one's own "story" through social media can function as a symbolic infrastructure through which individuals tactically navigate multiple cultural contexts, orient their future trajectories, and anchor plural belongings. In this sense, digital self-representation emerges not simply as self-expression, but as a situated practice embedded in different social and spatial conditions. The online staging of the self becomes a way of positioning oneself within overlapping social fields that connect Italy to other national and transnational contexts. Such practices can be understood as the performance of a "culture of transnational mobility," in which values such as discovery, autonomy, and intercultural interaction are intertwined with experiences of physical and social displacement.

PAPERS

USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS AMONG MIGRANTS ON AFRICAN MIGRATION ROUTES: CASE OF NIGERIANS IN MOROCCO

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ABSTRACT

The use of media has become a defining feature of the contemporary, technology-driven world, particularly among young people, permeating nearly every aspect of social life. Migration processes have likewise been shaped, influenced, and transformed by media technologies. In the African context, especially, the media have played a significant role in constructing perceptions of migration. Migrants in the diaspora frequently circulate images and texts that project affluence and upward mobility. These representations not only inform audiences in the country of origin about migrants' lives abroad but also stimulate aspirations to migrate. Consequently, perceptions of migration to the global north are increasingly shaped through information encountered in digital spaces. However, the instrumentalisation of digital tools in shaping migration aspirations is not exclusively positive. Media platforms are also deployed to discourage migration, as images, narratives, and graphic accounts of hardship, violence, and failed journeys circulate widely, highlighting the risks associated with migration and life in foreign contexts. For migrants travelling along migration routes, media technologies are indispensable in facilitating movement. Mobile phones and digital platforms enable navigation, coordination with intermediaries, and sustained contact with family members in countries of origin. Media technologies further compress the distance between countries of origin and destination, blurring social and cultural boundaries. Through information and communication tools, migrants maintain regular contact with home, thereby reinforcing transnational ties. This dynamic is also evident among second-generation migrants, who often develop a sense of attachment to their parents' country of origin without ever having physically visited it. Music, slang, and styles flow digitally, fostering belonging and cultural affinity across borders. Through this analysis, focusing on Nigerian migrants in Morocco, my presentation seeks to demonstrate how media technologies have redefined and reshaped the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism for Africans on the African migration route.

PAPERS

DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MIGRATION DECISION MAKING: FROM DEPARTURE TO THRIVING OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN THE UK

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ABSTRACT

The wave of the fourth industrial revolution has created a network of social media platforms. Social media platforms enable end-users to receive and exchange information, participate in discussions on several topics, and express their views on migration dynamics. In the UK, Brexit, the Calais migrant 'crisis' in 2015, the 'Windrush scandal' in 2018, and the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in 2017 intensified immigration political debates in the British media and social media. Anchored in the actor-oriented perspective, the purpose of the study is to examine the influence of social media on migration decision-making for African migrants to the UK. The objective of the study is to examine the influence of social media in constructing and reconstructing the agency and identities of African migrants and the power dynamics in the migration decision-making process of African migrants. Data were collected using a systematic review. From an academic perspective, the study nuances scholarship in migration studies, digital societies, and social identities, which are critical in contemporary academia. At a policy level, the findings from the study will feed into the huge policy space on dynamics, safety, and legalization of African migrants in the UK. The study will generate empirical evidence on social media as an opportunity for new communication practices, reimagining African migrants' agency and social identities, which can have a positive influence on the public narrative and representation of African migrants and their contribution to the British labor market. This directly contributes to the global agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and 10: Reduced Inequality.

PAPERS

REMEDICATION AS DISTRIBUTION: NIGERIAN FILM CIRCULATION ACROSS MEDIA FORMATS

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ABSTRACT

Southern Nigerian commercial filmmaking—known globally as Nollywood—emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s amid severe infrastructural and economic scarcity. These conditions shaped its aesthetics, production practices, and circulation. Through layered processes of remediation, Nollywood developed into a form of “small screen cinema”: accessible, informal, portable, communal in exhibition, and difficult to regulate, qualities that made its circulation inadvertently political. Over the past few decades, the industry has transformed significantly. International streaming platforms, new cinema chains, and satellite television operators have entered the market, while younger filmmakers have risen to prominence, often displacing earlier practitioners. Nollywood’s global visibility has expanded, sometimes distancing it from its original local audiences and reshaping its cultural orientation. These shifts have altered both the films being made and the pathways through which they circulate. Yet these transformations make Nollywood an especially rich site for examining how media formats intersect and how remediation fuels circulation. Building on my previous work, this presentation explores remediation as a driver of Nollywood’s international mobility. I focus on two contemporary vectors: the spread of Nollywood images as memes on social media and the incorporation of Nollywood references in afrobeats music videos. These practices link new globalized cultural forms to early Nollywood classics, generating forms of techno-nostalgia that anchor afropolitan aesthetics in vernacular popular culture. Through these remediations, Nollywood becomes a shared cultural reference, connecting present-day productions to their historical antecedents and shaping narratives of Nigerian and African identity that circulate widely across the continent and its diasporas.

PANEL 4

LIQUID URBANISM. RE-THINKING AFRICAN CITIES THROUGH WATER

Convenors

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Language of the panel

English, French

ABSTRACT

The panel uses water as a way of seeing through, with, and about cities in Africa. It aims to understand how water challenges the conceptualization of African urbanism. It intends to offer a critical examination of the material, environmental, socio-political, imaginative, and metaphoric urban/water dialectic in African cities. Today, African cities are described as characterized by rapid urbanization, population growth, informality, colonial legacies, migration, fragile infrastructure, and so on. This default description is problematic, and critical literature suggests that it should be rethought. To this end, we could start from water, which plays an important but insufficiently investigated role. The water scarcity traditionally associated with the African continent coincides with a scarcity of analytical attention towards the role of water(s) and their experiences in defining the different paths of African urbanism. The panel intends to fill this gap, exploring the dialectic between the conceptualization, the everyday production, the planning, and the imagination of African cities and water. To this end, the panel focuses on the concept of liquid urbanism. This can be interpreted in different ways based on the values, meanings, and significance that are attributed to water. Without attempting to be exhaustive, the panel accepts papers that consider water as: cultural object that challenges – through presence or absence, visibility or invisibility, accessibility or inaccessibility – the material dimension of African urbanism; urban environment that obliges to rethink conventional urban adaptation/planning/forms of living strategies by centering methodologically amphibious and liquefied relations; socio-political actor with a crucial role in the production of urban space; medium of imagination of designed, conceived, prophesied futures of African cities; metaphor for thinking about the local articulation of global processes of the past (e.g., the colonial violence, the slave trade, etc.) and the present (the fluidity of relationships, the instability of the formal-informal dialectic, the liquidity of financial capitalism, etc.) that strongly influences African urbanity.

PAPERS

PERI-URBAN WATER AS LIQUID URBANISM: RETHINKING AFRICAN URBAN FORM AND GOVERNANCE FROM KUMASI

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ABSTRACT

African cities are typically framed through unchanging categories such as informality, infrastructural gaps, and poor governance. Given their analytical significance, such perspectives generally cover up the negotiated and fluid processes that produce urban, notably in peri-urban settings. In this paper, I argue that the essential liquid nature of water presents an important lens through which african urbanism can be reimagined. Drawing on practical insights from peri-urban areas in Kumasi, Ghana, it investigates how water accessibility and governance practices contest conventional view of urban form and authority. Peri-urban is conceptualized in this study as a socio-political actor that significantly (re)shapes urban space, governance arrangements, and way of life. Water access in Kumasi's peri-urban periphery is co-produced by a dynamic interaction between fragmented state agencies, customary authorities, private vendors, and household-level adaptations. Such arrangements evince contexts of institutional overlap and spatial fluidity, reworking established boundaries between formal and informal, and urban and rural. My paper demonstrates how residents respond to ambiguity whereas also co-creating a fluid and unstable urban environment through an examination of everyday practices such as negotiated access, informal connections, and adaptive storage. However, the potential of planning frameworks and water policies to engage with peri-urban reality remains limited given that the aforementioned are generally established on fixed territorial and infrastructural assumptions. The paper contributes to critical discourse on african urbanism and liquid urbanism by underscoring water as a methodological and conceptual entry point. It argues for rethinking african cities as dynamic socio-ecological systems in which expanding boundaries, power dynamics, and governance practices are unpacked by water flows.

PAPERS

INÉGALITÉS ENVIRONNEMENTALES ET ACCÈS À L'EAU À CONAKRY

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CERFIG

ABSTRACT

Cette communication se propose d'explorer le rapport à l'eau des populations des quartiers littoraux de Conakry. Ces habitants sont parmi les plus anciens de la capitale – anciens pêcheurs et agriculteurs, autrefois propriétaires des terrains côtiers – aujourd'hui paupérisés et marginalisés par les transformations successives de la ville. À partir d'une recherche de terrain toujours en cours, nous souhaitons montrer, à travers le concept d'inégalité environnementale, comment les habitants de Conakry entretiennent un rapport à l'eau qui varie profondément selon le statut social, le type d'habitat et le niveau d'étude de leur famille. Cette relation sera examinée dans plusieurs de ses dimensions. Nous commencerons par la question de l'accès à l'eau et des stratégies socialement différenciées auxquelles les habitants ont recours pour faire face à la pénurie pendant la saison sèche, qu'il s'agisse des forages, du système d'adduction d'eau publique et de ses défaillances, ou encore du recours aux puits traditionnels. Nous analyserons ensuite l'impact de la stratification sociale dans l'exposition aux inondations et à leurs effets néfastes, notamment en matière d'hygiène et de risques liés aux maladies infectieuses. Enfin, nous nous pencherons sur la relation à la mer, autrefois élément cardinal des activités productives et culturelles des populations baga, mais aujourd'hui de plus en plus privatisée, à l'exception de rares plages demeurées populaires. À travers le prisme de l'eau, c'est ainsi le portrait d'une population autochtone prolétarisée que nous souhaitons dresser – une population exposée à l'expansion croissante de la ville, mais capable, dans le même temps, de manifester des formes de résilience inattendues.

PAPERS

INFRASTRUCTURAL BECOMING AND THE (UN)MAKING OF THE EVERYDAY IN URBAN ZANZIBAR

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ABSTRACT

Building on research conducted for the author's master's thesis in 2023, this paper extends the ethnographic and theoretical engagement with water infrastructures as dynamic, material-discursive assemblages. Grounded in posthumanist and new materialist perspectives, the paper explores decentralized, non-state water infrastructures in the old town of Zanzibar (Mji Mkongwe) to examine in more detail how pipes, pumps, wells, electricity, and their intra-action with human networks co-produce specific configurations and imaginations of urban life. Drawing on comparative insights gained through interviews with residents and water suppliers, the paper draws the concept of infrastructural becoming to foreground temporality, repair, and uncertainty as constitutive conditions of the everyday. Rather than approaching infrastructure as a stable, taken-for-granted entity, the paper conceptualises Zanzibar's urban, non-state water systems as processual and energy-intensive assemblages that are continuously shaped through breakdowns, repairs, improvisation, institutional arrangements, and religious practices such as sadaka (sacrifice). These processes simultaneously (un)make practices of support, cooperation, and responsibilities among residents, mosques, and semi-commercial potable water providers. The paper further elaborates how the visibility of above-ground pipes in the old town disrupts dominant imaginaries of infrastructure as something hidden (infra = below), centralized, permanent and predictable. By following these pipes as affective and agential actors, it places its focus on the material-social linkages of infrastructures in which urban residents continuously negotiate access, ownership, and risks, while responding to threats such as salinity, power cuts, abandoned materials, and shifting socio-economic conditions. In doing so, and by positioning Zanzibar's water worlds as theoretically productive sites for rethinking infrastructures, agency, and the everyday, it contributes to "worlding" an urban theory from Zanzibar that challenges normative "perceptions of what is normal".

PAPERS

CASTAWAYS OF MODERNITY. AN AQUATIC HISTORY OF ATLANTIC URBANISM: THE CASE OF MINDELO (CAPE VERDE)

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ABSTRACT

Cape Verde is an archipelago of ten islands located about 500 km off the coast of Senegal. Inevitably, water is a central element in the life of this island nation (99% of its territory is made up of water), playing an important role in various dimensions, whether material, practical, symbolic, social, cultural, or linguistic. The social history of Cape Verde revolves around the relationship that the islands and their inhabitants have (had) with water (or the absence thereof). To cite just a few examples seemingly unrelated, the archipelago played a central role in the (aquatic) construction of the Atlantic world – therefore of modernity, through the (mainly violent) maritime circulation of people, goods, and “cultures” between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Today the sea is an element that, among other things, physically and symbolically nourishes and provides work (fishing), connects and separates (transnationalism and migration), attracts (tourism). At the same time and at the opposite pole, drought – due to lack of rainfall – has played an important role in the processes of colonization and settlement, but also in the living conditions of the local population: during the 20th century, it caused tens of thousands of deaths. Today, due to climate change, (rain)water destroys, floods, sinks, and drowns. In this framework, starting from the ethnographic case of the city of Mindelo, located on the island of São Vicente, this paper aims to reflect on the past and present role of water in defining specific forms of modernity and urbanity, both understood as central elements in the social life of the Cape Verde islands but, more generally, of the Atlantic and Western African regions. In this sense, water represents a particularly dense and thick cultural (hyper)object, which allows an original understanding of social, political and cultural life in the urban Global South.

PAPERS

RE-THINKING KUMASI THROUGH WOMEN'S EMBODIED WATERSCAPES

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ABSTRACT

In African cities, women are generally considered to be at the margin of decision-making and interventions over their urban realities. However true, this assumption drastically underplays women's agency and transformative potential from below. Through a photovoice project paired with the insights of four months of fieldwork, this study investigates how women's agency over the remaking of the liquid realities of Asawase, a Muslim area in central Kumasi, is informed by their embodiment of the waterscapes in the neighbourhood. Waterscape identifies "the culturally meaningful, sensorially active places in which humans interact with water and with each other" (Canton and Orlove, 2010, p. 408). Places are the spaces of lived experience (Minca, 2021); thus, waterscapes encapsulate people's lived experience with water. Yet the potential of understanding waterscapes as places is not fully explored by the authors. Here, I appreciate such potential through the phenomenological lens of embodiment. Embodiment illuminates how bodies are not object of people's experiences, but the very subject of human lives. From this perspective, humans and water not only interact, but this interaction enters people's bodies and lingers there, becoming part of people's being-in-the-world and worldview. But experience also lingers within the space where it happened, transforming it into a place with meanings, memories and emotions attached. Therefore, women in Asawase, through their daily interactions with water, transform the spaces of interaction into places whose physical and abstract topography is known, readable, and therefore manageable. A waterscape. This means that, as places, waterscapes are inherently embodied, and this embodiment informs women's agency, allowing them to re-configure their urban reality. However small and from below, this constant re-configuration can defy technocratic and male-dominated urban water configurations. The pictures, emotions, and lived experiences discussed in this study demonstrate that Asawase is liquid and its multiple shapes depend on women's embodiment of multiple waterscapes.

PAPERS

FLOWS AND FRICTIONS: LIQUID URBANISM AND VERNACULAR RIVER CARE ALONG THE NAIROBI RIVER

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the Nairobi river as a form of liquid urban infrastructure through which flows of water, waste, capital, and governance are unevenly distributed and subject to ongoing negotiation. Drawing on the liquid urbanism framework, the study treats the river not as a static ecological entity but as a dynamic urban process shaped by informality, infrastructural deficiencies, climate variability, and everyday practices of care. This paper analyses how vernacular river stewardship functions as a form of environmental diplomacy within Nairobi's fragmented urban governance. Focusing on selected stretches of the Nairobi river that traverse informal settlements and industrial zones, the paper traces how community groups, youth collectives, and informal river stewards engage in clean-ups, waste diversion, flood mitigation, and riparian repair. These practices unfold alongside state-led river regeneration projects that seek to stabilise and formalise the river corridor, often through technocratic planning, securitisation, and eviction. The paper asks: how do everyday practices of river care negotiate the fluid boundaries between legality and informality, inclusion and exclusion, risk and livelihood? In what ways do vernacular engagements with the river produce alternative imaginaries of urban order grounded in flow, adaptation, and coexistence? The study integrates semi-structured interviews, participant observation of river-related activities, and analysis of urban planning and environmental policy documents. The paper posits that the Nairobi river exemplifies liquid urbanism in practice: a space where urban life is persistently constructed and deconstructed through water's material and political flows. This contribution offers a substantive Kenyan perspective to the ongoing discourse on African urbanism, water governance, and environmental justice by emphasising vernacular stewardship as an integral urban practice rather than a peripheral intervention.

PANEL 5

GOVERNING WATER, CROSSING EMPIRE: WATER POLICIES AND SUBALTERN AGENCY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA (1855–1991)

Convenors

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Language of the panel

English, Italian

ABSTRACT

Rivers, lakes, and seas are often understood as boundaries or obstacles. However, they have recently been reinterpreted as spaces of transit, interconnection, and exchange (Miran 2014). Water, conceived as a multifaceted resource, thus occupies a central place in territorial, political, socio-economic, and environmental analyses. These perspectives are particularly relevant to the political, social, and economic history of states and colonies in the Red Sea region between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Notable examples include water management policies in the Italian colonies of the Horn of Africa, which combined colonial planning projects on the one hand and policies aimed at controlling subaltern populations on the other (Armiero, Biasillo, von Hardenberg 2022; Caglioti 2022). Water, as an analytical lens, therefore, becomes fundamental for highlighting the dialectical tension between state intervention and subaltern processes of renegotiation, bringing to light different and multiple layers of conflict. The panel seeks to examine water resources as a prism for exploring dynamics of power, mobility, and marginality, while addressing their territorial, political, economic, and environmental dimensions. The panel focuses on two interrelated aspects: on the one hand, state and colonial strategies for managing water resources in the Horn of Africa; on the other hand, how marginal and subaltern subjects renegotiated and utilized these resources. The panel welcomes historical, geographical, political, or anthropological contributions focusing on water and its relationship with dominant and subaltern subjects, as well as their interactions at both local and international scales in the modern history of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia (1855–1991).

PAPERS

ETHIOPIAN IMPERIAL CONTINUITIES. THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE QUEST FOR SEA ACCESS AND ITS NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

The 2018 election marked a decisive reconfiguration of Ethiopia's socio-political landscape, intensifying long-standing struggles over national history, sovereignty, and political authority. The establishment of the Prosperity Party and the subsequent war in Tigray have reshaped the "National Question," reinvigorating Ethiopian nationalism and its mobilizing capacity. Within this context, Abiy Ahmed's project to restore Ethiopia's historical greatness has been articulated through the ambition to regain access to the Red Sea, a political project that directly echoes the imperial state-building vision consolidated under Haile Selassie, in which centralized authority, territorial integrity, and maritime access were constitutive elements of Ethiopian sovereignty. The renewed salience of the colonial construction of the Ethio-Eritrean border and the socio-historical processes underlying Ethiopia's loss of sea access reflects a discursive return to imperial-era geopolitical imaginaries. Under Haile Selassie, access to the sea was framed as both a symbol and a material foundation of Ethiopia's autonomy and international standing; its loss was understood as a historical injustice produced by colonial intervention. In the post-2018 context, this framing is reactivated and reworked, as the loss of maritime access is once again constructed as an existential threat to national survival. Drawing on the colonality of power as a theoretical framework, this paper investigates the post-2018 reconfiguration of Ethiopian nationalism through the interplay of state and ethnic nationalisms, highlighting the persistence of imperial political rationalities beneath contemporary institutional forms. Through discourse analysis, fieldwork interviews, and secondary sources, it demonstrates how restorationist nationalism, anti-colonial exceptionalism, and imperial revivalism operate together as mutually reinforcing narratives. These continuities with the Haile Selassie era enable the reframing of Ethiopia's maritime ambitions as the recovery of a historically grounded national destiny, thereby reshaping Ethiopia's regional posture and internal political order through the reactivation of imperial logics of sovereignty, authority, and territorial entitlement.

PAPERS

DISCIPLINARE LE ACQUE, MONETIZZARE LE CAMPAGNE: STATO, CAFFÈ E AGENCY RURALE IN ETIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

L'uso delle acque in Etiopia è sovente associato all'imbrigliamento del Nilo Azzurro tramite la Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Tuttavia, ben prima delle opere idrauliche, l'acqua ha costituito uno snodo cruciale dell'economia agricola e, in particolare, della produzione del caffè, principale fonte di valuta estera del paese. Recentemente, la letteratura si è occupata ampiamente degli effetti del cambiamento climatico sull'agricoltura, in particolar modo del caffè per la sua importanza nel generare risorse sia per le classi subalterne che per quelle dominanti, non solo per l'importanza di un'economia eco-friendly ma anche perché i cambiamenti nell'andamento delle precipitazioni, gli effetti dannosi dello scarico di acque sporche nei fiumi e le temperature più alte cambiano radicalmente le condizioni di produzione della pianta. Quest'intervento si occuperà di fornire un'ottica di *longue durée* a questo processo, in modo da osservare dall'inizio dello sviluppo dell'economia del caffè nel 1957 – quando sia il National Coffee Board (NCB) che il primo piano quinquennale furono istituiti – ad oggi quali siano le principali sfide che i governi etiopici e gli agricoltori hanno affrontato. L'obiettivo è dunque di creare una timeline che definisca e incaselli precisamente gli eventi che costituiscono il processo di confronto con le sfide climatiche nella filiera del caffè etiopico per comprendere come i governi e i contadini hanno cercato di 'governare l'acqua'. Collocando la gestione delle politiche idriche in Etiopia in un'ottica di lungo periodo, l'intervento mostra come la tensione tra progettualità statale e pratiche subalterne abbia plasmato le modalità attraverso cui l'economia del caffè si è adattata alle trasformazioni climatiche e ai mutamenti dell'economia globale, evidenziando la dimensione profondamente politica della gestione delle risorse naturali.

PAPERS

TRA IDRO-EGEMONIA E RAZIONALITÀ COLLETTIVA: IL CASO DELLA GRAND ETHIOPIAN RENAISSANCE DAM (ETIOPIA)

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ABSTRACT

La Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) è una diga situata in Etiopia sul Nilo Azzurro a 20 km dal confine sudanese. Annunciata unilateralmente e avviata la sua costruzione nel 2011, la diga è stata inaugurata nel 2025. Già nel 2022 fu attivata la prima turbina della diga più imponente del continente, dando così inizio alla tanto attesa produzione idroelettrica. Da un punto di vista politico, il progetto della GERD si configura all'interno della storica contesa riguardo al controllo e alla gestione delle acque del Nilo tra i vari attori statali coinvolti. Se per più di un secolo l'Egitto ha potuto esercitare un controllo esclusivo sulle acque del Nilo, infatti, a partire dagli anni '90 si iniziò a registrare un declino dell'"idro-egemonia" egiziana, favorendo i tentativi contro-egemonici etiopi. Ulteriori sconvolgimenti politici - tra i quali la rivolta egiziana del 2011 - permetteranno all'Etiopia di annunciare unilateralmente l'avvio della costruzione della GERD. Ciò alimentò le storiche tensioni tra Egitto, Sudan ed Etiopia, non assopirsi nemmeno con i successivi tentativi di dialogo diplomatico e tuttora persistenti. Oggetto dell'articolo è l'analisi delle dinamiche politiche e del quadro legale che caratterizzano la storica rivalità per il controllo egemonico delle acque del Nilo. Verrà analizzato il dinamismo degli equilibri geopolitici e come l'agency dei vari attori regionali e internazionali coinvolti sia condizionata dal cambiamento di questi equilibri. Tali analisi avverranno mediante un approccio multidisciplinare, attraverso la contestualizzazione critica del concetto di "idro-egemonia", integrando al suo interno il concetto parsoniano di potere in relazione all'"azione collettiva". Tale integrazione risulterà utile alla problematizzazione delle politiche di cooperazione allo sviluppo che si sono susseguite negli anni, spesso strumentalizzate per fini politici e propagandistici.

PAPERS

“AD OGNI SORSO PIÙ VICINI” LA STORIA DELLA PRODUZIONE DELLA BIRRA ITALIANA MELOTTI, POI BIRRA ASMARA, IN ERITREA (1939-1991)

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ABSTRACT

L'ingegnere italiano Luigi Melotti fondò il suo omonimo birrificio nel 1939 ad Asmara in Eritrea, uno stabilimento all'avanguardia progettato per la produzione di birra, liquori e vetreria. Nonostante l'apertura fosse arrivata alla vigilia di un periodo d'instabilità politica come quello dell'occupazione militare inglese (1941-1950) e successivamente dell'annessione del paese all'Etiopia, la birra Melotti divenne presto la più bevuta del paese. L'azienda restò in mano alla famiglia di Melotti, passando, dopo la morte del suo fondatore, alla moglie e al figlio, per poi essere nazionalizzata nel '70 dal governo comunista etiope, diventando ufficialmente un prodotto eritreo solo con l'indipendenza del 1991. Da bevanda simbolo dell'industria italiana nella sua (ex)colonia, la birra Melotti, ribattezzata poi birra Asmara, conta una produzione di centinaia di migliaia di bottiglie al giorno, frutto del lavoro di centinaia di dipendenti, uno dei pochi prodotti di importazione eritreo che arrivano fino in Italia. Ripercorre le vicende di questa birra vuol dire riportare alla luce un racconto di colonialismo, occupazione, lotta, violenza e resistenza, provando, attraverso la storia di una bevanda, a attraversare la storia politica ed economica di un paese.

PAPERS

L'ACQUA, ALLORA, NON ERA UN BENE COMUNE

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ABSTRACT

La "Fototeca IsIAO" costituisce una sezione del patrimonio documentale della "Biblioteca IsIAO" – Sala delle collezioni africane e orientali, oggi conservata presso la Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma. Si tratta del più ampio fondo fotografico dedicato al colonialismo italiano, formatosi anche attraverso l'acquisizione di materiali provenienti dal Museo coloniale di Roma e da diversi istituti coloniali. Di carattere prevalentemente propagandistico, l'archivio fotografico fu concepito per accompagnare e diffondere visivamente le realizzazioni delle politiche coloniali italiane. La fototeca, che oggi comprende circa mezzo milione di materiali fotografici – tra stampe sciolte, incorniciate o montate su cartoncino, immagini raccolte in album e negativi – conserva un corpus visivo attentamente selezionato e costruito, finalizzato a rappresentare solo determinate realtà e a celebrare il regime fascista e i presunti successi della sua azione coloniale. Queste fotografie furono raccolte da varie entità coloniali, ordinate e classificate in categorie integralmente funzionali alla propaganda coloniale. Avendo per decenni alimentato l'espansione coloniale e l'odio razziale, possono ancora oggi essere utilizzate distorcendo l'interpretazione e l'analisi. Ciò emerge con particolare chiarezza nei dossier dedicati alla gestione delle risorse idriche in Libia, che offrono un significativo esempio di propaganda visiva incentrata su un ambito tematico specifico. In un territorio caratterizzato da gravi criticità sul piano idrico, il regime fascista era chiamato a rappresentarsi come capace di dominare tali difficoltà, al fine di legittimare il proprio progetto coloniale di sfruttamento agricolo della regione. Guardare queste immagini senza conoscere il contesto coloniale, le violenze e gli abusi inflitti alle popolazioni potrebbe riattivare il motto propagandistico secondo cui il colonialismo italiano era mite, benevolo e costruttivo. L'intervento propone una riflessione su come individuare il carico propagandistico insito in questi oggetti coloniali e sulle strategie artistiche e di ricerca che hanno recentemente coinvolto questo materiale con l'intento di restituire adeguatamente il contesto storico.

PAPERS

LA GESTIONE DELLE RISORSE IDRICHE NELL'ETIOPIA FASCISTA (1935-1941), TRA DISUGUAGLIANZE RAZZIALI E LIMITI DEL GOVERNO COLONIALE

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ABSTRACT

Questo intervento intende analizzare il duplice ruolo dell'acqua durante l'occupazione italiana dell'Etiopia (1935-1941). Da un lato, l'accesso alle risorse idriche esemplificò una duplice gestione degli spazi coloniali, che vennero suddivisi tra quelli europei, in cui si programmò l'accesso a risorse idriche abbondanti e spesso potabili, e quelli africani, in cui le difficoltà nell'accesso alle risorse idriche si accompagnarono a pessime condizioni igieniche. Se consideriamo poi la documentazione giudiziaria e autobiografica, l'accesso all'acqua venne sfruttato in taluni casi per esercitare forme di violenza e abusi coloniali. Dall'altro lato, la gestione delle risorse idriche coloniali rappresenta un esempio delle difficoltà e dei fallimenti incontrati dal regime nell'opera di colonizzazione. Si prenderanno in considerazione aspetti quali le difficoltà incontrate dagli italiani all'interno e al di fuori dei centri urbani per l'accesso all'acqua potabile, oppure il blocco dei traffici commerciali durante la stagione delle piogge. In generale, la scarsa conoscenza e capacità di gestione dei fiumi e delle piogge in Etiopia ci restituiscono il limite della progettualità fascista, mostrando come quello che venne pensato come un vantaggio, ossia l'accesso ad ampie riserve idriche, divenne nella pratica uno degli ostacoli per i piani imperiali fascisti.

PAPERS

LA PERSISTENZA DELLA “GEOPOLITICA DEL MARE”: CONTINUITÀ E ROTTURE NELLA STRATEGIA IMPERIALE E POST-IMPERIALE DELL’ETIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

La questione dell’accesso al Mar Rosso rappresenta una costante strutturale nella politica estera etiopica, trascendendo le radicali trasformazioni di regime, che hanno caratterizzato il paese nel corso del Novecento e del XXI secolo. Dalla visione imperiale di Haile Selassie, che legava indissolubilmente la sovranità nazionale al controllo delle coste eritree, fino alle strategie dell’attuale amministrazione del primo ministro Abiy Ahmed, l’aspirazione a una proiezione marittima è rimasta un nodo centrale e irrisolto. L’intervento si propone di analizzare come la necessità di uno sbocco al mare abbia inciso sull’identità etiopica, interpretando tale esigenza non solo in chiave economica, ma come elemento fondante di una postura geopolitica di potenza regionale. Attraverso un approccio diacronico, la relazione esplorerà le continuità ideologiche e strategiche tra l’epoca imperiale, il periodo del DERG e l’attuale contesto post-indipendenza eritrea. Infine, si esamineranno le recenti evoluzioni – inclusi gli accordi infrastrutturali con i paesi limitrofi e le tensioni nel Corno d’Africa – per comprendere come l’Etiopia stia tentando di ridefinire il proprio destino geopolitico in un contesto di rinnovata competizione internazionale per il controllo delle rotte marittime del Mar Rosso.

