

**EUROPALIA**  
**ARTS FESTIVAL**  
**TRAINS & TRACKS**



## **TRAINS & TRACKS IN AFRICA**

A Dialogue on Infrastructures and Mobilities in Africa

**16 03 & 17 03 22**

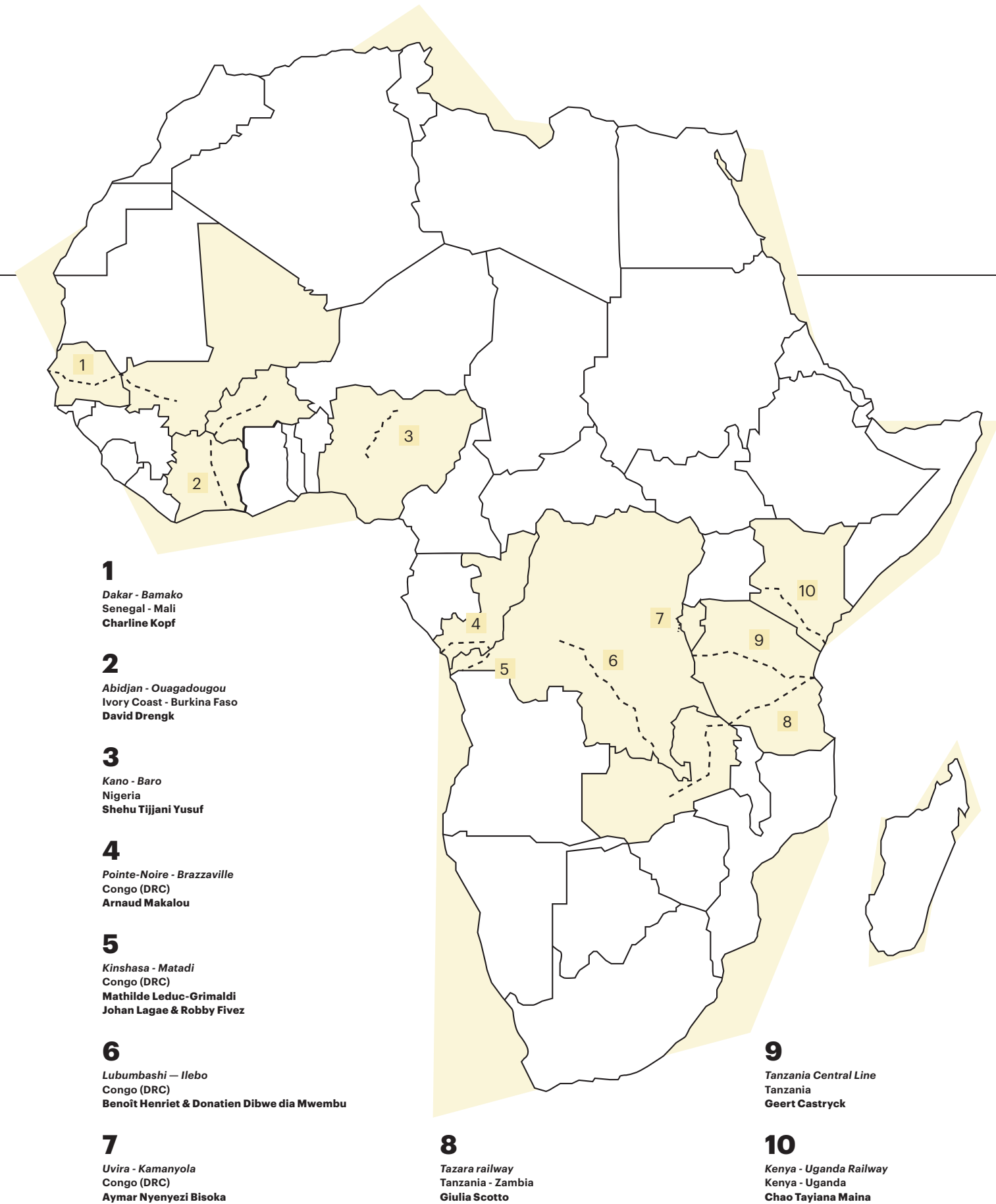
# TRAINS & TRACKS IN AFRICA

A Dialogue on Infrastructures and Mobilities in Africa



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## CONTEXT

This event takes place in the framework of EUROPALIA TRAINS & TRACKS, a festival dedicated to railways and its impact on society and arts. With researchers and artists from different disciplines, the festival looks at how the 19<sup>th</sup> century invention changed society, what role it plays today and might play in the future.

EUROPALIA TRAINS & TRACKS presents from 14 October 2021 until 15 May 2022 more than 70 different projects – mostly new creations and residencies – spread across artistic institutions but also, and especially, to be discovered in stations and on trains, in Belgium and in neighbouring countries. More info on [europalia.eu](http://europalia.eu).

