

Inhabiting the Uninhabitable: Who gets to stay on a changing Planet?

Call for Contributions

International Conference, 27-29 January 2027, Cape Town

Amidst dramatic ecological changes, rural areas across the global south are transforming. Many commentators point out the important effects of climate change on rural livelihoods, calling into question whether many locales in the global south will be inhabitable at all. Simultaneously, we see the acceleration of land purchases, seizures, and other forms of acquisition by the ultra-wealthy and various corporations and international foundations—purportedly in the name of mitigating the effects of climate change by dramatically changing how the land is used. From building large private nature conservation projects, to constructing private islands, to establishing ‘eco-estates’ for wealthy residents, to even speculating about future visions of occupying Antarctica or populating outer space, elites seek to inhabit the uninhabitable.

Elite control over lands deemed ‘derelict’ or ‘uninhabitable’ stands in the face of longstanding occupation of these areas by local residents for generations, many of whom recognise the reality of climate change, but nevertheless do not wish to abandon their lands. Much of the present, and likely future, land conflicts may be less about land uses which have been central in literature about land-grabbing—such as cash crop production or tree felling—but rather about whether large swathes of the global south should function as ‘sacrifice zones’ for planetary climate change mitigation. Likewise, many wonder whether such land acquisitions are about this at all, or if they are merely escapes of the wealthy.

This conference assembles researchers interested in how rural areas have transformed amidst the ecological and social ramifications of climate change. Simultaneously, we are interested in researchers whose work asks how rural areas have been accumulated, transformed, and capitalised by elite actors in the name of the environment. This conference asks how these two factors—one about ‘dereliction’, and the other about ‘curation’—are closely linked: how are elite actors creating the very conditions which they claim their money can solve? How are local residents affected by such elite-led projects?

We welcome researchers interested in topics related (but not limited) to: private nature conservation, luxury tourism and ‘lifestyle migration’, post-mining landscapes, agrarian change and class conflict, climate change and ‘greenwashing’, eco-estates and core-periphery relations, climate-fiction and literary visions, film and landscapes as well as other topics which deal with the past, present, and future of ruined landscapes and elite escapes. While we expect that many submissions would fall under the umbrella of African Studies, we welcome original research on topics from any geographical region.

This conference will be held at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, **27-29 January 2027**. It will form the first part of a broader academic exchange, with the goal of publishing a special journal issue (journal tbc). A subsequent conference will take place in Basel, Switzerland in late-2027. Both conferences are organised by the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel and UCT—particularly the SNSF-funded [project](#) *Curated Escapes and Derelict Landscapes in Times of Climate Change*—in collaboration with partners: the University of Namibia, and the University of Mauritius.

Interested participants should send an abstract (around 400 words) of a contribution, as well as a short biography. We anticipate that this Cape Town conference will be an opportunity for participants to share and receive feedback on works in progress, with the goal that such papers be published in the future issue.

Please send proposals to Luregn Lenggenhager (Luregn.Lenggenhager@unibas.ch) by **30 September 2026** the latest. We have a limited budget to assist some accepted participants from institutions in Southern Africa to attend this conference.

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