PANEL 7

LIQUID FRONTIERS. EXPLORING HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES OF INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE ALONG BORDER WATERWAYS

Convenors

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Language of the panel
English

ABSTRACT

Parallel economies based on smuggling and informal cross-border trade effectively challenge the geographical boundaries and cultural borders drawn by colonialism, even as they help shape them. Illicit trade activities are often shaped by the historical circumstances through which a given border has come into existence: where the border is not considered legitimate, smuggling represents - or may represent - an act of social conscience and political protest. This clearly shows how closely the processes and dynamics of border-demarkation and illicit trade activities are intertwined and how they influence each other. It has frequently been argued in African studies that the construction of borders across the African continent by European powers (but not only) has neglected the natural boundaries between different territories. Nevertheless, water bodies (i.e., rivers, lakes, lagoons) have undeniably maintained a crucial role in the opening of flexible border markets, accompanied by other social, economic, and cultural developments, such as warehousing, currency exchange, smuggling of illicit goods, cross-border transport, and flows of both local people and immigrants attracted by the profits of cross-border commercial activities. The panel aims to stimulate discussion about licit and illicit commercial activities conducted along a variety of waterways across the African continent. The discussion seeks to highlight that what we often refer to as “smuggling” reflects pre-colonial trading relationships, the artificial nature of colonial-era borders, and the differences in trade policies between two or more countries after independence. The proposed time frame is extensive, encompassing the years prior to colonial rule up to the independence of African states (early 19th century – second half of the 20th century). Perspectives for analysis and debate may include the commercial actors involved, the infrastructure deployed for commercial activities, border disputes over control of waterways, and trans-regional integrations facilitated by water trade routes.

PAPERS

TRADING IN WATER: MOBILITY, MARKETS, AND CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS IN NORTHERN GHANA (1920–1950)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of water, mobility, and trade in shaping regional commercial networks in Northern Ghana, with a particular focus on the Upper East Region along the Ghana–Burkina Faso border. Centering on female market traders, it explores how everyday trading practices both predate and unsettle colonial economic boundaries, challenging rigid distinctions between licit trade and smuggling. Drawing on archival research and interviews, the paper traces the ways in which water enters regional trade in multiple forms: as a commodity (through water selling, brewing, and food processing), as an infrastructural constraint shaping mobility, and as an environmental factor structuring seasonal market cycles. Rivers, seasonal water scarcity, and transport nodes near water sources sustained flexible trading routes that long predated colonial border demarcation. The paper argues that commercial networks in Northern Ghana reveal strong continuities across precolonial and colonial periods, particularly in cross-border exchange with present-day Burkina Faso. Practices often described as “illicit” emerge instead as historically grounded modes of circulation rooted in older trading relationships, and uneven state presence. By foregrounding women traders—largely absent from colonial archives but central to commercial life—the paper contributes to debates on borders and illicit trade by highlighting gendered labor, knowledge transmission, and monetary practices. It shows how women’s work both navigated and reshaped the economic boundaries imposed by colonial rule, revealing the porous and negotiated nature of African border economies.

PAPERS

THE ALCOHOLIC FRONTIER: ANALYSING THE FORMATION OF THE ASSINIE BORDER (GOLD COAST/CÔTE D'IVOIRE) THROUGH THE MOVEMENT (LICIT AND ILLICIT) OF LIQUOR, 1888/1893

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ABSTRACT

To reconstruct border dynamics from a bottom-up perspective, it is worth considering the role that African entrepreneurship, along with its ties to European trading houses, played in shaping the boundary between the Gold Coast and Côte d'Ivoire in the late nineteenth century. This process can be illuminated particularly well through the lens of the liquor trade. In the context of the Coast of Guinea, fermented beverages – palm wine above all – had long held a central social and ritual significance. Against this backdrop, the entry of alcohol into a market economy through the importation of distilled spirits from Europe, beginning in the fifteenth century, represented a change of considerable consequence. After the formal abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, the share of spirits in total imports from Europe and America grew disproportionately, fuelling an intense debate in nineteenth-century Britain – and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in Europe – around the alleged "moral degradation" of Africans through alcohol consumption. Chapter VI of the Brussels Convention of 1890 responded directly to these concerns, being dedicated explicitly to the restriction and control of liquor imports, with its provisions subsequently strengthened by the St. Germain-en-Laye Convention of 1919. The implementation of these policies by the respective colonial administrations inevitably affected the dynamics of the cross-border liquor trade. Border negotiations between the Gold Coast (Ghana since 1957) and Côte d'Ivoire had begun in 1877 and, after several stages, culminated in the signing of an Anglo-French Protocol in Paris in July 1893. This paper traces the negotiations for the demarcation of a specific section of that border – the stretch between Newtown (Gold Coast) and Nougoua (Côte d'Ivoire) – during the years from 1888 to 1893. The analysis focuses on the role played by the cross-border movement of imported spirits across the lagoons and the river Tanoe, examining how local economic interests, often mediated by local chiefs and merchants, shaped and influenced the work of the border demarcation commissioners.

PAPERS

OF WATER AND LAND: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE UGANDA - KENYA BORDERLAND

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ABSTRACT

Trade relations between Uganda and Kenya have long been shaped by their colonial history, geographic proximity, and evolving political boundaries in East Africa. Today, Uganda and Kenya are deeply interconnected through regional trade, particularly within the east african community (eac). Kenya serves as Uganda's primary transit corridor to global markets via the port of Mombasa, while Uganda is a key export destination for kenyan manufactured goods, food products, and services, and a key transit territory for goods bound for Rwanda, eastern Congo, and South Sudan. In addition, informal cross-border trade, especially in agricultural produce and fish, plays a significant role in sustaining livelihoods in border regions such as Busia and Malaba (the sites of two of the eac's main ospbs). Efforts to harmonise customs procedures, reduce non-tariff barriers, and strengthen one-stop border posts reflect ongoing commitments to regional economic integration and the close ties between the two countries. However, today's relations are also marred by disputes and tensions stemming from informal trade activities and the way the border was demarcated. The modern-day Uganda-Kenya border emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under british colonial administration, leaving some unresolved issues and potential disputes. In particular, Lake Victoria, a critical economic and ecological asset, was divided without precise demarcation, leaving ambiguities that persist into the post-independence era. Following independence in the early 1960s, both states inherited the colonial borders, which became internationally recognised, yet unresolved lake boundaries remained a latent source of tension. Overall, Uganda-Kenya relations illustrate how colonial boundary legacies continue to intersect with contemporary trade dynamics and resource governance in East Africa. This paper aims to analyse those unresolved issues and how key informal trade affected those tensions.

PANEL 8

WATER, DISEASES, AND HEALTH IN AFRICAN HISTORY

Convenors

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English

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the African continent, water has not only been a constant companion of humans and animals, but also an essential source of life and survival. At the same time, however, water – or its absence – has also brought disease and death. Across time and space, it has been a transmitter of various illnesses, either directly by carrying and distributing pathogens or disease vectors, or indirectly by creating an environment in which humans and animals congregated and shared living spaces, along with the diseases harboured. The panel proposes a historical perspective on water on the African continent that focuses on the dimensions of health and disease. It asks what different roles water has played in the spread of disease, how humans have responded to such threats, and how the relationships between water and disease have changed both naturally and through human intervention. We invite historians and academics from related fields to submit contributions, which may include, but are not limited to: medical histories of water as a transmitter of disease, social histories of large infrastructure projects surrounding bodies of water and their health impacts, and political histories of the distribution of water and related disease patterns.



PAPERS

SMALLPOX EPIDEMICS, INOCULATION, AND CONTAINMENT IN 18TH-CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICA: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE ORANGE RIVER AND KALAHARI DESERT

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ABSTRACT

It is a well-established thesis that smallpox came to southern Africa from across the water. The disease was borne by ships that followed the global sea lanes around the Cape of Good Hope at the beginning of the 18th century. Two major outbreaks, in 1713 and 1755, had a strong impact on the settler population of Cape Town, but decimated african communities across the broader Cape region, suggesting to contemporary observers and scholars that the disease was previously unknown in the southern parts of the continent. A third outbreak in Cape Town in 1767 had milder effects and later the disease became endemic. The paper seeks to integrate this view by analysing the evidence for a much less known smallpox epidemic that spread in the southern kalahari desert and reached the Orange river in the 1760s and 1770s. In this case at least, the disease came from the north, from the interior of the continent, together or shortly followed by the practice of inoculation – which was also being introduced in the colony at the same time. By reconstructing the history of this particular smallpox epidemic in the broader history of disease in southern Africa, the paper will touch upon the importance of long-distance trade networks across arid landscapes for the spread – and control – of diseases. It will discuss african medical knowledge as an effective counter to epidemics. Finally, it will present policies of containment that might have shaped how people moved and settled across the landscape.

PAPERS

ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION, MEDICAL CARE, AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURES: THE FIGHT AGAINST MALARIA IN (POST)COLONIAL ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the 1830s, during the french occupation of Algeria, military physician François-Clément Maillot observed that quinine sulfate effectively prevented malaria and recommended its use among french troops, paving the way for a revolutionary approach to malaria prevention. In 1880, Alphonse Laveran, a military doctor in Constantine, demonstrated through the study of patients' blood that malaria was caused by a microorganism, the plasmodium. Laveran's identification of the malaria parasite earned him the Nobel Prize. In the early 20th century, research on malaria was continued by Edmond and Étienne Sergent at the pasteur institute of Algiers. As these aspects contribute to demonstrate, colonial Algeria functioned primarily as an experimental research site rather than as a space providing care for the local population. French colonial medicine largely excluded algerians from access to healthcare, and this lack of services for the muslim population contributed to the growth of anti-colonial sentiment. This paper focuses on malaria control after algerian independence, examining continuities and ruptures with colonial practices. The paper argues that, despite personnel shortages in the 1960s, Algeria pursued a broad national approach, prioritizing population-centered interventions. Post-independence efforts against malaria included interventions in wetlands and marshes, such as larval control, drainage, land reclamation, and the expansion of water infrastructure, alongside medical care for the population, with the support of the world health organization (who). Drawing on archival materials from the algerian ministry of health, the pasteur institute of Algiers, the algerian national institute of public health, and the who, and paying attention to local actors such as algerian nationalist physicians, this paper highlights the achievements of post-independence anti-malaria campaigns, as well as the challenges in sanitation infrastructure and water supply systems. These challenges contributed to the persistence of malaria endemicity in southern Algeria for decades, until the who officially declared the country malaria-free in 2019.

PAPERS

DAMS AND DISEASE: A LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN THE HIGHLANDS OF LESOTHO AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE HEALTH OF HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES (1950S-2000S)

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ABSTRACT

The numerous rivers that have carved deep valleys into the mountains of what today is the Kingdom of Lesotho have always played an important role for the inhabitants of the highlands. The rivers are sources of water, part of everyday life, and sometimes vectors for diseases. Yet, due to its altitude Lesotho is spared from water-borne or water-associated disease such as bilharzia or malaria. Water has, however, also another important dimension for Lesotho and the larger region—as a natural resource. Since the 1950s, South Africa had professed interest in diverting water from the remote highlands of Lesotho to the ever more water-consuming metropolitan region of Gauteng. After many setbacks, construction started in the 1990s on damming the Malibamatšo river to form the Katse reservoir and to supply Gauteng via tunnel systems. The large infrastructure project brought jobs and the promise of high-modernist development. It also brought disease. The main construction of the tunnel system and the dam coincided with the rapid spread of hiv/aids in Lesotho. The work camps along the river and later reservoir reportedly became places from which the virus spread into the surrounding communities. Both the increased number of work accidents as well as the rise in hiv cases put additional strain onto a health care system already at capacity. The proposed paper focuses on the Lesotho Highland water project from the 1950s to the early 2000s from the perspective of health, showing the effects such a large-scale infrastructure project had on the health of the highland communities, as well as on the health care system. It critically traces ideas and promises of development tied to the project, and how these promises remained unfulfilled in many cases. It also highlights how the project impacted the existing health care system in the Malibamatšo valley, and what was left when the construction was finished.

PAPERS

A NEW INVISIBLE ENEMY TRAVELLING BY WATER: CHOLERA PROPAGATION AND DEFENCE IN 19TH CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

As it is known, cholera reached the Mediterranean basin at the end of the 1820s and repeatedly stroke it during the 19th century. Its fast and unpredictable propagation, much faster than plague, due to water ways as carrier (navigation and water contamination) and its horrible rapid lethal effects provoked not only important demographic losses but also profound panic, deep mistrust in scientific progress, and serious questioning of health defences up until the discoveries of the microbiological agents and the mechanism of water diffusion of the late 19th century (Robert Koch 1883-84 after F. Pacini 1854 and J. Snow 1854) both in the ottoman empire and in Europe. We assist to hard debates in the medical, sanitary, and juridical field on the ways of transmission and the measures to prevent it; the rapid institution of sanitary boards on european models; the widespread and regular application of sanitary cordons and quarantines; and participation in the international sanitary conferences (Paris, Istanbul, Vienna, Washington etc.). Cholera, effectively, acted as a litmus test, highlighting deficiencies and needs, and as a catalyst for speculative forces, the transfer of knowledge, the search of solutions, the strengthening of defences, and the international policies aiming at shifting the lines of epidemic defence from the northern to the southern shore of the Mediterranean. This proposal would highlight some key aspects of this phase of change in the mid-nineteenth century, underlying how the unpredictability of the waterborne spread of cholera and its terrifying effects so strongly influenced medicine, public health, and politics besides economy and law. Within the broader context of mediterranean Africa the focus will be on Tunisia, drawing on documents from african archives (health council records) and european archives (consular and sanitary correspondence) and an extensive bibliography ranging from medical reports to historiographical analyses.

PANEL 10

ACQUE E ATTIVITÀ ECONOMICHE: INFRASTRUTTURE IDRICHE, AGRICOLTURA E SVILUPPO NEI CONTESTI AFRICANI (SECC. XIX–XX)

Convenors

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Language of the panel

Italian, French

ABSTRACT

Il panel intende esplorare il ruolo delle acque come risorsa economica nei processi di trasformazione dei territori africani in epoca contemporanea (secc. XIX e XX). La relazione fra gestione idrica, attività economiche e modelli di sviluppo attraversa l'intera storia africana, dalle esperienze coloniali fino alle più recenti politiche di sostenibilità e adattamento climatico. L'acqua, nella sua dimensione materiale e simbolica, rappresenta una chiave interpretativa per comprendere la costruzione di spazi agricoli e industriali, le forme di controllo istituzionale e i conflitti sociali ed ecologici. Le opere idrauliche – dighe, canali, bacini artificiali, sistemi di irrigazione e drenaggio – sono state strumenti centrali tanto per l'espansione coloniale quanto per le strategie postcoloniali di modernizzazione. Essi hanno ridefinito rapporti di potere, modelli produttivi, catene di valore e gerarchie territoriali, incidendo sulle forme di sfruttamento del lavoro e sulla redistribuzione delle risorse. Il panel accoglie contributi che affrontino in prospettiva storica, economica, politica o antropologica il nesso tra acque e attività economiche: la gestione idrica nella produzione agricola e industriale; la costruzione di infrastrutture e i relativi saperi tecnici; i sistemi di irrigazione e le pratiche di conservazione; i rapporti tra istituzioni, comunità locali e attori internazionali; la dimensione ambientale e simbolica delle politiche dell'acqua. Sono particolarmente benvenuti studi di caso che mettano in luce la pluralità delle economie idriche africane – dall'Africa orientale alle regioni saheliane e mediterranee – e che interrogino i legami tra risorse, innovazione tecnologica, ecologia e governance. L'obiettivo è favorire un dialogo interdisciplinare sulla lunga durata, capace di connettere le esperienze storiche di gestione delle acque con le sfide contemporanee legate alla sostenibilità, alla sovranità alimentare e alla giustizia ambientale.

PAPERS

COMPETENZE SCIENTIFICHE E SVILUPPO AGRICOLO: ACQUA, COLTURE ED ECONOMIA NELLA SOMALIA COLONIALE

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ABSTRACT

Il contributo esamina il ruolo dell'acqua e delle infrastrutture idriche nello sviluppo agricolo ed economico della Somalia tra l'inizio del novecento e i decenni centrali del XX secolo, concentrandosi sulle interazioni tra istituzioni coloniali, saperi scientifici e pratiche produttive. L'analisi mette al centro l'attività di agronomi e botanici italiani attivi in Somalia, o impegnati nello studio del territorio somalo, a partire dagli anni dieci del novecento, tra cui Romolo Onor, Girolamo Azzi, Armando Maugini e Nello Mazzocchi Alemanni. I loro studi contribuirono a elaborare una lettura integrata del territorio, fondata sulla relazione tra clima, suolo, colture e disponibilità idrica. Attraverso osservazioni e sperimentazioni condotte in particolare nei bacini fluviali del Giuba e dello Scebeli, questi studiosi individuarono nell'acqua un fattore strutturante dell'agricoltura, non solo in termini di irrigazione, ma anche come risorsa potenziale per la produzione energetica e per la trasformazione del paesaggio agrario. In questo contesto, l'ecologia agraria offrì un quadro interpretativo capace di integrare l'analisi economica con la conoscenza degli ecosistemi locali, ponendo le basi per una lettura sistemica dei rapporti tra ambiente e produzione. L'attenzione degli agronomi e dei botanici alla gestione delle risorse idriche e alla scelta delle coltivazioni rispondeva anche a valutazioni di ordine economico, legate all'aumento della produttività agricola, alla riduzione dei rischi climatici e alla valorizzazione delle risorse naturali disponibili. I saperi scientifici contribuirono così a definire criteri economici di intervento sul territorio, orientando le decisioni relative alle colture da promuovere, agli investimenti infrastrutturali da sostenere e alle forme di organizzazione agricola ritenute più efficienti e sostenibili nel medio periodo. Si intende mostrare come tali conoscenze abbiano concorso a costruire una visione dello sviluppo agricolo fondata sulla razionalizzazione delle risorse naturali e sull'adattamento delle colture alle condizioni ambientali, piuttosto che sul semplice trasferimento di modelli produttivi europei.

PAPERS

L'IMPERO AUTARCHICO. AGRICOLTURA E BONIFICHE IN SOMALIA TRA LE DUE GUERRE MONDIALI

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ABSTRACT

Le risorse naturali delle colonie italiane erano estremamente scarse. Qualsiasi progetto di valorizzazione economica doveva assicurare inevitabilmente un equilibrio ideale tra le piantagioni tropicali che avrebbero garantito le materie prime alla madrepatria, la scarsità della manodopera e la volontà di raggiungere l'autarchia alimentare della popolazione africana e dei coloni italiani. Se l'esperimento più importante è stato certamente quello promosso in Libia con la creazione dei villaggi demografici sul gebel e l'immigrazione di oltre 30.000 coloni italiani fra il 1938 e il 1939, un caso di studio altrettanto interessante è certamente quello della Somalia, perché gli esperimenti agrari erano cominciati già in età liberale. Inoltre, era stata esclusa la colonizzazione demografica con contadini italiani. La divisione del lavoro concepita dal regime fascista per l'impero affidava alla colonia la produzione di materie prime secondo il modello dell'economia di piantagione, utilizzando lavoratori africani. Il contributo chiarisce come le politiche economiche del regime fascista abbiano ampiamente rimodellato il territorio mediante le bonifiche, sradicando la popolazione somala, e generando un equilibrio ambientale artificiale, correlato all'organizzazione economica autarchica.

PAPERS

IMPRESA PUBBLICA ITALIANA, RISORSE ENERGETICHE E SVILUPPO AFRICANO. TECNOLOGIE OFF-SHORE E IMPIANTI IDROELETTRICI TRA ANNI SESSANTA E OTTANTA

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ABSTRACT

Dalla metà degli anni Cinquanta, in uno scenario globale segnato dalla guerra fredda e dal declino dei sistemi coloniali, il tentativo di riaffermazione del prestigio internazionale dell'Italia si intrecciava con il protagonismo assunto dalle realtà africane. Muovendosi nell'ambito di una strategia di progresso comune dei popoli mediterranei e di crescente attenzione al processo di decolonizzazione, importanti settori della classe dirigente e imprenditoriale italiana contribuirono all'articolazione di iniziative di cooperazione allo sviluppo funzionali alla proiezione delle aziende nazionali verso mercati promettenti e ricchi di materie prime. Un ruolo centrale fu giocato in tale contesto dall'Iri e dall'Eni, grandi imprese pubbliche che si proponevano quali interlocutrici privilegiate delle giovani realtà africane, in cui la carenza di iniziativa privata assegnava all'intervento statale una funzione decisiva di motore della crescita. Un fattore cruciale di consolidamento della componente africana di entrambi i gruppi fu rappresentato dal livello di competitività internazionale raggiunto nella costruzione di grandi impianti, grazie all'attività svolta dalle controllate Saipem, Snam Progetti (Eni) e Italmimpianti (Iri). Per quanto riguarda l'Eni, l'implementazione del sistema dei mezzi di esplorazione off-shore e di posa dei materiali in mare aperto consentì dai primi anni Settanta alla Saipem di assumere la leadership mondiale nell'allestimento di reti di condotte sottomarine, diverse delle quali in acque africane e di significato fondamentale per l'approvvigionamento energetico dell'Italia. Il punto di svolta della strategia africana dell'Iri fu invece rappresentato dagli accordi con l'ex Congo belga, che a inizio anni Settanta vide la partecipazione di Italmimpianti al consorzio affidatario dei lavori per la centrale di Inga, sulle rive del fiume Congo, dove si stimava fosse concentrato il maggiore potenziale idroelettrico del mondo. In ambito finanziario, rilevante fu l'impegno africano della Comit (Iri), protagonista con altri istituti internazionali della creazione di una rete di banche di promozione economica grazie al cui sostegno furono avviati vari progetti di sviluppo agricolo e industriale, alcuni a partecipazione italiana, soprattutto nel settore idraulico e nella realizzazione di grandi dighe.

PAPERS

AMBIENTE NATURALE E ALLEVAMENTO NELL'AFRICA ORIENTALE ITALIANA: UNA DIFFICILE COESISTENZA

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ABSTRACT

Gli studi sul colonialismo italiano nell'afrika orientale hanno sostanzialmente analizzato le scelte per la creazione di un'efficace agricoltura tropicale in grado di produrre tanto materia prima (cotone) quanto prodotti alimentari (caffè, banane). Questa proposta prende in esame la situazione che caratterizzava l'allevamento tradizionale e i tentativi di introdurre una più progredita industria zootecnica nei possedimenti coloniali. Le relazioni ufficiali, già dalla fine del XIX secolo, mettono in risalto che la pastorizia aveva un notevole peso nella società della Somalia e dell'eritrea ma che i sistemi di allevamento erano molto arretrati. In realtà il bestiame per la popolazione indigena aveva un scarso valore economico in quanto veniva utilizzato quasi esclusivamente per la produzione di latte o pelli, escludendo il suo impiego nel lavoro o nella produzione di carne. Dunque il commercio di bestiame aveva un scarso peso. Inoltre le condizioni ambientali favorivano la diffusione della peste bovina e di mortifere malattie come la mosca tse-tse. Nel tentativo di rendere l'allevamento locale meno precario nel 1914 si creò l'istituto siero-vaccinogeno di Asmara. Nel 1912 Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini, futuro direttore della "società agricola italo-somala", pubblicò "l'impresa zootecnica nella Somalia italiana" e ci fornisce una dettagliata descrizione degli ostacoli naturali che imponevano la pratica di un allevamento molto lontano dalle aspettative dell'impresa colonizzatrice. Tuttavia tra gli anni venti e trenta furono compiuti numerosi tentativi onde incrementare e migliorare la pastorizia indigena, anche con il contributo dell'industria della carne in scatola, ma i risultati furono abbastanza deludenti. In realtà lo stesso Scassellati ammonisce che le opere di bonifica e canalizzazione dei corsi d'acqua se da un lato potevano favorire la nascita di un'agricoltura più progredita, dall'altro rischiavano di rompere i fragili equilibri ecologici che sostenevano la pratica di un allevamento perfettamente adatto alle difficili condizioni ambientali.

PAPERS

MUTATIONS SOCIO-ÉCONOMIQUES DES ESPACES RURAUX: CAS DES ZONES STEPPIQUES DE LA WILAYA DE LAGHOUAT (ALGÉRIE)

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ABSTRACT

Le présent travail décrit les retombées de la disparition progressive de la gestion communautaire de la ressource productive eau sur l'évolution socio-spatiale des territoires ruraux de la commune steppique de Hadj-Mechri, wilaya de Laghouat, où un système d'irrigation assurait l'acheminement de l'eau depuis les sources et l'oued, à travers des seguias (canaux) en béton et des bassins d'accumulation. La répartition de l'eau, à usage agricole, se faisait par tour de rôle déterminé selon une entente entre les usagers, engagés à respecter les règles de partage définies collégialement. Sur le plan méthodologique, un diagnostic rapide sur l'agriculture irriguée impliquant les usagers est réalisé en décembre 2025 selon une approche participative. Outre les entretiens avec des personnes ressources, le diagnostic déploie des cartes ressources mettant en évidence la répartition spatiale des points d'eau, des parcours et terres mises en culture; des calendriers agricoles renseignant sur l'importance de chaque activité agricole; des cartes de rayonnement social, etc. Une comparaison avec la situation analysée entre 2006 et 2008, laisse apparaître la fragilisation de l'irrigation communautaire au profit d'une irrigation individuelle. Par conséquent, un abandon progressif des terres restées dépendantes de l'ancien système d'irrigation gravitaire, est observé, malgré la rénovation des seguias sur fonds de programmes publics. La multiplication des forages individuels exacerbe la pression exercée sur la ressource en eau de moins en moins disponible, à cause de la sécheresse récurrente, augmentant cependant l'attractivité des agriculteurs itinérants, locataires de terres équipées de forages. Indirectement, une forme de rente foncière s'institutionnalise au profit des locaux plus enclins à l'abandon de l'activité agricole. Les agriculteurs itinérants apportent certes des innovations, mais, ils imposent des systèmes de production consommateurs d'eau (culture de la pomme de terre et de l'oignon) sur des superficies relativement importantes. Alors que traditionnellement, les agriculteurs cultivaient des fedden (petits carrés consacrés aux cultures maraichères et dont la superficie ne dépasse pas un demi-hectare). Dans ce modèle de production traditionnel, même les femmes participaient à l'effort de l'irrigation en déplaçant les tuyaux d'un fedden à un autre. Les mutations socio-économiques des espaces ruraux de Hadj-Mechri sont ainsi mises en évidence en dépit de l'intervention de pouvoirs publics par la réalisation d'un périmètre irrigué qui s'avère défailante, faute d'usagers.

PANEL 11

THE RIVER EMBODIES THE BORDER, THE BORDER EMBODIES THE RIVER. CASE STUDIES FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE AFRICAN BORDER.

Convenors

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Language of the panel
English

ABSTRACT

Through historical and anthropological analysis of archival and ethnographic materials, the Panel aims to discuss, in a critical and innovative manner, the frequent phenomenon of correspondence between rivers and borders (both colonial and postcolonial) in the African context. In many case studies, colonial and later national borders match the course of a river; in other situations, the river served as a border for a limited period, later replaced by a new territorial configuration. These overlaps between the colonial linear border and the course of a river—which locally often does not correspond to a line of demarcation but rather represents a ritual, political, and economic connector—highlight the conceptual clash between the fixity of the border and the fluidity of water and the activities practiced around and across it. What happens to rivers that become borders? What happens to borders that are placed along rivers? And, above all, how do the people who inhabit these territorial configurations mould them? The existing literature strongly emphasizes how river crossing can represent the ritual of the foundation of a political entity after migration (Izard and Ki-Zerbo 1992), or the confirmation of a foreign ruler's authority (Sahlins 2019), and how trespassing the river is often an act of social and economic connection (MacGaffey 2003; Coplan 2001). We will therefore seek to investigate whether and how an epistemological fracture takes place when a river and a linear border overlap, and what effect this may have on political dynamics, identities, and the mobility of border (and river) peoples. And, more specifically, how can colonial borders, which are also rivers, be culturally and politically incorporated? How are identities and political claims constructed when a river embodies a national border, a line on the map, a limit, a barrier to mobility?



PAPERS

FLOWING BORDERS: WATER, MOBILITY, AND BELONGING ALONG THE MEREB RIVER

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the discussion on the relationship between borders and waterways through the case of the Mereb River, a part of the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The image of the river aptly captures the paradoxical nature of African borders (Nugent, Asiwaju, 1996), namely the gap between official intentions and grassroots perceptions, between disjunction and connection. While, as a natural feature, a river lends fixity to the border that follows its course, the water that constitutes it embodies fluidity and unpredictability par excellence. Like the river, the border can entail both constraints and opportunities (Dereje, Hoehne, 2010) for the populations who inhabit and cross it. This interplay between stability and fluidity is particularly evident in relation to the Mereb River, which, since the pre-colonial period, has marked distinctions between Tigrinya-speaking populations on the two sides of its banks in the northern highlands of the Horn of Africa. Despite the apparent fixity of the river, the political institutions surrounding it have historically been shifting, producing over time different degrees of separation and permeability. The paper draws on ethnographic research conducted in Tigray before the 2018 peace agreement and the subsequent conflicts, among individuals who crossed the Mereb following the 1998–2000 war and were received in Ethiopia as Ethiopian returnees and Eritrean refugees. Drawing on travel narratives, family biographies, and everyday life, the paper explores, first, how the fluvial character of the geopolitical border has shaped the rhythms, experiences, and possibilities of these crossings, becoming an important symbolic and embodied reference in people's lives and memories. Second, by approaching the border as a symbolic construct shaping social differences (Barth 1969), the paper traces processes of distinction and differentiation among returnee and refugee populations in Ethiopia, which, however, like water, have retained a certain degree of fluidity and unpredictability.

