

# UTA-Do

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Dates: May 23-May 27, 2022

Venue: [BIEA](#) Laikipia Rd, Nairobi, Kenya

Uta-Do Convening Team: Wangui Kimari; Prince Guma; Liza Rose Cirolia



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## Overview

	May 23 Day 1	May 24 Day 2	May 25 Day 3	May 26 Day 4	May 27 Day 5
9:00 - 9.30	Introduction	Icebreaker	Icebreaker	Icebreaker	Icebreaker
9:00 - 10.30	Keynote: Jethron Ayumba Akala	The digital city and ICT transitions: theory and practice	Critical and dynamic urban methods	Keynote Gautam Bhan	Reflections and plan for future collaborations
10.30-11:00	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break
11:00 - 1:00	Setting ground rules  Framing the week: Provincializing urban studies in Africa	Questions around infrastructural labor in the digital age: survival, hustles and tensions	Sharing your work: presenting, publishing in urban journals	Participant Presentations	Visit to Mathare Social Justice Centre (artistic & activist interventions)
1:00-2:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
2:00 - 3.30	Infrastructure 1 A lens for social and political theory	Gender, identity and queering the city	Urban experiments – Cities as laboratories	Participant Presentations	Sound of Nairobi workshop
3.30-3:45	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break
3:45-4:15	Infrastructure 2 Complex systems in transition	Putting our urban sensibilities to work	Black Geographies	The Urban Planet	No session
4:15 - 5.00	Infrastructure 3 Chinese investment in African cities: the social, political and technical realities				
6.30 - late	Group dinner (venue tbd)	'Kamirithu' screening (venue BIEA)	None	None	Final dinner (venue tbd)  Night party with Sound of Nairobi DJs (The Mist)

## Day 1 | May 23

9:00 - 9.30

### *Welcome and introduction*

To open the workshop, we will introduce the workshop, the organizing team and do a round of introductions. Each participant is asked to share their name, institutional affiliation, and reason for attending Uta-Do.

9:00 - 10.30

### *People Attitudes, Citiness and Socio-Spatial Arrogation: Exploring emerging issues in Urban Research In and About Africa*

**Dr. Jethron Ayumbah Akallah** is a Lecturer in the department of History and Archaeology at Maseno University in Western Kenya. He holds a PhD in History of Technology from Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany. His research focuses on urban infrastructures in the Global South, specifically, but not limited to, water and sanitation technology in Nairobi. Currently, **Jethron** is a Co-Principal Investigator in a research project on Nairobi's Expressway as a form of mega-infrastructure planning and how such projects function as representations of the techno-politics of the state and global capital flows. The keynote discussion will be chaired by **Prince Guma**.

11:00 - 11:30

### *Setting ground rules and terms of engagement*

It is important to develop a shared understanding of what we want out of this week and how we want to treat each other through the process. This session will provide an overview of the week. In this session, we will collectively set the ground rules for engagement in the space.

\*Activity: co-develop principles and intentions of the space

11:30-1:00

### *Provincializing urban studies in Africa*

There have been resounding calls to 'place' urban theory in the global south generally, and Africa in particular. In this lecture, **Liza Rose Cirolia & Wangui Kimari** will frame the theoretical vectors of the week and reflect on the following questions:

- What does it mean to think from peripheral places?
- How do we centre southern and African knowledge in urban studies?
- What are the opportunities and limits of provincializing debates?
- And what does it mean to be both critical and propositional in the context of urban theory?

2:00 - 3.30

### *Infrastructure and African Cities 1: a lens for social and political theory*

Social science and the humanities have attempted to dislodge infrastructural studies from technical disciplines. In this session, **Liza Rose Cirolia** will provide an overview of the key debates in urban infrastructure and African cities. She will cover the 'infrastructure turn' within urban studies and the move from structural to relational readings of infrastructure and service configurations.

\* Activity: writing rich descriptions from fragmented archives.

3.45 - 4.15

*Infrastructure and African Cities 2: complex systems in transition*

Thick description shows rich insights into social and political theory - but can it help us make sense of infrastructure systems and the transitions currently underway? In this session **Liza Rose Cirolia** will cover the limitations of thick description and the importance of understanding system complexity. We will explore the technical specifics, scalar differences, governance, and finance and funding landscapes that inform infrastructural outcomes.