## INTRODUCTION

Studying the construction of railway lines across the African continent is crucial for understanding the logic of land colonisation, the exploitation of people, the extraction of natural resources and the transportation of goods to and from metropolises. The development of quintessential modern transport in Africa at the end of the 19th century had a lasting impact on the landscape, but also on the urban planning of cities and it still plays an important role today, in the mobility of people, goods and ideas.

During one evening and a day of conferences, researchers and artists will offer alternative views on railway transport in Africa, by confronting the many diverse narratives around the subject from a post-colonial and transnational perspective. All these narratives need closer examination, in order to fully understand the scale and complexity of such an undertaking, and its human, geographical, urban, political and social consequences.

Contributions will not only focus on the past, but will also take stock of the present and future of these railway lines – some still in service, others abandoned, yet others being restored – and of the railway infrastructure.

In the weeks leading up to the conference, artist Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe was in residency at the Wiels Art Centre (Brussels) and fellow artist Arnaud Makalou was in residency at the AfricaMuseum (Tervuren). During the conference, these artists will share their viewpoints and explain how the context of the railways plays a role in their work. Curator Anne Wetsi Mpoma develops and follows up on these artistic interventions.

By entering into dialogue, artists and researchers will stimulate new approaches to this important aspect of history.

A work-in-progress exhibition, created by professor Johan Lagae, doctoral student Robby Fivez and their students from the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning at Ghent University, offers a new cartographic reading of mobility, based on five railway lines across the African continent.

*The event will be mostly held in English with some interventions in French (indicated in the programme).*

*This is a hybrid event. This means that the lectures take place on site (VANDENHOVE UGent, 16 03 22 and AfricaMuseum, 17 03 22) and online at the same moment.*





WEDNESDAY 16 03 22  
OPENING EXHIBITION & INTRO

VANDENHOVE (Ghent University, Rozier 1, 9000 Ghent) & online

19:00 – 19:10

Opening exhibition

*Borders, Mobilities and Landscapes. Mapping railway infrastructure in (post)colonial Africa.*

Welcome speech by Dirk Vermaelen (EUROPALIA Arts Festival)

Introduction to the exhibition & the evening lectures by curators Johan Lagae & Robby Fivez

19:10 – 19:40

Johan Lagae & Robby Fivez (Ghent University, Belgium)

*Mapping railways in Africa. Bringing a spatial and transnational perspective to (post)colonial history in Africa.*

19:40 – 20:20

Keynote lecture: Geert Castryck (University of Leipzig, Germany)

*The Railway as Prism: Dis/Connection along the East African Central Line.*

20:20 – 20:50

Keynote lecture: Chao Tayiana Maina (African Digital Heritage, Kenya)

*‘Take photos of me instead’ - Documenting meaning and memory of the Kenya - Uganda railway through digital approaches.*

20:50 – 21:15

Q&A moderated by Johan Lagae & Robby Fivez

21:15 – 22:00

Free visit of the exhibition



THURSDAY 17 03 22  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (Full day of case studies and workshops)

AFRICAMUSEUM (Leuvensesteenweg 13, 3080 Tervuren) & online

09:30 – 09:40

Welcome speech by Guido Gryseels (AfricaMuseum)

09:40 – 09:50

Welcome speech by Eva Bialek (EUROPALIA Arts Festival)

09:50 – 10:40

Keynote Lecture: Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka (Université de Mons, Belgium) - in FRENCH

*Trains, railways and mobility in Africa: (post)colonial and necropolitical times.*

SESSION 1: Demarcating Territories and Crossing Borders

Railway lines are intricately linked to the ‘Scramble for Africa’ and hence the power play of demarcating distinct territories on the continent. As crucial instruments of extractive economies, both in the past and the present, railways, by default, often cross the borders of these delineated territories, thereby triggering transnational mobilities of people, goods and ideas.

10:45 – 11:05

Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi (AfricaMuseum, Belgium)

*‘Without the railway, the State cannot thrive’ (Stanley, June 1885): The Railroad at the Threshold of the Belgian Move in Congo.*

11:05 – 11:25

Giulia Scotto (University of Basel, Switzerland)

*Zambia, Tanzania, China, and their “Freedom railway”.*

11:25 – 11:45

Q&A with audience + respondent Monika Motylinska (Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany)



INTERVENTION 1

11:45 – 12:15

Intervention by artist in residence **Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe** (Kinshasa, DR Congo, in residence at WIELS) in conversation with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma - in FRENCH**

12:15 – 13:30

Lunch break by Bistro Tembo

SESSION 2: Linear Dynamics and Local Disruptions

The back and forth movement of trains on tracks in Africa engendered dynamics and disruptions all along the railway lines. Due to linear patterns of maintenance and operation, adjacent lands were incorporated in the machinery of railway logistics. Even today, repair shops, hospitals and even dust clouds can be interpreted to be the direct material debris of this operation. However, these railway lines did not only impact those places directly linked to their operation. All localities touched by the railway were confronted with, for instance, new economic opportunities or the disruption of existing settlement patterns.