PAPERS

MEREB RIVER AND ITS PROSPECTIVE ROLE FROM CENTRE OF CONTENTION TO COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Mereb is a rain-dependent river, mainly originating from the central highlands of Eritrea. On its east-to-west flowing course, the river serves as an international border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Centuries before the arrival of European colonization, the history of both sides describes the river as a border of political influence and identity. The land north of the river, especially part of the present-day Eritrean highland, was known as መረብ ምላሽ (the land beyond the Mereb River) and ruled under Medri Bahri chiefs, the Bahre Negash (king of the sea) based in Dubarwa. The river, as a borderline, formally separates the Tigriigna-speaking people residing in Eritrea and Tigray of Ethiopia, but it was the main source of livelihood and a platform for cross-border trade and cooperation. After the 1998-2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia border war, the river became a war zone and the centre of contention. The 2018 peace accord between the governments in Asmara and Addis Ababa was short-lived and dashed the optimism of the people. However, following the Ethiopian claims of access to the port of Assab, the bilateral relations with Eritrea were strained, and this encouraged the regional government in Tigray to ally with the government in Asmara. The new friendly relation known as ጸግዶ (Pairing) has been welcomed by the majority of people on both sides of the river. Hence, this research will explore the possibilities of the new initiative in recovering the losses registered throughout the last two decades. In doing so, a descriptive approach will be methodologically applied, and the research outcome is expected to enlighten the historical trajectories and contemporary developments along the Mereb River.

PAPERS

FLUID BORDER: THE ROLE OF CUSTOMARY CHIEFS ALONG THE CONGO RIVER

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ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the Congo River as a liminal and relational space, both as a colonial and postcolonial border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo, and as a site where customary authority is exercised. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the DRC, the paper analyses the role of customary chiefs in regulating access to resources, mobility, and social relations along the river, highlighting the tensions and negotiations generated by the overlap between customary law and the state border. Far from being a line of separation, the river emerges as a social, political, and legal infrastructure that connects historically interrelated communities, challenging the fixity of the imposed border. Through the lens of legal pluralism, the analysis shows how customary chiefs reinterpret the riverine border, incorporating it into practices of mediation, authority, and legitimation, and contributing to an epistemology of the African border grounded in fluidity, continuity, and the social use of space.

PAPERS

“THE PROPHETS THAT COME FROM THE RIVER”: PROPHETISM, MESSIANISM AND ANTI-COLONIALISM ALONG THE BANKS OF THE UBANGI (CONGO/UBANGI-SHARI, 1937-1951)

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1930s, some Congolese, whom the Belgians had tried and sentenced for political reasons before deporting them to the far North of their colony, crossed the Ubangi River and entered French territory (in the colony of Ubangi-Shari – the present-day Central African Republic). They were members of Kitawala, who emerged from the Watch Tower, a movement that in the early XX century had begun to spread through the continent, starting from South Africa. One of these fugitives, Ambroise Belety, introduced to Ubangi-Shari his own version of the Kitawala doctrine, to which he gave the name of Colinga: on the eve of the Second World War, Belety proclaimed the imminent overturning of the colonial order, the defeat of the Belgians and French, and the arrival of other “stronger” Whites. While setting up his own cult, he attacked the Protestant and Catholic missionaries and, with them, all manifestations of colonial authority as well as the traditional “chefs”. To these classic features of Kitawala doctrine, deriving partly from the Watch Tower movement, Belety added other aspects linked to the free consumption of alcohol and sexuality, which inevitably scandalized some administrators and missionaries who tried to thwart the Colinga movement. This was the start of a series of events that would prove to be a permanent source of concern to the French colonial administration, whose nervousness (Hunt 2016) was equalled only by its slowness to understand the nature of this millenarian, anti-colonialist movement, identifying its members and preventing their constant movements back and forth across the Ubangi. This waterway – the main tributary of the River Congo – corresponded to an administrative frontier that often ended up hampering enquiries and exchange of information between the two colonies. For the men and women of Ubangi-Shari, however, who for almost two decades would continue to propagate Ambroise Belety’s message in forms that became gradually more diverse, the banks of the Ubangi provided a valuable haven that enabled them to cover the traces of their movements, and a fragile but important escape route from administrative oppression. The Ubangi connected these people and their communities to millenarianism, prophetism, and appeals to the anti-colonialism and Pan-Africanism that were arising and spreading throughout the Congo basin and beyond. In this study, based on archive materials, I intend to trace some moments in this long and complex Central-African history, showing how the Ubangi was the vehicle of people and ideas that expressed, often in religious terms, a common anti-colonial sentiment transcending geographical and socio-cultural distances.

PAPERS

LUKKUS RIVER BORDER IN THE SPANISH–FRENCH PROTECTORATE OF MOROCCO: A POSTCOLONIAL READING

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ABSTRACT

French and Spanish colonial rule in Morocco was formally conceived as a system of shared administration within the Protectorate. In practice, however, it produced two distinct colonial states operating within a framework of trans-imperial cooperation. The establishment of the interzone colonial border along the Lukkus River, and more broadly the imposition of colonial rule, generated conflicts, divisions, and hierarchies. At the same time, it also opened new spaces for social mobility and forms of human interaction. Rather than simply interrupting long-standing connections between regions and communities that had historically been closely intertwined, the colonial border reshaped and reconfigured them. Based on archival research and fieldwork conducted in the western section of the former Lukkus border, this paper offers a postcolonial reading of these dynamics. It argues that post-independence migratory patterns across the former borderland and beyond Morocco were significantly shaped by the social and cultural legacies of the colonial past. By examining the historical formation of this borderland, the paper highlights how colonial spatial and administrative logics continued to influence mobility, social networks, and migration trajectories in the postcolonial period.

PAPERS

BORDERING PRACTICES: COLONIAL IMPOSITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY CLAIMS ON THE OTI RIVER (GHANA-TOGO BORDER)

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ABSTRACT

The Oti River became a border during the mandatory phase of the colonial period, when British and French colonial powers took control of the Deutsche Togoland after Germany lost World War I. Therefore, the colonial border moved and corresponds to the Oti River only from the 1920s, dividing a homogeneous yet marginal community, the Konkomba. Indeed, the British idea was to unite the most powerful Dagomba kingdom under the same colonial power, after years of separation that had highly destabilised the region. Today, the mobility 'across the river' (that actually means 'border' in likpakpaaln, the Konkomba language) is granted by a great deal of familiar, ritual, and trade relationships between various Konkomba clans living on both sides of the river, but has never been facilitated by the central governments of Ghana and Togo. Indeed, no bridge has ever been constructed to connect this transnational community, and some potential projects that served as political promises have been stopped by the Ghana government after the 1994 civil disorders, which actively involved the Konkomba. From a local point of view, the Oti River functioned in that period as a connector, hiding refugees and IDPs in Togo, but from the government's perspective, it could be used as a barrier to stop and control the smuggling of guns and the passage of warriors. It is interesting to notice that this double function of the river/border could also be observed during colonial times, when Konkomba actively used the border to hide and escape colonial control. This contribution aims at reflecting on the contradictory yet malleable nature of borders, both colonial and postcolonial, and on the creative and politically entangled nature of rivers that become borders. It interrogates the communities living on the shores of the Oti River, their political claims and imaginations, but also the colonial discourse on the idea of superimposing the border on a river, through the analysis of the colonial documents and, also, their silences.

PANEL 12

HISTORICIZING THE WATER-FOOD-ENERGY NEXUS IN AFRICA

Convenors

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

This panel interrogates the politics of the water–food–energy (WFE) nexus in Africa, reframing food–security and green revolution debates around power, governance, and distributional justice. From the late colonial period to contemporary climate adaptation, we seek contributions that trace how states, donors, corporations, experts, and farmers have bargained over kilowatts, cubic meters, and kilograms—and how those bargains reconfigured authority, citizenship, and inequality. We spotlight five lines of inquiry: (1) state formation and infrastructures—dams, irrigation, electrification—as instruments of rule and territorial governance; (2) political economies of inputs and prices—fuel, fertilizer, electricity tariffs, water fees—that align or misalign incentives and exclude; (3) knowledge and metrics—yield targets, food balance sheets, hydrological models, nexus indices—that render problems legible and governable; (4) transboundary and urban politics connecting river basins, power pools, and food markets; and (5) contention and labor, with attention to classed and gendered burdens of securing water and energy for food. We welcome papers asking how nexus choices—who gets water, who pays for power, which crops are prioritized—create winners and losers across African contexts, and how past settlements persist or unravel under drought, energy shocks, and new technologies. This panel grows out of the PRIN MUR 2022 project, planning for food security in the 1960s: FAO and the Freedom from Hunger Campaign in Africa. The project examines how FFHC sought to embed food security within the multi-year development plans of newly independent African states, and how those states received, adapted, and co-defined FAO priorities within domestic socio-economic strategies. The panel ranges beyond FFHC to invite broader historical perspectives on the WFE nexus and food security.

PAPERS

WHERE THE LINE ENDS, AND THE POWER BEGINS: THE OMVS, THE OMVG, AND THE LAYERED HISTORIES OF ELECTRIFICATION IN SOUTHERN SENEGAL

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ABSTRACT

In May 2025, the arrival of streetlights finally brought illumination to Baldecounda, a small village nestled in Senegal's southern region of Kolda. The impact was immediate: within just a few months, nearly every household had wired its home, fueled by the collective excitement of a new era. "We will watch the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations in the village," the residents proclaimed, marking a shift from isolation to digital participation. While this connection is a direct result of the rural electrification drive led by President Macky Sall between 2012 and 2024, its foundations go much deeper. It is a story rooted in the long-standing history of the OMVS (established in 1972) and the OMVG (created in 1978)—two organizations born from colonial-era initiatives that sought interregional integration through the strategic management of the water-food-energy nexus. The energy now powering Baldecounda travels from the Manantali Dam on the upper Senegal River in Mali to the Tambacounda dispatch station, which was completed between 2022 and 2023. This network is set to expand further as the Sambagalou Dam on the Gambia River comes online, bridging the OMVS and OMVG grids. This infrastructural synergy does more than just light up homes; it solidifies a massive interconnection among Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau. Baldecounda thus becomes a vital lens through which we can observe socio-cultural shifts and map the "temporal architecture" of this regional interconnection. The grid itself acts as a physical materialization of "past futures"—visions of economic and socio-political development first dreamed of in the 1970s, refined over decades, and finally reaching the ground today. Ultimately, one cannot fully grasp the significance of these river organizations without seeing where their power lines end, nor can we understand Baldecounda's transformation without acknowledging the geopolitical dreams that generated the current. By triangulating the village's micro-history with the macro-history of continental river planning, this paper explores how high-level geopolitics are metabolized into the fabric of daily life.

PAPERS

BEYOND THREE MEALS A DAY: FOOD POLITICS AND AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses recent transformations in Ethiopia's food and agricultural policies through the public discourse of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, particularly the claim that "eating three meals a day cannot be the ultimate goal." This statement is interpreted as a political and moral redefinition of food security, shifting attention away from subsistence and access to food toward productivity and aspirations of excellence. The paper examines the consolidation of a new crop mix based on two complementary yet potentially tensioned trajectories. On the one hand, wheat self-sufficiency is promoted through state-led programs relying on improved seeds, fertilizers, and mechanization. On the other hand, fruit cultivation is increasingly encouraged as an indicator of agricultural modernization, dietary improvement, and integration into global markets, both involving cultivation in non-traditional agro-ecological areas and reconfiguring agricultural spatial geographies. Although presented as innovative, these trajectories are embedded in longer-standing policy frameworks that have historically framed agricultural development around technological intensification, while leaving persistent structural challenges unresolved. Climate change plays a central legitimizing role, portraying agricultural transformation as urgent and inevitable and naturalizing resource-intensive interventions. At the same time, international recognition—through FAO awards and the support of key development actors—helps validate Ethiopia's agricultural strategy as a model of success, redefining food security as a national project oriented toward performance. Against this narrative of success, field research conducted between 2021 and 2022 reveals a more problematic picture. Growing dependence on improved seeds and chemical inputs was already placing significant pressure on smallholder farmers, translating into rising production costs, indebtedness, and uncertainty rather than sustained improvements in living conditions. This discrepancy between international acclaim and difficulties on the ground highlights the tensions shaping Ethiopia's current agricultural transformation and interrogates the gap between celebrated policies and their local social consequences, obscuring inequalities in access to land, water, and energy.

PAPERS

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1980S: ITALY'S AND EEC'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reconstruct the development cooperation policy pursued by Italy and the European Economic Community in Ethiopia during the 1980s, with particular reference to environmental issues. The severe drought and famine that struck several African countries in those years prompted the EEC, in 1985, to launch a Rehabilitation and Revival Plan designed to restore agricultural production across affected territories and revive the economic activities of local populations, with food self-sufficiency as its overriding objective. Italy participated in the Plan through the Italian Aid Fund, established by Law 73/85, contributing programmes spanning agricultural revitalization, rural development, environmental protection, logistical support, and technical assistance. Especially noteworthy is Italian engagement in Ethiopia, one of the principal countries targeted by the Plan, which found its most ambitious expression in the multisectoral and integrated Tana Beles project – an initiative that extended well beyond agriculture to encompass the construction of infrastructure for water supply, healthcare, and communications. Drawing on archival sources from the European Commission in Brussels and from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the papers of Senator Giulio Andreotti in Rome, this paper reconstructs the joint action of Italy and the EEC in Ethiopia throughout the 1980s. It examines their coordinated response to the Rehabilitation and Revival Plan and to the broader challenge of combating drought and desertification, while also bringing to light the critical issues and contradictions that marked this collaborative effort.

PAPERS

WATER, POWER, AND POSTCOLONIAL SOVEREIGNTY: KWAME NKRUMAH, THE VOLTA RIVER PROJECT, AND THE POLITICAL MAKING OF VOLTA LAKE (1957–1966)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Volta River Project (VRP) and the subsequent creation of Volta Lake as defining moments in the political construction of postcolonial sovereignty in Ghana. Under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah (1957–1966), large-scale water and energy infrastructures were not merely engineering feats; they were central to the era's visions of development, state authority, and international autonomy. By situating the project within the dual pressures of decolonization and the Cold War, this study explores how the control of water emerged as both a catalyst for growth and a significant political constraint. Rather than viewing the VRP through a strictly economic or technical lens, this research conceptualizes it as a water-based political project. It represents a deliberate attempt by the Ghanaian state to transform a natural river system into a strategic asset designed to fuel industrialization, foster national integration, and cement Pan-African leadership. The damming of the Volta River and the formation of one of the world's largest artificial lakes fundamentally reconfigured the national territory—displacing communities and altering patterns of mobility—while embedding water and electricity at the very core of postcolonial political authority. Drawing on a diverse array of sources—including U.S. diplomatic records (FRUS), Ghanaian governmental archives, and Nkrumah's own political writings—this paper places the VRP within the broader debates on modernization and dependency. It demonstrates how technical decisions regarding kilowatts and cubic meters became contested sites of negotiation involving international financial institutions, Cold War powers, and technical experts. These negotiations reveal the uneven power relations that underpinned infrastructural development in the mid-20th century. Ultimately, the paper argues that the VRP embodied a fundamental tension at the heart of postcolonial state-building. While envisioned as the foundation for economic emancipation, the project's heavy reliance on external capital and geopolitical approval turned these infrastructures into instruments of external leverage. By historicizing the water-energy nexus, this study illustrates how struggles over water control shaped the ambitions and limits of African sovereignty, leaving a legacy that continues to inform modern debates on dependency and climate vulnerability.

PANEL 13

BODIES OF WATER AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN HISTORY

Convenors

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Language of the panel
 English, Italian

ABSTRACT

This panel will examine how approaching the contemporary history of Africa through aquatic analytical frameworks can offer new perspectives from strictly “landed” approaches. This panel is inspired by the seminal framing of Paul Gilroy, who argued that a “Black Atlantic” connected space and concept revealed slavery to be the origin of Western modernity (Gilroy 1993). Particularly in African history, where the weight of the colonial and postcolonial state is so heavy, a ‘bodies of water’ approach can open up alternate vistas of analysis, including those that rethink region, diaspora, and identity. How might we write the history of colonialism in West Africa differently, for example, if we approach it from a Black Atlantic lens? This panel seeks contributions that approach history from such vantage points, including but not limited to the Atlantic or Indian Ocean worlds, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Nile, the Great Lakes, or even the Sahara, which was conceived as an ‘ocean of sand’ (indeed, its southern shore was called the Sahel (“shore” or “edge” in Arabic). As such, contributions need not address the history of water per se, but rather interrogate how bodies of water provide new approaches to understanding and framing the past.



PAPERS

READING DECOLONIZATION AS A BLACK ATLANTIC EMANCIPATION

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ABSTRACT

A Black Atlantic perspective yields fresh insights into the meanings of decolonization in West Africa. At once an imagined geography and affective experience, the term Black Atlantic conjures the Africans and people of African descent who have shaped the Atlantic world in bondage and freedom since its inception. This perspective allows us to see West African independence from colonial rule in the mid twentieth century as akin to nineteenth-century slave emancipations, thereby helping to explain the central role of education in both popular and statist visions of freedom. A Black Atlantic frame accounts for West Africa's signature accomplishment of the decolonization era: the transformation, in just over two decades, of a skeletal colonial infrastructure built for thousands into national school systems that welcomed millions of schoolchildren. It reveals that the educational project of anticolonial development was part of a broader liberation struggle. The term emancipation explicitly connects the powerful demand for schooling at the end of the empire in West Africa with parallel aspirations of formerly enslaved people in the Black Atlantic in the century prior. Whether in the southern United States during Reconstruction, in the post-emancipation Caribbean, or indeed in small pockets of coastal West Africa, the formerly enslaved sought out education as constitutive of the practice of freedom. In part, the desire to counter how Africans and African-descended people had been racialized by Europeans drove this striking demand, particularly among Europhone African elites. But, for most people, the process of going to school was meaningful because it represented a means to enact emancipation, to transition from being freed to being free.

PAPERS

PEDAGOGIES COAST TO COAST: THE MEDITERRANEAN TRAJECTORIES OF EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN ITALIAN LIBYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the circulation of pedagogies in the Mediterranean basin to emphasize the little studied yet strong connections and mutual influence between school curricula in the Italian peninsula and in Libya, and between educational policies in Libya and French North Africa. Most Italian schoolteachers crucially envisioned the Mediterranean as a borderless space in which Italian and Libyan youth simultaneously belonged as students to be similarly educated, in spite of their distinct language, religion, and citizenship status. Since Italy's birth as a nation-state in 1861, teachers had indeed received specific training that made them envision schooling as a tool to co-opt—but also socially uplift and "modernize"—linguistically and culturally diverse youth into the Italian national community, in Italy as well as in its African colonies. Even a few teachers' requests to adapt nationally standardized school curricula and schoolbooks to colonial contexts in the 1920s were part of a larger history of nation-building in the classroom, and especially of the regionalization of education as a strategy for educators and the state to connect to and unify students with different backgrounds across the Italian peninsula. Simultaneously, Italian scholars and officials carefully observed and were influenced by prevalent approaches to the education of French colonial subjects in North Africa. The legal scholar Enrico De Leone, for example, did research stays in French North Africa to familiarize himself with school policies in Algeria and Morocco. Such knowledge made him rethink and reshape educational policy in Libya. Drawing from teachers' and scholars' writings, and archival sources documenting their Mediterranean trajectories, this paper broadly argues that Italian colonial pedagogies in North Africa were not born in insulation and were not specific to the self-enclosed borders of the colony, but resulted from a sea-wide circulation of teachers, scholars, officials, their ideas, and pedagogic equipment.

PAPERS

MAKING THE DESERT LEGIBLE: WATER, KNOWLEDGE, AND STATE POWER IN LIBYA'S SAHARA (1950S)

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ABSTRACT

In the 1950s, the discovery of vast fossil water reserves in south-eastern Libya's Sahara, made in the context of oil exploration, marked an epistemic and symbolic transformation of the desert well before the construction of the Great Man-Made River Project. Far from being a merely technical or economic precursor, this discovery contributed to redefining the desert as a knowable, measurable, and governable space, gradually incorporating it into the logics of the newly independent state. In a border region historically characterised by mobility, fluid sovereignties, and local water knowledges, the rise of "scientific" hydrogeological expertise produced new hierarchies of knowledge and new regimes of territorial legitimacy. The underground water reserve – invisible yet quantifiable – became a key object through which narratives of development, modernity, and national futurity were articulated, transforming the Sahara from an unproductive margin into a strategic resource. This process reconfigured centre-periphery relations, as border zones were progressively integrated not through immediate settlement or infrastructure, but through the promise of deferred resource control. Drawing on the intersection of archival materials – primarily European – alongside memoirs and Arabic-language newspapers from Egypt and Libya, the paper reads this discovery as a foundational moment in the emergence of a new state "water politics", in which water mediates between territory, sovereignty, and collective identity, while also functioning as a tool of territorial claim-making. This perspective shifts attention from the completed infrastructure to the prior phase of knowledge and meaning production, showing how the Great Man-Made River was preceded – and made possible – by a profound cultural reorganisation of the Libyan desert.

PAPERS

PENSARE L'IDROPOLITICA AFRICANA: L' ACQUA COME QUADRO ANALITICO PER IL RINASCIMENTO AFRICANO

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ABSTRACT

L'analisi sulla gestione delle risorse idriche del continente africano riapre gli archivi tematici del periodo postindipendenze, riportando alla luce la scelta tra l'approccio nazionalista dello Stato-nazione, di eredità coloniale, e il destino federale panafricanista proposto dal professor Cheikh Anta Diop. Questa decisione di natura politica costituisce una lente d'ingrandimento sulle tensioni che il continente vive tra la necessità di sopravvivenza nel sistema-mondo, la salvaguardia della propria integrità territoriale e i tentativi di conservazione identitaria. Partendo dal paradigma africano che postula l'equilibrio tra valore d'uso e valore simbolico dell'acqua, l'analisi propone scenari alternativi all'idea dell'ineluttabilità del conflitto e all'imperativo della scarsità delle risorse idriche che caratterizzano il pensiero dominante. L'indagine offre una rassegna dell'epistemologia africana dell'accesso e dell'utilizzo delle risorse idriche, con l'obiettivo di circoscrivere il campo riflessivo dell'idropolitica africana. Essa adotta, inoltre, un metodo comparativo volto a individuare le principali linee di continuità e discontinuità tra i modelli di governance idrica esistenti, proponendo una "terza via", quella del Rinascimento africano, concettualizzato come un processo strutturalmente multidimensionale orientato a traiettorie di sviluppo endogeno, in cui si articolano e si ricompongono fattori storici, politici, economici e culturali, insieme a differenti forme di razionalità – spiritualità, potere e produzione di conoscenza, concorrendo alla riformulazione delle pratiche di gestione delle risorse idriche e, più in generale, delle traiettorie di sviluppo del continente. Per tradurre il piano epistemologico in osservazione concreta, l'analisi si concentra su due casi: da un lato, la prospettiva stato-nazionalista attraverso il caso della diga etiopica sul Nilo (GERD – Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam); dall'altro, le prospettive di cooperazione idrica regionale, con l'esempio del progetto Transaqua, volto al trasferimento idrico dal bacino del fiume Congo al Lago Ciad. I casi proposti costituiscono due nodi empirici che superano la mera visione politica, abbracciando le geometrie variabili delle modalità di finanziamento delle infrastrutture idriche, della sfida tecnologico-innovativa e delle implicazioni ambientali e sociali. In conclusione, la riflessione propone non solo uno sguardo decoloniale e alternativo all'idropolitica continentale, ma anche una "libazione" ai valori ancestrali africani di sacralità dell'acqua, sotto l'imperativo del Rinascimento africano.

PAPERS

FLOWS OF SOLIDARITY: THEORIZING REGGIO-EMILIA-SOUTH AFRICAN COOPERATION FROM THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID TO THE PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the notion of flows of solidarity as an analytical framework to understand the trajectory and fluctuations in the relationship between Reggio Emilia, a small town in northern Italy historically governed by the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) from the 1970s to the present. Reggio Emilia's bonds of solidarity with the ANC, which initially passed through Mozambique's Frelimo, were consolidated with the signing of a 'Pact of solidarity' in 1977 and reached a climax in the 1980s, when three ships travelled from Italy to southern Africa to deliver aid and other necessities to southern African liberation movements. Paradoxically, this first wave of Reggio's solidarity was waning precisely as South Africa's transition to democracy was underway. What makes Reggio Emilia's solidarity exceptional within the broader international anti-apartheid movement is its practice of direct cooperation and its active pursuit of these relations post-liberation. After the end of apartheid, a second wave in Reggio's relationship with South Africa started to gather momentum from the 2010s, with the province of Gauteng as its main partner. Flow is not conceived as a unidirectional movement, but used to describe the multidirectional exchanges between people, ideas, and material goods across various geographies as well as the changing intensity over time of these transnational networks and interactions, whose political, social, and symbolic significance is analysed in the paper. The paper also reflects on the shift from internationalism to internationalisation as the primary driver of international relations in a post-Cold War neoliberal world order.

PANEL 14

ACQUE E PLASTICHE D'AFRICA: MOBILITÀ, STAGNAZIONE E CONTAMINAZIONI

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Italian, French

ABSTRACT

Il panel intende avviare una discussione critica sulle complesse intersezioni tra acqua e plastica all'interno dei contesti africani passati e presenti. Partendo dall'assunto che la plastica, pur nella sua apparente solidità, sia un elemento intrinsecamente fluido, mobile e accumulabile, il panel esplora come la sua circolazione, non sempre visibile, ad esempio sotto forma di bottiglie e contenitori per l'acqua o microplastiche, stia trasformando radicalmente le relazioni sociali e le ecologie idriche in contesti diversi. Siamo convinti che la relazione tra acqua e plastica possa fungere da finestra attraverso cui leggere e analizzare le disuguaglianze sociali, ambientali ed economiche, in grado di rivelare alcuni aspetti della natura coloniale della contaminazione (Liboiron, 2021). Pertanto, il panel accetta contributi volti a indagare i modi in cui la plastica, specialmente quella legata al consumo e al trasporto dell'acqua, si muove e si deposita attraverso varie vie di comunicazione, ridefinendo non solo i paesaggi materiali e le pratiche informali di raccolta e riciclo, ma anche la rappresentazione stessa dell'acqua. Siamo particolarmente interessati alle analisi che esplorano gli impatti ecologici e sociali della plastica nelle acque, i cui effetti sulla salute e sull'ambiente ricadono visibilmente o invisibilmente sulle comunità locali, così come l'impatto delle discariche e dei rifiuti industriali. Inoltre, il panel intende porre particolare attenzione alle infrastrutture, alle economie informali e alle reti che si sviluppano attorno alla gestione dei rifiuti plastici. Attraverso approcci etnografici, storici, ambientali e artistici, l'obiettivo è quello di mettere in dialogo gli studi sulle idro-socialità africane con la politica materiale dei rifiuti. In questo senso, la plastica ci aiuta a decifrare le tensioni tra la mobilità (dei profitti e dei prodotti) e la stagnazione (dello sviluppo e delle acque reflue), tra la purezza (dell'acqua acquistata in bottiglie) e la contaminazione (della risorsa pubblica) e tra la scarsità (della risorsa idrica pulita) e l'abbondanza (della plastica).

PAPERS

LES PRATIQUES ET LES ENJEUX DE L'ÉCONOMIE POLITIQUE DE LA GESTION DES ORDURES DANS LES QUARTIERS LITTORAUX DE CONAKRY

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ABSTRACT

Capitale de la République de Guinée, Conakry se présente comme une presqu'île étroite de 36 km de long. Depuis l'indépendance en 1958, sa population a explosé, passant de 86 900 à plus de 2,2 millions d'habitants en 2024, une croissance alimentée par un exode rural massif. Dans ce contexte, l'absence d'égouts et de collecte systématique a favorisé un phénomène de « poubellisation ». Les déchets plastiques, qui représentent 18 % des rebuts ménagers, envahissent les rivages et les plages, tandis que l'augmentation de la pluviométrie provoque des inondations fréquentes qui drainent ces détritiques vers les quartiers littoraux. Issue d'une recherche en cours sur les inégalités environnementales, cette communication analyse les stratégies de gestion des ordures adoptées par les populations locales. Loin des discours simplistes incriminant un manque de civisme, l'étude met en relation la gestion des déchets avec la stratification sociale, le niveau d'étude et les rapports de genre. Les pratiques d'auto-gestion – allant de l'abonnement à des coopératives locales à l'incinération ou au déversement dans les caniveaux – révèlent comment des habitudes rurales, telles que l'enfouissement, sont transposées en milieu urbain. Cette gestion quotidienne génère des interactions complexes de voisinage, où chacun est contraint de « vivre avec la saleté des autres ». Dans un second temps, nous examinons les réponses institutionnelles du gouvernement et des communes. Celles-ci oscillent entre campagnes de sensibilisation et stratégies de culpabilisation des populations. Nous analysons notamment la spectacularisation des séances d'assainissement, où les femmes des quartiers sont mises en scène, transformant l'hygiène en ressource politique. Enfin, l'étude s'intéresse aux travailleurs des déchets : malgré leur rôle de « gardiens de l'environnement », ces acteurs marginalisés peinent à professionnaliser leur activité dans un système qui privilégie le paraître politique. Quelques initiatives de création artistique à partir de plastique recyclé viennent compléter ce panorama des modes de réappropriation des déchets.

PAPERS

VALORE E CIRCOLAZIONE DELLA PLASTICA NELLA DISCARICA DI MBEUBEUSS (DAKAR)

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ABSTRACT

Questa ricerca analizza le complesse intersezioni tra ecologie urbane e gestione dei rifiuti a Mbeubeuss, la più vasta discarica di Dakar, sorta nel bacino prosciugato di un antico lago salato. Attraverso la lente teorica dei discard studies, il contributo interpreta la plastica – con un focus specifico sulle bottiglie d'acqua – come un elemento fluido capace di ridefinire tanto i paesaggi materiali quanto le relazioni sociali nel Senegal contemporaneo. L'indagine si concentra sulla figura dei boudioumane, i raccoglitori informali che operano all'interno di un'economia di sussistenza, trasformando contenitori in polietilene (PE) o PET da scarto svalutato a risorsa economica attraverso pratiche quotidiane di recupero, selezione e pesatura. Nel contesto di Mbeubeuss, i corpi dei lavoratori si configurano come vere e proprie infrastrutture incarnate, mediando costantemente tra la contaminazione ambientale e la generazione di valore. Emblematica in tal senso è l'esperienza di Badara Ngom: la sua traiettoria biografica mostra come il passaggio dalla raccolta diretta all'intermediazione con le fabbriche di proprietà cinese presenti sul territorio possa trasformare il rifiuto in uno strumento di riscatto sociale. La sua storia dimostra come il commercio informale della plastica permetta di costruire una vita dignitosa e di sostenere la propria famiglia, sfidando attivamente lo stigma sociale associato al lavoro con i residui della città. Il paper esplora inoltre le tensioni simboliche tra la promessa di purezza dell'acqua imbottigliata e la progressiva contaminazione delle risorse idriche pubbliche, evidenziando come l'accumulo di plastica rifletta la natura coloniale della tossicità nelle aree marginali. Mentre i profitti derivanti dalla circolazione dei polimeri alimentano mercati transnazionali, la precarietà e il peso ecologico rimangono ancorati al territorio locale, delineando una geografia della disuguaglianza mediata dalla materia plastica.

