What do the histories of global health institution-building indicate about the politics of African liberation? When it came to tackling AIDS at the turn of the century, the very meanings of African liberation – such as self-determination and national emancipation - morphed into other uses or disappeared altogether. In their place emerged at least one new world that calls itself Global Health, one that is entangled with the worlds of finance, oil, and counterterrorism. What if the anthropologies of infectious disease and the STS of biomedical infrastructures were analytically located in geopolitics instead of global health? In order to experiment with this scalar possibility, the paper draws on a speech by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, which was delivered at the 2001 Organization of African Unity Heads of State summit on HIV/AIDS, held in Abuja, Nigeria. It also examines an 8 year-long Libyan court case where a Palestinian physician and eight Bulgarian nurses were accused of intentionally infecting nearly 400 children with HIV in a Benghazi hospital. Almost all events in the case hinged on Libya’s relationship to the Global War on Terror. The paper poses questions about the role of resilient viruses as markers of political struggles that directly map on to a wide range of racialized geopolitical stakes. It draws on a notion of ‘viral geopolitics’ that attempts to understand geopolitical formations underway since 9-11 – events that set in motion a scramble for the meaning and materializations of endemic viruses – including new interventions, new indebtedness, new hopes for the future. Within this particular frame of geopolitics, I intend to think about how a genealogy of African emancipation might be read today.
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