13:30 – 13:50

**David Drengk** (TU Darmstadt, Germany) **ONLINE**

*Coping with disruptions: The role of maintenance and repair work in the everyday railway life of Southern Ivory Coast.*

13:50 – 14:10

**Shehu Tijjani Yusuf** (Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria) **ONLINE**

*Lived Experience and Responses to Railway Technology in Gimi, Dangora and Madobi Villages in Northern Nigeria, 1908-1967.*

14:10 – 14:30

**Charline Kopf** (University of Oslo, Norway)

*Maintaining railway lives and lines: Working bodies and toxic dust in a Senegalese railway depot.*

14:30 – 14:50

**Q&A** with audience + respondent: **Jonathan Cane** (University of Warwick, UK) **ONLINE**

14:50 – 15:15

Coffee break

INTERVENTION 2

15:15 – 15:45

Intervention by artist in residence **Arnaud Makalou** (Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, in residence at the AfricaMuseum) in conversation with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma - in FRENCH**

SESSION 3: Lived realities in a productive landscape

While the impact of a railway line can be most vividly sensed in those places where a train can hurtle past at any moment, railway connections also brought new economic contexts about in the territories they cut through. All sorts of colonial companies were established in their wake, including ones cultivating cash crops, ones producing building materials or even electricity. Life in these new productive landscapes, be it in labour camps, preexisting villages or burgeoning cities, often synchronized itself to the rhythm of these new economic activities.

15:45 – 16:20

**Conversation between historians Benoît Henriet** (Free University Brussels (VUB), Belgium) and **Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu** (Université de Lubumbashi, DR Congo) - **in FRENCH**

*Railway in the Congo: cultures and modern lives in Lubumbashi and Lusanga, past and present.*

16:20 – 16:40

**Q&A** with audience + respondent: **Gillian Mathys** (Ghent University, Belgium)

INTERVENTION 3

16:40 – 17:10

**Chao Tayiana Maina** (African Digital Heritage, Kenya) in conversation with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma**

FINAL DISCUSSION

17:10 – 17:30

**Closing statements by curators and Q&A**

17:30 – 18:30

Meet & drink



BIOGRAPHIES & ABSTRACTS

WEDNESDAY 16 03 22

19:10 – 19:40

Johan Lagae & Robby Fivez (Ghent University, Belgium)

Mapping railways in Africa. Bringing a spatial and transnational perspective to (post)colonial history in Africa

ABSTRACT

In this talk, we will present some of the outcomes of the ongoing research on the theme of railway infrastructure in (Central-)Africa, that was conducted together with students at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Ghent University. In this research, we will investigate how railways introduced a new spatial order in Central Africa. Using techniques of mapping, we want to visualize how the spatial impact of these railways was not limited to their linear infrastructures. Instead, they transformed vast existing landscapes into new productive ones, dotted with infrastructures like labour camps, plantations, industrial production sites or hydraulic dams. The spatial reach of these railways was not even limited by colonial borders. As these lines often crossed different colonial territories to reach different sea ports, they also engendered transcolonial mobilities of goods, people and ideas – spatial phenomena that we have tried to visualize as well. This talk forms an introduction to the work-in-progress exhibition, hosted at VANDENHOVE.

BIO Johan Lagae



Johan Lagae is a full professor of twentieth-century architectural history at Ghent University. His research interests are colonial and postcolonial architecture in (Central) Africa, African urban history, colonial photography and colonial built heritage. He has published widely on these topics, and co-authored two monographs on the architecture and urban landscape of Kinshasa. Together with Paul Wenzel Geissler and Nina Berre he co-edited the forthcoming book *African Modernism and its Afterlives*. Johan Lagae participated in several Africa and Congo-related exhibitions. Currently he is co-editor-in-chief of ABE Journal (<https://journals.openedition.org/abe/>). From September 2019 until January 2020 he was a fellow at the *Institut des Études Avancées* in Paris.

BIO Robby Fivez



Robby Fivez is a PhD candidate and a teaching and research assistant at Ghent University, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning. He is finalizing a dissertation focusing on the introduction and use of concrete technology in (post) colonial DR Congo, and the different actors that were involved in the construction of the colonial world. He has presented his research at a number of international conferences and published in, among others, *ABE Journal*, *the Journal of Landscape Architecture* and the proceedings of several Construction History conferences.