PAPERS

MAYOTTE E IL “DILUVIO” DI PLASTICA. CRISI IDRICA E GESTIONE INSOSTENIBILE DEI RIFIUTI IN UN DIPARTIMENTO FRANCESE D'OLTREMARE

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ABSTRACT

Da oltre un decennio, l'isola di Mayotte – situata nell'Oceano Indiano sud-occidentale – attraversa una grave emergenza idrica che compromette drasticamente la qualità della vita dei suoi abitanti. Nonostante sia il 101° dipartimento di Francia, il territorio presenta fragilità strutturali profonde, acuite da ricorrenti episodi di siccità e calamità naturali di crescente intensità. Le persistenti disuguaglianze socio-economiche si riflettono in un sistema di approvvigionamento idrico e di gestione dei rifiuti deficitario, dove le frequenti interruzioni del servizio e la scarsa qualità dell'acqua erogata impongono una riorganizzazione forzata delle pratiche quotidiane, con pesanti ricadute sulla salute pubblica. Di fronte a questo scenario, la risposta dello Stato francese appare paradossale. Invece di accelerare l'adeguamento delle infrastrutture di stoccaggio e distribuzione agli standard nazionali, l'intervento pubblico si limita spesso alla distribuzione massiccia di acqua in bottiglie di plastica. Questa strategia emergenziale, in un contesto dove il sistema di raccolta differenziata è ancora embrionale, ha generato un allarmante inquinamento del suolo e delle acque. La pressione migratoria e la rapida crescita demografica non fanno che esasperare la vulnerabilità di quella che rimane una delle regioni più povere dell'Unione europea. Ricostruendo il nesso tra scarsità idrica e inquinamento da plastica, il presente contributo analizza le contraddizioni di un processo di integrazione ancora incerto. L'obiettivo è stimolare una riflessione critica sui temi dell'insostenibilità e dell'ingiustizia ambientale, osservando come le dinamiche di marginalizzazione si manifestino concretamente in un territorio segnato da una complessa eredità postcoloniale.

PANEL 15

WHEN WATER BECOMES FUEL: SOCIOTECHNICAL IMAGINARIES AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF H₂O IN AFRICAN ENERGY FRONTIERS

Convenor

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

This panel examines how "water" is being reconfigured on the energy frontiers of contemporary Africa through the analytical lens of sociotechnical imaginaries. Located at the intersection of political ecology, the anthropology of energy, and science and technology studies (STS), the panel raises the question of what happens to African societies "when water becomes fuel." It explores the dynamics of emerging social relations surrounding water within the intertwined economies of energy and ethics. Water (H₂O), indispensable for sustaining life, is simultaneously being transformed into a molecular resource that generates energy. In renewable energy initiatives associated with hydrogen production, water is no longer viewed primarily as "drinking water" or "irrigation water" but as a "material that produces energy." This shift is reorganizing the social, political, and ecological relations surrounding H₂O. Notably, this vision of the "energization of water" functions as an imaginary underpinning of the construction of what is often termed the "hydrogen society," through collaborations among states, technologies, and industries. At the same time, the long-standing cultural conception in many communities—where water is regarded as the foundation of life, environment, and community—intersects and competes with a technological imaginary that frames water as a medium of value transformation. This tension has produced new configurations of resource access, inequality, and symbolic value. Drawing on ethnographic and historical research in various sub-Saharan African contexts, the panel contributors examine how processes such as renewable power plant construction, water resource acquisition, and hydrogen production and circulation networks are transforming local systems of water use and value. This panel explores how communities negotiate and recalibrate these competing visions of the future, given water's dual nature as both a substance that sustains livelihoods and a driver of technological innovation.



PAPERS

GOVERNING HEAT: GEOTHERMAL ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF SPACE IN KENYA'S RIFT VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the transformation of subterranean heat into steam through water as a mediating substance, examining how this process renders geothermal energy visible and governable in Kenya's Rift Valley. In this region, high geothermal potential—shaped by intense tectonic activity—intersects with the nomadic land-use practices of pastoralist communities, creating a complex arena where subsurface resources meet surface-level subsistence. Driven by global decarbonization policies and rising electricity demand, Kenya has rapidly advanced large-scale geothermal development, extracting heat through water injection and circulation. Within these state-led energy circuits, which now include the prospect of green hydrogen production, heat and water are being fundamentally redefined as the essential mediating substances that enable the generation of "clean" fuel. However, geothermal development transcends mere technical energy supply, acting as a powerful tool of spatial governance. The implementation of land demarcation, access restrictions, and compensation schemes has profoundly reshaped pastoralist livelihood practices and their perceptions of the territory. Even as they are displaced by these infrastructures, communities have developed innovative ways to repurpose heat and water as resources for their own daily lives, creating a parallel geography of resource use. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how overlapping sociotechnical imaginaries reconfigure social relations on the ground. By analyzing the "governance of heat," the paper reveals how renewable energy development creates new resource frontiers in dryland regions, fundamentally changing the meaning of "when water becomes fuel."

PAPERS

BALANCING WATER DEMAND AND ENERGY NEEDS: ASSESSING THE WATER-ENERGY NEXUS IN HYDROGEN PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The population of Kenya is on a steady upward trend. Coupled with increased urbanization, the demand for food—and the corresponding water footprint required for its production—is set to rise significantly. In this context, the emergence of new technologies such as hydrogen poses a strategic dilemma for the country. While hydrogen production offers opportunities for energy storage and the development of derivatives like e-fuels and ammonia, it introduces a competing and intensive demand for water resources. Among fossil fuel-based processes, Steam Methane Reforming (SMR) is currently the most common, requiring approximately 20 liters of water per kg of H_2 . Coal gasification is even more resource-intensive, requiring 49.8 liters. The production of "blue" hydrogen, which incorporates carbon capture and storage, further increases these requirements to 36.7 liters for SMR and 80.2 liters for coal gasification. Conversely, green hydrogen produced through water splitting via alkaline electrolyzers—the most mature technology to date—requires about 32.2 liters per kg of H_2 . While electrolysis is emission-free, this water requirement remains a critical factor. Although global impacts might seem manageable, local consequences are severe: mapping of the Levelized Cost of Hydrogen (LCOH) clearly shows that potential production sites often coincide with regions already facing extreme water stress. Since 90% of Kenya consists of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) already suffering from climate-induced water scarcity, establishing hydrogen plants in these areas will inevitably lead to competition with the domestic, agricultural, and industrial needs of local populations. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop innovative water-sourcing methodologies that move beyond withdrawing from existing, overstretched sources. To ensure sustainable development, it is vital to prioritize green hydrogen projects while strictly monitoring water withdrawal and consumption as central performance indicators. Greater investment is needed to improve electrolyzer efficiency and reduce freshwater dependency. Encouraging water-saving cooling technologies and the responsible use of seawater in coastal plants—with strong oversight regarding thermal pollution and brine disposal—will be essential for aligning energy production with water security. Ultimately, these measures will determine how communities adapt to the rise of the hydrogen economy without compromising their primary environmental resources.

PAPERS

DISTANT MEGA-HYDROPOWER, NEARBY BIOMASS: ENERGY GOVERNANCE AND GENDER IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The energy transition in Africa cannot be adequately captured by linear models that assume a clean shift from traditional biomass—such as firewood and charcoal—to modern electricity and gas. Instead, the prevailing pattern is one of fuel stacking, where multiple energy sources are used simultaneously. Especially in remote areas where electrification remains inconsistent, biomass continues to serve as the primary fuel for cooking. Consequently, development initiatives have long focused on the dissemination of improved cookstoves to reduce consumption and mitigate health risks. Recently, however, the use of firewood has been re-politicized within global climate change mitigation frameworks. This shift raises critical concerns regarding transitional justice for the Global South and highlights a deeply gendered crisis, as the labor-intensive nature of fuel management continues to constrain the economic and social opportunities of women. Against this backdrop, the Ethiopian government has positioned large-scale hydropower at the core of its national strategy. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), completed in September 2025 with a capacity of approximately 6,000 MW, represents a strategic asset intended for both domestic supply and regional power exports. However, a significant gap remains between this state-led expansion of mega-infrastructure and the everyday energy choices of local populations who remain dependent on biomass. By examining the intersections between macro-level energy policies and micro-level domestic practices, this presentation analyzes how energy governance is both shaped by and constitutive of prevailing gender relations. Through this multi-scalar approach, the research explores the essential conditions for realizing a truly just energy transition in Africa—one that bridges the divide between national industrial ambitions and the daily realities of the most vulnerable households.

PAPERS

PATCHWORK GOVERNANCE IN RENEWABLE ENERGY FRONTIERS: COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICERS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF DEVELOPMENT AID IN NORTHERN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways in which large-scale energy development projects are reshaping the governance of aid in contemporary Africa. Focusing on the semi-arid regions of East Africa, the research explores how renewable energy plants influence the composition and activities of development organizations operating within pastoral societies. The analysis centers on the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) project in Marsabit County, Kenya—one of the largest wind farms on the continent. Since its inception in 2005, LTWP has significantly transformed the institutional landscape, embedding private energy companies within national and local systems of governance. A central component of this new governance structure is the role of Community Liaison Officers (CLOs), who serve as intermediaries between the company and the surrounding communities. By designating the Laisamis constituency as its "Project's Area of Influence," LTWP established a local NGO in 2015 to implement development initiatives funded by the company. These CLOs, recruited directly from the local population, function as accessible points of contact for residents, handling negotiations and complaints related to assistance. Interestingly, residents often liken these officers to "chiefs"—a title historically associated with administrative and judicial authority in Kenya. However, rather than viewing this as a simple form of indirect corporate rule, this paper argues that CLOs act as brokers who translate external resources into locally meaningful forms. Drawing on the framework of Bierschenk et al. (2002), the study situates these figures within the broader history of aid in northern Kenya. The resulting "patchwork" style of governance involves a multitude of actors—including construction firms, drilling contractors, and NGOs—all engaging with the community through these mediated practices. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that renewable energy development reshapes governance not through centralized control, but through layered, negotiated, and highly localized forms of management.

PAPERS

THE POST-APARTHEID TECHNO-POLITICS AND ECOLOGICAL MODERNISATION OF GREEN HYDROGEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Since 2007, the South African government has collaborated with private energy and infrastructure firms to advance "Hydrogen South Africa" (HySA), a national strategy aimed at building a hydrogen-based society. This vision culminated in the South Africa Hydrogen Society Roadmap 2021, which outlines a massive industrial shift. Central to this plan is the Hydrogen Valley initiative, a strategic triangle stretching from the mining hubs of Limpopo Province through Johannesburg to the industrial port of Richards Bay. The applications planned for this region are diverse: hydrogen is slated to power the mining sector in Limpopo, fuel public transport and facilities in Johannesburg, and support long-distance logistics via hydrogen-powered trucks connecting Johannesburg with the coastal hubs of Richards Bay and Durban. Additionally, the Northern Cape Province has emerged as a key development target, with advanced plans to construct a dedicated hydrogen production and export port at Boegoebaai. The introduction of green hydrogen, produced using South Africa's abundant solar and wind resources, is framed as a vital step toward an ecological society, especially given the nation's heavy historical reliance on coal. However, these plans have already faced criticism from environmental protection groups concerned about localized ecological impacts. This paper analyzes the emerging landscape created by this green hydrogen strategy, conceptualizing it as a form of post-apartheid techno-politics aligned with the principles of ecological modernization.

PAPERS

HAUNTED HARBOUR: HYDROGEN DEVELOPMENT AND GENOCIDE MEMORY ON NAMIBIA'S SOUTHERN COAST

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the unfolding of contemporary green hydrogen development on Namibia's southern coast within landscapes profoundly shaped by the legacies of colonial genocide. Focusing on Lüderitz (Kakoverua, Nami≠Nüs) and its surrounding maritime and coastal infrastructures, the research explores how hydrogen projects—framed as symbols of a green, post-carbon future—are layered onto sites historically marked by the incarceration, forced labor, and death of Ovaherero and Nama people during German colonial rule. Through anthropological fieldwork and archival research, the paper traces the colonial genealogy of coastal systems, including harbors, railways, and water infrastructures, to understand how these material remains influence contemporary development planning. While hydrogen imaginaries often depict the coast as an "empty" or underutilized space ideal for large-scale energy export, residents and descendants of genocide survivors articulate these same landscapes as haunted, morally charged, and inseparable from histories of violence and dispossession. The analysis focuses on how the memory of the genocide is negotiated, muted, or strategically mobilized in public debates over hydrogen infrastructure, port expansion, and desalination projects. The paper argues that processes of green industrialization risk reproducing colonial patterns of erasure by prioritizing global climate and export agendas over local claims for recognition and reparative justice. Conversely, it also highlights how place-based activism and storytelling interrupt these dominant narratives of progress, asserting that the transition to a green future cannot be decoupled from the work of historical memory and justice.

PAPERS

WHEN THE SUN MAKES WATER: SOLAR INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG THE SAN IN CENTRAL KALAHARI

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ABSTRACT

This presentation explores the social relations surrounding energy and water—a resource of absolute criticality in the arid regions of Africa. To achieve this, the study examines the development of solar power policies in Botswana and their social implications, focusing specifically on the lives of San hunter-gatherer communities in the Central Kalahari. Since independence, Botswana's energy system has relied heavily on coal-fired generation and imports from South Africa. However, from the 1990s onward, the government has pursued greater self-sufficiency, with solar power emerging in the 2010s as a pillar of national policy. Today, frameworks promote large-scale projects alongside rural electrification, leading to a rapid spread of solar technology throughout the country. In San communities, these panels are most commonly introduced through water-point development to extract groundwater. The Central Kalahari is characterized by extremely low and unpredictable rainfall with no permanent surface water; historically, water has always structured patterns of settlement, mobility, and subsistence. Now, solar-powered pumping systems make it possible for residents to inhabit and use remote areas far from formal settlements. Beyond the vital task of pumping water, small solar panels provide lighting and power for mobile phones and radios, supporting what residents call an "electrified bush life." Crucially, this infrastructure is often established through informal, albeit unequal, relationships with affluent urban-based investors who fund water points and livestock. While these ties are marked by instability, they often result in water and energy infrastructure remaining within the community. Ultimately, by placing water at the center of the analysis, this presentation shows that solar power functions primarily as a tool for accessing and controlling water, rather than as a mere symbol of energy transition. It argues that a focus on water reveals how infrastructure profoundly reshapes social relations, mobility, and everyday practices in the Central Kalahari.

PANEL 16

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: IRRIGATION, EXTRACTION AND POWER STRUGGLES IN AFRICA'S SEMI-ARID LANDS

Convenors

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

This panel examines the socio-political and ecological consequences of water infrastructure projects in Africa's semi-arid agro-pastoralist regions. Since the colonial era, development initiatives have introduced irrigation systems, sanitation technologies, and new resource-use models, a trend recently revitalized under climate change mitigation strategies aimed at "greening arid lands." These interventions often impose standardized methods of "proper" land and water use, frequently disregarding indigenous ecological knowledge and longstanding economic practices. The installation of boreholes, pipelines, and irrigation grids does more than transform the physical landscape; it reconfigures territorial claims and reshapes power relations, often in anticipation of the formalization of property rights. Rivers and seasonal streams are similarly affected, impacting the environmental skills that have historically supported agro-pastoralist livelihoods. Such interventions are frequently sustained by development discourses that frame local expertise as "irrational" or "unproductive," thereby delegitimizing existing land tenure and social systems. We invite contributions that critically examine these projects through several key questions: How do these infrastructures impact and reconfigure land tenure and territorial formalization? In what ways do they reorganize ecological knowledge, social systems, and customary authority? What underlying imaginaries of "progress" and "sustainability" drive the internal logic of these aid projects? How do local actors navigate, resist, or reinterpret these transformations? Ultimately, this panel seeks to understand how global environmental agendas materialize in local contexts, exploring how water becomes a primary site of contestation, adaptation, and the reimagination of power relations in rural spaces.



PAPERS

PIPELINES, SPRINGS AND IRRIGATION FRONTIERS: WATER INFRASTRUCTURE, LAND CONTROL AND HYBRID AUTHORITY IN KENYA'S AMBOSELI RANGELANDS

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ABSTRACT

Water infrastructure is increasingly presented as a technical fix for scarcity and climate risk in Africa's semi-arid lands. Yet boreholes, pipelines, irrigation furrows, and small reservoirs do more than deliver water: they territorialise access, reshape land claims, and redistribute authority. This paper mobilises political ecology and waterscape approaches to analyse how water infrastructures have reorganised power relations in the Greater Amboseli Ecosystem (southern Kenya), a conservation and agro-pastoral frontier partly fed by Kilimanjaro's aquifers. The analysis draws on 15 months of fieldwork (2019–2023), participatory mapping workshops, semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and archival materials (including hydrological studies and maps produced since the 1940s). I trace the co-evolution of infrastructure and governance across three interlinked "hydrosocial territories": (1) the Naoroenkaré/Amboseli-park-edge system, where pastoralists' access is negotiated under conservation policing and recurrent breakdowns; (2) the Nolturesh spring pipeline, historically built for colonial development and progressively diverted toward towns and industrial nodes, leaving limited downstream flows and new fee-based access regimes; and (3) the Kimana-Kikarankot river system, where irrigation expansion, wells and pumps intertwine with a wildlife sanctuary, rapid land subdivision, and growing urbanisation. Across these territories, infrastructure densification produces a paradox: more access points, yet deeper insecurity. Water is governed through a hybrid, negotiated control—local committees, conservation authorities, private investors, and political brokers—marked by pricing and monthly fees, gatekeeping, intermittent shutdowns, contested maintenance, and conflict with wildlife (including elephants damaging pipelines). These dynamics accelerate sedentarisation, deepen inequalities between households and group ranches, and intensify dry-season disputes among pastoralists, irrigators, and conservation actors. The paper argues that water infrastructure should be analysed not as neutral adaptation hardware, but as a key driver of extraction and power in semi-arid Africa.

PAPERS

GOVERNING THE LIQUID COMMONS: FLUID DISPOSSESSIONS IN NORTHERN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how oil extraction in Turkana, northern Kenya, reshapes water infrastructures, territorial claims, and local ecological knowledge in one of East Africa's driest pastoralist regions. When large crude oil reserves were discovered in 2012, state and corporate actors framed the discovery as a catalyst for development, promising new water access through pipelines, boreholes, and irrigation systems. Yet these infrastructures primarily served the water-intensive needs of oil production, redirecting groundwater from communal aquifers into industrial systems and generating what I conceptualise as fluid dispossessions. These forms of dispossession extend beyond material extraction: they undermine pastoralists' customary water governance, spiritual custodianship, and sovereignty over their liquid commons. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the paper shows how these infrastructures reconfigured not only material water flows but also governance regimes. Customary custodianship was displaced by overlapping formal institutions, including county authorities, corporate CSR structures, and newly created Water Resource Users Associations. This institutional layering generated ambiguity over responsibility and ownership, opening what I conceptualize as institutional loopholes: spaces where actors navigated, contested, or exploited competing governance claims. The Turkana case demonstrates how water infrastructures in semi-arid pastoralist settings do more than redistribute a scarce resource: they reorder land-water relations, devalue indigenous ecological knowledge, and reshape political authority.

PAPERS

THE BUILDING OF A WATER PIPELINE BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND LOCAL LAND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the building of the Kigoro-Gigiri Pipeline in Central Kenya as an example of a water infrastructure project that, notwithstanding the compliance with international standards geared towards the fair and transparent execution of the investment, ended up being severely delayed. Financed by international institutions, such as the World Bank (WB) and the French Development Agency, the building of the Pipeline complied with the WB Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs) regulating Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use, and Involuntary Resettlement. This presentation identifies the root causes of the delays and blockages with land tenure and administration issues; the analysis will contextualise these historically and socio-politically. The presentation will argue that these bureaucratic and political complexities shall be understood as socially and historically constructed, as well as resulting from the difficult articulation of international and national normative frameworks. None of the stakeholders can be held alone accountable for the delays and blockages: these are, in fact, systemic. Stakeholders are led to develop coping strategies and mechanisms to adapt to the blockages and delays that result from the 'instability' of the process and procedures. By seeking to explain the historical and political root causes of the problems encountered during the unfolding of the building of the infrastructure, we understand the delays and blockages as complex social phenomena.

PAPERS

IRRIGATION, POWER, AND PASTORALIST FUTURES IN TURKANA, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the history and contemporary trajectories of irrigation development in Turkana County, Kenya, from 1963 to 2026. It examines how water infrastructure has reshaped land tenure, labour relations, and socio-political authority in a semi-arid pastoral region. Drawing on archival research, oral histories, interviews with former scheme workers and development personnel, and long-term engagement with irrigation sites, the study situates irrigation within longer histories of colonial dispossession, environmental stress, and post-independence state formation. At independence, the Turkana people faced the legacies of colonial restrictions, livestock losses, drought, and famine. From the 1960s, the Kenyan state and international donors promoted irrigation as a technical solution to food insecurity and pastoralist vulnerability. Schemes along the Turkwel River, including Turkwel (est. 1966), Katilu, and Kaputir, are technical solutions to food insecurity. These projects framed irrigation as a pathway to modernisation, productivity, and sedentarisation. Using the Turkwel Irrigation Scheme as a case study, the paper argues that irrigation reconfigured social and ecological relations. Riverine land was reorganised through state-administered plot allocations. Many participants became wage labourers with limited control over production or marketing. Indigenous irrigation practices and pastoralist mobility were often marginalised. While some households experienced short-term gains, benefits were uneven and dependent on sustained external support. Following donor withdrawal in the late 1980s and 1990s, infrastructure deteriorated, and many schemes declined. Since 2000, renewed interventions under climate adaptation and resilience agendas have revived irrigation initiatives. Despite institutional changes, these projects reproduce earlier assumptions about the risk of pastoralism and the transformative power of water control. Across both periods, irrigation served as a governance technology. It redefined rights to land and water, reshaped ecological knowledge, and mediated struggles over authority and belonging. In Turkana, irrigation is not only about food production but also about governing pastoralist futures amid climatic, political, and development uncertainties.

PAPERS

BALANCING LIVELIHOOD GAINS AND GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY: THE RISE OF IRRIGATION IN SEMI-ARID KONGWA, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

This study employs household data survey, qualitative interview data, geospatial mapping, geological analysis, and statistical analysis to examine groundwater irrigated agriculture (GWIA) in Kongwa district, Dodoma region, Tanzania. While only 19% of farmers currently employ GWIA, they report notably higher food security, economic stability, and resistance to climatic disturbances as compared to cultivators pursuing rain-fed agriculture (RFA). Increased population growth in Kongwa district, largely driven by migration from other regions, is greatly increasing demand for groundwater for both household use and irrigation. Yet only 11% of irrigators hold legal permits to irrigate. Higher extraction rates risk depleting aquifers and intensifying already existing salinity and sodicity problems, making it harder for farmers to rely on groundwater as a safeguard against erratic rainfall. Without coordinated land-use planning, regular water-quality monitoring, clear limits on groundwater abstraction, and enforcement of policies requiring drilling permits and water association membership for small-scale irrigators, the district could lose a critical resource needed for climate-change adaptation. The risk of groundwater over-extraction and depletion due to this increased demand, compounded by climate change, underscores the urgent need for sustainable water management strategies in regions like Kongwa that are reliant on groundwater.

PANEL 17

ISLANDS, ARCHIPELAGOS, AND AFRICAN WATERS: FLUID PERSPECTIVES ON ISLANDNESS, SUSTAINABILITY AND GENDER

Convenors

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English

ABSTRACT

This panel explores islandness as an epistemological and political lens for rethinking relationships between water, communities, and sustainability in and around Africa. Drawing on the concept of the aquapelago—an assemblage of terrestrial and aquatic elements—the panel invites reflection on how island experiences generate practices of coexistence, resource-management strategies, and water-related imaginaries. The aim is to shift the discussion toward situated experiences of water and islandness, highlighting social, ecological, and symbolic tensions and innovations: sustainable economies; gendered inequalities in resource access; mobility; environmental resilience; and the role of sustainable tourism and agritourism in shaping local livelihoods and ecological stewardship. These sectors, when grounded in community-based approaches, offer pathways for valuing island landscapes while supporting agroecological practices and reinforcing cultural and environmental knowledge. The oceanic turn provides a framework for reimagining Africa as a space of circulation across the Atlantic, Indian, and Mediterranean worlds, moving beyond terrestrial and disciplinary boundaries. In this perspective, water is an active agent shaping territories, relations, and knowledge. The panel seeks to outline an original field of inquiry into islandness as a lens for understanding water–society relations, contributing to interdisciplinary debates on the fluid forms of living and knowing in Africa. It welcomes empirical and theoretical contributions on: local practices of managing freshwater, saltwater and transitional environments (lagoons, deltas, mangroves); gender dimensions in accessing, controlling and managing insular resources; agriculture practices – such as agroecology and agritourism – supporting sustainability on islands; applications of the aquapelago concept: land–water interactions, cultural identities and trans island networks; islandness as an anthropological and political category—connectivity, flows and mainland relations; literary, artistic and ritual representations of waters and islands; multisensory and participatory methodologies for “thinking with the archipelago”; environmental and economic resilience strategies in contexts of climate change and water scarcity.



PAPERS

CENTRALITY OF THE SEA: SUBSISTENCE, IDENTITY AND SOCIETY IN THE BAZARUTO ARCHIPELAGO

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ABSTRACT

The Bazaruto Archipelago of southern Mozambique is today best known as a luxury tropical destination visited almost exclusively by international tourists, and as a designated area for marine conservation. Within the field of archaeology, the archipelago has also been investigated as a potential southern outpost of the Swahili-related trading communities that were active along the East African coast before the arrival of Europeans in the Indian Ocean at the close of the fifteenth century. Little attention, however, has been paid to the modern communities of the islands or their more recent history. New ethnographic and oral historical research contributes greatly to our understanding of the histories of migration, settlement, and identity in this region since the late nineteenth century. Today, the Bazaruto Bay plays a central role in daily life, which is broadly oriented around an economic base of subsistence fishing, supplemented by small-scale agriculture on family plots (*machambas*). Regular movement into and across waterways underpins trans-island familial networks that emphasise a shared identity, language, and history – and which also serve as arbiters of access to both land and sea. Historically, the seascape played a key role in the oral histories of origin, and, more recently, defined the archipelago's use as a civilian haven and military base during the FRELIMO-RENAMO civil war, specifically due to its separation from the mainland. Both the past and present of this island chain are as much defined by its seascape as they are by its landscape. This paper outlines the importance of the seascape and considers how variable notions of islandness are expressed in this coastal archipelago across themes of subsistence, identity, and connection, and relates these to the concept of the aquapelago.

PAPERS

ISLANDS AT THE CROSSROADS: GENDER, COMMUNITY PRACTICES, AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN CABO VERDE

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ABSTRACT

Small islands occupy a critical position in the Anthropocene: despite their minimal contribution to global environmental crises, they bear disproportionate ecological, social, and economic vulnerabilities. The Cape Verde archipelago exemplifies this tension, where water, land, and community practices intersect, generating locally grounded responses to climate change and social inequality. This paper examines community-led sustainability initiatives on the islands of Santo Antão and Fogo. On Santo Antão, women's associations such as AMUPAL demonstrate participatory practices of resilience and social solidarity, while on Fogo, rural communities engage in sustainable agriculture and tourism that blend ecological adaptation with cultural heritage. These initiatives highlight how gendered knowledge and cooperative practices foster alternative pathways to ecological justice. Through a combination of anthropological and agro-ecological perspectives, this study investigates how participatory and bottom-up approaches in island communities reshape human-environment relations, empower women, and promote locally grounded models of sustainable tourism and agriculture. By focusing on Cape Verde, the paper illustrates how archipelagic experiences generate innovative models of tourism, agritourism, and climate adaptation, offering broader insights into fluid, situated forms of living and knowing in African insular contexts.

PAPERS

ISLANDNESS AS A FLUID SPACE: WATER, ART AND PROCESSES OF INCLUSION IN A MEDITERRANEAN ARCHIPELAGIC CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an artistic and cultural research project developed over a twelve-year period in the Mediterranean island context of Salina, in the Aeolian Islands, which has gradually evolved into a participatory project and a festival dedicated to the valorization of water as a common good. The research forms part of the international project Through Waters, which employs art, education, and collaborative practices as tools for raising awareness of issues related to water, environmental sustainability, and intercultural coexistence. The insular context of Salina, composed of three municipalities with distinct economic and social structures, offers a privileged laboratory for observing the relationships between environment, community, and cultural processes. Within this framework, the growth of the Arab-Moroccan community on the island is of particular relevance. Its slow and layered process of integration that holds considerable sociological and anthropological interest, and informal initiatives for teaching the Italian language – promoted over the years by members of the local population and addressed mainly to migrant women – have fostered practices of welcome, interaction, and the gradual construction of social bonds. From a project perspective, the research engages in dialogue with international experiences of sustainable water supply, drawing inspiration from Warka Water, developed by Arturo Vittori. This initiative is understood not merely as a technical device for water collection, but as a symbolic and cultural model capable of connecting natural resources, local communities, and traditional knowledge. This reference reinforces the transnational dimension of the project and the links it traces between islands, archipelagos, and African contexts. In recent years, the project has integrated artistic and educational workshops with students from local schools, incorporating video portraits, animation, and storytelling practices developed within the framework of the Archive of Memory. These activities have involved students, long-term residents, and newcomers alike in processes of visual and oral narration that interweave memory, environment, and identity. Taken together, this experience highlights how insular contexts can function as spaces for experimenting with sustainable and inclusive cultural practices, in which art acts as a mediating device between water, territory, and community.