4.15 - 5.00

*Infrastructure and African Cities 3: Chinese investment in African cities: the social, political and technical realities*

Chinese investment in African cities is a hot topic. However, few understand the nuances and logics of Chinese investment processes. To break open this black box, Guest speaker, **Zhengli Huang**, an architect and scholar focussed on Chinese investment in Africa, will be in conversation with **Andrea Pollio**.

\*Useful pre reading: [Goodfellow, T., & Huang, Z. \(2021\). Contingent infrastructure and the dilution of 'Chineseness': Reframing roads and rail in Kampala and Addis Ababa. \*Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space\*, 53\(4\), 655-674.](#)

## Day 2 | May 24

9:00 - 9.30

*Icebreaker*

To kick off the day, each person is asked to share what 'uta-do' means to them. This could include a feeling or experience.

9:00 - 10.30

*The digital city and ICT transitions: theory and practice*

In this session **Andrea Pollio & Prince Guma** will focus on the pathways of theory and practice in researching the digital city and ICT transitions in Africa. The session will include two presentations and a facilitated discussion about what matters and what to consider when researching African cities in the age of smart urbanism.

11:00 - 1:00

*Questions around infrastructural labor in the digital age: survivals, hustles and tensions*

In this session, **Prince Guma** will focus on the work and labor of infrastructure in the digital age. The session will address how and when infrastructural work and labor are rendered visible in the making and remaking of urban worlds in the global south. With promises of better futures amidst increasing socioeconomic inequality, the session will highlight different hustles, survivals and tensions in processes of infrastructural and city making in the age of smart urbanism. The session will be facilitated by **Wangui Kimari**.

2:00 - 3.30

*Gender, identity and queering the city*

Urban studies cannot ignore the centrality of identity in the making and *being* of cities. In this panel, **Keguro Macharia, Eddie Ombagi & Neo Musangi**, will reflect on how African urban studies can think more inclusively (or radically!) about gender, identity and queerness in our cities. **Neo**

**Musangi** is a predominantly experimental self-taught queer artist whose practice uses performance, text, visual and audio installations. Neo is also a poet whose online work is archived at Feminist Loft. **Eddie Ombagi** is a literature scholar based at the University of Witwatersrand. **Keguro Macharia** is an independent scholar from Nairobi, Kenya. Macharia's scholarship explores the relation between difference and freedom across the Black Diaspora, focusing specifically on the seam between Africa and Afro-diaspora. Macharia is the author of [Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora](#) (NYU Press, 2019), winner of the 2020 Alan Bray Memorial Prize. The session will be chaired by **Wangui Kimari**.

3.45 - 5.00

*Putting urban sensibilities to work*

In a world of silos and boxes, it is not always obvious what to do with interdisciplinary skills. This session will focus on the diversity of ways that urban skills can be utilized for career development. **Amollo Ambole** has a PhD from Stellenbosch University and is an associate of the African Centre for Cities. She has experience working as an academic, in philanthropy, and in consultancy. She will share her experience working across various urban environments, locally and globally.

6.30 - 8:00 pm

*'Kamiriithu' Screening (optional)*

Told through the voices of some of its original actors and community members, *Kamiriithu* is a documentary film about the Kamiriithu community theater and its legacy. After its establishment in 1976, the theatre was almost immediately demolished by the Kenyan government because of its revolutionary content. It is best known for the involvement of Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who was imprisoned and later exiled as a result. *Kamiriithu* looks beyond the world-famous writer and the spectacle of government repression to foreground the community's enduring struggles for social and environmental justice. It situates these struggles in the history of the land and urban transformation of the region since the colonial era. The result is a portrait of struggle, memory, and everyday life amongst the lasting infrastructures of colonialism in a rapidly changing Kenya. This session will be facilitated by **Kenny Cupers**.

## Day 3 | May 25

9:00 - 9.30

*Icebreaker*

Each person will be asked to share their response to the following question: Who is your favorite urban scholar/writer and why?

9:00.am - 10.30

*Critical and dynamic urban methods*

This interactive session facilitated by **Wangui Kimari & Joseph Kimani** from Shack Dwellers International (SDI-Kenya)/Muungano, will reflect on the applicability of orthodox research methods. It will explore approaches that are innovative, contextualized, people-centered and decolonial.