19:40 – 20:20

Geert Castryck (University of Leipzig, Germany)

The Railway as Prism: Dis/Connection along the East African Central Line

ABSTRACT

Since 1914, the Tanzanian Central Line connects the Indian Ocean at Dar es Salaam with Lake Tanganyika at Kigoma. However, this obvious material link is only one layer of the spatial connectedness. A plethora of spatial and temporal connections and continuities, as well as disruptions and disillusionments, reach well beyond the timeframe and the trajectory of the iron route itself.

Starting with the East African caravan trade complex in the nineteenth century and continuing to contemporary rail and road construction parallel to the centenarian Central Line, Castryck reconstructs how the railway has been both a product and a producer of spatial relations on different scales. Political order and disorder, working for and off the railway, migration and residence, world markets and petty trade, environmental conditions and economic opportunities, international concessions and nationalisations, technological possibilities and material constraints, maintenance and decay, heritage and tourism, urbanisation and globalisation, ups and downs, are all reflected in the long history of the Central Line. The story of a railway can thus be used as a prism to diffract the history of communities and cities, continuities and changes, chances and crises, into countless, colourful, and uncertain journeys from coast to coast.

BIO Geert Castryck



Geert Castryck is a historian specialized in African and global history. After obtaining his doctorate at Ghent University, he has been working at Leipzig University since 2010, where he is currently affiliated with the Leipzig Research Centre Global Dynamics (ReCentGlobe). His research focuses on East and Central Africa from a global and trans-regional perspective. He has published on urban history, Islam in Africa, colonialism, and colonial heritage. He is currently working on a global history of the city of Kigoma/Ujiji (Tanzania) and on spatial reconfigurations in Africa and Europe during and after colonization.

20:20 – 20:50  
**Chao Tayiana Maina** (African Digital Heritage, Kenya)

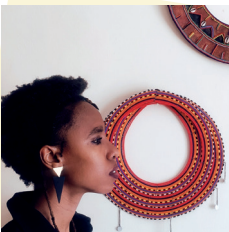
*‘Take photos of me instead’. Documenting meaning and memory of the Kenya - Uganda railway through digital approaches*

ABSTRACT

Between 2012 and 2016 Kenyan historian Chao Tayiana Maina travelled across the country documenting the dilapidated and disappearing infrastructure of the Kenya - Uganda railway (infamously known as the Lunatic line). Through her lense, she captured a country at the crossroads of modernity and memory, curating one of the largest photographic collections of contemporary railway history in East Africa. Like many colonial railways, the Kenya - Uganda railway has taken on multiple meanings during its lifetime. It symbolised the romance of the colonial endeavor, the voracious appetite of imperial machinery, the unifying thread that spawned a nation, and finally, the unseen crack at the heart of an independent African state.

This talk explores what it means to document the complexities of a nation’s railway heritage through digital approaches. How does one digitally capture that which is physically evident yet hidden between the lines? How can we build people-centred, digital approaches to preserving memory and meaning?

BIO Chao Tayiana Maina



Chao Tayiana Maina is a Kenyan digital heritage specialist and digital humanities scholar working at the intersection of culture and technology. A computer scientist by profession and a historian by passion, her work focuses on the application of technology in the preservation, engagement and dissemination of African heritage. She is the founder of African Digital Heritage, a co-founder of the Museum of British Colonialism and a co-founder of the Open Restitution Africa project.

THURSDAY 17 03 22

09:50 – 10:30    **Keynote lecture**  
**Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka** (University of Mons, Belgium) - **in FRENCH**

*Trains, railways and mobility in Africa: (post)colonial and necropolitical times*

ABSTRACT

The town of Uvira, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is today still peppered with rails that have survived the demise of the railway built between Uvira and Kamanyola in 1931 and closed in 1957. At times, one has the impression that these bits of iron seem to foreshadow the town’s disappearance. Indeed, amidst the repeated landslides and floods, people are fleeing the city, when they have not been trapped in their houses, under sand or under earth. And yet, it is around this town that a series of road and railway construction projects have been in development for several years, with the goal of connecting the countries of East Africa. As in colonial times, the developers of these routes of communication do not always take into consideration the fate of the dwindling population of Uvira, nor of the town itself, which could disappear too. They are so preoccupied with the efficient circulation of goods and the purported prosperity that could bring with it. It is as if, when it comes to this type of project, time had taught us nothing, that we had not learnt how the exclusively capitalist logic behind these projects could lead to the perishing of so many black souls in this (post)colony; as if, for black people, the arrival of the train would always have to be preceded by a form of ‘atmospheric death’ and over and over again, produce a form of necropolitics.