PAPERS

ISLANDNESS, WATER SCARCITY AND EDUCATION FOR RESILIENCE: DROUGHTS, HEATWAVES AND RISK MANAGEMENT IN GRAN CANARIA (AFRICAN-ATLANTIC CONTEXT)

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ABSTRACT

This communication proposes an analytical framework to examine the lack of precipitation, the increase in prolonged droughts, and the intensification of heat waves as key processes in the recent transformation of risk in insular territories. The study takes the Canary Archipelago, specifically the island of Gran Canaria, as a case study, incorporating an interdisciplinary approach that includes an educational perspective oriented toward the construction of climate and social resilience. Based on the planned analysis of climatic time series, the study aims to assess the growing irregularity of precipitation patterns and the increasing frequency of extreme heat events, to corroborate the hypothesis of a persistent water-stress scenario. In semi-arid insular contexts, these dynamics are assumed to acquire particular relevance insofar as insularity may amplify territorial vulnerability, limit structural adaptive capacities, and condition risk-management strategies. Building on this approach, the study seeks to analyze how these climatic processes affect risk-management dynamics, exploring the extent to which they reorient institutional priorities toward scenarios dominated by water scarcity and climatic uncertainty. From this perspective, water is conceived not only as a resource but also as an absent agent capable of reconfiguring territories, decision-making processes, and governance practices, while also influencing educational and learning processes related to risk management and sustainability. Within this framework, the study positions climate change education and education for sustainability as central analytical axes for the construction of resilience in insular communities. The most effective pedagogical approaches in climate change education are those that combine active learning, interdisciplinarity, and action-oriented strategies, facilitating the translation of scientific knowledge into concrete social practices (Monroe et al., 2019; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020). In this regard, recent studies show that climate education can contribute to improving risk perception, climate agency, and social understanding, particularly when it is connected to local contexts and real problems relevant to communities (Aeschbach et al., 2025; Aksit, 2025). This study is presented as an ongoing research project situated within the debate on insularity as an analytical and political category, to provide empirical evidence from an African-Atlantic context to critically rethink the relationships between climate, water, and risk management under climate change scenarios, incorporating the educational dimension as a key element in the construction of territorial resilience.

PAPERS

ISLAND AGRICULTURAL TERRACES AS A TOURIST RESOURCE: MAPPING OF AGRITOURISM SUITABILITY AND POLICY REVIEW IN LA GOMERA (CANARY ISLANDS)

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ABSTRACT

Terraced agricultural landscapes have been valued by international organizations. UNESCO recognizes them as historic monuments and cultural landscapes due to their construction using ancestral knowledge and techniques (dry-stone). FAO identifies them as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, as they combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient agroecosystems, and rich heritage. In addition, these systems provide ecosystem services, especially cultural, recreational, and leisure-related ones. Their high scenic quality and visibility enhance their appeal. The integration of ethnographic heritage (dwellings, wine presses, etc.) with the terraces increases the territorial value of the whole and facilitates their incorporation as an agrotourism resource, especially when they remain in use and generate income for those who maintain them. This study is carried out in La Gomera (Canary Islands, Spain), a tourist destination known for its landscapes and network of hiking trails. In this context, the paredones (the local name for terraces), despite their strong identity imprint, are threatened by agricultural abandonment, depopulation, and climate change, putting their conservation at risk. Traditionally, they have been little recognized as ecotourism resources, despite the institutional commitment since the island's inclusion in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (EUROPARC). The main objective is to assess agrotourism suitability by incorporating their conservation quality value, as well as the integration of the main ecosystem functions they perform. As a secondary objective, a diachronic analysis is proposed of the actions put forward for the active conservation of these agroecosystems linked to tourism activity, to identify what role these heritage elements have played—or not played—in their consideration as agrotourism-related resources. To this end, mapping was produced through photo-interpretation and fieldwork. Overall, landscape units and typologies of paredones were identified, and diagnostic maps of conservation quality and agrotourism suitability were generated. The study area shows high diversity and high conservation quality in its terraced landscapes. This combination translates into zones with differentiated potential, depending on the type of tourism to be developed, both in the form of agrotourism products and through interpretive hiking proposals derived from policy analysis. These alternatives could help redistribute visitor flows across the island and thus promote economic dynamism and conservation by giving a leading role to the local population.

PANEL 18

LE ROTTE DELL'ACQUA: CRISI CLIMATICA E RISPOSTE LOCALI TRA SAHEL E CORNO D'AFRICA

Convenors

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Language of the panel
Italian

ABSTRACT

Nel Sahel e nel Corno d'Africa, l'acqua è molto più di una risorsa: è territorio, potere, vita. Qui il cambiamento climatico è una realtà che ridisegna i paesaggi, le economie e le relazioni sociali. In queste regioni, dove la scarsità idrica si intreccia con fragilità politica e con una forte pressione demografica, comunità locali e diaspore stanno sviluppando risposte proprie, spesso invisibili agli occhi dei grandi centri decisionali. Questo panel propone una riflessione sulle interconnessioni tra acqua, conflitti, mobilità e cooperazione, con l'obiettivo di mettere al centro le pratiche e le conoscenze dei territori. Attraverso analisi territoriali e casi di studio, il panel indaga come le dinamiche dell'acqua si configurino oggi come un campo di tensione e di negoziazione tra dimensioni ecologiche, sociali e geopolitiche. In questo quadro, l'acqua non è solo risorsa naturale, ma spazio politico e culturale al centro di processi di redistribuzione del potere, definizione della cittadinanza e costruzione di nuove forme di appartenenza transnazionale. L'approccio si fonda su una prospettiva di ecologia politica decoloniale, che invita a rileggere le crisi climatiche non come eventi isolati o emergenze ambientali, ma come espressione di relazioni storiche di disuguaglianza, di appropriazione e di resistenza. Le società del Sahel e del Corno d'Africa offrono, in questo senso, osservatori privilegiati per comprendere come le comunità locali e le diaspore elaborino e rielaborino strategie ibride capaci di integrare conoscenze tradizionali, pratiche comunitarie e strumenti tecnologici contemporanei. La riflessione si estende alle forme di cooperazione translocale, dove le diaspore diventano mediatrici di innovazione e di capitale sociale, trasformando le reti migratorie in infrastrutture di adattamento climatico. Parallelamente, i contesti urbani e rurali del Senegal, della Somalia e di Gibuti emergono come laboratori territoriali in cui si ridefiniscono le logiche di gestione dell'acqua tra appropriazione e condivisione, sicurezza e sostenibilità, autonomia e dipendenza. In questa prospettiva, il panel si propone di superare la dicotomia Nord/Sud, mettendo in dialogo saperi situati e pratiche di governance plurale, per immaginare un modello di cooperazione che riconosca la centralità dei territori e delle comunità nella produzione di conoscenza e nelle politiche di adattamento climatico.

PAPERS

LAKE BOYE RESTORATION TRA LOCALE E GLOBALE: GOVERNANCE COMUNITARIA DELL'ACQUA TRA GREEN LEGACY E PIANO MATTEI

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ABSTRACT

Nel Corno d'Africa l'acqua costituisce un'infrastruttura ecologica e politica che connette livelli locali, regionali e diasporici. Il presente contributo esamina il Lake Boye Restoration Project a Jimma come caso di studio di governance ecologica urbana. Il progetto mira al recupero di un'area attraverso interventi di riabilitazione ambientale, monitoraggio satellitare e coinvolgimento diretto delle comunità locali, con particolare attenzione alla partecipazione femminile nella gestione sostenibile delle risorse idriche. L'iniziativa si colloca all'intersezione tra priorità ambientali etiopi, incluse le politiche di riforestazione promosse dalla Green Legacy Initiative, e partenariati internazionali, tra cui il Piano Mattei per l'Africa, che prevede investimenti italiani in settori strategici quali acqua, energia e agricoltura. Il contributo non assume il Piano come cornice interpretativa primaria, ma lo considera uno dei dispositivi attraverso cui si articolano relazioni di cooperazione, diplomazia ambientale e negoziazione di sovranità. Attraverso un approccio di political ecology situata, lo studio interpreta la scarsità idrica come esito di trasformazioni storiche, marginalizzazioni territoriali e governance urbana diseguale. In questo quadro, il progetto diventa uno spazio di mediazione tra autorità municipali di Jimma, istituzioni regionali dell'Oromia, attori federali etiopi, reti diasporiche e partner internazionali. Particolare attenzione è dedicata al ruolo delle diaspore etiopi come mediatori translocali di competenze tecniche, capitale sociale e risorse finanziarie, nonché alla dimensione di genere nella gestione dell'acqua urbana. Il caso di Jimma consente così di interrogare come i partenariati internazionali possano interagire con le traiettorie etiopi di adattamento climatico senza ridurre le comunità locali a semplici beneficiarie, ma riconoscendole come soggetti produttori di conoscenza e co-decisorie. Il contributo propone infine di leggere il Lake Boye Restoration Project come laboratorio di sovranità ecologica urbana, nel quale si ridefiniscono rapporti di potere, responsabilità ambientali e modelli di cooperazione, oltre le dicotomie Nord/Sud e dentro una prospettiva centrata sulle dinamiche etiopi.

PAPERS

IL BACINO DEL LAGO CHAD: GOVERNANCE PARTECIPATIVA ADATTIVA

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ABSTRACT

Il bacino del lago Chad costituisce uno spazio idro-politico caratterizzato da pluralità normative, mobilità transfrontaliere e presenza statale diseguale. La riduzione dell'autorità amministrativa in alcune aree periferiche implica la coesistenza e competizione tra sistemi regolativi differenti. In tale contesto, gruppi armati come Boko Haram hanno progressivamente integrato il controllo delle risorse idriche nelle proprie strategie territoriali, trasformando l'accesso all'acqua in dispositivo di coercizione attraverso sabotaggi infrastrutturali, controllo dei pozzi e tassazione informale delle attività economiche locali. Tuttavia, interpretare questa dinamica esclusivamente come fallimento statale o come mera criminalizzazione delle risorse rischia di oscurare trasformazioni strutturali in atto. La contrazione delle acque superficiali, la pressione demografica e la limitata infrastrutturazione per l'accesso alle falde profonde si innestano su assetti storici di marginalizzazione e su economie transfrontaliere preesistenti. Le risposte prevalentemente securitarie adottate da alcuni Stati hanno spesso privilegiato la militarizzazione, senza incidere sulle disuguaglianze nell'accesso alle risorse né rafforzare in modo strutturale la governance locale. Il paper propone dunque una lettura centrata sulla governance adattiva, intesa come processo dinamico, partecipativo e situato. In questa prospettiva, le comunità locali diventano attori centrali nella produzione di soluzioni contestuali. Si analizzano pratiche che includono l'adozione di sistemi fotovoltaici per l'estrazione sostenibile delle acque sotterranee, la costituzione di associazioni inclusive di utenti dell'acqua con partecipazione femminile e giovanile, e l'introduzione di colture resilienti alla siccità per ridurre la pressione irrigua. Un approccio adattivo e inclusivo consente di ricomporre il divario tra politica formale e pratiche territoriali, contrastando le condizioni di marginalizzazione socio-economica che alimentano forme di governance coercitiva dell'acqua. Ripensare la gestione idrica nel bacino del Lago Ciad implica quindi riconoscere la pluralità delle autorità locali, rafforzare la legittimità delle istituzioni comunitarie e integrare sicurezza idrica e giustizia territoriale in una prospettiva non gerarchica e non esterna ai contesti locali.

PAPERS

ACQUA, COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE E MEDIAZIONI DIASPORICHE ITALIA-SENEGAL: TRA ARCHITETTURA NORMATIVA E PRATICHE TERRITORIALI

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ABSTRACT

Negli ultimi due decenni, il settore idrico è emerso come ambito strategico della cooperazione tra Italia e Senegal, intrecciando priorità a livello locale, mobilità transnazionale e coinvolgimento delle realtà diasporiche. In Italia, il quadro normativo della cooperazione (Legge 125/2014) ha formalmente riconosciuto come attori soggetti della cooperazione “le organizzazioni e le associazioni delle comunità di immigrati che mantengano con le comunità dei Paesi di origine rapporti di cooperazione e sostegno allo sviluppo o che collaborino con soggetti provvisti dei requisiti di cui al presente articolo e attivi nei Paesi coinvolti”. Persistono tuttavia scarti significativi tra architettura normativa e pratiche di implementazione. La complessità amministrativa, la limitata conoscenza e accessibilità, da parte di alcune associazioni, dei meccanismi di riconoscimento formale e di registrazione nel Registro Unico Nazionale del Terzo Settore (RUNTS), la discontinuità dei finanziamenti e le criticità nei sistemi di monitoraggio e valutazione tendono a ridurre il coinvolgimento diasporico a una funzione prevalentemente consultiva, sollevando interrogativi sulla capacità effettiva di tali dispositivi di incidere sui processi decisionali e sugli esiti territoriali. Il contributo propone una rilettura critica del paradigma del co-sviluppo attraverso l'analisi comparativa di iniziative nel settore dell'accesso all'acqua, realizzate nell'ambito della cooperazione italo-senegalese. I casi di studio consentono di esaminare l'azione, le difficoltà e i risultati di reti diasporiche e partenariati translocali. L'analisi si articola su tre dimensioni: (i) la governance multilivello, includendo ministeri, enti locali, autorità senegalesi e organizzazioni associative; (ii) il ruolo sostanziale delle organizzazioni della diaspora nella co-progettazione e nella gestione operativa; (iii) i risultati misurabili in termini di accesso sostenibile all'acqua e rafforzamento delle capacità locali. Adottando un approccio ispirato agli studi sulla mobilità transnazionale, il paper argomenta che il co-sviluppo idrico oscilla tra un modello normativo-istituzionale e uno relazionale-translocale, con implicazioni rilevanti per l'efficacia e l'accountability delle politiche di cooperazione.



PANEL 19

SOCIAL FLUIDITY IN STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

Convenor

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Language of the panel
English

ABSTRACT

While social inequality is ubiquitous across Africa and beyond, in some parts of the continent, stratification has congealed into solid structures. In many Sahelian societies, for instance, caste-like systems are common. Here and in several other parts of the continent, people attributed servile or impure origins are stigmatized and often maintained as a separate group. In addition to the still widespread firstcomer/latecomer relations, structural asymmetries may also be naturalized in several other ways, including ethnicity and race, descent and age. Scholars have debated whether there was greater social fluidity before colonization, which surely catalysed and exacerbated rigidity in numerous contexts. Similarly, whether ideas of citizenship and the more liquid forms of identification and relationality allegedly brokered by post-modernity have challenged rigid structures is subject to scrutiny. Hierarchical segmentation often retains a degree of viscosity, if not of outright solidity, not least due to the resurgence of neo-traditionalist movements that not infrequently defy Western ideologies of equality. This panel calls for empirically grounded contributions that analyse the fluidification and/or solidification of social hierarchies in historical and contemporary Africa. While the optimistic overtones of early-day scholarship on globalization, mobility, etc. have by now been tempered, a certain puzzlement about the persistence of rigid social boundaries and hierarchies in several parts of Africa seems to be common. The panel, therefore, also welcomes contributions that critically engage with a conceptual vocabulary rife with metaphors of fluidity – flow, viscosity, etc. – to represent social change and stasis.

PAPERS

LIQUID METAPHORS: GENEALOGIES AND LIMITS OF THE NOTION OF “FLUIDITY” IN THE FIELD OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ABIDJAN

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ABSTRACT

The Anti-essentialist turn in social sciences and the consolidation of Queer theory in Euro-North American academia have made “fluidity” a privileged category for describing experiences exceeding gender binarism. Within particular strands of scholarship, it has come to function as a hegemonic interpretive framework. In general, metaphors related to the domain of water have been given an important position in contemporary Western social theory. From Zygmunt Bauman’s liquid modernity to the Spatial turn and the more recent Oceanic turn, the “liquid element” has been mobilized as a conceptual figure capable of accounting for transformations in the contemporary world. However, this categorical use does not merely rely on evocative imagery; rather, it reflects specific analytical frameworks through which reality is interpreted. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Abidjan in 2025, this paper tests the transferability of the notion of “fluidity” within the Ivorian LGBTQAI+ context. The analysis of the practices through which the so-called *communauté branchée* – literally “the trendy community,” referring to the local community of people whose gender expression and sexuality fall outside dominant social norms and evoking a presumed proximity to urban “modernity” and Western models of “development” and “progress” – names, classifies, and renders intelligible experiences of “nonconformity” reveals a socially shared linguistic repertoire known as *Woubikan*. This repertoire is not grounded in the idea of indeterminate or mobile identities, but in precise distinctions anchored in sexual practice, relational roles, and the social positioning of the individuals concerned. Although not rejecting the liquid metaphor, the paper reconstructs and questions its claim to heuristic universality, inviting us to consider “fluidity” as a situated theoretical construct whose projection onto other contexts may entail the imposition of interpretive grids that do not fully align with local logics.

PAPERS

THE HIDDEN DAM OF STATUS DISTINCTIONS: A VIEW FROM THE HIGHLANDS OF MADAGASCAR

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ABSTRACT

Based on research carried out in the Highlands of Madagascar, this paper addresses the reasons why status distinctions between slave and free descendants have been reproduced, despite the colonial abolition of slavery and the new opportunities of social mobility allowed by postcolonial contexts. Rather than considering status distinctions as simple “survivals” of a past era, in this paper I will argue that their reproduction must be seen as the combined result of interlacing processes of essentialization, politicization, racialization, silencing, and renegotiation. These processes have reshaped status distinctions in ways that made them “flow” with history, while at the same time reproducing and reinforcing the discriminations against people of slave origin and creating barriers to their social mobility.

PAPERS

IMMANENT AUTHORITY: HOW CHIEFTAINCY NAVIGATES THE STATE IN THE WESTERN SAHEL (CENTRE-EST, BURKINA FASO)

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ABSTRACT

In the western Sahel, military regimes are challenging the process of democratisation initiated in the 1990s. Among the most salient features of this shift – alternatively interpreted as “authoritarian” or “anti-imperialist” – is the dissolution of democratically elected municipal councils. The debate, however, often rests on a classic fallacy: the assumption that political centralisation entails the rigidification of social hierarchies and a reduction in agency. This is historically ironic, as the anthropology of Voltaic societies has long challenged schematic oppositions between centralised and acephalous political formations. In the absence of reliable information on the effects of the recent turn, this paper shifts attention to the preceding period of “decentralisation” that laid the groundwork for the dissolution of municipal councils by Burkina Faso's junta in 2022. It focuses on the fluid interplay between the withdrawal and re-emergence of traditional chiefs on the political scene. The analysis draws on a long-term ethnography of the Bissa region, complemented by a netnography covering the most recent period (2019–2025). The empirical material documents local conflicts surrounding two cases of succession to traditional chieftaincy, examined before and after 2022. These case studies highlight the plurality of actors involved in nomination processes and the arguments mobilised, thereby shedding light on the social production of “traditional” authorities, which, unlike “democratic” ones, are locally perceived as effective in maintaining the social order. Although the Bissa region is often portrayed as a marginal and unstable political periphery, opposed to the Moose world, closer analysis reveals it to be a particularly dynamic site of political formation. To account for local processes of legitimation in this context, the paper mobilises the concept of the immanence of authority, understood as a dimension that escapes analytical frameworks based on binary oppositions such as centralised/acephalous, traditional/bureaucratic, or public/private.

PANEL 20

NEW INTELLECTUAL HISTORIES OF WEST AFRICA

Convenor

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Discussants

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Chair:

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

Despite the proliferation of 'global intellectual history' in recent years, much remains to be done to excavate Africa's discursive horizons and intellectual contributions. By focusing on Ghana and The Gambia, this panel reconstructs how different categories of actors (scientists, students, historians, and trade unionists) recast their role as intellectuals in the 20th century. How did West African intellectuals construct their voices and their authority? Upon which epistemic regimes, intellectual genealogies, and discursive resources did they draw to imagine new political communities? Combining the analysis of under-used sources (student magazines, the archives of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Gambia Outlook & Senegambian Reporter newspaper) and different methodological approaches, including oral and conceptual history, the panel aims to widen the conversation on the concepts, metaphors, languages and discourses through which African intellectuals conceptualised their place in an 'uneven world'.

PAPERS

A PLAYFUL WORLDMAKING: LANGUAGE GAMES AND STUDENT MAGAZINES IN POSTCOLONIAL GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The paper reconstructs the history of magazines produced by students at the University of Ghana between the 1950s and the late 1960s. In the last years of colonial rule, and under Kwame Nkrumah and the NLC military junta, the university was the epicentre of a vibrant print culture, with each Hall producing its own weekly or fortnightly publication. Drawing on studies on print cultures, social movements, and global intellectual histories, the paper analyses the key categories, spatial referents, and temporal imaginaries through which Ghanaian students interrogated and conceptualised their place in an uneven world. To illuminate students' literary life worlds, the paper reassesses the notion of 'worldmaking'. Recent scholarship (such as Adom Getachew's excellent *Worldmaking after Empire*) has deployed this concept to tie together a wide range of anti-colonial and supra-national projects. However, in philosopher Nelson Goodman's original formulation, 'worldmaking' referred to procedures of linguistic and discursive ordering and assemblage, rather than to a specific kind of 'object' or political project. Rescuing 'worldmaking' in Goodman's sense allows mapping the concrete temporal and spatial referents used by students to account for a wide range of phenomena, from canteen prices to courtship on campus, from neo-colonialism to music and dancing. This is not merely conducive to retrieving a lost world of insider jokes, short-lived expressions, and bizarre semantic associations, but also to building a more expansive view of student politics. Indeed, by experimenting with genres and combining very different registers, student magazines articulated what I call a 'playful worldmaking'. The emphasis on playfulness is not meant to detract from students' commitment to understanding and changing the world. But it avoids reducing students' beliefs to pre-determined varieties of anti-colonialism, nationalism, and Pan-Africanism. Students engaged in 'playful worldmaking' challenged the distinctions between public and private, indigenous and foreign, serious and momentous, and, in so doing, they destabilised and remade the boundaries of political discourse.

PAPERS

UTOPIAN ECONOMICS AND REGIONAL THINKING: A GAMBIAN TRADE UNIONIST'S PLAN FOR A WEST AFRICAN SOCIAL INSURANCE SCHEME

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ABSTRACT

On 1st May 1933, the trade unionist, cooperative organiser and newspaper editor from The Gambia, Edward Francis Small (1891-1958), sent a proposal to the Colonial Office in London. In it, he outlined economic and social issues facing The Gambia and all British-ruled West African territories. Small then proposed how these could be resolved via a social insurance scheme. This was not just an airy dream: it was fully planned and cost. Needless to say, the Colonial Office concluded this was 'unnecessary and impracticable'. As a minor file in the vast archives of colonial-era West Africa, detailing an idea which was never acted upon, this could be of niche interest to Gambian historians. However, using it as a prism through which to view economic, social, and political thought more broadly disrupts the dominant scales of analysis of local, national, or imperial levels and highlights the diversity of economic thinking generated from the colonised world. Small's social insurance scheme complicates the binary of colonial and anti-colonial. It proposed a method of mutual, African-led self-help reliant on partnership with the colonial administration. This reflected Small's political vision of a socialist-oriented British Empire of equal partner states united by British values. It also demonstrates the significance of regional thinking in West Africa, economically as well as politically, correcting the national framework often retrospectively imposed. Finally, by placing Small's plans within the global narrative of ideas of social insurance, their utopianism is contextualised, revealing its subjectivity and conditionality and revealing the deeper intellectual frameworks which marginalised the colonised world spatially and temporally as well as economically, socially, and politically.

PAPERS

TOWARDS THE OVERLAPPING MAGISTERIA: MODERN MEDICINE AND AFRICAN HERBALISM IN POSTCOLONIAL GHANA, 1958-PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

The Ghana Academy of Sciences was established to coordinate all affairs relating to scientific research and the modernization of Ghanaian society and economy after independence. To achieve this objective, the Academy initiated and supervised various national projects. Fellows of the Academy supervised the establishment of the Ghana Medical School and coordinated medical research in Ghana after independence. The Academy was also required to work closely with the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association, an organization that was established after independence to coordinate all the activities of Ghanaian traditional healers and priests. The Academy's position on Ghanaian traditional medicine was starkly different from that of the erstwhile British colonial government and shaped the present outlook on this form of medical practice in Ghana today. For all the medical doctors in the Academy, the medicine of their culture was not the medicine of their education, even though their upbringing had acquainted them with remedies that were administered by Ghanaian herbalists. Conversely, all the traditional healers and priests in Ghana were considered "illiterate". A conscious attempt and concerted effort were therefore made to investigate the scientific efficacy of Ghanaian traditional medicine by juxtaposing it with modern biomedicine, in such a manner that fosters mutual pedagogical discussions and a fruitful exchange of methods and heuristic procedures to create an original synthesis of medical systems. This article discusses the history of this project in Ghana using archival records of the Academy.

PANEL 21

PAROLE ATTRAVERSANO GLI OCEANI: PRATICHE E RAPPRESENTAZIONI CONDIVISE

Convenors

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Language of the panel
 Italian, English

ABSTRACT

Le immense distese oceaniche separano geograficamente i continenti. Nello stesso tempo, la letteratura ha ampiamente dimostrato come le acque oceaniche, più che muri invalicabili, siano state veicolo di connessione tra orizzonti e mondi culturali anche molto distanti [1]. Le persone, le pratiche, le scritture, i testi, le lingue “viaggiano” tra gli oceani ed elementi interculturali “abitano” rappresentazioni, immaginari, tradizioni. Uomini e donne hanno in maniera diversa abitato queste rappresentazioni e vissuto questa traslocalità dalla propria prospettiva e posizione sociale. Donne e uomini schiavizzati hanno portato con sé le proprie conoscenze ed esperienze nei network delle loro mobilità transoceaniche, i commercianti hanno insegnato e diffuso saperi e nuove pratiche religiose, i domestic arrangements hanno favorito l'integrazione dei viaggiatori nei nuovi contesti. Le differenze dei ruoli di genere hanno marcato le opportunità, forme di rappresentazione, opzioni e possibili forme di mobilità all'interno di questi flussi in movimento. Le forme poetiche, le narrazioni storiche e le altre forme dell'oralità sono parte delle relazioni interculturali che la presenza degli oceani ha permesso. L'attenzione del panel è rivolta a quei contributi che vogliono presentare ricerche e studi che possano mettere in luce tracce delle connessioni tra mondi distanti percettibili in tradizioni scritte, orali, audio-visuali intese come custodi di rappresentazioni intessute in una dimensione diacronica, tra passato, presente e futuro.

PAPERS

TRA ATLANTICO NERO E OCEANO INDIANO: CONNESSIONI TRANSOCEANICHE IN O OUTRO PÉ DA SEREIA DI MIA COUTO

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ABSTRACT

Questo contributo propone un'analisi del romanzo *O outro pé da sereia* (2006) di Mia Couto alla luce degli Ocean Studies, con particolare riferimento al lavoro di Isabel Hofmeyr (*The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean*), per indagare l'oceano Indiano come spazio di connessione interculturale, mobilità e produzione di immaginari transoceanici. Il romanzo intreccia due narrazioni temporalmente distinte ma profondamente interrelate: da un lato, una vicenda ambientata nel XVI secolo, strutturata come diario di bordo di una nave portoghese che solca l'oceano Indiano, a bordo della quale convivono religiosi, schiavi e intermediari culturali; dall'altro, una narrazione ambientata nel Mozambico dei primi anni del XXI secolo, incentrata sulla presenza di ricercatori e cooperanti afro-americani e sulle loro interazioni con una comunità locale segnata da stratificazioni storiche e memorie coloniali. Attraverso questa struttura bifronte, il testo mette in scena una dimensione diacronica in cui passato e presente si rispecchiano, mostrando come pratiche religiose, saperi, rappresentazioni e rapporti di potere attraversino gli oceani e si reinscrivano in contesti differenti. Gli oceani emergono come archivi mobili di relazioni, violenze e scambi culturali. Particolare attenzione sarà rivolta alle posizioni soggettive dei personaggi – schiavi, missionari, mediatori e attori contemporanei della cooperazione – e al modo in cui genere, razza e ruolo sociale condizionano le possibilità di mobilità e di rappresentazione. L'analisi intende mostrare come *O outro pé da sereia* contribuisca a una rilettura dell'oceano Indiano come spazio letterario transnazionale, in dialogo critico con l'Atlantico nero, capace di articolare connessioni interculturali tra Africa, Europa e Americhe.

PAPERS

DIFFUSIONE DELL'ISLAM E LE DONNE NELLE CONFRATERNITE NELL'AFRICA DELL'OCEANO INDIANO

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ABSTRACT

Nell'ultimo secolo e mezzo, molte donne sono state coinvolte attivamente nella diffusione della religione musulmana nell'Africa dell'est. Questa religione tra la fine del 1800 e gli inizi del 1900 è stata diffusa soprattutto attraverso alcune migrazioni di studiosi e studiose afferenti a diverse confraternite e alle loro suddivisioni, Ahmeddyia, Qaddriya e Saliya in Somalia, Qaddriya, Shadulyia ed altre in Mozambico. Accanto al diffondersi della conoscenza del Corano e delle litanie e salmodie specifiche di alcune di queste confraternite si sono formati studiosi e studiose che hanno poi contribuito enormemente alla dinamizzazione sociale della pratica islamica. In questa presentazione saranno descritte diverse modalità di azione tipiche delle donne e celebrazioni specificamente organizzate da leader (khalifa) femminili per le donne. Alcune delle khalifa sono state importanti poetesse che scrivevano di tematiche religiose, altre dinamizzatrici delle proprie comunità tramite la formazione, l'insegnamento a donne e bambini della lettura e della recitazione del Corano, oltre che della recitazione di testi a tematica religiosa. Contrariamente a ciò che si pensa nel senso comune, diverse donne hanno avuto ruoli importanti nell'istruzione ed educazione musulmana nelle comunità, ivi comprese l'organizzazione di scuole coraniche e moschee per le donne.

PAPERS

LE CULTE D'IFÁ ET LA “RELIGION DES ÒRISHÀ” ENTRE LE GOLFE DE GUINÉE ET LES AMÉRIQUES. PRATIQUES ET SAVOIRS EN MOUVEMENT DANS LES ESPACES TRANSATLANTIQUES CONTEMPORAINS

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ABSTRACT

Par le terme òrìshà, en langue yoruba, ou vodou, dans les langues adja-fon, on désigne une articulation dynamique et plurielle de cultes qui présentent des spécificités sur le plan de la distribution géographique et lignagère. En ce qui concerne ces pratiques culturelles, une continuité significative est largement reconnue dans une partie du golfe de Guinée, notamment de l'ouest du Nigeria jusqu'au littoral oriental du Ghana. Parmi ces cultes, celui d'Ifá, à caractère divinatoire, revêt une importance centrale en raison de sa fonction d'articulation de nombreuses pratiques religieuses et thérapeutiques. Lors de la traite atlantique (XVIe-XIXe siècles), les òrìshà et le vodou ont voyagé avec les hommes et les femmes qui furent vendus comme esclaves vers les Amériques. Là, ces cultes ont connu des processus de restructuration syncrétique et ont adopté de nouvelles formes religieuses avec des noms propres (candomblé, santería, etc.) regroupés sous la définition générale de « religion des òrìshà ». Le retour en Afrique des premiers esclaves libérés (fin du XVIIIe siècle) a marqué le début d'une série de « flux et reflux » entre les Amériques et la « source africaine », avec des finalités et des trajectoires différentes, qui perdurent jusqu'à présent – comme en témoignent les grands festivals qui attirent de nombreux afrodescendants de la diaspora vers leur « terre ancestrale ». Il faut noter également que ces mouvements se développent dans les deux sens, selon une réciprocité qui engendre des articulations complexes de pouvoir et de savoir. À travers une recherche bibliographique et mes enquêtes de terrain au Bénin, ma contribution vise à analyser les transferts de connaissances dans les espaces transatlantiques en me concentrant sur une pluralité d'aspects : mémoire, recherche identitaire, réinvention de la tradition, tourisme spirituel, patrimonialisation du sacré, quête d'universalité au sein des discours sur la « religion des òrìshà ».

