

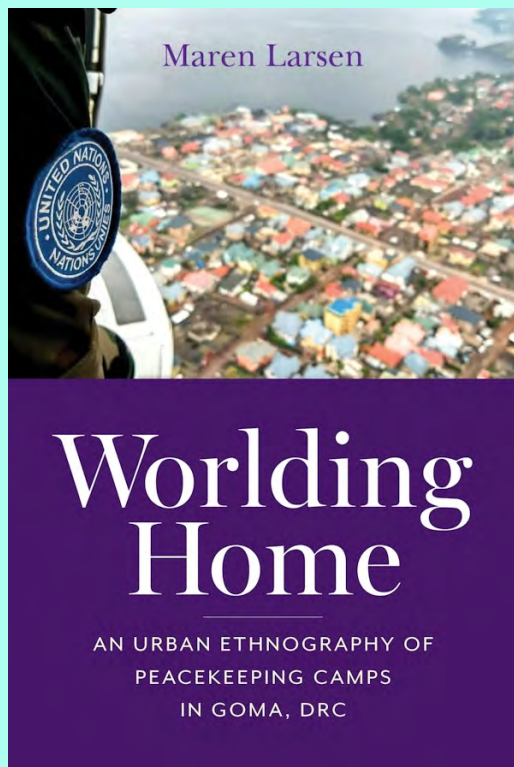
# Critical Urbanisms

Newsletter Fall 2025 | University of Basel

Our faculty wishes current and incoming students of the Critical Urbanisms MA programme a happy 2025/2026 academic year.

Welcome back to our 2025 cohort from their semester abroad at the African Center for Cities at the University of Cape Town (South Africa), and the Urbanism Across Geographies study track in Lamu (Kenya), as well as students who embarked on their master thesis fieldwork in Basel and worldwide!

## At a glance



### Worlding Home

We are excited to celebrate the



### Lecture Series

The lecture series exposes students to different schools of thought and practice that redefine understandings of the built environment. It explores different dynamics that shape places and cities and how these relate to global transformations.

forthcoming book, *Worlding Home: An Urban Ethnography of Peacekeeping Camps in Goma, DRC* by our Senior Lecturer and Programme Coordinator, **Dr (phil des) Maren Larsen**.

[Learn more](#)

The Current Debates' guest lecturers are: **Stefan Ouma**, **Fenna Imara Hoëfsloot**, **Hiba Bou Akar**, **Elisa Iturbe**, and **Nipesh Palat Narayanan**.

[Learn more](#)



### Africa Method Theory: Seminar

Africa Method Theory explores how current research grounded in Africa decenters the perspectives from which we understand knowledge production in urban studies, history, anthropology, and related fields. Our guests this semester are **Patience Mususa**, **Charles Piot**, and **Frank Matose**.

[Learn more](#)

### Research Perspectives: Aspirational Urbanism, Interim Urban Spaces

**Prof Dr Julie Ren** is leading the SNF-funded ASPIRA project titled “Aspirational Urbanism and the Recodification of Defiance” (ASPIRA) project, with a completely constituted research team at Urban Studies, University of Basel, running from 2025 to 2029. The team members are **Dr Haiyan Huang** as a postdoc, and **Sai Ho Chan**, as a doctoral student.

[Learn more](#)

### Pedagogy Highlights

In Spring 2025, the **Urbanism across Geographies** study track brought together University of Basel students and Lamu Youth Alliance volunteers to conduct research on the rapid and ongoing urban transformation of Lamu (Kenya). In **City Research Studio 2**, at University of Cape Town, students used embodiment practices to engage the sea-land interface of Cape Town, and formulate alternative cartographies based on

their data journeys.

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## Worlding Home

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We are excited to celebrate the forthcoming book, *Worlding Home: An Urban Ethnography of Peacekeeping Camps in Goma, DRC* by our Senior Lecturer and Programme Coordinator, **Dr Maren Larsen**. *Worlding Home* interrogates the social, spatial, and architectural lifeworlds of UN peacekeepers accommodated in contingent camps throughout Goma, the capital of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through multisited ethnography and deep engagement with anthropological and urban theory, *Worlding Home* explores the entanglements of camp and city. Between dwelling and journeying and “here” and “there,” the everyday lives and embodied practices of Goma’s peacekeepers and Congolese civilians co-construct a “city as elsewhere” in which camping is a vital urban practice.

