

# The Biennial CRG African History Conference 2024



## Centre for African Studies, University of Basel

We are pleased to invite you to the 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial AEGIS CRG African History Conference hosted in collaboration with the Department of History at the University of Basel and the Basler Afrika Bibliographien.

**Conference Venue:** Universität Basel, ‘Alte Universität’, Rheinsprung 9, CH-4051 Basel

## Programme

(detailed roundtable descriptions below)

### Thursday 20 June

13:30 **Welcome coffee (registration desk opens for those who have to pay their hotel room)**

14:15 **Welcome**

14:30 **Roundtable I: Betwixt and Between: On Being Classified as “Mulatto” / “Mixed Race” / Métis in West Africa, 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> C.**  
**Convenors:** Odile Goerg (Strasbourg/professeure émérite Univ. Paris Clité-CESSMA) and Adam Jones (Polenz/ professor emeritus, University of Leipzig)  
**Participants:** Michel Doortmont (Groningen), Jean-Pierre Eleydy-Cole (Karlsruhe), Peter Mark (Middletown, CT)

16:00 Coffee/tea break

16:15 **Roundtable II: Tools of Power – Teaching about the Past in Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan**  
**Convenors:** Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł (Warsaw)  
**Participants:** Zuzanna Augustyniak (Warsaw), Kamil Kuraszkiewicz (Warsaw), Nagmeldin Karamalla-Gaiballa (Warsaw), Ismail Hamed (Minnesota)

17:45 Break

18:00 **Exciting Lecture in African History: Invisibility, Hyper-visibility, Erasure, and Elsewhereness: Working with Black Women’s Life-stories**  
**Speaker:** Athambile Masola (Cape Town)

19:30 Dinner at Restaurant Anatolia, Leonhardsberg 1, 4051 Basel (10 minutes’ walk)

## Friday 21 June

### 09:00 **Roundtable III: Archives, Languages and Pasts: Foregrounding African Knowledge Productions and History Practices**

**Convenors:** Anette Hoffmann, Dag Henrichsen (Basel)

**Participants:** Duane Jethro (Cape Town), Winnie Kanyimba (Basel), Athambile Masola (Cape Town), Ettore Morelli (Basel), Andrea Rosengarten (Paris)

10:30 Coffee/tea break

### 11:00 **CRG business meeting**

12:00 Lunch (inner courtyard on ground level)

### 13:00 **Roundtable IV: Agency as a Problem in African History**

**Convenor:** Feli Becker (Gent)

**Participants:** Franziska Fay (Mainz), Ida Hadjivayanis (London), Vicky van Bockhoven (Gent)

14:30 Farewell coffee

### 16:00 **Optional tour: Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) – Namibia Resource Centre & Southern Africa Library**

Guided Archives Tour, with particular reference to acoustic archives and African manuscripts and prints

**Venue:** Klosterberg 23: [www.baslerfrika.ch](http://www.baslerfrika.ch)

17:30 Reception (Apéro) at BAB

**Organizers:** Julia Tischler, Department of History, University of Basel, [julia.tischler@unibas.ch](mailto:julia.tischler@unibas.ch)

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## Roundtable descriptions

### **Roundtable I: Betwixt and Between: On Being Classified as “Mulatto” / “Mixed Race” / Métis in West Africa, 16th–20th C.**

**Convenors:** Odile Goerg (Strasbourg, [o.goerg@free.fr](mailto:o.goerg@free.fr)) and Adam Jones (Polenz, [jones@uni-leipzig.de](mailto:jones@uni-leipzig.de))

**Participants:** Michel Doortmont (Groningen), Jean-Pierre Eleads-Cole (Karlsruhe), Peter Mark (Middletown, CT)

Most studies of West Africa from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century imply two watertight categories – “Africans” and “Europeans”. Yet from the beginning, there existed in the contact zone a small but influential minority of persons with African mothers and European (mainly British, Danish, Dutch, French, Portuguese) fathers.

To what extent were these people, both men and women, seen as different? By whom and in what circumstances? Did they form a homogeneous group? What did it mean to be regarded as neither “Black” nor “White”? Was it a question of pigmentation or did it imply a certain lifestyle? Did all “mulattoes” share Christianity and a Western education as distinguishing attributes? Were they all in contact with European traders or administrators, serving as middlemen or middlewomen, oscillating between “European” and “African” worlds, seeking to draw advantages from both? What impact did the Atlantic slave trade and the advent of colonial rule have upon the status of such intermediaries? What kind of mechanisms existed for integration into the wider population or for exclusion?