PAPERS

THE NEW ART OF WRITING ON CLAY-DUNG WALLS: ARUSA MAASAI WOMEN'S EMERGING LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the emergent practice of murals and textual inscriptions created by Arusa Maasai women on their house walls in Ilkurot village (Northern Tanzania), where most of the people are bilingual in Arusa Maa and Kiswahili. Arusa Maa is a variety of Southern Maa which belongs to the Eastern branch of Nilotic languages (Sommer and Vossen 1993). Within the community of Ilkurot, Arusa Maa is the language of communication within the family and the community, and Kiswahili – the lingua franca of Tanzania – is introduced in the linguistic repertoire through formal education and contact with people outside the Arusa area. English is not widely spoken among the Arusa population (Andrason and Karani, 2025: 5), but it is starting to spread among the new generations who acquire a higher level of formal education. Driven by educated young women, the mural art practice transforms the domestic wall into a dynamic, multilingual public medium for asserting identity and negotiating social space. Employing an ethnographic and visual data collection approach, the study analyses 67 unique wall inscriptions. Key findings reveal a strong thematic convergence: the most dominant messages are Christian scripture (52%) and social commentary (31%). The latter focuses on hospitality and condemning gossip, demonstrating the wall's function as a canvas for moral and cultural communication. Linguistically, inscriptions overwhelmingly use Kiswahili and English, indicating proficiency in contact languages shared through formal education. Iconographically, the murals demonstrate cultural syncretism, blending traditional patterns with national symbols and global motifs, which articulates awareness of transnational economic and cultural realities. The study concludes that these inscriptions are gender-based practices that emerge as an artistic expression of cultural adaptation to new lifestyles emerging in the area. By controlling the home's public exterior, educated Arusa women assert their new emerging identities through a syncretism of traditional practices related to the Maasai building activities and new values shared in contemporary society.

PAPERS

LOWING AND DIVINING. MAGICAL ANIMALS ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLDS AND THE ARABICO-MALAGASY TRADITION (SOUTHEASTERN MADAGASCAR)

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that Madagascar has been, and still is, at a crossroads of cultures between Africa and Asia, mediated through the Indian Ocean (Martin 2011). The result of centuries of trade, exchanges, and relationships is a peculiar variety of identities and creative expressions on a contradictory island, detached from the continents but, at the same time, as big as a continent in its own right. These interactions are tangibly visible in concrete cultural and artistic legacies. A particularly evident example is the case of the Sorabe 'ajamī literary tradition along the south-eastern Malagasy coast. Jealously and secretly passed down by the noble groups of the Antemoro people, this written literature is considered sacred and transmitted through handwritten copies of manuscripts hidden in the katibo (guardian scribes)' private libraries. Introduced by waves of Islamic migrants around the sixteenth century, the Sorabe historical, genealogical, and esoteric tradition clearly bears the marks of this melting pot in both its language and content. By examining the features of allegorical animals, such as the magical cow iValalañampy, it will become clear how they represent a peculiar reinterpretation of wider traditions recurring in other cultures of the Indian Ocean and beyond. The topic will be explored by connecting written literature to oral narratives, such as the episode of the devouring bull Boromena. The paper aims to offer an opportunity to reflect on the multifaceted relationship between the Sorabe written tradition, difficult to penetrate over the centuries and scarcely known to the point of being in danger of oblivion, and oral traditions. This relationship is woven through an original network of intersections, resulting in a unique, living re-elaboration of features and revealing a profound process of literary and cultural incorporation.

PANEL 22

GIUSTIZIA LIQUIDA: ACQUE, DIRITTI E RELAZIONI GIURIDICHE IN PROSPETTIVA AFRICANA, INTERNAZIONALE E COMPARATA

Convenor

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Language of the panel
Italian

ABSTRACT

Il panel propone una riflessione ampia e interdisciplinare sul tema dell'acqua, considerata non solo come risorsa naturale essenziale, ma anche come fulcro di relazioni giuridiche, sociali ed economiche che attraversano contesti locali e dinamiche globali. In particolare, lo sguardo è rivolto al continente africano, dove la gestione delle risorse idriche si confronta con sistemi normativi plurali, pressioni ambientali crescenti e interessi economici talvolta confliggenti. L'analisi mira a mettere in luce come i diversi livelli del diritto – dalle consuetudini comunitarie alle normative statali, fino al diritto internazionale – intervengano nella regolazione dell'accesso e dell'uso dell'acqua. In questo intreccio, l'acqua appare come un fiume che scorre attraversando territori giuridici differenti: talvolta li unisce, creando possibilità di coordinamento e cooperazione; talvolta li separa, evidenziando tensioni irrisolte e disparità di potere. Parallelamente, il panel affronta gli effetti delle trasformazioni ambientali e degli investimenti infrastrutturali, che incidono profondamente sulla disponibilità della risorsa e sulla concreta attuazione del diritto all'acqua. L'obiettivo complessivo è interrogare le molteplici dimensioni della "giustizia dell'acqua", ponendo in dialogo prospettive giuridiche, ambientali e socio-economiche e offrendo elementi per una lettura critica delle sfide che questo bene essenziale pone ai sistemi normativi e alle comunità che da esso dipendono.

PAPERS

L'ACQUA NEL PRISMA DEI DIRITTI COLLETTIVI

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ABSTRACT

Negli ultimi decenni il tema della proprietà dell'acqua ha acquisito una rilevanza significativa nei dibattiti politici e giuridici a livello globale. Il mio intervento tratta del riconoscimento delle forme consuetudinarie di proprietà dell'acqua delle popolazioni indigene e delle comunità locali nell'Africa subsahariana.

PAPERS

ACQUA CONTESA, PACE POSSIBILE: IL DIRITTO INTERNAZIONALE NEI BACINI AFRICANI

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ABSTRACT

L'Africa ospita bacini fluviali transnazionali che, tra pressioni demografiche e climatiche, possono trasformarsi in focolai di conflitto o in laboratori di cooperazione. La relazione mira a evidenziare come il diritto internazionale, se applicato con coerenza e inclusività, possa diventare una sorta di diga giuridica, che contiene tensioni e indirizza i flussi verso la cooperazione, ossia uno strumento strategico per una gestione condivisa delle risorse idriche, capace di ridurre tensioni, promuovere stabilità e aprire la strada a una pace sostenibile.

PAPERS

AGRICOLTURA LIMITATA DALL'ACQUA IN AFRICA: SENSIBILITÀ AI CAMBIAMENTI AMBIENTALI GLOBALI DEGLI INVESTIMENTI IN TERRENI AGRICOLI

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ABSTRACT

Negli ultimi decenni la crescente domanda di cibo ha favorito l'espansione degli investimenti agricoli su larga scala, con 38 milioni di ettari acquisiti nel mondo, di cui 16 milioni in Africa, perlopiù da investitori stranieri. Lo studio analizza la pressione sulle risorse idriche africane indotta dalla coltivazione delle terre oggetto di investimento nello scenario corrente e in secondo scenario di cambiamenti globali.

PAPERS

FLUSSI DI INVESTIMENTI SOSTENIBILI PER PROMUOVERE IL DIRITTO ALL'ACQUA IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

La relazione si propone di analizzare le molteplici iniziative emerse negli ultimi anni a livello internazionale e regionale volte ad attrarre investimenti per la costruzione e la gestione di infrastrutture destinate all'uso delle risorse idriche del continente africano. L'analisi sarà condotta alla luce dei parametri di sostenibilità ambientale, sociale e climatica degli investimenti imposti dalla natura fondamentale del diritto all'acqua.

PANEL 23

WATER INFRASTRUCTURES, LOGISTICS OF POWER: HYDROSOCIALITY, EXTRACTIVISM, AND SOVEREIGNTY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

Convenor

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Language of the panel
English, Italian

ABSTRACT

This panel explores the role of water as a crucial infrastructure in shaping political economies, power dispositifs, and inequality regimes across the African continent. In line with the theme “Waters of Africa: Flows, Fates, Contexts”, the panel examines how water—material, technical, symbolic, and maritime—shapes exchange networks, political sovereignty, and processes of accumulation, becoming a central component of contemporary governance. We invite contributions addressing water grabbing, conflicts over resource access, hydrological prioritisation within port infrastructures and logistical corridors, the impacts of large-scale works such as dams, pipelines, and desalination plants, and the effects of climate change on water distribution. The panel especially welcomes studies on coastal transformations, the Blue Economy, and maritime communities affected by logistical and military expansion. We aim to gather scholars adopting interdisciplinary perspectives—including anthropology, geography, political ecology, sociology, history, and oceanic studies—to understand African hydrosocialities as dynamic fields that generate new forms of citizenship, vulnerability, and power. Particular attention will be given to contexts in which water sustains logistical corridors, extractive economies, and transnational geopolitical projections, engaging with concepts such as liquid empire, sea powers, hydropolitics, and infrastructural statecraft. We welcome proposals integrating ethnography, archival research, technical documents, GIS, environmental analysis, and cross-regional comparison. The goal is to build a collective discussion on Africa’s water politics, showing how inland, coastal, and oceanic waters lie at the heart of global social, symbolic, and material transformations. We welcome papers exploring water grabbing and conflicts over water access, hydrological infrastructures like wells, dams, ports, pipelines, and desalination, global logistics, maritime flows, and coastal hydropolitics, the Blue Economy and its social or environmental impacts, climate change, water crises and mobility, as well as symbolic, ritual, and cosmological relations with water.



PAPERS

ESTRATTIVISMO ENERGETICO, ACCESSO DISOMOGENEO E PROPRIETÀ AMORALI DELL'ACQUA TRA GLI ACHOLI, IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

La rete elettrica ugandese è alimentata al 99% da energia rinnovabile grazie alle abbondanti risorse idroelettriche sfruttate tramite decine di dighe sparse in tutto il paese (IEA, 2023). In Uganda, l'interesse per lo sviluppo della potenza idroelettrica del Nilo risale ai primi del Novecento e, dall'impresa coloniale britannica fino a oggi, ha continuato ad alimentare le ambiziose visioni per lo sviluppo socioeconomico del paese. Il settore elettrico contemporaneo continua ad adottare una logica espansionistica che mette l'elettricità al servizio dell'industria, piuttosto che dei cittadini, considerandola un prodotto commerciale invece che un bene pubblico. Nel 2023, nonostante l'eccedenza di elettricità in Uganda, solo il 24% della popolazione aveva accesso alla rete nazionale (IEA, 2023). Nonostante i piani per aumentare la sua disponibilità tramite una politica di connessioni elettriche "gratuite", l'accesso all'infrastruttura centralizzata rimane scarso, sia in area urbana che rurale. In tal senso, i progetti idroelettrici energetici su larga scala non rispondono alle sfide socio-tecniche della maggior parte della popolazione a basso reddito, i cui bisogni energetici sono da tempo soddisfatti dall'adozione di piccoli sistemi solari, soprattutto cinesi e senza marchio, di seconda mano e autocostruiti. A partire da un'etnografia svolta nella città di Gulu, nel nord del paese, tale quadro disomogeneo di accesso all'elettricità evidenzia due tipologie parallele di cittadinanza rinnovabile in Uganda. Infine, a partire da un'analisi della cosmologia Acholi (una delle popolazioni del Nord dell'Uganda) e della relazione dinamica, spazialmente e temporalmente, con la pioggia, l'acqua e i suoi corsi, il seguente contributo fa emergere come i discorsi che si articolano attorno a questo elemento rivelino gli squilibri di potere regionali riprodotti dall'espansione infrastrutturale energetica e dalla lunga storia di violenza statale nell'area.

PAPERS

IDRO-POLITICHE ESTRATTIVE E PERCEZIONI DELL'ACQUA NEL GHANA OCCIDENTALE

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ABSTRACT

L'intervento presenta i risultati di una ricerca etnografica condotta nella Western Region del Ghana, un'area costiera strategica per l'estrazione offshore di petrolio e gas e per l'espansione di infrastrutture energetiche e logistiche. In linea con il panel, il contributo analizza l'acqua come infrastruttura materiale e simbolica, interrogando il modo in cui l'industria dei combustibili fossili riconfigura idro-socialità, ecologie locali e rapporti di potere. Adottando una prospettiva antropologica ed etnografica, l'intervento esplora le trasformazioni delle percezioni locali dell'acqua – oceanica, fluviale e piovana – all'interno di un contesto segnato da estrattivismo, governance infrastrutturale e marginalizzazione delle comunità costiere. Fenomeni quali la proliferazione di alghe lungo il litorale, il deterioramento percepito dell'acqua piovana e il caso del fiume Domuli – dove uno scavo petrolifero realizzato negli anni Cinquanta continua a far affiorare greggio denso – sono analizzati come espressioni di conflitti idro-politici e di un'ecologia dell'incertezza prodotta dall'industria fossile. Il contributo mostra come oceano e fiumi diventino spazi contesi, attraversati da narrazioni di contaminazione, sabotaggio e responsabilità ambientale, che articolano una critica dal basso alle promesse di sviluppo e alle asimmetrie di potere tra Stato, multinazionali e popolazione locale. In questo quadro, elementi cosmologici e riferimenti a entità non umane legate alle acque, pur rimanendo sullo sfondo, contribuiscono a strutturare interpretazioni morali ed ecologiche dell'impatto infrastrutturale. Inserendosi nel dibattito su hydro-politics, extractive infrastructures e governance marittima in Africa, l'intervento propone una lettura etnografica delle acque come dispositivi centrali della politica contemporanea, mostrando come l'estrazione di idrocarburi riconfiguri paesaggi costieri, immaginari ambientali e forme di vulnerabilità.

PAPERS

PRODUCING POWER WITHOUT DELIVERY: WATER INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY CONSTRAINTS, AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Ahead of the 2026 elections, Ethiopia's federal government finds itself in a precarious position due to an increasing crisis of legitimacy across differentiated regions. In this setting, water infrastructures emerge as central political instruments through which state authority is rearticulated and projected. This paper aims to examine the role of water infrastructures as devices for the production of political sovereignty. By focusing on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the paper argues that the ongoing securitization process of water and energy infrastructures constitutes a key strategy for Abiy Ahmed's government to survive the legitimacy crisis, growing because of socio-territorial fragmentation, most notably the fragile post-Pretoria implementation in Tigray, and performance-based legitimacy decrease. Despite being central in Ethiopia's developmental narrative, the GERD remains heavily constrained by a limited energy transmission capacity, high grid losses, and unresolved regional disparities in energy access. However, these shortcomings are discursively reframed through securitizing practices that present the dam as an existential national project, embedding infrastructural delay within narratives of sovereignty, sacrifice, and national survival. The paper conceptualizes the GERD as an incomplete hydrosocial infrastructure whose effectiveness lies more in its capacity to stabilize authority and legitimacy through organizing political time, deferring socio-economic demands, and reinforcing a shared sense of belonging, rather than in its real productive outcome. Rather than offering a comprehensive assessment of Ethiopia's energy or foreign policy, the paper focuses on the material constraints of energy transmission and absorption, underlining the infrastructural limits as entry points to assess the political results given by securitization. Methodologically, the paper aims to combine discourse analysis of official narratives and media representations with an analysis of energy infrastructures and regional energy and trade governance. The work aims to contribute to the debate on infrastructures, logistics of power, and sovereignty in contemporary Africa.

PANEL 26

EVERYDAY WATER STORIES: THE MAKING OF WATERWAYS AND WATERSTAYS ACROSS INTERCONNECTED MARITIME WORLDS (19TH–20TH CENTURIES)

Convenor

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Chair

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Language of the panel

English, Italian

ABSTRACT

This panel explores how diverse sources can transform our understanding of the water stories entwining the Red Sea, the Western Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea in the 19th and 20th centuries. The growing interest in commercial, religious, imperial, and migratory networks across these regions has emphasised the potential of alternative sources in capturing the layered, multifaceted textures of cross-sea entanglements. A wide array of new materials sheds light on the everydayness that sustains waterways – the routes, routines, and networks that connect the seas – and the waterstays – the social fabrics formed in ports, roadsteads, anchorages, and other semi-stationary maritime spaces. Corporate records, port archives, missionary and consular archives, and diasporic materials, such as correspondence, photographic albums, seamen's booklets, and newspapers, reveal the micro-histories of interaction, belonging, and circulation across the seas. Similarly, oral histories and family genealogies restore local agency and intergenerational perspectives, while the materiality of mobility – from traded objects to vernacular cartographies – reveals the practices that animated the social history of these maritime spaces. Attention will be paid to the intermediaries, such as consulates, commercial agencies, translators, merchants, fishermen, prostitutes, guides, dragomans, and clerks, whose everyday work brought contact zones to life and shaped the movement (waterways) and the social thickness (waterstays) of floating spaces. Their activities enable us to observe negotiation, adaptation, and the making of mixedness. The panel aims to offer shared methodological reflections on using and combining nonstandard sources, as well as new insights into how these materials can rethink the social fabric between the Red Sea, the Western Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.

PAPERS

NAVI(GATING) THE SOUTHERN RED SEA THROUGH SAMBOUKS, SHIPS, AND STEAMERS. A WATERWAY FOR ALL?

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ABSTRACT

Ships anchored at ports along the Red Sea historically signified trade activities, Sambouks equally symbolized the presence of locals who mediated access to these shores, while steamers- introduced at the latter half of the nineteenth century- indicated naval control and power. These modes of maritime transportation crossing the Red Sea waters were witness to moments of convergence and others of divergence between foreign actors and local settlers at the southern shores of the Red Sea during the nineteenth century. Against this historical backdrop of colonial attempts at navi[gating] the southern Red Sea region, and the geographical nature of inaccessible shores, this paper will survey historical episodes of interaction between foreign actors and local settlers at the southern shores of the Red Sea, highlighting the shift from a cooperative to competing mode of interactions. The study will showcase the mixedness of these interactions, specifically at the southern Red Sea Tihama shores of Yemen during the nineteenth century, and display how local sambouks were as significant as imperial steamers in determining the fluctuating nature of this narrow waterway. The episodes will explore the key navi[gaters], emphasizing the role of local coastal actors such as Al-Zaraniq of Tihama, and display a mosaic of converging and diverging interactions with-(in) foreign actors at the southern Red Sea shores, including the Ottomans, Italians, French, and British. The objective of this study is to portray the complexity of navi[gating] the southern Red Sea region during the nineteenth century through the various actors and their modes of naval control.

PAPERS

FINDING HABASHI: NAVIGATING MIXED IDENTITIES AND MULTIPLE ARCHIVES

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ABSTRACT

This contribution reconstructs the life of Josef Soliman Habashi by tracing his multiple movements across Africa, Europe, and Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century. Born along the Blue Nile in 1840, Habashi repeatedly travelled along the river, across the Mediterranean, and throughout the broader Red Sea region as well as southern, central, and western Europe. Ordained a Catholic priest in Naples in 1865 under the Franciscan name of Bonaventura from Khartoum, he was selected as part of an avant-garde of African missionaries tasked with facilitating the conversion of other Africans. Yet, after serving as chaplain on an Italian expedition to the eastern coast of the Red Sea in 1885, he disappeared from the records, leaving behind only the disappointment of senior missionaries and colonial officers, as well as a historiographical lacuna that deserves to be addressed. Working at the intersection of the history of Christianity and African history, and drawing on a diverse range of sources, from private correspondence in missionary archives to official reports in colonial records, we investigate why a figure valued for his capacity to mediate between multiple identities in different contexts could be simultaneously indispensable and expendable for religious and colonial institutions. In doing so, we trace how Habashi/Bonaventura negotiated the roles imposed on him by various Catholic institutions and colonial authorities, alongside the identities he crafted to pursue his own objectives and ambitions.

PAPERS

MIXITY, MIXEDNESS, AND SOCIABILITY IN ADEN DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1918–1939)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the dynamics of mixity, mixedness, and sociability in Aden during the interwar period (1918–1939), a time when the city emerged as a critical imperial, commercial, and military hub under British control. Aden's administration was transferred from British India to the Foreign Office in 1917. One of the immediate consequences of this administrative shift was the reconfiguration of census categories: the colonial authorities abandoned a purely religious classification in favour of a dual system combining religion and "race", the latter encompassing Arabs, Somalis, European Christians, and Jews (Goepel, Census of Aden, 1846). The establishment of the Aden Command in 1928, managed by the Royal Air Force (RAF), further militarized British presence in the region. Aden's elevation to a Crown Colony in 1937 coincided with a rearmament program and a significant influx of migrant labor, driven by the growing demand for workforce expansion. This period also witnessed the proliferation of associations, clubs, and communal organizations, including the founding of the Light in Arabia Lodge in 1918, one of the country's principal Masonic lodges in 1918, chartered by the District Grand Lodge of Bombay, which underscored the city's role as a site of both imperial sociability and transnational networking. Catholic congregations were equally significant, particularly the Congregation of Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur. However, despite the vibrancy of Aden's social life, these institutions often operated within segmented communal or professional networks, leaving limited space for interactions that transcended administrative or commercial boundaries. Against this backdrop of ethnic and religious diversity, this paper seeks to interrogate the forms and limits of mixity and mixedness in Aden's interwar society by analysing travelogues, archival records from club associations, and philosophical societies with particular attention to populations originating from the Horn of Africa.

PAPERS

NEGOTIATING WATERWAYS, INHABITING WATERSTAYS: INTERMEDIARIES AND EVERYDAY PORT LIFE IN LATE OTTOMAN HODEIDA (1872–1914)

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ABSTRACT

Hodeida functioned simultaneously as a corridor of circulation and as a semi-stationary maritime space where intermediaries created and maintained dense social ties. Customs routines, brokerage practices, credit arrangements, and the management of seasonal maritime rhythms anchored the port within wider Red Sea circuits (Blumi, 2007; Miran, 2009; Wick, 2016). Through these practices, intermediaries shaped negotiation, adaptation, and mixed belonging that structured everyday life along the Red Sea littoral. Situated within the late Ottoman provincial framework of Yemen (Kuehn, 2011), Hodeida connected caravan routes, dhow navigation, and emerging steamship lines, while telegraph infrastructures and administrative reforms sought to strengthen imperial integration (Çakılcı, 2022; Minawi, 2016). At the same time, the port shared features with other Indian Ocean and Red Sea urban formations, where merchant houses, mobility, and architectural forms articulated layered maritime sociability (Um, 2017; Freitag et al., 2011). The paper draws on Ottoman parliamentary debates and provincial reports, British and Italian consular correspondence, local chronicles, and visual and material evidence, including port cartography, photographs, and early postcards. By combining administrative, consular, and visual archives, the study reconstructs the micro-histories embedded in port life. It foregrounds the intermediaries who sustained maritime connections through routine mediation and everyday negotiation. By tracing the lived practices that linked caravan, dhow, and steamship, the paper presents Hodeida as a key waterstay in the late Ottoman Red Sea, where mobility and semi-stationary life intersected and where intermediaries actively shaped maritime worlds.

PAPERS

CAN THE SUBALTERN MAP? SLAVES, LABOURERS, AND PERIPATETIC GUIDES AND THE CARTOGRAPHIC BECOMING OF ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Following in the footsteps of recent historians who have shed light on the labour of African intermediaries in 19th century European geographical and cartographic operations in Africa, this paper will examine the pivotal role slaves played in the co-production of geographical and cartographic knowledge of Abyssinia and its surrounding territories – geographies that would eventually coalesce into the Ethiopian state – with European travelers, geographers, cartographers, and missionaries. Through close and critical reading of European travel accounts, diaries, and field reports, it will construct the profiles of subaltern actors – slaves, labourers, porters, domestic helps – who shared their spatial knowledge and practices with various Europeans who extensively mapped Ethiopia in the 19th century. In doing so, the paper seeks to reframe the history of European exploration and mapping of what would eventually become Ethiopia as a collaborative process, in which indigenous knowledge systems were central. Furthermore, the paper critically analyzes the power dynamics between Europeans and their local collaborators, exposing the tensions, exploitation, and erasure that accompanied these relationships. Ultimately, the paper aims to highlight the essential intellectual and practical labor of indigenous figures in shaping European geographical knowledge, challenging the Eurocentric perspectives that have long dominated the historical record. The first section of the paper tells the stories of some of the peripatetic Abyssinian guides employed by Europeans during their travels from the coast (Indian and Red Sea coasts) to central Abyssinia and beyond, highlighting their practical, logistical, and epistemic contributions. The second section discusses how laborers engaged by European travellers, geographers, and missionaries in Abyssinia sustained the European surveying and mapping operations. The third and last section examines the entanglement of Abyssinian slavery and the production and circulation of geographical knowledge.

PAPERS

REGIE AGENZIE COMMERCIALI: L'ETIOPIA SETTENTRIONALE E IL MONDO OLTRE IL MARE (1896-1928)

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ABSTRACT

All'inizio del Novecento, il governo italiano decise di rafforzare la propria presenza nel Mar Rosso aprendo nuove sedi consolari e commerciali. In questa strategia, l'Eritrea fu immaginata come una sorta di hub commerciale a livello regionale, capace di mettere in relazione i traffici di Asia e Africa. Tra gli strumenti utilizzati per sostenere questa politica figuravano le Regie Agenzie Commerciali. Nel solo 1909 ne furono fondate tre nel Nord dell'Etiopia: a Gondar, ad Adwa e a Dessiè. Le nuove strutture furono affidate alla guida di personale esperto proveniente dall'Eritrea, e il loro compito non fu solo commerciale. Le Regie Agenzie raccolsero sistematicamente informazioni che oggi possono aiutarci a comprendere meglio le dinamiche locali e regionali dell'Etiopia e del Mar Rosso e la presenza di reti commerciali e culturali. L'intervento si soffermerà principalmente sulla dimensione economica del lavoro delle Agenzie. In modo particolare, valorizzando una ricca documentazione archivistica, verranno messi in luce gli strumenti utilizzati per comprendere gli orientamenti dei consumatori locali e come queste informazioni furono veicolate all'industria italiana.

PAPERS

ANCHORING IN A NEW RUD(KHĀNEH): IRANIAN-ARAB MIXING AND MIXEDNESS IN THE RED SEA REGION (19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the life trajectories of Iranian subjects who moved to the Red Sea region – understood as both its shores and its highly interconnected hinterlands – between the 19th and the 20th centuries. It examines how the waterways of these mobile and migrant groups resulted in phenomena of social and religious mixing, as well as interethnic mixedness. While being in contact since ancient times, in the 19th century, the expansion of steamship navigation increased mobility between Iran and the Red Sea region for trade and pilgrimage purposes. The Red Sea became fully integrated into the mercantile networks of the Iranian *tojjārs* (big merchants), also expanding into the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Drawing upon Persian- and European-language sources, including the press of the Iranian community in Egypt, official documents, travelogues, and memoirs, this paper traces the multifaceted trajectories of Iranians of multiple ethnic and religious belonging who anchored themselves in the region while maintaining enduring “water connections” across seas. While in some African commercial entrepôts, Iranian presences were often temporary, elsewhere, most notably in Cairo, they established durable communities, where interactions were not merely commercial, but also domestic. The city along the river (*rudkhāneh* in Persian), the Nile, became a new house (*khāneh*) for these communities. Here, mixing became a matter of urban spatiality, and across generations, phenomena of intermarriage created new identities and belongings, constantly recalibrated to commercial strategies, minority conditions, and political events. As a result, this study shows how the Red Sea was a fluid space for diasporas, where commercial actors navigated multiple affiliations as key agents in shaping both the connective tissue and the fault lines of belonging across Asia and Africa.

PANEL 27

THROUGH MEDITERRANEAN WATERS: BEYOND EUROCENTRIC NARRATIVES

Convenors

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Discussant

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

More than three decades after the publication of Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic* (1993), scholarly and artistic movements have emerged to challenge Eurocentric frameworks for understanding identities, bodies, imaginaries, and memories through water spaces. Building on recent literature that foregrounds the Mediterranean as a critical site for questioning Euro-American epistemologies (Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Proglione et al 2021, Montalbano 2024), this panel leverages the Mediterranean Sea space as both an analytic framework and a methodological lens to reconfigure our understanding of broader social, economic, and political formations. For example, within Migration Studies, analyzing Mediterranean mobilities requires acknowledging how EU border infrastructures materially reinforce barriers through necropolitical measures while simultaneously generating encounters and solidarity practices. Treating the sea as a contested space of frictions and crossroads in its own right (Fravega and Anderlini 2025), rather than merely as a site of externalization policies, moves beyond reductive narratives and grounds the analysis in the lived experiences of migrants and the multiplicity of actors navigating these waters. Similarly, emerging scholarship (Scaglioni 2024) calls for re-reading the intense, centuries-long exchanges across the Mediterranean - encompassing migration, slavery, commerce, and cultural circulation - to understand the genealogies of social, economic, cultural, and political phenomena predating and exceeding the colonial encounter, cross-sectioning the entire region in complex and enduring ways. This panel welcomes contributions from history, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, cultural studies, and related disciplines that re-read the Mediterranean through global, critical, and postcolonial perspectives (Chambers and Marinelli 2020). We seek papers that deploy the sea's material and symbolic presence to illuminate both contemporary and historical issues. We particularly encourage submissions featuring original ethnographic and archival research, as well as interdisciplinary approaches that expand our methodological and theoretical horizons.