By offering a more expansive understanding of how UN peacekeeping camps fit within Goma's urban fabric, *Worlding Home* reveals the intertwined sociospatial processes of making a home, building a city, and reimagining the world. For more information, please visit: <https://iupress.org/9780253074485/worlding-home/#generate-pdf>

*Worlding Home* will be published by Indiana University Press in October 2025. The book will also be available as an Open Access Ebook with funding generously

provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation. On the occasion of the book's release, Maren will discuss her work with **Prof Laurent Fourchard** at the Cities are Back in Town Seminar (online) hosted by the Sciences Po Urban School on 16 October, 5:30–7pm (follow the link to the series to register). Stay tuned for further book launches and events throughout the semester!

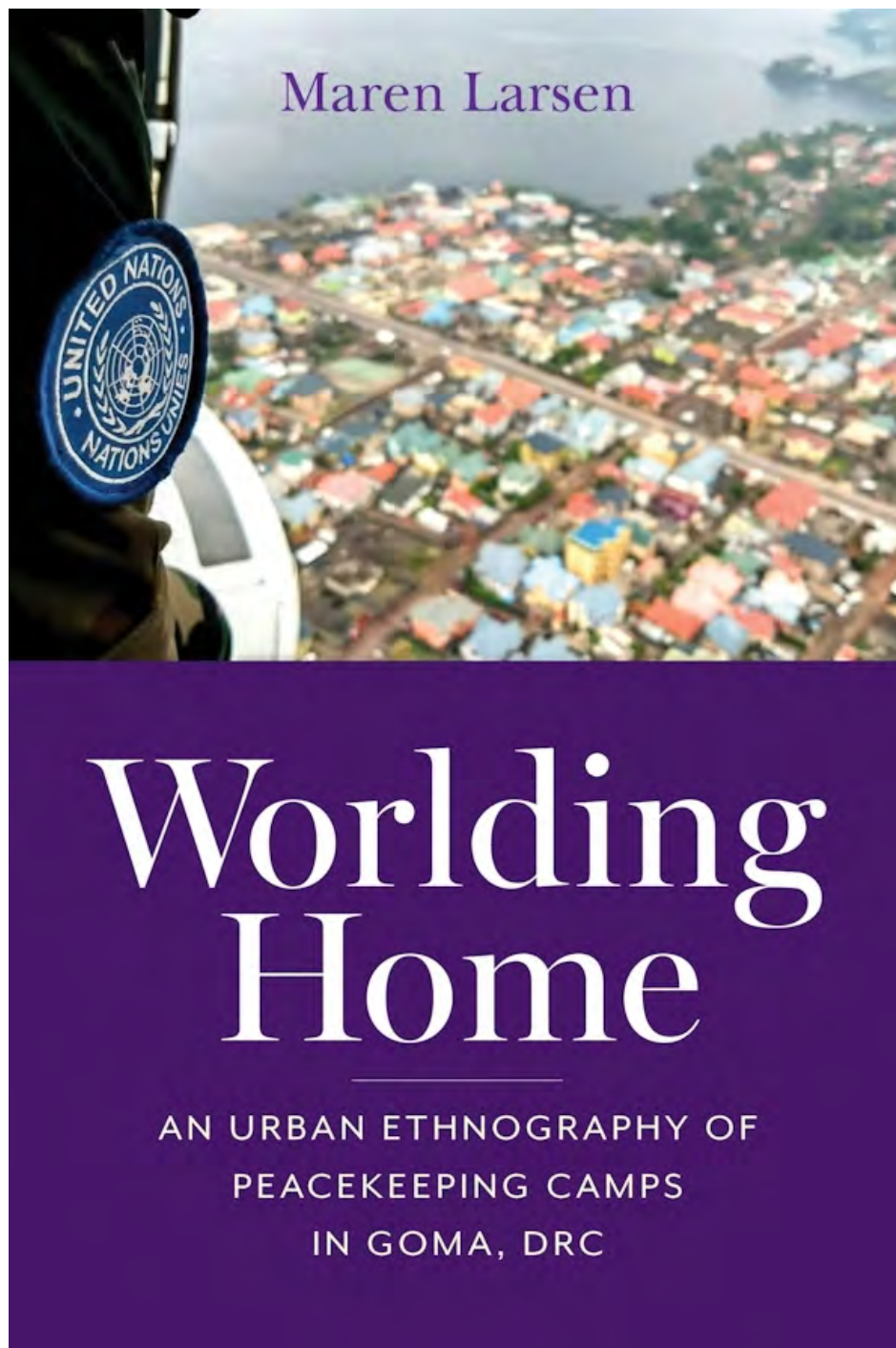


Image: Book cover of *Worlding Home*, 2025

## Lecture Series

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**Current Debates**, our biweekly online guest lectures are on this Fall. The Lecture



Series exposes students to different schools of thought and practice that redefine understandings of the urban and the built environment. It explores different dynamics that shape places and cities and how these relate to global transformations. Panel discussions following each lecture provide a platform for students to engage a debate with invited guest lecturers across disciplines addressing current debates in urban studies and allied fields. Further more information about the colloquium is available [here](#).