11:00 - 1:00

*Sharing your work: presenting, publishing in urban journals*

Publishing and presenting is a daunting process, filled with much anxiety, heartbreak but also small victories. The colonial hierarchies of knowledge production results in African scholarship accounting for less than 1%. Towards improving our own outputs and challenging these asymmetries, **Mary Lawhon** takes us through key points to consider in our presenting and publishing journeys.

2:00 - 3.30

*Urban experiments – Cities as laboratories*

As a side effect of the increasing turn towards evidence-based development aid, Nairobi has become a laboratory for all kinds of political and scientific experiments as well as interventions. Nairobians participate in randomized controlled trials and behavioral experiments for which, while the main beneficiaries are often Western scholars and Kenyan political and economic elites, they are paid small sums of money, but often take substantial risks. In our contribution, we aim to a) highlight the history of Kenya, and in particular Nairobi, as a place of scientific and political experiments, b) shed light upon the ethical problems resulting from the political-economic foundations of the unequal contract between experimental ‘subjects’ and scientists, as well as c) share the voices of some whose lives have been impacted negatively by participating in experiments that were presented as ethically unproblematic. This session is presented by **Mario Schmid & Adrian Wilson**.

3.45 - 5.00

*Black geographies (hybrid session)*

In this session, scholars **Willie J Wright** (University of Florida) & **Adam Bledsoe** (University of Minnesota) reflect on what it means to think and work with Black geographies, and how to use key concepts and framings within this approach to think about cities on the African continent, and towards highlighting the deep relationality with other Black geographies across the globe. Check out their article

\*Useful pre reading: [Bledsoe, A., & Wright, W. J. \(2019\). The pluralities of black geographies. \*Antipode\*, 51\(2\), 419-437.](#)

## Day 4 | May 26

9:00 - 9.30

*Icebreaker*

Morning guided meditation

9:00.am - 10.30

*Transgressing theory and activism (hybrid lecture)*

**Gautam Bhan** is an urbanist whose work focuses on urban poverty, inequality, social protection, and housing. He is currently Associate Dean, School of Human Development, as well as Senior Lead of Academics and Research at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Bengaluru, India.

\*Useful pre reading: [Bhan, G., Caldeira, T., Gillespie, K., & Simone, A. \(2020\). The pandemic, southern urbanisms and collective life. \*Society and Space\*, 3, 2020.](#)

11:00 - 1:00

*Participant Presentations*

In this session, people who will be applying for one of our 5 grants, will present their research projects for 10 minutes each.

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*“The Urban Planet” (hybird lecture)*

In this session, **Carl Nightingale** (SUNY) builds on his recent book, *Earthopolis*, to take us through a “sweeping six continent, six millenia tour of the world’s cities, culminating in the last 250 years, when we vastly accelerated our planetary realms of action, habitat, and impact, courting dangerous new consequences and opening prospects for hope.” Carl will also pay particular attention to how the metabolisms of cities contribute to both climate change and the anthropocene.

## Day 5 | May 27

9:00 - 9.30

*Icebreaker*

In this session, we will watch the music video on water that emerged from ongoing UTA-Do processes, and that was funded by the *Examining nature-society relations through urban infrastructure* (project number: P19-0286:1)

9:00.am - 10.30

*Reflections and plan for future collaborations*

In this session, we reflect on the following questions: What can we take away from this workshop? What could be changed in the future? How can we take this platform forward? This session will be facilitated by **Liza Cirolia & Prince Guma**.

11:00 - 1:00

*Visit to Mathare Social Justice Centre (artistic & activist interventions)*

On this site visit, we will visit Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) to learn about the different kinds of activist work shaping the city of Nairobi, and the ways in which academic scholarship can intervene to offer solidarity to these struggles.

2:00 - 3.30

*Sound of Nairobi workshop*

SOUND OF NAIROBI is an open-access digital archive of Nairobi’s soundscapes. In this session, we hear the process behind it and the sounds that emerge, as we think about the question: What can sound tell us about a city and its people? This session will be facilitated by three Sound of Nairobi DJs: **Raphael Kariuki, Kamwangi Njue & Brian Muhia**.