PAPERS

THE MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH HARGA MUSIC: SCENE ARTICULATIONS, SYMBOLIC LABOUR, AND MIGRANT HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Across the Maghreb, the term *harga* identifies undocumented migration. *Harga* can be translated as “the burning”: it signifies the idea of “burning the borders”, and refers to migrants’ (*harraga*) practices of burning identity documents or letting their Visa expire. The *harga* has been a central theme in a longstanding tradition of popular music from the region, and its centrality displays social, emotional, and aesthetic effects. Through an analysis of songs and related media (such as videoclips and social media discussions), and through data from my ethnography on music scenes in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Barone, 2019), the paper will explore the multiple social articulations and symbolic labor of *harga* as a musical theme. References to cross-Mediterranean migration foster a continuum linking rap scenes across the Maghreb with regional genres such as Tunisian *mizwid*, Algerian *raï*, and Moroccan *sha’bi*: such continuum is reproduced through aesthetic ideoscapes and infrastructural connections. Furthermore, songs about the *harga* conjure identifications between music scenes and specific publics, networking disenfranchised audiences across the Mediterranean. Finally, as noted by Celeste Ianniciello (2016), *harga* music is a form of “migrant heritage”, a collective rewriting of narratives and aesthetics of the Mediterranean region. *Harga* music works as a locus connecting the epics of border-crossing with the critical reminiscence of one’s departure society, the mourning of the dead, and with the passionate construction of hopes and dreams that link migration to the quest for a better life. In so doing, such production of heritage from below works on disparate historical plans: it articulates real and imagined pasts, presents and futures, while producing a flow of media that patrimonialize the narrative of illegal migration resignifying its elements – migration, Europe, and the Mediterranean Sea itself.

PAPERS

THIN ISLANDS, THICK BORDERS? AN ARCHIPELAGO AMID THE TIDES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

My reflection starts from the Tunisian archipelago of the Kerkennah Islands. How do these thin islands reshape Mediterranean currents and narratives? The sea marginalizes and interrupts quick and easy dialogues with the continent, while at the same time placing the islands within international flows and currents. The archipelago is thus courted by a form of globalization that is both inviting and intrusive: from the south, intense industrialization brings with it the “fertile” waste of phosphate processing, while hydrocarbon extraction platforms stand out on the western horizon. New boats equipped with “mass” fishing techniques—predatory and destructive—appear everywhere at sunset: a progressive impoverishment of land, sea, and prospects has led to the abandonment of the artisanal and local fishing practices traditionally widespread across the archipelago. From the northern shore, long-standing relations of neighborhood and images of “Instagrammable” lives intertwine with regulatory policies that reinforce border regimes and their attempts to externalize responsibility. This “archipe-logic” seems to enact a constant dialectic between the desire to globalize and the desire to remain rooted in the ground. In its unfolding, it reveals how concepts such as small, invisible, and vulnerable become relational and situated, to be understood as embedded in historical processes; it reveals how relations and movements of people, goods, and ideas constitute an ongoing process between and within each island-world. Amid these precarious ecologies, relations—unstable and monstrous entanglements—that take shape in the sea between human and more-than-human bodies unsettle and reinvent borders, opening up new ways of burning them, inhabiting them, or narrating them.

PAPERS

FROM VENICE AND TUNIS TO EU BORDERS: MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a historical and comparative analysis of the Mediterranean as a crucial space for international regulation, challenging Eurocentric readings of power, mobility, and sovereignty. It draws a parallel between the commercial and political networks linking Venice and Tunis (15th-18th centuries) and the contemporary border infrastructures of the European Union, showing how in both contexts the sea functions as a tool of governance, determining which lives, goods, and movements are protected and which are exposed to risk, detention, or death. Venice and Tunis exemplify a relationship shaped over centuries between dialogue and conflict, mutual influence, and the intersection of converging and clashing Mediterranean trajectories. This interaction produced knowledge, skills, exchanges, and techniques that could not have evolved in the same way without such sustained engagement. In the early modern period, Venice and Tunis constituted nodes in a multipolar network where mobility was regulated through commercial treaties, systems of captivity and ransom, and the control of ports and corsairs. Tunis was not a passive periphery but an active actor negotiating agreements, managing human flows, and using mobility as a political and economic resource. This structure underscores how the Mediterranean was governed by overlapping sovereignties capable of determining the fate of bodies in motion and shaping regional relations. The parallel with the contemporary Mediterranean highlights structural continuities: tourists, capital, and goods enjoy protected mobility, while migrants face detention centers, pushbacks, and life-threatening risks at sea, reflecting a necropolitical logic embedded in EU-North Africa policies. By framing the sea and aquatic spaces as central material and symbolic infrastructures of borders, sovereignty, and mobility, the paper positions the contemporary Mediterranean within a long-term continuum of differential governance of bodies and flows. It demonstrates that the Mediterranean has always been an arena of political co-production and a site where international power is negotiated through both the protection and sacrifice of human and material movement.

PAPERS

INFRASTRUCTURAL AFTERLIVES: SUEZ, LESSEPSIAN MIGRATIONS, AND THE BLUE CRAB IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

The name of Ferdinand de Lesseps evokes the construction of the Suez Canal, the infrastructure that cut through the eponymous isthmus, reconnecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean and durably reshaping the geographies of global trade. The Canal constitutes an infrastructural matrix of Mediterranean modernity: a colonial formation, a logistical corridor, and the material architecture of a renewed maritime centrality. Its legacy is inscribed both in the routes of capital and in marine ecologies, imprinting upon the Mediterranean an unprecedented configuration, intensely connected and structurally traversed. Among the trajectories generated by this infrastructure are the so-called Lessepsian migrations, named after the French diplomat, referring to the passage of marine species from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean. The proposal takes such more-than-human mobilities as an analytical prism through which to interrogate the Mediterranean as a space shaped by imperial legacies, differential regimes of circulation, and regimes governing life. Drawing on ethnographic research on the blue crab (*Portunus segnis*) along the Tunisian coast, the proposal examines how a species originating in the Red Sea and classified as “invasive” takes form within assemblages that intertwine colonial genealogies, ecological crises, and economic reconfigurations associated with the blue economy. The blue crab renders tangible an infrastructural genealogy of the present: the Suez Canal operates as a permanent dispositive, generating ecological, economic, and political effects that extend well beyond its nineteenth-century inauguration. The Mediterranean thus constitutes a space of friction and multi-species co-production, where the category of “biological invasion” functions as an epistemic construct and political apparatus organizing hierarchies of value and legitimacy. Rereading the sea through the Canal’s ecological legacy enables a reconfiguration of the region’s social, economic, and political formations grounded in the materiality of infrastructures and in the assemblages that prolong their action across time.

PAPERS

BEYOND COLONIAL MARGINALIZATION? THE YOUNG TUNISIANS' MEDITERRANEAN PROJECTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Young Tunisians movement in early twentieth-century Tunisia through the lens of Mediterranean connectivity, demonstrating how transnational networks and cross-Mediterranean circulation of ideas shaped anticolonial political action. Drawing on original archival research conducted in Tunisia, France, Turkey, and Italy, this study reconstructs the movement's extensive network of relationships and alliances through an analysis of the individual trajectories of Ali Bach Hamba's group members. By tracing their biographical pathways, educational formations, and political engagements across Mediterranean spaces, the research reveals how personal mobilities constituted the infrastructure of collective political action. Prevented from exercising direct political power within the Regency under French Protectorate rule, the Young Tunisians developed a legitimization strategy based on the Mediterranean projection of their movement. By mobilizing transnational networks extending from Istanbul to Paris, from Algeria to Egypt, and strategically exploiting the francophone press, Bach Hamba's group succeeded in breaking the colonial power's monopoly and constructing an alternative political space. This research interrogates how the Young Tunisians leveraged their multicultural origins, diverse educational backgrounds, and plural affiliations to forge alliances across different political galaxies: French "indigénophile" groups, Young Algerians, Ottoman representatives, and Egyptian nationalists. The circulation of people and ideas, enabled by the development of communication and transportation infrastructure, positioned the movement at the heart of Mediterranean debates on reformism, constitutionalism, and pan-Islamism. By foregrounding the Mediterranean as both an analytical framework and a methodological lens through individual trajectories, this paper challenges Eurocentric narratives that reduce anticolonial movements to reactive responses to European imperialism. Instead, it reveals how Mediterranean mobilities, exchanges, and solidarities shaped the genealogies of political mobilization, demonstrating how the sea operated as a contested space of frictions, encounters, and political possibilities.

PANEL 28

WATERWAYS AND THEIR ARTISANAL INFRASTRUCTURE: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE MAKING OF VERNACULAR TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Convenors

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Language of the panel
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ABSTRACT

The waterways across the African continent are shaped to a considerable extent by movements of people and goods that eschew the technocratic gaze of developmentalist planners. These movements are patterned by longstanding, but also more recent, practices of mobility involving techniques and technology based on skills, environmental knowledge, and social relations. Taken together, these practices form the infrastructural building blocks of riverine exchange systems that ensure the food security of many of Africa's riverine cities. For instance, rivercraft are often loaded and unloaded in various locations using dugout canoes, which serve as mobile, handcrafted landing stages. The logistics of many modern ports also rely heavily on porters' carrying skills, which are learned and passed on across generations. Our panel addresses the infrastructural workings of Africa's waterways beyond the techno-deterministic credo of international infrastructural handling standards. We are looking for panellists interested in practices of loading and unloading, boat building, navigation, bridge building, or any other related practice of tackling the capricious forces of water by means of skills and knowledge between tradition, creativity, and innovation.



PAPERS

BRIDGING A HISTORY OF RIVERINE AND MARITIME TRANSPORT: HOW THE KRU NAVIGATE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SHIFTING TRANSPORT REGIMES BETWEEN LIBERIA AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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ABSTRACT

In my proposed presentation, I examine the relationship between artisanal infrastructures of riverine and maritime transport and changing transport regimes among the Kru people in the border region between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire at the lower Cavally River. While the consideration of the Kru's globalized maritime labor is well established (Gunn 2021, Crutcher 2023), I suggest that the role of riverine transport also holds potential for the understanding of the social history and the present of the Kru. In a historical perspective, I trace how changing transport regimes have influenced the Kru's identity, social organization, and the distribution of skills and knowledge of navigation. Until their work was made redundant in the mid-20th century, many Kru navigated surf boats along the coast and as sailors on ocean ships. Yet, even afterwards, ocean fishing and river transport by canoe continued to play an important role along the "Kru coast". I analyze that the more recent river transport is still linked to certain dimensions of maritime knowledge (of boat building) and the social organization of transport work until today. However, interviews suggest that despite its economic importance, river transport only holds a marginal role for the current Kru identity. Based on the dimensions of prior analysis, I lastly consider how the existing system of canoe transport is currently implicated by an ongoing bridge-building project across the Cavally River. I suggest that the social pressure of the bridge's competition with canoe transport and the expected relocation of a riverine market away from the river are currently putting questions of (river) navigation back into the center of social changes for the Kru.

PAPERS

RIVERINE MOBILITIES AND MOBILE MACHINES: UNDERWATER MINING IN EASTERN DR CONGO

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ABSTRACT

The practice of mining for gold and digital minerals is hardly ever associated with waterways and riverine mobilities. Consider artisanal and small-scale mining in the Kivu provinces, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In this riverine landscape, extractive practices cannot be simply reduced to a land-bound, vertical, or underground workspace but need to be expanded to include underwater mining (with the use of assembled and modified floating dredges, which integrate sluice boxes and motorized engines such as pumps and air compressors) to produce a more complete understanding of global resource flows. In this paper, I do not follow the minerals from river to trading house, but through the myriad of informal mobilities that allow these itinerant extractive practices (from river to river and season to season) to take place. In previous scholarly work, mining has indeed been associated with itinerant and seasonal livelihoods. Expanding upon this angle, I focus on the ancillary economies of installation and transport (i.e., welders and carriers) that are required for underwater mining to be sustained. Moreover, I showcase the way a diverse and informal land- and river-bound system of installation and delivery is co-shaped by the portability, repairability, and fuel-ability of these dredges -- an effect of the socio-technical demands of riverine extraction itself.

PAPERS

MORE THAN MAKESHIFT: HOW BALEINIÈRES AND THEIR ARTISANAL INFRASTRUCTURE RECONFIGURE CONGO'S INLAND WATERWAYS

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ABSTRACT

Today's revival of Congo's inland waterways betrays an unbound and fluid notion of space, which resembles the spatial regime of early colonization, when access to the forest was organized with dugouts, porters, and artisanal infrastructure. Also today, neither the state nor any hard and anchoring infrastructure plays a fixating, territorializing role, although forest goods are no longer exported but shipped to nearby urban destinations. Over the past three decades, the DR Congo's navigable river transport system has undergone a profound reconfiguration 'from below', in response to changing needs and pressures from multiple ever-expanding urban centers. Congo's wooden 'baleinières' are a spectacular case of frugal innovation and small-scale development. Key to their success is their way of tackling the infrastructural challenge of river transportation, i.e., of boat building, navigating, loading, and unloading in an environmentally dynamic context, with changing water levels, subaquatic obstacles, and an intricate yearly eco-cycle. What is achieved elsewhere with 'hard' infrastructure, such as quays, ports, cranes, river dredging, slipways, bridges, buoyage, and nautical signposting, is achieved here with artisanal infrastructure, i.e., the skilled sociotechnical entanglement of muscular, environmental, and engineered forces. Rather than being an expression of ongoing improvisation and bricolage by individuals who are guided by serendipity, the constitutive practices and processes of baleinières' artisanal infrastructure prove to be systematic, consistent, repeatable, and depersonalized. Clearly, they are anything but makeshift.

PAPERS

THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE DAMMED RIVER NILE: BOAT-BUILDING AND THE CREATION OF NEW WATER WAYS ALONG THE FOURTH NILE CATARACT, SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

After the construction of the Merowe Dam on the Nile in northern Sudan, the inundation of agricultural fields and the changing river regime radically disrupted existing links between the Nile, villages, and road networks. Crucial for the development of new modes of creating infrastructural connections that allow for transport, movement, and fishery was the availability of boats and knowledge of navigating the river-turned-reservoir. Based on in-depth ethnographic research, I explore local creativity, knowledge, and technologies of boat building that supported the creation of new routes for motorboat transport and fishery projects on the dammed River Nile.

PANEL 29

FLOW AND INTERRUPTION IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL IMAGINARIES

Convenors

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Language of the panel
 English

ABSTRACT

This panel explores water as a medium of consolidation, transformation, and interruption across African cosmologies, religious practices, and historical and political landscapes. As both material and metaphysical substance, water links human and nonhuman domains, mediates between health and illness, and moves across the thresholds of visibility and invisibility, of birth, cessation, and renewal. While water enables healing, continuity, and connection, it can also become a site of interruption, disconnection, and historical rupture—the embodiment of pain in the case of the transatlantic slave trade, in which oceans served as both the medium of survival and the vessel of immense loss of lives. This duality persists in more recent histories as well, where the construction of hydraulic systems and related water metaphors—historically tied to forced labor in the pre-colonial and colonial eras—become instrumental in imagining and shaping contemporary states. Using the conceptual framework of flows and interruptions, the panel explores how African imaginaries navigate continuity and disruption, vitality and limitation —reimagining water as a cosmological and creative medium through which worlds emerge, dissolve, and transform. We invite contributions that engage with African cosmologies of water, ritual and religious practices, and political continuities and transformations. Papers may explore how water mediates power, transformative changes, memory, healing, and belonging, offering new approaches to understanding the flows that shape African worlds and their diaspora in the Atlantic.

PAPERS

HISTORIES IN FLOW: ONOWA AND THE POLITICS OF DISAPPEARANCE IN MOZAMBIQUE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how water-related metaphors and concepts are used in Makhuwa oral accounts to reconfigure the history of local kings' resistance to colonial occupation in northern Mozambique. It focuses on the Makhuwa concept of onowa—"to dissolve" or "to evaporate." Commonly used to describe the process by which substances such as salt or sugar dissolve into water—becoming invisible yet remaining vital and transformative—the paper explores how onowa functions as a narrative and cosmological framework through which the demise of local kings between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reinterpreted. While colonial archives recorded these rulers as captured and executed by the Portuguese, Makhuwa narratives maintain that they practiced onowa, disappearing from captivity and reemerging within the landscape—mountains, trees, and termite mounds serving as hidden repositories of water, life, and flow. By examining local meanings of onowa, the paper demonstrates how this concept reconfigures local histories of resistance and sustains the enduring political presence of these rulers beyond colonial occupation.

PAPERS

LE Puits COMME MATRICE DE POUVOIR : FONDATION, LÉGITIMATION ET CRISE DANS LES SOCIÉTÉS SONINKE ET MANDING (VIII–XIXE SIÈCLES)

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ABSTRACT

Cette contribution explore le rôle du puits dans les sociétés soninke et manding du Sahel et de la Sénégalie, du VIII^e au XIX^e siècle, en tant que point d'origine, de légitimation et de remise en cause du pouvoir politique et rituel. À travers une approche croisée d'histoire et d'anthropologie, fondée sur l'analyse diachronique des migrations, l'étude des récits oraux et l'observation des pratiques rituelles, il s'agit de comprendre comment le puits, bien au-delà de sa fonction matérielle, devient un espace de fondation, de transmission et de crise. Le puits accompagne les mouvements migratoires, marque l'appropriation du territoire et institue un lien rituel avec les forces souterraines, souvent incarnées par le serpent. Il fonde le droit politique et foncier, mais il est aussi le lieu de la rupture et de la mémoire du pouvoir, comme l'illustre le suicide collectif des femmes nyanthio dans le puits de Kansala, acte tragique scellant la fin d'une lignée royale. En mobilisant des sources historiques, des traditions orales et des enquêtes de terrain, cette étude met en lumière l'ambivalence du puits : à la fois espace de commencement et de dissolution, de sacralisation et de tragédie. Elle invite ainsi à repenser les rapports entre eau, pouvoir et sacré dans les sociétés ouest-africaines, en montrant comment les imaginaires réinventent l'eau comme médium cosmologique et politique, traversé par des flux et des interruptions qui façonnent l'histoire et la mémoire.

PAPERS

GOLD DREDGING IN BANCOUMANA (MALI): WATER, POLITICAL AUTHORITY, AND EXTRACTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the long-term transformations linking water, political authority, and socio-economic change in Bancoumana, a small town in the Manding region of southwestern Mali, where alluvial gold extraction has recently expanded on a large scale in the waters of the Niger River. It argues that water should be understood not only as a productive resource and an object of extraction, but also as a material and metaphorical medium through which socio-political organization has been imagined, contested, and reshaped. In Bancoumana, water has long informed agricultural production, collective fishing practices, and public forms of political regulation. Yet authority over water was never as stable or exclusive as political representations sometimes suggested. Elders and local authorities, colonial projects inspired by small-scale hydraulic schemes, postcolonial state interventions, USAID's rice-polder rehabilitation, and later decentralization plans for urban sanitation and water management all sought to order and channel water, yet none fully mastered it. Control over water remained partial, plural, and disputed, reflecting the fluid and shifting character of local institutions and political relations. Against this longer history, the paper explores how river gold dredging reconfigures both the material and political place of water. The river is increasingly transformed from a support for cultivation, subsistence, and regulated communal practices into an extractive frontier marked by risk, contractual labour, monetization, and severe environmental degradation. By tracing this passage, the paper shows how the fluidity of water continues to echo in equally fluid, negotiated, and unstable forms of authority.

PAPERS

WATERING THE STATE: WATER, POWER, AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION IN MALI

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ABSTRACT

Water-related references abound in historical accounts and political discourse in Mali. In the 18th century, Bambougou n'dji Diarra, the son of a prominent ruler of the Segou Bamana empire, forced his people to build a canalization system that facilitated his province's access to water for domestic use and field irrigation. His legacy is variously remembered; now the caring husband who would have brought water to his beloved wife, Bambougou n'dji, is also remembered as a prime example of the brutal power of the state. In this latter sense, power as *fanga* is conceptualized as, among other things, an unbridled force that forcefully brings about major physical transformations. The episode is often remembered as foreshadowing what the French would later undertake with the construction of the Office of Niger and its large-scale irrigation project. Water is also seen and portrayed as capable of producing transformative change, as in the idea of *kokajé* (lit. to wash properly; fig. transparency), a key concept deployed to convey some of the fundamental traits and hopes people associated with the democratic changes of the 90s. This paper will examine some of the water-related images in contemporary political speeches to further understand people's conception of the political, ranging from citizens' dissatisfaction with its brutality to the hopes initially released by the idea of *kokajé*, the washing away of that which impedes transparency and equity in the management of state resources.

PAPERS

WATER, TEMPORALITIES, AND CINEMATIC IMAGINARIES IN AKOMFRAH AND MAMBÉTY

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ABSTRACT

In the cinema of John Akomfrah and Djibril Diop Mambéty, water emerges as a central symbolic motif through which memory, history, and displacement are articulated. In *Testament*, it functions as a fluid threshold between past and present, shaping the instability of memory and the political experience of exile. In the video installation *Listening All Night To The Rain*, it becomes a mobile archive that reassembles heterogeneous temporal traces, interweaving migrations and multiple temporalities. In both cases, water also operates as a site of rupture, evoking the violence of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies, as well as contemporary ecological crises, thereby making visible the continuity between colonial exploitation, environmental devastation, and vulnerability. In Mambéty's films, particularly in *Touki Bouki*, the sea is a space of tension between rootedness and displacement, the desire for elsewhere and the impossibility of departure, a site of both union and separation. In *Le Franc*, water instead assumes a function of awareness and transformation. More broadly, its fluidity shapes a griotic, fragmented, and non-linear poetics that produces a narrative in motion between dream and reality, hope and disillusionment. This paper proposes to analyse how the figurations of water in the narratives of Akomfrah and Mambéty become a device through which memory and oblivion can be rethought within the tension between flows and interruptions, not as oppositions but as coexisting modes of producing cosmologies, histories, and forms of belonging in contemporary African and diasporic contexts.

PANEL 30

DIGITALIZZARE L'OLTREMARE: ACQUE DI MEMORIA E CORRENTI DI RESTITUZIONE

Convenors

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Italian

ABSTRACT

Nel solco del tema “Acque d’Africa”, il panel propone di riflettere sulla digitalizzazione degli archivi che raccolgono documentazione dei periodi coloniali come un attraversamento di correnti profonde che connettono rive lontane. La digitalizzazione appare come un’opera di canalizzazione: permette di far fluire nuovamente documenti dispersi, di riportare alla superficie materiali sommersi negli archivi delle ex potenze coloniali, e di ridisegnare i delta della memoria attraverso processi di repatriamento fisico o digitale. Come i corsi d’acqua che erodono, trasportano e depositano, i progetti di digitalizzazione trasformano i paesaggi archivistici: consentono nuove forme di accesso, proteggono le “falde” documentarie più fragili, e aprono a negoziazioni politiche e culturali sulla restituzione del patrimonio. Tuttavia, queste acque non scorrono senza ostacoli: si incontrano rapide tecniche (reperimento dei materiali, selezione, macchinari), vortici burocratici e costi che limitano la navigabilità del processo. Il panel intende mettere in dialogo esperienze concluse o in corso di digitalizzazione di archivi, biblioteche e fondi documentari, per esplorare come tali pratiche possano facilitare futuri accordi di restituzione e promuovere una gestione condivisa del patrimonio documentario. Attraverso la metafora acquatica, si vuole evidenziare il carattere dinamico, relazionale e spesso conflittuale dei percorsi di ritorno dei materiali d’archivio, interrogando le tensioni tra flussi digitali e giacimenti fisici, tra disponibilità tecnica e rivendicazioni politiche, tra memorie sommerse e nuove mappe di accessibilità. Invitiamo la partecipazione di contributi che analizzino questi processi come vere e proprie idro-grafie del passato coloniale, mostrando come la digitalizzazione possa trasformarsi in un ponte d’acqua verso pratiche più eque di custodia, circolazione e restituzione.

PAPERS

IDROGRAFIE DELLA MEMORIA COLONIALE: IL CASO DELL'ARCHIVIO SOMALIA E DEGLI ASCARI ERITREI

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ABSTRACT

Questo contributo propone una riflessione comparativa su due progetti di digitalizzazione archivistica sviluppati presso Roma Tre tra il 2010 e il 2023 – l'Archivio Somalia e la banca dati digitale sugli ascari eritrei – interpretandoli come ponti d'acqua tra archivi e comunità e come correnti di restituzione della memoria coloniale. Entrambe le esperienze si collocano nel dibattito sulla digitalizzazione degli archivi d'oltremare come pratica di riattivazione della memoria, capace di far riemergere materiali storici a lungo sedimentati negli archivi delle ex potenze coloniali e di riconnetterli, almeno simbolicamente e digitalmente, alle comunità di origine. Il primo caso analizzato è quello dell'Archivio Somalia e del Centro Studi Somali (CSS), nati in risposta alla frammentazione e dispersione del patrimonio documentario somalo dopo il collasso delle istituzioni culturali in seguito alla guerra civile del 1991. Attraverso una piattaforma digitale open access, oggi composta da oltre 7.600 documenti eterogenei (testi, immagini, audio e video) accessibili in tre lingue e organizzati secondo i principi FAIR, il progetto ha perseguito non solo obiettivi di conservazione, ma una forma di restituzione digitale e simbolica della memoria storica somala. Il secondo caso riguarda la creazione di una banca dati dedicata agli ascari eritrei, basata sulla digitalizzazione e classificazione sistematica di 38.247 documenti conservati presso l'Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito. In questo contesto, la digitalizzazione si configura come un'operazione di canalizzazione archivistica che trasforma giacimenti documentari militari in flussi accessibili alla ricerca e, potenzialmente, alle comunità eritree. Mettendo in dialogo questi due progetti, il contributo analizza opportunità e tensioni comuni: difficoltà tecniche e burocratiche, questioni di accessibilità, digital divide, rischi di riproduzione di asimmetrie coloniali, ma anche nuove possibilità di condivisione transnazionale, restituzione e sovranità culturale. La digitalizzazione emerge così come un'acqua di memoria in movimento: una corrente imperfetta ma necessaria per ripensare, in chiave decoloniale, le pratiche di custodia, accesso e restituzione degli archivi coloniali.

PAPERS

LE COLLEZIONI FOTOGRAFICHE DEL COLONIALISMO ITALIANO (1861-1960), UNA SPERIMENTAZIONE DIGITALE DI CITIZEN SCIENCE

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ISMEO

ABSTRACT

La "Fototeca IsIAO" è parte del patrimonio della "Biblioteca IsIAO" - Sala delle collezioni africane e orientali che oggi si trova presso la Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma. Ha ereditato stampe, lastre e negativi del Museo coloniale di Roma e di vari istituti coloniali italiani. Di natura prevalentemente propagandistica, le immagini oggi conservate nella Fototeca IsIAO hanno accompagnato e dato supporto visivo alle realizzazioni delle politiche coloniali italiane. Si tratta di un mare di memoria (centinaia di migliaia di stampe fotografiche e decine di migliaia di lastre negative) la cui navigazione segue rotte coloniali. La maggior parte delle fonti conservate in Fototeca sono oggetti complessi, che hanno mutato pelle più volte nel corso della loro lunga vita perché messi al servizio di "missioni" diverse, prima e dopo la "cesura" coloniale. Possono scatenare ricordi, produrre nuove analisi, generare scoperte, (ri)connettere idee, persone, eventi soprattutto se "liberate" dallo schema classificatorio coloniale che irregimenta la corrente tematica, canalizza l'attenzione e, goccia dopo goccia, produce lo stesso distillato di sempre: gli italiani erano "brava gente". L'intervento si concentra sul progetto Le Collezioni fotografiche del colonialismo italiano (1861-1960) portato dai collaboratori scientifici dell'ISMEO che operano nella Fototeca IsIAO. Nasce dalla necessità di "riprendere in mano" le collezioni fotografiche attraverso l'uso di una struttura collaborativa che consenta di restituire parte del materiale fotografico a lungo non consultabile e di coinvolgere nella sua descrizione un numero crescente di persone, non necessariamente addetti ai lavori, con l'obiettivo di tracciare nuove rotte. Sintomatico che la piattaforma utilizzata per il progetto (Zooniverse) organizzi questo lavoro in "flussi" (workflow) che ben si prestano a un approfondimento tematico non condizionato dalla corrente principale della classificazione coloniale, nella quale scorrono fiumi di immagini spesso prive di puntuali riferimenti temporali e/o geografici.

PAPERS

DEVOZIONI SOMMERSE: LA DIGITALIZZAZIONE DEGLI EX VOTO COLONIALI TRA VISIBILITÀ FRAMMENTATA E FLUSSI DI MEMORIA

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ABSTRACT

Questo contributo esamina criticamente la digitalizzazione degli ex voto pittorici relativi al periodo coloniale conservati presso il Santuario della Consolata di Torino, assumendoli come caso di studio di materiali d'archivio non convenzionali. Un nucleo specifico di ex voto fa esplicito riferimento alle guerre coloniali in Africa, offrendo rare testimonianze visive e testuali dell'esperienza coloniale filtrate attraverso le pratiche della devozione popolare. La digitalizzazione e metadattazione di questi materiali sollevano criticità di ordine metodologico e tecnico. Gli ex voto sono incastonati in una fitta struttura architettonica che ne impedisce la manipolazione individuale; di conseguenza, la riproduzione fotografica risulta parziale riducendone la visibilità e la possibilità di studio, nonché la perdita di informazioni (ad es., nomi, date e testi dedicatori). Inoltre, l'impossibilità di accedere al verso degli oggetti impedisce il recupero di informazioni, quali la paternità, la datazione e la provenienza. È un patrimonio fragile, la cui stessa sopravvivenza è stata minacciata da un bombardamento durante la II Guerra Mondiale, che ha causato una significativa perdita di materiali. Accogliendo la metafora dell'acqua, questo contributo concettualizza gli ex voto come archivi devozionali "sommersi": materiali apparentemente accessibili e disponibili allo sguardo, ma la cui complessa digitalizzazione impone modalità di accesso e investigazioni creative e originali al fine di scongiurare l'oblio e la perdita di dati. Interrogando la tensione tra visibilità digitale e persistente inaccessibilità materiale, questo contributo riflette su come la digitalizzazione possa tanto abilitare quanto limitare futuri processi di restituzione, gestione condivisa e ridefinizione del patrimonio coloniale. In questa tensione, il ruolo dei volontari che si occupano della catalogazione e della digitalizzazione apre alla riflessione sulle potenzialità della citizen science. Pertanto, accogliere la natura parziale e turbolenta di queste "acque digitali" spinge a costruire pratiche archivistiche che, oltre a mobilitare diverse competenze, richiamano forme più inclusive di restituzione.