BIO Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka



Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka is a lawyer and political scientist, specialising in political anthropology and legal anthropology. He teaches critical ecology, epistemology, anthropology and decolonial criticism at the University of Mons. He is working on the political ecology of natural resources, on governance and violent conflict in Africa and on the development of the Afro-critical perspective in social sciences. Aymar is a research fellow at Ghent University and a fellow of Emmanuel College at Cambridge University, where he has several ongoing research projects. In recent years Aymar has taught at the Rift Valley Institute and at several other universities in the DRC, Burundi and Belgium. Before starting his research career, he worked for ten years in the field of development cooperation in Africa and in Europe.

SESSION 1: Demarcating Territories and Crossing Borders

10:45 – 11:05

Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi (AfricaMuseum, Belgium)

‘Without the railway, the State cannot thrive’ (Stanley, June 1885): The Railroad at the Threshold of the Belgian Move in Congo.

ABSTRACT

While the Congo Free State was on the verge of becoming the King of the Belgians’ property, the early stage of prefiguring and financing its infrastructure preoccupied the various actors at play in the metropolis, and Leopold II activated his unofficial international network, with the financing of a railway in mind. From the beginning of the project in 1878, Stanley had considered the construction of a railroad an absolute necessity. Leopold II left the possibility of its construction in doubt. In 1885, after Stanley had left the Congo for more than a year, Leopold II, who had become the master of the Congo, could not finance such a project alone, and turned to Stanley to find the necessary funds and industrial-financial partners. The Stanley archives show to what extent Stanley and his relations were involved in a financial project that he considered indispensable for the survival of the Congo Free State, but how the king did not endorse it, for fear of losing control over the state.

BIO Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi



Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi is the Henry M. Stanley Archives and Collections’ curator at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (AfricaMuseum). She also teaches Curatorial Principles in Museum and Gallery Management (MA Level) at Western Colorado University. Her last publications include *Finding Livingstone, a History in Documents from the Stanley Archives*, co-published with J. L. Newman (2021, RMCA / Ohio Swallow University Press), and “Le Njinda dans la tourmente des Pende (1931)” in Volper J. (dir) *La Part de l’ombre: sculptures du sud-ouest congolais*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, 2021, p.51-59. Her views are her own.

11:05 – 11:25

Giulia Scotto (University of Basel, Switzerland)

Zambia, Tanzania, China, and their “Freedom railway”

ABSTRACT

Zambia is a landlocked country located in the centre of Southern Africa. Its historical evolution, since it was conquered at the beginning of the twentieth century, is deeply intertwined with the discovery, extraction, and export of copper and with the construction of railways. As soon as it achieved independence, Zambia found itself isolated and surrounded by white-controlled and colonial countries. In order to overcome this infrastructural emergency, the new government envisioned the construction of a new railway reaching the Indian Ocean through Tanzania. The Uhuru or Freedom railway was financed and built by the People’s Republic of China between 1970 and 1975. Chinese propaganda depicted the railway as a shared Third World struggle against imperialist and neo-colonialist forces, while Zambia and Tanzania described it as a successful pan African endeavor that would spur development in the region. But the TAZARA (Tanzanian Zambian Railway Authority) railway was, and still is, much more than this. This contribution explores the multiple meanings and impact of the Freedom Railway on territories and people living along the line.

BIO Giulia Scotto



© Simon Habegger

Giulia Scotto is an architect, urbanist, and PhD candidate at the Urban Studies department at the University of Basel. Giulia holds a master’s degree in architectural design from the IUAV University of Venice and the ETSAB of Barcelona. Before joining the University of Basel, she worked as an architect and urban planner for ‘OMA Office for Metropolitan Architecture’, ‘KCAParchitects & planners’, and the ‘UTT Chair of architecture and Urban design’ at the ETH Zurich. Giulia’s PhD research “Postcolonial Logistics: ENI’s ‘Disegno Africano”” investigates the spatial and social consequences of ENI’s (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) infrastructural operations in postcolonial Tanzania.

11:25 – 11:45

Q&A with audience + respondent **Monika Motylinska** (Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space,, Erkner, Germany)





BIO Monika Motylinska



© Felix Richter

Monika Motylinska is an architectural and urban historian, with a PhD from Technical University Berlin. Her current research combines interdisciplinary approaches to histories and materialities of the built environment in the “Global South”. Since January 2020, she is the principal investigator on the project “Conquering (with) Concrete. German Construction Companies as Global Players in Local Contexts” (Freigeist Fellowship funded by the VolkswagenStiftung) at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS) in Erkner, Germany. Simultaneously, she has been investigating, together with Dr. Rachel Lee (TU Delft), the work of the Institute for Building in the Tropics (IFT) within the framework of the “Centring Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives on Architecture” programme (Canadian Center for Architecture).