**76423-01 Kolloquium**

 **Universität  
Basel**

# Lecture Series 2025

## Critical Urbanisms: Current Debates

<b>30 Sept</b>	<b>Stefan Ouma</b> <small>University of Bayreuth</small> <b>Centering Accumulation in the Study of African Cities</b>
<b>14 Oct</b>	<b>Fenna Imara Hoefsloot</b> <small>University College London</small> <b>Informational Peripheries: Seeing from the Margins of Place, Flow, and Data</b>
<b>28 Oct</b>	<b>Hiba Bou Akar</b> <small>Columbia University</small> <b>Sedimentary Urbanization: Displacement, Refugeeeness, and the Afterlives of Dead Futures</b>
<b>11 Nov</b>	<b>Elisa Iturbe</b> <small>Harvard University</small> <b>Confronting Carbon Form</b>
<b>25 Nov</b>	<b>Nipesh Palat Narayanan</b> <small>Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique</small> <b>Southern Theory, Pluriversal Urban Ontologies, and Elsewheres of Urban Studies</b>

Critical  
**Urbanisms**

## Africa, Method, Theory

How does current research grounded in Africa decenter the perspectives from which we understand knowledge production in urban studies, history, anthropology, and related fields? Organized by **George-Paul Meiu** (Anthropology), **Julia Tischler** (African History), **Kenny Cupers** (Urban Studies), and **Marie Muschalek** (African History), this multi-year seminar and public lecture series facilitates in-depth

engagement with four prominent scholars' research-in-progress, and through it, a discussion about the cutting edge of theory and method.

Classes take place from 12.15-4pm (Alte Universität, Seminarraum -201), public lectures from 4.15-6pm (Alte Universität, Hörsaal -101)



## Research Perspectives: Aspirational Urbanism, Interim Urban Spaces

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**Prof Dr Julie Ren** is leading a newly constituted SNF-funded project titled “Aspirational Urbanism and the Recodification of Defiance” (ASPIRA) at Urban Studies, University of Basel. The project will run from 2025 to 2029. On **23-24 October 2025**, the symposium “Creative Research Methods for Uncertain Times”

will take place in Basel.

The team members are **Dr Haiyan Huang** as a postdoc, and **Sai Ho Chan**, as a doctoral student. **Dr Huang** will interrogate everyday micro-practices, resistance, and space-making. Prior to that, Haiyan worked as a cultural anthropologist with a strong focus on urban studies and emerging cultures in and about East Asia.

Ethnography of Everyday Queer Worldmaking in the Chinese City Hangzhou”, explored queer organizing in mainland China. **Sai Ho Chan** has a background in cultural studies and human geography. His research explores urban space as an alternative public sphere and the resilience of Chinese diasporic communities, particularly within Hong Kong and its transnational connections. **Ashwin Gupta** and **Marie-Jean Malek**, both Critical Urbanisms MA students, will support the project as student assistants from May 2025 by conducting literature and case study review, plus coding and analysis.

Led by **Dr Jonas Hagmann** (Principal Investigator) with **Dr (phil des) Thomas Betschart** as lead researcher, the project *Safeguarding Interim Urban Spaces: Understanding the Needs, Improving the Practices* is based at the Department for Urban and Cantonal Development Basel-Stadt in collaboration with Urban Studies, University of Basel, and funded by Fondation Botnar. It examines how security is governed in temporary and intermediary urban spaces that often emerge outside formal planning routines. Drawing on critical urban studies, it explores how temporality, informality and incremental urbanism intersect with questions of control, inclusion and spatial justice. Through case studies in Basel and beyond, it investigates how intermediary urbanism shapes broader trajectories of urban development.