PAPERS

CONDIVIDERE PER RACCONTARE UN PASSATO SCOMPARSO: TRE ARCHIVI PARIGINI LEGATI AL MONDO EBRAICO NORDAFRICANO

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ABSTRACT

Il processo di digitalizzazione degli archivi non è mai un momento lineare e non è neanche un elemento scontato. Vi possono infatti essere molteplici ragioni per le quali si decide di procedere alla digitalizzazione, ma esistono anche specifiche situazioni che bloccano lo sviluppo di questa attività. L'intervento si propone di presentare le diverse scelte compiute da tre archivi di istituti parigini che contengono materiali legati al mondo ebraico nordafricano: l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, il Casip-Cojasor e il Mémorial de la Shoah. Tutti questi centri hanno materiali di molteplici provenienze geografiche e che affrontano vastissimi temi. Nel corso delle ultime decadi due elementi si sono verificati: l'accresciuto interesse per le aree extraeuropee, in particolare il mondo nordafricano, e la creazione di database che si sono caratterizzati per ampiezza ma anche per differenti possibilità di accesso. In questi tre siti varia il grado di digitalizzazione, la possibilità di accesso da remoto, di consultazione dei materiali e anche la possibilità di combinare ricerca e poi iterazione successiva con gli archivisti per l'ottenimento dei documenti. Le ragioni dei differenti livelli di accesso sono legate anche alle storie in essi contenute, che raccontano il mondo ebraico nordafricano dagli anni '30 fino alla sua dissoluzione. La digitalizzazione ha permesso che tante storie non fossero perse ma non è destinata a raccontare, ad esempio, le storie dell'emigrazione post guerra, che per la loro estrema intimità resteranno disponibili solo alla consultazione manuale (e potranno essere riportate solo in forma anonima). Obiettivo dell'intervento è mostrare queste realtà archivistiche per ragionare anche sui percorsi post-coloniali di conflitto e crescita e capire quanto i mezzi più moderni permettano veramente che memorie sommerse possano finalmente venire alla luce.

PANEL 31

CURRENTS OF LABOUR: AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISM, NATIONAL POLITICS, AND TRANSNATIONAL FLOWS

Convenor

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Discussant

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Language of the panel

English

ABSTRACT

Across Africa's twentieth century, labour movements emerged at the confluence of multiple currents, including colonial and postcolonial state formation, capitalist expansion, nationalism, and transnational solidarities. This panel explores how African trade unions emerged and navigated these shifting currents, analysing labour movements not as static institutions but as dynamic, contested, and historically situated sites of agency. By foregrounding the tensions between state incorporation and workers' autonomy, the panel examines how African trade unions were alternately channels for political mobilisation, targets of corporatist control, and arenas of ideological struggle. Drawing inspiration from the conference theme, the panel adopts fluidity as an analytical metaphor for understanding the circulations, pressures, and sedimented histories that shape labour politics. African labour movements developed within zones of conflict and extraction and were influenced by flows of ideas, activists, resources, and geopolitical forces, ranging from Cold War interventions to Pan-African visions of worker unity. Across diverse contexts, labour organisations confronted similar dilemmas: how to maintain autonomy in the face of state centralisation, how to mediate internal rivalries and class-based demands, and how to harness international ties without becoming subordinate to external agendas. These challenges unfolded within broader histories of social inequality, industrialisation—often framed as modernisation—and political repression, producing cycles of radicalisation, co-optation, suppression, and renewal. Methodologically, the papers in this panel draw on archival research, oral histories, and class analysis to show how workers' organisations forged and defended spaces of political agency. The cases brought into conversation, spanning from West Africa to the Horn of Africa, highlight both the heterogeneity of African labour trajectories and the shared structural currents that shaped them. By reading labour movements through social and transnational lenses, the panel contributes to a rethinking of African political and social history, in which workers are seen as active participants in forging new political visions rather than as passive recipients of state policy or mere appendages of global alignments.

PAPERS

ANNIHILATION OF TRADE UNIONS IN CAMEROON: THE DOMESTIC SERVANTS UNION OF NIGERIA AND CAMEROONS (DSUNC), 1949-1972

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ABSTRACT

Trade Unions in colonial and post-colonial Africa played a crucial role in bargaining for better working conditions amongst their workers. The Second World War was a watershed as it unleashed unforeseen consequences. One of them was inflation and an increase in the cost of living. This affected the standards of living in Africa and the situation of the domestic servants negatively. With the formation of trade unions, the domestic servants responded by forming their own union, the Domestic Servants Union of Nigeria and Cameroons (DSUNC), with branches all over the colony. Their grievances were articulated in letters that were addressed to the colonial administration. On 28 April 1949, the DSUNC addressed a lengthy letter to the colonial administration. Despite its robust nature, it was eclipsed in 1972 after the Southern Cameroons reunited with French Cameroon and became the United Republic of Cameroon. With Ahidjo as the President and at the helm of affairs, he banned all trade unions. This paper focuses on the dynamics that led to the rise of DSUNC and its demise under the unitary state of Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo (1960-1982). The data for this paper were obtained from the Buea National Archives in Cameroon, and from these files, the paper concludes that Ahidjo's regime deliberately dismantled the autonomy of trade unions as part of a broader strategy to consolidate power and maintain "national unity". Through co-optation, legal restrictions, and political intimidation, trade unions lost their independence and became extensions of the state. This marked the "death" of vibrant labour movements in Cameroon during the Ahidjo era.

PAPERS

THE POLITICS OF WORKER UNITY: STATE CORPORATISM, LABOUR DISSENT, AND THE GHANA TRADES UNION CONGRESS, 1957-1971

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the period from 1957 to 1971, during which the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) transitioned from a semi-autonomous federation into a centralised, corporatist organ of the state, and the resultant dynamics of the rank-and-file worker resistance. This project proposes a historical analysis of the relationship between the state, organised labour, and the Ghana Trades Union Congress. By 1957, TUC was a vital cog for workers' rights and also integral to the Convention People's Party led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. The state aggressively pursued policies and strategies capable of centralising labour representations into state structures in order to diffuse the autonomous nature of the fast-growing worker organisations. Key to this strategy was the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) of 1958 (and its 1965 amendment). The strict policy led to varied resistance, such as strikes, protests, and the formation of rival labour movements. The study will use the qualitative historical narrative approach, consisting of secondary and primary sources, including archival materials, government reports, union correspondence, oral histories, and especially the Labour Department files. It aims to address key research objectives: to analyse the legislative mechanism within the IRA (1958, 1965) that destructed union democracy and consolidated power within the GTUC Secretariat, identify and map key patterns of rank-and-file dissent (including strikes, protests, boycotts, and petition writing, and compare the nature of state control and repression under the Nkrumah and Busia regimes. This paper contributes to scholarship on African labour history by demonstrating how trade unions in Ghana served as both agents of state consolidation and sites of dissent. In doing so, it opens the debate on how postcolonial governments in Africa sought to manage organised labour while grappling with the imperatives of development, democracy, and Cold War geopolitics.

PAPERS

DOMESTIC WORK, GENDER, AND TRADE UNION PARTICIPATION IN CONTEMPORARY TANZANIA: CONTINUITIES AND RUPTURES ACROSS COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL DYNAMICS

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ABSTRACT

This presentation reflects on the reasons behind the limited trade union participation of women domestic workers in Tanzania in recent decades and examines contemporary forms of militancy and associational life, including those that operate beyond formal trade union structures. The analysis is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2018 and 2019 in the cities of Morogoro and Dar es Salaam, drawing on life histories and open-ended interviews with domestic workers both inside and outside trade union networks, as well as with representatives of trade unions and sectoral associations. The dynamics observed in the field are interpreted in light of the historical and social transformations of domestic service and trade unionism in Tanzania from the colonial to the postcolonial period. During the 1920s and 1930s, urban waged domestic service was predominantly performed by African men, was highly specialised, and, for some of them, was associated with opportunities for social mobility not only in economic terms but also in terms of prestige and respectability. These conditions fostered significant forms of collective organisation and trade union mobilisation among domestic workers in the 1940s and 1950s, when a sharp decline in wages put the sector's protections and social value at risk. In the postcolonial period, the progressive feminisation of domestic service, its symbolic devaluation, and increasing state control over trade unions contributed to a loss of autonomy and credibility of trade union organisations. In this context, women domestic workers express disillusionment with trade unionism and develop alternative forms of agency and mutual support, often outside formal trade union structures. At the same time, some ties with trade union networks are selectively maintained, in the possibility that they may prove useful in the future, expressing a form of hope and agency oriented not only toward the disillusionments of the present, but also toward potential future transformations.

PAPERS

PAN-AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISM: REPRESENTATION OR CLASS STRUGGLE?

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Pan-African trade unionism, focusing on a central dilemma: the tension between its internationalist and regional aspirations and its grounding in workplace and mass struggles. The central question is whether the pursuit of transnational solidarity risks distancing the movement from the day-to-day concerns of workers, thereby undermining its power and legitimacy. The actors under analysis are trade union bodies such as the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF), the African Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) in the 1960s, the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), ICFTU-AFRO, and ultimately the African branch of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa). The analysis draws on foundational scholarship to frame this problem. It engages Wogu Ananaba (1979) to highlight how state corporatism has historically constrained union autonomy, and Robin Cohen (1974) to show how internal contests over ideology and resources have shaped these organisations. The lens of Bill Freund (2019) situates these dynamics within the broader context of global capitalism, where international union bodies must navigate mounting neoliberal pressures. The question is ultimately one of meaning and results: how effective can labour internationalism be if it becomes detached from local workplace struggles? The paper posits that for organisations like ITUC-Africa to be genuinely effective, they must reconcile high-level political advocacy with the material realities facing workers in conditions of informality and precarity. It argues that the future of a powerful Pan-African labour movement depends on reimagining internationalism not as a top-down endeavour, but as a project fundamentally rooted in class analysis that begins at the workplace.

PAPERS

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN IMPERIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY ETHIOPIA: ASCENT AND HIGH TIDE

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the Ethiopian labour movement from its origins to the 1970s, arguing against portrayals of its uniform subservience to the imperial state. Instead, it reveals a dynamic arena shaped by ideological contests, organisational interests, and external influences. It traces how unionisation coalesced under the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU), where tensions between moderates and a rising radical faction intensified from the 1960s. Contrary to histories that subsume labour within the 1974 revolution, this study places the peak militancy, culminating in the landmark March 1974 general strike, within a longer arc of internal radicalisation. It positions organised labour as a key political actor on the revolution's eve, before analysing its collapse under the military regime's repression and the subsequent era of state-controlled "yellow unionism". Methodologically, this research employs both a class and organisational historical approach, which heavily relies on archival sources. Primary sources, including records from international labour bodies, internal CELU documents, press materials, and oral histories like Tom Killion's interviews, are cross-referenced to triangulate contested narratives. These are critically engaged with secondary scholarship. This multi-source approach reconstructs the movement's structural conditions and lived dynamics, framing it as a site of negotiation, resistance, and uneven transformation.

PANEL 33

EAU DANS LES SOCIÉTÉS TRADITIONNELLES AFRICAINES: ASPECTS JURIDIQUES ET POLITIQUES

Convenor

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 d'Histoire du droit, des institutions et des idées politiques

Language of the panel
 French

ABSTRACT

Dans les récits fondateurs de nombreuses civilisations, l'eau occupe une place centrale en tant qu'élément primordial. Plusieurs mythes d'origine négro-africaine s'accordent à dire qu'au commencement, la Terre n'était qu'un vaste océan, un chaos liquide d'où émergea progressivement le monde organisé. Cette vision cosmologique confère à l'eau le statut de matrice universelle. L'eau est ainsi à la fois source de vie et source du désordre originel que le divin vient structurer. Ces récits, bien que distincts dans leur forme, traduisent une intuition universelle: l'eau est à l'origine de tout, elle est condition de la vie, objet de régulation dans les sociétés. Et, malgré leur étonnante diversité quant à leur dimension, leur contenu, leur pouvoir de suggestion symbolique, les mythes négro-africains traditionnels constituent des révélateurs de premier ordre en ce qui concerne les structures profondes de la pensée, les régulations de la vie sociale, la situation de l'homme dans le monde, ses rapports étroits avec le sacré, les idées fortes de sa cosmologie. L'eau est ainsi le socle sur lequel repose la pratique sociale et à laquelle elle donne par conséquent sens et puissance. C'est par elle que se structure telle institution, telle relation, telle possession, telle obligation. Elle explique et fonde entre autres les règles de droit. Cette symbolique ancienne trouve un écho contemporain dans les enjeux juridiques liés à la gestion de l'eau, dont la régulation soulève des questions fondamentales de droit, de souveraineté et de justice.

PAPERS

COMMENT S'EST-IL CONSTRUIT UN DROIT DE L'EAU EN AFRIQUE SUR UN MALENTENDU HISTORIQUE?

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ABSTRACT

À partir du XIXe siècle, l'eau se sécularise en Afrique. Réservée jusque-là à la sphère de l'invisible et du sacré, l'eau passe dans le domaine de la technique moderne. Les XIXe et XXe siècles représentent en effet une période de rencontres et affrontements entre deux manières de concevoir la ressource en eau et la relation entre l'homme et le vivant aquatique. C'est la période de la colonisation et de la domination. Le besoin de produire de nouvelles richesses conduit à une maîtrise absolue des eaux douces. Justifiant cet accaparement sur des motifs d'ordre géographique, économique et historique, le colonisateur étend le régime juridique de la domanialité publique sur l'ensemble des « eaux coloniales ». Ce régime juridique conduit à la négation des droits africains préexistants, soumettant les usagers à des autorisations administratives. Cette nouvelle maîtrise des eaux va très vite modifier le paysage hydraulique africain, divisant les communautés et provoquant de violents conflits opposant les « traditionnalistes » aux « modernistes ». Les indépendances reproduiront le même schéma juridique colonial. Dans un contexte de pluralisme juridique, le droit national souffrira d'effectivité et les droits endogènes africains continueront de s'appliquer en dépit de toute reconnaissance formelle. Cette contribution, inscrite dans les recherches actuelles en histoire du droit colonial, vise à développer deux points. D'une part, à travers l'analyse de l'extension de la domanialité publique, sera étudiée la manière dont le colonisateur met en place un régime juridique des eaux propre au monde colonial, inventant un nouveau récit environnemental. D'autre part, examinant l'action du colonisateur s'attachant à disqualifier les droits africains, on présentera la nature et la singularité de ces droits. Une attention particulière sera mise sur la fragilité de la norme coloniale écrite et sur l'importance reconnue par certains administrateurs coloniaux de respecter les normes traditionnelles africaines.

PAPERS

L'EAU COMME RESSOURCE POLITIQUE EN PÉRIODE ÉLECTORALE DANS LA VILLE DE YAOUNDE (CAMEROUN): ENJEUX POLITIQUES VERSUS ENJEUX SOCIAUX ?

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ABSTRACT

Durant la dernière décennie, le Cameroun a enregistré une forte pénurie d'eau dans les principales villes au point où cela est référencé parmi les récriminations portées par les populations contre les pouvoirs publics. En effet, le Cameroun possède l'un des premiers réservoirs d'eau souterraine et d'eau de surface en Afrique selon la FAO. Bien plus, presque tous les départements sont traversés/arrochés par les cours d'eau et en empruntent le nom. Pourtant, le taux de desserte en eau potable était de 33% en 2010 selon la BAD, comparé à un pays sahélien comme le Sénégal où ce taux était de 98% en milieu urbain et de 82% en zone rurale. En clair, 67% des Camerounais n'étaient pas connectés au réseau d'adduction d'eau et étaient exposés à tous risques de santé et autres spéculations de prix pratiquées par les gérants des fontaines. Dans la capitale politique, Yaoundé par exemple, seuls 10 000 m³ d'eau étaient disponibles pour les populations en 2011 sur un besoin total estimé à 250 000 m³ d'eau par jour. Le taux moyen de prévalence des maladies liées à l'eau et à l'assainissement est de 19%. Les vulnérabilités qui en découlent ont poussé les autorités politiques à engager, depuis 2017, le Projet d'alimentation en eau potable de la ville de Yaoundé et des environs (PAEPYS), à partir du fleuve Sanaga (situé à quelques 200 km de Yaoundé), pour une capacité estimée à 400 000 m³ d'eau par jour. Prévu pour être réalisé en 17 mois, ce projet n'a pas encore libéré ses premières d'eau, bien qu'étant un sujet prépondérant des discours politiques, à la fois pour les acteurs de l'État central et ceux de la municipalité. C'est à ce moment que l'eau est devenue une ressource de campagne électorale, régulièrement mise en relief par les candidats aux différentes élections, pour capter le maximum de voix. Il s'ensuit une clientélisation politique de l'accès à l'eau, devenu une ressource politique.

PAPERS

LE SCEPTRE ET LE TREILLIS NORMATIF : ESSAI SUR LA CENTRALITÉ DES EAUX DANS LE PACTE COMMUNAUTAIRE AFRICAIN PRÉCOLONIAL

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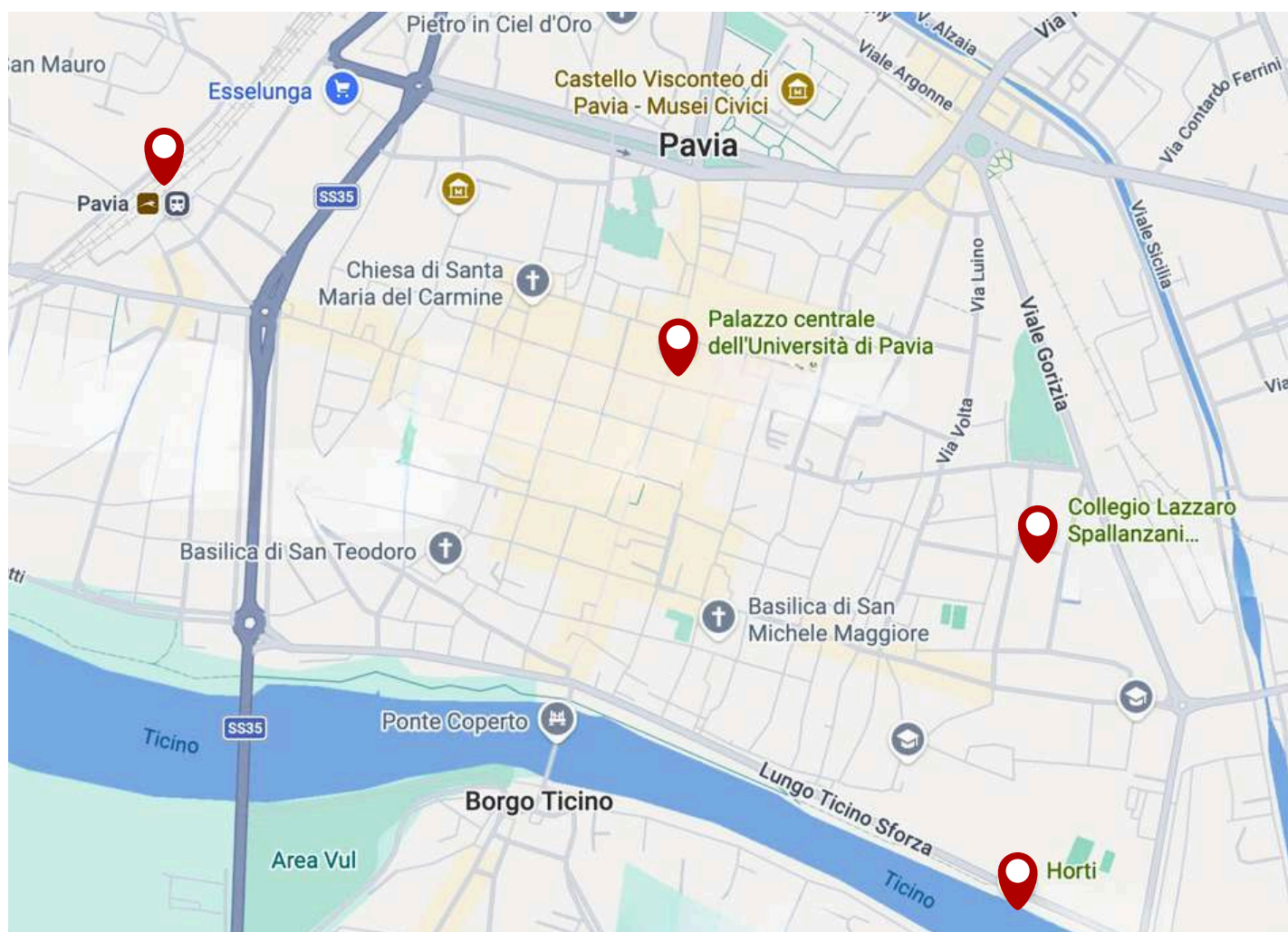
ABSTRACT

En Afrique précoloniale, l'eau n'est pas que ressource naturelle, bien commun inaliénable ; elle est le siège de divinités et est une divinité elle-même. Elle symbolise la fertilité, la sainteté et est un portail entre le monde matériel et le monde immatériel. Elle structure la pensée et la vie des hommes : leur vie intérieure et leur vie publique. L'accès aux points d'eau et la maîtrise des flux hydrauliques n'ont pas seulement permis la survie des populations, ils ont dessiné l'architecture de la norme et assis la légitimité du trône. Qu'il s'agisse de sociétés à pouvoir politique institutionnalisé ou de sociétés segmentaires, la gestion de l'eau apparaît comme la clé de voûte d'un système où s'entremêlent ordre politique et ordre juridique. Étudier la centralité des eaux, c'est donc explorer les fondements d'une matrice communautaire où l'eau agit à la fois comme le socle de l'autorité politique, veine nourricière des générations d'hommes et comme le garant d'une justice immanente. De là, l'interrogation suivante surgit : comment la maîtrise des ressources hydriques a-t-elle configuré l'exercice de la souveraineté, la production et la sanction des normes juridiques dans les sociétés traditionnelles négro-africaines ? Répondre à cette interrogation revient dans un premier temps à redire que celui qui maîtrise l'accès à l'eau détient l'imperium, car l'eau est source de vie et de puissance, et deuxièmement, à montrer que les hommes, dans l'exercice de leurs activités économiques et dans les rapports entre eux, transforment l'eau en objet de droits et enfin à indiquer que l'eau est et demeure auxiliaire de la justice. Toutefois, l'étude se limitera à la Côte d'Ivoire qui est un espace concentrant des sociétés étatiques et des sociétés anétatiques, zone de forêts et zone de savanes.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE MAP

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Please refer to the map below to navigate between the various event locations throughout the city.



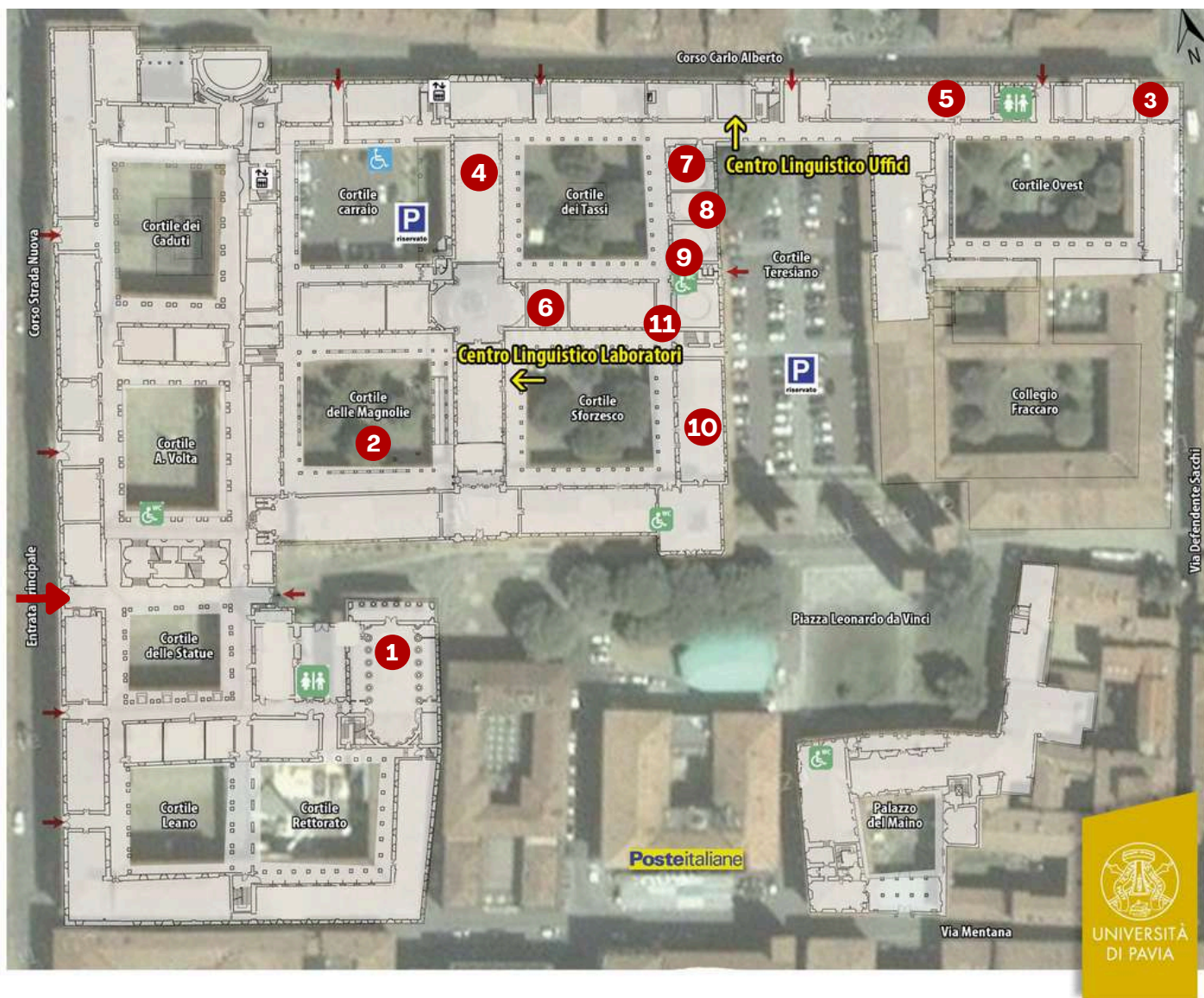
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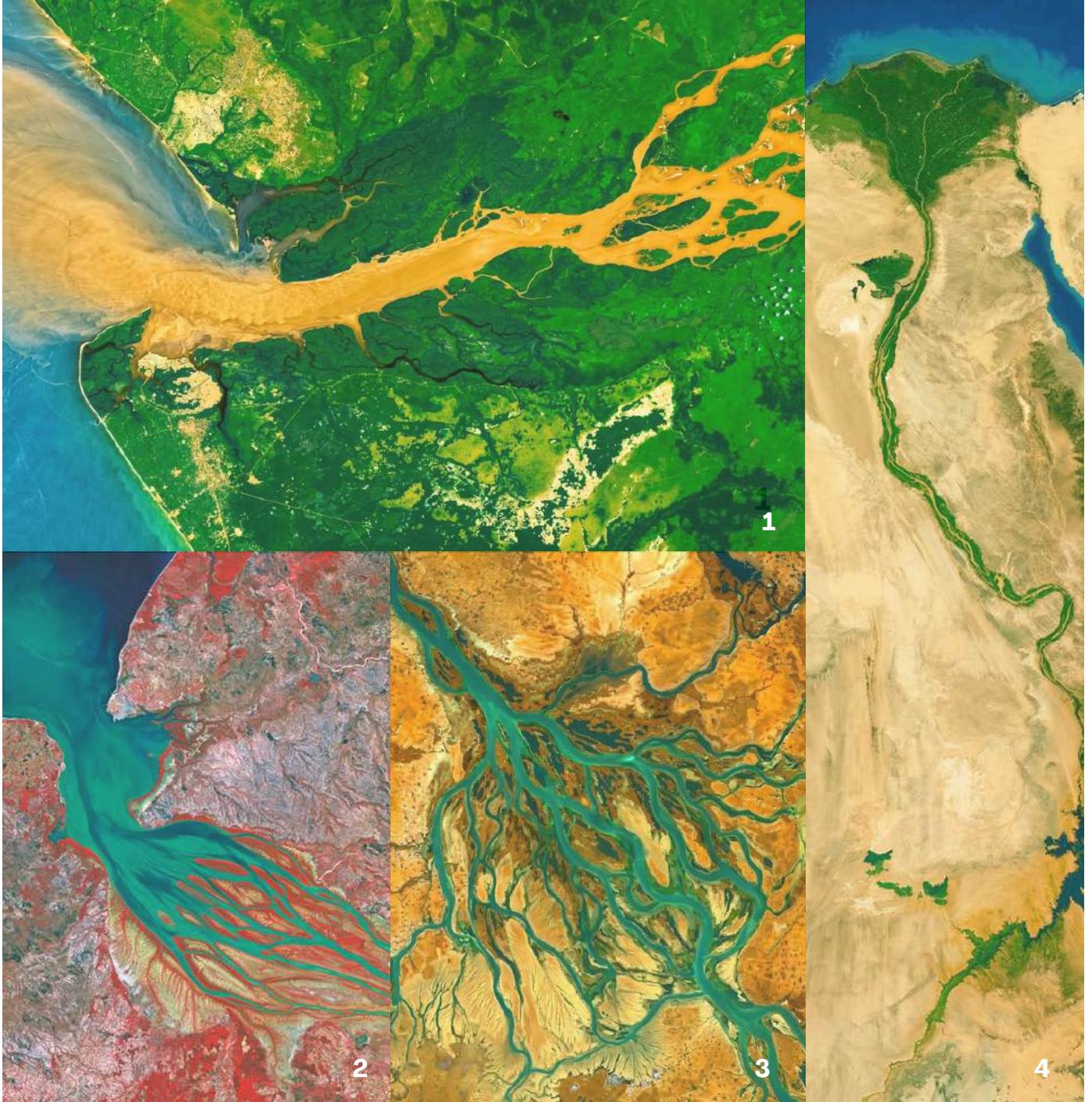
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|  Main entrance |  Aula Giuridico |  Aula 6 |  Aula C |
|  Aula Magna |  Aula 4 |  Aula A |  Aula E |
|  Cortile delle Magnolie |  Aula 5 |  Aula B |  Aula Grande |

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VISUAL CREDITS



1 – The Congo River, Democratic Republic of Congo

2 – The Betsiboka River, Madagascar

3 – The Okavango, Botswana

4 – The Nile, Egypt



VIII CONFERENZA BIENNALE ASAI
ACQUE D'AFRICA
FLUSSI, DESTINI E CONTESTI