

## Research Project

### Empires of the Visual - public visual economies in Southern Africa and the genesis of African modernities

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Empires of the Visual - public visual economies in Southern Africa and the genesis of African modernities

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**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Afrikastudien (Macamo)

**Department**

**Project Website** <https://zasb.unibas.ch/research/research-projects/empires-of-the-visual/>

**Project start** 01.07.2011

**Probable end** 30.06.2014

**Status** Completed

*Empires of the Visual* aimed to explore and to synthesize the history of modern public visual production and consumption of *space* in Southern Africa. The project was based on the hypothesis that the varied southern African visual economies of space are framed and patterned by a South African claim to hegemonic control of visual production and communication. The project reflected on the concept of a South African empire which articulates itself in a claim to socio-economic and cultural control. This concept of empire is part of a new approach to the region's history that aims to overcome limitations of the dominant nationalist historiography of South Africa and to understand the region's history from its margins.

The project was concerned, in particular, with questions of visibility and space: Is it possible to identify and locate a supposed South African empire as a distinct geographical space, and, are there specific spatial features and visual representations identifying and describing such a space? To answer these questions the project focused on three main spatial occurrences: firstly, on railways and roads as the arteries of empire, secondly, on the built environment or architectural interventions as the spatial design of empire, and thirdly, on fences as the grid of empire, that is the markers of spatial delimitations which define and constitute space around them. The project treated these three thematic foci separately to a certain extent but developed a perspective which accounts for their material and visual interweavements.

Conceptually the said spatial interventions were not merely analysed in terms of their infrastructural relevance. They were also explored as objects which formed sites and spaces where the South African empire became a visible and tangible experience, both directly, as physical or material reality, and indirectly, as mediated visual representation. The research also considered subaltern voices and dynamics that countered attempts to create a homogenised imperial space. The empirical focus of the project was primarily on Namibia and South Africa representing the extreme poles of the South African empire: the peripheral colony and the region's heartland. Methodologically the research project was based on archival studies, – including established ones such as public archives and more hidden ones, such as personal archives – on oral histories, as well as on syntheses of existing case studies.

**Keywords** Visuality Space Media Empire History South Africa

**Financed by**

Commission of the European Union

## Add publication

### Published results

3294032, Miescher, Giorgio, The NE 51 series frontier: The grand narrative of apartheid planning and the small town, 0305-7070, Journal of Southern African studies, Publication: JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

3294036, Grendon, Paul; Miescher, Giorgio; Rizzo, Lorena; Smith, Tina, Usakos : photographs beyond ruins : the old location albums, 1920s-1960s, 978-3-905758-59-7, Publication: Authored Book (Verfasser eines eigenständigen Buches)

3294040, Henrichsen, Dag; Lowry, Donal; Miescher, Giorgio; Rassool, Ciraj; Rizzo, Lorena, South African Empire, 0305-7070, Publication: Edited Book (Herausgeber eines eigenständigen Buches)

2354516, Miescher, Giorgio, Die Rote Linie : die Geschichte der Veterinär- und Siedlungsgrenze in Namibia (1890er bis 1960er Jahre), 978-3-905758-28-3, Publication: Authored Book (Verfasser eines eigenständigen Buches)

## Add documents

### Document

20150122092829<sub>54c0b4ad2420a.pdf</sub> |

## Specify cooperation partners

ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
2838921	Arlt, Veit; Miescher, Giorgio	Lalu, Premesh, Director of the Centre for Humanities Research	University of the Western Cape	15.01.2008	31.12.2020