INTERVENTION 1 – IN FRENCH

11:45 – 12:15

Intervention by artist in residence **Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe** (Kinshasa, DR Congo, in residence at WIELS) in conversation with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma**

ABSTRACT

Including a reflection on the notion of space and territoriality in his artistic practice, Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe is using his residency at Wiels to extend the scope of his questioning to that of intra- and international mobility. Based on what he calls the philosophy of ancestral cartography, the artist connects the past, the present and the future. It will be an exchange around these questions using his work in progress as a starting point.

BIO Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe



Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe (born in 1992, Kinshasa D.R.Congo) lives and works in Kinshasa. He studied art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa. He is co-founder of the group, Vision Total (vi.to), and works in collaboration with Kin Art Studio (KAS). Alexandre Kyungu has participated in several group exhibitions and artist residencies in his country and abroad. His artistic practice combines painting, drawing, sculpture and installations. He tries to reproduce the space mapped out by bodily scarifications by representing them on maps of physical geography. In this way, he examines the idea of migration and identity, borders and space, signs and symbols.

BIO Anne Wetsi Mpoma



© Teddy Mazina

Anne Wetsi Mpoma is an art historian, curator, author and gallery owner. She proposes solutions to deconstruct and reinvent the arts and the imaginary for a more inclusive society. She is director and founder of the Wetsi Art Gallery (2019, asbl Nouveau Système Artistique), an interdependent space that builds bridges between diverse audiences, particularly institutional ones, by showing the work of artists who are marginalised because of their “race”, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin and/or “disability”. In her essay, *Resisting in the arts and culture in a postcolonial context* (in *Being Imposed Upon*, 2020), she analyses the power relations between Belgian-Afro descendent women artists evolving on the margins and the holders of dominant power on the contemporary art scene. The exhibition project *Through her (True her)* addresses the same theme by bringing the works of these marginalised artists into dialogue with those that have joined the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the City of Ghent (S.M.A.K.), following research carried out by the co-curator of the project, Pascale Obolo. She is currently participating in the work of the experts appointed to draft a first report to guide the members of the House of Representatives participating in the commission charged with analysing Belgium’s colonial past and its current consequences.

SESSION 2: Linear Dynamics and Local Disruptions

13:30 – 13:50

**David Drengk** (TU Darmstadt, Germany) **ONLINE**

*Coping with disruptions: The role of maintenance and repair work in the everyday railway life of Southern Ivory Coast.*

ABSTRACT

The history of imperial railways is far more diverse than standard teleological narratives of colonial expansion and economic exploitation often suggest. Everyday railway life, this presentation argues, was extremely dynamic. This presentation examines how the railway company of the Abidjan-Niger railway line coped with reoccurring disruptions to everyday railway operations in the rainforest of lower Ivory Coast. It scrutinises the importance of central and mobile railway workshops in continual efforts to maintain the line in this forest setting during the first 20 years of its existence. One central argument of this contribution is that a lot of the repair works inherently needed to be mobile. The railway company could react immediately to spontaneous disruptions, caused either by wear and tear or well-aimed attacks and acts of sabotage, only by guaranteeing the mobility of the cohorts of repair workers. In the talk, Drengk classifies such unplanned places of repair as transient work sites. Repair sites in the forest often arose spontaneously and often existed only temporarily, ultimately only for the duration of the repair works on carriages or track materials. As health care of the responsible workers also needed to be considered as maintenance and repair work, it is finally argued that both repair work on physical railway equipments and medical treatment of wounded and ill railway workers were essential in the everyday life of the railway, showing what functioning railway traffic, in the end, really depended on.

BIO David Drengk



David Drengk is an Africanist focusing on African history and History of Technology, who currently works as a doctoral research fellow at the History Department at the Technical University Darmstadt in Germany. He is part of the interdisciplinary research group “A Global History of Technology, 1850–2000” (Global-HOT), funded by the ERC. His current PhD project is tentatively entitled “People, Technology, and Nature: Changes and Continuities in the technological landscape of the humid evergreen rainforest in lower Ivory Coast, c. 1890-1930”. David has graduated from the Humboldt University in Berlin and Leiden University/the African Studies Centre Leiden (ASC) and holds a diploma in area studies Asia/Africa, agricultural sciences (BA) and African studies (MA research).

13:50 – 14:10  
**Shehu Tijjani Yusuf** (Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria) **ONLINE**

*Lived Experiences and Responses to Railway Technology in Gimi, Dangora and Madobi Villages in Northern Nigeria, 1908-1967.*

ABSTRACT

This presentation examines the lived experiences and responses to European railway technology in Gimi, Dangora and Madobi villages in northern Nigeria, from 1908 to 1967. As the intervention will demonstrate, the railway had an enormous impact on the socio-economic activities of local people. The initial arrival of the train was marked by mixed reactions of anxiety, fear, and wonder in the villages, because the people did not understand what it was all about. However, as they started to better grasp the opportunities offered by the presence of the railway, they developed initiatives to use it in distinctive ways to better their lives. In fact , the railway provided them with a cheap and faster means of transport around which they crafted multi-spatial livelihoods. It also stimulated the cultivation of cash crops, notably groundnut, and the arrival of imperialist trading firms whose activities intensified the production and trade of these crops. This trade in cash crops also attracted many migrants whose presence led to the emergence of two main settlement patterns, thereby contributing to the growth and expansion of the villages into a peri-urban hub. As it will be further shown, the railway also stimulated a crime economy around its infrastructures, as a reaction to the colonial policies, and the three villages became hubs for all sorts of crimes committed along the railway line.