Digging deeper, we may ask how such persons were perceived and how they perceived themselves. Why did West Africa, with the exception of St Louis and Gorée, never produce a community remotely comparable to the “Coloureds” of Cape Town or even the Luso-Africans of Luanda? Why have certain European surnames survived in West Africa while others have disappeared? What difference did matrilineal or cognatic descent systems make? To what extent did solidarity exist between persons of Afro-European descent, and was this solidarity dependent on gender? Were racist terms like “miscegenation” or “half-caste” used exclusively by European settlers, officials and traders, or did African languages develop equivalent words? In addition to dealing with history as it happened, it is worth looking at the challenges of writing in this historical field. Are terms like “mulatto” and “mixed race” still usable today? Given the dearth of material written by persons of Afro-European descent (at least until the twentieth century), how can we attempt to see their history from an emic perspective?

We will discuss these questions from the perspective of individual or collective historical cases documented in the records, seeking to cover a wide geographical and chronological range.

## **Roundtable II: Tools of Power – Teaching about the Past in Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan**

**Convenors:** Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł (Warsaw, [h.rubinkowska@uw.edu.pl](mailto:h.rubinkowska@uw.edu.pl))

**Participants:** Zuzanna Augustyniak (Warsaw), Kamil Kuraszkiewicz (Warsaw), Nagmeldin Karamalla-Gaiballa (Warsaw), Ismail Hamed (Minnesota)

Teaching, understood as a transfer of knowledge, is not necessarily limited to school curricula. Knowledge of history is conveyed also through museum activities and policy related to monuments, it is intertwined with remembering and forgetting about certain aspects of past. Political leaders reinterpret history with the aim to legitimize their power based on presenting themselves as the next in a long sequence of great rulers.

This phenomenon will be illustrated with examples from Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its history being exceptionally long, the region has a unique potential in using the past for political reasons. Moreover, the historical remains are not only visually impressive but also (relatively) easily accessible thus they can be used as physical tokens to support such claims. The turbulent politics of today foster a variety of decisions intended to legitimize and reinforce the position of a leader in the eyes of citizens. This is often achieved through references to the glorious past.

The presentation of the past and teaching about it is achieved through school curricula (as discussed on the example of Sudan), politics of monuments (on the examples of Ethiopia and Egypt where leaders used them as media to convey information about the glorious past), it is also used to shape the vision of a leader as in the case of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abyi Ahmed, who wants to be perceived as a new emperor, and Egypt's president as-Sisi with his neo-pharaonism. The problem will be also discussed on the example of the model of heroism spread for the purposes of power.

## **Roundtable III: Archives, Languages and Pasts: Foregrounding African Knowledge Productions and History Practices**

**Convenors:** Anette Hoffmann (Cologne, [anetteh3@gmail.com](mailto:anetteh3@gmail.com)), Dag Henrichsen (Basel, [dh@baslerafrika.ch](mailto:dh@baslerafrika.ch))

**Participants:** Duane Jethro (Cape Town), Winnie Kanyimba (Basel), Athambile Masola (Cape Town), Ettore Morelli (Basel), Andrea Rosengarten (Paris)

The colonial archive continues to profoundly shape our knowledge about African pasts, despite its deeply flawed recording practices and epistemologies. Violent practices on which the archive is based continue to reverberate with and dominate the crafting of histories of knowledge in the present. The increased scholarly awareness of the reproduction of the archive's distortions to varied degrees does not present a solution for this impasse.

Our Roundtable discusses ways of moving beyond the refigurations of the colonial archive and exploring alternative ways and practices of knowing, which still appear to be underrepresented thus far. We discuss how the renewed interest in narrative forms other than academic writings, including African private archives of correspondences, collections of manuscripts or newspapers, as well as the still underrated acoustic archives, for example, may allow us to shift research agendas, vocabularies, concepts and validations of pasts. We also discuss different approaches to what counts as history for whom and to

which publics in and outside of academia. Other questions are how scholars can engage with underrated forms of relational knowledge production and what it would mean to focus on African archives, languages, genres and practices of knowledge, its creators, and practitioners? We call for inclusive debate.

#### **Roundtable IV: Agency as a Problem in African History**

**Convenor:** Feli Becker (Gent, [feli.becker@ugent.be](mailto:feli.becker@ugent.be))

**Participants:** Franziska Fay (Mainz), Ida Hadjivayanis (London), Vicky van Bockhoven (Gent)

The concept of agency has been crucial to historical research for over half a century, starting with social historians' effort to challenge traditional 'great man' narratives by emphasizing the popular agency of workers and labour organisers. Historians of Africa have particular incentive to emphasize the agency of Africans, given the tendency of Eurocentric histories to treat Africans as bystanders to their own history and Africa as a theatre of European intervention. Yet the drive to trace non-elite agents and attribute historical agency widely has led to a great variety of different phenomena traveling together under the name of 'agency', including the capacity to effect social change, that to make meanings of disorienting events, and that to negotiate everyday status struggles, among others. Questions can be asked as to whether the insistence that people have agency can lead to an implicit dismissal of people who end up truly out of options, thus in effect to victim-blaming. The papers on this roundtable aim to pay attention to this diversity, and to not take agency for granted. They examine agency of different kinds and at different scales, and they seek to pay attention to moments when agency is constrained or lost.