

Postcolonial Infrastructure

**Annual Conference of the German Association for Postcolonial Studies (GAPS)
University of Konstanz, 18-20 May 2023**

Extended Deadline: 31 January 2023

Mobility systems, urban planning, markets, educational facilities, digital appliances: infrastructure organizes social life, assigns subject positions, and enables or prevents cultural exchange. Yet its powerful role often goes unnoticed as most infrastructure is designed to recede into the half-conscious background of daily life. In recent years, researchers in several fields have begun to uncover the sociopolitical hierarchies and resistant forces at work in the construction, maintenance, transformation, and dismantling of infrastructure. Postcolonial studies has much to contribute to this research—and vice versa.

After all, colonization is itself a large-scale infrastructure project. Both historically and systemically, colonization involves the transcultural transfer of military, political, economic, legal, social, and other infrastructure, and the destruction of indigenous infrastructure, in order to establish and maintain power over colonized peoples. As Édouard Glissant remarks, today's infrastructures are "products of structures inherited from colonization, which no adjustment of parity (between the former colony and the former home country) and, moreover, no planning of an ideological order has been able to remedy." Scholars in postcolonial studies have therefore begun to analyze infrastructure as a form of "planned violence" (Boehmer and Davies). At the same time, infrastructure can function as a social good that fosters relations and enables alternative forms of sociality. Access to infrastructure thus confers privilege, regulates participation, and erects hierarchies. In the decolonial struggle, infrastructure has therefore emerged as a key site and means of resistance.

These infrastructural dynamics require analytic approaches from the humanities, and especially from postcolonial studies, because they unfold centrally on a cultural level. Infrastructure is shaped by specific actors and processes, and it sustains cultural presuppositions, imaginaries, and ideologies. Infrastructure is also a discursive category that confers visibility or invisibility, and can thus establish epistemological hierarchies and undergird material ones. The concept of infrastructure itself emerged in France at the peak of European imperialism and first spread in anglophone military discourse. At the same time, there are comparable concepts in languages and cultures around the world whose knowledge might modify, challenge, or interrelate with anglophone conceptions of infrastructure.

The 2023 GAPS conference seeks to explore this underrepresented yet essential dimension of colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial life. Proposals may address, but are not limited to, issues such as:

- infrastructures of (post)colonial literature / literature about (post)colonial infrastructure
- language as infrastructure / infrastructures of language

- the uses of infrastructure in postcolonial and decolonial theory
- racialized infrastructure
- infrastructure and identity
- trans/national infrastructure; cross/border infrastructures
- infrastructures of empire
- imperial and colonial entanglements of the infrastructure concept
- the temporality of post/colonial infrastructures
- the political aesthetics of infrastructures
- infrastructure and travel (writing)
- infrastructural genres / genre as infrastructure
- translating infrastructure / infrastructures of translation
- infrastructural imaginaries
- teaching postcolonial infrastructure (within educational infrastructure)
- rethinking postcolonial studies infrastructurally: which linguistic, literary, formal, theoretical, artistic, social, etc. phenomena can productively be described as infrastructural?

Conference participants might be interested in attending the annual Wolfgang Iser Lecture on the night before the conference (17 May 2023) which will be held by Homi K. Bhabha and is co-sponsored by GAPS. Attendance is free of charge.

Please submit your 250-300 word abstract by **January 31, 2023** to gaps2023@uni-konstanz.de. All presenters must be GAPS members by the time of the conference.

Work in progress in anglophone postcolonial studies—including M.A./M.Ed., PhD, and Postdoc projects as well as ongoing research projects in general—can be presented in the “Under Construction” section of the conference, for which poster presentations are also welcome. Please submit abstracts for project presentations (250-300 words) indicating your chosen format (paper or poster) by March 1, 2023.

A limited number of travel bursaries are available for emerging scholars, part-time, or currently unemployed speakers who are, or will become, members of GAPS. If you wish to apply for a travel bursary, please indicate so via e-mail to the conference organizers by March 1, 2023.

GAPS strives to create a conference in which everyone can participate in critical discussions of all topics. If a paper contains discussions of and/or representations of violence, presenters are encouraged to consider whether a content note might be warranted in order to prepare audience members. Content notes should be included in submitted abstracts for later inclusion in the conference program. Presenters are also encouraged to think critically about how they might choose to present such content (visually, orally, as text on a slide etc).

Feel free to contact the organizers if you have any questions or special requirements.

Conference organizers: Timo Müller, Dominik Steinhilber, Christina Wald (University of Konstanz)

Contact: gaps2023@uni-konstanz.de