

Giorgio Miescher (University of Basel), Chalden Sabab (Usakos Museum Council) and Raffaele Perniola (University of Basel)

Giorgio Miescher is the Carl Schlettwein Foundation Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in Namibian and Southern African Studies at the Centre for African Studies Basel (Switzerland) and an associate researcher of the University of Namibia. He has published widely on the history of Namibia and Southern Africa more general, with a special focus on historical geography and visuality. His ongoing research projects comprise 'Thinking with empire: towards an alternative geography of South Africa's imperial space', 'Usakos – Photographs beyond Ruins: the old location albums, 1920s-1960s', and 'Space in Time: Landscape narratives and land management changes in the Lower Orange River cross border region'.

Raffaele Perniola has recently completed his M.A. in history at the University of Basel (Switzerland) where he mostly specialized in Southern African history. His master's thesis focused on the ways in which the colonial railway project is remembered both publicly and privately in Namibia. He has participated in and co-curated multiple exhibitions on topics surrounding Southern African history, photography and popular culture including Usakos: Photographs Beyond Ruins and the exhibition Y/Our Colonial Gaze at Basler Afrika Bibliographien (Switzerland). He has also participated in workshops and conferences on the Namibian museum scene and has collaborated with the Usakos Museum Council (Namibia) for his master's thesis.

Chalden Sabab is a resident of Usakos and activist in the Usakos Museum-project since 2015. He has recently been promoted to chief officer of the Usakos Museum Council, which is tasked with creating a community museum in this small central-Namibian town. He has presented the Usakos Museum project and the first exhibition created for it, the well-received Usakos: Photographs beyond Ruins throughout Namibia as well as in South Africa and, more recently in China. Currently he and the other activists in Usakos are creating new exhibitions

Reclaiming South African railway spaces: attempts and frustrations in small towns

There are a few small towns in Southern Africa that owe their existence to the construction of the railways in the late 19th and early 20th century such as, for instance, De Aar in the Northern Cape and Usakos in Namibia. The logic and needs of the colonial railways determined the first layout and built structure of these towns. Later apartheid's urban planning left its mark. The economic prosperity of these town depended very much on the decision made in the headquarters of South African Railways in Johannesburg.

The population of these small towns had no say in, for example the closing of the railway workshop in Usakos in the 1960s, nor were they responsible for the decline of the South African Railways, which started in the late 1970s. These developments radically changed the economic perspectives of these communities, since the

economy depended largely on the railway. Today, disintegrating railway infrastructures are important spatial features of towns like De Aar and Usakos. In 2015 an exhibition based on photographic collections owned by four local residents (*Usakos: Photographs Beyond Ruins*), strengthened local efforts to actively engage with and reframe the town's history.

These attempts included active engagement with the ruins left behind by the railway, such as exhibiting a colonial locomotive in the context of a new post-colonial town museum and building a monument in the demolished and deserted old location. These efforts run parallel to the municipality's incessant attempts to redevelop areas such as the former railway yard in the town centre. For many years, the respective authorities tolerated individual recycling and reconfiguring of abandoned railway materials. Today, however, organized claims by young heritage activists and the municipality clash against the new national railway company's insistence on its exclusive land and material rights. Seen from the perspective of the inhabitants, there is a certain continuity of previous experiences made under colonial rule.