BIO Shehu Tijjani Yusuf



Shehu Tijjani Yusuf is an historian at Bayero University, Kano (Nigeria). He received his doctorate in socio-economic history from the University of Leiden (Netherlands). His research interest is on the socio-economic and cultural history of the railway in Northern Nigeria in the 19th and 20th centuries. Yusuf is a member of the International Railway History Association (IRHA). His work has appeared in peer reviewed Journals and in edited volumes. In 2010 he authored the book *The Impact of the Railway on Kano Emirate, c. 1903-1960s: the Case of Madobi and Kwankwaso Towns.*

14:10 – 14:30  
**Charline Kopf** (University of Oslo, Norway)

*Maintaining railway lives and lines: Working bodies and toxic dust in a Senegalese railway depot.*

ABSTRACT

This intervention examines railway workers’ narratives of dust and debris while they repair and maintain the suburban trains running on a section of the colonial Dakar-Niger rail line in Senegal. Often complaining about the *poussière* (dust) that engulfs them during their work, the workers’ reference to dust denoted a toxic blend, not only of pollution and sand, but also of asbestos lodged in the old train wagons. Attending to the corporeal and intimate stories of the workers, i shed light on how they handle their daily encounters with a fleeting, invisible toxicant as it seeps into the bodies of both machines and workers. Moments of maintenance also prompted heroic memories of former railway repairs, multiple stories of refurbishment and expertise surrounding the different types of trains the railway company relied on, from second-hand ones imported from France to what the workers called the ‘second-class’ trains that arrived from India and Pakistan. Amidst institutional and industrial negligence and processes of ruination, the workers persevere with their perilous practices, for fear of losing their jobs. I argue that the attention to dust helps disentangle the more nostalgic memories attached to the railway’s past, as well as the precarious and dangerous futures that are woven into the journey of the trains and their debris.

BIO Charline Kopf



Charline Kopf is a PhD candidate in social anthropology at the University of Oslo (UiO) and the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL). She is interested in the anthropology of infrastructure, trade unions and labour, as well as security and borders. Her current research focuses on the past and future reconfigurations of the Dakar-Bamako railway line and how these have shaped local practices and perceptions of labour, space and mobility in Senegal and Mali.

14:30 – 14:50  
**Q&A** with audience + respondent **Jonathan Cane** (University of Warwick, UK) **ONLINE**

BIO Jonathan Cane



Jonathan Cane holds a PhD in Art History from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and is the author of the monograph *Civilising Grass: The Art of the Lawn on the South African Highveld* (2019), a queer and postcolonial study of gardening. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pretoria where he worked with Prof. Noëleen Murray on a project called *EAST: N4/EN4* which studies minor architectures and infrastructure that connect South African and Mozambique along the N4/EN4 highway corridor. He is also the Principle Investigator on the SSRC-funded project ‘Sounding the Monsoon’ which examines the possibility of sound art to help us think about the Anthropocene and climate change. Currently he is teaching in the History of Art Department at the University of Warwick, UK.

## INTERVENTION 2 – IN FRENCH

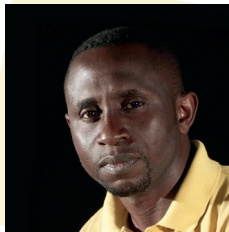
15:15 – 15:45

Intervention by artist in residence **Arnaud Makalou** (Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, In residence at AfricaMuseum) in conversation with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma**

### ABSTRACT

After several years of civil war in the Republic of the Congo, how does train traffic contribute to the country's development? Arnaud Makalou's artistic project is based on the desire to document the current state of affairs for citizens and to advocate for an improvement in their mobility. During his residency at the AfricaMuseum, the artist will bring his newly created archives into dialogue with archives from the colonial era.

#### BIO Arnaud Makalou



Arnaud Makalou's introduction to photography was conditioned by the civil war in his native country in 1997. He started by taking souvenir photos before joining the *Collectif Génération Elili* in 2005 (an association of photographers), where he was Technical and Artistic Director from 2009 to 2015. He participated in several training workshops in his own country and abroad. The first images of his series *La traversée du chemin de fer* (*The railway crossing*) won him the Young Talent Award at the Karibu Festival in Kinshasa.

