



Iron Tracks of Capital and Crime: Tales of an Exhausted Infrastructure

This seminar explores the aging, breakdown, impairment, and dysfunction of the Egyptian State Railway under British veiled protectorate (1882-1914). It seeks to connect the local microhistories of anxiety, agitation, and fear with the broader loom of imperial structure and expanding capitalism. This seminar zeroes in on the metamorphosis of speculative capital, from the shackles of public debt to the liquidity of cash profits, facilitated by the imperial machinery of the Caisse de la Dette Publique. I contend that the Caisse, in this period, meticulously crafted austerity measures, which aimed to reroute the financial lifelines from Egypt's rail arteries directly into the

coffers of European claimants. By paying special attention to chronic engineering damages left by the Caisse's relentless extraction of profit, this lecture uncovers a stark nexus between imperial mandates and infrastructural exhaustion. Moreover, I posit that acts of robbery and theft, though perhaps unpremeditated, emerged as a deliberate transgression, or at times rebellion, against the global tide of predatory capitalism. This narrative not only chronicles a tale of local exhaustion, but also illuminates the silent, yet potent, undercurrents of resistance that refused to succumb to wear and tear.

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CEDEJ TUESDAY SEMINAR

**Iron Tracks of Capital and Crime
Tales of an Exhausted Infrastructure**

Xiaoyue Yasin Li

April 29, 2025
2pm (Cairo Time)
at CEDEJ

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