## Pedagogy Highlights

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In Spring 2025, the **Urbanism across Geographies** study track convened University of Basel students and Lamu Youth Alliance volunteers to conduct research on the rapid and ongoing urban transformation of Lamu (Kenya) over the course of six weeks. Guided by **Maren Larsen** (University of Basel) and **Lilian Salama** (Lamu Youth Alliance), student researchers formed teams to explore three specific spaces in the city that raise key questions about accessibility in Lamu’s ongoing urban transformation. Questions of access to planning information and suitable land for development, to women’s spaces of spiritual practice, and to capital and opportunities for women’s small business ventures were explored in the rapidly

growing neighborhoods of Kandahari and Kashmiri, religious institutions and work places across the city, and the informal settlement of Wiyoni on the northern periphery of Lamu, respectively. Foregrounding the voices of Lamu residents, believers, and businesswomen, student research teams explored these topics while learning through and practicing a range of methods including guided visits, interviews, participation in everyday life, observations, autoethnography, and focus group discussions. Installations reflecting these key accessibility issues facing the communities in question and the city yet to come were presented at the exhibition “Ufunguzi wa Mustakbali Mpya // Unlocking New Futures” held at the Lamu Fort on 7 May, 2025. For more information, please visit [www.lamufutures.net](http://www.lamufutures.net).





Group photo of the 2025 Lamu Youth Alliance – UniBasel partnership members at the exhibition “Ufunguzi wa Mustakbali Mpya // Unlocking New Futures” exhibition at the Lamu Fort, May 7, 2025. Photo by Maren Larsen

In **City Research Studio 2**, at University of Cape Town during Spring 2025, students used embodiment practices to engage the sea-land interface of Cape Town, and formulate alternative cartographies based on the data they collected. The Studio was guided by the following questions: How is it that we could observe or inhabit a street and not notice anything, or more pertinently, *what* and *who* are hidden? Starting with



understanding Cape Town as a port city with a particular colonial significance, students worked in pairs, one walking and one swimming, in gaining experiential knowledge of a number of sites through embodiment practice, and engaging multiple stakeholder groups. These included the first black swimmers that did the Robben Island crossing swim, an organization called Waves for Change, that teaches surfing to children from embattled neighbourhoods, and a walking group advocating for women's pedestrian safety after dark. The project culminated in a podcast series, where the swimmer and walker from each pair interviewed one another, individual critical reflections and alternative maps of each of the four districts covered. The conclusion of the project was celebrated with an exhibition, and a rather sad farewell from the Basel group.



Photo by Nancy Odendaal



Photo courtesy of KhoiScouts\_and\_SeaDogs

## Seminars, Public Lectures, and Symposiums

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In Fall 2025, Critical Urbanisms will offer several new and updated seminars, all of which are listed [here](#):

We invite Critical Urbanisms students to participate in this year's **Zeit Raum Forum** taking place from **23-24 September 2025**, which is organised by **unterdessen** with the involvement of alumna Rebekka Ammann. The Zeit Raum Forum is a German-language conference which explores the interdisciplinary uses of temporary spaces from various perspectives, considering the opportunities and challenges alike. Depending on attendance and the number/length of written reflections submitted, students can obtain 1–2 credit points via a learning contract. If you are interested in obtaining credit points through your participation, please discuss the conditions of your individual learning contract with Dr (Phil des) Maren Larsen prior to the event.

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## Apply to the MA Critical Urbanisms

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The spring semester application deadline is 30 November 2025. For more information about the curriculum and admissions process, please visit our website: [urbanstudies.philhist.unibas.ch](http://urbanstudies.philhist.unibas.ch).

We encourage international applicants to apply as soon as possible, especially non-EU citizens, since the visa application process may take up to 4 months. Please make sure to submit a complete dossier (including a writing sample and a list of urban studies coursework, as specified in the Study Plan), to speed up the admission process. For questions please contact Ms Jennifer Felsenberg at [jennifer.felsenberg@unibas.ch](mailto:jennifer.felsenberg@unibas.ch).

## MA Thesis Highlights

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In the following, we highlight two recently submitted master's theses by two current students. **Maria Vermathen** examines in “Countering and Mobilising Invisibility: Sex Worker’s infrastructures of Mutual Aid and Representation in Marseille” how sex workers self-organise access to city space, knowledge and representation in a context that criminalises their communal strategies of support under the pretence of combating procuring. Drawing on queer-feminist methodologies, the thesis combines text and sound to centre marginalised voices through in-depth conversations with sex workers. The research shows how invisibility operates simultaneously as a tool and a barrier in the production of sex workers’ infrastructures of mutual aid and reflects on how to write alongside a community whose practices must remain ‘underground’ while still enabling the transmission of knowledge.