#### BIO Anne Wetsi Mpoma



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see p.17

## SESSION 3: Lived realities in a productive landscape – IN FRENCH

15:45 – 16:20

A conversation between historians **Benoît Henriët** (Free University of Brussels (VUB), Belgium) and **Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu** (University of Lubumbashi, DR Congo)

*Railway in the Congo: cultures and modern lives in Lubumbashi and Lusanga, past and present*

### ABSTRACT

In this conversation, historians Benoît Henriët et Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu discuss how railways, as key instruments of ruthless colonial capitalism, introduced new forms of connectivity between distant localities in what is today the DR Congo, while generating specific enclaves of labour in its urban centres as well as in rural areas. Focusing on the workers' camps of the mining city of Lubumbashi, in the Southern province of Katanga, on the one hand, and those of Lusanga, a Unilever palm oil concession in the Kwilu region, on the other, they will address how, in the process of bringing the train to colonial Congo, new cultural norms and forms developed in these two distant places and how particular forms of modernity, of which the railway is an icon, emerged and were experienced there. The urban culture in Lubumbashi, which was strongly shaped by "des gens d'ailleurs" (people from elsewhere) arriving by train from *l'Afrique australe* as well as Africans coming from various parts of the continent, will be confronted and compared with societal forms and practices emerging in Lusanga, an important economic node in the extractive economy of the Belgian Congo, linked to the fluvial rather than railway network. Finally, Henriët and Dibwe will reflect on what happened in these places once they became -partially- disconnected from the global capitalist system during the postcolonial era.

#### BIO Benoît Henriët



Benoît Henriët is Assistant Professor of History at the VUB. His research focuses on the colonial and post-colonial history of Congo, seen from a bottom-up perspective. After completing his PhD, he was a short-term postdoctoral fellow at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin in 2017. In 2017-2018 he was associate researcher to the African Studies Centre of the University of Oxford, working on the history of knowledge production and organised labour in early post-colonial Haut-Katanga. His first monograph, *Colonial Impotence. Virtue and Violence in a Congolese Concession (1911-1940)* has been published in 2021 by De Gruyter.

#### BIO Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu



Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu is an historian, based at the University of Lubumbashi. He is an expert in the urban history of this mining city in Katanga, and has conducted important oral history-work. He authored several books such as *Les Identités urbaines en Afrique. Le cas de Lubumbashi (R-D Congo)* (2008) and, together with Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Violaine Sizaire, co-edited several volumes in the *Mémoires de Lubumbashi*-series among which *Le Travail Hier et aujourd'hui* (2004) and *Lubumbashi 1910-2010. Mémoire d'une ville industrielle* (2010). At the University of Lubumbashi he has been in charge of the *Observatoire du Changement Urbain* for many years.



16:20 – 16:40  
Q&A with audience + respondent: **Gillian Mathys** (Ghent University, Belgium)

BIO Gillian Mathys



Gillian Mathys holds a MA in African Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), UK (2005) and PhD in History from Ghent University (2014). She has worked extensively on the (Eastern) Congo, Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes region, conducting research on long-term socio-political processes, such as mobilities, land conflicts and forms of governance, in particular in the borderlands. She has been a post-doc researcher at the Centre for International Analysis and Management, Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands and is currently a senior Research Fellow from the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) at the History Department of Ghent University. Recently, she acted as one of five expert historians in the national parliamentary commission on Belgian’s colonial past “Commission passé colonial”.

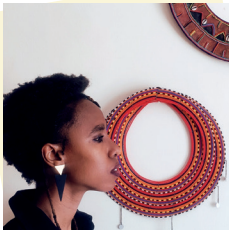
INTERVENTION 3 – IN FRENCH

16:40 – 17:10  
**Chao Tayiana Maina** (African Digital Heritage, Kenya) in conversation with with **Anne Wetsi Mpoma**

ABSTRACT

Chao Tayiana Maina strongly believes in the potential for digital technologies to create new forms of engagement with African heritage outside dominant colonial and neo colonial structures. Her work documents people talking about their memories around the railway stations in the Kenya. During this conversation with Anne Wetsi Mpoma, we will also explore how to use digitalization to keep African heritage alive.

BIO Chao Tayiana Maina



see p.12

BIO Anne Wetsi Mpoma



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see p.17

WORKING TEAM

**Research curators:** Johan Lagae, Robby Fivez  
**Art curator:** Anne Wetsi Mpoma  
**Project coordinator AfricaMuseum:** Christine Bluard  
**Project coordinator EUROPALIA:** Eva Bialek  
**Artistic Director EUROPALIA:** Dirk Vermaelen  
**Graphic design:** Johan Smeyers  
**Translation:** Erik Lambert

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# **EUROPALIA**

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## **TRAINS & TRACKS**