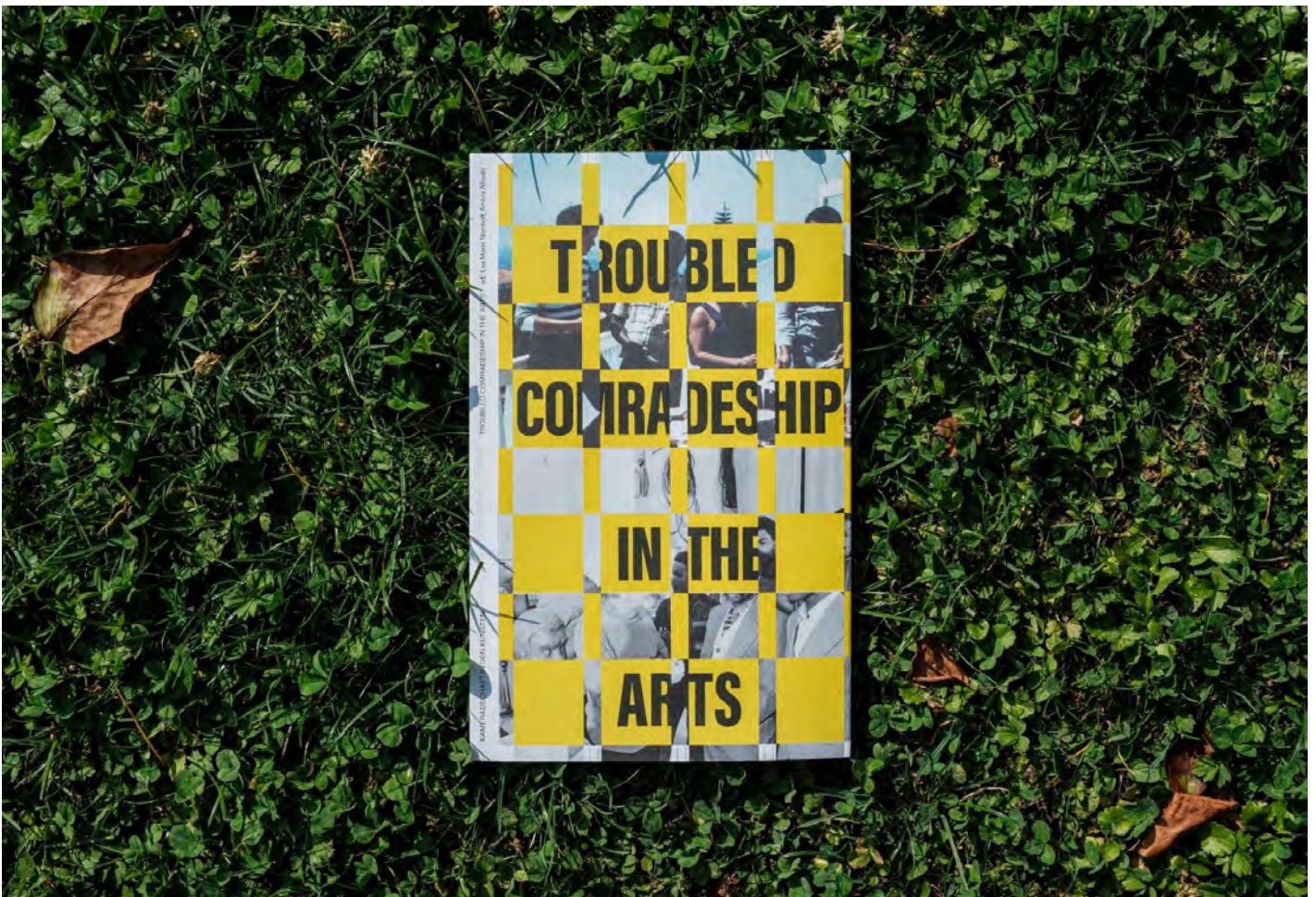
Image: View onto Langstrasse Zurich. Courtesy of Nadja Nievergelt 2025.



## Other Publications

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**Ambre Alfredo, Doreen Mende and Lea Nienhoff**, have edited “Trouble Comradeship in the Arts: On Mozambican Artists’ Experiences in the GDR, their Works, and Political Imaginations” with Spector Books (Leipzig). The anthology explores the cultural exchanges between the People’s Republic of Mozambique and the German Democratic Republic during the 1980s. Through conversations, photographs, personal letters, and official reports, the publication brings together the perspectives of Mozambican and East German actors involved in these exchanges, while situating them within the institutional frameworks that shaped the “comradeship.” Central to the Research Edition are the stories of painter Mankew V. Mahumana and theatre director David Abílio Mondlane – two Mozambican artists who lived and worked in East German cities such as Rostock, Schwerin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. The book also features a contemporary Mozambican perspective from art historian and researcher Alda Costa, who reflects on the lasting influence of the journeys and collaborations pursued by Mozambican artists after independence. The publication is part of the SNF-funded project “Decolonizing Socialism: Entangled Internationalism”.



The Liquid Urbanism in Africa conference 12–13 June 2025 was a resounding success, with exciting and animated discussions on and off the panels. Special thanks to **Dany Tiwa** and **Jennifer Felsenberg** for the stellar organisation!





Image: Full house at the Liquid Urbanism in Africa conference. Photo: Jennifer Felsenberg

Urban Studies were also well represented at the European Conference of African Studies 2026 in Prague, with **Ambre Alfredo**, **Semhar Haile**, **Natalie Schöbitz**, **Maren Larsen**, **Anna Selmeczi**, **Laura Nkula-Wenz** and **Jon Schubert** presenting.

## Awards and Achievements

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**Alaa Dia** is the newest **Dr (phil des)** on the block! He defended his dissertation, titled “Border Building: Layered, Modular, and Inhabited Architectures of EU Migration Governance in the Aegean Islands” on 21 August 2025. This Fall, he will be teaching Critical Cartography.

**Dr (phil des) Maren Larsen** has been awarded an Ambizione grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation for her project, “Inhabiting Climate Change: Re-locative Practices and Politics in Saint Louis, Senegal.” This four-year project will kick off in 2026, hosted at the Social and Urban Geography Unit at the Department of Geography, University of Zurich. Collaborators include various research groups at

the Université Gaston Berger de Saint Louis (Senegal), University of Cape Town (South Africa), ETH Zurich and the University of Basel (Switzerland).

**Kenny Cupers** received a 2025–2026 Senior Fellowship from the Merian Institute or Advanced Studies in Africa for his project "Unmaking the Plantation: A Planetary History of Architecture"

**Amanda Haas Abd El Halim** has been selected for the Pro Helvetia Artist in Residency programme of 2026. She will be visiting Egypt for three months, focusing on their artistic research through the lenses of design, art and local rest and resistance practices.

**Maren Larsen** and **Ernest Sewordor** were nominated by students for the University of Basel's 2025 Teaching Excellence Awards in the Strong Foundations category and the Engaging Courses category. **Kenny Cupers** was nominated in the categories Engaging Courses and 'Lernen an der Schnittstelle'.

## Last but not Least

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We are delighted to welcome **Leah Lazer**, **Yassine Rachidi** and **Mohammed Munib** as new doctoral students joining us with G3S starting grants. They will be working with professors Nancy Ordendaal, Jon Schubert and Julie Ren.

**Cristina de Lucas Espinosa**, who completed our MA programme last Fall, is starting a PhD at TU Delft's Climate Safety & Security Centre, within the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering's Department of Materials Science & Engineering. Her research will focus on developing smart agent-based models enhanced with reinforcement learning to support effective stakeholder collaboration in the Dutch green steel sector. The project is part of the national programme *Groeien met Groen Staal*, which aims to accelerate the transition to CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral and circular steel production in the Netherlands.

**Leah Bonvin**, also a Critical Urbanisms alumni, has begun her PhD in Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Neuchâtel, working under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sven Daniel Wolfe. Building on her master's degree thesis, her doctoral research examines the intersection between personal histories and societal upheavals and is grounded in post-socialist and comparative urban studies.

**Come join us at the semester-opening Apéro Friday, 19 September 2025 at 5 pm  
at the forecourt of Urban Studies on Hebelstrasse 3, 4056 Basel.**



## Critical Urbanisms

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This newsletter is published twice in the academic year and facilitated by the Communications Team in the Department. For any new announcements, please get in touch with Ernest Sewordor and Amanda Haas at [ernest.sewordor@unibas.ch](mailto:ernest.sewordor@unibas.ch) and [amanda.haas@unibas.ch](mailto:amanda.haas@unibas.ch).

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